

*Familia Matters?*  
**Social Support Networks Among Older Latina/os in the United States**

by

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## **DEDICATION**

*Dedicado a mis abuelos, a mi familia – de sangre y de elección, y para mi gente:*

(Dedicated to my grandparents, my family – of origin and chosen, and for my people)

*¡Pa'Lante!*

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## ABSTRACT

Cultural values and socioeconomic disadvantage make social support networks crucial to older Latina/os' health and well-being. Extensive research concerning social support in later life has demonstrated that the complex, multidimensional nature of older adults' social support networks is influenced by many personal and situational characteristics. The convoy model of social relations is augmented with acculturation theory to assess the extent to which sociocultural characteristics relevant to immigrant groups, such as U.S. nativity status, language preference, and subgroup heritage, may be differentially associated with social network structure, function, and perceived quality among older Latina/o respondents ( $N=1355$ ) using the 2012/2014 waves of the Health and Retirement Study.

More specifically, the first study used a cluster analysis to explore what social support network types exist among older Latina/os. Four network types were identified, including Extended Family (7%), Co-Resident Family (30%), Restricted Family (37%), and Friends Focused (26%) types. Each type was assessed for differences across nativity status, language preference, subgroup heritage, and neighborhood social cohesion. Most older Latina/os in the Extended Family network were foreign-born or took the questionnaire in Spanish. Moreover, neighborhood social cohesion was significantly higher among older Latina/os in the Extended and Co-Resident Family types when compared to Latina/os in the Restricted and Friends Focused network types. Social

support network types were also assessed in relation to three subfacets of loneliness. The most common network, the Restricted Family type, was consistently associated with greater loneliness. More acculturated Latina/os (U.S.-born or English questionnaire) reported greater emotional loneliness when they belonged to the Restricted Family group. However, less acculturated Latina/os (foreign-born or Spanish questionnaire) reported greater collective loneliness when they belonged to the Friends Focused network group—the only network type not centered around the family.

The second study also examined social support network types, but in relation to language preference and perceived positive and negative quality of the overall social support network. Positive social support was higher among older Latina/os who preferred Spanish compared to those who preferred English, but there were no differences in negative support. The Extended and Co-Resident Family network types were associated with greater positive support when compared to the Restricted Family and Friends Focused types, but again, there were no differences in overall negative support across network types. Additionally, there was no influence of language preference on the association between network structure and support.

The third study investigated structural dimensions of support in association with ambivalence about emotional and instrumental support within three specific relationship types. Nativity status, language preference, and subgroup heritage were also examined as potential moderators. Being foreign-born, taking the questionnaire in Spanish, and being non-Mexican-American were associated with higher rates of reporting ambivalence versus positivity about support. Fewer social ties and closer geographic proximity to social ties was associated with a greater likelihood of ambivalence. Among foreign-born

participants more specifically, reporting infrequent contact with relatives was associated with greater likelihood of ambivalence about support but patterns were inconsistent across relationship and support types.

Findings suggest that older Latina/os' social support networks are heterogeneous and not uniformly satisfactory among older Latina/os. Factors associated with acculturation contribute to intragroup differences in structure, function, and perceived quality. This dissertation can inform culturally appropriate interventions aiming to bolster older Latina/os and their social support networks, particularly among Latina/os who are more vulnerable to experiencing inadequate support.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background on Older Latina/os in the United States**

Anyone who has spent time in the hospital with aging family members has likely been witness to how different one room can be from the next. Walking along the hospital corridors, you may find adult children asking the doctor questions, a wife escorting her partner to the restroom, friends laughing at the bedside, entire family reunions, or an older patient alone in an empty room. In each of these scenarios, individuals may look joyful, pained, sad, frustrated, or any combination thereof. Patterns, and deviations from patterns in the social circumstances and emotional responses to those circumstances, could be observed along the basis of an older patient's age, gender, language, ethnicity, or other characteristics. The overarching question of this dissertation reflects an attempt to understand, make meaning out of, and assess the impact of such observations: What is the nature of social support networks among an increasingly diverse older adult population?

#### **The Need for Support Among Older Latina/os in the United States**

Social support networks are important because family and friends provide most of the companionship, assistance, and care for older adults. However, older Latina/os, like many other marginalized groups of older adults in the United States, are in greater need of assistance and care than White older adults. Latina/os are an increasingly growing demographic among the aging population in the United States. There will be

approximately 5 million Latina/os over the age of 65 by the year 2020 (Administration on Aging, 2015), and healthcare and social services must be prepared to meet the substantial demands of this population. Although Latina/os in the United States have low mortality rates relative to their disproportionately disadvantaged socioeconomic status, they are more likely to suffer from chronic health conditions, such as diabetes and metabolic issues, compared to their non-Latina/o White counterparts (Hayward, Hummer, Chiu, Gonzalez-Gonzalez, & Wong, 2014). This is especially true for U.S.-born Latina/os. This means that older Latina/os need extensive support and for extended periods of time. Coupled with a disproportionate lack of health insurance coverage (R. J. Angel, 2009) and limited knowledge about and access to culturally appropriate formal supports like social services (R. J. Angel & J. L. Angel, 2009), social support networks are crucial to meeting the socioemotional needs of aging Latina/os (Gallo, Penedo, Espinosa de los Monteros, & Arguelles, 2009; Guo, Li, Lui, & Sun, 2015; Peek, Howrey, Ternent, Ray, & Ottenbacher, 2012).

Beyond a greater need for support networks, older Latina/os value social support networks as an integral aspect of their well-being. *Familismo* is a set of cultural values that prioritizes collective family and close friends' needs and well-being over individuals. Similar values such as *respeto*, or respect for elders, also places eldercare responsibilities on the family (John, Resendiz, & De Vargas, 1997). Indeed, research finds that older Latina/os prefer to receive support from family and close friends rather than from casual friends or formal services (Min & Barrio, 2009). Evidence for cultural preferences and needs related to socioeconomic constraints are substantiated by research demonstrating lower rates of nursing home placement, social service use, and mental health utilization

among aging Latina/os and their families (Alegría et al., 2002; J. L. Angel, Douglas, & R. J. Angel, 2003; J. L. Angel, Rote, Brown, R. J. Angel, & Markides, 2014; Barrio et al., 2008; Crist & Escandón-Dominguez, 2003; Damron-Rodriguez, Wallace, & Kington, 1994). Yet, older Latina/os represent a diverse group, characterized by varied countries of origin and language preferences, for instance. Latina/os represent individuals from over 20 different countries, reflecting considerable differences in their sociopolitical histories and current circumstances with respect to socioeconomic status, health, and well-being (Gaugler, Kane, Kane, & Newcomer, 2006; Hummer & Hayward, 2015; Maldonado, 1985; Tirodkar, Song, Change, Dunlop, & Chang, 2008). Yet, Latina/os are often grouped together and regarded as a monolith in the United States (Suárez-Orozco & Paez, 2002). As a result, scholars and policymakers alike have called for more research that highlights within-group differences in their interpersonal circumstances that might help explain differences across sociocultural characteristics (Cook, Alegría, Lin, & Guo, 2009).

Despite the heterogeneity that exists among older U.S. Latina/os' sociocultural characteristics, there is very little work investigating whether older Latina/o social support networks are prepared to meet the demands of their aging networks. This is partially attributable to limited research aiming to examine whether social support network types diverge from the cultural norms older Latina/os come to expect as sources of support. Thus, this dissertation examines the multidimensional nature of U.S. older Latina/o social support network structure and quality across important sociocultural markers such as U.S. nativity status, language preference, and subgroup heritage. Understanding the social contexts within which older Latina/os of various backgrounds

find themselves would allow services to leverage networks when strong and to bolster networks that are inadequate or facing challenges.

## **Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks**

### **Convoy Model of Social Relations**

Studying persons-in-context is an important pillar of developmental psychology, and social relationships constitute the most ubiquitous of contexts (Ajrouch, 2008; Magnusson & Stattin, 2006). Social support networks are the source of an individual's social support, defined as the perception that one is embedded in a social support network, is cared for, and has help available in times of need (Cohen & Syme, 1985). According to the convoy model of social relations (Antonucci, Fiori, Birditt, & Jackey, 2010; Kahn & Antonucci, 1980), individuals move through the lifecourse with a network of social ties that exist at varying levels of closeness over time. The convoy model of social relations conceptualizes the social support network as a multidimensional construct that includes structural, functional, and qualitative components. That is, an individual's social support network must, at its foundation, have an underlying structure that provides the basis for social ties within the network to exchange different types of support (function) that are then subjectively evaluated for their adequacy (quality) (Antonucci, 2001). To the extent that social support is perceived as adequate, or evaluated as having positive qualities, social support networks are protective, especially during developmental transitions and major life events across the lifespan (Antonucci, 1994; Antonucci et al., 2010). There has been a substantial body of research showing that, in fact, satisfactory social support provided within a social support network is predictive of better health and quality of life (Antonucci et al., 2010).

In a paper on the issues facing scholarly work on social support networks, Jacobson (1985) notes that the study of social support and social support networks must be understood within the “culturally based assumptions and expectations defining the meaning and mobilization of social support” (p. 42). In the convoy model of social relations, cultural contexts are accounted for by an individual’s personal and situational characteristics. That is, personal (e.g., gender, age, race, ethnicity) and situational characteristics (e.g., socioeconomic status, neighborhood context) are associated with broader societal roles prescribing values, norms, and expectations that motivate behaviors and cognitive processes about social relations. As such, personal and situational characteristics influence who is sought for support, under what circumstances, how often, and for what purpose. Taken together, personal and situational characteristics also shape an individual’s standards regarding what constitutes acceptable and satisfactory support. Yet, there are limited examples of research investigating personal and situational characteristics as they relate to adhering to dominant U.S. norms and values versus norms and values associated with marginalized cultures. For example, as an immigrant group, Latina/o families are often stereotypically thought of as self-sustaining and harmonious. However, the culturally-specific ideal of *familismo* does not leave room for the dominant western ideals of independence and autonomy in the United States to influence how Latina/os’ social support networks are shaped. This is important because personal and situational characteristics that are socioculturally specific can elucidate why patterns of social support networks vary across groups, and equally important, why patterns vary within diverse groups.

### **Acculturation Theory and Social Relations**



Acculturation theory can be applied as a useful theoretical framework in understanding why specific personal and situational characteristics are relevant to the study of social support networks among diverse groups of individuals. Acculturation is the dynamic and multidimensional process in which individuals from marginalized groups—usually immigrants— negotiate mainstream language, values, and norms associated with both their cultures-of-origin and the dominant society in which they live (Berry, 2005). In a recent expansion of acculturation theory, Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, and Szapocznik (2010) argue that the process of adapting to a new dominant culture while maintaining cultures-of-origin can be measured along behavioral, value-based, and identity-based dimensions. For the purposes of this study, nativity status and language preference are examined as proxies of acculturation. This is due, in part, to limitations in the dataset which does not administer assessments of acculturation.

This dissertation uses nativity status and language preference as proxies of values-based acculturation (in the context of *familismo*) to examine differences in behavioral acculturation with respect to social support networks. Nativity status, or whether someone was born in the country of reference, is an important proxy of acculturation as it can indicate the dominant cultural values in which an individual was first socialized. The predominant U.S. cultural values of individualism and interpersonal distance, for example, may contrast with foreign-born Latina/o culture that emphasizes interdependency and interpersonal closeness (Campos, Ullman, Aguilera, & Dunkel Schetter, 2014; Schwartz et al., 2010). Padilla (2006) suggests that U.S.-born Latina/os are socialized into *familismo* differently than foreign-born Latina/os and adopt a mixture

of both culture-of-origin and dominant U.S. cultural beliefs and practices as a norm (Padilla, 2006). This also means that individuals born to immigrant parents but raised in the adopted country of their parents must negotiate their own acculturation process while also contending with the acculturation of their parents and grandparents. Although nativity status is important in understanding contexts of socialization, it is a fixed characteristic that cannot indicate the full extent of an individual's orientation to or identification with cultural norms and values. As such, language proficiency and preference—more dynamic facets of culture—are often also assessed as another important proxy of acculturation. Both U.S.- and foreign-born Latina/os can prefer either English or Spanish. Yet, preferring to use the Spanish language is often associated with a stronger attachment to their culture-of-origin, reflecting a higher level of cultural distinctiveness (S. L. Applewhite, 1998). Taken together, the proxies of acculturation can help contextualize the link between value-based and behavioral differences in social relationships among the Latina/o population. This is especially important because findings are mixed as to whether U.S.-born Latina/os shift in their own endorsement of cultural values compared to Latina/os who are foreign-born (Almeida, Subramanian, Kawachi, & Molnar, 2009; Knight et al., 2002). Moreover, there are few studies that examine whether behavioral changes occur across generations with respect to social relations resembling the *familismo* ideal, particularly in later life when this cultural ideal becomes more salient to Latina/os. Subgroup heritage is also examined in this dissertation as an important sociocultural characteristic associated with differences in cultural values and practices, and acculturation.

## **Literature Review**

In the subsequent review of the literature, previous work on social support network structure, quality, and function is summarized to identify significant gaps in research. Each section first addresses findings about general populations and then considers research about Latina/os. When available, patterns related to nativity status and language preference among older immigrants and Latina/o immigrants are also discussed. It is important to note that much of the research presented in the literature review is in relation to health and well-being outcomes with the goal of highlighting the broader significance of studying such issues. However, health and well-being outcomes are not the specific focus of this dissertation.

### **Social Support Network Structure**

Social support networks come in various configurations that include size, composition, and frequency of context. Personal and societal factors contribute to the variability of each of these characteristics across individuals.

**Size.** Social support networks have a relative size referring to the number of perceived close social ties. Several studies have suggested that as individuals age, their social support network size tends to decrease, as older individuals shift their focus toward a limited number of emotionally meaningful close relationships (Carstensen, 1992; Luong, Charles, & Fingerman, 2010). House and Kahn (1985) recommended a social support network size of 5 to 10 members as optimal for well-being. One study found lower quality of life associated with increased network size over time among institutionalized older adults and those receiving community services (Abbott, Bettger, Hanlon, & Hirschman, 2012), perhaps because larger social support networks become burdensome to older adults coping with health stressors. However, another study found

that more secure attachment styles in later life were associated with a larger network size (Fiori, Consedine, & Merz, 2011). These contradictory findings suggest that many contextual factors may influence whether, how, and which types of social support networks are optimal for meeting the support and well-being needs of older persons.

**Composition.** Social support networks are also composed of different close relationship types. Related to the idea that older adults narrow their social sphere to the most meaningful relationships, studies have shown that older adults tend to name more family than friends or acquaintances as members of their social support network (Levitt, Weber, & Guacci, 1993). Among older adults, individuals with a low proportion of close family in their social support network but a large total network size have also been found to have high emotional well-being (Fuller-Iglesias, Webster, & Antonucci, 2015). Yet, the aging society in the United States is shifting beyond the nuclear family toward larger, multigenerational families (Bengtson, 2001). This trend makes it important to investigate the optimal size and composition of networks across generations and diverse populations.

**Frequency of contact.** Findings are mostly inconsistent when it comes to patterns and outcomes of different network sizes and compositions. This may be because other characteristics associated with size, including geographic and emotional closeness and personal commitment to and effort in relationships (Ashida & Heaney, 2008; Green, Richardson, Lago, & Schatten-Jones, 2001; Lang, Wagner, Wrzus, & Neyer, 2013; Siebert, Mutran, & Reitzes, 1999), are more indicative of well-being and relationship quality outcomes. Therefore, understanding the behavioral component of social support networks, or how frequently individuals are in physical or long-distance contact with close social ties, is also crucial to understanding the nature and impact of social support

networks and well-being. A study conducted in the United Kingdom (UK) found that, descriptively, few people over age 50 reported infrequent contact and social isolation (Shankar, McMunn, Banks, & Steptoe, 2011). Warren-Findlow, J. N. Laditka, S. B. Laditka, and Thompson (2011) found that most participants in their sample had contact with family several times per week on average, but had less frequent contact with friends. Unmet expectations of contact, however, was a strong predictor of loneliness among aging adults in the UK (Routasalo, Savikko, Tilvis, Strandberg, & Pitkälä, 2006). Another study found that weekly contact with social support network members decreases in later life, but this was not necessarily associated with loneliness (Due, Holstein, Lund, Modvig, & Avlund, 1999). Research that examined children, other family, and friend type relationships found similar results, where in-person contact every few months or less often was associated with higher likelihood of depressive symptomology (Teo et al., 2015). Huxhold, Miche, and Schüz (2013) also found that engaging in activities with friends increased well-being among older adults, while activities with family increased both positive and negative emotions, suggesting that different types of relationships contribute to well-being differentially.

Ethnicity also influences whether and how social support network members are lost or gained over the lifecourse and the type of contact in which individuals often engage (Conway, Magai, Jones, Fiori, & Gillespie, 2013; Hawkey et al., 2008). Ajrouch, Antonucci, and Janevic (2001) revealed that, compared to non-Latina/o Whites in the U.S., non-Latina/o Black older adults had smaller networks, more in-person contact, and more family included in their networks. Additionally, frequent in-person contact with

children has been related to decreased likelihood of depression among a Korean sample of older adults (Roh et al., 2015).

Among Latina/os specifically, social values and practices shape the size, composition, and the frequency and type of contact with their social support networks. The cultural tradition of *familismo* prioritizes respect and honor for aging family members and family unity, both in countries of origin like Mexico (Fuller-Iglesias & Antonucci, 2016) and in the United States (Kao, McHugh, & Travis, 2007). As an example, Latina/os in the United States tend to have large, extended family networks (Burnette, 1999; Garcia, 1993; Gleeson-Kreig, Bernal, & Woolley, 2002) as opposed to small, nuclear families with whom they have frequent contact (at least once or twice a month) and to whom they feel emotionally close (Campos et al., 2014). Key differences across nuclear and other family and friend relationship types (Comeau, 2012; Donlan, 2011) warrant more research examining specific relationship types (Gallant, Spitze, & Grove, 2010).

Viruell-Fuentes and Schulz (2009) found that while Latina/o immigrants' ties in the United States were critical to well-being, they were also vulnerable, as Latina/os in their qualitative study reported feeling isolated within very small, tight-knit networks. M. E. Ruiz's (2007) findings from focus groups revealed that older Latina/os have infrequent contact with family until their level of need increases. Silverstein and Chen (1999) found that native-born Latina/o older adults maintain feelings of emotional closeness to acculturated family members, while those more acculturated family members report emotional distancing. Another study found that while Latina/os in general are more likely to live in family households, being native-U.S.-born increases the likelihood of belonging

to a household that includes family and extended family residents (Landale & Oropesa, 2007). Moreover, other research has suggested that language proficiency is one of the determinants of family composition and integration among older Latina/os in the United States (Gurak & Kritz, 2010; Hurtado-de-Mendoza, Gonzales, Serrano, & Kaltman, 2014). There has been limited quantitative, nationally representative empirical research devoted to understanding how sociodemographic and nativity shapes differences in social support patterns while also considering multiple dimensions of support among older Latina/os.

**Social support network typologies.** Size, composition, and frequency of contact are independent but related constructs that are typically assessed independently, but this approach limits our understanding of the diverse ways in which network dimensions occur simultaneously. Researchers have suggested examining at least two dimensions of support networks concurrently (House & Khan, 1985; Wenger, 1991). In this vein, the social convoy framework is important for both theoretical and methodological reasons, as social support network typologies have emerged as an innovative approach to empirically establishing varied structures of social support (Antonucci et al., 2013). Several studies have revealed four basic social support network typologies: Diverse, Restricted, Friends Focused, and Family Focused (Fiori, J. Smith, & Antonucci, 2007; Litwin & Shiovitz-Ezra, 2011). Diverse networks are those composed of a variety of relationship types, with several sources of support that have frequent contact making up the network. Restricted networks are those with small, socially disengaged network members. Friends Focused and Family Focused networks are those composed predominantly of friends or family, respectively, and that have frequent contact. However, cross-cultural studies have found

slight variants to these typical structures, suggesting that cultural contexts play a role in shaping the structure of networks. For example, an additional Married-and-Distal network type has been found in Japan and Korea (Fiori, Antonucci, & Akiyama, 2008; S. Park, Smith, & Dunkle, 2014). Previous studies have made gains in understanding broad patterns across countries and cultures. However, the heterogeneity of social support network types among specific ethnic minority groups, particularly with respect to within-group variance among immigrant groups experiencing multiple cultural influences, is rarely examined.

Nativity status also impacts patterns of social support network diversity. For example, Burholt and Dobbs (2014) examined network types among older South Asians, including migrants in the United Kingdom and residents of South Asia. They discovered four network types, but found that the proportion of participants in each network type differed according to whether individuals were born in the country of study. The authors suggest that immigration disrupts network patterns by way of pragmatic and acculturation processes. To the best of my knowledge, there are no studies that describe social support network patterns among older Latina/os in the United States. There is evidence from Mexico suggesting nuanced types of the Diverse network, one with and one without community participation, and a specific type of Restricted network, namely a widowed type (Doubova, Pérez-Cuevas, Espinosa-Alarcón, & Flores-Hernández, 2010). However, a typology of older U.S. Latina/os' networks would clarify whether and how nativity status, specifically Latina/o subgroup heritage and language preference, differentiate U.S. Latina/o network types from typical network types found in the United States and in Mexico.



## **Functions of Social Support**

Social support fulfills many different purposes, and the type of perceived support is often predicated on specific needs and desires. For example, social support can be provided in the form of financial resources, advice and information, companionship and a sense of belonging, and acts of support and helping (Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Wong, Nordstokke, Gregorich, & Perez-Stable, 2010). This dissertation focuses on three major functions of social support: (a) sense of belonging, (b) emotional support, and (c) instrumental support.

**Loneliness.** Because human beings are inherently social by nature, providing individuals with a sense of belonging and social connectedness is one of the foremost functions of social support networks. Research has demonstrated that among adults of all ages, individuals who feel a sense of belonging and companionship report greater psychological well-being (Rook, 1987). Alternatively, loneliness—that is, the deficit of sense of belonging—has been associated with several adverse health and psychological outcomes, such as cardiovascular disease, impaired cognitive functioning, mortality, and depression (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). Loneliness can be defined as a “distressing feeling that accompanies the perception that one’s social needs are not being met by the quantity or especially the quality of one’s social relationships” (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010, p. 218). As such, dimensions of social support network structures are often addressed in the literature as either risk or protective factors with respect to loneliness. For instance, in general, individuals with smaller social support networks, and those with disengaged social ties, are more likely to report loneliness (Ashida & Heaney, 2008; Green et al., 2001). Negative relationship quality also predicts loneliness (Hawkley et al.,

2008). Having close friendships also appears to be protective against loneliness, particularly in later life (Chopik, 2017; Nicolaisen & Thorsen, 2017).

Because loneliness is derived from unmet social needs, there is also work recognizing cross-cultural differences in how and whether various types of social support networks can fulfill those needs (De Jong Giervald, Tilburg, & Dykstra, 2016; D. P. Johnson & Mullins, 1987). This suggests that an individual's broader social context can influence the prevalence and predictors of loneliness. For example, O. Kim (1999) found that elder Korean immigrants in the United States reported higher levels of loneliness than other groups, and that a stronger attachment to their ethnicity was related to greater overall loneliness. Moreover, although commonly investigated as a unidimensional construct, many scholars have suggested a more nuanced approach to the study of loneliness, finding that unmet social needs associated with loneliness are multidimensional. More specifically, researchers have described loneliness as having a perceived social isolation component (lack of companionship), an emotional component (lack of confidants), and a collective component (lack of shared interests and values; Hughes, Waite, & Hawkey, & Cacioppo, 2004). Yet, there is very little work examining whether loneliness differs across its various dimensions based on the social support network structures found among culturally diverse groups.

