

'How to be a Cholo': Reinventing a Chicano Archetype on YouTube

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ABSTRACT

The online video "How to be a Cholo" is demonstrative of the potential that YouTube has to be a decolonial space where the reinvention of Chicano archetypes is possible. In this video, creator Eric G. Ochoa and his alter ego, Ego the Cholo, engage in humorous commentary that questions the stereotypes that have been ascribed to male Latinos through the Chicano archetypes. From this viewpoint we explore how new media facilitates the renegotiation of recurring Latino archetypes by explaining the role media had in illustrating bandits, pachucos and cholos. We also demonstrate how the conflation of the three archetypes (bandit, lover and buffoon) creates a type of humor that serves as a weapon of the marginalized by breaking down scenes in the video. In conducting an in-depth content analysis of the video, we found that Ochoa rearticulates the bandido archetype by contesting three particular characteristics that are ascribed to cholos: delinquency, masculinity, and appearance. Finally, we propose that YouTube itself has the potential to be a social space of self-affirmative cultural production citing "How to be a Cholo" as evidence.

Keywords: Chicano archetypes, cultural production, Latina/o self-representation, YouTube, resignification, virtual cholismo, new media, recurring stereotypes, hypermasculinity, parody, humor, bandit, pachuco, cholo.

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RESUMEN

El vídeo en línea “How to be a Cholo” (Cómo ser un Cholo), demuestra el potencial que YouTube tiene para ser un espacio decolonial dónde la reinención de arquetipos chicanos es posible. En el vídeo, su creador Eric G. Ochoa y su álter ego, Ego el Cholo, crean un comentario humorístico que pone en duda los estereotipos que han sido atribuidos a los hombres latinos a través de los arquetipos chicanos. Desde este punto de vista exploramos cómo los nuevos medios de comunicación facilitan la renegociación de arquetipos latinos / chicanos al explicar el papel que los medios de comunicación anteriores han tenido en describir a los bandidos, pachucos, y cholos. También mostramos cómo la fusión de los tres arquetipos (bandido, pachuco, cholo) crea un tipo de humor que sirve de arma para los marginalizados a través del análisis de escenas del vídeo. Al llevar a cabo un análisis del contenido del vídeo, encontramos que Ochoa rearticula el arquetipo del bandido al complicar las tres características que se atribuyen a los cholos: la delincuencia, la masculinidad, y la apariencia. Finalmente, proponemos que YouTube en sí tiene el potencial de ser un espacio social de producciones culturales auto-afirmativas citando “How to be a Cholo” como ejemplo.

Palabras claves: arquetipos chicanos, producciones culturales, representación auto-afirmativa, renegociación de identidad, medios en línea, masculinidad, pachuco, cholo.

1. INTRODUCTION

The virtual world of YouTube is a yet unexplored medium where images and videos achieve a new democratization. In the jungle that is YouTube, we find Ego the Cholo, the humorous protagonist of the series *Cholo Adventures* by Eric G. Ochoa. This paper discusses the historical legacy of Latino archetype reinvention, of which Ochoa's videos are heirs. We define the cholo as he has been defined according to the archetype. A cholo is a Chicano or Latino male, usually a young male that belongs to a group characterized by its perceived deviant social comportment. There are a number of visual and behavioral traits related to cholos, which will be expanded upon throughout this paper. We argue that Ego the Cholo finds himself at the threshold of a developing technology where identity ascriptions are in the control of the formerly socially disenfranchised. Through the use of YouTube, an online video hosting website, the creation and distribution of media sets the stage for a new stage of reinvention. The

online video “How to be a Cholo” is demonstrative of the potential that YouTube has to be a decolonial space where the reinvention of Chicano archetypes is possible. From this viewpoint we explore: 1) how individuals categorized under recurring Latino archetypes gain agency through time and through the use of new media, 2) how the conflation of the three archetypes (bandit, lover and buffoon) creates a type of humor that serves as a weapon of the marginalized, and 3) how YouTube itself has the potential to be a social space of self-affirmative cultural production citing “How to be a Cholo” as evidence. In order to do this, we illustrate scenes from Ochoa’s video that demonstrate humorous commentary about *Cholismos*, a term we use to refer to perceived cholo behaviors. We break down several scenes in order to show how Ochoa takes advantage of the decolonial potential offered by the YouTube forum.

2. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF *BANDIDO* ARCHETYPE

The position of Latina/os in the United States has always been precarious in many ways, not least of all due to a legion of stereotypes and misconceptions that are largely perpetuated through various media platforms. Francisco Lomelí eloquently notes that, “[t]he formulaic images as well as the impressions of Mexicans in the United States are bountiful, be they overt or sublime, usually recycling notions disproven as antiquated misrepresentations, but the central issue is not their reappearance per se but how these notions inexplicably gain traction over and over again...” (Lomelí 2). In this passage Lomelí not only acknowledges the history of (mis)representation of Mexicans in the U.S. but also how the appearance and value afforded to the ideological manifestations are repeated in a cyclical fashion. According to Ramírez Berg, three main categories for male Chicano / Mexican / Mexican-American males exist in popular cultural productions. Ego reminds us of the Chicano male archetypes we have seen over and over: the bandit, the buffoon, and the Latin lover. Over time these categories have encompassed different characters that are essentially all replicas of each other. These characters have merely been reinvented to fit into the current popular imagination and the available mediums of production. The *bandido* archetype exists in three different major manifestations through time: 1) the border bandit, 2) the Pachuco, and 3) the cholo. All three of these manifestations of the *bandido* archetype are recognized through their manner of dress, their use of language, and their perceived criminal tendencies.

In order to explain the social construction of the three archetypal characters (bandit, pachuco and cholo), we are focusing our analysis on the construction of the *bandido* archetype through stereotyping. Charles Ramírez Berg defines the

representations of Chicana/os portrayed in Hollywood films as mediated stereotypes. These stereotypes are concrete depictions of the “Other.” The manner in which these representations function is “by gathering a specific set of negative traits and assembling them into a particular image” (38). However, this concrete human form inherently limits the number of traits that can be attributed to the depiction. Consequently, most often a number of characters represent various negative traits associated with a particular group. We argue that Ego is a reincarnation of the bandit archetype. As Ramirez Berg explains, contemporary representations of the Latino male delinquent, “can be understood as not an altogether new stereotype but in many ways a continuation of the old one: a contemporary, urban *bandido*” (41). In a hyperbolic fashion, Ochoa combines all three of the male archetypes that Berg identifies; namely the *bandido*, the buffoon and the Latin lover; to create Ego. Since this violates the limits of accepted meaning, he makes the portrayal completely unbelievable, consequently challenging the way these traits are attributed to Latinos.

The manifestations of the *bandido* archetype have changed through time as technologies for cultural production have evolved and become more democratized. When reviewing the literature, we observed a progression from portrayals of bandits in Western genre movies and novels, to portrayals of Pachucos in news media and plays like *Zoot Suit* by Luis Valdez and finally to the Cholo in online media. The characters have gained agency as different entertainment technologies develop. The medium of YouTube has garnered only limited scholarly attention in part due to the recent nature of the phenomenon. Furthermore, significantly less work has been done on how Latinos specifically have made use of YouTube. Thus, through this project we hope to begin to address this underresearched area.

The cholo is a reinstallation of the *bandido* archetype, one of three archetypes (along with the buffoon and Latin lover) that are imposed on Latino males in popular cultural productions such as film and literature. We identify Ochoa’s video as continuing to make use of comedy as a means for social critique. However, this type of comedy functions as a technology of decolonization. This type of social critique is performed in a decolonial space: YouTube. YouTube is a forum that has the potential to democratize information and decolonize ideas. Rather than allowing the public imagination to continue to define Chicano male youth under the prescribed deviant archetype, the virtual forum is a space through which “the silent gain their agency” (Perez 33). Not only is the virtual cholo no longer silent, he expresses his identity through the use of comedy. YouTube and similar forums of democratized engagement challenge colonial ascriptions.

