

## MACHISMO AND CHICANO/A GANGS: SYMBOLIC RESISTANCE OR OPPRESSION?

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### ABSTRACT

Both machismo and gang violence have been widely discussed in the popular and social science literature. Scholars have not systematically addressed the meanings of machismo held by gang members. We interviewed 25 Chicano/a and Mejjicano/a gang members and 20 adult youth service workers and neighborhood providers, explicitly asking for their definitions of machismo. We find both similarities and variations across generational and gender groups in our sample. Using the both/and approach of Patricia Hill Collins (1991), we analyzed the simultaneously oppositional and oppressive nature of machismo in the lives of these young men and women. Our study reveals the complexity and contradictions inherent in machismo and related characteristics, and their implications for positive social change.

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of machismo has been widely discussed in both popular media and social science literature. In the United States, popular media have associated machismo with masculinity, physical prowess, and male chauvinism. In social science literature, machismo often has been linked to irresponsibility, inferiority, and ineptitude. In this vein, the male dominance and oppression of women associated with machismo are seen as outgrowths of a history of economic, political, and psychological colonization of Latino/a, and perhaps especially Chicano/a, peoples. These conditions lead to internalized feelings of inferiority by members of the colonized group (Gutiérrez-Jones 1995; Mirandé 1982). Dominating and degrading women then offers men a way to compensate for a sense of inferiority and loss of control (Rowbotham 1971). That is, they may displace difficult issues of class conflict in public life onto gender conflicts in the domestic sphere (Peña 1991).

Many scholars have argued that the cult of machismo has produced male-dominated Chicano/a families (Baca Zinn 1975). Machismo is also credited with causing aggressive and violent behavior outside the family. Adolescent peer groups provide an avenue for young Chicanos to prove their masculinity through drinking, fighting, demonstrating sexual prowess, and protecting younger relatives (Horowitz 1983; Moore 1991; Vigil 1988). Chicano criminality and youth gangs have been described as natural by-products of a cultural emphasis on aggressive and violent behavior among males.

Other scholars argue that these images of machismo are overgeneralizations and cultural stereotypes. Such stereotypes ignore the larger societal conditions (e.g., poverty, racism, and sexism) that produce cultural attitudes and behavior. They also ignore the

diversity and ever-changing nature of Latino/a cultures (Baca Zinn 1992; Moore, Pinderhughes 1993).

Still others argue that machismo has important revolutionary implications. It can represent the strength to resist and rebel against the societal racism and economic oppression confronted by Latino/as (Mirandé 1982; Rendón 1971).

Our research examines the meanings of machismo in the lives of male and female Mejjicano/a and Chicano/a gang members. We interviewed 25 gang members and 20 youth service providers or neighborhood leaders in gang communities to ask: 1) how they defined machismo, 2) how they viewed other characteristics commonly associated with machismo in popular and social science literature, and 3) how machismo and associated characteristics play out in gang activities. The activities discussed ranged from drive-by shootings and other clearly violent incidents to more subtle aspects of gender relations in gangs. We asked adult service providers to reflect on the meanings of machismo in their own pasts and in contemporary gang life. We focus on both commonalities and variations in perceptions of machismo in gangs. Finally, we consider the degree to which machismo can simultaneously take on self-affirming, oppositional, and oppressive meanings in the lives of gang members and their communities.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The portrayal of machismo in much social science literature has been very pejorative. Machismo has functioned as an all purpose explanation for anything that is wrong with Mejjicano/a and Chicano/a culture (Montiel 1970). More broadly, all Latino males are assumed to display machismo unless they have been fully assimilated into the U.S. society. Their attitudes and behaviors toward women are presumed to be invariant across

age, class, and educational strata. Yet, characterizations of all Latino/a families as totally male-dominated, or even as more male dominated than Anglo families, are simply not supported by the data (Baca Zinn 1980; Montiel 1970; O'Guinn, Imperia, Mac-Adams 1987). When controls for these factors are included, chauvinistic attitudes toward women and absolute male dominance in the family are similar among Anglos, Mejicanos, and Chicanos. The internalized inferiority explanation of machismo and its corresponding female submissiveness have the effect of blaming Chicano/as and their "dysfunctional" cultural response, for their subordination.

