

Machismo: The Role of Chicano Rap in the Construction of the Latino Identity Presented at WSCA (Monterey, CA, 2011)

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Abstract

As Chicano rap has begun to enter mainstream music, some argue that the presence of Latino identities within popular media is beneficial in terms of representation. However, some critical scholars discuss how deviant, hyper-masculine representations of the Latino male have had detrimental effects on how Latinos are understood by others and on how Latino males understand themselves. Specifically, this paper explores a particular form of Latino identity and representation called *machismo* where Latinos are typically characterized as being strong, violent, phallogentric, heterosexual and hyper-masculine. This essay explores the Latino male body through machismo.

First, the essay explores the existing research on machismo and how the performance of machismo emerged as a response to colonialism and displacement. The deviant identity performance can be understood as a counter-hegemonic response to subjugation by Spanish conquests. Second, the essay demonstrates that such representations are very much part of how Latinos are portrayed contemporaneously in Chicano rap and other forms of media. Machismo identity can be observed both in lyrics and visual representations of the Latino male body. Third, it discusses the need for representation for marginalized cultures through machismo, even at the cost of contributing to detrimental stereotypes. Latino rap serves as a voice through which artists explore identity, politics, social justice, assimilation, and more. The essay concludes with a discussion on how critical analysis of machismo might influence newer representations of the Latino identity and how other Latinos in media have made it possible to flow through different means of ethnic and cultural representation.

Machismo: The Role of Chicano Rap in the Construction of the Latino Identity

Since the early 90's, Chicano rap has emerged as an increasingly popular genre of music. Artists such as Kid Frost, Lighter Shade of Brown, Mr. Capone, and Lil' Rob have drawn attention to this fusion of modern rap and Chicano culture that typically explores the domain of what it is to possess Latino masculinity. For the purposes of this essay, "Chicano" will refer specifically to the genre of music and culture that is performed through a Mexican-American perspective, a perspective that rap artist Lil Rob represents. "Latino" will be applied more broadly to encompass peoples from other parts of Latin America and "Latino America" who also undergo similar masculine stereotypes within the media. This vernacular distinction is similarly made by Fernando Delgado (1986b) who has previously done research on rap artist Kid Frost. "These rappers use cultural and ideological elements to again empower Mexican American audiences to conceive of themselves as unified, politically engaged bloc" (p. 95). "

Lyrics and music videos frequently characterize the Latino male body as powerful, chauvinistic, and violent, a characterization that some scholars have labeled as *machismo*. As this essay will later discuss, machismo is a terminology that describes a particular characterization of the Latino male that ties hyper-masculinity to the Latino male body. This means of characterization carries significant implications that are worthy of exploration.

Moreman & McIntosh's (2010) article indicates that Brown masculinity must be performed in a "straight" manner to assure Brown masculine identity. This implication serves as a reminder that machismo characteristics must be performed by Latinos to ensure their sexual orientation. Machismo rests on Latin Lover stereotypes, leading researchers to believe that machismo qualities have been structured as well as accepted by media and their audiences all over the world.

Normalizing this behavior in the media may also harm all males within the Latino culture. Performing qualities of machismo may become conventional for Latinas/os since those are the images continually embedded into everyday media.

The characterization of cultural identities in popular media frequently plays a significant role in how people from different cultures understand one another, especially in areas of the world that lack diversity. However, having a limited understanding of a culture puts one at risk for misjudgment of that culture. Having derogatory perceptions, as Martin and Nakayama (2003) discuss, can lead to a chosen separation from specific cultures (p. 372). The representation of cultural identities not only has implications for how others view a culture, it has implications for how people of that culture see themselves. Questions regarding these implications arise. How do media outlets such as Chicano Rap influence how the dominant culture perceives Latino men? With lyrics that normalize drugs, violence, sex, gang affiliation, and poverty, does Chicano Rap serve as a positive outlet for the Latina/o communities? Do these lyrics contribute to negative preconceptions about the Latino male?

