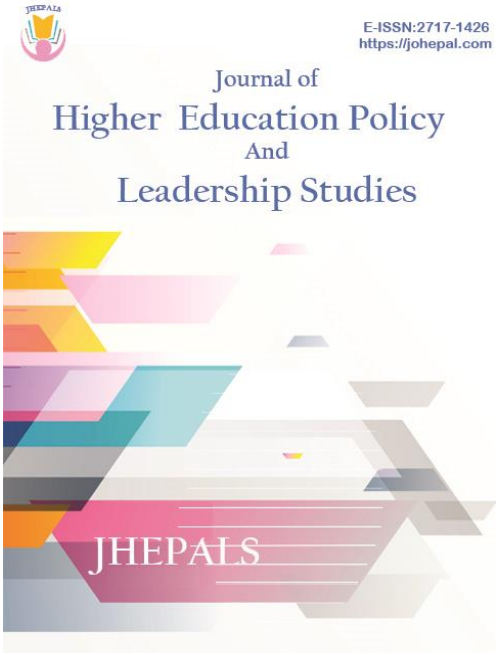
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Unhinging the Machismo Binary through a Third Space Lens: Reframing Latinx Males Postsecondary Academic Decision-Making

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Abstract

This critical and conceptual analysis problematizes the machismo binary and situates it in a third space framework. It explores Latinx males' higher education experiences and how machismo influences academic decision-making. Situating Latinx males' college-going in the third space provides a more nuanced portrayal of their academic decision-making across diverse postsecondary settings. In doing so, the Latinx Gender Identity Development Model for Latinx Males in the Third Space is proposed and connects machismo with other domains such as marianismo, caballerismo and familismo. The proposed framework is illustrated by applying it to Latinx males across critical dimensions that impact their decision-making in the higher education landscape.

Keywords: Latinx Males; Higher Education; Gender; Third Space; Academic Decision-making; College-going

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Introduction

Elements of machismo are often linked to academic decision-making and achievement of Latinx men in postsecondary education (Arciniega, Anderson, Blank & Tracey, 2008; Gonzalez, 2015; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008). Decision-making in the college context for Latinx males often includes family input and can be seen not only as a goal and achievement for the individual but for the family unit as well (Gonzalez, 2015). The transmittance of family messages and values regarding gender roles and machismo can lead to various academic outcomes and decisions by Latinx males (Gonzalez, 2015). Additionally, Gonzalez (2015) and Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) revealed that machismo reinforced expectations of masculinity through a culturally infused lens. Therefore, elements of machismo can inform Latinx male academic decision-making in post-secondary education contexts through the accumulated and processed information they have gathered through family, the cultural context and their own personal experiences.

The diverse ways in which masculinity is often conveyed can be problematic for Latinx males. Saenz, Bukoski, Lu and Rodriguez (2013) shared that masculinity is often linked to power and socioeconomic status. They further revealed that confusion for Latinx males regarding masculinity often occurs because successful white males are often portrayed as carrying similar elements of machismo which are considered positive for them, yet not for Latinx males. Therefore, understanding how to perform masculinity for Latinx males can be complicated. Broader perspectives of machismo with more diverse elements that are less negative and limiting are discussed in the literature, but are often less explored. However, researchers such as Arciniega, et al. (2008) have explored more complex and positive understandings of machismo. This study aims to extend the work of those who have fleshed out more complex notions of machismo using a more holistic approach in order to make more meaning of the literature on academic decision-making of Latinx males in post-secondary education.

For the context of this paper, the authors have defined machismo as the gender role construct that informs Latinx male social behavior, attitudes, decision-making and understanding of manhood. Machismo can be understood as masculine dominance in support of social status. The performance of dominance and control underlies unhealthy emotional regulation, where emotions other than anger are not shared or displayed (Fragroso & Kashubeck, 2000).

Philosophical and Theoretical Argument

Complicating and problematizing machismo may help better explore and explain the diverse ways in which Latinx males make decisions in postsecondary education contexts. Schwartz, Donovan and Guido-DiBrito (2009) posited that studies on Latinx males in postsecondary education often link machismo to negative contexts and outcomes. They further stated that there is a paucity of research on Latinx males in higher education and that further research, particularly related to examining gender and other social variables, can lead to understanding and overcoming barriers impeding academic and social success. Therefore, broadening the lens of machismo to include a more holistic picture may nuance understandings of how Latinx males make academic decisions in postsecondary education settings.

