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Of Marbles and (Little) Men: Bad Luck and Masculine Identification in Aymara Boyhood

This article takes up the way that Aymara boyhood marbles play counts as a spectacle of masculinity. Specifically, I examine the way that a boy's relationship to bad luck qhincha *(bad luck) in marbles has consequences for his gender and sexual affiliations. To do so, I analyze the way in which qhincha instantiates as a participant status in marbles and the way in which heterosexual "toughness" and homosexual "weakness" and "transgression" are thereby—that is, in relation to qhincha—made salient. Theoretically, I show that Aymara masculinity requires a semiotically nuanced concept of "identification" in order to capture its processual, task-like character.* [identification, metapragmatic discourse, masculinity, the Andes, bad luck]

Being a *chacha* (man) is a challenge that runs throughout Peruvian Aymara boyhood.[1] The boy who hesitates to jump into the river—fearful of heights—gets exhorted to be a man. The young boy who shrieks while washing himself in bitterly cold water scolds himself: "Chachjama, chachjama" [Like a man, like a man]. In such cases, the display of "manliness" is a matter of attempting toughness precisely when being tough is tough. "Manliness," however, is a game with a small prize (for boys, at least): the young boy who steels himself against challenge earns no praise, while the boy who succumbs to it or evades it gets taunted as a *warmi* (woman) or *imilla* (girl) or as a *qachu* (fag).[2]

Aymara boyhood "manliness" both conforms to and subverts theoretical accounts of masculinity. Margaret Mead writes of masculinity that it is something that must be achieved over "a long course of growth and practice" (2001 [1949]:145) in which "the male needs to reassert, to reattempt, to redefine his maleness" (147).[3] The case of "manliness" for Aymara boys is similar: it is assumed as a task and a trial before entities and circumstances that are exacting, circumstances that threaten to derail other projects (like washing or playing). In such cases, being a "man" is a problem and a possibility, not an inevitability. It is something that one must undertake or try to be (do).

Aymara "manliness" also creates theoretical trouble: how does one study the "inhabitance" of an identity that is, in principal, uninhabitable—that is, one that can only be encountered as a task? In such cases, one needs what the concept "identification" provides (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Cameron and Kulick 2003; Kulick 2003): to be "at risk of gender assessment" (West and Zimmerman 1987:136) in part means showing oneself to be in the process of affiliating with, refusing, differentiating from, partially repudiating, etc. some identity within a field of other possible identities. This is certainly true in the Aymara boyhood case: "inhabiting" heterosexual "manliness"

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(or "chacha-ness") mostly means being ready to show oneself to be neither feminine nor homosexual.

The concept *identification* requires a very specific kind of semiotic intervention into the study of language and identity: in order to theorize processes of identification like repudiation, one needs an account of the way in which explicit, metapragmatic discourse (Silverstein 1993) evaluates certain identity categories as, in Kulick's (2003: 149) terms, "unauthorized, illegitimate and marked" within a field of identity categories that become visible only in their absence. "Chacha-ness," for example, becomes interactionally salient in the context of insult practices that (explicitly, reflexively) target the absence of "chacha-ness" (i.e., femininity and homosexuality): one can infer, then, that "chacha-ness" appears to boys as the achievement of an "unmarked ground [in relation] to the figure of abnormal alterity" (Hastings and Manning 2004:304).

In this article, I give an account of the task-like character of Aymara masculine identification through an analysis of the gendered meaning of boys' marbles play. Marbles does for Aymara boys what Goffman argues games do for males in general: it is "an arrangement specifically designed to allow males to manifest the qualities claimed as basic to them" (1977:322). For Aymara boys, marbles play, in Goffman's terms, "provides *the* evidence" (322) for a boy's success (or, lack of failure) at assuming the project of "chacha-ness."[4] The "evidence," it turns out, is whether and how a boy—in a "tough" way—relates to *qhincha* (bad luck) or adversity in marbles play.

In marbles play, qhincha is the primary "other" in relation to which masculine identification gets assumed as the partial repudiation of homosexuality. In marbles, qhincha becomes the spectacular equivalent of mundane adversities like jumping into rivers and bathing in cold water: if a boy can be understood as engaging with and, ideally, conquering agents and entities understood as qhincha (e.g., the rocks that impede a marbles path, a marauding toddler, a person passing by), he escapes the insults (primarily qachu) that boys explicitly and reflexively use to homosexualize "unmanly" players. For Aymara boys, as implied in our own understandings of "lady luck" and masculine "risk taking," masculinity emerges in contact with contingency.

Masculinity in marbles presents an additional theoretical problem for an account of masculine identification: while heterosexual masculinity or "chacha-ness" is clearly the privileged, most highly valued social category available in marbles play, Aymara boys do occasionally and normatively embrace a "qachu" or homosexual persona in game play.[5] When invoking "qachu-ness," boys do subversive acts like move the material things—the qhincha (rocks, twigs, clumps of dirt)—that impede their marble, or stop their marble's movement with a foot stomp. In such cases, boys deploy what Bucholtz and Hall call a "tactics of intersubjectivity" (2004:270) in which, in highly constrained circumstances, boys strategically flip the default valuation of "chacha-ness" over "qachu-ness."

In what follows, then, I give an account of masculine identification in the game of marbles. In doing so, I offer a theoretical account and empirical example of an important semiotic dimension of the problem of identification—that is, the role of explicit metapragmatic discourse. It is an account that holds, I claim, for a very specific life course moment: that is, for boys between the ages of 5 and 12 for whom questions of toughness versus weakness are central tasks of identification.[6] The end result of such a task, I argue, is not a boy who is a man in any simple way—but, rather, a boy who can fend off accusations of homosexuality, and embrace them when appropriate. It is a boy who engages heterosexual masculinity as a (or his) project.