Chicano rap had been a genre that was clearly separate from mainstream media. Through music, Chicano rappers artistically represent their cultural experiences of growing up in the barrio, code-switching, affirming Chicano history, police brutality in brown communities. Recently, some Chicano rap has begun to enter the mainstream, thereby becoming a medium through which Chicanos can expose their identities to non-Chicano cultures while simultaneously serving as an outlet for Chicanos to understand their own male identities. Thus, a new, mainstream audience may call for a reconsideration of how Latino males, even those outside of Mexican-American descent, choose to represent themselves.

In this essay, I will explore machismo by examining the performance of cultural identities through Chicano rap music. First, I will explore the existing research on machismo and how the performance of the cultured male gender emerged as a response to colonialism and displacement. Second, I will demonstrate that these representations are still very much part of how Chicanos represent themselves in rap. Chicano Rap Recording Artist Lil Rob and his highly acclaimed *1218 pt 1* album will serve as the artifact that I will explore. Third, the social, cultural, and personal implications of machismo are discussed and analyzed. The essay concludes with a discussion on how communication scholars might contribute to inspiring a different representation of the Latino male body.

Machismo: An Expression of Border Identity

Fernando Delgado, one of the leading Communication field scholars on machismo, discusses the detrimental role of machismo on the Latino identity. He also focuses on how machismo emerged as an expression of homelessness and counter-hegemonic identity. Delgado (1998a) explains that brown masculinity is located in the *in-between* space otherwise known as the border. For recent immigrants, the feeling of being culturally displaced in the United States results in individuals “perform[ing] the self in extravagant fashions” (p. 389). Chicano rappers articulate and rearticulate Chicano identity to rise up against the police, educational institutions, as well as government officials who are typically part of the dominant culture. Lashing out through lyrical context in rap music offers a sense of power, awareness, and cultural reinforcement. Thus, expression of the male body through machismo represents something much greater than simple masculinity. To practice machismo is political; it is to be against assimilation to White performances of the male body, unfair treatment by law enforcement and by the government, and more.

For Hector Amaya (2007), both Samuel Ramos and Octavio Paz provide insight into the historical influences on male identity in Latin America. “Their works deal with deviant and violent masculinities in Mexico and these masculinities’ role in constructing a post-revolutionary Mexican identity” (p. 3). Ramos was a significant Mexican philosopher of the first half of the twentieth century. He argued that this type of masculinity was the effect of an inferiority complex resulting from the Spanish Conquest that later contributed to racialization and sexualization. Arguably, the act of overcompensation in the performances of masculinity or aggression is a response to the submissive role natives in Latin Americans had because of the Spanish conquest.

Over 400 years later, this counter-hegemonic performance continues in the United States where Latinos may experience a sense of subordination due to race issues in the United States.

Machismo then becomes a means of performing the Latino identity and as Amaya (2007) further states, machismo “serves as a rhetorical and analytical frame” (p. 92). Thus it is an interpretive orientation not only a means of self-expression. For some, machismo is a way of being, a way of thinking *and* a way of evaluating or judging other men. By evaluating Latino men through this frame, others are rhetorically persuaded to see themselves and others through this frame as well. In being both a means of self expression and a rhetorical and analytical frame through which to function, machismo is both a representation of Latino identity and an influential, rhetorical message that calls others to perform that representation as well.

Contemporary Examples of Machismo

Although there are multiple mediums through which the message of machismo is dispensed, Chicano rap music is perhaps the most pervasive. Although the machismo mentality can be spread through such networks as family, friends, television and magazines, Chicano rap is the one form that most conveniently reaches internationally into contemporary, mainstream, and Latino culture, especially considering its increasing popularity. Thus, for the purpose of this essay, Chicano rap will be explored in order to demonstrate the presence of machismo in contemporary culture. Specifically, this essay will analyze the musical artistry of recording artist Lil Rob. As a popular rapper with a career that spans as far back as 1992, he serves as an example of a Chicano rap artist who represents his Mexican and Latino culture through his lyrics. As I will further discuss, his music involves lyrics that describe his cultural experiences growing up in impoverished neighborhoods in San Diego.

