



5-2016

# Lullaby for the Burning Ear: How Intersectional Feminism Can Help Decolonize the Latino Consciousness

Donovan E. Hernandez Garcia  
*Dominican University of California*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholar.dominican.edu/senior-theses>

 Part of the [Chicana/o Studies Commons](#), [Latin American History Commons](#), [Latin American Studies Commons](#), [Latina/o Studies Commons](#), [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#), [Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), and the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Hernandez Garcia, Donovan E., "Lullaby for the Burning Ear: How Intersectional Feminism Can Help Decolonize the Latino Consciousness" (2016). *Senior Theses and Capstone Projects*. Paper 46.

This Senior Thesis (Public Access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Capstone Projects at Dominican Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Theses and Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of Dominican Scholar. For more information, please contact [michael.pujals@dominican.edu](mailto:michael.pujals@dominican.edu).

Lullaby for the Burning Ear: How Intersectional Feminism Can Help Decolonize the  
Latino Consciousness

A senior project submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts  
In Humanities and Cultural Studies

By  
Donovan Hernández  
San Rafael, CA  
May 2016

Joshua Horowitz, Ph.D. History  
Assistant Professor

Chase Clow, Ph.D.  
Chair, Humanities Division

# Lullaby for the Burning Ear: How Intersectional Feminism Can Help Decolonize the Latino Consciousness

---

By Donovan Hernandez

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

May 2016

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Definitions of Terms</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Intersectional Feminism: What does it mean?</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Cultural Hierarchy: Conquest through Culture</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Machismo: The Legacy of Colonization</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Masculinity under the Lens: <i>La Mission</i></b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Integrating Intersectionality in the Latino Consciousness</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>Relearning History</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>Intersectional Integration</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>Works Cited</b> .....	<b>36</b>

## **Abstract**

People exist with their own religions, cultures, and practices, which illustrate the ingenuity of humanity. Yet, because of major events that altered the fate of the Americas, a certain societal structure was created to maintain power. Due to colonization, the prolonged exposure to numerous cultures, and the continuation of oppressive systems, people have been forced to band together based on similar characteristics, be it race, gender, or sexual orientation, creating divisions within society. It is because of such colonial mentality, subliminal and apparent, political and cultural movements, such as Feminism and intersectionality, have been created to combat the harmful effects of postcolonial issues and practices. Even though colonization from European governments of the Americas has long ended, the effects of it still remain in contemporary culture. Some of these effects, such as identity conflict with American normative values, are revealed by a focus analysis of Latino men in the United States. Intersectional feminism, which takes into account how different identities and realities intersect, can help Latino men understand their role in a society that uses racism, homophobia, and misogyny to degrade and dehumanize many individuals of the United States. Latino men may gain new strength to combat harmful colonial mentalities, or decolonize, through a theoretical understanding of intersectional feminism.

## **Introduction**

As children age, some of the best ways to have them understand any language is through song, rhymes, sayings, and jokes. Lullabies are useful in similar ways. The innocence of young boys is challenged and they internalize what society begins to teach them as supposed, correct behavior. They change from innocent beings to ones who slowly change to adjust to the realities of their world. They often listen to harmful ideas, which dictate how to behave, leading them to violence, intolerance, ignorance, or fear. In a metaphorical sense, what they learn and hear burns deep into their minds as the only way of existing is to adhere to the norm of becoming a dominant and aggressive man. For Latino men in particular, this is often the case.

Although the Latino ethnicity is quite large, including men of different nationalities, races, and cultures, they suffer from an imposing cultural norm known as colonial machismo. Within our modern society, a tool against machismo has been feminism and intersectionality. Yet, what this initial movement lacked was a way to integrate all peoples within a society from a variety of backgrounds. Intersectional feminism may be a way for Latinos to liberate themselves from colonial machismo and achieve a sense of unity with the greater Latin American community.

Before explaining and understanding the gains Latino males might make from unity within the Latin American community, there must be an in-depth analysis of three important aspects: intersectional feminism, machismo, and the integration of intersectional feminism in the Latino male consciousness.

Intersectional feminism is an attempt at integrating the varying aspects of an individual and in understanding how a person's characteristics inform the society and

vice versa. Intersectionality deals with numerous aspects such as race, class, socioeconomic status, gender, or a variety of other identifiers, and how it relates to masculinity.

Machismo deals with positions of hierarchy that have been placed by past cultural and social systems. Historically, men have held power in institutions, such as government entities and religious sects, generating a polarized society of male versus female. For example, in national and international companies, white men, far outnumbering women and people of color, often hold executive power and positions of influence. The concept of machismo has then divided the population into groups, dominated by select peoples and their ideologies. The problem does not stop at greater groups having power within machismo ideology, but also on how subgroups within the population are affected by it. It is like the disease that plagues the mind of the individual. Machismo is the pervasive ailment that disrupts the humanity of the Latino male.

Finally, a framework will integrate intersectional feminism into the Latino consciousness. Given the scope of intersectionality, this thesis will primarily focus on Latino men and how they can reject the notions of colonial machismo, while simultaneously helping others around them, especially other Latino men.

Modern Latino men suffer from the adopted ideology of colonial machismo from the time of Spanish domination. Colonization played a significant role in subjugating the indigenous and slave populations to following a code presented and suited for the control of European powers, specifically White men. Although aspects, such as religion and race play a massive role on Latino male identities, the power that runs through machismo and how it affects the rest of society, specifically Latino men in the United States, also shapes

their identities. Machismo and sexual orientation interact with one another as well. It is through this interaction that discourse and expressions of machismo and sexual orientation affect both non-heterosexual and heterosexual Latino men.

