Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Machismo in the Nicaraguan Culture

Maria B. Jackson · Tuesday, April 4th, 2023

Machismo is still prevalent in Nicaraguan culture and has been one of the most significant barriers to women's equality in my country, not to mention many other cultures worldwide. Machismo is a source of pride for the men, the assertion of superiority and dominance over women, which often leads to violence. Sternberg describes machismo as "cult of the male; a heady mixture of paternalism, aggression, systematic subordination of women" (91). In turn, this transgression teaches women to see machismo as a normal part of the culture and keep it alive, enabling, and even passing on the same behavior to the future generations, instead of breaking the rules and norms to create a healthier cultural behavior in their household.

It is mind boggling how contradictory and absurd it is for mothers to dream of their daughters finding the perfect husband, this prince charming, who is going to sweep them off their feet and provide for them while treating them with equality, dignity, and respect. Meanwhile, women teach their sons how a real macho man should act and how they should expect to find a wife who is going to obey and treat them like kings. Mothers suffer for their daughters when they are being mistreated by their boyfriends or husbands, but they continue teaching their sons how to become this typical macho man of the house.

Unfortunately, in Nicaragua, it is very common to encourage young boys to start their sexual life at a young age while at the same time it is frowned upon for girls. For males it is natural to explore their sexuality because it is "governed by instinct," that wild instinct that is so difficult for them to control (Stenberg 93). I'm the oldest of three siblings. My sister, Tatiana, is the middle one and the youngest one is Felipe. I vividly remember when Felipe was in kindergarten; my family was so proud of him and even encouraged him to be this little macho guy because he had many "girlfriends" at such a young age. Meanwhile, my sister and I attended an all-women private catholic school to teach us the "right way" to behave and be little ladies. We were not allowed to have any guy friends and let's not mention boyfriends! Our only job was to go to school, have good grades, and follow the rules set by the patriarchy.

"el machismo mata" by lorena pajares, used under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

When my brother was starting puberty, some members of my family used to celebrate him for dating many girls at the same time and being so proud of him for being such a little player. I recall one day my mom came back home from work with condoms for my brother. My mother wanted him to be ready and prepared for any sexual encounter because he was becoming a man at 14th years old. Meanwhile, my sister and I were not even allowed to talk about sex, or any subject that was perceived as a sin or prohibited by society. It is sad to admit that we always followed those rules because we were afraid of getting in trouble. You can also find many other stereotypes ingrained in our culture that led men to believe they are entitled to certain privileges and can get away with mistreatment and abuse. For example, it is common to see women serving and catering to the male figures in the house, whether their husbands, siblings, or even their sons.

Another example I can provide from my childhood is an argument between my grandparents on a Sunday afternoon. I don't recall why it all started, but I remember my grandmother being so upset that she walked away from the kitchen and sat in the family room ignoring my grandfather. Meanwhile, my grandfather, like the macho he was, sat at the dining table waiting for my grandmother to serve his meal. I remember being around 17 years old when this event happened. Even though we were fortunate enough to have people helping with the chores around the house, my grandmother was always the one serving and bringing the meal to the table for my grandfather. However, on that occasion my grandmother decided not to bring him the plate to the table. Meanwhile, my sister and I realized that my grandma wasn't going to move from the couch, and we ran to the kitchen to start serving his meal because, in the machismo world, women are expected to serve the man of the house and that was what we did. We were afraid that any of them would get mad at us for not doing it. Having a daughter has no lesser value than a son, however, Sternberg highlights that for a daughter "her value lies in her ability to serve her family, and not in her as a human being. As one man said in the study: 'When I realized that God had given me a girl, I said to myself, "at least I have a cook to make me tortillas" (96). This is the type of machista ideology that men, including my grandfather, grew up with and instilled in his sons.

This memory impacted the image I had of my grandfather and men in general. How as a macho man he was incapable of walking to the kitchen and serving his own plate. I don't recall ever seeing him helping with anything around the house, he was not a handyman or a fair partner to my grandmother; he only was the breadwinner. It was the same story with my uncles and little brother, they never had to do the dishes, cleaning or any other task for them or the house. It was assumed

the females of the house had the obligation of doing it for them. Situations like this make you aware of how the same mothers are raising the future husbands and man of the house and teaching them it is acceptable to mistreat women the same way they were mistreated, planting the seed of Machismo from the very beginning. “Women often complain about these types of experiences, and yet, do nothing to break the cycle.” Stenberg also noted that “Individual men needed to consider how similar their actual behavior and attitudes are to the stereotypical model of masculinity with which they are presented, the model that in Nicaragua makes up the machismo system” (93).

I experienced a similar situation when I was a teenager. On one occasion, I invited my formal boyfriend for dinner at my grandparents’ house. As it was expected from a woman trained to enable the machismo culture, I served his plate and brought it to the table, where he was already sitting waiting for his meal. After I completed my “duties “, I sat next to him with my own plate and instead of being appreciative, he began lecturing me on how that was not the way his mother served his plate; even further, he had the audacity to tell me that if we were to get married one day, he expected me to serve his meals and set the table the same way his mother did it for him. I was so in love that I did not realize how I was also part of the “macho” culture.

Real change does not happen overnight, it takes many years to change a country’s culture and create new norms to create equality for women. Nicaragua requires several changes to create real change and move away from the machista culture. The first change needs to come from leadership, meaning the government, since they do not have the best track record respecting women since they also partake in the machista culture. A prime example is Nicaragua’s ex-president, Daniel Ortega Saavedra. Saavedra was accused in 1998 of raping his own stepdaughter, Zoilamerica Ortega Murillo, when Ms. Ortega published a letter accusing her stepdad of raping her. The legal battle lasted 3 years in court and unfortunately didn’t go anywhere, regardless of all the proof she presented and other many accusations he had in the past for abusing his political power and sexually abusing other females. Rosario Murillo, mother of Zoilamerica, and wife of the President Daniel Ortega, never supported her daughter and remained loyal to her husband. She also dismissed any other accusation he had against him. Instead, she publicly accused her daughter of lying.

The cruel reality that Nicaraguans endure back at home is inequality, especially amongst women. Most females endure extreme life experiences, which they thought to be normal because that was the fairy tale their mothers painted for them. Meanwhile, the reality is far from the truth. What Nicaragua needs is cultural shift that promotes a safe, respectful, and equal culture to truly eradicate machismo from our society. As Sternberg notes that CISAS (Centro de Informacion y Servicios de Asesoria en Salud) “hoped, through this research, to provide men with a body of information that they could use to understand their behavior, attitudes, and the context of these, in order to develop an awareness of the social and cultural norms defined by machismo, and the way these norms create a certain model of ‘acceptable’ male sexual behavior, and a particular set of attitudes” (90). True change starts at home when mothers are raising their sons to be anyone’s future partner/husband.

*

Work Cited

Sternberg, Peter. “Challenging Machismo: Promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health with Nicaraguan Men.” *Gender and Development,* vol. 8, no. 1, 2000, pp. 89–99. *JSTOR*,

http://www.jstor.org/stable/4030311. Accessed 16 Sep. 2022.

This entry was posted on Tuesday, April 4th, 2023 at 7:32 pm and is filed under Essay, Social Action, Community
You can follow any responses to this entry through the Comments (RSS) feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site.