More complex and nuanced notions of masculinity have been explored in the literature. Arciniega et al. (2008) argued that applying only negative conceptions of machismo to academic study is highly constraining. Fortunately, this literature has begun to broaden. For example,

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Mirandé's (1988, 1997) qualitative studies on machismo challenged past research that he argued focused solely on negative elements of machismo. He unearthed both positive and negative traits of machismo, deeming that there is complexity to it. Arciniega et al. (2008) claimed that psychological and sociological assessment of masculinity has moved toward a more dual dimension perspective. Their quantitative work aimed to measure the construct of machismo and its relation to psychological functioning from a dualistic perspective. The positive aspects were coined as "caballerismo". Negative aspects of machismo were associated with hypermasculinity in this study whereas positive elements connected to family and chivalry were linked with caballerismo.

We argue that, while this dualistic approach to understanding machismo is far more helpful than a monolithic approach, there is still room to further complicate it in order to be more inclusive of diverse experiences. This supports Torres, Solberg and Carlstrom's (2002) assertions that machismo is often shared in negative, monolithic tones or in a dichotomous manner. Furthermore, Pleck (1981) asserted that adhering to these stereotypical notions could lead to gender role stress. Therefore, the lack of research on variations in machismo across Latinx men may leave them burdened by stereotypes that can negatively impact them psychologically and therefore impede healthy academic decision-making in postsecondary contexts.

The literature also considers a couple of other important concepts linked to machismo. For example, Ojeda, Navarrao and Morales (2011) not only used this dualistic approach to machismo in their study of Latinx males in college contexts, they further added the element of familismo. The authors suggested the link between male identity and the collectivist nature of the family through familismo (i.e. the cultural value related to commitment, loyalty and dedication to family, or, a strong sense of responsibility to family (Gonzales, 2019; Patron, 2020)) is inseparable. This dedication to family can serve as a critical component of the academic decisions Latinx males make in higher education contexts (Gonzalez, 2015). Consequently, since college-going can be a family goal not necessarily just a personal endeavor, it is impossible to unhinge machismo from familismo.

While linking machismo in its more holistic understanding to caballerismo and familismo is critical, breaking the gender binary is as well. Shattering the binary by including marianismo is a step forward in developing a more fluid notion of machismo. Marianismo is typically described as a traditional Latina gender role (Castillo, Perez, Castillo, & Ghosheh, 2010). Components of marianismo may include "self-sacrifice, passivity, caretaking, duty, honor, sexual morality" (Jezzini, Guzmán, & Grayshield, 2008, p. 1). While in traditional family contexts, engaging in machismo and marianismo according to customary approaches may reinforce gender roles, it is important not to assume that all Latinx families ascribe to these traditional patterns of gender roles (Prelow, Loukas, & Jordan-Green, 2007). The authors suggested that level of acculturation for immigrants might impact how closely families conform to traditional notions of machismo and marianismo.

To better understand academic decision-making at postsecondary institutions for diverse Latinx male population's lived experiences spread across diverse higher education institution types, the authors believe it would be remiss to not disturb the binary. We aim to reframe machismo to be inclusive of all the terms above applied through a third space lens. In other words we attempt to reframe machismo through a third space framework to understand the diverse ways in which machismo impacts Latinx males' decision-making at post-secondary institutions for diverse Latinx male populations' lived experiences spread across diverse higher education institution types. Additionally, the authors implore that the complex and hybrid identities of Latinx people (Irizarry, 2007) need exploration and understanding through a hybrid framework (Witenstein & Saito, 2015).

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Consequently, clarifying and operationally defining caballerismo, marianismo and familismo are critical for conceptualizing a more fluid conception of machismo:

The morality of *caballerismo* is focused on social responsibility rather than social status. Caballerismo informs a manhood that is responsible to and for raising of and providing for a family. This strong sense of duty (to family) can be explained through a personal code of ethics that is informed by a greater sense of purpose, and outweighs material social status or dominance. This sense of purpose for others (family) allows space for healthy emotional regulation (Arciniega, et al., 2008).

Marianismo is defined here as the gender role construct that traditionally informs Latina female social behavior, attitudes, decision-making and understanding of womanhood. Opposite of machismo, marianismo is characterized as submissive femininity that honors family; dutiful daughter and passive wife in support of the family (Jezzini, et al., 2008).

