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Gender Dynamics in Charrería Mexicana

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GENDER DYNAMICS IN CHARRERIA MEXICANA

A Thesis

by

KAREN MELISSA FLORES TAVIZÓN

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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May 2020

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GENDER DYNAMICS IN CHARRERIA MEXICANA

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May 2020

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ABSTRACT

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This research and analysis about the experiences of women in charrería show the pervasive negotiation of needs that they engage as practicing in an Escaramuza Charra. Inside this study, it is introduced the term Sisterhood Paradox, used to describe the struggle that represents the Escaramuza's constant collective performance, in comparison to charros, but that paradoxically serves a tool of resistance of charra women inside this patriarchal institution. In this piece of work, it is also argued that women in charrería, in many cases, are not aware of the subordinate position they occupy and in an unconscious way function as agents that reinforce gender roles, idealized femininity, and even internalized misogyny in order to protect traditions. This study managed to prove that charrería institution functions as a microcosm of Mexico's society at large where women learn and reproduce gender expectations in the "real world."

DEDICATION

Agradezco a mis padres por permitirme practicar el deporte y apoyarme en cada paso que doy. A mi hermana Michel por acompañarme en todos los momentos importantes de mi vida. A mi mascota Vicenta por ser mi piedra angular hasta el último momento. A las hijas del Pavidó Navido; mis compañeras escaramuceras que me enseñaron la experiencia de vivir una hermandad. A todas las niñas que se aferran a subirse a un caballo y a continuar con este deporte. Y a todas las compañeras feministas que nos enseñan a nunca conformarnos.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Charro image plays an important role in introducing what a “true” Mexican looks like. Actors as Pedro Infante, Jorge Negrete, and Pedro Arméndariz portrayed influential charro characters in Mexican Golden Age Cinema, where films about Revolutionary times worked as a relevant way to depict real “Mexicanness” (Nájera-Ramírez, 1996). These highly revered figures highlighted the common characteristics still attributed to Mexican males: bravery, stoicism, charm, self-confidence, and in many cases, masculinity traits linked to machismo.

Mexican Golden Age movies influenced a whole country about what the charro, and its activity charrería, represented: Tradition, community values, national identity, sense of belonging, and patriotism. Charrería evolved from an array of ranching activities to an instituted national equestrian tradition, with a heavily patriarchal structure. This sport constituted the construction of a very rich culture that transcended to music, movies, national symbols, family values, and gender dynamics among *mexicanos*.

Charrería reinforce the image of the Mexican male, and the pride that represented being *very macho*. However just a few can understand what dealing with a Mexican macho really involves, as the women that share the sport with charros, and integrate an Escaramuza Charra, considered the feminine face of charrería.

An escaramuza is a team integrated by eight female riders that execute a high-precision routine at full speed, that was created around the 1950s, but officially instituted until 1989. However, the feminine figure among charros has been present since Mexican Independence, with the China Poblana, and Mexican Revolution, with the introduction of The Soldaderas, fearless skill-riders, depicted as soldiers' lovers and camp followers of men. This study will aim to introduce the story of the important female figures within Mexican Independence and Revolutionary times that consequently justified the creation of the escaramuza tradition within charrería.

Escaramuza teams are now considered the complement to the brave and fearless charros, the balance needed to make this traditional sport a familiar activity. Nonetheless, it is important to note how good is the relationship between escaramuceras¹ and charros? How do these women manage and negotiate their needs within this patriarchal institution? How independent they have become?, and how much are they conforming to gender roles and expectations based on outdated rural activities?

This auto-ethnographic research will have as main purpose to show and analyze the perspectives and experiences of escaramuza members, specially the ones that grew up within the charro environment and have been deeply influenced by its values, relations, and community. The participants in this research are women that have practiced in an escaramuza team almost all their lives, and were introduced to this sport by their dads and granddads, which carry the important heritage. Fifteen females of a variety of ages, occupations, geographic areas, and socioeconomic backgrounds share the love for this sport, but also describe their struggle as riders, instructors, judges, and coordinators inside the charrería institution.

¹ Escaramuza practitioners.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Charrería Origins: “Ser Charro es ser Mexicano”

Before comprehending the roots of this equestrian sport, it is important to understand modern concepts of charrería. Charro is the male that executes *suertes charras* (equestrian activities). Charreada is the traditional event where the *suertes charras* are organized in a preconceived order. Lienzo Charro is the actual space where charreadas are held, which includes the ruedo, the circular arena where every equestrian activity is executed -including escaramuza performances and *suertes charras*.

It is important to note that while charrería has been incredibly influential on Mexican culture, academia has largely been silent on the topic. However, one exception is Sands who wrote *Charrería Mexicana: An Equestrian Folk Tradition* (1990), one of the most comprehensive social histories, which represents the basic for most of this Charrería Origins section.

The first records of charrería were held when Spaniards arrived to the New World around the 1500s, and brought with them the first horses that eventually gave the American men a position of power and control, literally and symbolically. Horses played an important role in

Spanish colonization, especially because the horsemanship right was exclusively given to Spanish conquerors, prohibiting indigenous people and mestizos to ride horses and bear arms. In 1609, part of the indigenous population was authorized to ride horses in *haciendas* (large ranches) that had a special permission. This was the easiest way in which Indians and mestizos could take care of the rural needs of the cattle ranches, opening a way to low class vaqueros and working class people to elite equestrian culture (Sands, 1990).

Indians and mestizos incorporated ornaments and tools to their newly designed and manufactured saddles, which accelerated their introduction to ranching activities and cattle management in haciendas. These unique innovations empowered native people to regain their power as Mexicans, and faded Spanish horsemen off their culture. Native Americans started modifying Spanish equipment to their needs and incorporating native materials, fabrics, and fibers to their costumes and saddles, introducing the emerging image of the modern-day charro. Spanish attire consisted in luxurious shirts, elegant jackets, and fine linen pantaloons, meanwhile lower class vaqueros who worked for them adapted their costumes with more affordable materials, such as leather or suede, which were also much more durable for their activities in the *hacienda* (Sands, 1990).

By the seventeenth century, the ornamentation in clothing by all landed classes and vaqueros led to the origin of the term *charro* to describe the newly conceived attire and its wearers. The term was used in a pejorative way because it implied that the clothing had more ornaments and brighter colors than it was actually used in aristocracy costumes. This negative connotation in New Spain meant that these horsemen were in fact vulgar and crude. Over time, however, the word's meaning transcended and replaced the term *caballero* as an appellation of respect (Sands, 1990).

Stewards and head herdsman in charge of the haciendas were still positions occupied by Spanish and creole population. They were the main originators of the activities of charrería, known as *suertes charras*, where contests out of ranching practices became an important element of modern-day charreadas. It was not until the eighteenth century that a ranchero-soldier named as *chinaco* (there is no direct translation) emerged, essentially a previous version of charros (Sands, 1990).

In the awakening of the War of Mexican Independence is where we have the first record of women's participation with the appearance of the famous *China Poblana* (literally: Chinese woman from Puebla), as well as its emblematic attire. The legend states that the China Poblana was a Chinese princess that was held captive in Puebla, and later she became a symbol of resistance for many women. Chinacos (ranchers and cowboys), and their wives, Chinas, were fundamental pieces to obtain Mexico's independence thanks to their acquired mastery of the horse in previous years (Sands, 1990). Around 1876, the already wide gap between the rich and the poor grew increasingly wider. A progressively environment of inequality was rising due to a new economic system in Mexico and the expansion of manufacturing and industry. The Mexican Revolution is considered by many as an epoch of glory and patriotic heroism. Nevertheless it is a particularly complicated period of history in charrería because represented a clash of social classes in which vaqueros and rancheros manifested the abuses by their *hacendados* (ranchers) and *patrones* (bosses) (Sands, 1990). Ironically, these aristocratic horsemen are depicted as heroic charros that contributed to Mexican revolution.

In interview with Sands (1990), Joaquín Franco admits that there was an idealization of higher-class ranchers by the oppressed working-class vaqueros, which adapted the manners and costumes of the *hacendados* to their traditions: "Even though there is resentment by lower

classes toward the more affluent, there is respect for charro because people know they fought for independence and in the revolution. People know they represent all of Mexico (p. 67).”

Charros are considered true heroes of Mexican Revolution, they served as leaders to popular forces, they portray the romanticized notion of what being a true Mexican constitutes; brave, stoic, and very machos. Charros and horses became a sign of power, freedom, and patriotism; as it is narrated in songs, *corridos*, novels and movies, there is no existence of one without the other. The Revolution period became one of the most important in Mexico, not only because it gave power to their people, but also their own identity.

“What the bullfighter is to Spain and the cowboy is to United States, the charro is to Mexico – a national symbol.” (Sands, 1990, p. xv)

After Mexican Revolution, social hierarchy and old hacienda system extinguished, giving Mexicans a new opportunity to create their own traditions, protocols, and practices. Many of the vaqueros, rancheros, and *hacendados* moved to the city, putting horsemanship skills and charros in danger. Yet, these practices were passed to their children and grandchildren, who adapted them and brought them to their cities, building *lienzo charros* in urban settings around Mexico, transforming charrería which became the national sport of Mexico in 1932.

The following year, the National Association of Charros put all their efforts into the promotion and consolidation of charrería, creating thirty associations around the country, and formulating a set of rules and regulations for charro competitions and performance. This accelerated the formalization of charrería into a sport, but most importantly, the creation of a new set of manners, virtues, values, and traditions were established mainly by the upper classes.

Contrary to the common belief, charrería is not truly originated in Revolutionary times; in fact this tradition is based in Spaniard colonization, where a specific social order was strictly underlined and instituted. However, as it can be perceived, Charrería has been continually

transforming and creating an identity of *mexicanness* with the help of other important pop culture references as movies and traditional Mexican songs that are pervasive in *mexicanos'* celebrations, parties, and gatherings. In the next chapter, I will analyze the relevance of these resources on influencing the collective psyche.

Mexican golden age cinema

While, the purpose of my larger study is not to deeply examine the gender relations among pop culture references, as films characterized by charrería iconography, it is enormously relevant to introduce the influence that these movies continue to impart on Mexican society. As previously mentioned in the Introduction, actors such as Pedro Infante and Jorge Negrete were perceived practically as Mexican heroes. It was during this epoch Mexican cinema attempted to imitate Hollywood's Star System, in which actors are highly revered, just as John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, or Harrison Ford. As stated by Nájera-Ramírez, "The charro as a national symbol has been shaped and manipulated by various cultural industries" (1994, p. 8) such as sports, dance, contemporary charreadas, and especially national films.

During this time, the Mexican Golden Age Cinema had a primarily purpose: to portray conservative and traditional values, while rejecting those progressive ideals and socialist pretensions promoted by the Cárdenas administration. Conservative filmmakers sympathized with president Manuel Avila Camacho and rejected Cárdenas ideology. Consequently, they supported the idea of using the charro as a vehicle to maintain a social order, influence parallel sentiments of the actual government, and popularize certain traits in Mexican society, as male-female relationships, dichotomization, and social hierarchy as patron-peon (Nájera-Ramírez, 1994).

Some characteristics were added within the charro image, and some others were faded as the ranching activities and equestrian capabilities. Charros portrayed in the media were characterized by their costumes, their singings, their charm, and in some cases, they acquired a new important trait: machismo. The characteristics that derived from this machismo, such as heavy drinking, violent behavior, and adultery. As a national hero, the charro image became much more complex in films because “the sentimental traits served to humanize the charro, but also offset his violent and abusive behavior” (Nájera-Ramírez, 1994, p. 9). The charro was forgiven all his faults, and his negative qualities became acceptable, and for some even valued.



Figure 1: Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante

The “boys will be boys” approach was dominant in Mexican films around the 1940s and 1950s. There was also a pervasive romanticization of the Revolutionary Era, and the social structure that reigned on it, where everyone knew their place, and certain privileged men ruled the masses. Thanks to the socially constructed charro image in the media, these films continually idealized the past, and heavily criticized the present social ills that were threatening family and

community values. Nonetheless, according to Nájera-Ramírez (1994), there were important opponents to these highly revered characters: the real “professional” charros.

Motion picture charros, who in truth are not charros at all, but only a gross movie imitation of the bona fide charros, pay us an unwanted compliment when they pretend to portray us on the screen. In the so-called entertainment films, we see sturdy men in the guise of charros, who are not only quick at the draw, but... (who) appear as drunken sots or in the other discreditable roles, all of which are false portrayals that only serve to defame the noble character of the genuine charro. (Barajas De León, 1975)

Accurate or not, it can be seen how the disagreement centers in just how men are depicted, but there is no escaramuceras representation in Mexican Golden Age Cinema based on the short trajectory this tradition had at the time. Nonetheless, their predecessors, Soldaderas were represented in an array of films. An example is Ismael Rodríguez’s *La Cucaracha* (1959), starring two of the greatest actresses of the time: Dolores del Río and María Félix. In *La Cucaracha* (1959) we can see three important themes in charrería, also present in the current study: internalized misogyny, machismo, and competitiveness between women. Nájera-Ramírez (1994) introduces a clear dichotomization of the devoted and submissive women versus the spirited and rebellious one, also present in *La Cucaracha* (1959). “The leading female typically portrayed a beautiful but noble, self-sacrificing woman, as in the film *Flor Silvestre*. Alternatively she could play a feisty, high-spirited woman who ultimately succumbs to the charm of the dominant male.” (1994, p. 8)

In her analysis of Revolutionary cinema, Nájera-Ramírez highlights the way in which the rebellious woman ultimately surrenders under the charm of the charismatic charro. In Emilio Fernández film *Enamorada* (1946), María Félix plays the daughter of a *hacendado* that despises

guerrilleros and *soldaderas* of Mexican Revolution. She is feisty, stubborn, and ferocious, representing a challenge to Pedro Arméndariz character, a soldier who tries to conquer her as if she were the spoil of war. She ends up leaving her fiancée, her convictions, her fierceness, and her aversion for the barbaric soldiers of the Revolution, and becomes one of the things she hated the most: a *Soldadera*. The last scene of *Enamorada* (1946) represents a symbolic image of gender relations within present day *charrería*. The heroic *charro* rides his horse on the field, while she accompanies him on her feet, almost beneath him, reinforcing the stereotype that women will always succumb to their natural instincts: romantic love above everything else.



Figure 2 La Cucaracha Film Poster

Eli Bartra's (1990) gender reflections within films of Mexican Revolution, state that it is very difficult to notice the real roles of women in the Revolution. The only thing that it is clear is how the directors of the most popular films of the era decided to represent both genders, and the stereotypes that their characters carry.

“Until now, there has not been written the history of women’s participation during Mexican Revolution, and about how gender relations were given along this process. We only have available a few loose scraps. In films it is frequently confused the character of the soldadera with a prostitute, but how was their actual place in society?” (Bartra, 1999)

Although it is almost impossible to know by these films how men and women actually developed in the era, they depict the general values and the dominant ideology still present in modern-day Mexico; patriotism, religion, machismo, family, motherhood and nurture, and of course romantic love. Bartra explains that these films show the archetypes of femininity as mother, temptress, and muse, and coincidentally the soldadera character depicted in Golden Age Cinema in a certain way shapes the three of them, although not simultaneously (Bartra, 1999). Film industry in Mexico, and especially Revolution-themed has contributed to specific values that evidently shape the collective views of a whole nation, as well as the roles and identities for each gender. (Bartra, 1999)

Escaramuza Conception “¡Viva La Soldadera!”