Robert Flores also known as Lil Rob was born on September 22, 1975 in San Diego, California. He grew up in La Colonia Gardens, which is known to be a dominated Latino neighborhood on the outskirts of the city (R. Flores, phone interview, May 18, 2010). Lil Rob began rapping at the early age of sixteen years old, and as other Chicano rappers before him such as Kid Frost, he performs songs that provide insight to growing up in a Latino neighborhood. Chicano rappers similar to Lil Rob also offer the opportunity to explore the construction of identity through their lyrical performance styles. Some of these styles include examinations of how Chicano masculinity is performed in public settings framed by cultural politics such as the media.

His experience of his Latino identity becomes intertwined with stories of gang life, sex, drugs, and alcohol and that Latino identity evolves into a Chicano identity. As Amaya (2007) describes it, “most contemporary uses of machismo define it as a type of hyper-masculinity that is strong, violent, phallogentric, and in need of constantly proving itself.” In Lil Rob’s album, *1218 part 1*, which is his most successful record to date, the rapper identifies with a more mainstream sound, but does not surrender to the dominant culture that encourages less lyrical emphasis on the Mexican-American lifestyle. In his song “*Rough Neighborhood*,” Lil Rob describes in his lyrics how he was involved in a shooting that sent him to the hospital for injuries. He also details how there were many of the people that lived in his neighborhood who were familiar products of incarceration.

Rough Neighborhood

*It wasn't long before I got mine/
see I got shot at the stop sign
took a bala¹ to the boca²
got blood all over my ropa³
I lost a couple of homies
I got some friends up in the pin
but when they get out
it seems like they go right back in again
it all started out with crazy situations
juvenile hall and probation
then get busted for violation
that leaves a lifetime incarceration*

(Flores, 2005, Track #9)

¹ Bullet

² Mouth

³ Clothes

These lyrics perform qualities of machismo by connecting the Latino male with gang life (i.e. incarceration, probation, getting shot, etc.). This connects back to what Amaya (2007) was discussing in explaining how machismo is in part defined as a hyper-masculine and violent person, focused on proving him against legal authorities. Many Chicanos can directly or indirectly relate to the subjects within the musical genre like poverty, police brutality, or incarceration. Thus the lyrics that discuss gang life become complexly related to being Mexican or Latino. This connection becomes even more apparent when code switching is used to identify the self or others in music.

In the song “I’m Still Here,” Lil Rob narrates some of the experiences he has had with meeting new people. He suggests that men, in this song referred to as “eses,” often judge his character before meeting him. This usually results in many “eses” negatively judging Lil Rob.

I’m Still Here

*You've never met me, so why in the fuck
would I have a problem with you?
but if you do I guess we gotta do
what we gotta do, shit, other than that I'm cool,
tu sabes⁴ ese⁵ I'm not tryin to be something I'm not,
aint got nothin to lose, every nothing I got,
I'll take it with me when I rest in peace in my lot,
lately I've been thinking a lot, drinking a lot,
even gave tweaking a thought, I keep with the pot,
been sleeping a lot, wake up confused
I don't even know if it's the weekend or not, do you?
(Flores, 2005, Track #13)*

In this excerpt from his lyrics, Lil Rob takes on a very masculine tone, explaining that he is not afraid to resort to violence if conflict escalates. Heavy alcohol consumption and marijuana usage are also connected to his gang life, and consequentially to the male Latino identity.

Cultural identity is certainly something that is very complex and messy for Latinos. Instead of Chicano Rappers being thought of as having pride in their heritage through their lyrical content, they can at the same time be sending mixed messages to the dominant culture. Lil Rob’s track entitled “Summer Nights,” was his most successful track to date. This song helped the artist breakthrough into the Billboard Top 20 charts in 2005. This track helped form the imagery of Chicano lifestyle.

Summer Nights

*The temp was eighty and I'm cruising with my lady
Playing some Ralfi Pagan⁶ Ooo Baby Baby⁷
I see my homeboys and they're cruising in their rides
With their ladies sitting by their sides People think we look crazy
But I think we look classy
But then again...
That's only if you ask me
(Flores, 2005, Track #2)*

Mentions of cruising the summer streets in low-rider cars, listening to oldies, having beautiful women by their sides in their passenger seats, and excessive drinking and partying are all mentioned in this melodic summertime anthem. In this song, Lil Rob provides imagery of what may happen in the daily lifestyle of a Chicano. He mentions the challenges that other cultures may possess in understanding this type of Chicano living.

