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Latinx College Student Narratives of Familism and College Persistence

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LATINX COLLEGE STUDENT NARRATIVES OF FAMILISM AND COLLEGE PERSISTENCE

By

STACY SALERNO

A Dissertation submitted to the Department of Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Latinx immigrants view college attendance as a vehicle for upward mobility and a primary means for achieving the American Dream. Despite ongoing debates over the rightful place of immigrants in U.S. society and periods of anti-immigrant sentiment and xenophobia in the Brexit/Trump era, immigrants still believe in education as a vehicle for upward mobility. This dissertation explores the social psychological and cultural mechanisms that underlie Latinx college student narratives of persistence in seeking a college degree, and the resources used by students who seek a college degree but whose status is “suspect” due to their ethnicity. These mechanisms include the influence of parental immigrant narratives on self-efficacy, motivation, and the use of academic career narratives to make sense of their own college experiences. Academic career narratives are individual student stories that are created in an effort to make sense of their academic journey and future. The data come from thirty in-depth interviews with currently enrolled first and second-generation Latinx college students at public and private universities in the Southeast who have been in college at least two years. All students in the sample are of traditional college age (19-22 years old). The sample is stratified by gender, legal status- whether they are documented or undocumented, and generational status (1st or 2nd generation). Students who are undocumented, are attending college through the Deferred Action Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

Data analysis suggests that Latinx students fortify their college aspirations in the face of negative experiences (discrimination, economic stress, etc.) by adopting their parent’s narratives of achieving mobility through hard work. This interpretive frame and narrative allows Latinx students to recast negative experiences as challenges they successfully endure, even badges of honor, and the resolution of which reinforces their self-efficacy and motivation to persist.
Narrative construction is also a means by which Latinx students make sense of the difficult process associated with matriculating to college as first generation college students- preserving their self-efficacy, particularly for undocumented students. In this way Latinx college students construct their own narratives of immigrant mobility as experienced in specific events related to preparing for, applying to, and attending college.

Another major finding is how familial ties affect how Latinx women talk about their college experiences very differently than Latinx men. While close family ties are generally beneficial to academic success, there is one downside to strong parental connections: the stress that accompanies high family expectations and present and future family responsibilities. How Latinx college students manage family-related expectations varies significantly by gender. I frame these gender differences through Machismo and Marianismo- two broad cultural conceptions that define gender roles and obligations in Latinx families. The women I interviewed reported feelings of homesickness as a result of wanting to care for family members. These women also described their beliefs and behaviors using language associated with selflessness, sacrifice and chastity. The men, on the other hand expressed a duty to provide financially for their parents, but not to provide care. These men reported feelings of irritation toward maternal requests for constant communication, as well as a desire for greater independence.

Obtaining a better understanding of Latinx college students’ collegiate experiences is important for the social scientific research on college persistence, transition to adulthood, sociology of education literature on motivation and self-efficacy, and for colleges and universities seeking to increase the relatively low college completion rate of Latinx students. This dissertation extends our understanding of Latinx college students by identifying narratives
that redefine negative life experiences as positive, and by providing a more nuanced portrayal of family ties in the Latinx student population.
“We were pretty poor back in Mexico. My parents were divorced. Mom did the best she could. She was always a hustler. She’d sell jewelry, or food, or anything that she could. But a lot of nights there still wouldn’t be enough to eat. We’d survive on tortillas and salt. I was only eight when we came to America. So I was too young to understand. I think my mom thought she could make some money and bring us home. She thought she’d learn English, and maybe start a business. But it was so much harder than she expected. We moved so much looking for work. She’s fifty and she still cleans houses every day. Every year she gets more worn down. She’s been getting sick a lot lately. But she can’t afford to stop. She never will. Right now I’m in school. I always thought I had to be the best student because I’m undocumented. I thought I’d go to law school, or graduate school. But now I’m not so sure. My mom would literally destroy her body to make that happen for me. How could I allow that to happen? I’m a Dreamer. And everyone loves the Dreamers because we’re a perfect package to sell. But why am I the only one who gets the chance to feel safe? Whenever I hear ‘I stand with Dreamers,’ I always think about my mom. I’m not willing to throw her under the bus. I'm not willing to be a bargaining chip to make her seem like a criminal. Everything people admire about Dreamers is because of our parents.” Anonymous (2017). Humans of New York Facebook Post

In the above Facebook post, a Latinx college student is conflicted due to the opportunities afforded her as a result of her mother’s sacrifices, and the guilt she feels because of her mother’s undocumented status and physically taxing work. She describes her mother’s dreams and her own- yet she is uncertain about the future and worried about her mother’s health. This post on the Humans of New York Facebook page captures the plight of young undocumented college students in the U.S. today, and the strong parental influence on their lives. Like other young adults, the student grapples with the compounded difficulties associated with being undocumented- even as a Dreamer. She emphasizes that she is a Dreamer precisely because of
her mother. The post thus captures many of the major themes of this dissertation: mobility, ambition, sacrifice, indebtedness, and gender.

Young Latinxs desire a college education and believe it to be a vehicle for upward mobility, but a majority do not persist in college. Latinxs have an increased presence on college campuses across the US, with an enrollment rate of 65% in 2012, almost matching enrollment rates for both whites, and blacks (Wall Street Journal 2014). Also important to note is the magnitude in changes of enrollment rates since the 1980s, reflecting a commitment to higher education among Latinxs. In terms of matriculation, this is a considerable improvement- yet only 22% of Latinxs age 25 and older hold an associate’s degree or higher, compared to 60% of whites (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Simply put, Latinx college students do not persist in college as much as their white counterparts do.

Existing research focuses on the high percentage of failing students, and the mechanisms causing said failures. Surprisingly little research examines Latinx student persistence, and such research is critically needed to understand the unique challenges that many of these students face in our current political climate- Latinx college students today face increased anti-immigrant sentiment, a potential end to Deferred Action Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and increased deportations under President Trump. This dissertation explores the narratives of persistence used by Latinx students to conceptualize and construct their academic self-efficacy. Individuals who have self-efficacy believe they are able to be proactive in planning for the future, that they have significant control over their circumstances (Bandura 2001). This dissertation explores the narratives that underlie their high levels of motivation. Ethnic minority students who report high levels of motivation persist and experience academic success even in the face of adversity throughout their academic careers (Ojeda et al 2012), alongside strong family ties- allowing them
to make sense of the difficulties associated with being a college student. Through the use of intensive interviews, I attempt to understand Latinx college narratives of persistence to balance out the existing emphasis on the negative aspects of Latinx college attendance, being undocumented, and high drop out rates. I examine their narratives to understand how they frame their challenges in efficacious rather than fatalistic ways, conceptualize their obligations to their parents, and cope with being undocumented. Students in my sample are of traditional college age.

Latinx youth are often culturally bound to their family members by familism— the expectation that one’s family’s needs before one’s own (Lugo Steidel and Contreras 2003; Stein et al 2015). The findings of this dissertation suggest that familism’s effect on student narratives and persistence can be twofold: a resource in the form of motivation and increased self-efficacy fueled by parental immigrant narratives, and a burden in the form of onerous expectations manifested differently by gender. As a resource, Latinx college students construct academic career narratives influenced by parental immigrant narratives of sacrifice and hard work. These narratives seem to help preserve Latinx student’s self-efficacy by altering the meaning of social and economic obstacles (Cohler and Hostetler 2003; Ueno, Pena-Talamantes, Roach, Nix, and Ritter 2016). Others have also found that individual life narratives can serve as a coping mechanism for stigmatized groups (Ueno et al 2016).

Parental immigrant narratives create pressure to succeed, while also helping Latinx students reframe negative experiences as enabling forces— intensifying their feelings of self-efficacy and their motivation to persist. At the same time, familism can be a burden to students in the form of guilt, worry, and homesickness. Existing studies do not highlight the impact parental immigrant narratives have on academic career narratives constructed by Latinx students in
college. Narrative construction can be a resource to students when facing difficulties in educational environments like discrimination and financial barriers. Students are then able to manipulate said environments by rejecting negative narratives, and embracing positive ones.

A better understand of how Latinx college students differ by gender in their experiences of familism, can be obtained from examining the influences of Machismo and Marianismo-Latinx cultural values that influence gender socialization and gender norms in traditional Latinx families (Cuellar, Arnold, & Gonzalez 1995). Machismo emphasizes strength, honor, masculinity and independence, while Marianismo emphasizes caregiving, preserving family integrity, maintaining family traditions, providing both emotional and instrumental support for all family members, and self-sacrifice (Gil and Vazquez 1996). These values were readily available in my interviews.

In addition to immigrant narratives and familism, this dissertation explores how documentation status shapes Latinx students’ feelings of risk and belongingness. Undocumented students experience the added weight of their legal status, which greatly complicates their educational journey- fear of deportation, fear of family deportation, and uncertainty about their overall future (Abrego 2006; Schmid 2013; Chavez, Lavariega Monforti, and Michelson 2015). Current research on the experiences of undocumented students falls short of examining the narratives used by students who are labeled as “illegal,” and who attend college in the U.S.

Chapter 2 addresses the following research question: how do documented and undocumented Latinx students derive self-efficacy by drawing on parental immigrant narratives? In this chapter I will focus on the social psychological processes involved in academic career narrative constructions, drawing connections between parental immigrant narratives, and expressions of self-efficacy, and motivation. The interview data provide many examples where
students attribute their drive and odds to success to their parents’ hard work and sacrifice. These results are in line with other studies that show how disadvantaged individuals reject marginalization and use narrative construction to cope with disadvantages like discrimination and financial difficulties by refashioning these negative experiences as lessons learned (Silva 2012; Ueno et al 2016).

I also examine the added pressures of being undocumented, both in college student’s recollection of the process of college application and after enrollment as undocumented students, and pervasive uncertainty about the distressing future and their own life goals. Undocumented students aspiring for a college degree must strive to succeed academically, prepare for college acceptance, and participate in common adolescent social activities despite experiencing insecurities and anxiety related to their legal status (2006). If undocumented students are able to attend college through policies like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) (Schmid 2013), they still face uncertainties about their post-graduation legal status. I also find that undocumented immigrant youth live in fear of being separated from their families due to the increase of deportations that began during the Obama administration (Chavez, Lavariega Monforti, and Michelson 2015), and that continues today under President Trump. Chapter 2 also includes a brief description of DACA and its origins.

Chapter 3 examines the following: How do Latinx college students differ by gender in the way familism is experienced? In this chapter I explore students’ themes related to the burden of familism, paying close attention to how these differ by gender. As noted above, familism is characterized by the sacrifice of one’s individual needs over the needs of other family members (Lugo Steidel and Contreras 2003). Such close ties to family can have both positive and negative effects on Latinx youth, and this chapter will attempt to unpack how students experience the
burdens associated with familism, and how these burdens manifest differently by gender. The concepts of machismo and Marianismo are explored, specifically the very different ways in which they shape Latinx student experiences of familism. Machismo and Marianismo are Latinx cultural values that influence gender socialization and the establishment of gender norms in traditional Latinx families (Cuellar, Arnold, & Gonzalez 1995). Machismo informs masculinity in Latinx men by emphasizing strength, honor, masculinity and independence. Marianismo informs femininity in Latinx women by emphasizing caregiving, the preservation of family traditions, providing both emotional and instrumental support for all family members, and self-sacrifice (Gil and Vazquez 1996). In this chapter I address how Machismo and Marianismo are evident in Latinx gender role expectations- yet they have changed in some ways to reflect changes in gender dynamics among Latinx men and women in the U.S.

Chapter 4 serves as a conclusion to the dissertation, and a discussion of the intricacies of being a Latinx college student in the US, including the role of self-efficacy, motivation, parental immigrant narratives, and familism. Individuals who have self-efficacy believe they are able to be proactive in planning for the future, as well as changing their circumstances (Bandura 2001), and persisting Latinx college students strongly believe in their ability to control their life trajectory. I argue that this source of motivation boosts their chances of success as reflected in their narratives. Ethnic minority students who report high levels of motivation persist and experience academic success even in the face of adversity (Ojeda et al 2012).

In chapter 4 I also focus on undocumented Latinx student narratives in an effort to shed light on the added barriers associated with legal status. If undocumented students are able to attend college through policies like DACA (Schmid 2013), they still face uncertainties about their post-graduation legal status without a path to citizenship or guaranteed employment with
legal sponsorship. DACA recipients who are enrolled in college are only temporarily documented, and this temporary status is stressful. Undocumented immigrant youth also live in fear of being separated from their families due to the increase of deportations that began during the Obama administration (Chavez, Lavariega Monforti, and Michelson 2015), and that continues today under President

The remainder of this chapter discusses parental immigrant narratives and their influence on self-efficacy and motivation as social-psychological tools for college persistence. I also discuss the effects of familism in the lives of Latinx youth. By examining the ways in which parental immigrant narratives, self-efficacy, motivation, and familism contribute to Latinx academic career narratives of persistence, readers will have a better understanding of the resources used by immigrant youth, in particular the strong belief in education as a vehicle for upward mobility. Since these core concepts appear throughout the dissertation, I next provide a brief review of existing studies of parental immigrant narratives, self-efficacy, motivation, and familism.

**Parental Immigrant Narratives**

Immigrant parents often impart a sense of sacrifice and hard work to their children. The experience of immigrating to a new country for improved economic opportunities is commonly accompanied by periods of hardship. This is also true for immigrants arriving after the Immigration Law of 1965. Known as “New Immigrants,” immigrants today hail predominantly from Latin American, Asia, or the Caribbean (Zhou and Bankston III 2016). New Immigrants have settled in the US differently than past waves of immigrants due to the color of their skin, their varied levels of education, a higher number of undocumented immigrants, and diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (Zhou and Bankston III 2016). In a study examining the adaption of
second generation immigrants using data from the 3rd wave of the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study, authors found that education as a means to an American middle class is internalized by young immigrants due to their parents’ message that “failure is not an option” (Portes and Fernandez-Kelly 2008). Parents impart the message that their sacrifices upon migrating made access to a better education possible, therefore it must not be wasted (Rumbaut 1994).

Not all immigrants entering the US are equipped with the resources and skills necessary to succeed in the workforce. Immigrant children come of age with immigrant narratives at the center of their cultural environments. Learning English, academic success, and college attendance are important components of a “mobility project” that began when immigrant parents left their country of origin to provide their children with better opportunities. The majority of second-generation youth are succeeding in school, but those who arrive to the U.S. with fewer financial resources will sometimes struggle (Portes and Fernandez-Kelly 2008). Immigrant parents often recount stories of sacrifice they endured by leaving their homes, jobs, and families in order to provide their children with education and better economic opportunities (Portes and Fernandez-Kelly 2008).

Parental immigrant narratives feature prominently in Latinx student lives in part due to the emphasis placed on close family ties. Susan Wierzbicki found that ethnic minorities have fewer social ties when compared to non-Hispanic whites, and exclusively close ties with family members (2004). Even in cases where extended family members are not present, immigrants tend to compensate by developing closer relationships with their parents (Wierzbicki 2004). The decision to immigrate is often predicated on an already established family member in the receiving country. One parent will begin the process by moving first, only to be joined by the
rest of the family once a job and place to live has been secured. While Latinx are culturally tied to their families through familism, they also depend on them for social and psychological support in a foreign environment (Portes and Fernandez-Kelly 2008).

First and second-generation immigrant children report strong ties with their parents and a sense of responsibility to them (Portes and Fernandez-Kelly 2008). Family support and encouragement are crucial to student academic success (Hernandez 2000), and children of immigrants are protected from potential outside influences when they maintain close ties to their parents and overall ethnic communities (Zhou and Bankston 1998). Other reasons for strong family ties among first and second generation immigrants are general fear and mistrust of non-familial relationships, and a need for closeness with next of kin (Zhou and Bankston 2016). This is particularly important to undocumented immigrants who live with the possibility of deportation, and look to family members for social support.

Parental immigrant narratives are important in the lives of first and second generation Latinx college students, therefore I examine how these stories are uniquely tied to social psychological resources known to contribute to college persistence: self-efficacy and motivation.

**Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is having a sense of one’s own life aspirations, and an understanding the work necessary to achieve them. Individuals who have self-efficacy believe they are able to be proactive in planning for the future, as well as changing their circumstances (Bandura 2001). Those who report a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to pursue their goals, more likely to change their own circumstances, as well as their trajectories in order to fulfill their life plans (Cohler and Hostetler 2003). When faced with social and physical barriers that create disparate opportunities, those who have self-efficacy are better able to manipulate and avoid such
barriers. Conversely, those with low self-efficacy are less likely to feel control over their lives, and believe their life trajectories to be a result of external forces outside of their control (Cohler and Hostetler 2003). Repeated exposure to barriers and a lack of resources can undermine their sense of self-efficacy.

Latinx youth and other racial ethnic minority youth are disproportionately represented in disadvantaged positions. Previous research has highlighted the low levels of agency reported by ethnic minorities when compared to their white counterparts, with minorities believing in external control over their life trajectories (Madsen 1973; Ross, Mirowsky, and Cockerham 1983). When compared to their white counterparts, Hispanics report a weaker belief in personal agency, and a stronger belief in outside structures even after controlling for class (Ross, Mirowsky, & Cockerham 1983). Existing studies have found that racial and ethnic minorities have lower self-efficacy (Mirowsky et al 1996), and these findings have been attributed to negative life experiences, limited resources and structural powerlessness.

Qualitative studies reveal that the relationship between social structural position and self-efficacy is more complex, and that those who occupy disadvantaged social locations can engage in social psychological coping strategies that redefine success and failure. Current studies demonstrate that groups who occupy disadvantaged social positions report surprisingly high levels of self-efficacy. Silva, interviewed 93 black and white working class men and women in their 20s and 30s to investigate the narratives used by today’s youth in coping with difficult financial times while being expected to achieve markers of adulthood (2012). She found that narrative constructions allowed working class men and women to reshape their own life stories by rejecting negative ideas of failure, and embracing alternative markers of adulthood (Silva 2012). Silva’s respondents were able to manipulate the meanings of their circumstances and gain
control over their life stories (2012).