We focus on the male *bandido* archetype and not the female archetypes because the protagonist of “How to be a Cholo” is a male. It is also particularly of interest to us to discuss the evolution of the characterization of the Mexican male and the stereotypes that have been applied to him. As Juan Alonzo points out in *Badmen, Bandits and Folk Heroes*, “the Anglo-American production of stereotypes often presents Mexican men and women in very different lights, with the Mexican male receiving the brunt of the denigrating depictions and the women frequently cast as the object of erotic attraction” (38). Although the Mexican female archetypes are also subject to negativity, they are still deemed desirable, if only for their bodies. Even when the female body is not present in this video, its attributes are constantly being evoked as a negative definition when found in a character that is supposed to be hypermasculine. The use of female characteristics aids in defining masculinity by what it is not: femininity (Alonzo 66; Ramírez Berg 4). The Mexican male never seems desirable under any archetypal context; he is only expendable. Therefore, we are electing to discuss the evolution of the Mexican male *bandido* archetype in order to discover the ways in which the character has adapted in order to reclaim some agency and desirability.

3. ARTICULATING “HOW TO BE A CHOLO”

The text we are analyzing for this paper is a recent cultural production titled “How to be a Cholo,” a seven-minute YouTube video that was created by Eric Ochoa, a young Mexican-American male. It was posted on YouTube, an online video hosting website, in June 2008 and has since gained 3.2 million views (as of 10/14/2011). It also spawned a YouTube series by the name of *Cholo Adventures*, currently numbering over 25 videos that have collectively brought Ochoa’s YouTube channel, *SUPEReeeGO*, over 87 million views as of October 2011. According to YouTube statistics tracking available on all video pages, the majority of Ochoa’s viewers are males between the ages of 13 and 24, and females between the ages of 13 and 18. This viewership demographic shows that the virtual medium, as well as the content of the video are very much indicative of a youth phenomenon.

“How to be a Cholo” is a parody of an instructional video. The instructional video format was taken from the video “How to be gangster” by YouTuber *nigabiga*, which Ochoa is watching at the beginning of his own video (Higa 2007). In “How to be a Cholo”, Ochoa scoffs at the idea that *nigabiga* could be an accurate instructor on being / becoming a gangster. Ironically, Ochoa takes on the task of instructor when he also is not a member of the in-group being portrayed, limiting his ability to teach the realities of *Cholismo*. Ochoa, also known as YouTuber *SUPEReeeGO*, transforms

himself into an “authentic” cholo and proceeds to outline the requirements and traits to become a cholo. In this way, Ochoa provides a competing urban youth model to the ‘gangster’ created by user *nigabiga*. The instructional manner in which this representation is portrayed assumes that the viewer has the potential to obtain a cholo identity. The structure essentializes the cholo experience to mere steps that can be followed. It also presents Ego as possessing the identity and markers of a cholo, thus gaining native credence and consequently allowing him to define *Cholismo* on his own terms.

In the context of the video, Ego is the teacher. This position of authority and expertise is not often occupied by Latina/os, but on YouTube it is a possibility. Ochoa’s attempt at wide-ranging popularity nevertheless takes on a decidedly Latino manifestation. This is apparent in his choice to respond to *nigabiga*’s “Gangster” with his own “Cholo” pedagogy. Ego necessitates an intellectual analysis because although Ochoa is performing the traits that audiences expect, he simultaneously ridicules the characteristics and turns them on their head, subtly implying that those markers generally associated with *Cholismo* are stereotypical.

We were also interested in discovering what makes this video so popular. Its humor is appealing to audiences and its blatant exaggerations of the requirements for *Cholismo* generate provocative discussions. Comedy is a double-edged sword that can be used both as a means to oppress but also as a way to subvert the existing social standards. The source of much of what is considered humorous is either an inversion of expected outcomes or an accident that occurs to someone else (Lipsitz). Reactions to a joke can vary from uncontrollable laughter to mild amusement to utter confusion depending on the frame of reception (Burma 712). José Limón provides his readers with Mary Douglas’ definition saying that, “[f]or her, jokes are expressive structures that challenge and subvert some formal, dominant, structured pattern of thought or behavior in social life. ‘A joke is a play upon form. It brings into relation disparate elements in such a way that one accepted pattern is challenged by the appearance of another’” (1982: 155). Douglas’ definition is directly applicable to Ochoa’s video as he is constantly inverting the viewer’s assumptions and expectations with comedic results.

One form of joking that is of particular importance for this project is the self-derogatory ethnic joke. This form of humor is exemplified by the slapstick comedy of Cheech Marín in his movie *Born in East L.A.* Christine List argues that although Marín embeds his character with stereotypical traits; he does so in a way to demonstrate the character’s awareness of the process by which negative traits are attributed to his body and subsequently struggles against it (List 189). Furthermore, such self-representations

are a sophisticated critique of the over generalized nature of stereotypes which requires an intellectual analysis from the viewer. In this way Marín is only pretending to ridicule himself. Using ethnic stereotypes in this self-reflexive manner not only challenges the assumptions of mainstream society but it also serves to comment on the faults of the Latina/o community (List 192).

