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Machismo Literature Review

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Introduction

Machismo is defined as a strong sense of masculine pride. In Latino culture machismo is more than just a word as it is so embedded in the culture that it is not only accepted, but often even expected. In any study on Latino groups, machismo is a subject that should be considered, but it is often forgotten. Some articles found use literature review use the word “Hispanic” and others use “Latino,” they are used interchangeably in the literature review because the groups mentioned in all are articles fall under both terms.

In Latin American culture, machismo is a social behavior pattern in which the Latino male exhibits an overbearing attitude to anyone in a position he perceives as inferior to his, demanding complete subservience. Machismo is usually used and defined with a negative connotation; however within the traditional Latino culture, “macho” also has good aspects that are usually neglected. Latin men are expected to be a “varoon,” who is caring, responsible, decisive, strong of character, and the protector of the extended family (Wood, 1997). Some of the more commonly known negative aspects of machismo are aggressiveness, physical strength, emotional insensitivity, and womanizing.

Another concept that is rarely mentioned is “marianismo,” which is the female counterpart of machismo. It is a behavior pattern in which the traditional Latin female perceives herself as morally and spiritually superior to the man in direct proportion to his sexual behavior (Woody, 1997). This social behavior comes from the expectation to be virgin like. “Marianismo, a popular term that implies an idealized view of femininity based on the image of Mary, the Virgin Mother, connotes passivity and submissiveness and the appetite of a virgin like model for women (Stevens, 1973).

Impact of Machismo on Hispanic Women

Through the analysis of the impact of machismo in Hispanic women the definition of machismo in Latin American culture is discussed and the social behavior called “marianismo” is also mentioned. In Latin American countries, where Latin American culture is obviously more prevalent, the extent to which machismo and marianismo are expected and accepted is great. The Roman Catholic religion enforces these expectations of social behavior for both men and women. The social behaviors were stated to be learned behaviors through the generations. Women are told they have to learn to cook well for their future husband as well as do household chores well in order not to displease their future husbands. “Latin American women are equalized by the dictates of male superiority and are reared and trained to respond to the needs and expectations of their future husbands” (Mayo, 1996)

Acculturation becomes a factor when it comes to Latino women in the United States, “these women tend to be more verbal and assertive than their Latin American counterparts” (O’Connell, 1994). They may be less submissive but these women still remain attached to this social behavior; they are caught between the old culture of their countries of origin and the new culture of the United States. “Their hesitance to pander how to bring about changes that would merge the two social cultural systems often makes them seem complacent, unmotivated, and accepting of the status quo” (Mayo, 1994). Although the extremes of both machismo and marianismo are challenged in the United States the self concept of Latin women in the United States is still attached to the social behavior of the older culture.

Hispanic Househusbands and Machismo

A study of Hispanic “househusbands” in southern California shed more light on machismo in the United States. A Hispanic “househusband” is a man who challenges “the norms of the larger American culture as well as the traditions of the Hispanic subculture, and opt for a role which focuses upon household maintenance and emotional family support” (Davis, 1985). The issues of machismo came up because is an accepted social behavior in Latin American culture and a Hispanic “househusband” defies the norms because of the economic situation and the women have to go out of the home and make some if not all the economic stability of the household. “Machismo is being challenged by the present situation affecting the Hispanic adult male’s role, social status, and martial obligations” (Davis 1985). Twenty-two males who fit the description of Hispanic “househusband” were interviewed through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Through the experience of being a Hispanic “househusband,” in the role reversal, the men become more enlightened to the usual expectations of their female partners. “Although machismo is still a powerful influence, its strength may be weakening. Many househusbands gave a qualified acceptance of the changes that have been effected by the movement and in their own experiences by viewing them as temporary” (Davis, 1985). It is anticipated that some of the knowledge gained through their experience will endure through changing economic and social conditions.

Youth Understanding of Parent Legitimacy

The article is a study to explore judgments of parental authority in a Mexican origin familial context. Machismo was the “cultural value that was used to understand how parental authority functions in the familial context” (Alvarez, 2007). Machismo and marianismo can also be viewed and accepted differently by different generations, especially because different levels of acculturation can be a factor for U.S. born youth. In a study with students in a high school in

California; the students were of Mexican origin. The students and their parents were asked several questions that tackled the issues of acculturation, familismo, and machismo; then they tested the associations. The researchers acknowledged “gender role socialization within a Mexican origin family context is influenced by the cultural concepts of marianismo for females and machismo for males” (Alvarez, 2007). The study only focused on machismo “because it is a prominent cultural value that affects the pattern of relationships in the Mexican origin family” (Alvarez, 2007). What they found in their study is very interesting because it was the opposite of what would be expected. It would be expected that as the level of acculturation increases traditional Mexican values would be replaced by those of the U.S. mainstream culture. The youth who were U.S- born were found have higher levels of acculturation than their parents but they reported more adherence to machismo than their U.S. –born parents. This is an unusual find but the researchers suggest the result is associated with “the strong cultural pride and accessibility that youth experienced in their community and school context, particularly because the majority of students resided in close proximity to the Mexican International border, which allowed youth to maintain strong cultural ties” (Alvarez, 2007).

This study can only be associated with youth of Mexican descent and the fact that most of live within nine miles from the Mexican International Border is an important thing to consider. It is interesting to hear U.S. born youth adhere more to machismo than their parents because assuming the parents and the youth live in the same home, the parents live close to the Mexican border as well and have the same access to the cultural connection, even more so than their children.