Earlier mentioned is the enormous significance Revolutionary Soldaderas had in the creation of what we now know as the Escaramuza Charra. However, the integration of women into charrería tradition goes back to Mexican Independence, when the term China Poblana was popularized. Some say that *china* is how the Spanish used to refer to native women in the 1800s; others suggest the term denotes a mestizo servant girl (Franco, 55). Nevertheless the romanticized version of the origin of this symbol of resistance is the legend of a Chinese princess who was held as prisoner. She was then exchanged to a merchant from Mexico who, charmed

by her gentleness, freed her, showered with riches, and baptized her as Catarina de San Juan. A slight different story says that the very generous and charitable China Poblana arrived captive to Puebla, and recuperated her freedom with the consent of the Spaniard that purchased her. The outfit of the legendary China Poblana consisted in a short-sleeved blouse embroidered with bright colors, a red ankle-length skirt, a sash around the waist, green shoes, a shawl, and her hair braided in two plaits (Rincón Gallardo, 1960, p. 268). When she died, many of her clothes were donated and used in her funeral by her female supporters. This costume became a distinctive for women that sympathized with the ideas of independence from the Spaniards, and converted into a strong sign of defiance, so much that one of the viceroys prohibited women from wearing it. Nonetheless chinas from all classes ignored the ban and used it as a way to support insurgents in the War of Independence, and show their disdain to Spanish authorities. (Sands, 1993)

La China Poblana icon represented the first active participation of women in the independence movement. They not only used a distinctive outfit to demonstrate their support, but wives, daughters, and mothers started offering themselves in many operational roles in battle. Some replaced their husbands in ranching activities, and became accomplished stock managers and riders, but some others engaged in actual warfare during the fight for Independence. These women won combats, became captains, and even died fighting after a long period defending their country. Currently, the China Poblana costume is still used at formal parties by escaramuceras, but it is not what is worn while riding.

Today, chinas represent the origins of “*la mujer de a caballo*” (woman that rides), now referred to as *adelitas* or escaramuceras. These chinas served as a brave example to women that a century later had to participate in Mexican Revolution when once again, women played an important role in the search of freedom. Soldaderas were a key factor in achieving independence. They were considered the common-law wives and camp followers of men; they

lived in miserable conditions, and served as cooks, nurses, couriers, arms smugglers, and spies. However, others also served as fighters, and some even had to disguise themselves as men to be part of the war. In many cases, these heroic women were never exposed as females and achieved ranks for their military service, but some others were expelled and rejected based on their sex.

(Sands, 1993)



Figure 3 China Poblana

In her essay “Las Soldaderas”, Elena Poniatowska, a famous Mexican intellectual, dignifies the anonymous female guerrilleras and gives them a name and homage. Poniatowska recognizes their transgression to the domestic domain, and their search for a place in the public sphere, but admits soldaderas’ submissive position on the Revolution:

“En las fotografías de Agustín Casasola [...] no parecen las fieras malhabladas y vulgares que pintan los autores de la Revolución Mexicana. Al contrario, aunque siempre están presentes se mantienen atrás. Nunca desafían. Envueltos en su rebozo, cargan por igual al crío y las municiones. Paradas o sentadas junto a su hombre, nada tienen que ver con la grandeza de los poderosos. Al contrario, son la imagen misma de la debilidad y la resistencia [...] sentadas en lo alto de los carros del ferrocarril, las soldaderas son bultitos de miseria expuestos a todas las inclemencias, las del hombre y de la naturaleza”. (Poniatowska, 1999)

“In Agustín Casasola’s photographs soldaderas do not appear as the vulgar and foul-mouthed beasts depicted by the Mexican Revolution authors. In contrast, although they are always present, they hold themselves back; never challenge. Shrouded in their shawl, they likewise carry their children as the munitions. Sitting or standing up next to their man, they seem nothing compared to the greatness of the powerful. On the contrary, they are the portrayal of weakness and resistance. Sitting on the peak of the railway wagons, las soldaderas are bundles of misery exposed to all inclemency: men’s and nature’s.” (Poniatowska, 1999) [My translation]

Among the array of research that analyzes “Mexico’s nobodies” (Grilli, 2012) exists a dichotomy of two different visions of what a Soldadera constitutes. One is the troublemaking and vulgar “cucaracha”, as it is portrayed by María Felix character, and the other one is the sweetheart of the troops, the legendary “adelita,” inspired by Adela López Velarde, a nurse from Juárez who once healed the injured soldier Antonio del Río, who later composed “La Adelita,” a very famous corrido (traditional Mexican song) (Grilli, 2012).



Figure 4 Soldaderas, Archivo Casasola

Soldadera Tomasa García declared in an interview that although there are several versions that assume the creation of the term *adelita*, López Velarde was the *mera Adelita*:

“A todas nos decían “Adelitas” porque éramos revolucionarias, éramos de tropa, pero la mera Adelita era de Ciudad Juárez. La mera Adelita, esa decía: ¡Órale, todos a entrar y el que tenga miedo que se quede a cocer frijoles! Y balazos y balazos y al que no obedecía, lo mataba ella misma”. (Romo 1979, p. 121)

“They called us all “adelitas” because we were revolutionaries, we were part of the battalion, but the real Adelita was from Ciudad Juárez. The real Adelita kept saying: “Come on, let’s all go for it, and whoever is afraid should stay at home and cook beans!” And shots and shots and whoever did not obey, she would kill them herself! She was very brave.” [Translated by Tabea Alexa Linhard]

Although the description of Tomasa García depicts a ferocious and savage soldadera, in popular references, such as Mexican *corridos*, Adelita ends up being “an example of the

idealized, beautiful, and valiant soldadera type in its romanticized manifestation” (Herrera-Sobek, 1990, p. 108). Popularly, Adelitas are known as the women that “patiently wait for their man to come home” (Arce, 2017, p. 40), which in the long run becomes the justification of the Escaramuza Charra creation, an alternative term to call the escamuceras, and the official name for their attire.

On the contrary, the archetype of the “cucarachas” are a non-conforming vision of soldaderas, women that fought, rode, directed armed groups, and even achieved military ranks. One of them was the legendary Valentina Ramírez, which was immortalized with a song created by the Zapatistas. Petra Ruiz is another important woman that, disguised as a man, reached the rank of lieutenant and that she would even fight for the love of women against her comrades (Sands, 1990). A popular story narrates that once, some soldiers were arguing who would be the first to rape a young girl, Petra –known by them as Pedro– exploded and took the girl from them. She was very violent and good with arms so they did not fight back and let Pedro take her. Later, Petra revealed herself to the girl and let her go (Poniatowska, 1999). Another famous story tells that when the war ended, Petra uncovered herself to Venustiano Carranza: “Since there is no more fighting, I want you to know that a woman has served you as a soldier” (Herrera-Sobek, 1990). Petra deserted when Francisco Villa did not recognize her role in Torreon’s Battle due to her sex, and created her own all-female squad that went from 25 to a thousand women. Under her command, no man was allowed in the camp, female-soldiers were ordered to shoot if there was a male surrounding their ground (Poniatowska, 1999).

Last but not least is the story of Coronela Carmen Amelia Robles, which attained the rank of colonel and was distinguished for being an exceptional rider (Herrera-Sobek, 1990):

“Pocas personas se podían ufanar de ser tan buenas caballistas como era la Guerra [sic] Amelia en la Revolución. Como una real saeta salía a caballo en lo

álvido del combate y siempre dejó una huella imborrable de lealtad, valentía y sentido humano. Con verdadera energía tomó parte en la toma de Iguala, Chilpancingo, Cuernavaca y otras muchas ciudades de nuestro país”. (Uroz, 1972, p. 264)

Few persons could state they were as good horsewomen as Amelia was during the Revolution. Like a veritable arrow she would dart on her horse during the heat of the battle; and she always left evidence of her unimpeachable loyalty, valor, and human sensibility. With great energy she took part in the Battle of Iguala, of Chilpancingo, of Cuernavaca, and many other cities in our country (Uroz, 1972, p. 264) [Translated by María Herrera Sobek]

Women as Petra, Valentina, and Carmen Amelia served as a justification to accept women's riding in charrería; they fought in Mexican Independence and Revolution, not only to achieve their nation's freedom, but also to create a space for female riders, and women in general. However, the results are a bit paradoxical in that currently escaramuceras are required to ride only in a sidesaddle and wearing decorous costumes, limiting their performance to aesthetic, beauty, and elegance. The use of sidesaddles were influenced by the aristocratic tradition of the colonial period (Sands, 1990).

The first appearance of the traditional sidesaddle currently used in the Escaramuza Charra was in 1925 by the creation of a charro from Jalisco, Don Filemón Lepe (Ramírez, 2015). However the unofficial appearance of an escaramuza performance in a charreada was until 1953, and consisted of a mixed group of young boys and girls named Equestrian Carrousel (Sands, 1990). Nájera-Ramírez (2002) explains that there is a slightly different version of the conception of the escaramuza, and states that Elsa López de Jiménez reported that it was originated in 1952 in the Rancho del Charro in Mexico City as an effort to integrate children in the charreada.

Nonetheless, while the practice was spreading in the rest of lienzos charros in Mexico, some charros considered it too feminine for boys, and by 1958 the escaramuza charra was established as an all-female display (Chávez Gómez, 1991). It is worth noting that this was an important decade for women's rights in Mexico; 1955 was the first year women could vote. An important transition for women's rights movement.

The "acceptance" of the escaramuza charra consisted in a whole new experience for many young women that previously were limited to ride only in parades or equestrian shows. Now they had the opportunity to demonstrate their riding prowess, just as their brothers and fathers had been doing for years. However, until the late 1980s, the escaramuza informal competitions were organized and judged exclusively by charros that had no consistent scoring system (Sands, 1990), in contrast to Charros.

The creation of an all-female Escaramuza Council of Judges was a major breakthrough for women in charrería. The establishment of escaramuza championships and competitions provided recognition to escaramuceras as real athletes, and restrained a general notion of seeing them as a decoration of the charreada. Although the formalization of female practice was a huge step for the inclusion of women within charrería's patriarchal institution, informally the general discontent was bigger than ever, as stated by some of the participants of the present research, which are escaramuza pioneers and judges that struggled with the charros' rejection at the time.

Additionally, in Nájera-Ramírez (2002) fieldwork, Luciana Ozuna, a former escaramucera narrates her discomfort of the marginalized position they occupied:

"There are certain times where they are saying, 'O.K., three minutes, two minutes, hurry up, let's get them [the escaramuzas] out, we have more important things to do.' And that is very offensive and very appalling to us because we work just as hard as they do." (p.216)

Sands (1990) states that the escaramuza competitions were institutionalized in 1989, however Nájera-Ramírez (2002) writes that it was not until 1991 that escaramuceras won the right to compete, after a period of expressing their discontent and opinions in public and private spheres. In Nájera-Ramírez fieldwork, Elsa López de Jiménez, advocate of the *adelita*'s cause, reflects:

“The woman in Mexico has finally achieved her place within *charrería*. Ours was the only sport in the world where women did not have the right to compete. We accomplished our goal on the basis of tenacity, discipline, and because we ourselves have insisted on perfecting our movements. And we are very proud to be the first *escaramuzas* to be judged, and we know we are endowing our daughters with this sport and with a respect for our traditions.” (p. 219)

Although we have seen a progressive evolution in women's acceptance within the *charrería*'s domain, the heavily segregated activities men and women execute cannot be ignored, nor can the inexplicit discontent still perceived from the *charros* when they are interrupted in the *charreadas*, or the unequal amount of time men and women have for their performances. In the late 1980s, a group of women introduced an all-female competition called *La Feria de Escaramuzas*, which at the time was prohibited; however currently there has been a greater acceptance of the idea of women as main characters, and we can see *Ferias de Escaramuzas* all throughout the country. Also around late 1980s, in California, a group of women decided to organize their own *charreada*, where they could practice the *suertes charras* traditionally performed by men, but when the *Federación Nacional de Charros* found out, the girls were punished and threatened to be ban from the federation if they continued (Nájera-Ramírez, 2002). Women in *charrería* were not permitted to escape gender roles.

Fortunately, the current scenery seems much more positive, and escaramuceras have learned that by understanding the rules, they could become important and effective participants in changing an unequal structure. Progressively, escaramuceras have exercised more power, agency, and independence in a sport that was traditionally dominated and constructed for men. They have created a space for them within charrería, and they have worked very hard to become a valuable piece among it. Now Escaramuzas Charras are one of the biggest attractions of the charreadas. As an outsider, we could imagine things have changed, but is it really a more equal environment? This is one question the current thesis seeks to examine.

Previous research about escaramuza charra

Until recently, the escaramuza tradition was still unknown to foreigners and, more surprisingly also to Mexicans. Most of Mexico's population might be accustomed to the idea of the charro or the mariachi, but some of them still have no idea of what an escaramuza charra is or does. For those who grow up practicing it, this sport becomes a lifestyle, almost as important as school activities or work. Charrería requires an excessive amount of energy, time, hard work, and money. This can sometimes result in frustration due to not being able to get something back from their hard work, not even acknowledgement from friends and family.

It was not until 2018 that mainstream media introduced escaramuza tradition and positioned it in the eye of the global public. Featured with photographs by David Doyle, and interviews of escaramuza riders from Mexico and the United States, Vogue posted the online article "Riding High", which described the stories of escaramuceras, the origins of the sport, and customs inside charrería, considered by the author as the Mexican equivalent of Rodeo. One year later, Dior's creative director Maria Grazia Chiuri launched in Chantilly, France the brand's new

collection “Diorodeo”, inspired in Mexican Adelitas, and featuring an equestrian exhibition by Escaramuza Rayenari, from Phoenix, Arizona. This mainstream event popularized the image of the escaramucera among different fields.

After the global discovery and recognition of these high-skilled female riders, an array of media outlets started writing about the escaramuza charra, what this group represented for women empowerment, and most importantly: the “feminist manifesto” Grazia Chiuri was proposing, as she was being steadily doing in previous collections. For people that study gender relations among charrería, recognizing escaramuceras as feminist heroines, may compel a problematic statement, even now that evolution and progress have sparked in charrería, it has been at a very slow pace.

To understand the difficulties of studying gender dynamics in charrería, we must review the most important literature written about this topic, and the multiple paradoxes the authors encountered while researching the gender dynamics in this sport. In her book “Charrería Mexicana”, Sands (1990) dedicates a whole chapter to the role women occupy in charrería, arguing that escaramuza performance is not based in ranching skills of the hacienda system, reducing their participation to a primarily aesthetic and social character, even though they invest the same athletic prowess -and practice time- as charros. According to Sands, women in charrería rarely are aware about their significance in the “gender iconography of Mexican culture” (p. 185), instead she argues that they take pride in adding color and femininity to the charreada, and that this may be due to the fact that their place in charrería resembles to their role expectations in the larger society (Sands, 1990). Charrería and escaramuza traditions represent an important example of how Mexican society at large functions.

