Male dominance in the Chicano family is re-examined and a new conceptualization of the male role is suggested. The traditional view of the Chicano family as patriarchal and authoritarian is erroneous and based on unsupported myths and stereotypes held by both social scientists and the public at large. A review of recent research studies suggests that the dominant pattern of decision-making and action-taking in the Chicano family is not male-dominated and authoritarian but egalitarian. Husband and wife share not only in decision making but in the performance of household tasks and child care; sharp sex role segregation appears to be the exception rather than the rule among Chicano couples.

If there is a persistent theme in social science depictions of the Mexican and the Mexican-American, it is the thesis that male dominance is ingrained as a cultural trait. Without the benefit of empirical data, writer after writer has described an authoritarian and patriarchal family structure (see Mirande, 1977; Montiel, 1970; Sotomayor, 1972). Such studies rely heavily on the concept of machismo as a key variable for explaining not only the persistence of male dominance but other numerous pathologies that assumed to characterize Mexican-Chicano culture.

Although machismo was once thought endemic to Mexican or Latino culture, the term is rapidly coming into popular usage and its application is no longer limited to this group. Yet in its transference from Latino to Anglo culture machismo has taken an interesting turn. The word appears to have taken on more positive connotations and, if it is not totally positive, it certainly has substantial appeal for many people. A men's cologne by this name has appeared on the market, as has a popular song; and it is not uncommon for celebrities, rock stars, athletes, and other male superstars to be called macho or ascribed with macho qualities. This new popular usage suggests virility, masculinity, strength, and sex appeal. A macho is thus some sort of "he-man" or "SuperStud."

Despite the emergence of this new characterization of Anglo machismo, its more traditional application prevails. Rather than completely changing its meaning the term has simply come to evoke different meanings in different contexts. When applied to Anglos, it is largely positive and when applied to Chicanos it is largely negative. While machismo is imbued with virility and sexual prowess in both views, the Anglo macho is a much more positive and attractive symbol of masculinity. A "macho male" is sought after, not because he controls and subdues women, as his Mexican-Chicano counterpart, but because he attracts and seduces them. The woman thus has a much more active and volitional part in this process and need not be passive or inert, as the Mexican woman is said to be. The dominant culture, then, has taken a foreign and negative term, incorporated it, and recast it in a more positive light.

This writer brings the process full circle by calling the traditional, negative view of machismo into question and suggesting a new positive view. It seeks in addition to dispel numerous myths and stereotypes about the role of the male in the Chicano family and to suggest an alternative conception that is
more consistent with the nuances of Chicano culture and that is also much less stultifying. The basic thesis advanced is that the all-dominant and controlling Chicano male is largely a mythical figure—a fabrication of social scientists.

Chicano Male Dominance: The Traditional View

The traditional view of the male in the Chicano family has been pejorative and pathological and has its origin in a similar view of the Mexican family. There is a long tradition in social science literature which uses the concept of machismo to explain the alleged pathology of the Mexican family (Mirande, 1977; Montiel, 1970; Sotomayor, 1972). Such studies have been psychoanalytically oriented and have sought to identify a modal Mexican personality type. The Mexican is said to be driven by a pervasive feeling of inferiority and the rejection of authority. The male's quest to control and subjugate the woman is thus ultimately motivated by a feeling of powerlessness and is linked to the Spanish conquest of Mexico. The conquest is said to have been so pervasive that it constituted a moral and spiritual downfall. The powerless, colonized man is seen as compensating for feelings of inadequacy and inferiority by assuming an overly-masculine and aggressive response.

Despite the obvious hazards in extrapolating national character studies from one time and setting to another, the pathological view of the Mexican male and Mexican family structure also has been applied to Chicanos. Many social scientists have described a rigid, authoritarian, patriarchal Chicano family that is identical to its traditional Mexican counterpart (Heller, 1966; Humphrey, 1944; Jones, 1948; Madsen, 1973; Peñalosa, 1968; Rudoff, 1971; Carroll, Note 1).

