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Gender Roles in Hispanic Culture

As time passes by, the more society accepts different people in the Hispanic society. In this world there are a variety of different cultures that share different beliefs. As a society, we have come to accept different cultures but every culture has gender role differences. The Hispanic culture has a variety of different beliefs. I am Mexican and Nicaragua, in my culture family is very important and we always support one another. The women in this culture are hardworking and independent. But then men tend to stick to their beliefs of not letting the women work and only allowing them to stay at home to clean and cook. Many Hispanic families encourage their children to finish school and go to college in order to be successful. As for my family, my sister and I are the first ones to finish high school and continue on to college. Although my father wanted us to go to college he still enforces that we maintain tradition and do household duties. I believe there is two ways Hispanic women are categorized; young Hispanic women are portrayed as seductive while married women are compelled to being housewives. In the Hispanic culture, women are often stereotyped as either sexualized objects or housewives as a result of men being dominant figures. It is not right that Hispanic women are portrayed in a way that belittles them because it can lead to stereotypes which negatively affects their self-esteem.

In the media Hispanic women are often portrayed as “sexy” or as housekeepers. The way Hispanic women are portrayed in the media, it puts pressure on Hispanic women in general

because they are expected to live to those expectations. Hispanic actresses such as Jennifer Lopez, Eva Mendez and so on are beautiful women who are portrayed as the image of sexy Latinas. For example an article called, "Speaking of Jennifer Lopez: Discourses of Iconicity and Identity Formation Among Latina Audiences" written by Jillian Baez talks about the singer and actress Jennifer Lopez on her image, the way she portrays herself by using her body and in this article they interview Latina women on their opinion on Jennifer Lopez. In this article they interviewed a Hispanic women named Sandra and she states, "All these little children, teenagers that look up to her, buy her stuff, her clothes, buy her album or whatever. She's naked! I wouldn't want my daughter to look at her picture and look up to her...I really don't see why, she's a Latina and stuff like that and why Latinas portray themselves like that." (Baez). The way Jennifer Lopez portrays herself is provocative and it affects a lot of the Hispanic women. Teenage girls look up to her and they see how famous she got because of her curvaceous body. Many teenagers are inspired and they want to portray that seductive image. Not only does Jennifer Lopez portray this image but many other Latina actresses and by doing that it can affect the self-esteem of many women who are pressured by society to look a certain way. Another example, is an article called "*My hips, My Caderas*" by Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez; is about a girl who comes from a Cuban and American background and grew up with big hips. She talks about how Hispanic men loved her hips but the Americans judged her body as being too big. In the article Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez states when she wants to be loved for her body she talks to the Latino men because she knows they won't love her mind but for her body because they will feel threatened of how she is able to carry herself without a man. But when she wants to be loved for her mind she will go with the American men. Latino men do not care for the knowledge she has but only for her curvaceous body. Rather than the American men will love her for the knowledge she attains but

not for her curvy figure. The way Alisa is portrayed by men is horrific because she is not appreciated as a whole. She is not appreciated for her body and mind. It is not fair because it can destroy Hispanic women's self esteem. Media plays a huge factor in how it belittles Hispanic women as they are forced to convey a certain image of being "sexy" or seen as a housekeeper.

In addition, people tend to stereotype within people of different cultures. People may assume certain qualities depending on what they know about the culture or what they observe. In the article, "Culture and Communications" by Anastacia Kurylo this article talks about the different ways we communicate with different cultures and how some people generalize other cultures which can lead to stereotyping. For example, "stereotyping occurs when people expect all cultural group members to have same characteristics and engage in the same behaviors" (Kurylo). Many Latina women are stereotyped because of what their appearance communicates to society. Their appearance can communicate seductiveness depending how much they expose of their body. Not only by appearance but many Hispanic women are stereotyped to be housewives because of tradition. Once people get that image in their head they expect all Hispanic women to look that certain way. All Latina women are unique and different in their own way. Hispanic women come from different cultures and some come from the same culture but they have different beliefs.