Machismo also has been described as an obstacle to women's fuller contribution to the Chicano/a movement (Baca Zinn 1975; Chavez 1972). Lioneia López Saenz (1972) denounces machismo as a syndrome that advocates absolute power and authority over women.

Some social scientists have attempted to articulate a perspective on machismo that is consistent both with the equality of men and women, and with the liberation of all Chicanos/as from colonial oppression (Mirandé 1982; Rendón 1971). For example, the Black Berets of Albuquerque have redefined machismo in terms of a revolutionary struggle in which men and women operate as equals (Baca Zinn 1975). Armando Rendón offers a politicized definition of machismo:

The Chicano revolt is a manifestation of Mexican Americans exerting their manhood and womanhood against the Anglo society. Macho, in other words, can no longer relate merely to manhood, but must relate to nationhood as well. (1971)

The macho behaviors and attitudes that are often condemned in Chicano/a gangs today--the violence, aggression, and sometimes overbearing protection of the neighborhood and of family honor--can also be seen as having roots in the historical role of young men as guardians of besieged communities surrounded by hostile Anglos (Mirandé 1987). Neighborhood-based gangs are integral, quasi-institutional features of barrio life (Moore 1978, 1991; Vigil 1988; Zatz 1987).

In the past, most gang members were male, and it was considered quite improper for Chicanas to join in the rowdy, crazy gang life (Horowitz 1983; Vigil 1988). While older

**Table 1: Youth Ethnic Self-Identification**

Mejicano/a	9
Chicana/a and American Indian	2
Chicano and White	1
Chicano	6
Hispanic	3
Wetback	2
None	2

members of the community may still hold these views, the reality today is that many Chicanas are very active in gang life, including its most violent and sexually-charged facets (Harris 1988; Moore 1991; Portillos 1996). This history and the tensions associated with barrio life suggest the importance of further considering the meanings of machismo and other characteristics commonly associated with it. Is machismo always and necessarily oppressive? Or are there ways in which it can also be seen as affirming an oppositional stance toward the dominant society and its expectations of Mexican and Chicano men and, perhaps especially, women?

In response to the conflict over continuing use of the term "machismo," Maxine Baca Zinn suggests that rather than relying exclusively on social scientific categories, the most viable approach is to examine the ways in which machismo is defined and perceived by Chicanos/as themselves.

This approach may enable us to ask questions which would lead to an understanding of male dominance and aggression of the oppressed as a calculated response to hostility, exclusion, and racial domination in a colonized society. It is possible that aggressive behavior of Chicano males has been both an affirmation of Mexican cultural identity and an expression of their conscious rejection of the dominant society's definition of Mexicans as passive, lazy, and indifferent (1975)

Following Baca Zinn's suggestions, we have interviewed Mejicano/a and Chicano/a gang members, as well as the service providers and neighborhood leaders who work in the neighborhoods where these gangs are most prominent. Although there are common themes, we also find a diversity of views across respondents. In analyzing responses, we utilize a *both/and* perspective as outlined by Patricia Hill Collins (1991). Collins rejects the common tendency to analyze complex social issues as

simple either/or dichotomies. In this vein, we do not attempt to conclude whether machismo and associated traits are *either* oppressive or oppositional. Instead we attempt to describe the myriad of often contradictory meanings and behavioral implications that this concept holds for gang members and adults.

## METHODOLOGY

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in the summer and fall of 1995 with 25 self-identified current and former gang members, and 20 youth service providers and neighborhood leaders. Access for the interviews was obtained as part of the evaluation of a youth corrections community treatment center. Of the 25 youths interviewed, 17 were young men and 8 were young women. Youths ranged in age from 14 to 18 years. Four of the 25 youths are Mejjicano/a immigrants; the remainder are of Mexican descent but were born in the U.S. (see Table 1 for youths' ethnic self identification). Youths were interviewed in restaurants, in the barrio, in homes, in a Department of Juvenile Corrections community treatment center, and in locked institutions.