**Emotional and instrumental support.** Social support networks are defined not just by perceptions of belonging, but also by its emotional and instrumental functions. Emotional support, consisting of expressions of sympathy or empathy, caring, and affirmation, is often associated with well-being (Krause, 1986), overall, and can facilitate the provision of tangible forms of support during times of increased need (Morelli, Lee,

Arnn, & Zaki, 2015). Although many different relationships can be the source of both emotional and instrumental support, there is some research to suggest that older adults expect different types of social support from different relationship types (Agneessens, Waeye, & Lievens, 2006). This is also true of perceived receipt of support, as one study found that family more commonly provide tangible forms of support, while friends and neighbors provide emotional support (Wong, Yoo, & Stewart, 2005). Although previous research has documented that functions of support are associated with different relational sources of support, there is less work investigating whether structural facets of those relationships are predictive of the perceived quality of support.

Ethnic differences exist in the valuation and efficacy of different types of support in later life (Jutagir et al., 2016). Older Latina/os also often share in similar exchanges of informational, emotional, and instrumental support, but qualitative work indicates that some older Latina/os tend to value emotional support most (Becker, Beyene, Newsom, & Mayen, 2003; Cox & Gelfand, 1987). For instance, *respeto*, or the notion that older Latina/os should be respected, manifests as older Latina/os expecting that, when they share their worries, their social support network will express concern and understanding rather than critique. Some studies show that this type of informational support may be valued even more than actual care or affection (Sanchez-Ayendez, 1988; Steidel & Contreras, 2003). There is also research to suggest, however, that multiple forms of support are important for older Latina/os experiencing need as unmet expectations in one type of support may be compensated or reconciled by receipt of other forms of support.

Examining different types of support is also important because, as Dietz (1995) finds, older Latina/os perceived family to be available for emotional support but not for

instrumental support. Qualitative work shows that when older Latina/os report unmet needs in instrumental support, they reframe the support they do receive by focusing on emotional support from family as more important (M. E. Ruiz & Ransford, 2012). Participants suggested that emotional support from family was more easily facilitated because of geographic distance. Values seem to play a role as well, as Villalobos and Bridges (2016) found that endorsement of *familismo* was predictive of received emotional but not instrumental support within specific relationships like adult children. With respect to specific types of support across nativity status, Farley, Galves, Dickinson, and Perez (2005) found that Mexican American Latina/os who receive emotional support in particular fare better in terms of health, regardless of nativity status. Other findings suggest that more acculturated immigrant groups are less likely to seek this type of support, which is associated with greater perceived isolation (Patiño & Kirchner, 2009). Yet, few studies have compared differences in older Latina/os' perceptions of the *quality* of different types of support across proxies of acculturation like nativity status or language preference. Additionally, most of the work describing the nature of varied types of support focuses on children as primary sources of help, but different types of support from extended family and fictive kin are rarely examined.

### **Quality of Social Ties**

The link between structural dimensions of support network types and well-being is often conditional on the perceived quality of social support—another distinguishing characteristic of social support networks. The convoy model of social relations proposes that individuals make subjective evaluations about the quality of their socially supportive

relationships and that these evaluations stem from the relative fit of network structure realities and expectations of optimal structure (Antonucci, 2001).

**Positive and negative perceptions.** Historically, research on social support focused much of its assessment on positive and negative perceptions. In her review of the literature on positive and negative support and well-being in later life, Rook (2015) defines positive support as providing satisfactory aid in times of need and participating in enjoyable shared activities, and she defines negative support as perceived unmet expectations of help in times of need, rejection, or neglect. Negative support quality has been found to occur far less often than positive support, but it has been more strongly related to negative health and well-being outcomes. Positive and negative support occur across relationship types to varying degrees and have differential influences on well-being outcomes (Antonucci, Akiyama, & Lansford, 1998; Birditt, Jackey, & Antonucci, 2009; Bushman & Holt-Lunstad, 2009). Qualitative work finds that midlife and older Latina/os rarely discuss the quality of their social support in straightforward and positive ways (Martinez, 2002; M. E. Ruiz & Ransford, 2012; Smith-Morris, Morales-Campos, Alvarez, & Turner, 2012; Spira & Wall, 2009). There is little research devoted to empirically describing and predicting patterns of contentious support quality.

**Ambivalence.** As noted in a review of the social support research (Rook, 2015), social ties are rarely characterized as solely positive or solely negative. Most recently, ambivalence has emerged as an additional category of perceived quality that can account for the complexity of close relationships (Connidis, 2015; S.M. Park, 2014).

Ambivalence may be defined as contradictory emotions and thoughts about social relationships that may be attributed to opposing norms in society (Connidis & McMullin,

2002; Lüscher, 2002). Ambivalence can be measured directly, inquiring about whether participants have contradictory feelings for and/or experiences with their social relationships; it can also be measured indirectly by examining participants who report both high positive and high negative support (Uchino, 2009, 2013). Ambivalent perceptions of social support, have been linked to poorer health and well-being (Uchino, 2009; Uchino et al., 2013; Uchino, Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Bloor, 2004). For instance, individuals with more ambivalent ties had increased risk for health issues, but this association was attributable to specific parental, spousal, and friendship relationship types (Uchino, 2013; Uchino et al., 2012). Indeed, Fingerman, Hay, and Birditt (2004) found that older adults were more likely to classify close familial ties as ambivalent. On the other hand, distal ties such as friendships were more likely to be classified as negative. There is evidence to suggest that these factors contribute to relationship quality within the most widely studied relationship type, children (Ward, 2008). However, few studies have examined how other social support network characteristics previously mentioned, such as network size and frequency of contact, might relate to ambivalence across relationship types.

One of the most important contributions of research on ambivalence is the inclusion of multiple levels of influence “connecting the internal dynamics, mixed emotions, and contradictory behavior of family members and relationships to the contradictions of social, cultural, political, and economic arrangements and dynamics. . . . Thus, ambivalence can be observed in individuals, relationships, social institutions, and societies” (Connidis, 2015, p. 78). As an example, Hebblethwaite and Norris (2010) found that grandchildren and grandparents spending time together forged strong

emotional bonds but also felt burdened by the time spent, and both generations reported their relationships as ambivalent when they had values and beliefs that diverged from *familismo*. Hillcoat-Nallétamby and Phillips (2011) argue that the immigrant experience is one example of a cultural and political context that shapes how individuals negotiate many dimensions of social support, including appraisals of support quality within value systems that either prioritize individualism or collectivism (Kagitcibasi, 2005). Ajrouch (2005) conducted a qualitative study about Arab American immigrants' experience of social support in the United States, finding that most struggled to reconcile ideals and realities of support from children. Older Latina/o immigrants may also struggle to reconcile the unmet expectations of support received from family, but little research has examined perceptions of support quality across nativity status, language preference, or subgroup heritage.

Research on Latina/os has reported mixed findings on the quality of family ties relative to nativity and traditional value systems. Among Cuban American older adults, fears of depending too much on others while simultaneously fearing living alone were predictors of psychological distress (Mui, 1996), although this study was conducted irrespective of nativity status. Relatedly, Latina/os reported substantially more support from both family and friends compared to other groups, but for those foreign-born, high levels of both family conflict and family support were both related to lower well-being (Koerner & Shirai, 2012; M. Park, Unützer, & Grembowski, 2014).

Given that foreign-born individuals must contend with competing values about the salience of social ties, it is not surprising that research finds that nativity status often shapes the likelihood of perceiving social support as positive or negative. For example,

compared to U.S.-born Mexican Americans, foreign-born Mexicans report more family than friend support (Almeida et al., 2009). In the previously mentioned study, this was only true of those foreign-born Mexican Americans who preferred Spanish. Another study found that foreign-born Latina/os in the United States reported more family cohesion and less family conflict than those who were born in the United States (Chang, Natsuaki, & Chen, 2013). Conflicting reports about the quality of social support and family ties are further demonstrated in Smith-Morris et al.'s (2013) study, which found that "speakers may be defending, praising, reprimanding, or actively considering both pros and cons of family events and pressures" (p. 47). Given differences across language preference and Latina/o country of origin, it is important to take these factors into account in relation to support, but there are few studies that do so. There is considerable qualitative evidence for ambivalent feelings and attitudinal beliefs among older Latina/os. However, there are no studies, to my knowledge, that examine how quantitative patterns of network size and frequency of contact interact with sociocultural variables specific to Latina/os' acculturation to contextualize patterns of ambivalence. There are also no examinations of how patterns may vary across specific relationship types.

### **Dissertation Structure**

The convoy model of social relations has proven to be a useful organizing framework for understanding the complexity and multidimensionality of social support networks and social support. Moreover, the convoy model of social relations has been successfully applied across many cross-cultural contexts (Antonucci, Ajrouch, & Birditt, 2013), but fewer studies use the framework to analyze intracultural variation. As such, this dissertation augments the convoy model with acculturation theory to account for the



influence of personal and situational characteristics relevant to older Latina/os as a culturally diverse group with an immigrant background. More specifically, this dissertation examines nativity status and language preference as personal characteristics that can be reflective of acculturation with respect to contradictory sets of culture-of-origin and dominant culture values and norms that impact the patterning of social support network structure, function, and quality. Additionally, the current dissertation contributes to the literature on acculturation theory, which is overwhelmingly focused on childhood and adolescence (Yoon et al., 2013). This dissertation engages with the lifecourse perspective proposed by the convoy model of social relations to understand how proxies of acculturation shape social relations later in life. As outlined in the literature review, family and social relationships are culturally salient to older Latina/os. That cultural salience is incorporated in this dissertation in accordance with the notion that “culture simply cannot... be reduced to a measurable variable” (Hunt, Schneider, & Comer, 2004, p. 982). In addition to nativity status and language preference, subgroup heritage is also examined as an important personal characteristic that may influence the nature of social support networks. Moreover, this dissertation contributes to the literature on Latina/o social relationships by examining social support networks using both a holistic (person-specific) typology and a relationship-specific approach.

There are three overarching research questions, all of which focus on personal sociocultural characteristic differences among older Latina/os: (a) What types of social support network structures exist among older Latina/os and what is their association with loneliness? (b) How do social support network types relate to overall perceptions of the quality of social support provided within the social support network? and (c) How do

distinct structural social support network characteristics relate to ambivalent perceptions about social support? An adapted version of the convoy model of social relations was developed to illustrate the associations examined by each research question (see Figure 1).

The structure of this dissertation consists of three empirical studies examining various dimensions of social support networks, reporting on secondary analyses of cross-sectional data from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS). The Health and Retirement Study is a national, biennial longitudinal study of over 22,000 adults ages 51 and above in the United States. Although data collection began in 1992, HRS began oversampling racial and ethnic minority older adults in 2008. Cross-sectional data for all three dissertation studies come from a Latina/o only sample ( $N=1355$ ) from the 2012/2014 waves of the study. Important demographic descriptors of the sample are: age ( $M=64.53$ ,  $SD=9.24$ ); education ( $M=9.99$  school years;  $SD=4.39$ ); years since immigration for foreign-born population ( $M=36.02$ ,  $SD=13.77$ ); gender (57% women) and couplehood status (72% coupled). It should be noted that the third dissertation study reflects a slightly larger sample ( $N=1585$ ) because fewer variables were included in the models.

Across all three studies, socioculturally relevant personal and situational characteristics are explored with respect to their direct and indirect associations with social support network dimensions. The first dissertation study assesses heterogeneity in patterns of social support networks among older Latina/os living in the United States. Using cluster analyses, social support network typologies are derived using four dimensions of social support network structure (i.e., size, composition, physical proximity, and frequency of contact). Additionally, social support network types are

examined in association with loneliness and examined as a multifaceted construct (i.e., perceived social isolation, emotional loneliness, and collective loneliness). Nativity status, language preference, and subgroup heritage are the three sociocultural personal characteristics included. Neighborhood social context (as a proxy for context of reception) is also included as a socioculturally relevant situational characteristic. The second dissertation study examines the extent to which social support network types identified in the first study are associated with perceptions of positive and negative quality of social support from the overall network. The second study focuses exclusively on language preference, a variable commonly studied as a proxy for acculturation, as the sociocultural personal characteristic of interest. While structural, functional, and qualitative dimensions of social support networks are examined from a holistic perspective in the first two dissertation studies, the third dissertation study narrows the focus on each dimension. In the third dissertation study, three specific relationship types (children, other family, and friends) are examined separately. Structural characteristics specific to each relationship type (number of close social ties, geographic proximity, and frequency of contact) are examined in relation to the likelihood of perceiving ambivalent relationship quality about emotional and instrumental functions of social support, respectively. Once again, nativity status, language preference, and subgroup heritage are the three sociocultural personal characteristics included.

In the conclusion section, major findings from each study are synthesized and interpreted to discuss their implications for theory, social work practice, and broader policy. The conclusion also places the significance of this dissertation within the context

of its limitations and suggests directions for future research that may address unanswered questions.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK TYPES AMONG OLDER LATINA/OS IN THE UNITED STATES: ASSOCIATIONS WITH LONELINESS**

#### **The Convoy Model of Social Relations**

The convoy model of social relations has been one of the most widely applied theoretical conceptualizations of personal social support network processes. According to the convoy model, social support networks are comprised of an array of social relationships that both provide and receive tangible and intangible help throughout the lifecourse (Antonucci et al., 2010). Social support networks are considered multidimensional, the structural dimension of which is most fundamental. Overall network size, composition, and frequency of contact with network members constitute three basic elements of social support network structure (Antonucci et al., 2013). Taken together, these three structural characteristics provide the basis for individuals to exchange support with close social ties. Previous cross-cultural and cross-national studies have demonstrated that culture is a major factor influencing variation in social support network structure among older adults. However, it is also important to examine within-country and within-culture variations associated with racial and ethnic subgroup differences. This is particularly true for sociocultural subgroups in the United States whose traditions, values, and family obligations differ from those found in dominant U.S.

society (e.g., immigrant groups). The primary focus of this paper is to examine patterns in older Latina/os' social support network structures in their entirety.

The convoy model suggests that the structure of personal social support networks reflects variations in the life phase and in the sociodemographic and situational characteristics of individuals. For example, two sociodemographic characteristics—age and gender—are associated with social roles and major lifecourse developmental events that impact social support networks in several ways. As individuals progress through the lifecourse, widowhood, geographic migration, and a limited time perspective tend to narrow older adults' social lives. As an example, older age is related to having a smaller social support network size composed mostly of adult children (B. Cornwell & Schafer, 2016; English & Carstensen, 2014). Yet, some studies have found that friends remain integral to social support networks late in life as older adults experience widowhood and the relocation of family members (Ellwardt, Aartsen, & Van Tilburg, 2016; Fuller-Iglesias, Webster, & Antonucci, 2013). Here, gender differences exist. For instance, women tend to have larger social support networks and often incorporate more friends than men (B. Cornwell & Schafer, 2016).

## **Literature Review**

### **Social Support Network Typologies**

Much of the previous research on social support networks examines group differences in specific structural characteristics of social support networks and the relationship between each structural characteristic and an outcome (e.g., availability of support). However, people differ in the extent to which these characteristics are interrelated and define the nature of their personal social support network. As such, one

of the most important advancements in the study of social support networks has been a focus on identifying subgroup differences in so-called *types* of social support networks defined by distinct patterns (profiles) of structural and other characteristics. Four common typologies of social support networks have been identified and replicated in several studies: Diverse, Family Focused, Friends Focused, and Restricted (Fiori et al., 2007; Litwin, 2001). Often the most prevalent network type, Diverse networks have a relatively large network size that includes an equal number of relationships with children, other relatives, and friends. Additionally, older adults in this type of network tend to report frequent contact with most of the social ties in their network. The Family Focused network type is made up mostly of adult children with whom older adults have frequent interactions. Similar to the Family Focused network in terms of highly frequent contact, Friends Focused networks are comprised primarily of friends instead of adult children. Restricted networks are defined by very few social ties with whom older adults report infrequent contact. Being older has been associated with belonging to the Restricted and Friends Focused type (Fiori et al., 2007). Some studies have found that women are more likely to belong to the Diverse type, as women tend to have larger networks in general (Fiori & Jager, 2011).

The replicability of the four network types suggest that structural characteristics are indeed patterned in a specific manner. However, the co-occurrence of structural characteristics also suggests that a range of other network types is possible.

### **Typologies in a Cross-Cultural Context**

More recently, researchers have begun investigating the possibility of cultural differences in network typologies. Cultural differences in values and traditions influence

expectations and obligations about what constitutes closeness and who should be considered close. For example, one study in China focused exclusively on marital and blood-tie relations (Cheng, Lee, Chan, Leung, & Lee, 2009), finding a fifth “distant family” type in addition to the four typical networks. This network type included a limited number of immediate family members (i.e., children) together with many extended family members. In South Korea, a Couple Focused type consisting mostly of younger older adults emerged instead of the family type (S. Park, Kang, & Chadiha, 2016; S. Park et al., 2014). Three different network types not previously described in the literature were revealed in social support network data from older adults in Lebanon (Webster, Antonucci, Ajrouch, & Abdulrahim, 2014). In this study, geographic distance and emotional closeness characterized different levels of contact frequency of family members specifically. Other cross-cultural studies, however, reported similarities in network types despite country differences in cultural values and history. Fiori et al. (2008), for example, found the four typical network types in Japan and in the United States.

### **Older Latina/os’ Social Relationships**

Among older Latina/os in the United States, socioeconomic constraints and cultural values shape expectations of and dependence on their social support networks for support and companionship. This may be because values such as respect for elders and *familismo* (i.e., a set of traditional values prioritizing family over individual needs; Kao et al., 2007; Sabogal, G. Marín, Otero-Sabogal, B. V. Marín, & Perez-Stable, 1987) make older adults integral members of their families (M. E. Ruiz, 2007). Within this cultural frame, Latina/o social support networks are idealized as large, inclusive of extended



family members and close friends who are considered a part of the family (Garcia, 1993; Keefe, 1984), and highly engaged. Most studies examining social relationships among older Latina/os focus on their adult children. Older Latina/os expect to be highly involved in their adult children's lives (Beyene, Becker, & Mayen, 2002; Cox & Gelfand, 1987). Indeed, many report living with children (Gurak & Kritz, 2010) or seeing their children frequently (Comeau, 2012). Yet, older Latina/os also tend to feel emotionally close to a large family network that extends beyond their children. This may be because, like contact patterns with adult children, older Latina/os report frequent visits with relatives and close friends (Sarkisian, Gerena, & Gerstel, 2007). Relatedly, older Latina/os, like other marginalized groups, have a relatively high prevalence of living with their adult children (Blank & Torrecilha, 1998; Zsembik, 1996) and extended family members (Gurak & Kritz, 2010). However, as an immigrant group, U.S.- and foreign-born older Latina/os are socialized differently regarding family norms that often lead to different expectations and fulfillments of social support network expectations. Moreover, patterns in geographic mobility, education, employment opportunities, and marriage associated with nativity status differences (J. L. Angel, R. J. Angel, Aranda, & Miles, 2004) may lead to variations in the residential proximity of and frequency of contact with adult children and extended family.

### **The Importance of Sociocultural Factors: Nativity Status, Language, and Ethnicity**

To understand how U.S.- and foreign-born older Latina/os' social support networks might differ, it is important to review literature on the nature of social support networks as they occur in some older Latina/os' countries of origin. For example, Gelfand (1989) found that older Salvadoran immigrants' social support networks also

decreased in size the longer they resided in the United States. J. L. Angel and R. J. Angel (1992) also revealed that older foreign-born Latina/os report truncated social support network sizes, but maintain almost daily contact with children. Research finds that foreign-born older adults with languages and cultural practices dissimilar from the host country report fewer social ties than do native-born older adults (De Jong Gierveld, Van Der Pas, & Keating, 2015). With respect to language, the literature suggests that limited English proficiency can constrain the frequency of in-person contact (Korte, 1982) and the breadth of relationship types present in the network (Burr & Mutchler, 2003; Diwan, 2008; Mulvaney-Day, Alegría, & Sribney, 2007). For example, older Mexican American immigrants are less likely than U.S.-born Mexican Americans to report having friends or family (Vega & Miranda, 1985). While Mexican Americans represent the largest subgroup of older Latina/os in the United States (Motel & Patten, 2012), previous research has documented differences in unidimensional characteristics of other Latina/o groups' social relationships (Cortes, 1995; Landale, Oropesa, & Bradatan, 2006; Tran & Dhooper, 1997). These differences may also extend to variations in broader social support network configurations across specific Latina/o subgroups, but very few social support network studies focus on intragroup heterogeneity among minority ethnic groups.

### **Neighborhood Social Cohesion as a Culturally-Relevant Situational Characteristic**

According to the convoy model, an individual's need and desire for specific social support network characteristics are guided by both their sociodemographic characteristics and their situational contexts. Among older Latina/os, context of reception may be a particularly important culturally-relevant situational characteristic to consider. Contexts of reception refer to the overall acceptance and openness demonstrated by U.S.-born

communities toward immigrant groups, including the availability of structural opportunities and social support (Schwartz et al., 2014). Some studies have found that more positive contexts of reception are correlated with more individualistic cultural values, as opposed to collective values like that of *familismo* (Schwartz et al., 2014). Perceived neighborhood cohesion may be an indication of how well contexts of reception match cultural values. In other words, older Latina/os who perceive their neighborhood as cohesive may be reflecting on whether people in their communities facilitate feelings of belongingness. Evidence from network typologies found in Mexico (Doubova et al., 2010) revealed two diverse network types. One network type included older adults who belonged to a community group. If foreign-born Latina/os are socialized in home countries where neighborhood contexts are important, neighborhood context may also be important when they move to the United States. However, there is scant research describing older U.S. Latina/os' social support networks in light of their broader neighborhood contexts.

### **Social Support Networks and Loneliness**

One consequence of inadequate social support network structures can be loneliness, or, the antithesis of belonging. Loneliness can be defined as “a distressing experience that accompanies a perceived deficiency in social relationship[s]” (Hawkey, 2015, p. 1). As a multifaceted construct, loneliness has underlying social, emotional, and collective dimensions. Individuals can feel socially separated from others (perceived social isolation), emotionally disconnected in close relationships (emotional loneliness), and disconnected from a larger group (collective loneliness). Each dimension of loneliness is differentially associated with various social support network characteristics

like network size and frequency of contact. For instance, overall, large networks are protective against social isolation while frequency of contact is more protective against emotional loneliness (E. Y. Cornwell & Waite, 2009). Having children and friends in a network deters collective loneliness (Holmén & Furukawa, 2002). While the Restricted network type has been linked to general feelings of loneliness (Medvene et al., 2016; Wenger, 1997), there are few studies assessing whether network types are distinctly related to multiple dimensions of loneliness. Moreover, there is no research among older Latina/os examining levels and predictors of various loneliness dimensions (i.e., perceived social isolation, emotional loneliness, and collective loneliness).