Latino men, regardless of racial identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or socioeconomic standing can benefit from the understanding of intersectional feminism. Colonial machismo has hindered the advancement of the Latino community, and at the same time, Latinos perpetuate these same problems and cause harm to others. Intersectional feminism is not just a way to liberate oneself; it is a way to liberate entire groups all at once.

Lastly, intersectional feminism may be applied to the Latino male context. Because intersectional feminism deals with the concept of equality, not solely based on gender, it will explain what it will mean to this area of the population to adopt a concept helping to liberate them from machismo and patriarchal standards and provide solutions to these problems. Although the solutions will not be absolute, nor should they be, the steps taken will finally decolonize the Latino mentality and achieve a form of unity.

Before the analysis, there must first be an understanding of the world in which Latino men live. Knowing about the vastness of the world and the many people that make up humanity, focusing on one area of the world and a specific time period would make the image concise and easier to understand.

Within a nation, there is never any true homogeneity based on the fact that a variety of cultural expressions exist alongside one another. One such and great example of this is the collection of peoples who make the United States.



The United States is comprised of fifty states, each with its own density of experiences, some more similar to others, but all unique and different. If one were to look at densely populated states such as California or New York, one would experience a number of languages, religious practices, cultural identities, and daily rituals performed. This is even more apparent when subgroups are acknowledged and exist within these larger entities of cultures. One subgroup within the Latino communities around the United States is that of the LGBT community, more specifically, Latino gay men.

Even though there exists much diversity within the Latino community, there is an overarching problem that plagues these societies almost equally. This problem is that of the aftermath of colonization. Clearly, most of Latin America has brought about their independence from Western powers to a certain extent. The aftermath that lingers is that of colonial mentality, which keeps a people in check, and the privileged in power.

### **Definitions of Terms**

This colonized consciousness can best be defined by the domination of Western powers. Such a mentality holds fast to a sinister idea of machismo, which dictates gender, racial, sexual orientation, and religious identities, and aims to control and put in order an environment that did not compare to cultures of Europe, Spain specifically. For example, it gave the indigenous populations a lower social and cultural status when compared to European individuals.

First, the way colonized mentality is defined deals primarily with the ideals Western powers imposed on the indigenous peoples and slaves. Once this idea of European patriarchy was established, it became part of the norm, and so, adopted as automatic from generation to generation. Sherry B. Ortner, author of "Too Soon For Post-

Feminism: The Ongoing Life Of Patriarchy In Neoliberal America,” best defines European patriarchy “as having the particular virtue of evoking the idea of a social and political formation, rather than the image of a cave man with a club,” which favors individuals who are of European descent and individuals who would be considered white (533). In other words, European patriarchy was created to advance the agendas of white men in power. Latino men still adhere to such teachings and have continued this ideology.

Second, these ideas of European patriarchy are continued, upheld, and brought along by immigrants, from all over Latin America, to the United States, perpetuating its existence and continued practice. This idea of patriarchy became modified and changed over time, yet the main premise of father-knows-best remained. For example, the use of sexism to keep women confined to domestic life is very much prevalent in the Latino community. Another example is the use of racism to keep races deemed undesirable in lower social and economic standings. This machismo is very much part of the Latino culture and seen to many, as integral to their identity as a people.

Feminism, historically, has tackled women’s issues from a variety of social, cultural, and political standings. In many ways, it has gone through a plethora of changes since the beginning of the Women’s Rights Movement in the United States. The way some historians have classified this change in feminist theories has been through forms that have championed ideas specific to the time period and, in many cases, important to racial identity.

First Wave Feminism arose from a need for women to establish political equality with men in the United States “from the mid nineteenth century through 1920” (Ortner

3). It centered heavily on women having a voice in political arenas and being seen as integral and crucial members of society. The next wave known as Second Wave Feminism reached beyond just having a voice politically, but in changing the culture that surrounded them in the workplace and in the public eye (Ortner 3). Such aspects included demands like equal pay and protection from harassment. It even dealt with reproductive rights. Third Wave Feminism now deals with the problems women continue to face, such as equal pay and reproductive rights, and new ones that reflect the needs of modern society. Although it can be disputed about whether or not these waves are concrete and separate or whether it has just been a continuous evolution, there is one aspect that is sometimes missed in the previous two waves: the idea of intersectionality.

Third Wave Feminism, which focuses on challenging “sexism, racism, homophobia, economic injustice, and other forms of oppression,” has taken this idea of intersectionality and is bringing it into play in feminist discourse (Ortner 3). Of course, intersectionality has always been incorporated in feminist discourse by authors such as bell hooks. In the words of Sylvanna M. Falcón, author of “Shifting Analytics And Linking Theories: A Conversation About The ‘Meaning-Making’ Of Intersectionality And Transnational Feminism,” intersectionality “is a logic that removes us from thinking in silos and asks for us to delve deeper into complex inter-relationships.” Some of these aspects are race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, cultural and social norms, socioeconomic status, and the multitude of gender expressions. Due to the Latino identity not completely accepted into American culture, these interrelationships of identity are often ignored.

Intersectional feminism incorporates the various problems American society, as a whole, must face in situations in which patriarchy has played a role. Latino men, in particular, face nuanced and unique situations. In many cases, machismo is often defined as a heterosexual and heteronormative behavior, which can have positive and negative effects on the Latino population. In a positive light, it can give a sense of identity to Latino men who do not have a concrete way of looking at themselves and, by doing so, explore their own individuality. In a negative light, it has the potential of reinforcing racist, misogynistic, and other harmful attributes of what it means to be a man.

