

2024-05-01

Building Positive Gender Expressions Among Mexican-American College Students

Nezahualcóyotl Paniagua-Jiménez
University of Texas at El Paso

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.utep.edu/open_etd



Part of the [Education Commons](#), [Ethnic Studies Commons](#), and the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Paniagua-Jiménez, Nezahualcóyotl, "Building Positive Gender Expressions Among Mexican-American College Students" (2024). *Open Access Theses & Dissertations*. 4131.
https://scholarworks.utep.edu/open_etd/4131

This is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UTEP. For more information, please contact lweber@utep.edu.

BUILDING POSITIVE GENDER EXPRESSIONS AMONG MEXICAN-AMERICAN
COLLEGE STUDENTS

NEZAHUALCOYÓTL PANIAGUA-JIMÉNEZ

Master's Program in Education

APPROVED:

Cynthia Carolina Terán López, Ph.D., Chair

Char Ullman, Ph.D., Co-Chair

Jessica Slade, Ph.D., Committee Member

Stephen L. Crites, Jr., Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Copyright©

by

Nezahualcóyotl Paniagua-Jiménez

2024

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my wife, Ashley Swanson; none of this would be possible without your continuous support. You are an inspiration to your students and me. Thank you for challenging me to do better. Because of you, I want to believe.

Gracias a mis padres, Alfonso Paniagua-Paniagua and Rufina Jiménez-García por su apoyo incondicional.

BUILDING POSITIVE GENDER EXPRESSIONS AMONG MEXICAN-AMERICAN
COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

NEZAHUALCOYÓTL PANIAGUA-JIMÉNEZ, B.A.

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Teacher Education

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

May 2024

Abstract

This thesis explores the need for college programs to nurture and support positive gender expressions among Mexican-American college students. It does so through a historical and cultural analysis of gender identities and expressions within the Mexican community and how they impact the lives of Mexican-American college students. Additionally, it offers an exploration of potential practices and programs that support the development of positive identity and gender expressions, with a lens of intersectionality, to ensure students are allowed to critically explore and develop gender identities that move away from domination/subservience power structures and that are founded on their unique cultural background.

Table of Contents

Dedication	iii
Abstract	v
Table of Contents	vi
Introduction	1
Theoretical Framework	3
Methodology	5
Positionality	6
Data Analysis	6
Findings	8
Historical and Cultural Background	8
The Impact of Indigenous Ideas on Gender	9
The Effects of Colonialism on Mexican Gender Expressions	11
Current Political and Social Factors Impacting Mexican-American Students' Gender Expressions	13
Anti-Immigrant and LGBTQI+ Rhetoric	13
Digital Toxic Masculinity - Manosphere	14
Immigration and Perceived Ideas of Otherness	15
Gender Expressions in Modern Mexican Culture	17
Forms of Masculine Expression in Mexican Society	19
Forms of Feminine Expressions in Mexican Society	20
Forms of Non-binary Expressions in Mexican Society	22
Positive Gender Expressions	23
College Experience of Mexican-American Students	24
Effects of Traditional Machismo and Caballerismo on Male Mexican-American College Students	24
Effects of Marianismo on Female Mexican-American College Students	26
Effects of Traditional Machismo and Marianismo on Non-Binary Mexican-American College Students	29
Efforts to Support the Gender Expressions of Mexican-American College Students	31
Using Inclusive Terminology	31

Using Decolonizing Epistemologies and Methodologies	33
Instilling Activism among Mexican-American College Students	34
Using Culturally Responsive Practices	35
Providing Emotional Support and Validation.....	38
Supporting Transgender Students at the College Level.....	40
Discussion	41
Conclusion	44
References.....	46
Vita	51

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a seismic shift related to discussions about gender identities and expressions outside the binary male/female spectrum. While the openness expressed by some population sectors indicates progress toward equity, this progress has also been met with vitriolic political rhetoric from reactionary forces. It is with this in mind that I find the need to develop a deeper understanding of gender identities and expressions, as well as an understanding of the unique history and culture of Mexico, to develop college support programs that nurture positive gender expressions among all Mexican-American college students.

I decided to focus on the ways gender expressions have positive and negative effects because I have seen and even engaged in toxic aspects of masculinity. Still, with guidance, support, and challenges from others, along with self-reflection, I have been able to analyze my own gender identity and positionality critically and choose to embrace male and ethnic identity expressions that have had a positive effect not only on my own life but those around me. I found that college was an important time in my understanding of gender. Yet, at the same time, I wish I had had more support systems that would have allowed me to explore and examine how my gender ideas could potentially have positive and negative expressions that affected me and others.

Therefore, in this paper, I will explore the ways cultural gender expressions affect the Mexican-American college experience and examine possible support systems at the college level that may nurture positive holistic outcomes among this Latinx¹ population. I will utilize a literary review of various academic texts to explore the cultural and historical background of Indigenous and European influences that shaped Mexican culture, its understanding of gender expressions,

¹ The term “Latinx” indexes the intersectionality of race, class, sexual orientation, gender, status, and language as dynamic and multiple factors that construct identities (Vila, 2000).

and how they affect the lives of Mexican-American college students. I will also examine support programs and identify areas of growth in the development of positive gender expressions that respect the individuality and cultural norms of students without imposing Westernized ideals of gender positivity.

I decided to focus on the experience of Mexican-American college students because, as pointed out by Funk and Lopez (2022), Latinos are now the largest minoritized group in the United States, and within this population, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans make up the largest subsection. However, while researching this topic, I have found that there has been a limited focus on explorations of the lives of college students from this demographic group, specifically regarding their gender identities and expressions.

Theoretical Framework

A cornerstone of my examination of gender is the concept of intersectionality, or as Crenshaw (1991) explains, that to fully understand the lives of individuals, one must look at their identities and positionality within power structures and how they interact with one another to create their lives and societal experiences.

First, it is crucial to understand that gender, like other human expressions, is a social construct that evolves and adapts to the needs of a population. As Lorber (1994) explains, gender is separate from the physiology of sex. A culture's ideas of gender roles are not predisposed by biology but are described and reinforced by cultural standards and, therefore, can and will change over time. Therefore, the concept of intersectionality is crucial to my exploration of gender identity and expressions within this Latinx community; it drives the need to move away from simple explanations and stereotypes and instead asks to examine the different social identities of individuals holistically and respectfully to nurture positive expressions. It is with this in mind that I analyze the different articles I have gathered through an intersectional lens that aims to explore the Mexican-American college experience and detail how gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status interact in the development of student identity and their experience at institutions of higher learning.

Crenshaw (1991) breaks down how the concept of intersectionality affects various aspects of Western society. She focuses on structural, political, and representational intersectionalities and how they validate or ignore the world views of some individuals for the gain or benefit of others; Crenshaw specifically talks about the plight of minoritized women. Crenshaw explores the way identity politics often obscure meaningful discussions about the needs of women of color. That is, identity politics specifically focuses on how Western feminism

has failed to account for the perspectives of minoritized women and how race, class, and ethnicity interests can be used to undermine the voice of minoritized women.

Intersectionality is a framework that is needed to explore how minoritized women (i.e., Latina, Black, and Indigenous) have been failed by both white feminism and initiatives like the Chicano movement. Intersectionality allows us to explore how the toxic aspects of *machismo* negatively affect Mexican and Mexican-American women and how this might be explored without engaging the also toxic narratives common in the United States that depict Mexican men as violent.

By understanding intersectionality, society and individuals can inspect and tackle both the need to support and protect minoritized women and push back on racist narratives that aim to vilify minoritized men, as well as acknowledge and honor non-binary expressions of gender identity. The use of structural intersectionality, which can include gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality, among other intersecting and overlapping social identities, can allow colleges to explore more complex and better-adapted strategies to serve Mexican-American students. This can occur through understanding the different societal structures that students face, leading institutions of higher learning to become better able to adapt and develop strategies that meet the complex needs of Mexican-American college students as they examine, challenge, and develop their identities.

Methodology

For this paper, I utilized a narrative literature review of over 30 peer-reviewed academic articles and books to determine the established academic knowledge regarding gender expression in the Mexican and Mexican-American communities in the United States. I utilize the following research questions when trying to identify potential sources and analyzing the scholarly literature:

- How does gender affect the lives of Mexican and Mexican-American students?
- What can colleges do to nurture and support positive gender expressions among Mexican-American students?

The purpose of this review is to identify trends related to the unique needs of this student population and possible support systems that ensure positive gender identities and expressions are nurtured while discouraging behaviors that create negative outcomes. All of these while still respecting the cultural background of students and not imposing Westernized ideals of masculinity, femininity, or non-binary gender identities.