Very few of our gang respondents had managed to avoid entanglement with the juvenile justice system, and most of them were under parole supervision, or were incarcerated at the time of their interview. Some bias may have resulted from respondents' concerns that their comments would be relayed to parole officers or case workers. They might have exaggerated the extent to which they have reduced their gang activities or other changes that might make caseworkers view them more positively. However, the first author, who conducted all youth interviews, made every attempt to reassure respondents that he was not a part of the correctional treatment staff and that interviews would be confidential. He also spent several months getting to know some of the youth prior to interviewing them. He was able to establish rapport with the youth because of his knowledge of Spanish and of *calo* (Chicano gang slang), because he is himself Chicano, and because of his ongoing contacts with their homeboys and homegirls. In some cases, he was able to update them on life in the neighborhood and on events in their friends' lives.

Of the 20 adults interviewed, 14 were men and 6 were women. They include youth service providers active in the Chicano/a and

Mejjicano/a communities, neighborhood association leaders, other neighborhood activists, city neighborhood services representatives, and a parish priest who was actively involved with gang youths and their families. One representative each from the Phoenix Police Department and from the Governor's office whose responsibilities include gang and neighborhood affairs were also interviewed. Six of the adults are Chicano or Chicana, two were born in Mexico, two are Puerto Rican, one self-identified as Hispanic, one as mixed African American-Hispanic, four are African American, and four are white. All but one adult spoke at least some Spanish. Three of the adult respondents had children who had died in gang-related incidents. One of the adults was active in the anti-gang association Mothers Against Gangs. All of the adults were interviewed by the third author.

The presentation of findings begins with gang member perceptions of machismo. Then, we turn to the adult service provider/activists' perceptions. This is followed by a discussion of similarities and differences across generational and gender groups. We sought to be sensitive to the complexities, contradictions, and changing meanings of machismo and related characteristics in gang life.

## FINDINGS

### Description of Youth Lives and Neighborhoods

Interpreting the meaning and significance of youth and adult comments about machismo would be difficult without some description of the lives and community in which these gangs were located. Some youths described themselves as poor. They lived in the projects, wore second-hand clothes, and their families did not have enough money to pay for rent. Occasionally, they went without food. Other youths described themselves as lower middle class with money for housing, food and some amenities. Some of their parents had extensive criminal histories; some of their parents were heavy drug users themselves; some youths were abused by their parents. However, many youths also report that their parents were hard working, loving, and had high hopes that their children would further their education and have a better life.

The majority of youths described themselves as growing up in the "barrio" or in the "hood." In this environment there were drugs, shootings, and older gang members who were

admired. Peer groups often centered on their neighborhood gangs ("homeboys" and "homegirls"). Youths in gangs spent a lot of time in what they called "kicking it" (e.g., hanging out, drinking, getting high, talking). The most popular drugs used were "bud" (marijuana), "crystal" (metha-amphetamine), and "huffing" (sniffing paint).

These young adults also recounted experiences of racism and discrimination in job hunting, educational pursuits, and contacts with the police. They viewed racism and discrimination to be pervasive features of their lives. This sense of social injustice, combined with the effects of poverty, led many youths to feel frustrated, angry, and hopeless about their future.

### Youth Perceptions

When asked the meaning of machismo, only four of the youth were able to define the concept. There was considerable overlap among their definitions, which focused on "not being a punk," "trying to be brave," "a way of showing off too much, like they are conceited," "it is like being chingon (tough fucker)", "it is like acting bad," and "a load of bullshit."

The four youths who could define machismo all spoke Spanish. While some of the twenty-one youths who did not know what machismo meant also spoke Spanish, others did not. This finding suggests that non-Spanish-speaking gang members were not as cognizant of the term and were less likely to have reflected upon its significance in their lives. For example:

[What is your definition of machismo?]

Machismo, I don't know. Machismo, what is that? Do you mean like, I don't have no idea really.

[Have you heard of machismo before?]

Yeah, I think I heard of it before but I never really thought about what it meant.

