

# Depiction of Machismo through Castillo Brothers in Oscar Hijuelos' *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*

Supiastutik Supiastutik, Septania Alya Rakhman, Syamsul Anam

Universitas Jember

[supiastutik@unej.ac.id](mailto:supiastutik@unej.ac.id), [septaniaalya99@gmail.com](mailto:septaniaalya99@gmail.com), [syamsulanam1988@gmail.com](mailto:syamsulanam1988@gmail.com)

## Abstract

*The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* (1989) is a novel by Oscar Hijuelos, a Cuban-American writer. It talks about the lives of Cesar and Nestor Castillo, Cuban immigrants who live in America to pursue their dreams as musicians. The novel strongly connects to Latin American culture. The Castillo brothers are known for embracing their "Cubanness" as men. Men in Spanish-speaking countries are recognized for their masculine solid pride. Their strong masculine pride is often associated with an exaggeration of their masculinity. People often call it machismo. Machismo, derived from destructive aspects such as aggressiveness, womanizing, emotional withdrawal, and male chauvinism, is known for having harmful outcomes for men who embed it. Operating Hall's Theory of Representation and Kupers' concept of toxic masculinity, this research aims to show how the Castillo brothers represent machismo and reveal the ideology of Oscar Hijuelos' regarding machismo. This research is conducted as qualitative research, utilizing narratives and dialogues. The study found that Cesar's practice of machismo through the act of being a Latin lover affects his participation in alcoholism and resistance to professional help. Besides, Nestor's practice of machismo for being a "man with muscle" eventually leads him to depression, anxiety, and rejection of therapy. It is acknowledged their status as immigrants heighten their practices of machismo. Through his writing, the author expects to criticize machismo.

**Keywords:** Machismo; Oscar Hijuelos; Representation; *The Mambo Kings*

## INTRODUCTION

The issues of gender are often and constantly discussed. Under the umbrella of gender studies, they have become dynamic discussion in recent years. The studies in gender usually concern with men, women, and queer (Kowarski, 2021). In men studies, the common discussion is around men and their masculinities. It deals with how society construct the depiction of a "real man" (Kimmel & Bridges, 2020). *Machismo* has become one of the various topics to be discussed in men studies for the past decades. Besides, there is a literary work which contains the discussion on *machismo*. That literary work is Oscar Hijuelos' novel, *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*.

Oscar Hijuelos was a Cuban descendant American writer. He said he wants to share his "Cubanness" including his pride of being a Cuban man, his adoration for the culture, and his family history and heritage. He puts a vivid description of Cuban culture in his every book. That notion is what makes him unique as an American writer.

*The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* talks about the life of Cesar and Nestor Castillo. The Castillo brothers move to New York, America from Havana, Cuba, to pursue their dreams as musicians. The novel is written by a Cuban descendant of American writer. Therefore, the Latin American culture is strongly depicted there. Even though they have settled in New York until the day they die, they still embrace the Latin American culture within themselves. This culture is related to their identity as men, which is called *machismo*. During their years of life, Cesar and Nestor are seen performing *machismo* practices. The practices can be seen in their relationship and life as musicians.

In Latin American society, *machismo* is recognized as the common knowledge to describe men's masculinities and their strong sense of masculine pride. Latin Americans see community, family history, and heritage bonds as something important. Thus, *machismo* can be acknowledged as men's social behavior pattern embedded in the culture. *Machismo* is collectively accepted and even expected from men in Latin American society. This is due to their seeing it as something rightful and legendary for men to be (Walters & Valenzuela, 2020). The negative notion of *machismo* comes from its traditional view. So, the words 'machismo' 'hypermasculinity', and 'traditional machismo' are considered to be the same terms. Men who embody *machismo* perform external habits such as bravado, boastfulness, and chauvinism which later lead to stress and depression (Walters & Valenzuela, 2020). Moreover, it also is fixed that *machismo's* notion is derived from negativity, such as violent and aggressive, womanizing and controlling, bitter, vulnerable to alcoholism, emotionally unavailable, and intimidating (Pérez & Morales, 2020).

