"No, It's Not Like Any Other Love": Latino Morrissey Fans, Masculinity, and Class

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Abstract:

This essay interrogates the rise of Latino fandom for British musician Morrissey within the contexts of masculinity and post-industrial working-class communities. The links between stardom, class and masculinity are examined across icons such as James Dean and Elvis Presley. Heterosexual male fans were interviewed about their admiration for Morrissey and his influence on their gender expression and ideas about masculinity. The Latino men reported that listening to Morrissey's music broadened their understanding of masculine expression and inspired many of the men to advocate for gender queer individuals. Overall, the men felt the music opened them up to expressing emotions and allowed them to imagine other modes of masculinity besides hyper masculine American or Latino ideals.

Keywords: Latino Masculinity, Fandom, Morrissey

“Hayır, bu herhangi başka bir aşk gibi değil”: Morrissey’in Latin Fanları, Erkeklik ve Sınıf

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Özet:

Bu çalışma, İngiliz müzisyen Morrissey’in Latin fanlarının sayısındaki artışı erkeklik ve endüstri sonrası işçi sınıfı toplulukları çerçevelerinde analiz edecektir. Yıldızlık, sınıf ve erkeklik arasındaki ilişki James Dean ve Elvis Presley gibi ikonlar üzerinden incelenmiştir. Heteroseksüel erkek fanlar ile Morrissey’e duydukları hayranlık, Morrissey’in onların cinsel kimliklerini ifadeleri ve erkeklik hakkındaki fikirleri hakkında görüşülmüştür. Latin erkekler, Morrissey’in müziğini dinlemenin onların farklı erkeklik ifadelerini anlamalarını genişlettiğini ve onları kuir kimlikleri savunma konusunda cesaretlendirdiğini belirttiler. Genel olarak, erkekler, müziğin onları farklı duyguları ifade etmede özgürleştirdiğini ve aşırı maskülen Amerikan veya Latin modellerden farklı diğer erkeklik suretlerini tasarımlama imkanı sunduğunu belirttiler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Latin erkekliği, fanlık, Morrissey

In 1982, in Manchester, England Steven Patrick Morrissey, a bookish loner, joined forces with local guitarist Johnny Marr to form the Smiths. Marr's catchy guitar based melodies coupled with Morrissey's angst driven lyrics, unconventional subject matter and enigmatic persona quickly catapulted the Smiths into chart success and pop idol status in the U.K. By the time the group disbanded in 1987 they had recorded five critically and commercially successful albums with several top ten singles, and perhaps just as important, a cultish fan base. After the partnership dissolved Morrissey went on to a successful solo career that to date includes ten albums, several hit singles and numerous recognitions. In fact, *Spin* magazine (1989) rated the Smith's *The Queen Is Dead* album as the greatest album ever made, among other accolades from the music press. Although short lived compared to other celebrated British bands many music critics consider the Smiths the most important band to come from England during the 1980s (Hawkins *Settling the Pop Score* 72).

By the 1990s Morrissey and the Smiths became common household names for millions of teenagers and young adults in Southern California as well, a large percentage of which were Latino. This is partly explained by Los Angeles based radio station KROQ that frequently played the Smiths/Morrissey and other new wave English bands such as Depeche Mode and New Order during the 1980s and continued to play this music during "flashback" programming. Yet, of all the music of the era why does the forlorn music of the Smiths and Morrissey produce such ardent Chicano/Latino followers? As KROQ transmitted Morrissey's melancholic lines, set to Marr's "jangly" guitar across Southern California, the music resonated in a Latina/o audience KROQ overlooked. For despite notable Chicano/Latino contributions to rock 'n' roll—from Ritchie Valens to Question Mark and the Mysterians through Carlos Santana, Los Lobos and Ozomatli, to name a few—Chicanos, and Latinos in general, have never been taken seriously as an audience for rock music (Reyes and Waldman; Loza; Avant-Mier). This disregard of U.S. Latinos as consumers and listeners of rock music operates on many levels and through various discourses that legitimize the invisibility of the Latino rock fan. Prevalent among them, and informing many others, are: (1) rock's long standing

black/white dichotomy, (2) the music industry's erroneous belief that there is no market or Latino rock audience, and (3) "sonic stereotypes" about what type of music Chicanos/Latinos listen to and consume.

Gustavo Arellano of the *Orange County Weekly* has argued that media coverage of Latino Smiths and Morrissey fans is "universally condescending, if not outright racist" (3). Nor is the first time that Chicanos have been attacked on the basis of their fandom. One example being the unfortunate comments Howard Stern made in reference to Latino adoration of Tejana diva Selena and the media's general bewilderment at the outpouring of grief in the Latino community (Paredez 71). Both Morrissey fans and Selena fans are examples of what José Esteban Muñoz calls an "affective excess" that marks Latinos as non-normative and therefore un-American, in this casefor caring too much, for the wrong stars (70). Historically, fandomhas beencharacterized as a pathologicaldisorder or susceptibility to violence, but race and ethnicity adds a further layer of stigma and marginality (Jensen).