Ultimately, the use of intersectional feminism is meant to help modern Latino men in American society liberate themselves from societal norms that have restricted individuality and the cultures that populated the Americas. It is more than just a way to know about intersectional feminism, but a way to help transform oneself about power, gender, and race. By doing so, Latino men can begin to decolonize their mentality from the frequently harmful effects of European patriarchy in the Americas.

## **Intersectional Feminism: What does it mean?**

The creation of a new lullaby for the Latino male lies in reimagining what it means to be a feminist. Feminism, at its core, is meant to be the alleviating element that will give Latino men the ability to question their beings in society.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, author of *We Should All Be Feminists*, defines a feminist as “a person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes” (21). In many ways, it is more intricate than egalitarianism, which also focuses on equality for all, regardless of the differences individuals have. There are, however, distinctions between feminism and egalitarianism. Feminism, in its “original feminist political project,” brings to the forefront the issues specific to gender and stated “in which neither sex had the right to dominate or discriminate against the other” (Ortner 533). The drawback, however, is feminism has also been believed to champion issues of a specific woman: the middle class, educated white woman.

Intersectional feminism has attempted at dismantling the perception of focusing on one particular group of individuals. Drawing attention to only one group completely ignores the experiences of a great portion of the population. This form of hegemonic feminism, a feminism imposing itself on historically oppressed groups and regulating how and what to think, harms women, people of color, non-heterosexual individuals, and individuals with a variety of cultural or religious identities who do not match those of European patriarchy. The aim of intersectional feminism is to draw attention to the way identities of all kinds intersect with one another and how those intersections color the way in which people live. Because there are individuals who benefit more than others, Ann Garry, author of "Intersectionality, Metaphors, And The Multiplicity Of Gender,"

has stated, “the inclusion of both privilege and oppression in intersectionality implies that members of dominant groups must consider the factors of privilege in their own identity and positionality” (829). All human beings have some level of privilege they benefit from. Privilege is harmful to those who do not benefit from it. At the same time, it keeps the benefiter ignorant of the issues of others and does not acknowledge the individual struggles of marginalized groups and individuals. A prime example of privilege is the privilege white individuals have over People of Color, also known as white privilege. As bell hooks mentions when talking about the early feminist movements and the exclusion of African-American women in feminist movements and discourse, “All white women in this nation know that whiteness is a privileged category” (61). This, clearly, does not mean white individuals do not have any other type of personal suffering or that they did not have to struggle for their work or life. White privilege explains the concept that white individuals do not deal with certain stereotypes harmful, and specific, to People of Color. The same can be said about gender. Because there exists misconceptions and misogynistic rhetoric aimed directly at women, such as focusing on their appearance rather than their intelligence or achievements, men will not face similar misconceptions or sexism because of their gender. To be male, in other words, means to be safe from the sexism women endure.

There must be a point to make about the flaw about intersectionality and how it relates to feminism. Intersectionality is more of a framework used within feminist discourse, rather than a methodology itself. Yet, at the same time, there is a reason as to why there is a benefit to this drawback, however paradoxical this may seem. The very nature of intersectionality is not to make generalizations about a group of individuals nor

is it meant to restrict how feminism should be viewed. It, in fact, accomplishes the opposite. It is meant to bring about a realization about different identities and “enable [individuals the chance] to face squarely and understand the reasons why [individuals] might have different interests at stake in a particular issue” (Garry 829). In relation to Latino men, it has the possibility of giving these men the ability to voice their differences, combating over-generalizations.

The benefits of intersectionality far outweigh the potential issues it may have or may bring up. Because of its inclusive nature, a diversity of authors and individuals have come forth to talk about a society that has often excluded them from feminist discourse centered on identities other than gender. Women, such as bell hooks, Sylvanna M. Falcón, and Jennifer C. Nash, believe intersectionality will create conversations and much needed social change that is inclusive, disallowing for the continuation of oppressive systems such as colonization and institutional racism. In many ways, many feminists are coaxed by the idea of intersectionality because it is a way to implement change across a broad range of people and allowing them to voice their concerns and opinions, regardless of who that person may be and with the ability to affect change on a greater social level.

Considering the need in which humanity defines itself, either through a plethora of categories, this type of framework of looking at the world through intersections “resists fixity and stasis through its capacity to be mobilized to describe structure, subjectivity, identity, marginalization, multiple-marginalization, oppression, and agency at once” (Falcón and Nash). The removal of fixed identities helps in the inclusion of diversity. It also generates a sense of duality and multiplicity. Such duality and multiplicity allows for

various people to understand their identity as more than a group of singular characteristic, but a fluid representation of human experience.

Intersectional feminism ultimately accomplishes one important goal that has permeated and governed how individuals react to one another by “[exposing] and [redressing] inequality and violence” (Falcón and Nash). It identifies what parts of American society fails its citizens who do not fit a certain mold of being. By the use of intersectional feminism, there is a calling out of harmful and oppressive systems put into place that have always, and continue to this day, benefit a select group of individuals. Author bell hooks has stated, “feminism is for everybody,” showing the need for all American citizens to uphold such an integration of identities (qtd. in Falcón and Nash). It is an essential part to the expression of human kind and the nuances cultures have created.



## **Cultural Hierarchy: Conquest through Culture**

Before the beginning of the process of decolonization for Latino males in the United States, there must be a brief understanding of colonization of the New World by the European superpower known as the Spanish.