On the other hand, Nájera-Ramírez (1998) recognizes women in the charreada as important participants in tradition making. She argues that females understand the role they are playing as

socially constructing traditions within charrería, nevertheless, even though these women contribute in numerous ways and execute skills and abilities inside this celebration, they are still defined in relation to men “as their subordinate counterparts or attachments, not as their equals” (p. 208). According to Nájera-Ramírez women in charrería are aware of the emasculating position they are occupying, provoking them to challenge their status in many ways. In her fieldwork, she describes how women engage in critical reflections on gender roles and relations, and how escaramuza riders continually negotiate their own needs and desires, but in very nuanced forms, in order to subtly introduce changes that others will accept as legitimate. This standpoint as not being completely reactive or completely passive to gender inequality within the sport results in a position somehow confusing inside the institution. As stated by Nájera-Ramírez (1998), the ways women seek to reform rather than eliminate this patriarchal tradition, and how they have institutionalized change, often goes unnoticed as a feminist project. She also discusses the way the Soldaderas vision was sanitized in order to be less threatening to male-dominant traditions, without seeming radical or controversial. “As a newly formed female tradition, the escaramuza required a rationale to explain its existence as a formal part of the charreada” (Nájera-Ramírez, 1998, p. 212). Consequently, they chose to depict their exceptional riding-skills and braveness, but not their fame as soldiers’ lovers, and even whores (Salas, 1990).

In the times both Sands and Nájera-Ramírez wrote about the conception and the needs’ negotiation of escaramuzas, they discussed the way women were allowed to ride publicly in charreadas, but never to perform roping skills, ride astride, or wear something else than the Adelita-style voluminous dresses, or the tight *trajes de charra*, reinforcing the idea of women in charrería “as objects of display, beauty, and adornment, consistent in patriarchal notion” (Nájera-Ramírez, 1998, p. 215). Nevertheless, currently we can see an important transition in non-official private competitions where women are not only riding astride in saddles that were traditionally

considered just for men, but they also are using a specially tailored *traje de charro*, embroidered with flowers and colors socially constructed as feminine.



Figure 5: Sliding stop by woman in custom made traje de charro, credits: Pasión Charra

Riding astride gives men and women the capability to use both legs, and provide more control of the horse's movements. In contrast riding aside is very limiting, because it is barely giving one leg and one spur to perform, although some of the women in this study have argued that the spur in the left leg is far from being useful, because the stirrup is too high to even touch the horse, and transmit any message to its body. Escaramuza riding-style requires discipline, correct body movement, good posture, and exceptional communication skills with the horse, in order to engage better control and relationship. Contrary to this notion, anthropologist Ana Ramírez (2016) heavily criticizes the use of the "*albarda Lepe*" (Lepe sidesaddle).



Figure 6: Woman in traditional traje de charro, credits: Pasión Charra

“Based on my own experience, escaramuceras can perform, compete, and even win contests and prizes although they know next to nothing about riding well”, Ramírez (2016, p. 171). As a self-proclaimed outsider-insider in this sport, and a former escaramuza rider herself, Ramírez identifies charrería as a “space marked by patriarchal, masculine barbarism” (p. 168), and express a relevant critique about the traditional Lepe sidesaddle, arguing that it disguises poor horsemanship, and as a sum, it provides a type of riding that “fails to realize a great deal of embodied mutuality between horse and rider” (p. 172). Sidesaddle’s sit is positioned too high above the horse’s back, preventing that the rider and the animal feel each other, and eliminating

an approach for transmission and communication. Ramírez (2016) also argues that due to the lack of connection, horses become almost disposable in charrería, especially to escaramuceras, who end up replacing them if they are not useful for the maneuvers required and presented in their performances. Although Ramírez (2016) introduces an important characteristic about escaramuza and its accustomed sidesaddle, I disagree with the notion of horses being ‘disposable’ to escaramuceras. In this study I will demonstrate that the relationship between women and horses in charrería is actually quite strong, and better than the bond these animals have with charros. In fact, as stated by some of my participants, a lot of these men mistreat them executing excessive force and power towards the horse.

The interesting piece of work of Ramírez (2016), as a former escaramucera and an anthropologist, gives other important insights about charrería and escaramuza tradition. As she agrees with Nájera-Ramírez that change in this system requires a subtle approach to understand the gender roles played by men and women, she introduces the relevance given to the paternal figure in this sport. In her fieldwork around 2000-2003 Ramírez (2016) discovered that women who start in charrería at very young ages, are commonly first introduced by their fathers, and that mothers are rarely mentioned in the beginnings of an escaramucera. Instead mothers’ participation centers in aesthetic aspects, such as fabric selection and seamstresses.

As an insider-outsider myself, this author consider this daughter-father relationship very important because, as stated by Ramírez (2016), the space around my horse was also dominated by my father’s presence. From my perspective, mothers are usually much more kind and supportive, and fathers tend to be very oriented towards perfectionism, specifically inside the arena. This could be the reason why a lot of girls feel very uncomfortable by all the pressure it involves, and most usually quit after a couple of years. Although, I find this very unlikely based

on my personal experience and fieldwork, Ramirez argues that in many cases is actually the father's dream to ride attempted to realize through his daughter.

The daughter-father relationship is also relevant because it introduces the class factor, and the economic privilege required to practice the sport. Ramirez (2016) does not go further on this topic, but masculine figures, such as fathers, uncles, grandfathers, among others, are also important because in Mexico, as is typical in a patriarchal system, men are the family's primary economic providers. Girls cannot start practicing charrería without a horse or the correct equipment, which are quite costly. This is also a reason why there are numerous cases in which girls are unable to continue without their father's 'blessing,' because without his blessing she will likely not be able to afford to continue.

Ramirez (2016) concludes her narrative by referring to charrería as a “‘beloved’ patriarchy that helps to feminize women” (p.174), which is supported by Alejandra Rendón's master's thesis discussion (n.d.), another important piece of work where gender relations and inequality is argued. Rendón (n.d.), also a former escaramucera, emphasizes that charrería institution is a mirror of what constitutes Mexican society in general. Although is not stated in charrería regulations that women should not be part of the Consejo Directivo Nacional (governing board) there is no female presence on it, and barely even a slight chance that a woman could occupy a main position. These patriarchal notions influence a whole country's institutions, symbols, and cultural meanings that, according to Rendón, justify unequal relations between people, especially considering that charrería is a tradition that represents Mexico's heritage and identity. As Rendón (n.d) states, based on practices normalized within the sport women have learned to live and develop in a very conservative and traditional environment that promotes a self-diminishing behavior, accepting roles and stereotypes that are usually linked to beauty, grace, family, domestic chores, but never as truly athletes (p.47). Conforming to positions as caregivers,

tradition-bearers, wives, cheerleaders, and organizers reinforce gendered biological differences that limit women's activities inside the sport.



Figure 7: Albarda Lepe

Rendón introduces an important insight about how there are professional charros, getting paid for performing, but there are no known escaramuceras making a living of the sport. On the contrary, they end up spending a lot more than charros in attire, trainers, matching equipment, and more. As part of this study, I will be discussed the way women manage to cover their expenses by organizing raffles, food sales, fundraising events, and looking for sponsors.

Finally, a relevant topic introduced by Rendón is the fact that there is a certain ambiguity to women's opinion about machismo in charrería. According to the author, some of her research participants stated being involved in a constant questioning process about men's behavior and gender relations within the sport, but in the other hand, there are escaramuceras that declared

being part of machismo dynamics and conforming to them. I argue that there is a third group where charras are not even aware of the subordinate position they occupy, and in fact they unconsciously enforce gender roles, idealized femininity, and even internalized misogyny in order to protect traditions.

By reformulating Rendón's statement, this study aims to analyze charrería's dynamics as a microcosm that represents Mexico's society, institutions, structures, relations, and customs. Why does still exist certain ambiguity about machismo in charrería? How conscious or conforming are these women about the diminishing position they are still occupying within charrería? How do they negotiate their needs inside this patriarchal institution, and how do the gender relations within the sport influence their lives outside the sport and how they play their part in the "real world."

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

As an escaramuza rider myself, this research consists in an auto-ethnographic project, based on previous personal experiences and additional data collected from experiences of women that are or were part of the charrería institution. The data collection consisted of creating semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions directed at escaramuceras that have practiced the sport almost all their lives. They were recruited via a snowball sampling process.

Although I had personal contact with experienced escaramuza riders and instructors, the resulting recruitment process was more complicated than expected. Many women were not terribly interested in gender dynamics within charrería, and in the majority of the cases these women did not see a clear problem with their roles or the negotiations inside the institution. There is a strong idealization of gender dichotomization and gender performativity among the sport, and as stated by Ramírez (2016), discussing this subject requires a discourse that forbids the use of words as equality, justice, and feminism. Other researchers as Rendón (n.d) also found it difficult to recruit potential interviewees, some of them stopped responding her calls, and others simply rejected to participate by the first interaction. As a feminist researcher, and an escaramuza practitioner since the age of six, it was difficult to achieve a mediating stance between challenging sexist practices and ideologies in charrería and recognizing family values, unity, hard work and traditions learned in my childhood.

The initial contact with potential interviewees was made through social media messages, email, and personal reaching; subsequently these same women contacted other potential participants that contributed to complete relevant information for the research. Although there were many subjects interested in being part of the sample, later some of them were unable to partake due to schedule conflict, geographic distance, or simply because they lost interest in joining. They were never forced or pressured to be part of this study, nor influenced or biased by personal relationships.

Even when it was considerably difficult to find people that “had the time” to discuss women’s roles and needs in charrería, I had a clear understanding that even though escaramuza riders romanticized their place, activities, and even their struggle inside the institution, it is required to discuss the ways their relationship could be more equitable with the charros. Previous research about gender dynamics within charrería discuss the level of consciousness women have by occupying an undermining position, but these authors would not deepen enough about the specific perspectives and experiences women go through in the sport, neither their reflections about why is it worthwhile to keep practicing it.

Considering the previous premise, it was important to focus solely in women’s perspectives and experiences. The data collection was concentrated in interviewing 15 women that have been part of an Escaramuza Charra, many of them retired, some currently practicing it in the United States, and others now introducing their daughters to escaramuza performance. There was just one male participant, a charro and instructor that teaches girls and boys how to ride in an integral way, meaning that all of his students practice how to prepare their horse and their saddle, independently of their gender; a habit that sometimes escaramuza riders never achieve to learn.

From the 15 female participants at least 11 are bilingual, 10 achieved a high-education degree, 7 are currently living in the United States, although almost all of them practiced Escaramuza exclusively in Mexico, with the exception of 3 riders that are now involved in Charrería community in the United States. The male participant, in the other hand, is a charro that inherited the tradition from his father, who is an experienced horse trainer in Matamoros, Mexico. This interviewee also holds a college degree in Accounting, but preferred to follow his father's path, and also trains horses for charrería practice.

In total, the research includes data collected from the completion of 16 interviews, eight of them in a face-to-face modality, three of them via Skype and other video call services, and 5 of them digitally, this means that the participants received the questionnaire in their emails, responded in their computers and sent them back, this last method was heavily avoided, but it was the best approach for some interviewees in order to prevent schedule conflicts.

The majority of the participants practiced the sport in Matamoros, a small town in northeastern Mexico that shares border with Brownsville, Texas. This was easier for some of them to “jump” to the United States, create their own escaramuza teams and compete in American *campeonatos*. Other interviewees have their charrería origins in Nuevo Laredo (also a border town), Aguascalientes, Monterrey, and Austin (Texas).

Considering that charrería is a traditional Mexican sport, and that most of the participants were born and grew up in Mexico, although some of them now practice the sport in the United States, it was decided to complete the interviews in the Spanish language. Using a template of 15 open-ended questions, the interviews had a duration of approximately one hour in the place preferred by the interviewee, in order to give them more agency, and make them feel more comfortable (Firsch, 1990).

In-depth interviews did not just consist in a question-and-answer format. Since the beginning they were directed as an informal conversation that permitted a more open dialogue and better understanding about the specific topic. Although we were not focused in knowing the personal history of each participant around charrería, this type of questions were introduced in the structure of the interview to create a bond of trust, a “meaning-making partnership” and a knowledge-producing conversation between the two parties (Hesse-Biber, 2016).

While in depth-interviews are issue-oriented, and the issue in question was gender dynamics within charrería, it was important to also know the background of the participants; who taught them how to ride, how they became involved in the Escaramuza Charra, how supportive were their families, etcetera. Based on Hesse-Biber’s *The Practice of Feminist In-Depth Interview* (2006) I created a mixed-method interviewing process of *Oral History* and *In-depth interviewing*, where I played the role of an insider in charrería’s environment and dynamics, but at the same time I performed as a social researcher with a different perspective and standpoint than the participants, as well as a feminist research agenda.

Why is it relevant that a feminist conducted this research? In the words of Hesse-Biber (2006), feminist research gets an understanding of women’s lives, and other oppressed groups, promotes social justice and social change, and is mindful of the researcher-researched relationship. The feminist researcher is interested in the voices of marginalized groups, and although women in this study are not considered marginalized based on their class and position in society, they are undermined within an institution that at the same time romanticizes their place and roles; this is why we decided to focus in an almost all-female sample.

After completing the interviews, they were transcribed in Spanish, translated [entirely by myself] and later coded in iterative categories. The most frequent were Family, Negotiation of needs, Agency, Sisterhood, Class Factor (relating to how expensive it is), Good relationship with

charros, Machismo and manhood traits, Evolution (how “things have changed”), Bond with their horse, Dependence to men (masculine hegemony in the sport), Tradition and *Mexicanness*. In order to avoid being repetitive, these 11 categories were concentrated in three important common themes analyzed in the next chapters.

First, the most palpable trait in charrería: gender inequality. In this first chapter I introduced machismo behavior, and the way it has affected participants relationship with the sport, including their constant negotiation and acceptance of their men’s dependence in order to keep practicing it, as well as internalized misogyny and self-limiting behaviors perceived in participants.

In her doctoral dissertation *Race, Gender, and Cultural Identity in American Rodeo*, Ford (2009) describes how women in charrería even though are subordinated and limited to a sole event, they still find satisfaction and pride in celebrating their Mexican heritage and their controlled space as women inside the charreada. Likewise escaramuceras in this study highlighted the importance of celebrating their nationhood and traditions in charrería, overshadowing larger issues of gender inequality.

The second theme identified in the data is Tradition Preservation, where I discuss the class factor, and how charrería has been an elitist custom since its beginnings and has maintained a certain social hierarchy within the institution. Participants consider Charrería to be an expensive sport, where, of course, not every team has access to purebred horses and monumental lienzos charros. In the case of Mexican American practitioners, there is a delineated difference because in the majority of the cases the people that practice charrería come from a working-class background. In Mexico, to the contrary, the upper-classes are the ones that lead the sport. For many, this tradition is also considered a sign of status and owning a horse a symbol of power, as in the Colonial period.

In Tradition Preservation, I will also analyze unexpected examples of anti-feminist notions that, as considered by the interviewees, threaten conservative values and traditional family structure. As it was previously stated, the feminist movement is not well seen, and I needed to have a precautionary approach within the in-depth interviews to avoid biased responses or sentiments of distrust in the meaning-making conversation.

The third common theme in this study is the evolution and progress perceived by the participants, especially those who started to practice decades ago, when women and the Escaramuza Charra were much more limited by the institution. Within Women's Agency subsection, we narrate the deep relationship escaramuceras have with their horses, and we discuss Ramírez's (2015) theory about how these animals are easily replaced by their riders when they are no longer functional. In these cases, I argue that women in charrería possess a tighter bond with their horses than charros do, and is rather difficult that they get rid of them. Commonly there is a process in which female riders train their horse with total patience and empathy until the animal integrates inside the escaramuza.

