Yo También Soy Mariachi: All-Female Ensembles & Gender Representation in Mariachi Music

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Abstract

Despite the fact that mariachi music has become the international symbol of Mexican culture, the subtle implications of mariachi music as a gendered practice often go unnoticed by audiences. As all-female mariachi ensembles grow in popularity, issues of gender inequality within this typically male-dominated field arise. In order to better understand the gender inequality within this musical genre, this review draws from three different strands of knowledge and looks at the intersection of the historical development of mariachi music, gender representation in music, and cultural notions of femininity and masculinity within song lyrics. Examining these aspects of mariachi performance reveals how the performers represent gender norms through their choice in traje (suit) and interpretation of song lyrics. Further research can help elucidate the many ways in which female musicians challenge stereotypes and make mariachi music their own.

Introduction

It is a typical night at the Cielito Lindo Restaurant. The dining area is filled with excited patrons leisurely enjoying their food and each other’s company as they wait for the show to begin. Suddenly, the stage lights go on. The sounds of a busy restaurant: silverware clinking, customers conversing, and cooks shouting orders, all begin to dissipate as anticipation rises. Finally, the mariachi musicians appear on stage and the room is filled to the brim with the boisterous sounds of mariachi music. Throughout the night, the audience members shout, sing, and are even brought to tears by the sounds of a song that brings back old memories. Yet, what tends to surprise, inspire, and sometimes even upset the audience the most is that the musicians on stage are all women. This is because men, not women, are typically thought of as mariachi musicians. Although women have been involved in mariachi performance as singers and instrumentalists for years, the prevailing image of a mariachi ensemble is of all male musicians (Sobrino 2003).

Audiences everywhere recognize mariachi music as a social practice and visual performance. All over the world, people are introduced to Mexican culture through these sights and sounds that for many elicit emotions of pride and celebration. The stereotypical imagery invoked by audiences of loud festive music performed by men dressed in Charro outfits (traditional Mexican cowboy outfits) is connected to the entertainment aspects of mariachi performance. The contexts in which mariachi musicians perform are usually family gatherings and festive cultural celebrations where contentious issues like race and gender are temporarily sanitized and packaged as entertainment. However, the complex nuances of mariachi music as a gendered practice often go unnoticed. This is because, as McClary (1991) writes, the audience has normalized the symbolic meanings present in mariachi performance. They have internalized and taken at face value what the performance is telling them about Mexican identity. As more and more women engage with mariachi music, the gendered aspects of music begin to surface. This discussion aims to understand the historical, social, and cultural contexts that female mariachi musicians are an active part of in order to break down the barriers that make female mariachi musicians the exception instead of the norm.

Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles (Mariachi Queen of Los Angeles) is one of the country’s all female mariachi ensembles. Whether they are performing at the Cielito Lindo Restaurant or on tour, their performances exemplify the power of music. This power stems not just from the reactions of their audience, but also from their political and social identities as women. The existence of all female mariachi ensembles is generally unexplored by music scholars (Perez 2002). Yet, their presence within this genre provides an opportunity to explore how history, social norms, constructions of gender, and identity are transmitted, transformed, or challenged through mariachi music. Music after all is not apolitical or ahistorical as it is often thought to be (McClary 1991). It has the ability to construct and reproduce social norms which vary throughout cultures (McClary 1991). It is able to do this in all sorts of ways. The spaces in which it is played, who is allowed to perform, how it is performed, and the lyrical content to name a few, give us insight into different aspects of culture (McClary 1991; Soto Flores 2012). For example, the lyrical content of two popular songs when analyzed gives us insight into representations of gender in Mexican culture as articulated through music (Jaquez 2002; McClary 1991).

