

## Being Edward James Olmos: Culture Clash and the Portrayal of Chicano Masculinity

Nohemy Solórzano-Thompson  
*Whitman College*

The California-based comedy trio Culture Clash problematizes Chicano masculinity through the manipulation of two iconic Chicano characters originally popularized by two films starring Edward James Olmos – the *pachuco* from Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit* (1981) and the portrayal of real-life math teacher Jaime Escalante in *Stand and Deliver* (1988) in their skit "Stand and Deliver Pizza."

Culture Clash, composed of the US Latino performers Richard Montoya, Ric Salinas and Herbert Sigüenza, is one of the most prominent Chicano/Latino performance troupes in the US.<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1984, the comedy trio has written and produced over fifteen original works, guest starred in short films and feature-length motion pictures, and had a regular comedy series on Fox Syndication in the early nineties. "Stand and Deliver Pizza" is one of the final skits from their performance piece *A Bowl of Beings*, which debuted at the Los Angeles Theater Center in June 1991. In 1992, the performance was aired on PBS as part of its Great Performances series and later released as a VHS tape. In 1998, the script of *A Bowl of Beings* was included in Culture Clash's first published anthology, *Culture Clash: Life Death and Revolutionary Comedy*.<sup>2</sup>

In "Stand and Deliver Pizza," Culture Clash tries to introduce new Chicano characters that can be read as masculine, and who at the same time, display alternative behaviors and characteristics,

including homosexual desire. In the skit, an older Chicano man steps in to stop a fight between two Mexican-American youths. One of the youths is a *cholo*, a Chicano gang-banger, and the other is a *rockero*, a Chicano heavy metal fan. The older Chicano man, a composite of the two Olmos' performances, alternates between being a *pachuco* and Jaime Escalante while trying to teach the men how to use their *ganas* to make pizzas.<sup>3</sup> The *pachuco*-Escalante character wants the young men to understand that they are facets of the same identity and wants them to become positive examples of Mexican masculinity.<sup>4</sup> By working together, the youths realize that they are sexually attracted to each other. The *pachuco*-Escalante character tries to repress this realization but is powerless to stop it.

The three characters in "Stand and Deliver Pizza" represent stock icons of Chicano masculinity. In the skit, these icons are forced to interact with each other and through this process become more complex and accessible representatives of Chicano masculinity. In addition, they are able to communicate with each other to create something tangible. The pizza of course is a comedic metaphor for contemporary American society – the new melting pot.

#### From Zoot Suiter to Math Teacher

The PBS Great Performances "Stand and Deliver Pizza" skit begins with the playing of the big band song "In the Mood" by Glen Miller against a background of a newspaper. Suddenly, a man's hands appear and tear the paper in two. The camera pans back revealing the man (played by Herbert Sigüenza) against a softly lit background as he assumes the iconic *pachuco* slanted pose. In this instance and throughout the performance, Sigüenza will exaggeratedly assume the pose while making a key point. He will begin the pose by slouching his torso back and complete it by positioning his hands by his side and slightly tilting his head to the front. This movement becomes a physical leitmotif throughout the skit to both denote the *pachuco*-Escalante character's authority and to establish his dominance over the other two characters.

Sigüenza's *pachuco* appears on stage wearing a zoot suit with a cream colored jacket and dark pants. After assuming the *pachuco* stance, he snaps his fingers and the music stops. As the camera pans

closer to him, the character begins talking. He says, while gesturing with both hands, "It was the secret fantasy of every *vato* in and out of the *Pachucada* to become... a math teacher" (*Culture Clash* 98). After he says "math teacher," the character snaps his fingers again and the music returns. He then quickly changes into Jaime Escalante, as played by Olmos. He turns his back to the audience during this brief costume change; a cap replaces the *pachuco* hat, the jacket is taken off to reveal an embroidered vest, and the character now wears glasses and has acquired a potbelly. After slowly turning around to face the audience, he reassumes the *pachuco* pose and continues his introduction of the skit.