The course of my analysis runs as follows. After describing both the social context of marbles and the rules of the game, I analyze the way that qhincha itself is understood as a participation status—essentially similar to roles like "marbles player" or "sibling"—emergent from the meanderings of marbles. I then analyze gendered and sexualized insults for the insight they give on how boys, in engaging with qhincha,

get revealed as engaging (or not) in the project of heterosexual masculinity ("chachaness"). Across these two sections, qhincha goes from mere participation status to a crucial (if slippery) identification-producing other. Finally, I provide evidence that shows that it is not just the case that masculinity get implicated in marbles; rather, marbles is, essentially, a spectacle of masculinity.

The Social Context of Marbles Play

Marbles is typically played while children herd their household's sheep and alpaca either after school or throughout the day (during school vacation). Children take out their animals from the family corral and drive them to fields or mountainous land where the herd feeds. As the herd grazes, children—far from direct parental supervision, more often than not—play in the little streams that cut through the area, play at cooking and keeping house, and, most frequently, play games like fox and geese, jacks, and marbles. These latter two games are played with same-gender networks of kin: jacks is for girls, marbles is for boys.

Both jacks and marbles are special, then: they represent an innovation with respect to the typical social organization of herding tasks and game play. These other forms of labor and play draw their social organization largely from the sibling context in which gender plays a relatively unimportant role. In jacks and marbles, however, while sibling relations remain salient, it is now gender that comes to be requisite for participation. These games are not just played by either girls or boys; rather, game play is, I argue, about what it means to be a girl or boy. My analysis in this article specifically takes up the gendered meaning of marbles.[7]

Before doing this, I must consider marbles as a game. This requires spelling out the sense in which it counts as the kind of institution suggested in George H. Mead's understanding of "the game" (1934): that is, as a set of rules that specify a bounded set of interaction moves, the kinds of pragmatic possibilities afforded by those moves, the ways in which those moves are materialized (as marble movement, etc.) and the kinds of discursive positions or roles thereby afforded (as "opponents").[8] While, in doing so, I will be able to map out a set of social facts interesting in their own right, this account is merely preliminary and even slightly misleading: the sense in which marbles counts as a spectacle of masculinity occurs both because and in spite of the rules, as we will see.

My data for these analyses come primarily in the form of 35 video recordings of boys' (ages 5 to 12) marble play in the small, high-elevation Peruvian town of Anatiri (Department of Puno).[9] All 35 video recordings were transcribed and annotated with the help of a native Aymara speaker.[10] Of these 35 recordings, seven are of marbles play that occurred during naturally occurring instances of animal herding. The remaining 28 recordings were made on "play dates" in which I invited boys over to play in ways that duplicated as much as possible their play environments (its social and physical organization). This was done in order to ensure an environment in which recording would be possible (in particular, an environment shielded from the wind that made recording difficult in unprotected areas).

The Rules of the Game in Marbles

The form of marbles to be described here is most commonly referred to as *t'inka* (flick).[11] It is specifically understood as a form of play; that is, one plays the game of marbles rather than working at it, or suffering through it, etc. While there are numerous games that are played with marbles, the form of marbles to be described in what follows is far and away the most commonly played among the boys in Anatiri. There are some minor variations across groups of boys in terms of whether and when some rules are invoked or not;[12] in what follows, however, I describe only those rules that were considered essential.

T'inka consists of a playing field made out of four holes dug into the surface of the ground (typically) with a rock. These four holes describe two different spatial areas: three of these holes make up a straight line; the fourth is intentionally placed off of this line (see diagram 1 below). The geographical character of these two spatial regions also differs: the three holes that describe a line are placed in an area that is more or less flat and strewn with rocks, grass and other debris. The fourth hole, however is intentionally located in an area that—in comparison to the area of the straight line—is either higher or lower and more thickly riddled with debris.

These two spatial areas constitute two temporal phases of t'inka. The first phase is played with respect to the straight line of three holes. In this phase, players attempt to shoot marbles from one hole to the next (the marble must fall into the hole to advance).

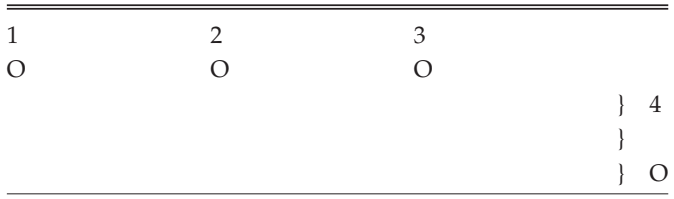
The marbles player must start at the center hole (2 in diagram 1), move to a hole at the end of the line (1), move back to the center hole, then move to the hole at the other end (3). In this phase of the game, the playing field is, essentially, a diagram of a temporal sequence: one looks to the playing field to determine how far away a marble is from a hole, where the next hole is and the next one, how and where to hit the marble, etc.

This temporal sequence allows for an indefinite number of possible players and plays. Each marble temporarily "belongs" to a given player and serves as a sign of his play: in a given turn, a player has an opportunity to advance two marbles. If he strikes a marble into a hole, he has another opportunity to advance that marble until he fails to reach a hole. Once he has failed to reach a hole with each of his marbles, the next player takes his turn. Under this guise, the playing field now serves as a diagram of the course of the game qua interactional sequence: one looks to it to see who has advanced further through the course of holes, whether one marble is further along than the other, etc.