It is within this context that inexplicably and unintentionally, Morrissey's passionate themes of disappointment, rejection, isolation, and contradiction reach a young Latino audience coming of age in a racialized, marginalized, and impoverished environ of Los Angeles. British "Dark Wave" music—which includes bands like the Smiths, the Cure, and Depeche Mode—featured industrial sounding beats and drums often coupled with dark lyrics coincided with changing demographics and the implementation of devastating neoliberal economic policies in Southern California. The destitute sounds of Thatcher era Manchester, England resonated with Chicano/Latino youth in the barrios and the suburbs of Los Angeles. The majority of Morrissey's Latino fans come from the working-class neighborhoods of South L.A., Orange County and the vast eastern corridor that runs from East Los Angeles into the Inland Empire. Depictions of Southern California as Hollywood glamour and affluent Westside suburbs veil these communities; Sandra Tsing-Loh playfully calls this other L.A. "lesser Los Angeles." While Morrissey's Latino fan base is a remarkably diverse group it can be argued that Morrissey's most

fervent and active followers come from the most segregated, underprivileged and disenfranchised sectors. Over a century of racist policies segregated Chicanos and Latinos into marginalized communities, but sound waves and popular culture penetrated the social and physical barriers of the barrio. Tuning into the radio, buying bootlegged CDs, sharing music, and singing their lives at club nights Chicanos built a dynamic fan culture that appropriated Morrissey and the Smiths as their own music. Consequently, in the early 1990s Chicano/Latino youth across the varied Latino communities ofmetropolitan L.A. built a rabid fan culture complete with its own aesthetic, events, and social groups—a largely independent and corporate free scene.

Utilizing in-depth interviews with Latino fans, field note observations from concerts and music events, and cultural productions by fans this essay investigates how Morrissey's popularity among the Latino community is linked to cultural and economic transformations that produce aesthetic resonances. I argue that Morrissey's popularity in part stems from how hismusic and persona enable Latino fans to re-fashion and re-mix masculinity in a way that then opens up new perspectives on gender, sexuality and social justice. Interviewing young Latino men about their fandom I seek to understand: What does it mean that Latinas/os—especially men—often display an intense and emotionally vulnerable admiration of a fey Englishman? What does this say about supposedly rigid notions of Latino masculinity? How do pop stars embody archetypes of masculinity for listeners? And how do we begin to unpack the racialized discourses around Latino masculinities.

In this essay I will briefly outline the historical relationship between male idols, masculinity, race and class. With this context I explore the rise of Latino Morrissey fandom in Los Angeles in particular and analyze how fans confronted ideas of masculinity through Morrissey's music. Finally, I conclude by considering the wider social and economic context that structures Latino fandom.

Pop Stars, Masculinity and Class

While Latino Morrissey fandom has been portrayed in the press as a bizarre and singular popular culture phenomenon, the appeal of mass media idols must be examined historically from the intersecting influences of class, gender, sexuality, and race and ethnicity. Using an intersectionality framework I analyze three iconic male stars that redefined masculinity in their respective eras (Crenshaw). Examining why particular celebrities are revered in particular times, places and among specific demographics highlights how fans negotiate different forms of masculinity present in any given time and place.

Popular culture stars like James Dean, Elvis Presley and Morrissey not only become media icons but also archetypes of competing masculinities available to the audience.The relationship between the audience and their idol's is most clear during eras of transformation and crisis. The intersection of pop stars, masculinity and class reveals important historical evidence of transformation and crisis in ideas about gender, race, class and sexuality.

One excellent example is James Dean's iconic role of Jim Stark in *Rebel Without a Cause* which has been read as indicative of Cold War era suburbia's malaise and general feeling of emasculation (Mitchell). John Mitchell writes that despite the prosperity and togetherness that suburban living was meant to usher in a spike in rates of alcoholism and abuse of tranquilizers suggests a lingering dissatisfaction in the rapidly expanding 1950s suburbs (132). Despite securing the latest home appliances and conveniences there was a sense that something was lost along the way. One source of unhappiness written about in 1950s magazine's like *Look* and *Playboy* was the belief that white American males had become emasculated and therefore dominated by women and feminine qualities.