Familismo refers to a core aspect of identity and belonging. Familismo includes connectedness to both immediate and extended family members. This connectedness can be extended to other social relationships and developed through deep trust. Familismo is an important determinant for and in decision-making (Piña-Watson, Ojeda, Castellon, & Dornhecker 2013).

Machismo and the Third Space Framework

The third space perspective for Latinx males in regard to machismo situates them on the liminal (i.e. on the border) boundaries of the traditional definition of machismo, caballerismo, and marianismo with its inseparable link to familismo (Bhabha, 1994). Additionally, Latinx male college students also live on the liminal boundaries of the dominant culture they encounter in the higher education setting. Bhabha (1994) further described the "interstice" between spaces that form a third space where new meaning is created. "Derived within this space are iterative representations of meaning; ongoing, infinite negotiations; and an indeterminate, unsettled existence in terms of how culture is typically explained" (Witenstein & Saito, 2015, p. 119). These spaces where new meaning are created are complicated.

Framing machismo in a hybridized fashion offers a more nuanced lens to understand decision-making in the college context. Reframing machismo in a third space provides the researchers a more accurate lens from which to depict the literature on Latinx males in higher education contexts because it is within these third spaces where new personal narratives are formed (Witenstein & Saito, 2015). For example, Gordon (2012) illustrated how bilingual Latinx people create new meanings between languages in the interstitial space. Critical questions, new thoughts and conceptions can be created in these interstitial spaces (Witenstein, 2020); consequently, only those who are on the border of these experiences and in this third space can develop them. Thus, new narratives can be developed through this "rupture" in this hybrid space.

Latinx Gender Identity Development Model for Latinx Males in the Third Space

There are diverse ways in which Latinx males may describe and explain machismo and how it impacts academic decision-making. The Latinx gender identity development model for Latinx males in the third space, as illustrated in in Figure 1, can help make meaning of this phenomenon. The following paragraph offers readers initial insight about how the components of the model work together.

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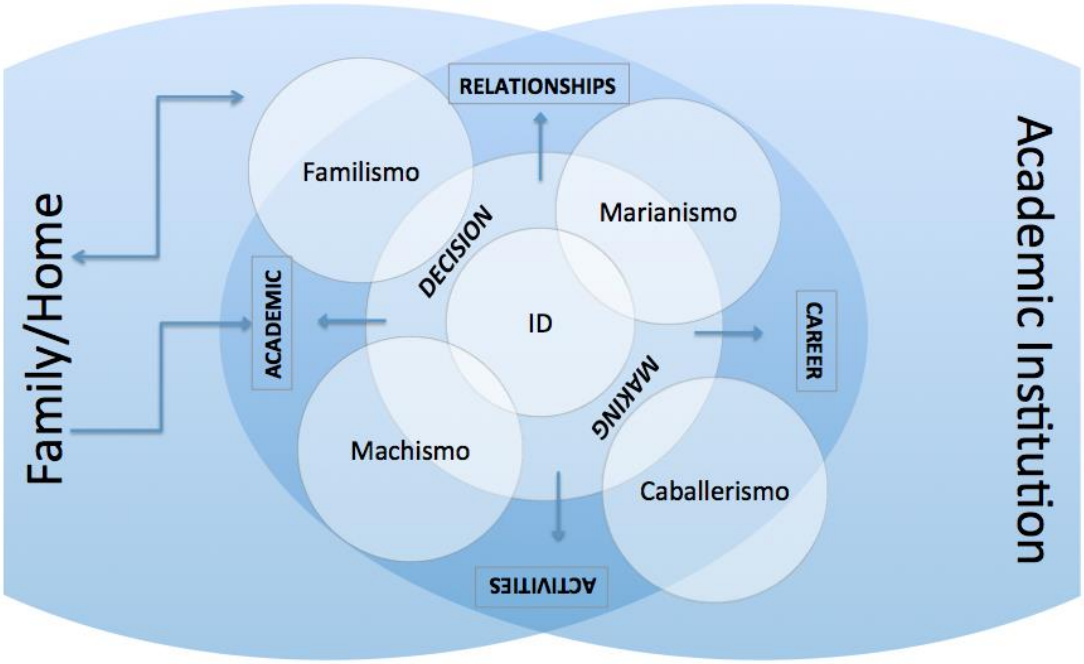