After advancing a marble through the line of holes, the player then attempts to advance it to the fourth, off-line hole (see diagram 1). This part of the game marks a new phase in the course of the game: upon being advanced into the off-line hole, the marble takes on new "interactional characteristics" or pragmatic possibilities. It is now understood to have *wininu* (venom)[13] that, upon contact with another marble, allows it to kill the other marble, regardless of whether the other marble is his or someone else's. When a marble has been "killed" (typically, the marble of one's opponents), it is removed from the field of play for the duration of the game.

Recall, however, the geographical characteristics of the off-line hole: it is typically located in an especially debris-laden, higher or lower area. The task of reaching the "venom hole," then, is an especially challenging one. Reaching this last hole does not just end one phase of the game, it culminates it: this first phase of the game is one in which players simply try to advance their marbles through the series of holes, trying as they may to navigate the inherently difficult terrain of this mountainous, fast-

Diagram 1
The circles are holes. The numbers indicate the sequence of moves (see textual explanation). The squiggly lines indicate the roughness of the terrain around the last hole (the fourth one)



eroding area. Advancing one's marble(s) to the venom hole, then, raises the level of difficulty of what was already the challenge of this phase of the game.

Once one or more marbles have *wininu*, the game changes, both temporally and spatially.[14] Temporally, it is now the act of killing that regulates turn-taking. If a player succeeds in killing another player's marble, he may continue killing. If not, he may play his other marble, if it has not yet been played, or else cede his turn to an opponent. Spatially, the playing field is now invested with a weighty interactional meaningfulness: to be close to a marble with wininu means certain death. In other words, the playing field is now no longer a mere diagram of who has advanced his marbles the farthest; it now contains places of refuge and sites suitable for attack.

These two phases of the game are not necessarily temporal sequences: a player may have one marble that has wininu, while another marble may still need to be advanced through the sequence of holes. One's opponent's marbles may also either have wininu or not (most likely not, at least at first). These overlapping phases of the game lead to a different set of strategic decisions, especially for a player whose marbles do not yet have wininu: one must decide whether and how to "run" from a marble with wininu without precluding the possibility of also attaining wininu (and therefore returning the game to a relatively even match).

The last remaining person with an "alive" marble has won the game. Theoretically, at least, a player could wait until his opponents eliminate each other, but this never happens (or, better, is never allowed to happen). More often than not, the game is decided by who attains wininu first: this marble now has the decided advantage of encountering a handful of defenseless marbles. This phase of the game, then, is overwhelming construed as a ceaseless attack. This is symbolized in the spoils of the attack: a player either puts the marbles that he has killed into his pocket (to be returned for the next game) or contemptuously tosses them aside.

The connection between marbles playing and masculinity is dimly perceivable in my account of its rules. As will become clearer in what follows, the two phases of the game speak to different issues of the performance of masculinity. The first phase, the one centered on passing through the four holes, allows for a masculinity centered on the difficulties involved in advancing one's marbles through challenging terrain. The second phase allows for a masculinity centered on the hunting and killing of one's opponent/s.[15] Ultimately, these two phases of the game, especially the first, enter into a boy's interpretive horizon as opportunities for leveraging a masculine persona.

Masculinity in Marbles

While the rules of the game in marbles create opportunities for masculine identity, they ultimately underdetermine the way in which marbles counts as a spectacle of masculinity. This lack of determination is apparent in the way that qhincha is understood to operate in the game and in the way that a boy's play—that is, his relationship to qhincha—reveals an Aymara understanding of masculinity. In fact, the two rule-driven phases of the game take on gendered meaning precisely in relation to the way in which boys relate to qhincha and, through qhincha, to each other (as "men"). In this section, however, I pull back from the full question of gendered meaning in order to analyze qhincha as a participant status in marbles play.[16]

Qhincha is, among other things. an agent that brings about bad states of affairs in marbles. According to the Aymara Religious Dictionary, it has an agency that is materializable in a range of entities: it can take the form of "persons, animals and things" that "can be the cause of adversity and misfortune" (Van Den Berg 2009). Implicit in this definition is its relationship to human agency. Qhincha is not something that simply brings about bad states of affairs; rather, it causes bad things for someone. It contravenes a person's action. It is a malefactor. In marbles play, qhincha is not just some cosmological entity; it is an actual (sometimes materialized) participant who has perlocutionary agency. Moreover, as the next section makes clear, it is the (slippery) bedrock on which masculinity teeters.

Qhincha exists outside of marbles. Urton, for example, defines it very broadly as "the principal cause of the emergence of a state of imbalance and disequilibrium" (1997:147).[17] Among adults, when persons are said to be qhincha, it is because they have lied, stolen and committed adultery—or, as one dictionary starkly puts it, they have "departed from social norms" (Carvajal 2001:92). Such persons unintentionally bring about misfortune: in one instance that I observed during fieldwork, an intense crop-killing hailstorm was attributed to a person understood to be qhincha (in this case, a village authority known to have misused, i.e., stolen, community resources). Qhincha has considerable salience outside the Aymara-speaking context: it is a lexical item in both Peruvian Spanish (quincha) and Quechua (qhincha).[18]

These are some examples of the ways that qhincha manifests itself in marbles: it is a rock that causes a marble to veer from its path; it is a toddler who runs through the playing field, knocking a marble from its path; it is the wobble of a marble as it teeters on the lip of a steep slope; it is an adult who, walking past a game with his animals, causes a marble to veer; it is the teetering of a marble as it momentarily sits up against a rock; it is the cartoon characters staring from a boy's shirt that cause a marble to go down a steep slope. In each of these cases, qhincha is made interactionally apparent through the disturbance to the projected path of a marble; in this way, it is understood to (potentially) bring about poor outcomes for a player (qua maleficiary).