The nature of this inquiry is an interdisciplinary one. The literature reviewed in this discussion draws from three different strands of knowledge. The academic work focusing on female mariachi musicians is limited. Yet, when combined with research done by Chicana scholars on Chicana identity and the work done by music scholars on music and gender, the subtle nuances of mariachi performance begin to come to light. This research will explore the history of mariachi music and women’s roles within it. The issue of gender and gender performativity as discussed by scholars is reviewed and their application to mariachi music is explored. Lastly, in order to contextualize the presence of women within this
genre of music, the notions of masculinity and femininity in Mexican culture are examined through a lyrical analysis of two songs. At the most underlying level, this research aims to continue the discussion on gender as related to mariachi music. In particular, how mariachi music articulates notions of masculinity and femininity and how these notions in turn prevent women from being accepted as mariachi musicians are the questions this study aims to explore.

Literature Review

Mariachi History
The state of Jalisco lies in central Mexico, bordered by the Pacific Ocean to the west and the states of Aguascalientes and Guanajuato to the east. At the center of this state is the town of Cocula, the birthplace of mariachi (Rafael 1983; Sheehy 2006). The precise origins of the mariachi in its current form are not entirely known, but its initial formation as a musical group began in the eighteen hundreds (Rafael 1983; Sheehy 2006). Like many aspects of Mexican society, music in Mexico is a result of syncretism, the melding together of distinct cultures (Rafael 1983). Native musical traditions, Spanish and African influences are all present in mariachi (Rafael 1983; Sheehy 2006). Different instruments like the guitar, violin, trumpet and harp were introduced by the Spanish as well as different poetic and rhythmic forms adding a more European centered sound to the music (Sheehy 2006). African derived rhythms are also present as a result of the influence of the many enslaved Africans who were brought to Mexico by the Spanish (Sheehy 2006). These different rhythmic and poetic forms are what make up the mariachi repertoire of today (Jaquez 2002; Sheehy 2006). They make up the five most notable types of songs performed by mariachis; the sones, polcas, huapangos, boleros and rancheras (Jaquez 2002; Sheehy 2006). Each different type is recognized by its unique rhythmic organization, tempo, meter, and lyrical content (Jaquez 2002; Sheehy 2006). The subjects of the songs are often romantic and speak of “lost love, love’s injustice, women’s beauty, and regional or national pride” (Jaquez 2002, 171). As Jaquez (2002) notes these lyrical themes are prominently sung in what she calls a “male-centered voice” making women the subject of a song (171). All of these elements, particularly the male voice as the legitimate mariachi sound, make up the mariachi ensemble that most audiences would recognize today (Jaquez 2002).

As this brief look at the history of mariachi has shown, music, like all aspects of culture, is not static. It has been subject to change as musicians, audience members, the Mexican government, and women negotiate and articulate its meanings in different ways. There have been many women throughout history who have contributed to mariachi (Perez and Sobrino 2005). The fact that their contributions are not as well-known tells us that the presence of women in mariachi is not one of total inclusion. Rather tensions exist between the female musicians who want to enact their own agency and the normalized forms of gender representation in mariachi which dictate what a female mariachi should look and sound like.

