

MEXICAN CHARACTER:  
AN ADLERIAN INTERPRETATION

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This paper is concerned with the entire population that considers itself Mexican, excluding only Indians. Despite diversity, I believe most of this population share certain character traits which will be investigated below. The outcome will be an "ideal type" which, while not completely accurate for any single individual, is, it seems to me, approached by a large portion of the Mexican nation.

The pioneer work in the field of Mexican character is Samuel Ramos' *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico* (22), first published in 1934. Ramos isolated tendencies toward distrust, deception, suspicion, aggression, timidity, resentment, and dominance, and proposed an explanation in terms of Adler's inferiority complex.<sup>1</sup> All writers since Ramos have agreed on an approximation of the Mexican inferiority complex (8, p. 216), although not on the theory of the inferiority complex itself, but on a remarkably consistent constellation of traits which have been explained in different ways.

It is my purpose to show how these different approaches are readily interpreted and integrated from the Adlerian viewpoint resulting in a more comprehensive and self-consistent description of Mexican character. In the first part we shall present the views of Ramos and Octavio Paz, derived from national history and general historico-cultural considerations.

The subsequent parts will be based on empirical data from actual lives. I shall draw here to a large extent on the observations of Oscar Lewis and my own. Lewis, born in 1914, is one of the most influential and widely read American anthropologists of whose eight books four are on Mexico (10-13). His data were obtained from in-depth recording of family and personal life histories, probing into intimate and normally not discussed material, and on relationships with some of his informants covering 25 years. These data, largely still un-analyzed, are among the best anthropology has to offer for culture and personality work.

<sup>1</sup>In 1936 Oliver Brachfeld published his *Inferiority Feelings in the Individual and the Group* (5), originally in Spanish (4). It contains a section on "The Spanish Inferiority Complex" (5, pp. 264-268) including a cursory mention of "the Mexican aspect," with special reference to the working class and Indians. Apparently Brachfeld was quite unaware of the work of Ramos.—Ed. note.

## THE SOCIO-CULTURAL SITUATION

*Ramos: Inferiority Complex*

Ramos, 1897-1959, one of Mexico's major philosophers, was the leader of an intellectual movement he called philosophical anthropology which aimed at understanding what it is to be human—and especially to be Mexican. His description of Mexican character has served as a central focus of the Mexican debate over the Mexican. Ramos found that Mexican psychological traits "could be explained from the point of view indicated by Adler" (22, p. 9), especially the systematic utilization of his concept of inferiority feeling. "One must presuppose . . . an inferiority complex in all those people who show an excessive concern with affirming their personality, who take vital interest in . . . power, and who demonstrate an immoderate eagerness to excell" (22, p. 56). Ramos, of course, does not attribute actual inferiority to his countrymen, only that "the Mexican undervalues himself" (22, p. 9). And even this he does not consider a valid generalization for all Mexicans.

Ramos tries to show how the unsuccessful attempt at copying inapplicable European social and cultural forms has led to the Mexican inferiority complex. In this view many Mexican character traits, all of an antisocial nature, although sometimes seemingly contradictory, can be explained as ways of compensating for an unconscious sense of inferiority (22, p. 9).

Among the *pelados*, the "peeled ones," the most open expression of the sense of inferiority is found. The *pelado*, at the bottom of Mexican society (excluding Indians), is a person for whom life from every quarter has been hostile. He harbors a deep resentment which explodes at the slightest provocation to terrify others, protect his self-esteem, and to subdue his depression (22, p. 58). Since he has little actual power in life, he grabs at what he does have—his own sexual powers. Says Ramos: "He is like a shipwreck victim who, after flailing about in a sea of nothingness, suddenly discovers his driftwood of salvation: virility" (22, p. 59). Distrust is his most conspicuous aspect. "He lives in distrust of himself and in continuous fear of being discovered. So . . . his perception becomes abnormal; he imagines that the next man . . . will be his enemy" (22, p. 61).

Yet the same basic attitudes and positions of defense are found among Mexicans of all classes, only that among the more educated and socially favored they are more concealed and subtle in their manifestations. All Mexicans are hypersensitive to criticism and, at

the same time, practice slander with great cruelty (22, p. 72). The Mexican must convince himself that he is not inferior to others by devaluating them or by dominating them (22, p. 68). The result is that every man lives closed within himself, with a fixed gesture of distrust towards others so that no one can come close to him (22, p. 72).