Figure 1. Latinx gender identity development model for Latinx males in the third space

Utilizing lived experiences as validated sources of knowledge is critical (Gonzalez, 2005). These knowledge assets, or funds of knowledge (Kiyama, 2011; 2018), enrich and complicate binary and monolithic notions of machismo. Merging these assets into a 3rd space can facilitate deeper understanding. Different forms of machismo can be unearthed on the border of machismo, cabellerismo, familismo and marianismo. Therefore, third spaces offer opportunities for new conceptions of machismo that are fluid. When the different aspects of machismo engage in this third space, more fluid conceptions of machismo can arise and new inquiry and new frameworks can be developed. This conception moves beyond a simple synthesis of multiple spaces. Furthermore, exploring a more fluid narrative in which machismo transacts in the third space may more accurately portray machismo narratives and consequently help explain academic decision-making in higher education contexts. The Latinx Gender Identity Development Model for Latinx Males in the Third Space fosters this narrative.

Purpose and Guiding Question

Researchers have asserted that there is a lack of research on Latinx males and on how machismo impacts educational decision-making (Ojeda, Navarro, & Morales, 2011; Schwartz. et al., 2009). Ojeda, et al. (2011) in particular revealed that their study was limited in that it did not include masculinity constructs when examining college persistence. Importantly, this critical analysis answers the call by researchers for more research on machismo in the college context and takes it a step further by breaking the binary. The purpose of this paper is to not only unhinge the machismo binary, but to infuse it with a third space framework to provide a more nuanced and perhaps

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accurate portrayal of academic decision-making by Latinx males in higher education settings. Therefore, the guiding question appropriate for this paper is- how does exploring Latinx males' experiences in higher education contexts through the third space foster understanding of how machismo influences their academic decision-making?

This critical analysis of the literature bridges together three literature sources: 1) the literature on machismo, caballerismo, marianismo and familismo; 2) the literature on third space frameworks; and 3) the postsecondary education literature focused on Latinxs. To begin making meaning of and to explore the utility of the proposed framework in Figure 1, the ensuing sections apply it to Latinx males across critical dimensions that impact their decision-making in the higher education landscape.

Latinx Gender Gap in Higher Education and its Impact on Academic Decision-Making

Policies that emerged from the social movements in the 1960's sparked research on understanding experiences of women, and how to support their needs and success. From the feminist movement, Latinas have experienced educational success in the form of enrollment and graduation rates that surpass their male counterparts. Through the process of attaining their postsecondary degrees, Latinas have aided in raising awareness of the educational inequities that exist for Latina/os, and significantly for Latinx Males (Pérez, 2012). The spotlight on Latina educational attainment surfaced the reality of the gender gap within the higher education domain and of the vanishing of Latinx males (Saenz, et al., 2013).

Latinxs are the quickest growing population in the United States (Garcia, 2015). If this trend is to continue the authors argue it is necessary to explore both the gender gap that exists and how machismo impacts academic decision making in various higher educational contexts and in particular at community colleges. Campa (2013) shared that 50% of Latinxs enroll in community colleges and that many factors influence this decision-making, which include distance from the home and family. High Latinx enrollment in two-year colleges highlights the critical pathway to postsecondary education attainment and the need for further research of the experience of students at community colleges (Pérez, 2011; Sáenz, Bukoski, Lu, & Rodriguez 2013). The growth of Latinxs and *familismo* involved in choosing community college underscores the value of exploring Latinx male academic decision making through a third space framework.

Help-Seeking Behaviors and Resilience

Researchers have explored masculinity and social identity constructs and the impact of Latinx males' educational experiences with diverse findings. Machismo, fear and family expectations all impact men's emotional regulation, outreaching for support, and focus on completing an educational degree (Saenz, et al., 2013) and are interconnected. When struggling with academics, the pridefulness of machismo impedes the ability to reach out and seek support. If support is sought and not responded to accordingly, help seeking behavior is not reinforced or validated and positions a student to continue to not excel in the classroom. The silent spiral contributes to negative perceptions of self-efficacy and temptation from finding more immediate "success" in getting a job in support of the family and saving face or ego.

