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Hispanic Culture and Machismo: How Hispanics Interpret Transgender and Gender Non-conforming Identities

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HISPANIC CULTURE AND MACHISMO: HOW HISPANICS INTERPRET
TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING IDENTITIES

A Thesis

by

KAREN R. RODRIGUEZ

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The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
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TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING IDENTITIES

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December 2018

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines dynamics linked to normative gender expectations and gender identities within Hispanic culture. Little is known in this regard concerning how Hispanics perceive and interpret transgender and gender non-conforming identities. The analysis provides a qualitative assessment based on 35 in-depth, face-to-face interviews to examine the following research questions: 1) how are life experiences such as marriage, employment and religiosity associated with gender ideologies and gendered expectations? and 2) how do age, sex, class, and education influence gender attitudes?

The present study, in turn, adds to the literature by examining gender norm constructs among Mexican-origin persons to enhance our knowledge about an understudied population which constitutes one of the largest ethnic groups in South Texas.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Gender norms encourage socially desirable behaviors to which people are expected to conform. According to Wade and Ferree (2015), gender norms are societal expectations based on an individual's socially identified gender. Certainly, gender shape our lives, beliefs and, interactions. This occurs in everyday social performances and these performances are acts deemed socially appropriate to our identified gender (Wade and Ferree 2015). For example, Butler (1990) describes gender to be a performance—how one acts through words and physical movements. Butler's concept of performativity (1990) describes gender as very similar to performing in a play. Individuals both act their gender and actively construct it while acting it out. Butler (1990; 2011) argues in this regard that masculinity and femininity are not inherent, and that gender is simply a societal construct. These constant acts or performances by men and women reinforce a gender binary, wherein it is assumed that there are only heterosexual men and heterosexual women. This gender binary excludes non-heterosexual men and non-heterosexual women and is found in most cultures (Butler 1990; Wade and Ferree 2015).

Within many Hispanic cultures, gender norms and gender constructs are further grounded within a machismo context. As a result, differences in gender role attitudes exist and dictate many aspects of men's socially acceptable behaviors—especially Hispanic-masculine behaviors that empower men, while at the same time perpetuating inequality and the degradation of women and femininity (Hurtado and Sinha 2016). In general, machismo refers to masculine ideologies

and behaviors that stress desirable attributes such as domination, physical courage, virility, and aggressiveness that is largely idealized among a majority of men in Mexican culture (Andrade, 1992). Machismo and its various dimensions are thus relevant to understanding social behaviors expected of men and women. Nevertheless, the formation of gender roles based on machismo perpetuates inequality and facilitates the oppression of women, non-conforming men, and other groups who do not conform to ideals of dominant gender norms—groups including transgender and gender non-conforming persons. Transgender individuals, for example, do not conform to traditional gender identity binaries (Wade and Ferree 2015). Therefore, a transgender person may be biologically male and identify as a woman, but cultural attitudes might reject her identity because of dominant beliefs regarding biological sex and the socially constructed gender binary. Similarly, gender non-conforming individuals may not conform in behavior or appearance to the normative constructs deemed appropriate for their gender across the continuum of masculine and feminine traits (Butler 2011; Connell 1987).

Another useful way in which we can examine how transgender and gender non-conforming identities are viewed within Hispanic culture is based on life course theory. Life course theory suggests that new experiences in life such as getting married, becoming a parent, starting a career, and becoming active in religion (among others) can transform gender ideologies and shape how people are socialized and subsequently how they behave (Elder 1998; Davis and Greenstein 2009; Vespa 2009). Such experiences are useful for exploring how Hispanics view and understand gender norms in dynamic and meaningful ways. Taken a step further, intersectional theory suggests age, sex class, and education play pivotal roles in shaping attitudes and understandings of gender norms and expectations (Vespa 2009). This perspective establishes

that people's multiple, overlapping social statuses—including sex, and class—shape the way we view, understand, and experience the social world (Crenshaw 1991).

The present study examines dynamics linked to normative gender expectations and gender identities within Hispanic culture. Little is known in this regard concerning how Hispanics perceive and interpret transgender and gender non-conforming identities. My analysis, in turn, adds to the literature by examining gender norm constructs among Mexican-American persons in South Texas and key life events that shape understandings of gender expression. I provide a qualitative assessment based on 35 in-depth, face-to-face interviews to examine the following research questions: 1) how are life experiences such as marriage, employment and religiosity associated with gender ideologies and gendered expectations? and 2) how do age, sex, class, and education influence gender attitudes? In the paper to follow, I provide a review of pertinent literature on gender norm construction and machismo culture among Hispanics. Next, I describe life course and intersectional theories and highlight how these frameworks can shed interpretational light on how transgender and gender non-conforming identities are understood among Hispanics. I then utilize the rich qualitative data collected to answer the research questions that frame this study. I conclude by discussing my key findings and their theoretical implications.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gender Norms and Performative Processes

Gender plays an integral role in shaping how individuals behave and interact with others. West and Zimmerman's (1987) framework of "doing gender" is a useful analytic tool for examining how social contexts and interactions among individuals influence gender. Conceptually, "doing gender" offers guidance towards understanding how gender is something performed in a continuous manner relative to how dominant gender norms are established and reinforced through social interactions. Gender, like culture, is a socially interactive process that relies on a critical mass of social actors consistently "doing gender" in largely mutually agreed upon ways that uphold overarching social expectations. West and Zimmerman (1987) contend that prevailing gender norms promote binary differences between girls and boys, as well as men and women. Such socially constructed differences, which are not natural or biological in origin, reinforce what is termed the "essentialness" of gender. Therefore, the social and cultural repetition of doing gender appears to be something natural and immutable, when in fact it is produced through performances. Such performances establish male/female and man/woman dichotomies as inherent and fixed (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Similarly, Butler (1990) emphasizes gender performativity. Butler describes gender as an ongoing performance by individuals and these performances project symbolic meanings of being a man or a woman. Butler (1990; 2011) argues that performances of dominant gender norms do

not come naturally, but rather people are socialized to conform to these norms over time. However, social performances contextually vary, especially when considering cultural differences as well as public and private spaces. Expressions of gender are nonetheless fluid and in constant flux and vary across time and place (Butler 1990; 2011). Both “doing gender” and “gender performance” are comparable as both propose that ongoing interactions establish gender relations and hierarchies.