Gender Representation in Mariachi Music
In order to understand how gender is represented in mariachi music and how women mariachis perform their gender on stage, we must first understand what is meant by gender. Conventional definitions of gender distinguish it from sex on the well-known premise that gender is socially constructed and learned by individuals while sex is biologically determined (Butler 1990; West and Zimmerman 1987). Yet, there are issues with this premise because it fails to account for the many ways in which the acceptable criteria for either category are often interconnected in the sense that sex is as influenced by social structures as gender (Butler 1990; West and Zimmerman 1987). West and Zimmerman (1987) give the example of motherhood. The ability to give birth is strictly a function of the female body yet, there are social structures like the labor force and the nuclear family, which attribute the nurturing role of mothering strictly to women (West and Zimmerman 1987). In this sense, biological sex (the ability to give birth), is not easily distinguished from gender and perceived gender roles (motherhood). This distinction between sex and gender is also problematic because it constructs a dichotomy between only two genders, male and female. Despite the many scholars who have refuted this binary, the metaphor of separate spheres still persists among popular discourse (Kerber 1988). This metaphor has been used of mestizaje that the mariachi we know today was created (Mulholland 2007; Najera-Ramirez 1994; Sheehy 2006). The ideology of mestizaje argued that the melding of the Spanish European race and the Indigenous made the Mexican people, what Jose Vasconcelos termed, a ‘cosmic race’ (Mulholland 2007, 252). This new ethnic and racial identity was promoted by the Mexican elite in an attempt to unite the Mexican people and through the decades poets, artists, actors and musicians contributed to the creation of this national myth (Mulholland 2007; Najera-Ramirez 1994). By the early nineteen hundreds mariachi groups were performing for the Mexican president and visiting international officials (Sheehy 2006, 17). Mariachi music was also recorded for the first time, transforming the mariachi sound from a local custom to a symbolic representation of Mexican culture co-opted by the upper class (Sheehy 2006).
to define separate roles for men and women (Kerber 1988). It posits that women and men occupy different spaces because of their different socializations; men occupy the public and women occupy the private or domestic sphere (Kerber 1988). However, as Kerber (1988) notes, there are many issues with the use of this rhetorical metaphor because its proponents have failed to holistically examine the mechanisms which produce these inequalities and have limited their analysis to include only the experiences of white middle class women (Kerber 1988).

This same dichotomy has often been assumed in the field of music (Post 1994). It is commonly argued that women are usually confined to the domestic sphere and musically, this means that most women sing or perform at home for their children or other family members (Post 1994). In contrast, the public sphere of men’s world allows them more free time to dedicate to music and become accepted as musical performers (Post 1994). Post (1994) defines the private sphere of women as a broad social space which revolves around domestic activities such as child rearing and responsibilities during important family centered events. The public sphere involves activities outside of the household with people who are not necessarily family members and men that are typically in leadership positions (Post 1994). This metaphor of separate spheres however continues to be less useful when looking at women’s and men’s musical traditions cross culturally (Post 1994). In many different cultural traditions women are very commonly involved in public musical performances (Post 1994). The spaces that women and men occupy are much more integrated than they may seem. As Post (1994) writes, “these spheres exist on a continuum rather than as part of a clear dichotomy” (36). For female mariachi musicians the distinction between public and private spaces is often problematic.

Each time the members of Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles perform they are performing more than just the music; they are performing for the audience the role of a Mexican woman (Soto Flores 2012; West and Zimmerman 1987). With their movements, gestures, feminine outfits and constant interaction with the audience they are “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987, 126). West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender is something we all “do” every day, all the time during our interactions with other people. We perform gender through a series of “socially guided” actions and interactions, which express to others either our masculinity or femininity (West and Zimmerman 1987, 126). Thus, gender is not just something culturally determined; it is an ongoing set of actions and metaphorical images that we are constantly performing (Soto Flores 2012; West and Zimmerman 1987).