In what follows, I analyze these kinds of examples in order to show that qhincha gets engaged with as an interactional participant in marbles. It emerges as a participant in three characteristic ways: (1) its intervention, once assumed to be materially instantiated in some way (e.g., as a rock), is understood to be a presupposable effect of that material entity; (2) its intervention is inferred after the fact on the basis of its effects in marbles play; and (3) its real-time participation is indexed through the movement of the marble. These three modes differ in terms of the degree to which qhincha can be presupposed as a participant in the interaction (arranged here from most presupposing to least). For rhetorical reasons that will become clear, I will start with the second in this list and then examine the first and third.

Qhincha, in its second guise, is made apparent through having brought about failure in marbles. This is most clear in the instance of rocks that intervene in a marble's path. For example, Alberto, playing marbles with his brother Francisco, struck his marble toward one of the holes. As the marble approached the hole, it struck a fist-sized rock on the ground and veered well to the left of the hole. Alberto, seeing what happened, ran up to the rock, picked it up and, rather theatrically, slammed it to the ground yelling "Qhincha qala!" [Bad luck rock]. In this case, the fist-sized rock gets understood as an agent-like entity that diverted his marble's path. And, in doing so, it casts Alberto as the aggrieved, the wronged, the maleficiary—hence his anger.

In this interactional guise, qhincha need not take the form of a (nonhuman) material entity that intervenes in the course of the game. Consider the following typical example: Alberto's youngest brother Marco, considered not yet old enough to play marbles, had gleefully run through the playing field and had kicked one of Alberto's marbles as it approached one of the holes. Alberto, angrily, went to collect his marble and, upon setting his marble back, spotted Marco again spying the game mischievously. Alberto yelled at Marco: "Ma qhincha bebe, sarakma" [One bad luck baby, get out of here]. In this case, Marco gets assimilated to the same role as the rock in the example above: that is, he is an agent that diverted a marble's path, casting Alberto as the aggrieved.[19]

Qhincha need not be an entity that directly, that is, materially, intervenes in marbles play. Over the course of a couple months, for example, Alberto discovered that his uncle Miguel was qhincha for him. He told me that every time Miguel passed by (driving animals, going to town, etc.), something bad would happen to his marble(s). This was not due to any direct intervention on Miguel's part (or lack of affection or other circumstance): he would pass by, and Alberto's marble would tumble down the slope, or fall into a deep hole, etc. It had gotten to the point that Alberto refused to

play when Miguel was within sight. In this case, qhincha again brings about adversity (through a human agent), but it does so in a way that does not depend on direct physical contact.

This kind of malevolent (but not physical) intervention does not necessarily come from someone who, like Miguel, is a nonparticipant in the game. It may even come from one's opponent or from oneself: Roberto, for example, over the course of a series of poor plays, accused his opponent Alberto of being qhincha (Alberto had not kicked Roberto's marble or otherwise intervened). Alberto, growing a little fed up, told him: "Jani! Qhinchasta jumapachawa" [No! You yourself are bad luck]. After one more accusation, Alberto got the final word: Roberto managed to bungle a very easy marbles shot that lent credence to Alberto's subsequent claim, "Qhinchastaw, ve?" [You're bad luck, don't you see now?]. Qhincha sometimes lies within or, at least, close at hand.

These three examples show qhincha in just one of its guises: in these cases, its interactional efficacy is evident through a creative after the fact re-reading of the interaction. In other words, it is assumed to have been a social actor in the interaction only after some adverse outcome obtains (e.g., a marble getting kicked). Subsequently, these adverse interactional outcomes get assigned to the causal efficacy of entities that bear some indexical relation to the marble: a relation of physical contact (the rock and the toddler) and physical co-presence (uncle, opponent, oneself). These entities otherwise occupy a wide range of participant roles: they may be participants in the game, bystanders (the toddler), mere passers-by (the uncle), or a malevolent rock.

Once an entity comes to be understood as qhincha, it continues to act as qhincha. This is implied in two of the above examples: in the case of the toddler and the uncle above, their status as qhincha is projected into future interactions. In these examples, two instances of (a durably materialized) qhincha (as a toddler and an uncle) must be subsequently managed: in future game play, Alberto would, as noted, cease playing when his uncle passed; and Alberto, also, after seeing the havoc his brother wrought, would keep him on the sidelines. In these two examples, these two social actors, after having been identified as qhincha (i.e., after the fact), can be presupposed to act as qhincha in future interaction. This is a second interactional guise of qhincha in marbles (the first in the list cited above).

There are, however, instances in which the interactional agency of qhincha is evident only through its interactional effects. These instances occur when the marble, after having been struck, appears to be on the verge of undergoing some bad outcome: for example, a marble sits on the edge of a flat plain-like area, teetering, about to tumble down a slope (far from the next hole); or, a marble, about to slip beneath a parked truck, is only gradually slowed by a clump of grass,. In such instances, qhincha is cast as what, in interactional real-time, is threatening to send the marble down the slope or under the truck. The connection to qhincha is clear: Alberto, seeing his marble teeter on the edge of a slope, yelled "Oy qhincha oy!" [Oh no, bad luck!].