Youths who could not define machismo were asked to describe the importance in their lives of other qualities commonly associated with machismo in the literature. These qualities included: being protectors, being honorable, being reliable, treating women with respect, hurting women and others, and making others fear them. The youths were also asked

to distinguish which qualities they viewed more positively and which they viewed more negatively. Some youths also named additional qualities that they thought were related to those mentioned by the interviewer. Qualities that youth viewed as positive or affirming included respecting and protecting others, being honorable and reliable, not backing down or "punking out," having pride in yourself, and treating women with respect. Most youths defined the following traits as negative or oppressive: having others fear you, violence, treating women poorly, acting crazy, and drinking too much (Mirandé 1982; Peña 1991; Urrabazo 1986). However, these designations were not accepted by all youth. Some viewed the oppression of others to be self-affirming; they viewed having others fear them and acting crazy in the gang (e.g., being involved in fights, shootings, and other criminal behavior) positively:

That's what the whole thing is about aay, making others fear you. That's the whole thing about a gang. Like letting them know what's up. You shoot us, we take out all of you. One person shoots us, we going to take the whole thing out. Make them scared, you know, because, comes deep, you know. You come three deep, we come four deep [You kill three of us, we kill four of you].

Other gang members defined oppressive aspects of machismo, such as disrespecting and abusing women verbally and physically, in a very negative light. One young woman relates this type of abuse in one of her personal relationships:

[T]here ain't no woman who is going to live with it. I lived with it for 2-3 years and fuck, man, I almost got killed.

Some male gang members justified the abuse of females based on the behavior displayed by young women:

It depends on how the girl is acting or how they present themselves. The only girls that I respect is my family or people that I know for a long time. The other girls that I meet on the street, they'll act all scanless (shameless). I'm like, whatever then. I won't disrespect them, I'll talk to them like okay, whatever. She starts telling me something, I'm going to start telling her something right back.

[Did the gangs treat girls bad?]

Well, it depends. Like, well, they would do it to anybody. Like if they wouldn't listen or like if they were trying to get out, they would hit them. To check them, to get them back in their place.

While the bonds implicit in gang membership are very strong, the everyday violence also bred distrust. Machismo also meant remaining strong in the face of doubt and mistrust:

Yeah, man, because you can't have friends. You don't know who is your friend, you don't know if they are out to get their prestige or their respect because they are with you. You don't really know who is your friend until the shit hits the fan, and then, like you can't really be close to anyone.

Many Chicano/a and Mexican gang members were able to list positive aspects of machismo in their lives. They believe machismo was "being the protector of your family," specifically their mothers and sisters. Machismo also meant being a provider for their family:

Like you work and everything and being a man from the house. That's like macho. Like being a man from the house, doing all you can to feed your family and stuff. That's like being macho.

Many young Chicanos and Mejicanos perceived that they and their friends showed respect to women:

Being respectful to other people and stuff, just respecting even if you have problems with them. Respectful to girls, not all my homeboys are disrespectful to girls.

Others focused more on machismo as a way of being strong, continuing to fight even when there is no hope of winning, and not giving up:

That you are going to keep fighting and not give up.... Not punking out, you know. a vato can be ten feet tall and I would still not back down. Being honorable, ese.

Many characteristics viewed positively by gang members were forms of aggressive behavior, which may not necessarily be desirable in the eyes of other members of society. For many gang members, not backing down was a means of showing other gang members that they were

dedicated to the gang:

When you box (fight) somebody or something, you know, your homeboys know you are down and you got respect. It makes you feel good inside.

Gang members believed that they protected their neighborhood from other gangs. Reliability was an integral part of being a protector. Being reliable meant that others could count on the individual when the gang's integrity was threatened. A Chicana explains how she possessed qualities of being reliable:

Because I had their back. They could call me and I'd go fight. If they were going to get jumped or if they were going to fight with somebody, I'll go fight with them. Or if they needed, if I had some stash on me or whatever, if they wanted to get high.

Some youths' comments made it clear that affirming, oppositional, and oppressive dimensions of machismo were closely intertwined in their lives:

[Is that (machismo) a bad thing or is it a good thing?]