It can be seen that *machismo* revolves around negative characteristics of men. So, the term "toxic masculinity" cannot be ignored. Toxic masculinity is the perpetuation of people's ideas about "manliness" which usually works around toughness, antifemininity, and power (Morin, 2022). Hence, men who embody the practices of *machismo* are vulnerable to unhealthy and risky habits which can lead to mental or health issues which affect the decision-making to overcome those issues. Not to mention that the Castillo brothers' status as immigrants enforce even more the practices of *machismo* and its outcomes. It is wise to say that *machismo* is not necessarily the same as toxic masculinity, but *machismo* can be linked to it.

Eventually, this research commonly concerns with men's studies. The discussion will revolve around men and masculinities. The main discussion of this research will be how *machismo* is constructed through the Castillo brothers as the main male characters and how Oscar Hijuelos as the author sees *machismo*. Therefore, the appropriate tools to answer those concerns are Hall's (1997) Theory of Representation and Kupers' (2005) concept of toxic masculinity. Hopefully, this research may fill the gap in academic research and bring the latest acknowledgment in the discourse of gender studies.

## THEORY

### A. Theory of Representation

Representation associates to meaning and language as well as to culture. Besides, representation is a way to use language to represent or say something meaningful to others. In short, representation can be briefly defined as a process of the production of meaning through language among members of a culture, society, group, or nation. This means that communities perceive something distinctively based on their understanding of concept, image, and ideas. Furthermore, meaning is what we give to the object or person. It is wise to say that meaning is constructed by mental representation and language as systems of representation. In addition, meaning is also resulted from conventions, culturally or socially. A group of people with the same cultural background shares a cultural convention which is exchanged through language. Cultural codes enable people with the same cultural background understand the same reference.

Using the discursive model, this research concerns with the production of knowledge through discourse, meaning that the objects or acts do not produce knowledge, but rather it is the discourse that creates knowledge. In other word a particular discourse can be valid truth or knowledge in a particular historical context. So, it is important to pay attention to the time when a text was written.

### B. The Concept of Toxic Masculinity

Kupers (2005) points out that toxic masculinity derived from socially destructive aspects of hegemonic masculinity. Those negative qualities are being unemotional, independent, non-

nurturing, aggressive, and dispassionate which later can lead to criminal behavior. Additionally, other poor qualities are rigid, domineering, and sexist (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hence, Kupers (2005) states that toxic masculinity can be defined as “the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence.” Men with toxic masculinity tend to be insensitive to and lack concern for feelings to other people. Toxic masculinity can be useful in gender-related discussions. Since the term depicts hegemonic masculinity traits that are socially destructive, such as being misogynist, homophobic, greedy, violent, and dominant. Moreover, those destructive aspects are culturally valued and accepted. In addition, toxic masculinity also becomes a trigger to psychotherapy resistance.

*Machismo* and toxic masculinity share the same negative qualities such as superior and disrespectful attitudes toward the members of opposite sex, aggressiveness, and rejection of emotional display. They also have the similar outcomes such as health or mental health issues and the refusal for seeking professional treatment. Latin American men who perform traditional *machismo* attitudes are most likely prone to depression and resistance to mental health treatment (Pérez & Morales, 2020). Many scholars have opinions on *machismo*, but they found nothing anywhere to be selected as a theory. The definition and traits of men who practice *machismo* are compiled from many findings and scholars' argument. Many scholars have opinions on *machismo*, but they found nothing anywhere to be selected as a theory. The definition and traits of men who practice *machismo* are compiled from many findings and scholars' arguments on the topic. Since there are lots of findings on *machismo*, it is difficult to find one “grand” theory to be utilized. Thus, the concept of toxic masculinity by Kupers (2005) that is “close” to *machismo* is chosen. Not to mention that the concept of toxic masculinity has been used in some previous researches on the topic. Since there are lots of findings on *machismo*, it is difficult to find one “grand” theory to be utilized. Thus, the concept of toxic masculinity by Kupers (2005) that is “close” to *machismo* is chosen. Not to mention that the concept of toxic masculinity has been used in some previous researches.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Since it is qualitative research are taken from many sources such as; statements, interviews, documents, narratives, and quotation. The primary data from the novel are collected by doing critical reading and highlighting important dialogues, statement, or narratives related to the main purposes of this research. The selected data are divided into three;