Studies like Silva’s (2012) demonstrate that “narrative construction” is a useful concept for understanding how individuals draw on cultural objects/themes to buttress their sense of self-efficacy and reconstruct negative experiences positively. Narrative construction is the creation of personal stories that describe an individual’s life, and these stories include future goals, self-efficacy, and motivation. Those with self-efficacy draw on, manipulate, and reconstruct narratives influenced by their particular cultural and historical context (Cohler and Hostetler 2003). Those living on the margins of society use narrative construction in order to create accounts of their disadvantages in a positive light, effectively reframing their disadvantage-motivating them to pursue their future goals (Silva 2012; Ueno et al 2016).

Self-efficacy is crucial in education, with current studies indicating that students often make the most important decisions with regard to life goals, identities, careers- and those with high level of self-efficacy in primary school have higher rates of academic success that translate into college attendance (Shanahan 2000). Ross and Broh conducted a study using longitudinal data of 8th through 12th graders, and found that high school students who felt a strong sense of control experienced higher academic achievement (2000). Self-efficacy develops in childhood and adolescence more so than any other life stage (Shanahan 2000), with parents and schools greatly influencing its development. In another study using longitudinal data of 9th graders in Minnesota, students with high grade point averages throughout high school had stronger efficacy beliefs in terms of their economic future (Grabowski, Schabo, Thiede Call, and Mortimer 2001). There is a reciprocal association between achieving good grades and self-efficacy. This association also exists between self-efficacy, academic achievement and persistence.
Motivation

Education scholars have studied student motivation extensively as a psychological construct that helps explain academic success. “Student motivation is important to study because it is malleable and likely to have a strong impact on academic outcomes“ (Arana et al. 2011). Student motivation is influenced by values, academic goals, behaviors, parental guidance and support (Harackiewicz et al 2014; Deci and Ryan 2000; Cavazos and Cavazos 2010; Ojeda et al 2012). Students who demonstrate high levels of motivation are more likely to have specific academic goals, and are more likely to persist in achieving those same goals. In another study using survey data from a university in the South West, students’ life satisfaction was measured in relation to ethnic stress and perceived discrimination. The authors found that ethnic minority students are motivated to persist and experience academic success even in the face of adversity-particularly older non-traditional students (Ojeda et al 2012).

There are two types of motivation: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Behaviors driven by intrinsic motivation occur purely because of personal interest and pleasure. There is no need for rewards, and students who are intrinsically motivated are simply driven by the pleasure of learning (Deci and Ryan 2000). Individuals who are driven by extrinsic motivation seek external rewards, and are not genuinely interested in the accumulation of knowledge as a purpose for academic achievement, but are interested in competition and the potential for an economic reward (Deci and Ryan 2000).

Students who have specific academic goals often report having high intrinsic motivation, and are more likely to persist in higher education (Ojeda et al 2012) In a retrospective qualitative study, nine Latinx college students were asked about their experiences with high school teachers (Cavazos and Cavazos 2010). Authors found that Latinx students who received high expectations
and mentoring from their teachers led them to pursue higher education (Cavazos and Cavazos 2010), this was true even with the existence of language barriers, financial barriers, and other difficulties. Students often found that as long as they remained loyal to their goals and their timelines, they were able to persist (Cavazos and Cavazos 2010). Socioeconomic status, race, and gender matter less for academic success when students are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated (Ojeda et al 2012). Parental interest in academic pursuits and parental support are also associated with children’s high intrinsic motivation, and academic success (Ojeda et al 2012).

Undocumented Latinx College Students

Undocumented students face higher stakes in their academic journeys when compared to their documented counterparts. Approximately 65,000 undocumented students graduate from American high schools every year (U.S. Department of Education 2015), and those who qualify are able to attend college through DACA, yet are faced with uncertainty beyond graduation. Undocumented students’ potential to contribute to the family’s mobility project may be severely limited due to legal barriers (Abrego 2006). Students who do not qualify for DACA face the high cost of tuition, often six to seven times the cost of in-state tuition, making it unaffordable to many (Abrego 2006). Undocumented youth have often internalized American values that equate academic success to upward mobility and stability, yet are faced with the fact that college may not be possible for them.

Even with DACA, undocumented students are not guaranteed access to college, and are burdened with the unpredictability of our current anti-immigrant political climate. An existing study examined the ways in which undocumented students still aspire to go to college, and continue to engage in preparation for college attendance despite their uncertain legal future in the
Due to the risk associated with their immigrant status, undocumented high school students are more likely to behave at school in order to avoid stereotyping or school sanctions that could possibly reveal their status (Perez and Cortez 2011). Fear of their own deportation or of family deportations are real among undocumented students. While undocumented students face many barriers, parental immigrant narratives are a resource. They fuel self-efficacy and motivation to persist in college, yet unlike their documented peers, undocumented students report feeling fear, mistrust, and uncertainty about the future.

**Familism and Gender**

Familism is a traditional Latinx cultural value that provides the guiding principles, expectations, and notions about the family— including the sacrifice of individual needs for the benefit of the family as a whole (Lugo Steidel and Contreras 2003; Stein et al 2015). Familism can manifest in many ways, including the involvement of mothers and fathers in their children’s schooling despite language or cultural barriers, which then has a significant effect on Latinx’ academic motivation (Arellano and Padilla, 1996; Plunkett and Bamaca-Gomez, 2003; Smokowski et al., 1999; Valenzuela and Dornbusch, 1994). Latinx adolescents report strong family values, emphasize the importance of family loyalty, and feel a strong a sense of responsibility to their parents (Stein et al 2015). In a study of Latinx college pathways, Latinas felt a very strong sense of familism while also viewing a college education as a path for independence (Ovink 2014). In this dissertation, familism is found to be the cultural mechanism that turns parental immigrant narratives and mobility projects into Latinx student self-efficacy and motivation.

Studies have found that familism can present itself in many ways. In a study by Stein et al, high school Latinx students who embraced familism reported less depressive symptoms, and a
greater sense of belonging in school (2015). In that study, familism was measured with an 18-item familism attitudinal scale that included four subscales: familial support, family interconnectedness, family honor, and subjugation of the self. Students who reported stronger familial support, family interconnectedness, and self-sacrificing behaviors felt better about themselves and their roles as students and family members (Stein et al. 2015).

Other studies have found familism to be protective against acculturative stress (Fuligni et al. 1999), while obligations to family include academic success as a reward to parents for their sacrifice and hard work (Perreira, Chapman, and Stein 2006). Those who report stronger relationships with parents and other family members, as well as a sense of responsibility towards their family, also note higher levels of academic motivation (Arellano and Padilla 1996; Plunkett and Bamaca-Gomez 2003; Smokowski et al. 1999; Valenzuela and Dornbusch 1994).

Familism is tied with feelings of sacrifice and devotion to family, and how it is experienced differs among Latinx students by gender. Girls are expected to stay closer to home, and engage in caretaking activities, while boys are given more autonomy and freedom (Arriagada 2005). These differences in how familism is experienced by gender are tied to two Latinx cultural values: Machismo and Marianismo. Machismo and Marianismo influence gender socialization and the establishment of traditional gender norms in Latinx families.

Machismo emphasizes strength, honor, masculinity and independence (Cuellar, Arnold, and Gonzalez 1995). Marianismo is in opposition to, and compliments Machismo. Marianismo is a Latino cultural value that emphasizes caregiving, preserving family integrity, maintaining family traditions, chastity, providing both emotional and instrumental support for all family members, and self-sacrifice (Gil and Vazquez 1996; Gonzalez-Lopez 2005). The word Marianismo originates from the belief that girls should emulate the Virgin Mary (Lac et al. 2011).
Catholicism does not fully explain Marianismo- gender dynamics and family honor are also at play (Gonzalez-Lopez 2005). Traditional gender roles are perpetuated in the Latinx community where familism can encourage behaviors and beliefs tied to Machismo and Marianismo. For Latinx college students, the expectations associated with familism can be a burden, particularly for Latinx women. While familism can fuel their motivation to persist, Latinx college students must struggle with the expectations associated with being a college students alongside the expectations associated with familism.

Parental immigrant narratives are a resource for Latinx college students by influencing their self-efficacy and motivation, as well as informing their academic career narrative constructions. Latinx college students believe they have control over their futures, and they report a desire to give back to their parents for their hard work and sacrifice. Undocumented students experience the same processes in that they have self-efficacy and motivation to persist, yet their academic career narratives include fear, mistrust, and feelings of uncertainty about the future. In the next chapter I will address how parental immigrant narratives are a resource to Latinx college students.
CHAPTER 2
LATINX COLLEGE STUDENT NARRATIVES OF PERSISTENCE

Introduction

Latinx adults lag behind whites in obtaining college degrees. Only 22% of Latinxs age 25 and older hold an associate’s degree or higher, compared to 60% of whites (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Existing research focuses on the high percentage of failing students, and the mechanisms that cause these failures. There is little focus on persisting Latinx students, or an understanding of the experiences of persisting students in our current political climate- characterized by an increased anti-immigrant sentiment, a potential end to Deferred Action Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and increased deportations under President Trump. This study explores Latina/o student persistence through interviews with thirty Latinx college students, where they describe having self-efficacy and motivation throughout their academic careers that are tied to their parents’ immigrant narratives. The interviews also reveal strong family ties. Attachment to parents, efficacy, and motivation help them recast and endure the difficulties associated with being a college student by creating academic career narratives to fit their needs. I also explore how being undocumented shapes Latinx college student’s experiences and persistence.

A commonly noted characteristic of immigrant families is the great emphasis parents place on sacrifice and hard work, and these narratives are pervasive among the college students I interviewed. Parental immigrant narratives make sense of immigration experience, and emphasize the sacrifices made for their children. Immigrant parents often recount stories of the difficulties they endured by leaving their homes, jobs, and families in order to provide their children with education and better economic opportunities (Portes and Fernandez-Kelly 2008). The experience of immigrating to a new country for improved economic opportunities is
commonly accompanied by periods of hardship. Key to the message from immigrant parents is that education is a means to an American middle class, and this is not lost on young immigrants as their parents instill the sense that failure is not an option (Rumbaut 1994; Portes and Fernandez-Kelly 2008).

Another theme in the interviews, complementing the emphasis on hard work and sacrifice, is the prevalence of close relationships with parents, and as intensive parental supervision, and monitoring. First and second-generation immigrant children report strong ties with their parents, and a sense of responsibility to them (Portes and Fernandez-Kelly 2008). Family support and encouragement are also found to be crucial to student academic success (Hernandez 2000), and children of immigrants are protected from potential outside influences when they maintain close ties to their parents and overall ethnic communities (Zhou and Bankston 1998).

Another prominent theme in the interview data is the strong sense of control over their lives, and this chapter considers the risks and rewards associated with such strong- and at times-unrealistic beliefs. Self-efficacy has a role in this regard, and is defined as the general perception of being in control of one’s life and future. Youth and young adults who have a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to plan for and deal effectively with challenges associated with their structural position in society, and they are not simply reactive to external events. Individuals with a sense of self-efficacy construct life stories that maintain a sense of order and continuity. Narrative construction enables individuals who have self-efficacy to choose narratives that fit their needs, and reject those that are harmful- particularly when faced with social and economic obstacles (Cohler and Hostetler 2003; Ueno et al 2016). Constructing one’s own life stories is used as a coping mechanism for stigmatized groups (Ueno 2016). College plans or aspirations
are part of our own individual life narratives or life stories (Cohler and Hostetler 2003). Self-efficacy gives individuals a sense of power, boosting career aspirations.

Another important theme in the interviews is Latinx college students’ expressions of motivation. Motivation is often influenced by values, academic goals, behaviors, parental guidance and support (Harackiewicz et al 2014; Deci and Ryan 2000; Cavazos and Cavazos 2010; Ojeda et al 2012). Students who demonstrate high levels of motivation are more likely to have specific academic goals, and are more likely to persist in achieving those same goals. Ojeda et al (2012) document how motivation helps ethnic minorities persist in school when faced with adversity like discrimination, negative stereotypes, and uncertainty in relation to their legal status.

Young people engage in the narrative construction of their life stories by drawing on personal experiences, and their own social context- this can also include barriers and negative experiences. Narrative construction can serve as a coping mechanism for the disadvantaged when it allows them to redefine disadvantages as positive, giving them hope in attaining their goals despite accepting a marginalized status (Sandstrom 1990; Silva 2012). The immigrant narrative of using education as a springboard for economic success, despite low rates of college completion, is an example this process. Immigrant children are resolute in their plans to go to college because to do otherwise would waste the sacrifices their parents made to provide them better opportunities (Rumbaut 1994).

A plausible detriment to self-efficacy and motivation is when students are not legal residents of the U.S. The interviews show that undocumented students also appear to have comparable levels of self-efficacy and motivation fueled by parental immigrant narratives- yet these resources are fragile in light of a possible end to DACA, as well as the absence of other

This study aims to shed light on the narratives used by persisting Latinx college students who are enrolled as juniors or higher, and who are beating the odds by staying in college. I ask the following two questions: (1) how do Latinx students derive self-efficacy by drawing on parental immigrant narratives for documented and undocumented Latinx students?

**Literature Review**

The purpose of this review is to link together research literature on race/ethnicity and social psychology in an overall conceptual model (Figure 1). This model suggests that Latinx students’ narratives of their college experience features efficacy and motivation, and that these derive from and are fueled by their parent’s own narratives- in this case, stories about immigration, sacrifice, and hard work. The model further suggests these contribute to their persistence though this dissertation can not empirically confirm if that is the case.

**Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals**

The Dream Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) was turned down by congress in 2010. The Dream Act was a proposed solution for children who were brought illegally by their parents by providing them a path to citizenship (Schmidt 2013). With the failure of the Dream Act, President Obama was given the opportunity to sign an executive order on June 15th, 2012 that would allow undocumented children to receive protection from removal for at least two years and the potential to attend college and receive a work permit. DACA applicants must provide proof of arrival before the age of 16, and continual residency in the U.S. for five years preceding the executive memorandum (Schmidt 2013). There is no path to citizenship with
DACA. On September 5th, 2018, President Trump’s administration stopped accepting new applications, and congress has yet to pass an extension or replacement for DACA.

**Parental Immigrant Narratives**

Immigrant parents commonly construct narratives representing the experiences associated with the immigration process. These experiences include sacrifice and hard work endured in an effort to provide their children with improved life opportunities. Despite ongoing debates over the rightful place of immigrants in U.S. society and periods of heightened anti-immigrant sentiment and xenophobia, Latinxs continue to dream of a middle class lifestyle earned with hard work and sacrifice (Huntington 2004), and for their children’s educational success. Many immigrants come to the United States because they believe their families will have a better life, whereas remaining in their home countries is associated with poverty, and lack of opportunities. Parental immigrant narratives include the desire for upward mobility often captured by wealth, income, job prestige, fame, educational credentials, or—in the case of immigrants—naturalization and citizenship. First generation immigrants seek a better world in which success can be measured in absolute terms— the simple improvement from one situation to another (Hochschild 1995).

Immigrant families relocate with the intention of improving their family’s quality of life. For many immigrant Latinxs, immigrating to the US is an opportunity that must not be wasted, and immigrating is associated with economic success through hard work (Rumbaut 1994). Latinx parents place high importance on success through education, and this is not lost on their children (Irizarry 2012), therefore parental immigrant narratives serve as a resource for young immigrants in the ways that they think about their own future. Parental stories of immigration inform student academic career narratives.
The emphasis on higher education as a vehicle for economic success is a product of the immigrant narrative, and fuels young Latinx’ self-efficacy. In Irizarry’s ethnographic study, Latinx high school seniors were followed over the course of three years. He found that immigrant Latinx high school seniors made sure to take advantage of many resources, including access to their own laptops, counseling, and test preparations available at their school because they believed that success in high school would increase their chances of getting a high school degree more so than their non-Hispanic white and black peers (Irizarry 2012). This attention to the steps necessary to succeed in high school may give Latinx students a potential advantage and shows that they believe themselves to be in control of their own life stories (Mirrowsky and Ross 1990).

Immigrant parents often reinforce the idea that education is the best vehicle for upward mobility. The belief that getting a college degree leads to economic success is central to the immigrant narrative (Rumbaut 1994). Immigrant students are told to not “waste” the opportunity that has been given to them by their parents when they immigrated to the US (Rumbaut 1994). This sense of responsibility to not squander parental sacrifices may serve as a cultural resource among Latinx students because immigrant parents made considerable sacrifices in order to provide their children with the opportunity of a college education- and these notions can create added pressures for immigrant Latinx college students. Parental immigrant narratives are thus potent examples of self-efficacy that can be passed on to children, and the debt owed to parents can also be a powerful source of motivation and pressure.

**Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is defined as the ability to recognize one’s own life aspirations, and the knowledge necessary to understand the work needed to achieve them. Individuals who have self-
efficacy believe they can proactively plan and control their future, and this includes the ability to change their circumstances (Bandura 2001). Those who report a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to pursue their goals, more likely to change their own circumstances, as well as their trajectories in order to fulfill their life plans (Cohler and Hostetler 2003). Even when faced with social and economic obstacles, individuals can construct their life courses by choosing positive narratives that fit their needs, and rejecting those that are harmful (Cohler and Hostetler 2003; Ueno et al 2016). Latinx college students draw on parental immigrant narratives to bolster their self-efficacy despite their disadvantaged status.