Silverstein's (1976) account of indexicality helps to systematize these observations about qhincha: understood as a participant status, qhincha takes on either more presupposing or more entailing guises. In the cases of Alberto's younger brother and uncle (understood as qhincha), their mere physical proximity is understood to inevitably—that is, presupposably—bring about failure for Alberto. In the case of the teetering marble, however, it is only the wiggle of the marble and the possibility of calamity that entails the (in this case, invisible or unmaterialized) co-presence of qhincha. The after the fact reading has this entailing relationship as well, though it is projected temporally into the past: known by their deeds (i.e., marble trouble), Alberto's brother and uncle get entailed as having been (and presupposably being) qhincha all along.

In each of these three cases, qhincha is understood as a very particular kind of agent or interactional participant: qhincha are thought to actually bring about some (undesired, destabilizing) state of affairs (as animators, in Goffman's 1979 sense);[20]

but, they do not design that state of affairs (as authors).[21] They bring about effects, but they do not do so by design or by intention. Moreover, they do so in a way that depends on a relation to a human agent (in this case, a marbles player): that is, they bring about results only in relation to the action of some pitiable marbles player. From the perspective of the player, qhincha takes control, or has effects on, his marble and does so in a way that causes (or may cause) failure for the marbles player.

The interactional logic of qhincha in marbles is analogous to its instantiation in adult social life. In both cases, it has a triadic logic: there is an entity that is qhincha (a rock, an adulterer, etc.); there is the destabilizing "effect" of qhincha (a marble sent off an intended course, a hailstorm that destroys crops, etc.); and there is the agent(s) whose projects are thereby adversely affected (the marbles player, the owner of the crops). In and through the dynamics of the social and natural worlds, qhincha gets revealed as the entity that has created some kind of imbalance or destabilization (e.g., an adulterer) and the effects that such an entity brings into being (e.g., hail). And, of course, there can be no qhincha if there is no victim.

This last point about the inherently relational character of qhincha is crucial. Qhincha does not wreak havoc willy-nilly; rather, it does so for someone. The question now more firmly centers on this poor someone: who can stand up to qhincha? What does it take to be this someone? Or, more technically, how is one recruited to be this person? In the next section, I provide an answer: it takes something that is, curiously, an impossibility: that is, a tough, heterosexual man. Considered in this light, qhincha can be understood as not just a participant status but, rather, as an alter that reveals, for boys, an Aymara cultural logic of masculinity: it is the alterity in relation to which masculinity is realizable (if not realized).

Qhincha and Masculinity in Marbles Play

In this section, I consider the way in which a boy's relationship to qhincha figures him as a man. To do this, I analyze a series of examples from boys' marble play in order to characterize the way in which marbles counts as a spectacle of masculine identification. At the heart of this spectable lies qhincha: what masculinity means—for boys—becomes visible against adversity and the possibility of failure. Against qhincha, Aymara masculinity is a task of a very particular sort. It is a project in which boys must show themselves to be in "manly" confrontation with bad luck. The theoretical apparatus of "identification" offers the most productive way of making sense of the ongoing, processual character of Aymara masculinity.

The following example shows the relationship between qhincha and "manliness" or "chacha-ness." First, however, I must point out the way that qhincha is at stake in the example: Edmundo successfully sank his marble into one of the holes, despite the fact that a twig had slightly diverted its path. At first, he exclaims gleefully "Ayta" [There it is] (i.e., in the hole). He then half picks up the little twig, groaning "Qhincha oy" [Bad luck oy]. In this case, the little twig is identified as qhincha only after the fact of its intervention: the twig first (slightly) diverts the course of the marble and is only subsequently understood as a materialization of qhincha. In this example, Edmundo, despite the intervention of qhincha, is actually able to sink the marble into the hole.

The subsequent exchange illustrates the relationship between qhincha and "manliness": Edmundo's opponent José picks up the same little twig that Edmundo had called qhincha and lays it out in such a way that it will help to guide his marble into the hole. He also sets a rock at the end of the twig right at the outer lip of the hole to ensure that the marble has little chance of veering away from the hole. Edmundo, at last, sees what José is up to, and exclaims in a mildly exasperated tone: "Kunatas juma uchasiri ukhama?" [Why do you put it like that?]. Edmundo uses his foot to forcefully brush aside the twig and rock that José had been setting up to guide his marble. Edmundo seals this exchange with a brusque insult, "Chachjamay!" [Like a man!].

The relationship between qhincha and "manliness" is clear in this example: it is José's unwillingness to confront qhincha (in the form of a little twig)—in comparison, especially, to Edmundo's immediately previous (and successful) confrontation—that invites Edmundo's gendered chastising. In this example, then, Edmundo, implicitly, has inhabited a tough manliness that engaged with destabilizing agents of malefaction (qhincha); José, however, does not and appears less manly thereby. This example suggests the central characteristic of what it means to inhabit "chacha-ness": one is tough in the face of challenge. Of course, it equally points out the characteristics of "unmanliness": being "unmanly" means evading challenge or being weak.

Note the characteristic, asymmetrical way in which "chacha-ness" and its absence come into view in this example: Edmundo's encounter with qhincha receives no explicit, metapragmatic commentary; instead, it is José's lack of "chacha-ness" that draws explicit, reflexive, discursive attention ("Like a man!"). In this instance, masculinity as a social category becomes visible in a moment of "dialectical arrest" (Crapanzano 1992): in this kind of moment, the participants (a presupposable instance of qhincha) and social categories ("chacha-ness" and its absence) at stake in the interaction have been explicitly noted (that is, momentarily "arrested") in such a way that the contours of masculinity become especially visible, for both boys and analysts.

