When speaking of men, the construct of machismo has long plagued the academic literature as non-Latino scholars have attempted to explain gender relations in Mexico and Latin America (González-López & Gutmann, 2005). Machismo refers to the conceptualization of men as dominant, aggressive, unemotional, and by assumption, heterosexual (Carrillo, 2002); a male who embodies these characteristics is called a macho. Yet, recent scholarship has criticized this long accepted concept claiming that it is limiting, biased, and flawed, as it attempts to make generalizations across various gender hierarchies in different Latino cultures (Arciniega et al., 2008; Baca Zinn, 1982; González-López & Gutmann, 2005). Despite the academic

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criticism, Latino men continue to reproduce the concept in their daily lives as their status in the larger society and interpersonal relationships depend on their ability to successfully perform their expected masculine roles and to remain accountable to the gendered understandings of what it means to be macho (Murray, 1995). The heavy emphasis on heterosexuality accompanying the concept of *machismo* becomes particularly detrimental to Latino men who may identify as, or be perceived as, homosexual.

It is at the intersection of gender and sexuality that I attempt to study the effects of *machismo* on the young gay Latino males whose cultural heritage has exposed them to the concept, and whose lives seem to be influenced by the socially constructed ideology of what the term entails. It is not the focus of this article to discuss whether the concept of machismo is legitimate, or simply imaginary and exploited. Instead, the emphasis lies in the concept of machismo as a social symbol individually defined by young Latino males seeking to forge identities as men. Using an interactionist analysis emerging from grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), this study seeks to present the ways in which gay Latino males in higher education institutions conceptualize and reproduce the concept of machismo and how these definitions affect the construction of their individual identities as men.

**MACHISMO AND HETERONORMATIVITY**

Machismo has been termed the Latin American equivalent of hegemonic masculinity (Kurtz, 1999). However, Latin American *machismo* does not stigmatize all men who have sex with men. Instead, sexual practices are gendered by Latino societies to allow the insertive partner in the sexual encounter (*activo*) to maintain a heterosexual identity, while the male who engages in receptive anal intercourse (*pasivo*) is labeled homosexual (Almaguer, 1991; Carrier, 1976, 1995; Carrillo, 2002; Murray, 1995). The dichotomy of roles in sexual acts draws attention to the strict binary found in most Latino communities, generally termed *machismo* and *marianismo*. These polar opposites not only serve to define what is masculine and feminine, but also serve as the roots used to construct labels for men within the bounds of sexuality. Where a *macho* is a dominant, aggressive, and unemotional heterosexual, the *maricón* is equated with passivity, subordination, and devalued aspects of femininity (Carillo, 2002).

The emphasis on a heterosexually charged gender binary within the Latino community has allowed scholars to define it as a *heteronormative* community (Asencio, 2011). Heteronormativity refers to the assumption that there are two socially distinct gender and sexual “roles” that conform to heterosexuality (Warner, 1991). Some gay men have been found to seek social acceptance and membership in various groups through adopting heteronormative values and practices (Duggan, 2002; Nardi, 2000). They may even engage in *defensive othering* (Schwalbe et al., 2000)—attempts to distance themselves from marginalized identities and attitudes of the larger society (Asencio, 2011; Kurtz, 1999). Some gay men, for example, distance themselves from other men who may appear more effeminate and those who may be socially labeled *locas* (crazy women), *mariposas* (butterflies), or *maricones* (sissies), derogatory terms that emphasize feminine characteristics in men (Ascencio, 2011; Kurtz, 1999; Carillo, 2002). Scholars (e.g. Bryant, 2008; Duggan, 2002; Nardi, 2000) have begun to use the term *homonormativity* to refer to the acceptance of heteronormative values and the devaluing of stigmatized homosexual identities within
the gay community. It shows that effeminate men may be oppressed within both heterosexual and homosexual contexts (Asencio, 2011).