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The literature often takes a deficit approach when uncovering the academic experiences of Latinx and this can be further explored and countered with an approach of deeper understanding through a lens of resilience, a pedagogy of survival (Campa, 2013). Viewing students as equipped with wisdom and knowledge from the struggles of their upbringing positions their realities as source material for how to navigate the complexities of higher education and family. Incorporating a resilience framework cultivates meaning making of hardship and struggle as pathways for potential personal and academic success, and not as obstacles. While the struggles experienced by students differ from the struggles previously endured by their family, they are nonetheless struggles that can be overcome.

Gender Identity and Resilience in Concert

While a majority of the participants in Campa's (2013) study are Latina women, it presents community colleges with a unique opportunity to further explore gender identity development and academic decision-making. This is especially the case when 70% of undergraduate students will be attending a community college at one point during their academic careers. In reflecting on their mothers' education, the Latinas in the study "rather than criticizing their mothers, (they) learned to question and challenge the patriarchy that thwarted their creative and intellectual identities" (p. 446). Complicating machismo in the third space for community college going Latinx males allows for potential consciousness-raising of the negative effects of hegemonic masculinity in society but also in their own lives. As resilience is explored, the reality of gender identity in the third space is important to continue unpacking considering the high rate of students that might transfer to a four-year public or private university from community college.

Literature frames caballerismo as positive manhood that is responsible for raising and providing for a family (Arciniega, et al., 2008). In a post-secondary context these characteristics may be an impediment if a student is struggling and unable to seek help and seeks more immediate success such as finding a job to support family. (Saenz, et al., 2013). However, connecting past family struggles and present academic struggles with the concepts of machismo, marianismo, familismo and caballerismo through the third space provides the opportunity to weave resilience and academic decision-making as long-term choice which supports the family and its overall continuance.

Exploring the Gender Role Script in Academic Decision-Making

It would be remiss not to reflect on the gender role script's potential impact on academic decision-making. This paper's argument is supported by this larger conversation about the more fluid conception of machismo posited in this article. In addition to the role of gender, numerous important topics regarding academic decision-making and success of Latinx males like persistence and retention, resilience and thriving, and peer, mentor and family support have been studied closely; yet, the gender domain is often mentioned in implications and conclusions sections as needing further research. For example, Aguinaga and Gloria (2015) shared that future research should explore how gender role scripts and cultural congruity (or overall fit of the student in the larger university context relative to their culture and the university's) affect persistence. Ojeda, Navarro and Morales (2011) called for future research on the intersection of gender role constructs and cultural orientation constructs like acculturation to more fully understand persistence.

Unpacking the amorphous connections between gender role scripts and other sociocultural and pscychosocial domains is needed. While traditional gender role script patterns may exist, patterns clearly vary. Therefore, theorizing a third space domain that complicates machismo

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provides a more fluid understanding of academic decision-making and beginnings of that narrative can be seen through several studies. In particular, Cerezo, Lyda, Beristianos, Enriquez and Connor (2013) explored numerous pieces of the proposed model by using gender and minority status to examine college access & retention, yet they did not leave out important contexts like neighborhood community, family and educational contexts. From their ecological lens, they began exploring how cultural identity and gender script in combination impact access and retention. Further exploration of the third space in this context might yield new meanings about access and retention.

Ethnic Identity Development in Brief Context at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) and Predominately White Institutions (PWI)

Studies on Latinxs in different public institutional contexts can add diverse dimensions of complexity to students in third spaces. Guardia and Evans (2008) examined how ethnic identity development was enhanced through the intersection of fraternity membership (Latinx-based) and being at an HSI. It is noteworthy that white males have been more apt to reevaluate gender roles than Latinxs (Gonzalez, 1996); therefore how fraternity members perceived and described the gender & ethnic identity interconnection was critical. Furthermore, Blanco (2015) shared how he was able to explore and reframe his identity through his Latinx fraternity experience in a way that was different than how his family viewed this domain. He was able to explore sexuality and masculinity identities through fraternity membership. Blanco made choices about how to explore and unpack his identity and the fraternity provided a supportive third space which facilitated this process.

Reflecting on Guardia and Evans' (2008) study, participants in a similar study at a PWI may have had more challenges particularly when considering cultural congruity. Their participants were able to be part of the "mainstream culture" by being part of a Greek organization while also retaining culture identity and preserving heritage. The added stressor of cultural congruity may have mitigated their growth and decision-making thereby demonstrating that existing in third spaces can be supportive, yet, depending on the context, can be quite challenging (Cerezo, McWhirter, Peña, Valdez, & Bustos 2013). For example, Cerezo and McWhirter (2012) mentioned cultural and political forces that may serve as barriers to support Latinx students' success on campus. While the congruence can pose a challenge at PWIs for some students, Cerezo and McWhirter (2012) revealed, through their Latinx Educational Equity Project (LEEP), that ethnically matching group leaders and participants helped support a sense of belonging to help improve social adjustment. Cerezo, et al. (2013b) intersected family, cultural values and gender through LEEP, which facilitated students' consciousness.