The film *Rebel Without a Cause* represents this idea in Jim's father Frank who is portrayed as weak man dominated by his wife, who wears an apron to do domestic chores and has lost any semblance of being "a

red-blooded American man." All of the characters in the film are presented as lacking fathers in an allusion to a lack of rugged masculinity in white middle-class families (Lewis). For the character Plato the lack of a father has led to effeminacy and hinted at homosexuality. Out of frustration with his father Jim Stark attempts to provoke a tough masculine reaction by fighting him. Jim's rebellion without a cause against his middle-class standing, then, can be read as a revolt against a supposed feminized culture.The film solves the masculinity crisis in the denouement when after Plato's death Frank realizes he has failed Jim as a father and finally asserts his patriarchal control over his family (Lewis 94).

Moviegoers idolized James Dean's handsome brooding and his ability to represent a white middle-class male angst in a suburbanized world. John Mitchell notes that notions of American male ruggedness came into direct conflict in the 1950s with a white collar suburbia that saw aggressive masculinity as a threat to the new social order (133). The teenage conflicts that James Dean portrayed of not having your parent's understand you, struggling to fit in at school, falling into delinquency and searching for an "authentic" masculinity echoed many of the sentiments of the audience. With the establishment of teenagers as a consumer group and demographic we also see the rise of teenage laziness, ennui and delinquency as a social concern; James Dean became the face of the anxiety for both teens and parents.

If the middle-class had James Dean to speak to their crises the working-class had Elvis Presley. Much has been written about how Elvis Presley embodied a transgressive sexuality, an androgynous masculinity and liberally borrowed from African-American culture, yet less is written about why this appealed to fans growing up in a post-world war II context. Elvis' music proved to be a powerful layering of sexuality, gender, race and class dynamics in the south. While the success of Elvis is often credited to white audiences Michael Bertrand reminds us that rock's success was actually "a popular biracial working-class phenomenon" (60). Bertrand argues Elvis' ability to tap into southern working-class sensibilities around masculinity, the previously unacknowledged

admiration of black culture and a rapidly changing post-war context made Elvis a star. With the 1950s urbanization of many rural whites, along with changing racial and gender norms, many young listeners turned to music to cope and groove to the transformation and dislocation.

Of particular note is how Elvis, and the rockabilly music explosion he ushered in, adopts black male urban style as way to assert their own masculinity and dignity in rapidly changing postwar context (Bertrand 62).As a truck driver and son of sharecroppers from Mississippi, Elvis and white working-class males in general were largely invisible to southern elites. Although never suffering the same racist scorn aimed at blacks, poor white southerners nonetheless were often excluded from economic opportunities and treated as culturally inferior "hillbillies" that proved the elites' claim to privilege. With little other resources, marginalized and denigrated men like Elvis often turned to popular culture and flashy style to assert their dignity and masculinity. Bertrand notes that the histories of both white and black working-class communities in the south are replete with loud and violent displays of masculinity, what W. E. B. Du Bois called the "the transgression of the poor" (qtd. in Bertrand 67).

What was different about Elvis and his fans way of expressing their masculinity was that they broke with the historical disavowal of African American culture and instead conspicuously embraced black cultural forms, particularly appealing was the hyper masculine bravado of some black subcultures. Scholars have identified how southern black bluesmen, hustlers and jazz musiciansbuilt an oppositional "hipster-trickster" black masculinity that celebrated swagger, boasts, style and virility (Williamson, 59; Kelley, 41; Kreil, 26). Bertrand argues that poor southern males like Elvis found in black male culture an opportunity to enhance their own masculinity even as they reproduced some racist ideas about black masculinity (75). It is thus important to recognize that Elvis' success is not just built around repackaging black music for white audiences but black masculinity as well.

Finally, Morrissey's connections to masculine crises and the working class are well documented in his music and by scholars.

Morrissey's songs have long held a fascination and admiration for neighborhood toughs. Whether he is asking them for help ("Ganglord"), asking for compassion for them ("Sweet and Tender Hooligan," "We'll Let You Know"), lamenting their short tragic life ("First of the Gang to Die") or blasting the middle-class for looking down on working-class men ("Reader Meet Author," "Teenage Dad on His Estate") the working-class lad has long been one of Morrissey's favorite themes to sing. Morrissey's lyrics also frequently describe these hard young men in a language of love and admiration: from "sweet and tender hooligan" to "pretty petty thieves," to "handsome devil." At the very least Morrissey's lyrics disrupt the binaries of "hard" and "soft" or masculine and feminine. Scholars have attributed these lyrics to both homoerotic desire and the admiration of a supposed authentic working-class masculinity these men represent (Power 106). Bannister argues that Morrissey has a masochistic and "eroticized" relationship to working-class masculinity constructed as his Other (152).

