

University of Nevada, Reno

**Exploring the Strategies that Latina Students Use to Navigate Work and Family  
Aspirations: A Case Study of Latina College Students**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Arts in Sociology

by

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**MASTER OF ARTS**

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## ABSTRACT

Post-secondary educational institutions have seen an unprecedented increase in the enrollment of women, most significantly within the last four decades. Commonly known as the college gender gap, extensive research has surfaced to address the causes of this rising trend, paying special attention to the condition of White and Black Americans. The shortcomings of this literature lie in the fact that it does not explore the nuances and complexities of the condition of Latinas given the power of the dominant culture in the U.S. Further, the existing research does little to shed light on the implications of gendered school enrollment patterns on other areas of social life, including dating, marriage, and family. Using the literature on the sociology of education and Latino masculinities and femininities while adopting a qualitative approach, interviews of 10 unmarried, Latina students at UNR were performed to examine how they navigate their academic and work goals and their family goals within the context of the college gender gap. Of central importance to this question was examining whether the pursuit of these paths creates a conflict to the extent that a paradox may exist between the societal encouragement for the professional advancements of women and the continuous presence of the cultural ideal of motherhood. The narratives of these women, however, suggest that there is no conflict for them in pursuing their occupational and family goals. Having a successful career and being a successful wife-mother are both fundamentally important for these women in terms of life satisfaction because the balance between the two accords them an elevated status that surpasses being only a professional or only a wife-mother and the stigma that comes from the either-or dichotomy. The researcher suggests that it is the acquisition of both that carries the most value for these women because the balance between professional and wife-mother is the new normative expectation given women's advances in higher education. The relevance of this study lies largely in its focus on an underserved demographic within higher education and it carries implications for contributing to the body of knowledge on issues of racial and gender inequities.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Introduction	1
Background	3
Theoretical Framework	5
<u>Sociology of Education</u>	5
<u>Latino masculinities and femininities</u>	9
Research Question and Implications	35
Methods	36
Findings	41
Discussion and Conclusion	50
References	57
Appendices	
Interview Guideline Questionnaire	63
Demographic Questionnaire	66

Post-secondary educational institutions have seen an unprecedented increase in the enrollment of women, most significantly within the last four decades (U.S. Census Bureau; American Council on Education). More women are attending college today than they did in the past and conversely, the percentage of men in college is decreasing relative to women. U.S. Census Bureau data show that the number of females enrolling in college after high school increased by 32 percent between 1960 and 1998, while the number of men increased by only 8 percent. More academic degrees are being conferred to women than men in numerous fields; the data released by the American Council on Education in 2009 show that for the 2006-2007 academic year, women outnumbered men in Bachelor's degree attainment in arts and humanities (62.9%), social sciences (64.1%), biological/life sciences (57%), education (78.7%), and health professions (85.9%). Women reached nearly equal percentages for degree attainment in business and architecture, with 49.2% and 44.5% respectively.

As evidenced by the data, women of color in particular, are disproportionately earning more undergraduate degrees and are increasingly entering into fields of study traditionally dominated by men than men of color, thus highlighting that the gender gap in education is greater between women and men of color than their White peers. The continued educational and occupational achievements of women are perceived by some as a significant step in the direction of gender equality. At the same time that women's educational advancement is being applauded, there is increasing concern about the diminished numbers of men, particularly minority men, in higher education. Some of this research is focused on finding solutions to alleviate a growing 'male crisis' in education. Little research, however, focuses on how students navigate other realms of social life

including heterosexual dating, marriage, and family patterns within the context of the college gender gap. The college gender gap is significantly larger among Blacks and Latinos (U.S. Census Bureau; American Council on Education); at the University of Nevada, Reno, for example, there are 1,157 Latina students (6.4%) versus 878 Latino students (4.9%) for both undergraduate and graduate standing as of fall 2011 (Institutional Analysis). These women and men are increasingly embarking on diverging life paths more so than their White counterparts, and this trend may affect their feelings about dating, marriage, and family. The research that does observe the relationship between disparate higher educational attainment and interpersonal relations is largely limited to White and Black populations, thus excluding the unique condition among the Latino population who may experience a clash between contradictory cultural mandates.

The continuous influx of Latino migration to the United States has contributed to the development of a strong presence of Latino culture in the U.S. The power structure in the U.S. has resulted in different migrant experiences for differing groups given the racialization of minorities. Whereas the migration experiences of White Europeans, for example, largely resulted in them abandoning their cultural heritage to immerse themselves in American culture, Latinos as a group are not accorded the same opportunity given their status as 'other.' (Marin and Marin, 1991; Cherlin, 2004). The position of Latinos between Latino culture that promotes a collectivistic perspective on family and is strongly infused with a value system founded on Catholicism and American culture that promotes individualism, progressiveness, and a nuclear family structure merits further examination in relation to the college gender gap.

Accordingly, it is essential to explore the strategies Latina students employ to navigate between occupational and family goals with the college gender gap in the background as a disjuncture may develop between a commitment to values that at times are associated with upward mobility and those that may connect people to their ethnic identity. It is imperative to note, however, the complexities of culture in that the ideals associated with upward mobility and ethnic identity are not necessarily always opposing and furthermore, culture is not something that is experienced cognitively. As Latino women and men navigate educational and occupational pathways, the interplay between cultural mandates and lived experiences involving educational and occupational strategies have the possibility to create gender-based opportunities and decision-making processes. Examining the differential strategies that women and men are employing to navigate their aspirations is imperative to understanding how the fundamental institutions within society are transforming through external factors. This study focuses on Latinas and how they navigate their work and family aspirations within the context of the gender gap in higher education.

## **BACKGROUND**

The body of literature gathered for this study has been divided into six sections in order to provide a more detailed and multidimensional account of the forces at work leading to the present condition of gender relations between Latino men and women of second-generation status and onward. This analysis will begin with an examination of the fundamental values of Latino culture as outlined in the literature to demonstrate the manner in which the tenets of Latino culture continue to guide gender relations. Second, an outline of the research involving gendered childhood and secondary school

experiences will explore the effects of these experiences as precursors to college enrollment, noting the higher impact of crime and military opportunities in swaying the life course of young Latino males. Subsequently, class and generation statuses will be taken into account in determining educational trajectories, primarily as they work together with gender status to enable the educational pursuits of some while hindering the advances of others. Fourth, a discussion of the gendered college experiences will develop that takes into consideration the differential perceptions of college benefits for men and women in determining actual enrollment, retention, and graduation rates.

Fifth, gendered career trajectories will be considered as a principal factor in the continuing shift in feelings toward marriage and family, particularly taking note of Latino males increased likelihood to pursue blue-collar jobs and earn a reasonable income as opposed to women in lower-income employment. In other words, the fact that men are more capable of finding blue-collar jobs that require little education yet offer relatively good financial compensation while service sector jobs for women do not offer that same financial security is more likely to make blue-collar work seem an attractive alternative to educational pursuit, more so than pink-collar jobs. Finally, a research of the literature exploring the changing attitudes of men and women toward marriage and family over time will lead directly to the questions posed in the present study. First, a discussion of the theoretical framework adopted for this study followed by an examination of the fundamental values of Latino culture as posited by Marin and Marin (1991) will be presented.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework guiding this research combines elements of the sociology of education—more specifically fusing the functionalist and conflict theory perspectives and Bourdieu’s work—with theory on Latino masculinities and femininities and their association with family structures as guided by the work of Mirandé (1997); Zambrana (1995); Anzaldúa (1999); Gutmann (1996); Baca Zinn (1982); and Castillo (1994).

### Sociology of Education

The sociology of education explores the interplay between public institutions and individual experiences in education and its outcomes. Concerning specifically the relationship between education and social order, structural functionalists believe the purpose of education as an institution is to socialize children and teenagers. Although the manifest function of education is to provide students with knowledge and skills—to socialize them—to be ‘productive’ members of society, the latent function of school is the teaching of societal norms and values (Merton, 1968). Students learn these values because their behavior at school is regulated until they gradually internalize and accept them. In this sense, students learn, for example, what is expected of them given their sex, race/ethnicity, etc.

In opposition to functionalism, conflict theorists (Bowles and Gintis, 1976, 2002) argue that the educational system serves to reproduce the stratification system by promoting values of the majority group. For example, many teachers assume that students will have particular middle class experiences at home, and for some children this assumption is not true. Some children, especially within minority groups of lower class rankings and single-headed households, are expected to help their parents after school

and carry considerable domestic responsibilities. The demands of this domestic labor can make it difficult for them to focus on schoolwork and thus their academic performance is affected. Furthermore, as McLeod (1995) argues, teachers treat lower-class students as less competent students, placing them in lower 'tracks' because they have generally had fewer opportunities to develop language, critical thinking, and social skills prior to entering school than students of higher class rankings. When placed in lower tracks, lower-class kids are trained for blue-collar jobs through an emphasis on obedience and following rules rather than autonomy, higher-order thinking, and self-expression. Many capable students from working class backgrounds fail to achieve satisfactory standards in school and therefore fail to obtain the status they deserve. Conflict theorists believe this social reproduction also continues because the educational system legitimizes the ideology provided by the dominant group. In effect, they perpetuate the individualistic myth that education is available to all as a means of achieving success. Therefore, individuals who fail to achieve this goal, according to the myth, are to blame.

The concept of social reproduction is also addressed in the work of Bourdieu as he develops a multidimensional theoretical framework to understanding social life by bridging the gap between individualistic and collectivistic theory. To explain the role of structure in maintaining and constraining individual agency, Bourdieu introduces the notion of habitus, referring to a mental filter that structures an individual's perceptions and experiences to such an extent that the world takes on a taken-for-granted, common sense appearance (Allan, 2006). Moreover, it is through the habitus that individuals acquire a sense of place in the world or a perspective from which they are able to interpret their own actions as well as the actions of others. In other words, an

individual's dispositions are a product of the internalization of the external world, meaning that structure is a lived reality manifested through individual action. To the extent that perception is guided by the individual's position in social space, Bourdieu introduces four types of capital—economic, cultural, social, and symbolic—that not only anchor human experience but also contribute to the reproduction of social relations.