More typically, however, "unmanliness" and "weakness" get understood as specifically gendered and sexual characteristics. This is most apparent in a set of insults that feminize or homosexualize a boy. These insults center, again, on a boy's engagement with qhincha. Take the following as an example. After having watched his marble veer off course, Alberto blames the rock that had made contact with the marble: "Qhincha qala!" [Bad luck rock!]. Francisco, in his next turn, attempts to move the same rock, hoping to clear the path for his own marble. Alberto, however, sees Francisco move the rock and exclaims exasperatedly: "Oy Francisco kunatas ukhamata? warmijamatawa, no?" [Ay Francisco, why are you like that? You're like a woman, aren't you?].

Despite the change in insult (from "Like a man"), this example is similar to the previous one: Francisco invites Alberto's gender insult through evading qhincha (presupposably materialized as a rock). In doing so, Francisco appears weak and, again, in comparison to Alberto, less manly. In this case, however, weakness gets explicitly considered as a gendered trait: it characterizes femininity (*warmi* best translates as adult female or even wife). This association between femininity and weakness has its reflexes in adult gender ideology and throughout boyhood insult practice (i.e., outside of marbles). In this case, again, it is the absence of "chacha-ness"—or, in this example, the presence of femininity—that receives explicit metapragmatic attention—not Alberto's toughness.

While femininity is a salient "other" for masculinity, "chacha-ness" more frequently gets counterposed to an analogous (if not exactly similar) understanding of homosexual masculinity. Francisco, for example, had managed to shoot his marble into an area strewn with rocks and clumps of grass. He immediately set about clearing out the rocks and pushing back a troublesome clump of grass. In response, Alberto yelled "Qachu!" [What a fag!]. While the rocks and grass in this example had not been explicitly cast as qhincha, the similarity to the earlier examples is striking: Francisco attempts to sweep aside the material things that make marbles challenging, and he gets insulted for it. This example suggests that homosexual masculinity and femininity come to stand for the same thing: an inability to confront difficulty (or, qhincha more particularly).

Throughout these examples, I have noted the asymmetric way in which "chacha-ness" and its alterities (femininity, homosexuality) are visible to boys in marbles play. This is what I mean: the presence of "chacha-ness" never receives explicit reflexive attention; only its absence, qua femininity and homosexuality, does. This is not because boys never act in 'manly' ways: in the first example in this section, Edmundo sinks his marble despite qhincha. This is what this asymmetry amounts to, then: while *chacha*-ness, femininity and homosexual masculinity ("qachu-ness") are all

interactionally salient identity categories, it is only femininity and "qachu-ness" that are, to invoke Kulick (2003), explicitly and reflexively marked; "chacha-ness" remains implicit, unmarked.

This asymmetry is not only about relative markedness or susceptibility to reflexive "consciousness." It is an evaluative one. In the context of marbles, the words *warmi* and *qachu* are understood to be insults. They are understood to demean one's opponent and, more often than not, they are sufficient to change his behavior (Francisco, e.g., after being insulted, stopped clearing out the rocks and grass that impeded his marbles). *Qachu* (female animal), especially, is thought to be a grave insult (analogous to fag in American English).[22] In other words, the reflexive asymmetry of "chacha-ness" and its alterities is also an evaluative one: "chacha-ness" is both unmarked and valued; "qachu-ness" and "warmi-ness" are both reflexively marked and explicitly denigrated.

Although femininity is an available (if denigrated) identity category for marbles play, the real interactional heat of marbles occurs in relation to "qachu-ness." I will cite more compelling evidence in the material to come, but overall, the salience of homosexual masculinity in marbles is evident through the frequency with which *qachu* gets used as an insult. In my corpus of 35 video recordings of marbles play (supplemented by fieldnotes), insults related to femininity occur only three times; by contrast, qachu occurs 42 times (similarly, insults that make use of chacha as a root occurred only twice). Marbles play ultimately turns on the contrast between an implicit, unmarked, socially legitimate "chacha-ness" and a marked, illegitimate "qachu-ness."

Marbles play, then, can be characterized as a task-like spectacle of masculine identification. Boys encounter "chacha-ness" and "qachu-ness" not only as available, indexable identity categories; they encounter them within a rich narrative-like structure that merits the processual implications of the concept "identification." Qachu-ness must be, in a narrative sense, avoided or fended off. Ironically, however, it is the most reflexively, explicitly available identity category. In contrast, socially legitimate "chacha-ness" or "toughness" appears only implicitly through the act of engaging with uncontrollable adversity and challenge (as qhincha). There is something even tragic about "chacha-ness": one must ongoingly show oneself to be something that will never be explicitly recognized.

In contrast, "qachu" weakness or evasiveness takes on an extremely rich set of associations in marbles play. These additional complexities are, again, most clearly evident in sexual insults. The following example is a dramatic one. Francisco, already losing the game, jumped into the path of one of Alberto's marbles and theatrically stamped on Alberto's marble. Alberto shrieked in response: "Qachu pue! carrambas!" [What a fag! yikes!]. In this case, while Francisco seeks an unmerited advantage in the game (similar to the evasion of qhincha), he does so through a brazen, fully public transgressiveness. Yes, he may be evading challenge or succumbing to Alberto, but he does so as a "fag." That is, he is ready to throw the game into disarray. And he laughs while doing so (as does his onlooking brother).

"Qachu-ness" also gets associated more specifically with defiance. Take the following as an example. Edmundo at first had silently borne José's use of an odd (but simplifying) manner of advancing his marble: José had scooped up his marble and, instead of striking it with his index finger, simply tossed it toward the hole. Edmundo, unwilling to let it happen a second time, warned José not to toss it again: "Jan jaktasiñampiw" [Without tossing it]. José, however, brazenly tossed it again. In response, Edmundo exclaimed, exasperated: "Qachutaw jumax" [You're a fag]. In this case, it is not just José's subversion of the rules of the game (like in the above example) that invites an insult but, also, his defiance of Edmundo's directive.

