

Latin America - Familism

Familism places the family ahead of individual interests and development. It includes many responsibilities and obligations to immediate family members and other kin, including godparents. Extended family often live in close proximity to each other, with many often sharing the same dwelling. It is common for adult children to supplement their parents' income. In many ways, the Hispanic family helps and supports its members to a degree far beyond that found in individualistically oriented Anglo families (Ingoldsby 1991b).

William M. Kephart and Davor Jedlicka (1991) claim that a large majority of Mexican-American young people comply with parental rules in the following areas: (1) dating and marriage within their ethnic and religious group; (2) having parental approval and some supervision of dating; and (3) complete abstinence from sexual intercourse before marriage. American-born Hispanics are less likely to insist on the tradition of chaperoning their daughters on their dates, and it is not known how well the children adhere to the no sex rule. Nevertheless, the research findings paint a very positive picture of Latin American family life that includes lower mental illness and divorce rates, greater personal happiness, and a secure feeling about aging.

Studies support this picture of Latin America being less individualistic than is the United States. In ranking the characteristics of an ideal person of the opposite sex, adolescents from the United States gave higher rankings to such traits as having money and being fun, popular, and sexy. Teens from Mexico and Guatemala were more collectivistic in citing many of the above traits to be unimportant and preferring someone who is honest, kind, and helpful and someone who likes children (Stiles et al. 1990; Gibbons et al. 1996).

Citing this material

Please include a link to this page if you have found this material useful for research or writing a related article. Content on this website is from high-quality, licensed material originally published in print form. You can always be sure you're reading unbiased, factual, and accurate information.

Highlight the text below, right-click, and select "copy". Paste the link into your website, email, or any other HTML document.

`Latin America - Familism`

Latin America - Machismo

Two principal characteristics appear in the study of machismo. The first is aggressiveness. Each *macho* must show that he is masculine, strong, and physically powerful. Differences, verbal or physical abuse, or challenges must be met with fists or other weapons. The true macho shouldn't be afraid of anything, and he should be capable of drinking great quantities of liquor without necessarily getting drunk.

The other major characteristic of machismo is hypersexuality. The impotent and homosexual are scoffed at—the culturally preferred goal is the conquest of women, and the more the better. To take advantage of a young woman sexually is cause for pride and prestige, not blame. In fact, some men will commit adultery just to prove to themselves that they can do it. Excepting the wife and a mistress, long-term affectionate relationships should not exist. Sexual conquest is to satisfy the male vanity. Indeed, others must know of one's potency, which leads to bragging and storytelling. A married man should have a mistress in addition to casual encounters. His relationship with his wife is that of an aloof lord-protector. The woman loves, but the man conquers—this lack of emotion is part of the superiority of the male (Ingoldsby 1991b).

Most women also believe in male superiority (Stycos 1955), and they want their men to be strong and to protect them. According to the dominant cultural stereotype, a man must protect his female relatives from other men because they should be virgins when they marry. Knowing that other men are like himself, the macho is very jealous and, as a result, allows his wife very few liberties.

In summary, machismo may be defined as: "[T]he cult of virility, the chief characteristics of which are exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in

male-to-male interpersonal relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relations" (Stevens 1973, p. 315).

Citing this material

Please include a link to this page if you have found this material useful for research or writing a related article. Content on this website is from high-quality, licensed material originally published in print form. You can always be sure you're reading unbiased, factual, and accurate information.

Highlight the text below, right-click, and select "copy". Paste the link into your website, email, or any other HTML document.

<http://family.jrank.org/pages/1042/Latin-America-Machismo.html>>Latin America - Machismo

Copyright © 2009 Net Industries - All Rights Reserved

Search content...

Other Free Encyclopedias :: [Marriage and Family Encyclopedia](#) :: [Marriage and Family Encyclopedia \(In-La\)](#) :: [Latin America - Familism, Machismo, Street Children, Family Violence, Conclusion](#)

Latin America - Street Children

Young children living on their own in the streets is a widespread problem throughout Latin America. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that more than forty million children are surviving on their own, without parental supervision. Lewis Aptekar (1990) claims that this is not as tragic and threatening as some claim that it is. His research indicates that the children are not so much abandoned as they are encouraged into early independence. This is a natural consequence of poor, matrifocal family life. Most scholars have seen it in a more negative light, however.