Specifically, economic capital refers to material resources including wealth, land, and money that an individual owns or controls. Cultural capital encompasses nonmaterial goods including educational credentials, types of knowledge and expertise, verbal skills, and aesthetic preferences (i.e. taste) that can be converted into economic capital (Allan, 2006). What is most significant regarding these two forms of capital is that they constitute the external forces internalized through the habitus by shaping the social space in which perception is created. Social capital involves networks of contacts that can be used to secure or advance a person's position and symbolic capital refers to prestige, honor, or reputation legitimated within interaction (Allan, 2006).

Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital is effective in exploring the differences in outcomes for students from different classes by examining what knowledge is conserved and reproduced in schools and how information is framed. It is the culture of the dominant group, and therefore its cultural capital, which is embodied in schools, and that this leads to social reproduction. The cultural capital of the dominant group, in the form of practices and relation to culture, is assumed by schools to be the natural and only proper type of cultural capital and is therefore legitimated. This legitimate cultural capital allows students who possess it to gain educational capital in the form of qualifications and those that do not possess it are at a disadvantage. Not only do children find success

harder in school because they must learn a new way of ‘being’, or relating to the world, and especially, a new way of relating to and using language, but they must act against their instincts and expectations. The subjective expectations influenced by the objective structures found in the school, perpetuate social reproduction by encouraging less-privileged students to eliminate themselves from the system. The majority of these students who do succeed at school have had to internalize the values of the dominant classes and use them as their own, to the detriment of their original cultural values.

When taken together, the concepts outlined within the sociology of education framework provide a useful perspective by which to view the correlation between feelings toward marriage and family among Latina students and the context of the college gender gap. The current school experiences of Latina students—as they are making significant academic achievements in numerous fields of study that will guide their career trajectories—are framing their projections not only of their future career prospects, but also of how such prospects will fit with their marriage and family expectations. The fact that Latinas are making important strides in education while their male counterparts are simultaneously losing their presence in education may influence their perception of relationships within their ethnic group.

Latino male students given their class and gender statuses, may be tracked into paths that will encourage them to pursue blue-collar employment after high school graduation rather than college enrollment to fulfill their expected roles as providers. As conflict theorists propose, students are sorted along distinct class and ethnic lines and when this sorting is taken together with gendered expectations of manhood involving added pressure to assume the breadwinner role early in age—a gendered pressure

heightened within Latino culture—it becomes evident that the educational structure is affecting the actions and perceptions of individuals. The educational system, in this sense, is a microcosm of society in which students learn the values, norms, and relational dynamics at both the interpersonal and structural levels of interaction as explained by functionalists. These teachings along with Latina students' experiences will subsequently be used as their reference points as they navigate their social lives post-graduation. The strategies that Latina students are and will employ to navigate their academic and work goals along with their family goals within the gender gap highlights the connection between education as an institution and the feelings and perceptions of Latina students and carries important implications for the social development of Latinas.

#### Latino masculinities and femininities

Prior to the discussion of Latino gendered identities, it is necessary to understand the rationale behind a discussion of both femininities and masculinities given this study's focus on Latinas. A detailed account of gender at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels must be studied as relational; that is, each gender is to a certain extent defined in opposition to the other (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). In this sense, to learn how Latinas develop feelings about marriage and family, it is not only necessary to understand how they define themselves as women, but also how they develop these definitions and their life trajectories in relation to men and men's behavior. A holistic approach to gender is also useful to this study because given the institutionalization of patriarchy, it guides the feelings and behaviors of both men and women, and so merits examination as a catalyst for gender relations.

In response to dominant group research on Latino masculinities and femininities that views specific manifestations of gendered identity among this group as unique to Latinos based on their ethnicity and historical experiences, a body of literature has developed that questions this normative assumption (Baca Zinn, 1980; Castillo, 1994; Anzaldúa 1999; Gutmann, 1996). Although not justifying its existence, this reactive body of literature advances an understanding of machismo that situates race- and class-based inequalities as the foundation for the emergence of patriarchal ideals. Moving beyond the scope of Latino culture, the central argument made by Baca Zinn, Castillo, and Anzaldúa is that machismo is a reaction to the systemic stratification under which Western civilization has developed. Thus, under this viewpoint, men of color who have been disenfranchised may project their anger and frustration toward those who are in inferior positions to themselves, such as women and children. Baca Zinn examines conceptual and empirical issues that affect identity formation among women and men of Latino origin.

Noting that the social science literature has played a significant role in “understanding” Latinas and Latinos through a gendered and racialized lens, Baca Zinn emphasizes that Latina identity is much more complex than the quintessential presentation of the submissive Latina and Latino identity much more nuanced than the overly aggressive, one-dimensional character. In this sense, as Baca Zinn explains, “Contrary to the prevalent approach which conceptualizes roles in terms of cultural values alone, recent research indicates that behavior of Chicanos varies according to life conditions and situations. The gender roles of Chicanos are changing both as a result of alteration in the broader society and in response to the internal changes” (1980:19).

Warning against simplistic explanations of gender identities using cultural descriptions, Baca Zinn recognizes that gender identity is best understood as a product of the intersections between the multiple identities that individuals hold.

Anzaldúa pushes the historical significance of machismo further by noting that for some men, acting “macho” is not necessarily an expression of female oppression, but rather female protection as structural conditions manifested by laws, customs, and the economic system placed women in disadvantaged positions (1999), thus highlighting the importance of differential interpretations and meanings of machismo and masculinity among Latinos. Gutmann also attempts to move beyond generalizations about Latino masculinity by explaining that what it means to be a man changes in different contexts (interactions) and is greatly dependent on other factors including class, generation status, and national identity. Introducing the ideal-types for masculinity—the macho, mandilón (a man that is either dominated by his wife or contributes to household labor more so than what is expected of men), nonmacho (a man who neither identifies himself as macho nor a mandilón, but rather as simply a man), and homosexual—Gutmann stresses that no man embodies only one of these qualities, but rather, masculinity as a fluid identity adopts elements of multiple types to negotiate gender relations.

Gutmann notes, for example, that for many Latino men, machismo is equated with wife beating; therefore, men that do not beat their wives do not identify as macho regardless of other traits that may qualify them as such. In understanding gender as relational, Gutmann’s work is significant by demonstrating how masculinity is not only taught and learned between men; women play an important role in socializing boys to become men and women also influence how adult men negotiate their gender identities

through interactions and negotiations with women. Anzaldúa's and Gutmann's research in particular highlight the significance of understanding that machismo and masculinity in general are subjective concepts that are interpreted, internalized, and manifested differently among Latino men.

Similarly, Castillo presents a historically and structurally centered account of the origins and persistence of machismo, arguing that "our own culture is based on our historical socioeconomic practice of patrimony (the passing down of property through the father)" (72). In this sense, Castillo emphasizes how gendered identity is historically specific and has developed in response to socioeconomic changes over time. Baca Zinn, Anzaldúa, and Castillo argue that male dominance (patriarchy) is universal, not specific to certain cultures, and therefore, must be studied as such. The notion that aggressive expressions of masculinity may seem more common within Latino culture speaks to class- and race-based structural inequality and social scientific approaches to study more so than distinct cultural group traits, as manhood may be more important for those men who do not have access to other sources of social identity and legitimation as do men of the dominant group. The understanding of patriarchy as a universal phenomenon and the formation of Latino masculinity as a response to the stratification system is important to the present study as a reference point to understand the dynamics of Latino gender relations given the interplay between established gendered norms among Latinos and the current period of transition as Latino women and men continue to take diverging life paths.

Much of the recent literature on Latino masculinities and femininities seeks to further dismantle generalizations about Latino men's compulsions toward 'macho'

displays of behavior and Latina women's backwardness in exhibiting passive and self-sacrificing behavior. According to this stream of research, not only does a great deal of diversity exist in gendered behavior within Latino culture as affected by variables including but not limited to class and generation status, but such preconceptions reflect the biases of Anglo social scientists (Coltrane and Valdez, 1993; Coltrane, 2001; Mirandé).

In their study of dual-earner Chicano couples, Coltrane and Valdez (1993) conclude that gender relations among Chicano couples, although still guided by patriarchal ideals, are becoming much more egalitarian in terms of decision-making and household labor, noting that income power plays a significant role in shifting the gendered dynamic within family structures. The relevance of Coltrane and Valdez's research to the present study is that it suggests that although it is correct to analyze Chicano social organization in terms of patriarchy, it is incorrect to make normative assumptions about Chicanas as insignificant, thus highlighting both patriarchy and the development of egalitarian gender relations as fluid phenomena. The interplay between institutionalized gendered norms and the fluidity of lived experience is of central importance to this study.

In response to the ethnic-based preconceptions of Latino gender roles within the social sciences, Mirandé developed the Mirandé Sex Role Inventory (MSRI) to contrast the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) and thus reflect the fluidity and complexities of gender within Latino cultures. Rather than asking respondents to rank themselves according to psychological traits such as "assertive" or "affectionate," the MSRI asks respondents to assess certain situations and the appropriateness of behaviors for each sex.

Mirandé further notes that there is much variation in the perceptions of what the “macho” identity signifies to Latino men. Specifically, his research findings suggest that Latino males’ responses to machismo are divided into three principal categories: negative, positive, and neutral conceptions. The negative perceptions of machismo include “exaggerated masculinity,” “authoritarianism,” “violence,” and “self-centeredness” (69-71). Positive conceptions include “courage, honor, and integrity” (72). The neutral category included conceptions that either embodies elements of both positive and negative themes or could not be classified into either category. These distinct perceptions of “machismo” must be taken into account when examining gender identities in a racial/ethnic context. The underlying connection between the work of Baca Zinn, Anzaldúa, Castillo, Coltrane and Valdez, and Mirandé is that they all seek to emphasize Latino gendered identities as historically-specific and thus fluid concepts that are simultaneously reaffirmed through socialization yet continuously undergo change in response to other factors that shape identities.