When faced with "qachu" subversion and defiance, "manliness" itself takes on new meanings. Now, to be sure, José and Francisco both seek to evade challenge in these two examples (thereby casting chacha as strong). But what emerges most clearly in these examples is not negatively evaluated weakness, but the mischievous value of

"qachu" subversion and defiance. In these moments, "chacha-ness" appears grim and dour. It stands on the side of facing adversity and qhincha. "Qachu-ness" stands on the side of cheeky fun. In a flash (and only a flash), marbles becomes vaudeville: Alberto and Francisco's onlooking brother laugh at Francisco's subversiveness; even Edmundo cracks a smile after lacing into José. The audience threatens to become a peanut gallery.

In these carnivalesque moments, the default valuation of "chacha-ness" over "qachu-ness" gets reversed for just an instant. They are highly constrained affairs. In the above examples, José and Francisco were both right on the cusp of losing the game. They had already lost one of their marbles and had no real reason to hope for success. In such cases, the deployment of a "qachu" persona is tactical, in Bucholtz and Hall's (2004) sense. José and Francisco, through inhabiting "qachu-ness," are enabled, as Bauman notes for a boy who eventually turned on his aggressors, to momentarily "take control of the situation" (1977:44).[23] In doing so, José and Francisco do not make victory more likely, nor do they evoke "manliness"; rather, they show themselves to be pragmatically potent (despite the game). They are, at least, not weak.

The full contours of masculinity in marbles is now be apparent. On the one hand, it is assumed as a trial before qhincha whose best reward, from a boy's perspective, is an escape from insults that homosexualize him. On the other, it is a carnivalesque show: when "chacha-ness" is no longer even a possibility, the subversion of "qachu-ness" beckons. In this sense, then, marbles is a spectacle of masculinity and masculinity only: femininity in this context (and only this context) offers only weakness; masculinity offers strength-against-havoc (implicitly), a tricksterish transgressiveness, and the risk of weakness. The mature boy traffics only in the domain of men: he escapes and embraces "qachu-ness" and (only) evokes "chacha-ness."

The Masculine Meanings in/of Marbles

I have attempted to show that understandings of masculinity get implicated in boys' marbles play. The question remains, however, whether one simply finds masculine meanings in marbles or whether marbles is in some sense "essentially" about masculinity. In what follows, I draw on three additional types of evidence to make the claim that marbles is, at bottom, a spectacle of masculinity: the structure of the game itself, girls' game play, and the insult practices of passers-by.

The first piece of evidence comes from the structure and understanding of marbles play itself. Recall that, at the end of the first phase of the game, a marbles player must advance his marble to a hole (the "venom hole," the fourth one) that players pointedly locate in an area chock full of rocks, grass or other difficulties (in comparison to the other holes located in more benign locations).[24] These obstacles very frequently get recognized as qhincha and it is this fourth hole that culminates (and vividly provides evidence for) the sense in which marbles is a sexualized trial against qhincha: Francisco, for example, while clearing out the venom hole area of its brush, gets lambasted by Alberto as "Qachuki oy" [Just a fag oy]. In other words, questions of qhincha get built into the "structure" of the game.

The specificity of the gendered meaning of marbles—in comparison to girls' jacks games—suggests the importance of masculinity for marbles. In jacks, the small playing field is intentionally cleared of debris so as to facilitate game play. And, I find little evidence of talk about qhincha in my eighteen transcripts of jacks play (there are just two mentions of qhincha). While I do not have the space here to give a positive account of the gendered meaning of the (incredibly baroque and legalistic) game of jacks, suffice it to say that it does not center around issues of qhincha, challenge or toughness. The relationships between these three issues appears specific to the game of marbles.

The insult practices of adult passers-by offers similar evidence. While it is rare for an adult to act as a spectator of a child's game, a child's godparent, uncle or aunt (individuals with whom children often maintain playful relationships) may stop by

briefly to tease a child while heading out to the fields. In the case of boys and marbles, this teasing centers on how the state of game play reflects upon the "manliness" of the players. Older boys—that is, the ones expected to be skillful and "manly"—are the frequent targets of such teasing when they are found to be losing to a younger player. These teasing practices often make use of qachu or imilla as insults. These insult practices strongly suggest the sense in which marbles gets reflexively understood as a spectacle of masculinity.

Conclusion

In this article, I have analyzed the boyhood game of marbles in terms of the concept "identification."[25] In doing so, I offer an extended empirical example in service of a primarily theoretical goal: in the face of several prominent critiques of the concept 'identity' (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Cameron and Kulick 2003; Hastings and Manning 2004), I clarify one way in which the concept *identity* can be supplemented in an empirically productive way. The critiques are clear: the concept *identity* does not adequately account for the processual character of social affiliation; it does not account for processes of social disaffiliation or repudiation; and it does not account for the way that axes of social difference are differently susceptible to explicit attention.

My account of masculinity in marbles helps to flesh out the specifically semiotic characteristics of processes of identification.[26] This is why: the key tool for showing the processual character of identification is a notion of reflexive language (Lucy 1993) or explicit metapragmatic discourse (Silverstein 1993). With this tool, one can show how one set of identity categories is the target of an (debasing) explicit, reflexive attention over against some other set that remains only implicitly (positively) appraised. In the Aymara case, these kinds of facts (i.e., insult practices) suggest that boys attempt a masculinity in which homosexual masculinity is to be fended off while heterosexual masculine toughness is to be evoked, if not achieved (subject to tactical re-valuation).