1. Textual data consists of the characteristics of *machismo* and *machismo* practices through the main male characters in the novel.
2. Contextual data comprises the information of Latin American society's historical and socio-cultural conditions.
3. Author's data consists of the author's interviews and a memoir. The author's life, family, and his educational background are also considered.

The analysis will cater the discussion of how the Castillo brothers perform *machismo*, why the Castillo brothers practice it, and how the quality of *machismo* is seen. The analyzed textual of the data will be linked with the contextual data such as the ones of Latin American cultures, issues, phenomena, and situations related to the novel's time and place, and where and when the novel was written.

## DISCUSSION

Cesar and Nestor Castillo spent their entire childhood and teenage years in Oriente Province, Cuba, and later they moved to New York, America in 1949. Growing up, the Castillo brothers were influenced by heavy Latin American culture. Masculine performance of Latino men is sometimes perceived through ethnicity and historical lens (Walters & Valenzuela, 2020). Hence, as men who become part of Latin American society, they are familiar to the concept of exaggerated Latin American masculinity or, as people call it *machismo*.

### **Practice of Machismo by Cesar Castillo by Being a Latin Lover**

#### ***Being a Boastful Womanizer***

Cesar is known as a proud and a confident man. The younger version of himself is often seen to be surrounded by many different women from time to time, as if it served him the purpose of being a true man. Even in his brink of death, he still reminisces about 58 five women he has been with.

Floating on a sea of tender feelings, under a brilliant starlit night, he fell in love again: with Ana and Miriam and Verónica and Vivian and Mimi and Beatriz and Rosario and Margarita and Adriana and Graciela and Josefina and Virginia and Minerva and Marta and Alicia and Regina and Violeta and Pilar and Finas and Matilda and Jacinta and Irene and Jolanda and Carmencita and María de la Luz and Eulalia and Conchita and Esmeralda and Vivian and Adela and Irma and Amalia and Dora and Ramona and Vera and Gilda and Rita and Berta and Consuelo and Eloisa and Hilda and Juana and Perpetua and María Rosita and Delmira and Floriana and Inés and Digna and Angélica and Diana and Ascensión and Teresa and Aleida and Manuela and Celia and Emelina and Victoria and Mercedes. (*The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*:394)

Seeing that the total number of women is 58, it seems his relationships with them are rather short, unserious, and non-committal. Based on the WebMD website (2022), a womanizer is a man who engages in multiple sexual or romantic relationships with many women on a regular basis. This definition seems unappealing and negative. Hence, it is only normal when a man becomes a womanizer, they are badly perceived. Despite of the fact that the thought of “men conquering women” is an idealized trait for Latin men, Hall (1997:22) states that to comprehend something, a society has to share the same conceptual map for meanings to be shared and exchanged among the people. This means that every group or community with different cultural background has different concept to see something. It seems some men in Latin American community fit the description of a womanizer. It can be seen from another research that shows how a Cuban man engages in the act of being a womanizer. Chandra's (2019) research discusses the song “Havana” by Cuban singer and songwriter, Camila Cabello. As mentioned in the first verse of the song elaborated the experience of a woman who met a man known as a rebellious womanizer because he said there are a lot of girls he can do with. It is interesting to see in the song that a womanizer is called “*malo*”, which means “evil” in Spanish or it can be translated as a man having a bad personality. Whether in the form of literature or music, it is amusing to know how being a womanizer is collectively perceived as something negative in practice.

