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Narrative Continuity/Rupture: Projected Professional Futures amid Pervasive Employment Precarity

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Abstract

As working conditions change worldwide, employment precarity is increasing, including for groups for whom such conditions are unexpected. This study investigates how members of one such group—educationally advantaged young adults—describe their professional futures in a context of unprecedented employment precarity where their expected trajectories are no longer easily achievable. Using 75 interviews with young university graduates in Madrid, Spain, I find that most young graduates drew on a long-standing cultural narrative, which I call the "achievement narrative," to imagine future stable employment. Simultaneously, most denounced this narrative as fraudulent. To explain this finding, I draw on the concept of hysteresis: the mismatch between beliefs that are dependent on the past

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conditions that produced them and the available opportunities in the present. I argue that hysteresis can extend into future projections; projected futures can be guided by beliefs based on past conditions more than by lived experiences in the present. Further, I argue that the achievement narrative itself reinforces hysteresis in future projections due to its resonance and institutional support. The paper offers new insights into projected futures and employment precarity by analyzing the future projections of a privileged cohort facing unexpected precarity, further develops the concept of hysteresis, and extends the study of cultural narratives.

Keywords
precarious work, young workers, university graduates, cultural narratives, future projections

In recent decades, employment has become more precarious across advanced post-industrial societies (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011; Kalleberg, 2018; Katz & Krueger, 2016); even groups with high levels of cultural and social capital encounter employment precarity more frequently than they did in the past (Emmenegger et al., 2012; Kalleberg, 2009, 2012). The present-day experiences of these more privileged individuals are therefore increasingly at odds with the expectations they had based on their social backgrounds and upbringings. Such unexpected precarity does not only create discordant experiences in the present—it can also profoundly unsettle expectations about the future. And these expectations are not unimportant abstractions: research shows that the past, present, and future continuously interpenetrate (Simko, 2018) and that projected futures[1] exert strong influence over decision-making in the present (Beckert, 2013; Mische, 2009; Oyserman, 2015).

The tension experienced by privileged individuals who face unexpected employment precarity is best encapsulated by Bourdieu's concept of "hysteresis," described as the mismatch or misalignment between people's habitus or beliefs, which are dependent on the (past) conditions that produced them, and the opportunities available to them in the present, particularly when circumstances have rapidly changed (Bourdieu, 1988, 1990; Fowler, 2020; Graham, 2020; Strand & Lizardo, 2017). Research on hysteresis has not yet specifically explored

how the mismatch between beliefs based in the past and present-day conditions extends into future projections.

To understand how hysteresis can extend into future projections, I turn to a core cultural tool through which people make sense of their experiences: narratives. Scholars have shown that narratives, and especially the available cultural narratives, powerfully structure future expectations (Beckert, 2016; Frye, 2012; Mische, 2009; Naudet, 2018). Cultural narratives refer to temporally structured stories that help people interpret their lives (Ricoeur, 2010), that are shared among groups of people, and that can contribute to both individual and collective identity (Lamont & Small, 2008; Polletta, 2009; Somers, 1994). For example, research has shown that disadvantaged individuals facing precarity draw on certain cultural narratives to imagine their futures (Frye, 2012; Matlon, 2016). Moreover, scholars have clearly demonstrated the force of narratives in other facets of precariously employed people's experiences, such as in how they draw on particular cultural narratives and frames to understand and adapt to employment precarity in the present (Barley & Kunda, 2011; Pugh, 2015; Snyder, 2016; Vallas & Christin, 2018). I therefore posit that cultural narratives can also influence the extent to which hysteresis extends into future projections.

Thus, in this paper, I ask: How do educationally-advantaged people project their professional futures in an unstable context where the trajectories they had expected to follow are no longer as easily achievable? I address this question by focusing on the projected professional futures of young university graduates in Spain, where unemployment and precarious employment rose sharply following the 2008 economic crisis. These changes have left the educationally advantaged group of university graduates facing widespread employment precarity. The traditional professional paths they grew up expecting to follow have become unexpectedly destabilized or "unsettled" (Swidler, 1986), profoundly impacting their present and, likely, their future lives. Drawing on 75 in-depth, open-ended interviews with young university graduates living in Madrid, I analyze the projected futures of members of this educationally advantaged group. Through this analysis, I evaluate the extension of hysteresis into future projections and demonstrate how people draw on shared cultural narratives to imagine their professional futures. I show how these cultural narratives can reinforce hysteresis in projected futures.

In my analysis, I first delineate how most respondents mobilized one particular cultural narrative that I call the "achievement narrative": a

narrative steeped in the logic of meritocracy and typically used to describe the rewards traditionally accompanying a university degree. Respondents drew on this narrative to project themselves onto clear, traditional paths toward an idealized professional stability in the future. Simultaneously, I show that most respondents denounced this narrative as a fallacious and even fraudulent fiction, based on their lived experiences in the present, despite their clear commitment to it in their future projections. To explain the concurrent denouncement and strong mobilization of this narrative, I argue that hysteresis, the mismatch between beliefs based on past conditions and the present circumstances, can extend into future expectations. Projected futures can be structured by beliefs based on the past more than by lived experiences, even when individuals are aware of the disjuncture between past and present.

I further argue that shared cultural narratives like the achievement narrative can reinforce hysteresis in projected futures. I highlight two key features of the traditional achievement narrative that allow it to underpin hysteresis—its resonance and the system of institutional support surrounding it. I describe the resonance of the narrative, or the match between respondents' values and the central ideals the narrative espouses, as well as the paucity of other widely available cultural narratives that are equally resonant. I then show how the achievement narrative is supported by its relocation from the attainment of a university degree to the traditional institution of the *funcionariado,* which presents the limited possibility of lifetime professional stability through employment as a civil servant.

I focus on this group of educationally advantaged young people as an extreme case; Spain is one of the developed countries with the most pervasive unemployment and employment precarity among highly educated young adults (Emmenegger et al., 2012; Martínez-Pastor, 2017). Nonetheless, this case highlights an increasingly pressing issue worldwide. Young adult employment precarity has been rising in Europe and beyond (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017), and has risen yet more drastically in the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic (Schwartz & Cohen, 2020). Simultaneously, numbers of university graduates have grown internationally and are projected to continue growing (Calderon, 2018). This paper thus contributes an essential perspective on how the growing group of young, highly-educated people understand their professional futures in increasingly common precarious contexts where their expected trajectories are no longer as easily achievable. Since imagined future possibilities are a critical component of how people make sense of and

make decisions about their professional lives (Beckert, 2013; Mische, 2009; Oyserman, 2015), the paper also gestures toward the potential effects for both their mental health and decision-making.