Loneliness appears to be a fear of older Latina/os living in the United States (Beyene et al., 2002; Hilton, Gonzalez, Saleh, Maitoza, & Anngela-Cole, 2012; Russell & Taylor, 2009), particularly those who are foreign-born (Rote & Markides, 2014). Given that cultural values prescribe large networks as ideal, it is not surprising that older Latina/os with smaller social support networks are more likely to report loneliness (Comeau, 2012). However, many studies do not account for sociocultural differences (e.g., nativity status) among older Latina/os. For instance, along with socioeconomic and environmental barriers, comparisons between experiences in their home countries and in the United States can facilitate unmet expectations about social support networks among foreign-born Latina/os (Hurtado-de-Mendoza et al., 2014). Immigration disrupts social relationship functioning, placing foreign-born older Latina/os at greater risk for loneliness (Treas & Mazumdar, 2002; Wu & Penning, 2015). Findings are mixed as to whether foreign-born older Latina/os experience perceived social isolation or loneliness at a greater rate than their U.S.-born counterparts. Citing cultural shifts in their younger

family members' values toward individualism (Sabogal et al., 1987; Treas & Mazumdar, 2002), foreign-born older Latina/os report feeling dissatisfied with their social support networks. Another study found, however, that foreign-born older Latina/os actually report an expansive and active social support network (Wallace, 1992). Research connecting social support network types to multiple dimensions of loneliness is important because findings may reveal the specific social conditions that lead U.S.- and foreign-born older Latina/os to report differences in unmet expectations described in qualitative studies (H. K. Kim & McKenry, 1998).

### **The Current Study**

Social support network typologies span a range of possibilities, and their prevalence differs based on age, gender, and culture. While older Latina/os describe emotional closeness with large, extended networks as a crucial component of feeling socially integrated, they can be dissatisfied with the nature of their social ties (Hilton et al., 2012). Is it possible that the association between specific social support network types and an older Latina/o's sense of loneliness hinges upon how real-life social support network structures play out against cultural ideals? To explore older Latina/o social support networks as they occur within the United States context, the current study proposes four research questions:

1. *What social support network types exist among older Latina/os in the United States?*

Given cultural values of *familismo*, and previous studies on the integration of extended family members, we expect that there will be variations in the network types found among older Latina/os in the United States, and that, in

addition to similarities to types identified in previous studies, there may be unique types revealed for this population subgroup. Consistent with previous research on social support network typologies, we expect to find a Friends Focused type, but we also expect to find variations in the Family Focused type. More specifically, we expect that a large, Extended Family type will predominate. Additionally, previous research has documented the preference for and relatively high prevalence of co-residential living arrangement patterns found among older Latina/os and their families (R. A. Johnson, Schwiebert, Alvarado-Rosenmann, Pecka, & Shirk, 1997; Zsembik, 1996). Because we include living arrangements as a structural characteristic, we also expect to find a network type where older adults live with family.

2. *Is membership in social support network types differentially related to sociodemographic, sociocultural, and situational factors?*

Parallel to previous work, we hypothesize that age will be associated with smaller, less engaged network types. We also expect that women will be more likely to belong to Extended and Co-Resident Family network types. Given mixed findings on whether native U.S.- or foreign-born older adults, in general, are more or less likely to be socially isolated, we do not have any specific hypothesis about nativity status, nor do we have specific hypotheses about language preference or subgroup heritage.

There has been scant research on the association between social support network type and neighborhood social cohesion. Based on previous research suggesting that positive contexts of reception are in fact related to

more individualistic values, we may find that smaller, less engaged network types will be associated with greater neighborhood social cohesion.

Alternatively, it is possible that older Latina/os in family-integrated networks like the Extended Family type report higher neighborhood social cohesion because family and friends live near, for example in an ethnic enclave (Biafora & Longino, 1990; Brown et al., 2009), helping to facilitate close-knit social ties.

3. *Are social support network types differentially related to dimensions of loneliness (i.e., perceived isolation, emotional loneliness, and collective loneliness)?*

We hypothesize that more integrated social support network types, such as the Co-Resident Family, Extended Family, and Friends Focused types, will all be associated with less perceived social isolation. Given the elective nature of friendships, we also expect that the Friends Focused network in particular will be associated with less emotional and collective loneliness. Moreover, because Extended Family networks are aligned with cultural values, we suspect that this network type will also be associated with less collective loneliness.

4. *Do sociocultural factors moderate the associations between social support network type and dimensions of loneliness (perceived social isolation, emotional loneliness, collective loneliness)?*

We hypothesize that nativity status and language preference will not be a factor in the relationship between more integrated social support network

types and lower levels of perceived isolation. However, we expect that the association between the Friends Focused network and less emotional loneliness will hold only for U.S.-born older Latina/os, or older Latina/os who took the questionnaire in English, who are more likely to have been socialized to perceive friends as confidants. We also expect that the relationship between belonging to an Extended Family network and lower collective loneliness will be especially pronounced for foreign-born older Latina/os, or older Latina/os who chose to take the questionnaire in Spanish, who are more likely to maintain strong cultural values (Cortes, 1995; Kao & Travis, 2005). Given the paucity of research comparing social ties across subgroups within the older Latina/o population, we do not have any specific hypotheses about the moderating role of subgroup heritage.

The current study contributes to gaps in the literature in several important ways. First, current knowledge about social relationships among older Latina/os has been based on qualitative, local, or regional studies. We build on previous research by examining the structures of older Latina/o's social support networks in a nationally representative sample. In this way, we also extend previous research on social support network typologies to examine the extent to which the four previously identified network structures are present and most prevalent among Latina/o elders in the United States. Similarly, loneliness has rarely been examined within the older Latina/o population. The current study serves as an opportunity to assess loneliness among older Latina/os for the first time. The study fills a gap in the literature by examining loneliness in relation to social support network typologies, but also by assessing loneliness from a



multidimensional approach. Finally, many cross-national studies have illustrated the importance of cultural differences across populations, but few examine within-group differences. To our knowledge, the current study is one of the first to assess within-group differences among older Latina/os more specifically, incorporating sociocultural factors as personal and situational characteristics that are relevant to the ethnic population under investigation.

## **Methods**

### **Sample**

Data come from an analytic sample of 1355 Latina/os aged 50 and above in the 2012 and 2014 waves of the Health and Retirement Study. For a detailed description of the HRS sampling design, see Sonnega et al., 2014). Using questions regarding Latina/o ethnicity and nativity status (see *Measures* below), inclusion criteria for the present study were: being 50 years of age and older, self-identifying as Latina/o, reporting nativity status, and completing a self-administered psychosocial questionnaire in either 2012 or 2014 (Smith et al., 2013). Each biennial wave, a rotating random 50% of the HRS panel is interviewed in person and asked to complete the psychosocial questionnaire and return it by mail; this study combined samples from two waves. The sample included subgroups of U.S.-born ( $n = 579$ ) and foreign-born ( $n = 776$ ) Latina/os. Table 2.1 provides descriptive information for all measures used in this study by nativity status.

### **Measures**

**Structural network characteristics.** We used seven structural social support network characteristics commonly included in previous studies examining social support network typologies.

**Total size.** Close social support network size was created by summing participant responses to the following question about children, other family, and friends, respectively: “*How many of your [children/other family/friends] would you say you have a close relationship with?*” Before summing across relationships, responses were recoded and truncated to reflect plausible numbers of children (max = 20), other family (max = 40), and friends (max = 40). Respondents who answered yes to the following questions were included: “Do you have any living children,” “Do you have any OTHER IMMEDIATE FAMILY, for example, any brothers or sisters, parents, cousins or grandchildren,” and “Do you have any friends?” In addition, participants who left the aforementioned questions blank but reported living with a child, other relative, or a friend were set to zero for respective relationship types.

**Composition.** The network composition proportion of participants who reported a close network size of zero was set to zero ( $n = 17$ , 1.3%). To calculate the proportion of family present in the network, we first summed across the number of close children and close other family members reported. We then divided this sum over the total close network size to create the proportion of overall family present in the network.

**Living arrangements.** HRS participants report their co-residence and household size. Those participants who reported a household size of one (for uncoupled individuals) or two (for coupled individuals) were categorized as not living with children or family (lives with family = 0). Participants who reported a household size greater than one (for single individuals) or two, were also asked to report on the relationship of those individuals living in the household. In this instance, participants who reported a non-familial relationship were also categorized as not living with children or family (lives

with family = 0). Participants who reported familial relationship (e.g., children, stepchildren, siblings, parents) were categorized as living with children or other family (lives with family = 1).

***Frequency of in-person contact.*** Three measures of frequency of in-person contact were derived from the following questions, for children, other family, and friends, respectively: “On average, how often do you [meet up] with any of these family members, not counting any who live with you?” (1 = less than once a year or never, 2 = once or twice a year, 3 = every few months, 4 = once or twice a month, 5 = once or twice a week, 6 = three or more times a week). Responses were dichotomized (0 = infrequent, or, less than once or twice a week; 1 = frequent, or, once or twice a week or more often). Participants who lived with children or family but did not designate frequency of contact were categorized as frequent regardless of their response. Additionally, participants who did not answer the frequency of contact question and who reported zero close ties within each respective relationship were categorized as having infrequent contact.

***Sociocultural factors.*** Nativity status was assessed with the question: “Were you born in the U.S.?” (-1 = no, 1 = yes). Language preference was coded as -1 = English, 1 = Spanish. Mexican American heritage was coded as 0 = other Latina/o heritage, 1 = Mexican-American.

***Loneliness.*** Using an approach similar to Hawkley, Browne, and Cacioppo (2005), we created three dimensions of loneliness from the short scale of loneliness assessed in the Health and Retirement Study (Hughes et al., 2004). We averaged across four items to create perceived social isolation ( $\alpha = .86$ ). Example items included: “How much of the time do you feel you lack companionship” and “How much of the time do

you feel isolated from others?" (1 = hardly ever or never, 3 = often). Participants must have answered at least two of the items to have a perceived social isolation score. Emotional loneliness was created by averaging across three items that were reverse coded ( $\alpha = .84$ ), for instance, "How much of the time do you feel that there are people you can talk to?" (1 = often, 3 = hardly ever or never). Again, participants must have answered at least two items to have a score calculated. We intended to use two items to create the collective loneliness: "How much of the time do you feel that you are 'in-tune' with the people around you?" and "How much of the time do you feel that you have a lot in common with the people around you?" (1 = often, 3 = hardly ever or never). However, because the Cronbach's alpha was low ( $\alpha = .43$ ) and we had concerns about the understanding of "in-tune" among older adults, we used the single item concerning having a lot in common with others to indicate this dimension.

**Sociodemographic and situational characteristics.** Age was coded in years, and gender as (-1 = men, 1 = women). Neighborhood social cohesion was measured using four items that were the same as Mendes de Leon et al. (2009). Example items included "Most people in this area can be trusted / Most people in this area can't be trusted" and "Most people in this area are friendly/ Most people in this area are unfriendly." Responses were reverse coded (1 = low neighborhood social cohesion; 7 = high neighborhood social cohesion). To create a neighborhood social cohesion construct, we averaged across four items for participants who answered at least two items ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

### **Analytic Strategy**

All analyses were conducted using SPSS. Cluster analysis has been used in many previous studies assessing social support network typologies and was the approach

adopted in this study (Fiori et al., 2007; S. Park et al., 2014). We followed a two-step procedure like the one used by Mandara and Murray (2002) in their study of African American family typologies.

A hierarchical clustering approach using Ward's (1963) technique was used to first assess an optimal number of network types based on seven variables: total network size, proportion of children and other relatives in the network, living with children and/or other relatives, and frequency of contact with children, other family, and friends. All seven social support network variables entered in the cluster analysis were standardized to z-scores to eliminate differences in response scales and to reduce the impact of outliers in skewing findings (Milligan & Cooper, 1988). SPSS does not provide statistics for cluster solutions in the hierarchical procedure. Therefore, we relied primarily on visual inspection of icicle and dendrogram plots, and the agglomerative schedule to determine the best cluster solution (Steinley, 2003). It appeared that a three-, four-, or five-cluster solution would be best suited to the data. We then examined three-, four-, and five-cluster solutions using the k-means algorithm.

To examine network type differences in sociodemographic, situational, and sociocultural characteristics (hypothesis 2), one-way ANOVAs were used for continuous variables (i.e., age, perceived neighborhood social cohesion) and chi square analyses were used for categorical variables (i.e., gender, nativity status, questionnaire language, and subgroup heritage).

Finally, to assess differences in loneliness associated with network type and sociocultural variables, repeated measures ANOVA were conducted using the GLM procedure in SPSS. Because the interaction between sociocultural factors is not the focus

of this paper, we used separate models for each sociocultural factor (i.e., nativity status, questionnaire language, and subgroup heritage). Network type and sociocultural factors were entered as between-subjects factors. The model included an interaction term for network type by sociocultural factor. The three dimensions of loneliness (perceived social isolation, emotional loneliness, and collective loneliness) were entered as the within-subject factor.

## **Results**

In the following section, we first report the number and distinctive structural profiles of the network types identified. We then examine differences across network type by sociocultural, sociodemographic and situational characteristics that were not entered into the cluster analysis. Finally, results from repeated measures ANOVAs relating social support network types, nativity status, and the three dimensions of loneliness are reported.

### **Social Support Network Typologies**

This two-step procedure allowed us to determine that a four-cluster solution was optimal. We based this conclusion on the most meaningful distribution of cases per cluster, maximization of differences between structural network characteristics, and minimization of differences in cases across structural characteristic within clusters (Litwin, 2001; S. Park et al., 2014). The two-step cluster analysis procedure revealed four distinct social support network types. One type, which we labelled Friends Focused, resembled a type identified in previous research with non-Latinos. Three additional clusters reflected variations of the previous Family Focused type. To distinguish these

variations, we labelled them: Extended Family, Co-Resident Family, and Restricted Family networks. Table 2.2 reports how the seven structural network characteristic variables differed significantly across the four clusters.

The Extended Family focused network type, akin to the idealized Latina/o family, was the least common type, representing only 7% of the sample ( $n=93$ ). Older Latina/os in this typology reported an average of 26 close social support network members, of which approximately 64% were children or other relatives. A majority of older Latina/os in this group reported frequent contact with both children and with other relatives, but not with friends. The Co-Resident Family type represented 30% of the sample ( $n=410$ ). This network type had an average network size of about 12 people, and was characterized by a majority of its members (70%) living with children and/or other relatives. Not surprisingly, most older Latina/os in this network type also had frequent contact with children (86%) and other relatives (54%), but again, not with friends. The Restricted Family type was characterized by a small network size of about five close social ties, on average. Additionally, on average, almost 90% of their close social support network was either children or other relatives. While a majority of individuals in this network type had frequent contact with children (58%), this was not the case for other relatives or for friends. Moreover, contrary to our hypothesis, the Restricted Family type represented the largest group, representing 37% of the sample ( $n=499$ ). Finally, the Friends Focused type, like the Restricted Family type, was also characterized by a small network size of approximately seven people, on average. However, on average, 59% of close social support network members were friends. Unlike all other network types, almost half

(42%) of older Latina/os in the Friends Focused type reported frequent contact with friends. This network type represented 26% of the sample ( $n=353$ ).

### **Sociodemographic, Sociocultural, and Situational Factors Across Network Types**

Contrary to our hypothesis, there were no differences across network types by age, gender, or nativity status. Among the four network typologies, the average age of respondents ranged from 63 to 65 years. With the exception of the Restricted Family network type (50% women), women made up a majority of respondents in the network (60%). Moreover, foreign-born Latina/os also made up a majority of most network types, as was reflected in the overall sample. The foreign-born group had, on average, a long length of residency in the United States ( $M = 35.97$  years). As such, follow-up analyses were conducted with the foreign-group only to determine whether length of residency varied across network type, but there were no significant differences. There were, however, significant differences in questionnaire language and subgroup heritage across network type. Adjusted residuals were examined as a post-hoc analysis to identify which cells were driving this difference. According to Bonferroni adjusted p-values corrected for multiple comparisons, significant differences by questionnaire language and heritage were found within the Friends Focused type. Specifically, people in the Friend Focused network were more likely to have completed the questionnaire in English than in Spanish, and they were also less likely to identify as Mexican-American.

As expected, there were significant differences in perceived neighborhood social cohesion across network types. Specifically, the difference between the Extended Family type, reporting the highest levels of perceived neighborhood social cohesion ( $M = 5.28$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ) and the Co-Resident Family Focused type ( $M = 5.09$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) were



significantly different from the Restricted Family network type, which reported the lowest perceived neighborhood social cohesion ( $M = 4.76$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ). This finding supported one of our alternative hypotheses that having close-knit social support network structures may be associated with living in communities where those network members and possibly other Latina/os also live.

### **Network Types, Sociocultural Factors, and Loneliness**

Findings from repeated measures ANOVAs for all three sociocultural models below can be found in Table 2.3.

**Nativity status.** Repeated measures ANOVAs revealed a highly significant between-subjects main effect associated with network type:  $F(3, 1316) = 44.11$ ,  $p < .001$  but the effects for nativity status,  $F(3, 1316) = 2.20$ ,  $p = .14$ , and nativity by network type,  $F(3, 1316) = 1.98$ ,  $p = .12$ , were not significant. Overall loneliness was highest among the Restricted Family network type ( $M = 1.75$ ,  $SE = .02$ ), followed by Friends Focused ( $M = 1.57$ ,  $SE = .03$ ), Co-Resident Family ( $M = 1.46$ ,  $SE = .02$ ); the Extended Family network exhibited the lowest overall loneliness ( $M = 1.26$ ,  $SE = .05$ ). All pairwise comparisons were statistically significantly different from one another.

The main effects for loneliness dimension,  $F(2, 2632) = 63.45$ ,  $p \leq .001$ , and the two-way interaction between loneliness dimension and network type,  $F(6, 2632) = 9.45$ ,  $p < .001$ , were significant; the loneliness dimension by nativity status was not significant,  $F(2, 2632) = 1.45$ ,  $p = .23$ . Overall, the level of reported collective loneliness ( $M = 1.65$ ,  $SE = .02$ ) was higher than emotional loneliness ( $M = 1.48$ ,  $SE = .02$ ), and perceived isolation ( $M = 1.40$ ,  $SE = .02$ ). Table 2.4 provides the descriptive information for mean-level differences on the loneliness subfacets by network type. Post-hoc one-way

ANOVAs revealed that perceived social isolation was higher in both the Friends Focused and Restricted Family networks than in the Extended and Co-Resident Family network types. Collective loneliness was highest in the Restricted Family network and lowest in the Extended Family type. There was no significant difference in collective loneliness between the Co-Resident Family and Friends Focused networks. Moreover, collective loneliness was significantly higher for the Co-Resident Family type compared to the Extended Family type, and significantly higher for the Restricted Family type than for the Friends Focused type. Interestingly, all pairwise comparisons on emotional loneliness were significantly different. Emotional loneliness was highest among the Restricted Family type, followed by the Friends Focused and Co-Resident Family types. The Extended Family type reported the lowest emotional loneliness.

There was also a significant within-subject three way interaction between loneliness dimension by network type and nativity status,  $F(6, 2632) = 2.67, p = .014$ . Three two-factor ANOVAs examining the interaction between network type and nativity status for each loneliness dimension separately were conducted. Results indicated that this finding was driven by the emotional subfacet of loneliness  $F(3, 1329) = 2.90, p = .03$ . Figure 2.1 shows that compared to foreign-born participants, U.S.-born participants belonging to the Extended and Restricted Family types reported higher emotional loneliness, but those belonging to the Friends Focused types reported lower loneliness. Interaction effects between network type and nativity were non-significant for perceived isolation  $F(3, 1334) = 1.33, p = .26$ , and collective loneliness  $F(3, 1324) = 2.24, p = .08$ .

**Questionnaire language and heritage.** All effects associated with

questionnaire language and heritage were consistent with those reported above for nativity. There was no main effect for questionnaire language,  $F(1,1316) = 1.59, p = .21$ , or heritage,  $F(1, 1316) = 1.02, p = .31$ , nor were there interaction effects between questionnaire language  $F(3, 1316) = 2.40, p = .07$  or heritage  $F(3, 1316) = 1.25, p = .29$  by network type on overall loneliness significant.

The main effects for loneliness dimension was significant for both the questionnaire language  $F(2,2632) = 68.66, p \leq .001$ , and subgroup heritage  $F(2,2632) = 54.48, p \leq .001$  models. This was also true for the two-way interaction between loneliness dimension and network type for both questionnaire language  $F(6,2632) = 9.41, p \leq .001$  and subgroup heritage  $F(6,2632) = 10.57, p \leq .001$  models.

There was also a significant within-subject three-way interaction between loneliness dimension, network type, and questionnaire language,  $F(6, 2632) = 2.26, p = .04$ . Three two-factor ANOVA post-hoc analyses examining the interaction between network type and questionnaire language on emotional loneliness revealed a similar pattern compared to the nativity model  $F(3, 1329) = 2.66, p = .05$ . Figure 2.2 shows that compared to participants who took the questionnaire in Spanish, participants who took the questionnaire in English belonging to the Extended and Restricted Family types reported higher emotional loneliness, but those belonging to the Friends Focused type reported lower loneliness. In addition, the interaction between network type and questionnaire language on the collective loneliness was also significant  $F(3, 1324) = 2.59, p = .05$ . Descriptively, compared to participants who took the questionnaire in Spanish, collective loneliness was higher for participants who took the questionnaire in English, when belonging to the Extended and Co-Resident Family types. However, there

were no questionnaire language differences in collective loneliness for those belonging to the Restricted Family type, but, compared to participants who took the questionnaire in Spanish, participants who took the questionnaire in English had lower collective loneliness when belonging to the Friends Focused type. The interaction effect between network type and nativity was non-significant for perceived isolation  $F(3, 1334) = 1.17, p = .32$ . Sensitivity analyses assessed the extent to which nativity status accounts for differences in the association between questionnaire language, network type and loneliness. A repeated measures ANCOVA controlling for nativity status indicated that the three-way interaction between questionnaire language, network type, and loneliness was still significant. There was no significant three-way interaction for loneliness dimension by network type by subgroup heritage.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of the current study was to better understand the nature of social support network structures and their associated loneliness outcomes among older Latina/os living in the United States. Using the convoy model of social relations as a guiding framework, the current study also examined the ways in which personal and situational sociocultural characteristics were related to social support networks and their associations with loneliness. We had several hypotheses regarding the structure and prevalence of different network types among older Latina/os, accounting for both the importance of cultural values prioritizing the family and the sociocultural nuances. We expected that the stereotypically large, extended family would be the largest network type, and that this network type would constitute older Latina/os who are most closely aligned to their cultures of origin (i.e., being foreign-born or preferring Spanish). In the

following sections, we first summarize and interpret network structures, their associations with loneliness, and the sociocultural nuances in relation to the four research questions. We then offer suggestions for future directions by outlining the current study's limitations. Finally, we conclude by discussing the major theoretical and practical implications of finding diverse network types among older Latina/os in the United States.