In line with research on Latino gendered identities, contemporary research on Latino families also seeks to eradicate ethnocentric accounts of normative or well-adjusted family structures as promoted by the functionalist paradigm. The breadwinner-homemaker functionalist family model presented Latino families as dysfunctional units that deviated from well-adjusted family processes by maintaining backward ideals and customs from generation to generation. However, new studies of Latino families demonstrate that rather than exhibiting dysfunctional behavioral patterns, these families are organized and maintained through adaptive responses to structural conditions. In other words, Latino families and all other disadvantaged families act in accordance with

their positions within the stratification system (Zambrana, 1995). In light of these conclusions, Latino family studies are now equipped with the following presuppositions: 1) social scientific theories on families have created false generalizations of all families; 2) the concept of “family” is a social construct affected by specific historical, social, and economic conditions; 3) families as social institutions are intertwined with other social institutions; 4) gender plays a significant role in family organization; and 5) racial inequality plays an important role in family structures (Baca Zinn 1995).

As such, contemporary study of Latino families has developed a framework that takes into account the intersections between class, race, culture, and gender to understand what motivates Latino families to organize in distinctive patterns. Understanding these intersections and the fluidity that they create in Latino family organization will be further examined in relation to the college gender gap. That is, as Latino family structures are characterized by adaptive responses, the role that the college gender gap plays in creating new adaptive responses to family structures is central to the present study. It should be noted that while the present study focuses on Latino families and recognizes that differences do exist in their family functions and relationships, there are similar threads between Latino culture and dominant mainstream ideology about family functions and relationships.

The brief discussion of Latino masculinities and femininities is intended to provide an illustration of the dynamics of gender identities and the relations based on such identities. The literature emphasizes the fluidity and nuances of gender identities and relations given the multiple meanings that individuals place on being a man and being a woman. What the literature also demonstrates, however, is the preoccupation on

studying masculinity in Latino culture over femininity. This fundamental shortcoming in the literature drives the trajectory for the present research. Given the fluid and adaptive nature of gender identity, this study is interested in examining how Latinas in college negotiate their gender identities and prospects in relation to men within the context of the college gender gap. As the gender gap continues to challenge gendered norms for success in education and work, it is imperative to study how this challenge serves as the background for gender relations and identity formation or reformulation.

### **Themes in the Literature on Latino Culture**

A substantive body of literature has developed as a response to the increased influx of Latino migration during the twentieth century in an attempt to understand the nuances of Latino culture and thus provide a reference point by which to effectively work with and research the Latino population. General topics of interest within this body of knowledge include familism and the continuity of family values (Mirandé, 1997; Marin and Marin, 1991; Glittenberg, 2008; Gil and Vasquez, 1996); assimilation (Gil and Vasquez, 1996); traditional values and gendered expectations (Glittenberg, 2008; Gil and Vasquez, 1996; Gutmann, 1996); sexuality (Castillo, 1994; Anzaldúa 1999); and religiosity (Castillo, 1994; Anzaldúa 1999). Below is a brief outline of some of the work dealing specifically with familism and gendered expectations, as these topics directly correlate with the focus of the present study. Understanding the unique position of Latinos in the U.S. given the strong presence of Latino culture is imperative to examining the extent to which Latino cultural mandates continue to affect feelings about marriage and family among Latinas.

However, it is imperative to recognize that discussion of general themes in Latino culture is not to suggest that such values are important to all Latinos or to the same

degree. Each study presented was conducted on specific segments of the Latino population at distinct times and therefore, the findings cannot be expected to apply to all members of the Latino ethnic group. Culture is interpreted, negotiated, and experienced differently by each member of an ethnic group given their own unique social location and breadth of experiences, therefore the forthcoming discussion is not intended to present Latino culture as a monolithic concept, but rather to present factors that may influence the perceptions of Latinos and Latinas.

### Familism and Family Values

Research on Latinos shows that *allocentrism*, also known as collectivism, is a recurring topic of importance in the literature on Latino culture. Allocentrism is operationally defined as a cultural system that emphasizes the “needs, objectives, and points of view of an in-group” (Marin and Marin, 1991:11). This ideology completely contradicts that of American society in which individualism is highly valued (Cherlin, 2004). This value manifests itself in Latino culture through personal interdependence, conformity, high levels of trust within members of the in-group, and willingness to sacrifice personal needs and desires for the betterment of the entire group. Associated with allocentrism is the concept of *simpatía*, involving the desire to act in such a way as to maintain and promote pleasant social relationships. This value also promotes conformity because it discourages conflict regardless of whether it is perceived as justified in order to achieve higher levels of harmony within interpersonal relationships.

Arguably, researchers regard the notion of *familism* as the foundation for the Latino value system. This value encompasses the individual’s high level of attachment to the nuclear and extended family, so much so that identity formation revolves around the

position in the family and the strength of kinship relations. Ideally, familism is intended to provide a stable support system that will reduce stress. Marin and Marin delineate the three factors that comprise this value in the following passage: "...perceived obligation to provide material and emotional support to the members of the extended family; reliance on relatives for help and support; and the perception of relatives as behavioral and attitudinal referents" (1991:14). Glittenberg (2008) echoes the importance of familialism not only as a socializer, but also as a primary factor in the prevalence of Latino culture despite the pressure to assimilate in the U.S. Marin and Marin offer a final cultural value that they propose functions to perpetuate an attitude of conformity within Latino culture. Power distance refers to a measure of a relationship of influence between two individuals that elicits authoritarian attitudes. This relationship plays out within interpersonal relationships through the demand for respect of those who hold prestige whether it is due to age, educational level, occupation, etc.

Taken together, these values help to illustrate the cultural context in which Latinos in general are socialized. The heightened importance of family unity (especially extended kinship), of maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships, and of conforming to unequal relations of power contradicts the individualistic values promoted in the U.S. deemed necessary for educational and career advancement. As discussed in a section of this study, prioritizing educational and career goals tends to result in either a reduction in the importance of marriage and family or in a reconceptualization of families that particularly for Latina women promotes individualism and self-gratification rather than the self-sacrificing role of wife-mother.

### Gendered Norms in Relationships and Family Structures

Establishing a single framework by which to view Latino gender relations is not only impossible, but it also ignores the nuances of the Latino ethnic identity and of gender relations themselves within different contexts and interactions. Gender relations among Latinos are fluid given that they are affected by a multitude of factors, including generation status, the specific country of origin, the passing of time, and individual socialization experiences within the different major social institutions, to name but a few. There are, however, established generalizations and expectations for gendered identities among Latinos as evidenced by certain literature and the patriarchal structure that influences Latino culture, although patriarchy exists in all Western cultures. For example, the woman serving as the central figure in the home through the care given to her children as well as by maintenance of her home as a product of her emotional responsiveness to the needs of the family. Thus, within the family structure, women are expected to serve as the propagators of culture through their responsibilities in the socialization of their children.

Men, conversely, are expected to exercise their dominance by functioning as the voice of authority and by providing financially for their families. In reference to the relationship between Latino men and women in the U.S., it is expected that men continue to exert the power bestowed upon them by Latino culture regardless of the socioeconomic status of women because the patriarchal dictates established by Latino culture are transferred to gender relations in the U.S. (Glittenberg, 2008). This assertion, however, does not adequately describe the condition of gender relations among Latinos, as it does not factor in the influence of generation status in changing perception over

time. However, patriarchy as a structural force within Latino culture relates to this current research, which seeks to examine whether or not aspects of Latino culture influence feelings about marriage and family among a segment of the Latina population that is experiencing accelerated progress in education and work. In other words, exploring whether or not there is a relationship between cultural precedents for gendered expectations and plans for marriage and family among educated Latinas is central to this study.

According to Gil and Vazquez (1996), the conflict between patriarchal gender relations among Latinos and the advancements of women is typical in the U.S. as the adaptation process begins, serving as a source of conflict because women feel a sense of guilt since they are not satisfied with being housewives or not having the economic means to care for their children as much as they would prefer. Gil and Vazquez elaborate on this notion: “To many Latinas who are pursuing careers outside of homemaking, *el triunfo en el trabajo*, success at work, is a mixed blessing. The more successful they become in the North American world of work, the less successful they feel as Latina women” (1996:100). Latinas and women in general are currently socialized to pursue higher education and career paths, yet women continue to take responsibility for the majority of housework and childrearing, creating a ‘time-bind’ as Arlie Hochschild (2003) suggested in her work on the “second shift.” The contradictory messages conveyed to women regarding career goals and family and the impact of such messages is of significance to this study and will be discussed in great length in a portion of it.

The work of Hurtado (1995) also supports this contradiction, as she notes that the degree of ethnic identification is strongly correlated with feelings of psychological

distress between educational/occupational achievements and gender relations. That is, Latinas who strongly identify with their culture are less likely to marry outside of their ethnic group experience more distress because of professional achievements, as they are more likely to view these accomplishments as threatening to their Latino male counterparts and to their own identities as good Latinas. Latinas who do not identify ethnically and are more open to interracial marriage are also less likely to experience such psychological distress. This theory on the struggle Latinas experience between gendered family obligations and professional achievements is useful in understanding the feelings about marriage and family within the context of the college gender gap because the gap suggests that perhaps a shift has occurred in what aspects of their lives Latinas prioritize. It is important to study whether a shift has also occurred in their feelings about relationships and family that contradicts the current body of knowledge, thus evidencing the complexities of lived experiences.

The cultural ideal of motherhood and marriage is pervasive not only among Latinos, but among men and women across all racial and ethnic lines. The importance of the wife-mother role is fueled by the perceptions of single or divorced women as either “good” or “bad” depending on their willingness to adhere to patriarchal ideals throughout Latino society, not to mention Latin American culture at large. For some Latinos, a “good woman” is defined as not only one who is virtuous, but also as one who places the needs of her husband and children before her own. In other words, a self-sacrificing woman is the most respectable type of woman. In this sense, if a woman decided to delay or forgo marriage and family, she may be judged in a critical fashion for not adhering to the values with which she has been socialized.

Gil and Vazquez argue that this condition is an example of the propagation of female dependency on men in Latin American culture: "...*la mujer sola*, whether she's single, divorced, or widowed, has no valid place in Latin American society because a woman's role is to be a wife and mother. Too often, women who choose to be alone are regarded as outcasts" (1996:61). Younger generations of Latinas are expressing a shift in attitudes that continue to deviate from the classical model, as delaying or forgoing marriage and family becomes more commonplace in relation to educational and career aspirations (Glittenberg, 2008). The foregoing discussion of Latino culture presented thus far is not intended to support the notion that all Latinos, for example, are violent and domineering or that all Latinas are passive and submissive, for that would negate the purpose of this study. Rather, this review of the research literature seeks to demonstrate how Latino culture has established a trans-historical set of ideal types for gender-appropriate behavior. In turn, these types have created expectations that have been internalized by most, thus affecting Latinos whether they accept or reject these ideals. Regardless of whether certain individuals reject these ideals, a sense of guilt may develop because they are conscious of what is expected of them.