Beyond focusing on the experiences and perceptions of an important group of young people, this paper makes contributions to the literature on employment precarity and to cultural research on future projections, hysteresis, and narratives. First, it furthers research on the consequences of employment precarity in two ways: by analyzing the future projections of an educationally privileged cohort of people facing unexpected precarity and by showing how such individuals may try to resist precarity by drawing on cultural narratives to describe themselves following traditional, professionally stable paths in the future. Second, this paper further develops the concept of hysteresis and extends the study of future projections by demonstrating how cultural narratives can reinforce the extension of hysteresis into projected futures. Lastly, the paper contributes to the study of cultural narratives by illuminating the complex, contradictory ways in which people can draw on the same narrative depending on the temporal location in which the narrative is mobilized.

Theoretical Framework

Future Projections in Contexts of Precarious Employment

Projected futures, also described as imagined futures or aspirations and expectations, have consistently interested sociologists, who have extensively studied the aspirations and expectations of disadvantaged or working-class youth and working adults. These scholars have particularly focused on the role of future projections in shaping decision-making and eventual life outcomes (Hardgrove et al., 2015; Hitlin & Johnson, 2015; Mische, 2009; Oyserman, 2015). For example, educational researchers have found that among equally disadvantaged youth, higher aspirations and expectations generally correlate with more positive outcomes, like higher grades, higher rates of applications to college, and better occupational trajectories (Baird et al., 2008; Bourdieu, 1977a; Khattab, 2015; MacLeod, 2018). Research on the projected futures of people experiencing employment precarity has similarly suggested that these imagined futures can influence action, finding that whether or not precariously employed, under-valued, and often working class workers maintain optimism in their idealistic futures determines whether they disengage from work and seek other forms

of recognition (Chinoy, 1955; Kanter, 1977), or whether they continue to work toward their goals (V. Smith, 2018).

Sociologists have also sought to understand the structural and cultural factors that influence the projected futures of disadvantaged people. For instance, scholars have analyzed the structural conditions and cultural frames that lead some disadvantaged youth to have high educational aspirations and others to reject such aspirations and their meritocratic basis (MacLeod, 2018; Willis, 1977). Sociologists have also suggested that the optimistic futures of disadvantaged youth, often disconnected from their actual circumstances, are deeply connected to identity and are expressions of moral worth (Deterding, 2015; Frye, 2012; Nielsen, 2015; Silva & Snellman, 2018; J. M. Smith, 2017). Research more specifically on employment precarity foregrounds the role of cultural norms and identity in shaping alternative aspirations of non-traditional employment and neoliberal forms of capitalistic enterprise among un- and under-employed black men in Côte d'Ivoire (Matlon, 2016). This research has emphasized the irrationality of projected futures and the fact that they are often heavily influenced by cultural narratives and other structural and cultural factors.

Despite extensive research foregrounding the projected futures of both disadvantaged youth and adult workers, little is known about how more advantaged individuals imagine their futures in contexts of widespread and unexpected change and uncertainty, such as that of increasing employment precarity. In unstable contexts, theorists have argued that individuals' future projections are destabilized; individuals become incapable of imagining their futures (Bauman, 2013; Bourdieu, 1964, 1998, 2000; Sennett, 2007). Tavory and Eliasoph (2013) claim that future trajectories, in such unstable periods, should become "contingent, short-term, willed projects" (928). Several empirical studies have analyzed the future projections of both advantaged and disadvantaged young adults during the precarity generated by the 2008 economic crisis with inconclusive results. Researchers have suggested that young adults may ignore the future and largely focus on the present when the future is uncertain (Leccardi, 2017), or describe optimistic projected futures due to a neoliberal[2] faith in the consequences of hard work (Franceschelli & Keating, 2018). Class differences have also been found to heavily structure young adults' future projections, with young people from privileged class backgrounds describing more control over their futures than those from less privileged backgrounds (Atkinson, 2013; Leccardi, 2017; Silva & Corse, 2018).

Foregrounding the projected futures of more advantaged people, such as those from privileged social class backgrounds or with high educational attainment, in contexts of widespread employment precarity enables a specific focus on how individuals' future projections are shaped by contexts where their social positions and trajectories are in flux, as well as how projected futures influence decision-making under such conditions. Such a focus is particularly critical in the contemporary global period of employment instability (Kalleberg, 2009; Katz & Krueger, 2016; Thelen, 2019), where non-standard work arrangements have proliferated (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017) and even the white-collar workers who have historically benefitted from stable jobs have been affected (Sharone, 2013).

Hysteresis and Cultural Narratives

The shifting trajectories of members of advantaged groups in contexts of increasing employment precarity are particularly well illuminated by Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis (Bourdieu, 1977b, 1988, 1990). According to Bourdieu, beliefs, behaviors, and other aspects of habitus are dependent on the conditions in which they were created or produced (Bourdieu, 1977b). Therefore, sudden changes in the present environment can lead to a mismatch, or misalignment, between these beliefs and behaviors, based in the past, and the opportunities available in the present (Bourdieu, 2000). In the context of such a mismatch, people have trouble adjusting their beliefs and behaviors to the situation at hand, as the past creates unrealistic expectations (Bourdieu, 1990; Hardy, 2008). This difficulty is also referred to as "the Quixote effect" (Bourdieu, 1990, 2000).

Research has suggested that hysteresis has the capacity to shape action (Fowler, 2020; Strand & Lizardo, 2017). Strand and Lizardo (2017) describe various ways that hysteresis can manifest through different kinds of past-tinged "reflexiveness," as actors attempt to make sense of their changing worlds. They delineate the consequences of each kind of reflexiveness, building on three dimensions: the presence of institutional patterns that structure the passage of time, the perseverance of old beliefs, and the ability to form new beliefs. For instance, a *radical* reflexiveness incorporates a weak presence of old belief, a strong new belief, and a clearly broken order of succession, where the passage of time is no longer structured by previously consistent institutional patterns. Individuals experiencing this type of hysteresis may participate in protests or otherwise act upon their sense of having been

wronged. A *traditional* reflexiveness, by contrast, unites the strong presence of the old belief, an absence of new belief, and no order of succession. Individuals experiencing this type of hysteresis turn the upholding of tradition into an explicit project or commitment.