Following Adler, Ramos believes that every man needs a measure of continual success. But, when ambition outruns external possibilities, continued defeat results, and with it loss of confidence, depression, and feeling of inferiority. Such a person can either lower his ambitions, or conceal the situation from himself, in which case self-deception and the inferiority complex develop (22, pp. 5-7).

Rather than facing his actual condition, however, the Mexican has continued to make an impossible attempt at living the life of a highly-developed Western culture, while attempting to conceal his inadequacy behind the façade of this culture (22, p. 19). This has led him to ever more certain defeat, further intensification of the sense of inferiority, and incompatibility with his actual condition.

The colonial era with its imposition of European forms had two main effects on the Mexican character: (*a*) it weakened the confidence of the Spaniard and the Creole (native-born person of Spanish decent); (*b*) it fostered inertia and immutability in the Indian. For the classes in servitude to the Spanish, work, industry, and initiative were no longer their own but were at the disposal of those who subjected them, with resulting loss of pride in achievement and resignation to poverty (22, p. 34).

After independence was won from Spain, a new dynamic minority with ideas of liberalism began to wrestle with the inertia of the colonial period. These new ideas were a second imposition from Europe, one with which Mexicans turned their backs on the past. The leaders of this period were Mestizos (mixed Indian and European) to whom the politically expedient liberalism of the French Revolution appealed. Thus Mexico became saturated with French ideas, ignoring Mexican realities (22, p. 45).

In investigating these trends in the history of the nation, Ramos succeeded in ordering much of Mexican behavior with the psychodynamics of the inferiority complex. But in building the causal links to support his observations Ramos did not investigate the lives of Mexican individuals or the development of this complex as would a clinical psychologist. Instead he investigated the history of Mexico as a nation.

*Paz: Lack of Social Interest*

The best portrait of Mexican character and culture is, in my estimation, to be found in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* by Octavio Paz (20). Paz is perhaps Mexico's greatest poet, and his work is literarily outstanding even in translation. In substance, and from the Adlerian point of view, Paz focuses on aspects closely related to those of which Ramos brought out; but unlike Ramos, Paz has no clear model behind the patterns he describes. Like Ramos he omits much of relevance and presents little empirical data in support of his theses.

Paz' main thesis is that the basic condition of Mexican life is solitude, and like Ramos, he seeks the causes of the Mexican condition in the general process of *mestizaje*—the social, cultural and racial mixing of Europe and indigenous America. In Toynbee's words, the Mexican is "in but not of" his society (27, pp. 377-378). Because of his solitude, the Mexican develops what Paz, after Toynbee (27, pp. 444-445), calls a "sense of sin." All men seek communion with others and fear its loss. Paz writes: "When the source of health—the old, closed society—is destroyed, solitude is no longer merely a threat or an accident; it is a condition, the basic and ultimate condition. And it leads to a sense of sin—not a sin resulting from the violations of some rule, but rather one that forms a part of their nature" (20, p. 206).

In less poetic language, the basis of the Mexican's character is a feeling of alienation and a sense of personal and collective guilt for this alienation. The Mexican lives in a culture which has lost its societal goals and common value orientations, and harbors resentment toward the external world and his own condition; but he has also internalized his frustrations through self-denigration. Under this scheme, the anti-social traits assumed by Ramos as part of the inferiority complex, are grounded in the realities of Mexican life. The Mexican's "sense of solitude is vaster and profounder than his sense of inferiority" (20, p. 19).

Interestingly, Ramos and Paz are really employing Adler's two major concepts, the inferiority complex, and "lack of social interest," Paz's solitude. In Adler's later writings these came to be almost synonymous, certainly interdependent: The inferiority complex produces lack of social interest, and lack of social interest (*a*) reinforces the sense of aloneness and thus helplessness and inferiority, and (*b*) creates the milieu which generates the inferiority complex in the next generation.

Paz is right that in a society without social interest, striving for dominance is adaptive. But does this alter the motivational basis of this behavior from that of the inferiority complex as held by Ramos? The adaptive aspects of Mexican behavior are best viewed as meaningful in a society dominated by inferiority feelings and lack of social interest.

### THE CULT OF MANLINESS

Although Ramos did observe that the *pelado* seeks salvation in virility, as mentioned above, and stated in the prologue to the 3rd edition of his book that "the *pelado's* conduct in compensation . . . corresponds precisely to what Adler has called 'the virile protest' " (22, p. 9), he did not examine further this major dynamic principle in the Mexican character and its course of development. Here we shall turn from *mestizaje* and history to Mexico's cult of manliness.