Although the history behind the conquering of the New World is widely known, there are details that make the colonization of the indigenous peoples of Central and South America different. To avoid generalizations about indigenous experiences, only one group of people will be examined: the Aztecs. The nuances specifically deal with the Spanish being able to manipulate the Aztecs' social and religious systems of belief to their advantage. It ultimately led to the domination of the Spanish in the New World and the integration of indigenous communities into a new social and political order.

The Aztecs had an advanced and complex society that constructed laws, customs, and creations unique to the Western Hemisphere. Given the diversity of the Americas, Octavio Paz, author of *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, focused on what it means to be Mexican in modern societies, both in Mexico and the United States. His book explains exactly how the Spanish were able to topple the Aztec empire, rivaling many European nations of the day. In his words, the indigenous populations were made of autonomous peoples with traditions and conflicts with others "exactly as in the Mediterranean and other cultural areas" (Paz 90). They were far from homogeneous, although they did share some commonalities, much like most cultures that were in constant strife and contact with one another.

Due in large part to their religious and social structure, cultural dogmas were created with a combination of their own beliefs and those of others, similar to the Olmec and Maya. To give an analogy:

Just as an Aztec pyramid often covers an older structure, so this theological unification affected only the surface of the Aztec consciousness, leaving the primitive beliefs intact. (Paz 92)

This feature of the Aztec way of living allowed for their culture to grow on the creations of others with the inclusion of their own works. It established hierarchies that affected the very social structure, allowing for the religious sects to pronounce prophecies and foretelling of new eras to come, much like their cyclical calendars. What this ultimately says about the Aztec was that their culture was based on the teachings and power accumulated by the priests and nobility. In other words, “[everything] was prepared for Spanish domination” (Paz 92). The Aztecs and their culture had a system in which the Spanish could easily exploit and use to their advantage.

The Spanish did not annihilate the Aztecs or any of the surrounding cultures. To the Spanish rulers, there would be no point in exterminating completely a source of labor already there. They would be able to use them for the need of expanding the power and influence of the Spanish crown. The Aztecs and their descendants would become an important aspect and integrated into the Spanish way of life. Compared to the North American experience of indigenous peoples, the Spanish did not “[deny] a place, even at the foot of the social scale, to the people who composed it” (Paz 102 -103). The colonial system placed by the Iberians gave them a role in society and saw them as an integral part, even if they were seen as inferior to them. Although it can be claimed the

indigenous peoples did suffer and many times were forced to adhere to the social structure imposed by the Spanish, the Aztec population was able to meld with the newly created society because it meant they were now “a part of one social order and one religion” (Paz 102). This singular social order, facilitated by a “single language, a single faith and a single lord against the variety of races, languages, tendencies and states of the pre-Hispanic world,” allowed for the Aztecs to assimilate into a society, now dominant and their only way of survival (Paz 100). The shattering of Aztec rule and independence meant, in many ways, the native nations and cultures had nowhere to turn to now that their leaders and gods had been eradicated from their seat at the throne. Yet, even if “[the] gods [and rulers had] departed,” there was another society in which to integrate themselves into, one with “other gods and another era” (Paz 94). The Spanish provided for them a new social order, an amalgamation of Aztec and Spanish identities.

This colonial design, the exploitation of the Aztecs and their culture by the Spanish, ultimately led to the Iberians holding much of the power and influence in Spanish America. Even once the conquered territories achieved independence, from the edges of the Rio Grande to the tip of Tierra del Fuego, the legacy of Spanish conquest remained. It is with this influence and legacy in which the current population of Latin Americans must live with. Alongside the suppression of many cultural norms once upheld, there was an adoption of harmful social characteristics, foreign to the Aztecs. Colonial machismo, once alien, is now the norm in which many Latino men fall into so as to establish their dominance in a society upheld by standards from European patriarchy and Spanish rule.

## **Machismo: The Legacy of Colonization**

Through the use of their own militaries, cultural, and social power, the Aztecs and other cultures had established their identity and created for themselves a civilization. Once the Europeans arrived, however, all of this changed.

The domination of the indigenous populations resulted in newly named territories and peoples, lumping them together, categorizing them, and placing them on a social and racial hierarchy. There was even a way in which genders would be socialized into the new Spanish social formation. Because of the gender binary Europeans had imposed on the Aztecs and the trauma of having lost ancestral homelands to a greater force than themselves, the male population had adopted a new form of masculinity. According to Alfredo Mirandé in his book, *Hombres y Machos: Masculinity and Latino Culture*, the acceptance of this new mentality was a way to “compensate for deep-seated feelings of inadequacy and inferiority by assuming a hypermasculine, aggressive, and domineering stance” (67). In other words, this reaction is known as machismo.

Contrary to popular belief, machismo is not just a way to expressing a type of aggressiveness and sexual dominance. It also has the capability of instilling of “responsibility, selflessness, and meeting obligations” (Mirandé 73). It is because of this understanding that machismo has made some Latino men into respectful individuals, rather than aggressive ones.

A major reason as to why machismo has often times been considered an aggressive form of masculinity, much like chauvinism, is because of misinterpretations that lead to generalizations outside individuals or non-Latinos did not fully comprehend. In the preface before the beginning of his book *Muy Macho: Latino Men Confront Their*

*Manhood*, Ray Gonzalez states such a belief ultimately resulted in a generalized assumption machismo was a “self-aggrandizing male bravado that flirts with physical harm to be sexual, like some rutting for the right to pass on genes” (xiii). Machismo is not a monolith. M. Cristina Alcalde, author of "What It Means To Be A Man?: Violence And Homophobia In Latino Masculinities On And Off Screen," cites Donnalyn Pompper:

Like other identities, masculinities are relational, fluid, and situational; what it means to be a man varies by historical period, setting, and among different groups of men (Pompper 682–85). (538)

In other words, it is a multifaceted identity that does not have one solid definition, but a multitude due to the interpretations of the Latino men and women who adopt it as an integral part of their culture.

