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Leigh Courtney
Denison University

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*Goodnight and thank you, Evita:
The Sexualization of Eva Perón in Popular Culture and its
Implications*

Leigh Courtney '10

Eva Perón, first lady of Peronist Argentina and a lasting national icon, remains one of the most nationally and internationally mythologized historical figures of Latin America. Her rapid rise to fame and political power and the ways in which she comported herself in her public roles inspired both fervent affection and intense hatred among Argentines. Historians and anthropologists alike have extensively studied her life in an effort to understand the origins and impetus of the Evita myth, and their theories are many and diverse. Yet one common thread that unites these studies is the observation that almost any discourse about Eva Perón includes references to her sexuality, her womanhood, or the objectification of her body. A synthesis of these discourses reveals a popular fascination with the sexual and female characteristics of Eva's power, both within Argentina and internationally. Indeed, it seems that no discussion of Eva's power can be entirely divorced from discussions of her sex or her gender. These themes are consistently echoed in the many artistic reinterpretations of her life that have emerged in the decades since her death from uterine cancer in 1952. Most of these versions are "hastily concocted" and "nonscholarly," and notable among them is the controversial *Evita*, a 1979 British musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice (Ciria 151).

Evita is an infamously "melodramatic remythologization" of the life of Eva Perón and is based primarily on the polemical book *The Woman With the Whip: Eva Perón* by María Flores (Savigliano 156). The musical is perhaps the most outrageous—certainly the most widely known—version of her story, and it has played an instrumental role in shaping popular perceptions of her, especially internationally. The structure and lyrical content of the musical present Eva as cunning, aggressive, and hypersexual—particularly as a woman who uses her sexuality to gain power. The musical has been largely responsible for the acceptance of this image of her on a global scale. Yet the fact that the production's origins lie in the work of Flores, an Argentine, indicates that these perceptions of Eva existed long before Webber and Rice chose her as their protagonist. The musical, then, is only one more manifestation—albeit a uniquely transformative one—of the Evita mythology.

The consequences and implications of this sexualized mythology are profound. Exaggerated narratives of Eva's manipulative and excessive sexuality are symptomatic of two interwoven and highly problematic

stereotypes, existing not only in Latin America, but also worldwide: first, that female power is inevitably reliant upon sexuality, and second, that female sexuality is more strongly motivated by power than by desire. In order to explode these stereotypes, it is useful to closely examine the assumptions about female power and sexuality made both in Argentina and abroad with regard to the life story of Eva Perón, one of the most powerful women in Latin American history.

Popular narratives of Eva's life begin with those of her childhood and early adolescence, and even these have largely been articulated through issues of sexuality, laying the groundwork for her hypersexualized public image later on. Eva was born out of wedlock to a young and lower-class woman named Juana Ibarguren and her lover, the bourgeois *estanciero* Juan Duarte, who raised a middle-class family with his wife in addition to the five children he fathered with Ibarguren (Fraser and Navarro 2-3). The cultural climate of early-twentieth-century Argentina made Eva's illegitimacy a defining feature of her identity, profoundly shaping the way in which she was received by her local community and thus the way in which she perceived herself. Some historians suggest that her mother's reputation as a "kept woman" also reflected poorly on the morality of Eva and her sisters within her community, leading villagers to accuse them of being "*chicas buscadoras*, [...] tarts" (Fraser and Navarro 4). This may have helped to lay the foundation of one of the most popular stories within the Evita mythology: that of her departure from Junín and the beginning of her professional career.

Most versions of Eva's life story suggestively link her relocation to Buenos Aires with the name of tango singer Agustín Magaldi, who is said to have met the 15-year-old Eva one night after performing in her hometown. Many say that Magaldi facilitated Eva's move to the city, and most leap to the conclusion that the two were embroiled in a short-lived affair. More specifically, they imply that Eva, already a seductress at 15, used her sexuality to win Magaldi's assistance. Webber and Rice's *Evita* makes full use of this dubious rumor, stating unequivocally in its second song that Magaldi "has the distinction of being the first man to be of use to Eva Duarte." Fraser and Navarro explain,

Most accounts of Evita's life say that she fell in love with the spotlight image of Magaldi or that she decided to seduce him and use him; but that, in either event, she was introduced to him, asked him to take her to Buenos Aires, and when he wavered, forced her way into his train compartment and rode with him to the city, thus leaving her family and becoming a married man's mistress (11).