#### *Masculine Protest*

The inferiority complex is in Adler's scheme first and foremost the feeling of not being "a real man" (2, p. 108) in a culture where man predominates. Character traits which reveal an attempt to hide this feeling or to compensate for it, the masculine protest, are most significant in the total dynamics.<sup>2</sup>

Adler wrote that there are two unconscious assumptions of all neurotic goal-striving, in men and women alike: "(a) Human relations are under all circumstances a struggle for [personal] superiority. (b) The feminine sex is inferior and serves in its reaction as a measure of masculine strength" (2, p. 250). For the person suffering from an inferiority complex each social situation becomes a challenge—either you dominate, or you are, in effect, a woman. This appears to be almost the conscious cultural imperative of Mexican life.

Paz believes that every nation employs words and phrases that are the key to its character. For the Mexican it is, *chingar*, to copulate. The word has various derived meanings, all of which are violent, masculine, and imposing (20, p. 74). To *chingar* is, above all, to tear open violently, to violate in the most literal sense of the word.

<sup>2</sup>Brachfeld finds this to be true of the Spaniard also. "One of the most characteristic traits . . . is his *masculine protest*. The value of virility is over-estimated to a degree that would be incomprehensible in other nationalities" (5, p. 265). Ramon Sarro, professor of psychiatry, University of Barcelona, remarked that, in comparison with those of Freud and Jung, Adler's psychology seemed best suited to the Spanish character (23).—Ed. note.

To be the *gran chingon*—to wound, penetrate, and violate—is the masculine ideal; and the permanent “sin” of the female is that she is the *chingada* (20, p. 77). Paz believes that the dichotomy of *chingon-chingada* pervades all of Mexican life. “The Mexican either inflicts the actions implied by *chingar* on others, or he suffers them himself at the hands of others” (20, p. 78).

When masculinity is highly rated in a culture, a child may see the masculine role as an impossible attainment or despise the feminine role. In an attempt to hide his feeling of inferiority and womanliness, he may overcompensate through hypermasculine wishes and actions. In Western culture, traits connected with manliness—independence, toughness, “badness,” aggression, virility, power, potency, dominance, superiority—are expressed in the masculine protest as compensations for dependence, weakness, timidity, “goodness,” sentimentality, and tendencies toward submission and obedience, which are unconsciously equated with femininity and inferiority. Often, unattainable, childishly evaluated masculine goals develop and a craving for their satisfaction and for personal triumph. The consequent inevitable defeat only increases the original sense of inferiority and unmanliness, and the resultant envy, defiance, vengeance, resentment, and general hypersensitivity of character (2, p. 48). These overcompensating self-defeating traits seem to describe closely Mexico’s cult of manliness—*machismo*.

#### *Violence and Alcoholism*

The masculine protest if sufficiently challenged may easily develop into violence on the one hand, or on the other hand, a lapse into a feminine role, great anxiety, apathy, mental collapse, sexual insufficiency (2, p. 50), or alcoholism.

Of these, violence and alcoholism are easy to document in Mexico and in Latin America generally. According to the United Nations Demographic Yearbook (28), Latin America has the highest homicide rates of any major world area, with Mexico second only to Columbia. These rates are five to six times the United States’ rate, which is itself fairly high. Cross-cultural studies by Whiting (30) and her co-workers, and clinical studies such as those by Siegman (25) have linked violence to masculine identification problems.

Maccoby (16) reports alcoholism among almost one-half of the male population over 40 years of age in the Mexican towns he studied. Throughout Latin America alcoholism is probably more prevalent

than anywhere else in the world. For those who, like Foster (5), believe that the complex of traits, here analyzed under the inferiority complex, are explained by cognition of a closed, limited land-use situation, it is noteworthy that Maccoby's highest alcoholism rates were among the larger landowners, who could afford to be drunk more often because (drier) landless peasants work the land for them (6, p. 29 ff.). The relation of alcoholism to masculinity problems and mother fixation is well known (14, 26) and used by Maccoby to explain his findings.

Apart from these extremely high rates, the context in which such behavior occurs is revealing. Most violence in Mexico occurs in connection with drinking (16). Alcohol gives "courage" and thus heightens the masculine protest. Mexican men are highly sensitive and aggressive when drinking. Their sense of *respeto* is so easily hurt that sober persons usually go out of their way to placate them with flattery and gestures of friendship.