With the aforementioned vilification of Latina/os in popular cultural texts dating back from the 19th century, as exemplified by the bandido archetype, there is no lack of problematic representations to contest. Chicano cultural productions, broadly defined, have been consistently used as a tool to disprove the negative rhetoric transposed on the bodies of Latinos. Following an in-depth discussion about some of those stereotypes, Lomelí posits that the subject of his study, “Homies, a collection of plastic figurines of barely 1-3/8 inches to 2 inches, which originated as comically stylized portraits of barrio or ghetto dwellers, react to and challenge such depictions with an unusual flair and strategic re-signification by deconstructing, or at least playing with past figurative misdeeds” (Lomelí 4). Like David Gonzales, the creator of Homies, Eric Ochoa repeatedly uses the prejudicial expectations to set up the viewer only to shatter the normalized progression of the various representational linkages.

4. BANDITS

Border bandits were prominent in literature before the invention of television. The Mexican male bandit (also called greaser) appeared in popular American cultural productions in early 1840s novels with themes of conquest, but he was immortalized through his recurring presence in American cinema and film. The Mexican bandit cemented this political role as a result of failed US-Mexico policies that initiated the Mexican-American War of 1846. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 served as a backdrop for the further *villainization* of the Mexican bandit. The Mexican bandit was set up as the adversary of the American war hero and he was thus portrayed to be his complete moral opposite. Juan Alonzo states, “In the realm of popular culture, the revolution and its figure form the iconic material from which cinematic stereotypes of greasers, bandits, and revolutionaries take their inspiration” (4).

The iconography associated with the bandit was permanently altered during the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and was loosely based on depictions of Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, both leaders of the popular rebellion against Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz (Alonzo 15). The bandit image that emerged from this context was characterized by, “the unkempt appearance, the weaponry and *bandolero* bullet belts, the funny-looking sombrero, the sneering look” (Ramírez Berg 8). Alfonso Bedoya’s

character “Gold Hat” originally appeared in the Hollywood film *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* in 1948 and began the characterization we still see today. This was the first instance in which the bandit was imprinted into the American imagination. With the exception of the legendary Gregorio Cortez and Joaquin Murrieta characters that were popular at the time, nearly all the bandits were characterized only as one-dimensional evil thieves

Following in the tradition of bandit tales, in “*With His Pistol in His Hand*,” Américo Paredes interpreted the story of Gregorio Cortez in a way that served to reveal a level of agency and moral justification that had not been attributed to perceived *bandidos* by the usual writers of border legends and films. Upon the publication of “*With His Pistol in His Hand*” in 1958, a new discursive space was opened “in which Mexican Americans were able to contest harmful images of themselves and re-frame their social standing within broader discourses of Texas and American history, folklore studies, and civil rights” (Alonzo 111). Chicana/o scholars and artists would continue to deconstruct the *bandido* archetype throughout history in different ways and with different tools. Eventually the bandit was replaced in the popular imagination by another rebellious character: The Pachuco.

5. PACHUCOS

Pachuco youth subculture catapulted into the national spotlight in 1942 and the years that followed due to the highly publicized Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Los Angeles Zoot Suit Riots (McWilliams 207-231; Madrid 17). The Pachuco generation had a widespread existence before they were brought into the public eye. Male Pachucos could be expected to wear a zoot suit which entailed high waisted, loose-fitting dress pants with pleats near the top, a long baggy coat, thick-soled dress shoes and duck-tailed haircuts (McWilliams 207). It is because of this dress style that Pachucos were referred to as “zoot-suiters.” Additionally, Pachucos are often identified as the predecessors of the modern day cholos, who are also identified according to socially accepted stereotypes (Moore 5).