Cesar came to New York in 1949 as a Cuban immigrant. However, the Latino community in New York City is dominated by a Caribbean presence. All Cubans in America reside in Florida

(Arreola, 2004). Thus, he becomes a part of a marginalized group over there. For many years he lives there is prejudice and postwar xenophobia and this result in an awful treatment for immigrants like him. He is being shushed for speaking in his mother tongue and having eggs thrown at his direction. Knowing Cuba's involvement in the one of important event in Cold War, it seems Cubans' presence in America is quite the sentiment. In 1961, bilateral relationship between America and Cuba get worse because Cuba began to strengthen its relationship with the Uni Soviet in Fidel Castro's reign. Previously, as two major nations who were at war, America and the Uni Soviet make an agreement for never using massive destructive weapon at war. However, Uni Soviet discreetly "plants" missile in Cuba to be sent to America. Thus, Cuba was involved in the dangerous confrontation of Cuban Missile Crisis in 1965 as the ally of Uni Soviet (Nay, 2015). Being treated in such a way, it can be a miserable event for Cesar since he is known for his strong masculine pride. It hurts his ego for him, pursuing women is a way to bring his pride and please his ego. In other words, it is a way to reclaim his manliness. At some points, Cesar shares his successful pursuit of women in the songs he produces. Walters & Valenzuela (2020) states that one of the ideas of *machismo* is to show boastfulness as an attempt to impress other people. The fact that Cesar is successful at getting total of 58 women and he also brags about it shows his participation in representing *machismo*.

### ***Being an Aggressive Lover***

Cesar met a woman named Vanna Vane. Their first encounter was in the club where she becomes a waitress for selling cigarettes. He describes her as a prestigious passport, a high-school diploma, a full-time job, a record contract, and a 1951 DeSoto. It means that she is only someone worth showing off for a few laughs. However, as a womanizer, though Cesar treats her nicely, he only wants to lead her on and is not interested in taking their relationship further. He only sees her as having a good companion for drinks, parties, and sex. Based on the WebMD website (2022), a womanizer does not seek a commitment and simply wants to get as many women as possible. They tend to lead women on and make women want something serious. This unclear situation about their relationship left Vanna Vane in confusion. Eventually, she left him and got married to another man.

Cesar moved to New York in the pre-Cuban Revolution. So, more or less, before moving overseas, he would adapt to the cultural values during that time. However, he seems to neglect Cuba's pre-revolution cultural values. During Batista's reign, Cuban society heavily placed morality and socio-sexual attitudes on Catholicism (Horowitz & Suchlicki, 2003). With a strong influence from Catholicism, Cuba before the revolution deemed pre-marital sex as a sinful. However, Cesar often engages in an explicit activity with Vanna Vane whenever he wants to. His relationship with women also is no stranger to sexual activity. Cesar's lovemaking is never soft. He tends to start off rough by taking and dragging Vanna Vane by wrist until her hipbones and buttocks are covered in blue or even black marks. Violently doing sexual activity, he only wants to show that he is well experienced in bed. Aggressiveness is one of the principal characteristics of *machismo*. The notion of aggressiveness revolves around physical power (Leiner, 1994) and sexual prowess (Hardin, 2001). Thus, Cesar's rough behaviors toward Vanna Vane during sexual activity indicate his part in taking the *machismo* role.

### ***Being Disrespectful to His Wife***

After a year of their marriage, Cesar, who decides to marry Luisa, is bothered, frustrated, and angry. He feels like a captive by committing his life to marriage and Luisa. As if being a womanizer has become his norm of perceiving relationships. In the end, he starts doing it so long as he pleases. His mistreatment to his wife escalates quickly from just staring at some women on the street to engaging in fatal infidelity. He starts to make excuses to come home. He likes spending more time with other women than with his wife. He disrespected her wife's feelings by cheating on her.