Our first research question aimed to examine the landscape of social support network types among older Latina/os in the United States. We found four network types in our study which partially confirmed our hypothesis. There were three different family-oriented networks (Extended, Co-Resident, and Restricted Family types), confirming our prediction that there would be several family-oriented network types. We hypothesized that a large network with extended family members who are frequently engaged would be most prevalent. One of the most interesting findings from this study was that although we hypothesized that the stereotypical large, Extended Family network would be the most common, it was in fact the least common network. Our findings indicate that conceptualizing Latina/o families as large and extended may be a misrepresentation of most older Latina/os' social reality. We believe the infrequency of large extended families may be a reflection of older Latina/os' own geographic migration away from family (Tienda & Mitchell, 2006) or their family members' migration. The more widespread prevalence of a Restricted Family type may also reflect older Latina/o's cultural adaptation toward more nuclear-family-oriented norms found in the United States (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2012).

Another interesting finding was that culturally relevant personal and situational characteristics were associated with network diversity. We did not have specific

predictions about the sociocultural make-up of network types, but we did find that networks more closely aligned with *familismo* were made primarily of older Latina/os more closely aligned with their cultures of origin. For instance, most older Latina/os in the Extended Family type took the questionnaire in Spanish whereas there were an equal number of Spanish and English questionnaire takers in the other three network types. One way of understanding this finding is that older Latina/os who predominantly speak Spanish may be more likely to teach their values to other family members, encouraging them to fulfill their cultural expectations. Relatedly, belonging to the Extended Family type was associated with greater neighborhood social cohesion. Viruell-Fuentes and Schulz (2009) found that neighborhood contexts are important for Latina/o immigrants' social integration to the extent that the broader community reinforces Latina/o identity. Therefore, it may be older Latina/os who feel welcomed by the larger community are affirmed in teaching and sharing their cultural values with others.

A third compelling finding was the association between network type and loneliness. The two social support network types most closely aligned with *familismo*—the Extended and Co-Resident Family types—were associated with the lowest loneliness. Moreover, sociocultural factors did not change this pattern, nor were there differences based on specific dimensions of loneliness. This set of findings may indicate that, having many family members present and engaged, even at a structural level, is unilaterally protective for the social well-being of older Latina/os. Put another way, older Latina/os, regardless of their sociocultural differences, appear to be most socially content when their social support networks align with cultural values.

Finally, we found that with respect to networks least aligned with the structural expectations prescribed by *familismo*, sociocultural characteristics differentiate who suffers most in terms of loneliness. In this study, U.S.-born Latina/os (and those who took the questionnaire in English) within the Restricted Family type reported greater emotional loneliness. Yet, it was the foreign-born group (and/or those who took the questionnaire in Spanish) within the Friends Focused type that reported higher collective loneliness. Generally, older Latina/os born in the United States are socialized into a U.S. society that values building emotional bonds outside of the family. It may be that when these older Latina/os are unable to engage in more elective relationships, having a small family network is not protective but, in fact, emotionally isolating. On the other hand, older Latina/os more closely tied to their culture who do find themselves in elective networks, that is Friends Focused networks seem to lack a sense of cultural belonging when their networks are not family-centric. In sum, older Latina/os who are outside of the large, interactive, extended family cultural norm, may seek social and emotional fulfillment from different types of networks depending on their sociocultural background.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Although making novel contributions to the literature, the current study has several limitations that should be discussed. The first set of limitations concerns variables used to assess social support network structure. For instance, a majority of the variables used to establish network typologies were based on social relationships deemed “close” and did not include variables about social ties that were present but not considered close. Moreover, individuals with missing frequency of contact data were coded as having frequent contact if they lived with family. However, it is possible that individuals who

live with someone do not see them frequently if they travel often. Including measures of distal social support network members in future research is especially important because many older Latina/os have cross-national family and friendship ties that may not have been accounted for in the current study. Because immigrant networks are constantly shifting, it would be equally important to assess how social support network types may change longitudinally, in general, and in response to network members' migration patterns over time.

In a similar vein, we do not have information on the personal and sociocultural characteristics of network members. Much of the research on social support network typologies incorporate these characteristics as part of network structure (Antonucci et al., 2013). Future research assessing network members' sociocultural characteristics would make it clear the extent to which older Latina/os are similar to their networks. Additional work in this area should not only collect age, gender, and socioeconomic status, of network members, but also collect relevant sociocultural characteristics, including whether network members live outside of the United States. Additionally, the *other family* relationship type was a broad category. Future work can collect more fine-grained information about the presence of other relationship types (i.e., siblings vs. aunts vs. cousins).

Another limitation was that we did not measure older Latina/o's expectations and desires about their ideal social support network structure. There was a clear association between the Restricted Family network and more loneliness. Yet links between other network types and loneliness seemed to indicate that older Latina/os more closely aligned with their cultures of origin feel most lonely when they are situated in network types that



deviate from the cultural norm of *familismo*. However, it will be important for future research to test this interpretation by directly measuring cultural values and expectations about the size, composition, proximity, and engagement of social support networks.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

It has been well-established that social relationships and loneliness are significant social determinants of health. As older Latina/os disproportionately suffer from chronic illness and morbidity, it is important to begin disentangling the mechanisms that underlie the relationship between social support networks, loneliness, and health outcomes among this population specifically. Our study found that, like previous research on *familismo*, family are present and integral to many older Latina/os' social support networks.

However, there is diversity among older Latina/o social support network structures. For instance, the culturally ideal large, extended, and self-sustaining network exists, but may not be as common as expected. Instead, a small Restricted Family network type is more common. This finding is especially important because the most prevalent network is also the least protective against loneliness. Given that networks are patterned along certain sociocultural characteristics, this research points to older Latina/os who are in need of help with bolstering their social support networks.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **STRUCTURAL SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK TYPES:**

#### **ASSOCIATIONS WITH PERCEIVED POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SUPPORT**

Individuals often turn to their social support networks for social support to cope with and adapt to stressful life circumstances and health decline in later life, but the mere presence of social relationships does not determine positive outcomes. Older adults' perception of the quality of their social support can influence whether social support networks are protective or consequential for health and overall quality of life (Antonucci et al., 2010; Ingersoll-Dayton, Morgan, & Antonucci, 1997; Newsom, Nishishiba, Morgan, & Rook, 2003). Previous research has demonstrated that different social support network configurations vary in their capacity for providing older adults with satisfactory social support (Birditt & Antonucci, 2007; Fiori, Antonucci, & Cortina, 2006; Fuller-Iglesias et al., 2015; Hawkey et al., 2008). For instance, culture is one factor influencing the configuration of social support networks, as relational values and norms provide important criteria against which older adults judge the quality of social support.

While much research has been dedicated to examining the complex association between social support network structure and social support quality among other groups, there has been little research on this topic among older Latina/os living in the United States. Older Latina/os are a growing demographic in the United States and tend to rely on their social support networks more than other groups, particularly if they struggle to

adapt to U.S. culture. Maintaining a preference for their native language, for example, is one sign of acculturation difficulty (Berry, 2005; Deyo, Diehl, Hazuda, & Stern, 1985; Lopez-Class, Castro, & Ramirez, 2011). Yet very little is known about the perceived adequacy of social support received by older Latina/os, or about how their different social contexts and acculturative backgrounds may be predictive. This paper fills the gap in the literature by investigating how the four social support network structure types found in the first dissertation paper relate to perceived positive and negative social support for English- vs. Spanish-preferring Latina/o older adults.

### **The Convoy Model of Social Relations**

The convoy model conceptualizes the social support network as the social relationships that surround and support an individual over the lifecourse (Antonucci et al., 2010). According to the convoy model, social support networks are complex, multifaceted, and contextual. This means that social support networks encompass a structure, various functions, and an individual's subjective evaluation of the adequacy of their social ties, all varying according to personal and situational characteristics specific to that individual. Within this framework, *social support network structure*, which refers to the size, relational composition, proximity, and contact frequency of different social ties, is the foundation for potential social support exchange within a network. Although previous research has found that the mere presence of social ties is somewhat beneficial to health and well-being (Thoits, 2011), much research has found that no single social support network type works for all individuals (Antonucci et al., 2010; B. Cornwell & Schafer, 2016; Fiori, Antonucci, et al., 2008; Litwin & Shiovitz-Ezra, 2011). Similarly, the convoy model suggests that an individual's perception of social support quality is one

of the most important dimensions predicting positive outcomes. Cultural norms and values not only guide how individuals structure their social support networks, but they also provide criteria against which to evaluate the adequacy of network quality. Therefore, the structure and quality of social support networks should also be considered with respect to cultural contexts within which those networks are embedded.

The following review of the literature will provide an outline of common social support network structural characteristics as they relate to positive and negative perceived social support quality, in general. There will be a focus on how older Latina/os' cultural norms may relate to expectations about social support network structure and quality. The review points to a gap in research that moves beyond expectations of support to examine the link between actual network structures and perceived quality among this group, thereby elucidating how associations between the personal, network structural, and qualitative components in the convoy model may play out in diverse cultural groups.

## **Literature Review**

### **Positive and Negative Perceived Quality of Social Support**

Although early research on social support focused heavily on the objective structural components of a social support network (i.e., network size and presence or absence of various relationship types), developments in the field have demonstrated that subjective experiences of social support are more important. Having a social support network is predictive of a host of well-being outcomes, but the perceived quality of support provided within a social support network shows much stronger associations than structural characteristics alone (Antonucci et al., 2010). Social support networks are beneficial inasmuch as individuals feel the support provided is satisfactory, or positive.

That is, social support is perceived as positive, if an individual believes that her/his network provides satisfactory aid in times of need and that she/he has opportunities to engage in enjoyable shared activities with network members. Alternatively, social support can also be perceived as negative, reflecting unmet expectations of help in times of need, rejection, or neglect (Rook, 2015).

Positive and negative social support are distinct, although interrelated concepts, and occur across relationship types to varying degrees (Antonucci et al., 1998; Bushman & Holt-Lunstad, 2009; Fingerman et al., 2004; Lincoln, Chatters, & Taylor, 2003). Social support perceived as negative has a greater influence on health and well-being outcomes such as increased stress, greater depressive symptomology, greater functional impairment, and lower life satisfaction, among others (Birditt et al., 2009; Newsom, Mahn, Rook, & Krause, 2008; Rook, 1997). Positive social support is, however, also associated with positive outcomes such as positive affect and decreased psychological distress (Rook, 2015), and among some groups of older adults, the experience of harmonious relationships is more salient than negative social interactions (Bertera, 2005; H. S. Kim, Sherman, Ko, & Taylor, 2006). Additionally, there is some research to suggest that the presence of negative support does not negate the benefits of positive support (Revenson, Schiaffino, Majerovitz, & Gibovsky, 1991). As such, investigating both positive and negative quality of social support may elucidate the link between social support and well-being.

### **Social Support Network Typologies and Support Quality**

Many studies examine the mediating role of support quality between social support structure and well-being, but few studies make an initial link between social

support network structure and quality. However, it is necessary to have some quantity of social ties and with certain relationship types to have high quality relations. Larger network size is predictive of lower perceived stress, fewer depressive symptoms, and better life satisfaction, but only when older adults are satisfied with their relationships (Fuller-Iglesias, 2015). The relational composition of networks is also important. As an example, in their assessment of the link between network structure and depression, Fuller-Iglesias et al. (2015) found that a large network size with fewer family members was related to lower depression, but only for those individuals who reported low negative support quality.

Previous work also suggests that specific relationships that are positive sources of support tend to outnumber negative or ambivalent ones (Rook, 2015). Positive support from children also buffers negative effects of social strain in other relationships, while positive support from other individuals buffers social strain in relationships older adults have with their children (Lincoln, 2000; Okun & Keith, 1998). Fingerman et al. (2004) find that elective relationships are more likely to be perceived as solely negative, while family relationships are more likely to be perceived as both positive and negative. Additionally, a certain level of contact frequency is necessary to facilitate opportunities to ask for and receive social support. Yet, too much, or too little contact with network members can lead to negative perceptions of support quality (Rook, 2003). The dynamic interplay between the structural characteristics of an individual's social support network ties warrants further examination of how overall levels of positive and negative support are derived from the social support network as a whole.

Recent social support research has begun focusing on investigating social support network structure typologies and social support quality simultaneously. Findings from such studies have been inconsistent. There are studies suggesting that positive social support, but not negative support, differ across network structure types. For instance, older adults in diverse network types (that is, networks with many different relationship types that are relatively engaged) seem to have the highest levels of positive social support while those in the restricted network (small networks usually limited to spousal and adult child relations) tend to have the lowest positive support (Medvene et al., 2016; Windsor, Rioseco, Fiori, Curtis, & Booth, 2016). Yet, Fiori et al. (2007) find evidence that positive social support quality is relatively high across all network types, even for those in small networks. Additionally, networks dominated by elective relationships, such as friendship-dominated networks, do not seem to be associated with dissatisfactory support (Suanet & Antonucci, 2016).

Because the convoy model posits that personal, situational, and cultural characteristics influence network structure and support quality, cross-cultural differences also contribute to further differences in network structures, and in the association between network structures and quality of support. In Lebanon, most networks revolve around family, where less positive support is related to geographic or emotional distance (Webster et al., 2014). Another study comparing network types in the United States and Japan found that American family networks were associated with highly negative support while family networks in Japan were no more negative than other network types (Fiori, Antonucci, et al., 2008). In their interpretation of those findings, the authors suggest that cultural norms and expectations regarding the value of maintaining solely positive social

relationships in general may account for differences in perceived social support quality. There is still limited research on how social support network types and associated support quality differ among other groups who have explicit cultural values surrounding family structure and functioning. There are even fewer studies examining intracultural variations in groups who contend with more than one set of cultural norms and values, such as immigrants.

### **Social Support Among Older Latina/os**

Among older Latina/os, the cultural norm of *familismo* often guides the structuring of social support networks. As an age-hierarchical set of beliefs, older Latina/o adults' social support networks are ideally, and often stereotypically characterized by large, extended families that remain highly engaged with one another throughout the lifecourse (Burnette, 1999; Campos et al., 2014; Garcia, 1993; Gleeson-Kreig et al., 2002). As a set of values oriented toward collectivism, *familismo* also prescribes that family relationships should be harmonious and positive and the value of *respeto* (or respect) guides older Latina/os to expect minimal levels of conflict from their family members (John et al., 1997). There is some qualitative research to suggest that some Latino/a families are inclusive of extended family, and that older adults tend to live together or close to their social support networks, facilitating frequent contact (J. L. Angel, R. J. Angel, McClellan, & Markides, 1996; Sarkisian, Gerena, & Gerstel, 2006; Sarkisian et al., 2007). Many Latina/os are embedded in such networks for socioeconomic reasons as much as cultural, but Latina/os report a sense of fulfillment from familial relationships (Beyene et al., 2002; Markides & Krause, 1985).



Older Latina/os who find themselves in stereotypically large, extended, and frequently in-contact social support network may perceive support provided within that network as more positive. Less is known, however, about the particular types of social support networks that are associated with more negative perceptions of support. This is important because, as found in the first dissertation paper, older Latina/o social support networks are more diverse than is expected from the stereotypes and ideals associated with *familismo*. In the first dissertation study, the large, involved, extended family did emerge (Extended Type), as did three other types. These included a Co-Resident Family type (with a mid-size network dominated by family with whom older adults also co-resided), a Restricted Family type (with a very small network size, mostly dominated by children), and a Friend type (also with a relatively small network size, mostly dominated by friends). Moreover, not all social support networks equally lend themselves to feelings of belonging, particularly when sociocultural differences amongst older Latina/os are accounted for.

Research suggests that immigrant groups often experience significant disruptions to their family networks (Antonucci, Jackson, & Biggs, 2007). For instance, older Latina/os must negotiate ideals of *familismo* within a contradictory cultural value system of individualism and autonomy within the United States (Kagitcibasi, 2005; Lopez-Class et al., 2011; Treas & Mazumdar, 2002). Within-group differences related to adjusting to another culture (the process known as acculturation), such as nativity status and language preference, can contribute to variation in the network structure and quality of older Latina/os. Although Latina/os in general are more likely to live in family households, those who are U.S.-born are especially likely to live in households with extended family

(Landale et al., 2006). Less acculturated Latina/os perceive *familismo* as a facilitator and rationale for positive family interactions, while others view it as a complicating factor (Gelman, 2012). This may be why more acculturated Latina/os tend to report less contact and fewer feelings of closeness with their elder family members than those who are less acculturated (Silverstein & Chen, 1999). Less acculturated older Latina/os claim a greater sense of family cohesion, even in the face of unmet expectations such as infrequent contact (M. E. Ruiz, 2007). A study by Mendez-Luck, S. R. Applewhite, Lara, and Toyokawa (2016), on the other hand, found that older Mexican-American caregivers reported inadequate support from family even when reporting that potential sources of support were available (Mendez-Luck et al., 2016). However, another study found that perceived family support does not differ according to acculturation level, place of birth, or where one grows up (Sabogal et al., 1987).

As a set of personal characteristics, sociocultural characteristics associated with acculturation fit within the convoy model's framework of factors influencing structure and quality of support. However, characteristics associated with acculturation, such as language preference, have rarely been examined in the study of social support network structure and quality. Research examining the role of personal acculturation characteristics on the multidimensional nature of social support is needed to better understand how older Latina/os in different networks perceive their social support as positive and negative.

### **Social Support Networks and Language Preference**

Language proficiency and preference is often associated with positive adjustment and well-being among older immigrant groups. This is because as a minority group,

Latina/os adjust to a culture with values and a language that is different from their country of origin (Gonzales, Fabrett, & Knight, 2009). For instance, older Latina/o immigrants with limited English proficiency are more likely to have poorer self-rated health and greater psychological distress than those who are more comfortable with English (G. Kim et al., 2011). Burr and Mutchler (2003) also found that stronger English language skills are associated with older Latina/os living independently. Moreover, strong beliefs in *familismo* exacerbate reactivity to negative support (Koerner & Shirai, 2012), and previous work has established a link between language preference and greater cultural adherence to traditional cultural beliefs (S. L. Applewhite, 1998). However, there are no studies examining whether perceived positive and negative social support differ based on language preference, nor is there work to determine whether language preference may moderate the association between social support network types and perceived positive and negative support.

### **Current Study**

Although qualitative work has suggested that older Latina/o social support networks are guided by specific cultural criteria that, in theory, shape its complexity, there is scant research assessing the multifaceted nature of perceived social support among this group on a national scale. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the association between holistic social support network structures (i.e., social support network types) and reported positive and negative social support quality among older Latina/os in a national dataset collected in the United States. Using the convoy model as a conceptual framework, the current study aims to expand work on the relative influence of personal and situational characteristics that are culturally relevant and associated with

certain role expectations and norms that shape the construction and subjective evaluation of social relationships (Antonucci et al., 2010). Among Latina/os, a group with an immigrant background, factors related to orientations toward dominant versus culturally-traditional expectations and norms are relevant to understanding how multiple dimensions of social support networks differ. This paper focuses on how language preference, as a proxy for orientations toward *familismo*, may mitigate the association between specific network configurations and perceived social support quality. The four social support network structure types (Restricted, Friends Focused, Co-Resident Family, and Extended) examined in this study were derived from a previous analysis (see Chapter 2).

Specifically, the current study addresses the following three research questions:

1. *Do levels of perceived positive and negative social support vary according to whether older Latina/os prefer English or Spanish?*

With respect to differences in support quality across language preference, we expect older Latina/os who prefer Spanish, thus more closely aligned with cultural norms of *familismo*, to report greater positive support than those who prefer English. This hypothesis is based on previous work suggesting that older Latina/os who are less acculturated tend to focus on the positive aspects of their social relationships to maintain ideals of family cohesion and harmony associated with *familismo* (Rivera et al., 2008; E. Ruiz, 2005). In a similar vein, we might also expect that Spanish-preferring older Latina/os report less negative support than those who prefer English. Alternatively, we may hypothesize that those who prefer Spanish report greater negative support

quality, as well as higher positive support quality, as they face challenges within their families as they negotiate contradictory cultural values (Coleman, Ganong, & Rothrauff, 2007; Miranda, Estrada, & Firpo-Jimenez, 2000; Rodriguez, Mira, Paez, & Myers, 2007).

2. *Do levels of perceived positive and negative social support among older Latina/os vary according to the social support network structure type they belong to?*

We hypothesize that the Extended and Co-Resident Family social support network

types will show substantially higher levels of perceived positive social support because these network types most closely resemble *familismo*'s ideal social support network as large, extensive, and engaged (Garcia, 1993; Keefe, 1984; Sarkisian et al., 2007). We expect the Restricted Family network type to show significantly lower positive support than both the Extended and Co-Resident Family types. There is very little research on friendships among older Latina/os, but we do expect that the Friends Focused type will show higher levels of positive support than the Restricted Family type specifically, as some evidence has shown that older Latina/os value some close friendships as family, especially when family relations are dissatisfactory (Magilvy, Congdon, Martinez, Davis, & Averill, 2000; E. Ruiz, 2005; Valadez, Lumadue, Gutierrez, & De Vries-Kell, 2006).

Across these two types, we expect the Restricted Family type to exhibit significantly higher negative social support levels than all three social support

networks because it is farthest removed from *familismo*. Moreover, the fact that one relationship type dominates this network may make it less likely that the rest of the network can compensate for older Latina/os, leading these older adults to rely too heavily on this source of support. With less control over disengaging from problematic social exchanges in the home, we expect the Co-Resident Family type to show higher levels of negative support than the more elective Extended Family and Friends Focused types.

3. *Does language preference moderate the association between levels of positive and negative social support and social support network type?*

Our predictions for the differences in the association between social support network type and perceived support quality based on language preference are as follows. With respect to positive support, we hypothesize that Spanish-preferring older Latina/os in the Extended and Co-Resident Family network types will report significantly higher levels of positive support compared to those who prefer English. We also hypothesize that English-preferring older Latina/os in the Friends Focused network type will report higher positive support than Spanish-preferring older adults in that network. This hypothesis is based on English-preferring older Latina/os being socialized within the broader U.S. norm of independence encouraging elective relationships that afford greater autonomy over social relationships (Adams & Torr, 1998; Rawlins, 1992; Siebert et al., 1999). In a similar vein, we also hypothesize that Spanish-preferring older Latina/os in the Restricted Family and Friends Focused network types will report higher levels of negative social support than those who prefer English, because these network types break from expectations of *familismo*.

## Methods

### Participants

The sample for this study come from the 2012/2014 waves of the Health and Retirement Study (HRS). HRS gives participants the option of taking the questionnaire in English or in Spanish. The sample included two subgroups of Latina/os, those who took the questionnaire in English ( $n = 692$ ) and those who took the questionnaire in Spanish ( $n = 663$ ), who completed the psychosocial questionnaire. Table 3.1 provides descriptive information about the participants in each of the eight groups (four Network Types by two Questionnaire Languages) in this current study design.

### Measures

**Network types.** Total network size, family composition, co-residence with family, and frequency of contact with children, other family, and friends were entered into a hierarchical two-step clustering procedure to derive network types. Chapter 2 of this dissertation provides a detailed description of these measures, how the network types were derived, and four social support network structure types that were found. For the present study, these four network types were treated as distinct groups and coded as follows: 1 = Extended Family type; 2 = Co-Resident Family type; 3 = Restricted Family network type; and 4 = Friends Focused network type.