The likely reality is considerably less exciting: thorough historians have produced considerable evidence that Magaldi never visited Junín that year,

or that even if he did, "his assistance was of the most innocuous kind" (Fraser and Navarro 11). As Fraser and Navarro rather snidely comment, "It is hard to understand what he would have seen in small, skinny Eva María" (11). But indeed, the tale of the tango singer appears either too romantic or too calculated to be true. Even so, people assumed otherwise, and this rumor has proven utterly tenacious. Its symbolic significance is immense, for it represents Eva as a woman willing to use her sexuality to exploit others for her own benefit. The musical uses this rumor as the basis for its first characterization of the young Eva, portraying her as hardened and manipulative even in her early adolescence. When Magaldi suggests that her ambition of moving to Buenos Aires is only a pipe dream, she responds accusatorily,

All you've done to me,
Was that a young girl's fantasy?
I played your city games all right, didn't I?
I already know what cooks,
How the dirty city feels and looks
I tasted it last night, didn't I?

The story of Eva and Magaldi proved only the first in a long series of sensational narratives about Eva's sexual exploitation of men as she embarked on her life in Buenos Aires. Her detractors insinuate or assert outright that as she pursued a career as an actress, she prostituted herself to important men in the film industry. Flores accuses that "she changed her allegiance as easily as she slid from one costume to the next" (40). Fraser and Navarro relay claims that she became "a *putita* who slept around for parts, [or] a courtesan who took presents and manipulated her admirers" (24). These authors insist that "these images of her belong in the category of fantasy," and that her success is attributable to the simple fact that "she had learnt how things worked" (24). Yet others recognize that "however it happened, it does seem that she was not without male company, and that these men were often in a position to help her with her career" (Hall 234). The musical once again latches onto this scandalous representation of Eva, resulting in one of its most amusing yet most ungracious songs, "Goodnight and Thank You." In this scene, Eva moves among men—beginning with the tango singer—while the narrator sings of how "helpful" they have been:

Goodnight and thank you, Whoever
We are grateful you found her a spot on the sound radio
We'll think of you every time she's on the air
We'd love you to stay,
But you'd be in the way
So do up your trousers and go!

A closer look at historical evidence suggests that, more likely than not, Eva did not "[use] her attractiveness and sexuality to help her climb the ladder of success" to a greater extent than any aspiring actress of the era might have done (Hall 234). In fact, some sources hint at her apparent "shyness about

sex” (Fraser and Navarro 23). Furthermore, her growing popularity as an actress and her increasing presence in the public eye made her an easy target for the tabloids—like many actresses, “her sexual attractiveness was the focus of what publicity she got” (Hall 235). But regardless of the truth or fiction behind these stories, they have indelibly marked the story of her success in a way that significantly discredits her achievements. The assertion that Eva Perón, one of the most powerful woman in Argentine history, “slept her way to the top” is indicative of widespread suspicion that a woman—particularly a woman of her lower-class background—could achieve such meteoric power without employing her sexuality. In seeking out the roots of this phenomenon, one might look to Argentine *machismo*, which disregards almost all notions of female power, with the exception of the mythologized female power to seduce. Yet the persistence of this interpretation of Eva’s sexuality abroad indicates that Latin American *machismo* is not solely to blame, but that rather, the assumption of a connection between female power and sexuality exists almost universally. After all, it was the British musical that most exploited this stereotype and pressed it upon countless audiences outside of Argentina—where it was enthusiastically accepted.

As a result of widespread speculation about her sexual life, Eva’s reputation was already fairly provocative by the time Juan Perón met her. The same critics who propagate tales of Eva’s sexual manipulation, including the musical, would have us believe that her interest in Perón was identical to her interest in the men who had preceded him: calculated and power-driven. In *Evita*, the scene in which the future president and first lady of Argentina meet is enacted through a duet entitled “I’d Be Surprisingly Good For You,” in which Eva sashays up to Colonel Perón and sings:

It seems crazy, but you must believe
There's nothing calculated, nothing planned
Please forgive me if I seem naïve
I would never want to force your hand,
But please understand
I'd be good for you—
I'd be surprisingly good for you.