Finally, I introduce an important topic that had not been discuss in previous research about Escaramuza Charra: the Sisterhood Paradox. The Sisterhood Paradox describes the way women complain about their collaborative performance, in comparison to men, but ironically serves as a tool of resistance in the hostile patriarchal environment. As charros do not have to worry about matching their attires and saddle equipment with the rest of team members, they neither are required to practice at the same time and create a space of camaraderie. However, Adelitas are enforced to do almost everything together, it is a hundred percent team effort that at first represents a burden, but in the long run is one of the things that makes it worth it.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Gender Inequality

Machismo

In the majority of the cases, my research participants consider charrería as a familiar sport, a place for all. Nevertheless there are certain times in which, unconsciously, they describe the lienzo charro as a man's place, wherein sometimes these women receive a welcoming experience, but in other situations escaramuza teams are practically prohibited.

Connell introduces “hegemonic masculinity” (1995, p. 77) as the dynamics and configuration of gender that legitimates patriarchy and guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. This type of social structure, within charrería, creates a space in which women are required to negotiate their needs, practice time and their order in the charreada, even if charros are not attending national competitions, or are not standing out competitively as their escaramuza counterparts. One participant states, “The only ones that excel in Matamoros are the women, that at least go to a regional competition or the nationals, but is on behalf of women that an association outstands, not because of men.” Interviewees often describe charros as disorganized and unprofessional, and that they do not practice as escaramuzas do.

The common complaint of these participants is that even if men are not interested in competing officially, women are demanded to be federated inside a charros' association; this

pushes escaramuza teams to look for an alternative team of charros that agrees to receive them, and let them be registered under their name.

“Los charros siempre han sido muy celosos de sus cosas, sí considero que aún dependemos mucho de ellos, y un buen ejemplo es el hecho de que obligatoriamente debes pertenecer a un equipo de charros para federarte. Cuando eso ya no debería ser así, deberían otorgarnos algo de independencia. Hay ocasiones en las que si un equipo de charros ya no quiere que te federes con ellos te lo dice y tienes que ir a buscar otro equipo y en ocasiones cuando te aceptan te condicionan a ciertas cosas de su conveniencia. No generalizo pero en ocasiones suele suceder”.

“Charros have always been really jealous with their stuff, but I do consider that we still depend a lot on them, and a good example is the fact that you must be in a team of charros to federate [compete officially]. When it shouldn't be like that anymore, they should give us some independence. There are occasions that if a team of charros do not want you to federate with them anymore, they tell you and you have to search for another team and on occasions, when they do accept you, they condition you to some stuff according to their convenience. I don't generalize but it tends too happen.”

Institutionally charrería maintains patriarchal rules and structure. As stated by many interviewees, “Charrería is much stricter for women than for men”, and “there is no position inside the organization's committee for a woman”. In this section I will analyze and focus on the inside workings of the sport, the informal characteristics of machismo that women face along

their sportive trajectory in charrería, and how the difference is maintained in order to govern the boundaries that symbolically delineate masculinity and femininity.

One of the participants was the founder of escaramuza practice in Matamoros. She learned the sport while living in Guanajuato around the 1970s, yet when she moved back to the northern city, and tried to execute her learnings in a lienzo charro, she discovered that, although Matamoros was a city next to the United States, men were much more closed-minded, traditional, and conservative than in central Mexico, and were very reluctant to accept women's integration in their sacred place:

“Llegué al lienzo de Matamoros y no había ni una mujer, ¡pero ninguna! El lienzo estaba cayéndose a pedazos [...] Había una crítica muy fuerte, pero fuerte, porque para empezar no estaban acostumbrados y luego era cortar con ese estigma de que los hombres son borrachos, jugadores, parranderos, ya sabes todo lo que se dice de los charros. Hacerlo familiar era muy difícil, porque en aquella época no lo era, era de hombres, quitarle esa imagen a la gente era muy complicado”.

“I got to the lienzo in Matamoros and there was not even one woman! None. The Lienzo Charro was almost falling to pieces. [...] There was a strong criticism, but strong, because for starters they were not used to, then we had to get rid of the stigma that men are drunkards, players, and partygoers, you know what they say about charros. Making it familiar was very hard, because in that time it was not familiar, it was just men, getting rid of the image that most people had was very complicated.”

According to Basham (1976, p. 126), machismo represents “the typical male response to fear of dominance by a (perceived) sexually superior and threatening female.” While it is unlikely the men in that time were afraid of women’s superiority, it is more likely they felt threatened of losing their all-men’s club, or as is said in Mexico, their *club de Toby*. The lienzo charro was a place of social gatherings, parties, barbeques, where men could perform manhood traits freely, as drinking heavily, being violent, smoking cigarettes; behaviors not permitted at home, considered the female’s sphere.

Inside the lienzo charro, there is the arena or ruedo, where men could execute their *suertes charras*, and perform the essential machismo characteristics, as described by Basham (1976, p.127): “a display of sexual prowess, zest for action; including verbal 'action,' daring, and, above all, absolute self-confidence”, additionally machismo can also be translated as “the cult of the male,” or as Nájera-Ramírez (2002) defines it: “the cult of virility.” In that time, the arena was the place where charros could feel as heroes and sole protagonists, hence the integration of women represented an invasion and an obstacle for their gender display.

For the pioneer escaramucera quoted above, it became very difficult to trespass this male cult, so she eventually abandoned the lienzo charro, bought a ranch and created a summer camp for young girls and boys who wanted to learn how to ride, create a bond with a horse, and to be introduced to the *suertes charras*. This was a very intense program where kids had to stay for a week, and learn how to feed the horses, put their saddles on, ride, rope, among other basics of charrería.

Inside these summer camps, prominent female riders became great escaramuceras that not only excelled in the sport, but one of them even eventually entered the council of judges, and then became their national coordinator, one of the most important positions for a woman inside the Federación Mexicana de Charrería (Charrería’s Mexican Federation). She described that

although she had a lot of fun practicing the sport, the official integration of women inside the Federación resulted in a very frustrating process:

“Tú conoces el ambiente, eran muy muy machines y no nos querían, no querían que interrumpiéramos su charreada, era lo peor que les podía pasar, que tenían que desocupar el ruedo porque iba a entrar la escaramuza AGH, nos odiaban. Entonces pues yo lo viví y fue muy, cómo te puedo decir.. no triste, pero frustrante. [...] El reglamento se instituyó en el 89, a mí me tocó el proceso. Cuando por reglamento los charros se tenían que salir, cuando ya formamos parte de la charreada, se tardaban un chorro en desalojar porque no querían, hasta que les tuvieron que poner una sanción. El desprecio y el desaire, y no nos querían ver, fue muy frustrante”.

“You know the environment, they were very very *machines* and they did not want us, they did not want us to interrupt their charreadas, it was the worst for them, that they had to clear the arena because the escaramuza was going to enter, AGH, they hated us. I experienced that, and it was very... not sad, but frustrating. [...] Regulations were instituted in 1989, I experienced the process. When men were obliged by the rules to clear the arena, they were taking a lot of time because charros did not want to, until they (the Federación) had to give them a sanction. The disdain and slight, that they did not want to see us, was very frustrating.”

Previous examples narrate the experiences of older women that went through the difficult transition of official escaramuza inclusion in charrería tradition. Based on the literature review it was expected to receive comments related to women’s lack of independence, discrimination, sexism, and heavy segregation. However, it was not expected to receive perspectives of frustration in younger riders’ visions. Next testimonials are from women in their late 20s and

early 30s, who started practicing the sport around the 1990s decade, and currently are still in charrería environment. In the next statements, it is perceived that although today men are more receptive about women's performance inside the lienzo charro, charros are still very protective of their position as main characters in the arena.

“Siempre estuve peleando el trato que recibimos como mujeres. No jugamos el mismo papel, ellos son los deportistas y nosotras simplemente una decoración entre charreadas. [...] Los hombres toman nuestras decisiones poniendo siempre por delante lo que les convenga a ellos, dejando nuestra seguridad a un lado. Un ejemplo de ello es cuando arreglan el cuadro a su favor, le ponen materiales que lo hacen más resbaloso para que sus puntas sean mejores, a nosotras nos pone en completo peligro ya que los caballos resbalan al momento de hacer nuestra rutina”.

“I was always arguing about the treatment we receive as women. We do not play the same role, they are the athletes and we are simply a decoration in between charreadas. [...] Men make our decisions putting first their convenience, and setting aside our security and wellbeing. An example of this is when they modify the center square on their favor and add materials to make it more slippery, so their *puntas* (sliding stops) are better. They put us in complete danger because our horses may fall at the moment we execute our routine”.

A common theme inside the fieldwork is the highlighting of the geographic location. Based on the experiences of women that have practiced the sport in different cities, it is noted that machismo traits are much more prevalent in the city of Matamoros. Some of these women have practiced in places like Ciudad Victoria, Guanajuato, Monterrey, and even the United States.

They declared feeling much more supported in these cities than in the associations of Matamoros.

“Sí hay muchos hombres machistas, simplemente aquí en Matamoros, no nos querían en sus lienzos, en sus charreadas, no nos querían dar nuestro lugar, no nos dejaban entrenar. Me acuerdo que en un nacional estábamos haciendo el reconocimiento de terreno y se metieron unos charros, sin respetar que nosotros teníamos ese espacio, no les importó en lo más mínimo”.

“There are still a lot of machistas, simply here in Matamoros, they did not want us in their lienzos, in their charreadas, they did not want to give us a place, we were not able to practice. I remember a time that in a National competition we were doing the field scouting, and a bunch of charros entered with no respect that we had designated the space, they couldn't care less.”

Although escaramuza performance is considered “boring” by many charros, men have learned that these activities are the ones that bring more people to charreadas, and increase the profit from the entrance, which is collected by the associations. Several participants explained that this works as a double threat because sometimes associations decide to push their presentation till the end of the charreada, increasing horses and teammates' exhaustion.

“La relación de las escaramuzas con los charros ha tenido mucha controversia a través de los años porque antes los hombres eran nada más ellos y las mujeres no teníamos ninguna voz en cuestión de la charrería. Los hombres eran como “las mujeres nos apoyan y punto”. [...] Siento que aún los hombres son muy machistas y dicen “ay no, las mujeres dejenlas al final”, “las mujeres nada más nos aburren”, en ciertos lienzos es muy difícil porque no sabes exactamente cómo los

hombres lo van a tomar, si están a favor de las escaramuzas o van a decir “mejor puro charro”.

“The relationship of escaramuzas and charros has been very controversial along the years because before it was just men, we did not have a voice inside charrería. Men thought ‘women support us, and that is it.’ [...] I believe that men are still very machistas, and they say ‘leave women till the end’, ‘women just bore us’, in some lienzos is very hard because you do not know exactly what is the men’s stance, if they are in favor of escaramuzas or if they are going to say ‘we prefer just charros.’”

Institutionally, Federación Mexicana de Charrería was making a big effort to influence men to be more open with women’s participation. After all, escaramuza performance generated bigger audiences, and women as tradition-bearers guaranteed the preservation of charrería in younger generations. However, one pioneer escaramucera remembered the discrimination received in multiple associations in Monterrey for being divorced.

“Yo quise entrar a un lienzo charro para seguir montando porque yo había dejado mis caballos, pero tienes la desventaja de que como no tienes marido no te aceptan en una asociación porque provocas problemas con los hombres; el hombre es hombre y más el charro. No me gustó esta discriminación, yo estaba sola y ya no podía participar, pero como soy muy inquieta me fui a la Federación, me dijeron ‘estamos trabajando en eso, pero ¿por qué no te vienes a trabajar con nosotros? Te metemos a un curso y te mandamos a toda la República con gastos pagados’ y me fui y anduve por todos lados sin marido”.

“I wanted to enter a lienzo charro to keep riding because I have left my horses, but you have the disadvantage that if you do not have a husband, they do not

accept you in an association because you cause problems with men; men are men, especially charros. I did not like the discrimination, I was by myself and could not participate anymore, but since I'm restless I went to the Federación and they told me 'we're working on that, but why don't you come and work with us? We will put you in a workshop and send you around the whole country with paid expenses', and I left and traveled everywhere without a husband."

Externally this could be considered a consolation prize, a measurement to keep her quiet, but as explained by Nájera-Ramírez (2002), women need to understand the insides of an institution in order to change its outsides. While she worked for many years with the Federación, this participant was very aware of the submissive position escaramuceras occupied, and she even reflected in how currently women could have much more strength and power if the Federación had really support them in that time.

"Los hombres como quiera se abren camino y brecha solos. A nosotras las mujeres siempre nos han puesto un pie encima. Si sí se hubiera visto realmente como el primer deporte nacional mexicano, pues sí qué bonito, pero sobre todo en mi época no le daban la fuerza e importancia a la mujer como se le daban al hombre, si nos hubieran apoyado más en esa época, ahorita estuviéramos incluso mucho más arriba que los hombres porque ya también hay mujeres que colean y hay mujeres que lazan".

"Men manage to open themselves a way, however us women always have been stepped on. If it was really considered the first national Mexican sport, well that would be nice, but in my time they did not give power and importance to women as they did to men. If they have supported us, right now we would be even higher than men because there are already women that tail and rope."

Although women have also managed to open themselves a path in charrería, they have been doing it at a much slower pace. Previous perspectives of machismo display were stronger and more explicit between the 1970s and the beginnings of the 1990s when escaramuza competitions were finally permitted, but still faced a strong rejection from men. As it can be perceived by younger Adelitas' responses, machismo traits still prevail in today's charrería practice, which have raised a level of complexity to their performance execution inside and outside the arena.

Internalized Misogyny

Historically, misogyny has been a strong word with an even stronger meaning. However according to Nina Aaron's *New York Times* article, being a misogynistic person or participating in misogynistic attitudes and institutions does not necessarily mean that an individual is a women-hater. What is ironic about patriarchy is that it is a system so entrenched in our society and mentality that it is almost imperceptible, and stated by Faludi (1991), its workings are internalized, encoded, diffused and chameleonic. The backlash of patriarchy, as the author illustrates it, is not necessarily performed by people that hate women or even individuals that are aware of the role they are playing; some even consider themselves feminists, however a lot participate in the unconscious aim to push women to their "acceptable roles" (Faludi, 1991).

As stated previously, men in charrería were not very receptive to the integration/addition of women in the institution. However, surprisingly, this sentiment was also shared by women themselves. As a pioneer escaramucera, one of the participants narrated the struggle to introduce girls and women into the tradition, even though this process represented the desired inclusion by daughters and wives of charros, who frequently were isolated and excluded from the lienzo

charro. According to the this rider, to introduce the ideology of female empowerment was harder than expected:

“Empezamos las mujeres a intervenir, yo con el estandarte de que “las mujeres también podemos”, a empoderarnos y a empoderarlas y a decirles “ustedes también cuentan y votan” [...] Cuando nosotras empezamos a montar y les mandamos a hacer el vestido de Adelita llegaron a decirnos que parecíamos cabareteras de cantina, pero era lo que yo había visto allá y era lo que yo había aprendido. Entonces no era nada más lidiar con el contexto, sino también de lidiar con las mismas mujeres porque eran las primeras en empezar a criticar”.

