

Being a Spiritual Pillar: The Influence of Marianismo Beliefs on the Education Levels of Second-Generation Latina Women

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INTRODUCTION

Marianismo is a set of cultural ideals in Latino culture, generally defined as the concept that women should be spiritual family leaders, submissive to others, and sexually “pure.” Positive marianismo components include being a spiritual pillar, a family pillar, virtuous, and chaste, while negative components include self-silencing and being subordinate to others (Castillo & Cano, 2008; Rodriguez et al., 2013).

Prior research has found that Latina adolescents who endorsed family pillar beliefs demonstrated higher motivation to achieve their educational goals due to their determination to support their families (Ojeda et al., 2011). In contrast, those who endorsed negative marianismo beliefs experienced adverse academic outcomes and lower motivation to succeed academically (Guyl et al., 2010). However, previous studies primarily focused on college students and those with a STEM background (Milian et al., 2023).

The purpose for our study is to understand how negative and positive marianismo beliefs influence Latina women’s pursuit of education in the general population.

- We hypothesized that endorsement of negative marianismo pillars (i.e., subordinate to others and self-silencing) is associated with lower education levels in second-generation Latina women.
- We also hypothesized that endorsement of positive marianismo pillars (e.g., family, virtuous and chaste, and spiritual) would be associated with higher education levels in second-generation Latina women.

METHODS

Participants:

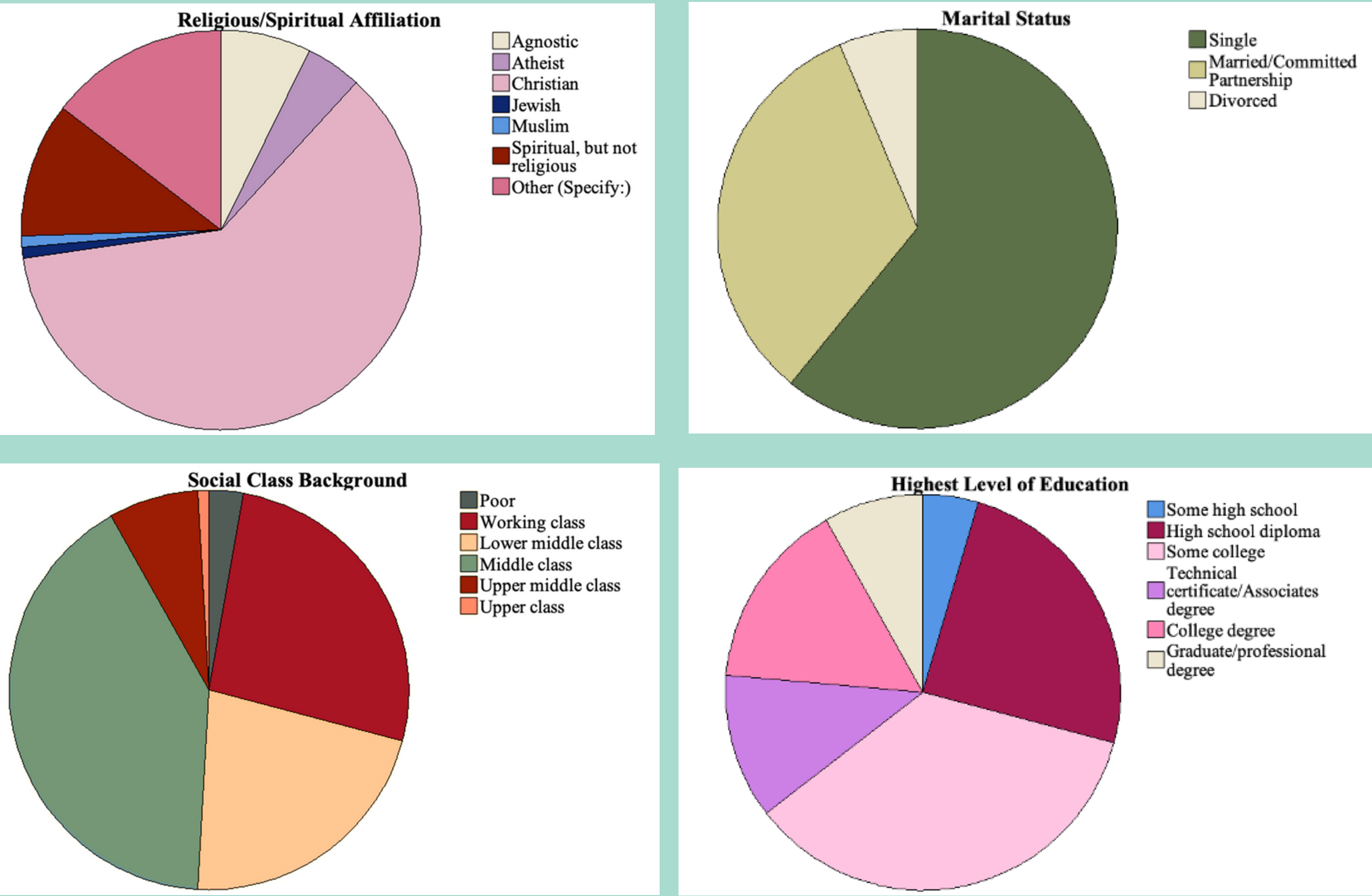
The sample included 110 second-generation Latina women.

