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## **Soy MacDiva: Changing Perceptions of Chicana/Mexicana Sexuality Through Corridos Hyphy**

Jessica R. Lozano, University of Washington

### **INTRO:**

As I pushed and slithered my way towards the front of the stage, accompanied by my dancing partner, my heart skipped a beat as I heard the first few notes coming from the accordion. I could not believe that they were in Tacoma. In a few seconds I would behold Los Amos, the creators of corridos hyphy. The place was so full that I knew it would be almost impossible to dance, thankfully my partner and I managed to slink our way to the front row. I finally found myself standing in front of Esteban, the bass player. I reached out and touched his hand. He looked down and smiled as I greeted him with a semi-lewd gesture. He held out his hand, I grabbed it, and suddenly was onstage with him. Then, I heard the musical cue that meant that the singing was about to start, and I heard several people screaming at the top of their lungs, “Los quiero! Que viva el desmadre!”

The excitement of that day filled me to the very core. I had befriended Los Amos while conducting research on corridos hyphy, and having them come up from California was like having a little piece of home transplanted in Washington, even if it was just for a few hours. When I first heard their music, it resonated with me since it legitimized my rebellious lifestyle and sexuality. Los Amos not only represent their respective music genre, they also represent the complexities of Mexicana/o and Chicana/o identities and experiences.

With all this in mind, let me now state that my goal for this presentation is to offer an analysis of the contradictory role of the corrido hyphy genre as both a promoter of “traditional” patriarchal themes found in Mexican corridos, and as advocates for a break with these same themes. I want to show how feminism and patriarchy go head to head in the corridos hyphy genre. This presentation ventures into Chicana feminist and music themes as I try to describe and analyze corridos hyphy and Los Amos, the band I have chosen to engage with for this presentation, as a case study of cultural productions acting as expressions of Chicana/o and Mexicana/o identities, experiences, and challenges to “traditional” sexual and gender roles.

Let me now go over the 2 parts of this presentation. My first endeavor for this paper is to give a brief history and description of corridos hyphy, since it is this musical and lyrical style that is the focus of my presentation. Second, I will go ahead and analyze the songs I have chosen from each band and/or performer, eventually comparing and contrasting these in order to highlight the contradictory complexity of corridos hyphy.

### **HYPHY**

The hyphy corrido borrows its name and lyrical formula from hyphy, a hip-hop sub-genre developed in the Bay Area of Northern California during the 1990s. In the Bay Area, the term hyphy originally meant anger that was out of control, but like many of hyphy’s associated slang, the negativity has been replaced by something positive, and hyphy has evolved to be understood as a hyperactive, crazy, amusingly eccentric state of being. Hyphy is both a noun and an adjective. Furthermore, this hip-hop sub-genre is a youth oriented and its lyrical content describes the lifestyle of many Bay Area youth, which focuses on having fun, dancing, drug use, and sex.

## ETHNOGRAPHY and DECONSTRUCTION OF CORRIDOS HYPHY:

In their hit song “El Hyphy (Jai-fi),” Los Amos, the self-proclaimed creators of corridos hyphy, declare that “creadores nomas hay uno/ que quede claro/ corrido hyphy nomas Los Amos” (translation: creators there are only one/ let it be clear/ corrido hyphy only Los Amos). Indeed, Los Amos de Nuevo Leon have been the ambassadors and godfathers of the sub-genre. According to Los Amos, corridos hyphy were born in the Bay Area, the birthplace of hyphy. When they started playing their own individual style of Norteño music, which is more fast-paced than the traditional genre, they noticed that many youth were attending their concerts. Band member Jesus Flores explains that these young people would go up to them and say they liked their music “porque lo tocan bien hyphy.”<sup>1</sup> He goes on to describe how the band did not know what these young people meant by the term or analogy, and so decided to ask. Once they understood the meaning behind the analogy, Los Amos soon declared their music to be hyphy: “acelerado, alocado, y que no tiene reglas ni para bailar ni limites de diversion.”<sup>2</sup> It is precisely these attributes that make their music “hyphy” and unique.

The music itself is composed of an accelerated rhythm, a much more fast-paced version of its traditional counterpart. However, the instrumentation follows that of the traditional corrido in the Norteño style, with the incorporation of the accordion, drums, bass, and bajosexto. Having been to about a dozen concerts where corrido hyphy bands have performed, I have observed that the manner in which the accordion is played is one of the most noticeable differences between the corridos hyphy and the Norteño style, as well as the accelerated pace of the singing itself, which at times can be so quick that the lyrics are hardly discernible, as is the case with some of the songs and lyrics in hip-hop hyphy.