Currently, few studies explore the intersection of gender and sexuality in gay Latino males, but most have been conducted in Spanish speaking and indigenous societies within Latin America (e.g. Carrier, 1995; Carrillo, 2002; Ramirez, 1999; Murray, 1995). Asencio’s (2011) recent study brings attention to the intersection of gender and sexuality of gay Latino men in the United States. She argues that gay migrant Puerto Ricans maintain many elements of hegemonic masculinity, and that through a variety of social mechanisms, their concept of masculinity results in the reproduction of homonormativity. Although insightful, Asencio’s (2011) study has two limitations: its focus on Puerto Ricans and its use of a multiple masculinities framework. The multiple masculinities concept “reflects a laudable desire to value diversity,” yet it has resulted in the perception that every group practices a different kind of masculinity (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009, p. 280). This pluralistic approach fails to identify the variety of enactments across all identified “masculinities” that allow for the reproduction of gender inequality and maintenance of the general concept of masculinity. In addition, more attention needs to be given to gay men, both migrant and non-migrant, of diverse Latino nationalities, various education backgrounds, and within different contexts, given that both masculinity and masculine performances—manhood acts—are specific to cultural and social contexts (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009).

**METHOD**

This study uses data from two large, predominantly White, public institutions with similar campus cultures heavily influenced by the sports scene (particularly football). “Central University” (CU) is located in a large city in the south central United States, while “Southeastern University” (SEU) is located in a mid-sized city in the southeastern United States and was the site of a second (and ongoing) pool of data.

Participants were initially recruited by a series of emails sent out through both institutions’ LGBT Resource Centers’ listservs. Using these emails and a continued snowball sampling method to locate participants (Bernard, 2002), I outlined a set of criteria for participant screening and selection as follows: (a) All must be undergraduates and currently enrolled at either Central or Southeastern Universities—the literature states that educated individuals report lower levels of adherence to ideals of machismo and are more tolerant to issues of gender and sexuality (e.g., Ahrold & Meston, 2010); (b) all must self-identify as Latinas/os; and (c) all must self-identify as gay, regardless of whether they are out to others or not. The final participant pool at the time of writing included 7 gay Latino undergraduates from both CU and SEU, ranging from 18 to 22 years old and encompassing all four classifications of the undergraduate career. All individuals identified as men, and further identified with their nationality (Mexican, n = 3; Cuban, n = 4), even though only one was foreign born. Of the seven participants, all were out in the college environment but only three—Manuel, Mario, and Hector—were out at home. Their sexual identity disclosure was interestingly tied to the ways in which they defined their home environment. Manuel, Mario, and Hector spoke of their hometowns as “liberal,” whereas the other participants thought their hometowns to be “conservative.”
Each participant was asked to take part in an in-depth semi-structured interview (Glesne, 2006), provide ten photographs of symbols that they associated with their ethnic, gender, and/or sexual identities, and then use four of those photographs as prompts to provide written reflections about their reactions to the images in the photographs. The purpose of the photographs and reflections was to uncover themes that were important to the participants but overlooked during the interview due to the structured nature of the questions (Streng et al., 2004). Thematic analysis, involving the coding all data materials, segregating data by codes, and generating themes that are supported by the coded data, proved to be the best method for the analysis (Tashakkori & Teddle, 2003). I identified three overall themes to better understand the participants’ college-situated gendered sexual identities. These findings are explored in the following sections with attention to the ways in which these students 1) understand the concept of machismo, 2) formulate a fluid masculinity spectrum that integrates the domains of gender and sexuality, and 3) forge gendered sexual identities that allow them to reconstruct the components of the label macho, a process I term machoflexibility. A discussion of the analysis, limitations of this study, and suggestions for future research follow the findings.

DEFINING THE MACHISMO DICHOTOMY

When asked where they had heard of the term machismo, all of the participants responded that it was sometime in their early childhood with their fathers’ or uncles’ use of being macho. They pointed to their mothers as the individuals who would “correct me if I was playing with the girls at the park,” as Hector stated or as Eduardo offered, “make sure that I was being a good little macho, chest out and all, and not skipping or being feminine.” Most participants further commented on developing a sense of both fear and respect towards the concept of being macho and that this fear was what kept them from coming out to their parents. "It's a very machismo sort of culture we have,” offered Oziel, “and with that comes the role of the woman as the house mother, and the man as the strong, unbeatable, and respectable man.” This ideal was expressed by most of the participants when asked about their families and how difficult it was to be both gay and Latino. Upon probing about the meaning of the term machismo, many found it difficult to construct definitions that they were comfortable with on the spot. Some described it as a coming of age phenomenon that everyone entered at a certain stage in life, having had their uncles and fathers as examples of the performances associated with socially acceptable machos. Other participants could only think of actions that they were expected to perform to remain macho—speak in lower vocal pitches, act tough, and associate with hypermasculine peers—and the implications of not doing so. For the most part, all participants adopted terminology and definitions that lined up with traditionalist perspectives about machismo defining a macho as dominant, aggressive, unemotional, and by assumption, heterosexual (Carrillo, 2002).