Considerable research has focused on gender and the various social agents and institutions that reproduce it. The family, work, schools, and other social settings reinforce and reproduce gender expectations for individuals (Lorber 2004). Martin (1998), for example, examines how at a very young age children are socialized into gendered beings. This study focuses on preschool and delineates how parents dress their children in colors deemed appropriate (or socially acceptable) according to their children’s sex. Notably, 61 percent of the girls in preschool wore pink, whereas boys were more likely to wear primary colors (such as black) and they never wore pink. Martin (1998) also describes how girls were encouraged by teachers to pursue a more formal behavior, such as crossing their legs when sitting down, not laying down, and raising their hand before asking a question. In contrast, boys were allowed to opt for more relaxed behavior, such as sitting with their legs and feet spread apart, and they often shouted and asked questions out of turn without being reprimanded. Undoubtedly, schools are major contexts for the socialization of young children’s gender attitudes and behaviors. Schools impose disciplinary behaviors for both boys and girls that eventually affect gender differentiation. Educational settings both as a place for schooling and a workplace reinforce gender differences, heteronormativity, and stereotypes of masculinity and femininity (Martin 1998; Garcia 2009; Wilkinson and Pearson 2009; Gansen 2017).

In a similar manner, scholarship in this area suggests that gender performances, and expressions are contextually situated in the workplace. Lester (2008) found, for instance, that female faculty members in higher education were expected to behave in stereotypical feminine ways including performing “mom” and “smile” roles—roles that entail caring for others and avoiding any type of confrontation. In fact, students communicated with women faculty as if they were adhering to traditional caretaker roles and often sought them out for emotional and professional support (Lester 2008). Several researchers have noted in this regard that female faculty members feel compelled to advise students, conduct research that is related to gender relations, and to perform “emotional work” which provides emotional support to others especially colleagues and students—actions that reinforce the stereotype of traditional feminine roles (Bird, Litt, & Wang, 2004; Knights & Richards, 2003; Tierney and Bensimon 1996).

Although emotional work may be beneficial to educational institutions, it is not necessarily beneficial to women as it stalls their career advancement and leaves them feeling unfulfilled (Knights & Richards, 2003). Such behaviors and expectations may contribute to lower rates of tenure among women relative to men in similar fields (Young and Wright 2001). Relatedly, female faculty members are more likely to participate in service activities, and serve on more committees than their male’s counterparts, thus limiting their research production, tenure, and promotion (Eveline 2004). Furthermore, the style of dress, use of language, and expression of emotions reinforce stereotypes of what is masculine and feminine, perpetuating the division of gender within the workplace (Lester 2008). The way in which men and women interact with one another constitute gender expectations, stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, and patterns of dominance and submission.

In addition to institutionalized settings, gender is performed in private, personal relationships and contexts. For example, scholars examine how gender inequality is promoted in romantic relationships. Armstrong et. al (2010) stress how women are more often judged harshly for engaging in the same behaviors as men especially when such behaviors are casual sex or sex with different partners. Findings from similar works suggest that stereotypical, heteronormative gender norms are prevalent among dating partners, and expectations for heterosexual men and women significantly differ (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Grazian, 2007; Laner & Ventrone, 2000). Hence, traditional norms reinforce the idea that on the first planned date, the man is the one who pays for everything (Bogle 2008; Laner & Ventrone, 2000). This idea of the man being in charge of paying for everything perpetuates the stereotype of the male role as “provider” and reflects men’s historical domination of finances and resources (Lever et al. 2015).

Taken a step further, gender and sexuality are intimately related. Sexuality is performed based on a social normative script that dictates certain behaviors that should be accomplished differently for men and women (Frith and Kitzinger 2001; Widerman 2005). Specifically, masculine gender roles dictate that men should be independent, assertive, powerful, and heterosexual. In contrast, feminine gender roles are based on ideals of behavioral restraint aiming towards personal control. Lippa (2001) found, for instance, that gender roles may encourage sexual exploration more for boys than for girls, resulting in boys growing up with different sexual experiences than girls. Subsequently, when men and women start to have sexual experiences, their sexual activity is viewed differently. For a woman, sexual activity is perceived as potentially dangerous to a female’s body and to her reputation in society, representing a deviation from the traditional female sexual script. Whereas for a man sexual activity represents an accomplishment (Alexander and Fisher 2003).

In sum, gender is a product of social interactions and it is socially constructed. From a very young age, children are taught to do gender and are trained to behave, think, and feel according to their designated gender (West and Zimmerman 1987; Butler 1990; 2011). Doing gender results in the production and reproduction of a stratification hierarchy where men are dominant, powerful, and in control. Women, in contrast, are expected to be submissive, weak, and dependent on men. As a result, early and later in life, both institutional and informal settings factor into reproducing gender expectations and stereotypes to women's detriment. Especially noteworthy here, the social construction of gender is heavily influenced by a variety of cultural factors. Within Hispanic cultures, to which I turn next, dominant conceptions of masculinity and femininity are rooted within a machismo context.

Machismo and Marianismo

For Hispanics, as in most societies, individuals learn expected attitudes, values, gender roles, and cultural practices within family and community contexts (Sotomayor 1991; Conrad 2011). In particular, research suggests that machismo and marianismo are shared values integral to Hispanic culture (Gil and Vasquez 1996:2014; Cofresi 2002). Although existing within other populations, the presence of such values shape and influence many aspects of Hispanic family life. Much of the literature suggests that relative to men, traditional roles for Hispanic women are shaped by cultural traditions. In Hispanic culture, marianismo dictates appropriate roles and behaviors that reflect ideals of womanhood such as chastity, submission, and caregiving roles (Diekman et. al 2005). Marianismo is often considered a complement of machismo, informing the passive and submissive behaviors of Hispanic women. Gil and Vazquez (1996) point out, in Hispanic countries, "women are defined according to the rules of marianismo, which in turn is

defined by the rules of machismo” (p.63). Women are often distinguished to be both spiritually and morally superior to men. In essence, “mothers are viewed as selfless, self-sacrificing and nurturing individuals who provide spiritual strength to family members” (Santiago-Rivera et al. 2002 p.50).