⁴ You understand

⁵ Dude

⁶ Ralfie Pagan was a New York based Soul Singer

⁷ Song composed and performed by Ralfie Pagan

The lines “*People think we look crazy but I think we look classy,*” in this song further illustrates how this Chicano artist detects that Chicanos have a different style than the norm. This includes everything from the way he speaks and dresses. Lil Rob contends in this hit song and through phone interview, that to him, this can be identified through many Chicanos as a form of sophistication and normal behavior. “There’s nothing wrong with the way we dress, the way we crease up, the way we take our time to look nice in our way. Just like that part in “*Summer Nights,*” when I say “*People think we look crazy, but I think we look classy.*” That’s just it. Being a class act. Following the old Chicano Culture that is educating the ideas about rapping about these kinds of things” (R. Flores, phone interview, May 18, 2010).

He contributes to some of the stereotypes that the dominant culture may possess, such as owning low-rider cars and cruising with beautiful women. This artist makes it clear that he believes these are things that showcase some of the differences between cultures. “We definitely have our own way of doing things. Chicanos; we have our own slang. That’s what makes us different. We have our own stories to tell. Everybody has their neighborhoods and ours was the barrio, so you speak with more neighborhood influences” (R. Flores, phone interview, May 18, 2010).

One other factor that also functions to separate Chicanos from other cultural identities is physical appearance. Chicano rappers have created a pattern of displaying distinct features (e.g. shaved heads, baggy clothes, extensive facial hair, wear brim hats and bandanas etc). This look obviously does not fit into mainstream conceptualizations of professionalism. Thus, many people are quick to categorize these music artists as criminals, lower class citizens or in society. Physical identifiers function to separate Latinos from others; but as Delgado (2009) discusses, a consequence of this is that “brown thus becomes part of a scatological vocabulary that marks Chicanos as matter of out place but also as part of masculinist identity and cultural practice. As such, Brown can be marked as other and forgotten (marginalized) or highlighted (stereotyped) by the mainstream institutions and discourses in the U.S.” (p. 155). “Brown” bonds us together but also makes us vulnerable to attack by non-Chicanos.

Not only is Chicano culture forgotten and/or highlighted within mainstream U.S. culture, at times it is displaced within Latino culture as well. Although colonialism and immigration issues are all facets of the Latino experienced in the United States, Chicano speaks to a very particular subset within Latino culture. Delgado (1998b) explains that identifiers can distinguish the names given to many Latin People including Mexican-Americans. Names such as Chicano highlight political and ideological significance that influence the work of Chicano rappers. Moreman & Calafell (2008), in their consideration of Latina/o identity constructions, further examine this topic. “When trying to define and determine what it means to be Latina/o using the general tools and techniques of cultural understanding, Latinas/os find ourselves forced into discursive terms that may or may not capture who we are” (p. 314). As noted above, the lyrical content of Chicano rap involves working toward the respect of their cultural identity in the United States, something that other forms of Latino music might more easily achieve.

Through lyrical content and performance, Chicano rappers such as Lil Rob are creating forms of identity and expressions of belonging here in the United States. For the reason that many Latinos have been told that they are outsiders and do not belong in the U.S., Chicano rappers have been motivated to lash out through their lyrical content. In turn, Chicano rappers have created a significant voice in society.

Recent recording artists such as Pitbull have been able to successfully breakthrough into the mainstream culture. This Cuban rapper from Miami, Florida, has had great success over the years selling hundreds of thousands records worldwide. Although Pitbull has had major success over the past several years in his career, his initial style included music and lyrical content similar to Lil Rob. He later branched off into a style that can no longer be labeled as Chicano Rap. Instead, because most of his music consists of electro hip-hop and house rhythms, (which are all mainstream qualities in top 40 radio stations nationwide) his music does not fall into the Chicano lifestyle that artists such as Lil Rob have been known to discuss in his music. Artists such as Pitbull shed positive light on the fact that it is possible for Latinos to break into the mainstream culture, which serves as an empowering message to Latino youth.