Broad groups of racial and ethnic minorities have been found to have lower self-efficacy than whites. This has been attributed to the fact that racial minorities are over-represented in the lower levels of our class structure (Mirowsky et al 1996). This is true for Hispanics, who when compared to their white counterparts, report a weaker belief in personal agency and a stronger belief in outside structures, even after controlling for class (Ross, Mirowsky, & Cockerham 1983). A disadvantaged position is then associated with lower self-efficacy and a lack of agency.

On the other hand, disadvantaged children with high self-efficacy are often able to succeed in education. When students experience success in education, an increased sense of self-efficacy translates to an increase in the desire to pursue higher education and occupational goals (Mirowsky & Ross 1983). Immigrant children face obstacles in education that might derail their sense of self-efficacy, yet it does not appear to do so for all. Overcoming obstacles faced by minority students in the education system provides a sense of control, and reinforces the idea that hard work, sacrifice, and insight will lead to success (Mirowsky et al 1996). However, efficacy
may not be sufficient when access to the necessary resources and support is not there, it can lead to failure and feelings of anxiety (Alexander et al 1994).

When individuals have self-efficacy: agency while planning for and dealing with challenges associated with their structural position in society, they are not simply reactive to external events. Self-efficacy is important in narrative construction because it makes individuals proactive in planning for the future as well as changing their current circumstances (Bandura 2001). According to life course theorists, human agency is central to narrative construction (Elder 1994). Individuals make choices based on their social conditions, and the obstacles or opportunities within their particular historical context (Cohler and Hostetler 2003).

Disadvantaged groups create narratives to manage social and economic obstacles. Minority populations that are often marginalized use narrative construction to cope with disadvantages by refashioning negative experiences as “lessons learned” (Silva 2012; Ueno et al 2016). Silva interviewed 93 black and white working class men and women in their 20s and 30s to investigate the narratives used by today’s youth in coping with difficult financial times. Silva (2012) was curious about how young adults make sense of barriers to achieving traditional markers of adulthood, such as marriage, stable employment, and moving out of their parent’s home. She found that narrative construction allow men and women to reshape their life stories by rejecting traditional ideas of failure, embracing alternative markers of adulthood, and preserving their self-efficacy (Silva 2012).

**Motivation**

Students who demonstrate high levels of motivation are generally more likely to have specific academic goals, and are more likely to persist in achieving said goals. Current research examines how student motivation is often influenced by values, academic goals, behaviors,
parental guidance, academic goals, behaviors, and values (Harackiewicz et al 2014; Deci and Ryan 2000; Cavazos and Cavazos 2010; Ojeda et al 2012). This is also true for ethnic minority students despite hardships, including discrimination and lack of economic resources—when high levels of motivation are present there is persistence and academic success (Ojeda et al 2012).

There are two types of motivation: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, and both appear in the interview data. Behaviors driven by intrinsic motivation occur purely because of personal interest and pleasure. There is no need for rewards, and students who are intrinsically motivated are simply driven by the pleasure of learning (Deci and Ryan 2000). Individuals driven by extrinsic motivation seek external rewards, and are not always genuinely interested in the accumulation of knowledge as a purpose for academic achievement, but are interested in competition (Deci and Ryan 2000). In this study I explore the possibility that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation drive disadvantaged groups to succeed in school in that they exhibit a desire to learn as well as external motivating factors that include a desire for economic stability for them and their families.

Students who have specific academic goals often report having high intrinsic motivation, and are more likely to persist in higher education (Cavazos and Cavazos 2010; Ojeda et al 2012), while students who report high extrinsic motivation were more likely to be fixated on external factors such as higher salaries with less likelihood of persistence (Próspero et al 2012). The literature reveals that even in the face of language barriers, financial limits, and other difficulties, students with high levels of motivation are often able to persist (Cavazos and Cavazos 2010), and are not seemingly affected by socioeconomic status, race, or gender (Ojeda et al 2012).
Legal Status and Latinx Students

Undocumented students are confronted with difficult realities associated with their legal status, including but not limited to a lack of citizenship rights, risk of deportation, and exclusion from public services. Undocumented high school students must contend with the possibility of college not being an option even if they are on par with their documented peers (Abrego 2006). Studies show that disadvantaged young adults often reject negative experiences, and manipulate their environments by constructing a narrative of perseverance in the light of their historical and social context (Cohler and Hostetler 2003; Ueno et al 2016), and this may also apply to undocumented immigrant status.

Having the right to a public education does not protect undocumented youth from the disappointment associated with their inability to enter higher education, as well as fear of individual and/or family deportation. Following the 1982 Supreme Court ruling Plyler vs. Doe, public schools in the U.S. were not permitted to exclude children who are undocumented—allowing immigrant children to participate in the public education system alongside their documented peers (Passel 2003). In one study, undocumented high school students reported having to hide their fears and self-monitor their behavior at school in order to remain in their teacher’s good graces and avoid the risk of being stereotyped, and/or deported (Perez and Cortes 2011). These same students described rejecting and having to disprove the Latinx stereotype of lazy and “illegal” throughout high school even when they felt angry. Latinx high school students report experiencing stereotyping and discrimination whether or not they are undocumented in the first place (Salerno and Reynolds 2016). In an ethnographic study that included interviews with documented and undocumented immigrant youth in Los Angeles, Abrego found that undocumented high school students must often strive to succeed academically, prepare for
college acceptance, and participate in common adolescent social activities despite experiencing insecurities and anxiety related to their legal status (2006).

Even if undocumented students are able to attend college through policies like DACA (Schmid 2013), they still face uncertainties about their post-graduation legal status. Undocumented immigrant youth also live in fear of being separated from their families due to the increase of deportations that began during the Obama administration (Chavez, Lavariega Monforti, and Michelson 2015), and that continues today under President Trump. The lack of a permanent and clear legal path to residency or citizenship makes DACA recipients feel powerless and afraid.

**Purpose of Study**

This study aims to contribute to existing literature on college student persistence by examining the cultural and social-psychological factors that uniquely characterize the college experience among Latinx young adults. In particular, this study will examine the role of parental immigrant narratives in influencing self-efficacy, motivation, and academic career narrative construction among persisting Latinx college students, while also examining how the above processes differ for undocumented students. By having a better understanding of the way in which students construct their own narratives, and their own sense of self-efficacy and motivation, we can pave the way for further research that aims to improve Latinx college persistence.

**Methods**

**Overview**

The purpose of this study is to understand the role of parental immigrant narratives in influencing self-efficacy, motivation, and academic career narrative construction among Latinx
college students. By doing so, I will gain a better understanding of their college experiences and the challenges to their education, while also examining how these processes differ for undocumented students. The following research question is addressed to achieve this: how do documented and undocumented Latinx students derive self-efficacy by drawing on parental immigrant narratives? A qualitative research design is used in this study by focusing on understanding the perspective and experiences of the respondents. An inductive process was used to identify, describe, and support emerging themes discovered by conducting a thematic analysis of the data. The findings reveal the meanings and experiences described by the respondents by situating them in the broader context of college persistence, self-efficacy, motivation, and immigration.

**Methodological Approach**

Due to the nature of my research questions, a qualitative approach is the most appropriate for this study. Through my research design, I was able to capture how Latinx students make sense of their experiences in education, and the nuanced ways in which they interpreted their own life stories. Data in this study come from 30 in-depth lasting from one to two hours (average of one hour) with current full-time college students over the age of 18 who identify as Latinx, and who are mostly in their junior or senior year of college. They are enrolled in 4-year universities in the South East, at both private and public institutions. My sample is stratified by gender, and both former documented and undocumented students are equally represented. Demographic information including age, racial/ethnic identity, and academic background was obtained by having each respondent complete a demographic information fact sheet as recommended by Warren and Karner (2010). In regards to race, respondents were asked to self-identify their race, and the majority identified as “Hispanic” or “Latinx” for both ethnicity and
race. This reflects the current difficulties in the categorization of race among the Latinx community- while there are Latinxs from a variety of racial backgrounds, they often solely identify with their ethnicity (Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends 2012).

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is situated in the social psychology of education, specifically in the self-efficacy and motivation literature, as well as immigration and the life course. The main concepts are self-efficacy, motivation, parental immigrant narratives, and academic career narrative construction- used by respondents as a tool when communicating their own experiences, goals and values. A conceptual model is provided below to demonstrate the assumed causal relationships among these concepts.

![Conceptual Model](image)

**Figure 2.1 Immigrant Resources for College Persistence**

As demonstrated in Figure 1, Latinx narrative depictions of their college experiences are characterized by self-efficacy and motivation that occur as a result of parental immigrant narratives. High levels of self-efficacy allow individuals to embrace positive experiences and
reject negative ones. In an effort to better understand how persisting Latinx students made sense of their educational journey, I examine how self-efficacy and motivation are central to their life narratives, and how their parent’s own immigrant narratives of sacrifice and hard work inspire Latinx student self-efficacy and motivation.

**Sample and Context of the Study**

As a former high school teacher, I have maintained relationships with many of my former students who are now enrolled in college. I used snowball (or chain-referral) sampling (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981; Weiss 1994) as a means of recruiting interviewees by reaching out to my former students, and requesting that they hand out business cards to their Latinx classmates with my name and email, and if the student was interested in participating, they could contact me. Former high school students identifying as Latinx had the chance to participate as well if they were so inclined, and four out of the thirty respondents are my former students. Twenty-two interviews were performed in person, and eight interviews via Skype. Interviews conducted in person took place at a coffee shop, or another location convenient to the interviewee. Interviews via Skype, took place in a private location for the respondents in order to facilitate a sense of comfort and confidentiality. Five of the eight Skype interviews took place in the respondent’s home, and three in public spaces.

**Data Collection**

The concepts studied are parental immigrant narratives, self-efficacy, motivation, and academic career narrative construction- used by respondents as resources when communicating their own experiences in college. The conceptual model reflects patterns that emerged in the interview data and field notes.
Interviews

Interviews began in May of 2016, and ended in November of 2017. All interviews took place in one sitting. I asked respondents questions about their childhood and school years, their preparation and application to college, their experiences on and off campus, their relationships, their perceptions of campus life, and how they have coped with difficulties as demonstrated in my interview guide located in appendix A. My interview guide was used as a scaffold to maintain a somewhat linear chronological direction, yet it still gave respondents room for open dialogue and a more natural progression (Charmaz 2006; Charmaz 2014; Dezin and Lincoln 2005). As a Latinx immigrant myself, I shared brief anecdotes of my own experiences when appropriate in order to establish rapport with my interviewees. My interview schedule was designed in order to encourage an autobiographical account of each respondent’s life. I asked them to tell me their “life story,” and in particular how their childhood, family, and friendships had shaped their college aspirations and future goals. Respondents would often focus on one particular era in their life by providing details about their experiences in high school, or a relationship with a particular family member.

Students received IRB approved consent forms, as well as a brief description of the study. All interviewee questions were answered prior to the interview, and participants were given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. After each interview, I organized my own notes collected during the interview. I created memos in order to reflect on emerging themes in the data. An inductive approach was used to explore how students experience college, their belief in sacrifice and hard work, their relationships and closeness with family, as well as academic career narrative construction.

Field Notes
After each interview I wrote interview notes, and reflected on any particular anecdote or description provided by the participant (Weiss 1995). There are both descriptive and reflective elements to my field notes. My descriptive notes contain details about the respondent’s reactions to questions, their facial expressions, the interview setting, and my own thought processes. Field notes were revised throughout to reflect changes in the interview schedule, and any problems that arose later in the study.

My field notes also contain reflective elements that include my own thoughts on the interviews, the directions taken by the interviewees, and my own perception of patterns emerging from their responses. I emphasized what seemed most significant to the interviewee based on the time spent responding to each question, or how the interview would change direction. My reflective notes allowed me to also realize that I was attempting to control the conversation early on in my first interviews, causing me to step back and give the interviewee the space necessary to reflect and process their narratives. The reflective notes give context to the descriptive notes, providing a strong sense of how the project was conducted and how the findings emerged.

**Strength and Limitations**

The methods used in this study have the capacity to provide rich and detailed data by allowing respondents to speak candidly about their experiences, thoughts, and feelings, as well as providing us with a more personal account of what it means to be a Latinx in college today. The main limitation in this study is that my sample only includes persisting students, and this limits my ability to infer that these resources make a difference in college persistence. I can simply demonstrate that they are prevailing themes in Latinx college student accounts. The demographic backgrounds of the respondents are characteristic to the South East U.S., and consequently my findings are not generalizable.
Data Analysis

The benefits of this analytical approach are associated with the benefits of a qualitative design in general. Conducting in-depth interviews allowed me to examine persisting Latinx college students’ perspectives and experiences in college. With a sample size of 30, I was able to reach saturation. Field notes were used to provide context and supplement the transcripts during the analysis. The type of analysis used fit my research questions perfectly because it is conducive to understanding the complexities in the experiences and narratives of persisting Latinx college students.

The interviews that were in English were transcribed using a transcription service, and I transcribed the interviews that took place in Spanish. Once interviews were transcribed, I read the completed transcripts and my field notes, and assigned the data codes based on what my findings revealed. A code is defined as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña 2013). I then sorted similarly coded passages into distinct excerpt files. My codes were organized under three major categories: parental immigrant narratives (hard work and sacrifice), self-efficacy, and motivation. I often returned to the recorded audio of the interviews in order to listen to the tone of voice of the respondent in an effort to validate my initial interpretation. It was an inductive process, where themes emerged from the data as it was analyzed.

In order to analyze the data made up of field notes, audio recordings of the interviews, and their respective transcripts, I used a word processor in my initial analysis to code transcripts, and once I was able to find themes in the data based on my interviewees’ narratives and life stories, I used Nvivo 11 software to create more comprehensive and focused codes. I gave
special attention to interviewee’s academic career narrative constructions, and the ways in which parental immigrant narratives influenced reports of self-efficacy and motivation.

Finally, I consolidated the excerpt files based on the patterns found in the respondent’s narratives, and this allowed me to create a logical framework of the areas of analysis. I use this framework in the next section in an effort to answer the following research question: how do documented and undocumented Latinx students derive self-efficacy by drawing on parental immigrant narratives?

**Findings**

To address the above questions, I conducted, transcribed, and coded 30 interviews that serve as the basis for the interview analyses presented here. Tables 1 and 2 contain respondent descriptive data displayed by sex, including nativity, age, year in college, region of attending institution, and legal status. All thirty respondents identify as Latinx, with fourteen of the respondents being male, and sixteen female. Six out of the thirty students are native born, and twenty-four are first generation immigrants. Most respondents are in their junior year of college, and their ages range from nineteen to twenty-two.

Interviewees spoke candidly about their childhoods, their families, and their plans for the future. I attempted to encourage an autobiographical account of their experiences within the education system, their homes, and how they went about preparing and applying for college. Every one of them was eager to tell me their story, and several patterns emerged.
Table 2.1 Descriptive Data Female

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Table 2.2 Descriptive Data Male

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Sixteen out of 30 of my interviewees were former undocumented minors, and they described feeling afraid of being caught, deportation, and described feeling uncertain about the future. On the other hand, they also described how believing in themselves, and not letting fear or stereotypes bring them down helped them make it to graduation. When stories of undocumented experiences were told in passing during the interviews, they became “markers,” because they were passing references that I made sure to return to later in the interview (Weiss 1995). They also talked about the worry they felt for their parents because of financial strain as well as their own undocumented status.

Interviewees also revealed a close relationship with their families throughout their lives, as well as the influence of their parent’s immigrant stories as motivation to attend college. Migrating to the US in order to achieve upward mobility was a narrative that emerged in all interviews. The Latinx students I interviewed used this cultural ideology as a resource when experiencing difficult times. They often reported using their negative experiences as lessons and motivation for success. They rejected any notion of needing or wanting help, and believed that it was solely up to them to achieve academic success.

The findings will be presented thematically, with each finding supported by evidence from the data. Several themes emerged, including a common reference to parental immigrant narratives of hard work and sacrifice. Other themes included self-efficacy, and motivation. Students reported having a sense of control over their futures, and a belief in sacrifice and hard work as a key to success even while undocumented as high school students, and interviewees engaged in academic career narrative construction. Below are excerpts from interviews, along with interpretive summaries and analyses.
Parental Immigrant Narratives’ Influence on Self-Efficacy and Motivation

Respondents described how they felt about working hard to achieve success, even under difficult conditions. Most respondents reported having immigrant parents who instilled hard work and sacrifice. They felt a responsibility to their families, and to themselves as Latinxs. For example, Daniel— a first generation undocumented immigrant from Guatemala explains that while he came from poverty, he believes he will achieve much more:

I want to put myself in the best position possible by going to college, so like you know I saw how hard I had to struggle. I had a hard time growing up dealing with being broke, and my parents not having a lot of money, and them working a ton and not being around. I’m going to make it though. I will do what I have to do.

Daniel emphasizes throughout his interview that both his parents have focused on his education so that he has opportunities that they never had as immigrants. When he mentions “making it,” he is referring to achieving upward mobility. He references his parents’ use of immigrant narratives as a source of motivation providing Daniel with a sense of self-efficacy and motivation.

My parents were like listen, just focus on school. We want you to make us proud. We came from our country so that you can have a better life. Don’t worry about getting a job now and as soon as I graduated (high school) I was like nah, I don’t want them worrying about me so much. I got this. I started working as much as I could.

Daniel explains his desire to work, and frames his actions within the context of his parent’s immigrant narrative. By using phrases like “I got this,” expresses a sense of control over his future. Daniel repeatedly said he did not want his parents to worry about him any longer, and that he was able to juggle a full-time class schedule and multiple jobs. Daniel wanted a middle class lifestyle that his parents never had, and he noted that he planned on taking care of them as soon as he could.
Respondents shared stories about the financial difficulties they face as college students. Roberto is a second-generation Cuban enrolled at a private university with a fifty percent scholarship. The remainder of his tuition is his responsibility, and he reports working four jobs at a time in an effort to make payments towards his tuition. He explains that his best friend, the white son of a banker, does not experience the same hardship:

Sure, I mean, I have to work four different jobs in order to pay my bills, but that’s just how it is. Just because my parents don’t make a lot of money does not mean I’m going to feel sorry for myself. I don’t believe in handouts, I believe in hard work. I have straight As, and I plan to be a politician. I will achieve this because I work my ass off. My best friend is a millionaire, and I look to him as an example of excellence. His father worked hard to be where he is.