Additionally, conceptions of traditional machismo emphasize male superiority and dominance over women (Torres 1998; Saez et al. 2010). Within Hispanic culture, gender roles, as well as expectations for sons, daughters and wives, are rooted in machismo (Estrada et al., 2011; Kupper& Zick, 2011). In an overview of the traditional Hispanic family, Galanti (2003) describes the experiences of Hispanic college students. She finds that in their homes, men (fathers) provide financially for the family, protect the family, and are the decision maker. In contrast, women are in this regard commonly viewed as responsible for raising children, do house work, and serve men (Giraldo 1972; Andrade 1992; Hurtado and Sinha 2016). Hurtado and Sinha (2016) present narratives of young, educated men and women living in the United States, and note how respondents experienced different treatment from parents during their youth. On one hand, men described how they were not required to help with the house work. They were allowed to go out at any time and had no curfews. On the other, women reported a lack of privilege and freedom. Women described being heavily supervised by both parents, had curfews, and were not allowed to “date” while they were growing up.

In traditional Mexican culture, masculine dominance has been described as a central facet of the family. Cultural expectations among many Mexican-American men suggest that men should pass on the ideals of masculinity to future generations (Lara-Cantu & Navarro-Arias, 1986). To prove their masculinity, men are exhorted to strive for dominance, aggressiveness physical strength, control, and power (Cantu 2009). Moreover, the goal of men is to have as

many women as they can to show the power and dominance they have as males (Giraldo 1972; Cofresi 2002). Certainly, machismo and marianismo are cultural values that influence the lived experiences of men and women. As such, these values maintain and reinforce attitudes and behaviors expected for men and women upholding the story of patriarchy and male supremacy (Hare-Mustin and Marecek 1990). With respect to sexuality as in the gendered social norms discussed earlier, machismo is a significant factor that defines, delineates and enforces sexual norms within Hispanic culture, encouraging (hetero)sexual encounters for men (Hernandez-Truyol 2008).

Within Hispanic culture homosexuality is widely viewed as morally wrong, stigmatizing men who are homosexuals as less than men (Diaz 1998:2013). Homosexuality is often linked with femininity. Therefore, gay men experience stigma and fear. The societal norms on masculinity perpetuates the marginalization of many Hispanic gay men, especially those who behave in feminine ways (Guarnero 2007). As a result, many Hispanic gay men pass as heterosexual, showing their masculine roles in order to avoid the social stigma that is associated with being homosexual (Kurtz 1999). Similarly, lesbians are socially stigmatized for not conforming to the cultural sexual norms experiencing subordination and discrimination based on their sex and sexual orientation (Hernandez-Truyol 2008). Homosexuality and lesbianism defy the cultural ideals of machismo and marianismo. According to the marianista and machista culture, lesbians lack the desirable and proper traits of femininity; while homosexuals are feminized and thus considered less than men (Hernandez-Truyol 2008).

In short, machismo and marianismo are shared cultural values that define and enforce gender roles for men and women. In the same manner, within Hispanic cultures, sexuality is also shaped by machismo and marianismo. Dominant, virile, and tough are proper traits that “real”

men should possess in order to have the respect of others. In contrast, soft, delicate, and pure are characteristics necessary for “good” women to be desirable to men and gain respect in society. Undoubtedly, machismo and marianismo are important to understanding gender among the Hispanic culture.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Life Course Theory

The present study is in part guided by life course theory. As introduced by Elder (1998), life course theory is a conceptual framework that explores individual transitions and trajectories through which the individual enacts over time, analyzing people's lives within structural, social and cultural contexts. Trajectories involve long-term patterns of stability and change. Examples include, marriage, work, or parenthood. In contrast, transitions are changes in roles and statuses such as getting married, getting a job or having a child (Elder & Kirkpatrick Johnson, 2003). This theory suggests that "early transitions can have enduring consequences by affecting subsequent transitions, even after many years and decades have passed (Elder 1998:7). In this way, an individual's lived events influence future decisions that shape future outcomes.

Research on gender role attitudes (conducted specifically with white adult parents) suggests attitudes are influenced by life experiences and role changes. For example, the continuation of education, movement into and out of the labor force, entry into marriage, and becoming a parent influence attitudes towards egalitarian-traditional gender roles. (Liao and Cai 1995; Cunningham et.al 2005; Cunningham 2008). Evidence demonstrates that increases in educational attainment as well as labor force participation of women is associated with less traditional gender roles orientations (Harris and Firestone 1998). As such, attaining a postsecondary degree significantly increases the chances of employment, and increases the

likelihood that women will want to be in the labor force. Similarly, research suggest that parenthood leads to a significant increase in the unequal time women spend on routine household labor compared to men who experience the same transition (Baxter et. al 2008). The transition to parenthood, reinforces gender patterns governing appropriate roles for men and women where women continue to do more household labor than men. While conversely, men appear to have more stability in housework time across most transitions including parenthood.

Further, the social dynamic of “linked lives” of individuals is a principle in the life course approach that demonstrates how social relationships of kin and friends extends across the lifespan. Key examples include the relationship between parents and children (Elder 1994). The quality of family relations between parents and their children have a strong impact to the children’s adulthood creating either a positive or negative lifelong impact (Whitbeck et. al1994). Research supports that the family, school, peers, and media are agents of socialization where adolescents learn cultural gender stereotypes (Gonzalez 1999; Crooks and Baur 2009). For instance, the cultural stereotypes that predominate the Latin American society, such as machismo and marianismo are transmitted to adolescents by parents and society (Pinos et. al 2016). In his study, Pinos et. al (2016) finds that machismo is transmitted especially by mothers reinforcing the idea that men is the authority. At the same time, mothers raise their children with traditional beliefs about gender, reinforcing traditional cultural stereotypes.