“We started to intervene, and I carried the flag of “women also can”, and we began to empower us and empower them, and to continually tell them “you also count and vote.” [...] When we started riding and we commissioned our Adelita dress to a seamstress, they even started to say that we looked as cabaret girls, but it was what I have seen and learned before! It was not only to deal with the context, but also to deal with the same women that were the first to criticize.”

Before conducting this study, I once heard about the experience of a former teammate that acquired her father’s membership inside a lienzo charro. Basically she paid for the debt her dad had, and she became a new member of an association that had been traditionally catalogued as an all-men arena. A friend told her that she needed to ask for the keys to enter the installations any time she wanted to (a right given to every member). However she replied that she did not want any trouble, and that that is why “charros did not like us, because we are very problematic.” Surprisingly, this is a general notion shared by many among charrería.

Considering a conflict that a woman asks for something that originally is supposed to be hers, sounds as a microcosm of what also happens in the real world, or in Mexican society at

large. The sentiment expressed by my friend and ex-peer had been continually in my mind since I started my study, that is why I considered it important to pay attention to the perspective escaramuceras have of themselves, as well as their teammates. Internalized misogyny was not one of the most common themes within my fieldwork, however it is a trait worth analyzing, as it is still existent in the sport today as it was in the 1970s when the proliferation of escaramuza teams was barely starting.

The common notion that women are “conflictive and problematic” has been inside the public worldview of lienzos charros since I started to practice the sport, and some responses show that it is unlikely to dissipate any time soon. According to Faludi (1990), the backlash of patriarchy is not a movement and it is not political, nevertheless its lack of orchestration is what makes it more effective, because is harder to identify the struggle. Its domination in the private sphere successfully inhabits the woman’s mind and vision, and makes her imagine that the pressure is all in her head, until she starts to enforce the backlash too, on herself, and apparently also on younger generations. (Faludi, 1990).

A former rider and trainer that was part of my fieldwork, narrated her experience introducing her teen daughters to the escaramuza practice. She expressed that the teen riders were constantly asking for help from the man that takes care of their horses, however she even sounded ashamed of how botherersome she felt women could be:

“No le pago para que le dé de comer a los caballos, le pago para que aguante a mis hijas. Yo les he dicho a las muchachas también ‘somos bien afortunadas de tener a los trabajadores que tenemos porque no cualquiera quiere trabajar con una escaramuza, somos bien fastidiosas’. A veces me dice ‘no me dé tanto, no me pague por esto’, le digo ‘nada más por el hecho de aguantar a mis hijas estoy más que agradecida’ y no cualquiera quiere trabajar con una escaramuza”.

“I do not pay him to feed the horses, I pay him to bear my daughters. I am always telling the girls that we should be grateful to have these employees because not everyone wants to work with an escaramuza team, we are very annoying. Sometimes he tells me ‘do not give that much, do not pay me for this,’ but just by the fact that he is willing to bear my girls, I am more than grateful, not everyone wants to work with escaramuzas.”

It is worth analyzing a more objective response below, but despite the noticeable respect for female riders, the discomfort of machismo still seen inside the sport. When asked about the relationship between escaramuza members, a former judge, rider, and female leader inside the Federación Mexicana de Charrería also agreed that women tend to be more complicated than men:

“Cuando empieza un equipo se batalla, como en todas partes y sobretodo las mujeres que somos medio complicadas, somos más complicadas que los hombres y siempre tenemos cosas”.

“Whenever a team starts, there is struggle, and especially with women that are kind of complicated. We are more complicated than men, and we always have *things*.”

None of the respondents specified a clear reason why in their vision women are complicated or conflictive. This could be based on the fact that the notion has been so reiterative inside charrería, that they managed to believe so in the long run. On the other hand, it could also be founded in the constant negotiation of needs that they take part in while practicing the sport. Although this research is focused on analyzing women’s perspectives and experiences, we also asked our male participant what his stance is on the subject; are women really perceived by charros as problematic?

“Definitivamente no, ¿por qué lo serían? Al contrario, benefician en gran parte. [...] Lo que podría impedir (su progreso) son ellas mismas y su actitud, en el sentido de que tiene que haber participación, tiene que haber compromiso, tiene que haber disciplina para ir dentro de un lienzo charro”.

“Definitely not, why would they? On the contrary, they benefit greatly. [...] What could impede (their progress) are themselves and their attitude, in the sense that there has to be participation, there has to be commitment, there has to be discipline to enter a lienzo charro”.

On the positive side, this charro explicitly affirmed that he does not consider women in charrería conflictive or problematic. However we cannot dismiss that his response implied that if women do not achieve a better position within the sport and its sacred place: the lienzo charro, it is based on their own lack of commitment and participation. These participants’ responses showed that internalized misogyny works as a way to justify the system’s flaws, and blame women’s “lack of hard work” instead.

Conforming To Gender Roles

Before starting my study I searched for some online articles in order to analyze how English-speaking media portrayed the Escaramuza Charra. I found an interesting piece of work that heavily criticizes American Women’s Rodeo Association that “fueled by feminism”, encouraged female riders to “pretend to be just like men, roping calves, riding bulls and wrestling steers in competitions,” considering it abnormal, antinatural, and far from counter-revolutionary.

Simultaneously, the article previously introduced and written by Marian Horvat (2010), highly praised escaramuza practice for making ladies to appear “elegant and skilled,” showing

their maneuvers with prudence and agility. The author concludes that escaramuza is the perfect example to demonstrate that it is possible for girls “to be sportive without being masculine or dress immorally.”

While I never revered escaramuza practice for its reinforcement of gender roles and the highlighting of my “feminine nature,” it was considered important to analyze what is the stance of the participants was on idealized femininity, and how much they enjoy conforming to certain roles expected inside the sport. Gender dichotomization, after all, is considered one of the main factors that reproduce inequality within a binary society (Budgeo, 2013). Charrería is a sport where men and women are clearly segregated, delimiting their roles and expectations based on biological traits.

Gender relations is a very complex subject, especially among charrería, where, as explained by one of the participants below, women are revered as tradition-bearers, mothers, daughters, and cheerleaders (although they still occupy a submissive position). Idealized femininity inside the sport plays an important role in this notion, because as challenged by second-wave feminism, traits that are intrinsically part of femininity, as beautification, fashion, and domesticity, are commonly associated with submissiveness, superficiality, and passivity (Budgeo, 2013).

“En la charrería la mujer es importante, la madre es importante, las hermanas son importantes, siempre las mujeres hemos tenido un lugar. De la manera en que nosotras practicamos el deporte vestidas de mujer, montadas de lado, nunca perdiendo nuestra feminidad, o sea tenemos que traer aretes y rebozo, el símbolo más importante de la mujer mexicana... nunca se pierde lo femenino”.

“In charrería, women are important, the mother is important, sisters are important, women always have had a place, because we practice the sport dressed as a

woman and riding aside, we never lose our femininity. We have to wear earrings and a shawl, the most important symbol of the Mexican woman... we never lose our femininity.”

Although Connell argues that “all forms of femininity are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men” (1987, p. 186), there has been considerable controversy surrounding the expressions of new femininities. Idealized femininity is not considered anymore as a threat to gender equality. In fact, authors as Snyder-Hall (2010) suggest that women’s socio-economic progress and empowerment have advanced to an extent that traditional femininity no longer represents an obstacle for women to assert their autonomy and achieve equity. Instead, some have argued that traditional femininity has been deconstructed, and now it can be executed in a *conscious and playful* way to destabilize gender hierarchy (Budgeon, 2013). This seems to be the approach of modern, progressive women riders.”

Although, just as explained by Nájera-Ramírez (2002), rather than being eliminated, Escaramuza Charra, as traditional femininity, have been resignified in a process that complicates their once routine association with gender subordination (Budgeon, 2013). While it is very difficult to accept or deny that femininity is in fact a tool of oppression for these Mexican riders, it is true that they are very grateful for the opportunity to excel in a sport and not lose their feminine nature in the process, as expressed by one of the senior participants, who an insightful comparison:

“Generalmente, en algunos otros deportes, las mujeres que sobresalen se vuelven medio machorroncillas porque, por ejemplo el tenis, que fue una de mis pasiones... pues Serena Williams, cómo le hace para tener tanto musculo y las mujeres charras nunca perdemos nuestra feminidad [...] en la charrería nos ven como mujeres, como algo muy bonito y muy delicado”.

“Generally, in other sports, women that outstand become a little bit masculine. For example, in tennis, that was also one of my passions... well, Serena Williams, I do not know how she does it to have that muscle, and we female charras never lose our femininity [...] in charrería they see us as women, as something very beautiful and delicate.”

As explained by Risman (2004) social production of difference is never neutral, and as long as men and women see themselves as different individuals, it will be very unlikely that women could occupy the same position within a social structure. When asking escaramuceras about the possibility to practice activities that are traditionally attributed to charros, most of them declared that although they are aware that it could be a great opportunity to prove that they are capable to do what men do in charrería, they prefer the side of “*lo femenino*”:

“Hace poco hicieron uno donde las mujeres tenían que vestirse de charro en montura de hombre, no es un tema que a mí me guste, porque no se me hace correcto que una mujer se vista de charro, siento que lo correcto es que se vista de Adelita o su traje de charra, pero siempre como mujer. [...] La escaramuza es muy femenina, a mí me gusta el hecho de que vas con tu vestido, se trata de mucho porte y mucha elegancia, siento que le quitaría un poco el sentido a tu vestimenta porque obviamente para practicar alguna de las suertes charras tienes que ir en pantalón y camisa, es muy diferente a como nosotras practicamos nuestra suerte”.

“Recently they did an event where women had to dress as charros on a man’s saddle. It is not something that I like because I do not think it is correct that a woman dresses as a charro, the correct thing is that she dresses as an adelita or with their charra attire, but always as a woman. [...] Escaramuza is very feminine,

I like the fact that you wear a dress, it is all about grace and elegance. That would eliminate some meaning because obviously to practice some of the *suertes charras*, you have to wear pants and shirt, it is very different to how we practice the sport”.

Most of the escaramuceras are aware that participating in men’s *suertes charras* could be an opportunity to take more time and participation inside a charreada, considering that women’s performance is around 8 minutes, and men’s activities can take up to 3 hours. However, some of them even link this variation as a transgression, disrespect to the gender establishment, and even conducts related to lesbianism:

“Una mujer jineteando yo no le veo el caso, la mera verdad. Jineteando toros, jineteando yeguas, la fortaleza de los animales les gana, la mujer es un poco más débil, donde entra la fuerza varonil combinada con el caballo como que no se me hace. No me imagino hombres a esta altura montados en una albarda, ni me imagino mujeres coleando, que sí las hay, pero... está evolucionado tanto el mundo que a mí sí me gusta respetar los géneros, Dios hizo al hombre y a la mujer, en ese aspecto soy muy respetuosa. Respeto al hombre en su canal y a la mujer en el suyo. No me ubico con un lesbianismo, o este... no no no. No me gustaría ver mujeres vestidas de charros o ver charros vestidos de adelitas”.

“A woman riding a bull, I don’t see the point, to be honest. Riding bulls, riding wild mares. The strength of the animals wins, women are a little bit weaker, where the masculine strength combined with the horse is supposed to be... I don’t see it. I don’t picture men at this point riding on a sidesaddle, nor I imagine women tailing, that there are some, but... the world is evolving so much that I do like to respect genders, God made men and women, and in that aspect I am very

respectful. I respect men in his role and women in hers. I do not identify with lesbianism or... no no no. I wouldn't like to see women dressed up as charros or charros dressed as adelita.”

Some participants respected the choice of other women in being part of what it is considered a man's activity inside charrería: “Women are so dedicated that they will achieve to even make more points than charros.” However, others simply affirmed that it would be unimaginable, emphasizing female's lack of strength and their preoccupation for their physical integrity:

“No, porque tienes que respet... digo, tienes que ser consciente. Nosotros no podemos hacer lo que ellos hacen. No te vas a subir al toro, ¿verdad? No vas a hacer el paso de la muerte porque ahí te puedes quedar. Tienes que ser realista. Te tienes que cuidar como mujer ¿A ti te gustaría colear? A mí no”.

“No, because you have to respe... I mean, you have to be conscious. We cannot do what they do. You are not going to ride a bull, right? You are not going to do the *paso de la muerte*. You have to be realistic. You have to take care of yourself as a woman. Would you like to do steer tailing? I would not.”

Although, general statements are characterized by role-conforming notions, there were more progressive responses from a female participant, and also the interviewed charro. One of the pioneers of escaramuza declared that it is possible to practice men's activities, and even challenged the idea of women being a complementary piece of charrería, and being considered just a partner for the charro, defying as well masculine hegemony inside the tradition:

“Yo soy partidaria de que podemos ser iguales o mejores, pero no todas.

Charrería no significa “hombre charro”, charrería es el punto de una pareja que

se forma y que practica la charrería, no charrería: el charro y la esposa del charro, no. La charrería es hombre y mujer, y la mujer puede ser tan eficaz dentro de la charrería y tan fuerte y con poder de liderazgo como lo es el hombre”.

“I am an advocate that we can be equal as men, or even better than them, but not all of us. Charrería does not mean “charro man”, charrería is the purpose of a couple that conforms and that practices charrería. It’s not charrería as the charro and the wife of the charro. Charrería is man and woman, and the woman can be as effective, strong, and have the power of leadership as the man has.”

Contrary to what was expected from men’s viewpoint, the male participant showed a positive endorsement on women that are trying to learn activities traditionally attributed to men. Very surprised, he declared that he has witnessed women’s prowess in charro performance, and that it is praiseworthy that they are trying to be involved in charrería, even if they are not capable of creating their own escaramuza.

“Me ha tocado ver mujeres montar a horcajadas en una silla de hombre y coleando, realizando suertes charras y qué bueno que traten de decir ‘no formamos una escaramuza, no tenemos una participación dentro de un lienzo charro como escaramuza’ pero hacen lo posible por participar y entran a colear, me ha tocado verlas y hacen las cosas bien”.

“I have seen women riding astride in a man’s saddle and tailing, executing suertes charras, and it is good that they are trying to say ‘we could not create an escaramuza, we do not have a participation as an escaramuza inside a lienzo charro,’ but they do the possible to participate and they enter to tailing performance, I have seen them and they do things well.”

Although almost all of the escaramuceras included in this research desire more participation within charrería, and are willing to become main characters as men have been during decades, it is very unlikely that they will abandon their role inside the institution, even if the Federación permitted it. These roles are so ingrained in their vision, that some of them even appropriate this heavy dichotomization into their lifestyle, values, and beliefs, as one respondent (around 28 years old) affirmed: “not because a man hangs out in the street at 5 AM, means that you as a woman could do it.” It is clear that perspectives of traditional values are still highly prevalent in this community.

Tradition Preservation

Class Factor

The study of gender within a social structure cannot be discussed without introducing the social class factor, and economic perspective. Women that practice charrería are usually introduced by their parents, which bear the costs of this expensive sport, as any other equestrian activity in the country. To perform in an escaramuza charra you are required to at least own a saddle and a horse, additionally you are expected to pay for trainings, dresses, matching equipment, hat, spur, a shawl combined with each dress, among other elements that are usually handcrafted by Mexican artisans.