In a way it is and in a way it ain't. You don't want all your homeboys thinking you're a *chava* (little girl) you know. In another way it's not good but your best friend hooks up with your sister and starts getting that way, and starts disrespecting you.

In comparing youths' responses across gender and national origins, we were surprised to find few sharp differences. We are wary of generalizing based on a sample with only eight female respondents. However, it appears that Mejicano/a and Chicano/a gang members' views about machismo were similar to those of the males. The females' views were also similar to each other, despite differences in their fluency with Spanish and their nation of origin.

Young men and women gang members also exhibited striking similarities in their definitions and perceptions of machismo in their own lives. In contrast to popular expectations that young women in gangs serve as auxiliary members, our female respondents felt that they played a very important role in the gang. Some Chicanas and Mejicanas believed that they displayed more loyalty and other

machismo-like qualities in the gang than did the males:

I feel like female gang members are more down than guys.

[Why do you say that?]

Because we don't hesitate and I think some of my homeboys do. Me and Precious, we were walking and some guys pulled a gun out on us and all our homeboys started running. We started laughing. Shoot us, shoot us. We don't show fear.

However, young men did not share their female counterparts' views on women's importance in gangs. They did not respect young women as gang members. They view girls with machismo-like characteristics to be to unpredictable, crazy (*loca*) and unnecessarily dangerous to others in the gang:

[Do you think girls in your gang have machisma?]

They probably think they are down ayy. They are down ayy, all the ones that I know. Like they are ayy, shit they're too much down, they're too bad.

I don't think so because they are always causing trouble not getting along with another hood, always getting into another fight. They start mouthing, they start fighting too, and so we will be fighting again. That happened a couple of times, always the girls got to mess it up.

Young men believed that women's place was at home and that they did not really belong in gangs. Many men felt that although their homegirls displayed characteristics of machismo, they could not be relied upon because, eventually, "they get pregnant" and leave the gang. Their comments in this regard suggest that woman should be at home caring for children.

One area in which females most deferred to males was in the realm of heterosexual dating and coupling. The young men attempted to control the behaviors of the Chicanas and Mejicanas with whom they were romantically involved, and physical abuse was one means of control. Some gang members stated that they beat their girlfriends for talking to other men, not listening to them, or not doing what they were told. Even though some gang

members said that they never physically abused their partners, they did control them by limiting what they wore, where and when they could go out, and other aspects of their behavior. In personal relationships, young Chicanas and Mejicanas were subservient to males:

When I had an old man, that was my first love, my real love. I treated him like a fucking king. I treated him like a king, there was nothing that I wouldn't do for him... I would wake up at two in the morning. Cook his breakfast, make his lunch, take out his clothes and iron them, and then send him on his way. I would wake up at 9:00, clean the house and cook breakfast for myself. Take a shower, get ready, then start cooking lunch, and he'd eat lunch. I would lay more clothes out for him, then back to work. Then he would come home around six. He'd come home and I would rub his back, his legs, his feet, and everything. He would take a shower and watch t.v. all day and I would cook dinner. He would eat dinner and go to sleep. I did everything for the man. It was just like I was the slave and I did it just because I thought he loved me.

This young woman later left the relationship. She was the only female gang member to offer a critical assessment of machismo as promoting gender inequality.

### Adults' Perceptions of Machismo

Adult perspectives on machismo in some ways mirror those of the young people with whom they work, but also differ in important ways. Overall, the adults tend to be more critical of the concept; several explicitly analyzed it in terms of gender subordination. A Mejjicano responded to the question, "What are the positive parts of machismo?" with his own question: "(What are) the positive parts of male domination?"

There are also substantial differences among the adults. The adults described machismo in terms of "taking responsibility," "protecting your family," "being in touch with yourself and your environment," "being assertive," "pride," "sexist," "male chauvinism," and "male domination." There are many reasons for these differences in perspective. Some of the adults grew up in the Phoenix barrios, others grew up in other cities within the U.S., Mexico, or Puerto Rico. There are also differences in age, class, and race/ethnicity which may explain some of the variations found.