In one study by Paul Velasco (1992), in which 104 street boys in Guayaquil, Ecuador, were interviewed, the following profile emerged. The boys ranged in age

from eight to eighteen, with thirteen as the most common age (31%, with twelve and fourteen year olds at about 15% each). The large majority, 62 percent, had been on the street for less than two years, and on average they had a third-grade education.

More than half of these boys had seen their parents within the last year. This supports most research, which indicates that these boys are not lost in the sense of not knowing where their home and family is. To survive, each boy has one or two jobs. Selling and begging are common, but shining shoes was the work most often mentioned (38.5%). Another 19 percent identified themselves as "artists," with about half of them acting like clowns for money and the others being comics or singers. Few admitted to being thieves, though they are feared by the community, especially for violence and stealing car parts. They typically stay within a certain part of town and sleep on the sidewalks, or even in the sewers, to avoid harassment by adults. That they form their own little communities is exemplified by the fact that four-fifths of them go by nicknames given to them by their comrades.

The Colombian term for runaway or abandoned children who live on their own and on the street is *gamine*. There are five thousand gamines in Bogota, the capital of Colombia, alone. They are mostly boys (there are girls as well, but they have received less attention by researchers and the media), and they live in small groups, controlling a territory where they sleep at night under cartons or sheets of plastic. They work hard each day to survive, by begging or stealing (Bikel 1979). In a country with no real social welfare program, this is a significant concern.

There are different types of *gamines*, and a boy may sometimes progress from one category to the next. The first is the *pre-gamine*—this boy still lives at home, but his mother works and is seldom there, so after school he spends his time on the street, occasionally staying away from home for two or three days at a time. The second is the *neighborhood gamine*—this boy lives in the street but has not left the general area of his home, and may visit his family from time to time. The

third is the *street gamine*—the true gamine who has left his home and is learning to live by stealing. The fourth is the *pre-delinquent*—the older boy who, after about age fourteen, will become either a marginal unskilled worker (selling lottery tickets, for example) or part of organized crime—stealing with other boys, using and selling drugs, or both—a career he will carry with him into adulthood (de Nicolo, Irenarco, Castrellon, and Marino 1981).

But why do the boys leave their homes? Many possible explanations have been put forth: lack of love at home, child abuse, neglect of basic needs due to parental unemployment, too much free time and television, pornography, and escaping overwork by parents for the freedom of the streets. All of these ideas may contain some truth, but parental rejection appears to be the chief cause, and the family dynamic is based on the stress of economic poverty.

The predominant pattern resulting in a gamine appears to be as follows: A young man moves from the country to the city in search of a better life. He does not find it—the Colombian economy is structured so that unemployment is consistently and extremely high, creating widespread poverty. He does fall in love with a young woman and they get married. The husband cannot find work, becomes depressed, acts irresponsibly, and eventually leaves his wife and children. They can have sex, but they cannot eat (Ingoldsby 1991a).

Another man moves in with the children's mother. This *stepfather* (informally so, as divorce and remarriage are rare in Colombia) is not interested in the fruit of a previous union and pushes the boys away, generally when they are eight to twelve years old. Almost half (47%) of all street urchins have stepfathers. The child feels rejected and leaves for the street. The mother, for fear of her new husband, does not try to bring her sons back (Bikel 1979). To summarize, unemployment leads to poverty and desertion, which results in child abuse and neglect, which creates the gamines. Similar conditions can result in abandoned children in any culture of poverty, and not only in Latin America.

For girls who become runaways, the situation is a little different. Half of those who do are escaping sexual abuse by their stepfather. They generally leave when they are ten to twelve years of age. Tragically, the most likely survival path for girl gamines is prostitution. Girls are less likely to run away because the street life is more dangerous for them, and parents are less likely to turn them away, as they are generally more useful than boys are at performing domestic tasks.

Citing this material

Please include a link to this page if you have found this material useful for research or writing a related article. Content on this website is from high-quality, licensed material originally published in print form. You can always be sure you're reading unbiased, factual, and accurate information.

Highlight the text below, right-click, and select “copy”. Paste the link into your website, email, or any other HTML document.

Latin America - Street Children

Copyright © 2009 Net Industries - All Rights Reserved

Search content...