As with the economic transformations surrounding the rise of James Dean and Elvis, Martin J. Power notes that the Thatcher era in the U.K. resulted in massive unemployment due to deindustrialization, cuts to the welfare state, and the tearing down of old working-class slums and schools (97-103). The working-class was forever transformed along with its understanding of blue-collar masculinity. Morrissey's songs about rejection, marginalization and humiliation—not to mention references to an idyllic pre-Thatcher England—hit a chord with many young men growing up in the U.K. in the 1980s. Morrissey's ability musically and lyrically to hold a tension between different competing conflicts has especially made him appealing to fans.Indeed, one of Morrissey's enduring aesthetic strategies is to create a tension betweengloomy self-obsessed lyrics and an upbeat musical backing.

Moreover, Morrissey's celebrated and criticized—and many would say carefully calculated—refusal to adhere to gender and sexuality norms has elevated him to cult hero (Woronzoff; Hopps; Hawkins*The British Pop Dandy*; Hubbs). His intense brooding (reminiscent of Dean), perfect pompadour (a la Elvis), a simultaneously supreme narcissism and self-

deprecation and playful masculinity made Morrissey an interestingly enigmatic figure.

Morrissey crafts from his own working-class background and from those of Dean and Elvis a paradoxically glamorous image. Rundowncity blocks, dilapidated bicycles, thrift shop clothes, government-issue glasses and poor haircuts become props of a quiet rebellion against conformity and rigid definitions of identity. If Dean's Jim Stark ultimately wanted a return to "authentic" masculinity, Morrissey mines the aesthetic but seeks no return; he dwells in the loss and ambiguity. Moreover,by openly acknowledging his own fandom of James Dean and Elvis Presley Morrissey places himself in the historical legacy of male stars that were misunderstood in their own time, challenged prevailing norms and did so deliberately through style. These traits made him attractive to fans around the world.

Moz Angeles[1]

Despite some clear differences between Morrissey and his Chicano fan base there are many biographical and contextual parallels to be made between Chicanos and Morrissey such as the fact that in many ways to grow up an Irish Catholic immigrant in a working-class neighborhood in Manchester, as Morrissey did, has some similarities to growing up Chicano in the Eastside of Los Angeles. Indeed, documentarian William E. Jones' film on Chicano/Latino Morrissey fans titled *Is It Really So Strange?*argues that perhaps the strongest connection between Morrissey and Chicanos is the similarity between a destitute post-industrial Manchester and an equally destitute Eastside that extends into the Inland Empire. A fan Jones interviews playfully comments: "I think it's funny that he's so far away from us but he's just like us. There's nothing different, except the fact that he doesn't speak Spanish."

[1]Latino Morrissey fans affectionately re-named Los Angeles to Moz Angeles in honor of their idol

Economic and gender transformations, coupled with a long standing interest in British rock music made Morrissey's music an appealing site to make sense of life's ambiguities for Mexican-American and other Latino men coming of age in Southern California in the 1980s and 1990s. As in the U.K., Southern California was undergoing deindustrialization, cuts to the welfare state along with the vilification of immigrant communities. Southern California since the 1970s is also in the midst of a transformation in the economy and its demographics. Beginning in the 1970s heavy manufacturing jobs in industries like aerospace and automobiles began to move overseas or to other parts of the country. Gaye Theresa Johnson notes that by "1988 not one of the auto, rubber, or steel plants was left standing" (129). The deindustrialization of the southland profoundly weakened middle-class communities, forced an exodus of African-Americans and contributed to the growing demand of labor from Latin America. By the 1990s a large cohort of American born Latinos rapidly changed the demographics of schools, workplaces and cities. As of 2014, Latinos comprise the majority of Los Angeles County and have surpassed European Americans statewide (Lopez).

At home, many of these young men confrontedrigid views of masculinity, while their exposure to American culture or acculturation to U.S. norms provided other models of masculinity that conflicted with the home culture. Whether it's the figure of the Latin macho, the *pachuco*, or the cowboy Latino tropes of masculinity emphasize self-reliance, virility and stoicism. Morrissey's vulnerability and gender play provided an ambiguous model of masculinity during an uncertain time personally and economically.

"Learning to Listen and Listening to Learn"[2]

I collected a total of eight in-depth semi-structured interviews from Morrissey fans in addition to a total of 12 (5 video interviews, 7 audio interviews) short interviews at a Morrissey concert in Los Angeles. The data collection spanned the years of 2009 and 2010. The data collection process was guided by apost-colonial Chicana/o cultural studies theoretical framework which cultural critic Gaspar de Alba has labeled the "alter-Native grain" that emphasizes popular culture as oppositional resource and contextualizes Chicano/Latino culture as a distinct yet not subordinate part of American popular culture.My use of semi-structured interviews channels the work of Charles Briggs on interviewing techniques and challenges. I am particularly influenced by Briggs' astute assertion that social science research takes the interview process for granted and that "What is said is seen as a reflection of what is "out there" rather than as an interpretation which is jointly produced by the interviewer and respondent"(3). On this note, Briggs adds that the interviewer's process cannot be to extract "the truth" out of the vessels called respondents but rather the task calls for "interpreting the subtle and intricate intersection of factors that converge to form a particular interview" (22). In my interviews I focus on the dialogical process of interviews by asking respondents to reflect on their fandom and theorize its meanings. Furthermore, by listening to music during the interviews with the respondents I found that I disrupted the mechanical process of extracting answers or "truth" and instead co-constructed a space from which to mutually explore feelings, memories and popular culture theories.