Her proposition sounds more like a business plan than a romantic proposal, and according to Webber and Rice, it is. Many accuse Eva of “scheming” to marry Juan so as to appropriate his political power (Flores 67). Meanwhile, they represent Juan’s interest in Eva as nothing more than the sexual infatuation he might have had for a prostitute. Although there are plenty of reasons to doubt this, it is indisputable that Juan and Eva’s relationship did ultimately resemble a political partnership just as much—or more—as it did a marriage. One of Flores’s more astute observations is that Perón “was as necessary to her as she was to him; she could get nowhere in that man-dominated culture without the protection of a man” (86). Meanwhile, Eva was instrumental in earning Perón the adoration of the masses through her charisma and compelling ideology. Also, interestingly, Flores asserts that

having “so beautiful and vivacious a young woman utterly devoted, at least outwardly, to himself and his career” was “very flattering to Perón’s virility” (Flores 87). This was evident when supporters began to congregate outside the couple’s window and chant, “*Oligarcas a otra parte / Viva el macho de Eva Duarte*,” suggesting that “the couple’s sexual relationship emphasized Juan Perón’s masculinity and toughness” (Hall 238). Flores abruptly concludes that their relationship was founded on a shared passion for power, not passion for one another. She makes the highly questionable claim that

The ruthlessness of her character incited desire rather than love, and although at this time and in the first years of her marriage there was a voluptuous quality in her which was later scalded out, there was never any sign in her of that relaxed contentment which comes from loving and being truly loved (Flores 67).

Fraser and Navarro explain a similar rhetoric asserted by other critics: Perón she had tolerated because he was soft enough to pander to her drive for power, but she had not loved him because she could not have done so; she was strong, he was weak; ‘he is the woman and she is the man’—and with such an inversion there could have been no real love (Fraser and Navarro 179).

Even substantially more objective writers than Flores note that “their marriage [...] served as [a model] for the couple’s broader aims” (Deutsch 271). When Juan and Eva began living together before getting married, they “challenged bourgeois morality,” and “abhorrent as they were to the upper and middle classes, Perón’s sexual habits may have strengthened his appeal to the lower” (Deutsch 280). Even more importantly, their relationship and eventually their marriage “set the model for female Peronists to follow: Just as Eva subordinated herself to Juan, women were to subordinate themselves to their husbands, the Leader, and the movement” (Deutsch 276). Over time, Eva and Juan projected an increasingly platonic public image, perhaps as a conscious effort to dissociate Eva from rumors of her earlier hypersexuality. According to J.M. Taylor, Eva orchestrated this shift in her image: “Not only did she remain constantly and irreproachably faithful to Perón, but she carefully muted the sexual element in her marriage,” creating a “perfect matrimony” (74). Taylor notes that later in their careers, Eva “affirmed, through the books attributed to her authorship, that she and her husband expressed their love for each other through their concern and love for the *descamisados* of Argentina”—not through sex (74).

Despite this convincing evidence that the Peróns’ relationship was largely a political tool, it seems overly simplistic to see any reality in *Evita*’s cynical version of their initial meeting, in which the two essentially establish a pact based on mutual usefulness—Juan sings “I like what I hear, what I

see, / And knowing me, / I would be good for you, too”—rather than a romance propelled by mutual attraction. Such an interpretation denies the possibility that Eva was also drawn to Juan himself, not just his political position—that she desired him, rather than simply offering herself as an object of his desire. This theory, a continuation of the theme expressed in earlier narratives about her sexual exploits, minimizes her agency as an individual with sexual needs, relying instead on the archetype of the female seductress who exercises—or seeks to acquire—power over men.

Contradictorily, even with the couple’s assertion of their commitment to politics as the basis of their relationship, Eva was unable to shake her hypersexualized public image. Flores rather amusingly describes how Argentina’s upper classes articulated their extreme animosity through rumors about her sexual life:

While they swore they disapproved of her only because of her interference with politics and because of the injustices committed in her name, the basis of their resentment against her was revealed in their preoccupation with her sexual life. Their gossip attributed to her a licentiousness the details of which neither their experience nor their imagination could supply, and which no woman’s stamina could have withstood (101).

Once again, rumors of Eva’s libertine past swept Argentina, particularly among its elite. One of *Evita*’s more historically accurate songs, “Perón’s Latest Flame,” illustrates this hostile discourse about Eva’s sexuality. In the scene, upper-class Argentines and members of the military express their distaste for Eva and speculate about Perón’s intentions toward her. The soldiers sing,

Her only good parts are between her thighs
She should stare at the ceiling, not reach for the
skies
Or she could be his last whore
She should get into her head
She should not get out of bed
She should know that she’s not paid
To be loud, but to be laid
The evidence suggests she has other interests
If it’s her who’s using him, he’s exceptionally
dim
Slut!