“Machismo is like when your dad is getting all drunk and beating up your mom, it may seem bad … and it is!” expressed Miguel, “...but like, it makes you know who is the main dominant one and stuff, you know sometimes you can’t help but admire them [his father].” Miguel’s explanation was an example of the contradicting elements of the label macho. He started off by portraying his father as a “drunk” who “beats up [his] mom” and then moved on to call his father “dominant” and ul-
timely worthy of admiration. In his statement there was an initial element of violence, but he immediately shoved it off by expressing how this violence was only an expression of the dominance that a man holds and the respect that should be given to him based on his performance of masculinity. These contradictions were evident in many of the participants’ definitions. Particularly, it was difficult for the participants to feel completely against the concept given that in the midst of the negative characteristics—the violence and the drinking in many of the cases—the presentation of machismo still had something to be desired and honored.

Similarly, when asked about the most difficult thing about being a gay Latino, Eduardo responded,

> It’s mainly the machismo, you know. Men have to be all powerful, they have to be able to defend themselves and exert a sort of power over everybody else, even other men who seem weaker, and they do it all the time, you know. You have to be ambitious, and very aggressive and walk with your chest out, riding those big trucks and motorcycles, basically running over anyone who tries to question your authority, but that’s just the way it is.

Although Eduardo did not point to violence explicitly, his definition lined up well with Miguel’s view explaining that men were powerful and exerted power over others, even over (weaker) men. He also stated that machismo allowed men to be aggressive and let them run over anyone who tried to question their authority. Machismo, from Eduardo’s perspective, was more authoritarian than violent, yet he failed to explain whether he believed that this was particularly beneficial or detrimental to the lives of gay Latino men. Following the full round of interviews, it was evident from the participants’ accounts that machismo was an authoritative, powerful, and dominant masculinity that was considered admirable by some and “just the way it is” by others.

In defining the characteristics of machismo, many of the participants drew on their understanding of the counterpart to the man who could be considered a macho: el maricón [the sissy]. The label maricón was associated with elements of passivity, subordination, and devalued aspects of femininity. “You know,” Adrian began, “the machos, I mean the machista men, are the ones who are socially venerated and stuff, but the jotos or maricones, you know the sissies, are socially shunned, pobresitos [poor things].” Upon probing about these distinct terms Adrian added, “Yes it’s true, there are machos and then there is the maricones which are so effeminate and weak that they are not even considered men anymore, it’s what we are taught as little kids. Like my mother used to say no te vayas a hacer de los otros [you better not become one of the others], once you are a maricón you are socially shunned forever.” Adrian explained that individuals labeled maricones were “not considered men anymore.” Similarly, the other participants spoke of the maricón as an identity that no male would ever want to be labeled by. The label was so powerful that it “strips you of your manhood” (Hector) and it made that “other people just wouldn’t want to have anything to do with you, cause it’s kinda like you become sorta pathetic since you’re this flimsy weakling that’s like girly and unable to fend for themselves [sic]” (Eduardo).

By defining these extremes the participants were able to make clear distinctions between the hypermasculine macho and the hyperfeminine maricón. They were aware of the characteristics and traits invoked by each label and had formed a very
similar understanding of the social acceptance that came with each of the two domains. Regardless of their country of origin, the macho-maricón dichotomy seemed to be understood in the same way by all participants. And even when the participants conceptualized machismo to be tied to violence, they found something particularly admirable about the social images of manhood it represented.