Research on hysteresis and its manifestations has helped sociologists understand the potential consequences of a mismatch between habitus and present circumstances. However, no research has been conducted to understand how hysteresis might extend into people's future projections. Yet both the past and present influence conceptions of the future (Simko, 2018), and individuals' future projections shape their decision-making (Beckert, 2013; Mische, 2009; Oyserman, 2015), suggesting that a close analysis of hysteresis in projected futures might lead to a deeper understanding of individuals' actions in the present.

To understand how hysteresis can extend into projected futures, I focus on narratives as a core cultural tool through which people make sense of their experiences. Projected futures and cultural narratives are closely intertwined; narratives are fundamentally temporal (Ricoeur, 2010), and future expectations take the form of stories and are also structured by the contextually available, shared cultural narratives (Beckert, 2016; Frye, 2012; Mische, 2009; Naudet, 2018). For example, research has shown that disadvantaged people facing precarity draw on the cultural narratives emphasized by ideological campaigns and the media to make sense of their experiences and imagine their futures (Frye, 2012; Matlon, 2016).

Sociologists have frequently revealed the potential power of cultural narratives outside of projected futures (Polletta, 2009). Most importantly, research on employment precarity has delineated the role of cultural narratives in shaping people's understandings and experiences in such contexts. In recent decades, scholars have repeatedly found that workers primarily seek to adapt to precarity, drawing on neoliberal cultural narratives that encourage extreme individualism, promote feelings of self-reliance, and emphasize flexibility and adaptation to market conditions over stability (Barley & Kunda, 2011; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Hall & Lamont, 2013; Lamont, 2000, 2019; Lane, 2011; Matlon, 2016; Pugh, 2015; Rao, 2017; Silva, 2012; Snyder, 2016; Vallas & Christin, 2018). Research has shown that this neoliberal focus on self-reliance and independence has also contributed to how people imagine their futures (Franceschelli & Keating, 2018; Matlon, 2016). Beyond studies of employment precarity, previous research has also repeatedly demonstrated the prevalence and power of one particular cultural narrative in serving as an ideal that guides action: that of meritocracy, the

narrative that a person's effort and abilities should and will lead to success (Chen, 2015; Lamont, 2009; Mijs, 2019; Warikoo, 2016).

Additionally, research has illuminated the capacity of people to draw on cultural narratives in complex ways. For instance, prior research has analyzed people's mobilization of *contradictory* narratives, showing how people can draw on distinct, even conflicting ways of talking about love (the romantic Hollywood myth versus the prosaic-realist vision of love as commitment) or unemployment (pinning blame for unemployment on the flaws of the unsuccessful job-seeker versus those of the employment system) (Lopez & Phillips, 2019; Sharone, 2013; Swidler, 2001). Swidler suggests that people use the cultural narratives that best serve them in different contexts (1,98,62,001).

Prior research has not yet investigated the role of cultural narratives in the extension of hysteresis into future projections in contexts where individuals' social positions and expected trajectories are in flux. Nonetheless, due to the fundamentally temporal nature of narratives and the well-researched links between cultural narratives and projected futures, their demonstrated power in guiding how people make sense of their experiences, and the complex ways in which they can be mobilized, I argue that cultural narratives can also reinforce or undermine hysteresis in future projections. This paper thus asks: how do individuals in educationally advantaged positions (young university graduates) imagine their professional futures when recent structural changes have made previously available paths less feasible? While answering this question, it investigates the extension of hysteresis into the projected professional futures of these individuals, and the role of cultural narratives in this process.

Data and Methods

I answer this question using in-depth interviews with young Spanish university graduates. Widespread employment precarity in Spain has profoundly destabilized the professional paths of young college graduates, creating an ideal case to understand future projections in a context of precarity. A period of relative prosperity in Spain ended abruptly with the start of the 2008 global economic crisis (Galindo, 2016). The crisis had an overwhelmingly negative impact on Spanish employment opportunities, particularly for young people; in 2014, over half of young adults under 25 were unemployed (Eurostat, 2017). In response to the crisis, labor market reforms led to the deregulation of labor, including the normalization of temporary contracts, the reduction of

dismissal protections for all contracts, and the decentralization of collective bargaining (Méndez, 2017; Picot & Tassinari, 2017).

For the growing numbers of young adults with university degrees (Villarroya, 2015), employment opportunities were and continue to be better than for those without such educational credentials. Still, in 2017, 16.4% of university-educated 25–29 year-olds and 11.4% of 30–34 year-olds were unemployed (Consejo de la Juventud de España, 2017). Young university graduates also face a scarcity of "good" jobs (Menárguez & Silió, 2019). Many hold temporary contracts that grant little or no stability, and over 40% of young Spaniards with higher education degrees are underemployed (Consejo de la Juventud de España, 2017).[3] Moreover, most of the available jobs offer poor salaries; many young adults do not reach an income of a thousand euros a month (Millán, 2017). Job prospects are better for graduates of some degrees, such as engineering programs, than others (Toro & Saco, 2017).

One important alternative to the tempestuous job market in Spain is employment as a civil servant (funcionario), usually accessible by exams called *oposiciones*. These positions include a wide range of professions, including public transportation conductors, firefighters, teachers, and judges, each accessible through a different exam with different specific selection criteria. The perks of employment as a *funcionario* are substantial—usually a job for life, and often higher salaries and shorter hours than private sector equivalents (Frayer, 2012). However, the exams are highly competitive—in 2018, for example, positions were available for only 7.8% of people who took a teaching exam and 2.6% of those who took the postal service exam (Agencias, 2018; Expansion, 2018).

To investigate future projections in a context where structural change has changed the available paths, I conducted 75 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with young Spanish university graduates, ages 25 to 35, who were not enrolled in full-time educational programs. These respondents were primarily socialized during a period of prosperity and were in their mid-teens to mid-twenties when the crisis began—all but the oldest entered the labor market during a period of maximum scarcity and uncertainty. The paths they and their families thought would be open to them when they were children closed off as they aged; they face opportunities different from those for which they were prepared.[4] Interviews took place between January and July 2018 in Madrid, Spain's capital city and one of the "best-case scenarios" of job possibilities in Spain (Consejo de la Juventud de España, 2017).[5]

I sampled for range (Small, 2009) using snowball sampling, beginning with a wide variety of seeds through websites I found and networks

I developed during my time living in Madrid and working at a secondary school in a working-class suburb. After each interview, I asked each respondent to recommend up to two unconnected acquaintances; some volunteered to use social media to share a call for participants. I interviewed until I reached saturation (Small, 2009).

