

HISTORY

How *Machismo* Got Its Spurs—in English: Social Science, Cold War Imperialism, and the Ethnicization of Hypermasculinity

Benjamin Arthur Cowan

University of California, San Diego, US
bacowan@ucsd.edu

This article seeks to shift the framework of decades-long debates on the nature and significance of *machismo*, debunking the commonly held notion that the word describes a primordial Iberian and Ibero-American phenomenon. I trace the emergence of *machismo* as an English-language term, arguing that a tradition of unself-consciously ethnocentric scholarship in the 1940s and 1950s enabled the word's entrance, by the 1960s, into popular sources. In fact, *machismo* was rather a neologism in Spanish, but midcentury US scholarship presumed the category's empirical validity and applied to it to perceived problems in the "Latin" world. Much of *machismo*'s linguistic purchase—the reason it has become a global shorthand for hypermasculinity—stemmed from mid to late twentieth-century anxieties about hemispheric security, the Cold War, immigration, and overpopulation, particularly vis-à-vis the United States' near neighbors, Mexico and Puerto Rico. I have sought out the word's earliest appearances in various English-language media (books, scholarly articles, newspapers, magazines, and television) and explained how it has long escaped scrutiny as a construct in and of itself. As a result, *machismo* has resisted the most earnest and well-intentioned of challenges to its scholarly primacy and remains a pathologizing point of departure in approaches to Latin American gender systems.

"Machismo"—the Latin American cult of virility that so often overpowers sweet reasonableness in moments of high passion
—*Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 1969

On November 13, 1969, television stations across the United States aired a new episode of *Ironside*, starring Raymond Burr as the eponymous chief detective. Known for delivering hard-hitting, timely dramatizations of controversial themes, *Ironside* tracked into uncharted territory with this installment, entitled "The Machismo Bag." The episode's reliance on stereotype—the wise, paternalistic constancy of Burr's character, contrasted with the belligerent, juvenile volatility of the Chicano dissidents under investigation—would have constituted familiar terrain for viewers. Yet the titular term *machismo* lay at something of a crossroads in terms of usage and recognizability.¹ Over the course of a decade, this word had trickled into English popular usage, but it remained unfamiliar enough that scriptwriters felt compelled to define it. Referring to the Chicano militants' dangerous "machismo bag," the junior, younger, debatably hip Detective Brown explains to his mystified boss: "*Machismo*. It's a word often heard among Spanish-speaking people. Especially those raised in the old-country tradition. It means 'manhood.'" "The Machismo Bag" thus introduced *machismo* (word and concept) as an exotic, ethnicized hypermasculinity that fueled the pathology and violence of the plot. In the episode, a Chicano youth rages against his father's failed masculinity and consequently turns to rebellion, delinquency, and terrorism, going so far as to announce, in a standoff, "I'm the macho here!"

While we cannot know how viewers received this blunt message in 1969, the use of *machismo* in the show's title, its painstaking definition in the script, and its application to contemporary problems furnish insight into the ways in which *machismo* was emerging as an anglophone word and set of concepts. The word has

¹ I have used italics to indicate when I am referring to *machismo* as a word. I do not intend this to imply foreignness; instead, I argue that usage in English has granted the word much of its power.

a relatively short history in Spanish and an even shorter history in English; yet, as I contend here, the latter history has enabled and governed the global, multilingual purchase of the term.² In this essay I trace that critical anglophone emergence. First, and most broadly, I argue that insight into *machismo's* ascendancy in English—examination of where and how the word attained its current primacy—is necessary to break an endless cycle of scholarly wrestling with the significance, validity, and utility of machismo as a concept. Second, I show that *machismo* made its greatest gains as a term of English-language scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s. Presuming its own empirical superiority vis-à-vis supposed machismo, this scholarship inevitably fulfilled researchers' expectations, and in doing so produced the term for authoritative entrée in popular lexicons thereafter. Third, in excavating the history of the word and the ideas it evokes, I argue that *machismo*, as it has been deployed since the mid-twentieth century, emerged in English as an ethnicized construction of hypermasculinity, forged and maintained at the nexus of social science, popular culture, racism, and empire. I explain this deployment—and *machismo's* rise as a global epithet—as the result of social scientific, and later popular, anxieties about immigration, overpopulation, security, race, and public health.

If *machismo* flowed uneasily and awkwardly from scriptwriters' pens and across US television screens in 1969, it has come a long way since then. Academicians played no small part in this, from the 1940s onward. Manifold studies of machismo, in several disciplines and countless Latin American communities, have made the word a focal point for gender study in the region. Beyond Latin America, moreover, research on masculinity has adopted machismo as a foundational paradigm.³ I do not mean to cast summary judgment on gender studies in Latin America; indeed, a venerable tradition of historicizing gender has taken much more nuanced, contextualized approaches to patriarchy, honor, shame, masculinity, and other critical categories of analysis.⁴ Yet *machismo* does inhabit a niche in the broader universe of scholarship on gender in Latin America; even those who seek to downplay or critique it seem obliged at least to address it. In a sense, research on machismo seems self-replicating. Over the course of the last four decades, scholars have investigated machismo as stigma; its realities and unrealities; its relationships with race and sexuality; its role among immigrants to the United States; its effects on Latin American women and, later, men themselves; and its function in religious settings, among different classes, and in various age groups.⁵ A singular machismo has become various machismos, difficult to define and nearly impossible to delimit. Conceptually, machismo grows richer and more complex with each new investigation of it.

Machismo, however, is not simply a complex, critical element of gender systems in some Latin American communities. English speakers now use the word commonly, in a seemingly infinite menagerie of references to masculinity. Defined by Mexican dictionaries, as late as 1959, as something of an obscenity (*vulgarismo grosero*), the word has made its way into the *New York Times*, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Joan Jett and the Blackhearts' "Machismo," and the expressions of countless popular and scholarly pundits (Santamaria 1959, 677). Sociologist Alfredo Mirandé (1997, 66) noted such broad appropriation twenty years ago in his landmark *Hombres y Machos*: "while traditionally . . . associated with Mexican or Latino culture, the word has recently been incorporated into American popular culture, so much so that it is now widely used to describe everything from rock stars . . . to burritos." Certainly the 1990s saw *machismo* used in just the ways Mirandé indicates, but how "recent" could this incorporation have been in 1997, decades after *machismo* first appeared in such popular forums? Popular magazines had used the word as early as 1963, and the *Washington Post* a decade before that. What do we learn from those earlier usages? How did the word reach the heights of English vogue it has achieved today? The timing and the more general provenance

² As Matthew Gutmann (1996, 224; 2000, 164), among others, has indicated, the sources of the word *machismo* are unclear in Spanish. While many who discuss machismo point to Samuel Ramos as a font, his 1934 *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* did not actually use the term; nor did the *corridos* indicated by Vicente Mendoza (1962) as the word's parent medium. The most authoritative source on the subject, Américo Paredes (1967), attributes the emergence of *machismo* in Spanish popular usage to a combination of circumstances including both late (1940s) Mexican revolutionary *corridos* and the presidential campaign slogan of Manuel Ávila Camacho ("Ca . . . macho!"). See also Carlos Monsiváis (1981, 103–109).

³ See Gilmore (1990); Connell and Messerschmidt (2005).

⁴ Any list purporting to be complete would overwhelm this space, but examples of such worthy literature include Arrom (1985); Lavrin (1992); Twinam (1999); Putnam (2003); Klubock (1998); Caulfield, Putnam, and Chambers (2005); Santos (2012); Frazier, Montoya, and Hurtig (2002); Besse (1996); and Findlay (1999). In spite of this bibliography of excellent work, it is worth noting that debates remain, in major scholarship, about the authenticity of machismo. Sylvia Chant and Nikki Craske's important volume *Gender in Latin America* insists that "stereotypes usually have some grounding in practice" and that a special cult of exaggerated masculinity can thus be presumed to pertain more to Latin America than to anywhere else (2003, 16).

