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Borderlands of Teenage Mothering: Life Stories of Latinx Teen Mothers from a Critical Feminist Perspective

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BORDERLANDS OF TEENAGE MOTHERING: LIFE STORIES OF LATINX TEEN
MOTHERS FROM A CRITICAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

A Dissertation Presented
To
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Ashley Burciaga
San Francisco
May 2019

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
Dissertation Abstract

Borderlands of Teenage Mothering: Life Stories of Latinx Teen Mothers from a Critical
Feminist Perspective

Rather than trying to understand and support teenage mothers, society has stigmatized
and marginalized them, even more so for women of color. The purpose of this study was
to explore the experiences of teenage mothers of color as they reflected back on their
teenage years in school, at home, and in their communities. Participants were asked to
photograph people, places, and things that reminded them of their time as a teen mom.
Open-ended semi-structured interview questions along with photo elicitation were
implemented to support the young mothers to describe their experiences in school,
community, and personal lives during their high school years. Using a critical feminist
mothering framework (community cultural wealth, intersectionality, and nepantla), this
study revealed how these young women were excluded in and out of school solely by the
fact that they were mothers.

These findings suggest that teenage mothers find themselves located amidst "in-between"
spaces of gender, age, and social constructs that create gendered expectations. Despite the
barriers, the young mothers became transformed into complex, loving, and supportive
women. The lesson of this study for educators is that we need to help make the transition
between childhood and motherhood to be full of support, love, and care through building
trusting relationships with our students. Instead of marginalizing these young women, we
can – and should - create a space of agency for them to make their own decisions about
their futures and bodies through providing constant unconditional love.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

_____
Ashley Burciaga
Candidate

Dissertation Committee

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Susan Katz
Chairperson

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Shabnam Koirala-Azad

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Ursula Aldana

DEDICATION

To all the women whose stories go unheard, unseen, and unacknowledged.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my ancestors. I would not be the person I am today without your sacrifice, your love, your wisdom. Thank you for shaping your children and grandchildren to be who they are. They eventually shaped my own parents who helped me become the person I am today. Grandpa Burciaga. You were one of the few Chicanos to go to college. I cannot image the obstacles you had to face to get there, but you did it and showed the rest of our family what is possible. Although my parents did not attend college, they always supported my dreams and were my biggest cheerleaders and support system. Disrupting the trajectory, without them I would not have been able to pursue higher education. Mom, thank you for always being available to watch our Elle when I needed to write or go to class, or sleep. The unwavering love and unconditional support you, Dad, Marcus, and Jacqueline provide me never goes unnoticed.

To Greg. Thank you for always pushing me to be the best version of myself and giving me the space I need to grow, to write, to just be me.

To Elle. I am so thankful for you. Although I could never imagine the experience of teenage pregnancy and parenting, you give me some insight on the life-altering transformation and changes that we encounter as mothers. I hope you understand the sacrifice of time away from you so I could go to class, interview participants, and write, write, and write some more. I hope you understand the importance of that sacrifice is to amplify the voices of those often unheard and that using our privilege to be an ally and advocate for others is always a good idea.

To Lil Joe. You have been at my feet or snuggled next to me the last seven years reading, writing, and learning.

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CHAPTER I: THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Some people question why I want to conduct research with young mothers, since they do not at first think of them as representing an appropriate researchable topic. My view, however, is that young mothers offer valuable insights for educators, like myself, who work with teen moms on a daily basis. Often people ask: "Why?" or scoff, or usually just express a clear feeling of not understanding that teen mothers make up a population that merit a spotlight. "Like 16 and pregnant?" "Won't your research encourage teenage pregnancy?"

In response, I make sure to be clear about my intentions behind working with young mothers: I want to work with a group of young women whom no one hears from, whose voices are left in the shadows. I want to work with a group of young women with an abundance of knowledge, skills, and assets that go untapped because of institutional oppression. *That is* why teen mothers constitute a subject to be discussed and researched, and why conversations should be flowing. These women are resilient *and*, no, they do not have poor outcomes. They go above and beyond what other teenagers and adults have to overcome to survive day-to-day. To get to school daily for some teenagers is a task, but to get to school and have an infant or toddler - that is a feat. Society needs to better understand the consequences of leaving out the narrative of an entire group, especially young women, and I feel responsible for providing a space for that conversation to happen.

I have worked at multiple alternative high schools within an urban school district for four years and have first-hand experience of students and educators speaking negatively about teenage mothers. I have heard educators stating how sorry they feel for

these girls, that they once had such high hopes for them, giving the impression that the girls can no longer achieve great things now that they are moms. I have overheard students talking about teenage mothers using slurs and seen friendships dissipate among long-term friends. These teenage mothers constantly feel this stigma surrounding them. They talk about feeling uncomfortable going to public places. They no longer want to visit areas they used to go with their friends from comprehensive high schools from fear of seeing old friends who have now excluded teen mothers from their circles. They dread riding the bus, going to the library, taking their baby to the park. They are often asked if they are the nanny or the older sister, and when corrected, they are told they look too young to be a mother.

Recently I was reading a thread by a woman in a mom's group on Facebook about how she does not see any young mothers in the city. When further queried, the woman typed that she does not see them, so there must not be any. This woman failed to realize young mothers, especially teen mothers, do not show up in the same spaces as she does. Teen mothers do not have the privilege of going around to public spaces, like taking advantage of story time at the library or neighborhood stroller walks, because of the judgment they receive in combination with trying to work, go to school, and care for a baby. Teen mothers are often looking for transitional housing, dealing with domestic violence, and/or may not be receiving parental support themselves. Yet teen mothers make it to school every day, have aspirations and goals, and have a narrative that we rarely, if ever, have the opportunity to hear. So, I want people to be clear that yes, young mothers exist in our city, and they have a wealth of knowledge very few know exists.

Statement of the Problem

In the United States, teen mothers are often portrayed as a problem in our society, assumed to be irresponsible and unprepared for motherhood. The teen mother is seen as the 'Other' in that she is perceived as 'the problem.' This construction of teen mothers as 'the problem' in the United States is more about who is getting pregnant (young women of color), when in their life (teen years), and how (e.g. single mothers and pathologizing pregnancy and mothering by race) than looking at their actual lived experiences (Pillow, 2010).

Over the last few decades, society has stigmatized and marginalized teenage pregnancy rather than trying to understand and support them, especially in regard to teenage mothers of color. Young mothers of color are threatening because they are going against the normative trajectory of their White, middle class peers - education, career, marriage, *then* childbirth (Wilson & Huntington, 2005). Consequently, teenage pregnancy is discussed as if it were an epidemic, even though in actuality the number of teen pregnancies has dropped over time.

In fact, the rate of teen pregnancy has substantially decreased from a peak in the 1990s of 116.9 pregnancies per 1,000 women aged 15-19 to a recent low of 57 births per 1,000 among 15-19-year-olds (Guttmacher Institute, 2015). Even though the number of teenage pregnancies is declining, U.S. society continues to problematize teen mothers due to prejudice rather than a careful and holistic analysis of research findings. Policy makers tend to only consider data from quantitative studies and adopt a deficit view that depicts teen mothers as being in social isolation and dependent on welfare (Wilson & Huntington, 2005). Qualitative studies that capture the thoughts and experiences of young mothers are left out of the narrative when policy decisions are being made. Instead, the

overall society holds on to a deficit lens to view those teenage mothers who take a different path from their middle-class peers.