As described by Jesus, the lyrics are part of the conglomeration of characteristics that set corridos hyphy apart as literary forms of expression and a musical genre. Esteban Guajardo mentioned that in years past, a corrido “hablaba de que ‘traigo una pistola y me quieren matar, y ando buscando a los que me quieren matar.’”<sup>3</sup> He followed by stating that Los Amos “...no cantamos eso. Nosotros cantamos lo que todos quisieramos vivir...de drogas, alcohol, y sexo.”<sup>4</sup>

While Esteban explained that hyphy corrido lyrics focus on having fun, usually with the help of drugs and alcohol, and going to clubs, Jesus mentioned that what has helped the band distinguish themselves is the fact that no other band before them has had the nerve to delve into these subjects in such an exclusive and explicit manner, especially sex. Jesus attributes this to Mexicans being considered and considering themselves, in his words, “medios tapadones, medios persignadones,”<sup>5</sup> regarding sex. This view of and by Mexicans has been defied by hyphy bands such as Los Amos, whose choice of lyrical content in songs include risqué sexual themes and lyrics that are very lewd and explicit. Jesus declared that regarding sex, Mexicans are not so traditional or sheltered anymore.

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: “...because you play very ‘hyphy.’” This quote and those that follow are from an interview conducted with Los Amos de Nuevo Leon on June 16, 2009 at El Rodeo Club in San Jose, CA.

<sup>2</sup> Translation: “accelerated, crazy, and without rules about how to dance nor limits for having fun.”

<sup>3</sup> Translation: “talked about ‘I have a gun and the want to kill me, and I am looking for the ones that want to kill me.’”

<sup>4</sup> Translation: “...we do not sing about that. We sing about what all of us would like to live...about drugs, alcohol, and sex...”

<sup>5</sup> Translation: “kind of sheltered, kind of religiously restricted.”

According to Los Amos, it is these themes (drugs, sex, and alcohol) that have greatly attracted people to their style of music. They express that the hyphy corrido is the change that many people were waiting for regarding the corrido genre. However, they fully recognize and acknowledge that many of their songs are very controversial.

#### CHICANA FEMINIST ANALYSIS<sup>6</sup>:

In 1990, Maria Herrera-Sobek published her book titled *The Mexican Corrido: A Feminist Analysis*. This book brought a very much needed feminist interpretation, analysis, and critique of the traditional corrido. She mentions, and we have seen, how most corridos are composed by men. This being the case, most of these authors “have incorporated mostly masculine-oriented themes and a strongly patriarchal ideology” (xviii). While Herrera-Sobek focuses on traditional Mexican corridos, the same can be said about corridos hyphy. There are only four known hyphy corrido bands and all members, including the lyricists, are male. Also, many of their songs are indeed imbued with patriarchal themes and ideology. However, corridos hyphy completely break down the virgin/ whore dichotomy. In “Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of ‘The Native Woman’”, Norma Alarcon describes the virgin/ whore dichotomy in the context of the Chicano Movement. In the Movimiento, being a “good” woman meant being a docile, nonsexual, virgin, while “bad” meant that you were disobedient, sexual, whore. There was no middle ground, these were the only two choices women had in terms of their identity and role. In corridos hyphy, especially in songs composed by Los Amos, both men and women are seen as sexual beings and are viewed to have equal rights in expressing their sexuality. A woman can be both a virgin and a whore, a little bit of both, or a completely different being altogether. Women are not demonized if they transgress traditional roles, in fact, transgression is viewed in a positive light and is encouraged. No female is described as worthless because of her open sexuality or promiscuity. Corridos hyphy really emphasize sexuality because members of these groups truly believe that a new era of sexual expression is at hand. Furthermore, Los Amos are taking corridos hyphy into a new direction by explicitly applauding and supporting female independence and sexuality.

When referring to women, Los Amos do not adhere to any of the traditional female corrido archetypes (which include the good mother, the bad mother – malinche-, the lover, & the soldier). The women in their songs are assertive, and very often sexual beings. Within the context of their songs, these women do not require a man with whom to identify with in order to be in the song’s narrative. At times women are at the main characters of their songs, at others they are part of the background, and yet during others you will find that they are a love or sexual interest/ object. Their portrayal of women is not one-dimensional, they portray them as complex creatures by the variety and complexity described throughout their lyrical repertoire. That is not to say that some of their songs do not mention women as one-dimensional subjects. As I have stated, many of the women in their songs are perceived as sexual beings, and even sexual objects. Hence, they do make use of patriarchal notions. However, sexuality is never viewed as a negative trait in a woman. Women are appreciated for their assertive sexuality, either because this assertiveness leads to the satisfaction of male desire, or because it is seen as an attractive and empowering female characteristic.

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<sup>6</sup> I do not have room in this paper to delve into the intricacies and complexities of a detailed feminist analysis of corridos hyphy, so I will stick to a broad application of themes covered in class, but only as needed.