As Pitbull moves away from Chicano Rap narration, his music incorporates the code-switching of Spanish and English.

Moreman (2008) discusses how a mixture of English and Spanish has generally been unaccepted by both Spanish and English language artists. Coincidentally, Pitbull has publicly discussed how many record labels were initially uninviting of his merging of two languages. Even today, Pitbull feels that it damages his reputation from a dominant culture perspective. He has publicly mentioned that mainstream music radio stations initially did not feel comfortable with his usage of Spanish in fear that it would not “fit” into the dominant cultural language. In an interview with K. Clark (2008) Pitbull discusses how “Everything in the game is how you get categorized and that’s very frustrating when you don’t think that you fit into one specific box.” Arguably, a significant part of Pitbull’s success has been because of the way he portrays his masculinity. Sexualized women are often posed with this artist, and topics of sex fill up the majority of his lyrical repertoire. While he minimizes the topic of gang life, as Chicano rappers are known to perform, Pitbull has found an innovative way to successfully incorporate other machismo qualities in his music.

Instead of wearing baggy attire, Pitbull presently utilizes his clothing as a form of success. In music videos and live concerts, Pitbull can be seen wearing expensive looking suits which had previously never been seen by Latino rappers. Pitbull’s new image also incorporates expensive automobiles and sexualized women in mainstream music videos. Furthermore, although his image has changed dramatically over the years, this author contends that there are bigger implications in being a Latino male in the media. There seems to be a sense of surrendering into what success is supposed to “look like” in the public eye. Sporting suits and having financial success has been an image that is typically normalized by white corporate Americans, not Latinos. Moreover, rap music has been a dominantly Black genre. As a result, Chicano rappers such as Lil Rob as well as Latino rappers similar to Pitbull may struggle to find their own identity into music and other forms of media because they do not fit into a constructed white/black binary. “The U.S. is comprised of three nations, one Black, one White, and one in which people strive to be something other than Black to avoid the sting of White Supremacy” (Alcoff, 2003, p. 8). Chicano and Latino rappers may be revealing to the public that the only way to be accepted into mainstream America is to possess forms of machismo not only through their behavior, but through their imagery and style. These developments of machismo may also reinforce success and social acceptance that is neither Black or White, but Brown.

This crossing over to the mainstream by Latinos is something that has been an issue mentioned by communication scholars. Calafell & Delgado (2004) discuss how artists such as Carlos Santana, Marc Anthony, and Gloria and Emilio Estefan have been able to cross over to the mainstream and initially be accepted by the dominant culture. Although these Latinas/os have gained celebrity status worldwide, Calafell and Delgado imply that it also can create a sense of loss to their roots. “The image of moving from, moving to, or moving through is commonly encapsulated in the notion of crossing over. Itself a multilayered term reflecting national dislocation, language change, and social mobility, crossing over often involves narratives of loss, liminality, even rejection” (p. 12). In some ways the act of serving a mainstream audience, requires one to alter one’s message to something unique from what it would have been if the audience served were purely a Latino audience.

Analysis: The Role of Chicano Rap in Media

Research on ethnic and racial representation has tended to be very critical of the mainstream media in the United States. Also, research has begun to examine how non-white groups are using their own self-determined imagery. As Delgado (1995) discusses, “scholars have begun to respond to how artists, in and out of the mainstream media machinery, have begun to represent themselves and articulate the voice of their communities through the mass media” (p. 161). Delgado discusses how Blacks as well as Latinas/os over the years have utilized media sources to establish cultural identity. Despite supposedly being given the agency to establish cultural identities, the Latino “concept” is frequently performed in particular ways. Thus, artists within Latino music face a dilemma. Some of the Chicano machismo ways of performing the Latino identity feed into and perpetuate hyper-masculine, violent, phallo-centric stereotypes about the Latino male body. Although glamorizing gang life may have negative implications for young Latino youth, there are also other needs that should be respected. As discussed earlier in the essay, machismo is a performance that has historical significance. Machismo functions not only as a means of representation for a particular sub-culture within the overall Latino culture, it also functions as a rhetorical performative response to subordination due to such persistent societal conditions such as colonization, displacement, inequality, and prejudice.