Even though there are a myriad of forms it can take, the harmful side of machismo can restrict Latino men and women from realizing their full potential as individuals with aspirations and differences. Given that there is obvious tension between the genders, male versus female, there is an aspect of the Latino male that is often ridiculed or mocked: Sexuality, or particularly, homosexuality. Because sexuality affects different cultures in other ways, a generalization cannot be made, even when speaking on the Latino experience. There are, however, commonalities about sexuality that are shared within the Latino community.

Gay Latino males are sometimes torn between the need to act as traditional males prescribed by the belief in colonial machismo or to accept themselves as homosexual males, but live with potential homophobia coming from family, friends, or their community. Although the experiences of homophobia are often nuanced and individual,

it is a common trend. The need to prove one's masculinity has reached the point in which the Latino community has seen homosexuals as groups separate from themselves. Ilán Stavans, contributor to a chapter in Gonzalez's book, has stated men who fall out of the heteronormative culture are considered a "they," rather than a portion of the community within the greater Latino population (qtd. in González 155). As Ilán Stavans illustrates:

Even as homosexuals entered my peer group and became my friends, I was uneasy. At times I wondered whether having homosexual friends would make others doubt my sexual identity (qtd. in González153).

It can be assumed his fear of being considered homosexual dissipated over time. The problem here is the fear of being considered homosexual in the first place and wanting to avoid any rumors depicting him as such. He wished to belong to the status quo and to deviate from that troubled his sense of identity and posed a danger for him.

In many ways, this need of wanting to be viewed as heterosexual and the fear of identifying as homosexual is because Latino men have "adopted the armature of [the] Spanish conquerors: Hispanic men are machos, dominating figures, rulers conquistadors – and, also, closeted homosexuals" (qtd. in Gonzalez 148). By use of this quote, it is not saying all Latino men are closeted homosexuals, or that they are in denial or confused about their sexual orientation. It is making the analogy these men are in constant defense of their masculinity, thus, perpetuating their fear of being perceived as less than a heterosexual male.

Many Latino individuals, not just those who would identify as heterosexual, experience this form of anxiety. While some individuals fear being seen as homosexual,

there are others who admit to themselves the differences in their sexual orientation, yet hide it for fear of retribution.

Due to the limited representation in popular media of Latino men, women, and individuals with different gender identities, the Latino community and its individuals have been constructed as a specific caricature. For Latino men, their masculinity was already created for them and often “associated with ... fairly one-sided and stereotypical [versions]: the oversexualized Latin Lover, the lazy crook, and the violent macho” (Alcalde 537). In order to destabilize this persistent stereotype, films like *La Mission* have created a narrative in which the characters who populate each scene react differently to the main focus of this work: Homosexuality under the view of traditional masculinity.

### **Masculinity under the Lens: *La Mission***

*La Mission* takes place in the Mission District of San Francisco. This part of San Francisco has historically been known as an area populated by the Latino community from everywhere in Latin America. Taking into account this city is in California, an enormous portion of the Mission population is made of Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants. The film focuses on two individuals who are part of this Latino community and integral to the main plot.

Although the acts of homophobia are not just centered in the Latin American population, they are present throughout many cultures worldwide. The use of Latino men in this instance specifically is to bring attention on how European patriarchy has changed a culture that once integrated non-heterosexual identities into their cultures. This recognition allows for the culture to understand its plight and give it the ability to rebuild what was taken.

Jesse, a gay Latino, along with his father, Che, are central characters who must confront their understanding about what it means to be a man in the Latino community. Both individuals encounter this new realization in their lives and act accordingly: Jesse hides his sexuality from his father and the rest of his community, and when Che discovers this part of Jesse, resorts to homophobia. Although the main premise of the film is how men deal with homosexuality, another overarching theme is how men interact with masculinity. Both of these men confront their masculinity in two distinct ways.

Jesse faces the reality of his homosexuality, yet, also keeps such information from his father, or he would suffer from harmful consequences such as rejection and even violence. To some, it may seem strange he would maintain hidden this fact from a family member, especially his father, considering that generally, it is assumed parents would be more understanding. However, his situation is different and costs their relationship a heavy blow. Family is an important aspect of Jesse's life, so much that "being gay means missing out on family time as he cannot reconcile his sexual identity with his family expectations. He must choose between family and his own identity and wellbeing" (Alcalde 544). The family expectations are those imposed on him to be the traditional macho he is made to be. Diverging from this imposed and predestined identity and venturing off in a different direction would result in becoming "a target of mockery and derision, forced to live on the fringes of society" (qtd. in González 154). It would leave Jesse vulnerable to hardships, dangerous circumstances, and isolation from his family.