⁵ This is by no means an exhaustive list of the ways machismo has been treated academically. See, for example, Stevens (1965, 1973), Dealy (1977), Gutmann (1996), Mirandé (1997, 1977), Lancaster (1994, 1998), Carrier (1995), Briggs (2002), Brusco (1995), Barbieri (1990), Limón (1994), Bastos (1997), Fuller (1997), Valdés and Olavarría (1998), Ramírez (2008), Irwin (2003), Girman (2004), Del Priore (1988).

of *machismo* as an English word remains unknown and generally unmentioned. How, when, and for what reasons did *machismo* enter English vocabularies?

Answering these questions is essential to understanding how the word developed its historical significance and contemporary prevalence. As I demonstrate below, in the two decades before “The Machismo Bag” aired, anglophone scholars propagated the term; following their lead, US popular sources picked up *machismo* and laid the foundations for its commonplace usage in years to come.⁶ In the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, social scientists and public health authorities in the United States pathologized machismo as the source of problems within Latin America. Their scholarship also constructed machismo as a more hemispheric, geopolitical threat—one that transcended Latin America itself because Latin Americans, by dint of their supposed machismo, were (as a matter of course) putatively ill-equipped to resolve perceived threats of overpopulation and political precariousness. English-language scholarship drew vaguely on the work of Mexican essayists like Samuel Ramos and Octavio Paz—neither of whom, remarkably, used the word *machismo* in his early work. US scholars also encountered *machismo* in the putative expertise of fellow English-speakers who had spent time in Latin America (invariably referred to as “observers” of “Latin” society and “mentality”). Trailing in the wake of these academics, popular sources replicated and expanded the ethnicization of hypermasculinity. In the 1970s, popular media (like “The Machismo Bag”) increasingly used the word to register anxieties about the politics of race, immigration, youth, and radicalism. In other words, *machismo* gained purchase as an anglophone social science term, used to describe a variably imagined gender system that posed problems for Latin Americans themselves as well as for hemispheric (Cold War) security and development. US popular sources then took up the thread, adopting *machismo* often with direct reference to the scholarly sources, and as a moniker for dangerously emotive, alien, youthful, and/or immigrant masculinity—a destabilizing force that would generate dysfunction, rebellion, and disorder within Latin America and among the susceptible (by virtue of race, class, or age) on the US home front.

This article recuperates this lost history of machismo, both conceptually and linguistically. Combining manual consultation with optical character recognition, I have scoured English-language sources—books, scholarly articles, journals, newspapers, and magazines—to determine the time line and quantity of the word’s first detectable English usages. I used academic databases, digitized archives of individual periodicals, digital and print editions of books, broader databases covering many newspapers and magazines (particularly Google News), and paper editions of periodicals.⁷ Part of this work relied on digital searching for the words *macho* and *machismo*—an invaluable tool, but one which then entailed a secondary, painstaking search through the individual sources to verify the existence and nature of digitally recognized occurrences. I also manually traced references in footnotes and parenthetical attributions. Based on this research, I detail the two related stages of anglophone adoption mentioned above, dating the term’s ascendancy in English—and its transformation into an epithet—to the scholarship of the 1950s and 1960s and the popular culture that followed on its heels.

My reading of these texts suggests that *machismo* emerged in English at this particular moment for several reasons. Among academics, use of the term reflected a frenzy of anxious social-science interest in two of the United States’ problematically near neighbors—Mexico and Puerto Rico. Linked anxieties about overpopulation, poverty, communist subversion, and increased immigration lent urgency to sociological, public health, and psychological research on these places and on associated communities. Propagating the academic use of the term *machismo*, such studies assumed and concurrently reinstated the term’s validity. Presuming, in contradictory fashion, their own empiricism, they found what they set out to find: not *whether* Latin Americans’ gender systems were problematic, but *how* they were. The resultant social science did not firmly ground *machismo*’s meaning but it did grant the word traction as a means of stigmatizing and pathologizing Latin American masculinities. In fact, a community of scholars, traceable from the 1950s until today, perpetuated stereotypes about Latin American gender, social organization, and national and regional viability. In a certain sense, academics, from María Bermúdez and Gustave Gilbert in the 1950s to revisionists in the 1990s, took part in a process that has produced the university student of today, who comes to class ready to understand *machismo* as an organic shorthand for hyperpatriarchal gender systems in the Americas

⁶ By the 1980s, scholars had come full circle, dating the rise in English-language use of machismo to the late 1970s, and disregarding the word’s origins and its use by researchers since the 1950s (Sullivan 1983; Mosher and Tomkins 1988).

⁷ In this research, I drew on several databases, including the digital archives of major US periodicals—*Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Time*, *Life*—and the paper and digital editions of lower-profile newspapers like the *Village Voice* and the *Minneapolis Sentinel*. To locate and trace early usages of *machismo* in English-language media, I also used academic databases and Google News, which at the time of this research allowed me to search for instances by decade and by date. My information about the appearance of *machismo* on television came from *TV Guide* and television reviews.

and beyond.⁸ This has occurred despite valiant intellectual countercurrents pioneered in the 1970s and 1980s by Chicana feminists and scholars like Mirandé, Miguel Montiel, and Maxine Baca Zinn.⁹

When US popular sources adopted *machismo*, they followed the lead of those pathologizing academic forerunners, such that by 1970s, the word had become an English brand for any kind of negative masculinity. This development, too, reflected ambient anxieties about security, public health, and immigration. Like the scholarship it cited, popular use of the word reaffirmed neocolonial presumptions that “Latin” represented a racialized liability in the gambit for development and stability. Framed by the Cold War, *machismo* served as a way of talking about fears of susceptibility to Communism in Latin America. More important for the term’s English-language longevity, it became shorthand for anxieties about young people, race, radicalism, and security on the home front.

“Psychology of the Mexican”: *Pelados, Machos, Pachucos, and Academics*

Anglophone use of *machismo* first emerged in the work of researchers bent on answering questions about Latin American (particularly Mexican, Mexican American, and Puerto Rican) reproduction and families. In the 1950s and 1960s, a phalanx of US-trained psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, social workers, and vague “observers” set out to map the presumed problems of Latin Americans abroad and at home. Hitting upon *machismo*, these analysts precipitously, even heedlessly, propagated it as a kind of sobriquet for those problems. Drawing on national characterology (a species of hand-wringing, macro-level psychoanalysis then in vogue) and seeking new understanding of what anthropologist Oscar Lewis would dub the “culture of poverty,” US scholars loosely followed the lead of Mexican intellectuals Samuel Ramos, Octavio Paz, and a few others. It is important to note that Paz and Ramos, like Lewis himself, laid the groundwork for mythologizing Mexican hypermasculinity. In so doing, they highlighted previously naturalized gender experiences, enabling later critical frameworks. Nevertheless, the Mexican essayists’ characterologies, however pathologizing, racist, and classist, did not use the word *machismo*. Even the less exotic *macho* gained only a tenuous foothold here: Ramos’s *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico* (1934), often cited as the fountainhead of academic analysis of *machismo*, used *macho* but twice and carefully explained the word as a reference to “the male animal” (not a familiar, hypermasculine and human figure). Paz’s *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), endlessly invoked as the source of knowledge-seeking on *machista* and *machismo*, scattered fourteen mentions of *macho* across a small excerpt, and put quotation marks around thirteen of those instances, indicating the word’s relative unfamiliarity even in Mexican Spanish of the time.

Still, many (if not most) scholars, in the mid-twentieth century and since, have mistakenly attributed the term *machismo* to these two sources. This trend reflects the disconnect between diffuse, early attempts to diagnose Mexican patriarchal masculinity, and US social scientists’ subsequent crystallization of *machismo*. Most strikingly, where Ramos and Paz had ruminated on a connection between manhood, inferiority, and national neuroses, US scholars sought to systematize that connection. Confident in the validity and superiority of their own empiricism, these scholars eagerly applied modern social science methodologies to the perceived problems of Latin America. They adopted the word *machismo*, imbued it with scientific sanction, and thus produced a self-fulfilling, lasting pathologization of the region’s gender, sexual, and reproductive cultures. Spurred on by the rise of Cold War area studies, the resultant explosion of scholarship scrutinized “Latin” character via gender and sexuality—notably through the masculinity of those Latin Americans closest to home: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. Oscar Lewis exemplified the tendency to emphasize a “cult” of authoritarian patriarchy as an ethnically peculiar phenomenon, beginning with his work on the small community of Tepoztlán, Mexico. Lewis’s extremely influential oeuvre would attribute violent hypermasculinity to Mexican and Puerto Rican gender arrangements across national borders, rural-urban divides, and generations.¹⁰ In the 1950s, this genre of scholarship proliferated; articles on Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Mexican American families and sexualities filled periodicals like the *Journal of Comparative*

⁸ See Bermúdez (1955) and Gilbert (1959).