Male-Female Relationships in Hispanic Families

The overview of the traditional Hispanic family and male-relationships are presented, and machismo is discussed. “It can have both positive and negative associations. On the positive side it dictates that men are expected to behave valiantly; to protect the honor and welfare of their families” (Galanti, 2003). In this situation the relationship between male and female Hispanic would be of protector and protected. “The negative aspects of machismo often result in heavy drinking and high-risk activities” (Galanti, 2003). The author also associates machismo with Latin American culture. The author surveyed his students in a Hispanic college and asked them questions about their views on male-female relationships. According to the Hispanic students surveyed “the role of the traditional Hispanic woman is to take care of the family. Her job is to cook, clean, and care for the children. A good wife should be submissive and take orders from her husband. She should not question him but rather should stand behind whatever he decides, even if she disagrees. She must also be tolerant of his behavior” (Galanti, 2003).

An interesting thing the students brought up is that the mothers of some of the female student told them females have to pretend the husband is the boss but that they could manipulate them in order to get what they want. The females said they didn’t intend to have that relationship with their husbands, “they intend to share the position” (Galanti, 2003). Another interesting fact brought up by the students is “given the responsibility for the day-to-day raising of children, many Hispanic women may prefer smaller families; however, the husbands often oppose limiting family size because having a lot of children is seen as a proof of their machismo” (Galanti, 2003). The students brought up different aspects of how machismo plays a role in older generations of Hispanic male-female relationships and how it affects college students, with higher levels of acculturation, to this day. It would be expected that the college student would have view of male-female relationships to be more like an Anglo student in the United States.

The article tackles how machismo still has a presence in the United States. The survey may be biased because it was conducted in a Hispanic college in California where the cultural atmosphere enforces the traditional values.

Family Planning and Machismo

In another articles they discussed machismo as a part of recently immigrated Hispanic females. The authors conducted four focus groups of recently immigrated Hispanic women in the medium-sized Midwestern community. The main theme of the focus groups was to go into different aspects of family planning. The focus groups discussed their belief on the association to male-superiority and family planning. “With respect to family planning, machismo is most evident in the use or nonuse of condoms; traditional Latin American culture dictates that the decision to use condoms in the man’s prerogative and that a woman must defer to his decisions regarding health” (Sable, 2009). This showed to what extent machismo was a part of their lives. Even marianismo or an aspect of it came up. “Another barrier to the use of condoms by Hispanic women is the embarrassment associated with buying them” (Sable, 2009), the women were controlled by issues of judgment since according to marianismo they should be modest and virgin-like. When it comes to health, machismo is one of the biggest aspects to be concerned about. The author acknowledged “recognizing the influence of cultural beliefs, such as machismo, is key to effective health care service with Hispanic immigrants” (Sable, 2009).

The females interviewed are recent immigrant so their exposure to United States culture is limited but this is an idea of some of the perceptions in Latin American countries, “many described themselves as being under male control; in some cases, this control had a great impact on family planning choices” (Sable, 2009). This is not to say that they didn’t know the concept

existed, “the participants were keenly aware of the influence of machismo and male power and control and tied these concepts to family life and family planning” (Sable, 2009), but that they know and accept it. They are faced with different aspects of machismo, they “acknowledge the issue of men’s infidelity, condition that they appear to accept reluctantly” (Sable, 2009). They also touched upon a reason why they accept it. “Some women indicated they would choose to remain in an abusive or unfaithful relationship for the perceived benefit of the children” (Sable, 2009). These women are very strongly tied to these concepts especially because they are recently immigrated females. As mentioned in previous articles, as they spend more time in the United States their level of acculturation might increase and the concepts would be less influential.

Conclusion

As previously discussed some articles can have limitations as to what groups of Latinos were surveyed. Some articles only survey people from Mexican decent and others only surveys recent immigrated females and most of the studies were conducted in California. There were limitations to finding articles that incorporated various Latin American origins. Another limitation was finding relevant articles that focused entirely on machismo and marianismo; usually those concepts were just a part of the broader focus. Marianismo was even harder to find, since it is a term mostly used in Latin American countries and few researchers are aware that this concept is an underlying factor to various aspects of Latin females in the United States with any decent from Latin American countries. Another limitation is that the articles usually focus on the effect on females but little is known about Latino males in the United States.

Another thing to mention is an issue barely touched in these articles is domestic violence. In my previous knowledge of machismo and exposure to it in various was, domestic violence is a

major part of machismo. To what extent it happens and is accepted varies among different groups and generations. For this literature review it was hard to find relevant articles on the subject and the information that was found included many older studies whose relevancy may now be disputed. Most articles dealt with machismo as an aspect of their study and not the focus of their study so if things like domestic violence didn't relate to their study they didn't mention it. Many parts of this paper were difficult because my knowledge of machismo and marianismo goes beyond that of this literature review; I have previous knowledge of Latin American cultures. It was difficult trying to find the point of discussing these issues where someone who hasn't been as exposed to Latin American culture would understand these concepts and how Latinos in the United States are influenced by them.

This subject of machismo and marianismo, traditional concept in Latin American culture is so varied and can be an aspect of different parts of the lives and belief of Latinos in the United States. It varies so much by generation but level of acculturation by what Latin American country they descend from, what part of the United States they live in, what kind of neighborhood they are exposed to, and the list goes on and on. Even though machismo can mean different things for different people it is still very much present in the lives of some Latinos living in the United States. It may not be a bad thing since not all parts of machismo are negative but the main core of it is male-superiority. There should be much more research done on the impact of this on families across generation and to what extent these concepts are part of the self-concept of the United States-born Latinos.

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