As Sigüenza embodies the *pachuco*, he draws heavily from the 1981 film version of the play *Zoot Suit* directed by playwright Luis Valdez and starring Olmos as *El Pachuco*. The play chronicles the trial and incarceration of Henry Reyna in 1940s Los Angeles. Reyna is a referent to the real-life Zoot Suiter Hank Leyvas, one of the Mexican Americans falsely accused in the Sleepy Lagoon Murder Trial of 1942. Olmos' character represents Reyna's guide and alter ego; he also serves as the narrator of the film. Olmos began playing *El Pachuco* in the stage production of *Zoot Suit* in 1978 in Los Angeles and later in Broadway; for this role, Olmos earned a Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle award, a Theatre World award, and a Tony award nomination. The embodiment of the *pachuco* on stage and on screen would become one of Olmos' most significant and iconic performances, to the point that one could argue Olmos is perceived to be an eternal *pachuco*. This is certainly how *Culture Clash* presents him in the skit.

In Valdez's play, a giant facsimile of a newspaper serves as backdrop at the start of the play. *El Pachuco* emerges from this slit using a switchblade to separate the pages while "*Perdido*" by Duke Ellington plays.<sup>5</sup> After *El Pachuco* enters the stage in *Zoot Suit*, he slowly dons his *pachuco* outfit and strikes the pose. After this ritual, he snaps his fingers to stop the music and he begins his monologue to introduce the play. *Culture Clash*'s dialogue is a variation from *El Pachuco*'s speech. In *Zoot Suit*, he says, "It was the secret fantasy of every *bato*/ in or out of the *Chicanada*/ to put on a *Zoot Suit* and play the *Myth*/ *más chucote que la chingada*" (Valdez 26). *Culture Clash*'s staging plays homage to *Zoot Suit*'s beginning, while at

the same time signaling the end of the *pachuco* era. This is most evident in Sigüenza's dialogue, which situates the *vatos* of his time as "in and out of the *Pachucada*" (Culture Clash 98). This alteration of *El Pachuco*'s speech suggests two differences affecting Chicano masculinity today. First, Culture Clash creates the possibility of *vatos* "in and out" as opposed to the either/or suggested by *El Pachuco* in *Zoot Suit*. This distinction is fundamental to understanding the characters in "Stand and Deliver Pizza," especially the *rockero*. Second, Culture Clash situates their construction of masculinity after "the *Pachucada*," while *Zoot Suit* chronicles the beginning of that era. Thus, Culture Clash is creating a timeline that introduces their generation as emerging from the mythic *pachuco* experience. Although this is of course not historically accurate, it echoes what Arturo Madrid says in his essay "In Search of the Authentic *Pachuco*," where he argues that although the "*Pachuco* is the most fascinating figure in the world of the Chicano" (17), his representation is from the outside and often through distorted lenses that include "the nostalgic stereoscopes of Chicano recollection" (20).

In the skit, Culture Clash is attempting to both present the mythical *pachuco* and also deconstruct its status within the Chicano imagery. This is achieved by the transition from *pachuco* to math teacher, but also by the interactions with the other younger characters in the skit. While the *pachuco* became a math teacher, the *cholo* and the *rockero* are still in search of an identity. The appearance of the *pachuco* represents a nostalgic allusion to the supposed glory days of the Chicano *Movimiento* and introduces an imagined and romantic agent of change and resistance. The classic *pachuco* character in *Movimiento* cultural production encompasses an idealized masculine identity that is constructed as if existing outside of the mainstream. In *Zoot Suit*, *El Pachuco*'s power is manifested through his linguistic liberty and his ability to resist any challenges against his authority. He in fact is able to transcend the real-life events affecting those involved in the Sleepy Laguna case and remain unchanged by violence, persecution, and discrimination.

Culture Clash's manipulation of the *pachuco* character suggests nostalgia for this romantic view of Chicano masculinity, while at the same time, pointing out its irrelevance in contemporary Chicano identity politics. This is not to say that real-life *pachucos* did not

exist or were not important in the development of Chicano identity and politics, but rather that this particular romanticized portrayal of the *pachuco* is not enough to describe or encompass contemporary Chicano identity and performativity. Furthermore, *El Pachuco* of *Zoot Suit* represents an exclusive construction of Chicano masculinity that alienates women and sexual minorities. In her book about Teatro Campesino, Yolanda Broyles-González attributes *Zoot Suit*'s theatrical success to the figure of *El Pachuco* and his revalorization within the Chicano *Movimiento*. His prominence however, she says, gives the play "an overbearingly masculine bent" (200).