As a result, teen mothers are often shamed and viewed as promiscuous, evident in the language of anti-teen pregnancy campaigns tinged with classism, racism, and sexism. Examples of this negative stereotyping abound: New York City had an ad campaign that suggested teen mothers were to blame for their pregnancies without any mention of teen fathers and that teen mothers and their children would inevitably have poor outcomes, such as poverty, incarceration, and low academic achievement (Reichard, 2014). In Louisiana, a charter school forced girls who were suspected of being pregnant to take pregnancy tests and kicked them out of school if the results were positive (Culp-Ressler, 2013). In Michigan, a school forbid a student to show her pregnant belly in the yearbook, while a school in North Carolina refused to show a student's senior portrait in the yearbook since her baby was in the photo. Interestingly, a high school student did her own social experiment for her senior project pretending to be pregnant for six months and was astounded at the degree of discrimination she received from teachers and friends she lost in the process. Moreover, a national campaign showcased women celebrities in a way that implied being a mother would not allow a woman to do great things (Culp-Ressler, 2013).

Organizations and institutions tend to view teen mothers of color from a deficit lens, accompanied by a narrative about these women's poor academic outcomes and burden on U.S. taxpayers. Teen mothers are often treated as gendered racialized subjects, in that teen mothers of color are simultaneously stereotyped, negatively perceived, and

triply marginalized based on their intersectional differences of age, gender, race, and/or sex. This perception is especially pervasive in schools.

In looking at the lives of teen mothers, understanding how race and racism along with sexism are intertwined with other forms of subordination helps to recognize the many layers of oppression based on "race, gender, class, possibly immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25). Low-income girls of color often live with intersecting oppressions, such as class, race, language, gender, and age, that are not fully understood by the public. Being a teenager adds an extra layer, magnifying the negative stereotypes of teen mothers who are living somewhere between motherhood and childhood. Thus, pregnant teens are generally viewed in a shameful way, further stigmatizing teen mothers of color.

As a result, the current discourse on sexuality, pregnancy, and parenting of girls of color tends to be degrading. Society has problematized the pregnant teenage body with public policies focused on controlling, regulating, shaping, and (re)producing bodies (Pillow, 2003). Girls in school face the common challenge of how their bodies are regulated in regards to a dress code, a sexist practice. Girls are sent home and disciplined for not following the dress code, most often due to wearing shorts or dresses too short, crop tops, or tank tops. Disciplining girls in school for their clothes is an institution's attempt to regulate female bodies, often deemed as "distracting."

Even more troubling is that girls who are pregnant are often sent off to alternative schools, as if the changing of their bodies is too distracting for other students. Why are women's bodies' normal biological processes, such as pregnancy and birthing, treated like a problem? Those who most often face these circumstances are girls of color who are

victims of sexualized racial stereotypes, accused of having 'welfare babies.' Society sometimes blames social problems, such as poverty, on young women of color without looking at them as whole beings and fully understanding their full experiences (Lynch, 2007).

In the 1960s, federal funding for pregnant teenagers caused school policy changes that are still in effect today (Hunter, 1982). An increase of teenage parent dropout rates among African American students led to initiating special programs. Unfortunately, these special programs took place in locations separate from comprehensive schools, as school administrators felt that the pregnant teens would "corrupt the morals of other students" (Luttrell, 2003, p. 16). Young women of color's bodies were "showing" and disrupting their typical peers and teachers (p.178). Their bodies were regulated by having students go into a separate school program, which was usually less academically rigorous, but financially beneficial for school districts. Some states still allow school districts to be able to classify pregnant teens as students who are disabled or have special circumstances, which permits school districts to then receive special education funding (Luttrell, 2003).

Then, changes in the welfare system introduced in the 1990s via the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 made life as a teen mother more difficult, especially for teen mothers of color. Teen mothers of color struggling to earn money, raise their children, and finish school were up against a difficult battle. Basically, welfare reform depicted women staying at home with young babies as 'welfare dependent.' Mothers were forced to be in the workforce or without a job, deeming mothering and the unpaid labor attached to it as obsolete (Luttrell, 2003).

Overall ramifications of these policies led to increased poverty and lower income for single mothers. As Luker (1996) noted, even though American culture has scapegoated teen mothers of color by using racial stereotypes, in actuality there are more White than African American pregnant teenagers and more "unwed mothers" in their 30s than pregnant teenagers. More importantly, welfare reform caused an increase in women needing to stay in homeless shelters (Ehrenreich, 2003). Since mothers were no longer able to stay at home with their children on welfare, many were forced into low paying jobs or they could not find a job at all. This resulted in an insecurity of housing and placement into homeless shelters for mothers of color.

An alternative view of teen mothers through the lens of intersectionality may serve to incorporate the complexity of their identity related to race, gender, immigration, language, class and age. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) highlighted the crucial importance of acknowledging the intersections of oppression as racialized, gendered, and classed, since seeing only one dimension is never enough. Focusing on solely one identity or lived experience inevitably dismisses the realities of those affected by racism, sexism, other forms of oppression, and/or those living in transitional spaces, such as between childhood and motherhood.

To describe the experience of living between two spaces, worlds, and beliefs, Anzaldúa (2012) uses the Nahuatl concept of nepantla, or *"in-betweenness."* Nepantla can help to comprehend the role of young mothers' spaces, since their home lives, family histories, and ways of knowing all constitute funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) that are valuable, legitimate, and not easily accessible. It is important to view a teen mother not only as someone who is still considered a child, but also as

someone who is responsible for a child. In fact, often these women are balancing a life of being uniquely gendered as caretakers for their child, while simultaneously acting as translators for their parents or caretakers for younger siblings. Therefore, these young mothers are experiencing nepantla by living between the spaces of childhood, adulthood, and motherhood.

Young Latinas often experience an identity clash between the values of family ties, honor, and living in the present that they experience in their home, and the white racial ideologies of achievement, independence and deferred gratification that they face at school (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Furthermore, the current negative portrayal of youth sexuality, pregnancy, and parenting is degrading and demonstrates the systemic factors failing our youth. We need to shift the dominant discourse that silences teen mothers' voices toward one that acknowledges their strengths. This re-framing has the potential to bring forth awareness among educators and serves to shift their mindset from the web of power, gender, race, and class toward understanding teen mother's abilities to make informed reproductive choices. This shift is necessary to change the way educators and educational institutions address and respond to teenage pregnancies, toward instead providing supportive environments.

Background and Need

The U.S. public school system is deeply embedded within a white racial framework that views youth of color through a deficit model (Delgado Bernal, 2002; García & Guerra, 2004; Valencia, 2010; Yosso, 2005). As a result of this framework, pregnant teens are often pushed out of comprehensive high schools and into alternative high schools due to the negative stereotypes around teen pregnancy (Mangel, 2011).

Being pushed out of a comprehensive high school diminishes opportunities to graduate, prepare for higher education, and improve their economic circumstances. Isolating pregnant and parenting teen mothers of color into separate educational settings or providing a different standard of instruction represents a sexist policy that violates Title IX (Clark, 2009), a federal law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity (Mangel, 2011). Pushing students, specifically Black girls, into alternative high schools also goes against the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling of school segregation as unconstitutional. Educators operate from a deficit lens when they place teen mothers of color into a school for pregnancy and ultimately punish the girls for their "bad choices" (Luttrell, 2003, p. 29).