First generation students have the drive to persist by constructing their own life narratives, and making sense of their experiences in college. Narrative construction is therefore a strategy for persistence used by students inspired by the belief that hard work and sacrifice can result in success. Respondents express their belief in the connection between achieving material success and happiness, and this in turn emphasizes their self-efficacy and motivation- they believe in agency over structure. Minorities are able to reframe their status in a positive light- one that is associated with hard work that will lead to a better life (Cohler and Hostetler 2003; Ueno et al 2016).

Most respondents described experiencing hardship during their childhood. Johanna is a second generation Puerto Rican, and she grew up with three siblings and a single mother who worked two jobs to support her family. From an early age she was enrolled in gifted programs and remembers wishing she could help her mother more, yet her mother forced her to focus on school. They moved around often, and didn’t have much. She explains how she hopes to make her mother proud, and plans on taking care of her mother by being successful:
My mom was a teacher in the NY school system, and eventually we had to leave because we could not afford our apartment. We moved quite a few times. She made sure I didn’t miss school, and was always proud of my good grades. I know it’s hard, and people have told me I won’t amount to much, but I believe I will. I’m going to work in women’s health, and I will have the things I always wanted. I will take care of my mom too.

Johanna is able to reconstruct her difficult childhood story in a positive light in order to construct an academic career narrative where she will not only achieve a better life for herself, but will also take care of her mother. Having experienced difficulties as a child, she is grateful for the opportunity to give back. Johanna expresses a sense of control over her future. She is both extrinsically motivated- when she mentions having the things she always wanted, and intrinsic motivated- by saying that she will take care of her mom. Self-efficacy is key in the reported desire of Latinx college students to succeed academically and economically. Johanna says she believes she will succeed and take care of her mother. Students believe in themselves even when faced with the possibility of failure, and have the self-efficacy and motivation to gain the experiences and knowledge necessary to succeed.

Hugo is a first generation Mexican immigrant who is undocumented, and he remembers immigrating from Mexico to the US as a young child. He explains that it was his mother’s dream that he attend a good university, and become a doctor someday. Attending medical school has become his dream as well:

She was always scared of being sent back to Mexico, but she said it was all worth it. My mom would tell me that I needed to be a Doctor because I would get respect, even if I was Mexican. I ended up liking science and math, so it worked out. I worry about her every day, and it’s hard to be away. I remind myself that this is for her too.

Hugo draws from his mother’s use of the immigrant narrative- stories she told him of leaving everything she knew to give him a better life. Hugo wants to persevere even while he
worries about her wellbeing. He never discusses feeling unsure or insecure of his abilities, yet he wants to take care of his mother. His mother cleans several houses daily, and he worries about her physical health as she ages. Hugo dreams of giving his mother the gift of retirement.

Alberto is a second generation Cuban, and he talks about how his parents often remind him of how much they left in Cuba in order to give him a better life. He describes his parents’ departure from Cuba, and the dangerous journey they took with his older sister by boat. Leaving the rest of their family and life behind, they worked at an uncle’s restaurant until they were able to gain better employment.

My mom still works at the mall. It’s hard work dealing with customers, especially during the holidays. She really should retire, but she can’t. She wants me to go to law school, but I’m not sure. I mean, I don’t know if I want to be a lawyer, but I know that I do want to help her retire. Being a lawyer will allow me to do that. It would be horrible if I didn’t give back, you know?

Alberto is unsure of the career he will choose, but he is certain he will make enough money to support his mother, although he seemed nervous about it. He has an internship where is not getting paid, but he is sure it is only temporary. He also works part-time as a barista at a local coffee shop near campus. Not working is not an option for him. Marginalized young immigrants may construct their own narratives as a strategy for coping with disadvantages associated with their status (Sandstrom 1990; Silva 2012), and Alberto insists on choosing a career that he believes will help him take care of his family.

Rebeca is an undocumented first generation immigrant from Ecuador who calls herself a dreamer, and is thankful that President Obama signed DACA into law. Rebeca reflected on how emotional her parents were when they found out that their daughter could now go to college and pay in-state tuition. Rebeca does not like that her mother cleans houses, and she insists that her dislike is not out of embarrassment, but because she believes her mother deserves better. Like
most of the students I interviewed, she wishes she could tell her mother to quit. She believes that starting her own business someday will allow her that pleasure.

I hate that she cleans people’s houses. I also hate that sometimes they treat her so bad! She says it’s not a big deal because she’s tough, but I’m sick of it. She can’t really get any other jobs because she has been doing this for years and because she doesn’t have a green card. She is embarrassed to be illegal, but proud of me. With DACA I can now be here as a student legally. When I start my wedding planning business, she can quit. She can work for me! (laughs).

Rebeca hopes she can eventually become a US citizen. She then plans to claim her parents and her older brother. Her dad works in construction, and she wishes he could also resign. She talks about being grateful to them for life, and wanting them to have what they came to the U.S. for, better opportunities.

Luis is a documented first generation immigrant from El Salvador who hopes to become a pharmacist. Luis is a junior who calls himself a survivor. He tells me he grew up in a rough neighborhood, and that his brother is in jail. He has never met his father, and talks about how hard his mother and aunts have worked to raise him and his siblings. He talks about how he sometimes feels like he does not fit in, and that college is very different. He is not dissuaded by these feelings:

Sometimes I want to quit school because I feel like professors are really tough on me for no reason. I mean, there was this one professor in an English class last semester that was an asshole. Sometimes I feel like it is because I have an accent, or because I’m Hispanic, but it makes me want to work harder. I want to prove to them that I am smart enough for this shit, and I ended up getting a good grade. When I was a kid, my mom always told us to be proud of who we were as immigrants and to believe in ourselves.

Luis has taken the negative experience of perceived discrimination and turned it into something positive: hard work resulting in a good grade. Like his fellow Latinx college students in this study, he constructs a narrative of hard work and perseverance and a sense of control over
his academic career. By recounting how his mother told him to be proud of his heritage, Luis shows how his mother’s parental immigrant narratives have helped him develop self-efficacy.

Tatiana is an undocumented first generation immigrant from Venezuela. She desires a career in broadcasting and journalism. Most of her life story during the interview focused on the political and social unrest happening in Venezuela since the late 1990s. Her father lost his medical practice, and her mother quit her job as a pre-school teacher in order to immigrate with her to the U.S. She wants to be a reporter so that she can help inform the world of human rights violations taking place in dangerous places. She struggles because English is not her first language, and she tells me this holds her back:

I have learned a lot since we arrived, but I am still not where I need to be. I have applied to work as an intern in a local newspaper, but the work they give me is stupid. I do nothing important, and it is because I’m not good with the language. I decided to read and write something every day. Not just my homework, but other stuff too. The more I read and write in English, the better I will get. This is not an obstacle it’s a chance to be a better reporter.

Tatiana is motivated to improve her English because of the fact that she is not receiving significant assignments in her internship. She is taking a negative experience and transforming it into something positive by refashioning her English deficiency as a motivating force in order to become a reporter. Her experiences in Venezuela, and her parents’ actions to improve her life chances inform her individual narratives of hard work and sacrifice.

The Latinx men and women I interviewed described feeling indebted to their parents for their hard work and sacrifice. Parental immigrant narratives shaped their feelings of self-efficacy, and gave them motivation to persist in college despite having to work while going to college, and face the uncertainties associated with being undocumented. Latinx college students show a mixture of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and neither type of motivation truly captures
what is conveyed in their narratives. They are motivated to contribute to a family mobility project and to care for their parents. Unlike previous studies, my findings reveal that the men and women I interviewed reported having self-efficacy despite the obstacles they faced, including discrimination, anxiety, uncertainty about the future when undocumented, and financial insecurity. Latinx college students constructed academic career narratives by using parental immigrant narratives of hard work and sacrifice, and by redefining their negative experiences as lessons learned.

**Latinx Students and Legal Status: Fear, Anxiety, Concealment, and DACA**

Sixteen out of thirty respondents reported that they were undocumented during their high school years. They described this period as challenging, and seemed uneasy during this part of the interview because of the stress and anxiety associated with their status. They were not afraid to speak to me about their status because they are DACA recipients. There were similar patterns in their narratives, like maintaining self-control, focusing on academics, and manipulating their environment by pretending that they were not undocumented or “illegal.” By engaging in college preparation even when college attendance seemed unlikely, students reported feeling hopeful and rejected any stereotypical expectations of undocumented immigrants. Respondents explained that while they lived in fear because of their legal status, they still felt a sense of responsibility to move forward.

Valentina and her mother moved to the US from Peru when she was eight years old. Her early memories in the US include an awareness of being undocumented, and a concern for her own safety. When she was a child, she overheard her mother and step-father discussing the implications of Valentina’s legal status, especially since she was the only one in the household without legal residency in the US. Her mother remarried upon arrival and became a U.S.
resident. She also has a younger sister who was born in the US. Valentina’s father is in Peru, and refused to cooperate in any way when it came to signing paperwork related to her legal status in the U.S. She describes her anguish as a young girl:

I was aware pretty early that I could be deported at any time. I was always scared, and did not tell any of my friends. I used to pray that my mom’s lawyer would call with good news. It wasn’t until late in high school when I found out I qualified for DACA, and was able to attend college. It was the happiest day of my life.

Previously undocumented respondents describe their experiences in high school as a “rollercoaster.” Latinx college students recall experiencing a range of feelings as undocumented high schools students, and the importance of self-control. Their narrative about college included recasting their experiences as positive, as challenges that made them stronger. Valentina shared that even though she was anxious about her undocumented status as a high school student, she nevertheless persisted in her preparations for college admission.

Sergio is an undocumented first generation immigrant from Colombia. He was an honor student and took advanced placement (AP) courses all through high school. His academic success gave him confidence, and he wanted to be a doctor. He prepared for entry into college by accumulating college credit early through AP classes and by going to free tutoring at school for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). He did all these things knowing that there was a good possibility he would not be able to attend. He described how he felt trapped, and unable to do “normal teenage stuff” like get a driver’s license, yet he made up stories in order to avoid suspicion. He found out his senior year that because of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), he would be able to attend college. His cousin called him early on a Saturday morning:

I was sleeping, but my cell phone woke me up. My cousin was yelling into my phone, telling me that the news had just reported DACA case approvals all over
the country. That’s when I knew my dreams of going to college would come true. All the years of stressing about this were over.

Yet, undocumented students explained that they did experience a loss of hope at times when they feared that college was not an option. Daniel started to let things slip his senior year. He started to feel like there was no point in working hard if he was unable to go to college. He had lived in the US for over ten years, yet due to his undocumented status, he would not be able to afford college. He dreamed of attending a particular university in the Southeast due to its high ranking and reputation of being a party school, but knew his parents would never be able to afford out of state tuition. His relatives offered to help pay for tuition at a local community college. He describes how he felt:

I applied to my favorite university, but there was no point. I knew I would not be able to attend, and it was really depressing. My parents tried to make me feel better by offering to come up with the money so I could go to a community college, but I didn’t want to. I felt it would be a waste of time. Everything seemed like a waste of time.

Daniel felt a temporary loss of control. He no longer felt empowered, and felt as though there was no point in working hard. Once he qualified for DACA, he was able to attend the college of his dreams and regained a sense of control. Once this happened, he told me that he changed his thinking, and turned himself around- He changed his academic career narrative to accompany his newfound success. Even while experiencing a sense of loss, Daniel appeared to shift his outlook both as a result of qualifying for DACA, and the strong influence his parent’s dreams had on him, giving him the drive to succeed in college and achieve the lifestyle they migrated to this country for.

Christina is an undocumented first generation immigrant from Colombia. She described the confusion and uncertainty she felt during the college application process in
high school. She was undocumented, and aspired to go to college. She wants to be an
architect, and has since her junior year of high school. She knew her parents could not
afford to pay for college, and she would not be eligible for student loans because of her
undocumented status, or as she said being “illegal.” Still, she persisted:

I just had this feeling that I would figure it out. I would go to college some way. My parents came here from Colombia separately. First, my dad came and we stayed. He would send money, but it was hard being alone for my mom. They decided for all of us to come here, and it was not easy because we were, and actually still are, scared of being sent back. My parents worked hard though, and I will too.

Christina still struggles with the uncertainty of her status, and especially that of her
parents. She said she believes that she must think positive, and explains that being able to
someday sponsor her parents is her goal. She reports feeling doubt about what may happen
in the future, but plans to continue working towards her goals. Like other undocumented
respondents, she qualified for DACA. She told me that she was happy to be in college, but
constantly worried about what would happen after she graduated.

Blanca immigrated to the US from Nicaragua with her parents when she was six. She does not recall much from her life in Nicaragua, but her parents tell her stories of
escalating violence in their hometown. They had family in the US, and decided to
immigrate with Blanca. She is grateful to her parents for taking the risk of moving, yet she
remembers feeling ashamed of being “illegal.” Her schoolmates would tease her, and she
would lie about her status to make them stop. Nevertheless, she worked hard to be a good
student so that she could go to college.

I was a good student. I got along better with teachers than with kids my age. My
parents told me to do well in school, and that they would figure out a way to pay
for college. I always want them to be proud. I’m majoring in education because I
think I would enjoy being a teacher, and there is always a need for teachers. I’m
hoping once I become a teacher, and I can become a US citizen.
Like other undocumented respondents, Blanca is hopeful for the future and believes she can achieve her dream and that of her parents. On the other hand, she’s unsure at times. Undocumented respondents revealed feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, shame and concealment in their stories. While they resemble documented Latinx students in that they report self-efficacy and motivation—these resources are fragile in the face of the unknown: the expiration of DACA, and their undocumented status after graduation.

Latinx college students who are undocumented are equally influenced by parental immigrant narratives, and feel the responsibility to do well in college to repay their parents’ hard work and sacrifice. They report self-efficacy and motivation to persist, yet they differ from their documented peers in that they display fear, anxiety, and the need to conceal their status. These differences are retrospective in that students felt the same way while in high school. DACA made it possible for the men and women I interviewed to go to college, but there is no guarantee that it will be renewed, and students are aware of this. While DACA was a dream come true for many of the men and women I interviewed, their legal status impeded their belief in having control over their future.

**Discussion and Implications**

The above findings elucidate how parental immigrant narratives influence Latinx student academic career narrative constructions of self-efficacy and motivation, particularly when considering the unique social strain associated with being an undocumented student. Student’s unusual degree of optimism can be attributed to feeling a sense of responsibility towards paying their parents back, and not wasting the opportunities given to them through immigration. This dissertation contributes to the social scientific research on college persistence, in particular how student motivation is influenced by parental guidance, values, and academic goals—regardless of
hardship (Cavazos and Cavazos 2010; Ojeda 2012; Silva 2012). By providing examples of how persisting Latinx college students experience and perceive college, this dissertation contributes to the sociology of education literature on self-efficacy by highlighting that persisting Latinx college students report believing in their own agency, and have control over their future. This motivates them to continue, contradicting Mirowsky et al (1996)- who found that racial and ethnic minorities have lower self-efficacy. This study also contributes to the life course literature by examining narrative constructions used by individuals along the transition to adulthood, specifically the way in which disadvantaged individuals use narrative construction as a coping mechanism when it allows them to reconstruct negative experiences like discrimination- into something positive (Sandstrom 1990; Silva 2012; Ueno 2017). This study is also aimed at informing colleges and universities of the ways in which Latinx college students perceive their college experience, and perhaps help better guide college retention programs. At the outset of this project my intentions were to investigate the individual experiences of Latinx students on campus, and what their academic trajectories looked like.

Respondents who reported being undocumented while in high school describe feeling uncertain about the future, memories of being guarded about who they confided in, and how they behaved in school. They crafted academic career narratives to cope with these feelings and stress during the time leading up to the college application process, as well as college preparation and interactions with peers. Students also rejected existing stereotypes about Latinx students by positively reframing their disadvantaged positions, and focusing on their future plans. They reported self-efficacy and motivation in their strategies for persistence.

For undocumented respondents there is an added layer of concern that emerges in their narratives. The uncertainty of their status does not necessarily derail them from persisting in
college, yet they differ from their documented counterparts in the description of concrete future plans. Undocumented respondents speak carefully about their future and that of their parents, and the need for contingency plans. We are in a particularly precarious historical moment for DACA recipients, as students find themselves in a legal limbo, unaware of their ability to complete their college education. Latinx students who are enrolled as DACA recipients may even face deportation, proving their worst fears. When I conducted these interviews, the legal status of interviewees was more definite, and the expiration of DACA seemed unlikely. After March 5th, no student was able to apply for DACA, making it almost impossible for most undocumented Latinx students to attend college in the U.S.

Latinx college students use academic career narratives to frame their challenges in productive rather than deterministic ways. Some students mentioned the absence of a father, and while their narratives are mostly positive when discussing their parents, it is clear that this is not necessarily a reflection of reality. My findings are compelling because the men and women I interviewed are motivated to go persist in college by the desire to repay their parents (mother) back for their hard work, and the aspiration for a high paying job in order to provide for their parents.
CHAPTER 3
LATINX COLLEGE STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF FAMILISM AND GENDER

Introduction

Strong family ties and family loyalty are characteristic of Latinx culture. Scholars refer to this phenomenon as “familism”: a cultural value that dictates appropriate beliefs, expectations and responsibilities within the family. Familism is characterized by the sacrifice of one’s individual needs over the needs of other family members (Lugo Steidel and Contreras 2003). Familism is associated with greater respect for authority and Latinx youth often demonstrate such values by abiding strictly to rules at home (Calzada, Fernandez, and Cortes 2010; Guilamo-Ramos, Dittus, Jackard, Johansen, Bourdis, and Acosta 2007). This chapter explores how familism influences Latinx students’ feelings in and about college, with an emphasis on gender differences.