Other Free Encyclopedias :: [Marriage and Family Encyclopedia](#) :: [Marriage and Family Encyclopedia \(In-La\)](#) :: [Latin America - Familism, Machismo, Street Children, Family Violence, Conclusion](#)

Latin America - Family Violence

Spouse and child abuse are characteristics of family life that received very little attention in the United States before 1970. Leading researchers in this area have concluded that family violence is more common in marriages in which the male is dominant and in societies that condone violence in general. Another predictor is the privacy of the conjugal family, which could predispose Western societies towards violence, though it is widespread throughout the world (Strauss 1977). In one study of ninety different societies, wife beating was found to occur at least occasionally in 84.5 percent of them (Levinson 1989).

Wife abuse is consistently mentioned as commonplace in traditional Hispanic families. In one study (Straus and Smith 1989), almost one-fourth of Latino couples experienced violence in their relationship—a rate over 50 percent higher than it was for Anglo couples. This may not be surprising when we realize that the characteristics of machismo are some of the same ones mentioned in studies of spouse abuse. One is alcohol. Varying estimates suggest that from 40 to 95 percent of all wife-beating situations are ones in which the husband has been drinking. Another is male dominance, or the man's right to force compliance to his wishes within his family. The last is low self-esteem, often related to financial problems. All of these characteristics that predict spouse abuse are aspects of being a macho male.

Citing this material

Please include a link to this page if you have found this material useful for research or writing a related article. Content on this website is from high-quality, licensed material originally published in print form. You can always be sure you're reading unbiased, factual, and accurate information.

Highlight the text below, right-click, and select “copy”. Paste the link into your website, email, or any other HTML document.

`Latin America - Family Violence`

Copyright © 2009 Net Industries - All Rights Reserved

Search content...

[Other Free Encyclopedias](#) :: [Marriage and Family Encyclopedia](#) :: [Marriage and Family Encyclopedia \(In-La\)](#) :: [Latin America - Familism, Machismo, Street Children, Family Violence, Conclusion](#)

Latin America - Conclusion

The culture of poverty and the rejection by men of children not their own provides the context and tragic results of machismo. In fact, it may be that it is poverty that is breaking down the personal dignity necessary for traditional familism and replacing it with the excesses of machismo. Some evidence, however, suggests movement toward what Western clinicians would describe as a more functional or healthy family.

A survey of seventy-one married women in Panama (Stinnett; Knaub; O'Neal; and Walters 1983) revealed fairly egalitarian beliefs concerning marriage. Large majorities believed that women (1) should have an education of equal quality as men; (2) should receive equal pay for equal work; (3) are just as intelligent as men; (4) are just as capable of making important decisions as are men; and (5) should express their opinions even if their husbands do not ask for them, and should voice their disagreements with their husbands.

At the same time, most agreed that the husband is the head of the family, that the wife must obey her husband, and that the woman's place is in the home (even though 77% of the sample worked outside the home). This indicates a separate but equal attitude compatible with the familism construct.

Finally, Hispanic families that rate themselves as strong and in which couples are highly satisfied with their marriages emphasize that psychological factors—love and companionship—take precedence. Data collected from nine Latin American countries using Stinnett's Family Strengths Inventory yielded results that were virtually identical to studies conducted in the United States (Casas et al. 1984).

The most important factors for maintaining a happy family life were:

1. love and affection;
2. family togetherness;
3. understanding and acceptance;
4. mutual respect and appreciation;

5. communication and relationship skills;
6. religion.

Wives emphasized love and affection more than husbands did, and husbands were more likely than wives to mention the importance of religion.

Evidence also shows that a growing number of Latin American families value love and affection in the husband-wife and parent-child relationships more than they do the traditional authority-submissiveness approach. All of this bodes well for familism, which not only avoids the abuses of patriarchy, but also makes it more likely that Latin American families will not suffer the disengagement, in which individualism is more important than family, common in the West.

See also: [ARGENTINA](#); [ETHNIC VARIATION/ETHNICITY](#); [EXTENDED FAMILIES](#); [FAMILISM](#); [GODPARENTS](#); [HISPANIC-AMERICAN FAMILIES](#); [MEXICO](#); [PERU](#); [SPAIN](#); [VENEZUELA](#)

Bibliography

Aptekar, L. (1990). "How Ethnic Differences Within a Culture Influence Child Rearing: The Case of Colombian Street Children." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 21(1):67–79.

Balakrishnan, R. (1976). "Determinants of Female Age at Marriage in Rural and Semi-Urban Areas of Four Latin American Countries." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 7(2):167–173.