The goal was to use music to trigger memories, foment discussion or focus on specific songs or lyrics. Overall, the music collection proved

[2]I borrow this phrase from George Lipsitz's "Listening to Learn and Learning to Listen: Popular Culture, Cultural Theory, and American Studies."*American Quarterly* 42 (1990): 615-636.

useful as scrolling through the song titles alone proved to be useful for interviewees. In one interview, a fan played music I did not have from his cell phone. Hearing the music allowed a more in-depth conversation about the feelings and memories triggered by the song and it also created an affective bond between the interviewer and interviewee. I felt a growing kinship through talking about Morrissey and common experiences. As a popular music aficionado I have always felt an important basis for friendship is the shared affinity for the same popular music and in this case my own Morrissey fandom responded to the sentiments expressed in the interviews. As we listened to music I felt a bond was created between interviewer and interviewee which facilitated trust, intimacy and an open discussion.

All of the in-depth interviews surveyed young Mexican-Americans or other Latin American origin fans between the ages of 21 and 33 and representing various areas of Southern California. All of the respondents claimed to come from working-class backgrounds and were at least partially fluent in Spanish. All of the respondents were at the time of the interview either in college or recent college graduates. The college experience, as will be noted further below, did make a difference in how they articulated their fandom for Morrissey. Their college education exposed them to a critical academic vocabulary and a social awareness of race, gender, class and sexuality issues.

The in-depth interviews ran from one and a half hours to two hours. The interview analyses that follow are based on my discussions with, León Villa, Moz005, Eric, and Pedro. All the names are pseudonyms selected by the interviewees.

"I'm Not The Man You Think I Am"

The persistent question in the mind of many music journalists is why do Latinos like Morrissey at all (See, Arellano; Aitch; Torres)? This need by the media to make sense of Latino Morrissey fandom and account for difference has unfortunately led many a journalist down a

slippery slope of stereotypes, mockery and latent racism. The following description from the *Houston Press* exemplifies the pitfalls:

> And now there's the Mexican-American Morrissey craze. In Morrissey's adopted hometown of Los Angeles, Morrissey Mania among young Hispanics is almost religious. There's a booming trade in his relics—autographs trade for $60 and up, even those of dubious authenticity, and some even ascribe mystical powers to him. (It's said that the 1986 Smiths album *The Queen Is Dead* and other recordings foretold Princess Diana's death in 1997.) Vintage Chevy Impalas roll down the East L.A. streets, full of sinister-looking gangbanger types, and in place of English-script "Lopez" or "Rodriguez" stickers in the rear window are ones that read "Morrissey." There's a Hispanic Morrissey tribute band there called the Sweet and Tender Hooligans, and one Latin Morrissey fan there has a back-length tattoo of an iconic shot of a slouching James Dean with Morrissey's head. (Lomax)

Unsurprisingly, many fans have taken offense to this coverage and its stereotypical assumptions and belittling undertones. The largest online fan forum for Morrissey fans includes threads such as “StigmaAgainst Hispanic Morrissey Fans”where Latinos report feelingostracized by the media and non-Latino fans.Many fans felt that the media treated Latino Morrissey fans as “aliens” who inexplicably follow Morrissey. Indeed, this “alien-ness” (non-human, non-citizen, and non-consumer) permeates the media’s perception and feeds a discourse that exoticized and ridiculed fans and their ethnic origins.

Examples from news sources like the *Houston Press* also demonstrate how the media’s deficient knowledge about this fan culture and Latinos in general make them reliant on stereotypes. In the above example, we can identify stereotypes of Mexicans as superstitious, quixotic and dangerous bandidos. Many of these stereotypes can be traced back to the American conquest of the U.S. Southwest (Nericcio).Other

media outlets have used two primary modes of representing Latino Morrissey fans: The "gangbanger" and the just-arrived immigrant—the two most common media stereotypes about Latinos in the U.S. For Instance, British fashion magazine *Dazed and Confused* featured an article on Latino Morrissey fans titled "Smiths Crips" a play on an English snack food and Los Angeles street gangs. Also, In the documentary *The Importance of Being Morrissey* produced by the BBC the Latino Morrissey "phenomenon" is discussed accompanied by shots of recent immigrants in East Los Angeles, when in fact, Morrissey's Latino fans tend to be young Latino youth who are English dominant and hail from the suburbs.