As the *pachuco* dissolves into Jaime Escalante in "Stand and Deliver Pizza," Culture Clash depicts the transformation of Chicano subjectivities in the media from a romanticized figure of resistance that draws its power from its refusal to engage with the mainstream to the figure of the inspirational math teacher. By creating the juxtaposition of the *pachuco* with the math teacher in this manner, Culture Clash comically portrays the rigid roles available to Chicanos in mainstream media and ridicules the extreme transition from one role to the other.

Sigüenza merges both *pachuco* and Escalante performances in his characterization in "Stand and Deliver Pizza" through the use of a Chicano form of *caló* [slang] and by the *pachuco* stance leitmotif. Sigüenza's *caló* draws from several literary and cinematic linguistic portrayals of the Los Angeles Chicano male speak. His slang is constantly referring to Olmos' multiple performances, as well as to the use of these words in key Chicano performances and texts. In the PBS performance, Sigüenza strategically includes additional utterances of "y qué" 'so what' to the end of some of his statements that do not appear in the 1998 published script. The phrase alludes to the Chicano Movement and the construction of a Chicano identity that does not seek compromise. The "y qué" is meant as a challenge to the audience, as if daring them to challenge his authority. But this is a false challenge, as the audience cannot challenge his onstage presence and instead he deceptively affirms his own assertions.

As the Escalante character appears, Culture Clash draws on the 1988 Ramon Menéndez film *Stand and Deliver*, also starring Olmos. This film version of the true-life story of Garfield High School math teacher Jaime Escalante became an important vehicle for Olmos

and other minority actors to break into the mainstream. *Stand and Deliver* created a new genre of films about the Mexican American Los Angeles experience that adopted the quintessential American dream formula. Through hard work (strategically referred to as *ganas* in the film), a math teacher at Garfield High is able to turn *cholos* and *cholas* into college material through calculus. Of course, Menendez's film is not naive in its depiction of the challenges faced by Escalante and his students; the film shows us the barriers faced by the students when placed in conflict with other Chicana and Chicano students and their families, as well as the questioning of their success when the College Board doubts their test results. Ironically, the College Board sends two officers, an African American and a Latino (played by Andy Garcia) to question Escalante and his students. Through this juxtaposition of different characters that encompass different aspects of the Chicano experience (on the one hand, the *cholo* who doesn't support his friend's academic progress; on the other, the *vendido* 'race traitor' character played by Andy Garcia; and finally, the unsympathetic and cynical teachers at Garfield who wish Escalante to do the minimal and not challenge the students intellectually), Menendez's film suggests that Escalante's performance of Chicano masculinity is the key to success in an unequal world.

In contrast to the *pachuco*, Olmos' performance of Jaime Escalante provides a figure of resistance that works within the mainstream and whose goal is the creation of a Mexican American middle class. Thus, Culture Clash's melting of the *pachuco* into a "math teacher" suggests a radical change in the performance of Chicano resistance – and implicitly criticizes such a transition. Although the *pachuco* was a romanticized figure, the Escalante character is an equally unsatisfactory alternative and presentation of Chicano masculinity. The character in the skit is ultimately more interested in his own agenda – which includes the exploitation of his Chicano workers, self-aggrandizement, and the repression of queer and alternative sexualities and identities as will be evidenced in the skit.

The *pachuco*-Escalante character however is able to bring together two other Chicano masculine identities and suggest the creation of a new subjectivity. He is able to do this because of his own flaws and his own position of authority as a *veterano* and mentor.

As his Chicano disciplines learn to work together and develop as subjects, the *pachuco* -Escalante character is left behind.

A *vato* from East LA

After the *pachuco* transforms into Escalante, he resumes his narration and introduces the dramatis personae of “Stand and Deliver Pizza.” The characters of the *cholo* and the *rockero* join him on stage and he briefly describes them for the audience. The *pachuco*-Escalante first describes the character of the *cholo* (played by Ric Salinas) as: “Look at the *cholo* with his shiny calcos... twin mirrors of despair, look at his nethead, holding his greasy hair. Looks like Spiderman” (*Culture Clash* 98-99). The character appears on stage with padded shoulders to make him look bigger—he is wearing a large button-down red shirt and black pants.

The *pachuco*-Escalante character’s introduction of the *cholo* attempts to demasculinize him by first ridiculing his existential Chicano angst and then laughing at the hairnet by implying he is dressed like a cartoon superhero. The reference to the existential angst is a recurrent theme in *A Bowl of Beings*; here it references the *pachuco*-Escalante character’s belief that the younger generations have not suffered in the same manner as the members of his generation. The reference to angst is one of the unifying themes in the entire play and suggests that in each skit, the characters are trying to resolve this angst by understanding and then performing their Chicano identities. After the *rockero* is introduced, the skit’s main action starts. I discuss the *rockero* in the next section.