For escaramuceras that live in the United States, acquiring these items tends to be a difficult process because they are all made in Mexico. One of the participants expressed that in some cases, manufacturers that notice that the products are going to be delivered to the United States raise the price, adding it to an already expensive cost of shipping. She narrates that once she began riding, her lifestyle changed drastically:

“Cambió mi vida completamente, las salidas del fin de semana se acabaron porque pues hay que mantener al caballo. [...] Acá no te venden nada, todo está demasiado caro, todo lo tienes que ordenar a México y esperar a que te llegue o cruzarte y traerte dos o tres albardas a la vez, es mucho”.

“My life changed completely, going out on the weekends was over because you have to pay for the maintenance of the horse. [...] Here they do not sell you anything, everything is too expensive, you have to order it from Mexico and wait till it arrives or cross the border and bring two or three saddles, it is too much.”

Escaramuza teams in the United States face additional disadvantages because charrería culture is still relatively new, and things are managed very differently. One example is that they are not used to the concept of “caballerango”, the person that is in charge of taking care of the horses. This respondent even affirmed that she keeps her horses at her home, so it is easier for her husband and her to groom them and feed them. She has to manage her schedule in order to keep up with this hobby, so she wakes up at 6 AM, and her husband at 5 AM, so they can feed the horses before going to work.

“Yo no conozco a ningún caballerango acá, cada quien hace lo suyo, aquí no tienes alguien que llegas y tu caballo ya está listo... trépatte. [...] Es lo primero que te enseñan, ¿eres nueva? Este es el cincho, el bajador, pecho, etc. Hay que aprender a hacer las cosas una misma”.

“I do not know any caballerango here, each person make her or his things, you do not have someone that you just have to arrive and your horse is ready... get on. [...] It is the first thing that they teach you. You are new? This is the cinch, the bajador, the harness, etcetera. You have to learn to do stuff yourself.”

An experienced trainer that started her practice in Mexico, and later moved to the United States expressed that the main difference between both countries is that girls in America definitely have it much harder to pursue their dream to become an escaramucera. It represents a sacrifice:

“Hijole, allá está bien difícil porque las niñas tienen que prender el remolque de la camioneta, subir el caballo, bañarlo, bajarlo, ensillarlo, todo lo hacen solitas. Aquí en México le hablan al caballerango y le dicen "me tienes el caballo porque vamos a montar a las 5", tenemos otro tipo de educación. Yo estaba cómoda porque siempre tuvimos un caballerango excelente, mis monturas siempre estuvieron bien limpias, mis caballos bien comidos, etc. “Ellas se levantan a las 4 de la mañana a bañar caballos, a darles de comer, a irse a trabajar o a la escuela, después regresan de la escuela, lo suben a la traila y se van a practicar y las niñas las ves manejando desde los 16, 17 años con la camioneta y la traila y todo. Son situaciones difíciles en ese caso para una mujer de esa edad”.

“It is very difficult in the United States because the girls have to turn on the trailer, the truck, bathe the horse, put him on the trailer, put him down, saddle him, they all have to do it by themselves. In Mexico we call the caballerango and we tell him “prepare the horse because we are having a practice at 5,” we have other type of education. I was comfortable because we had an excellent caballerango, my saddles were always clean, my horses well-eaten. They have to get up at 4 AM, bathe the horses, feed them, go to school or work, they come back, get the horse on the trailer, drive to the practice, you watch them driving

since 16, 17 years old with big trucks and trailers. It is a difficult situation for a girl at that age.”

Although they also spend a lot of money on this sport (some may consider that even more than Mexicans) people that practice charrería in the United States come from a very different class background than it is accustomed in Mexico. Originally, charrería was a class based activity practiced only by land owners and ranchers. Currently, although it is not explicitly discriminatory, associations in many cities maintain an elitist stance, characteristic of the patriarchal structure.

In Matamoros for example, there are some associations known for maintaining elitist premises, and being against escaramuzas. Once I was invited to the first female team inside one of these lienzos charros. They finally accepted the inclusion of an escaramuza in their association, nevertheless in order to be accepted; they demanded a list of the women’s names, next to their dads or husbands’ (if it was the case). Later, this letter was discussed with the committee members and finally approved.

“A la mujer nos ponen nuestras trabbitas y pues si no tienes el apoyo de tu papá o tu esposo, ahí te quedas... ellos como quiera pueden decir ‘es mi dinero y me lo gasto’, hay unas que no trabajamos, en ese aspecto sí un poquito te detienes, muchas se salen por dinero, es un chorro de gasto”.

“As women, we have obstacles, and if you don’t have the support from your dad or husband, that’s the end... they can always say ‘it’s my money and I spend it’, there are some of us that do not work, and in that aspect you do get held back, a lot of women quit for economic reasons, there are a lot of expenses.”

In charrería, passion and *amor al arte* are not the only things you need to succeed, and although not all escaramuceras are expected to be rich and privileged, commonly the teams that possess more economic resources are the ones who achieve better places in national competitions. They have better horses, better lienzos, better trainers, and usually more time to practice.

“Las diferencias que yo veía eran falta de apoyo económico, porque realmente el entrenamiento lo tenías, el horario lo tenías, pero no te podías comparar con un equipo que traían unos caballos, por ejemplo, todos caladores de \$300,000 y tú traías un caballo de \$80,000 que no están bien arrendados, o que no están arrendados por fulanito de tal, que son caballos que nacen para la charrería. La mayoría de las escaramuzas que llegaban a finales eran muchachas que estaban cerca de ahí, de Guadalajara, Querétaro, Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, igual eran muchachas que tenían mucho apoyo económico y sí hay un desequilibrio, no te puedes comparar”.

“The difference that I saw was the lack of financial support, because you had the training, the schedule, but you couldn’t compare with a team that had horses, like for example, worth \$300,000 and you have one of \$80,000 that was not well trained, or was not trained by a specific person, that are horses born for charrería. The majority of the escaramuzas that made it to the finals were girls that were nearby, from Guadalajara, Queretaro, Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, they were girls that had a lot of financial support and there is an imbalance, you can’t compare.”

Escaramuza pioneer in Matamoros narrated how back in the time, she was so moved by the passion and stubbornness of a couple of girls that were daughters of her husband’s caballerango,

that she decided to pay for their dresses, saddles, hats, as if they were her daughters. One of these girls is now a trainer and mom of escaramuceras, and described how was her experience inside the sport as a kid, where sometimes she had to share a horse with her brother:

“Mi papá era arrendador, nosotros no somos de dinero, pero si teníamos que ir a un estatal, a veces pasaban por nosotras para practicar o nos íbamos en pecera. Mi papá hacía su esfuerzo, él ya sabía que íbamos a ir a una competencia y ya tenía arreglando un caballo listo para vender para podernos ir. [...] Cuando estábamos chiquitos, mi hermano y yo compartíamos caballo y se enojaba porque terminaban las colas y él tenía que desensillar el caballo y poner mi albarda y a veces me subía y me aventaba como cayera... se enojaba, decía: ¿por qué tienen que andar en la escaramuza?”

“My dad was a horse-trainer, we do not come from a rich family, but if we had to go to a state competition, our teammates gave us a ride or we got there by bus. My dad made a big effort. When we had an upcoming competition, he had a horse ready to sell so we could go. [...] When we were little, my brother and I shared a horse, and he would get angry because when he would finish tailing, he had to quickly remove his saddle and put mine. Sometimes he would help me get on the horse, and he almost threw me... he was angry, and he kept saying: why do you have to be in the escaramuza?”

Although economic privileges are important factors inside charrería, this section showed how even women that come from lower class backgrounds are managing to continue in this sport. Also, it is perceived that even though escaramuceras are aware of the disadvantages they

face compared to other teams in the country with more money, this does not affect their experience riding.

Anti-Feminist Notions

As we have read along the pages of this study, we perceive that charrería in particular, and Mexican society in general is ruled by an unequal and heavily gendered system. In the majority of the cases, participants were perfectly aware of the role they are playing within the institution. They know they are facing disadvantages inside the sport, and most of them believe that there should be a kind of reformation among this ‘beloved patriarchy’, as denominated by Ramírez (2015). However, as a feminist research, it was relevant to understand the exact perspectives of escaramuceras in terms of the feminist movement.

According to Yeung, Kay and Peach (2013), a system justification theory represents the situation in which people are motivated to believe that the social system they live in is fair, desirable, and how it should be. These authors explain that there is a common reluctance in women to identify themselves as a feminist, based in antifeminist hostility portrayed in the media and negative stereotypes that associate feminists with a woman that is “discontented, selfish, militant, and hard-line in her views” (Percy & Kremer, 1995, p. 214). Paradoxically, there have been studies that show that despite holding egalitarian values and sharing feminist ideals, “many women reject feminist self-identification and add qualifications such as ‘I’m not a feminist, but...’ when expressing proequality sentiments” (Yeung, Kay and Peach, 2013).

As it has been previously stated, the study of gender relations inside charrería is a very complex subject, because although the patriarchal status quo and the unequal social hierarchy are evident, they are safeguarded by the tradition justification. It was considered important to add

this section because in previous research it has been argued the threat that supposes the words feminism, justice, and equality while discussing the study of charrería (Ramírez, 2015). I was aware of the backlash that this question could bring to my fieldwork, however as a feminist researcher and former escaramucera, I do not believe dresses, shawls, and sidesaddles should be opposed for the search of gender equity.

I asked my participants if they would consider themselves feminists viewing it as a movement that aims for equity of the sexes in a political, social and economic environment. I received three types of statements; the first kind, and most uncommon, were the responses that rapidly and convincingly said yes, and made clear arguments backing their stance. The second type was a doubting affirmative response, where they looked somehow afraid that I could judge their position. The third one was a firm no, where in the majority of the cases we received the typical ‘I’m not a feminist, but...’ described in previous literature. Some examples are shown below:

“No, honestamente no. Estoy de acuerdo con la equidad de género en un ambiente laboral, en todos los aspectos de la vida en realidad, estoy de acuerdo con que las mujeres sabemos lo mismo que saben hacer los hombres, que debemos tener las mismas oportunidades en la vida [...] no me considero feminista porque pienso que ahora el movimiento feminista se ha vuelto ya en que el matrimonio no es bueno y que una mujer que se queda en su casa no está bien, que en una relación las mujeres no le tenemos que pedir permiso al marido, ni siquiera tenemos que conversar con él sobre si queremos hacer tal o cual cosa, que hay que hacerlo y se acabó”.

“No, honestly I do not (consider myself a feminist). (Although) I am in favor with gender equity in the labor force, in every aspect of life really, I agree with the idea

that women know the same as men do, and that we must have the same opportunities. [...] I don't consider myself a feminist because I think nowadays, the movement has shifted into marriage being not a good thing and that a woman that stays home is wrong, that in a relationship women shouldn't ask their husbands for permission, we shouldn't even talk to them about if we want to do this or that, we have to do it and that's it."

Statements from participants showed a disagreement with recently proposed laws by gender equity organizations.

"No estoy de acuerdo... o sea el feminismo, que porque eres mujer, que busca la equidad, o por ejemplo ahorita que los partidos políticos que tienen que haber 3 candidatos hombres y 3 candidatos mujeres, el lugar se gana. Lo que sí creo es que se les tienen que dar las mismas oportunidades, que no te coarten por ser mujer, pero que nada más por ser mujer te den una candidatura, o nada más por ser mujer te den un puesto en una empresa, que si tenemos 15 administradores, tienen que haber 7 y medio mujeres y 7 y medio hombres, o sea no... con eso yo no voy".

"I do not agree (with feminism)... just because you are a woman searching for equity or for example, now that in the political parties that there have to be 3 men candidates and 3 women candidates... the position must be earned. What I do believe is that they should give the same opportunities, to not being restricted for being a woman, but to get a candidacy just for being a woman, or to get a position in a company just for being a woman, that if we have 15 administrators and there

should be seven and a half women and seven and a half men, I mean... I do not support that.”

Some showed a viewpoint in considering feminism as the exact the opposite of machismo:

“No, no me considero ‘feminista’ por que el término como tal es lo mismo al decir ‘machista’ solo que viniendo de una mujer, por lo que creo que ambas cosas son negativas, sin embargo soy una persona que apoya la igualdad, es decir que estoy a favor de que las mujeres debemos tener las mismas oportunidades que el hombre, creo que somos tan importantes en la sociedad como lo son ellos”.

“No, I do not consider myself a ‘feminist’ because the term per se is the same as saying ‘machista’, but coming from a woman, I think both things are negative.

However I am a woman that supports equality, I am on favor that women should have the same opportunities than men, we are as important in society as them.”

Participants’ responses implied that they are not against gender equity, they just feel threatened by the term ‘feminism.’

“No, porque yo veo las cosas como dices tú... con equidad, pero sin perder los valores. No me considero pertenecer a un grupo en específico. Simplemente hay cosas que están bien y hay cosas que están mal. Claro que debe haber una igualdad, por ejemplo 50 diputados y 50 diputadas, yo lo entiendo, que haya mujeres presidentas eso sí, pero siento que la palabra machismo o machista es muy fuerte e igualmente decir ‘yo soy feminista’, siento que es muy fuerte, como que estás en contra de los hombres”.

“No because I see things as you said... with equity, but without losing our values. I do not consider myself to be part of a specific group. Simply there are good

things, and there are bad things. Of course there should be equality, for example 50 male deputies and 50 female deputies, I get it, that there should be women presidents, but I feel that the work machismo o machista is very strong as saying ‘I am a feminist’, I think it is a very strong statement, like if you are against men.”

As explaining their negative position against feminism, I could perceive that there is a big misunderstanding and ignorance of what the movement represents (even though these women come from privileged backgrounds, attended higher-education institutions, and are bilingual). These responses show that antifeminist hostility portrayed in Mexican news and social media platforms has heavily disrupted feminist vision. And that the assumption that “the feminist agenda encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians” (Robertson, 1992), as absurd as it sounds, is far from disappear in the collective worldview.

We could imply that these women were influenced by the socialization processes they went through inside a traditional, gendered, and patriarchal society, after all they started in charrería at very young ages, and they spent an extensive amount of time in lienzos charros, coexisting with Mexican ‘machos’, and feminized Adelitas. However, in this study we also found determined self-declared feminists that showed a challenging posture against charrería’s patriarchal structure, as one discontent escaramucera stated: “We are anatomically different, but mentally we have the same capacities. Why not giving us the same treatment as athletes?” Non-conformist sentiments also come from women that are part of an important charrería heritage; they and their parents have practiced this sport almost all their lives.

Women's Agency

Sisterhood Paradox

Introduced by feminist theorist Kate Millet around the 1970s, sisterhood is the word to describe “fraternity among women” that later was adapted in the Spanish language by Mexican anthropologist and researcher Marcela Lagarde as *sororidad*. Lagarde (2009) believed that men are not afraid per se of their exclusion in the public sphere, and that they are in fact afraid of women's aggregation and contribution within themselves, in a place where they have been historically isolated and excluded. In cultures as Mexico the creation of support groups of women that are not linked by blood ties is considered a novel tool of resistance, because as expressed by Lagarde (2009), these require the analysis of their misogyny:

“La sororidad exige de nosotras revisar la propia misoginia; cada una tiene que ir descubriendo dónde, cómo se nos aparece, cómo nos legitima para dañar a las otras. Eso también es violencia. La sororidad es una política que trata de desmontar la misoginia, acción básica para el empoderamiento de las mujeres y la construcción de la igualdad. Sin ella, nos pondremos trabas entre nosotras mismas”.