Cesar has cheated on Luisa more than once. He does not want to admit and be accountable for his infidelity. He also does not know how to handle the situation and makes an excuse that that is normal behavior for a man. However, Walters & Valenzuela (2019) find this kind of behavior cannot be generalized because the younger generations of Latino men prefer monogamous romantic and sexual relationships and deem infidelity as something low, disrespectful, and irresponsible. They also explain that young Latino men think that it will ruin their relationships and themselves by adopting hypermasculine behaviors (traditional *machismo*). Younger generations of Latino men often see hypermasculine behaviors as problematic. Likewise, they prefer to seek equality-based on romantic relationships and want to stay away from actions that may hurt their partners in the way their fathers and grandfathers did in the past. Some Latin Americans agree that having multiple sex partners does not count as cheating if the relationship is casual (non-committed). However, Cesar has been married to Luisa. Thus, his infidelity is a proof of how disrespectful he is to his marriage and his wife. This kind of situation aligned with the concept of toxic masculinity. It is explained that the devaluation of women is one of the traits of toxic masculinity. Devaluing a woman does not only mean to think women are inferior beings compared to men, but it is also extended to the disrespectful acts to them (Kupers, 2005).

### ***Being "Ashamed" of Showing Emotions***

In the end, Cesar's continuous mistreatment toward Luisa makes her leave him by assigning divorce papers, and the custody of their daughter, Mariela, fell to the mother's side. His case of infidelity is aligned with the change of moral and sexual values in Cuban society during Castro's reign. In his reign, an ideal, nurturing, and stable family model did not become major points. Family value was not the main concern during his time of governing the country, therefore, the number of divorces was greatly increased (Horowitz & Suchlicki, 2003). Actually, Cesar feels distraught by the divorce. There is also an underlying reason why he feels that way. Lerner (1987) points out that patriarchy is the manifestation of authority by male in the household over women and children. More than 30 years after the Cuban Revolution, Cuba still becomes a patriarchal society (Horowitz & Suchlicki, 2003). As a Cuban man, the divorce makes Cesar no longer have that authority. He is a proud Cuban man and he takes his masculine pride seriously. That is why the divorce make him feel distraught because he fails to perform or perpetuate patriarchal values.

As someone who inhibits macho temperament, Cesar's emotional spectrum does not work well. Instead of feeling his sorrow, Cesar decides to ignore his feelings by pretending that he is okay or distancing himself from his younger brother just because he thinks that his sadness is not worth sharing. Leiner (1994) states that *machismo* works when a man disdains any feminine traits or behaviors. One of concrete feminine trait is how someone is letting themselves to feel something and be vulnerable. Ultimately, how Cesar cheats on his wife shows his ignorance of someone's feelings and empathy. The fact that he easily diminishes his sadness is seen as his choice of rejecting

emotions. Hence, the way he does not want to regulate his sadness as he should is seen as his participation in representing *machismo*.

### ***Being a Drunkard and Refusing to Seek a Professional Treatment***

Rejection of emotional displays may lead to emotional dysregulation which can affect someone's well-being because it is considered harmful and toxic. The dysregulation of emotions may lead to self-damaging behaviors. Some of the examples of the damaging behaviors are self-harm and substance abuse (Watson, 2023). It has been stated that a man who embeds traditional *machismo* has high risk of engaging in harmful and dysfunctional coping mechanisms (Pérez & Morales, 2020).

Cesar engages in the self-destructive coping mechanism because his sadness is not regulated normally. Latin Americans have higher risk of drinking behavior than other ethnicities. The major cultural cause of drinking behavior is acculturation. Immigrants and their ancestors experience transformation as they arrive in new environments. The alcohol use in Latin American society, especially in men, is often seen through the lens of hegemonic masculinity and connected to the expression of manhood (Perrotte & Zamboanga, 2021). Cesar felt like he had fallen as a "real man" because of his divorce. Apart from using alcohol to reduce the load and forget about his worries and problems, he also uses it as a way to prove his manhood (Zamboanga et al., 2017). His lifestyle as a musician also enhances his level of addiction. He often performs in a club where the availability of alcoholic drinks is high.

Cesar knows the alcohol has a bad impact on his body. However, he did not stop himself from drinking. His alcohol addiction made him dysfunctional. It threatens his career as a musician because he cannot properly write lyrics or be productive. Aside from affecting his career, his addiction to alcohol is slowly affecting on his health.