### **College Experiences and Trajectories by Gender**

Women have made greater advances in college enrollment, retention, and completion in comparison to men during the last 40 years. Women are increasingly more likely to enroll in college than men and currently outnumber their male counterparts in earning Bachelor's and Master's degrees (Adebayo, 2008). However, the role that gendered socialization process plays in college life trajectory, especially choice of major, has been a catalyst for investigation within education studies. The most common finding of such

research notes that the differential socialization process for women and men (e.g., women are not encouraged to pursue math and science) creates gendered values that are translated into college major choice and subsequent career pathways (Bridges, 1989; Marini et al., 1996). Women are socialized to value altruistic social rewards while men are socialized to place greater emphasis on factors including income and prestige (Ma, 2009). Although other factors contribute to gendered choices of major, this value system increases the likelihood that women will major in the social sciences and humanities while men will more likely be attracted to the business and life/health science fields (Ma, 2009).

In this sense, college men and women are largely segregated given their preconditioned gendered approaches to the purposes and rewards of college. However, SES tends to outweigh the effects of traditional gender socialization in that women of a lower SES background are just as likely to choose lucrative college majors as their male counterparts; the gendered college major choice trend seems to be most salient among higher SES students (Ma, 2009; Adebayo, 2008). Gendered choices of major suggest that the notion of masculinity that boys and men are socialized with is prevalent in their decisions, as they tend to go into fields that will facilitate their ability to take on the breadwinner/provider role that will be expected of them when they marry. If this premise is true, then women's choices of major reflect different motivations that will be explored in this study as possible determinants of their feelings about marriage and family.

Another aspect of the college experience that merits attention as a precursor to marriage and family trends after graduation is the changing dating patterns in recent decades. Evidence suggests that modern, Western society is experiencing a shift from

traditional dating patterns to a prevalence of “hooking up,” especially on college campuses (Bradshaw et al., 2010). According to researchers, a “hook up” is defined as “a sexual encounter which may or may not include sexual intercourse, usually occurring between people who are strangers or brief acquaintances” (Paul et al., 2000:76). This type of encounter—although it may free women from the patriarchal constraints of traditional heterosexual dating in which men navigate the course of the relationship—generates more benefits for men than women. As noted by Bradshaw et al. (2010), the flirting that leads to the hook up, for example, tells males that rejection is much less likely in comparison to traditional courtship. The usual presence of alcohol and drugs in hooking up scenarios also reduces anxiety and inhibitions in dealing with the opposite sex. Furthermore, men are more likely to establish sexual goals for themselves in social settings; therefore, the prevalence of hooking up makes these goals more easily attainable.

For women, however, hooking up highlights the double standard concerning sexuality between men and women, as women tend to experience guilt and remorse more often than men do after a casual sexual encounter (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Given that women tend to correlate love and sex to a higher extent than men do, hooking up activities may prove unsatisfactory for women in terms of personal contentment (Regan and Berscheid, 1995). The theories on hooking up are useful to this research because changing feelings about dating among college students will likely lead to changes in feelings about marriage, which is of primary interest in this study. One of the goals of this work is to discover whether causality exists between dating patterns and feelings

about marriage; thus the research on hooking up provides the foundation for further examination.

The shortcomings of the literature suggest that to adequately conceptualize the college experiences of women and men, further research is necessary that delineates the unique obstacles facing each sex during the lived college experience that in turn affect retention and completion rates, exploring both the differences among male and female re-entry students as well as those entering college immediately following high school graduation.

### **Factors Leading to Gendered Career Paths**

Researchers have pinpointed three external factors among people of color in the U.S. that lead women and men to take divergent career paths. First, the male advantage in the blue-collar job sector has created a gendered division in career perception and outcome. Specifically, men have greater access in comparison to women to higher paying jobs that do not require a college education (e.g. construction and manufacturing). Women who enter the lower ranks of the labor force without a college degree tend to go into either food services or sales, occupations that usually do not provide sufficient income to sustain a standard of living without an additional income (Keene and Prokos, 2010).

Second, among men of color, specifically Blacks and Latinos, young males are significantly more likely to experience gang and other crime involvement, which has resulted in the majority of prison inmates being young men of color (Brownsberger, 2000; Curry and Corral-Camacho, 2008). Studies have shown that along with a higher likelihood of incarceration, men of color tend to receive longer prison sentences than their non-Hispanic White male counterparts (Brownsberger, 2000; Curry and Corral-

Camacho, 2008). Third, aside from incarceration and blue-collar work as factors leading young men of color away from the college path, military service as a career option also plays a crucial role in occupational trajectories for males. There exists a strong correlation between the decision to enter the military and race/ethnicity along with SES, meaning that Black and Latino males from lower SES backgrounds are significantly more likely to perform military service than are Whites (Lutz, 2008). Military service not only provides a financial incentive since it provides employment, but also offers a paid college education after service is completed and the opportunity to gain technical skills for future employment. Further, joining the military also fulfills the values common with gendered socialization. Specifically for Latino males, the cultural value of machismo continues to serve as a motivator in military service as this male demographic is given the opportunity to fulfill the role of not only strong male, but also of a family provider given the financial rewards of military duty.

Further research on the interplay between blue-collar work, incarceration, and military service as stressors in gender relations and factors affecting attitudes toward marriage and family is merited. Concerning the present study, the fact that blue-collar work, incarceration, and military service disproportionately affect Latinos more than Latinas is important in guiding the assumptions of this research regarding the conceptualization of masculinity and its effects in guiding career decisions. That is, since Latinas do not face these factors to the extent that Latinos do, what gendered motivators are causing them to pursue further education and careers? This question is further explored through in-depth interviews in this study.

Examining trends in gendered career paths across racial and ethnic lines, Eccles (1994) examines the factors influencing the educational and occupational choices of women and men using the Eccles et al. expectancy-value model of achievement related-choices. Eccles notes that despite the efforts to increase women's participation in traditionally male-dominated fields, gender segregation remains in high-status fields such as physical science, engineering, and applied mathematics. In examining this trend, the Eccles model suggests that the continued gender segregation in high status fields is due to three primary factors: 1) women's lower expectations for success in such fields; 2) women's less subjective value on these fields; and 3) gendered socialization. Eccles notes that the research on gendered expectations for success among students has produced mixed findings, but when gendered expectations do arise, they tend to vary by domain. The Eccles model argues that occupational choices also tend to be influenced by intraindividual hierarchies of expectations and efficacy, meaning that people tend to select activities for which they have the highest expectations for success. For example, Eccles discusses research findings in which girls in gifted programs have more confidence in their reading ability than their math ability, even though they did not have lower confidence in their math ability compared to their male peers.

The Eccles model also predicts that decisions about course enrollments, college majors, and occupational choice are influenced by the value individuals attach to the various options that they believe are available to them, and these values are heavily influenced by gendered socialization. For example, in a longitudinal study that Eccles and colleagues performed, they found that girls were less likely than boys to enroll in advanced math because they felt that math was less important, less useful, and less enjoyable than the boys

did. In another study, when asked their occupational interests and/or anticipated college major, gifted girls rated domestic, secretarial, artistic, biological science, and both medical and social service occupations higher than the boys. Boys, on the other hand, expressed more interest in the physical sciences, engineering, and the military.

Eccles argues that gendered socialization also plays a role in influencing academic and occupational choices. Eccles explains that women and men tend to value certain things more than others; women tend to value making job sacrifices for their family and to have a job that allows them to help others, while men tend to value becoming famous, economic success, seeking out challenging tasks, and doing work involving math and computers. Regarding long-range goals, to the extent that a woman has internalized the traditional female script, she will rate parenting and spouse-supporting roles as more important than professional roles, while a man will rate family and career goals as equally important because the traditional breadwinner role allows him to fulfill his family role by having a successful career. Gendered socialization also affects how men and women perceive success. If, for example, a woman internalizes the traditional female script, success in parenting is defined as more involvement in her children's lives, while success in parenting for men is defined by increased commitment to and success in their careers. Eccles' research is imperative in understanding the perceptions of the women in this study concerning their academic careers, occupational choices, and their expected relations to their spouses and children, particularly in how they prioritize their home and work lives.

### **Gendered Attitudes toward Marriage and Family**

The transformation of perceptions regarding marriage and family across generations has been a topic of considerable interest for researchers (Gubernskaya, 2010; Koropecyj-Cox, Pendell, 2007; Espenshade, 1985). Studies suggest that new gender patterns are

developing in recent generations regarding the attitudes toward marriage and family; specifically, women are deviating from the traditional notions of family, believing that marriage and children are not essential to life satisfaction and happiness (Gubernskaya, 2010; Koropecj-Cox, Pendell, 2007). Men, conversely, tend to support traditional models of the family structure. Other demographic factors including race/ethnicity, level of religiosity, educational attainment, employment status, and marital status are all shown to affect attitudes toward marriage and family differently between the sexes. Employed women with higher education who have never been married and hold more secularized views tend to hold disproportionately less traditional views than men, the unemployed, less educated individuals, married persons, and religious peoples (Gubernskaya, 2010; Koropecj-Cox, Pendell, 2007; ).

These findings directly correlate with the variables under examination in this study and guide the expected findings for the present work. Given that the research demonstrates a correlation between high levels of education and gender (specifically the female gender) and more flexible or 'progressive' feelings about marriage and family, this study examines whether Latina college students will likely also express more flexible opinions about these issues. Although marriage and family may still be long-term goals for them, marriage and family may not hold the same degree of importance given the priority Latinas are placing on education as a means to career advancement.

