PERSONAL ESSAY

Mi cultura, your campus

// BY LIZETH ORTIZ-CALLEJA



LA CASA BY MARTIN PERALTA

As the sun sets, students gather on Beinecke Plaza. Their smiley faces and laughter indicate that this is some sort of celebration. Some people are dressed in typical modern clothing while others wear long bright dresses adorned with colorful ribbons and suits with golden buckles and precise stitching. The scene has you puzzled: What's going on?

This is what Hispanic Heritage Month looks like at Yale this fall. It's visible, both seen from a distance and photographed for all to watch on social media.

But as I talked to peers across campus, I found that not everyone experiences the month the same way. For some, Hispanic Heritage Month is a joyful, long-awaited time to cherish their culture in the spotlight. For others, it's a reminder of how much work is still left to feel truly represented at Yale. Being seen isn't the same as being represented, and it raises a more complicated question: when Yale celebrates "Hispanic" identity, whose Hispanic identity is actually being spotlighted?

As of 2025, 16 percent of Yale's undergraduates identify as Hispanic. For Mark Rodriguez '29, outreach chair of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, who grew up on the South Side of Chicago, that makes celebrating here more than a party. "Celebrating here at Yale specifically is almost retaliation to assimilation, to the predominantly white culture here," Rodriguez said. "You really need to try and hold on to your cultural norms and embrace it."

I felt that pressure the moment I arrived. Coming from Salinas, California, where my high school was mainly Hispanic, Yale was a huge cultural shock. Hardly anyone looked like me, and even fewer people understood the way I'd grown up speaking. Things like a joke landing differently when it's half in Spanish, or the specific chaos of a Hispanic household, don't need explaining among your own people but suddenly do among strangers. I found myself translating not just language, but an entire way of being.

Madison Aguilar '29, social chair of Ballet Folklórico Mexicano de Yale, said she knows the feeling. She is from San Antonio, Texas, and her high school was primarily Hispanic. But the shock she describes went beyond numbers. "It was a big culture shock at Yale that not everyone was Hispanic, and also that there were different kinds of Hispanic," she said.

For others, Yale is the first place their Latino identity has felt surrounded. Alaia Aquino '29, co-president of the Dominican Student Association, went to school in New Haven, where Hispanic students were one group among many. Now, she estimates that 90 percent of her friends are Hispanic. "It's just nice having friends who can communicate with my mom, who can relate on a cultural level when it comes to childhood experiences or ways we grew up," she said.

For many of us, that community lives in cultural organizations. I started choreographing for Ballet Folklórico Mexicano de Yale and advocating with Mecha de Yale. Aquino spends so much time with the Dominican Students Association that she treats its room like a second home. "I find myself just going to the DSA room to do homework, or just talking to everyone on board," she said. "It's a good community."

Aguilar said the effort it takes to find these spaces is part of what makes them matter. "At Yale, it's definitely more of an effort to join these groups, which makes it more intentional and more meaningful," she said.

That community gave me the confidence to do something I hadn't expected: share my culture beyond those spaces. I started inviting my non-Hispanic roommates to Ballet Folklórico showcases, telling stories about growing up Mexican and welcoming questions I might once have found exhausting to answer back home.

To me, Hispanic Heritage Month isn't just a celebration for those of us who already carry this culture. It's a chance to hand a piece of it to the people who don't. It's the moment I get to put my suitemate on to Tajin, or explain to a friend what a quinceañera actually means beyond Raini Rodriguez's "Living Your Dreams" music video, and watch my culture become a little less foreign to someone who didn't grow up in it. One of my favorite moments this month was sharing a piece of my pan dulce with my roommate and seeing her enjoy it.

Rodriguez carries his culture differently. For him, the work is less about sharing it and more about not losing it. "It's about trying to remember what makes me Latino as a person versus actually being just a Latino in white spaces like Yale," he said.

And the month's visibility has limits. Aguilar said she only feels isolated from the community when she isn't going to events. While programming is plentiful during Hispanic Heritage Month, it is scarce the rest of the year.

Rodriguez wants more than events. He said he would like to see a more outspoken administration, pointing to University President Maurie McInnis's silence on federal policies he believes harm Hispanic communities and people of color. "How can I feel safe when our own president of the school cannot speak out against these evils?" he said.

On Oct. 15, Hispanic Heritage Month ends. The ribbons and golden buckles will be packed away, and the photos will scroll out of our feeds. What's left is the question the celebration couldn't answer on its own: can being seen for a month ever add up to being represented for a year?

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PERSONAL ESSAY

But he's the boy

// BY ASHA ROY

When I hear a new internet word or viral phrase, it usually comes from my social media-savvy younger sister. With the phrase "He's the boy," it was in conversation with one of my guy friends. We were sitting in L-Dub eating Trader Joe's snacks — the highest good in the Yale snack economy. I had mentioned one of his fraternity brothers who, earlier that week, had called me and my friends "overdramatic" and told us to "take a deep breath" while we were dealing with a medical emergency. My friend responded sympathetically but closed his comment with the refrain, "He's the boy, though." I faltered. As usual, there are a million things I now wish I had said in response. However, what I lack in off-the-dome responses I make up for in WKND articles, so I set out to explore what my peers think about the term "He's the boy" and write the response I wish I had given my friend that night.