Many of these media reports on also rely on Latino masculinity caricaturesto mock a supposed disconnect between young "macho" Latino men and the effeminate and presumably homosexual Morrissey. The above quote from the *Houston Press* that described male fans as "sinister-looking gangbanger types" alludes to this trope. This discourse is ultimately a critique of their masculinity that marks these young men as bizarre in their musical taste and men who have failed to achieve a "natural" Latino machismo by being tainted by Morrissey's queerness.

The question of gender and sexuality has long been a source of controversy for Morrissey as journalists have repeatedly tried to infer and cajole a confession of his queerness (See, Henke). Meanwhile, Morrissey has claimed to be a prophet for the "fourth gender," which appears to allude to a fourth option from the normalized categories of male, female, and gender invert (male in a female body, or vice versa) (Hubbs 269). Early in his career Morrissey also publicly opted for a fourth option in his sexual orientation in claiming to reject heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bi-sexuality, for celibacy. Although Morrissey no longer claims celibacy the desire to resist categorization and fixed definitions remains an essential part of his star persona (Egan).

Given the amount of attention on Morrissey's gender performance and sexual orientation, I asked fans to discuss whether or not Morrissey's gender and sexual orientation was important to them and whether or not it had influenced their own ideas about gender and sexuality. Universally,

the fans I spoke with, who all identified as heterosexual, claimed that Morrissey's gender performance and sexuality mattered little to their fandom, what they cared about, they claimed, was the music and how it made them feel. Yet, most fans did admit that if they had to guess they would categorize Morrissey as queer. Although these fans accepted Morrissey's sexuality—whatever it may be—others around them scorned Morrissey's ambiguity. His "queerness" became a stigma to some fans, Patricia recalled classmates taunting her for wearing a tee shirt that featured a reclining, shirtless Morrissey. Similarly, Eric recognized that "Morrissey was always dogged as the queer guy." I was particularly interested to hear what male fans had to say about Morrissey's gender performance and the related discussion of masculinity and sexuality.

The male fans I interviewed reasoned that Morrissey subverted established gender roles by, for example, twirling flowers on stage, performing in an effeminate manner and using vague lyrics such as pronouns that defy gender roles or refuse to specify. With some important caveats the men interviewed stated that Morrissey's music expanded their horizon of possible gender expressions, made them more aware and accepting of gender differences and allowed them to more freely express their emotions.

When I asked Pedro how he felt about Morrissey's gender expression when he first started listening to Morrissey he described being unsure how to interpret what he saw. However, Pedro felt that this was also how he developed a social consciousness towards gender and "queer" issues:

> I was confused why he does this stuff. Why are his lyrics like this? Why does he play with gender? He also does it in his performance. I remember the first time I saw that he carried flowers in his back pocket and wove them around and how he dances is very effeminate. It introduced me to that and gave me self-empowerment and just expanded my mind coming from a catholic background. I grew up with very judgmental elders. I can tell you of this time I was at Kmart

> (discount department store) and saw these two *cholo* attired (clothing associated with Latino street gangs) guys holding hands and I was with my *tia*(aunt) and my mom and they noticed it and said 'oh my god.' And I knew as soon as we got back into the car they were going to start talking about it. The whole time we were paying I was trying to think of something to say [in defense of the men] even though I knew I was going to get into trouble for sure, I might get hit and I probably won't go out for another week. It [Morrissey's music] got me to stand up for it, it doesn't matter. And I think it influenced me in the classes I take. I've taken gender classes and I'm taking a queer communities class right now. It's just getting me more informed so I can stand up for it—as an ally, not that they can't do it for themselves.

I followed up on this comment by asking him if Morrissey's "effeminate gestures" influenced him in anyway and what they meant to him:

> It was definitely different. Dressing the way that I did and seeing how he dressed and looking up to him it kinda broke down those gender boundaries for me. And seeing him come out waving flowers and dancing the way he did, it furthered my understanding of things. You know what: what's wrong with it? Why do people see something wrong with it? So it actually does change the way I see things. I had some person come up to me and say 'oh you listen to the guy that swings flowers' and I said yea so?

The fans I spoke with unanimously celebrated Morrissey's gender "play" and felt that the rigid gender roles and often homophobic ideas they were socialized with were countered by what they learned in Morrissey's music. Eric admitted: "I was homophobic, but it's a learned habit. Growing up having a queer older cousin we would say *sabemosquees* [we know that he *is*]. You would make fun of that but then you grow up." Growing up, for Eric, involved having queer friends in high school and college, learning

about gender and sexuality in college, and being active in political movements for the equality of all people.