After these introductions, the *pachuco*-Escalante briefly explains to the audience that after retiring from Garfield High School, he decided to open a pizzeria. However, he continues his social activism by continuing to help Chicano youth. As the main action begins, the *pachuco* -Escalante is in his pizzeria when the *cholo* arrives to apply for a job. As he arrives, the *cholo* quickly picks up on the rivalry alluded by the *pachuco*-Escalante earlier, and he tries to counter by asserting his identity over that of the math teacher through an attempt at linguistic prowess. This challenge clearly reflects the *cholo*’s understanding of the *pachuco* performance as one based on a linguistic portrayal of resistance. It also suggests that the *cholo*

through his use of *caló* is the apparent heir to the *pachuco*, at least in Culture Clash's imagery. This is later reinforced when the *pachuco*-Escalante character briefly allies himself with the *cholo* when the *rockero* arrives at the pizzeria.

The *cholo* introduces himself to the *pachuco* -Escalante speaking very fast and gesturing wildly with his arms, "Hey. Mr. Escalante. I hear you need somebody to make and deliver pizza three P.M. to midnight, Monday to Friday órale con safos, ese, *vato*, carnal, loco homeboy" (99). As he says the last word, the *cholo* crosses his arms and tries to imitate the *pachuco* stance but does not slant as much and leaves his arms crossed on his chest. The *pachuco*-Escalante character is not impressed by this challenge and quickly admonishes the *cholo* by saying loudly, "Órale, don't try to out-*Pachuco* me, *ese*." As he utters this, he adopts the *pachuco* stance and menacingly nears the *cholo*, who backs down from his challenge and hunches his shoulders. This brief exchange establishes the rules of their interactions; the *pachuco* is not to be challenged in his own turf.

After establishing the hierarchy, the *pachuco*-Escalante decides to interview the *cholo* for the position of delivery boy. The *cholo* once again tries to challenge the *pachuco*-Escalante by verbally and physically answering obscenely to one of his questions. The character, here playing more the math teacher and not the *pachuco*, implies that the *cholo*'s intellectual ability is suspect and hence he relies on vulgarities. He tries to prove this to the audience by asking the *cholo*, "I bet you don't even know who Shakespeare was?" (99). The *cholo* quickly changes his pose and reads dramatically from a Shakespeare play. The *pachuco*-Escalante character is at first shocked and wordless; after he recuperates, he nods his approval of the *cholo*'s familiarity with the British canon. This exchange echoes the beginning monologue of *El Pachuco* in *Zoot Suit*, where the character switches from *caló* to perfect English (as indicated in the stage directions) to say, "The *Pachuco* was existential/ for he was an Actor in the streets/ both profane and reverential" (Valdez 25). As with *El Pachuco* in *Zoot Suit*, the *cholo*'s speech creates the juxtaposition between imagined street and cultured talks to suggest that the *cholo* is in fact an actor and not a real-life person.

The *cholo* character as presented by Culture Clash is a composite of stereotypical representations of gang-bangers and Chicano

criminals popularized by Hollywood films—and often played by the same Chicano actors, Danny Trejo, Jesse Borrego, Jacob Vargas, and Juan Fernández—as well as a subversive interpretation of this character that suggests he is not that he seems. The Shakespeare quote is meant to not only make us laugh but also to counter our notions about this type of Chicano performativity. The *cholo* is not as shallow as Hollywood makes him out to be.

### Wassup *rockero*

The third character in the skit is the *rockero* (played by Richard Montoya). In the introduction, the *pachuco*-Escalante character describes him as: “Look at the rocker with his tight *puto* jeans, makes his ass look like an apricot, *que no?*” (99). This description of the character will become relevant later on in the skit, but it is suffice to say that the Escalante character is already constructing the *rockero* as not masculine given his appearance. This is not only however due to the tight jeans, but rather because of the character’s cultural interests and the performance of his identity. The *rockero* has not embraced a Chicano identity or an acceptable (at least to the *pachuco*-Escalante) Mexican American masculine performance, as his alliance to rock and roll music by non-Mexican Americans is a sign of *malinchismo* ‘race treason’ within the context of this performance. That is to say, that the *rockero*’s musical taste (which is what embodies him and characterizes him as his name implies) is outside of the stereotypical limits of the Mexican American community and identity. To be a *rockero* means to be defined by something seen inherently as not Mexican American and hence not Chicano.