The relationship between the inferiority complex and lack of social interest is demonstrated by Mexican aggressive behavior at male-oriented sporting events. Soccer and bullfights are heavily policed and all male spectators are searched for weapons upon entering. Even so, programs are set afire, beer cans are thrown, insults—mostly aimed at young women and the officials—are constantly shouted, and sometimes young men engage in such depreciating activities as urinating on the fans below. The typical insult shouted at an official is "*Cabron!*" (Cuckold!) or more fully, something like "*Cabron! Te estan haciendo los tamales de chivo!*" (Cuckold, go home, your wife is making a fool of you!). The decline of social interest as the masculine protest waxes at these events is demonstrated by the frequent panics which occur at them in Latin America. A bad call by an official can start a stampede killing hundreds of people. According to widely accepted theory, panics involve failure of mutual trust and cooperation.

### *Male Weakness and Fear*

A close relationship between overcompensating aggression and underlying weakness is frequently revealed by the Mexican male. One of the most popular themes in Mexican music is that of the man who, after risking his manliness in love, is rejected and kills himself by drink or in the act of performing heroic masculine deeds. Frequently these songs plead for sympathy from the desired woman.

The seemingly contradictory dominance-submission poles of the inferiority complex show up in Mariachi songs which are often laced with haughty shouts followed by despairing wails, and the theme of martyrdom seems to allow the male singer to reveal a submissive victimized attitude toward women, which is normally tabu. As a martyr, the singer is admired rather than despised as a weakling, and his mood vicariously enjoyed.

In the Lewis books, the scenes of most violent aggression and pathetic self-abasement seem to involve male-female relations. All males seem to have a deep fear of female insubordination, and react to it either with intense anger—often wife-beating, abandonment, and attempted revenge through humiliation—or with a complete reversal of the male role, acting like pleading, dependent children to gain the pity of their women.

Jaime in Lewis' *Children of Sanchez*, for example, attempts to win Consuelo through hyper-male outbursts (always while drunk): he pommels on doors, brags about his other women who want him and don't reject him, about the men he has beaten, threatens what he will do if she rejects him. Finally he ends up in a total breakdown, crying for his mother and begging Consuelo to pay some attention to him and to pity him (12, p. 283).

Although less visible than violence or alcoholism, apparently a pattern of situational impotence is also common, when, in the later years with powers waning, the Mexican male's underlying fears of inferiority can no longer be suppressed (13, p. xxxix). But impotence seems to be common even among men under 30 when they feel challenged by an aggressive woman or by a woman whom they really desire (12, p. 177). It appears as if confidence is built up with more submissive, older, or less attractive women. Often these are the women chosen for wives, thus enabling the men to take as mistresses the more aggressive or desirable women who would be more damaging to the self-esteem as wives if failure should occur (e.g. Lewis's characters, Manuel and Jesus Sanchez, and Pedro Martinez). In the case where the man's wife is attractive or aggressive, he seeks a submissive or motherly mistress and sexually abandons the threatening sex objects (e.g. Lewis's characters, David Castro, and Agustin Gomez). The Mexican male, from Adler's point of view, appears to fear "demon woman," unconsciously felt to be his sexual superior.

Patriarchal Jesus Sanchez, for example, confesses a belief that Mexican women are more passionate than Mexican men, that it is impossible to satisfy them, and that he fears the shaming, magical and even physical reprisals of an aggressive, unsatisfied woman. Jesus suffers anxiety over his long-term, periodic

impotency, experienced even in his youth with his first wife, adding, however, that he does all right with a woman who is gentle with him (12, pp. 470-471).

Throughout Mexico it is a common belief that submissiveness and impotence in males are caused by feminine sorcery. If a menstruating woman should put some of the fluid into a man's coffee, he will then be completely within her power (12, p. 208). In Lewis's data frequent reference is made to the ugliness of the female organ; Manuel finds nothing more repugnant than the odor of woman (12, p. 43).

According to Adler, in adults suffering from an inferiority complex love aims only at victory or at not submitting to the "right" partner. The individual thus avoids actual love-relationships since he fears inadequacy: his goal in love is rather to enhance his own self-esteem by disparaging the partner. Out of an overwhelming fear of reversing the roles of dominance and submission, he wants to be lord over life and death, to inflict and to conquer (2, p. 268).

Tendencies to depreciate a woman and yet to have intercourse with her go hand in hand. What Adler calls "the Don Juan characteristic" (2, p. 68), zenith of the male protest and common among men suffering from an inferiority complex, is actually an attempt to escape from and to safeguard against "demon woman"—a wish to depreciate the woman by sexual intercourse (2, pp. 68-69). To leave a woman and to turn to another, to deceive her, and to feel that one woman is not enough, further safeguards against the feeling of being unmanly—"I am superior to woman; I win them, but one is not enough for me." This comment from one of Mexico's *machos* on the prowl shows the intent of his Don Juan exploits: "What do you want? To let you go so that later you can mock me? Above all I am a man, and you are trying to demean my manhood! Why don't you fulfill your duty as a woman?" (12, p. 441).