“Sisterhood demands from us to revise our own misogyny. Each of us has to be discovering when and how it appears, and how it legitimizes us to harm other women. That is also violence. Sisterhood is a policy that tries to dismantle misogyny, a basic action to empower women and construct equity. Without it we will hinder each other.”

In this study, we introduce the sisterhood paradox in charrería as a term to describe the constant struggle riders describe as being part of an escaramuza team and having to perform

collectively, in comparison to men that execute almost every activity individually. Ironically the union of these women serves as an effective tool to deal with patriarchal rules and empower them to continue being part of the institution traditionally ruled by men.

As explained by several participants, men in charrería have it easier, because they can practice their activities whenever they want, they can buy their outfits however they desire, and basically they just have to worry about themselves while executing their *suertes charras*. However, when a woman practices in an escaramuza team, she has to agree with other seven participants on what to wear, when to practice, and at what time, which may cause a constant conflict.

“Nosotras somos 8 y el charro sólo uno. Nosotras teníamos que coordinar el transporte para los demás caballos, el charro sólo se preocupa por el suyo y se acabó. Pienso que se les facilita más a ellos. Ellos son solos, pueden entrenar solos, nosotras no. Nosotras necesitamos las 8 para ponernos de acuerdo con las 8 familias. [...] El charro se puede mandar a hacer el traje que quiera dentro de sus posibilidades, nosotras no. Nosotras nos tenemos que poner de acuerdo todas y estar de acuerdo con lo que vaya a costar, que nos guste lo mismo y las botas todas tienen que ser iguales, las espuelas todas tienen que ser iguales. Si al charro se le pierde una espuela puede usar otra y no pasa nada, nosotras no. Nuestros arreos tienen que ser iguales, los de los charros no.”

“We are eight, and the charro is just one. We have to coordinate transportation for the rest of the horses, the charro only worries about his and that’s it. I think that is easier for them, they are by themselves, they can train alone, we cannot. We need to be there with the eight members in order to coordinate and plan including our

eight families. [...] The charro can order the suit that he wants and he can afford it, we cannot. We have to plan and agree with the price of our dresses, that we all like it, and the boots, they have to be all the same, same as spurs. If the charro loses a spur, he can use a different one and it is ok. Our saddle equipment must be the same, unlike the charros.”

“A los charros mientras que anden trepados, traigan sombrero, botines y espuelas, no les dicen nada, pero como mujer si te falla el arete o te falla el color de la bota porque lo ordenaron otro año pues ya valió, te pueden descalificar por el color de un sombrero. La charrería es mucho más estricta para la mujer que para el charro [...] Todo todo todo tiene que ser igual. Las reglas son mucho más difícil de seguir para una escaramuza que para un charro”.

“To the charros, as long as they are riding, with hats, boots and spurs, nobody tells them anything, but as a woman in the escaramuza, if an earring is missing or you get the wrong color of boot because it was ordered on a different year you’re screwed, you can even get disqualified for the color of the hat. Charrería is way stricter for women than for the charro [...] everything, everything, everything has to be the same. Rules are much harder to follow for an escaramuza than for a charro.”

Paradoxically, it is observed that although the collective participation may cause a struggle for the female riders, the closeness among participants simultaneously creates a support group that aids them to negotiate their needs, raise funds, perform better routines, etcetera. This female cohesion has been named by more than one escaramucera as a sisterhood, especially for those that practice the sport in the United States, far from their actual family:

“Es como estar en una hermandad, en la Universidad te hablan mucho de las ‘sororities’, las hermandades y todo eso, y una escaramuza es casi lo mismo. Pasas tantas horas juntas a la semana, viajamos juntas, muchas de nosotros tenemos niños que están creciendo juntos. Somos una familia en sí”.

“It’s like being in a sisterhood, in college they tell you a lot about sororities, sisterhoods, and all that, and in an escaramuza it is basically the same. You spend so many hours together a week, travel together, a lot of us have children that are growing together. Basically, we are family.”

As I have been practicing the sport, I have known and befriended multiple females that were part of at least one escaramuza team. This helped me to reassure a notion confirmed by many participants: when a group has a good relationship it has good results. In a specific case I remember a former teammate that created an escaramuza team that had everything to succeed: purebred horses, great lienzo charro, beautiful dresses and good saddle equipment. However even though they invested thousands of pesos, they never got any of the first places of the contests they participated in, because they had a terrible relationship, and the funny thing was that you could notice it just by watching them perform. One of the interviewees that not only was an escaramuza member, but also a very important judge in the Federación, shared this feeling:

“Cuando empieza un equipo se batalla [...] una vez que se superan todas esas cosas la escaramuza se vuelve como una hermandad, es tanto el tiempo que pasamos juntas que nos vemos ya como familia, tú también lo viviste, nos volvemos hermanas. [...] Yo he comprobado que cuando un equipo se mantiene junto a través de los años va a hacer algo, va a sobresalir, porque es muy

importante que todas las integrantes se conozcan, confíen unas en otras, creen lazos de hermandad, así el equipo se vuelve fuerte”.

“When a team is starting there is struggle, like in every other places [...] once all those things are overcome, the escaramuza becomes a sisterhood, it is so much time that we spend together that we see each other as family, we become sisters. [...] I have confirmed that when a team stay together through the years it is going to do great things, it is going to outstand. It is very important that the team members know each other, trust each other, create bonds of sisterhood, and this way the team becomes stronger.”

Another important characteristic in the sisterhood paradox within charrería is that in comparison to men, women organize themselves to collect money that eventually will be useful to buy hats, equipment, dresses, and cover transportation expenses. Many of these activities were called by some participants as the *vendimia*, which can vary from selling food, making raffles in charreadas, organizing events, and even looking for sponsors:

“Se nos puede facilitar un poco más esa hermandad y trabajo en equipo porque para ayudar a una nos ayudamos todas. Si a una le falta dinero para el sombrero, a la otra para el vestido nuevo que vamos a estrenar en el nacional y a la otra que se le perdió el freno o algo por el estilo, nos juntamos a hacer rifas, vendimia de comida organizamos cualquier cosa para recaudar fondos para nuestra causa [...] si se te olvidó la crinolina para participar por que te pueden descalificar, si no tienes los requisitos para participar... pues siempre hay una amiga de otra escaramuza que te preste la suya, somos competencia dentro del ruedo pero siempre me sentí en familia afuera”.

“It could be easier for us the sisterhood and teamwork because to help one out, we help all of us. If one needs money for her sombrero, another one for her new dress that we will be using for the national, and the other one who lost the bridle or something like that, we would organize raffles, bake sales, anything to raise money for our cause [...] if you forgot your crinoline to participate, because you can get disqualified if you don't fulfill the requisites, there is always a friend from another escaramuza that can lend you hers, we are rivals inside the ruedo but I always felt like I was in a family outside of it.”

Although in the majority of the cases I heard great stories about how progressively escaramuza teams transform into sisterhoods and families, I consider that this is a relatively new phenomena that has been evolving since escaramuza practice conception, because as narrated by one of the pioneer escaramuceras, it was a struggle to create a team, keep it together, and make it work effectively:

“Acarree a un enjambre de niñas, a todas mis sobrinas, amigas y enemigas también. En esa época era todo para mí y yo nada más me enfocaba en lo que yo hacía y tenía que hacer un corte a las malas vibras. [...] Hay momentos y días que todas andan bien padre, pero si a alguna le bajó la regla y anda de malas y se pelea con la otra empieza la rivalidad, incluso en mi grupo de adultas había mucha envidia, había dos que tres que ni quiero volver a verlas”.

“I brought an array of girls, I invited my nieces, friends, and even enemies. In that time it was all for me, and I was only focused on what I did, so I had to cut the bad vibes. [...] There are moments and days were all the girls are in a great mood, but if one of them has her period and it is on a bad mood and has a fight with

another girl, the rivalry starts. Even in my group of adults there was a lot of envy, there were two or three women that I do not want to see ever again.”

Some riders that have practiced the sport since they were little, are aware of the transition, and agree with the notion that when you are starting to grow up, and move into a different socialization process, your relationship with the teammates improves considerably.

“Éramos muy unidas, en la infantil era un poco diferente porque estabas más chica. Ya estando en el equipo juvenil es cuando te desenvuelves más y eres más madura, tienes otras prioridades, ya quieres ganar, empiezas a trabajar en equipo, a ser más unida y a salir a fiestas con ellas, carnes asadas, empiezas a formar parte de una familia”.

“We were very close, in the junior escaramuza was a bit different because you were younger. Being in the adult escaramuza you develop more and you are more mature, you have other priorities, and you want to win, so you start working as a team, to be more close, going out to parties with them, barbeques, you start being part of a family.”

“Siento que cada vez es más hermandad, antes era simplemente compañeras de equipo, cada quien su vida. Con los años ha crecido una relación muy bonita entre las integrantes, es importante checar bien quiénes son las personas que están en tu equipo, que sean personas que sean compatibles, qué tú sabes que tienen la misma meta, la misma visión que tú, porque hay personas que les gusta pero no les apasiona, entonces sí es importante eso. La relación debe de ser hermandad, debe ser en verdad muy solidaria una con otra, si algo te está

pasando yo te voy a ayudar sea dentro del ruedo o fuera, más que nada esa es la clave: la hermandad”.

“I believe that it has increasingly become a sisterhood. Before they were simple teammates, dedicated to their own lives. With the years we have developed a very beautiful relationship between team members. It is very important to check who are the persons on your team, if they are compatible with you, and that you know that they have the same goal and vision as you, because maybe they like this sport, but are not passionate about it. The relationship has to be as a sisterhood, being supportive one with the other, if something is happening to you, I am going to help you inside or outside the arena, that is the key: sisterhood.”

The creation of an effective sisterhood in charrería involves several factors. As stated previously, the majority of these participants have no profound understandings and visions of feminist theory. They are not familiarized with Marcela Lagarde’s *sororidad*, much less with Kate Millet’s term of sisterhood, and they definitely are not aware if they are being good and supportive feminists with their fellow teammates. Nonetheless, along the years these women have learned that a structure is much more successful and powerful if it is united, which happens to be very similar to the role that feminism plays in society at large.

Bond with their horse

In *The Meaning of Horses: Biosocial Encounters* (2015) Ana Ramírez, an anthropologist and former escaramucera, points out the absence of good horsemanship in the escaramuza performance, as well as the lack of co-being between the horse and the female rider. While the author depicts important insights about the use of the *albarda* Lepe, and the disadvantages that

this sidesaddle brings to riders, she undermines the relationship these women have with the animals, arguing that “performances are often cruel to the horses that themselves are seen as disposable” (Ramírez, p. 174).

Although, there is no profound understanding of how cruel escaramuza exercises are for the horses involved, based on my own perspective and fieldwork I can argue that Ramírez (2015) expressions are inexact, and with a lack of bases with the exception of her personal opinion. The author states that the use of a sidesaddle “fails to realize a deal of embodied mutuality between horse and rider,” and that it is difficult for both elements to feel each other within escaramuza training. Based on my experience the use of sidesaddle does limit the communication and transmission of aids through the body. However, the limitations added by the height of the *albarda* Lepe and the side position of the legs signifies a stimulus to develop other forms of communication.

Women in charrería have learned to create a different and greater bond with their horse in comparison with charros that ride astride. Escaramuceras managed to design different ways of mutuality, based on the use of their voice, hands, body language, and the handling of the reins. What Ramírez (2015) considers as a lack of horsemanship and ability, ‘adelitas’ see it as an opportunity to develop alternative skills, not dominated by men.

“Los charros traen sus espuelas, cuartas, la fuerza de su mano y pues nosotras no, porque a mí nadie me va a decir que la espuela del pie izquierdo sirve de algo, yo monté muchos años de mi vida, de nada, absolutamente de nada. Para poder usar la espuela que traes en el pie izquierdo tienes que bajar del estribo, picarle y luego tienes que volver a poner el pie en el estribo, o sea no es cierto.

[...] Todas esas limitaciones que nosotros tenemos con los caballos, las suplimos con la voz, con las caricias, con otro tipo de contacto, se crea ese bond”.

“Charros have their spurs, riding whips, the strength of their hands and well, we don’t, because no one will tell me that the spur on the left foot is useful for something, I rode horses for many years, nothing, absolutely nothing. To use the spur on the left foot, you would have to put your foot off the stirrup, use it and put your foot on the stirrup again, I mean is not true [...] all those limitations that we have with horses, we replace them with the voice, the caresses, another type of contact, it creates that bond.”

In this section we introduce women’s experiences about the relationship with their horses, and we prove that these creatures, far from being disposable, are in fact a really important individual in the lives of our participants. Even when *adelitas* cease practicing the sport, most of the horses stay in their families or are sold to other women riders that also construct a personal bond with the animal, and get to be “crazy in love” with them.

“Yo tenía mi tordillo que me hizo campeona, ese caballo ya conocía el ruido del carro, desde la carretera. Nada más me olía o sentía que llegaba y daba unos brincos y reparos que pocos lo podían bajar, hasta que llegaba a decirle “¿qué pasó, chiquito?”, le daba sus zanahorias, azúcar, etc. Yo a ese caballo lo amé con locura, yo creo que lo amaba más que a mi marido, era pasión total con ese animal”.

“I had my *tordillo* that made me a champion, that horse perceived the sound of my car, from the highway. He just smelled or felt that I was arriving and he started jumping non-stop, nobody was able to calm him, until I arrived and kept

telling him ‘what is going on, little boy?’, I gave him carrots, sugar. I loved him like crazy, I believe I loved him more than my husband, it was total passion with that animal.”

In some occasions women made a particular distinction with the treatment they give to horses, in comparison with charros. Several times, escaramuceras affirmed that although men do care for their horses, they are not as patient, sensible, and humane as women, also dismantling Ramírez (2015) belief that their suffering means “little or nothing” to their owner:

“El caballo es parte fundamental del deporte de la charrería, uno desarrolla ese sentido de humanidad, ya te preocupas por un animal, ya es parte de tu familia. Para nosotras las escaramuzas no es nada más un caballo, es tu compañero, es tu pareja en este deporte. Los hombres también son muy sensibles, cuidan también sus caballos, pero nosotras somos más pacientes con ellos, nosotras nos preocupamos más, te da miedo que algo le pasa a tu caballo, obviamente el hombre también siente miedo pero no lo demuestra, nosotros somos más expresivas en ese aspecto, es ganarte la confianza de tu caballo. Los hombres son más duros, más rudos con los animales”.

“The horse is a fundamental part of charrería, we develop a sense of humanity, we are worried about our animals, they are part of our familia. For us, escaramuzas is not just a horse, it is your companion, is your partner in this sport. Men are also sensible, they take care of their horses, but we are more patient, we worry more, we are afraid that something happens to the horse. Obviously the man also is afraid, but he does not show it, we are more expressive, it is about winning the trust of your horse. Men are more tough and rude with animals.”

Based on my experience, it is true that horses are capable of perceiving when you are afraid, uncomfortable or even mad, ironically when you are afraid it is more likely that you will fall from it. They tend to imitate your mood and energy, which is another important common theme expressed by escaramuceras. It is such their attachment to these animals that one of the participants even compared them with men:

“Los caballos son como los hombres, si tú los tratas bien, te tratan mejor. Si lo tratas a madrazos pues te va a tratar a madrazos también. Por eso dicen que cuando andas de malas el caballo lo percibe, cuando tienes miedo el caballo lo sabe, él tiene que sentir el dominio cuando lo traes en las piernas, él tiene que sentir que trae jinete. El hombre se aprovecha mucho de eso y a veces los trata bien mal”.