Cesar's addiction to alcohol deranges his organs. Although he is living in pain, he still does not want to go to the doctor to treat him. He refuses to be vulnerable. He has forced himself to stay resilient to prove his manhood. His alcohol addiction and refusal to be treated professionally can be considered toxic masculinity because it harms severely a man who embeds it. Traditional *machismo* has been linked to dysfunctional and harmful coping mechanisms, for example drinking alcohol and engaging in violent acts (Pérez & Morales, 2020). Latino men who embed traditional *machismo* behaviors are more likely to have negative responses to health care. Moreover, the chronic health disparities for the ethnic minorities might also become the perpetuation of his addiction to alcohol. The health disparities for minorities group usually happen for immigrants because of language barriers, a problem with legal documents, cultural changes, and economic hardships (González-Guarda et al., 2016). His condition is aligned with what happens in the prison where male prisoners often do not seek help until their condition is sever (Kupers, 2005). **Practice of Machismo by Nestor Castillo by Being a "Man with Muscle"**

### ***The Act of Aggressive Lover***

Latin Americans see family roles as something important. One of the cultural values they believe is *familismo*. It shares a substantial and intimates sense of attachment between people in the Latin American community. Usually, a child and adolescent find parents or other older family members as an emotional support system. *Familismo* works based on three factors, they are, familial

obligations, support from the family, and family as a role model (Ortiz, 2020). In some cases, it is not only limited to the familial structure but can also perform in friendship level with friends or trusted acquaintances. This cultural value is seen in Nestor and Cesar's brotherhood. Nestor once relied on Cesar for a piece of relationship advice, because Nestor did not know how to handle his sad lover. The advice from Cesar is terrible. Cesar who is known for his macho temperament advised Nestor to physically hurt his lover. Performing violence aims to show Maria (Nestor's girlfriend) that he is the one who can control the relationship. Nestor was not sure of his brother's advice at first, but he eventually did what his brother suggested. He was really looking up to his brother.

Eventually, Nestor decided to follow his brother's advice to order Maria around. During their silent walks he showed here that he was someone who was in charge of their relationship by taking her by her wrist harshly. Someone's quality time is supposed to be warm and lovely, but Nestor did otherwise. Besides, he also showed his physical power during the act of love. He will leave marks on her legs and other body parts from gripping them roughly just to show that he is a strong man. A man tends to use physical violence when he needs. Physical power is inflicted upon a woman to show control and power (Ragonese et al., 2019).

### *The Act of Heroism*

Nestor, alongside his older brother, immigrated to New York City, the United States from Havana, Cuba to pursue their dream as musicians in 1949. Their arrival in America was as a part of the musicians' migration that burst out from Cuba in the 1930s and 1940s (Jiang & Long, 2014). Though he moved to the United State amidst the war, he managed to go there because of the bilateral harmony between Cuba and the United States. However, the diplomatic relations ended during Castro's reign early 1960s (Copeland et al., 2011). As a part of an ethnic minority and an "unmanly" man, Nestor has the urge to prove his manliness to the world. He used to be an unfit kid. Some parts of his childhood were filled with his experience of illness. This made him physically weak as a kid. Now, he has grown up and been more fit in his adult years. Nestor is capable of showing his manliness in the form of physical strength by picking a fight with a male stranger to protect a woman.

Then he heard quick, pattering footsteps on the stairs, slaps, then through the doorway the fighting couple. Nestor interceded, heroically, approaching the man and telling him, "Look, stop it, you shouldn't hurt her. She's only a woman." And then it turned into something else and then they both started punching each other, the fight ending up on the cobblestone street, with both men bloody and their clothes covered with dirt. (*The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*:94-95)