Interestingly, Flores argues that, regarding aristocratic women, “the vindictiveness of some of their gossip is perhaps accounted for by the fact that Eva represented the ‘other woman’ in their marriages, who was tolerable only while she remained obscure” (103). This argument proves compelling

when contextualized. Fraser and Navarro explore the social climate in which “the fantasy that *Evita* was a prostitute” took hold:

It was based on assumptions about her ‘obscure past,’ and it also reflected contemporary sexual myths. The idea that prostitutes, far from being exploited, possessed some mysterious power over men, was widely adhered to. Because they were not emotionally engaged in their sexual activities, prostitutes were supposed to be able to enthrall their victims and hold them powerless. [...] This set of assumptions was readily applied to *Evita* the more so because it seemed to validate the contempt and fear Perón inspired, particularly among the Argentine wealthy (46).

According to these authors, the power that Eva wielded over Perón and thus over the Argentine people was perceived by her upper-class detractors as primarily sexual—akin to the prostitute’s—possibly because they could not envision female power taking any other form.

Although Flores presents herself as an objective expert on Eva’s rise to power, it is not difficult to see that Flores’s own views represent the spiteful anti-Peronist rhetoric of the 1950s. She offers a biting analysis of Eva’s innermost feelings and motives, despite her inability to substantiate any of them. Flores observes that Argentines of the 1940s and 1950s, particularly men, disapproved of Eva “not so much because of the corruption and illegality she has encouraged but because she is a woman in a position of great power” (36). She claims that it was therefore “natural to the culture of the society in which she now found herself” that Eva should “use her sex as a weapon” (36). In general, she states, “It is not surprising that the Argentine woman should so often have regarded her sex as her only marketable commodity;” and more specifically, that “it was only natural that Eva should adjudge her opportunities by the use that she could make of men” (38-9). Flores’s observations about the social climate of this era are not inaccurate, but her conclusions leave something to be desired. If we are to accept Flores’s cynical view of female sexuality in the 1940s and 1950s, we risk reaching the unlikely conclusion that all female sexuality of the era was “based on contrivance and subterfuge and all the hostility that that implies,” once again ignoring the possibility that female sexual desire exists as anything but an attempt to gain power (Flores 39).

An interesting development in the historical discourse on Eva Perón was a growing belief, both in Argentina and internationally, that Eva could be seen as a feminist figure. And indeed, one of the ways in which Eva proved politically useful to Juan was as a seeming champion of women’s rights. Her stance on the rights of women and the proper relationship between the sexes remains one of the most discussed aspects of Eva’s career. While some have lauded Eva as one of the first successful advocates for

women's rights in Argentina, and herself a groundbreaking symbol of strong female power, others have accused her of reinforcing gender norms behind a thin façade of feminist rhetoric. Her association with the women's rights movement won her plenty of enemies among conservative Argentines, and it is probable that, once again, their use of sexualized language to defame her was a direct response to her unusual female power and the threat she seemed to pose toward gender norms. Donna Guy observes that Perón's rise to power "marked the moment in modern Argentine history when family, class, and nation had to be re-examined" (207). She specifies, "Emerging as a popularly elected president after years of authoritarian rule, Perón promised a new political role for the working class and, through female suffrage and Evita Perón's efforts to organize the Women's Peronist party, a new role for women as well" (207). According to the Argentine elite, the new female role that Eva embodied was aggressive, emotionless, and subversive of the "healthy" relationship between the sexes. One politician famously accused her of being "a woman who would stand by and see someone to whom she had made love, whipped to death"—resulting in her unflattering reputation as the Woman with the Whip (Fraser and Navarro 179). Critics like Flores depicted her as "an utterly flat character of monomaniacal intensity," believing that everything Eva had achieved "was the result of a single-minded quest for revenge on the world, while she revenged herself on men by seducing them in order to humiliate them" (Fraser and Navarro 179). It is unsurprising, then, that they resorted to a discourse that represented Eva as a heartless whore, hoping to discredit her promotion of new freedoms for women, namely suffrage.