While some research studies have portrayed participant voices through interviews, stories that specifically explore the experiences of teen mothers of color are scarce. For example, Anwar and Stanistreet (2014) explored the future aspirations of teen mothers through in-depth interviews. Their findings concluded that the teen mothers felt that motherhood was a positive experience; their dislike for school prior to pregnancy shifted as they reassessed their goals and discovered that further education and a career path were important for reaching their goals and aspirations. However, this study was conducted in the North West area of England with teenage white mothers and, therefore, does not address the intersectional identities of girls of color. Expanding on this study with a focus on girls of color may help to depict the authentic experiences of a more diverse population of teen mothers in the United States.

In order for educators, policy makers, and the greater society to better understand teen mothers, they need to shift the frame through which they see teen mothers from

negative to positive, from deficit to asset. In order to do this, we first must listen to the voices of teen mothers speaking of their own experiences.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of young mothers of color through their own voices in order to produce new knowledge about their experience in schools, at home, and in their communities by engaging the women in a process of inquiry. Through having the opportunity to tell their stories, teen mothers described the in-between nature of their experiences and detailed their impact in and out of school. My hope is that their stories can serve to challenge and complicate the dominant deficit-based view of young mothers and that this new knowledge can be used to facilitate a shift in how educators support teen mothers. Specifically, a better understanding among educators of the lives of teenage mothers may help to diminish the current challenges that teenage mothers face in confronting limited opportunities to graduate, preparing for higher education, and improving their economic circumstances.

Research Questions

1. How do young mothers of color describe their lived experience in and out of schools?

2. What factors, such as particular people, services, or circumstances, do young mothers of color identify as instrumental in their lives in and out of schools?

    a. What factors have contributed to their being successful?

    b. What factors have created obstacles to their success?

3. What recommendations do young mothers of color have for educators to help identify and build upon their assets in order to provide for more supportive and encouraging educational spaces?

Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks

Critical feminist mothering

There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not live single-issue lives. (Lorde, 2007, p. 138)

By centering this study on the experiences of teen mothers in the United States, this study aimed to challenge the dominant narrative by being based in the knowledge production of teen mothers of color living in transition. As teenagers, these mothers are living in a space between childhood, adulthood, and motherhood. This research used a theoretical framework similar to Anzaldúa's (2012) *Borderlands*, in that the young mothers of color are living in between the borders of social constructs (childhood, motherhood, and adulthood) with unique living knowledge and life experiences. To understand their stories further, I coined the term of "critical feminist mothering" to combine the concepts of intersectionality, nepantla/third space, and community cultural wealth. Critical feminist mothering forefronts the experiences of teen mothers of color, noting that they are vastly different from the experiences of both men of color and white women. This framework centers the knowledge and experiences of marginalized groups, particularly teen mothers of color.

Intersectionality: A feminist perspective

Intersectionality, which looks at the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, immigration status, ability, and other aspects of identities, can serve as a

multidimensional lens to understand how young women make decisions about their reproductive lives. Intersectionality is a term coined by Black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. As Crenshaw (1996) argued, "many of the experiences black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender oppression" (p. 358). Crenshaw (1996) explained that looking at singular identities alone cannot explain the totality of an individual's experiences: "Intersectionality has been set up as the most appropriate analytical intervention expected to accomplish the formidable task of mediating multiple differences" (Erevelles & Minear, 2010, p. 130). Intersectionality allows for the space to explore how gender, race, class, dis/ability, sexuality and age are mutually constructed.

Using intersectionality as a theoretical lens for analyzing the experiences of teen mothers of color may lead to a better understanding of how individuals' identities shape who they are as persons. Intersectionality allows educators to view their students as whole beings, looking at multiple dimensions impacting their lives. Teen mothers of color not only have multiple identities, but also face multiplied oppressions.

Nepantla/third space

These multi-layered oppressions are magnified by their multiple roles and categorizations: mother, daughter, and teenager. For this study, I connect intersectionality with Anzaldúa's (2012) concept of nepantla, which refers to an in-between space. This is similar to third space, in that the space of in-betweenness can be a place of opposing capital, in which individuals have unique insider knowledge. Nepantla refers to "transitional, in between spaces" (p. 211) that are not quite this and not quite that. This concept can directly relate to teen mothers of color in that they offer no "fixed truths" (p.

211). Burciaga (2007, 2010) described nepantla as a way to understand "women who negotiate a transitional in-between space and understand their role as individuals in the collective search for social transformation" (p. 329). Utilizing nepantla encompasses the centering of experiential knowledge in that, "Cultural knowledge, pedagogies of the home, and family histories of students and families of color are often negated, silenced, and ignored in traditional school settings" (Burciaga, 2007, p. 329). The concept of third space is similar to Patricia Hill-Collins's (2009) notion of the "outsider within" (p. 13), since the third space is a way to understand the intersections of identities.

Intersectionality focuses on women of color, since women of color are often left out and overlooked in dominant frameworks. Since this research addresses teenage women of color, the concepts of intersectionality, nepantla/third space, and community cultural wealth are integrated extensively to allow for a deeper understanding of teen mothers of color's experiences in and out of school.

Community cultural wealth

Recognizing that students, their families, and their communities of color are all holders of knowledge ultimately challenges deficit thinking (Delgado Bernal, 2002). These holders of knowledge possess community cultural wealth in that young mothers have a set of assets (forms of capital) that often remain unacknowledged (Yosso, 2005). From a community cultural wealth perspective, histories, traditions, cultures, and languages are integrated into the educational setting rather than being disregarded.

Yosso (2005) developed the notion of community cultural wealth as an extension of Bourdieu's (1977) concept of cultural capital, defined as "skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society," comparing cultures from a binary vantage

point of white versus other, rather than understanding that all cultures have capital (p. 76). Bourdieu (1977) explained that cultural capital is an accumulation of knowledge and skills of the dominant class, and by learning from the privileged, one can move up the social ladder. Yosso (2005) critiqued Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, claiming that community cultural wealth shifts the lens to acknowledge and appreciate cultural and social assets of communities of color. The six forms of capital within community cultural wealth (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant) described by Yosso (2005) promote an array of "knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color" (p. 77), which can be used to better understand assets in the herstories and livelihoods of teen mothers.

This theoretical framework integrates concepts such as intersectionality and nepantla/third space to look at how knowledge is situated from a feminist perspective. I am also interested in connecting different forms of capital outlined in Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth from a mothering perspective. Analyzing teen mothers' experiences using narratives and photographs from a feminist perspective, while also focusing on community cultural wealth, may help shift educators' view of teen mothers from a deficit lens to a positive space of support, community, and healing.

Educational Significance

This study aimed to honor the experiences of teen mothers of color. It challenges the current research regarding teen pregnancy prevention programs by exploring the lived experiences of teenage mothers in order to move beyond the deficit view that is embedded in the dominant narrative. Through learning about the lives of teen mothers from their own perspectives, educators, community programs, and policy makers will

hopefully gain valuable insights before making decisions. I hope that a critical understanding of the issues impacting teen mothers can promote empathy as well as a shift in perspective away from a deficit lens.