Che, the father, is different. Although he is not gay, his discovery of Jesse's sexuality threatens a predetermined reality he envisioned for his son: A life style more relatable to Che's. He, on the other hand, does not need to hide because the culture he



grew in determined his sexuality a norm. Instead, his use of violence and intimidation becomes his initial response. This has to do more with his belief that homosexuality threatens the masculinity he is accustomed to seeing. Although we cannot assume his immigrant status, whether he was born in the United States or in Latin America, it can be assumed he maintains “[the] hegemonic ... construction of masculinity ... [that] is represented by the sexist Latino ‘macho’ who defends his views through violence” (Alcalde 539). This form of masculinity also confronts the Latino male who does not fit in the “ideal of the dominant, heterosexual man” (Alcalde 539). This is further exacerbated by his upbringing in a hostile and violent environment in which he learns strength, violence, and intimidation are necessary to survive, be accepted, and hold a secure place within the community (Alcalde 548). It has become the only way in which he can and knows how to live.

Throughout the film, the relationship between these two individuals is challenged to the point of violence and abandonment. However, the redeeming factor in their relationship is the eventual acceptance of Jesse by Che. This act of acceptance does more than just reunite a family. It challenges what it means to be masculine and how two forms of masculinity can interact with one another and does away with the stereotypical definitions of Latino men in the United States. It means both of these identities and interpretations of masculinity can co-exist in the same spaces. One type of masculinity is not a threat to the other. Films like *La Mission* allows for the exploration of the Latino male experience through the creation of two distinct aspects.

In the first aspect, works of art like this permit Latino individuals to reclaim their voice and show popular media a truer representation of the Latino community. This act of

decolonization breaks the colonial narrative that restricts Latino identity to violence, and instead empowers them. Although it remains easier to portray this community as a monolithic entity, in the words of Steven Bender, “the most important objective [when creating films or works depicting Latinos and their community] is to seize control of the means of production... [to] enable Latinas/os to begin to tell their counterstories to mainstream audiences as a form of counter-speech to the body of derogatory stereotypical works that exist” (Alcalde 542). It provides an outlet to expose the reality and multifaceted identities of this community. This act gives the voice of the colonized to speak on the realities they face, rather than continuing the historical violence and silence of marginalized groups.

In the second aspect, this film “invites [the viewer] to recognize violence as a problem without essentializing it as an inherent part of Latino/a culture(s) and masculinities” (Alcalde 548). It challenges the belief Latino culture and their communities are homophobic or violent by nature. This film, instead, reinforces the concept men are capable of changing for the good of themselves and their community. Authors Barbosa et al. concludes that the identity of Latino men can co-exist with homosexuality, and not automatically assume “Latino cultures as homogenous, unchanging, and uniquely homophobic” (qtd. in Alcalde 545). Just this aspect alone helps the Latino man decolonize their mentality from a standard placed on them by the Spanish conquistadors: Homosexuality is a natural occurrence within the human identity and does not threaten any other form of masculinity. It expands an understanding of the Latino male identity.

Here, the creation of the lullaby has become the saving grace of the Latino male. It will give him the chance of reinventing his narrative and create a newer sense of being.

## **Integrating Intersectionality in the Latino Consciousness**

From the continuation of colonial machismo, homophobia and the questioning of masculinity, to the concepts of intersectional feminism, it can be seen as a difficult feat to integrate intersectional feminism into the Latino consciousness. This is especially true when culture and history closely tie into one another and become difficult to separate.

For this very reason, there is a need of a framework for Latino men to successfully integrate intersectional feminism within the everyday culture they live in. Or at the very least, begin a conversation in which to engage with one another. The general idea is not to impose a one sided and bias approach to feminism, but rather in the creation of discourse on what it truly means to live in a world in which being a Latino male has many definitions.

This framework can best be called Intersectionality through the Latino lens. It will be divided into two parts, each emphasizing a process for decolonization. The first part will be a relearning of the history of colonization. The second part will center on the use of intersectional feminism and what it means to be of other races, genders, religious sects, and other forms of identification. Both of these sections will be used as a means to begin a conversation to help Latino men achieve some sort of understanding about why intersectional feminism would help in the decolonization of their consciousness.

### **Relearning History**

The first part is for Latino males to look critically at how history has changed the culture they live in. This would bring to clarity the cultural interaction and conflicts the Aztec culture had with the Spanish, effectively creating a hybrid culture. Doing so establishes a cause and effect sequence, pinpointing the problem to a specific time and

working towards a viewpoint that better suits the needs of a modern society in constant flux.

A crucial aspect is to understand what colonial masculinity is, where it originated from, and how it affects Latino men. Here, it will expand on the issues of colonization by comparing how colonized peoples are affected by colonizer cultures. In context of the European male, their version of masculinity was already established. They had used both religion and established cultural norms to dictate what or who should be considered male or masculine. The rhetoric that can be seen in use even to this day is reflected in *La Mission*.

In one particular scene, Che asks Jesse if he is a woman or a man, once he realizes Jesse's sexual orientation (Alcalde 545). The use of trying to make mutually exclusive sexual and romantic attraction to gender is a learned behavior by the use of the colonizers, the Spaniards. Author Freya Schiwy in her article, "Decolonization And The Question Of Subjectivity," explains that the Spaniard's use of "gendering of colonial imaginaries has operated as a means of rendering European masculinity through Othering" (Schiwy 275). In other words, European masculinity was established as norm by determining other forms of gender expression as incompatible with their own customs.

Thus, as a consequence, these "foundational elements of the coloniality power where gender binaries and gender imaginaries have been naturalized," creating the situation in which European masculinity was forced onto the Aztec population (Schiwy 275). Relearning the history and understanding what the culture was like during the era of colonization by Europeans is an active way of decolonizing, or undoing the colonial mentality. For example, the sexual violence the Spanish conquistadors inflicted on the

Indigenous woman. By learning this aspect of colonization, there can be a movement forwards in redefining what it means to be a Latino male or expanding it to new limits.