To conduct my literature review, I took advantage of the University of Texas at El Paso library search tool (MinerQuest) and databases like Academic Search Complete (EBSCO), Sage Journals, and JSTOR to find academic peer-reviewed articles and books. I used the following terms: gender, sexuality, colonialism, Mexico, Latina/o/@/x, masculinity, femininity, nonbinary, LGBTQ+, toxic gender expressions, positive gender expressions, *nepantla*, *machismo*, *caballerismo*, *marianismo*, Aztec, Mexica, Spanish, manosphere. Accordingly, the research on the articles and books I was able to find provided additional topics relevant to the gender expression and experiences of Mexican and Mexican-American college students, such as dating

violence, self-efficacy, self-esteem, mental and sexual health, enculturation, acculturation, and identity among Mexican-American and Latinx college students.

Additionally, while my focus is on the college experiences of Mexican-American students as they relate to their gender and the ways colleges can support them, due to a lack of comprehensive research on this specific population, I had to expand my search of the literature to include articles addressing the needs and experiences of non-Mexican students. This allowed me to find relevant articles but also provided me with insight into the lack of academic research regarding gender expression among Mexicans in the United States, specifically among young Mexican-Americans and college students. Conclusively, through the development of this paper, I have identified a clear and significant area of opportunity for further academic research regarding Mexican-American female and non-binary identities and their life experiences.

POSITIONALITY

I acknowledge that my position as a cisgender heterosexual male provides me privileges and blind spots to the unique life experiences of those outside my identity spheres. Still, with humility and a willingness to learn, I explore ways to support and encourage positive gender and sexual expressions among all my peers. As such, I engaged in a rigorous data analysis process that included coding and the development of themes associated with positive gender expressions.

DATA ANALYSIS

The narrative literature review of the over 30 sources provided the following themes regarding gender expression among Mexican-American college students:

- Gender expressions within Mexican culture are influenced by both the Indigenous cultures of Mesoamerica and the European norms brought to the Americas through Spanish colonization.

- Gender identity within Mexican culture is a continuum that is more complex than the simplistic depiction of the binary male vs female scheme. Not only male and female expressions can be placed in an axis that produces positive or negative expressions, but gender identities are more diverse than simple biological sexuality.
- Gender identities among Mexican-American college students are influenced by both their Mexican identity (enculturation) and their adaptability to American culture (acculturation).
- The intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, social class, and education plays a major part in the identity development of Mexican-American college students.
- Gender identity among Mexican-American college students plays different roles in their academic, social, and personal lives as they navigate college life.
- Colleges can support Mexican-American college students by developing programs to nurture both the ethnic and gender identities of these students in a manner that focuses on positive expressions.

In the following section of this paper, I will expand on each of these themes, discussing the corresponding literature.

Findings

The topic of gender expression among Mexican-American college students is a complex and understudied one. This literature review revealed significant themes that shed light on the origins of gender identity within the population and how these identities are expressed in the academic and social lives of Mexican-American college students. The findings are broken down throughout this paper in a manner that provides the historical and cultural background needed to understand how gender ideas are created and nurtured, an overview of the different gender expressions and their positive and negative aspects, the experience of Mexican-American college students, and ultimately identifying possible best practices that can lead to the creation of support programs at the college level that encourage positive gender expressions and improve the academic, social and individual outcomes among this student populations.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

To fully grasp the different gender identities Mexican-American college students bring to the table, one must first explore the cultural and historical background that led to the creation, reproduction, and evolution of these gender identities. It is with this in mind that I explore some of the binary and non-binary gender identities of pre-colonial Mesoamerican cultures, colonial and modern Mexico. This brief exploration will allow college program staff to understand better the cultural ideas of gender that Mexican-American college students hold.

When trying to understand the influence Mesoamerican societies had in the development of Mexican gender ideology, it is fundamental to keep in mind that the indigenous populations of the area were a diverse group with different and varied cultures. The many differences are reflected in the tapestry of cultural practices found in modern Mexico. However, for this paper,

the focus will be on the influence of the Mexica, or as they are commonly known, the Aztec and Spanish cultural influence on modern Mexican gender identity.

The Impact of Indigenous Ideas on Gender

In this section, I highlight some of the gender ideas of some Mesoamerican cultures that resided in what is now modern Mexico and explore how these ideas influence Mexican culture's modern understanding of gender identity. This knowledge will allow college programs to develop the necessary historical background knowledge to fully understand how to support positive gender identities and expressions based on the cultural and historical values of the Mexican-American population.

Joyce (2000) stated that the Aztec or Mexica civilization was the premier power in Mesoamerica at the time of the Spanish invasion of the New World and played a crucial role in the development of modern Mexican culture, even as it became subjugated to European domination. To better understand the Aztec civilization precolonial, Joyce explores how gender played a vital role in the different stages Aztec boys and girls would experience on their journey toward full adulthood. This historical examination of text collected after the conquest of the Aztec empire by Spanish forces provides an insight into the values Aztec society placed at the highest level and the gender structures of the society.

Joyce (2000) utilizes historical documents² and Butler's (1993) explanation of social production³ to underline the values Aztec society held regarding how children were reared to fulfill their respective roles, such as possible reproductive male, possible reproductive female, and celibate. Through this analysis, the author argues that Aztec society was very conservative in

² It is crucial to know that the sources also express some biases held by the Spanish authors when interpreting Aztec customs (Joyce, 2000).

³ The result of the repeated performance of a particular way of being that is represented within a society (Joyce, 2000).

their ideas of gender expectations and what would be considered socially acceptable behavior by adults. The Aztec society was very structured and invested in the “proper” rearing of children, whom they saw as “raw materials,” into acceptable forms of adulthood, including expected gender expressions. Therefore, to achieve the goal of building children into their proper roles, there were prescribed and repetitive rituals, like body modifications or tying the depiction of children to tools associated with male or female professions, throughout childhood that aimed to develop their predetermined gender and social identity. As children grew up, body modifications, hairstyles, clothing, and participation in communal rituals were tied to their gender expectations. This is evidence of how Aztec society had a patriarchal structure, like Europe's rigid societal expectations of gender, while still allowing for a bigger range of gender expressions.

So far, I have provided an example that assists in the understanding that Indigenous societies already had gender ideas and hierarchies, which can lead to misunderstanding the influence gender had in their lives before and after colonization. Additionally, exploring how colonial forces imposed a binary mindset that overtook the more flexible understanding of gender among the conquered populations allows us to understand some of the most negative facets of post-colonial gender dynamics, like extreme patriarchy and sexual violence. College programs need to understand the origin of the patriarchal attitudes found within the Mexican community through an examination of the historical consequences of Colonialism before they can support Mexican-American college students to examine and explore more egalitarian gender expressions of masculinity, femininity, and non-binary. This is an idea that will be explored further later in this paper. But before that, I will continue the conversation of how our ideas of gender continued to develop after the Spanish conquest and through the Mexican colonial period.

The Effects of Colonialism on Mexican Gender Expressions

Modern Mexican culture originates from the collision of two worlds: the Indigenous populations of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, the conquering forces of Spanish exploration, and the contribution of other colonized people from Africa and Asia. This forced mixing gave birth to a people that not only carries within them the blood of the conquered and conquerors but also the contradicting ideas and emotions that such a violent event creates.

Anzaldúa's (1987) focus on the conscience of the *mestiza* allows one to explore the historical and cultural streams that led to the creation of the Mexican identity, neither Indigenous nor European, but both and therefore new. Additionally, her use of *nepantla* is useful in moving away from the binary understanding of gender norms within the Mexican-American community and instead embracing the gender and identity axis that allows for an array of different expressions. Anzaldúa argues that the more negative aspects of *machismo*, or male Mexican expressions, are tied to the inherently violent conquest of Mexico and the unjust colonial area. This created masculine ideals that focus on domination and subjugation of other men of lower cast, but especially women regardless of cast. While Anzaldúa understands the background of toxic *machismo*, she does not excuse it but rather challenges her male counterparts to do better—to move away from the toxic elements of it and instead embrace the positive roles that allow men to become equal partners to strong and independent women.

Also attesting to the pervasive effects of colonialism, Rogers (2021) contributes to the understanding of how Spanish-dominant discourse has created a narrative that demonizes Indigenous women. Rogers utilizes the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*⁴ to explore and decolonize the mythical figure of *Malintzin* as more than just an interpreter and assistant to the conquering

⁴ Pictorial record of the role of Malintzin and the Tlaxcalteca in the conquest of Mexico (Rogers, 2021).

Spanish forces but instead as an active participant in the conquest of the Aztec and other Mesoamerican tribes. This interpretation moves away from the triumphant and Eurocentric narrative that has dominated discussions of the Spanish conquest, and instead, it provides an insight into the role Indigenous people and women played. Importantly, the analysis of this document also highlights the religious imagery of *Malintzin* as a Marian figure that would later create the idea of *marianismo*⁵ within female Mexican identity.