In the media, Pachucos suffered from a tradition of forced identity ascription that can be traced to ascriptions inflicted on border bandits in legend and cinema. The perspective of deviance stems from the ideas that were proliferated by the authorities. The first interpreters of the Zoot Suit riots were newspapers and they portrayed the youth as gangsters and hoodlums due to their preconceived notions of ascribed deviance and the stereotypes that are attached thereof. Reporters focused on Pachuco comportment, namely; their looks, their language, their dress, and their

names. Police accused Pachucos of crimes due to the way they looked (Madrid 19). Additionally, “civil authorities became cultural anthropologists” when they wrote reports about what they observed about Mexican crime and racialized their observations by arguing that Mexicans were no more than 20 percent Caucasian and their hostile behavior drew from their Indian background (Madrid 19). Police identified Pachucos as being socially disturbed and as being part of the “Mexican Problem” (McWilliams 211). Laura Cummings argues that “[i]n this view, a manufactured social imagery, rather than actual behavior, is the root of the labeling of Chicano youth groups as deviant” (183). It was not until social ascription deemed the Pachuco a criminal and a social deviant that young men who dressed in this style were linked to a negative reputation.

Interpretations of the Pachuco in scholarly historiography include early criticism in the book *The Labyrinth of Solitude* by Octavio Paz. The first chapter of this book, “*El Pachuco y otros extremos*” paints the Pachuco as an assimilated Mexican who took up a disguise that both protected him and pointed him out, stemming from a type of confusion about what his identity was as a border-dweller (Paz 5). Other early perceptions of Pachucos, such as Beatrice Griffith’s *American Me* 1948 study included an analysis of Mexican youth as victims of circumstance (Madrid 24). As this was taking place, Chicano males later took the Pachuco and presented him in a more complex light in cultural production.

Popular cultural production took the image of the Pachuco in similar paths of cognition through use of the stage. Luis Valdez’s play and film *Zoot Suit* made the Pachuco into, “a complex mythological tragihero” (List 192). Valdez explained in *Zoot Suit*, the play, that for bandit / heroes Tuburcio Vásquez and Joaquín Murrieta, “their claim to fame rests on their notoriety, and their enduring memory owes much to their incorporation into Western conquest fiction as stereotypes” (97). Likewise, the Pachuco’s rise to prominence is largely due to the negative articulations about them in mainstream media solidifying the linkages between these two Chicano icons. Even literature that critiques *Zoot Suit* defines Pachucos as the same group of people who are labeled cholos in contemporary times (List 192). As Chicano producers claimed a new interpretative space, deviant characters such as Pachucos began to gain the agency necessary to reinvent their identities and explain their complexity.

6. CHOLOS

Cholos today are the modern incarnation of the criminalized *bandido* archetype. The term ‘cholo’ itself is not very commonly used in U.S. public discourse. The

individuals known as cholos tend to be discussed and studied as gang members. Both within public perception as well as in academic discourse, gang youth have been consistently characterized as delinquents and consequently as threats to the social order. Furthermore, the negative traits (violence, drug abuse, misogyny, etc.) that are imposed on the racialized bodies of gang youth are then essentialized to apply to all youth, and particularly men, of color (Montejano 31).

More recent scholarship challenges both the simplistic conceptualizations of gang youth as well as the attribution of delinquency as an inherent cultural trait among Latina/o youth. David Montejano analyzes the structural factors that contribute to the dynamics of gangs while problematizing the assumed static nature of said social groups. He explains that neighborhood affiliation became one of the primary forms of self-identifications among youth and in order to exercise these affiliations, individual groups would claim street blocks or even street corners to defend. If hostilities among rival groups continued, they could also justify preemptive use of violence thus initiating a vicious cycle of attack and retaliation although only a small minority of gang youth actually engage in violence. Montejano demonstrates that many social groups perceived as gangs are often merely *clicas*, or groups of friends. What activates identification with gangs or an assemblage of different *clicas*, are hostilities with other groups, gangs, or authorities. Consequently, many gangs can be understood as reactionary mobilizations for the purpose of self-defense rather than a social institution oriented towards violence. Gangs and the cholos that take part in them are thus a product of the constant conflict propagated by the limited access to resources that marks the social conditions of the barrio - conditions that remain largely unchanged since the days in which bandits were first being shown in Hollywood films.