The *rockero* arrives on scene after a case of *mota*-induced munchies and orders a “burrito” (100), mispronouncing the word. Montoya’s interpretation of the *rockero* relies on the character’s ambivalent relationship to his ethnic identity. This is most clear in his voice. Montoya adopts a high-pitch nasal voice and distorts Spanish words to try to suggest a non-familiarity with Spanish; yet instead, this achieves quite the opposite effect, as he is not able to “fake” his accent. The *rockero*’s outfit also suggests his distinctness from the *cholo* and the *pachuco*-Escalante characters; he has a black leather jacket, jeans, and long black hair. After the *rockero*’s arrival,

it is clear to the audience that the *rockero* and the *cholo* are mortal enemies, as foretold in the introduction of the skit.

The *rockero* and the *cholo* immediately engage in a linguistic fight with each other about the other's performance of masculinity. Their dialogue is full of jokes that reveal stereotypes and perceptions about Chicano masculinity and performativity. The *rockero* characterizes the *cholo* as uncultured and violent. He says of the *cholo*, in a very nasal and high-pitched voice, "jalapeño-eating, lettuce-picking, *para bailar la bamba* loser... [and then] Los Tigres del Norte eight-track tape listener" (100-101). This criticism contextualizes the *cholo* within a Mexican and Mexican American community with very strong cultural ties to Mexico. His taste for Los Tigres del Norte, traditional food, and music—and his description as the descendant of farm-workers—suggests that the *cholo*'s true crime (in the eyes of the *rockero*) is his class status and the reflection of it in the character's taste. The *cholo* responds to these attacks by calling the *rockero*, "coconut... surfer... gringo... [and] honky" (101), and in the PBS version, the *cholo* adds "white-boy-want-to-be"—all nouns that imply (as did the *pachuco*-Escalante character's previous description of this character) that he is not behaving as a Chicano should. The *rockero* responds to all insults with a final word, "Hispanic" (102).

The amalgamation of these negative words and the ending of insults with Hispanic, which upsets and shocks both the *cholo* and the *pachuco*-Escalante, reveal one of the goals of the *pachuco*-Escalante character. He is trying to counter the performance of the Hispanic identity as he is interested in these men becoming and performing Chicanidad. In this context, Hispanic means mainstream and deracinated; and Chicano means radical and authentic. The *pachuco*-Escalante however is unable to conform their performance of Chicano masculinity to his own vision.

The *pachuco*-Escalante is able to break the fight by giving them a motivational speech about peace and harmony. He then hires the *rockero* by taking advantage of the character's bad math skills. He first offers \$2.50 an hour, and after the *rockero* complains, he raises it to \$7.50 a day. The *rockero* tries to count with his hands and is stumped; he accepts what he thinks is a good deal. This humorous exchange highlights some of the limitations of the *pachuco*

-Escalante's supposed good nature; he is quite happy to exploit his workers in order to make a profit. His previous assertions about goodwill and wanting to work with Chicano youth become suspect after this negotiation.

#### Chicano Subjectivities and Pizza a la Olmos

After the *pachuco*-Escalante convinces both men to work together, he wishes for the men to publicly make up and affirm their friendship. The character first asks them to do the Chicano handshake. The *rockero* who is still struggling with his Chicano identity suggests he "might not know it" (102). His use of words is key; it is not that he does not know it, but that he has chosen to perform his identity as someone who might not know it. In other words, the "passing" that he is accused of is really a shield against racism and discrimination. It is clear he is a Mexican American; he just wishes he had to chance to choose his own performativity and subjectivity, be it Hispanic, Chicano, Latino, or simply American.

The *pachuco*-Escalante character however is a product of the Chicano *Movimiento* and is not willing to compromise this way; he wishes for his charges to declare themselves as public Chicanos. He responds to the *rockero*'s words by saying courtly, "Yes, you do" (102). This declaration affirms the *pachuco*-Escalante's character conception of masculine identity – if you are a Mexican American man, you must adopt Chicanidad.