Moreover, Lipsett-Rivera (2019) investigates the intersectionality of manhood, race, class, and rank in the stratified society of New Spain⁶. The study is done through an exploration of how different ethnic groups (Indigenous, European, Mestizo, African, and Asian) interacted within the hegemonic power structures created by Spain's conquering forces, as well as explains the creation of an environment where men of distinct ethnic backgrounds had to navigate different standards according to the other intersectional identities they held, with those of European descent holding a position of superiority.

So far, the presented literature has provided an understanding of gender role evolution within Mexican society and highlights the patriarchal hierarchy that puts the identity, interest, and history of men, especially those with power, above the rest of society. Yet, I want to underscore the need to acknowledge the influence of feminine and non-binary roles in Mexico and how they can inform practices that support the gender expressions of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the United States. Thus, later in this paper, I will introduce literature that addresses the Muxes⁷ of Juchitán, a third-gender expression found among the indigenous Zapotec people of Oaxaca (Mirandé, 2016). This is because, as part of my literature review, I

⁵ Norms that are traditional female-based in which women are viewed as spiritually stronger than men (Atencio, 2023).

⁶ Colonial name for the territory that would become modern Mexico (Lipsett-Rivera, 2019).

⁷ Third gender among the indigenous people of the Istmo de Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, Mexico (Mirandé, 2016).

seek to address this important aspect of feminine and non-binary roles in Mexico that will contribute to creating awareness about different gender expressions that can support inclusive and equitable academic communities. However, before I do that, I want to extend this historical overview to more current times and the issues that impregnate our society nowadays.

CURRENT POLITICAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS IMPACTING MEXICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS' GENDER EXPRESSIONS

We must go back to the idea that gender is socially constructed. Thus, understanding current sociopolitical forces helps inform our understanding of gender expressions among Mexican American students. As such, I would like to explore the effects of hostile social, political, cultural, and educational environments on the lives of Mexican-American college students.

Anti-Immigrant and LGBTQI+ Rhetoric

This is exemplified by the presidential administration of Donald Trump from 2017 to 2020, which enacted many anti-immigrant and LGBTQ+ policies that fomented a hostile environment in American society and at many colleges through a reformation of structures of power that focused on the grievances of conservative actors. Patron (2021) focuses on the intersection of ethnicity, sexual orientation, and politics as it affects the lives of gay Latino college students during the Trump administration. The study involves the narrative experiences of 50 gay Latino college students. The interviewees outline the different types of negative interactions they faced due to their dual minoritized status as gay Latino college students. These experiences happened immediately after the election of Trump and the politically charged atmosphere this created against both the LGBTQ+ and Latinx communities. The author uses racist nativism and queer critical theory to explore how the policies of the Trump administration

both affected the interviewed students but also created an environment where politically conservative students felt emboldened to target minoritized students, in these cases, Latino gay college students.

The narratives collected confirmed Patron's (2021) hypothesis that the political environment created by the Trump election caused gay Latino students to have increased fear due to their double status as a targeted minoritized groups who saw an increase in hostile incidents by sympathizers of the former president, such as verbal harassment and other microaggressions. While the study focused on the experiences of gay Latino college students during the Trump presidency, the study's findings are still relevant outside of this timeframe. The narrative experiences of the students highlight the intersection of ethnicity, racial, sexual, gender, and political identities in environments where discrimination and oppression are allowed, at best, and encouraged at worst.

Digital Toxic Masculinity - Manosphere

Ging's work (2019) furthers the understanding of different structures of power that have corroded and affected college life. Ging notes that as discussions of gender expression and hegemonic patriarchy continue to happen in American and Mexican society, often the rhetoric of misogynistic actors tends to be the loudest. This can be seen in the rise of toxic environments like the *manosphere*, "a particularly toxic brand of antifeminism [that] has become evident across a range of online networks and platforms...which purports to liberate men from a life of feminist delusion" (Ging, 2019. p. 595). The unique nature of the internet allows for this anti-feminist discourse to occur in a manner that transcends localities, and it has become a multinational phenomenon, where misogynists and opportunists can take advantage of vulnerable young men by focusing on perceived transgressions and attacks on "masculinity," and

a return to “male domination.” Ging points out that there is a need for more ethnocentric studies to fully understand the effect of misogynistic rhetoric on culture outside of the West.

Consequently, understanding the impact of the “manosphere” and the toxicity associated with it highlights the need for colleges to support the positive expression of masculinity among Mexican-American college students.

Immigration and Perceived Ideas of Otherness

A different aspect of the current political and social factors impacting Mexican-American students is immigration and the sense of “otherness.” An important player in the development of the identity of Mexican-American college students relates to the level of Mexican and American cultural aspects they utilize to develop their worldview. As bi-national individuals, Mexican-American college students find themselves in a unique position to experience the world through multiple cultural standards. This can create a sense of not belonging or not fitting into either one, but it also allows these students to examine and choose to embrace positive aspects of the Mexican and American cultural experience. This idea is explored in the studies by Perrotte et al. (2020). They examined how acculturation and enculturation interact with gender identities and expressions among Mexican-American individuals.

Perrotte et al. (2020) examine the relationship between enculturation or the retention of native values among immigrants, depressive symptoms, and risky health behaviors as it relates to gender among Mexican-American college students. The study considers the cultural phenomena of enculturation, or the process by which an individual learns the cultural values and standards of one’s group, and how it might be an indicator that Mexican-American men experience higher depressive symptoms than their female counterparts.

The study found no relationship between levels of enculturation, depressive symptoms, and risky health behaviors among the overall Mexican-American college student population (Perrotte et al., 2020). It, however, showed a relationship between enculturation and depressive symptoms among male Mexican-American college students. The authors argue that this might be reflective of the levels of isolation between them and American society. In response, college programs can use the knowledge that Mexican-American male students who identify more with their Mexican identity can feel more isolated from their peers, college, and community and, therefore, can explore steps needed to both nurture their Mexican identity and feelings of connectedness with the rest of the college community. This can improve mental health and reduce levels of depressive symptoms. This is a good example of the intersectional influence of a student's different identities.

In the end, I argue that the debate between acculturation vs. enculturation is misguided, and instead, colleges should develop programs that allow Mexican Mexican-American college students in the United States to examine, develop, and embrace the different aspects of their cultural and national experience in a manner that allows them to develop unique positive identities and expressions. This can be achieved in group or individual settings that also foment intercultural understanding among Mexican-American and other college student groups.

In this section, I have only addressed a few of the many sociocultural, political, and historical factors that have given shape to how we understand gender expression among Mexican and Mexican-American students in the US. For example, the rhetoric and policies that are hurtful against Latinx communities and LGBTQ+, the acculturation and enculturation processes by immigrants who attempt to adapt to the dominant U.S. culture while maintaining their traditional culture, or the power of online sources that carry misogynist ideals. Understanding that there are

structures of power that shape our behavior is fundamental to addressing the effects of colonialism at grassroots levels. This work further emphasizes the need to understand the socio-historical context that informs the lived experiences of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in college.

The next step in the exploration of Mexican gender ideas is to analyze some of the modern-day expressions of gender identity found within the Mexican community. Again, this knowledge allows for a deeper and more meaningful understanding of Mexican-American college students' gender identity and expressions and is a needed component for any program that aims to support them at the collegiate level.

GENDER EXPRESSIONS IN MODERN MEXICAN CULTURE

Now that a sociocultural and historical foundation regarding gender identities and expressions within Mexican culture has been created, I can begin to explore the gender within Mexican identity, an important step in the process of serving Mexican-American college students to analyze and develop their own gender identities and expressions. To do so, I first want to define gender expressions within the Mexican and Mexican-American communities, including *caballerismo*, *machismo*, and *marianismo*.

These gender expressions within the Mexican-American community are deeply influenced by stereotypes that portray men as *machos* or over-sexualized men who assert their dominance over their partners and families (Anzaldúa, 1987). On the other extreme are men who exhibit *caballerismo*. They are the positive image of a man who is the family provider who respects and cares for his family. It depicts Mexican-American men as chivalrous, nurturing, and noble. At the same time, women are relegated to supportive and dismissive roles dominated by *marianismo* or the “traditional female-based norms in which women are viewed as spiritually

stronger than men” (Atencio, 2023, p. 13). These stereotypical portrayals limit individuals in this community while denying them agency and perpetuating harmful power dynamics. As was examined in the previous section, these modern ideas of gender are influenced by the Indigenous cultures of Mesoamerica and European ideas brought by the Spanish during the colonial period, as well as the current sociocultural context.