**Constructing a Spectrum of Gendered Sexuality**

Having acquired an understanding of the existing macho-maricón dichotomy, the participants were then forced to position themselves within the dichotomy. Seemingly an easy task,

it’s hard when you’re gay and Latino you know. You are torn. The gay side calls for freedom and being not as masculine sometimes, you know, like you’re radiating rainbow colors once in a while (laughs), but then, as a Latino, you can’t do that, you’re supposed to be more centered, more masculine, hiding every tear, every, like, emotion, you know. So as a gay Latino, I can’t just be really macho or really flamey [flamboyant], I have to find my place somewhere in the middle but still be accepted.

Hector’s words (above) best exemplify the difficulties that these students faced when adopting a sense of masculinity coordinating with their sexual orientation. Because their sexual and ethnic identities tugged them in two seemingly contradicting directions, the participants found themselves in a kind of limbo, as Mario expresses when asked: Would you say you are more macho or maricón?

Well, I’m not super macho but I’m definitely not a maricón, I mean, yeah sometimes people say it to tease you, but it’s really hard to just say, ‘are you this or that?’, you know? I mean, there are so many possibilities and it’s weird ‘cause you just end up feeling like you’re floating in masculine limbo.

Mario’s words were echoed by most of the participants. For them, a distinct dichotomy existed in the minds of ordinary people for whom “they have no issue being gay to everyone” (Oziel) or those that were “well like having a girlfriend and being in football so no one ever even questions their manliness” (Manuel). When I met with Hector for a second time, he brought some of his photographs and in the stack was a picture of a book cover to the very popular Twilight vampire series by author Stephanie Meyer (the book was *Eclipse*). Hector then proceeded to tell me,

There is a big divide between the real manly mans and the really gay guys. But for us, it’s like playing with both extremes and trying to create a ribbon, like glue it together, kind of like this twilight book [points at picture that he brought to the meeting], you know, the red ribbon is torn, but not really, its still holding on with a couple of threads, and if you think about it, it can work backwards, we may work to sew the two parts back together.

Finding themselves in masculine limbo as Miguel had expressed, the participants knew there were extremes that situated the macho and the maricón as polar opposites. Given their own contradicting identities, they were forced to be progressive
and break the dichotomy they had previously defined. In its place, the participants conceptually understood the previously defined dichotomy as a kind of newly “sewn” spectrum where they were allowed to feel comfortable enough to call themselves machos while retaining the ability to tap into their feminine side “once in a while” (usually in the privacy of their rooms or with individuals to whom they had disclosed their sexual orientations out of the home. No participant ever mentioned being completely comfortable “acting gay” in front of their parents).

Interestingly, the spectrum of masculinity that the participants constructed was not only one of gender displays, but it was also one where sexuality was intertwined. As Oziel explained, “The beauty of it lies in the ignorance of the people because they think that because someone looks masculine that they are straight, and then associate only more feminine people with being gay, so they are just too stupid to really connect that macho men can be gay too.” For the participants who were not yet out to their families, realizing that the emphasis of their culture lay on gender as the determinant of sexual orientation was of paramount importance. Mario remembered, “You learn from the time you’re really little como ser un macho hecho y derecho [how to be a man’s man (lit.: how to be a man, made and straight)], like my mom says, and when you start questioning your sexuality you just keep acting like they taught you and you don’t have to worry, since there’s always a way to lie about why you don’t have a girlfriend (laughs).”

Like Oziel and Mario, the other participants spoke of the complexities of gender and sexuality and how, for the most part, in the Latino communities they had been raised, the ideology seemed to be the same. In essence, their spectrum of masculinity was not only one of gender, but ultimately one of gendered sexuality. They could carry their sexuality across the spectrum of masculinity, but they had complete agency over the gendered performances they wished to present in any given social context—either those that were most aligned with their individual definitions of machismo or those with the maricón.