**Perceived quality of social support.** Perceived positive and negative social support were measured using items previously used in social support research (Cohen, 2004; Uchino, 2009; see also Smith et al., 2017). Nine items were used to assess perceived positive social support among children, other family, and friends, respectively: “How much do they really understand the way you feel about things?”, “How much can

you rely on them if you have a serious problem?” and “How much can you open up to them if you need to talk about your worries?” (1 = not at all; 4 = a lot). A positive support score was calculated for the network overall by averaging across the 9 items ( $\alpha = .86$ ). Perceived support from spouse/partner was also collected but was excluded in the present study. To have a positive support score calculated, participants had to answer at least three of the positive support items. This composite overall score for the network weighs support from children, other family, and friends equally.

Twelve items were used to assess perceived negative social support among children, other family, friends, respectively: “How often do they make too many demands on you,” “How much do they criticize you,” “How much do they let you down when you are counting on them,” and “How much do they get on your nerves?” (1 = not at all; 4 = a lot). Similar to positive support, responses related to partner support were excluded and a unit-weighted composite negative support score was calculated for the network overall by averaging across the 12 items ( $\alpha = .87$ ). To have a negative support score calculated, participants had to answer at least three of the negative support items.

**Sociodemographic and sociocultural control variables.** Age was measured in years and gender was coded as follows (-1 = men, 1 = women). Questionnaire language was coded as (-1 = English, 1 = Spanish). Nativity status was assessed with the question: “Were you born in the U.S.?” (-1 = no, 1 = yes). Mexican American heritage was assessed with the question: coded as 0 = other Latina/o heritage, 1 = Mexican-American.

### **Analytic Strategy**

To assess differences in perceived positive and negative social support associated with network type and questionnaire language, two 4 x 2 between-subject factor



ANOVAs were conducted using the GLM procedure in SPSS: one model examined perceived positive social support as the dependent variable and the other examined perceived negative support. Although the two dependent variables could have been examined as a within-subject repeated measure in a combined 4 x 2 x 2 model, we adopted the separate analysis strategy for ease of interpretation and because the literature generally does not combine these two dimensions of support into an overall indicator of social support. To take account of the non-independence of these dimensions in the current study, however, we controlled for the dimension of the opposite valence in each model. In each model, network type was coded as four groups indicating membership in one of the four structural typologies derived in Chapter 2 of this dissertation (Extended Family, Co-Resident Family, Restricted Family, and Friends Focused network type). The Questionnaire Language factor was coded as two groups (English vs Spanish). The models included an interaction term for Network Type by Questionnaire Language, and each model also controlled for age, gender, nativity status, subgroup heritage.

## **Results**

Results from the two 4 x 2 factor ANOVA models revealed partial support for our hypotheses regarding perceived positive and negative support quality differences by social support network type and questionnaire language. Table 3.2 (a and b) summarizes the results for the separate models.

With regard to the first research question about a main effect of Questionnaire Language on the valence of perceived quality of support, our hypothesis was supported for perceived positive social support [ $F(1, 1345) = 5.62, p = .02$ ] but not for perceived negative support [ $F(3, 1345) = 1.87, p = .17$ ]. It is important to note that these findings

for the two support dimensions are over and above controls for the respective opposite valence of perceived support quality and other related sociodemographic and sociocultural covariates. Perceived positive support differed in the expected direction, such that participants who took the questionnaire in Spanish (estimated  $M = 3.20$ , 95% CI [3.13, 3.26]) reported higher positive support than participants who took the questionnaire in English (estimated  $M = 3.07$ , 95% CI [3.01, 3.26]).

Interestingly, our second research question addressing support quality differences across social support network types also indicated significant network type differences in the positive social support model [ $F(3, 1345) = 34.41, p < .001$ ] but not in the negative social support model [ $F(3, 1345) = .49, p = .69$ ]. Our hypothesis that the Extended and Co-Resident Family social support network types would show substantially higher levels of perceived positive social support was supported. Descriptively, the Extended Family network type reported the highest positive social support (estimated  $M = 3.34$ , 95% CI [3.22, 3.46]), followed by the Co-Resident Family type (estimated  $M = 3.27$ , 95% CI [3.21, 3.33]), the Friends Focused network (estimated  $M = 2.99$ , 95% CI [2.93, 3.05]), and the Restricted Family type (estimated  $M = 2.93$ , 95% CI [2.88, 2.98]). Pairwise comparisons from the univariate model indicated significant differences between the following network types: Extended and Co-Resident Family versus Restricted Family and Friends Focused type. Thus, our hypothesis that the Restricted Family network type would report significantly lower positive support than both the Extended Family and Co-Resident Family types was also supported. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 illustrate the interactions revealed for positive perceived support based on language preference and based on network type.

Finally, our hypotheses surrounding the third research question with respect to the moderating role of language preference on social support networks' association with support quality were not supported. The interaction between Network Type and Questionnaire language was not significant for perceived positive social support [ $F(3, 1345) = 1.17, p = .32$ ], or negative social support [ $F(3, 1345) = 1.41, p = .24$ ]. Table 3.3 provides the estimated means (with model covariates partialled) for positive and negative support quality by social support network typologies and questionnaire language.

A follow-up post-hoc 4 x 2 x 2 ANOVA with positive and negative perceived support included as the within-subjects third factor in the model was conducted to determine whether significant associations might exist between social support network types and perceived support. This more complex analysis design revealed a similar pattern of findings as reported above for the two separate models.

### **Discussion**

The current paper applies the convoy model of social relations as a conceptual framework and is the first to study the association among social support network types and perceived support quality among older Latina/os across the United States. Like previous research on social support network types and support quality in general, older Latina/os' social support network types are related to differences in social support, with networks resembling *familismo* stereotypes and ideals revealing greater positive support. We expand on previous work on the convoy model by finding that a personal sociocultural characteristic relevant to acculturation, language preference, is related to within-group differences in positive support quality. Interestingly, although language preference was significantly associated with perceived level of positive support quality,

language did not moderate the link between network type and perceived support quality. In this section, we summarize group comparisons in support quality across the four network types and by language preference, providing some interpretations. We conclude by outlining limitations and directions for future research, as well as outlining the theoretical and practical implications of this study.

With respect to our first research question, we sought to determine whether or not language preference might be an important personal characteristic to examine with respect to older Latina/os' perceptions of social support quality. Positive social support was higher among older Latina/os who preferred Spanish (as indicated by questionnaire language) than Latina/os who preferred English. This link between Spanish language and positive support quality has not yet been explicitly examined, but some previous work on acculturation differences in family relationships can guide two interpretations of this finding. First, older Latina/os who prefer Spanish may be trying to maintain their strong cultural beliefs by reinterpreting negative instances of social support in a positive light to an effort to maintain family harmony. Second, older Latina/os who are less acculturated may lower their expectations for social support (Magilvy et al., 2000). Our findings also demonstrated that language preference does not differentiate levels of negative support. Thus, older Latina/os may not evaluate inadequate support as negative, but instead, as an unavoidable consequence of their circumstances. Reframing negative interpersonal experiences as necessary circumstances for the sake of maintaining critical family ties may be one coping mechanism older Latina/os employ to maintain their cultural identity.

One of the most compelling findings related to our second question concerning the link between social support network types and positive and negative support also

indicated that differences exist in positive, but not negative support. We found that Extended and Co-Resident Family network types are associated with greater positive support when compared to the Restricted Family and Friends Focused types. These findings deviate slightly from previous research with older adults which show that positive support is high across all networks, including small network types (e.g., Fiori et al., 2007). In our study, however, it was the two network structures most closely aligned with cultural values of *familismo* that were related to more positive support, indicating that cultural backgrounds may make a difference in how older adults evaluate support adequacy. It may be that in larger networks involving several different relationship types, older Latina/os can shift their time and attention to those social ties that reinforce cultural notions of family engagement and harmony when other ties in the network do not. There were no differences in negative support across network type revealed in our study, contrary to work suggesting that Latina/os do experience family conflict when differences in cultural values are explicitly addressed (Gallant et al., 2010; M. Park et al., 2014). Aging is generally associated with a decrease in reports of negative social support (Akiyama, Antonucci, Takahashi, & Langfahl, 2003; Rook, Sorkin, & Zettel, 2004). Older Latina/os are no exception, and, in fact, may be even less likely to disclose negative social exchanges because the prioritization of collective well-being over individual exchanges of support does not necessarily accommodate negativity (Delgado, 1997; Hilton et al., 2012). However, there may have been differences in negative support if relationship-specific support quality had been assessed in our study (Birditt et al., 2009). By suggesting that there may be alternative meanings ascribed to positive and negative perceptions of support quality according to cultural differences, these findings

align with researchers' recommendations that positive and negative support be examined as distinct concepts.

Finally, with respect to our third research question, we found no influence of language preference on the association between network structure and support. This suggests that, among a majority of older Latina/os, extended close-knit social ties may be most satisfying primarily because they fulfill cultural expectations. Indeed, previous work indicates that regardless of acculturation, including language preference, older Latina/os believe in *familismo* and aspire to it (Ihara, Tompkins, & Sonethavilay, 2012; Kao & Travis, 2005; Sabogal et al., 1987). In this way, it may also be that older Latina/os are in Extended and Co-Resident Family networks because they actively work to maintain ties with social network members that are most receptive to and embracing of *familismo* cultural values.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Revealing the links among sociocultural relevant personal characteristics, social support network structure types and perceived support quality among older Latina/os is a novel contribution to the literature but there are several limitations that should be considered. First, the current study is cross-sectional, limiting our understanding of how changes in language preference and social support network structures may contribute to older Latina/os' perception of their support quality. The convoy model emphasizes a lifecourse perspective, recognizing that major life transitions greatly impact network size, structure, and function. For first- and later-generation older Latina/os, social support network structures are especially in flux as close social ties migrate within and across countries seeking opportunities. From a developmental perspective, social support

network structures in early life are likely predictive of social support networks structures in later life, especially with respect to being socialized with a specific set of cultural values. Future work should begin longitudinal social support network typology research with Latina/os early in life to examine developmental changes over time.

Relatedly, a second limitation of this study is that neither endorsements of *familismo*, nor expectations about social support, are explicitly measured among older Latina/os. While we can use *familismo* as a framework for interpreting why larger, more extended network structures are associated with more positive support, we cannot draw conclusions about whether older Latina/os would themselves point to cultural values as an explanation. Moreover, we also do not measure acculturation. Using language preference as a proxy for acculturation is not unprecedented in the literature and was the best measure available in the HRS. However, like social support networks, the concept of acculturation is a multidimensional construct. Future work would benefit from understanding the extent to which older Latina/os in different social support networks identify with and embody both U.S. and Latina/o values, beliefs, practices, and its relationship subjective evaluations of support adequacy. Finally, although understanding positive and negative support quality in their aggregate form informs us of the general state of support among older Latina/os, there is always variation with respect to relationship and support types. It will be important for subsequent research to examine how support quality and function differ across various relationship types (i.e., children, extended family members, friends, neighbors, fictive, kin) to elucidate any compensatory or buffering effects that may be advantageous in some network types but harmful in others.

## **Conclusion**

Theoretically, the current study illustrates the importance of including personal characteristics, such as language preference, that are socioculturally relevant when applying the convoy model as a framework for understanding how dimensions of social support networks vary across diverse groups. Differences found in support quality according to language preference hint at the salience of culture in older Latina/os' perception of how adequate their social support networks are. That is, identifying older Latina/os in network types that stray from cultural ideals can help service providers target programming to individuals in need of more or different support. Additionally, while more recent work on social support has justifiably attended to the reality of negative experiences, studying positive support is equally important among older adults whose culture prescribes maintaining positive support over conflict. Irrespective of language preference, it appears that cultural norms provide the most positive support contexts for older Latina/os.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **AMBIVALENCE ABOUT SUPPORT AMONG OLDER LATINA/OS**

In the United States, Latina/os are a rapidly growing demographic subgroup of the population over age 65. Indeed, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates the Latino/a population over the age of 65 to be approximately 5 million by the year 2020 (Administration on Aging, 2015). Although Latina/os in the United States have lower mortality rates compared to Whites, they are more likely to suffer from chronic health conditions (Hayward et al., 2014). Socioeconomic barriers operating in tandem with cultural values lead to aging Latina/os depending on support from family and friends to meet their needs (Guo et al., 2015; Peek et al., 2012). However, their social support networks may not be able to address all their needs, which can result in ambivalence (i.e., perceptions that are both positive and negative) about support quality. Ambivalent perceptions of social support have been linked to poor health outcomes (Uchino et al., 2013; Uchino et al., 2012). This paper examines the interrelationship between sociocultural characteristics, structural support network dimensions, and ambivalence about social support quality among older Latina/os in the United States.

#### **The Convoy Model of Social Relations**

Assessing the multidimensional nature of social support networks elucidates the association between social support and well-being. The convoy model of social relations provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding how characteristics of the

person, situation, and dimensions of social support are interrelated. According to this convoy model, an individual's personal characteristics (e.g., age and gender) shape their expectations about the structure and function of social support networks (Antonucci et al., 2013; Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). The structural dimension of social support networks includes the number of people to whom an individual feels emotionally close, the geographic proximity to these individuals, and the frequency of contact with them. Personal sociocultural characteristics also influence the presence and closeness of different relationship types (i.e., children, relatives, and friends) that provide support in an individual's social support network (Adams & Blieszner, 1994; Burholt & Dobbs, 2014; Fiori, Antonucci, et al., 2008). Along with personal characteristics, structural dimensions also impact an individual's satisfaction with the adequacy of different types of support exchanged. In other words, individuals often base their subjective evaluation of support on the extent to which their expectations about support structures are fulfilled. The perceived adequacy of social support influences health and well-being by enhancing an individual's self-esteem (Krause, 1987), self-efficacy (Fiori, Mcilvane, Brown, & Antonucci, 2006), and sense of belonging (Thoits, 2011).

### **Literature Review**

In the following section, we review literature on the personal sociocultural characteristics relevant to social support among older Latina/os' social support, as well as the dimensions of social support network structure that are influenced by cultural norms. We also review literature on older Latina/os' perceived quality of social support, focusing on differences across personal sociocultural characteristics and types of social support.

**Personal sociocultural characteristics.** According to the convoy model, social support networks are influenced by social norms and cultural values. Among Latina/os, *familismo* is a set of traditional cultural values that prioritizes family needs and unity over those of individuals (Perez & Cruess, 2014). *Familismo* generally functions in an age-hierarchical fashion, with older family members holding a highly respected position in the family. For older Latina/os, respect is often expected in the form of family members remaining physically and emotionally close and providing housing, help, and caregiving (R. A. Johnson et al., 1997; Min & Barrio, 2009). Older Latina/os report a greater sense of satisfaction with aging and higher levels of functioning when they believe the support received from family members meets their expectations of *familismo* (Beyene et al., 2002; Hilton et al., 2012).

The convoy model posits that personal characteristics (e.g., age and gender) shape social support networks and social support (Antonucci, Akiyama, & Takahashi, 2004). Personal sociocultural characteristics may be particularly relevant to older Latina/os. As a diverse group, Latina/o older adults are distinguished by three key characteristics: nativity status, language preference, and subgroup heritage.

***Nativity and language preference.*** Previous research has found that immigration tends to disrupt behaviors related to cultural norms about the closeness and role of family and friends. For instance, older foreign-born Latina/os tend to be more socially and geographically isolated from their families than those who are born in the United States (Gurak & Kritz, 2010). Additionally, older Latina/os in general are more likely to live in households that include their families, but being native-U.S.-born increases the likelihood of belonging to a household that includes immediate and extended family residents

(Landale et al., 2006). Limited English proficiency can often lead to strained relationships due to communication barriers with family members with less proficiency in speaking Spanish (Korte, 1982).

***Subgroup heritage.*** Most of the research on support among older Latina/os is based primarily on Mexican-Americans, the largest subgroup of older Latina/os in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Krause and Goldenhar (1992) found that older immigrants from Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico have varying levels of psychological distress attributable to complex group differences in language proficiency and social integration. Yet few studies have examined precisely how satisfaction with family involvement differs among other Latina/o older adult subgroups, particularly on a national level (Vega, 1990).

Other situational characteristics associated with social support also distinguish Latina/o older adults. Previous research has found, for instance, that education and couplehood status are important predictors of support exchanges among older Latina/os (J. L. Angel, R. J. Angel, & Henderson, 1997).

**Structural dimensions of social support.** The convoy model posits that perceived quality of support depends on the relative match between the normed expectations about and the actual structure of social support networks (Antonucci, 2001). According to the convoy model, such structural dimensions include the overall size of one's social support network, geographic proximity to, and the frequency of contact with different network members (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987; Fiori et al., 2007). Social and cultural norms influence the patterning of each of these dimensions. Among Latina/os, large extended family networks are the social norm (Garcia, 1993; Gleeson-Kreig et al.,

2002). Furthermore, older Latina/os tend to feel emotionally close to, and expect support from, extended family (Campos et al., 2014; M. E. Ruiz, 2007). Such feelings are often facilitated by frequent in-person gatherings among family members with whom older Latina/os are also more likely to live with or near (Burr, Mutchler, & Gerst-Emerson, 2013; Keefe, 1984). However, previous work examining the connection between structural dimensions of and ambivalent perceptions about support has most commonly looked only within the parent-child relationship (Silverstein & Giarrusso, 2010). When considering the social support networks of Latina/os, it is most culturally relevant to consider the relationship between ambivalence and structural dimensions of support among extended family and friend ties. Moreover, including extended family and friends in studies of ambivalence can elucidate the prevalence of ambivalence in social support networks more broadly.

### **Perceived Quality of Social Support**

**Emotional and instrumental functions of social support.** Social support serves many different functions according to the convoy model, two of which are emotional and instrumental support (Antonucci, 2001; Birditt, Antonucci, & Tighe, 2012). Emotional support refers to others being present during difficult times and communicating encouragement and understanding. Instrumental support refers to more tangible, helping actions such as providing transportation and running errands. Irrespective of nativity status, older Latina/os highly value emotional support from their families (M. E. Ruiz, 2007; Sanchez-Ayendez, 1988; Steidel & Contreras, 2003). R. J. Angel, J. L. Angel, Lee, and Markides (1999) found that older Latina/o immigrants migrate to the United States to both give and receive daily instrumental support. Older Latina/o immigrants also look to

their social support networks for emotional support to cope with the stress of adapting to a new culture (Tienda, 1980). Elder Latina/os born in the United States, on the other hand, are more likely to utilize formal health and social services in addition to or in place of support from family and friends (Calderón-Rosado, Morrill, Chang, & Tennstedt, 2002). This may indicate that inadequacies in instrumental support are less salient to older Latina/os born in the United States. Indeed, foreign-born older Latina/os, and older Latina/os struggling with English language proficiency are more likely to depend on their social support networks as their primary source of emotional and instrumental support (Delgado, 1997; Mulvaney-Day et al., 2007). Researchers have also found variability with respect to subgroups of older Latina/os. For example, Mexican-Americans and other Latina/o subgroups differ in the extent to which they rely on formal versus informal support (Dietz, John, & Roy, 1998; Tran & Dhooper, 1996). As such, it is important to understand patterns of social support quality for both emotional and instrumental types of support. Further, we must examine differences in these support functions with respect to the extended network of support.

**Ambivalence about support.** According to the convoy model, the benefits of social support network structures are most evident when an individual is satisfied with support received from their social support network (Antonucci, 2001). Perceptions about the quality of social support are the most common assessment of an individual's satisfaction with support. The quality of support ranges from positive, to negative, to indifferent (Rook, 2015). However, individuals often experience a combination of positive and negative feelings, also referred to as ambivalence, about their relationships (Uchino et al., 2012). Older Latina/os may be especially prone to ambivalence about their

relationships with family and friends because their expectations are influenced by competing cultural norms.

Traditional Latina/o cultural values prescribe the ideal support network structure as large and involved (Sabogal et al., 1987), but dominant U.S. norms are based on the nuclear family and on maintaining independence (Swartz, 2009). For example, some studies have found that older Latina/os have high expectations about support that are unable to be met by family and friends who are dealing with competing responsibilities (Cox & Gelfand, 1987; Koerner & Shirai, 2012). The negotiation of tension in cultural values can manifest in many ways, including as ambivalent perceptions of support. It stands to reason that when social support network structure norms based on *familismo* are unfulfilled, older Latina/os may feel conflicted about asserting that support from these networks is satisfactory. Yet there has been limited research devoted to examining the association between perceived quality of social ties and the actual structure of those ties, namely network size, geographic proximity, and frequency of contact.

Additionally, the extent to which contradictory cultural norms manifest as ambivalent perceptions can vary according to sociocultural characteristics. For instance, older foreign-born Latina/os report tensions in their close social ties because they believe their U.S.-born family members have adopted norms of individualism and autonomy, thus deprioritizing the needs of elders (Beyene et al., 2002; Cox & Gelfand, 1987). This suggests that personal sociocultural characteristics may have a direct influence on the perceived quality of social support and is consistent with the convoy model of social relations, which posits that perceived quality of support differs according to personal characteristics because various dimensions of social support network structure are more

relevant to some groups than to others (Antonucci, 1985). Some research also suggests that among socially isolated older Latina/os, those who are foreign-born are more likely to report mixed feelings about their social ties (Hilton et al., 2012). Nativity status, as well as language preference and subgroup heritage, may have an indirect influence on perceived quality of support by influencing the salience of structural dimensions of social support networks. However, few studies have examined this moderating link.

### **Current Study**

The current work is driven by the need to better understand how components of the convoy model are interrelated when taking into account personal and network structure characteristics relevant to Latina/os. Three research questions are addressed in this study. The questions examine ambivalent perceptions about social support and their associated social support network structural dimensions across personal sociocultural characteristics (i.e., nativity status, language, and subgroup heritage).

*First, what is the association between personal sociocultural characteristics and perceived quality of social support? We hypothesize the following:*

1. Ambivalence about support will be more likely among foreign-born Latina/os. U.S.-born older Latina/os are socialized into contradictory cultural norms about family from birth, allowing them to reconcile tensions in expectations about support. However, foreign-born Latina/os are often socialized in their countries of origin, and may be less flexible when cultural values are not enacted.
2. A larger proportion of those who take the questionnaire in Spanish will report ambivalence. We base this prediction on previous research findings



suggesting that dominant use of the Spanish language makes it difficult to maintain connections with English-speaking family and friends (S. R. Applewhite & Gonzales, 2012).

3. We do not have any specific predictions about ambivalent perceptions about support across Latina/o subgroups because the research in this area is scant.

*Second, what is the relationship between structural dimensions and perceived quality of social support? Irrespective of sociocultural characteristics, we examine how structural dimensions of social support networks (i.e., number of close social ties, geographic proximity, and frequency of contact) are related to the likelihood of older Latina/os reporting ambivalence about support. Based on previous research regarding values and behaviors aligned with familismo (Comeau, 2012), we hypothesize the following:*

1. Fewer close social ties will be associated with an increased likelihood of ambivalence about support.
2. Being geographically distant from family and friends will be associated with an increased likelihood of ambivalence about support.
3. Having infrequent contact will be associated with an increased likelihood of ambivalence about support.