While Paz does not specifically present a case for the Mexican inferiority complex, he nevertheless claims that Mexicans of both sexes view relations with the other sex as essentially a struggle of combat and conquest. The Mexican in love always evades a normal relationship by exaggerating his own feelings; neither partner dares give of his real self (20, pp. 42-43). It is easy to see Adler's inferiority complex at work in Mexican love situations. Neither party feels himself fully a man or a woman; they overplay the roles with childish views of what masculine and feminine behavior *should be*, or they dodge it altogether. Above all, they hide their true, lesser selves from themselves.

Paz claims that to the Mexican it is not primarily propriety or Christian morality that keeps women and sex in seclusion. Instead, the Mexican regards sex as *dangerous* (20, p. 37). The Mexican woman ideally has no will of her own; she is inert and passive; she is to be aroused only by the sexuality of the male. The *bad woman* in Mexico is the *aggressive woman* (20, pp. 38-39).

The Latin double standard has to me the basic function of guarding against the threat of the aggressive woman to the males' over-compensated pretensions. It stacks the cards so that the game of conquest and degradation will usually be in the man's favor. Because of his idealized self-image, the man can not imagine any woman not being completely satisfied with him and reacts with rage at any hint of infidelity. At the same time, he would steal another man's woman. The double standard is born of the horns of this dilemma. The division of women into two distinct classes—assigning his wife, daughters, sisters and mother to those whose purity, hopefully, can be counted on—gives some security at home while leaving an open field for conquest.

Men who fear a real test of their manliness wish to isolate themselves from intimate, permanent love-relationships. They seek out prostitutes or mistresses, thereby debasing their wives; fixate on incestuous or impossible love relationships; or become homosexuals, thereby escaping women altogether. In whatever case, the desire is to exclude all worthwhile women, and in doing so avoid the threat of failure.

#### WOMAN'S ROLE

##### *The Female Martyr Complex*

The masculine protest has its counterpart among women, although here it is usually "transformed into seeking its triumph with feminine means" (2, p. 49). In a culture where highest privilege and prestige are connected with the male role, a girl's feeling of inferiority begins when she realizes that she is a female. The two main compensations for the feeling of inferiority among men and women are over-submissiveness or rebellion and defiance (2, p. 66). Which choice the individual makes depends upon his training and the opportunities presented to him for successfully meeting his situation. A girl is usually lead to over-submissiveness, but like the male she may change completely in her reaction from one to the other if the oppor-

tunities change. In either case, the goal is to gain control and superiority (2, p. 288).

Adler mentions a typical form of over-submissive compensation—the masochistic tendency to submit and to suffer at the hands of another or because of one's own actions. Suffering and martyrdom become an excuse and a justification for existence (2, p. 266). They remove one from the battle for superiority and domination where the odds seem too great, and they keep one's feelings of worthlessness from being demonstrated actively.

Corresponding to *machismo* is then a complementary martyr complex in the Mexican woman. It would appear that there is hardly any other choice for her to compensate for her feeling of inferiority, to justify her position, and to satisfy her real striving for superiority. If the *macho* controls others by domineering, the martyr controls others by the debt owed her for her sacrifice.

This female compensation often includes negative attitudes toward the husband and father, and an attempt to turn the children against him. To ally the children with herself can be a way of "winning" over the superior male. Most important in the formulation of the inferiority complex within the next generation, as we shall see, is the common attitude among Mexican mothers that "if I must submit to my inferior position before my husband and male society, at least I can have my children to myself."

The martyrdom of Mexican womanhood defines the feminine ideal of the long-suffering mother who tolerates male abuse for the sake of her children. As part of the martyr's strategy, Mexican women develop a strong feeling of moral superiority over what they look upon as the brutish, irresponsible male.

Marta in Lewis's *The Children of Sanchez*, for instance, says that her children are her world; she wants nothing of their father, rather only to be left alone with them, adding that they dislike their father and do not even call him papa (12, p. 318). The woman whom Marta most admires and who is her ideal of womanhood is her Aunt Guadalupe (the Virgin Mother's namesake), of whom she says: "She was the kind of woman who knew how to suffer" (12, p. 312). And Consuelo's ideal is her stepmother Lupita (also the Virgin Mother's namesake); she was quiet and submissive with a low opinion of men. She made her sacrifices for her children; they were her world. She wanted no part of men (12, p. 246).