Forging Heteronormative “Machoflexible” Identities

Although the participants claimed to have constructed a fluid spectrum of masculinity within the domain of machismo that spanned from the macho on one extreme to the maricón on the other, they actively found themselves gravitating towards the direction of the macho. This was evident in their interviews as they spoke about their constant need to perform masculine acts that they had adopted or thought to be honorable. By adopting such characteristics and learning to navigate the spectrum of masculinity they claimed to have reconstructed, they could not only feel safe but also benefit from the social privileges granted to machos. “The real trick is a deep voice!” exclaimed Manuel,

It’s one of those things that you need to be able to navigate our society without question. In particular, here in college you have to be efficient and independent to call the financial aid office and the registrar and all those departments, and if you want good service you have to sound like a man … they won’t take you seriously if you sound gay, and even worse, what a blow to your ego when they say ‘yes ma’am!’ and then what do you do? You automatically reply in a deeper voice and wait until they say ‘Oh, I’m sorry sir!’
To Manuel having a lower voice gave him a kind of capital that not only got him the services he requested more easily, but also helped reinforce his sense of manhood. Like with Manuel, it was important for the participants to be perceived as men when they were not visible to others. Hector offered a different perspective: “I admire the friends of mine who can appear masculine just because of how they talk. There is this like, I don’t know, this sense of like majestic kind of stuff in their voice, like they have some power, they speak and everyone just listens, everyone just respects them.” For Hector (and for the other participants who mentioned not having the ability to lower their voices effectively), lower voices were further a symbol of respect and a tool that could be used by men to project authority and at times even elicit deference from others. In general, the participants agreed that it was important to have vocal flexibility that could allow an individual to present an appropriate tone of voice to be perceived as masculine when engaging in phone conversations or when they were not physically present.

It was not enough to sound masculine. The participants explained that alongside a deep and domineering voice, they had to look masculine as well. Often times, the participants spoke of having to live up to the persona that could be believed to embody all of the characteristics that represented the definition of machismo that others held. They had to present an appearance of a male who could be “strong, successful, un-afraid, dominant, but most importantly, believable,” as Adrian explained. Mario stated, “I’m gay, and just me being gay, by definition, does not give me the ability to call myself macho, you know. It seems I have to work for it, I have to show that I’m worthy of the label, I have to have the authority on the outside, even if I like men on the inside.”

Having previously acknowledged the cultural emphasis on gendered performances intertwined with sexuality, like Mario, many of the participants explained that an outer macho shell could be actively constructed to acquire outer authority and downplay their inner sexual identities. Yet, unlike their initial definitions of machismo, the participants spoke of opting for an image of machismo that was grounded in a different set of respectable characteristics; one that would shed violence and replace it with authority and honor. In his interview Miguel explained, “I don’t wanna be that violent male, I wanna be better than that, you know, more of a role model who is respected, and I can only get that by being more masculine and presenting myself in that way to those who doubt me.” Like Miguel, the participants described a desire to construct masculine selves that elicited respect from others. I term this presentation an authoritative presence. In the eyes of the participants, the authoritative presence was fundamental in appearing as respectable men to others, even if their sexual orientation could prove to be potentially discreditable to their identities as macho men.

Some of the participants took the authoritative presence a step further. “You not only need the look, but you need the feel and the … how do you call it…. I mean it’s like what the Blacks call swagger, you know, its own little thing that makes you kinda cool and masculine, to the point where even the girls might start hitting on you,” Oziel offered. For Oziel, it was not only about the look, but you had to feel the masculine performance. It was a kind of effective embodiment of what it meant to be a Latino man who—even though internally homosexual—could still be sexually appealing to women who saw him. “You gotta be a man, you know, chin up high, like you don’t give a shit about anything,” Mario explained, “because if you slouch just a little, you lose control of yourself and the situation, and you become
weak.” Mario’s description, as did many of the participants once they were asked to elaborate on their individual situations, involved the idea that the slightest weakness perceived by others could potentially cause an individual to lose their authority. Interestingly, some were particularly concerned that this weakness may dampen their ability to exert dominance and elicit deference from others to assert their identities as “real Latino men,” as Miguel expressed.

According to the participants, their ability to distance themselves from the gendered sexual binary of macho-heterosexuals and maricón-homosexuals, gave them an advantage over others. In their eyes, they were able to adopt a fluid masculine self which, as Miguel suggested, allowed for the flexibility of their identities as machos who just happened to like other men. He triumphantly asserted,

> You know being gay is not that great, but being a real macho gay, now that is okay! You can be like … machoflexible, you know! Since no one has to know [about your sexual orientation], you can be proud of who you are, but no one bothers you, and if they find out, well it doesn’t matter, because they [people in society] see us as real men, we have to learn to move our species along, hombres de verdad [real men], like the men that we are!

