

Review

Jennifer Domino Rudolph, *Embodying Latino Masculinities: Producing Masculinidad*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, ISBN: 978-1-137-02287-5, 226 pp.

Embodying Latino Masculinities aims to advance understanding of the meanings of Latino masculinities through exploring six diverse case studies in detail. This engaging and well-written book charts the representation and construction of Latino masculinities, by Latino men themselves and Latina/o communities more broadly, across different social contexts and within different cultural spheres. The book is written from the theoretical perspective of comparative gender and ethnic studies and Rudolph's focus is Latino masculinity as an ethnically specific gender construct, for which she has coined the term *masculinidad*. This term is drawn from the problematic, as Rudolph acknowledges, concept of *latinidad* which is the idea that all Latina/os share a common identity and cultural solidarity. *Masculinidad* is a gendered version of this which uses masculinity in an attempt to gain power and prestige for the Latino community, sometimes through subordinating those who do not conform to heteronormative ideals of Latino masculinity. The central aim of the book and the importance of the concept of *masculinidad* is best encapsulated by Rudolph herself when she writes that it allows for an examination of 'the tensions around unity and cultural nationalism embedded in *latinidad* through the lens of masculinities' (p.5). Rudolph wisely considers the construction of *masculinidad* in relation to structures of race, sexuality and class from US and Latin American cultures, as Latino men understand and experience their masculinity through the interplay between the norms of both cultures.

Due to this cross cultural approach and the diversity of Rudolph's case studies the book is likely to be of interest to a wide range of scholars, beyond its most readily identified audiences of students and academics in the fields of Latino and gender studies. Her case studies range from an examination of performance of Latino masculinity by theatre and music professionals, to that within Latino gang and party crew narratives, nationalist prison writings and major league baseball. She also focuses on the importance of 'ordinary men' but also cultural and community figures, considering the way in which the lives and work of Piri Thomas and Luis J. Rodriguez (Latino youth advocates and former prisoners) and the personas of reggaeton performer Don Omar and baseball star Manny Rodriguez have

shaped conceptions of *masculatinidad*. Rudolph's rationale in choosing these case studies is based on their relationship to the way in which representations of Latino men have been associated with violence, crime and patriarchal privilege and hence it is likely to be of interest to scholars whose interests lie in sociology and anthropology, as well as those in disciplines more explicitly aligned with cultural studies methodologies.

After an introduction to the project and its aims, the first half of the main body of the book is devoted to a three-part study of Latino men's role in cultural production, indeed while Rudolph's case studies are diverse they are all linked by the way in which they explore Latina/o involvement in representing masculatinidad. Part one of this section examines the way in which Latino masculinities were explored in a performance piece entitled *MACHOS*, by the Chicago based Latina theatre group *Teatro Luna* whose image features on the book's front cover. In this performance Latina performers portrayed Latino men in everyday situations, basing their performances on interviews and questionnaires with Latino men, and Rudolph argues that it poses a range of questions about masculatinidad by separating it from the male body. This is followed by a second part which examines narratives of delinquency and crime in the lives of Latino men, through analysis of memoirs from former gang members and prisoners who later achieved redemption through community work. The third and final section of the book considers narratives of Latino masculinity as synonymous with poverty and delinquency in a different context, through examining the personas of two public Latino figures from contrasting cultural arenas, reggaeton singer and actor Don Omar and major league baseball star Manny Ramirez. This section focuses primarily on the way in which the rags to riches narratives of these two Latino stars has become a prestigious part of their stories and is used to legitimise their masculatinidad.

The book's greatest strength is in the originality of its contribution to the study of Latino masculinities. Rudolph considers the cultural inter-relationship of different Latino masculinities, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos etc., in constructing masculatinidad whereas existing studies in this area have looked at more specific ethnic groups. This is particularly important as the Latino population in the US grows and is increasingly defined within US culture as one ethnic group. It also considers the agency of Latino men in creating narratives of their own identity, which provides a valuable insight into the self-construction of *masculatinidad* for a group historically marginalised as ethnically and criminally 'other' by mainstream US culture. The case studies within *Embodying Latino Masculinities* also highlight significant, but lesser known examples of the construction of Latino masculinity by Latino individuals and communities. The significance of these case studies could perhaps be more strongly highlighted by comparing them to portrayals of Latino masculinities created by white US producers. The inclusion of more illustrations may also be helpful to illustrate the points being made here, particularly in relation to the performance related sections on *MACHOS* and the personas of Don Omar and Manny Rodriguez. These adjustments could enhance reader perceptions of the important case studies here, but they are not essential to the

aims of a book which makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the social and cultural construction of Latino masculinities.

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