Taken together, machismo and marianismo both contribute to the double standard creating a lifelong impact in the lives of men and women. The sexual double standard encouraged men to be sexually active, while women are devalued if they present the same behavior (Sequeira 2009; Pinos et. al 2016). Comparatively, in focus group with Puerto Rican and Mexican adolescent girls and their mothers, the idealized traditional feminine gender role

was expected. The value that mothers place on teenaged daughter's virginity demonstrates the way in which daughters were socialized compared to boys (Villarruel 1998). An exploratory study of family of origin experiences revealed that many Latinas while living at home were discouraged to engage in sexual behaviors. Parents of Latina daughters had more control of their romantic relationships; sons did not have these limitations (Raffaelli and Ontai 2001:2004).

The life-course perspective provides a firm basis for understanding how turning points in life are important for how gender role attitudes are acquired and altered. One of the major advantages of a life-course approach is the key it provides to understanding the various consequences of social change at different stages of a person's life. The distinctive transitions and series of roles through which the individual passes as she or he ages from birth to death, affects dynamics linked to normative gender expectations. This study explores gender norm constructs among Hispanics and a life course approach can help bring this to light by demonstrating how key life events shape understandings of gender role attitudes.

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectional approaches recognize the multiple interlocking identities in relation to systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination (Crenshaw 1991). Feminist scholars acknowledge that class, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation and other social categories do not exist separately from each other but are interwoven together creating different experiences for men and women (Crenshaw 1991). In feminist theory, intersectionality is a central tenet and has modified the way in which gender is understood in present research (McCall 2005). There are however, few studies that have applied an intersectional perspective to the study of gender ideology, although it is highly applicable. Notably, Vespa (2009) describes the gender

expectations men and women experience in specific social settings depends on the combination of their race/ethnicity, class, and gender. To capture the multidimensionality of Hispanic men's perspectives and experiences, Hurtado and Sinha (2008) consider how intersections of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender impact understandings of masculinity. Shields (2008), similarly provide an insightful overview of intersectionality and describes how social identities serve as components of social relations which "mutually constitute, reinforce and naturalize one another" (p. 302). This perspective acknowledge that the individual's social identities strongly influence one's beliefs and experiences of gender (Shields 2008). Undoubtedly, intersectionality provides impetus for understanding gender in relation to other social identities.

In this study, I take an intersectional approach to examine if the combination of different social categories such as age, sex, class, and education influence the construction of gender ideology among Hispanics. Guided by this perspective, I argue that the gender expectations that men and women encounter in specific social settings depend on the simultaneous combination of their age, sex, class, and educational level.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOG

Sampling Procedure

This study is based on semi-structured interviews with 11 men and 24 women aged 20 to 77 at the time of the interview. Individuals interested in participating were screened for eligibility based on their ethnicity, age, and citizenship status. Participants are all of Hispanic descent and United States citizens. The sample was derived through a chain or snowball procedure, which “relies on previously identified group members to identify other group members of the population” (Henry, 1990, p. 21) to get in touch with additional informants. Some participants were recruited by advertising the study throughout campus bulletin boards at local public, 4-year university. Other participants were located through my social networks and those who were eligible and wanted to participate contacted me via cellphone. Once I was contacted, the in-person recruitment script was used to introduce myself and the study. At the end of each interview, voluntary referral cards were offered to participants to distribute to their eligible social networks.

Data Collection

I conducted all the interviews. Participants completed one digitally tape-recorded, in-depth face-to-face interview lasting from 15 to 40 minutes and a short demographic

questionnaire asking for the participant age, race/ethnicity, gender, educational background etc. Participants were interviewed in a private location agreed upon by the investigator and the participant, such as a reserved room at a public library. Study procedures were explained to all participants and informed consent was obtained prior to the start of the interview, whereby both the participant and researcher provided their signatures. To ensure confidentiality, all respondents were assigned pseudonyms in the interview transcriptions. The pseudonyms are used in the present study to ensure continued respondent confidentiality. Within the format of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, respondents were asked a series of open-ended questions that revolved around the topics linked to normative gender expectations and gender identities.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. After transcription, each interview was read. A coding instruction device was used, and the data were coded and organized in search for commonalities highlighting emergent themes pertinent to normative gender expectations and gender identity expression. Review of data from interviews resulted in a list of approximately 48 codes. Analysis of the codes led to the second part of the coding process, where I compared codes, grouping them into relevant categories. During open-ended coding, several themes began to emerge, and my paper became organized around discussions of gender norms and culture, discussions of gender identities, and contradictions. This process, of comparing concepts for relevance, and grouping and categorizing generated 5 themes: 1) traditional gender norms; 2) gender and family dynamics; 3) traditional Mexican gender expectations; 4) heterosexuality and gender non-conformity; and 5) contradicting views. After these five broad themes were

identified, I began the process of focused coding (Charmaz, 1995) where I examined all of the interview transcriptions and extracted quotes and grouped them according to the five themes.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

The findings presented here are organized around 5 major themes identified from participant interviews: 1) traditional gender norms; 2) gender and family dynamics; 3) traditional Mexican gender expectations; 4) heterosexuality and gender non-conformity; and 5) contradicting views.

Traditional Gender Norms

When conducting my interviews, what initially stood out was that women more frequently supported traditional feminine and masculine roles and behaviors compared to men. When specifically asked to describe the roles for a woman, 11 women described how important it is for women to raise kids and to nurture the family. Similarly, 13 women emphasized that women should also dress in traditionally feminine clothes (e.g., wearing dresses and make up), whereas only 4 men did. Alma a 50 year old, middle-class woman described the following:

“Now when it comes to the home, I think that although women work, they should be responsible at home and be the ones who take care of the home. I mean that’s something very important for the family, that’s what a woman should always do, that’s her role.”