Nestor shares his view about a woman. He thinks that a woman is someone to be protected and not to be hurt. The traditional view men are perceived to be women's protectors and must take extreme practice when a woman is disrespected; however, this view is considered as a colonized mindset (Martinez, 2019). Some scholars agree that *machismo* is the product of colonization. It is said that *machismo* is the product of indigenous men who endured humiliation from violence and subjugation during the conquest. Indigenous women were being abused by the conquistadores and indigenous men were not able to take care of their kin. That particular occurrence instills European racial superiority over indigenous people. Hence, in order to redeem for what they lost, culturally



and physically, indigenous men began to show macho attitudes. Their aim, by showing macho behaviors, was to trace their dignity and honor after being degraded, emasculated, and made to feel inferior (Pérez & Morales, 2020). Hall (1997:3) argued that meaning is produced when people express themselves in a particular cultural behavior. So, seeing a woman was beaten by his lover on the street, he could not help but fight the man to protect that woman. He did not think of his safety is first place. So, seeing a woman was beaten by his lover on the street, he could not help but fight the man to protect that woman risking his safety. Ragonese et al., (2019) states that heroism is one of the common theme in masculinity. The discussion about heroism revolves around the sphere of risk, danger, violence, and courage. Heroism involves physical strength and has a close relation to the display of traditional masculinity (Frisk, 2019). *Machismo* tends to be related to the act of normalizing violence for a man and dangerous activity to boost a man's ego (Craig, 2019). Thus, Nestor's heroic action can be considered as his attempt to show *machismo*.

### ***Risk-taking Behavior***

Furthermore, there is another proof of Nestor's practice of *machismo*. This proof involves an activity that almost took his life. It was during a family trip to the lake. Nestor, out of nowhere, had the urge to prove his manliness once again. He tried to show that he was a real man, almost drowned, but he tried to swim far away to a small island in the middle of the lake. His attempt can be considered as a risk-taking behavior. Nestor was putting his life in danger by doing an extreme activity to prove his manliness. He was preoccupied by the thought of his not being manly enough. He had burdens to carry. First, the burden is from his anxiety of not being macho. Second, his desire is seen as macho as his older brother is. Third is his status as an immigrant and minority. Those aspects trigger his emotions. When he reached his limit, he proved his manliness through that harmful activity. Based on Ragonese et al. (2019), a man has a desire to participate in activities that will make him appear to be strong and brave. Being strong and brave can be a standard that man can handle difficult matters.

### ***Depression and Anxiety and Rejection to Therapy***

Nestor felt heavily ashamed and guilty because he has decided to follow his older brother's advice to abuse Maria. He failed to perform his cultural heritage as a man when he should have protected a woman (Pérez & Morales, 2020). Eventually, the abuse drove her away and left Nestor alone. He is heartbroken by that. He tends to dwell in sadness. It is also apparent that he suffered from depression and anxiety. Nestor seems to have suicidal tendencies. Even when he had his peaceful walk, his thoughts wandered somewhere. He yearned for death by looking at the icy river and he thinks himself inside the river. One of the signs of depression is having thoughts of death or suicidal tendencies (Zohuri & Zadeh, 2020).

He refused to seek for a professional help regarding his personal issues. However, instead of seeking medical treatment, such as visiting a therapist, He prefers to go to church. A man who exhibits masculine norms, such as physical strength and toughness tends to neglect his illness or mental health problems (Ragonese et al., 2019). He hoped that by praying in the church, his anguish and bad feelings might disappear. In Latin America society, Catholicism is the most popular and believed religion (Morello, 2019). Religion is aimed at assisting people to understand the universe and their purpose in it. Spiritual healers are considered to be helpful to care someone and prevent future suffering (Bornet et al., 2019). However, doing religion practice is not enough to solve

someone's problem. There should be a balance between the practice of religion and the effort to seek professional health care. Unfortunately, Nestor only "treats" himself through religious practice and refuses to see therapist. As a result, the bad feelings and guilt kept lingering in his thoughts as long as he was still alive.