A common result of this attitude is the Mexican woman's domination over her children throughout their lives by bonds of dependence and affection engendered in their early childhood.

*Female Defiance*

The feeling of inferiority and the resulting desire to debase and avoid the opposite sex has its counterpart among women in a number of patterns including prostitution. A feeling that the feminine role is one of humiliation often leads to prostitution through a tendency to further degrade the role, and to escape thereby a real test of womanhood while substituting a more aggressive, more masculine alternative (2, pp. 313 & 441).

Lewis's Consuelo, an example of this, fixates on her father in a strong incestuous bond, which is a way of escaping real love relationships. After attempting to enter a nunnery, she ruins her one real chance for marriage and a family by humiliating her husband at his every approach, and going home to her father. It is Consuelo who says that sex nauseates her, who becomes, in the end, a prostitute. She claims that she cannot marry because she could never play the humiliating role of wife to a domineering Mexican man—"I didn't like crushing authority. I didn't want to feel inferior" (12, p. 431).

In an interview with one of Mexico City's numerous prostitutes, attractive, twenty-seven, and the mother of three children, I asked her why she had not married. She replied that she was quite fond of children and very proud of her own, but that she would rather be a prostitute than "have one of those bums around the house."

It seems to me that the Mexican pattern of many households existing without men, whether they be of prostitutes, mistresses, unwed mothers, or abandoned women, is in part supported by the Mexican woman's attitude which complements *machismo*. These women are not willing to deny themselves motherhood; but, like the Mexican male, they avoid intimate relations with the feared and unconsciously envied opposite sex.

As will be seen, the family structures produced by these complementary attitudes are greatly responsible for the continuation of the same attitudes and family patterns in the next generation.

## CHILDHOOD SITUATION

The relevance of Adlerian theory to Mexican character and society will become still clearer when we examine the socialization of the Mexican child. The foundations of the Mexican inferiority complex must be sought in Mexican family life. It is through family experiences that the child forms an opinion of himself, his society and the world. Lewis provides invaluable data, because he documents the attitudes and views of family life of the participants themselves. Here especially his work supports Adlerian theory,

which the contributions of Paz (20), Foster (6) and Maccoby (18) also seem to fit, although written from different viewpoints.

When both the adult traits and corresponding childhood conditions predicted by a theory are present in a culture, they serve as cross-validation of the theory. To a remarkable degree the childhood background and family structure which Adler reserved for the "neurotic" with his low self-esteem and underdeveloped social interest coincide with the typical Mexican pattern.

Commenting on Western European culture of the early 1900's Adler said that the "arch evil of our culture" lies in "the excessive pre-eminence of manliness" (2, p. 55). In Mexico, where all power is equated quite literally with *potency*, where the ultimate value is expressed as "having balls," and where words have come into use giving even women the quality of "having balls" or of not having them (e.g. *huevona*), the masculine mystique is seemingly much stronger than that blamed for the inferiority complex in the culture of which Adler wrote.

The overcompensating male may be a clown and a bluff to some sophisticated adults, but to his own small children his masculine protest looms large and real as a barrier to their own achievement of adulthood. To the child with an over-compensating mother, the seducing and humiliating aspects of femininity are made equally as clear and are to be suppressed and resisted. In short, the inferiority complex creates its own future.

Adler lists three main types of children who are prone to develop an inferiority complex when faced by the challenges of life: (a) children with inferior organs, (b) children who are pampered, and (c) children who are neglected (2, p. 368). As we shall see, the Mexican child often suffers from pampering by women and from a feeling of neglect and rejection by men, and, along with the less extreme social and cultural experiences of negative self-image inherent in the invidious process of Mexican society, he may develop deep-seated feelings of racial ("organic") inferiority.

### *Pampering*

The pampered child is usually the result of a mother's desire to bring up the child for herself alone. This child comes to feel that his favored position with the mother is his birthright, and in later life he develops a feeling of resentment toward a society which, in comparison with the attentions of his mother, appears to be hostile.