In Miguel’s statement pride in oneself came only from one’s ability to be a real macho gay, as he called it. When I asked for clarification, he proceeded, “Being gay and Cuban, well you know, it’s like double whammy, but at least having the tools to act like a man gives you some credit … and it’s how I present myself, I mean I have a dick and everything, right? so I just don’t get why other gay Hispanics have to be so faggy.”

The process of othering effeminate gay men was also reiterated by several of the participants towards the end of their interviews. Seemingly progressive, the amount of “machoflexibility” these students allowed themselves was constrained by the range of identity performances that allowed them to continue to appear as men to others, and nothing else (at least not publicly). Eduardo stated, “I don’t understand what is so hard about it all, I mean, just look around you and man up! There is the men, the masculine gays bonded with the straights, and then there is the gays, but not just any gays, the really hardcore fabulous ones, they just don’t belong with us.” Like Eduardo, some of the other participants felt like effeminate gay men should not be categorized in their same group, and in other cases, the participants claimed to be the determining markers of what constituted acceptable displays of manhood within the dimension of sexuality. As Hector explained, “I’m not totally masculine acting, but I can definitely pass as straight if I need to, you know, but like anyone gayer than me would just be labeled outright gay.”

The participants had defined machismo as the product of a gendered set of cultural scripts and the macho as a domineering, violent, and heterosexual male. Given their sexual orientation, they understood that they were unable to claim the macho label in its entirety but sought to construct a spectrum of masculinity where they could “move to being more macho in public or more sensitive when I’m alone,” as Eduardo explained. As a response, they resorted to enacting masculine performances—including lowering their voices and adopting authoritative presences—in an effort to adopt machoflexible identities. In their eyes, this machoflexibility was an acceptable alternative to machismo given that it did not allow for violence towards women and honored what they perceived to be the admirable qualities of men,
such as respect, authority, and the ability to elicit deference from their peers. In choosing to dissociate themselves from more effeminate gay men and identify themselves as real men, they failed to challenge the pervasive gender norms in their social environment, positioning masculinity as hierarchically superior to femininity and consequently reproducing heteronormativity.

**Discussion**

The conceptualization of machismo has long plagued academic journals and has found its way into most studies dealing with gender relations in Mexico and(11,70),(994,913). Since its “discovery,” social scientists have sought to understand what this cultural trait in Mexican and Latin American men represents, defining masculine nuances cross-nationally in a plethora of ways that have only served to continue to stereotype the Latino community (González-López & Gutmann, 2005). Where most literature focuses on explaining Latin American gender relations with the concept, this study has sought to explore how seven gay Latino college students define the term machismo and to understand how they construct their identities as men. The findings of this study are important in shedding light on how the concept of machismo is understood at the micro level and how, if at all, it affects the construction, maintenance, and management of gender identities in Latino sexual minorities.

Initially, the participants defined machismo in line with the traditionalist view of the concept as a “cult of strutting virility” (De la Cancela, 1986, p. 291), heavily grounded in the commanding of respect and deference (e.g., Ramirez, 1999) and as a system of violence towards women and devaluation of femininity (e.g., Almaguer, 1991). To counteract the hypermasculine characteristics of the macho, the participants spoke of the maricón, a male void of masculinity who was weak, feminine, and socially shunned. Constantly policed by their mothers at an early age to adopt characteristics of the macho, they actively sought to distance themselves from the domain of the maricón throughout adolescence and young adulthood. In doing so, they created and maintained strict binaries within gender (masculine versus feminine) and sexuality (heterosexual versus homosexual), as well as strong links between the two constructs, leading to the internalization of heteronormativity.

