

# Familism: The Transitional Journey of a Latina LIS Doctoral Student

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## Abstract

**AIM:** This study explores the academic transition of a Latina doctoral student as she relocates from her family and community residing within the United States to pursue an LIS degree in another part of the country. **METHODOLOGY:** This study applies the concept of “familism” and draws on a narrative structural analysis to understand the role that familism plays in the participant’s transition and academic retention experiences. The researcher conducted and transcribed one semi-structured, teller-focused interview. **ANALYSIS:** The narrative was analyzed through the use of James Gee’s model for transcription of oral narratives, which focuses on the poetic structure of language (Ohlen, 2003). **DISCUSSION:** As the transcribed text was transformed from a verbatim transcription to a poetic condensed transcription, the participant’s narrative revealed a connection to the Latino/a cultural value of familism. The participant experienced the following “phases of retention:” *at risk, uncertainty, and a sense of belonging.*

**Keywords:** mentoring; narrative; LIS; Latina; familism

**Doi:** 10.9776/16612

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**Acknowledgements:** Thank you to 1) Dr. Ed Cortez and Dr. Suzie Allard, my La SCALA (*Latino Scholars Cambio Leadership Academy*) academic advisors at UTK; 2) the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for sponsoring La SCALA; 3) Dr. Lauren Moret, my narrative inquiry instructor at UTK; and 4) my dear friend Daniel Goldstein for believing in me.

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## 1 Introduction

In the United States (US) there is a gap in the number of Latinos/as earning doctoral degrees. In 2009-2010 of the US residents that received doctoral degrees 74.3 percent were White, 11.8 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 7.4 percent African American, 5.8 percent Latino, and .7 percent American Indian/Alaska Native (Yohn & Thomas, 2012, p. 285). Although Latinos are the second largest population in the US (making up 16.3 percent of the population), the doctoral completion rates among Latinos/as compared to Whites, Asians and African Americans does not proportionately represent the Latino/a population based on the 2010 US Census data (Humes, 2011). The *Library and Information Science Education Statistical Report 2012* reflects disparities in doctoral degrees awarded to Latinos/as from library and information science (LIS) programs, as well. Of the 125 doctoral degrees awarded by LIS (and IS and interdisciplinary IS) programs in 2010-2011, only “one” degree was awarded to Latinos/as (ALISE, 2012). See *Figure 1*. Despite this data, there is limited research on doctoral completion of Latinos/as.

Through a narrative inquiry approach this study explores the role that familial attachments play in the academic transition and retention of a Latina student that geographically relocates to pursue a doctoral degree. The concept “familism,” a term associated with “attachment to nuclear family” (Campos, Aguilera, Ullman, & Schetter, 2014, p. 191), and the narrative structural analysis through James Gee’s model of the poetic structure of language (Ohlen, 2003), provide a methodological framework for the study.

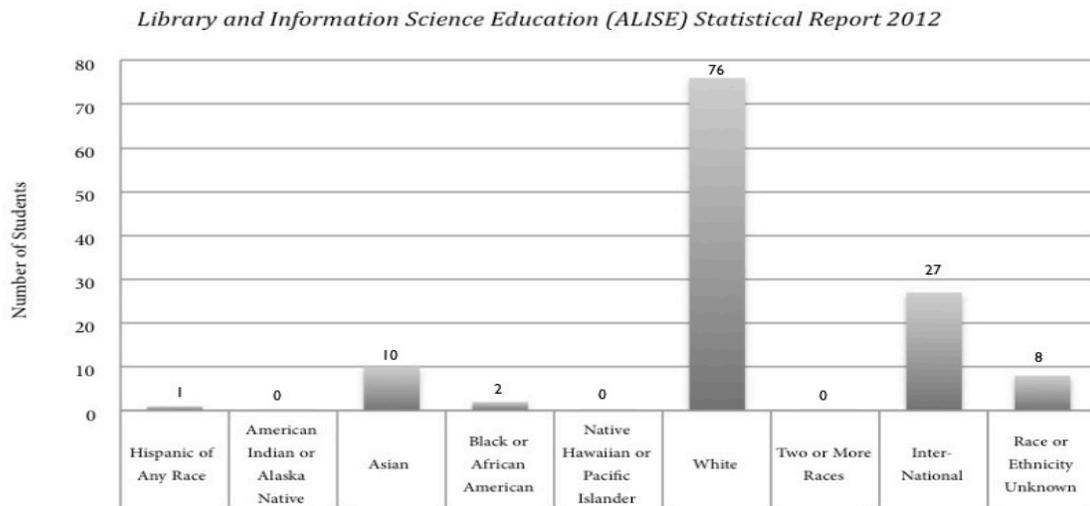


Figure 1. (LIS) Doctoral Degrees Awarded by Race and Ethnicity, 2010-2011 (ALISE, 2012).

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Framework

This study is guided by the concept of “familism,” which is defined as a strong identification with the attachment to nuclear and extended family (Bardis, 1959; Campos et al., 2014). Familism places emphasis on interconnectedness, social support, closeness, and mutually obligatory social networks (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Gable & Reis, 2006; Sawer, 2000). Research shows that Latinos report higher mean levels of familism than other cultures in the US (Campos et al., 2014). In addition, the literature on familism also suggests that women may have higher levels of familism than their male counterparts given that women are often more likely to maintain family bonds (Campos et al., 2014).

### 2.2 Research Questions

The research questions for this study draw on the concept of familism and the role that it plays in the geographical transition and academic retention of the research participant, a Mexican (American) female that relocated to attend an LIS doctoral program.

**RQ1:** What role does familism play in the geographical transition of Latina students that relocate to attend LIS doctoral programs?