As Anzaldúa (1987) points out, the depiction of Mexican men as *machos* reinforces the toxic aspect of masculinity, such as encouraging aggressive behavior and repressive emotional exploration and expression. This not only restricts men from fully engaging their humanity but also creates harmful patterns of violence and control. On the other hand, portrayals of Mexican women embody gender expressions of *marianismo* and are depicted as only supportive and self-sacrificing. This denies them autonomy and establishes the idea their value lies solely in their ability to nurture and serve their families, partners, and others. The ideas and expressions of femininity among Mexican women have been dominated by their relation to the family unit. Unfortunately, this means that they have often been relegated to supportive roles.

Additionally, these stereotypical portrayals ignore the existence of non-binary gender identities within the community and relegate them as outliers who do not conform to the traditional binary understanding of gender. This causes these vulnerable populations to be further marginalized and reinforces the domination of patriarchal structures within Mexican society.

In what follows, I will analyze different articles that explore the different gender identities and expressions that can be found within the Mexican and Mexican-American communities. It is important to point out that while the next sections are broken down into “male,” “female,” and “non-binary” subsections to ensure that “male” narratives do not dominate

the discussion of gender, the breakdown itself reflects the power of hierarchical gender binary ideas.

Forms of Masculine Expression in Mexican Society

While it is simplistic to portray these expressions as positive or negative, the focus will be on understanding how male-gender expressions can have beneficial or detrimental outcomes for the individual and society. Understanding these expressions will help college programs identify and nurture the positive aspects of Mexican masculinity while fighting against the more toxic aspects. To explain further, I draw from Arcienega et al.'s (2008) work. In their article, they investigate the social construct and perception of the idea of *machismo* among Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. *Machismo*, or the expression of “male” behaviors among those of Mexican descent, has become a point of much contention. The authors attempt to separate the positive and negative male gender expressions and expectations in a binary scale. The first one, which they refer to as *traditional machismo* or the hypersexual, male-dominant identity, can create negative and anti-social traits in those individuals who subscribe to this idea of the Mexican male gender. The second one is referred to as *caballerismo* or the male expression related to Spanish chivalry attitudes that have become associated with positive expressions of masculine identity such as community, family, and emotional support.

Another article pointing to how gender expressions influence the expressions and experiences of Mexican and Mexican-American students in college is by Haglund et al. (2019). They explore the relationship between expressions of masculinity among Mexican-American youth and their perception of relationships and dating violence. The article and study focus on the perception of Mexican-American young men regarding male and female expectations and the level of acceptable control and violence within romantic relationships. The article explores

concepts like *marianismo* and *caballerismo* and how these ideas within Mexican culture influence the development of gender roles, in this case, dating expectations. The authors use gender theory, more specifically the idea of precarious manhood or how one's image as a man is tied to the perception of others, mostly males, and how one can lose it, to explain the different levels of male expression among the study's sample.

Haglund et al. (2019) related lower levels of acculturation or embracing aspects of the host culture, in this case, American, with the sample participant's perception of the need for males to assert more control in the relationship. This was reflected by individuals exhibiting *traditional machismo* or *caballerismo*. This article highlights how even *caballerismo* still is an aspect of male-dominated ideology within Mexican society, as its values are based on a patriarchal structure. Among Mexican female students, lower levels of acculturation signaled adherence to traditional domestic roles in relationships, which is reflective of *traditional marianismo*.

Through an exploration of ideas of Mexican manhood like *traditional machismo* and *caballerismo*, college programs can understand the link and impact of the different Mexican male gender expressions and aspects of the college experience, such as a sense of belonging and psychological health through discussion groups and other individual and communal methods. Accordingly, it is crucial to understand that male identity is not set in stone and that manhood, *traditional machismo*, and *caballerismo* are not the only expressions of masculinity within the Mexican community.

Forms of Feminine Expressions in Mexican Society

The ideas and expressions of femininity among Mexican women have been dominated by their relation to the family unit. Unfortunately, this means that they have often been relegated to

supportive roles. This, however, does not fully explain and explore the complexity of Mexican womanhood. Colleges can develop programs that support Mexican-American female college students in exploring and expanding their identity in a way that respects their cultural background while also allowing them to analyze, expand, and explore their identity as women and separate from familial or societal pressures.

As explained by Ertl and Fresquez (2023), whose work focuses on the relationship between traditional gender female roles, specifically *marianismo*, among Latina college students and their sexual behaviors through an exploration of the five pillars of *marianismo*: (1) Family – female duties and expectations to family; (2) Virtuous and Chaste – the ideal of purity until marriage (3) Subordinate to others – females playing a supportive and secondary role; (4) Silencing self to maintain harmony and virtue – Self-censure, especially as it relates to males; and (5) Spiritual – expectation that women should lead spirituality among the family. Through these pillars, the authors seek to understand how they influence different health and sexual behaviors among Latinas.

Ertl and Fresquez's (2023) breakdown of the pillars of *marianismo* allows for an exploration of the societal and familial factors that shape the identity development of Mexican women, as well as the type of behaviors and pressures that are imposed on them.

Additionally, Gutierrez and Leaper (2022) correctly point out that the different female expressions or “pillars” can have positive or negative effects on the lives of Mexican-American women. For example, *pillar 1: family*, can be associated with effective and supportive familiar relations that create sources of strength, while *pillar 2: virtuous and chase*, solidifies male domination and can create a sense of subordination. This analysis of the different pillars of *marianismo* shows how complex female gender expression can be, as well as how it interacts

with other cultural and individual identities to create positive or negative female experiences among Mexican-American women.

The understanding of the pillars of a *marianismo* can allow female Mexican-American students to explore and analyze their gender identity in a manner that rejects aspects that create a sense of subordination and inferiority and instead supports aspects of equity and self-determination.

Forms of Non-binary Expressions in Mexican Society

Gender identities and expressions within Mexican culture are an axis that is not limited by the binary understanding of male/female. As explained in the historical section of this paper, the idea of an expansive understanding of gender was part of Mesoamerican cultures, and this can be used to expand and support non-binary gender expressions among Mexican-American college students. Unfortunately, as I have stated before, research related to non-male populations has been limited, and academic researchers should make it a priority to analyze the unique experiences of female and non-binary Mexican-American college students.

Mirandé (2016) utilizes the gender theory or the concept of “doing gender” or the understanding of gender as a social and routine construction rather than an internal and biological aspect of identity, developed by West and Zimmerman (1987, 2009) through an examination of the Muxes of Juchitán. As mentioned earlier, the Muxes are a third-gender expression found among the indigenous Zapotec people of Oaxaca. The Muxes are biological men who portray Zapotec female traits like dress and mannerisms but who are not trying to “become” women but rather embody a unique, distinctive gender expression separate from the conventional binary understanding of Western and modern Mexican society. Through a survey of Muxes and other members of the Zapotec community, the author was able to document the

clear separation of sex, sexual category, and gender. The Muxes are not just biological men who want to become women, but rather, they want to maintain the unique cultural practice of the Zapotec. This is embodied by their choice not just to dress in “feminine” attire but also to dress actively in traditional female Zapotec clothes.

The example of the Muxes provides non-binary Mexican-American college students a link to the ancestral tradition that not only had non-binary gender identities but encouraged their fluid gender and cultural expression. This can be a starting point for college programs to create support systems that both acknowledge their positionality as non-binary and indigenous individuals fighting against oppressive and colonial ideals.

Positive Gender Expressions

Through my examination of Mexican gender identities and expressions, I have come to understand that positive gender expressions among male, female, and non-binary Mexican-American college students need to be grounded on a challenge to power structures that create ideas of domination and subservience. By allowing students to express and experience their gender identities free of the constraints and oppressions associated with domination and superiority, they can embrace Mexican gender expressions that create a more just and equitable environment for all while still retaining their cultural values. Additionally, as the Muxes exemplified, non-binary Mexican-American students should be allowed to explore and express their unique gender identity in a way that allows them to experience acceptance from the general population.

It is also crucial for institutions to examine and analyze their role in the development, implementation, and protection of unjust and unfair gender expectations. While individuals can enact changes at the personal, familial, and communal levels, governmental and societal

institutions also need to take an active role in challenging toxic gender ideas and instead support the development of gender identities and expressions that respect all individuals.

Colleges can become catalysts of change by educating and supporting Mexican-American college students to analyze and embrace positive gender expressions and challenge and demand meaningful change at the local, state, and national levels.