Women also more frequently supported traditional masculine behaviors, reporting that men should be the protector and provider, while only 3 men reported similar views. Hilda a 55 year old, upper-class woman described the following:

“A man should work hard, be the breadwinner and provide for the family in every aspect not only financially, but he also should be there to help in other activities at home. For instance, mow the lawn, fix, or repair the home and other outside activities.”

The pattern is consistent showing that among older women who supported traditional masculine roles, a majority are married, middle-class housewives, with a high school degree (or less) and a majority considered religion to be very important. The sequencing and timing of various life transitions, such as those around age, education, marital status, and religiosity are central to understand how these statuses shape individual's values, expectations and norms. For example, participants who reported religion to be very important, more frequently supported traditional feminine and masculine roles. According to Geertz (1973) religion can be a central part of one's identity. Furthermore, participating in a religion often means more than sharing beliefs, but it also means being part of a community and even a culture. As such, the religious experiences that these participants share demonstrate the importance of linked lives and social ties and how these could affect individual's attitudes and behaviors and significantly affect other familial relationships.

Class status was also apparent, revealing that a majority of respondents that supported traditional gender roles were older middle-class adults. This pattern is similar for men. The pattern shows that a majority of older and younger adults that consistently supported traditional gender roles and behaviors for both men and women have a high school degree (or less). In other words, individuals with a college education or degree don't typically support these views. Undoubtedly, factors such as age, marital status, educational achievement, religiosity, and social class are tied to the life course and may eventually impact a person's decisions and life experiences. Although respondents did not discuss for example, how their age, or the transition and duration of their marriage has changed or molded their beliefs about gender norms, we see

that it is men and women sharing these life course transitions and experiences that shared similar attitudes when it comes to gender roles. Moreover, some participants did say how religion influenced their beliefs and attitudes in ways that conform to a gender binary. They reported that religion along with biblical readings taught them to follow certain roles appropriate to their gender.

Gender and Family Dynamics

Nine participants described that gender roles are very important in society because they keep families together. However, a majority of these respondents were middle-class women. The pattern is consistent regarding marital status and education. Married and less educated individuals more frequently supported a binary system of traditional gender norms compared to single and college educated participants. For example, when participants were asked to describe why gender roles are important in society, Bianca, a 50 year old middle-class woman reported the following:

“Well it keeps the family together. The important thing here is the family and we should all know that. So yes, it is important to keep these roles about who is doing what and for what reason. I mean women can work all they want but they shouldn’t forget about the family and take good care of their children and not just work and not be at home at all.”

Consequently, a majority of men and women reported that deviating from traditional gender norms could cause conflict; specifically, family conflict. Older adults more frequently described how fights or divorce could occur at home if couples do not follow their appropriate gender roles. Although half of young adults (n=9) reported that conflict occurs, some of these participants did not say conflict occurs because people don’t follow “traditional norms.” Instead, they argued it was the lack of communication that exists between couples. Participants with these

views more frequently viewed religion to be very important and were married. In the same way, middle-class participants, and participants with a high school degree (or less), exhibited more traditional attitudes, affirming that family conflict occurs. Once again, this pattern is consistent in showing that married respondents share similar experiences. Although each participant has unique experiences within their marriage, all of them at some point in their lives experienced this transition (getting married). Participants (both men and women) experienced new roles and behaviors that differed from when they were single. Educational attainment can also be key. In this instance, participants without a college degree have to a certain extent had limited exposure to new ideas and possibilities.

Traditional Mexican Gender Expectations

Recent studies have demonstrated that gender ideology is linked to macro-cultural factors (Conrad 2011). Within Hispanic culture, individuals learn expected attitudes and gender roles within family and community contexts (Sotomayor 1991; Conrad 2011). Normative and stereotypical attitudes within Hispanic culture that may shape gender attitudes and ideology include machismo and marianismo. For example, 8 participants (a majority older adults) discussed their experiences related to machismo and marianismo while they were growing up. Respondents described growing up in a patriarchal family structure where defined roles for mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters were important to maintain order. Women typically displayed a submissive and dependent role in marriage relationships and men were given the “leader of everything” role. Today, this role is called “Jefe de familia” and is used for the person that is the head of the household. For example, Hilda, a 55 year old, upper-middle class woman described the following:

“I think our ethnicity and culture influence our beliefs. For example, my parents, specially my father was born in Mexico and raised in Mexico, so he was very machista, you know my mom had to do what he said, and all the family knew that he was the one who had the final say. I mean, that is how I was raised, and we were told that was our culture and that we should be proud of it. Also, when my father was young, he used to laugh at men that were not men, you know. (gay men). However, everything changes and although I don’t agree with that lifestyle (gay men) I respect them.”

Melissa, a 62 year old middle-class woman, shared similar views:

I agree with my Mexican culture. My parents taught me to do what a woman is supposed to do, like cleaning, and raising kids. That’s what I did all my life. My husband is the one that works, and I am fine with that”.

Participants reported that things changed and that now everything is different saying that men and women should do whatever they want. However, some old and young participants still showed high attachment to traditional cultural gender norms, describing that they feel that women in some way are still responsible for house work and men are responsible for earning an income. Elena, a 65 year old working-class woman noted:

“Now is very different, you know is 2017 and it’s all different. But I think men and women, should do what they need to do and what they want to do. That’s how it should be.”

However, when Elena was asked to describe the gender roles for men and women, she described that a woman is responsible for domestic roles, most notably the caretaking of the children, while men should be the economic provider. Manuel, a 57 year old middle-class man offered a somewhat different take:

“Our culture is machista, so I don’t think that is going to change any time soon so maybe yes it has an influence on these beliefs we hold. I don’t consider myself a machista, I think that I am not one of them, you know I think my wife and I are the same and I don’t feel more powerful than her, so we are equal.”

Nonetheless, when Manuel was asked to describe the roles for a man, he also reported more traditional views supporting the idea that men should be the main provider at home.

