# COLLEGE AND FAMILIA: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN LATINX STUDENTS EXPERIENCES OF FAMILISM[1]

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## ABSTRACT

There is an increased presence of Latinx college students on US college campuses, yet only 36% are graduating. Existing studies examine the mechanisms that influence the failure of Latinx college students, but few explore the experiences of persisting Latinx students. This focus is necessary if we seek to understand how Latinx students navigate college campuses in today's anti-immigrant climate. This study examines how the interplay of familism and gender influence the narratives used by persisting Latinx college students, and how family responsibilities can affect the way in which Latinx college students experience college differently by gender. 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. A major finding is how familial ties affect how Latinx women talk about their college experiences very differently than Latinx men. 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

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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. These findings contribute to current

research on immigration, education, gender, and college retention.

**Keywords:** Latinx, immigration, gender, higher education, familism
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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 study examines how the interplay of familism and gender influence the narratives used by persisting Latinx college students, and how family responsibilities can affect the way in which Latinx college students experience college differently by gender. 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 study

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 examines how the interplay of familism and gender influence the narratives used by persisting Latinx college students, and how family responsibilities can affect the way in which Latinx college students experience college differently by 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?

**Background**

*Familism*

Familism 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 men 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). 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 Latinxs. 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.

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 guilty 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.
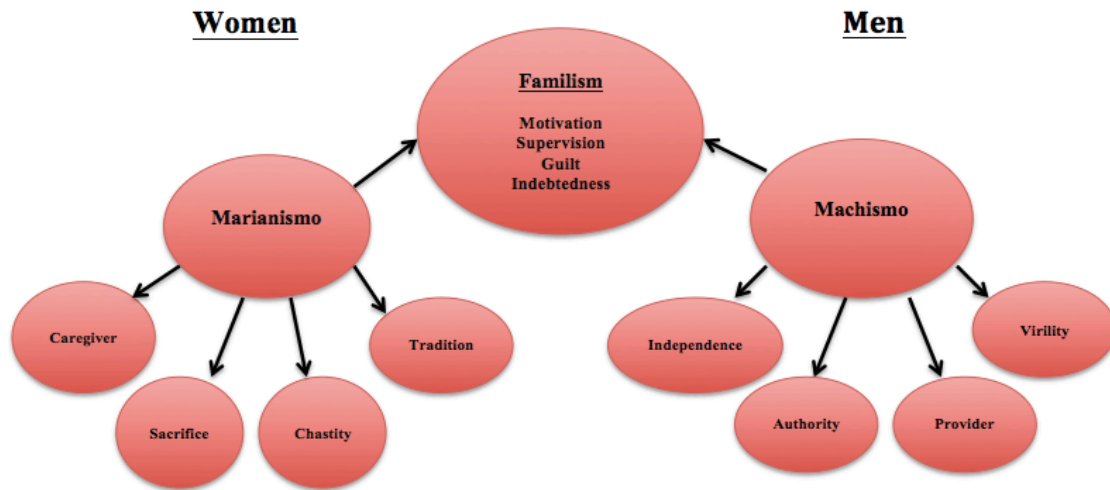
**Methods**

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.

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 regard 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. Family relationships are a theme that remained strong throughout the interviews, and notable gender 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.

**Women**  **Men**

Familism

Motivation
Supervision
Guilt
Indebtedness

Marianismo

Machismo

Caregiver

Tradition

Independence

Virility

Sacrifice

Chastity

Authority

Provider

**Figure 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 Lainx 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*

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. 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. 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 fourteen 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 1. Latinx College Students, Familism, Machismo, and Marianismo**

| Marianismo | Description | Men % | Women % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Care work | Responsible for caring for family members | 0% | 75% |
| Sacrifice/ Selflessness | Giving something up, or putting other before oneself | 21% | 63% |
| Chastity | Not engaging in sexual activity, or feeling guilt if engaging in sexual activity | 0% | 69% |
| Tradition | Upholding family activities: helping plan holidays, birthdays, etc. | 14% | 56% |
| **Machismo** | **Description** | **Men %** | **Women %** |
| Independence | Wanting space from family members, and making personal decisions without their consultation | 86% | 64% |
| Authority | Making decisions about family matters, and controlling family members | 64% | 44% |
| Provider | Planning on, or currently providing financially for family members | 71% | 25% |
| Virility | Not settling down, and dating around before finding a wife | 57% | 0% |

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 1reports 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. 71% 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. 63% 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. 69% of Latinx women disclosed the decision to not engage in sexual activity or felt conflict and guilt if involved in an intimate relationship. 56% 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.

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 views on 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. 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.

**Conclusion**

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 think 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. Marianismo causes feelings of anxiety 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 35.2% 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.