

Awareness Harmony Acceptance  
Advocates



## AHA Advocate Talk: Rocky Rivera



**Samantha Ellison:** The Gangster of Love, could you tell us a little about this novel and the impact it has made on your life?

**Rocky Rivera:** It was a book assigned to me in college by my professor, the first one I had ever read by a Pinay (Filipina) author from San Francisco. The character, Raquel "Rocky" Rivera, was born in the Philippines, raised in San Francisco, and later moved to New York, which paralleled my life at the time, but other than that, there are no other similarities between myself and the character. It's essentially my interpretation of that character and using the title Gangster of Love thematically in my work.

**SE:** It seems like you have been performing all of your life. In other interviews you talk about performing with your sister and being a part of a dance group. Then you went onto become a hip-hop journalist as you continued down a path to becoming a hip-hop artist. How did music become

**such a passion within your own life and looking back did you ever imagine you would be where you're today?**

**RR:** Music has always been the ultimate expression for me. I never had any formal training, but my parents supported every endeavor in the arts - it became the cornerstone of what I do. Performing early in life gave me the confidence to be who I am and to go after my dreams, so when I got older and had insecurities about where I should and shouldn't belong, I already conquered the fear of being in the public eye. I am still nervous before every single show, but when I go on stage, it's so transformative that it tests my will and reminds me that I've done this before and this is where I'm happiest. Looking back, I always knew I'd be a performer, I just couldn't imagine then that I would be a musician and my words would reach so far and wide in musical form. It still amazes and humbles me.

**SE: What kind of new perspective do you bring to hip-hop today? What are some of the themes that come up within your music? How has your Filipino & San Francisco Bay roots influenced your music?**

**RR:** I wouldn't say that my perspective is entirely new, just rarely heard. I believe that there are many young women (and men) that can relate to my music because when it comes to storytelling, all that matters is the emotion of the story and how well the person tells it. Every story can be universally felt regardless of gender, race, status, or generation. My roots in the Philippines and SF are the compass in which my stories are told, and they directly influence how I say things, just as much as what I say. But I try not to focus too much on the differences, but on the similarities of struggle that are everywhere.

**SE: In your opinion, how can hip-hop be a vehicle for change? And what do you think are some of the major issues in today's world that need to change, be addressed, or reexamined?**

**RR:** Hip-Hop is a small drop in the bucket for all the social change that must happen. Though it is the voice of today's generation, the struggles that I often refer to go back hundreds of years historically, and we still face the effects of it today. I personally believe in decolonizing all oppressed people, starting with their thought processes, their family traditions, their community, the church, and then the government. I also am a proponent of equity and Women's Rights - no woman in this day and age should fear being gang raped by her own neighbors and shunned into silence or public humiliation.

**SE: Have you faced any challenges in being a Filipino woman within hip-hop?**

**RR:** I think the question should be "What challenges HAVEN'T I faced being a Filipino woman within hip-hop?" There are things that are blatant, like putting "Female" in front of "MC", which signifies that an MC must always be a man, the constant grouping of myself with other women simply because of gender in the form of all-female line-ups,

mix tapes, collaborations, fighting for a good slot in a Hip Hop festival in which I am the sole female act, and there are things that are intangible, like the conversations that happen behind closed doors, the lack of co-signs from other male artists that perceive all women to be inferior, the inability for them to accept my music because it challenges their misogyny and way of thinking.

**SE: What recent news article has made you squirm or get angry?**

**RR:** The recent gang rapes in New Delhi and South Africa make my stomach turn. To try and comprehend the lack of humanity in each situation and how powerless it makes me feel sickens me. Also, incidents of intimate partner violence and domestic violence always make me upset that there are not enough initiatives that protect women against violence, especially from their own partner.

**SE: If you could sit down with any activist alive or passed away, who would it be and why?**

**RR:** Definitely Malcolm X. And Gabriela Silang, first woman general of the Philippines. I just want to know their true beliefs and experiences, not the romanticized accounts of what happened. I also want to ask Martin Luther King how he would feel about the NRA (and multitudes of white people) claiming that "if he were alive" he'd be supporting whatever agenda they had to push. I want to know how MLK feels about what's happening now.