Theories explored as possible determinants of the growing changes in family-related attitudes include the post-materialism and Second Demographic Transition (SDT) theories. The post-materialist argument as presented by Inglehart (1997) and Inglehart and Baker (2000) suggests that economic advances and development produce increasing

levels of material comfort, which provides individuals with the freedom to pursue individualistic pursuits without being constrained by the economic dependence that characterizes the traditional family structure. In this sense, post-materialism emphasizes the shift away from traditional and community-based values (i.e. allocentrism) toward an emphasis on individualistic pursuits and secular views to support such pursuits (Gubernskaya, 2010). Similarly, Second Demographic Transition theory (Lesthaeghe and Meekers, 1986; Lesthaeghe and Surkyn, 2004; Van de Kaa 1987) suggests that the fertility decline during the mid- to late twentieth century is due to the predominance of individualistic values that clash with traditional mandates for marriage and family as higher educational and career aspirations become central to self-satisfaction (Gubernskaya, 2010; Espenshade, 1985). The post-materialist and Second Demographic Transition theories offer valuable insights into the structural changes related to feelings about marriage and family. In the present study, the interplay between these factors and Latino cultural mandates will be investigated to measure whether Latino culture hinders the effects of post-materialism and demographic transitions or whether these structural changes are diluting the effects of Latino culture in the U.S.

Cherlin (2004) fuses a historical perspective with an understanding of how micro-, meso-, and macro-level structures interact to guide changes in attitudes about marriage and family. Cherlin notes that the evolutionary nature of American society has dramatically altered its members' dependence on marriage and the meaning of marriage itself. He attributes this decreased dependence to a number of factors: marriage is less of a necessity for economic stability (particularly for women); the increased difficulties for uneducated; young men to acquire stable employment; and the increased individualistic

perspective on marriage and family. This individualism, as the author explains, is a by-product of the postmodernist age in which self-gratification and other aspects of well-being, including freedom, self-expression, and the quality of life have become increasingly important. Paradoxically, Cherlin argues that while marriage's practical value has diminished in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, its "symbolic value" has increased as members of Westernized countries delay marriage until they have earned a social position worthy of entering into such a commitment, typically through the acquisition of higher education, economic stability, and the practice of cohabitation. Cherlin's theory on the increase in symbolic value of marriage frames an explanation for the perceptions of Latinas in higher education. In this sense, for college-enrolled Latinas, marriage and family temporarily lose value as they prioritize education and work, but will increase in importance once these stepping-stones have been reached.

Research on the effects of women's increased presence in the labor market on marriage suggests that women's economic independence is altering the dynamics in mate selection as selecting compatible partners prior to marriage becomes preeminent as opposed to postmarital socialization, in which spouses adjust to increase the compatibility of their union (Oppenheimer, 1988). In a traditional marriage, postmarital socialization is fundamental to increasing the likelihood of the marriage lasting, as women adapt to their marriage lifestyle depending on their spouse's achieved socioeconomic status. As women's participation in higher education and the workforce continues, however, premarital mate selection becomes more important as women have increased marital choices and are not limited to having to make adjustments once they are married. This trend, significantly, is delaying the marriage timing of both men and women as

perceptions of their long-run attributes and contributions to the marriage become paramount (Oppenheimer, 1988).

Moreover, an unintended result of increased presence in education and employment on the part of women is divorce, as evidenced by a positive correlation between female college enrollment and the divorce rate (Tian, 1996). The incompatibility between gender socialization representative of a traditional family structure and the preeminence of individualistic self-realization among women, creating a struggle between family and work responsibilities, is perceived as a major contributive factor in the rise in divorce (Mason and Goulden, 2004). The divorce trend seems particularly salient among women with doctoral degrees, highlighting the disjunction between social structure, particularly as it applies to employment, and the lived experiences and needs of working women (Mason and Goulden, 2004). It is important to note, however, that the correlations between education and divorce rates among women found in these studies may also be attributed to other factors outside of education, although the gendered experiences in academe and their connections to home life are largely supported.

Mason and Goulden suggest that the advances that women have made in the workforce have created a unique plateau for sex discrimination. An evolution has occurred as women no longer experience such blatant discrimination, but rather, the work structure disadvantages women in university teaching positions as the tenure track, for example, takes place precisely during women's peak childbearing years, thus forcing professional women to sacrifice either career advancement or family. Aside from the heightened divorce rate among female Ph.D. recipients, this demographic is also much

more likely to delay or forgo childbirth, as opposed to male Ph.D. recipients who begin their families earlier in their careers (Mason and Goulden, 2004).

These theories on the effects of women's increased role in the workplace as presented by Oppenheimer, Tian, and Mason and Goulden echo Cherlin's theories regarding the prevalence of individualized marriage in Westernized nations. As women continue to develop their individual presence in the workplace, their criteria for partners or spouses becomes more selective since they are less likely to view marriage or cohabitation as an economic necessity and thus, qualities in potential partners or spouses that will bring them gratification and happiness become more important. This increase in selectivity among women is not only a factor in delaying their entry into marriages, but it also plays a role in increasing the likelihood of divorce. Although, an equally valid argument that could develop in light of this literature is that there is in fact less selectivity in practice as marriage is not considered until later in life for many women with college and graduate educations, when the pool of marriageable partners has decreased. The present study utilizes these premises to understand the trend in prioritizing education and work during the early adult stage. In other words, the increase in symbolic value of marriage and family may be partially attributed to the difficulty in attaining and maintaining marriage and family as social status markers that are evident in the larger society. Women (and men) may feel that given the increase in 'failures' in family formation and maintenance, they need more time to prepare themselves for their attempts and more time to find suitable partners with whom to embark on these attempts.

### **Research on Black Women as Reference Point for the Present Study**

The majority of research that examines the effects of the college gender gap on feelings about marriage and family overwhelmingly focuses on the experiences of White and Black women (Bulcroft and Bulcroft, 1993). The present study is developed as a response to this shortcoming by examining the experiences of Latinas. However, literature on Black women serves as a useful reference point in providing understanding of women of color and their condition as ‘Other’ that are simultaneously making significant advances in education and occupational fields despite their disadvantaged positions. For example, research on Black women’s attitudes toward marriage lends significant insight into the strategies women of color are employing within the context of the educational gender gap. The study of mate selection among Blacks performed by Bulcroft and Bulcroft (1993) highlights the pattern decrease in marriage rates as a stage in adult life as they find that Black women tend to have significantly lower marriage rates than women of other races/ethnic groups. This decrease in marriage may be partially attributed to the value Black women place on economic support and are therefore more resistant to marrying a man with fewer resources than they have.

This finding suggests that a way of coping with the educational gender gap for Black women involves delaying or forgoing marriage in pursuit of individualistic career goals, resulting in marriage and family formation becoming less important as a preeminent source of life satisfaction. The differential obstacles faced by Black women and men are believed to contribute to the increasing disconnection in relational trajectories in this group (Kaba, 2008). The gendered obstacles that Black women and men face provide a lens by which to examine the diverging life paths that Latino women

and men are taking as evidenced by the college gender gap. As research on Black women suggests that they develop coping mechanisms for the disjuncture between themselves and Black men, the present research seeks to examine whether Latinas are similarly developing strategies to adapt to the gender gap in education.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION AND IMPLICATIONS**

Given the information provided in existing studies regarding the factors influencing the college gender gap and the impact of that trend on marriage and family, attention must be paid to the shortcomings in the literature. The body of research does not explore the nuances and complexities of the condition of Latinas as an ethnic group and the power structure in the U.S. Examining the possibility of Latinas feeling a sense of distress resulting from the disjuncture between their accomplishments and the pervasiveness of patriarchy within the cultural system and gendered expectations is of great importance to this study.

The present study seeks to add to the limited literature regarding the strategies Latina students employ to navigate their work and family goals within the context of the gender gap, paying close attention to the unique situation of Latina women given their unique cultural context. The rationale behind the focus of this study on educated Latinas only is three-fold. First, this study examines the condition of Latinas within the college gender gap; therefore, a sample of the student population must be examined. Second, examining Latinas will provide unique and unexplored insight into the strategies they employ to maneuver their aspirations in the midst of a gender gap in higher education given their cultural context in the U.S. Third, the decision to observe Latino women and not men is intended to emphasize the complex condition for educated women given the

disjuncture between gendered expectations for what women's priorities should be and the reality of the advances in education and work that they are making.

Exploring the interplay between gendered expectations for women and their lived experiences, particularly as it affects their feelings and opinions, is central to this study. As an example of exploratory research, this investigation builds on the pre-existing literature regarding the college gender gap in the U.S. as well as the literature on the complexities of Latino masculinities and femininities. This study seeks to uncover the relational trajectories that Latina college women are undertaking to pursue their academic/work goals and their family goals. The research question in this study as outlined below is developed in recognition of the shortcomings in the current body of literature and designed to explore the manner in which Latina college students navigate between their academic and work goals and the cultural ideal of motherhood and marriage within the context of the college gender gap:

As a result of the different paths to success pursued by Latino men and women, a gender gap exists in higher education. Within this context, how do Latina students navigate the relationship between occupational aspirations and marriage and family goals?

## **METHODS**

This study seeks to examine how Latina students that identify strongly as Latina navigate between their educational and occupational aspirations and the cultural ideal of motherhood and marriage within the context of the college gender gap. Although this study only examines unmarried Latina students at UNR, their experiences and responses produce an adequate range of responses about the experiences of Latina students in relation to the gender gap. A sample of students enrolled at UNR was selected to

participate in in-depth, open-ended interviews between the months of January 2012 and February 2012. The sample size selected consisted of ten unmarried UNR-enrolled Latina students of undergraduate and graduate standing, with a minimum of two students representing each undergraduate class level and two graduate students. The rationale behind this sampling decision is that the researcher sought to have a range of experiences to examine.

The recruitment process for participants involved the researcher informing students that frequent the Center for Student Cultural Diversity at UNR about this study and posting flyers on campus to attract potential participants. The sample selection process involved convenience sampling, meaning that this was a non-probability and purposive exploratory study. Prior to beginning the interviews, informed consent was secured from the respondents, ensuring that each was aware of the purpose and measures of the study as well as of their right to refuse participation at any time.