This shift in perspective will hopefully be of interest to and prove beneficial for educators of youth and young adults in order to inform their practice, while understanding the importance of hearing their students' voices and stories. Community agencies and nonprofit organizations could use the findings to adjust their models in order to provide resources and positive support to young mothers. Additionally, policy makers and legislation may better understand the importance of funding sex education, as well as implementing practices and policies that provide a support system for teen mothers. Hopefully, this process will serve to empower these teen mothers from hearing their own stories and stories of others, gaining cultural and social capital in the process (Yosso, 2005).

Definition of Terms

Herstory/Herstories/Herstorical is used to emphasize the ancestral roots from a feminist perspective.

Nepantla is a Nahutatl concept, meaning "in-betweenness." It is used to refer to those living between different cultures, identities, or worlds.

Latinx is used to appropriate language and rules that have been normed by academia. Latinx is used to allow readers to examine how the participants with different identities and perspectives "are included or rejected from different spaces or communities" based on their language (deOnís, 2017, p. 91). Although the use began with inclusivity of LGBTQ communities, the term has expanded to the "awareness of the

complexities that come with individual and collective identities" (p. 85). Many of the young mothers have multiple identities due to nepantla (above).

Background of the Researcher

The purpose of this study is to show the complexities in the identity of teen mothers of color in order to bring awareness to educators and the greater society. Since the focus of my research and professional work have been on teen mothers for a significant period of time, I have tended to think I already understand teen mothers, but I most definitely do not. I cannot do so without being a teen mother myself. Instead, I imagine it is better to explain that I empathize with them, but empathy sounds like they are "dealing" with something unfortunate. Thus, I have a hard time finding the academic vernacular to explain my intentions.

Personal reflections on my own identity

When considering my own background, I relate to the strong head of household female role of my mother and Latino roots of my father's side of the family. Yet, my mixed race identity affords me white passing privilege, allowing me to flow into white spaces unseen. I relate to the powerfulness and powerlessness of being a woman more and more every day. When considering my own identity, I often feel like I am in my own third space – not quite this and not quite that, but a space I can flow in and out of. My mother is a first generation American with her own mother immigrating to the United States from New Zealand after marrying my grandfather, who immigrated from Ireland via Canada. In contrast, my father and his family grew up on a border town of Texas and Mexico, where they were often punished in school for speaking Spanish. Therefore, the Spanish language stopped at my father. I used to think that because I could not speak

Spanish fluently, I could not identify with being Latina - even though deep in my soul, the art, music, language, food, and everything the Mexican culture held fueled me. Then one day I read the following passage by Gloria Anzaldúa over and over again, and I let myself solidify my identity as Mexican living a life as a mestiza:

> Deep in our hearts we believe that being Mexican has nothing to do with which country one lives in. Being Mexican is a state of soul – not one of mind, not one of citizenship. Neither eagle nor serpent, but both. And like the ocean, neither animal respects borders. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 84)

I learned something about myself with Anzaldúa's readings - that "a monolingual Chicana whose first language is English" (p. 55) is just as much as a Chicana as someone who speaks Spanish fluently. My feelings were then confirmed with a comment on one of my papers turned in during my time at USF. My professor at that time, Emma Fuentes, wrote a remark on one of my graduate level course papers along the lines of "the language that I speak does not define my identity," and that one single comment brought clarity to my struggle of grappling with my identity.

The stories of my life, my mother's life, and my grandmothers' lives flow through me while thinking about the mother I want to be to protect, to nurture, to love not only my child, but all the children I work with on a daily basis at work. My time at USF expanded my thinking about what my experiences and the stories of my own ancestors (e.g. mother, grandmothers, and other women role models in my life) have brought to the table to nourish how they have nurtured and loved me, helping shape who I am and influencing how I mother.

My own critical motherhood is the constant re-evaluation of my positionality in the space I am occupying, so I can understand and embrace the scars of my body and on the bodies of my ancestors. Scars, visible or invisible, are not ugly, as scars tell a story of where we come from, and ultimately who we are. They help us find strength and they allow us to grow. Whatever life throws at us is what we need to understand and cherish, and what we need to own our scars. We need to be the best versions of ourselves. That is what we need to teach and model for the next generation. Critical feminist motherhood is going back to what we know of our own bodies and ancestral voices, for that is how I will guide my own children and will help me better understand the students I work alongside of as an educator.

My role as a school psychologist

As an educator, my professional role is as a school psychologist for a Northern California public school district. I work primarily with students in special education attending alternative high schools. I conduct psychometric assessments, provide counseling to students, and offer consultation to parents and staff. A major responsibility of my position is maintaining confidentiality. All of the students I work with, their reports, my findings, counseling sessions, and almost everything I do with students is kept confidential. The only exception to this policy is if harm is coming to them or if they intend to place harm on another person. Therefore, it was important that the young mothers who participated did not know me in my role as a school psychologist, and I avoided working with participants I have seen for counseling to avoid a potential conflict of interest.

I am usually a planner and organizer, so going in with open-ended questions and not knowing resulted in a feeling of unknown, uncertainty, and discomfort. Fully understanding and empathizing with the individuals I work with for my research topic was essential, as I was not trying to "analyze" them. I wanted them to know me as their confidant or advocate, or whatever they need me to be - never as someone coming in to do research on their life, publish, and disappear. I wanted them to understand the impact their stories can tell – to elevate their voices that are often in the shadows, left out of textbooks, and excluded from the dominant narrative. I want others to read their stories, to understand, to empathize in such a way that it alters the reader's response into conscious actions from a deficit view to taking real action.

Being able to integrate the epistemology of mothering through the teen moms is something I am very interested in. However, allowing myself to risk the unknown brought forth information that is truly in the shadows of our society. Or better put: unheard. And that feeling was transformative. Being comfortable with the discomfort. The voices of young women I heard from are often voices in the shadows - voices that may never be read in books, on the internet, in the news ... at least most likely not in a positive light. Having the privilege to hear and provide a space for these voices to have power was worth the risk of the unknown. This counter-narrative was an act of resistance, and that is worth all the risks I took on.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section includes literature related to the theoretical framework, how the bodies of teen mothers of color are regulated (feminist epistemology), policy changes that affect young mothers, and literature based upon the concepts of critical feminist mothering, particularly intersectionality, community cultural wealth, counter-story-telling, and third space/nepantla. The second section provides background on Lapayese's (2012) mother-scholar work and its relation to the notion of third space. The third section focuses on literature related to teenage mothering.

Intersectionality

Teen mothers experience extensive health, educational, and socio-economic inequities. In terms of class, teenage childbirth tends to be more common among girls from low socioeconomic communities, especially in places with a high level of income inequality (Holcombe, Peterson, & Manlove, 2009). For many teen mothers of color, the main barriers against using birth control come from limited transportation, lack of health insurance, intimidating immigration regulations, and inadequate guidance about available services. When teen pregnancy prevention programs ignore these obstacles, teen mothers of color become further distanced from sex education efforts (Luttrell, 2013).