- Age: 18-63 years old ($M = 27.07$, $SD = 10.66$)
- Citizenship Status: U.S. Citizen ($n = 105$; 95.5%), Legal Permanent Resident ($n = 2$; 1.8%), DACA Recipient ($n = 3$; 2.7%)
- Marital Status: Single ($n = 67$; 60.9%), Married/Committed Partnership ($n = 36$; 32.7), Divorced ($n = 7$; 6.4%)
- Religious Affiliation: Agnostic ($n = 8$; 7.3%), Atheist ($n = 5$; 4.5%), Christian ($n = 67$; 60.9%), Jewish ($n = 1$; 0.9%), Muslim ($n = 1$; 0.9%), Spiritual but not religious ($n = 12$; 10.9%), Other ($n = 16$; 14.5%)
- Social Class Background: Poor ($n = 3$; 2.7%), Working Class ($n = 29$; 26.4%), Lower Middle Class ($n = 24$; 21.8%), Middle Class ($n = 45$; 40.9%), Upper Middle Class ($n = 8$; 7.3%), Upper Class ($n = 1$; 0.9%)
- Sexual Orientation: Asexual ($n = 7$; 6.4%), Bisexual ($n = 19$; 17.3%), Fluid ($n = 1$; 0.9%), Heterosexual ($n = 71$; 64.5%), Lesbian ($n = 1$; 0.9%), Pansexual ($n = 6$; 5.5%), Questioning ($n = 2$; 1.8%), Other (Specify) ($n = 3$; 2.7%)
- Current U.S. Region of Residence: Eastern ($n = 8$; 7.3%), Western ($n = 23$; 20.9%), Midwestern ($n = 24$; 21.8%), Southern ($n = 45$; 40.9%), Northern ($n = 10$; 9.1%)

Measures:

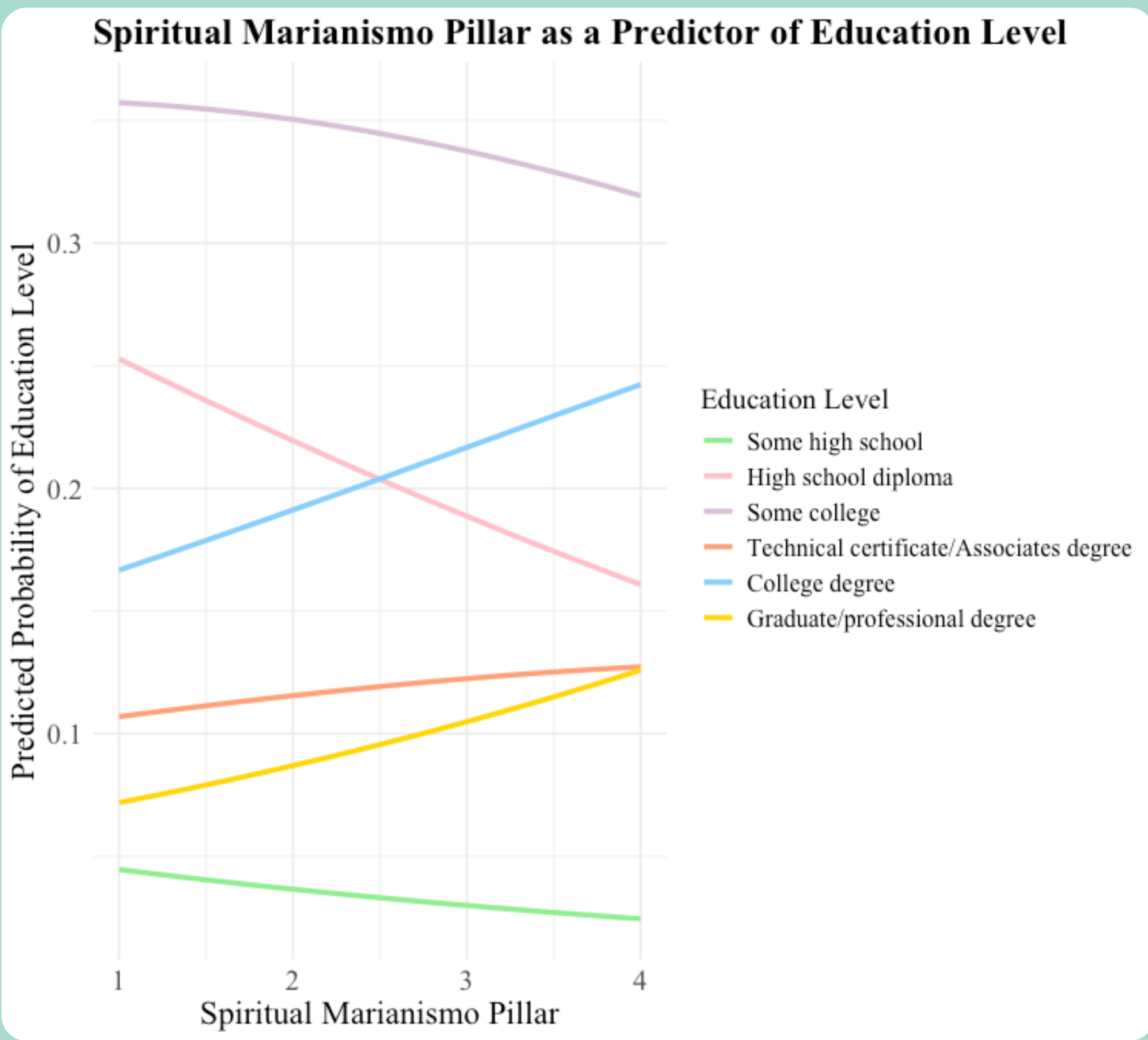
- Marianismo Beliefs Scale
 - The Marianismo Beliefs Scale (MBS; Castillo et al., 2010) assesses the extent to which Latina women endorse traditional marianismo norms and behaviors. The 24-item scale is composed of 5 subscales: Family Pillar, Virtuous and Chaste, Subordinate to Other, Silencing Self to Maintain Harmony, and Spiritual Pillar.
- Education Level Questionnaire
 - Participants indicated their highest completed level of education, with options ranging from “Some high school” to “Graduate/Professional degree.”