Of course, supplementing the study of "identity" in this way does not mean supplanting it. If anything, paying attention to the problem of identification, in my account, requires distributing additional semiotic attention to the ideologies and explicit reflexive discourses that asymmetrically target and evaluate categories of social identity. It is a project that presupposes identities like, in the case at hand, "chacha-ness" and "qachu-ness." It simply puts them within the context of reflexive discourse that differently characterizes the narrative modalities of their achievability in discourse (as repudiate-able, evoke-able if not accomplish-able, etc.).

There are yet more questions to ask about identification. In this article, for instance, I have only needed to make recourse to moments of "dialectical arrest" in which qhincha, "chacha-ness," and "qachu-ness" have been at stake in explicit reflexive language. Having given an account of marbles as locus of/for masculine identification, however, the question remains about how boys succeed at evoking (if not achieving) "chacha-ness:" how do boys show themselves, implicitly, to be engaged in the project of manliness? What are the discursive mechanics of this task of identification? Or, more generally: how do different narrative modalities of identification come to be instantiated in discursive activity?

Notes

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1. I use the term *Aymara* to refer to the tuber-growing, camelid-herding Aymara-speaking communities of the high Bolivian, Peruvian, and Chilean Andes. I use *Aymara* in this way for two reasons: my claims about identification are sociolinguistic ones, and Aymara is the language of the community under investigation; and, it allows for claims that are neither sweeping (Andes) nor particular (community-specific ones).

2. The word *qachu* literally means female animal. In its use as a sexual insult, it best translates as fag.

3. This is an understanding of masculinity that has had considerable traction in the gender literature. This is especially true for the more psychoanalytically informed gender literature (Chodorow 1989; see Butler 1995 for a discussion as well).

4. A good ethnographic analogy is Geertz's cockfight (1973). Goodwin's work on gender in games (1990, 2006) serves as another precedent for this piece.

5. I should note that my argument throughout is specifically about an entwining of sexual and gender identities.

6. These are the ages during which boys have mainly herding responsibilities as their primary labor task.

7. The "gendered meaning" of both marbles and jacks players in part presupposes that children can already be understood in terms of gender. This is accomplished ritually: the children who go out to herd animals in Anatiri have all undergone the early childhood ritual of *rutucha* (first hair-cutting) in which children, as Canessa notes (2006:82), get understood as *yuqalla* (boy) or *imilla* (girl) for the first time. See also Dean's (2001) nice account of Inca understandings of the development of gender.

8. With this account of Mead's "game," I have transposed his insights into the current linguistic anthropological idiom. Mead's "social behaviorist" language does not lend itself to brief citation.

9. All names of towns and persons throughout this piece are pseudonyms.

10. My research assistant was an adult native of Anatiri (although he was only a part-time resident as an adult). As a boy, he was a frequent player of marbles.

11. *T'inka* also can mean offering or even gift.

12. The game can also be played with either small rocks that are marbles like or large rocks that are thrown rather than struck. This manner of playing is uncommon. However, the ease with which the game can be transposed to rocks makes me hesitate to conclude that the game necessarily has a European origin.

13. The word presumably comes from the Spanish word *veneno*.

14. I should flag here that my analysis of the game is a "chronotopic" one, in the Bakhtinian sense (1981).

15. The analogy between the killing of marbles and Arnold and Hastorf's (2008) account of the "taking of heads" is too strong to go without notice.

16. My account of qhincha can be considered as an intervention into actor-network theory (Latour 1992) or into an account of "meaning without intention" (Dubois 1993). I do not pursue this line of inquiry here.

17. Urton is writing specifically of Quechua-speaking populations.

18. I consider it an open ethnographic issue as to whether qhincha and Andean notions of "luck" should be analyzed as a coherent set of cultural concepts/agents (see Arnold and Yapita 2006 throughout on luck). Talk about *surti* (luck) was relatively infrequent in marbles play, certainly in comparison to qhincha.

19. Implicit in this example are cultural understandings of development (notions of infancy or toddlerhood, as expressed here with the Spanish *bebe*) and agency (or its relative lack, in the case of Marco).

20. Qhincha is a count noun grammatically that inflects for number only optionally; hence the locution of this sentence and the previous one.

21. This is rather dramatically the case in the instance of the marbles player who simultaneously occupies the roles of marbles player and qhincha. In his capacity as marbles player, he is understood to design and bring about the initial strike of a marble. However, in his capacity as qhincha, he causes the marble to diverge from its path by effect, not by design.

22. See Pascoe (2007) on sexual insults in the American high school context.

23. I am indebted to Nicholas Harkness for noting the relevance of Bauman's example.

24. I should note that the second phase of the game, focused on the "killing" of marbles, adds another layer of gendered meaning on understandings of qhincha and masculinity. In other words, it is not killing in and of itself that is at stake. Rather, one must kill in the face of real challenge, real qhincha, real possibility for failure.

25. While my emphasis has been exclusively theoretical, I have also mapped out a set of social facts interesting for ethnographic purposes as well. The form of masculinity at stake in marbles is clearly a precursor of the adult forms of masculinity—forms that are clearly "hegemonic" in Connell's sense (1987), and are central to Andean political and religious authority (See Abercrombie 1998; Arnold and Hastorf 2008; Astvaldsson 2002; Harris 2000).

26. I should explicitly note that I am dealing here only with the semiotic dimensions of identification. There are other dimensions with respect to which it contrasts with identity (psychoanalytic and social psychological differences come to mind in particular).

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