Soto Flores (2012) further elucidates this point by examining how female mariachi musicians metaphorically perform their own interpretation of the mariachi image through their different rendition of the traditional traje de charro or the typical mariachi suit. The typical mariachi suit is modeled after the suits worn by Mexican cowboys, which in turn are a symbol of the ideal Mexican male (Mulholland 2007; Najera-Ramirez 1994). As Mulholland (2007) writes, the national myth of mariachi, through a combination of symbols and metaphors perpetuates what she calls the “hegemonic representation of Mexican identity as mestizo, macho and rural” (251). In essence, Mexican notions of masculinity and what it means to be an ideal Mexican man are symbolically connected to Mariachi aesthetics. After all, the typical Mariachi musician is male, mestizo, and by wearing the traditional Charro uniform derived from the Mexican cowboy, connected to an idealized Mexican rural ranch life (Mulholland 2007; Najera-Ramirez 1994). Female musicians have been redefining the image of the mariachi through their choice of suits (Soto Flores 2012). In her discussion of female mariachi musicians Soto Flores (2012) comes across a variety of all-female groups who choose to divert from the now standardized full length skirts and perform wearing shorter skirts, dresses and even pants. The agency with which these all-female groups redefine the charro outfit reminds us that social norms are not static. Women are continuously challenging and redefining this musical genre. However, it is important to note that in Soto Flores’ discussion what was considered appropriately feminine did not change. The female groups she discussed all still wanted to look feminine and never challenged the assumption that this meant clothes worn by women like skirts and dresses or that colors like pink and purple were more appropriate for a feminine look. Their gender and sexuality is still put on display, packaged and normalized for the audience to consume (Perez 2002). As Perez notes, “the contemporary female mariachi usually conforms to the gender expectations characteristic of traditional Mexican culture” (2002, 156). This is seen in the feminized charro suits, “how a female handles her body on stage”, the male voice as the “measure [of] what is legitimately mariachi” and in the instruments they are encouraged to play (Perez 2002, 156). The masculine voice as the reference from which all performances are judged remains the norm. The all-female ensembles are expected to sing “feminine” songs in “feminine” keys. The way in which a female singer conveys song lyrics and the way audiences interpret her performance becomes a site for contention (Perez 2002). The audience is judging her performance on how well it compares to the “legitimate” masculine sound of mariachi. Perez’s point highlights the hegemonic structures that remain.

History of Women in Mariachi

Although, throughout the history of mariachi it was common to see a female vocalist accompanied by all male instrumentalists, the presence of all-female
groups is thought to be rather recent (Jaquez 2002). Mariachi’s connection to the Charro, the Mexican cowboy as a symbol of Mexican manliness, affirmed its place as a male dominated field (Jaquez 2002; Najera-Ramirez 1994; Soto Flores 2012). Socially constructed notions of femininity in Mexican society on the other hand, depicted a woman as a passive audience member being serenaded, the subject of the song, but never a mariachi herself (Jaquez 2002; Perez 2002). However, as Perez and Sobrino’s (2005) research on the history of women in mariachi music shows, women have been actively participating in mariachi as musicians for decades. Perez and Sobrino are both mariachi musicians themselves and have worked together to document the history of women in mariachi. In their research, Perez and Sobrino (2005) make an important distinction between the female mariachi musician who is an instrumentalist in the ensemble and the ranchera singer who is accompanied by a mariachi ensemble, but is not a mariachi herself. There are many popular male and female artists in Mexico who are known for their particular skill as ranchera singers, like Lucero, Vicente Fernandez, etc., but they are not considered mariachi musicians (Perez and Sobrino 2005). However, female instrumentalists have been in mariachi ensembles since the 1940s (Perez and Sobrino 2005). Carlota Noriega was the director of the first all-female mariachi group formed in the mid-1940s in Mexico City called Mariachi Las Coronelas (Perez and Sobrino 2005). In subsequent decades, other groups began to form in Mexico; Mariachi Las Adelitas and Mariachi Michoacán in the 1950s, Mariachi Las Estrellas de Mexico in the 1960s in Mexico City, and Las Perlas Tapatias from Guadalajara, Jalisco in 1989 (Perez and Sobrino 2005). In the U.S. all-female mariachi groups began forming in the 1970s and their presence in mariachi performance circuits rapidly increased throughout the 1990s (Perez and Sobrino 2005). Individual women like Rebecca Gonzales and Laura Sobrino have been playing as the only women in all-male ensembles since the 1970s but all-female groups like Mariachi Las Generals from Los Angeles and Mariachi Estrella from Topeka, Kansas formed to prove that women could play as well as men could (Perez and Sobrino 2005). These women and the many more generations of female mariachi musicians continue to shape the history of women in mariachi.