*Third, do nativity status, language preference, and Latina/o subgroup heritage influence the relationship between structural dimensions of social support and the likelihood of perceived quality of support? We hypothesize the following:*

1. Ambivalence will be especially likely among those foreign-born older Latina/os who have fewer close social ties; are geographically distant from children, other family, and friends; and have infrequent contact.
2. We have similar hypotheses about those who took the questionnaire in Spanish. Ambivalence will be especially likely among those older Latina/os who took the questionnaire in Spanish with fewer close social ties; are geographically distant from children, other family, and friends; and have infrequent contact.
3. We have no specific predictions across subgroups of older Latina/os due to lack of research in this area.

## **Methods**

### **Sample**

Data are from the 2012 and 2014 waves of the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), a nationally representative study in the United States (for a detailed description of sampling design, see Sonnega et al., 2014). Using questions regarding Latina/o ethnicity and nativity status (see Measures), inclusion criteria for the present study were: being 50 years of age and older, self-identifying as Latina/o and reporting nativity status, and completing a self-administered psychosocial questionnaire in either 2012 or 2014 (Smith et al., 2013). Each biennial wave, a rotating random 50% of the HRS panel is interviewed in person and asked to complete the psychosocial questionnaire and return it by mail; this study combined samples from two waves. The initial sample included subgroups of U.S.-born ( $n = 674$ ) and foreign-born ( $n = 911$ ) Latina/os. As shown in Table 4.1, most foreign-born participants took the questionnaire in Spanish, but there were some U.S.-

born participants who did so, as well. Although we report the initial sample ( $N = 1,585$ ), analytic samples associated with support from children, other family, and friends were reduced because participants reported that they did not have either children, other family, or friends. Discrepancies in the initial and analytical samples are also attributable to participants who did not complete questions pertaining to perceived quality of support. Missing data are discussed in further detail in the Results section.

## **Measures**

**Personal sociocultural characteristics.** Nativity status was assessed with the question: “Were you born in the U.S.?” (-1 = no, 1 = yes). Participants were given an option to take the questionnaire in English (-1) or in Spanish (1), and their choice was used as a proxy measure for language preference. Latina/o subgroup heritage was coded (-1 = other/Hispanic type unknown and 1 = Mexican American). Specific details about heritage other than Mexican American are not publically available in HRS data.

**Structural dimensions of social support.** Several structural dimensions of social support were included: (a) geographic proximity to nuclear and extended family, (b) number of close social ties; and (c) frequency of contact with family and friends. For geographic proximity to children, any participant who reported that at least one child lived with them or answered yes to the following question: “Do any of your children who do not live with you live within 10 miles of you?” was categorized as having children live with them or nearby. We coded geographic proximity to family/friends as (-1= no, 1= yes) if participants answered “yes” to the related questions: “Besides the people living with you, do you have any [relatives/good friends] in your neighborhood?” Number of close social ties with children, immediate and/or extended family, and friends, was

assessed using three items: “How many of your [children/other family/friends] would you say you have a close relationship with?” Frequency of in-person contact with nuclear and extended family was measured using three items: “On average, how often do you meet up with any of your [children/other family/friends] not counting any who live with you?” (-1 = less than weekly, 1 = at least weekly or more often).

**Perceptions of emotional and instrumental support quality.** Items about perceived quality of emotional and instrumental support were asked separately for children, other family (i.e., brothers or sisters, parents, cousins or grandchildren), and friends. Respondents were categorized as having positivity, ambivalence, indifference, or negativity toward emotional support based on their responses to the following positively-worded question: “How much do they really understand the way you feel?” and the following negatively-worded question: “How much do they criticize you?” Responses were coded on a Likert scale (1 = not at all through 4 = a lot). Similar to Uchino et al. (2004) classification scheme, positivity was defined by responses of *a little, some, or a lot* to the positively worded question but *not at all* to the negatively worded question. Ambivalence was defined by responses of *a little, some, or a lot* to both the positively and the negatively worded questions. Indifference was defined by responses of *not at all* to both positively and negatively worded support questions. Negativity was defined by responses of *not at all* to the positively worded question but *a little, some, or a lot* to the negatively worded question. The same classification scheme was applied to instrumental support based on the following positively-worded question: “How much can you rely on them if you have a serious problem?” and the following negatively-worded question: “How much do they let you down when you are counting on them?”

## **Analytic Strategy**

The primary focus of this paper is on the extent to which ambivalent feelings occur as compared to positive, harmonious feelings more commonly associated with *familismo* (Rodriguez et al., 2007). Preliminary analyses indicated that fewer than 7% of respondents reported indifference and negativity. Therefore, these two types of perceived quality were excluded from all analyses. Initially, descriptive chi-square analyses were run separately for each type of relationship (children, other family, friends) and type of support (emotional, instrumental) to assess the frequency of reporting ambivalence versus positive perceptions about support based on nativity status, language preference, and Latina/o subgroup heritage. When the results were significant, one-sample chi-square analyses were used to identify the specific sociocultural differences.

Logistic regressions were used to examine predictors of perceptions of ambivalence versus positivity about support. Perceptions about support were dichotomized such that ambivalence about support could be compared to positivity about support (0 = positive, 1 = ambivalent). Six separate models were included to differentiate emotional and instrumental support for each of the three relationship types (i.e., children, other family, friends).

**Covariates.** Sociodemographic variables known to be associated with social support, such as age, gender (-1 = men, 1 = women), years of education, and couplehood status (-1 = not coupled, 1 = coupled; Antonucci et al., 2010), were entered as covariates in the first step of each model. In addition, we included years living in the United States as an important control variable specific to the population. Years living in the United States was equated with age among the U.S-born participants and created by subtracting

answers to, “In what year did you first come to live in the United States?” from 2014 and 2012, respectively, for foreign-born participants. Nativity status, questionnaire language, and Latina/o subgroup heritage were also included as covariates.

**Missing data.** It is important to note that for each type of support (emotional and instrumental) within each relationship type (children, other family, and friends), a proportion of respondents had missing responses either because they did not report having children, other family, or friends, respectively, or because they did not answer the social support items used to create our support quality construct. When there was missing data for a relationship and/or support types, participants were excluded only from the analyses specific to the relationship and/or support type that was missing. The following percentages represent missing data for each relationship type by support type. For emotional support from children, 11% were missing ( $n=181$ ); 12% were missing for instrumental support ( $n=187$ ). With respect to emotional support from other family, 10% were missing ( $n=150$ ); 16% were missing for instrumental support ( $n=158$ ). With respect to emotional support from friends, 18% were missing ( $n=282$ ); 17% were missing for instrumental support ( $n=285$ ). Discriminant analyses revealed that nativity status, age, education, couplehood status, and questionnaire language were all associated with having missing data, although the relevance and influence of these factors differed according to support and relationship type.

## **Results**

### **Ambivalent Perceptions across Nativity Status, Language, and Latina/o Subgroup Heritage**

Results from descriptive chi-square analyses largely supported our hypotheses that the frequency of reported ambivalence would vary according to nativity status, language, and Latina/o subgroup heritage. However, these findings were not significant across all relationship and support types. See Table 4.2 for percentages of Latina/os reporting ambivalence and positivity about support according to personal sociocultural characteristics.

Our hypothesis that more foreign-born Latina/os would be likely to report ambivalence about support was partially confirmed. Among the foreign-born group, there were no significant differences in reporting ambivalence versus positivity about emotional or instrumental support for most relationship types, with the exception of instrumental support from friends (53.4% ambivalent vs. 46.6% positive). However, among the U.S.-born group, significantly more participants reported positivity than ambivalence about emotional and instrumental support across most relationship types, with the exception of instrumental support from children (52.5% ambivalent vs. 47.5% positive). Comparing across nativity status groups, significantly more foreign-born than U.S.-born participants reported ambivalence about emotional support from children, other family, and friends, as well as instrumental support from friends. Compared to foreign-born participants, significantly more U.S.-born participants reported positivity about emotional support from children.

We also found partial confirmation for our hypothesis that taking the questionnaire in Spanish would be associated with more frequent reports of ambivalence. Among those who took the questionnaire in English, significantly more participants reported positivity versus ambivalence about both emotional and instrumental support for

all relationship types, with the exception of instrumental support from children (53.5% ambivalent vs. 46.3% positive). Among those who took the questionnaire in Spanish, although typically more participants reported positivity versus ambivalence about emotional support from children and other family, this pattern was reversed for instrumental support from friends (52.3% ambivalent vs. 47.7% positive). Comparing across groups, significantly more participants taking the questionnaire in English compared to participants taking the questionnaire in Spanish reported ambivalence about instrumental support from children. However, fewer participants taking the questionnaire in English compared to participants taking the questionnaire in Spanish reported ambivalence about emotional and instrumental support from friends.

With respect to Latina/o subgroup heritage, among the non-Mexican American group, there were no significant differences in reporting positivity versus ambivalence about support. Among Mexican-Americans, significantly more participants reported positivity versus ambivalence about emotional and instrumental support from other family and from friends. Comparing across groups, significantly more non-Mexican-Americans than Mexican-Americans reported ambivalence about emotional support from children and other family, and about instrumental support from other family and friends. Significantly more Mexican-American than non-Mexican-American participants reported positivity about emotional support from children, other family, and friends. Additionally, significantly more Mexican-American than non-Mexican-American participants reported positivity about instrumental support from other family and friends.

### **Structural Dimensions of Support as Predictors of Ambivalence**



Logistic regression results are presented in Table 4.3. Our predictions that fewer close network members; being geographically distant from children, family, and friends; and having infrequent contact would all be related to an increased likelihood of ambivalence were partially supported. Fewer close social ties increased the likelihood of ambivalence about emotional and instrumental support from other family and from friends.

Contrary to our hypothesis, geographic proximity to other family—that is, having family members live nearby—was associated with an increased likelihood of reporting ambivalence about both emotional and instrumental support from other family. Finally, infrequent contact with children increased the likelihood of ambivalence about support from children, but only with respect to instrumental support.

### **Personal Sociocultural Characteristics as Moderators**

Nativity status, questionnaire language, and Latina/o subgroup heritage all moderated the relationship between structural dimensions of support and likelihood of ambivalence. Contrary to our hypothesis, the likelihood of reporting ambivalence about instrumental support from children was especially high for U.S.-born older Latina/os who lived with or near their children (see Figure 4.1). Similar results were found for older Latina/os who took the questionnaire in English. However, in the case of instrumental support from children, our hypothesis that infrequent contact would increase the likelihood of ambivalence for those who took the questionnaire in Spanish was confirmed.

In line with our hypothesis, the likelihood of ambivalence about emotional and instrumental support from other family was especially high for those in the foreign-born

group who reported infrequent contact as opposed to frequent contact. Results were similar with respect to increased likelihood of ambivalence about support for participants who took the questionnaire in Spanish and reported infrequent contact (see Figure 4.2).

The likelihood of ambivalence about emotional support from other family was particularly high among those in the non-Mexican-American group who reported infrequent contact with other family.

There were no moderation effects for any personal sociocultural characteristics with respect to any type of support with friends.

### **Discussion**

The current study is one of the first to investigate ambivalent perceptions about support among older Latina/os. Extending the convoy model of social relations to Latina/o elders, findings reveal a general picture of how the prevalence of ambivalence is nuanced according to nativity status, language preference, and Latina/o subgroup heritage. Indeed, previous work has demonstrated that culture matters in the ways in which social support is subjectively evaluated (Ajrouch, 2005; Fiori, Consedine, & Magai, 2008). Building on this work, our results suggest that even within cultural groups, specific attributes like nativity status and language can differentiate how individuals perceive the quality of their social support. Compared to U.S.-born participants, more foreign-born participants and Spanish questionnaire takers reported ambivalence about emotional support in particular. Ambivalence appears to be a relevant construct among older Latina/os with sociocultural characteristics that are more closely tied to cultures-of-origin. That is, negotiating contradictory norms about social support among Latina/os and

within dominant U.S. society was more likely to manifest as ambivalent perceptions about support among foreign-born Latina/os and those preferring Spanish.

This study also extends previous research by providing evidence of ambivalence in relationships outside the parent–child relationship. We found evidence that differences in support quality across various relationship types differ along sociocultural characteristics. These are important findings because older Latina/os value and rely on extended family networks to meet their needs; ambivalence about their broader network may reflect inadequate support, putting them at risk for a variety of health issues (R. J. Angel, 2009).

Our work also sheds light on what occurs when large physically and emotionally close network structures, idealized by *familismo*, do not exist. We find that under certain conditions, violations of this idealized network structure are linked to ambivalence about support. For instance, in our study, older Latina/os who reported infrequent meetings with family were more likely to feel ambivalent about social support. Moreover, having fewer close social ties was also related to greater likelihood of ambivalence. Unexpectedly, we found that living close to family made older Latina/os more likely to perceive social support with ambivalence. It may be that having family members living nearby drains older Latina/os' resources because their family members require their assistance (Becker et al., 2003), and the needs of their family members may lead older Latina/os to have mixed perceptions about whether that support is reliable. Seemingly, both violations and fulfillment of cultural expectations about support uniquely contribute to ambivalent perceptions. To better understand how ambivalence influences negative health outcomes, future research should examine the conditions under which violations

and fulfillments of expectations are either protective of or detrimental to older Latina/os social relationships.

One of the most intriguing results from this study was that violations of *familismo*-oriented family structure do not impact all older Latina/os in the same way. As expected, older Latina/os more closely affiliated with their cultures of origin (i.e., those who are foreign-born and those preferring Spanish) were susceptible to ambivalence. This susceptibility was especially evident when they reported infrequent contact with family and friends. Surprisingly, geographic proximity to, not distance from children made U.S.-born Latina/os more susceptible to ambivalence. Frequent in-person meetings to reinforce cultural values about support are vital to older Latina/os who are foreign-born and who are Spanish-speaking and believe very strongly in families prioritizing their needs (G. Marín, 1993; Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000). These meetings with family members are important for intergenerational transmission of cultural values that prescribe the very network structures and behaviors that make support available (Olmedo, 1999).

Moreover, our findings also point to the importance of examining social support across different Latina/o subgroups. Researchers have suggested that older Latina/os of various national backgrounds face significantly different issues while living in the United States (Tran & Dhooper, 1996). Our findings expand on this work by revealing that one of the major social support issues faced by non-Mexican-American older adults is ambivalence about support due to limited frequency of contact with family. If health and social services are to plan effective interventions, it will be important to further examine how increasing frequency of contact can improve support. Future research would benefit

from qualitative inquiry into the political and access barriers specific non-Mexican-American elder groups face in maintaining consistent contact with family.

One especially surprising finding was that U.S.-born Latina/os experience ambivalence when the structure of their support network is in line with *familismo*. That is, compared to U.S.-born older Latina/os who lived away from children, U.S.-born Latina/os living with or close to children were especially likely to report ambivalence, specifically with respect to instrumental support. The same was true for those who took the questionnaire in English. It may be that older U.S.-born Latina/os have been socialized into U.S. norms. They may expect their children to be independent and autonomous, while children who live with them or nearby may be struggling to meet their own needs. This may pose a drain on older U.S.-Latina/os' ability to see their children as reliable sources of support. In this case, U.S.-born and English-speaking older Latina/os may be struggling with biculturalism, not in terms of maintaining culture of origin, but in fulfilling dominant U.S. norms of independence and autonomy. The fact that older Latina/os with different sociocultural characteristics can experience ambivalence for opposing reasons warrants further research into understanding how cultural values shape expectations about support.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

This study expands upon previous research by examining contradictory evaluations of support and including several types of relationships outside of the typically investigated parent-child relationship. Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, to assess ambivalence, we adapted an approach similar to Uchino et al. (2004), but where Uchino examines ambivalence in relation to specific individuals, HRS

data only allow us to examine ambivalence vis-a-vis broad relationship types. Future research should examine specific dyadic relationships. Second, this study relied on structural dimensions of support that were proxies of *familismo*. Future research should include culturally specific measures of *familismo*, for example the Familism Scale (Sabogal et al., 1987), and the Latino Values Scale (B. S. K. Kim, Soliz, Orellana, & Alamilla, 2009). Measuring cultural values themselves and their associated expectations of support across sociocultural characteristics would allow us to better understand how dimensions of support structure differentially influence ambivalence. Furthermore, foreign-born older adults in this study lived in the United States for a lengthy amount of time: an average of 36 years. Subsequent investigations should examine the relationship between structure of support and ambivalence among older Latina/os who have lived in the United States for shorter periods of time. Intergenerational patterns of migration, including reasons for migrating at different points in the lifecourse, should also be investigated as potential moderators between network structure and perceived quality of support.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Poor health among older Latina/os is often related to socioeconomic factors including low rates of health insurance coverage and less access to health and social services (R. J. Angel, 2009; Hummer & Hayward, 2015). Our work examines the social support networks of these older adults and points to the importance of perceptions of support. We suggest that future research examining health disparities among older Latina/os should include this vital aspect of support adequacy. Specifically, since older Latina/os depend on family and friends for healthcare and caregiving, the presence of

ambivalence represents uncertainty and tension that may threaten social support networks that are already stretched thin (Flores, Hinton, Barker, Franz, & Velasquez, 2009; Valdez & Arce, 2000).

While this study provides evidence that the nuclear and extended family can be and are an important source of support and care for aging Latina/os, it also suggests that they may not have adequate support. This inadequacy is more common among those who are foreign-born and Spanish-speaking. As evidenced by research from Landale and Oropesa (2007), changes in economic status, migration, and fertility patterns have led to a decrease in the prevalence of extended family households, and an increase in more geographically dispersed social support networks. Rather than assuming that the family can provide sufficient support, service providers need to be prepared to assess and to bolster family members' support of aging Latina/os in culturally appropriate ways given their immigration background, language preferences, and specific subgroup heritage.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

This dissertation investigated the multidimensional nature of social support networks across various sociocultural characteristics among older Latina/os using the convoy model of social relations as a conceptual framework. Secondary data from a Latina/o-only sample of older adults in the nationally representative Health and Retirement Study were analyzed to better understand the structures, functions, and quality of social support networks among this increasingly growing demographic of older adults in the United States. Findings from each of the three dissertation studies contribute to previous research on social support networks in later life by being one of the first to describe rich intracultural variation in the landscape of social relations among older Latina/os. Findings from the three dissertation studies expand upon research examining social relations among older Latina/os within the context of the cultural value system of *familismo* by demonstrating the extent to which older Latina/os perceive that ideals have been fulfilled in provisions of social support. This dissertation also focused on expanding the type of personal and situational characteristics known to be influential in differentiating social support network patterns, by including characteristics that are socioculturally relevant to older Latina/os. More specifically, given older Latina/os' background as an immigrant group, acculturative factors, such as nativity status and language preference, were examined as potential sources of intracultural variation. As



suggested by the conceptual model depicted in Figure 1, each of the sociocultural characteristics was indeed associated with social support network structure, function and quality, across each of the studies in some way. The following chapter provides an overview of key findings and insights, as well as implications for theory, social work practice and policy. The concluding section of this chapter provides a discussion of limitations and directions for future research.

### **Summary of Findings**

The first dissertation study assessed patterns in the structure of social support networks and their associated sociocultural characteristics. This study also focused specifically on how the function of social support, in this case a multifaceted loneliness construct, differed across social support network types. A cluster analysis including close network size, composition, living arrangements, and frequency of contact with family and friends as structural characteristics, identified four social support network types. Three of the four network types were centered around family: Extended (very large network, with a majority of the network comprised of frequently engaged children and close other family members), Co-Resident Family (mid-size network, with co-residing relatives, and a broader family network that is frequently engaged), and Restricted Family (small network, made mostly of children, and with infrequent contact). These findings affirm previous qualitative and regional quantitative research with older Latina/os at a national level, finding that family, including extended family, is salient for this group (Beyene et al., 2002; Campos et al., 2014; Gelman, 2012; Hilton et al., 2012; M. E. Ruiz, 2007). Previous research on Latina/o social relations has primarily examined only one dimension of social support networks, such as size or frequency of contact, and usually

among the family overall. By assessing the configuration of multiple dimensions of social support network structure, the first dissertation study revealed important nuances in *exactly how* family is salient for older Latina/os. That is, for part A of the conceptual model in Figure 1, the family appears to be the main facet of support structure, but one type of family structure does not fit all. The network structure most closely aligned with *familismo*, the Extended Family, type was the least common network type. Although somewhat surprising, one interpretation of this finding is that Latina/o families contend with competing responsibilities, such as sandwich generation caregiving and seeking economic opportunities, making close extended networks more difficult to maintain over time. The identification of a fourth network type, the Friends Focused network (small network consisting mostly of friends who are more engaged than family), further demonstrates the variety in older Latina/o networks, suggesting that relationships outside of the family are also important to many older Latina/os. This finding is particularly important in light of the small percentage of older Latina/os in the Extended Family type as it suggests that in the absence of an ideal network, older Latina/os pursue other relationship types that may be significant sources of support.

Yet, the sociocultural make-up of older Latina/os in each network varied where the general personal characteristics such as age and gender did not. For example, older Latina/os who took the questionnaire in Spanish were overrepresented in the Extended Family type and individuals in the Extended Family type also reported the highest levels of neighborhood social cohesion. Mexican-Americans were overrepresented in each of the network types, with the exception of the Friends Focused group. With respect to loneliness, there was further within-group heterogeneity among older Latina/os' social

support networks. U.S.-born Latina/os and Latina/os taking the questionnaire in English reported greater emotional loneliness when belonging to the Restricted Family group, but foreign-born Latina/os and Latina/os taking the questionnaire in Spanish reported greater collective loneliness when belonging to the Friends Focused network. This finding is reflective of how acculturation factors can differentiate the way various social support network structures fail to function in providing a sense of belonging according to older Latina/os' orientation to *familismo*. More specifically, it appears that as older Latina/os become more acculturated, they turn to elective friendships as confidants. However, for those older Latina/os who are less acculturated, one consequence of being in a network farther removed from cultural ideals leads them to feel like a cultural outsider.

The second dissertation study built upon the first by examining how perceived quality of support (positive and negative more specifically) from the overall network varied across social support network types. Extended and Co-Resident Family network types were associated with greater positive support when compared to the Restricted Family and Friends Focused types but there were no differences in negative support. These findings confirm previous work which finds that older Latina/os in networks that fulfill cultural expectations tend to be more satisfied with the support received within those networks (Korte, 1982; Martinez, 2002; Min & Barrio, 2009; Sanchez-Ayendez, 1988). An assessment of language preference (measured by questionnaire language), indicated that positive support was higher among older Latina/os who preferred Spanish. Yet, language preference did not moderate the association between network types and perceived support quality, so that unlike Figure 1, part B suggests, sociocultural

characteristics may only influence quality of support and not the association between structural network type and quality.