A Chicano who grew up in the Phoenix barrios distinguished between old and new styles of machismo, depending on one's occupational and educational achievements:

Today, for high school drop outs, you would probably have the old style, with the male still having that decision making power, but if you make it occupationally, everything changes, the relationship is more balanced, with less power going to the men. The emphasis is on decision making power.

This nostalgia about what machismo once meant was also reflected in the following comment by a Latina:

At one time it was a beautiful pride in a man, now they have no problem hitting a woman.

For many adult women, however, and particularly for the two African American women in our sample, it was hard to find anything good to say about machismo. An African American woman described machismo in the gangs:

In the Hispanic community the real man was the person who was supportive of his family and the community, the gentleman, the scholar. It is sexist, the part about having to support the woman, but I'll agree with some of it being positive. I don't see why being a responsible human being has to be called machismo. I see no signs of any of the positive among gang kids, there is no longer anything positive without the sexism, so why not remove it... The kids are extremely sexist. They live out their ideals, their fantasies of what a real man is—violent, ruthless, controlling.

Another African American woman working in a primarily Chicano/a neighborhood defined machismo as:

[T]he little woman, she belongs in the kitchen, home raising the babies. Battering of women, total control over women.

When asked about machismo and how it plays out in gangs, she responded:

The gang kids are very protective of their families, just as protective of their families as of the 'hoods, especially their mothers.

[Do gang kids show these negative parts of

machismo?]

The control over women, beating women, keeping women submissive, not allowing them to grow, to venture out on their own, trying to keep women without options. Yes, the gang kids show these parts of machismo.

Some of the adults, while criticizing macho behavior, explained it in terms of racial oppression. A white woman defined machismo as:

Macho-ism. Within black and Hispanic cultures they have to be rough and tough because they're nothing in the real world because of racism.

She went on to discuss machismo in gangs as a reflection of racism and poverty:

They're trying to be somebody but we as a community don't work with them to build self-esteem. How can you have self-esteem if you have nothing? If you have talent but no one works with you to develop it?

The two Puerto Rican men interviewed differed in age by 15-20 years. The younger said of machismo that it is:

antiquated, outdated... Refine the term or strike it from the Spanish language.

From his perspective, gang youths:

try to emulate the machismo of their predecessors, if *chingon*, try to be *chingon* too... The ultimate responsibility of a gang member is to be shot for your homies. I see it as negative, but gang members wouldn't—a martyr if you die in the line of battle. In family relations, it is no longer good for the macho man to work, get a pay check, expect food on the table and kids to be fed—need to redefine machismo as her helping, need to change machismo.

The martyr aspect of machismo which he raised was also mentioned by the other Puerto Rican man in the sample:

Dying is not a problem, it's how you die. Could be a martyr, or a fuck-it syndrome. Fuck it, let's do it, ain't nothing gonna happen to me. They don't want to live anyway... [Machismo] is a word Americans have totally fucked up and took

out of context. As explained by my dad, you were the first male born, your role was to protect your family when your father wasn't there. It meant responsibility, watching out for brothers and sisters. Now it has been distorted to imply a cultural deformity—every Hispanic is this macho guy, "don't fuck with me," it connotes a violent person.

Thus, this respondent was highly critical of machismo. Yet, like other adult males, he hoped to revitalize and update the concept, making it more compatible with a middle class way of life.

Overall, the youth workers had more varied definitions of machismo and had given far more thought to the concept, its meanings, and its implications than had the gang members. This is not surprising, since youth does not have the degree of detachment and hindsight that characterized the adults. The adults were selected for interviews precisely because they work closely with the youths on a daily basis and must give substantial thought to those factors which will facilitate or hinder their work.

Physical and psychological abuse of women and girls was one factor that emerged very strongly whenever adult women were asked about machismo. In contrast, in reflecting back on their earlier experiences, only a few of the young women recognized that they had become less willing to accept male violence directed against them, whether by their fathers or their boyfriends. Finally, while all of the youths were of Mexican heritage, some of the adults were African American, Puerto Rican, and white. Cultural and racial factors also may generate differences in how they understand the concept and see it playing out in the lives of the youths with whom they work.