Following the acquisition of informed consent, the interviewer administered an introductory questionnaire to each participant to gather demographic information, including the respondents' ages, grade levels, generation status, choices of major, parents' highest educational attainment, parents' occupations, and their family's country of origin. A neutral environment was selected for the interview portion of this research. Given that the present research deals with the possible conflict between the academic and home lives of Latina students, the researcher intended to hold the interviews in a neutral setting outside of campus and the subjects' homes so as not to elicit responses that are biased toward either academic goals or family goals. Each interview was recorded and transcribed thereafter to increase the accuracy of the narrative collection process.

The researcher recognizes the limitations that come with audiotaping, including the possibility of inhibiting the respondents' answers given their knowledge of the tape recorder's presence, as well as the possibility that the researcher will become overly dependent on the tape recorder to capture the responses and thus fail to probe answers further when necessary. However, for the purposes of this study, the benefits of audiotaping outweighed the costs. Given that the interviews were intended to collect in-depth information, it was necessary to audiotape the responses to have the opportunity to listen to the interviews afterwards and parse out the information during analysis. In-depth interviewing, particularly when examining feelings about life prospects, is intrusive whether audiotaped or not, but audiotaping allowed the researcher to focus on establishing a rapport with respondents that counteracted the inhibiting effect of the tape recorder's presence. Although all interviewees were asked several of the same baseline questions, considering that the questions asked were primarily open-ended and that the questionnaire itself was a guideline for the interview in the sense that questions were reframed, elaborated upon, or repeated to probe responses further when necessary, a certain amount of deviation was expected. The interviews were expected to have approximately a one-hour duration, but given the expected degree of variation, most interviews deviated from this estimation.

This study adopted a qualitative approach towards narrative collection and analysis for several reasons. This study seeks to focus on the strategies, feelings, and values of a specific demographic of Latinas, and in order to achieve this, the data collected needed to be in-depth to capture the complexities of the issues addressed. This study is also intended to stimulate detailed understanding of the condition of educated

Latinas within the context of the college gender gap, a goal that cannot be reached using statistical analysis. The use of only a limited number of cases in this study is intentional because, as qualitative research, this investigation is intended to build a richer, deeper picture of these Latina students to gain a better understanding of how they navigate their academic and work goals and their family goals.

Each audiotape was labeled using a simplified coding system in which each tape was coded using the two-digit fiscal year, a two-digit 1-4 numerical system for each respondent's year in school, and a three-digit numbering of each tape in numerical order (e.g. 11-01-001). Following the transcription of the audiotapes, the interview narratives were subsequently analyzed using the three-step coding process based on Strauss' (1987) qualitative data analysis approach. The researcher adopted Strauss' approach to data analysis because its emphasis on grouping the narratives based on recurring themes and analyzing the narratives multiple times encouraged a higher level of understanding. This strategy was intended to allow the narratives to speak for themselves to express the feelings these Latina students have about their educational and occupational goals versus their family goals within the context of the college gender gap and the strategies that they use to navigate between the two.

During the first step, the researcher performed what Strauss terms open coding to locate broad themes and assign initial codes in an attempt to organize the narratives into categories based on the themes addressed in the research questions. This step involved carefully reading the narratives, looking for key events, feelings, experiences, or themes that were then noted. The initial open coding strategy helped the researcher see emerging themes at a glance and the list of themes served to build a universe of all themes in the

study, which were reorganized, sorted, combined, extended, or discarded in subsequent analysis.

During the second phase, the researcher used axial coding to establish connections among themes and to elaborate on the concepts that the initial themes represented. This step was distinct from open coding in that during open coding, the researcher was not concerned about making connections among themes or elaborating the concepts that the themes represent. The axial coding step helped the researcher link concepts and themes, and thus begin to make evaluations of trends among Latina students regarding their strategies for their educational, occupational, and family goals. The final phase involved using selective coding to choose the narratives that best illustrated recurring themes in the students' responses. The selective coding step allowed for making comparisons and contrasts between narratives to establish core generalizations or ideas. This final step in analysis served to pinpoint the themes that best represented responses to the research question about the manners in which Latina college students navigate occupational goals and the cultural ideal for marriage and motherhood within the context of the college gender gap.

Strauss' technique was the most fitting for this research as it allowed the researcher to work with the narratives' themes and their connections to understand the relational strategies of Latina students and their possible connection to the college gender gap. This study seeks to explore the feelings Latina students have about their educational, occupational, and family goals and the strategies they employ to maneuver through this goals within the gender gap in higher education. It was the intention of the researcher to adopt a methodology that uses a humanizing approach by treating these

Latina students not as research subjects, but rather as individuals that are navigating between goals that may be conflicting and thus resulting in distress for these women.

The methodological approach for this study allowed these women and their narratives to speak for themselves and thus create a better understanding of their experiences both within and outside of the educational system.

To ensure these women's anonymity and confidentiality, the researcher has assigned pseudonyms to all participants. However, all respondents are identified by their reported age, generation status, and school year.

## **FINDINGS**

This study has thus far emphasized the importance of understanding how Latina college students navigate their occupational goals and their family goals as two undoubtedly connected, yet *distinct* paths. Of central importance to this question is examining whether the pursuit of these paths creates a conflict to the extent that a paradox may exist between the societal encouragement for the professional advancements of women and the continuous presence of the cultural ideal of motherhood.

### **Academic and Occupational Goals as Means to an End**

The narratives of the women in this study reflect a vastly different understanding of the relationship between their occupational and family goals. Rather than viewing their work and family goals as distinct pathways, these women understand them as fundamentally interconnected in that fulfilling their family aspirations (90% of the respondents plan to marry and have children) necessitates first completing their academic and occupational goals. As Natalia, a second generation, 20-year-old sophomore explains:

I do see myself getting married and having kids [...] and doing it like my dad told me, when it feels right, when you see that you're situated and when you feel comfortable [...] when you have that diploma to fall back on.

Rebecca, a second generation, 21-year-old, echoes the belief of pursuing academic/work goals as a logical step toward reaching her family goals:

I have a belief that things just fall into place, so I have always been very education-oriented, so I just focus on my school and eventually I'll just meet that person and I'll figure out ways to make it work. If it means at that time kind of going back on my career goals a little bit, depending on what needs to happen...[respondent smiles and shrugs]

Similarly, Fatima, a second-generation, 23-year-old senior, and Ariana, a second generation, 20-year-old junior, state,

I just personally want to finish school, that's my main goal [right now] ...but I know when the time's right, it'll [marriage/family] happen for me.

[...] To me it's more of like, get my education and get things done. Marriage and kids is you know, things that will happen in their time, when the time is right.

The importance of accomplishing academic and occupational goals as a precursor to family formation is also voiced in the advice most respondents received from their parents. As Jessica, a second generation, 21-year-old senior, and Natalia explain:

Jessica: Well my mom's kind of like, "Oh you should first get your education and then eventually get married."

Natalia: My dad is the one that says, "Everything will come at the right time" and never to rush anything.

As opposed to perceiving occupational goals and family goals as two separate categories, each with their own set of strategies for pursuit, Natalia, Jessica, Fatima, and Rebecca discuss their academic/work goals as strategies in themselves for attaining the ultimate status marker of wife-mother, or more accurately, professional-wife-mother. It

is important to note that these women are not conscious of using their academic/work goals as strategies for attaining the status that comes from being a professional and a wife-mother. Their responses are interpreted as reflective of their exercising agency in reaction to the internalization of ideologies within the institutionalization of education, motherhood, and femininity in general. These narratives support Cherlin's work on the increase in the symbolic value of marriage and family as a mark of distinction despite the decrease of its practical significance. While these women are education- and career-oriented, they understand that school and work are in a sense, the means to the end goal of family formation and they prioritize their occupational and family goals as such. Rebecca's willingness to sacrifice occupational upward mobility for the sake of accommodating her future family highlights the viewpoint of family as the ultimate goal. Sofia, a fourth generation, 18-year-old freshman, elaborates on the prioritization process:

You can have your career, you can have your goals or whatever, but you need to establish kind of earlier on, which is going to take precedence.

In line with this perspective, Maribel, a second-generation, 25-year-old Master's student in Spanish language and literature and Rebecca reiterate:

Maribel: I think your priorities come first, what comes first is your family, and I think that's something that's always been embedded, you know, in Latino culture. I think it always comes down—it always comes back to the family. You know, family first—your child, your children.

Question for Rebecca: Do you think it's going to be an issue in any way as far as when you do get your career going and when you do have kids? Do you think it's going to be something hard to balance the two or do you see it as not even an issue?

Rebecca: I think it could be hard to balance because I would have to be at a point where I'm willing to step back in my career, focus more on my family, because I don't want to have a family and not spend time with the kids or not spend time with my husband. So it would just have to be the right time. I wouldn't be willing to have a family if I didn't feel I was at a place where I can step back career-wise.

Within this case study, 60% of the women interviewed are delaying marriage and family until they have at least completed their educations and established their professional lives. The decision to temporarily prioritize education over family is a strategy in itself for successfully reaching the wife-mother stage. As Sofia and Rebecca explain, once they create a family, that aspect of their lives will take priority over their professional lives. In this sense, the notion that pursuing academic/work goals and family goals could create a conflict does not reflect the perceptions of these women. They intend to work diligently in the world of academia and later the professional world to ‘earn’ the right to embark on the wife-mother phase, which they believe to be the most important responsibility that they will take on. Thus, to these women there is no conflict in navigating occupational and family goals as one necessitates the other. The conflict arises in terms of maintenance once they establish themselves as wife, mother, and professional. Rosa, a 25-year-old doctoral student in cell and molecular biology, elaborates on this concern:

I want to say that I don’t think they affect each other [work and family responsibilities], but it’s like inevitable that they’re going to. I feel like work stress can definitely affect my lifestyle at home and even now I notice that when I’m stressed out about school, I’m in a bad mood when I’m at my house. And I try to work on that a lot. I really want to separate those two things, but it’s really hard for me right now, so I want to say that I want them to be two separate things, like family life and marriage from work, but I feel like work can get stressful enough that it will affect my relationships. In the same way, if I’m upset about something that has to do with my family, I’ll just think about it, and it’ll—I’ll be thinking about it even when I’m at work.

Ariana also discusses the difficulty of balancing both spheres:

If I do decide to go into a broadcast sequence, and go out and do a career on it, a kid is going to be difficult because as a reporter, you’re on call like 24/7 basically and you have to be there on the spot. So unless you have a really good, reliable babysitter, like “Hey, I’m going to drop off my kid in 5!”