Riley Yang '29 was the first subject of my investigation. When I asked her if she had ever heard the phrase before, she admitted that she hadn't. "I actually thought that maybe when you asked about this, you were getting confused with 'He's the man'" she said. I was shocked. I hear "He's the boy" about five times a day. Riley continued, "I don't really talk to a lot of like bro-ey guys very often," which is fair enough. Both Riley, and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies professor, Joe Fischel LAW '21, compared the phrase "He's the boy" with "Boys will be boys," which Riley claims "glosses over a double standard."

I agree that there is a double standard. Certain mistakes that men make are excused by other men — and women — and mistakes that women make are scrutinized by both genders. I have seen that time and time again with my female friends — and sometimes myself. We excuse unacceptable behavior from male friends, citing their 'avoidant tendencies' or 'past-relationship trauma' when we would, without doubt, criticize our female friends harshly for doing the same things.

Riley told me that her mom used to say, "There's no quality control for men." This is not a value judgement on men, simply a recognition that social institutions do not check men the same way they check women. Men get away with a lot, and thus, there is less behavioral "quality control," so to speak. As Riley explained it, "if you're in the position of power, you don't have to think about how your actions come across as much," whereas women are constantly considering every angle of perception.

About the specific use of 'boy' instead of 'man' in the phrase, Fischel noted, "It strikes me that the phrase is about licensing childishness as an alibi for unsavory behavior. Sabrina Carpenter's 'Manchild' comes to mind." While that analysis doesn't immediately hit home with how I've heard the term used — I would say that the word 'boy' has colloquially lost some of its literal meaning — Fischel brings up a valid point.

Fischel and Riley were also right to flag "He's the boy" as similar to "Boys will be boys" in the specific instance of men excusing other men. In both cases, the very fact of being male is the thing worthy in itself of excusing poor behavior. The phrase is not always used as an excuse for bad behavior. As Leo Ladeira '28, a member of the fraternity LEO, clarified, "The way I've used it or the way that I've seen it used, is more of a stamp of approval on someone's character or someone's personality." He continues, "I mean, a lot of the time I'll see it used around LEO and especially during Rush and all that. It's always like, 'Oh, he's the boy,' like, "You need to meet this guy."

The way Leo uses the phrase is not as an excuse for bad behavior, but as praise for likeability. In fact, Leo said, "I would say, 'She's the boy,' I think."

I suspect that this disagreement on the malignance of the phrase "He's the boy" comes from a varied perspective on the 'bro code.' When I asked Leo about what he thought about 'bro code,' he said, "I did Boy Scouts for about nine years, and I got a lot of value from fraternity in the sense that you're there with your brothers or with other people who are very similar to you. You would be there for them, you would sacrifice for them, you would do whatever, and it's along those lines I've kind of experienced that sort of bro code. But bro code has never been something negative for me or a big part of my life."

Riley, however, sees 'bro code' as inextricably linked to patriarchy. She cited scholar Eve Sedgwick GRD '75, saying that her definition of patriarchy "is basically like social relationships between men that are for men by men, and benefit men. I think 'He's the boy,' like guys who call their friends the boys, I think it more emphasizes this network of social relationships between men." The fact that I have only ever heard men call someone 'the boy,' and only ever in the context of social relationships between men, eerily aligns the phrase with Sedgwick's definition of patriarchy.

Now, I know that some people reading this are thinking that I've looked far too deeply into a phrase that no one thinks about all that much. I argue that in a world where women still earn 81 cents to every man's dollar, we should be focusing on the things that are not so obvious. Words have an impact, even if we don't say them with malice. This leads me to a conundrum that I have long puzzled over: When is it okay to use words with complex histories of discrimination or marginalization? For example, b---- or c---. If these words carry such power, should we use them at all? Or, if we can, who should be able to use them? What I have settled on is that groups that wield power over the people implicated by a certain word should never be able to use it.

I understand that 'He's the boy' is hardly a derogatory insult. It does, however, tap into a history of excusing men on the sole basis of their gender — in essence, power breeding power. My question remains unanswered: Innocuous frat platitude or covert internalized misogyny?

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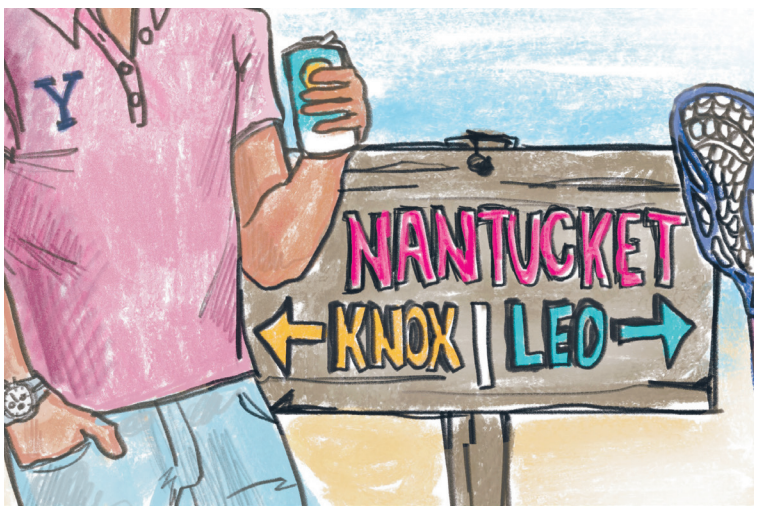


ILLUSTRATION BY TASHA FU

WEEKEND RECOMMENDS:
COMPLIMENTING STRANGERS