Bikel, O. (1979). *World: Bogota, One Day*, transcript of PBS television program. Boston, MA: WGBH.

Boremanse, D. (1983). "A Comparative Study of the Family Lives of the Northern and Southern Lacandon Mayas of Chiapas (Mexico)." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 14(2):183–202.

Casas, C.; Stinnett, N.; Williams, R.; DeFrain, J.; and Lee, P. (1984). "Identifying Family Strengths in Latin American Families." *Family Perspective* 18(1):11–17.

- Chaney, E. (1984). "Marital Status and Living Arrangements." In *Women of the World: Latin America and the Caribbean*, U.S. Bureau of the Census, 99–132.
- Chant, S. (1993). "Family Structure and Female Labor in Queretaro, Mexico." In *Next of Kin*, ed. L. Tepperman and S. Wilson. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- David, P. (1987). "Children in Despair: The Latin American Experience." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 18(2):327–337.
- de Nicolo, J.; Irenarco, A.; Castrellon, C.; and Marino, G. (1981). *Musaranas*. Bogota, Colombia: Industria Continental Grafica.
- Gibbons, J.; Richter, R.; Wiley, D.; and Stiles, D. (1996). "Adolescents' Opposite-Sex Ideal in Four Countries." *The Journal of Social Psychology* 136(4):531–537.
- Gonzalez, N. (1983). "Changing Sex Roles Among the Garifuna (black Carib) and Their Implications for the Family." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 14(2):203–213.
- Haffner, L. (1992). "Translation is Not Enough: Interpreting in a Medical Setting." *The Western Journal of Medicine* 157(3):255–259.
- Ingoldsby, B. (1991a). "Street Children and Family Life." *Family Science Review* 4(2):73–77.
- Ingoldsby, B. (1991b). "The Latin American Family: Familism vs. Machismo." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 22:57–61.
- Ingoldsby, B. (1980). "Emotional Expressiveness and Marital Satisfaction: A Cross-Cultural Analysis." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 11(4):501–515.
- Kephart, W., and Jedlicka, D. (1991). *The Family, Society, and the Individual*. 7th edition. New York: Harper-Collins.
- Levinson, D. (1989). "Family Violence in Cross-Cultural Perspective." In Vol. 1: *Frontiers of Anthropology*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Munoz, J. (1983). "Changes in the Family Structure of the Pokaman of Petapa, Guatemala in the First Half of the 16th Century." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 14(2):215–227.

Pollak-Eltz, A. (1975). "Household Composition and Mating Patterns Among Lower-Class Venezuelans." *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 5(1):85–95.

Stevens, E. (1973). "The Prospects for a Women's Liberation Movement in Latin America." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35:313–321.

Stiles, D.; Gibbons, J.; and Schnellmann, J. (1990). "Opposite-Sex Ideal in the U.S.A. and Mexico as Perceived by Young Adolescents." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 21(2):180–199.

Stinnett, N.; Knaub, P.; O'Neal, S.; and Walters, J. (1983). "Perceptions of Panamanian Women Concerning the Roles of Women." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 14(2):273–282.

Straus, M. (1977). "Societal Morphogenesis and Intrafamily Violence in Cross-Cultural Perspective." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 285:719–730.

Straus, M., and Smith, C. (1989). "Violence in Hispanic Families in the United States: Incidence Rates and Structural Interpretations." In *Physical Violence in American Families: Risk Factors and Adaptations to Violence in 8,145 Families*, ed. M. Straus and R. Gelles. New York: Transaction Books.

Stycos, J. (1955). *Family and Fertility in Puerto Rico, A Study of the Lower Income Group*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Stycos, J. (1968). *Human Fertility in Latin America: Sociological Perspectives*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Velasco, P. (1992). Unpublished study. Guayaquil, Ecuador.

Wiest, R. (1983). "Male Migration, Machismo, and Conjugal Roles: Implications for Fertility Control in a Mexican Municipio." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 14(2):167–181.

BRON B. INGOLDSBY

Citing this material

Please include a link to this page if you have found this material useful for research or writing a related article. Content on this website is from high-quality, licensed material originally published in print form. You can always be sure you're reading unbiased, factual, and accurate information.

Highlight the text below, right-click, and select “copy”. Paste the link into your website, email, or any other HTML document.

`Latin America - Conclusion`