While Cerezo, et al. (2013a) argued that familismo undergirds and explains the critical need for building community and supportive spaces on campus, particularly in relation to racial and ethnic identity, we contend that their further exploration which connected how gender role script challenges and opportunities can play a major part in persistence and graduation are key. The LEEP program provided a space, like the fraternity space Guardia and Evans (2008) explored, for students to reflect (as Blanco (2015) did and navigate their identity in order to be successful.

A Call for More Research at Private Four-Year Universities

Little has been written about Latinx males at private four year institutions. Considering the bulk of Latinx students are at public institutions, with nearly half of them at the six percent of HSI designated

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institutions, it may not be a surprise (Guardia & Evans, 2008). A growing number of Latinx students find private institutions to be there college home and many of these institutions are working to create more diverse student populations. Many private colleges are using a variety of strategies to achieve this as 75% of less selective private ones use targeted scholarships and financial aid and 66% of more selective private institutions utilize targeted recruitment to support diversity (Espinosa, Gaertner, & Orfield, 2015). These strategies, among others, may signify larger numbers of Latinx students overall and yield more Latinx males in part. Academic decision-making may transpire differently in the third space for males in private institutional contexts. Therefore, it is imperative that research on this vastly understudied context for Latinx males commence.

A Call for Studying Institutional Types

The third space offers new opportunities for understanding how psychosocial issues impact academic decision-making. For example, Saenz, et al.'s (2013) study examined how machismo triggers emotionality in rigid ways and how that can influence academic decision-making. They saw this transmitted by students who vacillated between both pride and fear when deciding to seek assistance for academic support. The authors can examine this type of experience within different institutional contexts and in concert with other elements of machismo that impact academic decision-making. For instance, Saenz et al. (2013) and Gonzalez (2015) complicated the above discussion about support seeking behaviors by adding the intersecting element of cultural expectations about males assuming a "breadwinner" role in the family (through the concept of familismo). The authors anticipate unpacking more differences in academic decision-making across diverse institutional types based on examples like the abovementioned. We anticipate that students in different types of institutions may engage differently with this scenario leading to diverse patterns of machismo, which may result in varied academic decisions.

Preliminary Conclusions and Implications of the Argument

This conceptual paper offers the first steps in reflecting on the proposed *Latinx Gender Identity Development Model for Latinx Males in the Third Space.* From this initial article, researchers have been offered a reframed lens for studying machismo in higher education settings. It can help them critique past studies they have conducted and a new lens for future research. Practitioners have been offered detailed analysis that can help them reframe ways in which they support Latinx male students on their respective campuses. They can use this analysis to assess and critique academic and student affairs support programs. It also provides Latinx male college students and their families keener insight into the diverse ways in which machismo impacts academic decision-making at postsecondary institutions. Furthermore, it sheds new insight into opportunities for framing machismo in the family context and how academic decision-making may be impacted by machismo in a third space framework. Moreover, it can enhance understanding of the collectivist nature of familismo to promote more holistic approaches that support Latinx males' academic-decision making and achievement in higher education.

The unhinging of the machismo binary through the *Latinx Gender Identity Development Model for Latinx Males in the Third Space*, by including familismo, marianismo and caballerismo connects with the literature regarding "gender role identity as a continuum of personal growth towards interdependence" (Pérez, 2011). Understanding machismo and caballerismo as barriers to help-

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seeking behaviors that negatively influences academic decision-making (Saenz et al. 2013) is a call to higher education practitioners and educators. Supporting students' desires to support the family is a necessary key in learning how to unlock the restrictions of machismo. La mezcla of machismo, marianismo, familismo and caballerismo in a third space lays a foundation to understand past, present and future self.

Finally, it is important to note that there is not always a supportive space on college campuses for deconstruction and construction to manifest in third spaces. Reflection questions may arise like- how can colleges support creating spaces for this to happen? And finally, if these spaces are not being considered/conceptualized, how can what Latinx males need be supported and developed?

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