

# Deleting oppression

*How two activists' digital platforms are creating space for marginalized voices in Xicanx communities*

BY EMILLY PRADO  
STAFF WRITER

**M**achismo, an exaggerated and culturally specific form of toxic masculinity, is a concept that shapes many Latinx households. While it manifests itself in a multitude of ways, machismo is most clearly marked by a rigidity in gender roles and the encouragement of dominant, self-righteous men.

For Cassandra Alicia and Ruben Angel, activists and founders of the online platforms Xicanisma and Queer Xicano Chisme, the effects of machismo are felt on a daily basis. Instead of quietly retreating into the subservient roles that machismo has tried to carve out for them, they're challenging it and other regressive ideologies head-on, and are encouraging fellow Latinx to say no with them.

Through a combination of personal narratives and resource sharing, Xicanisma and Queer Xicano Chisme are providing an online network for marginalized voices to be heard. Since starting on Instagram in 2014 as a way to create visibility and representation for brown and Latina feminists, Xicanisma – a feminized word that stems from the ideology that inspired the Chicano movement – has expanded to Facebook with each platform nearing 100,000 followers. Queer Xicano Chisme is a multi-platform outfit that Ruben originally started as a blog in the wake of the 2016 Orlando Pulse nightclub shootings.

"The urgency of creating something happened the morning of Orlando because all the news that was being reported (wasn't) from black and brown queer and trans people. It was from folks who were not Latinx or Xicanx," Ruben said. (Neither Ruben nor Cassandra, who live in Oakland and El Paso respectively, use their last names out of fear for their safety. Alicia and Angel are middle names.) "So I started making all of these posts and they started to gain a lot of traction. I started to see that there was the need for this type of voice," Ruben said.

Cassandra shared a photograph of Ruben's graduation cap on Xicanisma the same day as the Orlando shootings. Instead of thanking his parents in glittery text as is common in college commencement



Cassandra Alicia of Xicanisma

PHOTO COURTESY OF CASSANDRA ALICIA

ceremonies, he opted for soft florals and warm pink letters that read, "For all the sissy brown boys that couldn't."

As it turns out, the message resonated deeply with others. The post was quickly circulated thousands of times.

"My parents were actually the hurdle that I needed to cross in order for me to graduate. I was disowned and homeless. I had to do a lot of things on my own," he explained. "I was having this conversation with my friend about how many queer and trans folks didn't have the opportunity to make the stage because of the time (in which) they were raised. So I wrote a poem about how me crossing that stage was also about other sissy brown boys that couldn't cross that stage because of the violence they faced or because they had to kill that part of themselves. Because I graduated the day of the Orlando shootings, it took on a new meaning. It was overwhelming."

On May 26, the two will participate in a panel discussion "Dismantling Machismo in Chicax Communities," hosted by Portland State University MEChA as part of Chicax Week. Cassandra and Ruben shed light on the ways they've implemented social media as a source for combatting systems of oppression and will focus on their own struggles resisting machismo in their spheres. Ruben said the effects of machismo

are, "incredibly tangible—especially for women, trans folks and gender non-binary folks. Anybody who doesn't fit the mold of machista or even marionista which is the opposite of machista, gets persecuted because they fail at gender. They fail expectations."

It's an experience he has known all his life, Ruben said.

"My family tried to beat the femininity out of me. My community tried to beat the femininity out of me. And so for a long time, I resented my community because of machismo. They didn't want me to exist as my authentic self. The most tangible way that machismo has affected me was when I was kicked out of my house for being queer. I failed at gender. Not only was I queer but I was femme, right? There was no way that I could ever be stealth – that I could ever hide my identity which, for a lot of people who want to navigate this machista culture, (is what) they do," Ruben said.

Living in the borderlands, Cassandra speaks of the violence against women happening next door in Juarez, Mexico, as a sobering, notable, ongoing example of machismo.

"I go to Juarez and know that women are there that are being raped, murdered and tortured. It's this really ugly thing," said

See XICANX, page 11

## DISMANTLING MACHISMO

Cassandra Alicia and Ruben Angel will be speaking on a panel about machismo during Portland State University's Chicax Week, now through Saturday, May 27. The panel is 4-6 p.m. Friday, May 26, at the PSU Native American Student Community Center, 710 SW Jackson St.