Findings also show that participants that supported traditional Mexican gender expectations are

mostly very religious. In terms of education, the pattern suggests its persons with a high school education (or less) tend to support traditional Mexican gender expectations (as well machismo and marianismo). Indeed, machismo and marianismo are still present in the Hispanic community. Even though younger participants did not necessarily discuss machismo and marianismo directly, some participants still supported masculine and feminine gender roles. Men reported that they feel better if they provide for the family or if they do outside activities that require physical strength, whereas women agreed that it is okay for women to work, but they should never forget to be there for their husbands and their children. Alfredo, a 34 year old upper-class man stated:

“A man should be self-sustained, so I believe that either he should work or pursue an education to be the provider. I believe that a man should be the breadwinner, but I think it is okay if woman is the breadwinner as well since a lot has changed over the years. But I think that men should be the breadwinner because in our culture, specially here in the RGV, it’s kind of a must, you know. I grew up with the beliefs that men should be the breadwinner.”

Similarly, Vanessa, a 22 year old working-class woman stated:

“I think, there are some roles that we should follow. For instance, if you are in a relationship, yes, the woman should be working and do what she likes to do you know stuff like that, but also, I believe that the man should also take care of the kids and help at home. But going back to the way my parents raised me or my grandparent’s is that a woman should take care of her husband. You know like cleaning the house, cooking and I guess taking his shoes off when he comes home. You know like hey relax I’ll get your shoes (laughs). I think that yes, a woman should take care of her husband and vice versa. I guess that’s one of their jobs. I would say that also the man, sometimes he could help his wife, cook something for her once in a while or do laundry. So yes, I believe a woman should take care of her husband. I’m not saying catering or something like that but yea you know just taking care of him. So, I think it depends how the person was raised.”

Noticeably, rigid and traditional cultural norms are reinforced by immediate family members as well as extended family. Both machismo and marianismo are cultural constructs that are intertwined, dictating socially acceptable behaviors for men and women and reinforcing gender stereotypes and gender role development.

Heterosexuality and Gender Non-conformity

The pattern keeps its consistency showing that among participants that are supportive of heterosexuality and stereotypical feminine and masculine gender expressions, a majority are older middle-class adults that are married, with a high school degree (or less), who viewed religion as very important. Although participants were not asked directly if they supported heterosexuality, some participants remarked that society should never forget that individuals are here to reproduce. Interestingly, a majority of participants supported the idea that people should express their gender and sexuality however they prefer. However, such support was often only conditional. Participants were also asked to define the term transgender. This question was asked because it was important to know if participants were familiar with the terminology. A majority of participants, in this instance, were actually unfamiliar with the term (n=22). When participants were asked to describe the term, only 7 women and 6 men described it consistent with typical LGBTQ conceptualizations.

As expected, a majority of these participants had a college degree. Older adults, married participants, and participants that viewed religion as very important more frequently reported that they did not know the term. After participants were given the definition of the term, they were then asked to describe how they feel or how they would feel if they interact with people who identify as transgender. Some participants shared their opinion but later on added that they opposed same-sex marriage. Some participants automatically assumed that transgender individuals must also be gay. For example, Ines, a 56 year old middle-class woman stated:

“Well, yes, I know what you mean now, and well I feel okay like if she or he wants to be another person. But I think that intimacy is something we should respect. Well something that I don’t agree with is that they get married, you know man with man and woman with other woman, I don’t agree with those things, that is wrong.”

Clearly, among the majority of participants, there was a common misconception that gender identity and sexual orientation are connected. Other participants suggested that transgender people negatively influence children and adolescent's gender identity. For example, Lucas, a 21 year old man described the following:

“I think people should express what they want to express. You know they should do what they like. But the only thing that I don't like is for them to influence others, especially kids like young kids. Like in social media. You know, they express who they are, but they keep posting like pictures that might influence others you know like 15 years old's and maybe they can confuse these kids like you see a man with makeup and I mean that is just making the other person to be confused about it. So, I think that should stay more private, you know. Like nowadays, 15-year-old have access to social media so for them to see other men with makeup and in a dress, I mean that is something that might shape their lives in a bad way you know.”

Some participants also emphasized that people should have society in mind when expressing gender identity. Some respondents acknowledged that sometimes expressing who you are can put you at risk and in danger, especially in the Hispanic culture. For example, Santiago, a 30 year old working-class man describes the following:

“I really think you should express how you feel inside. If you want to dress in a cow suit do it. But you should also have in mind society. You know and any backlash towards you. There is a lot of judgement towards gays and lesbians in the Hispanic community. If someone comes out to be transgender in a town where everyone is very judgmental, you literally are paving your own path to either committing suicide or engaging in drugs and that's not just me saying it. I have witness and some of the transgenders and transsexuals that I know here are drunks and do all that stuff, and don't go to school and they engage in very risky behaviors because it's the path that society has pave for them. So, I think just do your own thing and be private just like me and my partner and be seclude it. I am glad I came out as a normal homosexual. I really don't know how I would cope with being transgender. I honestly think it would have been such a huge thing on me, on my life that I don't know maybe suicide would have been something that I would have contemplated.”

It is evident that participants perceive transgender identities quite different. Participants that are single, with a college degree who don't view religion as very important hold more progressive views on transgender identity. In contrast, married participants with less education and that view

religion as very important tend to be more confused in their perceptions and interpretations of transgender and gender non-conforming identities. Even though all participants identify as Hispanic, it is the overlapping identities and experiences that influence the way in which participants experience the social world.