Family loyalty is central to familism, with Latinx parents and children giving higher priority to family responsibilities when compared to non-Latinx whites (Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, Marin, & Perez-Stable, 1987). Parental immigrant narratives fuel responsibility to the family. Included in family responsibilities is children’s academic performance and success in light of sacrifices made by parents attempting to provide better educational opportunities. For this reason, familism may also yield educational benefits (Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006; Stepick & Stepick, 2010). A sense of obligation towards their parents is also protective when Latinx students are faced with negative experiences at school (Fuligni, Tseng and Lam 1999).

Familism is also thought to be an important social resource that compensates for material disadvantage. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported in 2015 that thirty percent of Hispanic children live in poverty. Latinx immigrants are less likely to have a college
education, and more likely to have unstable, low paying jobs. Acting as a buffer against the stress associated with financial instability, familism protects Latinx youth from deleterious mental health outcomes by helping them cope (Stein et al 2015). Familism also provides motivation for academic success as a means to improve social class standing by attending college (Stein et al 2015).

Familism appears to be a resource for Latinx college students at school. Existing research examines how Latinx youth embrace familism as an important cultural value (Lugo Steidel and Contreras 2003; Stein et al 2015). Those who report stronger relationships with parents and other family members, as well as a sense of responsibility towards their family, have higher levels of academic motivation (Arellano and Padilla, 1996; Plunkett and Bamaca-Gomez, 2003; Smokowski et al., 1999; Valenzuela and Dornbusch, 1994). However, the expectations and responsibilities to the family differ by gender under Latinx familism. Girls are socialized to stay closer to home, and engage in caretaking activities, while boys are given more autonomy and freedom (Arriagada 2005). These differences can be detrimental to college students who experience a conflict between school and family.

Two concepts used by scholars to better understand traditional Latinx gender norms within Latinx families are Machismo and Marianismo. Machismo and Marianismo are Latinx cultural values that influence gender socialization and the establishment of traditional gender norms in Latinx families. Latinx and Chicana studies have attempted to move beyond Machismo, in an effort to debunk the negative stereotypes associated with the concept (Hurtado and Sinh 2016). Yet, in my interviews with Latinx college students, I find that the concept us useful for conveying the striking gender differences in how familism is experienced by college students. Furthermore these differences matter for college success.
Machismo and Marianismo are opposing but complementary concepts. In Latinx culture, boys and girls learn traditional gender norms associated with these two cultural values under familism. Girls learn they are vulnerable, and in need of protection, while boys learn to be independent and protectors. Because Latinx boys are given more freedom, they are more likely than girls to engage in risky behaviors (Lac, Unger, Basañez, Ritt-Olson, Soto, and Baezconde Garbanati 2011). Machismo emphasizes strength, honor, masculinity, and independence (Cuellar, Arnold, & Gonzalez 1995), and is characterized by aggression, dominance, and promiscuity, often occurring in opposition to femininity (De Mente 1996; Sequeira 2009).

Marianismo, in contrast, emphasizes caregiving, preserving family integrity, maintaining family traditions, providing emotional and instrumental support for all family members, as well as self-sacrifice (Gil and Vazquez 1996). The word Marianismo originates from the belief associated with Catholicism in Latinx communities that girls should emulate the Virgin Mary (Lac et al 2011). For Latinx women in college, the message of Marianismo that they should prioritize family responsibilities and expectations can conflict with school.

This study explores the ways in which Latinx college students experience Familism, with a particular focus on gender. Machismo and Marianismo provide a cultural lens from which to view how Latinx men and women experience and talk differently about their responsibilities towards their family. I will attempt to answer the following research question: How do Latinx college students differ by gender in the way familism is experienced?

**Literature Review**

**Famílism**

Famílism is a traditional Latinx cultural value that provides guiding principles, and expectations concerning the family. More specifically, familism encourages the sacrifice of
individual needs for the benefit of the family as a whole (Lugo Steidel and Contreras 2003; Stein et al 2015). Familism manifests in many ways, including how mothers and fathers emphasize schooling as the child’s responsibility to the family, and this is demonstrated by their involvement in their children’s schooling, having a significant effect on Latinx academic achievement (Arellano and Padilla, 1996; Plunkett and Bamaca-Gomez, 2003; Smokowski et al., 1999; Valenzuela and Dornbusch, 1994). In a study of Latinx college pathways, Latinas felt a very strong sense of familism while also viewing a college education as a path for independence (Ovink 2014).

Familism has many benefits for Latinx students. In a study by Stein et al, high school Latinx students who embraced familism reported fewer symptoms of depression, and a greater sense of belonging in school (Stein et al 2015). In that study, familism was measured in terms of four subscales: familial support, family interconnectedness, family honor, and subjugation of the self. Other studies have found familism to be protective against acculturative stress (Fuligni et al 1999). Obligations to family include academic success as a reward to parents for their sacrifice and hard work (Perreira, Chapman and Stein 2006). Latinx adolescents who report strong family values, emphasize the importance of family loyalty, feel a strong a sense of responsibility to their parents (Stein et al 2015).

Other studies demonstrate that familism can manifest in both negative and positive ways. Ojeda et al looked at 115 Latinx college students and found that family related stressors diminished life satisfaction, especially women college students (2012). They found that male college students had higher life satisfaction than female students because the latter group felt burdened by stereotypes and cultural conformity, in particular the need to conform to family expectations (Ojeda et al 2012). Men in the study did not feel pressure to conform to ethno-
cultural expectations, including family expectations. Thus, Latinx women continue to feel a sense of obligation and responsibility to family during the college years and beyond (Ojeda et al 2012). Yet these authors don’t examine the cultural influences of familism on Latinx college students. Even among high school students, Reynolds and Burge found that from 1972 to 1992, Hispanic girls had the least increase in educational expectations compared to white and black girls (2008). The authors speculate that these patterns reflect traditional gender beliefs. In another study of Latinx adults, economic stress predicted a higher incidence of depressive symptoms, particularly among women who felt a sense of obligation towards family (Aranda and Lincoln 2011), yet we need to have a better understanding of why these differences exist. Another study found that undocumented college students in California tend to choose a college closer to home, foster close relationships with counselors, and feel an obligation to give back to family more than their non-Hispanic white and black peers (Perez, Rodriguez and Guadarrama 2015), yet gender differences are not examined.

Familism can be beneficial to Latinx youth, yet it can also be a burden. Familism provides benefits that include protecting young Latinx from deleterious mental health outcomes, and impacting Latinx student academic success. By contrast, Familism can be a burden in the nuanced ways in which gender influences how college students experience familism. For Latinx women in college, familism increases the load of responsibilities and expectations, posing a potential risk for college completion.

**Gendered Familism: Machismo and Marianismo**

**Machismo**

Machismo is a complex set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors associated with hyper-masculinity, strength, independence, authority, virility, honor, and responsibility towards
providing for, and protecting the family (Sequeira 2009). Historically, Machismo has been associated with the Latinx culture, but not exclusively so. Hyper-masculinity and patriarchy exist in many cultures, but the term Machismo is commonly referenced as a Latinx phenomenon. Existing studies find the use of Machismo by scholars problematic because it implies that Latinx in the U.S. are all part of one homogenous group, ignoring the different ways in which Latinx masculinity exists (Hurtado and Sinha 2016). While this may be true, Machismo is not negative overall, and can be used as a tool to better understand gender dynamics among Latinx. American anthropologist Oscar Lewis first introduced Machismo to the social sciences in the 1960s- and since then it has been used to stereotype all Latinx men as aggressive, womanizing, and oppressive towards their wives (Hurtado and Sinha 2016). Some Chicano scholars today reject the stereotype associated with Machismo, and are attempting to move beyond Machismo. I argue, however, that Machismo is a useful concept when examining gender roles among Latinx men and women today.

Machismo exists in opposition to femininity, and includes notions of dominance and authority over women and children (De Mente 1996). Sexual aggression and promiscuity are often recognized as markers of masculinity under Machismo (Sequeira 2009). Machismo is not solely negative, it also includes respect for family values: protecting and providing for all family members, bravery, pride, and courage (Sequeira 2009), chiefly the protection of the women in the family.

Young Latinx men in the U.S. today are moving beyond Machismo because they are coming to terms with the privileges associated with masculinity, while recognizing the disadvantages associated with class, race, and ethnicity that make up their experiences as Latinx regardless of gender (Hurtado and Sinha 2016). Latinx men in the Latino Masculinities Study
(Hurtado and Sinha 2016) reported witnessing the difficulties faced by the women in their lives, especially their mothers, and distance themselves from the aggression and authoritarianism associated with traditional notions of Machismo. While Latinx men seem to be breaking away from more negative traditional values associated with Machismo: such as aggression and control over women and children. Other aspects of male power are still there. For example, Latinx young men still enjoy more independence than young Latinx women, while Latinx young women remain much more restricted in their activities at home when living with parents (Hurtado and Sinha 2016).

Latinx women are still expected to adhere to traditional gender roles that advantage Latinx men. In the Chicana Feminisms Study, 101 Chicana women aged 19 to 30 were interviewed, and they reported having more household chores than their brothers, as well as strict curfews, giving their brothers more freedom from, and opportunities for independence (Hurtado 2003). Saturdays were cleaning days for the women in the house, and respondents described cleaning “quietly” to not awaken their brothers. Hurtado found that Latinx women also talked about not having permission to date, and a parental emphasis on preserving their virginity (2003), while Latinx men had no such restrictions, and were encouraged to date and become sexually active relatively early.

**Marianismo**

In contrast to Machismo, Marianismo is a set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors associated with femininity. I have chosen Marianismo as a theoretical construct for this study because it complements Machismo. Marianismo is interconnected with religion, and Catholicism’s strong influence on Latinx culture since colonialism (Mendez-Luck and Anthony 2016), Marianismo embodies virtues often associated with the Virgin Mary: selflessness,
sincerity, humility, chastity, caretaking, and devotion to children, husbands and homemaking (Sequeira 2009). Scholars have questioned any differences in traditional gender norms between Latinx women and white women, however, while white women in the U.S. experience some of the same gender stereotypes and expectations, the difference between Marianismo and traditional gender roles in the U.S. is the strong association with religion mentioned before, mainly Catholicism. Catholicism’s influence on gender roles in Latinx familism can be more restrictive. An ethnographic study using interviews found that white middle-class women are also faced with constraints when it comes to their sexuality despite having progressive sexual values because they are labeled promiscuous if they engage in hook up culture (Hamilton and Armstrong 2009). In the same study, less privileged women felt college class beliefs to be in contradiction to their sense of sexuality.

Marianismo emphasizes caregiving, preserving family integrity, maintaining family traditions, providing both emotional and instrumental support for all family members, and continuous self-sacrifice (Gil and Vazquez 1996). Latinx women are socialized from a young age into the behaviors and values associated with Marianismo, including but not limited to obedience, femininity, weakness, and submission (Mendez-Luck and Anthony 2016). Because of Marianismo, Latinx women can often feel drawn to their home, and express feeling comfortable with closeness and family dependence (Sequeira 2009).

A consequence of Marianismo is Latinx girls and women assuming most responsibilities for domestic duties. Chicanas reports having to care for their younger siblings, even once siblings are older. Hurtado and Sinha (2016) found that young Latinx girls were in charge of cleaning, and caretaking at home, while also working outside of the home in order to have spending money until they found a husband. Their brothers, on the other hand, were given cash
and freedom from chores or strict rules. In a study conducted in Los Angeles, California, 44 caregiving Chicana women were interviewed, and all respondents had similar views on caretaking— that it was a choice, and this choice was associated with self-sacrifice, and their roles as women (Mendez-Luck and Anthony 2016). These women engaged in caretaking both in and outside the home, and they said it felt like it was their calling because they were women after all.

The caregiving burden associated with Marianismo can interfere with the college pursuits of Latinx women. In one study, Latinx women in college who held traditional beliefs associated with Marianismo, and experienced family conflicts because of not adhering to family expectations, reported higher rates of depression compared to peers who complied with family expectations (Piña-Watson, Castillo, Ojeda and Rodriguez 2013). The Marianismo Belief Scale (MBS) was used by Piña-Watson et al (2013) to measure the indoctrination of Latinx gender role beliefs. In this study, the MBS measured the degree to which Mexican women maintain the value systems learned from Marianismo (Piña-Watson et al 2013). The MBS scale consists of 24 items using a Likert scale from 1-4, such as “A Latina should feel guilty about telling people what she needs.” Marianismo can make Latinx women in college more vulnerable, and potentially more likely to give in to family responsibilities or expectations associated with Marianismo at the expense of staying in school.

Marianismo can also manifest in the form of selflessness by keeping troubles and challenges secret from family members during health crises. In a qualitative study examining the experiences of Latina breast cancer survivors, 25 Latinas between the ages of 28 and 83 were interviewed (Martinez-Ramos, Garcia Biggs, and Lozano 2013). Among their findings, the authors reported how Latinas often choose to consciously limit what they share about their illness with their spouses and family members because they do not want to be a burden. They
also worry about overcoming the perceived negative effects that a cancer diagnosis has on their family relationships and their femininity. (Martinez-Ramos et al 2013). Latinx women engage in concealment more than non-Hispanic white women when critically ill (Carver, Smith, Vida, and Anthony 2006).

Latinx women in college are often presented with an ideology that conflicts with Marianismo, and may wish to become more independent in a less restrictive culture, yet studies show how deeply entrenched Marianismo and familism are among Latinx women and girls. We must understand how Latinx college women perceive their family roles, and the possibility that Marianismo may buttress or undermine college persistence.

**Purpose of Study**

This study aims to contribute to the literature on gender, Latinx sociology, and college persistence by understanding the effects of familism and its gendered experiences on Latinx women and men in college. Previous studies have not examined how familism impacts Latinx men and women in college differently. Familism is experienced differently by gender and influenced by Marianismo and Machismo: My data suggests that Latinx women feel guilt if attending college away from home, or care for family members when living at home. Latinx men feel a responsibility to provide for their family, while yearning for independence.

**Methods**

**Overview**

The purpose of this study is to understand how Latinx college students experience familism, and to explore gender differences that reflect the contrast between Machismo and Marianismo. The following research question is addressed to achieve this: How do Latinx college students differ by gender in the way familism is experienced? A qualitative research
design is necessary to tap into students’ subjective experiences and understandings of family, responsibility, and gender in the context of pursuing a college degree. An inductive process was used to identify, describe, and support emerging themes discovered by conducting a thematic analysis of the data. The findings will reveal the meanings and experiences described by the respondents by situating them in the broader context of college persistence, familism and gender.

**Methodological Approach**

Due to the nature of my research question, a qualitative approach is the most appropriate for this study. Through my research design, I was able to capture how Latinx students make sense of their relationships with their families, and the gendered way in which familism emerges in their academic career narrative constructions about college. As outlined in chapter 2, the data come from 30 in-depth interviews lasting from one to two hours (average of one hour) with current full-time college students over the age of 18 who identify as Latinx, and who are in their junior year of college or beyond. They are enrolled in 4-year universities in the Southeast, at both private and public institutions. My sample is stratified by gender, and both former documented and undocumented students are equally represented. I did not ask students about their sexual identity, but those who spoke about romantic relationships or intimacy implied that their partners were of the opposite sex. Demographic information including age, racial/ethnic identity, and academic background was obtained by having each respondent complete a demographic information fact sheet as recommended by Warren and Karner (2010). In regards to race, respondents were asked to self-identify their race, and the majority identified as “Hispanic” or “Latinx” for both ethnicity and race. This corresponds challenges in the use of race categorization in Latinx community. While there are Latinxs from a variety of racial
backgrounds, they often solely identify with their ethnicity or country of origin (Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends 2012).

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is situated in Latinx sociology, immigration, and gender studies. The main concepts used are familism, gender, machismo, and marianismo. Under Machismo, the following characteristics emerged in the data: independence, provider, authority and virility. Under Marianismo, the following characteristics emerged: care work, selflessness/sacrifice, chastity and tradition. These concepts are explained in table 1. As described in chapter 2, respondents use academic career narrative construction as a tool to communicate, and make sense of their own experiences, goals and values. Family relationships are a theme that remained strong throughout the interviews, and notable differences emerged in the way in which Latinx students discussed their own family narratives. A conceptual model is provided below to illustrate the relationship between these concepts.

![Figure 3.1 Familism for Latinx College Students](image)

**Figure 3.1 Familism for Latinx College Students**
As demonstrated in Figure 1, familism is a social resource that can provide motivation to succeed in education, while also acting as a buffer against discrimination. At the same time, Latinx college students talk about familism differently by gender. My data show that Latinx women are more likely to report behaviors and values associated with Marianismo like caregiving, sacrifice, chastity and maintaining family traditions, while Latinx men are more likely to report a drive for independence, authority, virility, while also expressing the desire to provide for their family members, all features typically associated with Machismo. Latinx male respondents were also concerned with their parent’s current financial situation, as well as their health. In an effort to better understand how familism manifests differently among Latinx students, I examine how Marianismo and Machismo are cultural forces that contribute to the ways in which both Latinx women and men think about their own responsibilities to their families, and how those perceived obligations interact with their college pursuits.