So although the presence of this voice may reflect negatively on Latinos and reinforce some stereotypes, the voice of their struggles should be welcomed, respected, and understood as one of many ways to perform the Latino identity. Latinos have some agency in how we want to be represented. In other cases of self-representation, people of other cultures have felt pressured to perform their identities in prescribed ways. Calafell (2008) describes how immigration forces individuals to perform dominant ideologies that can be inconsistent with their own. However, with a Latino presence that spans anywhere from Carlos Santana to Mario Lopez to Lil Rob, it seems that Latinos and Chicanos have some range in how they want to be seen in popular media. Still, certain representations prevail in the minds of popular culture.

Ramasubramanian (2009) points out that Latina/o's in the media have been labeled as the "other" relative to the dominant culture. She argues that media sources such as television depict Latinos to be inferior and different. It is this depicted difference in the media that leads Ramasubramanian to presume that portrayals in the media can have detrimental effects on attitudes towards racial/ethnic groups. She uses a model to examine the role of prejudice feelings towards cultural groups. The model is then used to specify types of negative stereotypes such as laziness and criminality work independently and simultaneously to influence policy preferences by the dominant culture. Lastly, the model is used to examine attitudes towards groups such as Latinos, which provides greater confidence in the applicability of the model. Similar to the way machismo can be analyzed in Chicano Rap, Ramasubramanian uses television in particular to point out the ways in which Latinos are portrayed. These stereotypes include being labeled as oversexed and promiscuous seducers, which has significant connection with machismo. Examinations within the model conclude that viewers from the dominant culture associate (label) Latinos as being either lazy or criminals. Most extensively, the findings from this study reinforce the existing literature that suggests that emotions are a greater predictor of performance behavioral intentions than are beliefs.

Valdivia (2008) suggests that Latina/o media scholars must work in ways that capture the over floating Latina/o representation. Traveling across somatic lines, linguistic lines and even natural lines, our imagery moves but often maintains insubordinate meanings. "The fact is that media and popular culture do not stay within the boundaries of the US nation-state, nor are they any longer produced cleanly within its borders" (p. 2). Valdivia indicates that Latino research must go into tensions between agency and structure. This will allow increased nuanced study in class, nation, ethnicity, and race of individuals such as Latinos. Since mainstream Latina/os receive the majority of attention from media outlets, this dehumanizes those Latinas/os that do not fit into this popularized Latinas/os structure.

Machismo: What is it doing?

So, what exactly is machismo in Chicano rap doing? How can this element be vital towards the Communication field? Moreman and Calafell's (2008) article on La Llorona's revolution against Latino Masculinity highlights the importance of trying to uncover identity through pan-Latinas/os representation in the media. "When trying to define and determine what it means to be Latina/o using the general tools and techniques of cultural understanding, Latinas/os find ourselves forced into discursive terms that may or may not capture who we are" (p 314). According to these authors, non-mainstream films such as *Chasing Papi* are utilized to show the forms of machismo, and typically considered outside of critical consideration. This leaves much room for evaluation, much like Chicano rap.

Miller (2010) asserts that masculine behaviors can be understood as performative and ideal to one's culture. Since these images of masculinity are fed to the public, people become compelled to recognize and assimilate these behaviors with the cultural groups they see in the media. Miller describes how media sources often label these cultural groups because it achieves successful identification for them. In other words, people begin to believe in the machismo qualities they see within the media and make the assumption that machismo is connected to Latino male identity.

Masculinity for Latinos in particular, has become a noticeable problem in society. Delgado (2000) describes how there are larger implications of hybridity and space that go into what he calls brownness. The author describes how being brown fits somewhere between the traditional black and white paradigms that we have created in the U.S. He continues that Chicanos (Mexican-Americans) in the U.S. are economically segregated from mainstream U.S. society.