⁹ See Montiel (1970); Baca Zinn (1982); Mirandé (1977). See also Cromwell and Cromwell (1978); Cromwell and Ruiz (1979); Hawkes and Taylor (1975). For the Chicana feminist critique, see, for example, Sosa-Riddell (1974, 156). Claudia Roesch (2015, 417–419) examines an additional countercurrent: a subset of Chicano activists who championed “positive machismo” as a protest masculinity. This, of course, did not disrupt the construction of machismo as peculiarly Mexican in origin, and was a trope only taken up by some Chicanos.

¹⁰ Lewis did not use the word *machismo* extensively; and when it did appear in his landmark 1959 *Five Families*, he argued that the middle and upper classes in Mexico were more likely to display it. Still, masculinity was a central theme of his early work, as in “Husbands and Wives in a Mexican Village” (1949, 602), which opened with the gambit that “according to the ideal patterns for husband-wife relations in Tepoztlán, the husband is viewed as an authoritarian, patriarchal figure who is head and master of the household and who enjoys the highest status in the family.” See Lewis (1959, 17).

Family Studies, the *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, the *American Journal of Sociology*, and *American Sociologist*. Such scholarship likewise generated tellingly titled books: *Chicanos: Social and Psychological Perspectives*; *Across the Tracks*; *Psychology of the Mexican: Culture and Personality*, to name a few. These and other publications went beyond Lewis and even further beyond Paz and Ramos, making *machismo* a code word for sick, degenerative masculinity. Poignantly illustrating this valence, the word appeared in *Eugenics Quarterly* as early as 1956 (Kiser 1956, 58).

A critique of such research emerged in the 1970s, influenced by Chicano and black rights movements and by reaction to the Moynihan Report's "tangle of pathology" model. Championed by the likes of Mirandé (1977), Montiel (1970), Baca Zinn (1982), and Cromwell (Cromwell and Ruiz 1979), this critique rang with insight and outrage. It identified and sought to depart from the rote pathologizations and the "pejorative view" of 1950s and 1960s social scientists (Mirandé 1977, 748). The critique itself was both timely and necessary. Still, it was couched in terms limited to Chicanos and to family studies, and wedded to self-proclaimed empiricism as an academic cure-all. Mirandé and his righteous comrades did not—indeed, could not—investigate much of what was salient about masculinity and the appearance of the term *machismo* in this context. Little attention was paid, then or later, to the ways in which the word served to stigmatize not just Chicanos but other Latin Americans and ultimately broader collectivities defined by masculine alterity; or to the reasons for this literature's emergence and the lasting impact of its path to anglophone usage.

This critique, in other words, made signal contributions on several fronts and admirably resisted the pathologization of Chicano families. That resistance, however, must be broadened by seeking the underlying causes of pathologization and examining the centrality to it of *machismo* as a fascinating, *new* concept.¹¹ The wave of corrective research, though well-intentioned and methodologically thorough, continues to be limited by its very point of departure. Such research remains mired in the notion of *machismo* as a phenomenon more organic than constructed, one that must be addressed as a peculiarly Latin American (or more specifically Mexican) gender formation that can, in some way, be empirically measured, if only to disprove its negative connotations. Equally insightful and well-meaning studies of more recent vintage have acknowledged *machismo's* racism but tend to fall back on ethnographic investigation of its current usage among stigmatized populations, thus reiterating the limited, empiricist critique that Latin American and Latino men do not *always* conform to *machismo*. Such critiques can be strengthened and broadened by asking essential questions about how *machismo* came to hold the academic and linguistic sway that it did and does—how, that is, researchers came to expect "Latin" men to conform to, or be perpetually measurable against and answerable to, the putative standard of *machismo*.¹²

Let us turn, then, to the midcentury, anglophone social science I have mentioned. Why and how did it introduce *machismo* in this fashion? Why did the scholarly books and articles of the mid-twentieth century insist, virtually a priori, that a "cult of *machismo*" separated Latin Americans from Anglo-Americans, and that this cult generated gross distortions of personality among the former? Anthropologist Julian H. Steward, for example, explained in *The People of Puerto Rico* that "the male's life is pervaded by a cult of *machismo*. . . . Even as an infant the male child is praised for being *macho* . . . , which really means 'male animal' rather than 'man.'" (For the benefit of his presumably incredulous readership, Steward reiterated that "*macho* . . . 'male animal' . . . is thus used in a complimentary sense.")¹³ Such takes on Latin American masculinities reflected not only the presumed superiority of Anglo-American family and gender patterns—something that Mirandé, Montiel, Baca Zinn, and Cromwell would rightly have identified here—but also the zeal of English-language scholars to address "problems" in Latin America with the rationalized, technocratic eye of the modern social scientist. The questions of these scholars, then, tended to be shaped by forces evident in the work of Steward and many like-minded researchers. These forces included the self-assured presumption of the empirical

¹¹ Montiel (1970, 59–61) observes pathologization but does not displace *machismo's* primacy in Mexican American family studies. This approach does not question the presumption of empiricism nor the focus on masculinity, suggesting instead that previous research was not "scientific" enough.

¹² Where the 1970s wave of critique is generally credited with demonstrating "egalitarian decision-making" in Mexican–American households (Mirandé 1997, 16; Roesch 2015, 451; Ybarra 1983, 101–102), recent scholars have focused on Latin American and/or Latinx subjects' direct response to *machismo*. Josué Ramírez (2008) cogently declares that his Mexican study participants did not endorse *machismo*, but he does not investigate how the research questions that have guided such ethnography came into being, that is, how *machismo* came to be the category against which Latinx masculinities must inevitably be measured. Aída Hurtado's and Mrinal Sinha's 2016 call to arms combines theoretical insight with resort to methodologies that, like Ramírez's book, once again demonstrate that *machismo* does not define all Latin American and Latino men. The authors rightly denounce *machismo* as stigma and epithet but limit their revision to the contention that today's Latino men have developed "feminist masculinities" or "new Latino masculinities," which this study sets out to empirically distance from the "old" (*machismo*).

¹³ Steward et al. (1956, 436, 441); see also Mirandé, Pitones, and Díaz (2011).

problem solver, combined with US area-studies scholars' penchant for seeking out weaknesses in Latin America's security and development outlook.

North American scholars found those weaknesses, empirically or no. Secure in their own empiricism's power to disentangle any potential pathologies, these scholars failed to interrogate the idea of that empiricism; so, in fact, did Mirandé and his fellow critics. To none of these researchers did it seem possible that empiricism itself—like, ironically, machismo—might prove chimerical, or at the very least variable and impossible to ensure. By placing the empirical approach of the North American academy on a pedestal, the academics who introduced *machismo* to English speakers sanctioned their own prejudices and stereotypes—sanctioned, that is, with the confidence of science, the idea that faulty masculinity lay at the heart of Latin America's problems. Thus Mirandé's and Montiel's critique, however worthwhile, must ultimately go further; rather than pointing out that inherent, inescapable biases are at work in such study, Mirandé and Montiel argue that their predecessors simply did not approach machismo *empirically enough*. The critique, in other words, gets bogged down in a circular "more-empirical-than-thou," in lieu of a challenge to the framework that generated English adoption of *machismo*, or to the idea that scientific approaches can seamlessly unlock categories like machismo, defusing inherent ethnocentrism.