In the United States compared to Mexico, women’s involvement was influenced by the different historical circumstances women of Mexican descent faced. In her research on female mariachi, Jaquez (2002) discusses one of the major differences amongst mariachi groups on both sides of the border. The difference is that women are more likely to be included as musicians in the U.S. (Jaquez 2002). Clark (2005), Jaquez (2002), Perez (2002) and Sheehy (2006) suggest that this is perhaps a result of the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s when mariachi music was celebrated as a symbol of Mexican culture and self-determination by the thousands of young Mexican-Americans living in the U.S. This revival of Chicano pride prompted the creation of youth mariachi groups in high schools and university campuses in California and throughout the Southwest (Clark 2005; Jaquez 2002; Perez 2002; Sheehy 2006). Since then young women have been able to learn and participate in school programs, workshops and conferences dedicated to mariachi performance (Clark 2005; Jaquez 2002; Perez 2002; Sheehy 2006). Because of these programs women instrumentalists and all-female groups are more common in the U.S. (Jaquez, 2002). Nevertheless amongst the top paid show groups all-male ensembles are still the norm (Jaquez 2002). In the U.S. it is Nati Cano’s Mariachi Los Camperos and Jose Hernandez’s Mariachi Sol de Mexico that dominate the higher paying show group circuit (Jaquez 2002; Sheehy 2006). Mariachi Reyna is one of the few exceptions, but it is important to note that they too are directed by Jose Hernandez (Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles Homepage).

### Intersectionality and Chicana Identity

It is important to highlight the socially distinct circumstances faced by Chicanas in the United States. For centuries in America, women actively worked to shape their families and communities as mothers, workers, leaders and activists (Ruiz 2008). Women playing music is an extension of this tradition of involvement in their communities (Vargas 2012). Historians however typically ignore their stories and diminish the impact of their many contributions (Ruiz 2008; Vargas 2012). The agency with which Mexican women lived their lives and navigated through hegemonic social structures impacted all aspects of life in America (Ruiz 2008). Take for example the story of the Chicana Singer Rita Vidaurri. She was born in San Antonio Texas and grew up listening to Spanish language radio in the 1920s and 30s (Vargas 2010). As a teenager trying to pursue her dream of becoming a singer she struggled to gain the acceptance of her father, who like most at the time believed that young women did not belong on a public stage (Vargas 2010). Vidaurri challenged gender norms by performing in places not deemed acceptable for young women in Texas (Vargas 2010, 4). She established a musical career in Mexico City and became one of the most well-known female singers of the 1940s and 50s (Vargas 2010).

Vidaurri’s life is a perfect example of the role of intersectionality in the lives of female musicians. Her identity as a working class Mexican-American woman had a great impact on her music and performative style (Vargas 2010). Feminist scholars, particularly women of color, have shed light on the way in which gender, sexuality, class and race are experienced simultaneously by women (Crenshaw 1991; Zavella 1991). Traditionally, feminist theory focused primarily on gender as a form of oppression that affected all women equally, but failed to include the diverse experiences among women (Crenshaw 1991; Zavella 1991). The framework of intersectionality more holistically includes the voices of women who are marginalized on multiple levels (Crenshaw 1991; Zavella 1991). In this sense, an intersectional theoretical framework is ideal when examining the lives of female mariachi musicians. The experiences of Mexican American women and
the contributions made by Chicana Feminists shed light on the complex social identity that many Chicana mariachi musicians experience.

Female mariachi musicians, the majority of which are also Mexican-American or Chicana, carry with them these multiple identities each time they perform. It is the intersection of their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and class, which makes their stories unique (Crenshaw 1991; Zavella 1991). They experience institutionalized oppression in their lives as an ethnic minority and as women in a male dominated field (Crenshaw 1991; Zavella 1991). While other scholars used intersectionality theory to examine issues of labor, education, violence and other important issues faced by women of color, this theoretical lens can also elucidate issues of power and inequality in music. All-female mariachi ensembles offer music scholars the opportunity to explore this further. As mariachi musicians, they are symbolically connected to a musical genre that is so intimately associated with Mexican nationalism and issues of race and ethnicity (Mulholland 2007; Najera-Ramirez 1994). As female musicians their gender is often highlighted on stage most obviously by their distinct outfits, typically full length skirts in feminine colors like pink and purple. The intersections of these different racial and gendered aspects of mariachi music are also expressed lyrically. An analysis of two specific songs helps to further show how ideas of masculinity and femininity are articulated in mariachi music.