Once the *pachuco*-Escalante character has convinced both men to do the Chicano handshake, he asks them to hug. This initial request shocks both men, but he leaves them no option. The men hug and immediately separate and act nonchalantly. The *cholo* stands tall and big; the *rockero* appears unaffected. Then the *pachuco*-Escalante character shocks the men by telling them to kiss. The men tentatively approach each other and suddenly begin to passionately kiss. Their kissing becomes a total body act as they embrace and the *rockero* grabs the *cholo* by the butt and lifts him up in their fervent embrace. At the sight of this, the *pachuco*-Escalante character is shocked and speechless – this second reaction being the most powerful one. After the kiss the men separate in a mock recreation of their previous nonchalant stances, but this time, they are very

affected. The *cholo* appears disheveled – his glasses are partly off and his hairnet is messed up. The *rockero* is fanning himself, sweating profusely, and playing with his long hair.

The *pachuco*-Escalante character regains his use of language after this act of transgression and homoerotic desire has occurred. He immediately mocks their affection by stating, “Are you two Tijuana *putos* finished?” (103). This comment affirms the audience’s perception of the *pachuco*-Escalante character’s contempt for queer desire, and it also situates his understanding of queer subjectivities in a particular cultural context. The suggestion that the men are behaving like Tijuana *putos* situates queerness south of the border and within the context of prostitution. The *pachuco*-Escalante character is not allowing the creation of a queer Chicano subjectivity within his construction of the Los Angeles Chicano experience. However, the homoerotic act has taken place and that cannot be erased from the experience of the characters and the audience.

The PBS version of the skit ends with the *pachuco*-Escalante character leading the men into the workshop to instruct them in the making of pizza. The *pachuco*-Escalante character tries to insert once again his own notion of Chicano masculinity through his instructions for correct and proper pizza making, he states:

I am going to teach you how to make the house special. The “Edward James Olmos” pizza! First you, knead the dough. Then you pour the “Gregorio Cortez” tomato sauce... see how it runs... some pachuco pepperonis... olives from Miami... Vice. Add some “American Me” cheese. You stick it in the oven, wait till it’s farmworker brown, take it out, put it in a box, get in your lowrider and deliver it to the barrio! (103)

Beyond the comedic references to other Olmos’ television and film performances, this last commentary by the *pachuco*-Escalante character is trying to repress the previous homoerotic act by providing other alternative (and very heterosexual-acting) performances of Chicano masculinity. The *pachuco*-Escalante character has probably realized that his previous presentation of Chicano masculinity was not as inclusive as it could be, but rather than acknowledging the characters’ obvious queer desire, he focuses on other possible

subjectivities.

However, the alternative subjectivities suggested by the pizza ingredients are equally restrictive and stereotypical. The first reference is to the Robert M. Young television film *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (1982), which tells the story of the famous incident in 1901 that inspired the *corrido* of Gregorio Cortez and created the myth around this figure. The film stars Olmos as Gregorio Cortez, who is falsely accused of murder and then cruelly gunned down by the Texas Rangers. By citing this performance as the initial ingredient, Culture Clash is tracing here not only the media portrayal of the Chicano male, but also the development of Chicano Studies. The reference also alludes to Américo Paredes' seminal book, *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and its Hero* (1958) which was the basis for the Young film. Paredes' book is one of the precursors to Chicano Cultural Studies and a foundational text in folklore and border studies. Gregorio Cortez, like Henry Reyna (aka Henry Leyvas) in *Zoot Suit*, represents a mythical figure that is victimized by Texas Anglos due to racism and cultural misunderstanding. His story and heroic death (as told by Paredes and the film) elevate him to the heights of a cultural hero to represent Chicanos everywhere. Like the *pachuco*, however, Gregorio Cortez is found to be equally problematic to today's Chicanos in Culture Clash's skit.

After Gregorio Cortez and another reference to *pachucos*, the pizza needs olives from Miami. This is a reference to Olmos' supporting role in the popular 1980s series *Miami Vice*. In the series, Olmos played Cuban American police Lieutenant Martin Castillo. While the main characters played by Don Johnson and Philip Michael Thomas were portrayed as over-the-top fashion-conscious playboys, Olmos' Castillo was quiet, reclusive, and conservative. This particular role helped Olmos establish himself as a television actor, a medium in which he still is active today. Culture Clash's reference casts Olmos' participation in *Miami Vice* as odd, as olives are not usually from Miami. Similarly, Olmos as Castillo is out of character along with his other performances.