Given their sexual orientation, the participants were aware that they belonged to a subordinate group and they thus began to engage with what Goffman (1963) terms their discreditable identities as gay Latino men. Because they believed their sexuality could be downplayed through manhood acts (Schwalbe, 2005), including lowering their voices and developing an authoritative presence, they used what they had learned about machismo to create gender appropriate performances when interacting with others. By engaging in these strategies to downplay their sexual identities, they both “do gender” (West & Zimmerman, 1987) and “do heteronormativity” (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009), not only to themselves but also onto others. They accepted that there were heteronormative scripts that they were required to follow—such that machos and masculinity were socially superior to maricones and femininity—and instead of challenging these cultural understandings in their entirety, they embodied them and enacted them, where deemed appropriate, to gain social acceptance from their families and their peers.

By engaging in what I term machoflexibility, the participants attempted to redefine their understandings of what it meant to be machos by replacing violence and...
heavy drinking—characteristics of machos aligned with traditional machismo—with success, honor, and authority. Yet, in the process of reconstructing these machoflexible identities, the participants engaged in defensive othering against their more effeminate gay peers by: 1) making themselves the defining markers of what were acceptable displays of masculinity; and 2) making a distinction between masculine homosexual men (themselves) and feminine homosexual men (the others) (Schwalbe et al., 2000).

The active dissociation of adolescent and young adult males from homosexuality has been previously documented in educational contexts in the United States. The concept of the maricón, as explained by the participants, bears resemblance to the American epithet *fag* (Pascoe, 2007). Pascoe explained that adolescent boys use the fag discourse to police one another’s masculinity. She stated that the label *fag* was a kind of hot potato identity that could adhere temporarily to heterosexual males to bring into question their masculinity. Once they were able to prove their manhood, the label could be lifted and passed on to others (Pascoe, 2007).

The difference in the case of these participants lies in their discreditable identities as gay men. Where labels like *fag* (Pascoe, 2007) may be used within the educational context as a kind of socialization process among boys, there are heavier implications across a variety of social contexts for sexual and ethnic minority youth if their sexual orientations are disclosed. Given the strong adherence to gender norms and conservative views that characterize many Latino communities, those who deviate from heteronormative ideals are often hesitant to expose their sexual orientation to others (Carrier, 1989). As Hidalgo and Christensen (1976-77) previously found, the fear of rejection experiences by non-heterosexual Latinas/os often forces them to break social ties with their communities, distance themselves from their homes, and avoid seeking other means of support for fear of repercussions.

These heavily gendered scripts continue to plague the minds of young Latino boys today. Mora’s (2013) recent study found that USA-born Dominican and Puerto Rican boys actively repudiated the identity of the maricón and perceived homosexuality as a choice. Their heteronormative masculine identities and their abjection of homosexuality, Mora (2013) argues, were a product of the cultural scripts where the students had been raised and were constantly confirmed through the messages they received in their educational environment. This may help explain why the seven gay Latino men in this study turned to constructing gendered sexual identities that emphasized the superiority of the masculine over the feminine, and consequently felt the need to engage in defensive othering against feminine gay men. By doing so, they too were seemingly able to participate in the dominant heteronormative discourses of the social environments they inhabited by constructing seemingly progressive definitions of machismo and machoflexible identities informed by their experiences in their hometowns and the highly gendered practices of the educational systems in the United States.

**Conclusion**

Studying the experiences and identity management strategies of Latino sexual minorities in higher education institutions provides social scientists, educators, and student affairs administrators an opportunity to learn about the intersection of cultural scripts that influence the students that we serve. Understanding the social mechanisms that fuel these identity conflicts may further allow university officials...
to establish institutional programs, services, and resources to provide these students with a welcoming and inclusive social space that may help deter from the continual stigmatization of sexual minorities that do not adhere to our heteronormative views.

Although this study incorporated Latino students from two nationalities, it did not particularly address the nuances that these two groups exhibited. Further, this study focused on gay Latino men more closely aligned with masculine social selves. In the future, social scientists should work to examine the experiences of a variety of ethnic minority students paying particular attention to the similarities and differences that each ethnic community exhibits, including the nuances in their individual identity construction and their understanding of macro-social institutions (e.g., gender) and their relation to the reproduction of inequality. In addition, a focus on the experiences of a variety of sexual minorities that encompasses the totality of the gender spectrum would be highly beneficial to scholars attempting to understand the ways in which gender and sexuality are intertwined across social contexts.

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