## CONCLUSION

We have considered the differences and similarities in views of machismo among gang members and gang workers, including differences across gender groups. Our findings suggest that the youths resonate most to issues of respect. They gain respect by evidencing a willingness to fight for, and in other ways protect, their families, barrios, and fellow gang members. Whether or not the youths defined their efforts to gain respect in terms of machismo, the activities they described are typically associated with machismo in the literature.

We find that the adults were more likely than were gang members to both recognize the term machismo, and to have a more critical and nuanced view of its implications. Adults reflect back on their own lives as they look at the lives of the young men and women with whom they are working. In so doing, they identify affirming, oppositional, and oppressive consequences of machismo for youths and communities. The adult women were most cognizant of the oppressive aspects of machismo and of its implications for gender subordination. However, this critique was almost totally lacking among the young women.

With reference to our initial research question about the significance of machismo for gang youths, we must conclude that machismo is both oppositional and oppressive. It offers moments of resistance to class and ethnic-based oppressions. Youth are conscious of their resistance to varying degrees, depending on the youth and his/her particular situation. Machismo also represents the manifestation of structures of gender, racial/ethnic, and economic oppression. For example, gang members speak of protecting families and neighborhoods, all of which face declining job opportunities, economic resources, and social services. At the same time, their drive to demonstrate machismo becomes an incentive for violence against rival gangs and, on occasion, innocent bystanders. Moreover, even though machismo also dictates the protection of women, this "protection" has oppressive connotations. One must ask, from whom are men protecting women? The comments of youths and adults indicate that, at least sometimes, protection is needed from men who are themselves supposed to be the protectors—husbands, fathers, boyfriends. It is important to recognize that such danger from intimates confronts women of all race-ethnic groups, and from all social classes (Baca Zinn 1975; Stanko 1990). In this way, the ethos of machismo is shared by many races and cultures. Thus, machismo has a varied, often contradictory, and ever-changing meaning in youth gangs. Our study reveals the importance of analyzing abstract concepts like machismo within the context of concrete persons, structural circumstances, and situations.

The first author (Portillos 1996) describes the dilemma facing many modern men in their struggles for an oppositional definition of machismo:



I was reared in a traditional Mexican home where there were certain duties for men and certain duties for women. As a child, I rarely made my bed, never ironed my clothes, never cleaned the house, and had the total liberty to come and go as I pleased. My sisters' behaviors, on the other hand, were strictly monitored, and they were expected to assist my mother with cleaning duties. I began to question these types of gender roles not only because of the problems that they created in my personal relationship with my partner, but also because of the birth of my daughter. Upon her birth, I could be a macho man and allow my partner to care for our daughter, which would not have pleased her. Why not, all my life I observed females rearing children? Or, I could take a meaningful part of my daughter's life. I chose the latter, and quickly learned what it was to be a father. I learned how to delicately give our newborn a bath, how to change diapers, burp a baby, how to make funny little noises, etc. This process has taught me how to relate to our daughter not as a macho man, but as a person who helped raise our daughter in every possible way... I still struggle with patriarchal values in my personal relationships, but this project is the result of trying to understand how I have oppressed. I knew that as a person of color this society has oppressed me. I did not realize how even using positive characteristics of being a man continued the oppression of women very dear to me.

Despite the importance of individual struggle, the oppressive aspects of machismo are also part of a larger social structure that also must be challenged on a collective level. Because race, class, and gender are decisive factors in our lives, these individual and collective struggles must address all three.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> All respondents live in the United States. As we are using the terms, "Mejicano/a" refers to men (Mejicano) and women (Mejicana) born in Mexico who may or may not now be U.S. citizens or permanent residents. These persons all self-identified as Mexican. "Chicano/a" refers to men (Chicano) and women (Chicana) of Mexican ancestry who were born in the U.S. Also, Chicano or Mejicano refers solely to males, Chicana or Mejicana references only women.

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