Finally, the third dissertation study assessed the prevalence of ambivalent perceptions about emotional and instrumental functions of social support within three specific relationship types across sociocultural characteristics (i.e., nativity status, language preference, and subgroup heritage). Unlike the second dissertation study which found that less acculturated older Latina/os reported more positive support overall, the third dissertation study revealed that foreign-born older Latina/os were more likely to report ambivalent versus positive support when disaggregating relationship types. Despite idealizations of Latina/o social ties as overwhelmingly positive and harmonious (Gelman, 2012; John et al., 1997; Smith-Morris et al., 2013; Wallace, 1989), foreign-born older Latina/os reported tension in their perceptions about social support quality. Interestingly, Mexican American older Latina/os were less likely to report ambivalence about emotional support from friends. Thus, taken together with results from the first dissertation study indicating that Mexican Americans were less likely to be in Friends Focused networks, it appears that relationships outside of the family may be less important, or less available, based on subgroup heritage. Additionally, fewer social ties and closer geographic proximity were associated with a greater likelihood of ambivalence, but this was only apparent in relationships with other family and friends and not with children. It should be noted that several associations between structural network characteristics and likelihood of ambivalence were moderated by sociocultural factors. This suggests that the structural characteristics influencing ambivalence about support do not have equal relevance for all older Latina/os, as Figure 1, part C depicts

potential differences in support quality when structural facets of social support networks are examined as distinct and specific to relationship and support type.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Social support networks are highly complex, and cross-cultural differences in the prescription of who and what constitutes a social support network contributes to the complexity. The convoy model of social relations has been instrumental in conceptualizing how personal and situational factors, reflective of broader societal and cultural role expectations, influence structural, functional, and quality dimensions of social support networks (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). A major theoretical contribution of this dissertation is the integration of acculturation theory with the convoy model of social relations, as depicted by the conceptual model in Figure 1. The application of acculturation theory to the personal and situational characteristics component of the convoy model explicitly addresses how older adults from immigrant backgrounds may be orientated toward a dominant or marginalized set of societal and cultural role expectations that influence how social support networks are structured. For instance, English-preferring older Latina/os were more likely to be in network types that were dominated by friendships, not family, but foreign-born older Latina/os were more likely to be in all network types that were dominated by family members.

Acculturation theory also provides a framework for understanding how an orientation to one set of societal and cultural expectations over another impacts an older adult's satisfaction with the structure of their networks, particularly when the structure does not match the cultural expectations indicated by sociocultural factors. Returning to the previous example, English-preferring older Latina/os were less lonely in Friends

Focused networks. English-preferring older Latina/os may be more acculturated to U.S. values of autonomy, and friendships, as elective relationships which afford autonomy. However, Spanish preferring older Latina/os were less lonely in Extended and Co-Resident Family networks. Acculturation theory would suggest that preferring Spanish reflects a stronger orientation toward *familismo*, and family-oriented network structures fulfill this expectation, leading to greater satisfaction with that network type. To better understand how culture influences social relationships, Ajrouch (2008) recommends that research “place individuals and groups in context, distinguishing ideal aspects of culture from pragmatic realities” (p. 202). The integration of acculturation theory with the convoy model also suggests that an orientation to dominant cultural values in the United States may be a significant “pragmatic reality” that distinguishes less acculturated older immigrant groups’ social support network structures and quality from that of more acculturated older immigrant groups. As such, future work should begin to examine how the process of acculturation may be a mechanism through which social support networks are formed and transformed throughout the lifecourse.

### **Social Work Practice and Policy Implications**

The heterogeneity across social support networks, their structure, function, and quality, among diverse older Latina/os’ has several important implications for social work practice and policy. Scholars and practitioners have acknowledged the cultural importance of family and personal relationships among the Latina/o population, calling for services and policies that respond to and involve these social ties (Ayón, 2013; Falicov, 1998; Hummer & Hayward, 2015; Mutchler & J. L. Angel, 2000). Findings from

this dissertation affirm practical and theoretical knowledge that cultural values like *familismo* contextualize how older Latina/os rely on their informal networks.

*Familia* does appear to matter, as family members were a prevalent and salient component of older Latina/os' social support networks. The direct service and intervention implications of this information are two-fold. First, social workers in settings frequented by older Latina/os, such as hospital social workers, can apply the typologies included in this study to map older patients' social support network types to identify important family and friends that should be invited to participate in discharge planning, care coordination, and help with activities of daily living. Previous research has demonstrated that many Latina/o clients are more responsive to service-providers who take time to ask about their family lives (Uebelacker et al., 2012). Second, older Latina/os may need assistance when it comes to handling *familia* matters. That is, older Latina/os and their close social support network ties can be referred to family counseling to facilitate discussions about planning for support to make explicit and negotiate their needs and wants. Delgadillo, Sörenson, and Coster (2004) found that although most older Latina/os in their study preferred relatives for help and assistance, 91% of them had no concrete plans for care. This means that social workers and therapists involved in family counseling should also explicitly address cultural expectations around elder support, and help families develop strategies for overcoming challenges faced in fulfilling those expectations.

This dissertation also acknowledges social work practitioners' and other minority aging scholars' caution against an overgeneralization and idealization of the Latina/o *familia* as overwhelmingly positive and self-sustaining. In their article outlining policy

development recommendations for the older Latina/o population in the 21st century, Mutchler and J. L. Angel (2000) note:

...due to shifting cultural traditions and demographic characteristics throughout the Latino population, traditional patterns of informal support by extended families may be difficult to sustain in coming years. Patterns of-and needs for-long-term care will be particularly affected by these changes. Finally, the intra-group diversity of the Latino population is considerable and must be factored into planning and policy development. (p. 180)

One of the Social Work's grand challenges is effectively preventing and reducing social isolation (Brown et al., 2016). This was one of the first dissertation studies to demonstrate that loneliness and unmet needs for support are not uncommon occurrences among older Latina/os in the United States, identifying this group as an important target group for services and intervention. Previous work has demonstrated that lower acculturation and social isolation are associated with barriers to healthcare use and access, further implicating the well-being of immigrant older Latina/os who already disproportionately suffer from chronic illness and disability (Chesney, Chavira, & Gary, 1982; Estrada, Trevino, & Ray, 1990; Pippins, Alegria, & Haas, 2007). An important implication of these research findings is for primary care providers to screen their older Latina/o patients for loneliness. The occurrence of loneliness in older Latina/os who prefer Spanish also suggests that screening tools should be provided in Spanish. Moreover, screening for social support network type and loneliness can ensure that social workers and healthcare providers do not dismiss referrals to formal supportive services as a necessity for older Latina/o clients based on stereotypical assumptions about the



overwhelmingly positive role families play in providing care. For instance, less acculturated Latina/os in Friend Focused networks seemed to experience collective loneliness. Social services could use these findings to develop a culturally tailored friendly visitor program that pairs older Latina/os with a Latina/o friendly visitor who can discuss and share in activities related to their cultural practices and traditions. Medina and Negroni (2014) highlight family relationships and close social ties as powerful influences that affect healthy aging among older Latina/os. Findings from this dissertation can inform how interventions involving the Latina/o family, such as those aimed at improving eating habits and physical activity (Marquez et al., 2016; Sarkisian, Trejo, Wang, Frank, & Weiner, 2010; Schwingel et al., 2015), can be designed to more flexibly meet a range of social support network types to be most effective.

Additionally, findings from this dissertation suggest that interventions aimed at reducing geographic distance and facilitating more frequent contact with social support network ties are important for addressing older Latina/os' needs. One intervention can take the form of providing older Latina/os with access to and training with technologies such as Skype and social media applications such as Snapchat so they may keep in touch with family and friends across the country, and across the world. It is important, however, for assessment, screening, and interventions to take place in the context of older Latina/os' level of acculturation and orientation to cultural values. Shifts in social support networks that move away from *familismo* seem to affect less acculturated older Latina/os the most while the *familismo* ideal may itself be unsatisfactory to more acculturated older Latina/os, for instance individuals born in the United States.

Results from the first dissertation study on the high neighborhood social cohesion

among older Latina/os with Extended Family networks also suggest that social services collaborating with the Latina/o community more broadly may be more far-reaching and effective (Gallagher-Thompson, Solano, Coon, & Areán, 2003). Leveraging the community is particularly important because assessment and screening for social support network type, loneliness, and unmet support needs is impossible if older Latina/os and their families do not have knowledge about or access to the aforementioned direct services. Moreover, on a cautionary note, while families play a role, families can also be problematic and a source of tension for older Latina/os. Therefore, an increased need for awareness-building and outreach with respect to support planning and formal support services to assist both caregivers in Latina/o communities and isolated older Latina/os, is another implication of this research. One example would be for local governments to fund campaigns that encourage older Latina/os and their families to talk with one another about *familismo* and care expectations, referring them to local services that facilitate these conversations via a hotline that includes Spanish-speakers. Community health workers, known as *promotoras* (Balcazar, Fernandez-Gaxiola, Perez-Lizaur, Peyton, & Ayala, 2015; Koskan, Friedman, Brandt, Walsemann, & Messias, 2013), can also be used as a model for creating a program of community “elder support” workers. In this model, elder support workers could be trained not only to connect older Latina/os and their families to eligible services in their neighborhood, but also to coordinate informal and formal sources of care. Moreover, findings related to collective loneliness among less acculturated Latina/os in small networks suggest that cultural socialization is particularly important among this group. Previous research has demonstrated that older Latina/os who regularly attend senior centers experience less psychological distress when facing

difficult life circumstances (Farone, Fitzpatrick, & Tran, 2005). Older Latina/os who frequent senior centers with culturally-specific programming can work with local services to recruit older Latina/os at-risk for collective loneliness to help maintain a connection to culture, bolstering a sense of belonging.

This dissertation informs policy makers of the important role the Extended Family network plays in deterring loneliness and facilitating positive support among older Latina/os. First, it will be important for workplace policies to move beyond supporting only the nuclear family in support and caregiving. Moreover, respite and other caregiving services should be extended to offer support for more than one caregiver. This is especially important in light of research demonstrating that Latina/o caregivers suffer disproportionately from health and mental health consequences (Pinquart & Sorenson, 2005). Additionally, given the prevalence of older Latina/os who live with family, and the high quality of support reported within these circumstances, senior housing policies can also be reformed to allow more supportive network members to live with older Latina/os who need care.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The findings from this dissertation should be understood within the context of several limitations. First, acculturative factors such as nativity status and language preference serve as proxies for cultural values and practices, but one limitation of this dissertation is that it does not explicitly measure the cultural value of *familismo*. There is also no information about whether network members themselves endorse *familismo*, or their sociocultural characteristics associated with acculturation. Future research should collect information on cultural values and social support expectations. This work could

begin assessing cultural values among older Latina/os and their families by using established measures of *familismo* such as The Familismo Scale (Steidel & Contreras, 2003). In a similar vein, assessing cross-national ties among older Latina/os, and older Latina/os cultural values in the context of globalization and technological advancements will be important. For example, some scholars have suggested that cultural values in the United States have reached Latin American countries, changing the nature of *familismo* and its prescriptions for social support. Data could be analyzed to triangulate older Latina/os' values and perceptions with that of their families to better understand whether intra-familial contradictions in values predict loneliness, negative support, and ambivalence about support. It will also be important for future research to apply qualitative methods, such as the use of focus groups, to better understand how older Latina/os make meaning of social support patterns in connection to cultural values amidst varied family migration histories (Lopez, 2015).

The convoy model of social relations proposes that the nature of social support networks in later life has been greatly shaped by the nature of social support networks earlier in life (Antonucci et al., 2010; Kahn & Antonucci, 1982). Moreover, the convoy model of social relations suggests that major life events and transitions, and more importantly their developmental timing, greatly impact how social support networks change over time (Antonucci et al., 2010). Due to the cross-sectional approach employed in this dissertation, we cannot ascertain what factors predict the social support network structures revealed, nor can we determine whether social support network structure causes loneliness and perceived support quality. Future studies can begin to address this limitation by examining longitudinal data on immigrant groups to assess structure,

function, and quality of social support networks over time, while also accounting for which sociocultural factors are most influential in shifting social support networks, and at what point these factors matter most. Similarly, future research should account for age at migration and years since immigration in these longitudinal analyses to determine whether trajectories of social support networks, and sociocultural factors like language preference and neighborhood social cohesion, differ according to the developmental timing of immigration.

One final and important area for future research to consider is the role other contextual factors play in shaping social support networks in later life. Research focusing on *familismo* and social support among Latina/os has been heavily critiqued because it does not acknowledge how cultural values are often adaptive responses to socioeconomic disadvantage and sociopolitical barriers to formal sources of support (J. L. Angel & R. J. Angel, 2006; J. L. Angel et al., 1997). The fact that this dissertation does not incorporate education, wealth, citizenship, documentation status, discrimination, and subgroup heritage beyond Mexican-American comparisons, as critical factors influencing support is a major limitation. However, future work can address this limitation by examining typologies of socioeconomic background, immigrant status and heritage in addition to typologies of social support networks.

### **Conclusion**

Networks of family, friends, and neighbors are the bedrock of care for aging adults in the United States. Social support networks are instrumental to older adults. Marginalized groups of older adults are especially dependent on their informal networks of support and care for cultural reasons as much as adaptations to systemic

socioeconomic disadvantage. This dissertation offers a glimpse into the changing landscape of social support provision and unmet needs among Latina/os. The findings illustrate how older Latina/os' social support networks may be both powerful in light of, and vulnerable to, intergenerational shifts in the endorsement of and ability to fulfill cultural values that support aging family members. Social services and policies can begin to identify social risks, and collective resilience, on the basis of many sociocultural differences that exist among older Latina/os. The historical and ongoing hostile sociopolitical climate that targets immigrant groups for criminalization and deportation dismantle the social support networks Latina/os are expected to rely upon (Quenenmoen, 2016). Yet, by-and-large, older Latina/os are absent from research documenting the devastating effects of unjust immigration policies on individuals and families across the lifecourse. Researchers, advocates, and policy makers can and should use findings from this dissertation to demand more research that will inform the creation of culturally responsive programs and policies to maintain and bolster older Latina/os and their families' social support networks. Social support networks are an important social determinant of health (CDC; WHO) and, as such, work in this area has the potential to reduce health disparities and improve the well-being of a marginalized population in the United States.

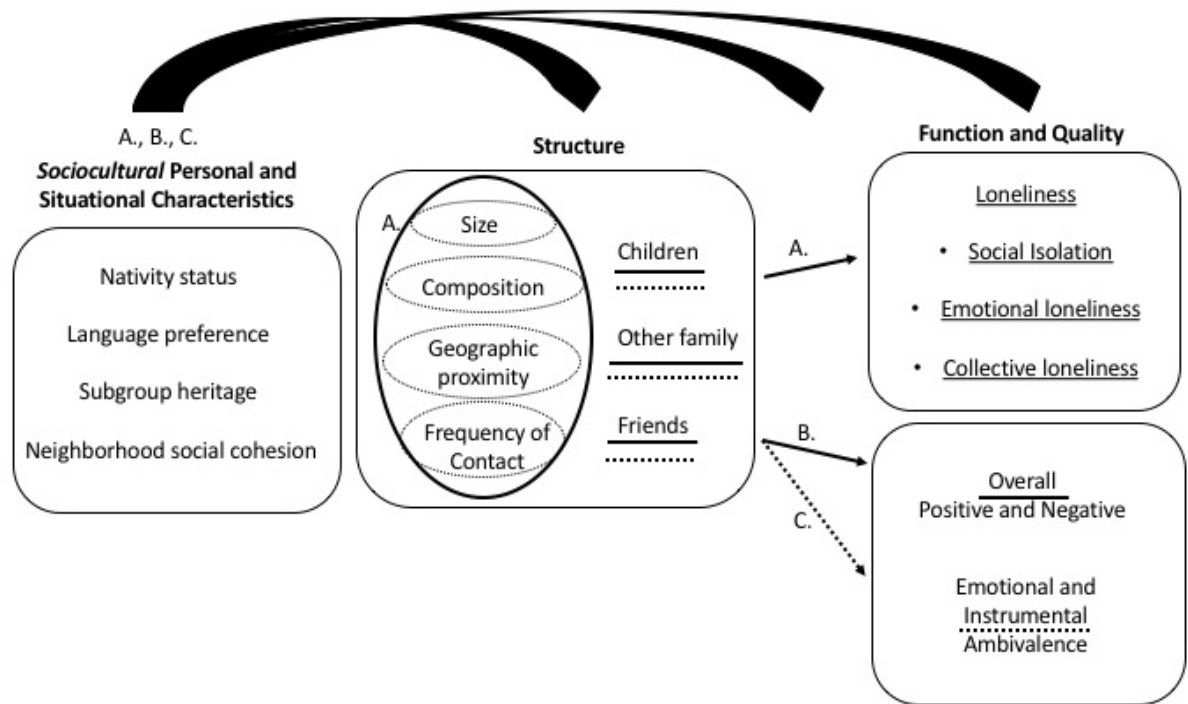
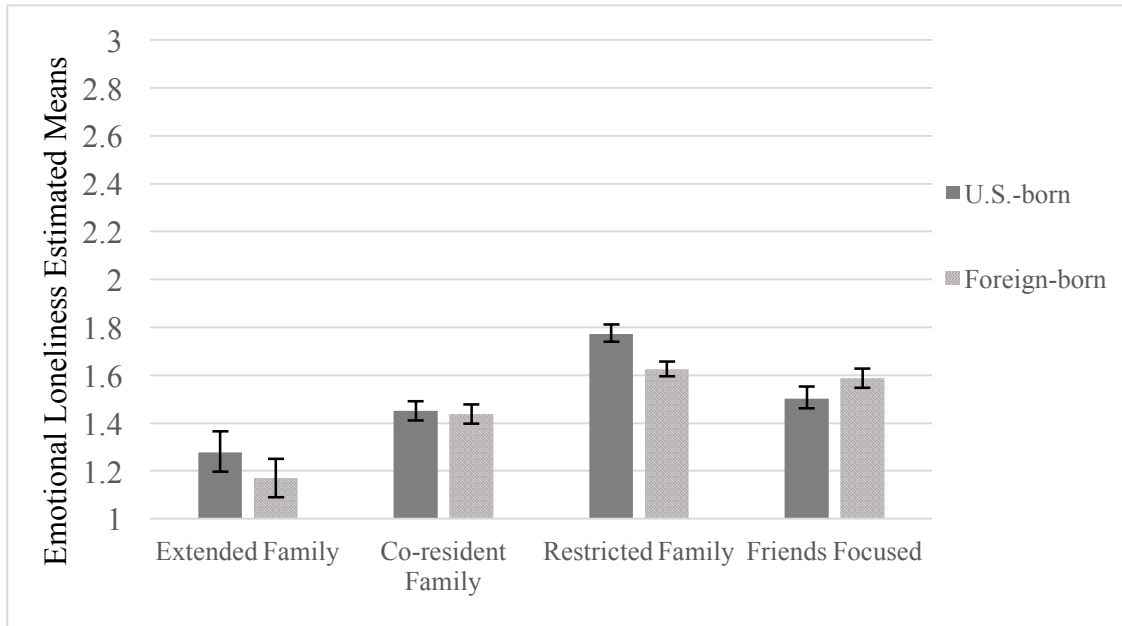
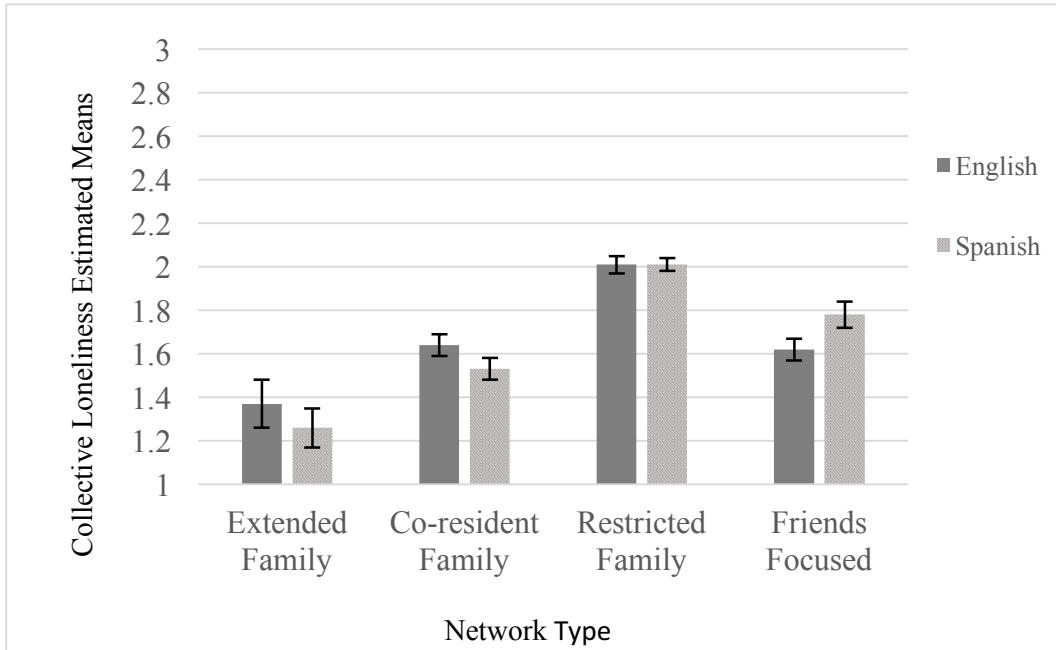


Figure 1. Conceptual model—Adapted Convoy Model of Social Relations.



*Figure 2.1.* Estimated mean-level emotional loneliness by network type and nativity status.





*Figure 2.2.* Estimated mean-level collective loneliness by network type and questionnaire language.