A long period of indulgence by the Mexican mother, especially with her sons, is often followed by a sharp break as she weans one son to nurse another. The Mexican phenomenon of *chipil*, illness from jealousy at the time of weaning, may be a first manifestation in the development of a character structure marked by feelings of inferiority and a sense of dethronement. It is significant that the term *chipil* is also applied to adult males who sometimes react jealously to the birth of their own children; the prescribed cure is a visit to their own mothers (13, p. 62-63). Paz has said that the very basis of the *macho's* character is resentment—he commits *chingaderas*—and that the power he seeks is always destructive (20, p. 81). This well agrees with Adler's description of the mother-centered neurotic whose goal in life is to gain a position from which he can avenge himself (2, p. 370).

### *Neglect*

Adler describes the neglected child as developing much the same complex. The most common situations which produce this involve the orphan, illegitimate children, and families in which one or both of the parents are extremely authoritarian and who isolate themselves from the children. The neglected child need not be actually neglected; what is important is that he *feel* or *be made to feel* neglected (2, p. 242). The Mexican child has real reason to feel neglected by his father, and moreover, the Mexican woman often exaggerates this point. Hence the Mexican family situation generates an excessive dependence upon the mother, and a feeling of neglect from the father. For the neglected child the outside world becomes equated with the neglecting father—hostile, cold, superior and beyond reach—and he becomes suspicious and sly, his goal one of suppression and domination (2, pp. 118-119). The feeling that the world of men is enemy territory contributes to the simultaneous development of the inferiority complex and lack of social interest.

### *Role of the Mother*

It is through the mother that the child relates himself to the rest of the social community. After the mother has succeeded in relating the child to herself, she must spread his interest out toward the father; this is impossible if she herself is not interested in the father or if she is actually hostile toward him. If, in fact, the mother's goal is one of personal superiority, she may exaggerate the feeling of the child's being a part of herself to the extent of excluding the

father and the outside world, pressing the child into her service in the desire to feel the power, love and self-esteem which she feels herself lacking (2, p. 373). Such children have been forced into a kind of symbiosis with the mother; they have not been given a reason for or chance to develop interpersonal competence or interest in the world beyond mother; society is feared as a rival for the mother's attention.

In the common Mexican family situation the mother and children are isolated from the father or are allied against him. Mother and son typically form an alliance against the father, the mother shielding the son from his father's wrath while, openly or secretly, the son sides with his mother in all matters. In adult life such children show ambivalence toward their own sex and strong hostility toward the opposite sex. Young men try to escape intimate, personal relationships with women, not only because of their confused masculine identity but because they fear dominance by the female. Any close attachment to women other than their mothers is seen as a threat to the precarious role of the masculine protest protecting their real identities. The Mexican male contradictorily combines extreme devotion to and dependence on his mother and his guardian angel the Virgin of Guadalupe with contempt for and absolute superiority over women in general. His mother, for her part, seems to be jealous of any bond between him and his wife, and often tries to keep them apart. In some cases she may go so far as to try to lure him back into her own household by acting as a procuress for him with less threatening women of her own choice (11, p. 89; 12, p. 294).

Whiting's cross-cultural study (31) has shown rather conclusively the close correlation between the establishment of strong mother-son ties early in childhood, and cultural adjustments to the resulting dependency, rivalry, and cross-sex identification, as boys approach sexual maturity. Contrary to the practice in most societies with excessively strong mother-son relationships, Whiting found among his Mexican groups no puberty rites or change of residence. Thus the Mexican youth must himself establish his manliness, a process which often becomes a personal and lifelong trial.

### *Role of the Father*

When the father is absent or does not cooperate with the mother, or is extremely authoritarian, social interest and cooperation are not likely to develop. Instead, open or secret resistance and striving for power develop. The father's absence preserves his abstract superior-

ity, and on the other hand precludes the possibility of the son identifying with a reasonable representation of the masculine role.

Lewis and others have written that the absent father is a crucial characteristic of Mexican family life. In cases of disaster or abandonment the absence is often literal; but even where the father abides, his authoritarian status leads to a virtual absence from the family (11, p. 18).

To me the theme of the absent Mexican father has been overdone. True, it is a factor in the development of the inferiority complex; but the intimidating and demeaning effect of the Mexican father's presence in the home on his children and their mother would seem at least as important for such a development.