The common punitive strategy of blaming teen mothers and categorizing them as 'costs' further stigmatizes the community while ignoring the social, economic, and political factors that shape their lives and behavior. Olivia et al. (2013) explained how Latinas are racially vilified in policy discourse and law because they are seen as contributing to a host of social and economic problems (such as immigration, use of

Spanish, strain on social services). Instead it is important to face the educational disparities due to race, class, and gender, immigration, and sexuality. First, comprehensive sex education is not usually taught in low-income communities. Second, birth control and contraceptives are not easily accessible due to a lack of access to healthcare. Both of these factors directly affect girls of color with intersecting oppressions of class, race, and age. While exploring the experiences of young mothers through the lens of intersectionality, considering the different spaces they live in further complicates their gender roles at home, school, and in the community, in that their bodies are usually regulated based on the space they are in.

Feminist Epistemology

Educators need to look at how they attempt to regulate what teen mothers do with their bodies. For this reason, I appreciate the words of Cruz (2001): "reclamation begins with the body that houses multiple identities" (p. 663). Fully understanding the complex lives of girls of color will help educators to move away from maintaining systems of power and privilege in the education system. To do this, we need to listen to the mothers' own "messy" stories (p. 659), instead of assuming and deciding what we know about them and what we 'think' is best for them. Bringing the stories of teen mothers of color and the production of knowledge from the bodies of their own mothers and grandmothers can transform theorizing, creating a new kind of epistemology.

Cruz (2001) in "Epistemology of a Brown Body" and Rich (1986) in *Of Women Born* both discussed how our bodies encompass our experiences and shape who we become. For example, Rich (1986) stated:

To write "my body" plunges me into lived experience, particularly: I see

scars, disfigurements, discolorations, damages, losses, as well as what pleases

me. Bones well-nourished from the placenta; the teeth of a middle-class person

seen by the dentist twice a year from childhood. White skin, marked and scarred

by three pregnancies, and elected sterilization, progressive arthritis, four joint

operations, calcium deposits, no rapes, no abortions, long hours at a typewriter-

my own, not in a typing pool- and so forth. To say "the body" lifts me away from

what has given me a primary perspective. To say "body" reduces the temptation

to grandiose assertions. (p. 2)

Rich (1986) distinguished motherhood from mothering, in that mothering is women-

centered:

In education, we systematically dismiss the phenomenology of children.

Throughout school, educators presume to know what is best for children. In

reality, educators' insights cannot simply compare to the power of awareness and

discernment that already exists within children…the wisdom inside of them is the

ultimate source of discernment. Inner wisdom allows children to do what they

need to do and be who they want to be. Schools should pave the way for children

to utilize their strengths, acknowledge their inborn wisdom, subsequently

fulfilling their truest potential. (p. 42)

Mothers' experiences get passed on to their own children through the way they

mother, protect, and nurture. Therefore, their herstories, their visible and invisible scars,

and the way their mothers' and grandmothers' experiences have been transmitted to teen

mothers, shape the way women unconditionally love their own children. This concept of

mother's stories getting passed down generation to generation lies in Cruz's (2001) "Toward an Epistemology of a Brown Body*"* that can be connected to teen mothers of color. When these teen mothers have the space to think about their herstories through their ancestors, they become embedded in their own bodies. Mother's herstories shape how they act and take care of their own children.

Understanding teen mothers' epistemology may impact how we educators act, care for, and nurture our own students. To accomplish this end, we need to understand the power of a story, of narratives, or working with our students enough to truly get to know who they really are and where they come from, building a positive community, and ultimately creating coalition and ally-ship (Hill Collins, 2008). Right now, "in our education systems, there are millions of students of color, mostly economically disadvantaged and disabled, for who spirit murder is most significant in their educational lives" (Erevelles & Minear, 2010, p. 143). Instead our educational system has the potential to provide a liberating experience, where teen mothers of color gain the space to have their voices heard, understood, and respected.

Smith (1987) discussed the importance of understanding the experiences of women from their "standpoint" in that a conversation about women's experiences can construct new knowledge. When constructing new knowledge about young mothers, we need to hear from the young mothers themselves as a starting point. Specifically, the ideas around "women's work," "caring labor," and "maternal thinking" from a feminist standpoint relate to young mothers of color (Harding, 2004). These terms can be characterized as birthing a child, lactating, preparing food, mothering, housework, breastfeeding, and caring for parents (Ruddick, 1989). All the work done by women,

especially mothers, is generally undervalued, underpaid, and not recognized. Women living with many intersections have different experiences that reflect varying standpoints, so the work of one mother will look different than another's.

Policy Changes Affecting Teen Mothers of Color

This next section of the literature review shows how teenage pregnancy has been shaped since the 1960s by looking at how policy changes have shifted the discourse. In *Shapeshifters,* Cox (2015) conducted an ethnographic study at a homeless shelter in Detroit, Michigan for eight years, which portrays how these policies have directly affected mothers of color in their everyday lives. Cox used the term "shapeshifting" to describe the process of involuntarily altering your body in reaction to an extreme external force. She analyzed how Black women pushed up against those social hierarchies put into place to marginalize them.

Although Cox's (2015) study covered a range of stories to depict the creative outlets which these women used to exercise agency, I was interested in understanding the changes in the welfare system that have served to construct Black women, particularly Black mothers, as a social problem. I looked at how these changes completely disrupted the lives for mothers of color from being able to afford to stay home with their babies, along with the decline of social programs making childcare too expensive. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 stopped funding early childhood education, forced welfare recipients into low paying jobs, and increased the potential for housing insecurity, homelessness, food insecurity, and difficulties finding affordable childcare. So-called 'welfare reform' negatively impacted women of color since they were overrepresented among welfare recipients at that time.

Although society blames teen mothers of color for being a burden, the mothers described in *Shapeshifters* are countering the current narratives of teen mothers and mothers of color. They are proclaiming that women's bodies are like the earth because they can create life. Interestingly, Cox (2015) uses the metaphor of choreography to describe how the women navigate their bodies within systems of oppression by shapeshifting. These women used the physicality of their bodies to embody meaning making, physical storytelling and their space within social contexts that cause them to actual shapeshift depending on their space, themselves, and their situation. In describing the difference between Black and White motherhood in the United States, Cox (2015) specifically noted how White motherhood has been constructed into a sacred institution, while Black motherhood has been portrayed as the nurturing nanny or caregiver of other children except their own.

Moreover, Weitz (1984) explained that women do not fit the normative mold of *women* when they live outside society's trajectory of marriage, such as prostitution, single mothers, mothers with multiple partners, and single mothers who are Black. When addressing teen mothers of color, the dominant society often pays much attention to adolescent women in the context of institutions, such as our welfare and social service systems. Members of the majoritarian society fear single mother pregnancies, particularly in regard to perceived dependency on welfare and social systems. In turn, the government feels that it is obliged to determine what family structures should look like and caseworkers often pry into the private lives of young women to deter them from "deviant sex" (Cox, 2015, p. 162), which goes along with the "wrong kind of family" narrative as described by Anastas (2017). For example, Cox (2015) described a poetic performance

by LaT, who was young, Black, and pregnant. LaT's poem depicted how the system tries to shame women like her by enforcing policies and practices for social welfare, allocating resources strategically, and employment practices.

