Carrillo 2003 Neither Machos nor Maricones: Masculinity and Emerging Male Homosexual Identities in Mexico

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Carrillo 2003 Neither Macho nor Maricone in Mexico.pdf

Carrillo’s article is an analysis of how male identities are shifting in contemporary Mexico due to an increasing presence of masculine openly gay men. While the change is ongoing, Carrillo attempts to trace patterns in recent thought through ethnographic investigation.

The piece starts out by defining the terms maricon, hombría and masculinity. A maricon is what Carrillo terms an effeminized man. This concept is very important as it is seen in Mexican culture as the rejection of manhood, a standard by which masculine men can compare themselves to. One is hombría and masculine if they are not maricon. Traditionally, one was masculine if they were attracted to women and only women. The widespread introduction of masculine gay men into Mexican culture has shattered this paradigm. This change is the main focus of Carrillo’s article. Preferring women is no longer a precursor of masculinity, and a man can be manly whilst being gay.

Throughout the article Carrillo explores personal examples to try and explain the shifting thoughts of masculinity and homosexuality. With these stories the author adds a personal touch to national trends. A recurring theme Carrillo notices was men living two lives, one as a “normal” man with a wife and family, but also a separate gay social circle. Some of the men he observed lived this double life in hopes to retain status in Mexican society. “Sexual silence” (Carrillo 2003:355) would never put their masculine identity into question. These men see effeminate gay men as a threat to all gay men’s acceptance into society, as effeminate eccentrics encourage negative stereotypes. Maintaining masculine reputations is the biggest concern for most of the individuals Carrillo came into contact with. Be it as the one penetrating in the sexual relationship, the absence of other ‘effeminate’ characteristics, or partaking in traditional machismo behavior, masculine gay men present themselves with calculated tact.

Carrillo also goes into detail about the Mexican TV show La Vida en el Espejo, one of the first portrayals of masculine gay men in Mexican media. The gay characters were not portrayed in a sexual fashion and displayed both values of love and stability. He uses this example to conclude that gay men are accepted if they obey familial and masculine expectations. Carrillo suggests more research be done on the opinions of heterosexual and homosexual communities on the other in order for a more encompassing perspective. He leaves the reader pondering the rapidly changing...what?...in Mexico.

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Traditionally in Mexico there have been a widespread perception that there are two types of men: the machos and the maricones (add short translations). Until recently, homosexual males were viewed as effeminate, while their heterosexual counterparts were considered the epitome of masculinity.

Maricones were used as a reference to show what abnormal behavior was. Their atypical lifestyle helped define the traditional norm of a manly man. The emergence of masculine homosexual males in the mainstream society has tested this belief. Masculine homosexuals defy the conventional view and are a key element for the ever changing definition of men in Mexico. It has forced many to resist assuming that a man is heterosexual solely on masculinity.

Many homosexual males in Mexico are still very selective with who they disclose their sexuality with. Oftentimes men are worried about their reception at work and by their family and friends. Some men only share their true feelings with other homosexuals and understanding friends. Others are comfortable enough in their masculinity to openly reveal their true selves.

Carrillo explains that some homosexual males feel threatened by extremely effeminate maricones; they believe that they are a hindrance to the social acceptance of homosexuals.

Carrillo also describes different types of relationships between homosexuals and heterosexuals. In some cases, men who claim to be heterosexual indulge in sexual relations with other men. They can reassure themselves as not being gay if they take on the more masculine role, the penetrator. He can identify himself as normal because “he is more of a man than the other” (Carrillo 2003: 367). Friendships between the two sexualities were also described. Carrillo uses many examples, including heterosexual men who were tolerant of the homosexual lifestyle as long as they were not included. Carrillo touches on the effect of sexuality on affection shown for each other in a friendship. Two heterosexual male friends may affectionately touch each other because there is no threat of possible intimacy; in heterosexual-homosexual friendships, however, these expressions are usually absent.

The perceived difference between the terms homosexual males and gay men is also highlighted. Carrillo explains that oftentimes those who consider themselves gay have fully embraced their sexuality, while homosexual males tend to lead double lives. They are not usually as open with their sexuality.

Carrillo concludes with an acknowledgment of an attempt by the media to also become involved in shattering the traditional perception of homosexuals as only having one identity: maricone. Although homosexual men may have a long way to go before complete acceptance, many Mexicans have shown efforts to expand the identities of homosexuals.