As with the Mexican family, the key to understanding the Mexican-American family is assumed to be male dominance or machismo. But in the hands of these social scientists machismo becomes much more than an explanatory variable; it becomes an all-powerful and encompassing pathological force or malady. It is not uncommon, for example, for it to be referred to as the Cult of Machismo. Based on a pathological model, such a conceptualization does not make allowances for normal behavior so that Chicano families are free to vary only in their degree of pathology (Montiel, 1970).

The macho, according to this view, is able to retain the same style of life after marriage that he did as a bachelor. He comes and goes with impunity, drinks, and stays out all night (parrandiar). So extensive is his freedom that he may even establish a casa chica with another woman. According to Madsen (1973, p. 51), "The most convincing way of proving machismo and financial ability is to keep a mistress in a second household." The male is thought to be motivated by an insatiable sex drive and a life-long struggle to prove his masculinity and sexual prowess:

The macho is likened to a rooster: "The better man is the one who can drink more, defend himself best, have more sex relations, and have more sons borne by his wife" (Madsen, 1973, p. 22). Yet the Mexican male also subscribes to a double standard that divides women into two mutually exclusive classes, i.e., good and bad. Good women (wives, sisters, daughters) are to be honored and respected, whereas bad ones are to be used, abused, and deceived.

The concept of honor is integral to machismo. The Latin man places great emphasis on maintaining his honor and integrity not only in the community but within the family. Dishonor can befall a man if he does not live up to the demands of machismo or if he is deceived or cuckolded by his wife or girl friend. Especially important is the belief that a man should be honored and respected by his

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1 Among the most prototypical are Octavio Paz' (1961) The Labyrinth of Solitude; Samuel Ramos' (1962) Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico; Maria Bermudez' (1955) La vida familiar del mexicano; Díaz-Guerrero's (1975) Psychology of the Mexican; and G. M. Gilbert's (1959) study of mental health in a Mexican village.
family. He is viewed as a strict disciplinarian who demands complete respect, deference, and obedience from his wife as much as from his children. She is to literally honor and obey him, despite his many transgressions. Yet wives may accept this punishment as deserved or even be "grateful for punishment at the hands of their husbands, for such concern with shortcomings indicates profound love" (Madsen, 1973, p. 22).

This authoritarian and patriarchal pattern is assumed not only to engender passivity and to stifle independence and achievement in children (Heller, 1966; Rudoff, 1971) but to generate family violence. Carroll (Note 1) asserts that values and norms within the Mexican-American group produce a high level of family violence, especially in comparison to the Jewish-American group which is said to produce an exceedingly low level of violence:

The higher level of violence in Mexican-American families was proposed to be associated with the values of severe male dominance, strict discipline, and submission to the father. Severe and distant father-son relations were seen to be the result of these values, leading to fear of the father, poor communication, and a resulting high level of parent-child violence. (Carroll, Note 1, p. 80)

Jewish-American family norms and values, on the other hand, emphasize:

the pursuit of knowledge and the use of the mind rather than the body. The values of intellectualism resulting from these values was proposed to lead to the favoring of articulateness, argumentativeness, and bargaining as a way to solve family disputes. (Carroll, Note 1, p. 80)

Jews are thus democratic, articulate, and intellectual, whereas Chicanos are authoritarian, inarticulate, non-intellectual, and violent.

Chicano Male Dominance: Another View

Perhaps even more significant than the pejorative or stereotyped quality of the traditional view of Chicano male dominance is its wholesale acceptance without the benefit of empirical research. Analyses of the Chicano family have typically been based on impressionistic data, at best, and unsupported stereotypes, at worst. Social scientists have been reluctant to reject this stereotyped view even when faced with contradictory evidence. Findings which show that the Chicano family is more egalitarian than previously assumed have been down-played or explained away as resulting from increasing acculturation and assimilation.