I used purposive sampling to achieve balance across employment status, gender, and socioeconomic background (see Table 1). I categorized respondents as stably or precariously employed based on each respondent's contract; people with fixed or indefinite contracts were categorized as stably employed, while those with temporary or internship contracts were categorized as precariously employed. I also included several respondents with fixed/indefinite contracts who described high levels of subjective precarity in the form of forced underemployment or extremely low wages in the precarious category. Despite this division, most respondents coded as stably employed voiced the same concerns as those coded as precariously employed; the majority felt that they were on the brink of precarious employment. I established class background based on parents' levels of education and the occupations parents held during respondents' adolescence.

I conducted in-depth, open-ended interviews, ideal for a study about people's self-perceptions and accounts of their lives (Lamont & Swidler, 2014; Weiss, 1995). The interviews took place in cafés or other public

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Interview Sample.

	N
Employment status	
Stably employed	33
Precariously employed	30
Unemployed	12[a]
Socioeconomic background	
Upper middle class	27
Middle class	27
Working class	21
Gender	
Male	34
Female	41
Total	75

[a]Unemployment among university graduates is not as common as precarious employment and many university graduates who are unemployed return to full-time education; I found few entirely unemployed respondents.

spaces and lasted between 39 and 149 minutes, with an average of 83 minutes; they were conducted in Spanish. All interviews but one were recorded and transcribed; one respondent did not wish to be recorded, so I took extensive notes instead.

All interviews focused on individuals' life histories. I asked open-ended questions like "When you were about to finish secondary school, what did you think your life would be like after graduation?" and "Tell me about your first step after you finished college. What came next?" and probed to find out more about their experiences and perceptions of their decision-making. Eventually, these questions led into my central questions for this paper, as I asked about their projected futures in five and ten years: "Thinking a little further ahead, in five years: how do you see yourself? What will your life be like?" I asked how respondents "saw themselves" or "thought their lives would be," rather than asking what they "wished" or "hoped for," because in preliminary interviews I saw a clear difference in responses to these questions—a respondent might "hope" to win the lottery and open a zoo, but "think" they would have a stable private sector job in their field. Nonetheless, many respondents used the language of "hope" in response to questions about how they saw themselves; the line between expectations and aspirations is a blurry one (Frye, 2012). I probed to find out what obstacles they saw to their projected futures and if they saw any alternative trajectories. As a foreigner with an ambiguous accent and experience living and working in Spain, my position provided background information that informed the analysis while also prompting respondents to explain certain complicated concepts, like the *funcionariado*, as they would to an outsider.

I coded the transcripts on N-Vivo iteratively; my codes were broad at first and became more precise as I added and refined codes, focusing on disentangling the specific themes emerging in the data. I coded the stable professional future projections that form the core of my analysis based on markers of stability and consistent employment. For example, I coded both "I'll do small [artistic] things to combine with a stable job" and "I'll be working at the [public] center that I want to, for sure" as stable professional futures. The quotations in this paper reflect themes present in multiple interviews.

Findings

In the following sections, I show, first, that most respondents described their professional futures as characterized by good, stable employment. In doing so, they mobilized a cultural narrative that I call the

"achievement narrative" to describe themselves reaching the rewards traditionally accompanying a college degree. Yet I also show that most respondents denounced this same narrative as a fraudulent fiction based on their experiences of precarity in the present. To explain the simultaneous mobilization and denouncement of the achievement narrative, I argue that hysteresis can extend into future expectations, and outline how this future-oriented hysteresis is reinforced by the "achievement narrative" itself, specifically focusing on two characteristics of the narrative.

A minority of respondents described their projected futures in alternative ways that cohere with past research on projected futures and precarious employment, as I outline below (Bauman, 2013; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Bourdieu, 2000; Leccardi, 2017; Pugh, 2015; Sennett, 2007; Silva, 2012; Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013; Vallas & Christin, 2018). Employment status, age, gender, and difficulty finding employment did not pattern respondents' projected professional futures; social class background did in a minor way, discussed in a later section. Table 2 summarizes the findings, delineating respondents' professional future projections, the narratives underlying these futures, and the respondents in each category.

The Stability of Projected Futures

The vast majority of respondents described their future professional trajectories by narrating conventional paths toward good, stable jobs. Sixty-six of the 75 respondents projected part or all of their professional futures in contexts of stability.[6] Carmen,[7] an unemployed engineer recently laid off from her first job, illustrated the pervasive emphasis on long-term stable employment. She described her life in ten years as "in a bought house with my partner . . . and something more stable, in a more stable company, where I will finish my working life" (unemployed). Marina, an educator who had recently faced tremendous difficulty finding a job, nonetheless confidently saw herself in a school with "a fixed salary, stability, and long vacations" (precariously employed). Some respondents described their future stability in less explicit terms, but nevertheless stated that they imagined themselves in stable careers. For instance, Antonio, an assistant professor, said he saw himself "continuing to dedicate myself to the university, more to the research and less the classes" (stably employed).

Many respondents described professional futures following unappealing trajectories, but they described stable futures nonetheless.

Table 2. Summary of Findings.

		Respondents		
Projected futures	Narratives	Short-term future (5 years)	Change from short- to long-term	Long-term future (10+ years)
Respondents described clear, traditional paths toward good, stable employment.	Achievement narrative	66	−12[a]	54
Respondents said they could not imagine their professional futures or could only imagine their short-term futures. They were distressed by this uncertainty.	Uncertain ambiguity (non-narrative)	5	+8	13
Respondents described ambiguous, uncertain, and flexible future lives and either welcomed or reluctantly accepted such a future.	Neoliberal narrative	1	+4	5
	Creative entrepreneurship narrative	3	0	3
Total		75		75

[a]These numbers demonstrate the variation in how many people drew on each type of projected future between their delineations of their short-term and long-term futures. For example, although 66 people drew on the achievement narrative to describe their five-year future, 12 of these "left" the group and drew on different narratives to describe their long-term futures. Of these 12, 8 instead drew on the uncertain ambiguity non-narrative and 4 on the neoliberal narrative.

