

MACHISMO: A CASE STUDY IN REIFICATION

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DEDICATION

To Sue, my closest friend,
and to my son, Marc.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE	1
I. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	3
A. The Meaning of Machismo	3
B. The Mexican-American Critique	10
C. The Meaning of Reification	17
D. Reification and Stereotypes	23
II. THE THESIS: MACHISMO AND REIFICATION	25
III. THE STUDY	33
A. General Summary and Statement of Aim	33
IV. METHOD AND DESIGN	37
A. Subjects	38
B. Instrument	40
C. Analysis	41
V. RESULTS	43
A. General Synopsis of Interview Process	43
1. Thematic development	43
2. General impressions of respondents	46
3. General synopsis of interviews	50
B. A Comprehensive Exposition of Machismo Views	54
1. The Hispanic-American interpretation	54
2. The Anglo-American interpretation	61
C. Phenomenological Analyses	68
VI. DISCUSSION	74
A. General Discussion	74
1. The Hispanics	75
2. Non-Hispanics	75
3. The absence of substantive sex differences	78
B. Critical Discussion: Reification	82
C. Conclusions and Implications	88
REFERENCE NOTES	94
REFERENCES	95
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE	99
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SYNOPSES	100

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The present work critically examines the concept of Machismo, a term commonly understood to refer to exaggerated masculinity as exhibited by Latin-American males. In order to fully achieve this purpose, the study has been organized to emphasize three major themes: the critique of existing social science usage of the concept; the discussion of how such usage may be interpreted as illustrating the theory and process of reification; and, a presentation of the socio-cultural, personal meanings that Machismo has taken on in contemporary society, as these meanings may be elicited in depth interviews with Anglos and Chicanos.

This study may be seen as a contribution to social science knowledge on several grounds. It can help clarify the meaning of Machismo. This is important since the concept has been abundantly invoked to explain various complex aspects of Latino life (Montiel, 1973a, 1973b; Padilla and Ruiz, 1973). Further, the usage of the term has been uncritical. The concept, in effect, has become a stereotype yielding inaccurate accounts of the life of Chicanos (Montiel, 1973a, 1973b; Padilla and Ruiz, 1973). As it will be shown, this state of affairs appears to be related to several socio-economic and historical circumstances.

On another relevant dimension of theory, this study also aims at clarifying the process called reification. Developed by the neo-marxist scholars of the Frankfurt school, the theory and process of reification has been an important tool for the analysis of socio-cultural life. With a few exceptions, however, contemporary American social scientists remain largely unaware of its significance.

Finally, by focusing on Machismo as a stereotype and also as a concrete instance of reification, this study should make a clear-cut theoretical contribution toward the relationship between the two terms. The connections between stereotype and reification, it should be noted, have also been ignored in contemporary social scientific work.

CHAPTER 1

Theoretical Background

The Meaning of Machismo

The word Machismo, one adverbial form of the Spanish noun "Macho" (male), is defined by Webster (1972) as strong or assertive masculinity, characterized by virility, courage, and aggressiveness. Latin Americanists are basically in agreement with this definition. Their accounts, however, are more instructive in that they serve to document the qualitative aspects of the phenomenon--which are essentially negative and destructive. Campa (1969), for example, notes that Machismo:

". . . is an undue emphasis on maleness. . . It is a means of calling attention to the self, a way of flattering the ego and gaining stature . . . It is not manliness, because it is provocative, and it has the primitiveness of the beast whereby the animalistic tendencies of the male seek to prove to its own satisfaction that he is very Macho. The unfortunate feature of this type of dramatized virility is that, unlike an upsurge of vital energy, it cannot be channeled into useful energy or work. It is an end in itself."

(p. 35).