Gordon Hewes's 1954 essay in the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* exemplifies the tendentious empiricism of midcentury Latin Americanist social scientists. Introducing himself as a representative of "modern anthropological thinking" and thus neither racially nor "ethnocentrically biased," Hewes noted the surge in "national characterology" studies, sparked by the "exigencies of war and cold war." Latin America, Hewes contended, needed these studies, performed by the "modern" social scientists who had but recently begun to "affect" the field. Despite late "advances" toward legitimate social science, he lamented, "the study of Mexican national character remains primarily in the hands of philosophers and essayists," like Ramos and Paz. Thankfully, some "influence of psychoanalysis and the social sciences" had now arrived and this should "yield very valuable results." These results not yet forthcoming, however, Hewes drew on a smattering of Mexican intellectuals (Ramos, Carlos M. Velasco Gil, José E. Iturriaga, Xavier Tavera Alfaro, Leopoldo Zea) and North American anthropologists (notably Oscar Lewis) to paint a picture of "the Mexican" as a *pelado* or *macho*, "irrational," dependent on "the fiction of his enormous virility," characterized by "phallic obsession" and "extravagant obscenity." Using the word *machismo*—which neither Ramos nor Paz's *Laberinto* had used—Hewes concluded that alcoholism, poverty, and overpopulation were the harvest reaped from this characteristic: "Wracked by doubts of his personal worth, and under the constant strain of defending his hypermasculinity or *machismo*, he finds solace in tequila, mescal, rum, or if he can afford it, whiskey." Hewes added that further "scientific description . . . should improve our understanding of the Mexican people," a key step in such dubious times, as "the Mexicans are not only the permanent southern neighbors of the United States, but are a significant ethnic minority within our boundaries" (1954, 209, 218–222, 223).

"Scientific description," then, would bring the benefit of empiricism to the study of Latin America (and Latin Americans)—and yet Hewes had already outlined the conclusions of such descriptions. Preoccupied with the effect of Latin America's presumed pathologies on the United States, and explicitly acknowledging concern about the region's Cold War security, scientists like Hewes endeavored to find out not whether Latin Americans were pathologically irrational, macho, and phallic/alcoholic/prolific, but why (or how) they were. Hence sociologist Nathan Whetten, in his 1948 *Rural Mexico*, put forth the unqualified assertion that corruption and political disarray—indeed, "crisis," according to Whetten—stemmed from "authentic Mexican *machismo* (masculinity)" ([1948] 1969, 544–545). Like Whetten, Orrin E. Klapp made conclusions about machismo and Mexican instability based on informal interviews and a dalliance in Mexican literature, all the while insisting that in so doing he was empirically avoiding "inaccuracy" and "stereotype." Mexicans, he wrote, "stereotype Americans as *gringos* . . . but they have more realistic concepts of other Mexicans." Klapp spoke with Mexicans; hence, he concluded, his findings would accurately "reflect national character." That character, he found, was bound up in "types," the foremost of which was "a man who is *muy macho* (strong, virile, valiente, stubborn, fuerte), a man's man." To Klapp's eye, "the macho theme" lent Mexicans a predilection for "rash things," "rebeldía," and "revolutionaries and Communists." While he acknowledged the speculative nature of his assertion that "perhaps our own [US] . . . attachment to capitalism is a little stronger," Klapp nevertheless did not question his conclusions about Mexican character. "One [could] hardly look at salient types," he averred, without concluding that "emphasis on courage and virility (macho) and contempt for the sissy (marica)" defined the "Mexican ethos" (1964: 404–405, 411).

A sort of vicious-circular logic was at work here: setting out with questions about what was "wrong" with Latin America, these scholars reflected the need to answer such questions "empirically," in the same culturally and academically imperialistic terms that justified their collective project. This need generated research that

insisted on empiricism even as it habitually relied on the predetermined impressions of Klapp, Hewes, and Whetten or—shakier still—on the prognostications of an ill-defined cadre of “observers” of all things Latin. Indeed, though Klapp and some like-minded researchers sought to limit their interlocutors to denizens of the subject country, nonnative “observers” quickly came to form a backbone of information on machismo, male sexuality, and national character. Economist Raymond Vernon’s 1963 classic *The Dilemma of Mexico’s Development*, for example, affirmed the ongoing presence of retrograde *caciquismo* and machismo in Mexico by citing “seasoned observers of Mexican culture.” Continuing to insist on machismo’s centrality, Vernon appeared frustrated with the incalculability of his subject—a dizzying morass for even the most methodical of empiricists—which forced him to acknowledge that “Mexicans, like any other people, are made up of a wide range of temperaments, outlooks, and subcultures.” Yet the ever-ready observers provided an escape valve from this complexity: “Still,” he added, “considerable emphasis is placed by most observers on the role of *machismo* in Mexican culture.” Vernon proceeded to affirm the self-centered machismo of the “Mexican adult character”—something that made Mexicans generally unreliable, not only personally but politically and macroeconomically. (“Short-run planning,” he explained, “demands *machismo* more than it demands mathematics.”) Mexico might save itself “if machismo diminishes and the rational approach becomes ascendant” (1963, 159–160, 168).

J. Mayone Stycos, the late and distinguished sociologist, furnished further evidence of this reliance on “observers” among the self-described empiricists who propagated *machismo* in English. In the early 1950s, Stycos set out to investigate Puerto Rico’s putative overpopulation crisis. His accounts typified a school of research in which raced, classed, and sexualized North American anxieties colored social science on Latin America. Much of this anxiety coalesced around theories of “overpopulation,” in which high birth rates and low death rates in Latin America inhibited the population control thought central to public health and anticommunist development. Neo-Malthusian fears of a “population explosion” or “population bomb” proliferated among North American academics in the 1950s and 1960s, and Stycos joined the researchers scrambling to address the ersatz apocalypse (Desrochers and Hoffbauer 2009). As Laura Briggs (2002, 119–121) has expertly articulated, Stycos’s caricatures of Puerto Ricans as oversexed “grotesques” wrote neocolonial social science across women’s bodies, justifying US intervention in the name of Cold War “development through democracy.”

Yet much of what Stycos and like-minded colleagues had to say dealt essentially with *men’s* bodies and sexualities and stemmed from vague “observation” of Latin American subjects. Stycos, followed by a cadre of anthropologists, medical professionals, and sociologists, concluded that machismo predetermined dangerous instability in Puerto Rican society. Men, unable to control their machista drive to father as many children as possible, had overpopulated the island, multiplying the undernourished, undereducated, unsupportable, and politically vulnerable masses. Reflecting the presumptions of empiricism we saw in Hewes and Klapp, Stycos insisted on the importance of machismo—despite evidence to the contrary in his own research. Using “modern” methodology, Stycos queried one hundred men, asking “How does machismo manifest itself?” Only 5.8 percent of respondents answered that “procreando hijos” (siring children) demonstrated machismo—a sharp contrast from the 14 percent who responded that machismo meant “virtudes cívicas (trabajando duro, siendo fiel cumplidor del deber en el trabajo y en la casa)” (civic virtues: working hard, faithfully fulfilling duty at work and at home), or the 18.2 percent who saw machismo in “siendo honrado y digno de confianza” (being honorable and worthy of trust). Nevertheless, Stycos continued to blame rampant reproduction on “the tendency, on the part of men, to identify a big family with ‘machismo’” and on the idea of siring children as the “proof *sine qua non* of manliness.” Stycos’s intransigence stemmed, at least in part, from dependence on “observers,” so much so that—as he admitted in a footnote on the importance of machismo in child rearing—“Since observational techniques were not part of the present project, the reports of other observers must be relied upon here” (1958, 42n6). In a separate, coauthored article, Stycos acknowledged that “there has been much disagreement on the meaning of the term [*machismo*] among the [Puerto Rican] population,” and that there was some evidence for other factors in reproductive decisions (Back, Hill, and Stycos 1960, 570). Yet he and his collaborators still concluded that machismo was the key to overpopulation. “Expressions of *machismo*,” they wrote, “are noticeable enough to catch the attention of observers”—demonstrating, the article implied, machismo’s primacy even in the face of evidence to the contrary.