"Safeguarding by distance," says Adler, is a common technique of the person who suffers from an inferiority complex (2, p. 274). The Mexican male places a distance between himself and others in order to avoid that his facade of superiority be brought to a test. He seems to live in great fear of rebellion on the part of his family; therefore, he isolates himself from his wife and children and attempts to keep them subservient through constant debasement and belittling. In cases like that of Lewis's Sanchez family where, with the mother dead, the father takes a relatively large part in the lives of his children, he appears always as a distant and unapproachable figure who belittles even as he gives. He fears the independence of his children and is jealous of their achievements for they threaten his absolute authority. When Manuel, brought home his bride, his father greeted her with the warning that she had no man for a husband, for "this one has no balls." That night Manuel found that his status at home as a child had not changed; his father separated him from his wife (12, p. 168). For the son of a Latin father who is present, the example of an aloof belittling male leads to further over-compensatory behavior, a struggle to conceal his feminine identity which he acquired through his close ties with his mother, and to surpass his infantile, super-male image of his father.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

##### *Recency*

Since 1910 Mexico has experienced revolutionary social change and is presently among the leading underdeveloped nations of the world. This paper in no way intends to detract from such political, social, and economic development. However, these changes must not be easily equated with fundamental change in Mexican character

or culture. These changes are not, in my opinion, based on any wide increase in social interest among the majority of Mexicans; e.g. Almond and Verba (3) only recently wrote on the alienation, authoritarianism, rebellious dependency, and low level of democratic values in Mexico (3, pp. 310-311). How such remarkable social and economic gain as has been achieved is possible in a nation like Mexico is an interesting question but must remain the topic of another study.

While Ramos' theoretical formulation was first drawn up in the 1930's, most of the data on which the present paper is based were collected by the author and others in the 1950's and 60's (6, 9-13, 15-17, 19, 32), documenting the contemporary nature of our thesis on the Mexican culture and character. Thus, for example, Maccoby's finding (16), mentioned above, of approximately 50% alcoholics among males over 40 in a Mexican village is dated 1965. The reports of the United Nations (28) and the Pan-American Sanitary Office (24) that Mexico ranks second in the world in homicide rate and third in alcoholism are dated 1966 and 1961 respectively.

### *Generality*

From a review of theories of the Mexican character it would seem that the role of *mestizaje* and events specific to Mexican history have been exaggerated, while the role of the Latin family and tradition in general have been underestimated. Lewis, for example, attributes the striking malaise shown by his characters and their lack of happiness or affection in family life to rapid culture change in which the old satisfactions are gone and new ones have not yet been adopted (11, p. ix). This is similar to Ramos' explanation that the inferiority complex of the Mexican is due to his attempt to lead the life of another culture. Paz (20) and Wolf (32) have assumed alienation resulting from *mestizaje*: the alienated *mestizo* was stripped of his cultural heritage and made an outcast from both Indian and Spanish society, leaving him with only his sexual powers and the ability to don masks. Life became a struggle for dominance and the suppression of the powerful.

While these views are partial explanations, it must be recognized that a similar ethos and type of society are found throughout Latin America, Mediterranean Europe, North Africa, and the Near East (1, 21). If in the New World the *mestizo* is the marginal man with little power, trying to live the life of another culture, in the Mediterranean region the masses are also powerless and dominated by the cultural and social forms of their aristocratic superiors. There can

be little doubt that the conquest of and subsequent developments in Mexico have strengthened these already present tendencies. But the Mexican inferiority complex is not due as much to Ramos' theorized imposition of the cultural forms of another civilization, as it is due to internally generated invidious processes. These stem from the Latin family and the related effects of exaggerated highly status-oriented values originating in the Latin aristocracy, pretentious even with their means, and setting standards to which the vast majority are hopelessly inferior (7, 29).

### *Summary*

Ramos saw Mexican character in terms of the Adlerian inferiority complex and the basic striving for security and superiority. He saw the feeling of inferiority as undeniably influenced by external circumstances, but ultimately dependent mainly on "an internal factor; the degree of confidence that the individual has in himself" (22, p. 5). This self-confidence can be greatly undermined when a person's goal over-reaches his ability. Then he can achieve only an illusion of superiority, by dominating or power striving. Paz saw the Mexican as living in a society which gave him no sense of community, and hence did not enable him to feel or express the equivalent of Adler's social interest.

The empirical data of Lewis and others, including the present writer, have added to this the further Adlerian dynamics of the cult of manliness, with the masculine protest and man's fear for his status; and as counterpart, the female martyr complex and occasional female defiance.

The data have shown that these characteristics develop not so much from the Mexican historico-cultural situation, as from the childhood experiences within the Latin family everywhere, in which the distant and "superior" father neglects or withholds affection, and the mother pampers the children in her attempt to bind them to her as allies against the father. The children are given neither a model of cooperation between the parents, nor a chance to practice it with the parents. These observations still apply to the current scene despite the remarkable political and economic development that has taken place in Mexico.

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