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[Ralph Lauren's New Fall Focus: Mexican Drug Traffickers?](#)

Posted on June 3, 2011 by [Catlan McCurdy](#)

If the thousands of ads I have seen over the years have taught me anything, it is that the words “Ralph Lauren” and “drug traffickers” don’t belong in the same sentence. According to ad campaigns, upon hearing “Ralph Lauren” we are instead supposed to imagine clean-shaven, chiseled young men with their equally attractive, perfectly slender, well-browed, female counterparts. Throw in Ralph Lauren himself with [his shocking white hair](#) and eccentricities (Lauren required that the new door at his house on a 13,000 acre ranch actually squeaked when opened, just like in the movies) and I’m there. And yet, Ralph Lauren polo shirts have become the new fashion craze of choice developing in Mexico, influenced by the Mexican drug lords and gangsters.

[As recently reported by the Guardian](#), this trend first became apparent in August 2010 when [Edgar Valdez Villarreal aka La Barbie](#) (no word on whether Mattel is concerned about trademark infringement) was arrested on charges related to large scale drug trafficking, torture, and murder, while [wearing a green Ralph Lauren polo and a smirk](#). By the way, La Barbie gets his nickname from his supposed good looks. Maybe it’s just me, but I don’t see it. Moving on.



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Then in September 2010, [La Barbie was photographed again, in another Ralph Lauren polo](#), navy blue this time (to compliment his eyes perhaps) as he was being transferred by the police. Other Mexican cartel members including, Jose Jorge Balderas Garza aka El JJ, have followed suit. El JJ was arrested for murder while [wearing the same blue Ralph Lauren polo](#). El JJ's [Columbian supermodel girlfriend](#) was also arrested in connection with the same murder, so at least he is living up to the image of having a beautiful woman by his side.

Flash forward a year (the typical time for looks to leave the runway and hit the streets), and Mexican youths have been buying similar Ralph Lauren polos, including knock-offs, at an alarming rate in order to "look like the bad guys." What does this mean for Ralph Lauren when their shirts have become the uniform of choice for criminals?

To me, this news story exemplifies the fact that brand management is sometimes uncontrollable. Ralph Lauren can't stop Mexican drug cartel members from wearing their shirts at inopportune times, such as a public arrests, and they certainly can't prevent the fad from continuing among the Mexican youth. As blogged by David Mitchel on here, [brands in the past have attempted to distance themselves](#) from certain activities they deem out of touch with their image, and with what success? [Ja Rule still wears Burberry](#). As of now, Ralph Lauren has declined to comment on their new customer base, and if I were a betting woman (which I am), I would be inclined to bet that the company will continue to remain silent, lest they be [called elitist](#).