Yet conservative Argentines need not have worried as much as they did, for Eva's feminism was only a diluted version of the revolutionary movement that Socialist women's groups advocated. In fact, "Juan and Eva were anxious to distinguish their movement from feminism," and "much of Eva's gendered rhetoric served to justify her leadership and the roles of Peronist women in nonthreatening terms" (Deutsch 272-3). Even as she promoted suffrage and greater political participation for women, her ideology remained bound to traditional assumptions about women and men, and she was careful not to overstep those limitations. A close look at her agenda reveals that although she ran the Peronist Women's Party, "urging women into nontraditional roles, [...] at the same time, she positioned herself and them as traditionally feminine" (Hall 243). Her political role beside Juan mirrored her role in their marriage, which was decidedly conservative. Her autobiography states that "the difference between herself and her husband was that he was the one 'with the intelligence; I, with the heart,'" and the slogan of the Peronist regime became "*Perón cumple; Evita dignifica*," reinforcing the assumption that men are naturally intellectual while women are naturally emotional (Taylor 11). Eva and Juan were careful to emphasize the difference between their brand of women's rights and that of the socially threatening feminist movement. Taylor explains, "The virtue

of the Peronist woman lay in never aspiring to supplant the opposite sex. Rather, Peronist feminism represented an effort to take advantage of women's own special identity and talents in order to better fill their particular place in the world" (76). According to Peronist discourse, men and women retained their natural-born differences, and women remained subordinate to men—but they were encouraged to make the most of their feminine attributes for the good of the country. The Peróns asserted that, at their most patriotic, "Argentine women would place God, country and Perón above their individual desires" and their participation in politics would make them all the more "feminine and attractive," not "masculine and overbearing" (Carlson 189). Many Argentines swallowed this ideology, to the dismay of genuine feminists (Hall 243). It is important to note that Eva's advocacy of rights for women was not entirely empty; the Perón administration did bring some concrete, positive changes for women, such as offering them their own political party and thus a space in which to articulate their needs and desires, as well as to be active outside the private sphere (Deutsch 273). Nonetheless, as Sandra McGee Deutsch so astutely notes, "if [...] leaders and the masses continue to define sex roles in traditional terms and use this framework as a paradigm for the state and society, they may undermine the entire process of political and social change"—and indeed, the Peróns' failure to challenge traditional sex roles prevented their movement from being revolutionary in a way that would have truly benefited women (260).

Still, Eva's role in winning certain rights for women was one of many factors that won her vast public support, particularly from the working class, during her short career. This support became so intense that Eva began to take on the mythical status in public discourse that would come to define her, especially after her death. In multiple ways, Eva became objectified by her people, reduced to the purely symbolic and hyperbolic. For this reason, her physical appearance and the changing condition of her body held immense significance for Argentines both during her life and after her death. In certain ways, Eva facilitated her own transformation from a simple woman to a national icon, mainly by dressing the part. She adopted her trademark bleach-blonde hair during her film career, and so it served as a reminder of her sensational past even afterward. She was also known for her eye-catching fashion, which lent her aristocratic glamour yet simultaneously raised questions about her class and her moral character—as evidenced, for example, by an infamous incident in which she wore a dress that bared one shoulder while seated next to a church official. The rather bizarre interpretation of Eva's appearance offered by Flores in *The Woman with the Whip* reflects that of many Perón-era Argentines:

In appearance she was the apotheosis of the demimondaine; there was a voluptuousness about her that did not come from the prodigal display of ornament alone but from the lushness of the flesh

itself, as if that, in sympathy, had ripened with her material success. [...] She displayed the smooth curves of maturity and a softness and a womanliness in her face that quite vanished later. To the discriminating her appearance was vulgar; beautiful as her clothes were they might have been chosen for the star of some super-colossal Hollywood production. Perhaps in this showy array she found a needed reassurance, for none could question her ability to wear such clothes to their full advantage (110).

And indeed, it seems certain that Eva selected a wardrobe designed to complement her desired image, whether it was that of a European-Argentine aristocrat or, later, that of the saintly mother figure for her country's people. *Evita* dramatizes Eva's preoccupation with her appearance in the song "Rainbow High," in which she prepares for her so-called Rainbow Tour of Europe:

I came from the people, they need to adore me
So Christian Dior me from my head to my toes
I need to be dazzling, I want to be Rainbow High
They must have excitement, and so must I!