Where does this appreciation and support of female self-confidence come from? No one from Los Amos is very familiar with feminist theory, but they are familiar with feminism as it is practiced. They are proficient ethnographers, writing what they see, observe, and know in lyrical form. For example, in an interview on January 28, 2010 on Univision's *Despierta America*, the interviewer asks the group:

- Interviewer: *In your album 2010, I see that a lot of things are happening. You describe how young people live their lives and pass the time in nightclubs and all that. A lot of your songs talk about that. I was reading some of your lyrics, and they talk about women who are well dressed and have brand names and everything, and ignore men! What is this all about? Are you all seeing that women are being spiteful?*
- Vampiro from Los Amos: *It's not spite, women are rebelling! Today women are seeing that if a man could do it, they could do it too. For example, I remember an incident at a nightclub. A woman was in a truck that regularly is driven by men, and it had a sticker that said "And it's not my boyfriend's, it's mine."*
- Audience member: *Bravo to that!*

In their album *2010*, there is one song in particular that is an ode to women's independence and empowerment called "Las MacDivas." This song is imbued with powerful imagery and symbolism:

Oh, how desmadre is done in the nightclubs/  
And the reason are the MacDivas/  
These women are very hyphy/  
Readily crazy and refined/  
Their best friends are Chanel and Coach, Versace,  
Dolce & Gabana/  
And they always know what's going on/  
They don't believe the lies we whisper  
in their ears/  
They take the initiative/  
They have their condoms/  
They don't want love songs/  
They prefer a good corrido/  
And if you try to give them flowers they look at you up and down,  
smiling/  
They make you sigh/...They arrive at the nightclub and pay their own entrance fee and  
bottles/  
Their mischievous faces are the prettiest/...When they count their money they smile  
and say that business is good.

True to corrido hyphy's hybrid roots, the title of the song is a fusion of two words with very disparate etymologies. "Mac" is short for "Mac Daddy". A "Mac" is quite literally a pimp, the middleman between prostitutes and sex solicitors. According to Urban Dictionary<sup>7</sup>,

'Mac Daddy' or Mack Daddy, is a term used to describe a man with an unusual power over women, and is derived from the French and later Louisiana Creole patois term 'maqereau', which means 'pimp'. Adding 'daddy' makes it mean 'top pimp'...This use of 'mac' is quite different from the Scottish/Gaelic term 'mac' (son of) used to address an unknown man.

Another definition from Urban Dictionary for "Mac" is, "the pimp, the king of the streetwalkers, possessor of the blingest of bling-bling. The mac daddy is the man who means everything to his ladies of the night." A "Mac Daddy", as the name implies, is a male figure. This male figure has

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<sup>7</sup> Urban Dictionary is not a scholastic source, but a public dictionary in which any individual of the general population can define popular vernacular and slang.

control over a group of sexually available women. Macs have power over “their” group of sexually available women. Often, this power is expressed through the unequal appropriation of capital gained by the sexual exploitation of women, and can also be expressed in violent forms. A diva, on the other hand, is a female figure (although there are men who identify with this term) and is of Italian origin. The word originated as term used to refer to an excellent female opera singer. In today’s popular culture, a diva is often referred as any woman with an air of grandeur.

Los Amos have taken these two very different words and merged them together in order to describe a sexually assertive, independent, economically stable, empowered woman. It is extremely important to note that the empowerment of these women comes from their financial independence and control over their sexuality. As the song describes, these women are considered to be financially stable enough that they can pay their own fees to a club, by their own liquor, and can even afford top fashion designer brands. MacDivas do not depend on men economically, and as such they like to show their independence through the purchase of material goods. The sexuality of the MacDiva goes beyond the prescribed social norms. The MacDiva is seen and described as intelligent when it comes to sex and love. They know that men will approach them with promises, tender words, and gifts in order to get them to bed or to make them fall in love. As the song portrays, however, MacDivas are too quick witted and knowledgeable to fall for such gestures. Yet, if they choose to engage in sexual behavior, they take the initiative and do so safely.

The mere fact that these women carry their own condoms denotes control over their sexuality and power over their bodies. Again, they are cautious and intelligent enough to realize that men do not always carry condoms, and so carry their own. Condom use goes against Roman Catholic guidelines of female sexual behavior. According to the Roman Catholic church, sex is supposed to be an act of procreation only. Pope Paul VI explicitly prohibited contraception in his *Humanae Vitae*, arguing that “the direct interruption of the generative process already begun and, above all, all direct abortion, even for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as lawful means of regulating the number of children”. Condom use and other forms of birth control are not allowed, since these not only prevent procreation, but lead people to pursue sex for pleasure.