Sample and Context of the Study

As indicated in chapter 2, I have maintained relationships with many of my former high school students who are now enrolled in college. I used snowball (or chain-referral) sampling (Biernacki and Dan Waldorf 1981 and Weiss 1994) as a means of recruiting interviewees by reaching out to my former students, and requesting that they hand out business cards with my name and email to their peers who identified as Latinx, and if the student is interested in participating, she/he can contact me. Former high school students identifying as Latinx had the chance to participate as well if they were so inclined, and four out of the thirty respondents are my former students. (For more details on the interview process, see chapter 2).
Data Collection

The concepts studied are familism, Machismo and Marianismo. These concepts were applied after collecting interview data and field notes. Under Machismo, I focus on independence, authority, provider, and virility. Under Marianismo, I focus on caregiving, selflessness/sacrifice, chastity and tradition.

Interviews

Interviews began in May of 2016, and ended in November of 2017. All interviews took place in one sitting, and were conducted in both Spanish and English. I asked respondents questions about their childhood and school years, their preparation and application to college, their experiences on and off campus, their relationships, their perceptions of campus life, and how they have coped with difficulties as demonstrated in my interview guide located in appendix A. My interview guide was used as a scaffold to maintain a somewhat linear chronological direction, yet it still gave respondents room for open dialogue and a more natural progression (Charmaz 2006; Charmaz 2014; Dezin and Lincoln 2005). As a Latinx immigrant myself, I shared brief anecdotes of my own experiences when appropriate in order to establish rapport with my interviewees. My interview schedule was designed in order to encourage an autobiographical account of each respondent’s life. I asked them to tell me their “life story,” and in particular how their childhood, family, and friendships had shaped their college aspirations and future goals. Respondents would often focus on one particular era in their life by providing details about their experiences in high school, or a relationship with a particular family member.

Students received IRB approved consent forms, as well as a brief description of the study. All interviewee questions were answered prior to the interview, and participants were given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.
by using a transcription service. After each interview, I created memos in order to reflect on emerging themes in the data. I was interested in how students experience familism in college, the gender differences in how students perceive their responsibilities towards their families within the context of being a college student.

Field Notes

After each interview I collected interview notes, and reflected on any particular anecdote or description provided by the participant (Weiss 1995). There are both descriptive and reflective elements to my field notes. My descriptive notes contain details about the respondent’s reactions to questions, their facial expressions, the interview setting, and my own thought processes. Field notes were revised throughout to reflect changes in the interview schedule, and any problems that arose later in the study.

My field notes also contain reflective elements that include my own thoughts on the interviews, the directions taken by the interviewees, and my own perception of patterns emerging from their responses. I emphasized what seemed most significant to the interviewee based on the time spent responding to each question, or how the interview would change direction. My reflective notes allowed me to also realize that I was attempting to control the conversation early on in my first interviews, causing me to step back and give the interviewee the space necessary to reflect and process their narratives. The reflective notes give context to the descriptive notes, providing a strong sense of how the project was conducted and how the findings emerged.

Strength and Limitations

The methods used in this study have the capacity to provide rich and detailed data by allowing respondents to speak candidly about their experiences with familism, thoughts, and feelings, as well as providing us with a more personal account of what it means to be Latinx
women and man in college today. The main limitation in this study is that my sample only includes persisting students, and this limits my ability to infer that these resources make a difference in college persistence. I can simply demonstrate that they are prevailing themes in Latinx college student accounts. The demographic backgrounds of the respondents are characteristic to the Southeast U.S., and consequently my findings are not generalizable.

Data Analysis

The benefits of this analytical approach are associated with the benefits of a qualitative design in general. Conducting in-depth interviews allowed me to examine persisting Latinx college students’ perspectives and experiences of familism in college. With a sample size of 30, I was able to reach saturation. Field notes were used to provide context and supplement the transcripts during the analysis. The type of analysis used fit my research questions because it is conducive to understanding the complexities in the experiences and narratives of familism among Latinx college students.

The interviews that were in English were transcribed using a transcription service, and I transcribed the interviews that took place in Spanish. Once interviews were transcribed, I read the completed transcripts and my field notes, and assigned the data codes based on what my findings revealed. I organized similarly coded passages into distinct excerpt files. I often returned to the recorded audio of the interviews in order to listen to the tone of voice of the respondent in an effort to validate my initial interpretation. It was an inductive process, where themes emerged from the data as it was analyzed.

In order to analyze the data made up of field notes, audio recordings of the interviews, and their respective transcripts, I used a word processor in my initial analysis to code transcripts, and once I was able to find themes in the data based on my interviewees’ narratives and life
stories, I used Nvivo 11 software to create more comprehensive and focused codes. As shown in Table 1, there were a total of eight categories: four under Machismo and four under Marianismo. I gave special attention to interviewee’s reports of behaviors, beliefs, and values associated with familism, and how these differed by gender.

Finally, I consolidated the excerpt files based on the patterns found in the respondent’s narratives, and this allowed me to create a logical framework of the areas of analysis that derived from said consolidation. I use this framework in the next section in an effort to answer the following research question: How do Latinx college students differ by gender in the way they experience familism?

**Findings**

**Familism as Source of Motivation for Latinx College Students**

A constant theme in all interviews was strong family ties: all respondents emphasized that family comes first, and that their families inspired them to succeed. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, Familism provides Latinx college students with motivation to persist in their studies, in particular by adopting parental immigrant narratives of hard work and sacrifice. Respondents named their parents as their main reasons for success in education, and how persisting was a responsibility to their family, motivating them to persist.

**Gender Differences in Experiences of Familism Among Latina/o College Students**

The way respondents talked about their family responsibilities differed by gender. Table 1 shows how Latinx College students identifying as men, reported the need to provide financially for their families, as well as wanting their independence. Male respondents described making their own decisions without consulting other family members. Among the men interviewed, only two out of thirty stayed close to home in order to be near their parents, and
they explained how this decision was a financial one. Male respondents talked about having some authority over family decisions, and the desire to date many women before settling down.

As I show in Table 2, Latinx college students who identified as women reported behaviors, beliefs and values associated with Marianismo. Those who moved away for college talked about feeling guilty for not being closer to home in order to care for their parents, grandparents, and/or siblings. Many Latinx women in my sample chose to attend a university near their parents in order to stay home, in some cases sacrificing the opportunity to attend higher ranked universities. They also spoke about family expectations of chastity, and their own feelings about sexual intimacy.

Table 3.1 Latinx College Students, Familism, Machismo, and Marianismo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marianismo</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Men %</th>
<th>Women %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Care work</td>
<td>Responsible for caring for family members</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifice/</td>
<td>Giving something up, or putting other before oneself</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selflessness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chastity</td>
<td>Not engaging in sexual activity, or feeling guilt if engaging in sexual activity</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition</td>
<td>Upholding family activities: helping plan holidays, birthdays, etc.</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Machismo</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Men %</th>
<th>Women %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Wanting space from family members, and making personal decisions without their consultation</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Making decisions about family matters, and controlling family members</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>Planning on, or currently providing financially for family members</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virility</td>
<td>Not settling down, and dating around before finding a wife</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Familism in the Latinx culture has defined roles for men and women. Machismo and Marianismo inform these complementary roles and reflect to some degree a traditional “home-maker bread-winner” model. The Latinx men I interviewed talked about their roles as men in the family in terms of the need to be strong providers. Both Latinx men and women talked about women’s role as being a supportive caregiver. Twenty-seven out of the thirty respondents embraced these traditional gender roles.

Table 1 shows that Latinx men and women typically talk about their family responsibilities in gendered ways. Although it is important to note that the women I interviewed also demonstrated some of the characteristics associated with Machismo. In particular, 64% of the women I interviewed reported behaviors and beliefs associated with independence, but only when making personal decisions without consulting their families. 44% of the women I interviewed spoke about making decisions for other family members, mostly the elderly. Men did not talk about their responsibilities towards their family in ways associated with Marianismo. Only 21% talked about sacrifice, and only one student described being involved in the planning of family traditions/activities.

On the other hand, table 1 reports that 86% of Latinx college students identifying as men in my sample spoke about wanting independence from their parents. They did so by describing their need for space from family members, and how they were making personal decisions without their family’s consultation. Findings show that 64% of male respondents discussed having authority in family decisions, and having some control over other family members specifically female family members. Seventy one percent of respondents talked about being current or future providers for their families, including parents, grandparents, and/or siblings. The majority of respondents discussed providing for their mothers. Fifty seven percent of Latinx
men described not wanting to settle down, and that dating many people was expected before marriage. This may be one of the characteristics of Machismo that is fading away.

Table 1 indicates that 75% of Latinx college students identifying as female were responsible for the care of at least one family member, such as a parent, grandparent, or sibling. Sixty three percent of female respondents talked about sacrifice or selflessness, such as choosing a closer university, staying home instead of moving out with peers, and working while in college to help support the family. Sixty nine percent of Latinx women disclosed the decision to not engage in sexual activity, or felt conflict and guilt if involved in an intimate relationship. Fifty six percent of female respondents were actively engaged in traditional family activities, including holiday planning, birthday parties, among others.

**Latinx Men, Familism and the New Machismo**

Latinx men in college experience familism very differently than Latinx women in college. The men I interviewed sought to fulfill their family obligations by striving for independence, yet they expressed guilt and concern for their parent’s finances and health. Latinx men revealed having feelings of annoyance toward their mother’s constant requests for phone calls, and wanting to be more independent from their families. They spoke of authority over other family members, as well as providing, or planning on providing for them. Latinx men in my sample also told me about promiscuous behaviors they engaged in, and that they would do so until marriage.

Jose, a first-generation Nicaraguan immigrant grew up in the Southeast with his parents who encouraged him to live out his college dreams. Once away in college, he worried constantly about both his parents due to the grueling nature of their work. His father was a janitor at an elementary school, and his mom cleaned houses. He felt like he
was wasting his time sitting in a classroom while his parents worked so hard. He wanted to help them financially, but was unable to. His mother would constantly ask that he call her, and he recounts how much he resented that:

She drives me crazy! She wants me to call her every day, but I’m busy. I think she has a hard time thinking of me as grown (chuckles). I don’t know. I wish she would just give me my space. I also hate the feeling I have after I hang up. You know? I just keep thinking that she’s getting old and probably not doing so well. I hate that feeling.

Jose felt responsible for the financial wellbeing of his parents, and wished he could do more. He spoke of this responsibility, and emphasizes how he would one day support his family. Jose also worked two part-time jobs in order to pay for his own expenses, because in his eyes depending on his parents for money would make him less of a “man.” These narratives demonstrate the influence of Machismo in Latinx culture, particularly in how men associate financial independence with masculinity. In the case of Latinx men, being able to support their parents is also associated with masculinity, a characteristic associated with Machismo.

Mariano, a first-generation immigrant from Colombia immigrated with his family from Colombia when he was three years old. His parents owned a small business in Colombia, and enjoyed a middle-class lifestyle. They left everything behind, and upon arrival began working odd jobs including house painting, house cleaning, and childcare to make ends meet. Mariano does not like that his mom cleans houses, and wants to graduate soon so that he can support her, allowing her to retire from such physically grueling work.

I’m a business major, and I’m getting through the program quickly. I need to start working and making real money soon so that my mom does not have to clean houses anymore. My sister is helping her with money now, but she will want to get married soon and have her own family to take care of. Since my dad left [after
separating from his mother], I’m the “man of the house,” you know what I mean? I’m making connections now so that I can get a good job as soon as possible.

Mariano believes it is his responsibility to support his mom. I asked if this would still be the case once he has a family of his own. He confirmed that he would still provide for his mom. As the only son, it is his duty to support her, and to provide for his wife and children when the time comes. Mariano is dating an “American” girl, and is not sure if he wants to marry her because they have different beliefs about family and caring for their parents. He thinks he will likely marry a Latinx woman because he wants someone who thinks like him. I asked what he meant by that, and he explains:

I think a Colombian girl, or any Latina would be on the same page. I’m not trying to discriminate! I love all girls (laughs), but when it comes to marriage, I think I would be happier with a Latina because she will take care of our kids and my mom. It won’t even be a question. She might even have her own parents to take care of, and I would be more than happy to welcome more family members. The more, the merrier! I think.

Mariano talks about his responsibilities as two-fold: first he must provide for his mother so that she is able to leave a physically grueling job. Second, he must marry a woman who is also Latinx, and who will therefore take on the role of caregiver of his mother. These two separate sources of pressure are a stark example of both Machismo and Marianismo at play.

Gabriel, a first-generation immigrant from the Dominican Republic was eight years old when he immigrated to the U.S. with his mother after she remarried. His stepfather is Cuban-American, and Gabriel has a strained relationship with him because he says they both want to be “the man of the house.” Gabriel’s mother constantly tries to communicate with Gabriel, and pleads for him to come home more often. Gabriel resists,
and describes how he wants to have his own life, and that while he plans on helping her with finances once he graduates, he needs to be independent.

My mother is always on my case. She calls me pretty much every other day, and sometimes I don’t answer. It’s not that I don’t care about her it’s just that I have my own shit going on. She wants to know everything! It drives me crazy. Why doesn’t she focus on my sister? That’s where she needs to be- on my sister’s case. Not mine. I’m a guy, you know? I don’t need to be babied.

Gabriel resents his mother’s attempts to communicate with him often. He equates independence with being a man, and believes that his mother should focus on his sister, and not him. He seems to resent her wanting to know more about his day to day life, but when asked who he is closest to, he responds: “my mom.” One moment he speaks about his mother with contempt, and the next minute he seems almost sentimental about how much she has sacrificed for him. Gabriel seems conflicted in that he wants to be independent, yet he understands why his mother wants closeness. Machismo appears to generate conflicted feelings in men that include the possible denigration of women while at the same time recognizing the hardships experienced by the women in their lives.

Eduardo, a second-generation Puerto Rican attends a college out of state, and says he will inherit his father’s electronic repair business after his father retires. His mother is a dance instructor, and has her own small studio. Eduardo tells me his father’s business pays the bills, and that he will continue to help his mother and sister keep the dance studio in business. I asked him to elaborate:

I like working with my dad, and I’m familiar with how things run. My parents only had two kids, but I also have cousins that work for my dad too. The guys run the big family business. My mom is an amazing dancer, and my sister is following her- but there is no money in dance. They can do that because of us. It’s a good thing.
Eduardo speaks with authority when he describes the income disparity between his parents. He tells me that without his father’s business, his mother’s dance studio would not survive, and that his father makes all the financial decisions for the dance studio as well. He says he will do the same. By expressing his future plans, Eduardo shows both his desire to provide for the women in his family, and his sense of authority in the family over matters of business and finance.

I asked Eduardo if he was dating or in a relationship, and he said “yes, and no.” I asked for clarification, and he discussed how he was not in any serious relationships right now, but that he was “talking” to several girls. When I asked if he planned to ever get married, he said:

Of course! I just haven’t met the right girl. I want to have fun anyway, so why have anything serious? I tried that once, and it was not a good idea. My ex was possessive, and psycho. After that, I decided to just “talk” to girls. I will settle down when I’m ready. Not anytime soon.

Like half of the Latinx men I interviewed, Eduardo has no desire to be in a committed relationship, and instead tells me that he believes he should have fun before marriage. This is in contrast to the women I interviewed, who felt frustrated or guilty with the expectations that they remain chaste. Contrary to the Latinx women in college, the men did not want a committed romantic relationship in the same way that the women did.

Carlos, a first-generation immigrant from Peru is a business major at a college a few hours away from his hometown. He is a DACA recipient, and wants to practice immigration law. He is frustrated that his mother is not a “dreamer,” because she does not meet the qualifications to be a DACA recipient, nor does she have access to other
pathways to becoming documented. He is hoping to get into a prestigious law school so that he can become an intern, and then get a job.

My mom tries to change the subject when I get angry about my chances to get ahead, while she has to keep cleaning. She tries to make me feel better by acting like she’s ok with it, but it’s not ok. I know she came to this country so my brothers and I can have a good life, and she should not have to worry about even driving anywhere because she is undocumented. In the end we will make sure she can live in peace.

Carlos tells me he is angry about his mother’s undocumented status. He says he appreciates the chance to go to college and plans to be an attorney helping people like his mother. He wants to represent her, or to be able to afford an attorney so that she can legally remain in the U.S.

**Latinx Women, Familism and Marianismo**

Ella, a second-generation Cuban-American student from the Southeast recounted how she would speak to her “Abuela” (Spanish for grandmother) every afternoon. If she did not call her Abuela, she said she would feel sad and knew that her grandmother would worry:

> When I was little we moved here from Cuba. We lived in Miami with my grandma. Those were the happiest days of my life. I’m still very close with my Abuela. [When I was attending an out-of-state university] I called her every day because I missed her, but also because she would get really worried if I don’t (laughs). I missed her and my mom so much. That is why I left that particular university, and transferred to the local university to be closer to home.

Ella gave up seeking her degree at a more prestigious university far from home in order to return home, and help her family. She also talked about feeling better being closer, in the same city. According to her narrative, Ella’s strong attachment to family had a large impact on her college career.

Rosana, a first-generation Cuban immigrant chose to go to college in her hometown because she could not imagine leaving her family. She reported that one
reason she lives at home is to save money, but most importantly she lives at home to help
her mom with her younger siblings. Also, her parents did not like the idea of her living on
campus because they are protective of her. She explains:

My parents did not want me to live on campus because of all the stories they
heard when my brother went to college. He was allowed to live on campus, of
course! (rolls her eyes), but I also don’t see the point. It would be a waste of
money, and I would probably just sleep there. I would miss my mom and my little
sisters too much. I already have a room here, and I have less distraction than some
of my friends do. I can still go to parties and stuff, but I get to go home to my bed.

I asked Rosana if she ever wanted to attend a university in another city, and she
explained that she never really thought about it. She didn’t ever consider it an option.
Rosana has two older brothers, and one of them did go to a college on the West Coast,
but she thinks that for boys it is much easier to leave home. She plans on staying close to
her parents and her younger sisters. Rosana’s experiences and perceptions are indicative
of Marianismo. Her college decisions reflect efforts to protect women in the family from
men, substance abuse, and any other negative outside influences, as well as the
expectation that women and girls will stay home and care for their relatives.