Hawkes and Taylor (1975), for example, set out to show that the Chicano family is basically patriarchal and male-dominated. Much to their surprise, the hypothesis was not supported; instead, the dominant pattern of husband-wife decision-making and action-taking among California migrant farm families was egalitarian. Faced with these serendipitous results, the authors attempted, unsuccessfully, to explain them as being due to increasing acculturation, urbanization, and the decreasing dependence of women in the United States. Only reluctantly, and after other avenues have been exhausted, do Hawkes and Taylor suggest that:

... many of the traditional stereotypes of groups such as ethnic minorities noted in the literature and in public assumptions need more adequate verification. It is possible that more sophisticated methods of research may negate many of our previous assumptions. (Hawkes & Taylor, 1975, p. 811)

The egalitarian pattern of family decision-making is found among urban Chicanos as well as rural ones. The Mexican-American Study Project, one of the best-known surveys of Chicanos, found that respondents in Los Angeles and San Antonio did not conform to the traditional patriarchal pattern (Grebler, Moore, & Guzmán, 1970). Although a majority of respondents agreed "'the most important thing' that a married woman could do was to have children," there was less agreement on whether a husband ought to have complete control over the family income," and almost all (91%) believed that "a husband should care for the children when the wife wants time for herself" (Grebler, Moore, & Guzmán, 1970, p. 361). Interestingly, the most significant changes, according to the authors, seem to have occurred in the male rather than the female role. The patriarchal pattern suggested
in the literature was not supported, especially among younger and higher-income respondents. Egalitarianism was also observed in response to questions concerning who performs certain sex-typed household tasks such as painting rooms and washing dishes. The Chicano responses, which were very similar to those observed in an earlier 1953 sample of the Detroit population, suggested that egalitarianism was more prevalent in traditionally masculine tasks. Sex, age, and income differences were insignificant, nonetheless, and "the most striking finding relates not to internal variations in the departure from traditional sex specialization, but rather to the conspicuous presence of a basically egalitarian division of household tasks." (Grebler, Moore, & Guzmán, 1970, pp. 362-363)

A more recent study by Ybarra (1977), based on in-depth interviews with one hundred married couples in Fresno, California, also refutes the patriarchal model of the Chicano family. The sample for this study included incomes ranging from $3,000 to $50,000 per year, education from none to a Ph.D., and occupations from farm laborers to professionals. Ybarra found a broad range of conjugal role relations from a patriarchal pattern to an egalitarian one. However, most couples shared in decision-making:

A large number of Chicano husbands helped their wives with household chores and child care. Also, the Chicanos interviewed were not as obsessed with the idea of machismo as has been suggested in the literature. The overwhelming majority of Chicano husbands preferred to participate in social and recreational activities with their wives and children. Overall, the data indicated that the majority of Chicana wives played an important and/or equal part in most facets of conjugal role relationships. (Ybarra, 1977, p. 2)

As in previous studies, there was no statistically significant relationship between the type of role relation exhibited and the level of acculturation into the dominant society, level of income, or level of education. The most significant factor affecting conjugal role relationships appeared to be the employment status of the woman; couples with the wife working outside the home were much more likely to share in decision-making, household chores, and child care. This finding has important implications, because it suggests that it is not acculturation or improved socioeconomic status of Chicanos which produces a more egalitarian pattern. The sheer fact of employment outside the home may necessitate adjustments in conjugal roles and a movement toward joint or shared decision-making. This, of course, is a two-way street and it is undoubtedly those couples who are already more egalitarian who are more likely to permit the woman's employment outside the home.

An extensive review of literature pertaining to power and control of Chicanas in the domestic sphere has been undertaken by Baca Zinn (1976). The review suggests, at first, contradictory patterns: a patriarchal value system juxtaposed against a mother-centered family structure. The patterns are not contradictory, however, if one recognizes that each sex has primary responsibility for its respective sphere, the man outside of the household and the woman within. The power of the Chicana, according to Baca Zinn, is thus rooted in the domestic realm as she has primary responsibility for handling the daily affairs of the family.