While these women value both becoming professionals and becoming wives-mothers, they perceive the latter as primary and pursue their professional goals as means to fulfill their future goals, highlighting the influence of constructions of gender on their perceptions.

### **Gendered Occupational Choices**

A significant theme in this study, especially as it relates to the concern of balancing work and home lives, is the emphasis on pursuing 'helping' professions. Of the women interviewed for this study, 70% intend to enter a helping profession such as social work or teaching. Eccles (1994) notes that this trend is evidence of the manner in which gendered socialization guides occupational choices. To the extent that women internalize the normative script for femininity that prioritizes motherhood, they will be more likely to choose professions that give them the flexibility to provide the emotion work that they believe a wife-mother should. Although Sofia does not intend to enter a helping profession, she does recognize the benefit of doing so in facilitating the fulfillment of the wife-mother script:

My mother always said that she growing up knew she wanted to be a teacher because she wanted to have the same time off as her children, that way over the summer or for breaks and things like that they wouldn't be home alone bored with nothing to do but TV. [...] all my breaks have such good memories because she was home with us [...] so we got to do all these things because my mom was off and with us. So that definitely, being raised like that, has definitely made me question whether or not a professional career is for me because I want the same type of memories for my kids.

Rosa, Ariana, Sofia, and others share a common understanding of the difficulties of the wife-mother-worker job. To minimize such difficulties, they seek professions that will not be as demanding of their time compared to male-dominated careers, thus highlighting the importance of successfully being a wife-mother over that of a professional.

## **The Wife-Mother Identity**

The importance of being a wife and a mother is also evidenced in their conceptualizations of wife-mother that are developed in opposition to those of their mothers and other members of the Latino community with whom they interact. In this study, 90% of the women interviewed mentioned being lectured by their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, or other nonrelatives within the Latino community about the importance of service work for the wife-mother identity. The need to cook and perform all other housework properly was emphasized by their relatives as a sign of distinction and readiness for marriage. Most respondents, however, rejected the primacy of housework in fulfilling the wife-mother script as an outdated, oppressive cultural norm. Instead, they emphasized the importance of emotion work and support as a marker of being a successful wife-mother. Following are definitions of the wife-mother role illustrative of the overall findings in this study:

Fatima: I think it's [the wife-mother role] someone who supports her significant other, in anything, any goals that they may have. Obviously, I'm not saying cater to someone, but knowing that you are taking care of them, making them happy and getting that same in return and just being there for your kids. Supporting them, teaching them morals and values that they can use throughout their whole life.

Natalia: I think [being a wife-mother is] setting a good example for your kids, being able to say, "I put myself through school and I worked my way up." And not take so much importance, like, of the whole housework, like not making that a priority, but teaching that something like an education will make you feel better about yourself.

Ariana: Well as a wife, it's definitely taking on that priority of being there for that person, whether it be up, whether it be down, and being able to have communication between each other because I see without communication you have nothing. It's a matter of supporting them and being there for them and understanding what they're going through, versus like expecting so much from them and "You need to do this, and you need to do that!" So it's being on the level of understanding each other and as a mother, if the time came for me to be a mother, it would take on a whole other priority of not only being a mother and a wife, and it's also understanding that child, being there for that

child. So obviously to do that you need to spend time with them and you need to know your kids. So if someone was to ask like, “Hey, what does your kid like to do on the weekends?” or “What do they like to do on other days?” you need to know how to answer that and not be like, “Oh, shit, I don’t know my kid!” Cause you’d probably be in a lot of trouble! Like, “Oh, I thought you were a mother” you know?

Rosa: I don’t know exactly what it [wife-mother] means to be, but I know what it’s not. I don’t think that the wife should be the one that makes the food, washes all the clothes. I don’t think that’s the way it should be.

The two exceptions to this trend were Sofia and Isabel, a second-generation, 21-year-old sophomore, both of whom expressed a stronger adherence to the normative husband-wife dichotomy:

Sofia: I am a big believer in the wife...that the husband is there to provide and the wife just does what she can for the family, for the household, things like that.

Question for Isabel: Do you agree with part of the job of being a wife is learning how to cook?

Isabel: I would agree that somebody—I don’t know about staying home and not working—but somebody who takes care of the house, I mean, I would definitely agree with the traditional idea.

Although the overall rejection of the service work primacy of the wife-mother script suggests a change in perceptions of gender relations across generations, the emphasis on providing emotional support to their husbands and children voiced by Fatima, Ariana, and Natalia is an expectation reflective of constructions of gender. In this sense, while these women believe that they are adopting a progressive viewpoint on marriage relations (relatively speaking, they are), the prioritizing of emotion work by women legitimizes the gender binary that assigns different scripts to men and women as ‘normal’ given their biological sex, thus reproducing gendered inequality.

The legitimization of the gendered structure in which these women are socialized is further evidenced in the individualistic lens through which they view balancing their professional and home lives. As opposed to recognizing the structural factors

contributing to the stress that comes from negotiating the ‘second shift’ as a gendered phenomenon, several of the women interviewed viewed conflict arising from balancing their professional and home lives as a personal issue that they are solely responsible for resolving. For some respondents, such as Ariana, conflict is evidence of a personal flaw:

I think it [balancing work and family] would be a matter of just managing everything. So let’s say I don’t have my career established [when starting a family], I would have to find a way to get back on track so that I can still pursue my goal, while at the same time still be the wife and mother that, in my mind, I’m supposed to be. I think eventually like the things will come together versus clash, ‘cause clashing against each other would just mean that me personally, I don’t know how to balance things in life, and so that will be kind of sad because I need to find that balance between everything and be able to manage this and manage that. Still be the person I want to be, while still at the same time managing the other priorities that I need to take care of too.

Maribel and Fatima echo the individualized perspective on this issue:

Maribel: [...] when I was an undergrad I worked full-time, so I can manage it, you know, so just imaging having a full-time job and having kids. You can manage it, there’s possibilities, I mean my mom did it, you know? So I could see myself, I know that I have the potential if anything were to happen, I can do it.

Question for Fatima: Do you see any obstacles between the two, being a professional and having a family or do you think it’s not even going to be an issue?

Fatima: I think it could definitely be an issue, especially if I do go into the accounting field [...] but I’ve always been very organized—I multitask very well, I’ve always had a lot of activities that I do, so to me at a personal level, I think I will be able to handle it.

Other women expressed a marked contradiction in their aspirations for the husband-wife relationship. In rejecting the ‘traditional’ wife-mother responsibility of housework, most of the women adamantly expressed the need to have an equal division of household labor, yet the language used to express this sentiment supported the idea of men as ‘helping out,’ suggesting that it is in fact women’s primary responsibility. In discussing the importance of having a partner, Maribel states:

Actually having somebody who is willing to help you, it's possible, it's just about communicating in the relationship.

Fatima provides a similar perspective on the prospects of her current relationship:

Well, hopefully I do end up with the guy I'm with right now, but he's super busy as well. He's got a really good job and uh, he's involved with a lot of organizations and committees and stuff around the city and I think he understands what it's like to be a professional, so I think that he'll definitely understand and be able to help me through it.

By viewing their partners' role in the home as helping rather than contributing equally, Maribel and Fatima exacerbate the conflict in juggling both spheres as they have internalized the expectation for them as women to fulfill the everyday needs of the home.

### **The Importance of Ethnic Endogamy**

The interplay between Latino culture and gendered expectations is seen in that most women interviewed (80%) expressed the desire to marry a Latino as opposed to a man from another racial/ethnic group. For most of these women, ethnic commonality is desirable in creating a sense of comfort in the mutual understanding of cultural identity.

Rebecca, for example, notes that:

I think they've all [previous boyfriends] been Latinos just because I'm in that culture, that's the people I identify with and talk more. I think by preference they would be Latino just because like there's some things I admire more culturally that is within the Latino culture.

Isabel and Jessica explained the role of culture in guiding her dating preference:

Isabel: My family's really traditional Mexican family, so I think if—I would want somebody to have that same culture, understand the culture, so I guess relate to.

Jessica: I guess as of right now it's been only Latinos. I think it's just 'cause I feel like comfort that we have at least something in common, like that foundation I guess you could say.

When asked whether they would prefer to have ethnic commonality, educational commonality, or both, with their partners, most of the women responded that ideally, they would want a marriage with a Latino that is college-educated. Only one respondent, Fatima, recognized the conflict that this preference creates given the shortage of Latinos in higher education. From Fatima's viewpoint:

I would prefer both [but] sometimes it is so hard to find a Latino that is educated. I just feel that sometimes Latinos are very limited to getting an education, just maybe financially or whatever it may be...it is hard for me to find someone like that because they are—whether working and supporting their family or um, financially it's not always there.

Fatima hints at one of the forces pulling Latinos away from education, that being the gendered and cultural expectation for men to establish themselves as economic providers at earlier ages, more so than Latinas. In this sense, Latinos may view entering college as hindering rather than facilitating their ability to fulfill the provider role as postsecondary education is a time of delayed economic upward mobility.

In short, for these women, there is no conflict between their occupational and family goals because accomplishing their occupational goals will eventually lead to the accomplishment of their family goals. As opposed to viewing these as separate goals requiring the pursuit of distinct strategies, these women view their academic and work goals as strategies in themselves in pursuit of the status marker of the wife-mother title. The pursuit of one goal as a means to acquire the other results in the distinction of being a worker, a wife, and a mother—of being the quintessential successful woman.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The goal for this research was to allow the women in this study to describe the strategies they employ to navigate their occupational goals and their family goals within the context

of the gender gap, paying close attention to the possibility of conflict arising between the two. The narratives of these women, however, suggest that there is no conflict for them in pursuing their occupational and family goals. Having a successful career and being a successful wife-mother are both fundamentally important for these women in terms of life satisfaction because the balance between the two accords them an elevated status that surpasses being only a professional or only a wife-mother and the stigma that comes from the either-or dichotomy. It is the acquisition of both that carries the most value for these women because the balance between professional and wife-mother is the new normative expectation given women's advances in higher education.