7. VIDEO ANALYSIS

In a close reading of Ochoa's video we identified explicit representations of three different themes/characteristics commonly associated with the *bandido* archetype and its subsequent manifestations, namely delinquency, masculinity, and appearance. Instead of merely reproducing mainstream stereotypes of cholos, Ochoa employs parody and humor in order to systematically destabilize the very characteristics that have become naturalized components of the Latino male body in most public discourse. It is significant to note that we employ these three particular themes/characteristics for the sake of clarity; however, they are not stagnant or monolithic categories by any means. As our discussion will show, the boundaries between the characteristics, and the Chicano archetypes they are ascribed to, bleed into one another creating a dynamic borderland

where meanings are negotiated and combined to create an imagined, Latino-produced cholo identity. The following is an analysis of specific scenes that demonstrate the decolonial potential of virtual self-representation.

7.1. *Critique of the Delinquency and Criminality of the Bandido Archetype*

Delinquency is one of the primary, if not the most significant, attributes associated with cholos. Ego presents delinquency, a quality continuously attached to the *bandido* archetype, as a rite of passage necessary for becoming a cholo. As part of the first step in the video, Ego indicates that a swap-meet belt is an important part of cholo attire by placing his hands on the belt buckle. The act of deviance in this case comes not from explicit action within the video itself but instead through a quick anecdote. Ego tells the viewer that the swap-meet belt he is wearing is worth an exorbitant \$1.99 but even at that price he stole it. While Ego has indeed performed a criminal act (according to him anyway), the offense is so relatively insignificant to render it a literal joke. In this way, he is including delinquency as a trait of the cholo but doing so in a manner marginal to the instructional narrative. He ridicules the perceived *hypercriminality* of cholos by illustrating a petty instance of theft.

We consider it significant that criminality was not explicitly mentioned as a trait or a step necessary for becoming a cholo in Ochoa's video. The closest approximation is the need to like being "rebellious". The scene begins with Ego looking at the camera as an unnamed male character in the video has placed a Pepsi can on the table. Ego tells the viewers in a hushed voice that they need to like being rebellious in order to become cholos and proceeds to shake the soda can to demonstrate his own rebelliousness. He then goes under the table until the unnamed male opens the can and has it spill all over him. At this point Ego jumps up from under the table and laughs at him. Though rebellion does imply contesting authority, the rebellious act that Ochoa portrays is shaking an unopened soda can, which is again comically benign. Even so, Ochoa transforms his character from the archetypal cholo stereotype to the buffoon/trickster capable of inverting social structures. Furthermore, being rebellious elicits connotations of social struggle and a level of agency. Overall, Ochoa's representation of cholos defuses their threat to society, thus allowing for a more nuanced and, potentially, even decolonial understanding of this group.

7.2. *Masculinity and Homosexuality Within the Text*

Jokes about homosexuality and masculinity are a frequent part of Ochoa's overall instructional narrative. Ego, the character, attempts to perform masculinity throughout

the text. However, Ochoa, the artist / actor, subverts that performance through ‘effeminate’ or ‘weak’ displays, thus criticizing the hypermasculine nature of the cholo archetype. This is exemplified during the “you gotta like Scarface” scene where Ego symbolically castrates himself by shooting a Nerf toy gun at his own crotch.

One of the scenes where a masculine performance comes into play is the “Hollerin’ at the Hynas” scene where Ego embodies the bandit, Latin lover and clown personas as he cat-calls at a passing woman in the hopes of hooking up with her. He engages in a hypersexualized display that includes thrusting his pelvis into a mailbox, calling out “hey baby” incessantly to the object of his desire and maintaining his eyes fixed upon her. The chase ends with the woman pulling out a can of pepper spray and macing Ego in order to thwart his advances. When he is maced, his hypermasculine comportment is compromised for a split-second as he regains his composure and asks the camera through teary, blinded eyes, “Did you see the way she was looking at me? Cuz I... I can’t see.” This scene conflates the three different archetypes and achieves a humorous commentary about the ways in which cholos tend to be boxed into one essentialized category while also pointing to the absurdity of *Cholismo* in general. Furthermore, Ochoa’s choice to have Ego be rejected in such a manner means that Ego is not able to verify his masculinity. In this way Ochoa also problematizes Ego’s approach to women and by extension the perceived cholo behavior towards women.