This power extends not only to decision-making on domestic matters but to child-care. There is a substantial body of evidence which suggests that la mujer plays an especially important part in the lives of children. The father may serve as titular head of the household and is formally granted a great deal of respect and authority, but he is likely to be seen as a distant authority and his relations with children are frequently tenuous, especially when they enter puberty (Rubel, 1966). Mothers, on the other hand, are integral to the functioning of the family (Heller, 1966; Sotomayor, 1972; Tuck, 1946). Mothers perform many domestic tasks, set limits on children's behavior, and are honored and respected by other family members (Goodman & Beman, 1971). Although not having as much formal status or prestige, the woman remains an extremely influential figure nonetheless.

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2The stereotypic view of the Chicano family as patriarchal has also been questioned by a recent study of self-report perceptions of relative spousal dominance in decision-making and conflict resolution carried out by Cromwell and Cromwell (1978).
Despite the formal appearance of a patriarchy, "as the madrecita, entitled to respect and homage, she may actually dominate, in all matters that affect her children. Hers may be the deciding voice in every important decision" (Tuck, 1946, p. 123).

**Conclusion**

This paper has sought to examine male dominance in the Chicano family and to suggest a new conceptualization which holds that the traditional view of the Chicano family as patriarchal and authoritarian is erroneous and based on unsupported myths and stereotypes held both by social scientists and the public at large. Among reasons given for the persistence of this mythical view of the macho dominated family were:

1. Many studies have extrapolated questionable generalizations about the Mexican family and uncritically applied them to the Chicano family.
2. Such studies have employed a psychoanalytically-based, pathological model of machismo which is incapable of discerning normal behavior.
3. Generalizations about the Chicano family and machismo have been accepted without the benefit of empirical research.
4. Research findings which have failed to support the monolithic, patriarchal model have tended to be dismissed or attributed to acculturation and assimilation into the dominant society.
5. Social scientists have typically approached the study of ethnic families with an immigrant group, melting-pot model of race relations in United States society: this society uses the Anglo-American family ideal as the standard against which other family forms are measured and sees deviations from this ideal as pathologies or aberrations.
6. Compared to this Anglo-American, familial ideal, the Chicano family appeared rigid and undemocratic.

From the standpoint of this assimilative paradigm Chicanos were viewed as a curious anomaly, a group which clung to traditional values and culture (Mirandé, 1977). The authoritarian and undemocratic character of the Chicano family, moreover, served not only to stifle achievement and independence but potentially to undermine the American way of life. Madsen (1973, p. 48), for example, asserts that "Anglos believe that equality in the home and self-advancement are necessary to maintain the American ideals of freedom, democracy, and progress. Mexican-Americans believe that putting family above self is necessary to fulfill the will of God."

A review of recent research suggests that the dominant pattern of decision-making in the Chicano family is not male-dominated and authoritarian, as is commonly assumed, but egalitarian. Husband and wife share not only in decisions but in household tasks and childcare. Sharp sex role segregation appears to be the exception rather than the rule among Chicano couples.

Those who believe that the Chicano family is patriarchal and dominated by the cult of Machismo have thus been proven insensitive to the nuance and subtlety of Chicano culture. While the man is formally granted prestige and authority, the woman is informally honored and revered as the matrix of the family and her influence, especially in matters pertaining to children, is undoubtedly greater than the man. The male still exercises considerable control outside of the domestic sphere but his power is neither absolute nor unlimited. Although additional research into the dynamics of the Chicano family is needed before these generalizations are accepted as conclusive, there is sufficient evidence to seriously question the traditional male dominant view.

**Implications for Public Policy and Family Counseling**

In addition to theoretical and methodological implications, this new view of the Chicano family has significant implications both for the formulation of public policy and family counseling. Just as public policy on the black family was traditionally pejorative, either implicitly or explicitly as in the infamous Moynihan Report which blamed poverty on the black family, so has policy regarding the Chicano family been based on a negative and pathological model.