In the Hispanic culture they have different beliefs about gender roles in the family. The men and women have different roles they play in their family. Men are seen as the dominant ones in the family. For example an article called, "Gender and Gender roles" by Marcus D. Jones, Charles Henry Rowell, Benita Lopez, Hernalinda, Pablo Garcia Alfonseca, et. al, talks about Hispanic values and gender roles in the family. It is based on the women in Coyolillo a small pueblo in Mexico. In this novel Benita says, "the women do not leave their homes they

work at home by taking care of their children, the men do not allow them to work outside”

(Jones e.g. 82). Men dominated the women and even now in some families women are following the men’s rules. Women were not able to find jobs; they could have a degree in college but the men did not allow them to get a job. Men probably felt this jealousy toward women with a higher education helping to contribute to the family. It has always been the men working hard to pay the bills and maintain there home, and family. Women did not have freedom of speech to tell their husbands that they wanted to work outside aside from taking care of their children at home.

These men have a “Machismo” mentality meaning a way of being so they expect to be respected and served by the women around them. Another example, my father told me about his childhood of him growing up in Mexico. My father had two sisters and lived with his father and mother.

My dad’s father worked every day and by the time he was off work he expected food to be ready for him and the house clean when he got home. My dad’s father expected the women to do the cooking and cleaning, he did not expect much from my dad. If the food was not ready by the time he got back from work he would punish the two sisters. Women in the Hispanic household were expected to obey the men and the rules that were strictly forced. Women were not able to talk back and say no because they would suffer the consequences. Women were restricted from their rights and were not able to stand up for themselves because of the male dominance.

Hispanic women also face inequality in the workforce. Some women are discriminated in the work place because they are incapable of doing hard labor. Women are portrayed as being housewives and taking care of the kids, and cleaning the house. They are expected to be at home to take care of the household. For example in this article called, “International Women’s Day: Inequalities still present in Latin America, despite significant gains ” by World Bank News talks about women who are discriminated in the work force and it states how they struggle to find

jobs. In this article it states, “Furthermore, a persistent wage gap, particularly in Chile, Brazil, Mexico and Peru, means male professionals can earn up to a quarter more than their female counterparts.” (World Bank News). Women continue to face inequality in the workforce either based on their abilities or because they are a women. Often in society people discriminate against women that they cannot do heavy labor, which restricts them from doing certain jobs. Women have the stereotype of not being able to handle certain things because they are emotionally unstable. Women are not treated equally in the workforce and are discriminated from having certain jobs. Latina women are seen to be stay at home mothers who take care of the household.

Unlike most Hispanic women, Jennifer Lopez accepted herself being stereotyped as seductive and used it to build a career. Many famous Latina actresses use their curvaceous bodies to portray a seductive image that has been an advantage to their careers. In addition to the Hispanic tradition, many men can say women are meant to be at home to protect their children while the men are working hard themselves to provide for their family. Tradition is very important to Hispanic culture and it can be problematic when tradition is not followed. Some hispanic men see this as the right way for a family to be. However, some men are controlling Hispanic women. Hispanic women are being held to be housewives only and obey their husbands. Not only that but the way Hispanic women are portrayed in the media as seductive or housekeepers affects all Hispanic women self esteem.

All in all, it is not right for Hispanic women to be belittled by the media because it can affect their self-esteem. In an article called, “Understanding the impact of thin media models on women’s body-focused affect: The roles of thin-ideal internalization and weight-related self-discrepancy” by Helga Dittmar, Emma Halliwell, and Emma Stirling is about the affects media has on women. It states, “Almost 90% of girls and women diet at some point in their lives”

(Dittmar 45). Media portrays images of how women should look and when women see that it affects them because they do not have those assets. Women should not change their appearance because of the influence of the media. The way women are portrayed in the media as seductive or a housekeeper is problematic because then they feel pressured to look a certain way. Not all Hispanic women should feel pressured to portray that image because they all have their unique look. In addition, Hispanic men tend to stick to Hispanic tradition which is the women being housewives and the men working to provide for their family. Hispanic men are the dominant ones in the family and they strictly enforce rules to their women. Hispanic women should not be controlled by men they deserve to be independent and seen as intelligent.

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