

My Own Gender Identity

By Jeremiah Lopez

That's not how MEN act. That's not what MEN do. That's the WOMEN'S job. For most of my life I wasn't sure how I was supposed to act, what I was supposed to do or not do. Growing up, I was predominantly raised by my mother, only visiting my father every other weekend for short periods of time my mother had more of an impact on my life than my father did. Not until I was five years old, old enough for my mother to trust me with my father, was I allowed to be with him more often. The older I became the more frequently I was able to spend time with my father. But because I grew up, mostly with my mother, I learned many of her daily routines how to curl hair, how to paint nails, how to cook, how to clean many things that the average male in society does not know how to do. As I became older these habits became second nature. However, as I slowly started to be around my father more and more, I then realized that not all men act in such way that I did. I then began to learn "the ropes" of being a man.

By the time I was four years old, I had become accustomed to my mother's daily routines. I never knew what was right or wrong for me to do until my fourth Christmas, when my stepdad came into my life and bought me a child's shaving kit. One would obviously assume that I would be ecstatic to begin "shaving" my face. On the contrary, my reaction to receiving the gift was completely opposite, "YAY a shaving kit! Now I can start shaving my legs!" But my stepdad told me, "NO, it's for you to shave your face." The next day he took me into the restroom to show me how to shave my face, because "That's how guys do it," but how was I supposed to know, I had only learned from my observations of my mother. Until that day I always thought that shaving ones legs was a norm because I was never taught otherwise. As my mother's boyfriend, who is now my stepdad, became more a part of my life and as I was able to spend more time with my father, I started learning that the way I operated wasn't like other men.

At a very young age, my father instilled two very important ideas into my head that continue to reiterate to this very day. Rangel states in his essay, "As a young boy I was taught that I was not allowed to cry" (Rangel). I can relate to Rangel because I too was taught not to cry. "Men are only allowed to cry for two reasons, if you fall down and get hurt, or if you get punished," said my father. Growing up this was one thing that my father repeatedly enforced, because "Real men don't cry for bullshit!" Those six words will forever be etched into me mind. The more I was around my father; the more I realized that I didn't react to certain things the way he did. My father, being a retired veteran, is very masculine and has little to no fears. So because I wasn't as "manly" as he wished I was, he would repeatedly attempt tell me to "man up." There was a certain point in my life where I didn't even like going with my father, simply because I didn't his demeanor.

One weekend when I was 14, I went camping with my father and his side of the family. We were moving firewood from one pile to the next and my father was moving it

and getting dirt all over himself, while I was being careful and trying not to get dirty. My father looked at me and said, "A real man is not afraid to get his hands dirty." I have lived with this mindset since the moment he said it. I didn't want the older male figures, such as my uncles, to look at me differently like I wasn't a real man. As Kimmel states, "Boys among boys are ashamed to be unmanly" (Kimmel 2), and it's true. Although I knew I wasn't like the rest of the guys, I would never want them to look at me as any less than they would themselves. Being treated differently by my family simply because I'm not "manly enough" is my biggest fear.

Although my father taught me some "manly things," as I was growing up, I was already accustomed to the mindset that I had originally grown up with. As a young adolescent I didn't quite understand why I thought and acted differently from other boys my age. I would get made fun of and bullied as a student in elementary school for not liking sports or always preferring to associate with females over males. It's not until I entered high school and became a little more educated that I finally understood what type of person I was. After finding more information, I had come to the realization that—I was gay.

"Your cultural identity defines you in a world of individuals" (Guerrero). My cultural identity plays a big role in who I wish to become. Reflecting off of how I was raised by both of my parents. I was raised in a very Hispanic traditional way and when I become a father one day, that's exactly the way I hope to raise my children. Growing up in a traditional Hispanic household, I knew exactly the reaction I would receive from my family if they ever found out, disownment. The more I explored my sexuality and became comfortable with it, the more I began to act more flamboyant than before. However, I would have to play this persona to my family, the normal "straight" ideal son, so they would not begin to suspect anything. I didn't know how long I was going to be able to pretend to be someone I'm not. I didn't know how long it was going to be until they figured out that I am gay.

Pretending to be someone you're not is not as easy as one may assume. The older I became, the harder it was to be two different people. At school I was able to actually be myself and let all my barriers down. At home I am not able to express my true emotions to the fullest I have to be the oldest brother/parental figure to my younger siblings; helping my mother and stepdad with picking up the children from school, making sure they do their homework, starting dinner, etc. But because I went from being myself at school, to being a second father figure at home, and then pretending to be this big macho man at my father's house, I began to lose my own identity. After a while I didn't know who I was anymore. I didn't know who I had become, or who I was becoming.

The average male will grow up to become a very similar man to their father. They were raised as their father would want them to be. However, since I was raised differently, with the majority of my adolescent years and childhood influenced by my mother, was I supposed to grow up to be similar to that of a woman? I then began to find who I really was, and who I wanted to become. It was my decision how I was going to create my gender identity. I wasn't going to allow society to tell me how I was supposed to be, how I was supposed to be a man. It was my turn to tell society who I really am.

My gender identity is a beautiful mixture of how my mother raised me, what my father instilled into me, and some of my traditional values. Guerrero states that, "You can

choose to be traditional or lead the way down a new path,” and I’m choosing to do both. My mother has taught me numerous different necessities in life; how to cook, how to clean, how to wash clothes, some things that some men don’t know how to do. My father has infused very inspiring ways of life that I will forever live by. And I chose to incorporate some of my traditional values that I grew up with, such as activities specific for certain holidays.

Yes I am not the average male who grew up in the average household. But because I was raised with such a diverse background, these qualities make me unique. The characteristics that I have gained and learned from my parents are what help me into finding my true gender identity. I may not be the best or the ideal man that society is looking for, but I am me, and I have accepted that.

Works Cited

- Guerrero, Xochitl. Breaking the Habit. 2012.
Kimmel, Michael. Masculinity as Homophobia. 1994.
Rangel, Michael. Tu Eres Un Hombre. 2012.