Some have presented an idyllic, romanti-
cized depiction of the Chicano family as a warm and nurturing institution that makes the individual confident and secure. The prevailing conception of the Chicano family in social science literature and public assumptions, however, is one of a rigid, authoritarian, male-dominated structure that engenders passivity and dependence, and impedes the acculturation and assimilation of its members. While such a view may not be formally articulated as public policy, its widespread acceptance has the effect of creating an unstated or de facto policy. The implications of such a de facto policy are counterproductive, because they would mobilize social welfare institutions, case workers, and counselors to counter the supposed negative influences of the Chicano family. Whereas the War on Poverty waged an overt war against the black family, this implicit policy wages a covert war against la familia Chicana.

If public policy is to be effective in dealing with contemporary problems encountered by Chicanos and other minorities, it is essential that the mythical, stereotyped view of the family be discarded in favor of a view that is not only more accurate, but is also consistent with the nuances of Chicano culture. A redefinition of machismo and the male role within the family is a critical first step in this process, since male dominance is assumed to be not only the cornerstone of the culture, but the source of much of the pathology found within the family and the Chicano community.

The traditional, negative conception of machismo is the view that the male is unencumbered by marriage; he comes and goes as he pleases, partying, drinking, fighting, and chasing after women. Since his power and authority within the family are unlimited, it is also assumed that he will frequently be abusive towards his wife and children, either by beating or otherwise mistreating them. A wife who is beaten or abused, however, should accept her punishment as deserved, or even be grateful for the attention paid her. Children may also be subjected to strict discipline, violence, and abuse, but they would never protest or challenge the actions of the patriarch.

Abuse is not limited to physical excesses and may extend to other areas as well. The macho is said to be selfish and hedonistic, concerned more with his own welfare, pleasure, and reputation than with the welfare of his family. He would not think twice about wasting money or badly needed resources on women, liquor, or gambling. The essence of machismo, according to this pathological model, is thus irresponsibility. The hedonistic, sex-starved, irresponsible macho pales in comparison to his counterpart—the thrifty, thoughtful, virtuous, and responsible Anglo-American paternal ideal.

There is a sharp discrepancy between this stereotyped, negative view of the macho and his role within the family, and the view that emerges from the empirical research reviewed in this paper. Such research is unequivocal in its rejection of the authoritarian, patriarchal model. Family counselors and persons who formulate public policy would do well to recognize that relations within the Chicano family are much less rigid and authoritarian than we have been led to believe. The pattern of husband-wife decision-making and action-taking appears to be basically egalitarian.

The behavioral manifestation of egalitarianism should not obscure, however, the normative deference and respect formally accorded the father. That the father is recognized as titular head of the household goes without saying, but this does not mean that his power is unlimited or that he is free to come and go as he pleases or to abuse his wife and children. Those who see the male as "lord and master" of the household and the woman as a quiet, saintly, submissive creature fail to grasp the nuances of Chicano culture. A woman may defer to her husband in public or express reluctance in engaging strangers without first consulting him; but this does not mean that she is powerless or weak. In familial matters her influence is, in fact, as great if not greater than her husband's.

In summary, the fact that irresponsibility has emerged as a critical component of machismo is ironic, because it constitutes a grave distortion of the traditional Mexican meaning of the concept. Being responsible and providing for one's family are critical in defining one's manhood. A man who abused,
neglected, or otherwise failed to provide for his family would surely lose the respect of his family and of the community as well. The image of the father as a harsh disciplinarian and as an abusive and irresponsible parent also does not mesh well with depictions of the father provided by Chicanos themselves. Sosa Riddell (1974), for example, refutes the stereotyped view of the male:

Within each of our memories there is the Image of a father who worked long hours, suffered to keep his family alive, united, and who struggled to maintain his dignity. Such a man had little time for concern over his “masculinity.” Certainly he did not have ten children because of his machismo, but because he was a human being, poor, and without “access” to birth control. (p. 156)

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