COLLEGE EXPERIENCE OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS

College is both a time and place that allows for the creation of new knowledge and identity among young people. Therefore, it provides a unique opportunity to explore and create an understanding of one's different identities and to critically analyze how different familial, societal, and cultural factors influence how one sees and is seen by the world. It is with this idea in mind that colleges can create programs that aim to support positive gender understanding and expressions, especially among underserved student populations, to not just fight toxic aspects but instead nurture positive and culturally relevant expressions.

College programs developed to support Mexican-American college students need to understand the need to create systems that support these students according to their intersectional needs. While Mexican-American students will share a cultural and ethnic background, their different gender identities and expressions will bring to the table unique sets of needs that should be addressed with the needed historical and cultural knowledge that will ensure they are supported in a manner that is responsive and respectful.

Effects of Traditional Machismo and Caballerismo on Male Mexican-American College Students

Having now explored some of the different gender expressions within the Mexican axis, the focus will move toward understanding how these different gender expressions interact and

affect the lives of Mexican-American college students. Again, this section follows a male, female, and non-binary breakdown in the interest of highlighting unique aspects of the different gender identities.

Estrada and Jimenez's (2018) article focuses on how *caballerismo*, a cultural concept rooted in Latin American masculinity, relates to various aspects of college life among male Latino college students. The focus is on connectedness, ethnic identity, and support-seeking. The article explores how the positive masculinity expression of *caballerismo* among Latino college students and psychosocial functions lead to college persistence. The authors tested three different hypotheses related to the positive effects of *caballerismo*, such as respect for family and community would lead to academic success factors like connectedness, support-seeking, and identity integration.

The study shows that *caballerismo* was linked with both connectedness and ethnic identity (Estrada & Jimenez, 2018). *Caballerismo* created a sense of belonging among Latino male college students and provided them with a healthy idea of their ethnic identity.

Caballerismo, however, did not show a positive effect on support-seeking among the selected students. The study highlights the beneficial effects of positive masculine expressions like *caballerismo* on the college experience of Latino male students. This further supports the creation and implementation of individual or group programs that utilize *caballerismo* and the analysis of power structures at the college level to support positive male expressions among Mexican-American college students.

College programs aimed at supporting male Mexican-American college students can utilize the concept of *caballerismo* to foment a sense of connectedness, as well as develop their unique cultural and gender identity (Estrada & Jimenez, 2018). However, as Estrada and Jimenez

pointed out, this concept did not have enough of an effect as it relates to support-seeking. This can serve to understand the findings presented earlier in the study by Perrotte et al. (2020), who noted Mexican-American college students isolated themselves from American society, more specifically Mexican males who are expected to be mentally strong and discouraged asking for assistance but perhaps these programs could develop a sense of community to encourage an increased level of acceptance as it relates to support-seeking.

Effects of Marianismo on Female Mexican-American College Students

Furthermore, there is a need to explore and expand the understanding of the effects of culture and gender identities among Mexican-American female college students. While these students might experience similarities to their male and non-binary counterparts, there are aspects of Mexican femineity that influence their college experience. College programs need to be aware of these aspects to better cater support systems to the unique needs of this student population.

For instance, Lopez (2014) explores the different levels of self-efficacy and confidence in their ability to perform effectively among college Latino and Latina students at a predominantly White institution (PWI) and how gender dynamics might explain the different experiences. The study took place at an elite PWI and consisted of 95 students.

The study found that Latino college students reported higher levels of self-efficacy than their female counterparts at the beginning of the school year, but as time passed, the level decreased among male students and increased among female students (Lopez, 2014). The authors propose that gender-associated familial pressures associated with *marianismo*, like modesty or expectations to not attend college, negatively affected the level of self-efficacy among Latina students. At the same time, Latino students had more traditional *macho* attitudes that showed

great confidence and, therefore, self-efficacy. However, as the school year passed, Latino students faced higher levels of discrimination and microaggressions that ultimately affected their perceived self-efficacy, while Latina students became more aware of their skills and comfortable with the new environment and, therefore, gained higher levels of self-efficacy.

The difference associated with gender among Latinx students, as it is reflected in levels of self-efficacy, can indicate the likelihood that a student will be able to succeed academically (Lopez, 2014). Therefore, colleges must be able to nurture and maintain high levels of it among Latino students while supporting and guiding Latina students early on in their academic careers to ensure they build on their feelings of self-efficacy. Equally important, there is a need for research on levels of self-efficacy among non-binary Latinx students to understand how gender expressions influence and affect it.

Additionally, Perrotte et al. (2018) explore the possible relationship between gender roles, stress, and alcohol consumption among Latina/o college students. The article uses gender ideas within the Latino community, such as *traditional machismo*, *caballerismo*, and *marianismo*, to explore how these gender expressions, along with the stressors associated with college life, can influence the level of alcohol consumption among Latina/o students. The article uses gender schema theory, or the idea that individuals are encouraged to engage in gender behaviors associated with their respective gender, to explore how college attendance stressors can interact with gender norms to increase or decrease alcohol consumption. In this case, the authors explain how, socially, Latinos are encouraged to engage in alcohol consumption while Latinas are discouraged from meeting their respective gender ideals.

The study found that the amount of alcohol consumed by Latinas increased due to stressors (Perrotte et al., 2018). This was not observed with Latinos. Among Latinos, those

associated with *traditional machismo* exhibited an increase in binge drinking as compared to their *caballerismo* counterparts. The study mostly found that stress, along with gender roles, plays a part in the different types of social engagements that can lead to alcohol consumption. This was also evident in the sample of Latina engaging in *positive marianismo* consuming more alcohol. According to the authors, this could be because they deal with stress by engaging in social outings.

This type of analysis can also be carried out in the study of other beneficial or harmful practices experienced by college students. While this example focuses on the influence of gender identities and their interaction with outside stressors as they relate to alcohol consumption, this intersectional knowledge can be utilized by college programs to tackle other potential negative behaviors experienced by Mexican-American college students.

One last example of the effects of *marianismo* on female Mexican students is the study referenced earlier by Earlt and Fresquez (2023) that focuses on the relationship between traditional gender female roles, specifically *marianismo*, among Latina college students and their sexual behaviors. The study found that adherence to the *marianismo* identity was tied to practicing abstinence but had a negative effect related to Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) testing. More specifically, the authors argue that there is evidence linking the concept of *marianismo*, which is an idolized female image, and sexual abstinence among Latinas. Contrary to their hypothesis, *marianismo* was not associated with inconsistency in condom usage.

These behaviors were associated with the virtuous and chaste pillar of *marianismo* because emphasis was placed on maintaining their virginity until marriage. As a result, participants were more reluctant to engage in healthy sexual behaviors once they became

sexually active. The article provides a direct link between gender expectations for Latina students and real-life health effects related to sexual practices.

Because college can be a place for these students to explore and understand their sexuality, colleges should develop programs that not only promote healthy sexual practice but also allow for their students' unique cultural experience to drive conversations and support systems that speak to them in ways that make sense through their cultural lens. Sexual health plays a role in positive gender expressions.

Effects of Traditional Machismo and Marianismo on Non-Binary Mexican-American College Students

As was pointed out earlier, gender identity and expression are an axis that allows for flexibility among individuals. Fundamentally, programs developed to support Mexican-American college students should not perpetuate binary and patriarchal hierarchies that can isolate non-binary students. Consequently, the following articles serve to highlight gender expressions on non-binary Mexican-American college students.

Rivera et al. (2021) researched the effects of healthy and toxic masculinity among Latinx LGBTQ+ members. The author utilizes the Latino concepts of *traditional machismo* and *caballerismo* to embody the negative and positive expressions of masculinity, as well as their effect on the health of individuals, through a study that took place among the LGBTQ+ community in San Diego. The study explored how sexually minoritized men within the Latinx community who aligned more towards the *traditional machismo* expression are at higher risk of exposure to HIV infection based on cultural perceptions of being seen as “feminine” and losing a position of “dominance.” The study’s results were as follows: first, that *caballerismo*, with its emphasis on family and social responsibility, was tied to healthier and more responsible

practices, like condom usage and HIV testing among participants. Second, those who were identified as exhibiting *machista* tendencies tended to be exposed to risky behaviors and consequently at a higher risk of an HIV infection. This study serves as evidence that positive expressions of masculinity can create a net communal positive, as well as not being limited to the heteronormative dynamic. The findings also validate that gender identity, ethnicity, and sexual orientation expressions contribute to the unique identity of individuals, and therefore, toxic masculinity does not just affect cisgender, heterosexual males.

The San Diego study provides a window into the effects of *traditional machismo* and *caballerismo* among LGBTQ+ Latinos (Rivera et al., 2021). At the same time, it can provide a good base to develop programs that support healthy sexual practices among LGBTQ+ Latino college students, as well as others in the gender and sexuality axis.