The “observer” phenomenon extended beyond Stycos to other key anglophone students of machismo. Beatrice Griffith, credited with the earliest English-language use of *machismo*, was in fact something of an observer herself. A Los Angeles social worker, Griffith worked with Mexican American youth in the 1930s and 1940s, then published her impressions (Griffith 1947). Her 1948 book *American Me* attempted to recuperate a “lost generation” of *pachucos*, whose “confused ideas about American democracy” Griffith found downright

alarming ([1948] 1973, 50). Machismo, according to Griffith, explained the rampant delinquency and violent behavior of her male subjects. Griffith would thenceforward appear in endless citations as (to quote one later researcher) “a sensitive observer of social conflict”; her ruminations on machismo among her clients would become foundational to the study of machismo more generally (Madrid Barela 1973, 38). Likewise, Evelyn Stevens, a political scientist whose 1970s work on machismo and *marianismo* is now canonical, went so far as to define *machismo* in terms of the “postulations” of observers. Machismo’s importance was presumptive, even obvious, she implied, as “foreign observers call it the ‘cult of virility’ and almost anyone who has lived for some time in Latin America includes its many manifestations in a list of distinguishing characteristics of the region.” Critiquing the notion of machismo as a classed, limited phenomenon, she retorted that “a chorus of observers . . . sees ramifications in every social class and in every country of Latin America” (Stevens 1965; 1973, 91).

Justifiably troubled by this “observer” phenomenon, Alfredo Mirandé astutely denounces it as a reliance on “outsider” views. As Mirandé points out, research on machismo in the last quarter of the twentieth century followed the patterns laid out in work like that of Stycos, Vernon, Griffith, and Stevens. The solution proposed in *Hombres y Machos*—reliance on “insider” perspectives like that of Mirandé himself—responds with understandable ire to the pathologizations and the observer-laden prognostications of the early literature; yet such a solution merely exchanges one group of observers for another and cannot begin to destabilize the empiricist presumptions that facilitated that literature (Mirandé 1997, 6).¹⁴

“The male animal in these regions is worse than the baboon”: Academic *Machismo* Makes the Leap to US Popular Media

When it came to English-language usage of *machismo*, and the importance of that usage for epitomizing stereotypes and subsuming anxieties about Latin American gender systems, popular sources soon quite literally followed academicians, drawing both the word and its authoritativeness from the scholarship outlined above.¹⁵ If Mirandé noted *machismo*’s ascendancy in US popular lexicons in the 1990s, the crucial years of its entry process occurred decades earlier, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. *Machismo*’s novelty in this period lent it unwieldiness, and its transition into English can be followed by tracing the facility (or lack thereof) with which popular sources used it. These were years when *machismo* appeared in printed English with widely varying levels of familiarity (evidenced by italics, quotes, apostrophe or lack thereof); when some journalists began using *machismo* as a global referent for masculinities, while the *Los Angeles Times* readers’ quiz could, in 1969, still ask: “What is the meaning of the Latin expression ‘machismo?’”¹⁶ One Chicago writer, for example, though she did not italicize or apostrophize the word in her title—“Machismo comes to Chicago”—did provide a small pronunciation guide next to the headline (“mah-CHEESE-moe”).¹⁷

Television followed suit with programs that sought to capitalize on the word’s vogue. *Ironsides*, as we have seen, surrounded its reference with heavy-handed dialogue; but mention of machismo also surfaced in television journalism. *First Tuesday*, NBC’s answer to *Sixty Minutes*, aired a special on machismo on December 2, 1969. The broadcaster’s synopsis demonstrated a desire both to introduce machismo to the uninitiated and to brand it the purview of Latin American men. The show would cover “‘machismo,’ the lusty, robust life style of Latin American men. Literally translated, the word means ‘he-goat.’ The program was filmed in Mexico, where the macho life style is strongest today, and includes interviews with three of Pancho Villa’s widows. Villa had more than a dozen wives without a single divorce. Around here that’s not known as machismo but bigamy.”¹⁸

Advertisers, too, got into the act, acknowledging that the word had some cachet. A 1969 advertisement invited women to “approve his swagger and pride” by purchasing “him” a patterned polyester shirt “that’s strictly ‘machismo.’” The ad (**Figure 1**) reflected the hesitant use of *machismo* at this early point in its English-language history. Writers put the word in quotes, modified its syntax, and applied it to a drawing of a white,

¹⁴ In other words, the researchers that Mirandé critiques certainly considered themselves empirical; if he and others (Montiel, Baca Zinn, Cromwell) find fault with the methodology of these earlier studies, they do not depart from the basic assumption that empiricism can solve the problems of approaching a topic like machismo. Mirandé substitutes a different kind of empiricism, with which we might find similar fault, based on his implication that only “insiders” (howsoever defined) can access cultural truths.

¹⁵ The quoted portion of the section title comes from James Reston, “Santiago, the Cult of Virility in Latin America,” *New York Times* (hereafter *NYT*), April 9, 1967, 188.

¹⁶ “News Quiz,” *Los Angeles Times* (hereafter *LAT*), July 20, 1969, F5.

¹⁷ Mary Daniels, “Machismo Comes to Chicago,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 12, 1970, E9.

¹⁸ “TV Today,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 28, 1969, A12.

A DACRON® AND COTTON VOILE Print Shirt by SPIRE, that's strictly "machismo." You approve his swagger and pride in possessing this handsome permanent press shirt of 65% Dacron® polyester and 35% cotton. Features long pointed collar, 3-button cuffs and its own solid color scarf. In an exciting TIE-AND-DIE DESIGN, in tones of blues, browns, golds, purples, with Apache scarf 16.00.

*DuPont's reg. T.M.

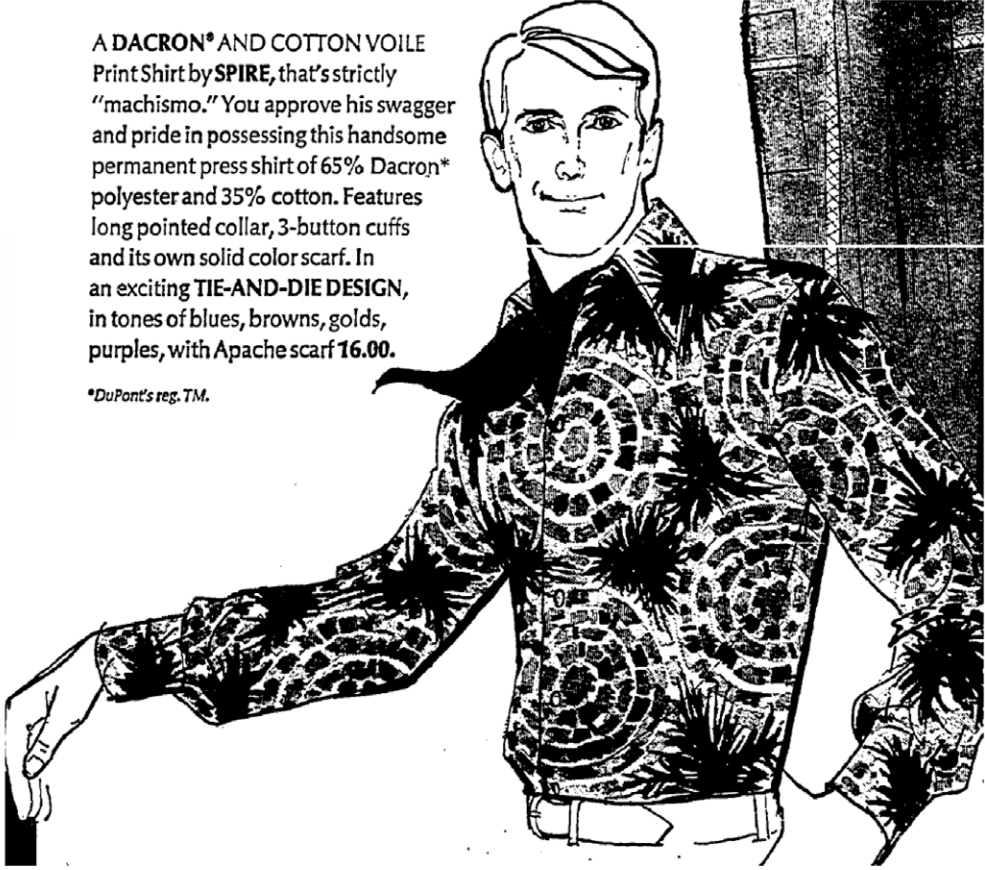


Figure 1: Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1969, p. 6.

blond man. Yet they referred to the “swagger and pride” that *machismo* connoted—a possible, if uncertain, reference to Latin American derivation.