León likewise celebrated Morrissey's gender expression and admired Morrissey as a male figure:

> I think it's great. He's fine with it being [alludes to androgyny]…I don't want to say masculine. I want to say a man as in he has a penis so maybe this is like what in a better place a person with a penis should be acting like. I see him as a man but not the Hollywood male, the "American" male, the stereotypical white European male. It's to me a more respectable male. Morrissey makes it okay for a man to be vulnerable. So that is something that I want to identify with.

Referencing his earlier comments about Morrissey representing an alternative to the archetypical white male figure León admires Morrissey's masculinity as being more "respectable." Here he alludes to Morrissey being a role model for new definitions of masculinity liberated from oppressive hierarchies and binaries.

Resisting "Latino Machismo"

With the male fans I also presented the popular media idea that Latino males are bizarrely drawn to Morrissey because they are emotional repressed or because of a latent homoerotic desire and asked them to comment. While many fans felt there may be some truth behind the claim they also had cautionary words to express about the stereotypical representation of Latino males and the Latino community in general.

Speaking against the idea that Morrissey's music represents the only emotional outlet for males Eric explained that even before Morrissey entered the picture other artists he listened to pushed against the boundaries of normative gender roles. His earliest example referenced growing up listening to Mexican singer Juan Gabriel who he described as

feminine but being able to sing the bravado filled Mexican ballads known as *ranchera* songs better than anyone. He also described the gender bending styles of bands like Soda Stereo, David Bowie and "hair metal" bands like Poison. "With Morrissey it was like maybe he is [queer] but what does it matter it was more about my how the music made me feel and how I conceptualized it for myself" he added. Eric's point about Juan Gabriel's ambiguity also underscores that a queer critique of traditional gender roles is possible and already present from within the Latino community and not only from a cultural outsider like Morrissey.

León also wanted to challenge the characterization that only Latino males practiced machismo. American media has long portrayed Latinos as emblems ofsexism (Ramirez Berg; Romero). Indeed, the Spanish word machismo has entered the lexicon to refer to all sexist men but originates as a description of Latin American origin men.

> "For Latino men I guess you could say the whole macho thing—which I have a hard time with because white men do the same thing. Because I'm brown I don't think I'm pushed more to be a masculine figure than a white dude. Its assumed that we want to be machos or are forced to be machos when white guys are just as much, maybe in a different way."

León argued that the reasons Latino males enjoy listening to Morrissey could be said of any male fan, across race and ethnicity, looking for a different expression of masculinity.

With these critical caveats noted I asked if Morrissey did allow Latino men to more fully express their emotions; all the fans agreed that listening to the Smiths and Morrissey did open up a momentary space of greater emotional freedom. Moz005 commented on his own experience and theorized about why other men might enjoy the music too:

> Personally I had trouble… I wasn't always able to express myself or my feelings. Or be in touch with myself or with my feminine side or whatever. But something about his music does make me feel like hey I could talk about things without having to put on

> this facade of being a macho man or something like that. Music does kinda help; maybe it's his tone of voice when he is singing. I'm not gonna say feminine but a lot of people associate Morrissey as being gay—because he's so secretive about his life—which has never been proven. Because of his mannerisms on stage or the way he carries himself. I've never personally cared for that cause I just love the guy for the music, for him you know, but that's probably why men do listen to his music and you feel somewhat in touch with him or his songs. It probably would make it easier for them to express themselves and be able to get in touch with themselves more.

Eric also believed men could more fully express themselves through Morrissey and added that concert spaces and being with other fans allowed male fans a temporary reprieve from strict gender roles. In particular Eric was struck by the now common place rush of male fans scaling the concert stage to embrace their idol:

> With Morrissey you are allowed to be happy, more effeminate. You're allowed to show your emotions. They [Latino men] are not allowed to be effeminate or show their other side. They're repressed. Emotionally repressed and now they are finally allowed to [express themselves]. Specifically, in a dark room where you know some of the Morrissey fans are like you so you are allowed to do that too. But if your family saw you they'd say "*está loco estecabrón*" [this dude is crazy]. The band allows you to do that, the venue and the audience. It's a play; everybody is in on the joke.

The interviews further demonstrate that popular music is a space where gender relations play out and where norms are transgressed, however fleeting, and new identities are explored (Espinoza; Bragg and McFarland; Schippers; Vargas; Perez). This phenomenon, of course, has a long historical trajectory in the Chicano community. Historian Vicki Ruiz argues that young Mexican women growing up in Los Angeles in the 1920s found an alternative to the strict gender roles of the family and the

church in the "flapper" culture of the era (67). Being able to witness and consume an alternative way of life lent the young women's choices an "aura of legitimacy," according to Ruiz.