Contradicting Views

Particularly noteworthy, 4 participants contradicted themselves when discussing issues pertaining to sexual orientation. These participants were all middle-class older women who viewed religion as very important. A majority of these women were married with a high school degree. At some point during the interviews they described how they respect others and that they believe people should feel free to express who they are and how they feel. Yet, they also reported that they disagree when homosexuals publicly announce their sexual orientation. Moreover, they stated how uncomfortable they feel when same sex couples show affection in public places. For example, Alma, a 50 year old woman described the following:

“I guess I respect people. You know, but, before everything was so private and it was something yours, you know if a man was gay well nobody knew about that, it was hard to find out because it was something that they kept at home, and that was good but now, they don’t care and now they are on the streets and they kiss, and they don’t have respect for our society. So, I think it was better before. I mean if you were gay you just kept it to yourself and that was it. Now, these people are fighting for their rights and all that and they ask the public, you know to understand them and well I think it’s okay, but I mean why should they be kissing and doing all that stuff in public.”

Contradictions were also apparent when discussing gender identity expression. 7 of 10 participants who contradicted themselves were women. Once again, a majority were middle class and married. In terms of religiosity and education level, participants who viewed religion as very important and participants with a high school degree (or less) contradicted themselves and their

point. However, a few exceptions were evident among participants with a college degree. For example, Maria, a 23 year old woman stated the following:

“I do not think there is any rules on how to express gender. I mean someone who is transgender or whatever should be able to express their gender however, they want.”

But, when asked to describe how she feels about interacting with people who identify as transgender, she reported the following:

“I wouldn’t treat them different only because they feel that way, regardless if they are transgender, gay or anything else. But in my mind, I think they are still confused. They still don’t know what they are doing, they are completely going to hell you know because that is what the bible says. I mean I do not feel any different talking to them is like talking to anyone else and that is where all of us should learn to view them as normal regular people not just some transgender person. However, religion tells me that that is not right, so I know is not right.”

Similarly, Alfredo, a 34 year old man described the following:

“I feel that’s completely on their end, I have nothing against them. The only thing I would say is that I wish they wouldn’t influence children. I mean from what I have witness, there is a lot of either shows and sometimes cartoons that are saying that is okay to be that, but a children’s mind is a sponge and they absorb everything, it’s like they are planting a seed in their mind and with that seed they can grow and be what they are or be a transgender. So why give the children that seed and exposed them to that at an early age where they don’t have the capacity to think compare to an adult who does. I am a very open person, it’s just that as long as it doesn’t influence me, I’ll be fine. It’s just that I wouldn’t want my children to be exposed to those shows or people.”

Presumably, the attachment to traditional cultural values and beliefs shape the way in which individuals perceive the world. As a result, contradictions pertaining sexual orientation and gender expression may occur. For example, participants show disagreement to sexual and gender expressions that go beyond their expected cultural values and beliefs. In one way, participants suggested that everyone should express what they truly feel. Nonetheless, participants also reported that violating the norm, that is, what they see as “culturally

acceptable,” is bad for society and negatively impacting not only the lives of older individuals but the lives of children as well.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The major emphasis of this paper is to examine dynamics linked to normative gender expectations and gender identities within Hispanic culture. Gender plays an integral role in the way individuals behave and present themselves. From a very young age, children are taught to do gender and are trained to behave, think and feel accordingly to their gender (West and Zimmerman 1987; Butler 1990; 2011). Notwithstanding, the social construction of gender is also heavily influenced by cultural factors and within Hispanic cultures, dominant conceptions of masculinity and femininity are rooted within a machismo context (Gil and Vasquez 1996:2014; Cofresi 2002). Narratives of 35 Hispanic adults revealed common themes offering insight on how machismo, key life events, and social statuses affect gender constructs and interpretations of transgender and gender non-conforming identities.

The participant's narratives exemplify the principals of machismo and marianismo (Gil and Vazquez 1996). The study found that gender-specific messages to Hispanic men and women on acceptable and expected behaviors are influenced by the notion of machismo. Findings suggest that the family system is the primary social context where these norms are transmitted to new generations. In this instance, the narratives illustrated numerous manifestations of machismo and marianismo in the home. The primary manifestation was in the form of traditional gender roles, along with other shared cultural beliefs and ideals regarding men and women. Findings show that it is common for males to be very concerned with economic achievements, while

females are primarily concerned with domestic activities. Participants discussed that they hold such beliefs because that's how they were raised and that is something expected in their families and in their community.

Moreover, conceptions of traditional machismo often emphasized how men are supposed to be strong and women more delicate (Cantu 2009). In this instance, participants that supported traditional Mexican socio-cultural norms often performed stereotypical behaviors that expressed their masculinity and femininity. For example, both men and women described that they felt that men were responsible in accomplishing outside activities that required physical strength.

Whereas, women felt that their responsibilities were inside the home complying to stereotypical feminine activities, such as cleaning and cooking. In addition, participants described that males and females should behave and dress accordingly to their gender. Some participants agreed with the stereotype that women should be feminine, meaning that they should dress in feminine clothes and men should dress in stereotypical masculine clothes.

With respect to sexuality, Hernandez-Truyol (2008) explains that machismo often encourage heterosexuality, and (hetero)sexual encounters for men and women. Findings from this study offer evidence that a majority of participants that supported traditional Mexican gender expectations more frequently supported heterosexuality and explained that men and women are here to reproduce. Often times, participants argued that public display of affection between same-sex couples is wrong. As in the gendered social norms discussed earlier, machismo was a significant factor that defined and enforced sexual norms among participants. Definitely, the notion of machismo strongly influenced participants to define the meaning of being a man or a woman. The descriptions obtained from participants were guided by this concept arguing that women should be decent, feminine and should behave accordingly to her gender in order to have

the respect of society. On the other hand, the expectations about being a man required to be strong, protector and heterosexual.

Correspondingly, findings here also underscore the impact that life course trajectories and transitions have on gender ideology construction. Research shows that gender role attitudes are influenced by life experiences and role changes (Elder 1998). For example, the continuation of education, movement into and out of the labor force, entry into marriage, and becoming a parent may influence attitudes towards egalitarian-traditional gender roles. (Liao and Cai 1995; Cunningham et.al 2005; Cunningham 2008). Findings show that a majority of participants that are married, view religion as very important and have a high school degree (or less) held more traditional views regarding gender roles. Respondents with these characteristics also view gender non-conformity as deviant. In the same manner, participants argued that people who identify as transgender negatively influence children and adolescent's gender identity. On the other hand, younger adults who were single, and were neutral about religion, with a college degree typically held progressive views on transgender identities.