For all the uncertainty and variable familiarity that these popular sources demonstrated vis-à-vis *machismo*, however, newspaper and popular magazine articles drew on academic usage of the term. The spread of *machismo* in academic parlance enabled its entrance into popular vocabularies. Introducing *machismo* to potentially unfamiliar readers, journalists cited the school of social scientists described above: anthropologists, psychologists, medical professionals, and sociologists who had already made the term a byword for the putative pathologies of Latin American men. Indeed, in the earliest example I could find of *machismo*'s use in a major newspaper, the *Washington Post* printed a 1957 article covering sociologists' work on “what the Pachucos mean by ‘making machismo.’” This oblique reference to Beatrice Griffith accompanied explicit mentions of the American Sociological Association and police sociologists Arthur Neiderhoffer and Herbert A. Bloch—indeed, their putative expertise in combating *machismo* (and thus delinquency) was the focus of the article and the reason for the word's appearance in the newspaper.¹⁹ Later articles would more directly transfer the academic pathologizations described above. *Time* first used the word in 1963, drawing on sociology for definition and provenance and intimating the hemispheric proportions of *machismo*'s potential liability. The article, “The Americas: The High Cost of Manliness,” described *machismo*'s harvest of political and personal instability among Latin Americans: “Whether involved with a mistress, a mishap or an election, the Latin American male is constantly forced to prove his aggressive masculinity by a compelling phenomenon called *machismo*. . . . It turns arguments into blood feuds, business dealings into tests of strength, and heroic revolutionaries into ruthless tyrants. . . . Sociologists contend that *machismo* is a hangover from the days [of] bloodthirsty Spanish conquistadors.”²⁰

¹⁹ “The Men from the Boys,” *Washington Post and Times Herald* (hereafter *WP*), August 31, 1957, A6. The word occurs in an earlier letter to the editor, referencing Griffith's *American Me*. Sue Birchfield, “Pachuquismo,” *WP*, September 29, 1954, 12.

²⁰ “The Americas: The High Cost of Manliness,” *Time*, September 6, 1963.

Sociologists, however, did not get sole credit for discovering machismo. Popular sources drew on a variety of social-scientific experts and replicated their ideas about manhood, political instability, poverty, and overpopulation. A 1968 *Washington Post* dispatch from Mexico City, for example, defined machismo and its effects “according to a leading psychologist here.” Paraphrasing this anonymous psychologist, the *Post* blamed machismo for “the Mexican’s love for guns” and concluded that “this ‘machismo’ seems to reach a peak when a Mexican’s pride is hurt, his heart betrayed, or his stomach full of alcohol.” Likewise, a *New York Times* article alleging that “cultural, migration and poverty problems” had led to widespread neuroses among Puerto Ricans in New York—“male anxieties about masculinity or ‘machismo’”—cited the work of sociologist Joseph P. Fitzpatrick and psychiatrist Robert E. Gould.²¹

Predictably, given this link to academic sources, anxieties about masculinity aggravating Latin America’s political liabilities and its alleged overpopulation problem (sensationalized by Paul Ehrlich’s 1968 *Population Bomb*) made the leap to popular media. Newspapers and magazines presented reproductive patterns in Latin America—the supposed cause of destabilizing population explosions—as a pathological symptom of machismo. *Time*’s early mentions of machismo conjured fathers with a “he-man obsession” who felt masculinity “is to beget children, not support them” (1963); or a Latin American “complex” in which “a man who has fathered only five or six children may be regarded . . . as something of a laggard, if not bordering on impotence” (1965).²² Similar mentions in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post* showed journalists replicating the academic linkage between machismo and overpopulation. The *Los Angeles Times*, for example, defined *machismo* as “the attitude that a man is weak or impotent unless his wife is almost constantly pregnant.”²³ The *Post*, in turn, quoted a US Senate Foreign Relations Committee report that defined “the ‘machismo’ complex . . . as excessive preoccupation with establishing masculinity,” which inhibited birth control methods promoted by the United States. Such inhibition, the report and the article intimated, would further predispose the region to “domination from Moscow, Havana, or Peking.” Indeed, the *Post* subtitle made this connection in no uncertain terms: “Senate Unit Warns on Red Influence.”²⁴ Other newspapers, too, linked machismo and subversion, often drawing directly on the scholarship. One 1969 article cited (unnamed) sociologists to blame “‘machismo’ and ‘Don Juanismo’” for “fueling extremist political agitation” in the Dominican Republic.²⁵ Machismo, in other words, caused the proliferation of Latin Americans, generating multitudes who could be expected neither to support themselves nor to resist the lures of the East.

“Machismo über alles”: Machismo and Communism in Popular Media

The popular association of machismo with subversion, like the academic work on which it drew, transcended anxieties about overpopulation. English-language press further pathologized the “he-man obsession” as an inherently destabilizing force that would predispose Latin American men—irrational as they were thought to be—to communism. The tone of the overpopulation-related articles above reveals the familiar Cold War perception of Latin America as a protocommunist powder keg; machismo undergirded this perception in a variety of ways. *Time* magazine’s “The High Cost of Manliness,” for example, contended that Castro’s machismo—“the whiskery look of virility”—had catapulted him to power in Cuba; and furthermore that Cubans’ machismo—the “compulsion to follow a macho leader” and the inability of anti-Castro Cubans to cooperate—granted Fidel’s regime its longevity.²⁶ Suggestion that Latin American (especially Cuban) machista volatility would cause faulty political judgment cropped up so often as to become a regular theme of the word’s English-language debut. In 1967, the *Post*’s John Goshko wrote that Latin American machismo explained what he called the “emotional appeal” of Ché Guevara: “In a part of the world that places a high premium on ‘machismo’ (manliness), the beards, fatigue uniforms, and other trappings of guerrilla warfare strike a responsive chord.”²⁷ The *New York Times*, meanwhile, acknowledged that the Cuban Revolution’s gender equality policies belied machismo, but quoted a Cuban film director to affirm that “it is, after all, the machista spirit that creates revolutionaries.”²⁸ In Los Angeles, *Time* magazine surmised that populist mayor

²¹ “Hospitalization Rate of Puerto Ricans for Mental Disorders Said to Be High,” *NYT*, March 26, 1970, 36.

²² “Venezuela: Illegitimate Family,” *Time*, March 8, 1963; “Population: The Problem of Our Time,” *Time*, August 20, 1965.

²³ Francis B. Kent, “Overcrowding Perils Latin American Cities,” *LAT*, February 12, 1967, D1.

²⁴ “Latin Trend to Left Is Noted,” *WP*, September 24, 1967, A2.

²⁵ “Male Ego a Problem in Dominican Republic,” *LAT*, November 20, 1969, C6.

²⁶ “The Americas: The High Cost of Manliness.”

²⁷ John M. Goshko, “Castroism Emerges as New Red Force,” *WP*, August 13, 1967, A1.

²⁸ Renata Adler, “Cubans Are Molding Movie Industry into a Pervasive Force,” *NYT*, February 11, 1969, 26.