The exploration of the effects of gender identity and expressions among members of the Latino LGBTQ+ community provides insights into how complex the gender axis can be, as well as the need to provide support that is comprehensive to the unique needs of this subpopulation. Additionally, there is a need for further and more in-depth studies of non-binary gender expressions among Mexican-American college students.

Ultimately, the purpose of this section was to highlight a sample of the impacts of the different gender identities and expressions among Mexican-American college students. While there are similarities in experience based on cultural and ethnic identity, there are important differences that influence different aspects of the well-being and academic success of these students. This fact can drive the development of successful college programs that can tackle different aspects of the college experience and ensure that Mexican-American college students are supported as they develop positive gender identities.

It is important to understand that marginalized communities should be free to determine the development of positive gender identities and expressions through their unique lens, so college programs should ensure that any support system developed encourages critical examination of cultural gender ideas and the development of positive expressions according to the wishes of the population, in this case, Mexican-American college students. This will ensure that ideas of positive gender identity and expression are organic to the culture of the students and not imposed by Westernized ideals.

EFFORTS TO SUPPORT THE GENDER EXPRESSIONS OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

In this final section, I will explore some useful ways colleges can support the development of positive gender expressions among Mexican-American college students. These strategies can serve as a basis for the development of further programs to ensure a holistic approach to assisting these students.

Using Inclusive Terminology

It might sound minimal, but one of the first steps colleges can take to create welcoming and supportive environments for Mexican-American college students is to use inclusive language and terms. This ensures that all students feel welcome and acknowledged.

It is with this in mind that Salinas and Lozano (2019) delve into the cultural and historical roots of the term “Latinx” and how its use in higher education institutions can create intersectional and positionality discussions regarding the view of gender among the Latino/a,@,x community. The term Latinx is a recent gender descriptor within the academic sphere, and while its usage has increased since the early 2010s, there has been minimal examination of the origins or even an actual concrete and agreed-upon definition. The authors argue for the importance of

understanding and defining the emerging term “Latinx.” While discussions of gender have largely been positioned off a binary axis within Latin American society, there has always been a need to provide more inclusive and accepting descriptors for gender minorities. The article also examines the power that language has to shape culture at large.

The inclusion of the term “Latinx” to define gender as it relates to Latin-American populations in academia reflects the cultural evolution of language, as, more than likely, the term originated within the Latin-American LGBTQ+ communities (Salinas & Lozano, 2019). The term also breaks the binary and male-dominant structure of terms like “Latino” when used to describe the plurality of Latin America. Using terms like “Latinx” as a gender-neutral descriptor for Latin-American individuals can both acknowledge and honor the sexual and gender-minoritized individuals of the community. However, a concrete definition must be created to ensure levels of ignorance are reduced, and further usage of the more inclusive term can take place.

To further support the need for inclusive language, Guerrero and Salinas (2023) research how the term Latinx helps three Latina/Latinx college students explore and expand the boundaries of their gender identities. The source provides a good background on the evolution of the term Latinx to move away from the binary axis of terms like Latino and Latina while also emphasizing how the term has largely been used in academia and not often taken the perspectives of the general Latin*⁸ population.

Guerrero and Salinas (2023) argue for a need to define the term Latinx concretely and clearly to alleviate confusion and misunderstanding among the Latin* population. The author outlines how language has always been used as a tool to resist or dismantle hegemonic

⁸ Term that considers the fluidity in gender identities across the Latin American diaspora. The goal is not to replace “Latinx” but rather acknowledge the experiences of gender-nonconforming people. (Guerrero and Salida, 2023).

structures. The article utilizes Anzaldúa's idea of Latinas as being able to cross borders as it relates to their identities. This highlights the ideals of critical race feminism to explore the unique feminine experience of Latinas and other sexual and gender minorities in a patriarchal and binary society.

The narrative study provides a window into how language and terms can help non-binary individuals navigate the boundaries of societal expectations and find their true identities (Guerrero & Salinas, 2023). Also, it is crucial to clearly define and consider underserved populations' experiences and points of view to ensure ideas are not imposed on them.

Furthermore, inclusive language can be the key to both welcoming female and non-binary expressions, as well as fighting against dominant and unjust patriarchal norms experienced by Mexican-American college students.

Using Decolonizing Epistemologies and Methodologies

There are different examples of Chicana⁹ feminist epistemologies that decolonize and deconstruct hierarchical structures in the classroom and society. Calderón et al.'s work (2012) draws heavily from the work of Anzaldúa and the concept of *nepantla*, El Mundo Zurdo, and the reclamation of *Coyolxauhqui*¹⁰ to allow Chicana identity to stand in between places to explore her different identities, fight violent oppression, and allow for the disruption of binary ideas and hierarchies within Mexican culture. Anzaldúa's concepts are useful for exploring the different identities and expressions of Chicana identity fully. What is more, Chicana feminist epistemologies can help support theory-informed practices that support non-binary and male Mexican-American students.

⁹ Mexican-American female identity (Calderon et al. 2012).

¹⁰ Aztec moon goddess (Calderon et al. 2012).

Along the same lines, decolonizing methodologies can support the gender expressions of Mexican-American college students. Mexican culture already places a strong value on narratives, so utilizing strong narrative groups can help support college Mexican-American students as they navigate academic, emotional, familial, and societal life. As explained by Delgado et al. (2012), *testimonios* can serve as tools to provide a voice to marginalized populations or to create narratives that explore political injustice in Latin American countries. As the authors outline, testimonios are different from simple oral traditions of autobiographies because they allow participants to self-reflect critically within particular social or political realities. The use of testimonios as a tool for Mexican-American students to analyze their positionality as it relates to social or political factors allows these students to become active agents fighting against oppressive systems while also developing connections with others in similar circumstances. College programs can utilize testimonios to encourage students to not only self-analyze their position as it relates to society at large but also gain levels of awareness and agency to enact meaningful changes. This could also include reflections on the more toxic and patriarchal aspects of gender expression.

Instilling Activism among Mexican-American College Students

Colleges across America find themselves in a unique position to support the academic, emotional, and social development of young people. It is with this in mind that I argue that they have the responsibility to support Mexican-American college students in exploring, expanding, and developing positive gender identities and expressions that create positive outcomes and fight negative ones while also nurturing agency and social responsibility among these students.

Elliott (2018) focuses on how simplified, rigid, and toxic forms of masculinity within American culture harm everyone at large. Most importantly, the article points toward successful

school initiatives that aim to challenge the toxic aspects of masculinity and build on positive gender expression, such as the initiative Men Can Stop Rape (mencanstoprape.org) and the University of Wisconsin- Madison's Men's Project (msc.wisc.edu/mens-project). The purpose of these programs is to allow male college students to examine and explore healthy aspects of masculinity while identifying, rejecting, and actively fighting against toxic aspects of masculinity. While these programs are aimed at supporting a diverse male student population, the analysis of power dynamics and societal norms that justify toxic and violent male behavior is relevant to this paper's topic, as these dynamics can also be found within Mexican-American communities.

Hope et al. (2016) examine how Black and Latino youth express political activism and support for political and social movements or policies like Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The authors identified how gender played no role regarding African-American youth, but when it came to Latinx students, Latinas were more likely to be politically and socially involved. Additionally, the study highlighted how political efficacy and exposure to racial/ethnic micro-aggressions played a major role in the levels of political activism among these minoritized populations. The work of Hope et al. (2016) highlights the influence gender can play in the levels of political activism among Latinx students and the need for colleges to consider the levels of political efficacy and exposure to micro-aggressions as they develop programs that aim to create political involvement and activism among Mexican-American college students.

Using Culturally Responsive Practices

Camacho et al. (2023) focus on the unique understanding of what it entails to be a leader and masculinity among undergraduate Latino college students. The article explores the cultural

meaning of leadership and manhood among Latino populations, with a heavy emphasis on familial responsibilities. The article takes a very patriarchal approach to the meaning of manhood among Latinos, one that is based on societal expectations and responsibilities of males to be heads of household. Camacho et al. uses values-based leadership, which is the idea that Latino men create their gender identity from the expectations and responsibilities they have towards their families as protectors and providers. This idea can influence how leadership programs can attract and nurture leadership skills among Latino college students. Critical gender and race theory are used to analyze the different ideas of manhood among Latino populations and how they are reflected in leadership skills and goals.

The concept of leadership and masculinity among the participant sample was related to ideas of duty, strength, and familial support (Camacho et al., 2023). They saw leadership through the lens of being a provider. The article highlights the need for colleges to be culturally responsive to the unique needs and ideas of Latinx students when creating support programs. In the case of the study, programs aimed at increasing leadership skills and participation among Latino college students should reflect the familial perspectives of Latino populations. I also think that we must be aware that this definition of leadership and manhood, while positive for some of the participants, is limited to the patriarchal approach that might alienate other Latinx students, especially female, non-binary, and LGBTQ+.