For example, Julia, who "hate[d] teaching, but want[ed] the benefits of teaching" narrated her future:

> I see myself locked up in a school for life, but oh well, I think it will be what makes me happy . . . in a school. In a school teaching, which is what I'm preparing for now, . . . for the rest of my life [laughs bitterly]. (precariously employed)

Julia was unenthusiastic about the permanent job she described in her stable future, describing herself as "locked up," but nonetheless declared that its stability would make her happy.

The trend toward long-term professional stability in projected futures stands in sharp contrast to the short-term, unstable, and/or flexible futures predicted by theorists and most empirical research on employment precarity (Bauman, 2013; Bourdieu, 2000; Pugh, 2015; Sennett, 2007; Silva, 2012; Swidler, 1986; Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013; Vallas & Christin, 2018). Instead, these projected futures align with the historically strong prioritization of employment stability as a professional goal in Spain (Baviera, 2013; Beltrán de Heredia Ruiz, 2008). As Paula, a stably employed respondent, dismissively said: "it's very Anglo-Saxon to think you'll flow through life . . . In Spain we're more [like], 'I'll stick my head in one place and here I'll stay'" (stably employed). Cristina, who struggled to find even part-time employment, similarly revealed strong beliefs about stability as she wholeheartedly rejected the idea of becoming an entrepreneur, saying: "what people are looking for isn't going this way and that all the time, I think. I think what people want is a stable job that can give you the decent life conditions to have a life project and fulfill yourself as a person" (unemployed). The concept of professional stability permeated most respondents' discourse as the key feature of their professional futures.

Stability and the Achievement Narrative in Projected Futures

Most respondents' descriptions of their future professional stability were intertwined with a pervasive cultural narrative detailing the path by which to reach this valued stability. I term this narrative the "achievement narrative"—the meritocratic story that working hard and being qualified leads to the accomplishment of graduating from college, which naturally results in good, stable employment. Respondents generally delineated this narrative as they described the reality of university graduates' experiences in past generations. Some respondents described the narrative as encapsulated by their parents' trajectories, while others described the stories they were told by their parents and teachers as they were growing up (Baillergeau & Duyvendak, 2019). Isabel, an unemployed artist, told her father's story as an example of a typical achievement narrative:

> My father was born in a village where he was a goatherd. And he ended up as a [university] professor. It's like day and night from how he started. And everything started because he studied, it took him from a wretched environment in which he was poor and they lived in the countryside and

> didn't know how to read or write, and he came to the capital, studied a degree, and it was like "this is what has secured my future." (unemployed)

Similarly, Roberto described how his older brother, who had already graduated from college, counseled him not to drop out despite his unhappiness in his degree, telling him that "in the future, the more studies you have, the more professional possibilities you will have" (precariously unemployed). The attainment of a university degree, in this achievement narrative, is the mechanism through which a person "secures" his or her future, the feat that enables him or her to reach good, stable employment.

Respondents explicitly described their internalizations of this narrative in the past, particularly in their childhood and adolescence, in line with Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus. Rosa, an engineer who felt undervalued by her company, compared how she thought about the future as a teenager to her reality a decade later by drawing on the same relationship between a degree and professional stability: "I saw myself studying constantly…and at 18 [years old] I thought 'in ten years I'll have…a successful job, I'll have a very stable job already'… [laughs] and it's not like that!" (stably employed). Detailing his difficult professional trajectory through failed *oposiciones* and underemployment, Sergio remarked wistfully that "in the end, when you complete a degree, you see yourself in a stable job, or… you visualize yourself that way" (precariously employed). Respondents described the narrative as one that they had taken to heart as children and teenagers.

Delineations of the achievement narrative were most frequently visible, although often in more subtle forms, as respondents described their trajectories toward their professionally stable future lives. For example, despite years of frustrated unemployment and a lack of job leads, Fran referred to his "preparation" (a word used to describe education and training) to explain his stably employed future: "Since I think that, within my possibilities, I prepare myself as well as possible…I trust that I'll have found a job that allows me to live well" (unemployed). Rodolfo, an engineer who had recently found a stable job in Madrid after having felt forced to leave the country years earlier to find employment, similarly drew on the achievement narrative to imagine his future, "I'm a guy who works well, and yes, I see myself in this company or another, in high positions in ten years, or at least pretty high" (stably employed). He directly connected his self-conception as hard-working to his achievement in completing his degree: "Since the degree was very

hard, and I did badly at first, when I finished it, I learned 'if I work hard, I can do it.' It's like a movie, but it's true."

The Fraudulent Fiction—The Clash between Narrative and Lived Experience

Although most respondents drew on the achievement narrative to describe their stable professional futures, they were simultaneously aware of the economic circumstances in Spain and the exceptional difficulty of reaching the good, stable employment implicated in the achievement narrative. All respondents commented on this reality in the course of their interviews, often as they discussed the consequences of the economic crisis; for all but six of them, the crisis had deeply affected their own lives or those of their loved ones. Pablo, who held four jobs and earned about a thousand euros a month, described himself as having a "positive but realistic" vision of the situation following the crisis: "I think that people work a lot and see that they stay the same or get worse. The most you can aspire to is to have a situation as a *mileurista* [someone making a thousand euros a month], or a little more" (precariously employed).

Most prominently, for most respondents—56 people—this difficult economic reality was the basis for their frequent exclamations about the impossibility of successfully following the achievement narrative to reach the promise of professional stability. I did not explicitly ask any questions on this theme and was initially surprised by the prevalence and consistency of these critiques. Respondents were indignant that their experiences were so different from the narrative they had internalized as children. Their complaints suggested that they felt they had followed the trajectory established by the achievement narrative —they had studied, worked hard, and graduated—and yet had not received the reward promised at the conclusion of the narrative: good, stable employment. Although these descriptions were most vociferous among precariously employed and unemployed respondents, even all but six "stably employed" respondents voiced this frustration; despite having better contracts than precariously employed or unemployed respondents, many were poorly paid and felt undervalued. Adri, who had recently found decently stable employment through a friend after a long and arduous employment trajectory, described these unexpected experiences as provoking the "rupture" of the established narrative:

> I think what we have is [the story of] where we came from, where we are, and where we think we'll end up. . .it isn't just that we're poor people who

> have remained poor and were told they'd be rich, or middle or upper-middle class people like me whose positions have worsened. . .the point isn't exactly that we're poorer. The point is the rupture of the discourse. (stably employed)

Adri, like most other respondents, clearly described the achievement narrative as broken and suggested that the fracture itself was profoundly damaging for himself and his friends.