**RQ2:** What role does familism play in the academic transition of Latina students that relocate to attend LIS doctoral programs?

### 2.3 Approach

This qualitative study utilizes a narrative inquiry approach through the application of a narrative structural analysis. Clandinin and Connelly (2008) describe narrative inquiry as the study of experience as story or as a storied phenomenon. It involves the living, telling, retelling, and reliving of the story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2008). The researcher is part of the phenomenon being studied (Clandinin & Connelly, 2008). As the researcher retells the story, it should be done with attentiveness to the participants’ lives and attentiveness to scholarly audience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2008). Riessman (2005) defines the narrative analysis as an approach in which the “emphasis is on the content of the text, “what” is said more than “how” it is said, the “told” rather than the “telling” (Riessman, 2005, P. 2). My research focuses on the reported experiences of the “told”/the interviewee in order to better understand the journey of the “told” (Mishler, 1995) in the context of transition and familism by using Gee’s Model as the structural analysis approach. James Gee’s model for transcription of oral narratives focuses on the poetic structure of language. Gee’s method involves “examination of how a narrative is spoken in units, lines, stanzas, strophes, and parts” (Reissman, 2008, p. 93) in order to interpret meaning (Reissman, 2008). Through Gee’s model, oral narration can be organized into sequences of lines, which can be shaped into stanzas (Gee, 1991; Ohlen, 2003). The oral narrative is often organized into four-line stanzas, which are

“interrupted by single-line expressions” (Ohlen, 2003, p. 560) or codas that “reveal aspects of the central meaning of the narrative” (Ohlen, 2003, p. 560).

## 2.4 Participant

This study is based on the interview of one study participant, a second year doctoral student, Mexican-born US citizen, attending an LIS doctoral program in the US.

## 2.5 Procedure

This research used a single semi-structured interview (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008) and incorporated the teller-focused interview approach (Hyden, 2013), which is “oriented toward narration” (Hyden, 2013, p. 796) and based on a “dialectal way of thinking about the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewed” (Hyden, 2013, p. 796). This interviewer was conscious of the power dynamics of age and gender issues between the interviewer and study participant and made an effort to create a more balanced interview. The interview was conducted via Blackboard Collaborate, a Web-based server software used for online real time collaborative and interactive communication. The recorded interview was converted into an MP3 file, downloaded to iTunes, and transcribed into an 8 ½ single spaced document.

## 2.6 Analysis

This study utilizes the narrative structural analysis approach using James Gee’s poetic transcription model to analyze the transcribed interview of the participant. Narrative inquiry recognizes that the researcher and the interviewee co-construct the events of the interviewee’s experiences in order to create meaning within the social context in which the events occurred (Josselson, 2013; Reissman, 2008). Through the application of James Gee’s model, the text from the participant’s verbatim transcription of the interview was organized into a poetic condensed transcription, which involved shaping sequences of lines into stanzas (Gee, 1991; Ohlen, 2003). The oral narrative was mostly organized into four-line stanzas, which were “interrupted by single-line expressions” (Ohlen, 2003, p. 560) or codas (Ohlen, 2003, p. 560). See *Table 1* for the poetic condensed transcription version of one part of the interview.

<b>Uprooting: A Latina Student’s LIS Doctoral Experience</b>	
	<i>I felt like I was out of place.</i>
<b>Part I: Retention Phase – “At Risk”</b>	
Stanza 1 About my transition, It has been one of the hardest things I’ve had to do.	Stanza 7 Whenever I am doing anything for school everything feels really normal but when I need to do “life” stuff I feel alone, disconnected, so abandoned.
<i>Uprooting is a painful experience.</i>	Stanza 8 I distanced myself from something I didn't need to. Emotionally, why had I chosen to do that? It was an inner battle.
Stanza 2 It was really very quick kind of like removing a band aide you pull it off as fast as you can.	<b>Part III: Retention Phase – “A Sense of Belonging”</b>
Stanza 3 I didn’t really think about the implications of being away from my family. It was really traumatic.	Stanza 9 Thankfully I’ve been able to nurture new friendships I’ve been able to feel more connected to this geographical space.
Stanza 4	<i>I’m no longer disconnected or out of place.</i>

Being away from my family was definitely more difficult than taking these classes.	Stanza 10 I do have a home here I don't have to fight myself to leave. With new relationships (in & out of class) the transition is bearable
Stanza 5 I left a rich, amazing support system my parents, siblings, cousins, school, friends lifelong relationships Many miles away.	Stanza 11 People I am friends with we do real life things like going to a movie, or hanging out I've normalized my activities here.
<b>Part II: Retention Phase – “Uncertainty”</b>	
Stanza 6 Slowly, very slowly I was forced to recreate a support system.	

Table 1: Poetic Condensed Transcription of the Participant's Verbatim Transcription

#### 4. Conclusion

The poetic narrative of the participant supports the research on “familism” which suggests the significance of a strong attachment and identification to the nuclear and extended family among Latinos/as (Campos, et al., 2014). The poetic condensed transcription in *Table 1* revealed that the participant experienced three phases of retention (1. *at risk*, 2. *uncertainty*, and 3. *a sense of belonging*) and that the Latino/a cultural value of familism played an important role in the participant's geographical transition and academic retention experiences. Further research in this area may provide insight as to how LIS programs can design doctoral programs to support higher retention and graduation rates among Latino/a doctoral students.

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6. Table of Figures

Figure 1. (LIS) Doctoral Degrees Awarded by Race and Ethnicity, 2010-2011 (ALISE, 2012).....2

7. Table of Tables

Table 1: Poetic Condensed Transcription of the Participant’s Verbatim Transcription.....3