“Horses are like men, if you treat them good, they treat you better. If you treat them roughly, they are going to treat you roughly too. That is why they say that when you are moody, the horse perceives it, when you are afraid the horse knows it, he has to feel the domain when you have it between your legs, he has to feel that he has a rider on his back. Men tend to take advantage of that and sometimes treat them very bad.”

Creating a bond with their horse could also mean a strategy to execute better the escaramuza routine, and not necessarily be involved with the fact that these women truly care about their horses. However when practicing escaramuza it is almost impossible not to be attached with your animal partner. Even when it is a borrowed horse, and that you will eventually asked give it back.

“Recuerdo mucho que me gustaba ir a ver y platicar con mi caballo antes de ensillar ya que pase por muchos y aprendí que para tener una mejor práctica tienes que atender a las necesidades de tu caballo y así tener la mejor cooperación del animal a la hora de la práctica”.

“I remember that I liked to go see and chat with my horse before saddling, I had several, and I learned that in order to have a better practice you have to attend its needs, and that way achieve better cooperation from the animal at practice time”.

With this section I am not implying that animal torture does not exist in Mexican charrería, in fact some participants expressed their worry for the way bulls, mares and horses are treated, and then immediately they corrected themselves with something similar to: “but I know that it is tradition”. What it has been argued along this research is that the justification to preserve attitudes that are harmful to others based on tradition is simply inconceivable.

In *The Racialization of a Debate: The Charreada as Tradition or Torture* (1996), Nájera-Ramírez studies that animal cruelty controversy in charrería along the United States is also based in a xenophobic discourse that involves not only the treatment of animals, but also of Mexicans. Nájera-Ramírez (1996) fieldwork points out the experience of a woman that is devoted to rescue animals from charreadas, who argued that people involved in this practice “do not believe that the animal has intelligence, that the animal has a soul, that the animal has feelings,” she is convinced that charrería “promotes animal cruelty and violence in the community”. While this aseveration cannot be completely denied, this auto-ethnographic study aims to show that there are people inside this tradition that indeed care for animals, and that there is awareness about the room for improvement in this matter.

Evolution

Despite what has been described in this research and previous literature, the place of the Escaramuza Charra has taken a huge step forward in charrería. These women's constant negotiation of needs, their involvement in institutional matters, and their participation inside charrería's structure has opened a space for future generations that unfortunately were not available for pioneer adelitas. Senior participants explained being proud of having conquered this place, and that young women are not that "stupid, as we were before":

"No nos dejaban opinar y creo que hasta ahorita tampoco lo hacen, pero la mujer se ha empoderado. Yo lo veo, ya no son tan mensas como lo éramos nosotras, ya ahorita las toman en cuenta y mucho porque ahorita ya jalamos a la gente a ver el show. [...] Ellos sin nosotros no serían nada, serían unos señores que montan a caballo y hacen una carnita asada al ahí se va, pero hasta para eso tienen que tener a la mujer a un lado porque sino no se organizan bien".

"They would not let us express our views, I think they still do not do it, but women have empowered themselves. I see it, they are not as stupid as we were, now they consider us, and a lot because we bring the people to see the show. [...] Charros without us would be nothing, they would be a bunch of men that ride and make a simple barbeque, although even for that they need to have a woman on their side, because if not they could not coordinate themselves."

Participants' conclusions show that the performance of the escaramuza has been normalized along the years. Now is an intrinsic part of the charreada, and it is now very unlikely to attend one of these events without the presentation of an escaramuza. Senior interviewees declared that "we can not let this female practice die", and we must permit changes, evolution,

and modernization in order to guarantee its conservation. As a former national coordinator of judges, she expressed that when she was serving her position in the Federación there were around 500 escaramuza teams, and now there are more than a thousand.

“Hemos cosechado mucho respeto. A mí me tocó lo peor, el desaire, pero ahorita hay mucho respeto, nos hemos ido ganando un lugar bien importante. Una cosa que es diferente es que el reglamento de los charros generalmente es el mismo y el reglamento de las mujeres a cada rato está cambiando. Lo que las mujeres nos dicen que hagamos lo hacemos. Si a mí me dicen: "tienes que hacer la coladera, volteada para atrás y con los ojos vendados", la voy a hacer. Las mujeres charras somos muy aguerridas y somos muy perseverantes, nos hemos ganado la admiración. Ahora ya las mujeres calan, ya hacemos cosas que antes no hacíamos. Ahorita los charros van encantados llevando a la bebida y ya le quieren comprar la albardita, las botitas... porque las nuevas generaciones, para ellos ya es normal que tengan que desalojar el ruedo porque va a entrar una escaramuza, antes era muy muy de hombres”.

“We have earned a lot of respect. I experienced the worst, the disdain, but now there is a lot of respect, we have earned that important place. A different thing is that the rulebook of charros is always the same, and the rulebook of women is continually changing, so we do whatever they ask us to do. If they tell me that I have to perform the *coladera* backwards and blind-folded, I will do it. Charra women are very feisty and we are very persistent, we have won the admiration of all. Now women perform the *cala*, we do things we did not do before. Now the charros are delighted carrying their baby daughters while they ride, they want to

buy them their little side-saddle, their little boots... because for new generations now it is normal to clear the arena for the escaramuza performance, previous charrería was very very manly.”

A very recognized escaramuza trainer in Mexico, now operating in the United States, declared that before it was much more difficult to even convince charros to let their daughters be part of an escaramuza. It was a very common pattern that men would not give permission to women in their family to practice charrería, even though they were part of the organization as charros. She implied that the first reason for this was the high cost, but also very commonly the motive was based on their strong machismo, and a bit of jealousy.

“Tenemos mucho machismo dentro de la charrería, pero muchas veces la dureza de la huerca y la terquedad hacen que estén dentro y están dentro. “Es que mi papá no me deja” y ahí vas a hablar con el papá y todo, pero ahora casi la mayoría lo logra, ya no se queda ninguna atorada, antiguamente sí, ahora no. [...] Se ha perdido mucho (machismo), ahora comen de las manos, son mancos, no hay charro que sea bravo, ya todos son mancos, pero antiguamente era una de las características fuertes, ahorita ha cambiado mucho, aquí las machas ahora somos nosotras. Ya dejamos atrás muchas cosas y hemos escalado despacio, pero cada paso que hemos dado ha estado firme, la prueba está de que estamos dentro y tenemos lugar y tenemos respeto”.

“We have a lot of machismo inside charrería, but many times the toughness and stubbornness of the girl made them enter. (Before was very common to hear) “my dad would not let me”, and there you go to talk with the dad and everything, but now the majority of girls achieve it, nobody gets stucked, formerly yes, now they

don't. [...] A lot of machismo has been lost, now they eat from our hands, they are calmed, there is no wild charro, now they are all serene, but previously it was one strong characteristic, now the 'machas' are us. We have left behind a lot of things, and we have escalated slowly, but every step we have made has been strong, the proof is that we are inside, and we have a place and respect."

On the positive side, roles inside charrería have changed so much that even one of the participants narrated how a lot of men are becoming escaramuza trainers. Although she affirms that there is definitely some prejudice on the lifestyle of these instructors for working with escaramuzas, and are even considered "faggots", she believes that it is a great opportunity for these trainers' wives to develop professionally, because most of the times are the women who become the primary providers in the household.

"Últimamente he visto muchos hombres en la charrería que entrenan equipos de mujeres y que su esposa es la que trabaja y el hombre está yendo nada más a entrenar escaramuzas. La mujer está trayendo el sustento, a lo mejor en un 80%, o sea la mayor parte con un trabajo profesional y hombres mayormente se está encargando de sus hijos. Eso lo he visto con varios entrenadores, por ejemplo, de Guadalajara, de Chihuahua. En ese aspecto se están viendo diferente los roles y qué padre, qué bueno que esos hombres crean en sus mujeres".

"Lately I have seen a lot of men in charrería that train Escaramuza teams, and that their wives are the ones working while men are just training escaramuzas. Women are bringing the money, maybe in an 80%, meaning that the majority have a professional job and their husbands mainly take care of their kids. I have seen that with multiple trainers, for example, from Guadalajara, from Chihuahua. In that

aspect, roles are seen differently and that's great, it's good that those men believe in their women."

It is worth noting that charrería is increasingly being practiced and popularized in the United States. Based on this research's fieldwork, it could be extremely relevant to consider a study focused on the remarkable differences between developing the sport in Mexico and the United States. An interviewee that began practicing at a very young age in Mexico, is now introducing her practice in America, where she believes that women's independence and autonomy is considerably greater. Escaramuceras feed, saddle, and even transport their own horses (in comparison to Mexico's custom of paying someone to do it), and according to her, this empowering sentiment has also been translated to their private sphere.

"Ahora las mujeres se meten más en su rol de "yo puedo", muchas mujeres que están casadas ya le demuestran a su marido de que "oye yo también sé hacer mis propias cosas, no te necesito para todo, ya soy más independiente". Lo he visto mucho con las integrantes de mi equipo, muchas son completamente nuevas y ellas mismas dicen "yo jamás me hubiera imaginado estar haciendo esto y yo sola, siempre había alguien más que lo hacía". Se sienten más seguras en su vida de que ya pueden hacer cualquier cosa, de que no necesitan ningún hombre ni para ensillarles ni para subirse al caballo porque muchas se suben solas al caballo, ya no los necesitan para eso y siento que les ayudan mucho en sus relaciones. Ya no necesitas de un hombre que te dé esa fuerza que pensabas que no tenías, ya sabes que lo puedes hacer".

"Now women believe more in their role of "I can," many married women demonstrate to their husbands that they can do their own stuff, that they do not

need them for everything, and that they are independent. I have seen it with my teammates, a lot of them are completely new, and they say ‘I have never imagined doing this, and by myself, there was always someone that did it.’ They feel safer in their life, that they can do whatever they want, that they do not need a man to saddle their horses or help them get on the horse, because a lot of them do it by themselves, they do not need men anymore, and that is translated to their personal relationships. You do not need a man to give you the strength you thought you didn’t have, you know that you can do it (by yourself).”

The rest of the experiences described by these participants vary enormously. Some of them consider that women being placed in the first spot inside a parade is a great sign of escaramuza empowerment and evolution, others think that just by the fact of keeping a place in the charreada is a sign of acceptance from the charros, additionally there are females that consider a great honor men’s recognition of their capability to do *suertes charras* on a sidesaddle. In the majority of the cases they agree that there has been progress inside charrería, and they even romanticize their struggle because it makes them appreciate their place and power more. However, some escaramuceras are still conflicted and discontent, arguing that they are not sure if a glorious four-minute performance is worth standing charros’ mistreatment within the sport.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Since its creation, the escaramuza tradition within charrería has encountered an array of obstacles that impacted the experiences and perspectives of the women that practice it.

Machismo is still a very predominant trait inside this institution, and although it is not that strong as in previous years around the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, it is still described and pointed out as a disadvantage for young riders within the sport.

There were no anecdotes or examples of women that have abandoned an escaramuza team caused by sexism. This could be based on the fact that women that integrate this practice possess what is defined as internalized misogyny, or as Faludi (1991) describes it: the backlash of patriarchy. The workings of this unequal system are so ingrained and chameleonic, that it is difficult for escaramuceras to perceive that their vision of themselves has been influenced and compromised in order to believe women in charrería are conflictive, annoying and problematic.

Female riders that went through an important socialization process inside a lienzo charro have learned to conform to certain gender roles that are commonly attributed to femininity, a trait romanticized by escaramuceras. Idealized femininity has influenced an incapacity to escape gender expectations inside charrería, making it very unlikely that women would perform suertes charras traditionally executed by men, in order to get more participation within a charreada.

Although sexism is not a common reason for this escaramuceras to quit the sport. In the other hand, it is proved that the class factor is an important obstacle for a lot of them. This study also delineates the class differences between practicing the sport in Mexico and the United States, which is an important topic needed to be discussed more thoroughly in future research.

The study also managed to prove that even though many women in charrería showed an anti-feminist perspective, they believe in gender equity of opportunities, proving that these women are just threatened to use the word ‘feminism’ based on media’s negative portrayals. Based on the fieldwork, some escaramuceras think that a feminist is against traditional family values, and believe that feminism is the exact opposite of machismo.

Another important contribution of this piece of work is the introduction of The Sisterhood Paradox, which describes the struggle women face while executing their activities as a team, but ironically this has functioned as a resistance tool inside the patriarchal structure. In the majority of the cases they referred to their collaborative experience as a “sisterhood,” and narrated the importance of being united and having a good relationship between teammates.

In bond with horse it is analyzed Ramírez (2015) critique about horsemanship inside the escaramuza charra and its use of the Lepe sidesaddle. It is discussed how women in this practice do create a bond with their horses, and refuted the author’s theory that these animals are disposable to escaramuceras. Even though these women have a different style while riding, this does not prevent them to achieve an embodied mutuality with their horse, using their voice, caresses, body language, and an appropriate use of reins.

Finally, it is pointed out the perspective participants have about the evolution of the escaramuza charra, the big steps forward they have made, and the female empowerment achieved along the decades. Escaramuza pioneers affirmed that currently women are not “stupid

as themselves were before,” and they are now demanding for equal treatment and opportunities. Escaramuza practice had been normalized inside the charreada, and currently charros are accustomed to women’s presence in the lienzo charro, formerly known as an all-men’s arena.

In conclusion, this study shows that in many instances charrería works as a microcosm to explain Mexican society at large. Charrería is dominated by a social hierarchy, in which women still conform to gender expectations, hold anti-feminist viewpoints, and are ruled by an encoded and diminishing perspective of themselves. I consider it an important part for future research to compare gender dynamics within charrería between Mexico and the United States. This will be an important insight about the social differences both countries have, and the traits that the Mexican community in the U.S. replicate.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. How old are you, and how long you've been in an Escaramuza team?
2. Tell me more about your first experience riding horses... how it started your desire to be part of an Escaramuza?
3. Did you encounter any type of issues while starting to practice the sport? (economically, socially, family-related)
4. Does your family also practice Charrería? How your parents support your affinity for this sport?
5. Tell me about your personal experience inside Charrería. What is your daily typical routine as an Escaramuza member?
6. How is your relationship with charros. Would you consider Adelitas as their female equals in Charrería? Why?
7. Based in your experience and considering the differences in riding styles, attire and activities, for whom do you believe is harder to be part of this sport, men or women? Why do you think so?
8. Which social expectations (not related to their riding skills and performance) exist for charros and, especially, Adelitas outside the arena?
9. How would you describe the relationship between women within Escaramuza teams?
10. Would you change something in Charrería (social structure, regulations, dynamics, customs) or do you think it works pretty well as it is? Why?
11. It requires a lot time, energy and money to be part of an Escaramuza, it also requires women's continuous negotiation of their needs. Why keep being part of it?
12. Why do you think most of the parents keep embracing their kids to continue practicing charrería and not other activity?
13. How do you think this traditional sport is influencing Mexican society in a bigger scale?
14. Seeing feminism as a movement that seeks the political, social and economic equality of the sexes, would you consider yourself a feminist? Why?
15. Can you visualize an all-female charreada being held in the future? Will you agree to be part of it?

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