Seeing that historical context always paints the Latino male as violent, promiscuous, or other types of negative connotations, identity is isolated to specific spheres, rather than a multitude. Masculinity, like any other identifier, is “a historical process that shifts depending on context and community: [it is] always becoming” (“Building” 25). Confining it to one space severely limits the Latino male from expressing himself as fully and completely as he knows himself to be. It is also an attempt at comprehending that masculinity does not simply refer to heterosexual male, but refers to men who do not always conform to gender norms, such as transgender and queer men. Identity fixed to one form of expression is what causes violence due to the limited comprehension that Latino males have the capacity of individuality. The narrowing of identity renders it almost impossible to please all aspects of colonial masculinity because it was never meant for a group of people who never had the same restrictions of gender or sexuality as those who colonized.

### **Intersectional Integration**

Intersectionality assumes all people, regardless of where, who, or what they may align themselves with, derive from a plethora of cultural, political, racial, and social backgrounds. This is over looked when only a small side of Latino men is seen in popular media. However, at the same time, because Latino men also consume the same media that portrays them, they commit the same acts of generalization. This is where intersectional feminism may alleviate these acts of generalizations. It calls on the need for a deeper exploration of the humanity of Latinos and their many forms of existing.

In a way, decolonization is intersectional feminism because “[decolonization] requires thinking racialization and imposed gender systems together, along with class and sexuality” (“Building” 31). It informs the individual on how Latin American society was created and what and who were put into positions of power.

Integration would begin at the most basic level: Latino men are not homogeneous or one-sided individuals. As a result of an emphasis in popular media and through historical narratives in creating caricatures of peoples that are easily accessible and recognizable, it solidifies such stereotypes and miscommunications. For example, in the use of the film *La Mission*, the miscommunication happens between Jesse and his father due to Che not comprehending his son’s sexuality. Since before his son’s birth, his upbringing made him believe gender was closely tied with sexual orientation, severely limiting the possibility of his interaction with other men who were not like him or denied completely the use of colonial masculinity. Here, intersectionality would dismantle this misunderstanding by bringing to light this statement:

Rather, the call of intersectionality is to re-think the categories themselves, and to consider how our categories, our modes of analysis, might look and *feel* different if our starting point was the experiences and material realities of women of color.

(Falcón and Nash “Shifting”)

This may be talking about women of color and their intersections, but it can also be applied to the lives of Latino men. If Latinos began questioning what it meant to be male, it would open the possibilities in realizing there is more than one way to achieve masculinity without confining it to narrow descriptions. This questioning of continued

Western mentality is the second step in breaking down the coloniality of the Latino consciousness.

Every Latino male has the capability of inflicting harm on others, regardless of sexual orientation, which is why intersectional feminism is not only aimed at heterosexual men, but non-heterosexual men as well. Although it may not seem it at first glance, gay Latinos have the capacity of perpetuating and benefiting from patriarchal standards due to one crucial characteristic: Being male. This reason alone garners them immunity from certain types of discrimination such as misogyny and transphobia. Scott Lauria Morgensen, author of "The Representability And Responsibility Of Cisgender Queer Men In Women's Studies," proposes that gay Latinos, and other gay men in general, were confined to a "[definition of] manhood [that is] naturally heteropatriarchal," even though this same definition was a source of homophobic oppression (538). In his article, Morgensen also refers to a hegemonic feminism that silences and homogenizes the problems of groups such as women of color and non-heterosexual men. This in turn, oppresses these groups and continues the process of colonization.

Hegemonic feminism is another form of colonization because it assumes the very standards of gender, race, class, and socioeconomic status feminism critiques. It is because of this reason that gay Latinos can use intersectional feminism to include themselves in a conversation that once excluded them. By involving themselves in the discourse, they begin to dismantle the misconceptions they gain from certain privileges hegemonic feminism assumes they maintain, such as the privilege of being accepted as fully male in heteronormative settings. Exchanging hegemonic feminism within feminist



discourse for “antiracist and anticolonial feminist work that recognizes them as potential participants,” allows for them to cooperate in a process that has oppressed all whom do not fit into European patriarchal ideals (Morgensen 553). Intersectional feminism also has given women of color and Indigenous feminists the ability of “teaching cisgender queer men a feminist understanding of their marginality and privilege will follow explaining heteropatriarchy as a racial and national formation that in North America is defined by settler colonialism” (Morgensen 553). In other words, it will allow for Latino gay men to see how it is they have benefited from European patriarchy, but also how it is they have suffered from it.

Integration is not an easy process, especially when many individuals do not participate completely or do not agree with the methods it proposes in using. There will always be a push back to include oneself, especially when historically, European patriarchy has been considered the standard and a fear in changing that social, political, and cultural order. The use of integration is to form a union with other intersectional feminists. Such a union will not only allow for Latino men to decolonize their mentality, but also achieve decolonization across all peoples and cultures once subjugated to colonization by European patriarchy.