In their descriptions of this ruptured narrative, half of the respondents foregrounded disappointment borne of changing circumstances. Julia, distraught by the difficulties she and others like her faced, described the breakdown of the achievement narrative through tears:

> I think in general, we're all doing badly. . .in everything [begins to cry]. In absolutely everything. . .It's a limbo, what I call the professional limbo, in which the logical progression, which is you study, you go to high school, university, you have a job, has changed completely. (precariously employed)

These respondents described the changing situation and the negative consequences they faced. Raúl, stably employed but deeply affected by years of feeling trapped in a marginally precarious job, described a state of disillusionment, saying that "everything has changed on us. . . my parents, when I was young, before going to college, said everyone would get more or less what they wanted, there was a very optimistic message. . . and now I wouldn't give that advice" (stably employed).

The other half of the respondents explicitly denounced the fraudulence of the narrative; many referred to the narrative as a "lie" or a fiction and emphasized their indignation, seeking to attribute blame, even though no respondent clearly identified the culprit(s). Pilar, who studied two degrees and worked in dozens of precarious jobs before quitting to study for an *oposición* exam, described how "we had been sold the tale that if you studied and worked and were smart, nothing bad would happen to you. . .of course, we've been surprised by [the economic situation]" (unemployed). Carlos, who had also had difficulties finding good employment and worked as a waiter, described the narrative as a lie: "The topic had always been sold that if you study you'll get a good job, a tale that my generation has discovered as a lie" (precariously employed). The scant opportunities respondents faced after they graduated were affronts to their understandings of what their professional lives should hold.

Hysteresis in Projected Futures

There is a striking disconnect between respondents' denouncement of the achievement narrative as no longer accurate, and even as broken or fractured, based on their lived experiences, and their repeated mobilization of that narrative to project themselves into stable professional futures. I argue that this disconnect is an extension of hysteresis into future projections (Bourdieu 1988, 1990), because respondents' future projections were guided by beliefs based on past conditions more than by current lived experiences, even though respondents were aware of the mismatch between past and present. Some respondents were aware of this paradox. Lara, who worked a few hours a week while she looked for a better job, explicitly described this problem for the young adults around her:

> We're always, myself too. . .thinking about the impossibility of finding the path they had promised us. I mean, it was 'study, go to college, because that way you'll have better jobs, a better future'. . .And that has become a lie, a dramatic lie. I mean, that idea of social ascent, of meritocracy, is totally a lie. And now we suffer, because although we know that it is, it has been a lie, we're not capable of getting out of it, because in the end we keep looking for. . .it's that constant schizophrenia, right? To know that it's all collapsing, but we need to do it anyway. (precariously employed)

Despite respondents' strong sense of a broken (or "ruptured") order of succession and their rejection of the old belief as a "lie," they continued to describe their futures following traditional paths to stability, an example of hysteresis in projected futures.

But neither Bourdieu's conceptualization (1988, 1990), nor Strand and Lizardo's (2017) expansion of hysteresis can fully explain how respondents' stable future projections were maintained despite their insistence that such possibilities were fictitious. I argue that hysteresis in projected futures is strongly reinforced by the cultural "achievement narrative" itself, and that two characteristics of the narrative—its resonance and institutional support—aid it in underpinning hysteresis. First, I argue that respondents were drawn to the "best available" narrative—the achievement narrative—because other available narratives, including neoliberal narratives, did not resonate with them. Second, I show that stable future projections were bolstered by the relocation of the achievement narrative from the attainment of a university degree to a particular national institution—the *funcionariado*, or civil servant corps.

The absence of widespread alternative narratives. Past research on employment precarity and Strand and Lizardo's delineation of radical reflexiveness would predict that respondents who strongly denounced the achievement narrative would reject it and draw on other narratives to imagine different futures (Pugh, 2015; Silva, 2012; Strand & Lizardo, 2017; Vallas & Christin, 2018). Twenty-one respondents did describe at least their long-term futures differently (see Table 2). However, the majority of these responded to questions about their long-term futures by drawing on what I call "uncertain ambiguity." These futures were unguided by any narrative. Víctor, who had faced difficulties finding employment and ultimately found a job at a supermarket, demurred when asked to describe his projected future:

> I don't know what to tell you. I just don't know, because it might not depend on me, because I've looked for work and found a totally different type of work. I mean, I'm a waiter, or I sell things, I don't know. I don't know... thinking about it overwhelms me. (precariously employed)

Víctor and these other respondents were anxious and demoralized by the uncertainty looming in the future, as theorists predict (Bauman, 2013; Bourdieu, 2000; Sennett, 2007; Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013). They seemed noticeably more dejected than the remainder of respondents, who did draw on narratives to imagine their futures.

Only a handful of respondents partially or wholly drew on alternative narratives to the achievement narrative. Some of these respondents drew on a "neoliberal" narrative, embracing uncertainty as a life philosophy. Sergio, who experimented with numerous jobs prior to establishing his path, explained why he could not describe his future:

> I don't think a lot about the future. I'm someone who is open to changes... Now I'm doing this, but if there's a work opportunity that someone offers me and it seems interesting, a project, a company, a friend...I'm open to change. (precariously employed)

These respondents voiced confidence that they would ultimately lead successful professional lives and welcomed ambiguity as opportunity, accepting flexibility and change (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Leccardi, 2017; Pugh, 2015; Silva, 2012; Vallas & Christin, 2018) (see Table 2). The other respondents who described unstable professional futures drew on a narrative of "creative entrepreneurship," related to the neoliberal narrative. These respondents more reluctantly accepted

flexible trajectories as a byproduct of the artistic careers they had chosen.

These two narratives were the only alternative narratives evident in respondents' projected futures, and they seemed available only to a privileged few—of these respondents, the majority were from upper-middle class backgrounds, and only one came from a working-class background. This class-differentiated finding is supported by prior research (Atkinson, 2013; Leccardi, 2017; Silva & Corse, 2018) (see Online Supplemental Material).