### The Critical Position of Oscar Hijuelos

*The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* was Hijuelos' second novel published in 1989. That year is considered a part of the major historical event in the world which is known as the Cold War. The Cold War is known for its "war of men's minds". Likewise, the Cold War then has a strong relation to men's masculinities. It has been found that there is a crisis of manhood during the Cold War period, specifically in America. It is said that America was lacking in making strong-willed and resilient individuals. During the period of the Cold War, in December 1957, America's vice president, Richard Nixon warned America about the dangers that the Soviet Union could bring upon their education system, health, medical power, and any other aspects. Middle-class men were described to be miserable because they allowed themselves to be controlled to the point, they were not able to live their life to the fullest (Nicholson, 2011). That sort of "warning" and situation inflicted collective cultural anxiety for men over their masculinities.

Now, if the anxiety arises from how middle-class men are considered to be pitiful, then Cesar and Nestor Castillo who belongs to the working-class men and are part minorities will definitely carry complex burden regarding their masculinity. Their status enhances further their participation in the practice of *machismo*. It can be summarized that Cesar and Nestor's practices of *machismo* happen because of two major reasons. Firstly, they represent the practices of *machismo* because they think that how Cuban men should act depends on Latin American shared culture. Secondly, their practices of *machismo* also become a response to their "vulnerable" state as part of minorities to reclaim their manhood.

In this novel, Hijuelos brought up a topic about exaggerated Latin American masculinity. It is a fitting topic in the novel, because he made two males from Cuba as the main characters in the novel. Cesar and Nestor Castillo are described based on Hijuelos family members experiences. For example, Cesar's mistreatment of his wife and marriage is based on how Hijuelos' father treated his mother. The way Cesar copes with his worries also based on how his father handles sadness. Nestor's aggressiveness in the form of physical strength and prowess is based on the childhood story of Hijuelos' mother. The way Nestor copes with his depression and anxiety through religion and not professional health is based on Hijuelos' grandmother action for taking her daughter to pray to church whenever they face difficulties.

Latin American society perceives their family as an important aspect of their life. Thus, most of Latin Americans have extended family. They will know well the history and background of their parents, grandparents, or even great-grandparents. Hall (1997:44) mentions that he is inspired by Foucault's opinion on discourse. A discourse is a group of statements which consist of certain amounts of actions that appear across texts repeatedly. It means that we need to pay attention to certain narratives and dialogues to understand the discourse of *machismo* through Castillo brothers as the main male characters. In this case, Hijuelos relates the practice of *machismo* by Cesar based on his father's horrible treatment to his mother and his father act in dealing with sadness through alcohol. Besides, he also connects Nestor's practice of *machismo* through his maternal grandparents' way of showing physical strength by hitting his mother to discipline her and his maternal

grandmother's habit to pray to overcome worries, difficulties, and sadness. Through this particular moment of his family member, he was able to define what *machismo* is and how it works. Thus, through his writing, he wanted to criticize the discourse of how practices of *machismo* could be considered destructive and toxic.

## CONCLUSION

In Latin American society, *machismo* is often perceived as something legendary or rightful for man despite its negative characteristics and destructive outcomes. Based on the discussion the depiction of *machismo* is seen from its non-physical practice through Cesar's role of being a Latin over. Although Cesar is seen as a physically aggressive type of lover but his practice of *machismo* leans more on the non-physical acts by becoming a boastful womanizer, a cheater, and an emotionally withdrawn man. The novel shows other physical practice of Nestor's act of being a "man with muscles" by showing his physical strength in a fight and dangerous swimming activity that almost drowns him. The practices of *machismo* ruins Cesar's health due to alcoholism and Nestor's mental health because of depression and anxiety. Both of them also reject professional or medical treatments.

The practices of *machismo* by the Castillo brothers can happen because, first it is the cultural value embed in Latin American man's masculinity. Second, their statuses as immigrants, ethnic minorities, and working-class man also boost more the practices of it. Through the Castillo brothers as the main male characters, the author, Oscar Hijuelos implicitly tried to warn the reader to not embrace *machismo*'s values as a way of life by showing its negative characteristics and hazardous outcomes. In essence, he wanted to criticize the discourse of how *machismo* is considered harmful and toxic for a man who practices it.

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