The objectification and symbolic importance of Eva's body only increased as her illness worsened. In her final days, Eva continued to be paraded around Buenos Aires, wearing "a huge fur coat [that] concealed her emaciated body and the framework of wire and plaster that kept her on her feet" (Hall 250). Throughout the progression of her illness, Eva's doctors never revealed to her the facts of her uterine cancer, "only that she had some sort of 'female problems'" (Hall 247). To some, it is symbolically significant that Eva refused a hysterectomy—and there is reason to believe that she did so because it would have seemed to her like a violation of her womanhood. In this instance, and even more after her death, there was the pervasive "implication that mutilating her body and endangering her health would destroy or diminish her power," and this seems to reflect a belief on behalf of Eva herself and of Argentines as a whole that there existed a "profound relationship between her very womanhood and her political power" (Hall 246-7). The symbolism of Eva's cancer alone was profound, for the illness rendered her sterile and thus unable to produce the kind of family that was so highly valued in Argentina.

Yet the significance of Eva's living body never matched the significance it acquired after death, when it was completely transformed in the minds of Argentines into an object representing every last element of the *Evita* mythology, from her purported spiritual power to her supposedly liberal sexuality. The events following her death amplified this mythology to an extreme degree; her corpse was immediately preserved before being displayed to the Argentine masses as they paid their respects. Then, during

the coup that finally ousted Perón, the body was stolen and its whereabouts remained unknown for almost two decades. Rumors abound that it was ravaged by bands of anti-Peronists—specifically, that it was sexually abused. Her body was considered "so potentially powerful" that when it was recovered, it was placed in an impenetrable tomb (Hall 231). Fraser and Navarro conclude their study of Eva with a description of her final resting place: "It is an outwardly unimpressive tomb, but it is more than it appears to be. [...] It reflects a fear: a fear that the body will disappear from the tomb and that the woman, or rather the myth of the woman, will reappear" (192).

The reasons behind the fact that Eva's body assumed such cultural significance during and after her life, to an extent that remains unmatched by any other, are complex and debatable. Still, it does not seem unreasonable to conclude that the process of Eva's objectification was closely tied to popular beliefs about her sexuality. It is significant that Argentines—and eventually foreigners as well—consistently placed such emphasis on her physical appearance and the special "powers" that her body were thought to possess as a result of its femaleness, from its sexual attractiveness to its motherly qualities (or lack of them). Once again, the sexualization of Eva's body seems to indicate that in popular culture both in Argentina and abroad, female power could not—and cannot still—be conceptualized independently of female sexuality.

Although we might perhaps hope to attribute this flawed conception of power and female sexuality to the "backward" attitudes of the past, we must face the fact that the *Evita* myth—and countless reincarnations of it—persists today. *Evita* the musical did not emerge until the end of the 1970s, almost three decades after Eva's death. In the same year, Jorge Luis Borges was asked for his opinion of Eva Perón, and he replied that he considered her a whore (Fraser and Navarro 181). Furthermore, we cannot allow ourselves to attribute this sexism to Latin American *machismo*, for as Taylor confirms, "the ethnographic literature in general support[s] the idea that the qualities thought to characterize the power of Eva Perón are linked both in Argentina and in other cultures with ideas concerning female power in general" (13). More specifically, in societies around the world, female power is considered "informal and uninstitutionalized in contrast with the culturally legitimated statuses and authority attributed to men," and "powerful or not, women and their behaviour are seen as 'idiosyncratic and irrational,' 'emotional,' 'happy-go-lucky,' 'spontaneous and confused,' 'affective,' and 'expressive,' deviant or manipulative" (Taylor 13). This is precisely the ideology that has historically been applied to Eva Perón, who is remembered as possessing a power that was "emotional and intuitive, violent, mystical, uninstitutionalized" (Taylor 11). We can see this stereotype at work not only in contemporary Latin America, but also in U.S. society today; consider, for example, the popular discourse surrounding presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin in 2008. Rumors circulated that Clinton was a lesbian, while excessive attention was paid to

Palin's physical appearance. Meanwhile, the sexuality of male politicians regularly goes unexamined. While certain elements of the popular discourse on female power and sexuality may have shifted, it is clear that the two are rarely separated in the collective consciousness—a pattern that threatens to discredit the agency and desires of women worldwide. A closer study of powerful females such as Eva Perón may help us to identify and counteract the misleading connections we so often draw among women, power, and sex.

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