Importantly, the multiple social categories such as age, sex, class, and educational achievement create different experiences for individuals affecting the construction of gender ideology. For example, in my study, working-class, young educated women who were single often times held egalitarian gender role attitudes. In the same way, women with these characteristics frequently held progressive views on transgender and gender non-conforming identities. By contrast, middle-class older women who were married and retired/housewives were more conservative when discussing gender roles and gender identity expression. In sum, machismo, key life events and the intersection of overlapping social categories should be considered to understand the construction of gender ideology. Unquestionably, all of these, are

factors that shape and guide young and older Hispanic adults in their perceptions and interpretations about gender role expectations and gender identity expression.

Limitations

This study provides foundational information about an understudied topic and population. Nevertheless, there are limitations that need to be addressed. First, the nature of qualitative research does not allow for standardized comparisons. As such, these findings cannot be generalized to the broader population as they reflect a specific group of Hispanic adults in South Texas and their views on gender roles, expression, and identity. Another barrier of this study was the methodological format of face-to-face interviewing compared to telephone/ or surveys. Interviews may have led respondents to hesitate in sharing their personal views, including their views on how they interpret and express gender norms and sexual identity. Last, the unfamiliarity of the term transgender. The majority of participants, specifically, older adults did not know the meaning of the term. Some participants confused the term transgender and assumed that the term was related to sexual orientation. Although a clear definition was given to the participants, they still were confused about the terminology. This lack of familiarity with the term may have also influence the data and how participants responded to interview questions.

Conclusion

Despite such limitations, this study adds to the literature by examining gender norm constructs and understandings of gender expression among Mexican-origin persons. Certainly, machismo and marianismo transcend into gender relations and roles resulting in differences in gender role attitudes dictating many aspects of men and women's socially acceptable behavior.

In addition, key life events such as getting married, religiosity, and the continuation of education shape gender role expectations and understandings of gender non-conforming identities. For instance, married participants that considered religion very important with a high school degree (or less) more frequently supported traditional gender roles and viewed gender non-conformity as deviant. In contrast, single participants with a college degree who did not view religion as very important more frequently held progressive views on transgender identity.

Last, an intersectional approach was applied to examine how social categories such as age, sex, education, and class may influence understandings of transgender and gender non-conforming identities among Hispanics. Although all participants are of Hispanic descent, the social identities and the different statuses in which they live appear to shape their experiences and the perceptions they have about the social world. The results of this study highlight the need to investigate in greater depth the Hispanic community and opens the door for the development for future research. As such, the study provides a useful starting point for addressing an important topic enhancing our knowledge about an understudied population which constitutes one of the largest ethnic groups in South Texas.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

Demographic Questionnaire

1. How do you currently define your gender?
 - Man
 - Woman
 - Other _____

2. What is your race/ethnicity?
 - Latino/Latina/or Hispanic
 - African-American or Black
 - White or Caucasian
 - Asian-American or Asian Pacific Islander
 - Native American or American Indian
 - Bi- or Multi-racial
 - Other _____

3. What is your current age? _____

4. What is your religious preference?
 - Muslim
 - Jewish
 - Protestant
 - Catholic
 - Mormon
 - Other _____

5. How important is religion in your life?
 - Very important
 - Somewhat important
 - Neutral
 - Not very important

- Not at all important
6. What would you say best describes your relationship status?
- Married
 - Divorced
 - Single
 - Other _____
7. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?
- Heterosexual
 - Gay
 - Lesbian
 - Bisexual
 - Other _____
8. What is your employment status?
- Employed for wages
 - Self-employed
 - Unemployed
 - Other _____
9. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- No schooling complete
 - Some High School, No diploma
 - High School graduate, Diploma or the equivalent (GED)
 - Some college credit, no degree
 - Bachelor's degree
 - Master's degree
 - Doctorate degree
10. What would you say best describes your class status?
- Working class
 - Middle class
 - Upper middle class
 - Upper class
 - Other _____

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

1. How do you think a woman should be?
2. How do you think a man should be?
3. How would you describe the gender roles for a woman?
4. How would you describe the gender roles for a man?
5. What do you think happens when these gender roles are not met?
6. How do you view someone when they do not fall into your definition of what a woman/man should be?
7. How do you treat someone when they do not fall into your definition of what a woman/man should be?
8. Why is it important to have gender roles in our society?
9. How does your race/ethnicity shape your gender beliefs?
10. How do your religious views affect your beliefs about gender?
11. How do you understand/define the term transgender?
12. How do you know when someone you meet is transgender?
13. Describe how you feel when you interact with people who identify as transgender?
14. How should people express their gender identity?
15. How do you feel about boys/men who behave in feminine ways?
Why?
16. How do you feel about girls/women who seem masculine to you?
Why?

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Karen R. Rodriguez was born in Mexico and has been residing in the Rio Grande Valley for the past 15 years. She attended The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley where she earned her bachelor's degree in sociology in 2016 and her master's degree in sociology in 2018. Throughout her studies at UTRGV, Karen, developed management skills, as well as aptitude in acclimatizing to socially diverse interactions and contexts. As an emerging social science researcher, Karen, has demonstrated a keen awareness of social diversity, specifically through her extensive experience collecting data as a research assistant and her independent research for her thesis project.

Karen plans to further her education to pursue a Doctorate degree in Sociology. Moreover, she has the desire, motivation, and ability to excel as a university instructor working with the next generation of young students. Karen would like to teach at the university level in various concentrations such as Gender and Sexuality, Social Psychology, Sociology of Culture and Research Methods. Conducting research requires an intricate balance of knowledge and empathy, and Karen has worked to hone these skills through her multifaceted coursework and diverse research experiences. For any academic inquiries, you may email Karen R. Rodriguez at Karen-rodz@hotmail.com.