Latino men in particular have often been stereotyped as possessing a rigid hypermasculinity (termed machismo) that “is a male attempt to compensate for feeling of internalized inferiority by exaggerated masculinity” (Baca Zinn 30). Ochoa complicates this line of thinking by overtly problematizing masculinity in a second scene we have titled “The Oldies Scene,” where Ego cries. According to the literature, a major trait of *Cholismo* is a strong, hypermasculine approach to circumstances. In this scene we observe Ego crying over an emotional song; James Brown’s “Try Me” which is a song linked to low riding. This juxtaposition can be interpreted as critical commentary that conflates prescribed masculine activities, such as low-riding, with prescribed feminine activities such as crying. The symbol of this juxtaposition is a faux tear tattoo that Ego sports, parodying tear tattoos found on some cholos and at the same time explaining that the tear actually signifies emotion — something that is generally not associated with cholos. Ochoa’s critique shows that there is more to gang youth than popularly accepted hypermasculine conceptualizations.

Ochoa complicates and draws humor from moments where Ego’s sexuality is questioned. Ego repeats the word “faggot”, thus emphasizing the homophobic nature of the hypermasculine cholo archetype all the while he is performing activities that could

label him with this pejorative label as well. This contradictory performance shines light on the ridiculous nature of the hypermasculinity present in *Cholismo*. R. Kirk Mauldin states “that masculinity cannot be conceptualized apart from the dichotomy of male/female”. He goes on to indicate that “[r]ecognizing that masculinity exists ‘only in contrast to what it supposedly is not’ (Schacht, 1996) is the key to understanding how the social construct of homophobic humor “reinforces the ‘essentialness’ of gender” (Mauldin 2002: 79). Ego complicates the essentialness of masculinity by blurring the lines between gender categories.

7.3. *Cholo Appearance*

Appearance, and clothing in particular, are important symbols of *Cholismo*. There are two steps in this video dedicated to dress style components. Like the pachuco, the cholo is being instructed to button up only the top button of their Pendleton, to buy a particular brand of pants (Dickies), to wear Nike Cortez shoes, and even the proper accessories that come in the form of a swap-meet belt. Aside from explaining what a cholo must wear, Ego reminds the viewer to, “[m]ake sure you’re nice and sharp. Nobody wants a dirty lousy gangster *ese*. Gotta be nice, eh.” Reminiscent of Cummings’ Pachucas/os in the early 1930’s and their dress style, there is a certain pride that exists in the clothing articles that a cholo wears and these first two instructions indicate that appearance and proper wearing of these clothing articles are just as important as the pieces themselves. Appearance is thus a space where a level of agency becomes possible, just as it was with pachucos. Resignifying an outfit with pride represents a way of reclaiming a cholo identity.

Ochoa identifies tattoos as another visual symbol that demarcates a cholo. Step Three in “How to be a Cholo” identifies tattoos as a vital indicator for *Cholismo*. However, since Ochoa does not actually have any tattoos, he brings in another male to show his tattoos to the camera while claiming they are his own. The switch is purposely made painstakingly obvious for comedic effect. After the second male shows his tattoos, the video cuts to Ochoa who claims that he has had additional ink work done on his back. The first tattoo, obviously a temporary one, shows a skull in the middle of his back. The second tattoo, also temporary, is the “Weenie the Pooh” donkey character, Eeyore. This cartoon character represents childhood, which is incongruent with the hard, tough image of cholos. Therefore, this tattoo effeminizes Ochoa’s alter ego. Ochoa’s character recognizes the tattoo is effeminate by looking in a surprised and nervous manner into the camera and saying “What...what *ese*?” Here Ochoa debunks the stereotype that Latina/os or even cholos have an affinity to tattoos just as he questions other assumptions

elsewhere in the video. In this way, even as Ego goes about the work of defining what it means to be a cholo, the humorous execution goes about destabilizing the standard homogenous representations that exist of cholos within most public cultural productions.

7.4. *Ego as a Hyperbolic Character*

In “How to be a Cholo” Ochoa uses various joke structures outlined above in order to produce an entertaining and popular cultural product but also to problematize the cholo archetype propagated in mainstream discourse. Additionally, Ochoa’s Ego is a hyperbolic character that is extremely complex. This combination makes his character unbelievable and therefore humorous and at the same time rendering these stereotypes he is listing, equally ridiculous [example: Hollerin’ at the Hynas (the bandido and the Latin lover), rebellious soda scene (bandido and the buffoon)] (Ramirez Berg 38). Just as with Cheech Marin’s character in his film *Born In East LA*, Ego’s “vato loco stereotype operates critically through distancing devices such as anti-realist (cartoonish, hyperbolic) aesthetic” (de la Mora 289). Ego is largely funny because he is a hyperbolic character that encompasses all three archetypes.