Another step towards supporting the gender expressions of Mexican American students is explained by Diaz's (2023) exploration of the significant role of Latino Cultural Centers (LCC) at predominantly white colleges in developing and nurturing the identity development of Latino college students. The author's goal is to provide tangible evidence that LCC encouraged the growth of Latino male students via community and individual support. The author used a

qualitative case study of six Latino male college students attending a mostly white college and how being part of the LCC helped them maintain and build a positive cultural and gender identity.

The LCC participants reported that the organization provided a safe space for them to express and explore different aspects of their Latino and male identity. Additionally, the students reported that they felt safe from the negative political environment within their colleges, saw themselves as part of a strong and supportive community, and challenged the negative hyper-masculine expressions within the Latinx community. While the case study was small in sample size, the success of LCCs in combating toxic masculinity while also developing a positive Latino and male identity validates the need for different support levels and organizations within colleges for Latino male students and potentially other members of the Latinx community.

One last example that serves to exemplify this strategy is Aponte's (2022) dissertation. She noted there is a need for radical change at the college level to ensure that minoritized students experience pedagogies that are reflective of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds while also moving away from the dominant white standard that alienates minoritized students. In her study, Aponte focuses on the experiences of eight Latina students attending Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). Aponte relates that through the use of *testimonios*, the students expressed the need to create educational and communal environments that allow for their cultural expressions to be celebrated and honored.

In total, college programs can utilize culturally responsive practices to analyze and understand gender expressions to create programs that support male, female, and non-binary expressions in a way that is responsive to their unique position. While also challenging institutional structures that disregard the ethnic and racial experiences and knowledge of marginalized student groups.

Providing Emotional Support and Validation

Another important aspect of improving the life and academic experience of Mexican-American college students is the awareness and development of healthy emotional expressions, as well as their cultural and gender identity.

College can be an important place for the development of healthy gender and sexual identities among college male students. However, minoritized male students often face unique social and cultural aspects that isolate them and encourage negative behaviors. By providing support during this crucial time, colleges can ensure that this student population feels supported and can express their emotions and feelings in manners that create healthy masculine identities.

Huerta (2022) examines validation theory to explore the experiences of African American and Latino college students in two college programs that aim to support their emotional well-being. Huerta noted that minoritized male college students need to feel connected and validated, and when this need is met, they can develop stronger ties with their peers, institutions, and communities. By providing spaces where they can feel vulnerable and supported, colleges can ensure that Latinx and African-American students can fight back against cultural ideas that create isolation and toxic masculinity.

Another example of a successful emotional support program is the Men's Story Project (MSP) in San Francisco, CA. Peretz and Lehrer (2019) evaluate the impact the MSP had on the lives of the participants. This project's goal was to create a safe environment where public sharing among men would not only be encouraged but supported by allowing participants and spectators to explore and share via narration the different aspects of their male identity and journey. The diverse pool of participants allowed for different discussions about intersectionality and masculinity.

The project created a sense of companionship and support to both challenge toxic aspects of masculinity and build on positive ones through the power of narrative (Peretz & Lehrer, 2019). The MSP utilized informal meetings that allowed for a safe environment to explore, analyze, and challenge different aspects of masculinity. This gave both the narrators and audience a means to understand their masculinity beyond terms that allowed emotional expression to deter the more toxic aspects of it while also assisting in the further development of positive emotional expression and masculinity. Projects like the MSP in San Francisco can be replicated at the college level and serve Latinx populations regardless of sexual and gender identity.

An equally important aspect of emotional health is the idea of resiliency and efficacy, which can be crucial to the life and academic success of Mexican-American students. Vela et al. (2018) examine the positive psychological factors associated with Latino/college students to explain their resiliency and efficacy as they navigate higher education environments. The authors point out how analysis of the educational experience of Latina/o college students tends to focus on a deficit framework, or the idea that Latina/o students have unmet needs or lack resources. In response, the authors focus on positive psychology by examining the assets Latina/o college students have at their disposal. This is relevant to the understanding of male and female expressions in Mexican culture and how they also provide positive outcomes.

Vela et al. (2018) focus on positive psychology, specifically in the following areas: psychological grit or the ability to sustain interest and motivation, mindfulness, life satisfaction, presence, and search for the meaning of life and hope. The study found that hope and mindfulness served as indicators of psychological grit among Latina/o college students. In contrast, the other factors did not provide a significant relationship to psychological grit. College

programs can focus on the creation of hope and mindfulness among Mexican-American students to increase resilience and efficacy to increase their success in college. This, in combination with discussions of gender, can create effective programs that support and serve all students along the gender axis in a manner that is responsive to their own unique needs and experiences.

Supporting Transgender Students at the College Level

Seelman (2014) examines the results of a research project done by Colorado Trans on Campus (CTOC) that surveyed students, faculty, and staff at a Colorado college to evaluate and determine the best way to support trans students. Seelman identified five different themes related to support systems and changes colleges can make to create a more inclusive and safer environment for this population. The themes varied from more support and systems and procedures that allow for an easier transition for individuals by moving away from a binary understanding of gender, allowing for easier changes to name and identification. Creation and support of diverse group organizations, making physical changes to facilities, and holding people accountable for harassment of trans students. While the suggestions are not specifically aimed at supporting Mexican-American students, similar changes can be enacted to support transgender students of Mexican background.

This section has provided an outline of different efforts at the college and communal level to support Mexican Americans and other marginalized student populations. While the concept of gender identity and expression is the focus of this paper, an intersectional approach that allows for the examination of multiple identities allows for support systems that not only are adaptive to the needs but also can develop specific solutions to the unique needs of each student.

Discussion

Through the examination of the over 30 academic texts outlined in this paper, there are ideas that I find relevant to the development of effective programs aimed at supporting Mexican-American college students in exploring and developing gender identities that are beneficial to their whole selves.

Utilizing the background knowledge related to the cultural and historical development of gender norms within Mexican society, one can begin to interpret and understand how modern expressions are based on actions from the past, but also that these ideas are not rigid but rather evolve and adapt to new needs and societal pressures experienced by individuals.

Programs should embrace an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1991) or *mestiza/o/x* consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987) when serving Mexican-American college students. This allows for the exploration, discussion, and development of knowledge regarding the positionality of each student. This can create awareness about how the different identities they embody interact and affect themselves and others. Additionally, an intersectional approach can create opportunities for cooperation and understanding among cisgender and non-binary Mexican-American students, as well as students from different backgrounds.

The questions of acculturation vs. enculturation, as outlined by Haglund et al. (2019) and Perrotte et al. (2020), are also relevant to the effectiveness of potential programs. The different studies explored in this paper outline the complexity of how the development of one's culture versus adapting to the host culture can have vast and different effects on the psychological and physical health of individuals. This idea of adapting to the host culture or retaining aspects of the home culture also opens the opportunity for honest and supportive discussions about the Mexican-American experience.

Cultural and individual identity needs to be a cornerstone of any program developed to support Mexican-American college students. Discussions about *traditional machismo*, *caballerismo*, *marianismo*, and non-binary gender expressions should not only be discussed but encouraged to be explored in the personal lives of students. Group discussions could create opportunities for exploring personal and societal expectations about students' gender identity, as well as identifying how gender identity can positively impact their academic, social, and personal lives, whether at college or in society at large.

Anzaldúa's idea of *nepantla* is relevant because college programs should create environments where students can explore, challenge, and stand in between their many different identities and develop new and improved ones. This can also allow students to understand and explore how different gender expressions affect them, as well as move away from simplistic binaries that try to pin one idea or concept as opposite to another (binary vs non-binary) but instead focus on understanding positionality and hierarchy. Examples like the Muxes and other "two-spirit people" provide Mexican-American individuals with an example of how gender is not biological but rather a cultural practice that is not only flexible but also constantly changing. With this knowledge in mind, college programs can create environments where gender is understood as a mutable aspect of a student's identity, one that can be adapted to their unique experience and needs to improve all aspects of their college experience.

Ultimately, as it has been outlined in this paper, cultural gender ideas and expressions can have positive or negative effects on the many different aspects of the college experience, from self-efficacy, mental and sexual health, identity, and community building to others that are yet to be explored. This provides colleges a unique opportunity to develop programs that nurture

positive aspects of gender expression that not only fight toxicity but can also have positive effects on the academic outcomes of Mexican-American college students.