Through active condom use, MacDivas are seeking sex for pleasure, not procreation. They are deliberately casting away their role as mothers, rejecting both religious and social norms about female sexuality. Additionally, in order for a woman to convince her male sexual partner to wear a condom, she must have a great sense of confidence and power that is absolutely necessary to express. If a woman is not equal in relation to her partner, convincing him to use a condom will not be a successful endeavor. It is only when a woman enjoys equal power relations that she can proceed to induce safe sex practices (Schefer, et al).

In the figure of the MacDiva, Los Amos describe the empowered, independent women they see and interact with. It is their observations that inform their lyrics, and in turn their lyrics inform others. Although “Las MacDivas” has not achieved any airplay, during concerts it is one of the most requested songs from their female fan base. In fact, the word MacDiva is gaining popularity, as a number of Los Amos fans are using this word to identify themselves. Despite the empowering message of the song and use of the word, Los Amos do engage in writing and performing songs that do not depict women in such a supportive light. One such song is “El

Monstruo" from Los Amos' album *El Hyphy (Jai-fi)*.

I will never drink fuckin' tequila again/ I'm so stupid, just to follow what my friends were doing/ I got up because I wanted to piss/ I saw high heels and a thong/...I saw my used condoms/ Then a woman said/ "You haven't been working lately/ I'll wait for you in bed/ So you can keep loving me"/ She was so ugly/ I threw up again from just looking at her/...I had gotten so drunk/ I saw that monster and I got the urge/...With some cocaine/ I'll feel better and fuck her again.

The song is pretty straightforward in its depiction of the woman subject. Although the woman's sexuality is not put into question or seen in a negative light, the fact that she is referred as a monster yet seen as sexually desirable is highly problematic. In traditional corridos, women are depicted as being beautiful, whether they are "bad mothers," "good mothers," "mother goddesses," "lovers," or "soldiers". As a "lover" archetype, it is a woman's beauty that attracts attention and desire. It is a woman's beauty and sexuality that will turn two brothers against one another, as with the song "Los Dos Hermanos" (Herrera-Sobek, 64). If she is vain and takes control of her beauty and body, she can lead men to their death (57). In traditional corridos, a woman who uses her characteristics in an intelligent manner is seen as loose, manipulative, and dangerous, as depicted in the song "La Entalladita". To give you a glimpse of what I mean, here are a few lyrics:

1. Don't be so flirtatious  
Be a little more decent  
She answers him with a smile  
Well, it's not my fault  
That I was born so pretty
2. He took out the gun  
So he could threaten her  
But Teodora took the weapon away from him  
With it the eight bullets  
She buried in his soul
3. She was arrested  
But the judges saw  
Teodorita in her tight clothes  
And set her free  
Only because she was pretty

In "La Entalladita", Teodora's beauty is cause for her vanity, jealousy, death of her fiancé, and eventual freedom.

The woman depicted in "El Monstruo" is not beautiful at all. Although she is still seen as sexually desirable despite her lack of beauty, being identified as a monster because she has no distinguishable physical qualities of conventional beauty is not an empowering message. The woman is seen solely as a sexual object, not as a person worth knowing or loving. In other words, despite her "monstrosity", she still has a vagina, and it seems that this physical feature is the only one that counts. Even worse, her vagina and sexual objectification is only achieved by skewing perception and judgment through the use of alcohol and drugs. Lack of beauty renders

this woman worthless. She gains a minimal amount of worth when ingestion of impairing substances lead a man to objectify and desire her sexually.

It is difficult to conceive why and how a group that can be so supportive of women and practiced feminism can at the same time encourage sexual objectification of women. Not only do their lyrics promote women's objectification, as in the case of "El Monstruo", women who lack "qualities" such as beauty are characterized as worthless. I do not have a concrete answer as to why this is, mostly because Los Amos do not have a concrete answer themselves. There is no doubt that the next step in my research is to figure out why the contradictions found within the music of Los Amos, and corridos hyphy in general, exist.

George Lipsitz states in his article "Home is Where the Hatred Is", "Banda music may be the last major musical craze of the twentieth century or part of the first wave of musical innovation in the twenty-first century" (310). Indeed, the corridos hyphy genre is definitely part of a wave of "musical innovation in the twenty-first century," following a trajectory of Mexican music developed in the United States and popularized not only throughout the nation, but throughout Mexico as well, as in the case of quebradita, duranguense, and now corridos hyphy. Along with all of its characteristics, whether borrowed, adapted, or singularly unique, the hyphy corrido is one in a long line of general musical expression and release. The hyphy corrido, despite its status as a controversial musical form and explicit lyrics, is no less a valid form of human expression which is changing the face of traditional corrido and Norteño music by expressing revolutionary ideas about sex, sexuality, women, and empowerment.