Although sex education could merit its own dissertation, I want to note Cox's (2015) observations that the young women who were discussing sex were those who had already given birth. A common theme in the women's narratives was self-respect, calling women's bodies like the earth because they can create life and not to let anyone mess with them. Cox explained that Black women's bodies shapeshift where they "strategically choose from a variety of gender, race, and class displays depending on the situation" (p. 183). Their scripts tend to be conflated with both their gender and their sexuality "within a broader political economy that seeks to subjugate them on the basis of sex and gender" (p. 183). It is important to understand how policy changes have shifted how society views teen mothers of color in that changes in the welfare system left teenage mothers of color living in the margins of society, which resulted in society viewing these mothers from a deficit perspective. This perspective completely misses the reality that teen mothers of color have a wealth of knowledge that too often becomes ignored.

Community Cultural Wealth

Teen mothers of color have assets that educators need to grasp. For example, when looking at linguistic capital, Faulstich Orellana (2003) examined bilingual children who were often called upon to translate for their parents or other adults. She found that these youth gained multiple social tools, such as vocabulary, awareness of audience and cultures, 'real world' literacy, skills in math and teaching, as well as a feeling of responsibility for their family and social maturity.

The notion of familial capital has informed scholars who have addressed the communal bonds within African American communities (Foley, 1997; Morris, 1999), funds of knowledge within Mexican American communities (Gonzalez et al., 1995; Moll et al., 1992; Olmedo, 1997; Rueda et al., 2004, Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992), and pedagogies that students of color bring from home to the classroom setting (Delgado Bernal, 2001). Specifically, Delgado Bernal (2001) drew on Anzaldúa's (1987) writing on consciousness while working with Chicana college students. She found that Chicana college students draw from their mestiza consciousness and their funds of knowledge brought from home when negotiating the barriers of higher education.

Peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions (Gilbert, 1982; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). In turn, communities of color offer the information and resources gained through these institutions back to their social networks. This tradition of 'lifting as we climb' has remained the motto of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs since their organization in 1896 (Gurnier, Fine & Balin, 1997, p. 167)

In looking at resistant capital, Robinson and Ward's (1991) study depicted a group of African American mothers who consciously raised their daughters as resistors. Through verbal and nonverbal lessons, these Black mothers taught their daughters to assert themselves as intelligent, beautiful, strong and worthy of respect to resist the barrage of societal messages devaluing Blackness and belittling Black women (Ward, 1996). Similarly, Villenas and Moreno (2001) discussed the contradictions Latina mothers faced as they tried to teach their daughters to be self-reliant (*valerse por si misma)* within structures of inequality, such as racism, capitalism, and patriarchy. These

young women were learning to be oppositional through their bodies, minds, and spirits in the face of race, gender and class inequality.

Expanding on Yosso's (2005) theory of Community Cultural Wealth, Rendón, Nora, and Kanagala (2014) conducted a qualitative study of the experiences of Latinx students in higher education with a goal for educators to view students' cultural assets. Their findings uncovered four additional forms of capital, which they called ventajas y conocimientos: ganas/perseverance, ethnic consciousness, spirituality/faith, and pluriversal cultural wealth. Ganas/Perseverance referred to the students' inner confidence and sacrifices they made to go to college despite personal challenges with documentation, poverty, and a lack of role models. Ethnic consciousness was found in students' desire to give back to their communities and their families. Spiritual/Faith was revealed in the way students relied on their faith for strength when faced with difficult situations. Pluriversal cultural wealth was compared with Anzaldúa's (2012) term of mestiza consciousness, where students are in constant transition between identity, language, and behaviors depending on their social or intellectual space.

Counter-storytelling

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) discussed how the use of counter-stories could be used as a tool to challenge intersections of oppression (race, class, sex). Counter-storytelling is used as a methodology to bring out the experiences of people of color. Introducing a space for mothers to build relationships and community within and between other mothers allows for the opportunity for important dialogue and counter-stories to open up the hearts and minds of educators. Being able to speak of herstorical struggles brings about consciousness-raising. Consciousness-raising may lead to building

coalitions with each other and emphasizing the importance of women supporting women rather than a power dynamic between students and educators. Critical race theory intentionally gathers the lived experiences of people of color by using methodologies, such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, cuentos, testimonios, chronicles and narratives (Yosso, 2005). In doing so, critical race methodology disrupts "White privilege, rejects notions of neutral research, and exposes deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26).

Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, and Vélez (2012) analyzed literature over the past ten years in which scholars utilized concepts from Delgado Bernal's (1998) article, "Using a Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research." For the purposes of this section, I focus on scholars' use of how narratives have been used to demonstrate unique knowledges of communities that are often oppressed. Incorporating counter-narratives "aligns with a strong feminista tradition of theorizing from the brown female body, breaking silences, and bearing witness to both injustice and social change" (Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012, p. 525).

Since 2002, Childbirth Connection has conducted surveys to explore the experiences of Latinx mothers with maternity care in a project called: "Listening to Mothers in California" (National Partnership for Women and Families, 2018). Their survey went out to 1,222 Latinas with questions covering prenatal, postpartum, and newborn periods of time. Although teen mothers were excluded from this study, important implications were uncovered. Respondents of this study reported gender and

race discrimination during childbirth, in that they felt they were treated unfairly due to their race, using Spanish as their first language, and/or their insurance provider being Medi-Cal.

Interestingly, the White and Latina women in this survey (National Partnership for Women and Families, 2018) had similar experiences with their medical care providers using rude and threatening language with them. During their births, the respondents felt that the medical staff did not communicate well with them, did not encourage the women to make their own decisions, and pressured them to be induced or to be given epidurals. Overall, the study found that Latina mothers were not receiving proper medical care that was culturally sensitive due to their ethnicity and use of the Spanish language.

Using counter-narratives with young mothers of color can provide a source of cultural intuition where mothers can "enter each other's lives in the research process and become motivated to overcome" any shared difficulties, which also "engenders a solidarity that moves...toward a collective effort of healing, empowerment, and resistance" (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 529). Going to school together and facing the everyday challenges of being a teen mother was a product of discrimination, but their ability to bond as they are faced with similar difficulties shifted the students' social-emotional well-being in a positive direction. Sharing counter-narratives can provide a space for agency to emerge, which in turn can provide a space for empowerment and resistance to the dominant deficit thinking around young mothers of color.

Photography as a feminist methodology

Utilizing photography can be viewed as a feminist methodology since photos exhibit situated knowledge and prioritize local knowledge, which can be used as a form

of counter storytelling. Photography permits us to access the worlds and experiences of marginalized women by providing them with tools to raise their own voices and initiate change. Photography allows a way for marginalized populations to share about their experiences in a creative and empowering way (Harrison, 2002). Marginalized women, especially mothers, are often objects – rather than subjects - of research. Using a combination of interviews and photography can serve to record and reflect on personal strengths and concerns, and to promote knowledge and critical dialogue (Wang, 1999).

For example, Sopcak, Mayan, and Skrypnek (2015) studied young fathers using standard interviews along with photography ("photo-interviewing"). The researchers asked the fathers to take photographs of the people, places, and things that made them feel or think like being a dad. When using photo-interviewing, the researchers found that the fathers were more comfortable in the research process, had a sense of agency, and provided the researchers with richer data. Thus, the researchers suggested that using conventional interviews with marginalized populations may not provide suitable data. The researchers stressed the importance of using alternative methods, such as photography, along with standard interviews to hear the experiences of those who are often underrepresented.