Exploring the Lyrics

Normalizing Gender Dichotomies: Women as an Object of Desire

While the different ways in which people perform gender may go easily unnoticed, one of the areas in which gender dichotomies are normalized and are more easily analyzed is in the lyrical content of the mariachi repertoire. Although there is a vast number of songs that a mariachi ensemble must be familiar with the broad themes which are usually present in the lyrics talk about women, love, and pride of one’s country or region (Jaquez 2002). What remains constant in these songs is what Jaquez (2002) describes as the “male-centered voice” which is characterized by the predominance of male composers and a normalization of a particular gender dynamic demonstrated through song lyrics (171-173). This second characteristic is especially important. Jaquez (2002) asserts that the lyrics in a great majority of songs normalize a relationship between men and women in which women are portrayed as an object of desire that is actively pursued by men (173). This dynamic plays out in sometimes obvious, but more often than not subtle ways.

Jaquez (2002) exemplifies this with her examination of the song “Ay Jalisco!” which she explains has multilayered meanings which are perceived by the audience in the context of a musical performance (173-174). The first is the song’s more obvious reference to regional pride. Its upbeat tempo and lyrics celebrate the state of Jalisco and liken its capital city of Guadalajara to a beautiful woman (Jaquez 2002). This comparison to a woman is the second underlying reference which, as Jaquez (2002) notes, follows the normalized gender relationship she previously described.

The state or homeland is thus feminized, casting woman as the object of desire as an allegory of man’s allegiance to his country or land. Issues of courtship and pursuit—“por una morena echar mucha bala/Y bajo la luna cantar en Chapala” (for a Brown-skinned woman, fire a lot of bullets/sing under the moon in Chapala [stanza five])—cement women’s availability “lo mismo en los Altos/ Que alla en la Canada” (the same in Los Altos as in/over there in Los Altos [stanza four]) (2002, 173).

The more standard interpretation of the song as a symbol of regional pride then overshadows the less obvious reference to women as objects of desire. Audiences perceive these references in a very interesting way. It is the context of a musical performance and the entertainment aspect of mariachi which mediate how the audience perceives these otherwise contentious topics of gender relationships and regional pride as nonthreatening and normal (Jaquez 2002). This normalization process in mariachi song lyrics that Jaquez sheds light on exemplifies McClary’s (1991) discussions of music as a location where social reproduction occurs. Music’s ability to actively reflect, reproduce, and challenge societal norms, once again, demonstrates the political nature of music (McClary 1991).

El Macho y Maria

It is under this established idea and following Jaquez’s example that two other songs; “El Rey” by Jose Alfredo Jimenez and “Yo También Soy Morena” by Aida Cuevas are examined. These songs represent lyrically the two dichotomies of the masculine and the feminine. While these two songs are not entirely representative of all mariachi songs, in their lyrics, there are symbolic representations of two idealized gender roles in Mexican and Chicano/a culture: machismo and marianismo. Machismo refers to an idealized form of manhood often portrayed to be dominant in Latin American cultures (Stevens 1973). Men are idealized as the heads of households and dominate the public sphere (Stevens 1973). A real man is said to be one with unquestionable authority, a womanizer who never shows his true emotions (Stevens 1973). “El Rey” is a very masculine song portraying a man down on his luck because of a woman. There are metaphors to patriarchy and machismo from the very beginning. In the title and the chorus he likens himself to “El Rey”, the King. “Con dinero y sin dinero/hago siempre lo que quiero/y mi palabra es la ley/no tengo trono ni reina/ni nadie me comprenda/pero sigo siendo el rey” (With or without money/I always do what I want/and my words are the law/I don’t have a throne or a queen/nor anyone that understands me/ but I keep being the king; Mariachi Publishing Company 2008). The references to kings and monarchy tie to the notion of machismo because they represent the
man as the dominant patriarch. He has no money and was scorned by a woman, but his identity as El Rey is still intact. The lyrics portray the idealized Mexican man, who even when down on his luck, is still in charge. These notions of masculinity are then in turn perceived and reproduced by the audience.