Conclusion

Above all, programs aimed at supporting Mexican-American college students should move away from simplistic and binary understandings of gender and instead provide opportunities for real and honest discussions among these students to critically reflect on their history and experience and how it helps develop their gender identities. Additionally, conversations about concepts of domination and subservience within the domestic and societal sphere will allow students to understand how hierarchies based on gender are created and their negative effects on the lives of individuals and society at large. This can be achieved through individual examination and narrative creation, group discussions, and group support in the development of gender identities that provide benefits to their lives and their community.

The goal of any program should be to support students to critically examine, understand, and develop their unique gender identities in a manner that is respectful of their cultural and individual experiences, without forcing outside ideals, while at the same time understanding and challenging unfair and unequal power structures within their lives and communities. The research conducted on the different sources points to the need to create gender identities that move away from ideas of domination and subordination and towards more equitable and just gender identities regardless of their position in the gender axis. As it has been explored in the different articles, gender expressions, whether male, female, or non-binary, are not inheritable “positive” or “negative,” but rather, through their interaction with other identities and societal structures, they can have different effects on the lives of Mexican-American college students, but a good starting point for discussion and examination is the analysis of power structures and how students can challenge and move towards more equitable identities.

An important note to keep in mind after analyzing the different works is that there is still a lot of opportunity for further research regarding gender expressions within Mexican culture, more specifically, research relevant to the experiences of women and non-binary college students. There seems to be a noticeable lack of academic research involving these populations. Before more progress can be made to ensure individuals can explore and develop identities beneficial to them, academia needs to make a significant effort to cover the gaps in knowledge and bring to light the unique experiences of populations that have far too often been overlooked. This critique of academic research focuses especially on the experiences of LGBTQ+ Latinx college students.

References

- Aponte Aucutt, E. (2022). Decolonization of institutions of higher education: Testimonio of Latina experiences at HSIS and impact on ethnic consciousness and community cultural wealth
- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). La conciencia de la mestiza. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The new mestiza* (pp. 77-91). Aunt Lute Books, San Francisco.
- Arciniega, G. M., Anderson, T. C., Tovar-Blank, Z., & Tracey, T. J. G. (2008). Toward a fuller conception of machismo: development of a traditional machismo and caballerismo scale. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 55(1), 19-33. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.55.1.19>
- Atencio, M. (2023). Convirtiendome en mi: The materialization of self in Latino transgender men (Order No. 30817456). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2908259936).
<https://utep.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/convirtiendome-en-mi-materialization-self-latino/docview/2908259936/se-2>
- Calderón, D., Delgado Bernal, D., Pérez Huber, L., Malagón, M., & Vélez, V. N. (2012). A Chicana feminist epistemology revisited: Cultivating ideas a generation later. *Harvard Educational Review*, 82(4), 513-539.
- Camacho, L., Salinas, C., Vasquez, M. C., Rodriguez, S. L., & Izaguirre Peña, J. (2023). A values based leadership approach to (re)defining Latino manhood and masculinity. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 26(4), 645-665.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2020.1862921>

- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*; *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Delgado Bernal, D., Burciaga, R., & Flores Carmona, J. (2017). Chicana/Latina testimonios as pedagogical, methodological, and activist approaches to social justice. Routledge.
- Díaz, H. (2023). Beloved place: A Latinx/a/o cultural center and undergraduate Latino men. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 1-12.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2023.2243710>
- Elliott, K. (2018). Challenging toxic masculinity in schools and society. *On the Horizon*, 26(1), 17-22. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OTH-11-2017-0088>
- Ertl, M. M., & Fresquez, C. L. (2023). Do traditional gender role beliefs promote abstinence and sexual health behaviors among Latina college students? *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-023-02760-x>
- Estrada, F., & Jimenez, P. (2018). Machismo and higher education: Examining the relation between caballerismo and ethnic identity, support seeking, and sense of connectedness among college Latinos. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 17(3), 215-224.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2017.1319367>
- Funk C., Lopez M. (2022). A brief statistical portrait of U.S. Hispanics. *Pew Research Center*.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2022/06/14/a-brief-statistical-portrait-of-u-s-hispanics/>
- Ging, D. (2019). Alphas, betas, and incels: Theorizing the masculinities of the manosphere. *Men and Masculinities*, 22(4), 638-657. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X17706401>

- Guerrero, V. A., & Salinas, C., Jr. (2023). "I am Latina and Latinx": A narrative study of how three Latina/Latinx college students create identity boundaries. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education*, 16(3), 220-238.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/26379112.2023.2230605>
- Gutierrez, B. C., & Leaper, C. (2022). Reconstructing Culture: A latent profile analysis of Mexican-heritage young women's cultural practices, gender values, and ethnic identity. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 28(2), 259-270.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000515>
- Haglund, K., Belknap, R. A., Edwards, L. M., Tassara, M., Hoven, J. V., & Woda, A. (2019). The influence of masculinity on male Latino adolescents' perceptions regarding dating relationships and dating violence. *Violence Against Women*, 25(9), 1039-1052.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801218808395>
- Hope, E. C., Keels, M., & Durkee, M. I. (2016). Participation in Black Lives Matter and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals: Modern activism among Black and Latino college students. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 9(3), 203-215.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000032>
- Huerta, A. H. (2022). Exploring undergraduate students' emotional vulnerability in men of color programs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 63(1), 51-68. 10.1353/csd.2022.0006
- Joyce, R. A. (2000). Girling the girl and boyng the boy: The production of adulthood in ancient Mesoamerica. *World Archaeology*, 31(3), 473-483.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00438240009696933>
- Lipsett-Rivera, S. (2019). *The origins of macho men and masculinity in colonial Mexico*. University of New Mexico Press.

- Lopez, J. D. (2014). Gender differences in self-efficacy among Latino college freshmen. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 36(1), 95-104.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986313510690>
- Lorber, J. (1994). Night to his day: The social construction of gender. (pp. 13). Yale University Press.
- Mirandé, A. (2016). Hombres mujeres. *Men and Masculinities*, 19(4), 384.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X15602746>
- Ojeda, L., Rosales, R., & Good, G. E. (2008). Socioeconomic status and cultural predictors of male role attitudes among Mexican American men: Son más machos? *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 9(3), 133-138. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1524-9220.9.3.133>
- Patron, O. E. (2021). 'That hat means a lot more than a hat for some of us': Gay Latino collegians in the era of Trump. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 24(6), 737-754.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2021.1924135>
- Peretz, T., & Lehrer, J. (2019). The Men's Story Project: Promoting healthy masculinities via men's public, personal narrative-sharing. *Global Social Welfare: Research, Policy & Practice*, 6(4), 245-257. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40609-018-00133-0>
- Perrotte, J. K., Baumann, M. R., Garza, R. T., & Hale, W. J. (2020). The combined relations of gender, enculturation, and depressive symptoms with health risk behaviors in Mexican-Americans: A moderated mediation analysis. *Ethnicity & Health*, 25(1), 47-64.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13557858.2017.1395813>
- Perrotte, J. K., Baumann, M. R., & Knight, C. F. (2018). Traditional gender roles and the stress-alcohol relationship among Latina/o college students. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 53(10), 1700-1705. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10826084.2018.1429472>

- Rivera, D. B., Brady, J. P., & Blashill, A. J. (2021). Traditional machismo, caballerismo, and the Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) cascade among a sample of Latino sexual minority men. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 58(1), 21-28.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2020.1743961>
- Rogers, C. J. (2021). Malintzin as a conquistadora and warrior woman in the Lienzo de Tlaxcala (c. 1552). *The Historical Journal*, 64(5), 1173-1197.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X20000576>
- Salinas, C., & Lozano, A. (2019). Mapping and recontextualizing the evolution of the term Latinx: An environmental scanning in higher education. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 18(4), 302-315. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2017.1390464>
- Seelman, K. L. (2014). Recommendations of transgender students, staff, and faculty in the USA for improving college campuses. *Gender and Education*, 26(6), 618-635.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2014.935300>
- Vela, J. C., Smith, W. D., Whittenberg, J. F., Guardiola, R., & Savage, M. (2018). Positive psychology factors as predictors of Latina/o college students' psychological grit. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 46(1), 2-19.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12089>
- Vila, P. (2000). Crossing borders, reinforcing borders: Social categories, metaphors, and narrative identities on the U.S.-México frontier. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Vita

Nezahualcóyotl Paniagua-Jiménez is a native of Mexico City. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology with a minor in History from the University of North Texas in May 2009. He is currently a master's student in Education with a focus on Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice in Education at the University of Texas at El Paso.

He has previously worked at Region 3 Education Service Center in Victoria, Texas, as the Migrant Education Program Specialist from 2013 to 2017. He currently works for the Texas Education Agency in Austin, Texas, as the State's Title I, Part C Migrant Education Coordinator and Title V, Part B, Rural and Low-Income School Program Director.

Contact Information: nezpaniagua@gmail.com