Mother Scholars

Mother-scholar researchers analyze the narratives of women in education who see themselves in three different spheres: private, public, and third space. They strive to (re) imagine the space of education for all children. Lapayese (2012) noted that a focus on motherhood appeared lacking in education research. She found that standpoint theory, which challenges male concepts of objectivity, served as the best qualitative research

method to represent mother-scholars' voices and experiences. Standpoint theory is based upon the knowledge of the oppressed and for the oppressed by using research methods, such as stories: "Granting epistemic privilege to mother-scholar modes of knowledge sheds light on narratives that have been historically silenced and ignored" (p. xi).

Lapayese (2012) used qualitative methods with mother scholars as a way to fully understand their knowledge that too often has been silenced. She conducted in-depth interviews with participants looking at three areas: 1) the experiences of a mother engaging in scholarly work, 2) motherhood and education knowledge and beliefs, and 3) how the maternal and the intellect interplay. Participants also journaled about how their experiences shaped them as mother scholars and influenced their work. In this study, two focus groups emerged where the women discussed themes from the interviews and journaling process. Lapayese (2012) emphasized how motherhood could be a source of empowerment even in a patriarchal society. Mother scholars revealed how everything about being a mother (identity, constructs, maternal institutions, practices) is often unseen in the institution of education, which usually focuses on masculine activities.

For the purpose of my study, Lapayese's (2012) research on mother scholars is extended to teen mothers in order to provide an important perspective on the education, knowledge, and beliefs of teen mothers and how they balance their lives of "in between-ness." Lapayese (2012) noted that some feminist academic theorists have failed to acknowledge women of color, LGBTQI, and poor women. She referred to the work of Hill-Collins (1992), who argued that survival, identity, and empowerment are the basis of mothering for women of color. Hill-Collins (1992) explained how a mother of color must make sure their child develops a racial identity within a society that under appreciates or

dismisses their history, culture, and customs. Linking Lapayese's (2012) mother-scholar framework to focus on teen mothers of color in high school may reveal how everything about being a mother is often unseen in the institution of high school education as well.

"Mother-scholars in the field of education constantly confront the binaries of intellect/maternal and public/private" (Lapayese, 2012, p. 29), especially when binary thinking is transcended, a third space opens up for consideration. This concept of third space is similar to Patricia Hill-Collins' "outsider within" (2009, p. 13) in that the third space is a way to understand the intersections of identities. Additionally, Anzaldúa (1987) explained, "the mother-scholar standpoint is marked by a unique tolerance for ambiguity. This tolerance provides relief from turmoil, while facilitating their ability to live in the middle land between two worlds, los intersticios, or the space in between identities" (p. 31). A tolerance for ambiguity as discussed here is similar to what teenage mothers experience living between identities of childhood and motherhood.

Teenage Mothering

While an abundance of research addresses teenage pregnancy worldwide. a majority of these studies tend to focus on preventing teenage pregnancy, depicting teenage mothers from a deficit lens. While several studies included teen mothers as participants, most of these studies were in the United Kingdom (Guttmacher Institute, 2015). Current researchers, such as Azar (2012), Guttmacher Institute (2010), Jenner and Walsh (2016), Kappeler and Farb (2014), and Kappeler (2016), address the issue of teen pregnancy solely through looking at prevention models, such as pregnancy prevention education, abstinence only versus comprehensive sex education, and providing access to contraceptives. Prevention models and sex education focus the narrative of teenage

mothers from a deficit lens, not allowing room for either the supports that current teen mothers may need or their lived experiences as teen mothers.

For example, Azar (2012) investigated how the Center for Disease Control has adolescent prevention on its top ten list of battles. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is leading the way with a city-wide goal to dramatically decrease adolescent birth rates by providing evidenced-based sexual health curriculum, parental involvement on prevention strategies, and access to reproductive health care services. They launched a citywide media campaign that spotlights teenage pregnancy as a social problem affecting the entire community, depicting teenage mothers from a deficit lens. Similarly, Kappeler and Farb (2014) examined how federal funds were dedicated to creating the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) and the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program (TPP) specifically to target adolescent health rather than examining how federal funds could support the needs of teenage mothers. Overall, this narrow view of teen pregnancy from a prevention standpoint is deeply problematic since it misses key components about the experiences of teen mothers (Mezey et al., 2017), preventing us to understand them as full, complex human beings.

In fact, young mothers actually gain more complex life experiences through maturity and responsibility. Anastas (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of 41 qualitative studies from 1989-2014 and categorized these studies into three different Narrative Types (A, B, or C). Type A was 78% of the studies and showed sympathy toward the girls, but none of the studies included recommendations for policy changes. Type B was only one study, which was defined as studies that result in the "wrong kind of family" (p. 135). Type C narratives were studies seeking reform in schools and social structural barriers.

20% of the studies fell in the Type C category. Some commonalities among the studies were that giving birth was a rite of passage into adulthood and moving forward to become more responsible individuals. Anastas (2017) found that a majority of the studies focused on the individual, in this case the girl, as being a part of the problem, rather than looking at systemic issues. Anastas noted that girls of color are often pushed out of school before and after they become pregnant and then are placed into alternative settings with an inferior quality of education. Importantly, the studies focused on pregnant teenagers rather than on parenting teenagers, which might overlook the long-term effect on supporting teenage mothers.

Using participatory action research methodology, Wood and Hendricks (2017) conducted a study with 24 high school students, male and female, who were teenage parents. The authors concluded that current strategies to prevent teenage pregnancies have ignored the experiences of youth, recommending that hearing from the youth themselves would help create more meaningful teenage pregnancy interventions in schools. Wood and Hendricks (2017) indicated that students thought that having a child while in school had a negative impact on their future, and that prevention strategies used by educators were incongruent with teen lifestyles. Although the authors advocated for listening to youth voices, the study still had a deficit lens in viewing teenage parenting as a problem in need of remediation, rather than hearing from the youth themselves about how to create congruent sex education along with supporting them reach their aspirations.

When looking at a study of parenting teenagers, Anwar and Stanistreet (2014) discussed young mothers' experiences and future aspirations based upon in-depth interviews to explore their future aspirations. The researchers conducted 10 in-depth

interviews with teenage mothers of low socio-economic status from a social constructivist and symbolic interactionist perspective. They chose this theoretical framework to focus on how teen mothers construct and continue their identities and how it impacts behaviors, choice, and action. Four key themes emerged: mother identity, stigma, social support, and future aspirations. The researchers found that although being a teen mother had its hardships, the mothers felt overall that motherhood was a positive experience; their dislike for school prior to pregnancy shifted in that they reassessed their goals and discovered that pursuing education and a career path were important to reach their goals and aspirations. Still, this study was conducted in the North West area of England with teen white mothers from an economically deprived area. Although this study portrayed teenage parenting as a positive experience overall, other studies revealed negative social constructions of teenage mothers.

Brand, Morrison, and Brown (2014) conducted a literature review intended to heighten awareness of the negative social construction of teen mothers and how that view influences health and social policy. The qualitative studies revealed that teenage motherhood offered an opportunity for young women rather than leading to bad outcomes as typically portrayed in the media. Since Brand et al (2014) found that most literature that frames young mothers from a deficit view was quantitative in nature, they argued that more qualitative studies were necessary to "position young others as the 'experts' in their own lives and consider the multidimensional experiences of young women as they transition to motherhood" (p. 178). They uncovered much stigma about young mothers from health and social service providers, affecting young women's transition into motherhood.

