

Sexual Violence or Flattery?: Latin American Perceptions of Catcalls and Street Compliments

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Catcalls and street compliments are referred to as “piropos” in Latin America

What is a *piropo* interaction?

The most salient definition of the *piropo* interaction involves the following: a woman walks down the street and passes a man. He makes a remark to her generally in the form of a sexual advance. She does not respond and continues on.



Elegant *piropo*



Social restrictions to this interaction?

Class distinctions

Elegant vs. Vulgar

A *piropo* identified as elegant by a woman of low social status would be tasteless or vulgar by a woman of higher status.

A vulgar *piropo* is not considered a *piropo* at all. The word “groseria” is used to describe the vulgar *piropos*.

Age restrictions

Viejo verde/Viejo baboso is a derogatory term used towards older men who give *piropos*. Additionally, women who are past their sexual prime generally do not receive *piropos*.



Where do these interactions occur?

Piropos are generally recognized as occurring in public spaces, but they can be used as teasing among friends and family.

What do *piropos* tells us about gender roles and perceptions of gender within these societies?

These interactions help define sexuality, as well as ideas of maleness/femaleness where both parties are active participants. Women are active participants in the sense that their response encourages or humiliates the men who approach them, and in the sense that they also may give *piropos*.

What is the current controversy?

Some organizations want the *piropo* practice to stop all together. They claim that all *piropos* are a form of violence against women.

Changing practices?

Although reducing violence against women has become an important part of modern day discourse in many Latin American countries, the *piropo* interaction is culturally accepted and is a key social interaction that

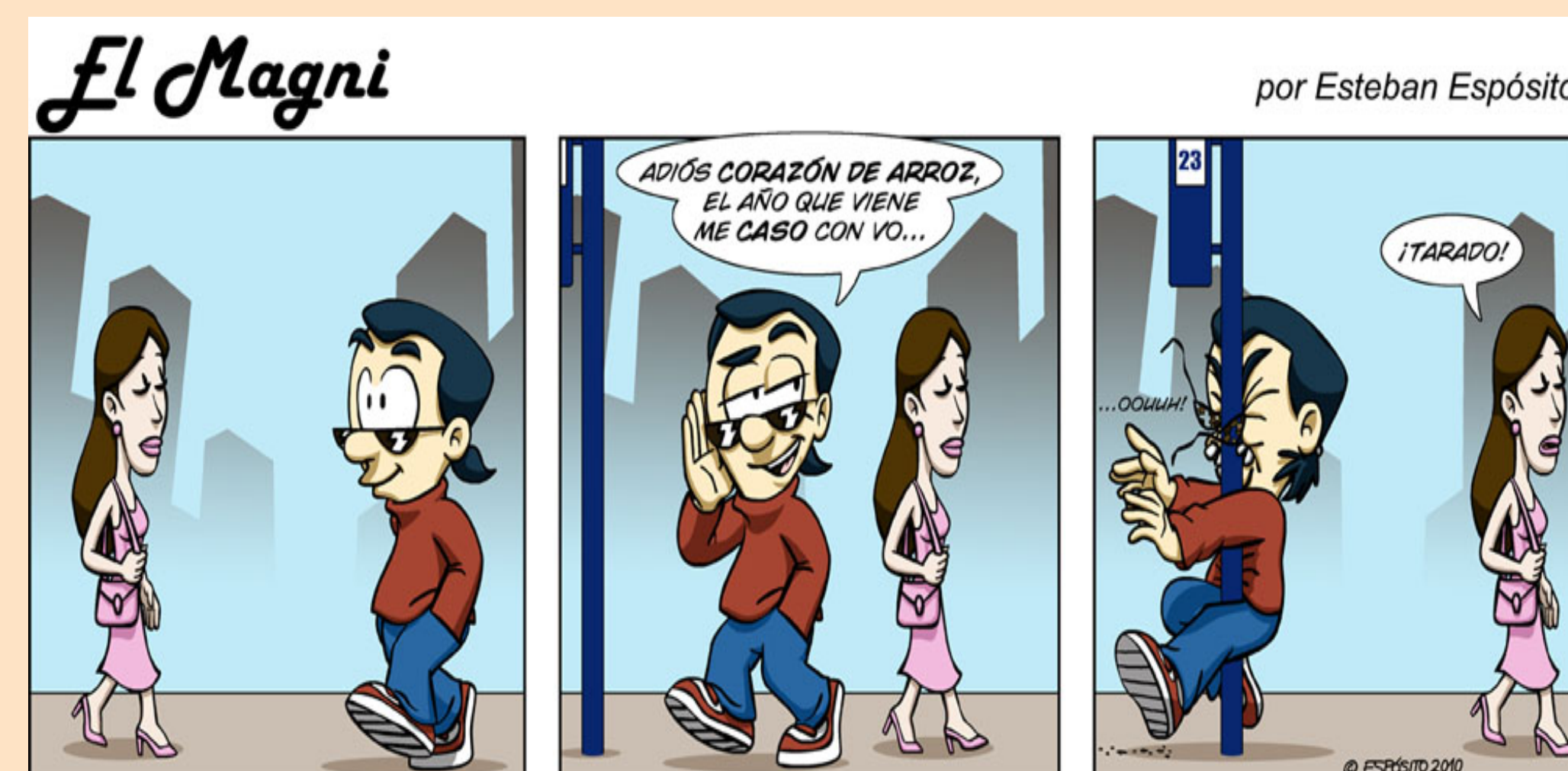


determines cultural ideas about sexuality and gender. Awareness about violence against women has led to a stronger distinction between *piropos* and *groserias* but not to a complete eradication of the practice. Culturally, the *piropo* interaction aims at flattery, not violence. Vulgar *piropos* or *groserias* are not socially acceptable.

Defining different kinds of *piropos*...

Women are like food	“Vete por la sombra porque lo dulce al sol se derrite” (Walk in the shade because sweets melt in the sun)
Women are like cars	“Tus curvas me marean” (Your curves make me dizzy)
Women are divine creatures	“Con usted voy a ser bueno para irme a la gloria” (With you I’ll be good in order to go to glory/heaven)
Women are rewards for men’s courage	“Por un beso tuyo meteria los dedos en el enchufe” (For a kiss from you I would put my fingers in the socket)

(Achugar 2011)



Vulgar *piropos*

Sources

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