The next ingredient is the cheese, which references Olmos' directorial debut in *American Me*. Based on a true-life story, *American Me* chronicles the creation of the Mafia Mexicana gang in the California prison system. The plot centers on the fictional

character of Pedro Santana (played by Olmos) who is unjustly jailed and forced to survive by creating a powerful gang within prison. Santana is based on the real-life former leader of the Mafia Mexicana, Rodolfo Cadena. The film gathered mixed reviews from critics and proved to be controversial among Chicanos. The PBS taped version of "Stand and Deliver Pizza" omits this mention of *American Me*. I read the mention of the film in the script as another allusion to a stereotypical performance by Olmos. This time the actor performs the incarcerated *cholo* who must use violence to survive in an unjust and racist system.

It is no accident that all these ingredients refer to male-centric films and narratives. Culture Clash suggests that the Olmos pizza is a composite of roles and performances that rely on an understanding of the Chicano experience as male, heterosexual, lower class, angry, and forced into violent behavior. In order to make this point even clearer, the instructions say that the pizza needs to become "farm worker brown" in order to be ready to be sent to the *barrio*. Culture Clash humorously refers here to the Chicano master narrative, which privileges narratives about the experience of farm workers and signals that to be the quintessential Chicano experience. It is interesting to note, however, that none of the Olmos roles mentioned nor any of the characters in the skit are actually farm workers. Thus, the creation of the pizza through the addition of stereotypical urban performances by Olmos produces an equally unauthentic end result. The pizza is supposed to be a metaphor for the American dream, but in fact it produces another stereotype that minimizes the Chicano experience and excludes other subjectivities.

After the instruction on how to make pizza, the three men begin mimicking the making of pizza and the Jackson Five's song "ABC" is heard. The skit ends with them working away as a giant pizza slice prop behind them flies off into the sky.<sup>6</sup> The published version in the anthology *Culture Clash: Life, Death and Revolutionary Comedy* (1998), however, provides another epilogue to our story. After the pizza-making workshop, the *pachuco*-Escalante character has a heart attack (like in the film *Stand and Deliver*). After rising from the dead, the character tells us what happened to the two characters. In fact, they achieved the *Stand and Deliver* dream; they melted into modern America and achieved middle class status.

It is revealed through the *pachuco*-Escalante's words, however, that this ending is not what he truly intended. He says that the *cholo* became a prominent Hispanic Republican politician and the *rockero* a famous brain surgeon in Malibu. They both also became "REAL, real good buddies" (103) implying that their attraction continued. These characteristics attributed to them by the *pachuco*-Escalante character (Hispanic, surgeon in Malibu) along with the lasting bond between the *cholo* and the *rockero* suggest that he failed in his Chicano project because he did not allow them to create their own subjectivities. The result was that they chose to create identities outside of Chicanidad. As the skit closes, the *cholo* tries to testify in Congress that he is not corrupt and did not "smoke crack with that 'ho!" The *cholo*'s language suggests a mockery of the former mayor of Washington DC Marion Barry. The *rockero* is seen in an operating room behaving like a hysterical prima donna. The *pachuco*-Escalante ends the skit with a hopeful comment about how "We're working it out... sí se puede Raza! Órale!" (104). As he says this, the three characters strike the *pachuco* pose as "In the Mood" plays again, and as with the PBS taped version, the pizza slice becomes a rocket and flies away.

### Queering the Chicano Experience

In an article on Latino performance, David Román criticizes Culture Clash's earlier work like *A Bowl of Beings* for reinforcing "a type of cultural nationalism that collapses all Latino experience into a unified (heterosexual male) subject. In short, by failing to account for the differences among Latinos, Culture Clash inadvertently performs the very limits of the identity politics they practice" (Román 158). Román's reading of Culture Clash is in tension with what I try to argue here about Chicano subjectivities. While Román sees the collapsing into a single identity (perhaps the one promoted by the *pachuco*-Escalante), I see the creation of multiple narratives about subjectivity through the exploration and reversal of different stereotypes.

Culture Clash attempts what José Estebán Muñoz labels as "disidentification" in their performance of Chicano identity. Muñoz's term refers to the performative practices of queer minority artists

that rely on mainstream culture in order to create their own counter identities. In his analysis of Carmelita Tropicana and Ela Troyano, Muñoz describes comedic disidentification as accomplishing an “important cultural critique while at the same time providing cover from, and enabling the avoidance itself of, scenarios of direct confrontation with phobic and reactionary ideologies” (119). In “Stand and Deliver Pizza,” the presence of the *pachuco*-Escalante character and his admonishment of queer transgressions provide the necessary cover to allow a homoerotic text to emerge. Culture Clash is not only relying on mainstream stereotypes about Chicano identities, but also is relying on Chicano-made stereotypes. These are based on the constant negotiation between Chicano artists and performances, as evidenced by the multiple identities played by Olmos.