Sam Yorty gained Mexican American votes because he “appeals to the Latin sense of machismo (masculine independence).”²⁹

Other journalists applied this thinking region-wide, locating machismo at the root of Cold War vulnerability throughout Latin America. In this they once again reflected the dubious conclusions of academics who, to echo Orrin Klapp, saw machismo as a source of “revolutionaries and Communists.” The *New York Times*’ Malcolm Browne wrote in 1968 that machismo had foiled US attempts to curb “the Latin military syndrome.” The region would remain susceptible to right-wing authoritarianism—and to left-wing subversion—so long as “the peculiarly Latin ideal of ‘machismo’ has . . . a special effect on military tradition.”³⁰ A year later, the *Washington Post* blamed “Machismo über alles . . . of which Latins are so inordinately proud” for hemispheric anti-Americanism, and for a “truculent super-nationalism à la Fidel Castro” that threatened U.S. interests across Latin America.³¹ In an ironic twist, *Los Angeles Times* contributor David Belnap urged more political rights for Latin American women—because, according to Belnap’s reasoning, women might temper machismo-fueled Cold War liabilities. In “Some Gains, Sí, but You’ve Still Got a Long Way to Go, *Señorita*,” Belnap cast women (from Christian Democrats to pro-coup agitators) as centrist ballast that saved Latin American men from the “extreme left” tendencies facilitated by machismo.³² The journalistic propensity to link machismo and dangerous revolutionism in Latin America ran so deep that one *New York Times* writer, in an article titled “How One Pleasant, Scholarly Young Man from Brazil Became a Kidnapping, Gun-Toting, Bombing Revolutionary,” expressed surprise that a member of the Brazilian guerrilla group Vanguarda Popular Revolucionária was *not* a quintessential macho.³³

“A Family Fight”: Machismo and Revolutionism on the Home Front

Major newspapers and magazines thus plucked *machismo* from academic sources and used it to indicate susceptibility to subversion within Latin America; but US popular media brought the word further into the mainstream as an idiom for understanding youth radicalism at home. Just as *Ironside* suggested that machismo underlay political militancy and gang activity, other popular sources unerringly linked youth radicalism—particularly Puerto Rican and Mexican—with machismo. This continued the trend of limning machismo as irrational, childlike, and liable to subversion, but also raised the stakes by bringing macho radicalism home and making it a particular threat to young people. Notably, this included expanding the scope of *machismo* by applying it to young, non-Latinx radicals.

Chronicling the founding years of the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), the *Post*’s William Greider wrote that the group’s anti-imperialist and even anti-American attitudes were bound up with “the Chicano’s machismo.” In his description of MAYO leaders, Greider went beyond any movement-based claims of protest masculinity, suggesting that the Chicano cause had originated organically in members’ “sense of manhood. . . . Machismo is to take on the gringo.”³⁴ A 1970 review article in the *New York Times* likewise tied political militancy to machismo. Nearly echoing *Ironside*, the article pointed to Chicano militants’ “kinship . . . to black separatist movements” and the ways that “cultural chauvinism (*machismo*)” had spawned “paramilitary cadres (El Tigre, the Brown Berets).” The reviewer did differentiate types of Mexican–American resistance—only to confirm that the distinction between the pacifist César Chávez and “La Raza’s violent chauvinism” was, in fact, machismo itself.³⁵ Several *Times* articles sought to explain the role of machismo among New York City’s Young Lords. “Right On with the Young Lords,” for example, noted the militants’ opposition to “capitalism . . . and the American military” and their commitment to socialism under the slogan “always until victory,” the phrase Ché Guevara used.” All this, the *Times* suggested, was an outgrowth not only of the zeitgeist but of “the mores and traditions of Puerto Ricans,” including “so unequalitarian a tradition as *machismo*.” Author José Yglesias quoted the Lords’ own proclamation that “machismo must be revolutionary and not oppressive,” tempering its pathological implications for sex relations while reaffirming its potential for rebellion and militancy.³⁶

²⁹ “Minorities: Pocho’s Progress,” *Time*, April 28, 1967.

³⁰ Malcolm W. Browne, “In Latin America, Militarism Remains Order of the Day,” *NYT* December 26, 1968, 14.

³¹ “Machismo über Alles,” *WP*, February 17, 1969, A22.

³² David F. Belnap, “Some Gains, Sí, but You’ve Still Got a Long Way to Go, *Señorita*,” *LAT*, August 18, 1969, 1.

³³ Sanche de Gramont, “How One Pleasant, Scholarly Young Man from Brazil Became a Kidnapping, Gun-Toting, Bombing Revolutionary,” *NYT*, November 15, 1970, SM21.

³⁴ William Greider, “A Family Fight Embitters Chicanos,” *WP*, May 25, 1969, 35.

³⁵ John Leonard, “Books of the Times,” *NYT*, February 3, 1970, 41.

³⁶ José Yglesias, “Right On with the Young Lords,” *NYT*, June 7, 1970, 215. See also Judy Klemesrud, “Young Women Find a Place in High Command of Young Lords,” *NYT*, November 11, 1970, 78.

Such takes might have resembled the appropriation of machismo by Chicano activists themselves; but machismo, in the estimation of US journalists, did not apply only to Latin American or Latinx radicals. US popular media extended this reading beyond even black militancy, connecting dots between machismo, radicalism, and white, middle-class youth. Strikingly, this use of *machismo* engendered early English-language uses of the word *without* explicit reference to Latin America or Latinos. A 1970 article on antiwar activism referred generically to “the violent *machismo* posture of the radical left,” but other sources were more specific on a putative link between machismo, revolution, and violence. The *New York Times*’ Peter Babcox implied that clashes with police at Columbia University and the 1968 Democratic Party Convention could be traced to demonstrators’ rebellious machismo. Writing of the New Left and particularly of Students for a Democratic Society, Babcox denigrated “the wantonness of The Movement’s male chauvinism—greatly enhanced by the *machismo* mystique that inevitably flowed from the Columbia and Chicago confrontations.”³⁷ *Time*, meanwhile, suspected the Weathermen of consciously trying to use “machismo” to recruit fresh militants: “The Weathermen desperately try to act tough in ways that supposedly appeal to street kids.”³⁸

Even media outlets of more liberal disposition shared this vision of macho posturing as an explanation for revolutionism, or at least for the promotion or performance of it. The *Village Voice* saw the antics of rock band MC-5, particularly their empty “revolutionary rhetoric,” as “an expression of machismo,” part of a broader trend of “male chauvinism” in bad-boy pop music.³⁹ Feminist Susan Brownmiller, though sympathetic to revolutionary youth, wrote in 1970 that machismo had motivated the white men of these movements. In Brownmiller’s account, the Latin American origins of machismo remained clear and had here inspired the hot-headed activism of New Left men. “The white male radical’s eager embrace of machismo,” she wrote, “appeared to include those backward aspects of male supremacy in the Latin culture from which the word machismo is derived.”⁴⁰

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, then, *machismo* had moved beyond Latin Americanist social scientists and emerged as a journalistic epithet for madcap masculine susceptibility to revolution not only in Latin America, but also among young white men in the United States. Even Malcolm Boyd, who shared Brownmiller’s and the *Voice*’s tempered sympathy for youthful protest, condemned “machismo” as the marker of fruitless, destructive revolutionism. While Boyd favored “humanistic revolution,” he denounced the supposed macho showiness of young activists. “Self-styled heroes . . . in the movement,” he wrote, “must desist from exploiting the cult of personality, allowing *machismo* to be quiet heroism in ordinary life situations instead of bravado performance on well-lit stages.” Here Boyd cited the example of “an urban commune whose members were former students, all whites, from families that were upper-middle-class” and who threatened, via “machismo,” to devolve into violence or self-destruction.⁴¹ As Boyd and Brownmiller make clear, *machismo* had become an idiom, even for those of more leftist persuasions, for talking about undesirable elements of revolution—nihilism and the frightening derailment of the young, white, best, and brightest.

Conclusion: “You Can Overcome It”

Fascination with machismo continues, in some ways, to determine its ethnicized applications in research; indeed, volumes of recent research, much of it rightly seeking to demonstrate complexity and mitigate stereotype, have focused on how men and women of Mexican, Latin American and/or Latinx descent respond to or conceptualize machismo.⁴² The term *machismo*, then, has come full circle—from a word assumed (by “observers”) to be used by Mexicans and/or Mexican–Americans to describe an endemic gender construct, to an in-vogue academic and later popular loanword designed to connote hypermasculinity generally (albeit always vaguely *a lo latino*), to, today, a term presumed to have inherent significance to people of Mexican descent, whom researchers (fatalistically, inevitably) confront with the word. One present-day researcher’s question—“Are there still machos?”—neatly articulates the presupposition that there once *were* machos, essentialized hypermasculine types whose presence or lack organically haunts Latin American and Latinx masculinity. The presupposition posits these machos as part of an illusory, primordial cultural

³⁷ Peter Babcox, “Meet the Women of the Revolution, 1969,” *NYT*, February 9, 1969, SM34.