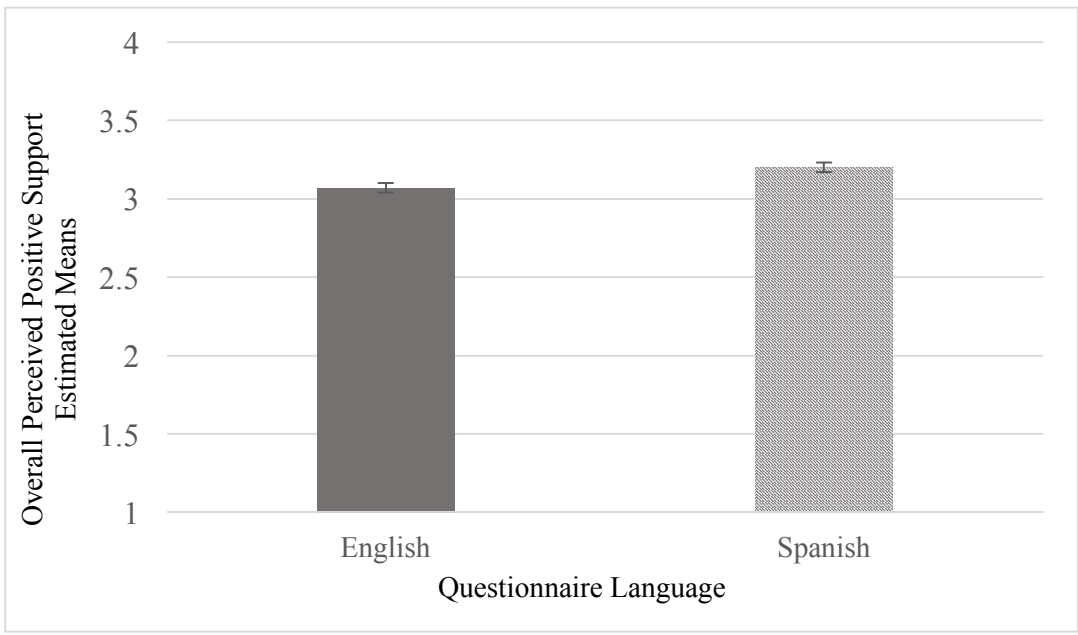
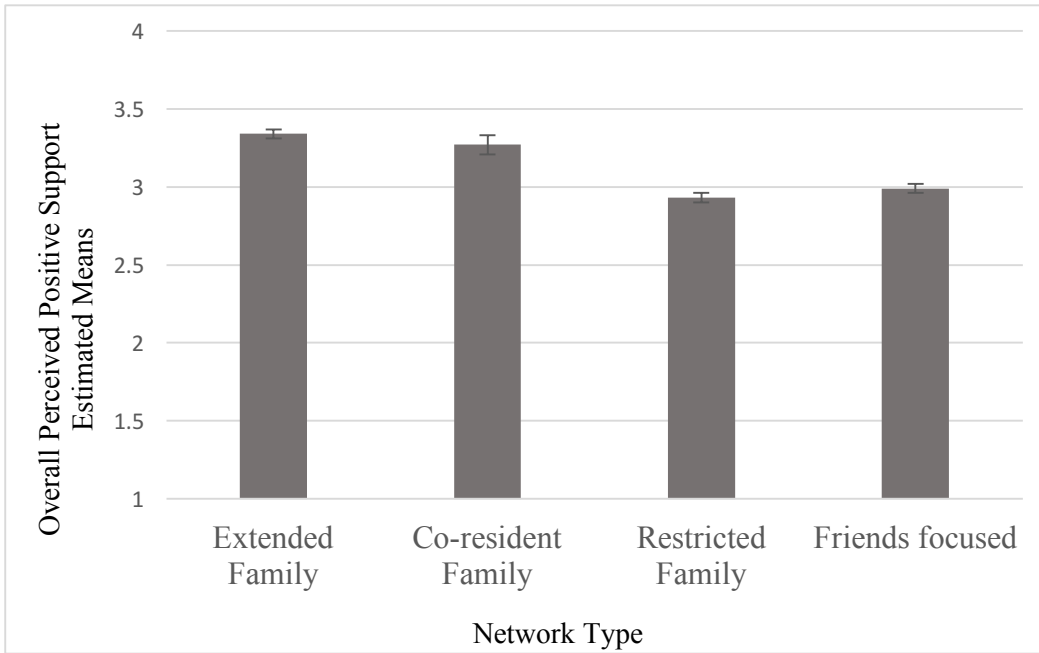
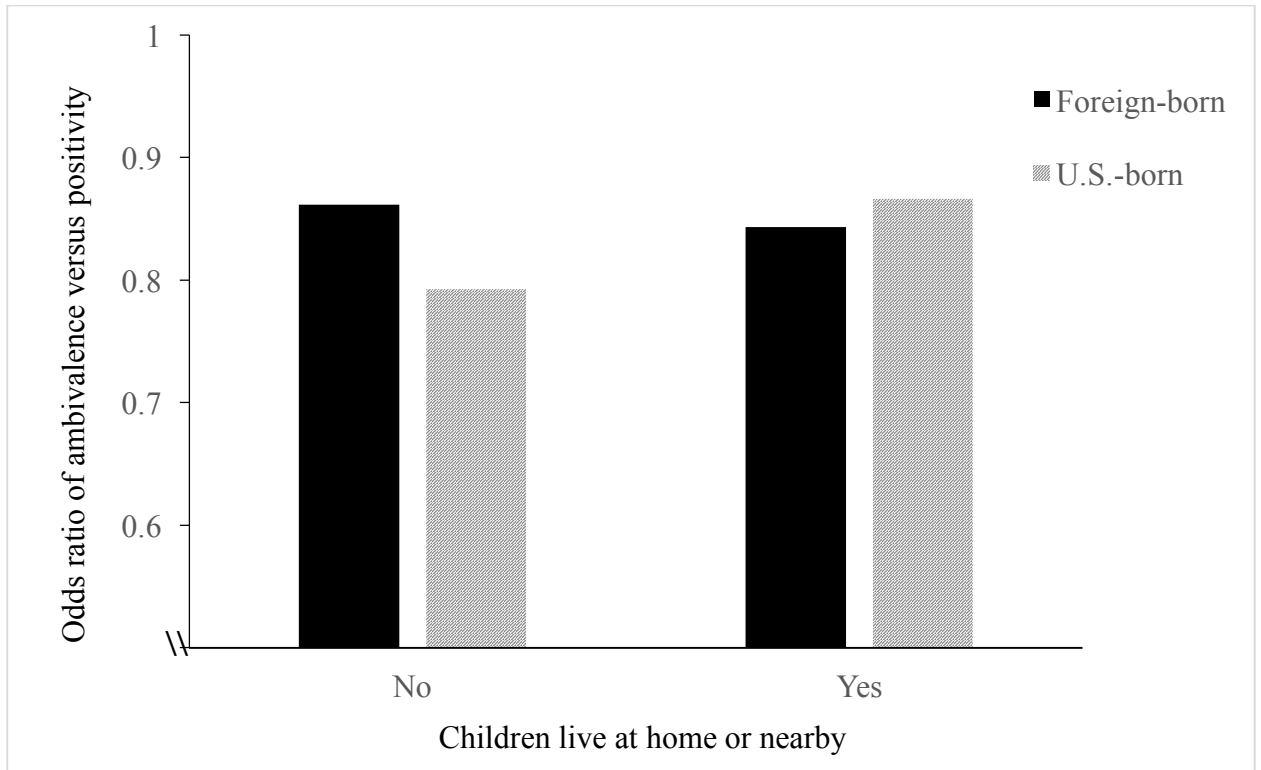


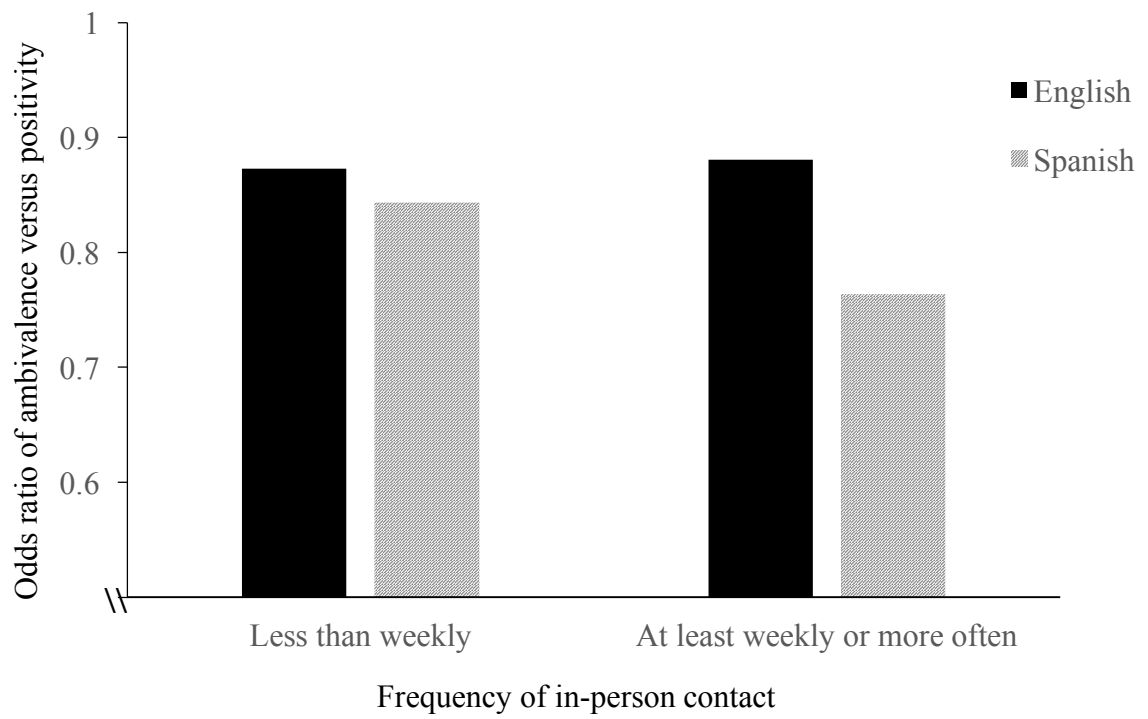
Figure 3.1. Overall perceived positive support by questionnaire language.



*Figure 3.2.* Overall perceived positive support by social support network type.



*Figure 4.1.* Interaction effect of nativity status and geographic proximity on likelihood of ambivalence among children.



*Figure 4.2.* Interaction effect of questionnaire language and frequency of contact on likelihood of ambivalence among other family.

## Tables

Table 2.1

*Sample Characteristics by Nativity Status*

	U.S-Born		Foreign-Born		Sig
	<i>n</i>	% or <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	% or <i>M (SD)</i>	
Years of education	574	11.56 (3.29)	774	8.83 (4.74)	< .001
Coupled	579	68	744	76	< .001
Years living in the U.S. <sup>a</sup>			776	35.97 (13.77)	
Spanish questionnaire language	579	9	776	79	< .001
Mexican-American	579	72	776	52	< .001
Age	579	64.98 (9.21)	776	64.89 (9.26)	.12
Women	579	58	776	57	.82
Perceived neighborhood social cohesion (1-7) <sup>b</sup>	565	5.20 (1.42)	750	4.77 (1.66)	< .001
Has children	579	96	776	98	.26
Has other relatives	579	98	776	94	< .001
Has friends	579	86	776	85	.87
Total number of close children, other relatives, and friends	579	9.02 (6.45)	776	9.26 (6.60)	.50
Proportion of children and other relatives	579	.70 (.25)	776	.69 (.24)	.82
Lives with children and/or other relatives	579	45	776	59	< .001
Frequent contact with children	579	62	776	68	.02
Other relatives	579	36	776	35	.73
Friends	579	32	776	27	.05
Loneliness unidimensional composite	574	1.59 (.46)	771	1.53 (.43)	.02
Perceived social isolation	571	1.50 (.56)	771	1.39 (.52)	< .001
Emotional loneliness	571	1.57 (.59)	766	1.53 (.58)	.14
Collective loneliness	571	1.75 (.69)	761	1.75 (.73)	.95

*Note.* a. Years residing in the United States is only reported for those who were foreign-born. For those born in the United States, this variable is equal to age. b. 1 = low neighborhood social cohesion; 7 = high neighborhood social cohesion. Demographic, sociocultural, and social network structure differences between U.S.-born and foreign-born groups are based on omnibus chi-square tests and t-tests.

Table 2.2

*Structural Characteristics Across Network Types*

	Extended Family	Co-Resident Family	Restricted Family	Friends Focused	Significance
<i>n</i>	93	410	499	353	
%	7	30	37	26	
<b>Structure</b>					
Total network size	26.48 (6.88)	11.97 (3.59)	5.34 (2.59)	6.70 (3.50)	< .001
Proportion of children and other relatives in network	.64 (.22)	.71 (.13)	.90	.41 (.19)	< .001
Lives with children and/or other relatives	55	70	48	40	< .001
Frequency of contact with children	77	86	58	49	< .001
Frequency of contact with other relatives	54	54	26	23	< .001
Frequency of contact with friends	34	36	14	42	< .001
<b>Personal and Situational Characteristics</b>					
Age	63.60(9.78)	63.63 (9.11)	65.14 (9.28)	64.25 (9.10)	NS
Women	59	62	53	58	.058
Neighborhood social cohesion <sup>a</sup>	5.28 (1.59)	5.09 (1.58)	4.76 (1.53)	4.99 (1.60)	.002
Foreign-born	59	58	57	57	NS
Spanish questionnaire	58	49	52	43	.026
Mexican American	71	63	62	52	.002

*Note.* a. Neighborhood social cohesion means reflect smaller sample sizes for participants who responded to at least one question from the scale as follows: Extended,  $n = 91$ ; Co-Resident,  $n = 402$ ; Restricted Family,  $n = 473$ ; Friends,  $n = 349$ . NS = not significant.



Table 2.3

*Repeated Measures ANOVA Sociocultural Characteristic Models*

	Nativity Status		Questionnaire Language		Subgroup Heritage	
	<i>F</i>	Partial $\eta^2$	<i>F</i>	Partial $\eta^2$	<i>F</i>	Partial $\eta^2$
<b>Between-Subjects</b>						
Network	44.11	.09***	44.50	.09***	41.04	.09***
Sociocultural Variable	2.20	.00	1.59	.00	1.02	.00
Network * Sociocultural Variable	1.98	.00	2.40	.01	1.25	.00
<b>Within-Subjects</b>						
Loneliness	63.45	.05**	68.66	.05***	54.48	.04***
Loneliness * Network	9.45	.02	9.41	.02***	10.57	.02***
Loneliness * Sociocultural Variable	1.45	.00	.67	.00	.14	.00
Loneliness * Network * Sociocultural Variable	2.67	.01*	2.26	.01*	1.39	.00

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  indicate significance levels.

Table 2.4

*ANOVA Mean-Level Loneliness Dimensions by Network Types*

	Extended Family <i>M (SD)</i> <i>n = 92</i>	Co-Resident Family <i>M (SD)</i> <i>n = 408</i>	Restricted Family <i>M (SD)</i> <i>n = 491</i>	Friends Focused <i>M (SD)</i> <i>n = 351</i>	Sig
Perceived Isolation	1.25 (.41)	1.34 (.45)	1.53 (.59)	1.47 (.57)	< .001
Emotional Loneliness	1.21 (.42)	1.44 (.56)	1.69 (.60)	1.5 (.58)	< .001
Collective Loneliness	1.31 (.55)	1.58 (.65)	2.01 (.71)	1.69 (.70)	< .001

Table 3.1

*Participant Characteristics by Network Type and Questionnaire Language*

	Extended Family		Co-Resident Family		Restricted Family		Friends Focused	
	Eng	Sp	Eng	Sp	Eng	Sp	Eng	Sp
<i>n</i>	39	54	210	200	242	257	201	152
Age ( <i>M, SD</i> )	66.87 (10.64)	65.89 (9.20)	63.05 (8.51)	64.24 (9.70)	64.95 (8.86)	65.31 (9.67)	64.00 (8.50)	64.58 (9.86)
% Women	56	61	67	56	54	52	59	58
Yrs in US ( <i>M, SD</i> )	66.07 (12.14)	35.06 (13.89)	58.28 (13.57)	35.56 (17.07)	61.54 (12.53)	38.01 (4.42)	58.13 (14.10)	36.40 (15.11)
% Foreign-Born	8	96	26	92	19	92	29	93
% Mexican American	67	74	66	60	68	56	55	50

Table 3.2 (a and b).

*Univariate ANOVA Results for Positive and Negative Support*

a.

Analysis of Variance Model for Perceived Positive Social Support				
Source	SS	df	Mean Square	F
Questionnaire Language	1.85	1	1.85	5.62*
Network type	33.91	3	11.30	34.41***
Language x Network type	1.15	3	.38	1.17
Error between factors	437.53	1332	.33	
Total	13306.50	1345		

b.

Analysis of Variance Model for Perceived Negative Social Support				
Source	SS	df	Mean Square	F
Questionnaire Language	.47	1	.47	1.87
Network type	.37	3	.12	.49
Language x Network type	1.05	3	.35	1.41
Error between factors	331.27	1332		
Total	4016.28	1345		

*Note.* Models control for age, gender, nativity status, subgroup heritage, and positive or negative support. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  indicate significance levels.

Table 3.3

*Positive and Negative Support Estimated Means by Social Network Typologies and Questionnaire Language*

	Extended Family		Co-Resident Family		Restricted Family		Friends Focused	
	English	Spanish	English	Spanish	English	Spanish	English	Spanish
N	39	54	210	200	239	254	199	150
Positive Support	3.27 (3.09, 3.46)	3.41 (3.26, 3.57)	3.25 (3.17, 3.33)	3.29 (3.20, 3.37)	2.84 (2.76, 2.92)	3.02 (2.94, 3.10)	2.93 (2.85, 3.01)	3.06 (2.96, 3.15)
Negative Support	1.66 (1.50, 1.83)	1.53 (1.39, 1.67)	1.68 (1.61, 1.76)	1.58 (1.50, 1.65)	1.66 (1.59, 1.74)	1.63 (1.64, 1.70)	1.65 (1.58, 1.72)	1.68 (1.59, 1.76)

Table 4.1

*Sample Characteristics by Nativity Status Groups*

	U.S.-Born		Foreign-Born		Significance Level
	<i>n</i>	% or mean ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>n</i>	% or mean ( <i>SD</i> )	
Age (mean)	674	65.17 (9.19)	911	64.32 (9.38)	
Women (%)	674	43	911	59	
Years of education (mean)	669	11.62 (3.35)	908	8.84 (4.73)	***
Married or partnered (%)	674	66	911	73	**
Self-rated health <sup>a</sup> (mean)	674	2.91 (1.10)	910	2.72 (1.04)	***
Years residing in the U.S. <sup>b</sup> (mean)			874	35.91 (13.76)	
Spanish Questionnaire (%)	674	9	911	79	***
Mexican American (%)	674	71	911	51	***
Has Children (%)	611	90	805	92	
Number of close children (mean)	539	2.85 (3.18)	710	2.88 (2.65)	
Children live in home or within 10 miles (%)	552	86	743	87	
Frequently ( <i>at least weekly</i> ) meets with children (%)	524	44	702	38	*
Has other family members (%)	654	95	854	88	***
Number of close other family members (mean)	612	4.28 (5.31)	716	4.26 (4.58)	
Relatives live nearby (%)	615	30	740	21	***
Frequently ( <i>at least weekly</i> ) meets with other family (%)	611	28	725	26	
Has friends (%)	648	85	860	84	
Number of close friends (mean)	537	3.77 (4.66)	679	3.91 (3.98)	
Friends live nearby (%)	544	61	709	56	
Frequently ( <i>at least weekly</i> ) meets with friends (%)	542	38	702	30	**

*Note.* a. Self-rated health (1 = poor; 5 = excellent) b. Years residing in the United States is only reported for those who were foreign-born. For those born in the United States, this variable is equal to age. Demographic, sociocultural, and social network structure differences between U.S.-born and foreign-born groups are based on omnibus chi-square tests and t-tests. c. Number of close social ties, geographic proximity, and frequency of contact descriptive statistics correspond to a smaller sample of participants who reported having children, other family, and friends, respectively. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 4.2

*Percentages of Respondents Reporting Ambivalence or Positive Feelings About Support Across Sociocultural Characteristics*

	Nativity Status				Questionnaire Language				Latina/o Subgroup				N
	U.S.-Born		Foreign-Born		English		Spanish		Mexican-American		Non-Mexican-American		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
<b>Children</b>													
<i>Emotional</i>													1342
Ambivalent	264	46.0	396	51.6	344	50.1	316	48.2	384	46.8	276	47.0	
Positive	310	54.0	372	48.4	343	49.9	339	51.8	437	53.2	245	47.0	
<i>Instrumental</i>													1332
Ambivalent	298	52.5	367	48.0	358	53.7	307	46.2	410	50.3	255	49.3	
Positive	270	47.5	397	52.0	309	46.3	358	53.8	405	49.7	262	50.7	
<b>Other Family</b>													
<i>Emotional</i>													1313
Ambivalent	233	40.4	375	51.0	315	46.1	293	46.5	341	42.7	267	51.9	
Positive	344	59.6	361	49.0	368	53.9	337	53.5	458	57.3	247	48.1	
<i>Instrumental</i>													1305
Ambivalent	247	44.0	367	49.3	318	47.4	296	46.7	350	44.4	264	51.1	
Positive	314	56.0	377	50.7	353	52.6	338	53.3	438	55.6	253	48.9	



<b>Friends</b>													
<i>Emotional</i>													1216
	156	29.4	326	47.6	211	32.6	271	47.7	254	35.0	228	46.4	
Ambivalent													
Positive	375	70.6	359	52.4	437	67.4	297	52.3	471	65.0	263	53.6	
<i>Instrumental</i>													1203
	189	36.5	366	53.4	256	40.6	299	52.3	304	42.5	251	51.4	
Ambivalent													
Positive	329	63.5	319	46.6	375	59.4	273	47.7	411	57.5	237	48.6	

*Note.* Differences between ambivalence and positive feelings about support within each sociocultural characteristic are based on omnibus chi-square tests. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 4.3

*The Contribution of Sociocultural Covariates and Structural Dimensions of Support to Predicting the Likelihood of Ambivalence about Emotional and Instrumental Support in Different Relationship types (odds ratios)*

	Emotional Support						Instrumental Support					
	Children ( <i>N</i> = 1105) <i>OR</i> ( <i>SE</i> )		Other Family ( <i>N</i> = 1126) <i>OR</i> ( <i>SE</i> )		Friends ( <i>N</i> = 1076) <i>OR</i> ( <i>SE</i> )		Children ( <i>N</i> = 1096) <i>OR</i> ( <i>SE</i> )		Other Family ( <i>N</i> = 1110) <i>OR</i> ( <i>SE</i> )		Friends ( <i>N</i> = 1061) <i>OR</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	
<b>Sociocultural Covariates</b>												
Nativity (U.S.-born)	.92	(.08)	.77	(.12)*	.97	(.12)	.93	(.12)	.84	(.12)	.75	(.12)*
Language (Spanish questionnaire)	.87	(.10)	.77	(.10)**	1.07	(.10)	.94	(.10)	.84	(.10)	.98	(.10)
Subgroup (Mexican-American)	1.00	(.07)	.90	(.07)	.82	(.08)**	1.10	(.07)	.90	(.07)	.88	(.07)
<b>Structural Dimensions of Support</b>												
# Close ties	.98	(.02)	.96	(.02)**	.96	(.02)*	.98	(.02)	.95	(.02)***	.95	(.02)**
Geographic proximity	1.16	(.09)	1.20	(.07)*	1.07	(.07)	1.12	(.10)	1.19	(.07)*	1.02	(.07)
Frequent contact	.89	(.06)	.91	(.07)	.93	(.07)	.84	(.07)**	.92	(.07)	.89	(.07)
<b>Interactions</b>												
Nativity × # Close ties	1.02	(.02)	.99	(.02)	1.01	(.02)	1.01	(.02)	1.00	(.02)	.98	(.02)
× Geographic proximity	1.00	(.09)	1.05	(.07)	1.03	(.07)	1.28	(.10)**	.99	(.07)	.89	(.07)
× Frequency of contact	.99	(.06)	1.18	(.07)*	1.09	(.07)	1.04	(.06)	1.21	(.07)**	1.08	(.07)
Language × # Close ties	.99	(.02)	1.02	(.02)	1.00	(.02)	.99	(.02)	1.00	(.02)	1.03	(.02)
× Geographic proximity	1.12	(.10)	.92	(.07)	.90	(.07)	.78	(.10)**	1.00	(.07)	1.07	(.07)
× Frequency of contact	1.01	(.06)	.85	(.07)*	.90	(.07)	.86	(.06)*	.85	(.07)*	1.03	(.07)
Subgroup × # Close ties	.99	(.02)	1.03	(.02)	1.02	(.02)	.98	(.02)	.99	(.02)	1.01	(.02)
× Geographic proximity	.99	(.09)	1.02	(.07)	.99	(.07)	1.00	(.09)	1.04	(.07)	.94	(.07)
× Frequency of contact	.97	(.07)	1.017	(.07)*	.97	(.07)	1.03	(.07)	1.15	(.07)	.99	(.07)
<b>Cox &amp; Snell's R<sup>2</sup></b>	.05		.07		.09		.06		.05		.06	

*Note.* Demographics and sociocultural/sociodemographic variable coefficients shown are from main effects models; interaction coefficients were entered separately in each full model, respectively. *OR* = odds ratio. *SE* = standard error. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Cox & Snell's  $R^2$ s are reported from main effects models.

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