Humor has been particularly used throughout history as a way to critique power. Comedy has the power to invert the present power structure. This suggests a deep understanding of power dynamics by the joke teller and an implied resistance to structures of power. Given the way that those in power have policed social space in the U.S., people of color have often been forced to resort to humor as a way of resisting their marginalization. Now that the means of production is in the hands of some of those marginalized people because of YouTube, we are witnessing a moment in which disenfranchised persons are able to define themselves on their own terms. Additionally, there is a level of protection afforded to the joker/trickster based on the fact that jokes are not to be taken seriously. José Limón argues that joking, particularly jokes with political underpinnings, can be empowering for Latina/os as it can represent a “creative act that contributed symbolically to an ideological formation” (159). Thus jokes can serve as a tool for the socialization of oppressed groups into an oppositional consciousness similar to the way that jokes can be used to perpetuate discrimination. Additionally, in some cases, like that of Ochoa, members of those groups can self-consciously perform the stereotypes placed on them in exaggerated ways that critique the very viability of those conceptualizations.

8. CONCLUSION

YouTube remains an evolving medium whose impact can only be gauged with the benefit of hindsight. However, as is demonstrated by the success of Eric Ochoa’s

video and YouTube career, there is opportunity for Latina/os and other marginalized groups to use this medium as a means to contest the way in which they are viewed in the national and global imaginary. Some specific ways in which to improve our understanding of the specific role of Latina/os within the YouTube phenomenon are: 1) to conduct studies on the viewership of Ochoa's videos and other videos that explicitly use markers of their membership in marginalized groups within the video's content; 2) to focus on ethnographic studies on the creators of such videos (both those who are successful but also less so); 3) to analyze the political economy of views/hits and the resulting hierarchy of whose work is actually seen on a mass scale. With the insights of these and other studies, we shall gain a deeper understanding of YouTube's role in society and its potential for decolonization.

The line of development of characters in popular culture has passed through literature, film, theater, and is now further democratized by the presence of media on the internet; particularly videos on YouTube. The YouTube platform allows the easy distribution of this media and presents the videos to any and all audiences who choose to view the video. The creator of the video himself is not a cholo; however, he (like cholos) is also a product of the social milieu of the barrio. His insider status gives him a first-hand view of this group within his community. His character often fails to live up to the very steps he proposes to attaining *Cholismo*. Consequently, Ego the cholo is strictly a performance as opposed to a true self-representation. Although he cannot be considered a 'native' cholo since he is not part of the group, his position as a Latino male from the barrio (a group often stereotyped as cholos despite a lack of any gang affiliations), allows Ochoa to comment on commonly held definitions of cholos while simultaneously critiquing aspects of their behavior. Through YouTube, a relatively low-cost medium for video production and distribution, Ochoa was able to create his own definition of members in his community and the videos he created have been viewed by hundreds of thousands if not millions of people. Consequently, he was able to reclaim the space of cultural production within new media.

YouTube is still in its developing stages. While it is democratized for a select few, it is not democratized for everyone. Not everyone has access to video making or editing equipment or even computers. Therefore, although the internet is allegedly a universal space we can plainly see that this is not so. Additionally, Latina/os are underrepresented within the YouTube context. Ochoa, however, is able to make full use of the medium's advantages and uses it to craft his own conceptualizations. YouTube is a contested public space where Ochoa is able to engage in performance on his own terms rather than on the dictations of a production company. By exercising agency online,

Ochoa creates a self-representation and this ability is what grants him a voice. Similar to the case of *Born in East L.A.*, Ochoa's employment of parody "does in fact provide a powerful indictment of dominant society" (Fregoso 245). In order for someone to laugh at a joke, it requires them to "move beyond their comfort zones and commonplace understandings" through the art of inversion (Mayo 245). This performance thus creates an alternate view of the world that, if only temporarily, reshapes the way we conceive of marginal groups within society (Limón 157). Ochoa's work offers such a glimpse into a world where people are not stripped of their humanity through the essentializing forces of hierarchy. We can only hope that many others, particularly the subaltern, will also gain the ability to share their creative visions.

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