³⁸ “Education: Hard Times for SDS,” *Time*, November 28, 1969.

³⁹ Robert Christgau, “Rock & Roll &,” *Village Voice*, July 3, 1969, 27.

⁴⁰ Susan Brownmiller, “Sisterhood Is Powerful,” *NYT Magazine*, March 15, 1970, 27.

⁴¹ Malcolm Boyd, “The Urban Activist,” *NYT*, December 5, 1970, 32.

⁴² I do not mean to indict the authors of these well-meaning and often well-researched studies; I merely point out a problem in the framework delimiting the field of inquiry. See, for example, Briceida Avila 2014; Stobbe 2005; Torres, Solberg, and Carlstrom 2002; Saez, Casado, and Wade (2010); and Newman, Carabí, and Armengol (2012).

formation generated in pristine conditions, outside the matrix of transnational and transcultural scrutiny and stereotype (scholarly as well as popular) that I have illustrated here. Lost in translation, so to speak, is the way that that presumed significance—both to the subjects and to the social scientists—was built across decades, by racialized and pathologizing usage of a term that as late as 1930s did not have much traction, in either language, as a way of describing Mexican, Latin American, or Latinx masculinity.

I do not mean to dismiss any and all scholarship that takes up machismo; in fact, I deeply admire and have long been inspired by much of the research done on the subject. Nor do I mean to suggest that machismo, word and concept, has only been wielded in ways we might categorize as imperial. If nothing else, the Chicana feminists discussed above are evidence of alternate uses of *machismo*, as is the “protest masculinity” of the Young Lords. Likewise, I realize that many scholars (from the humanities, arts, and social sciences) will justly protest that they interact with people in Latin America who use the word *machismo*. I do not say that this is wrong or chauvinistic; nor do I wish to imply that these scholars are mistaken or that their experiences are anomalous. Rather, I am suggesting that the word’s prevalence, in Latin America and beyond, does not reflect a timeless reality of gender structure or (much less) the fault lines between different cultures’ gender structures, but that it may, instead, reflect the impoverished language that we use to delimit those categories. The decades-old struggle (and failure) to define *machismo* demonstrates, as much as anything else, that this construct obscures too many divergences and complexities to allow it any lasting coherence. *Machismo* cannot bracket a Latin American gender essence; rather, the word continues to confound attempts to make it stand for such an essence. (This is something several excellent ethnographies have documented, in work that takes seriously the widely varying responses to the question, “What is machismo?”)⁴³ Instead, many people, with variable relationships to Latinity, both in Latin America and far beyond, deploy the word *machismo* based in a history I have tried to outline here.

As indicated by much of the material above, by 1970 *machismo* had begun to blossom into a known English-language referent for negative masculinities everywhere. While one journalist tried to find an Arabic counterpart for “what the Latins call machismo,” many others applied this or similar phrases (“latinesque machismo”) to various corners of the world.⁴⁴ Thus *machismo*, in English, simultaneously gained global significance and remained distinctively Latin American. The *Wall Street Journal* neatly summed this up in 1970: “I suppose we all have some of the Latin American machismo inside us, but it’s anti-intellectual and you can overcome it.”⁴⁵ (Appropriately enough, the writer warned of overpopulation in the United States and blamed masculinity in this case, too.) *Machismo*, then, even when applied to white men in the United States, be they reluctant vasectomy patients or machista demonstrators, connoted pathology and unreason, putatively shared with those nonwhite and/or non-US subjects whom the term’s loanword status evoked. Directly citing social scientists who had introduced *machismo* to English media, popular forums took up the word, making it a vehicle for mid to late twentieth-century anxieties and linking manliness, public order, and racialized pathology. The word’s salience, throughout its ascent to English-language vogue, correlated directly with its conceptualization, by “experts” and dilettantes alike, as a liability in the race for security and development.

Presumptions of machismo’s categorical validity have proved shockingly persistent. Scholars, even in conscientiously conceived attempts to investigate the term, continue to treat machismo as a legitimate, self-sustaining, empirically measurable unit of analysis.⁴⁶ A much-cited 2008 psychological study, for example, blithely defines machismo as “a standard of behavior exhibited by men in Mexican culture,” then earnestly seeks the essence of machismo via a “full, representative sample of Mexican male behaviors” (Arciniega et al. 2008, 19). A similar 2010 article cites “speculation” that Latino men “endorse more traditionally masculine gender roles than European American men” (Saez, Casado, and Wade 2010, 117). Again, the presumption is that machismo is a Mexican and/or Latinx phenomenon, pertaining especially and inextricably to men of these cultures, and that it can be both quantified and qualified by empirical study of those men’s perceptions and behaviors. Such study may (and often does) nobly aim to problematize the meanings of *machismo* and/or demonstrate that not all Mexican, Mexican–American, Puerto Rican, or Latino men conform to the rubric(s) of the word. Yet the premise itself reaffirms the notion that this word originates with and applies to these men. Indeed, the authors of the 2008 paper, following a time-honored trend, conclude that machismo does

⁴³ Such ethnographies have multiplied, particularly since the 1990s, but see especially Gutmann (1996, 2000).

⁴⁴ See Ridgely Hunt, “Move One Muscle and He’ll Kill You,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 1, 1970, 24; “Trials: Death Without Dread,” *Time*, March 14, 1969; Robert Cross, “The Tardy Bell Is Ringing at Waller High,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 19, 1970, 34.

⁴⁵ Ellen Graham, “Vasectomies Increase as Concern over ‘Pill,’ Overpopulation Grows,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 11, 1970, 1.

⁴⁶ See note 42.

define a peculiar, Mexican hypermasculinity, but that there is also a positive side of Mexican manhood, which should be referred to as “caballerismo.” Machismo thus exists in sociological, psychological, and pathological space as a category to be regarded, examined, and—in ongoing presumptions of its validity—reproduced as a natural, sensible, and autonomous analytical tool. All this, despite Américo Paredes’s half-century-old contentions that machismo and hypermasculinity were “almost universal” and certainly not “peculiar to the Mexican” (1967, 82), and despite David Gilmore’s tantalizing suggestion that “the machismo version of manhood” pertains to a global pattern of hypermasculinity (1990, 99).

Machismo, word and concept, is not autonomous or self-contained. It sustains a web of pathologizing racisms that created it less than a century ago. If recent research, however well-meaning and thorough, remains wedded to the construct of machismo as a genuinely Latin American behavior pattern, subject to empirical measurement, it continues a tradition of scholarly attention to and reification of the term. As we have seen, this tradition dates back to the 1940s, when English-language scholars used the word to ethnicize and pathologize perceived problems rooted in Latin America but threatening to spill beyond its borders. Most researchers have turned away from the shadowy “observers” who granted the term twentieth-century purchase, relying instead on current social science methodologies; yet references to Paz and Ramos as godfatherly sources of the terminology remain staples of the literature. The anxieties that generated midcentury scholarly and then popular deployments of the term have shifted, but what these deployments produced remains constant. I close by offering a definition that is part of that product: *Machismo* is a conceptualization of hypermasculinity presumed to be derived from an Iberian or Latin American cultural essence, and applied by anglophone scholars and popular authorities since the 1950s to flag, admonish, or deride hypermasculinities of variable forms. Today, these hypermasculinities can be non-Latin in origin and scope but are associated simultaneously with retrograde patriarchy and unarticulated stereotypes of Latinity by the word itself, now used as a generic shorthand for negative masculinity.

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Author Information

Benjamin Cowan is an associate professor of history at University of California, San Diego. He received his BA from Harvard University and his MA and PhD from UCLA. His book *Securing Sex: Morality and Repression in the Making of Cold War Brazil* was published by the University of North Carolina Press in 2016. He has also published articles in *American Quarterly*, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, *Radical History Review*, and other venues. His research interests include right-wing radicalism, morality, sexuality, and twentieth-century imperialism; he specializes in Cold War Brazil, especially the cultural and gender history of the post-1964 era.

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