Moreover, these narratives were antithetical to the historical prioritization of stability in Spain; even most socioeconomically privileged respondents did not feel that the narratives resonated with them. For instance, Paula, an upper-middle class respondent, explicitly denounced what she called "that neoliberal bullshit that it's cool to be precarious," sarcastically saying, "I don't think it's *cool* if the bills come and you have to pay them. I don't think it's *cool* to think 'in two months, my contract is over, I don't know if they'll renew me or not" (stably employed, emphasis hers). Due to this rejection of neoliberal flexibility, the achievement narrative was, for many respondents, the "best available" narrative—the only available narrative that supported their identities, resonated with their principles, and provided hope (Lamont, 2019). Lorena, who described herself as definitely following one of two paths to stable employment, made her commitment to the achievement narrative exceptionally clear when I pressed her on whether she saw any other possibilities for her professional future, blurting out: "otherwise I'll shoot myself now. I hope so" (precariously employed).

The *funcionariado* and the institutionalization of the achievement narrative. Respondents' projected stable futures were also bolstered by the strong institutional support for the achievement narrative in Spain, evident in the relocation of the narrative from the attainment of a university degree to a career path as part of the national institution of the *funcionariado*. The position of *funcionario*, or civil servant, is typically associated with guaranteed lifetime employment, accessed through months to years of studying culminating in grueling *oposiciones* exams. These exams are highly competitive; in recent years, most exams have had at least ten times as many applicants as open positions (El País, 2019).

Forty-eight respondents were considering following the *funcionario* path, including almost all of the respondents who were precariously employed or unemployed but projected professionally stable futures

for themselves.[8] Respondents described the path to stability through civil service as clear and achievable; due to the guarantee of lifetime employment, multiple respondents referred to it as "life insurance." Pilar, who had taken an administrative *oposición* exam and was awaiting the result, described how "I want my job, knowing that I'll retire with that job, that feeling of saying, the day that I pass, if it happens, taking that burden off [my] back. My job for life, in which I'll work so happily!" (unemployed).

Despite the uncertainty of successfully attaining a position as a civil servant, respondents drew on the meritocratic achievement narrative, relocated to the new context, to voice their assurance of passing the *oposiciones* and becoming *funcionarios*. They suggested that studying to become a *funcionario* was an arduous task, but with hard work and ability, the process would undoubtedly culminate in the achievement of a job with the guarantee of lifetime professional stability. Respondents used meritocratic language emphasizing their intelligence and effort to describe their future trajectories through *oposiciones*. Alba, for instance, was drawn to the path by the stable job conditions. She described her future without serious obstacles as a civil servant, saying "I see myself as pretty capable of passing [the exam], I think it's a hard path, but I'm smart about that kind of thing, and that's why it's the path that I want" (precariously employed). Sebastián, a private school teacher who had decided to opt for a public civil servant job because of the stability, claimed that "I don't think it'll be hard for me to be a teacher in a public school. . .I trust that I'm prepared and qualified and that's not going to be the problem" (precariously employed). The trajectory of the relocated achievement narrative was identical to when it was mobilized to describe the achievement of a university degree, but respondents were still working toward the reward of stable employment that they anticipated upon passing the *oposición*; they had not yet confronted the potential failure of the narrative.[9]

About half of these respondents were actively pursuing a *funcionario* position; the other half described the option of preparing for *oposiciones* as a potential back up plan. This second group drew on the achievement narrative in their professional futures as reassurance that a concrete trajectory toward stable employment existed, even if they did not want to pursue it. Ana, a psychologist who had no interest in joining the civil service, nevertheless imagined it as an alternate future:

> One thing that has occurred to me, or that I think about, is that if I get tired of the long journey that is being a psychologist, there are other

> things I can do, I can do an *oposición,* start at a school, which isn't my best option, but if I get tired, that option's there, or for example, there are *oposiciones* to prisons, that I'm not excited about, but if I need it... (stably employed)

Even Isabel, an unemployed artist determined to follow an unstable artistic path, described a "plan B" where she took the *oposición* pertaining to her degree and followed that career trajectory. Thus, the relocation of the achievement narrative to the institutionalized career path of the *funcionariado* bolstered respondents' stable future projections.

Discussion

The young Spanish university graduates I interviewed were aware of the difficulties they and other young university graduates faced in finding good, stable employment after the 2008 economic crisis, as well as the changes that had occurred over the previous decades. Despite their advantaged educational backgrounds, the traditional professional paths that seemed available to many as they grew up had become destabilized, and rates of precarious employment and unemployment were high. Nonetheless, most respondents imagined their professional futures on traditional paths toward long-term professional stability by drawing on a shared cultural narrative—the achievement narrative. Simultaneously, most respondents denounced the achievement narrative as a fallacious, and even fraudulent, fiction. This finding diverges from the previous research that would predict either 1) adaptation to precarity through neoliberal narratives or 2) an inability to contemplate the future due to the changing, unstable context.

However, this finding can be explained by incorporating Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis into the study of projected futures in contexts of unexpected precarity. I show that the mismatch between beliefs based on past conditions and the available opportunities in the present can also extend into expectations about the future; future projections can be guided by beliefs based on the past more than by lived experiences in the present, even when respondents are aware of the disjuncture between past and present. Furthermore, I particularly foreground the role of shared cultural narratives in influencing the extent to which hysteresis extended into projected futures. The cultural narrative that most respondents drew on, the achievement narrative, reinforced hysteresis in projected futures due to its resonance and institutional support. The historical prioritization of long-term professional stability in

Spain encouraged a continuation of the traditional achievement narrative over available alternatives that deprioritized stability and did not resonate with most young Spaniards. Moreover, the relocation of the meritocratic achievement narrative to the institution of the *funcionariado* bolstered stable projected futures among young Spaniards through the possibility of a path to lifetime employment absent in many other countries.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to the precarious employment literature, specifically to research on projected futures amid employment precarity and how cultural narratives shape responses to employment precarity. First, this research further incorporates projected futures into research on employment precarity, which has primarily studied the aspirations of disadvantaged workers (Chinoy, 1955; Matlon, 2016; V. Smith, 2018), by foregrounding the ways in which educationally advantaged workers who are experiencing unexpected employment precarity imagine their professional trajectories. Additionally, by focusing on the projected futures of young adults who have little to no direct experience with the work structures in place before the expansion of employment precarity (Snyder, 2016), this paper reveals how the past powerfully figures into individuals' temporal understandings of employment precarity. Second, through its focus on projected futures, the paper also provides evidence of a particular attitude toward and resistance to conditions of precarity. While past research has primarily found that workers willingly or begrudgingly adapt to precarity, drawing on neoliberal narratives that promote extreme individualism and prioritize flexibility over stability (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Lane, 2011; Pugh, 2015; Rao, 2017; Snyder, 2016; Vallas & Christin, 2018), I find that educationally advantaged people can also resist precarity by holding on to cultural narratives delineating traditional conceptions of what professional life should entail and applying them to their own futures, even though they denounce such narratives in other contexts. These findings also illuminate the role of cultural narratives in previous research indicating the divergent perceptions of employment insecurity versus long-term career security among highly educated workers (Lowe, 2018).