The ultimate goal of intersectionality is for the improvement of society, but also a personal improvement that allows for the exploration of one’s own spirit. David T. Abalos, author of “Transforming The Personal, Political, Historical, And Sacred Faces Of The Latino Male,” states that the society in which Latino men currently live in attempts at telling them they should “hide who [they] are because [they] know that [they] live in a dangerous world of competition for power” (162). What becomes important to note is this

creates a system in which Latino men are controlled by and continuing this system of oppression. What is even more devastating is the fact Latino men do this same controlling to other Latino men, either through violence or by ostracizing them. By taking control of the narrative that defines Latino men, they can in turn recreate themselves as living, breathing individuals with a myriad of personalities and identities. Because colonization attempted at making the Latino community conform to a foreign way of existing, there was a loss of culture. Such a separation has orphaned the Latino because there was no point of reference in which to return to or acknowledge. Yet, by embracing intersectionality “[de-educating themselves], [throws] out the lies regarding [their] past by re-educating [themselves] to [their] history of struggle against the oppression and exploitation encountered in the collusion between the stories of capitalism and racism” (Abalos 164). European patriarchy also attempts at stifling emotions that do not show strength and violence. Feminism creates a space opposite of that objective by encouraging Latino men to “rediscover [their] body, nature, emotions, feelings, the feminine, and fiesta as a search for community” (Abalos 164). Colonization is then reverted and indigenous identities that were once suppressed become part of the living reality of Latinos.

To restrict the Latino experience and their value as individuals perpetuates European patriarchy and stops them from retaking their own narratives. This patriarchy can only be dismantled when there is an understanding it is not the defining method of living. Continuing such practice dehumanizes Latino men and their intrinsic value to the society they are part of and one in which they can participate fully.

## **Conclusion**

The use of intersectional feminism is to enlighten Latino males about the possibilities this framework can provide for a group of individuals that have faced oppression from a number of situations. Intersectional feminism is not meant to preach and much less force itself on others, but a calling to understanding the diversity that exists within the human race. Such an understanding helps us rid the harmful stereotypes present in our modern society.

Because of globalization, there is a greater need for a framework that is inclusive, reaching further than some political formats. Even more, due to the use of media and the convoluted and biased narratives, entire peoples and cultures are drawn as unrealistic caricatures.

Latino cultures and intersectional feminism are not opposites nor are they completely incompatible. It just requires a constant questioning of the norms that diminish a people and confront them, even when such confrontation makes the situation feel uneasy. It is meant to create an uncomfortable feeling, which pushes people to change their mentality, and eventually their actions.

In essence, European patriarchy can only be destroyed once its validity is questioned, challenged, and ultimately done away with, especially in a world that should not cater at creating a stereotypical caricature. Multitudes exist within humanity. The Latino male is not the exception.

Once this has been achieved, Latino men can explore their humanity and see themselves as complete individuals with their own aspirations, flaws, and nuances. The lullaby is more than just giving Latino males the initiative of redefining history, but at

redefining what it means to be Latino, especially a Latino that does not fall into stereotypes. Their humanity is of far more value and more intrinsic to their existence. It is time to recreate a new lullaby for the modern Latino male.

## Works Cited

- Adichie, Chimamande Ngozi. *We Should All Be Feminists*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. New York: Vintage Books, 2016. e-Book.
- Abalos, David T. "Transforming The Personal, Political, Historical, And Sacred Faces Of The Latino Male." *Journal Of Men's Studies* 13.2 (2005): 155-167. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 1 Mar. 2016.
- Alcalde, M. Cristina. "What It Means To Be A Man?: Violence And Homophobia In Latino Masculinities On And Off Screen." *Journal Of Popular Culture* 47.3 (2014): 537-553. *Humanities International Complete*. Web. 27 Feb. 2016.
- "Building On 'The Edge Of Each Other's Battles': A Feminist Of Color Multidimensional Lens." *Hypatia* 29.1 (2014): 23-40. *Humanities International Complete*. Web. 1 Dec. 2015.
- Falcón, Sylvanna M., and Jennifer C. Nash. "Shifting Analytics And Linking Theories: A Conversation About The "Meaning-Making" Of Intersectionality And Transnational Feminism." *Women's Studies International Forum* 50.(2015): 1-10. *Humanities International Complete*. Web. 27 Feb. 2016.
- Garry, Ann. "Intersectionality, Metaphors, And The Multiplicity Of Gender." *Hypatia* 26.4 (2011): 826-850. *Humanities International Complete*. Web. 28 Feb. 2016.
- González, Ray. *Muy Macho: Latino Men Confront Their Manhood*. New York: Anchor, 1996. Print.
- hooks, bell. "Chapter 6: Race And Gender." *Race & Resistance: African Americans In The Twenty-First Century* (2002): 61-65. *Humanities International Complete*. Web. 27 Feb. 2016.

- La Mission. Dir. Peter Bratt. Perf. Benjamin Bratt, Alex Hernandez, Christopher Borgzinner. Global Cinema Distribution, 2009.
- Lotz, Amanda D. "Communicating Third-Wave Feminism And New Social Movements: Challenges For The Next Century Of Feminist Endeavor." *Women & Language* 26.1 (2003): 2. *Humanities International Complete*. Web. 4 Mar. 2016.
- Mirande, Alfredo. *Hombres y Machos: Masculinity and Latino Culture*. Boulder, CO, USA: Westview Press, 1997. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 27 February 2016.
- Morgensen, Scott Lauria. "The Representability And Responsibility Of Cisgender Queer Men In Women's Studies." *Women's Studies* 42.5 (2013): 534-558. *Humanities International Complete*. Web. 28 Nov. 2015.
- Ortner, Sherry B. "Too Soon For Post-Feminism: The Ongoing Life Of Patriarchy In Neoliberal America." *History & Anthropology* 25.4 (2014): 530-549. *Humanities International Complete*. Web. 27 Feb. 2016.
- Paz, Octavio. *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. New York: Grove, 1985. Print.
- Schiwy, Freya. "Decolonization And The Question Of Subjectivity." *Cultural Studies* 21.2/3 (2007): 271-294. *Humanities International Complete*. Web. 27 Feb. 2016.