The homophobia exhibited by the *pachuco*-Escalante alludes more to a Chicano understanding of male subjectivity than a mainstream assumption of heterosexuality. Although one could argue that the harsh repression of the *pachuco*-Escalante and the eventual deracinated future identities of the *cholo* and *rockero* (as narrated by the *pachuco*-Escalante, of course) in fact suggest that hetero-normativity prevails and queer desire has been effectively erased from the Chicano experience, both the skit's end and the skit itself provide a counter narrative that creates the possibility of queer subjectivities and desires.

In *Chicano Drama*, Jorge Huerta discusses the struggles of playwrights and performers to insert queer subjectivities into their work. Huerta especially highlights the paucity of queer theater texts as an indication of the politicized and controversial nature of queer performance. In this context, Culture Clash's skit is more radical than it superficially seems. In the disidentification tradition established by other artists, Culture Clash subverts masculinity through the introduction of a queer subtext that cannot be ignored by the audience.

The skit's end proves that the queer subtext remains and has in fact not excluded the *cholo* and the *rockero* from forming Chicano identities, as previously suggested. As the *pachuco*-Escalante remarks, the characters continued as “REAL, real good buddies” (103), a clear euphemism for a gay relationship. More importantly, although the

final scenes directed by the *pachuco*-Escalante character suggest that the *cholo* became a Hispanic Republican politician and the *rockero* a brain surgeon in Malibu, the audience can choose to ignore this epilogue as it is then contradicted by the final words in the skit that suggest identity is a work in progress as the characters assume the *pachuco* pose. The presentation of a possible alternative ending alludes to the conclusion of *Zoot Suit*, where different *finales* are given to the audience. Culture Clash chooses not to be specific as to what the *finales* might be, but the character's *pachuco* pose suggests that their identities are a manifestation of Chicano masculinity, not something outside of it.

### Notes

1 A common misconception is to simply label Culture Clash as a "Chicano" comedy troupe. In fact, although noticeably influenced by Chicano theater, the group's ethnic origins and theoretical influences are far wider. Salinas was born in El Salvador, Sigüenza is of Salvadorean origin, and Montoya identifies as a Chicano and is the son of the *Movimiento* poet José Montoya. Their performance art is influenced by a self-acknowledged amalgam of Teatro Campesino, *Movimiento* performance and poetry, and mainstream American popular culture, including Jerry Springer and *The Brady Bunch* (Monaghan 11).

2 There are some noticeable differences between the taped 1992 PBS performance and the 1998 published script; relevant changes are addressed in this article. Unless noted, all direct quotes are from the 1998 published version.

3 The word *ganas* roughly translates to will power; but in the original 1988 film *Stand and Deliver* and in Culture Clash's skit, it denotes the Mexican expression that refers to a person's interior capacity to overcome all odds to achieve a specific goal. As with other Mexican expressions used in the skit, the *pachuco*-Escalante character delivers the word *ganas* through an exaggerated physical and linguistic recreation of the original Olmos performance.

4 Throughout this article, I refer to the composite character as "*pachuco*-

Escalante—as both performances are embodied in Sigüenza's role. At strategic times, the character will favor one identity over the other in order to manipulate the audience and the two other characters, but he will quickly revert to combining both identities through his exaggerated physical and linguistic moves. In the article, I note the strategic instances when one identity is emphasized over another.

5 Culture Clash chooses Glen Miller's "In the Mood," which also appears in Valdez's play.

6 The flying pizza might be a coded reference to Olmos' role in Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner*. In the film, Olmos plays Garf, a futuristic Los Angeles cop who speaks an urban hybrid language that combines vocabulary and slang from multiple languages. Olmos' character in the film can be read as an updated *pachuco* given his elaborate outfit that echoes a zoot suit and his constant use of unintelligible and untranslated dialogue (created by Olmos himself for the film). Although a minor character, Garf is the only one who solves the mystery surrounding Harrison Ford's character and decides to allow his character to escape with his love interest from Los Angeles.

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