The work of Cherlin on the symbolic value of marriage and that of Eccles on the gendered educational and occupational choices of women and men are particularly useful in understanding the findings of this study. As Cherlin explains, although these women do not need marriage for economic survival or stability given their occupational goals, they value marriage and family nonetheless, but in a different aspect. Coupling a successful career that requires higher education with a successful marriage and family is the ultimate status marker not only for these women, but arguably, for women in general. The advances of women in education and other social arenas have resulted in the institutionalization of the 'women that want it all' conceptualization.

Women are told, through media sources for example, that to be a woman in the twenty-first century is to be one that balances a fulfilling career with an equally (or perhaps more) fulfilling family life. This perception is legitimized through the stigma attached to women that only have a career or only fulfill the wife-mother script. To only have a career calls into question the femininity of women that lead this lifestyle, as a

‘real’ woman is one who is desired by men and who accomplishes her ‘natural’ nurturing capabilities through mothering. Paradoxically, only fulfilling the wife-mother script is not only increasingly economically infeasible, but it may be viewed as adhering to an outdated script that the women’s movement zealously fought to expand. Thus, the solution to this problem lies in the duality of women’s experience, as they attempt to perform both scripts and therefore conform to the shift in societal expectations for women and femininity in general.

The role of Latino culture and the experience of immigration specifically must be taken into account in guiding the perceptions of the women in this study. The women interviewed for this research are mostly the children of immigrants and all express a strong ethnic identity, and to the extent that this is the case, the duality between the professional and the wife-mother identity is magnified. The respondents are clearly aware of the expectations for them as women within their culture as communicated by relatives of previous generations and although most say that they reject these expectations as oppressive, it is evident in their narratives that these expectations nonetheless influence their own perceptions to an extent. The pressure that many second-generation and subsequent generations of Latinos face from their families and the Latino community in general to maintain the strength of their cultural heritage (e.g. family dynamics) is likely to affect the extent to which they place primacy in conforming, however loosely, to the boundaries for gender and family relations.

The consensus among these women, for example, that academic and work goals are means to the ultimate goal of fulfilling the professional-wife-mother identity must be understood as reflective of both a gendered structure and of their experiences as children

of immigrants within that structure. To the extent that their relatives of the first generation emphasize the importance of family and of the wife-mother as central to the functioning of the family, these women are more likely to view becoming professionals as important given their access to higher education in the U.S., yet view the wife-mother script as ultimately primary given the strength of the cultural ideal of motherhood communicated by family members of previous generations. Similarly, the development of the definition of the wife-mother identity for these women in opposition to that of previous generations is undoubtedly related to their generational status, arguably more so than to Latino culture in general. Gender relations are internalized, negotiated, and experienced differently within Latino culture given a multitude of internal and external factors, therefore the respondents' views of service work as primary to the wife-mother script as outdated is indicative of changes in perceptions across generations.

The importance that most of the women interviewed expressed about ethnic endogamy may also be understood as evidence of the influence of their generation status. Given that most of the respondents in this study are children of immigrants, it is not surprising that they express a desire for maintaining their cultural heritage through marriage choices, yet this preoccupation may not be as primary in subsequent generations. Analyzing the responses and experiences of these women from both a cultural and generational perspective, thus avoiding blanket statements about Latino culture, provides a more accurate understanding of the nuances of gendered perceptions within a segment of a single ethnic group. This research should motivate further exploration of the influence of Latino culture and generation status in particular in

guiding perceptions of occupational and work goals within the context of the college gender gap and the institutionalization of the redefinition of women in Western culture.

The women in the present study are adapting to the duality of their lived experiences by pursuing their academic/work goals as a means to their family goals, facilitated through their 'choices' to go into helping professions with the understanding that their family obligations take precedence. Eccles highlights the importance of gendered socialization in influencing choices. As she notes, several studies show that women and men tend to value certain things more than others. Women tend to value making job sacrifices for their family and to have a job that allows them to help others, while men tend to value pursuing tasks with great economic return and public recognition. Concerning long-range goals, to the extent that women internalize the traditional female script, they will view parenting and spouse-supporting roles as more important than professional roles, while men will perceive family and career goals as equally important because the traditional breadwinner role allows men to fulfill their family role by having a successful career. Thus, the parenting role becomes an extension of the occupational role for men.

Eccles also argues that gendered socialization affects perceptions of success between men and women. If a woman internalizes the traditional female normative script, success in parenting is defined as more involvement in her children's lives, while success in parenting for men is defined by being more committed and successful in their careers. Eccles' findings help shed light on this study's findings in that these women, although not focusing on family goals now, believe that their priorities should ultimately lie in the wife-mother identity. Thus, reaching their occupational goals by prioritizing them now will facilitate their ability not only to earn the right to enter the wife-mother identity in the future, but to perform the script successfully.

When considering all variables, it is not surprising that the women in this study do not view a conflict in pursuing their occupational and family goals. The academic and professional advances of women in the last half-century coupled with the continued strength of the cultural ideal of motherhood, particularly in some segments of Latino culture, have resulted in a redefinition of woman. Women's identities have been reformulated and represented to adapt to a global society in which wanting and balancing work and home have been institutionalized and thus internalized as normal. To the extent that this perception is normalized, the recognition of a conflict would be counterintuitive to the naturalness of the essence of women in the twenty-first century.

This ideology is problematic in reaffirming differential expectations for women and men based on socially constructed scripts that are subsequently viewed and discussed as natural and normal. Further, this ideological development carries implications for our understanding of the college gender gap and vice versa. Discussions of the gender gap in higher education as problematic revolve around the consequences for men, with the assumption being that the gender gap only advantages women. This popular perception is dangerous in that it obscures an accurate understanding of the gap. The gender gap in higher education is problematic for women in that the continued societal expectation for women to prioritize their wife-mother identity is masked in the cloak of academic achievement.

The women in this study express gendered perceptions of their relationships to their occupations, to their partners, and to their children, evidence of the reproduction of gendered inequality. The women interviewed for this study highlight the influence of gender structure in their occupational choices, their view of education and work as a means to an end goal of higher status that comes with being a worker/wife/mother, their definitions of wife-mother, and their individualized perspectives on balancing the spheres of their lives. To the extent

that women pursue occupational goals with the frame of mind that family goals ultimately take precedence, it results in lower wages for women, less opportunities for advancement, and increased stress from the lack of interpersonal and institutionalized support through services and employment policies that recognize the importance of the duality in women's experiences.

The legitimization that wanting and balancing work and home lives for women has taken is not necessarily evidence of progress for women in the public sphere. Rather, it underlines a gendered structure affecting Latinas that disadvantages them by creating a push-pull factor between the obligation to adapt to the professionalization of mainstream Western culture while clutching to the cultural ideal of motherhood prevalent in both mainstream U.S. and Latino cultures. Doing gender in this way not only reaffirms these women's positions as "women" but also as "wives" in their future relationships, thus reproducing gendered power relations that will accord their husbands or partners more power. It is imperative to reframe the discussion of the college gender gap to recognize the manners in which this trend in higher education is disadvantaging both men and women through poignantly gendered means.

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## Interview Guideline Questionnaire

*Research Question: As a result of the different paths to success pursued by Latino men and women, a gender gap exists in higher education. Within this context, how do Latina students navigate the relationship between occupational aspirations and marriage and family goals?*

First I'd like to talk a bit about your education. What motivated you to decide to go to college?

What factors influenced you to choose your academic major?

Did your parents talk to you about the importance of education?

Okay, so what kinds of things did they tell you about it?

Did your parents talk to you about the importance of getting married and having children?

If so, what kinds of things did they tell you about it?

Okay, so what did your family tell you about pursuing an education in relation to getting married and starting a family?

So when you were growing up with the people that were around you, what were you told about the goals or expectations for marriage and motherhood?

What do you see yourself doing when you graduate from college? What about in the long term?

Do you have plans to get married, to have children at some point, to cohabitate, to stay single or what?

(Only ask this question if respondent does intend to marry and have children) How do you plan to pursue your school/work goals along with your family goals?

Now I'm going to ask you a few questions about dating and romantic relationships. Some people see dating as something serious, others see it as something casual. How do you see it?

Are you single, dating, or in a relationship right now?

So when you go out with a guy, do you go out with Latinos or White guys or what?

Do you feel different about who you date if it's serious versus casual?

As far as potential dating partners, do you think it is more important to be in a relationship with someone of your same ethnic group, with someone that is school- and career-oriented as you are, with someone that is both of your same ethnic group and as school-oriented as you are, or does it not matter?

Do you see your occupational and family goals as connected or related to one another or do you seem them as pretty separate aspects of your life? That is, how does one affect the other?

We talked earlier about whether or not and how your school/work goals conflict with your family goals, but let's talk a bit more about this. Have you thought about how are you going to pursue your family and work goals? Do you have any plans or strategies for navigating between your professional and personal lives?

## Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
2. What is your grade level? (e.g. Freshman or first-year, Sophomore or second-year, etc.)
3. What is your major of study in college?
4. What is your Latino generation status? (i.e., Members of the first generation are those born outside of the U.S. who subsequently migrated to the U.S.; the second generation is the first generation to be born in the U.S.; the third generation is the second generation to be born in the U.S., etc.)
5. How much formal education did your parents attain? Please check the options that apply.
  - a. Mother's education:
    - i. Grammar school \_\_\_\_\_
    - ii. High school or equivalent \_\_\_\_\_
    - iii. Vocational school \_\_\_\_\_
    - iv. Some college \_\_\_\_\_
    - v. Bachelor's degree \_\_\_\_\_
    - vi. Master's degree \_\_\_\_\_
    - vii. Doctoral degree \_\_\_\_\_
    - viii. Professional degree (MD, JD, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_
    - ix. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Father's education:
    - i. Grammar school \_\_\_\_\_
    - ii. High school or equivalent \_\_\_\_\_
    - iii. Vocational school \_\_\_\_\_
    - iv. Some college \_\_\_\_\_
    - v. Bachelor's degree \_\_\_\_\_
    - vi. Master's degree \_\_\_\_\_
    - vii. Doctoral degree \_\_\_\_\_
    - viii. Professional degree (MD, JD, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_
    - ix. Other \_\_\_\_\_
6. What are your parents' occupations?
  - a. Mother's occupation:
  - b. Father's occupation:
7. What is your family's country of origin? If it is not the U.S., how frequently do you visit?