Carmen is a first-generation Honduran immigrant who was attending college out
of state. Carmen reported being very close to her mother. They spoke on the phone every
night before going to bed, and texted throughout the day. She thought about moving back
home often, but realized that being away for college is part of growing up. However, she
plans on returning to her hometown immediately after graduation so that she can be close
to her family. She is hoping to become an elementary school teacher, and will be looking
for a job close to her parent’s home. She spoke of making her parents proud by doing
well in school after everything they had done for her, but she also missed home:
My mom and I are attached at the hip, well I guess not physically! (laughs). I have to call her every night or else neither one of us can sleep. Both my parents worry about me living alone a lot, and I wish they wouldn’t. I was living in the dorms until last year, and this year I got a place with two roommates. I’m working and going to school so that I can graduate and move close. I may live at home after graduation until I get a job. My mom doesn’t want me to get my own place anyway! She misses me, but she also needs my help sometimes. My grandma lives at home, my dad’s mom, and it’s a lot because my mom already cares for an older lady during the day. She’s tired, and I wish she could just stay home with my grandma.

Carmen described how close she is to her mother, and how she believed her mother needed her. Her parents worried about her living alone, albeit with two other women. She said she reassured them constantly, but they didn’t like the idea of young women living alone. I asked if they would feel better if she had a male roommate, and she said that it would be worse because her family members would think of it as inappropriate. Carmen described being in a bind because she was attempting to get a college degree and be independent while also struggling with the cultural barriers associated with Marianismo and familism.

Linda, a first-generation Mexican immigrant, was hoping to become an attorney. She was planning to take the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) for the second time soon to increase her score. Her mother moved Linda and her sister to the U.S. from Mexico when they were little for work. Linda’s mother was hired by a local news magazine as an editor, and now she writes for many publications. She raised Linda and her sister as a single mother, and wanted them to be strong and independent. Linda was thankful for that, but still decided to go to school close to home so that she could live with her mother. Her mother encouraged her to leave, but she did not want to move far because she worried:
I know my mom doesn’t want me to stay close for her, but I can’t help it. She needs me! My sister moved to California to go to college, and she’s miserable. I wasn’t going to make the same mistake! My sister talks about transferring to a university that is closer, but my mom will not even talk about it.

When asked whether Linda is dating anyone, she said she has been her boyfriend for three years now, and that they are planning on getting married. He is from Colombia and has similar values, including waiting until marriage to live together. She hopes to have a family sooner than later and wants to stay close to home so that her mom can be a constant part of her life. She is only applying to law schools in the area.

Carolina, a first-generation Colombian immigrant was accepted and offered a scholarship at Harvard, but there was no way she could leave her family. She was also awarded a full scholarship to attend a private university about an hour from home. She lived at home the first year, but driving two hours a day to and from campus was too stressful. She applied for a job as a resident assistant (RA) so that she could save money on housing. She feels awful about leaving her parents every Sunday night. Her mom has cancer, and her dad and aunt care for her while Carolina is at school. Her mom tells her she is fine, and feeling better, but Carolina does not believe her. She told me that she takes anti-depression medication in order to cope:

I’m doing well in school, but I am definitely depressed. I take medicine now because they recommended it at the student health center. I think it’s all too much really. I have my classes to worry about, my finances, and my mom. I know I can do it, but I wish I had more help with my parents. I live an hour away, and that is a lot if there is an emergency or something. I go home every Friday for the weekend. I also nanny for a family near school in the afternoons. I can’t wait to graduate so that things can be easier.

Carolina is torn between school and her family responsibilities. She believes she is her mother’s main caregiver, and she hates having to leave her during the week. She
does not seem to regret turning down a scholarship at Harvard, and reports doing well at her current university, although she sounds like she is trying to convince herself. Carolina is under a lot of pressure both at school, and at home. She is not sure of her future plans because she is also undocumented and as a DACA recipient, she’s not sure if she will be able to stay in the U.S. after graduation.

Alexandra, a first-generation immigrant from Honduras plans to go to nursing school. She is taking all her pre-requisite classes, and hopes to get accepted at her local college’s nursing program. She wants to move in with her boyfriend, but realizes that would not go over well with her parents. She says the relationship is serious, but that they would never understand because according to her mom “you are not supposed to give it up before marriage.” Alexandra covers her face while telling me this.

We know we are going to get married eventually, but we don’t want to do it yet. My parents would probably never speak to me again if I moved in with him, but it’s so stupid because it makes sense. We would save so much money on bills, and we are already together all the time. Of course, they don’t know that. It’s the 21st century! It’s so frustrating. I’m supposed to be pure or something crazy like that. Carlos has already agreed to move back to my hometown when we graduate to be close to them. You would think that was enough.

Alexandra’s actions do not comply with her family’s expectation of chastity, yet she is obviously frustrated and attempts to explain the financial incentive associated with cohabitation. She questions these expectations, and considers them backwards. She does not understand why it is necessary for her to wait until marriage to live with her partner.

**Discussion and Implications**

Twenty-eight out of thirty respondents expressed strong ties with family, which is consistent with research that finds a “family comes first” discourse among Latina/o immigrants in the US (Steidel and Contreras 2003; Stein et al 2015). My results reveal that there are
substantial gender differences in how familism and family obligations are experienced by Latinx college students. Among the students I interviewed, Latinx men in college reported feeling concern for parental health and finances, while also feeling annoyance towards mothers who demand constant communication, essentially seeking independence. Latinx men also expressed concrete plans for providing financially for their mother/parents after graduation, authority over other family members, and promiscuity before marriage.

Latinx women in college report beliefs, values and behaviors associated with Marianismo that include: care taking, sacrifice/selflessness, chastity and the maintenance of family traditions. An example is choosing to move back home when away for college, or by turning down a higher ranked university in order to stay close to their parents. Latinx women in my sample were influenced by the idea of chastity, as well as communicating with their mothers constantly.

Among the men I interviewed there was a conflict in the way they spoke about their mothers. One the one hand, they complained about them, and felt a responsibility to provide for them, yet they also spoke of them with admiration. They worried about their physical health, and talked about wanting to help them more. Respondents in this study do not associate with the more negative characteristics of Machismo: they did not talk about aggression or control over women and children. They do, however still appear to embrace the provider role and independence associated with Machismo, and on the question of seeking sex versus relationships, the men were mixed. Like the respondents in the Latino Masculinities Study (Hurtado and Sinha 2016), my respondents have witnessed the difficulties faced by the women in their lives, especially their mothers. Latinx men champion their mother’s strength, and describe wanting to compensate for their mother’s sacrifices by providing for them.
Latinx women are the ones who lose the most in this dynamic. Latinx women must contend with the expectations and responsibilities as caregivers for their families. Latinx women who attended college close to home did so in order to remain in their parent’s home. Latinx women who attended college far from home, often fantasize about transferring to a university near their family, even if that meant attending a lower ranked school. When talking about the future, they planned on staying near their parent’s home when starting their own families. Respondents also reported feeling conflicted with their parent’s assumption that they will remain chaste until marriage. While they may have been in intimate relationships, they describe feeling guilty and not always being able to speak frankly with their mothers. Latinx women seemed forever connected to home, whether it be by still living with their parents, or constant communication and responsibilities while out of state.

The ways in which Latinx college students experience familism reproduces gender inequality in higher education. Familism can have positive effects on Latinx college students, but my findings demonstrate that the ways in which familism operates among the men and women I interviewed are twofold: on the one hand their relationship with their parents and parental immigrant narratives have informed their own academic career narratives, emphasizing that their parents’ sacrifices should not be wasted. On the other hand traditional gender role expectations for women are not compatible with being a college student, and even though Latinx women in college want to be a contributing member of their family’s mobility project, they are struggling. Latinx men feel pressure to provide financially for their mothers, although this pressure is not necessarily incompatible with being a college student.

Machismo and Marianismo shape the way familism is experienced by Latinx college students regardless of legal status. In Chapter 2 there were clear differences in how
undocumented students talked about the future, and how structural and legal obstacles threatened their self-efficacy and motivation. They felt anxious, ashamed, and uncertain. In this Chapter we see how Marianismo increases these feelings by adding a sense of responsibility for caregiving to Latinx women in college, and how it drove Carolina to need anti-depressants. Three quarters of the women I interviewed felt a responsibility to care for a family member while attending college full time, while none of the men reported any responsibility to caregiving. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center’ six year outcome report on college attainment, 38.2% of Latinx women are completing college versus 38.2% of Latinx men. While college completion is slightly higher for Latinx women, traditional gender roles are a liability. Although this is not possible to infer with my data, I speculate that familism can be detrimental to Latinx women pursuing a college degree.
CHAPTER 4
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation examines the experiences of persisting Latinx college students by investigating how parental immigrant narratives of hard work and sacrifice inform student self-efficacy: the belief that they can effectively plan for their future, and are able to change their circumstances when necessary. Findings reveal that parental immigrant narratives also fuel motivation alongside strong family ties, giving them the tools necessary to make sense of difficulties associated with college, like discrimination and financial instability. Findings show that undocumented students experience the added weight of their legal status compounding their educational journey: fear of deportation, fear of family deportation, and uncertainty about their overall future. While undocumented students report the same sense of self-efficacy and motivation as their documented peers, these strengths are fragile due to their immigrant status.

The unusual degree of optimism displayed by Latinx college students can be better understood by studying their narratives. They are motivated by a sense of responsibility to their parents, and a desire to contribute to their family’s mobility project often headed by their mother. They are also motivated by a drive to achieve a high-paying careers so their parents can retire from jobs characterized by hard labor and low prestige. Latinx student insistence in having control over their futures is at odds with sociology of mental health research on racial/ethnic minorities, which often report low self-efficacy.

I explore how familism’s effect on student narratives and persistence is twofold: a resource in the form of motivation and increased self-efficacy fueled by parental immigrant narratives, and a burden in the form of difficult expectations experienced and perceived differently by gender. I found that the Latinx cultural values influencing these gender differences
are Machismo and Marianismo, inasmuch as they influence gender socialization and the establishment of traditional gender norms in Latinx families.

Latinx students engage in what I call “cultural persistence strategies.” These strategies are a result of the interplay of culture and ideology through mobility projects, Machismo/Marianismo, and familism. Cultural persistence strategies include a social psychological process where self-efficacy and motivation help Latinx college students make sense of their transition to adulthood through college. Having self-efficacy help them cope with the liabilities associated with being a racial/ethnic minority and experiencing financial hardship.

In this concluding chapter, I provide a review of the findings from both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, and I discuss how these findings contribute to the sociology of education literature on self-efficacy, and motivation. I then discuss how my findings contribute to the life course literature by examining narrative constructions used by individuals along the transition to adulthood, as well as the literature on immigration. I then present implications for theory and practice. Finally, I discuss the limitations of this study, and I provide suggestions for future research.

**Summary of Findings for Chapter 2: Latinx Student Resources for College Persistence**

In Chapter 2 I examined the resources used by persisting Latinx college students who are enrolled as juniors or higher, and who are beating the odds by persisting in college. My research questions are: how do documented and undocumented Latinx students derive self-efficacy by drawing on parental immigrant narratives? Immigrant parents construct immigrant narratives that capture the experiences associated with the immigration process, including a sense of sacrifice and work endured in an effort to provide their children with improved life opportunities that they share with their children.
Self-efficacy and motivation are resources that appear to result from parental immigrant narratives of hard work and sacrifice, and this is true for undocumented students as well, albeit alongside a sense of anxiety and fear about the future. Existing research shows that disadvantaged groups including racial and ethnic minorities report lower self-efficacy than whites (Ross, Mirowsky, and Cockerham 1983; Mirowsky et al 1996) and do not equally feel as though they have a sense of control over their lives. Studies find that motivation, on the other hand can be high despite hardships (Ojeda 2012). My findings differ from existing research in that they demonstrates that minority populations who are often marginalized use academic career narratives to cope with disadvantages by recasting negative experiences as “lessons learned” (Silva 2012; Ueno et al 2016). My findings may differ from existing studies in that the men and women I interviewed may only show high self-efficacy in their narratives of socioeconomic success in the context of their own academic careers. Undocumented students use the same academic career narratives of self-efficacy and motivation, yet they are fragile in the face of potential deportation. One of the reasons for the difference in my findings is that I interviewed persisting students, and did not include students who dropped out.

This dissertation contributes to the above literature by examining how Latinx college persistence strategies are driven by self-efficacy and motivation that occur as a result of parental immigrant narratives. As described in their narratives, high levels of self-efficacy allow individuals to embrace positive experiences and reject or redefine negative ones. In the words of Peggy Thoits, they are their own psychological activists (1994). In an effort to better understand how persisting Latinx students made sense of their educational journey, I examine how self-efficacy and motivation are central to their academic career narratives, and how their parent’s
own immigrant narratives of sacrifice and hard work inspire Latinx student self-efficacy and motivation.

Undocumented respondents engaged in college preparation courses and studied for their SATs while in high school in order to increase their chances of college acceptance despite not knowing if they would likely not be able to attend college. Undocumented high school students described being afraid at school while pretending everything was fine in order to avoid being discovered. They were guarded about who to confide in, and how to behave. These findings coincide with Perez and Cortes (2011) who reported that students had to hide their fears and self-monitor their behavior at school in order to remain in their teacher’s good graces and avoid the risk of being stereotyped, and/or deported. They crafted academic career narratives to cope with these feelings and stress during the time leading up to the college application process, as well as college preparation and interactions with peers. Students also rejected existing stereotypes about Latinx students by positively reframing their disadvantaged positions, and focusing on their future plans. They reported self-efficacy and motivation in their strategies for persistence.

For undocumented respondents there was an added layer of worry that emerged in their academic career narratives. The uncertainty of their status did not necessarily affect their ability to persist in college, yet they differed from their documented counterparts in their description of concrete future plans. Undocumented respondents spoke carefully about their future, and that of their parents with doubt and the need for contingency plans. As mentioned in chapter 2, we are in a dangerous era for DACA recipients, and students are facing a legal barrier that may prevent them from graduating college. Latinx students who are enrolled as DACA were even afraid of deportation. Students enrolled with DACA today are being denied renewals, and new applicants are being turned away. After the recent expiration of DACA, it is uncertain if any undocumented
student will be able to apply for DACA, making it very difficult for most undocumented Latinx students to go to college.

**Summary of Findings for Chapter 3: Latinx College Students’ Experiences of Familism and Gender**

In Chapter 3 I examined familism as a resource and a burden. Respondents described having close ties with their families, and expressed the idea that family always comes first. Parental immigrant narratives provide Latinx college students with a source of motivation, and a feeling that staying in school is their responsibility as members of their family. However, the responsibilities and expectations associated with familism are experienced differently by gender among Latinx college students. My research question is as follows: How do Latinx college students differ by gender in the way familism is experienced? My findings reveal substantial gender differences in how familism and family obligations are experienced by Latinx college students. These gender differences are a result of two Latinx cultural values: Machismo and Marianismo that help shape gender socialization among Latinx women and men.

Machismo is associated with independence, providing financially for family, authority, and casual intimate relationships. The Latinx men I interviewed reported feeling concern for parental health and finances, while also feeling annoyance towards mothers who demand constant communication, essentially seeking independence. Latinx men also expressed concrete plans for providing financially for their mother/parents after graduation, authority over other family members, especially female family members, and promiscuity before marriage.

Marianismo is associated with caregiving, sacrifice, chastity, and the maintenance of tradition. The Latinx women I interviewed reported beliefs, values and behaviors associated with Marianismo. An example is choosing to move back home when away for college, or by turning
down a higher ranked university in order to stay close to their parents. Latinx women in my sample were influenced by the idea of chastity, as well as the need to communicate with their mothers constantly. The women I interviewed occasionally questioned some of the values associated with Marianismo, yet it will still pervasive in the way they felt about college and family.

Another interesting finding is that the men I interviewed were conflicted about their feelings towards their mothers. They spoke of wanting independence and they complained about them, while feeling a responsibility to provide for them, yet they also spoke of them with admiration, often naming their mothers as the most influential family member. There were no signs of more negative characteristics of Machismo, such as aggression or control over women and children. They did talk about providing for their families and wanting independence, both characteristics associated with Machismo. Male respondents have witnessed the difficulties faced by the women in their lives, and in many ways this has shaped how they think about their own roles. Like the respondents in the Latino Masculinities Study (Hurtado and Sinha 2016), the Latinx men in my sample champion their mother’s strength, and describe wanting to compensate for their mother’s sacrifices by providing for them.

Latinx women are those most negatively affected by gender differences in how Latinx college students experience familism. They must meet the expectations and responsibilities as caregivers for their families, while also succeeding in college. The Latinx women I interviewed who attended college in their hometown did so in order to remain in their parent’s home. Latinx women who attended college far from home, often fantasized about transferring to a university near their family, even if that meant attending a lower ranked school. Future plans included staying near their parent’s home when starting their own families. Respondents also reported
feeling conflicted and frustrated with their parent’s assumption of chastity until marriage. Latinx women in intimate relationships described feeling guilty and not always being able to speak frankly with their mothers. Latinx women seemed connected to home at all times, and this was true whether they were attending college out of state, or still living with their parents.

**Implications for Theory**

Life course theory has been useful for understanding how individuals construct narratives in order to make sense of their circumstances. According to life course theorists, human agency is central to narrative construction (Elder 1994), and this is especially true for disadvantaged groups who create narratives to manage social and economic obstacles. Marginalized groups use narrative construction to cope with disadvantages by refashioning negative experiences as important lessons (Silva 2012; Ueno et al 2016). Latinx college students construct academic career narratives to cope with the liabilities associated with financial disadvantage as well as belonging to a minority racial/ethnic group. Immigrant parents construct narratives to make sense of their experiences as immigrants, and to impart ideals of hard work and sacrifice to their children. Parental immigrant narratives help Latinx students reframe negative experiences as enabling forces, intensifying their feelings of self-efficacy and their motivation to persist.