SAMPLES



RESULTS

- An ordinal logistic regression in SPSS revealed that higher endorsement of the spiritual marianismo pillar was significantly associated with higher odds of being in a higher education category ($b = 0.44$, $SE = 0.19$, $Wald = 5.42$, $p = .02$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.80]). For every one-unit increase in spiritual pillar beliefs, the odds of being in a higher level of education increased by 55% ($OR = 1.55$).
 - The model fit was statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 110) = 5.38$, $p = .02$), suggesting that the model was effective in differentiating between education levels based on the predictor.
- However, an ordinal logistic regression revealed that the family marianismo pillar ($b = 0.41$, $SE = 0.28$, $Wald = 2.03$, $p = .15$, 95% CI [-0.15, 0.96]) and the chaste/virtuous marianismo pillar ($b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.21$, $Wald = 0.11$, $p = .74$, 95% CI [-0.35, 0.49]) were not significantly associated with education level.
- Additionally, an ordinal logistic regression revealed that the self-silencing marianismo pillar ($b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.23$, $Wald = 0.26$, $p = .61$, 95% CI [-0.34, 0.58]) was not significantly associated with education level.
- Although an ordinal logistic regression revealed that the subordinate to others pillar significantly predicted higher education level ($b = 0.49$, $SE = 0.24$, $Wald = 4.04$, $p = .04$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.97]), the model fit was not significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 110) = 3.73$, $p = .06$), suggesting limited explanatory power.



DISCUSSION

- Our study found that greater endorsement of spiritual pillar beliefs is significantly associated with higher odds of attaining higher levels of education. This finding supports our hypothesis that certain positive marianismo pillars predict educational attainment among second-generation Latina women.
- In contrast, no significant associations were found between education level and other positive marianismo pillars (e.g., family, virtuous, and chaste), nor with a negative marianismo pillar (e.g., self-silencing). Although the subordination pillar was significantly associated with higher education levels, the model did not significantly predict education level.
- These findings highlight that cultural values (e.g., spirituality) may serve as protective factors that support second-generation Latina women’s pursuit of higher education.
- This suggests that integrating cultural strengths in educational and counseling settings may be beneficial for Latina women.

LIMITATIONS

Some limitations include that:

- The study did not assess participants’ specific Latin American country of origin, which limits the ability to examine inter-group cultural differences.
- The study only assessed second-generation Latina women which fails to evaluate marianismo beliefs in first-generation Latina women.
- The study only focuses on Latina women who reside in the U.S., limiting the perspective of marianismo beliefs in other Latin American countries.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- To build on this study, future research should compare first-generation Latina women to second-generation Latina women to identify potential differences in marianismo beliefs and education levels.
- Future studies could explore how participants’ Latin American country of origin relates to marianismo endorsement.

REFERENCES