This paper also speaks to cultural sociology by contributing to the literature on projected futures or aspirations, on hysteresis, and on cultural narratives. First, drawing Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis into the empirical study of projected futures (1988,1990) allows for

empirical attention to the importance of the past and present in conceptions of the future (Simko, 2018). Second, the paper further develops the concept of hysteresis already refined by Strand and Lizardo (2017), showing the power of cultural narratives to shape hysteresis in future projections during an unstable time. In particular, the paper shows how nationally varying shared cultural narratives that resonate and are institutionally supported can reinforce hysteresis in projected futures. Young Spanish graduates' achievement narrative allowed them to continue to strongly imagine traditional stable futures *despite* strongly denouncing the impossibility of that same, expected path; drawing on the achievement narrative therefore reinforced the maintenance of traditional paths based on their past beliefs in their future projections. I argue that it is important for cultural sociologists to think more concretely about the sources and effects of the cultural narratives that shape the specific future trajectories respondents describe. Third, the paper contributes to the study of cultural narratives by foregrounding the complexity of how individuals can draw on them. Following from Swidler (2001), who showed that people could draw on two contradictory narratives about love depending on the specific context, I demonstrate that people don't just hold contradictory narratives at all times, but can also mobilize the same narrative in temporally patterned ways, drawing on or denouncing the narrative based on its temporal location in the future or in the present.

These findings raise questions about the potential consequences of drawing on cultural narratives to reinforce hysteresis in projected futures, since future projections shape individuals' decision-making and outcomes in realms as diverse as educational or occupational attainment, social class, and mental health (Beckert, 2013; Mische, 2009; Oyserman, 2015). Although positive, stable professional future projections seem to cause short-term optimism for these respondents, it is possible that in the long-term, drawing on cultural narratives to imagine futures that are difficult to achieve could have serious psychological consequences. Indeed, research suggests that not reaching one's aspirations has a negative impact on mental health (Gjerustad & von Soest, 2012). Furthermore, different forms of hysteresis prompt different types of action (Strand & Lizardo, 2017). The particular way in which cultural narratives enable traditional future projections may have consequences for decision-making. In the case of young Spanish graduates foregrounded here, the reliance on a meritocratic, individual achievement narrative leads many of them to dedicate themselves to studying for *funcionario* positions that guarantee lifetime employment.

These positions are extremely competitive and very difficult to attain (El País, 2019), and many individuals may not achieve the success they imagine, despite dedicating years to studying. Moreover, the individualistic focus on achieving permanent professional stability through civil service, which many young adults see as requiring single-minded, greater-than-full-time dedication, may diminish the possibility for widespread protest, political participation, or other collective action, such as unionization (Simms et al., 2018), that could lead to the improvement of the situation for the generation as a whole. Sociologists should seek a thorough understanding of the consequences for individuals of imagining the future by drawing on a narrative that they also denounce in terms of the effect on their psychological health, decision-making, political mobilization, and educational/professional development.

There are other potential avenues for future research. This paper has sought to describe and explain the intriguing existence and maintenance of the achievement narrative in projected futures (Small, 2009), rather than its prevalence in the population. Future research might seek to ascertain the patterns of the different cultural narratives that shape professional future projections in Spain and in other countries, as well as how other narratives do or do not contribute to hysteresis. Moreover, this paper has analyzed young adults' future projections at one point in time. Since there may be a lag between changing structural conditions and the production of new cultural narratives, future research could compare young people's perceptions in 2018 to those of a younger cohort of graduates to investigate whether such a time lag exists. Indeed, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a noteworthy, and unexpected, impact both on conditions of employment and on how people contemplate their futures, makes such a comparison particularly apt even though only a few years have passed since these interviews. Scholars have additionally suggested that the concept of "hysteresis" might be an especially useful tool to analyze the disruption of the pandemic (Graham, 2020). Further, future attempts to combine the precarious employment literature and cultural research on projected futures could consider young university graduates' future projections beyond the professional realm, including in family formation, as well as how professional and personal futures intertwine (Pugh, 2015).

Lastly, university graduates' increasing employment precarity (and corresponding economic instability) is apparent in most post-industrial countries, including the United States, where young graduates are additionally burdened by mounting college debt. However, the specific ways

that precarity manifests vary by national context (Kalleberg, 2018). Studying precarity more broadly, and in comparative perspective, is thus of critical importance. Such research may help sociologists attain a better understanding of the consequences of precarity, including what shapes young graduates' perceptions of precarity, their projected futures under such circumstances (Beckert & Suckert, 2021), and their strategies to avoid or ameliorate it.

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Notes

1. I define projected futures, or future projections, following Mische (2009), understanding humans as having "an imaginative horizon of multiple plans and possibilities" (696).
2. "Neoliberalism" is both an economic system and an ideology (Evans & Sewell, 2013; Harvey, 2005). As an economic system, it privileges "an unfettered free market economy, the privatization of the public, and the casualization of work" (Matlon, 2016, p. 1034). As an ideology, it emphasizes individualism and self-reliance, and foregrounds people's identities as consumers and entrepreneurs (Hall & Lamont, 2013)
3. "Underemployed" is defined as employed in a job that does not require a university degree.
4. This is reminiscent of Bourdieu's "cleaved habitus" (Bourdieu, 2000; Bourdieu & Accardo, 1999).

5. 19.8% unemployment for 25-29-year-olds and 11.5% for 30-34-year-olds (Consejo de la Juventud de España 2017).
6. Most respondents (54 of 75) described both their short- (5 year) and long-term (10+ year) professional futures by centering professional stability. A minority (12) described their short-term futures in this way, but described their long-term futures following different paths.
7. All names are pseudonyms and some identifying details have been altered. All quotes have been translated from Spanish.
8. I began asking respondents about the *funcionariado* soon after I began interviewing. Nonetheless, in two early interviews, respondents did not mention it and I did not ask, so I do not include them in the count of people considering or not considering that path (total N=73).
9. Two respondents were the exceptions; they had given up on trying to pass an *oposición* after failing multiple times.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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