

Men's Resource Center of South Texas August 2007 Column

What is a “macho” man?

By Emiliano Diaz de Leon

Machismo—the mere utterance of this word stirs up an array of emotions. For some, it evokes great male pride, and for others, it reeks of negativity and abuse. Growing up, Emiliano Diaz de Leon associated the word with one thing, wrestling. His favorite wrestler was Randy “Macho Man” Savage, and after watching Macho Man’s signature moves on TV, Emiliano would emulate them during matches with his younger brother and step-dad, proving that he too could be “macho.” At the time, this word “macho,” seemed to epitomize what Emiliano wanted to be — a fighter that was cool, powerful, strong, and in control. After all, these characteristics were not only being portrayed by his favorite wrestler, but they were being acted out right in front of him by some of the Chicano males in his own family and community. Emiliano was being conditioned to be a macho man, but what does that mean? What is a “macho” man?

Many studies have been conducted to answer this very question, but a wide range of conflicting responses still exist. For every connotation of the word “macho,” there seems to be a philosophical debate. The literal definition, however, is difficult to refute. In simple terms, the word “macho” means one thing — “male.” The phrase “macho man,” therefore, is actually somewhat redundant because to be macho merely means to be a male.

The clash over machismo occurs when people begin to equate being male with being a man. Boys learn how to be a man from television, music, movies, literature, and most importantly from the other men in their lives. As they get older, however, each man must decide for himself what kind of man he is going to be. Will he place drugs and alcohol before his family, or will he come home eager to spend time with his wife and children? Will he be the husband who beats his wife just like his father beat his mother, or will he treat his partner as an equal and share household responsibilities? Will he gather with friends to make racist, anti-feminist, or homophobic jokes, or will he seek to be understanding of those who are different from him?

Will he coax other young men to participate in chauvinistic practices, or will he serve as a positive role model, challenging traditional stereotypes? In the end, only he can decide.

For our wrestling fan, Emiliano, the decision came after much self-discovery. He came to the conclusion that he would embrace the idea of being macho — of being a male —without all the preconceived notions about what a man should or should not be. There's only one problem, though, with not following preconceived ideas. There's a lot of room for error when you have to figure out things on your own. So, although he has a clear picture of what kind of son, brother, friend, and husband he wants to be, Emiliano still needs occasional help and support from the men in his life to make sure that his picture remains in focus.

Every man should paint their own picture of what kind of man he wants to be, and if enough men paint with respect, then perhaps, a grand masterpiece of tolerance and nonviolence will be created in our communities.

Which kind of man are you?

¿Que tipo de hombre eres?

If you are still trying to figure out what kind of man you want to be, the National Compadres Network has developed a set of principles that serve as a guide for how to be a noble man.

Si todavia estas descubriendo que tipo de hombre eres, el National Compadres Network ha criado una seria de principios que sirven como guia de como ser hombre noble.

Principles of “A Noble Man”
Principios de “Un Hombre Noble”

- Is a man of his word

Es un hombre q ue cumple con su palabra

- Has a sense of responsibility for his own well-being and that of others in his circle
Tiene un sentido de responsabilidad para su propio bienestar y otros en su círculo
- Rejects any form of abuse: physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual...to himself or others
Rechaza cualquier forma de abuso: físico, emocional, mental o espiritual...a si mismo o a otras personas
- Takes time to reflect, pray, and include ceremony in his life
Toma tiempo para reflexionar, rezar e incluir la ceremonia en su vida
- Is sensitive and understanding
Es sensitivo y comprensivo
- Is like a mirror, reflecting support and clarity to one another
Es como un espejo, reflejando apoyo y claridad de uno a otro
- Lives these values honestly and with love
Vive estos valores honradamente y con amor

As posted on the National Compadres Network website: www.nationalcompadresnetwork.com

For additional reading on the topic of machismo, check out Muy Macho by Rudolfo Anaya (Anchor Books, 1996).