Analyzing traditional Mexican music to understand undocumented men’s desire for assimilation.
- Research Proposal

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I’m interested in learning how intersectional aspects such as status, gender, and race affect the speed and interest of assimilation of undocumented immigrants within the United States. I will mainly focus on undocumented immigrant men, and how masculinity, gender roles, work, and family formation affect the speed at which undocumented men assimilate into American society willingly. I will explain how these concepts can be understood through traditional Mexican Music. I will be focusing on a few songs from Los Tigres del Norte, a Norteño band that is typically known for their political commentary on social justice issues and have a very close relationship with the undocumented community. This close relationship can be observed from the vast number of songs dedicated to the undocumented community. This research is significant because it will help us better understand how these intersectional aspects play a role in the way that undocumented immigrant men choose to assimilate. Their decision to assimilate tells us how they feel American society views and treats them, and this directly translates into the ways that they may feel about themselves, their families, and masculinity.
Background and significance

Undocumented immigrants do not have the same opportunities as residents or citizens within the United States, their undocumented status becomes a hindrance in their ability to fully integrate and succeed within American Society. They are unable to receive the same resources such as education, financial help, medical assistance, social security benefits, stable employment, or even safe work environments. When you consider how gender roles work within Latino cultures, such as Machismo, plays a large role in the way that latino men process their undocumented status. In order to understand how undocumented men truly process their lives and experiences within the US, we must understand how machismo affects this process. Traditional machismo also affects the way in which undocumented men process their emotions, and have found that they are less likely to express themselves with anyone, leading to high levels of anxiety and depression, which ultimately lead to self-destructive behaviors such as drinking, drugs, and dysfunctional family structures and behaviors. I have found that media such as traditional Latino music has been one of the few places that male artists have been open and expressed their emotions on a large scale. I believe that many undocumented men find solace in this music as a way to release their emotions, and even validate them. Los Tigres del Norte is a well-known group of musicians known for their political commentary and concern for social justice.
Literature review

Important themes such as gender roles, labor, and family structure all outline how undocumented men and women typically divide emotional and physical work depending on their gender. Family formation is especially important because Latinos are incredibly family-oriented, and their dedication and passion for family values are much different than typical American values. Latinos will typically avoid being selfish and instead focus on how they can help their families, even extended family members, which is uncommon within American society. Latinos come from collectivist cultures, while Americans come from Individualistic ones, meaning that the priorities and values that Americans may have will not be the same for Latinos. Within Latino cultures, family structures reveal how healthy members within that household are, and will typically have happier, less stressful family lives. Unhealthy family structures typically form toxic or abusive behaviors within multiple family members, many family members will struggle with mental illness, all of these factors lead to a much more stressful home life. Status is an incredibly important factor in determining how family structure may be formed. The ability to start dating, form a family, and have children is much different for an undocumented family than a family with citizenship or residency.
For my research design, and methodology I will translate songs and use textual analysis to decode the language and themes used in traditional Latino music. I will spend my time analyzing the language used in the three songs I've mentioned before by Los tigres del Norte; with more time and resources, I would like to analyze multiple albums they have created, because of their importance and prominent presence within Latino households. I believe translating and analyzing these songs will give us a better perspective into the kind of emotions that undocumented men keep to themselves about their families, their jobs, and even themselves. Translation and textual analysis were my preferred methods of research because they will emphasize how music is one of the only places that men can be openly emotional without repercussions. Although I will translate these songs, translation from Spanish to English may not have the same meaning or effect as the original text and language does, and although I will explain cultural beliefs and concepts, they may be hard to understand for individuals who are not used to Latino cultures.
The results from this research will give us an enlightened perspective of what it is like to live within the United States as an undocumented man with a family that depends on him. This is especially important for understanding how assimilation relates to the themes of gender roles, labor, and family structure, and how they can all be understood in the context of music. Music is the one place I have found Latino men to be emotionally vulnerable without receiving negative reactions from family members, while still being able to actively listen to artists and songs that speak personally to these men. I also believe men specifically like to listen to emotionally vulnerable music like this because it validates their feelings and experiences, without having to turn to anyone in their family for support, and without admitting weakness or showing vulnerability in front of family. Many Latino men are known for being huge fans of the political commentary and sensitive and powerful statements that Los Tigres del Norte make within their songs, all while hiding under the pretext of solely enjoying good music “made for men”.

I will analyze a few stanzas from the song “la Jaula de Oro”, in order to demonstrate how much information I was able to translate, analyze and extract from these stanzas. (continued in next slide)
We can see that the father feels betrayed by the fact that his children have assimilated within the US, and that they even deny being Mexican, an identity that is incredibly important to him, and which he has based himself around. This is especially true when he sings “even though they have my color” meaning that the father knows that because of their skin color, they will be treated a certain way within the US, yet his children still choose to side with Americans instead of people from their country of origin, Mexico. This disconnection in identity creates distance between him and his children and makes the father feel as though there may be an Us VS. Them. The fact that he states that his children “piensan como Americanos” especially gives us the understanding that he views American thought and values as negative. Further pushing the idea that he may believe his children were “taken away from him” or “brainwashed” into becoming American and prioritizing American Values over their original Mexican values, something which the father cannot understand. We can also see from the first line in this stanza when he states “Mis hijos no hablan conmigo” that he has attempted to make contact with his children and reconnect with them, but was unsuccessful in understanding or reaching them. This has left the father distraught and insecure within his family, further leading to feelings of resentment towards Americans and American society.
Conclusion

Pursuing research in this field is especially important because not only will it educate others, but by understanding how intersectional factors affect undocumented men’s willingness and desire to assimilation, we may also learn more valuable information about immigrant experiences within the US, which will hopefully put forth some positive government bills that will help aim at some of the issues ailing undocumented families. Undocumented immigrant’s willingness to assimilate should be important and valuable to us because this choice speaks to how we as a country treat marginalized individuals, and how we respond to important issues. Understanding undocumented men may be difficult, but understanding how intersectional factors affect the way in which undocumented men process their status and move through American society, are incredibly valuable in understanding their desires or need for assimilation.

Through the research I have done so far, we have come to better understand how important gender roles are within Latino families, and how men’s masculinity is constantly on the line, and some of the things men are allowed to do and say may even be performative, but it is equally as important understanding how their masculinity affects how they move through the world, and how they form relationships. Much of the labor is divided by gender in Latino cultures, and so much of the responsibility falls on men to become the sole providers for their families, while women typically care for their children, and even when they do work, they typically find stereotypically feminine work, since their undocumented status hinders them from getting other forms of stable high paying jobs. Family structure is another incredibly important factor in understanding undocumented men, the way in which they form their families, demonstrates how they interpret their masculinity, and how they believe others expect undocumented fathers to act. Depending on how undocumented fathers can handle the multiple stressors that come with being an undocumented person of color within a country that constantly looks down on them, will reflect a lot of how they can express and manage their own feelings. If they are unable to manage and express their feelings then this will lead to mental health issues, which lead into larger family problems.
Bibliography