In the 1950s and 1960s the Chicano community was a key cross-cultural audience of rhythm and blues and early rock music. Black R&B singer Brenton Wood performed long after he had any hits on the radio due to an extremely loyal Chicano community in East L.A. who supported him for a long period of time attending shows, purchasing his music and making requests on the "oldies" station (Reyes and Waldman xx). Moreover, Chicano rock legend Ritchie Valens earned the moniker the "Little Richard of the San Fernando Valley" for emulating the swagger and sound of R&B and rock pioneer (Reyes and Waldman 38). These fans looked to black masculinity and sound to define the soundtracks of their lives. As part of this trajectory, Morrissey fans in the 1990s confronted gender and racial boundaries and experimented with different expressions of masculinity via listening choices and effects.

What these fans articulated also echoes recent scholarly and creative work that seeks to problematicize rigid notions of Latino Masculinity. The anthology *Muy Macho: Latino Men Confront Their Manhood* showcases personal reflections from writers and scholars as they come to terms with machismo has shaped their sense of self. Similarly, research by Gabriel S. Estrada and Alfredo Mirandé interrogate the patriarchal binds and mythology of Latino masculinity and suggest new understandings of masculinity are needed whether they come from pre-Hispanic traditions as Estrada suggests or a grounded praxis of Latino experience as advocated by Mirandé.

Mexican poet and essayist Octavio Paz theorized that the colonized history of Mexico had produced in Mexican men a symbolic hardened mask of masculinity that never cracks except in moments of revelry, violence or the mutual surrender of true love (42). Based on the interview data Latino Morrissey fans remove, if only briefly, and experiment with their masks through reveling in the vulnerability and aesthetic bleakness of Morrissey's music. And just as Paz grounded his psychoanalysis of

masculinity in the historical circumstances of Mexico we must likewise return to the context of Latino listening.

Conclusion: "No, It's Not Like Any Other Love."

Latino Morrissey fan culture speaks to the unique characteristics of growing up Latino in the U.S. Southwest and the social transformation underway in the 1990s. For a large cohort of Latinos growing up in Southern California their admiration for Morrissey was unlike any other pop idol love. In the song "Hand in Glove" Morrissey sings of a covert love affair: "No it's NOT like any other love/this one's different/because it's us!" The strong personal identifications made by fans and the emotional nature of the music generated in many fans an intimate feeling of being personally understood by Morrissey. A fan's comment of "I think it's funny that he's so far away from us but he's just like us. There's nothing different, except the fact that he doesn't speak Spanish" exemplifies this relationship.

For the young men that participated in this study their relationship with Morrissey's music, and its play of masculine/feminine images, expanded their understanding of masculinity and gender non-conformity. Moreover, the emotional vulnerability of the music connected the men to their emotions in ways that did not seem possible in other music or other parts of their lives. Finally, this critical re-examination inspired more tolerant and accepting perspectives of various forms of social queerness. Morrissey's music and persona represents a vehicle for deconstructing rigid notions of masculinity imposed by Latino and American culture. But they do not become clones; Morrissey's gender ambivalence is used as an archetype to explore other types of Latino masculinities that can expand how Latinos and non-Latinos view Latino masculinity.

The lyrics also speak to the unique context that made Morrissey's relationship to his Latino fan base possible.It is not a coincidence that Morrissey's music resonates with Latino fans in a moment of economic and cultural transformation. The deindustrialization of Southern

California's heavy industries, cuts to the welfare safety net, criminalization of youth of color and the vilification of immigrant communities through state ballot initiatives such as proposition 187which sought to deny basic social services to undocumented immigrants made it a difficult time to be a young Latino. These structural factors also have cultural impacts.

The rise of the service economy meant many men had to take on "feminized" service labor jobs and the stagnation of family income meant more women joined the workforce. Globalization has shifted the historical pattern of men migrating to find work; instead women have now become the dominant workforce of industries around the globe (Sassen).This shift is also evident in Latino communities as the bulk of low skilled jobs have become domestic work and service jobs preferring the gendered labor of women to fill these positions (Romero*Maid in the U.S.A.*; Hondagneu-Sotelo). In a culture where men are traditionally the primary income earners these changes destabilized gender norms within Latino families and some men may feel emasculated. Scholar D. Inés Casillas has noted that this gender anxiety is often visible and audible in popular culture like radio programming that revels in hypermasculinity. Under these conditions many Latinos looked to build different models of masculinity from Latino, Mexican and American Popular culture. For many music fans Morrissey provided an emotionally vulnerable masculinity steeped in working-class images and outsider angst that sounded familiar, sounded irresistible.

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