Another theoretical implication in this study, is that education is still at the center of the immigrant mobility plan, and as a vehicle for economic success.

This study demonstrates striking gender differences in the experience and perception of familism, and how this can be detrimental for Latinx college students, especially women. Machismo and Marianismo inform gender socialization among Latinx families, and directly affect the Latinx college experience. Women are the most damaged by these mechanisms due to
the competing pressures originating at home and in college. Latinx women must be responsible daughters, granddaughters, and sisters while also being good students.

This dissertation contributes to life course theory by expanding on the use of narrative construction among first and second generation Latinx college students. By constructing narratives of self-efficacy and motivation, Latinx students draw on parental immigrant narratives of hard work and sacrifice. Undocumented students do the same, yet they are fraught with uncertainty, and fear. Another significant theoretical implication is that disadvantaged students do have self-efficacy, persisting Latinx college students report having self-efficacy and feeling in control of their futures. They are able to refashion negative experiences into positive learning moments. Latinx college students are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to persist in college. My findings contribute to current research that examines how student motivation is influenced by values, behaviors, and parental guidance (Harackiewicz et al 2014; Deci and Ryan 2000; Cavazos and Cavazos 2010; Ojeda et al 2012). Even though my respondents faced hardships, including discrimination and lack of economic resources, they reported high levels of motivation that helped them persist (Ojeda et al 2012).

Implications for Practice

Among the implications for practice are the need for college retention programs with trained staff that understand the social-psychological needs of Latinx college students. The unique experiences of first and second generation Latinx college students make persistence difficult for the most vulnerable among them: undocumented students on DACA, and Latinx women. While persisting Latinx college students report self-efficacy and motivation fueled by parental immigrant narratives regardless of gender or legal status, these resources can be fragile.
in the face of barriers like the uncertainty of documentation after graduation, and the pressures of familism that compete with the pressures in college.

It would also make sense for colleges to provide culturally sensitive training and orientation designed for Latinx families in order for them to better understand what goes on in college, and grasp the importance of giving their children the independence and freedom necessary to succeed in college without the added burden of family responsibilities. If parents were able to witness the work associated with going to college, they would be better informed, and would perhaps allow their daughters more freedom from the expectations of familism in order to focus on their studies.

It is necessary to implement immigration reform that includes legal pathways to residency for DACA recipients. Latinx college students with a clear path towards residency or work permits would experience less anxiety and uncertainty about the future. Part of the stress associated with being a DACA recipient is that students are now visible to immigration authorities, and DACA is not permanent. A legal and long-term form of DACA that includes a path to residency is necessary if undocumented students are able to attend college without the burden of a fragile and temporary legal status.

**Limitations**

This study only includes Latina/o students who have persisted in college up until the time these interviews were conducted. It is necessary to understand how parental immigrant narratives influence students who were unable to continue their studies, but whose sense of responsibility to their parents is very much alive. I was also unable to capture how familism is manifested among students unable to stay in school, but believe these are processes that require attention. My sample was comprised of Latinx college students in the Southeast who are demographically
different from Latinx college students in other U.S. regions, therefore my findings do not speak
to the experiences of all Latinx college students. I am unable to describe the narratives used by
non-traditional Latinx college students due to my sample only including traditionally aged
college students.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

I plan to follow up with my respondents in order to investigate whether or not they
graduated, and what their college experiences have been since our interviews. Future studies
should focus on comparing persistence narratives of persisting Latinx college students with the
narratives of non-persisting Latinx college students in order to gain an understanding of why
some Latinx students persist, while others do not. I speculate that all immigrant Latinx college
students are influenced by parental immigrant narratives, and am interested in understanding
why self-efficacy and motivation may be irrelevant for students who do not persist in college.
Including a comparison group of Latinx college students who were not able to stay in college
would give me the opportunity to examine if there is an emotional cost to failure. It would also
serve the literature on college persistence if this study were conducted in other geographical
regions of the U.S. in order to gather a more complete social psychological analysis of the
experiences of Latinx college students nationwide. Further examining the experiences and
narratives of Latinx women who graduate college would be advantageous in the effort to
understand the advantages of having a college education in their lives. Finally, A quantitative
study examining the relationship between familism, cultural persistence strategies, and academic
success would also be an important contribution to the literature on college persistence.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Hello, my name is Stacy Salerno and I am a graduate student at Florida State University. I am conducting research on the experiences of Latina/o college students in different types of institutions. Please read the FSU Behavioral Consent Form and sign it if you agree to participate in this study. Thank you. I really appreciate you taking the time to answer some questions. Do you have any questions about this study? Ok, let’s begin the interview:

Childhood:

1. Tell me about yourself. Where did you grow up?
2. What was your childhood like?
3. Where are your parents/family from?
4. Describe what a college education represents for you and your family
5. Did you grow up surrounded by Latinas/os?
6. Describe your childhood friends
7. What was high school like?

College:

1. What was the application process like?
2. Why did you choose [insert name of institution]?
3. What is your major?
   - Why did you choose that major?
4. Do you participate in any extracurricular activities at [insert name of institution]?
   - Describe. Sports? Which?
5. Do you belong to a student organization/club?
   - Which one?
   - What is that like?
• Tell me about other members in said organization?

6. Describe your favorite class at [insert name of institution]

7. Describe your least favorite class at [insert name of institution]

8. What is it like to be a Latina/o at [insert name of institution]?

9. Do you feel like you fit in at [insert name of institution]? Why/why not?

10. Tell me about your friends at [insert name of institution]. Describe the support you receive from them. (probe on friend’s heritage)

11. What do you do with your friends at [insert name of institution] on a typical weekend?

12. What happens when you step off campus? Do you ever get stereotyped? I hear a lot of times people assume that Latinos are…

13. Are there moments in school when you feel proud?

14. Are there moments in school when you feel uncomfortable?

15. Tell me about your family back home. How close are you? How often do you see them?

• What is that like?

• What is it like when you talk to them on the phone?

16. Who are you the closest to? Why?

17. How do you cope with feeling homesick?

18. Can you describe an instance where you felt discriminated against on campus because you are a Latina/o?

• What did you do?

19. Do you feel like you have the same opportunities as other students? Why/why not?

20. What is it like dating as a Latina/o at [insert name of institution]?

21. Is there anything else you would like to add about yourself that you think would be relevant to this study?

Thank you for participating in my study. I can be contacted at 561-699-8123 or at sls13n@my.fsu.edu. Is it all right if I contact you if I have a follow-up question?
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL II

Hello, my name is Stacy Salerno and I am a graduate student at Florida State University. I am conducting research on the experiences of Latina/o college students in different types of institutions. Please read the FSU Behavioral Consent Form and sign it if you agree to participate in this study. Thank you. I really appreciate you taking the time to answer some questions. Do you have any questions about this study? Ok, let’s begin the interview:

Childhood:

8. Tell me about yourself. Where did you grow up?

9. What was your childhood like?

10. Where are your parents/family from?

11. Describe what a college education represents for you and your family

12. Did you grow up surrounded by Latinas/os?

13. Describe your childhood friends

14. What was high school like?

College:

22. What was the application process like?

23. Were you able to apply to college, or did you need to qualify through programs like DACA?

24. Why did you choose [insert name of institution]?

25. What is your major?

   • Why did you choose that major?
   • What do you plan to do after graduation?
   • What career do you see yourself having?

26. Do you participate in any extracurricular activities at [insert name of institution]?

   • Describe. Sports? Which?
   • What is that like?

27. Do you belong to a student organization/club?
• Which one?
• What is that like?
• Tell me about other members in said organization?

28. Describe your favorite class at [insert name of institution]

29. Describe your least favorite class at [insert name of institution]

30. What is it like to be a Latina/o at [insert name of institution]?

31. Do you feel like you fit in at [insert name of institution]? Why/why not?

32. Tell me about your friends at [insert name of institution]. Describe the support you receive from them. (probe on friend’s heritage)

33. What do you do with you friends at [insert name of institution on a typical weekend?]

34. What happens when you step off campus? Do you ever get stereotyped? I hear a lot of times people assume that Latinos are…

35. Are there moments in school when you feel proud?

36. Are there moments in school when you feel uncomfortable?

37. Tell me about your family back home. How close are you? How often do you see them?
   • What is that like?
   • What is it like when you talk to them on the phone?

38. Who are you the closest to? Why?

39. How do you cope with feeling homesick?

40. Can you describe an instance where you felt discriminated against on campus because you are a Latina/o?
   • What did you do?

41. Do you feel like you have the same opportunities as other students? Why/Why not?

42. What is it like dating as a Latina/o at [insert name of institution]?
   • Tell me about your relationship
• Why are you not in a relationship?

43. Is there anything else you would like to add about yourself that you think would be relevant to this study?

44. May I contact you in the future if I have any additional questions or to follow up on your college experiences?

Thank you for participating in my study. I can be contacted at [email protected] or at [email protected] Is it all right if I contact you if I have a follow-up question?
Hello,

I am conducting an interview study that focuses on the experiences of Latina/o students in college. I am writing to ask for you or your friends’ participation in our study. Each participant will meet with me for a face-to-face interview, which will take about 60 minutes. We usually conduct interviews in a private office on the FSU campus, but for people who do not live in Tallahassee, we can either Skype, or I can travel to your area and meet in a coffee shop.

At this time, we are looking for people who meet all of the following criteria:
(1) You identify as a Latina or Latino
(2) Over the age of 18
(3) Are currently enrolled in a college/university
(4) Have completed a minimum of two years in college

In the interview, I will ask you questions about your experiences on and off campus, your friends in college and back home. I will also ask questions about your college trajectory, and even questions about your childhood. We will keep the interviews confidential, and we will not collect any information that identifies you.

If you are interested in participating, please email [sst13n@my.fsu.edu](mailto:sst13n@my.fsu.edu). If you know people who might be interested in the study, please forward this email and ask them to contact Stacy. (Please do not send us their contact information because we are not allowed to receive their personal information until they contact us.) Thank you for your consideration.

Stacy Salerno, Principal Investigator
Department of Sociology
526 Bellamy Building
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-2270
Tel 850-644-6416
APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

FSU Behavioral Consent Form
Experiences of Latina/o Students in US College

Principal Investigator: Stacy Salerno, Department of Sociology, Florida State University

Introduction: You are invited to participate in a research study on the experiences of Latina/o college students in different types of institutions of higher learning. You were selected as a participant because you are Latina/o and a college student. The purpose of this study is to better understand the needs of Latina/o college students within various types of educational institutions.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, we will have a face-to-face interview lasting between one to two hours. The interview will take place at a location convenient to you, and the options are: in a coffee shop convenient to you, in your home, or via Skype. With your permission I will record the interview. I may contact you within six months of the initial interview if I have a quick follow-up question. If you are not comfortable with me recording you, I will take notes.

Risks and benefits of being in the study: There are no significant risks or benefits to you from participating in the study.

Compensation: You will receive no payment or compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private and confidential to the extent permitted by law. DATA RECORDS WILL ALL BE KEPT IN DIGITAL FORM. THIS INCLUDES TRANSCRIPTS OF THE INTERVIEWS. I WILL KEEP THIS DATA ON A PASSWORD PROTECTED COMPUTER IN A LOCKED ROOM. ADDITIONALLY, MY RESEARCH ADVISOR, DR. JOHN REYNOLDS, WILL KEEP A BACKUP OF THE TRANSCRIPTS ON A PASSWORD PROTECTED COMPUTER IN A LOCKED ROOM AS WELL. WE WILL KEEP RECORDS OF THE STUDY UNTIL AUGUST 1ST, 2017. In any sort of report that I publish, I will not include information that would make it possible to identify any participants, AND I WILL USE PSEUDONYMS IN PLACE OF REAL NAMES.

Voluntary Nature of Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect any current or future relations you might have with Florida State University. If you participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting the study is Stacy Salerno. You may ask her any question you have now. If you have a question later, you are encouraged to contact her at [redacted] or [redacted] or her faculty advisor Dr. John Reynolds at 850-644-6416 or [redacted]. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the FSU IRB at 2010 Levy Street, Research Building B, 276, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2742, or 850-644-8633, or by email at humansubjects@magnet.fsu.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and I consent to participate in the study.

_____________________    ________________
Signature      Date
APPENDIX D

USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH APPROVAL

Florida State University
Office of the Vice President for Research
Human Subjects Committee
P.O. Box 3002742
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-8673  FAX (850) 644-4392

RE-APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 06/16/2017
To: Stacy Salerno
Address: 2270
Dept.: SOCIOLOGY
From: Thomas L. Jacobsen, Chair

Re: Re-approval of Use of Human subjects in Research:
Latina in College: Institutional Type and Socio-Emotional Health

Your request to continue the research project listed above involving human subjects has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee. If your project has not been completed by 09/14/2017, you are required to receive approval by the Committee.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your renewal request, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this re-approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting of research subjects. You are reminded that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report in writing, any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chairman of your department and/or your major professor are reminded of their responsibility for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in their department. They are advised to review the protocols as often as necessary to ensure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

Cc: HSC No. 2016.19071
Office of the Vice President For Research  
Human Subjects Committee  
P. O. Box 3002742  
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742  
(850) 644-8673  FAX (850) 644-4392

RE-APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 05/29/2018

To: Stacy Salem

Address: 2270

Dept.: SOCIOLOGY

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Re-approval of Use of Human subjects in Research:  
 lithium in College, Institution Type and Socio-Emotional Health

Your request to continue the research project listed above involving human subjects has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee. If your project has not been completed by 06/28/2018, you are required to request renewal approval by the Committee.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your renewal request, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this re-approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting of research subjects. You are reminded that any changes in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the Protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report in writing, any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chairman of your department and/or your major professor are reminded of their responsibility for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in their department. They are advised to review the protocols as often as necessary to ensure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

Cc:  
HSC No. 2017.21507
RE-APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 06/19/2018
To: [Redacted]
Address: 2270
Dept.: SOCIOLOGY
From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Re-approval of Use of Human subjects in Research:
Lilies in College: Institution Type and Socio-Emotional Health

Your request to continue the research project listed above involving human subjects has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee. If your project has not been completed by 06/19/2019, you are must request renewed approval by the Committee.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your renewal request, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this re-approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting of research subjects. You are reminded that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chairman of your department and/or your major professor are reminded of their responsibility for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in their department. They are advised to review the protocols as often as necessary to ensure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

Cc: SFSIC No. 2018.25136
REFERENCES

Abrego, Leisy J. 2006. “I can’t Go to College because I Don’t have Papers”: Incorporation Patterns of Latino Undocumented Youth.” *Latino Studies* 4(3):212-244.


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

EDUCATION

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
P.h.D. Candidate, Sociology (Expected 2018)

Dissertation: Sustaining Motivation and Narrative Construction: Immigrant Latina/o College Students Make Sense of Family and The American Dream
Committee: John Reynolds (chair), Kathryn Tillman, Koji Ueno, and Melissa Radey (Social Work)

Comprehensive Exams: Race, Class, and Gender

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
M.S., Sociology (2015)

FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Latina/o Sociology; Education; Immigration; Race & Ethnicity, Gender.

PUBLICATIONS

PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES


*Indicates equal co-authorship

MANUSCRIPTS UNDER REVIEW

MANUSCRIPTS IN PROGRESS


FELLOWSHIPS, HONORS, AND AWARDS

2014  Wilson-Auzenne Fellowship for Minorities
Florida State University

2008  Excellence in Teaching Award
Florida Atlantic University

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

PAPERS PRESENTED


DISCUSSANT


TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Florida Atlantic University | INSTRUCTOR

2017 Family and Society
    Sociological Perspectives

2016 Family and Society
    Sociological Perspectives

Florida State University | LECTURER

2017 Families and Social Change

2016 Introduction to Sociology

Bainbridge State College | LECTURER

2014 Social Problems

Palm Beach State College | LECTURER

2011- 2013 Introduction to Sociology
    Social Problems

Florida State University, Department of Sociology | TEACHING ASSISTANT

2016 Sociology of Marriage and Family
    Social Problems

2015 Sociology of Sex and Gender
    Aging and the Life Course
    Sociology of Marriage and Family

2014 Sociology of Marriage and Family
Family Problems and Social Change

2013  Methods of Social Research
   Aging and the Life Course

OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Boca Raton Community High School | TEACHER & MENTOR
2008-2013  Sociology, US History, and Spanish

SERVICE

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

2016-   Member, Departmental Awards Committee
   Florida State University, Department of Sociology

2015-   President, Sociology Graduate Student Union
   Florida State University, Department of Sociology

2014-   Treasurer, Sociology Graduate Student Union
   Florida State University, Department of Sociology

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Sociological Association (ASA)
   Sections: Latina/o Sociology, Education, International Migration, Racial and
   Ethnic Minorities, and Children and Youth.

Southern Sociological Society (SSS)
Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP)
Sociologists for Women and Society (SWS)

REFERENCES

John Reynolds, Chair and Professor of Sociology (Dissertation Chair)
Florida State University
email: john.reynolds@fsu.edu | office phone: (850) 644-6416

Kathryn Tillman, Associate Professor of Sociology and Graduate Director
Florida State University
email: kthillman@fsu.edu | office phone: (850) 644-1669
Deana Rohlinger, Professor of Sociology
Florida State University
email: drohling@fsu.edu | office phone: (850) 644-2493
Ann Branaman, Chair and Professor of Sociology
Florida Atlantic University
e-mail: branaman@fau.edu | office phone: (561) 297-0261