On the other hand, marianismo portrays the ideal Mexican woman as someone who emulates the Virgin Mary, is pure, self-sacrificing, and through the pains of motherhood is a sort of exalted figure that brings protection to her family. “Yo También Soy Morena” is sung to the Virgen de Guadalupe on December 12. This date is said to be the day that the Virgen De Guadalupe appeared to a poor Indian peasant named Juan Diego (Poole 1995). She spoke to him in Nahautl, the language of the Aztecs and she told him to speak to the local priest in order to have a church built in her honor (Poole 1995). At first, no one believed Juan Diego so the Virgen de Guadalupe had him search for roses, which during winter should not have been growing (Poole 1995). He returned to the priest with the roses and on the cloth, in which he had wrapped the roses, appeared the image of the Virgin (Poole 1995). It was regarded as a miracle. A cathedral was built in her honor and to this day La Virgen De Guadalupe is the revered patron saint of Mexico (Poole 1995). “Yo también soy morena/Y te vengo a pedir/Que me cubra tu manto/Y a todos los de mi hogar” (I am also brown skinned/And I come to sing to you/like the Indian Juan Diego/I bring you roses and a prayer; Mariachi Publishing Company 2008). Race and gender intersect in this song. The references to Juan Diego as well as the symbolism of her brown skin remind the audience of the indigenous roots of the Mexican people. The lyrics also imbue La Virgen with a real power and strength that seem to celebrate her womanhood.

Within the lyrics of these two songs idealized gender norms for men and women are being conveyed and polarized. The audience however perceives these interpretations as celebrations of culture. They elicit pride and nationalistic fervor while simultaneously portraying men and women within these very narrow gender roles. The importance of exploring the mariachi repertoire lyrically is perhaps best expressed by the feminist Chicana scholars who have paved the way. Anzaldua’s (2007) new mestiza consciousness comes to mind. Only through careful analysis and critique of the world around us can we understand and break down the walls of hegemony which perpetuate inequality even within our own culture (Anzaldua 2007). These inequalities exist even in music (McClary 1991). Despite the relative success of all-female mariachi groups tensions and inequality still exist. As this discussion has shown, gender representations in mariachi music still conform to traditional expressions of masculinity and femininity. However, the female musicians who can proudly say they are a Mariachi will continue to shape this musical genre in new and exciting ways.

**Conclusion**

The existence of all female mariachi ensembles provides an opportunity to explore how history, social norms, constructions of gender, and identity are transmitted, transformed or challenged through mariachi music. Mariachi music as a mechanism of social reproduction and a gendered practice perpetuates many of the hegemonic constructions of gender. However, these norms have not gone unchallenged. All-female ensembles are an example of the many ways in which women have made mariachi their own; through their long historical involvement, choice of suits, and interpretation of song lyrics. Yet, understanding how women have influenced the history of this musical genre and how their contributions are often ignored because cultural notions of gender, which are reproduced in mariachi music, deem them less significant is only the beginning. Future research is necessary in order to continue to deconstruct the different nuances and power structures involved in the social practice of mariachi music.

**Future Research**

The fact that not much research has been conducted that looks specifically at female mariachi musicians leaves room for a vast number of possibilities. Much more research can be done in the form of lyrical analysis. The large repertoire of songs known to mariachi ensembles provides a vast and varied sample. Any future research done must also include the views and experiences of the female musicians themselves. Research that looks at the audience and their views of female mariachi musicians would also shed light on the ways in which audience members perceive the gendered aspects of mariachi performance and whether or not these views have changed over time. It will be exciting to see how audiences at the Cielito Lindo restaurant and around the world will experience a mariachi performance as more and more women are able to say, Yo También soy Mariachi!
References