This cultural group is then considered as Americanized Mexicans or hyphenated Americans, which disassociates their overall identity in the U.S. Not only does this feeling of being “out of place” damage masculine behavior, it can also damage the ideologies of all Mexican-Americans. Therefore, it is vital that outlets such as Chicano Rap can be considered to be an expression of American space and cultural identity.

Cultural groups such as Latinos may convey alternative values that the dominant culture may not understand due to a deeper historical context that others are not familiar with. Rinderle & Montoya (2008) believe that cultural identity labels are applicable to the study of interpersonal and intercultural communication. They explain some of the troubles that Latinos have been faced with including disempowerment issues as well as cultural invisibility. “Cultural invisibility, racialization and prejudice, individual disempowerment, and submission to divide-and-conquer political hegemony are potential dangers of misinformation and the misuse of ethnic identity labels (p. 146). Interestingly, however, it seems that part of what it means to be machismo is the need to be marginalized and disempowered. Due to the fact that machismo functions as a rhetorical response to marginalization, pulling it into the mainstream would erase the needs for its existence.

Conclusion

Lyrical content in rap music has been controversial ever since the genre began in the early 1970’s. Although much research has been analyzed concerning the lifestyle of hip-hop artists, a wide majority of studies has concentrated on the Black culture. This gap in study has left out a wide range of Chicano Rap Artists who have also been struggling to find a voice for their people.

Although many of these rappers contend that they are exemplifying portrayals of brown pride and cultural identity, the research in this essay does provide evidence as to how the dominant culture may perceive things differently. Traits of machismo have damaged the way Latino males are depicted in the media and throughout society. This has resulted in stereotypes that Brown men are typically abusive, alcoholics, unintelligent and of lower class. There is undoubtedly a powerful responsibility that brown masculinity possesses. Struggles to find an identity here in the U.S. persists to this day, indisputably because Latinos are from different locations around the world.

Embellishing machismo in the media is just part of the dilemma that Latino men are undergoing. Not only does machismo send mixed messages to the dominant culture audience, but this masculine trait can also persuade other cultures to believe in these stereotypes. By analyzing Chicano Rap artist Lil Rob, this essay demonstrates how Chicano Rap artists portray qualities of machismo, which reinforce stereotypes toward Latino males. The dominant culture then uses these images of machismo to portray how men of this culture behave, which of course is a stereotype that becomes very difficult to overcome. What should be gained in this, is an understanding that what it means to be Latino is contextual; there are multitudes of ways to perform a singular ethnic identity. Although machismo may have detrimental implications, it is a performance that is necessary to give voice to a portion of the Latino culture that specifically feels marginalized and disempowered. More, however, could be done in framing the past struggles as the past, in creating forms of music that preach a message of overcoming the dangerous lifestyle, poverty, and mistreatment.

For as long as I can remember, I have been captivated in the behaviors that help construct Latino identity. For the reason that racial discrimination played a momentous role in my upbringing, I have specifically dedicated my research interests in how Latino males are perceived throughout our society. In addition, discussions regarding machismo in previous courses that I have had always seemed to be noteworthy, leaving me with many questions to be asked about this global stereotype. By evaluating the topic of machismo and by utilizing a critical approach this essay has definitely linked to my overall research interests in Latino identity within intercultural communication.

As I mentioned in the early stages of this essay, in the song “Rough Neighborhood,” Lil Rob affirms that he will never change who he is and what he portrays within Chicano Culture. Although there are plenty of other Chicano Rap Artists who continue to employ their roots through lyrics, performance, or interviews, as communication scholars we must come to appreciate the differences that culture generates.

Furthermore, although society will continue to undergo transformations of ideas, beliefs, or thoughts regarding ideologies such as machismo, one thing is for certain. There will always be a need for subordinate groups to create a voice...an identity...and a move towards social acceptance of subcultures within cultures.

Rough Neighborhood

“But even though my town went through some changes
one thing will never change
it made me who I am
and I remain to stay the same.”
(Flores, 2005, Track #9)

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