Pillow (2004) discussed how teenage pregnancy is embedded in policies such as Title IX, where teenage mothers can attend an alternative setting only on a voluntary basis, that they cannot be expelled from school, and their education must be comparable to their peers. Importantly, Pillow (2004) found that white pregnant teens often continued at their comprehensive high schools, while girls of color attended alternative settings. The author examined both portrayals of the pregnant teen, which are both consistent as well as constantly changing, including the teen mother as the "Girl Next Door" versus the teen mother as "The Other Girl." A more contemporary analysis reveals a shift from "unwed mother" to the socially constructed term "teen mother" during the 1970s, and the emergence of a discourse around teen pregnancy as an epidemic, despite the fact that teen pregnancy rates fell to their lowest level between the late 1960s and 1980s.

Pillow (1997) expanded on Foucault's (1980) concepts of "truth" and genealogy of works to focus on the structures that *embody policies* that are raced, gendered, and sexed to re-interpret truth. Pillow (2003) used this framework to understand educational polices of teenage mothers in schools. Pillow (2004) examined several discourses and how the teenage mother is treated differently depending on her social class and race. The author used the theoretical approach of feminist genealogy, which "emphasized that the formation of policies is about regulating, reproducing, and surveilling certain bodies" (p. 9). Feminist genealogy was a tool for Pillow (1997) to trace how the policies and discourses pertaining to teenage mothers have been formed historically. The researcher conducted interviews with school staff and conducted document analysis on policies. One discourse was regarding "contamination," in that pregnant teens may "contaminate" other students at school by being a bad example. Another discourse identified "education

responsibility," in that a teen mother needs to attain an education in order to not need welfare or burden taxpayers. These discourses tended to portray teenage mothers in a negative light.

Molborn (2011) conducted in-depth interviews with teenage parents in 2008-2009 in Denver, Colorado. She used one of the teen mom's stories to highlight the bigger societal picture of how teenage mothers are negatively portrayed, the social inequality, and the consequences they endure. Her research found that most teen parents live in lower income neighborhoods, and are youth of color, which she attributes to the lack of accessibility to contraceptives, as well as religious affiliation. She found that conservative religious communities, usually in Southern states, are Pro Life, and having the baby is the "lesser of the two evils" (p. 34). She explained the history of teenage mothering and the perceptions similar to Pillow's (2004) research. However, her research showed that the negative outcomes of teenage parents were actually due to their life experiences prior to getting pregnant. Moreover, the negative outcomes often noted are short-term outcomes, when in fact, when looking at long-term effects, teenage parents are better than they would have been as teens without children. Teenage parents finding out about their pregnancy shifted their motivation in school. Molborn (2011) ends with the importance of supporting teenage parents, noting that it is a "smart societal investment" (p. 37). Furthermore, although there is a lack of financial support due to the welfare reform in 1996, continuing the current financial supports offered is critical in providing a positive trajectory for youth to go to school, have transportation, and childcare so they can reach their educational and career goals.

DeVito (2010) explored the experiences of teenage mothers during their postpartum period (4-6 weeks postpartum) with 126 adolescent mothers in New Jersey. She conducted a content analysis of interviews conducted from a previous study looking at the self-perceptions of teenage mothers (DeVito, 2007). During her content analysis, three themes emerged: being caught between two worlds, feeling alone and desperate, and if I knew then what I know now. She emphasized that depending on what adolescent developmental period the young mother is in, she will need specific kinds of supports.

For instance, a younger adolescent (up to age 14) still needs her own kind of "mothering" by her own mother or support person in her life. Therefore, each young mother will have specific needs for support depending on what developmental period they are in themselves as they transition into the role of motherhood. DeVito's study specifically used a demographic form, the Norbeck Social Support Questionnaire, and a revised instrument of: What Being the Parent of a New Baby is Like when conducting interviews (DeVito, 2010).

DeVito's (2010) findings showed that support from the young mothers' own mother was beneficial for teen moms in the form of emotional support. For instance, when adolescents become mothers, the typical conflict between teenagers and their own mother dissipates as they now share something in common. The theme: being caught between two worlds, emerged when participants spoke about the demands of their own particular needs as a child while also having to tend to a baby. The theme, feeling along and desperate, emerged as young mothers talked about feeling isolated postpartum while adapting to their new role as a mother. "If I knew then what I know now" emerged as a theme when participants discussed how they perceived relationships, love, getting

pregnant, life's demands, and so forth before becoming a mother and what it is really like in reality. It is important to note that these interviews are during one of the most difficult times as a mother at any age, 4-6 weeks postpartum. However, DeVito emphasized that this is a critical time period for young mothers to get guidance, support, education, and reassurance, especially from professionals like nurses and childbirth educators. She expands on the need for childbirth education, parenting classes to help foster mother/child bonding, ongoing home visits, education and career support, and social gatherings with other adolescent moms to build new friendships with those going through similar life situations.

Although DeVito (2010) studied teenage mothers four-six weeks postpartum, Kraeger, Matsueda, and Erosheva (2010) conducted a study using data from a 10-year longitudinal study in Denver, Colorado, with over 500 women from low socio-economic neighborhoods. Their study controlled for pregnancy, marriage, sexuality, and contraceptive use, finding that motherhood, not marriage, was a "turning point" (p. 248) for young mothers, shifting their attention away from high-risk behaviors (use of drugs, alcohol, and engagement in crimes) and to prioritizing the well-being of themselves and their children. Their findings explained that becoming a teenage mom may have some benefits, especially if the mother comes from a low socioeconomic neighborhood, in that teenage girls from poor neighborhoods transition away from drugs and delinquencies when they become mothers.

Summary

The first section of this literature review covered literature related to the theoretical framework, including concepts of critical feminist mothering intersectionality,

feminist epistemology, policy changes affecting young mothers of color, community

cultural wealth, counter-storytelling, and third space/*nepantla.* The next section provided

background on mother-scholars, based on Lapayese's (2012) work and its relationship to

the framework of critical feminist mothering and the notion of third space. The last

section focused on empirical studies related to teenage mothering. Throughout the

literature review lies an emphasis on how young women's bodies are regulated based on

their race, class, gender, and age. Teen mothering has been problematized by policies

created on the bodies of young mothers of color. The prevalent research focusing only on

prevention and education does not allow room for addressing either the supports that

current teen mothers may need or their lived experiences as teen mothers. Thus, there is a

need to continue to unveil the voices and knowledges of teen mothers to counter the

current discourse.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter of the dissertation includes the research questions, research design, research setting, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations. Through the lens of critical feminist mothering, it is essential to examine the social and political structures imposed onto teen mothers of color in a qualitative study through counter-stories. I am interested in documenting knowledge that is missing and shut down in the dominant narrative. Thus, I used narrative analysis and photographs to examine the experiences of teen mothers of color.

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of young mothers of color through their own voices in order to produce new knowledge about their experience in schools, at home, and in their communities by engaging the women in a process of inquiry. Through having the opportunity to tell their stories, teen mothers described the in-between nature of their experiences and detailed their impact in and out of school. My hope is that their stories can serve to challenge and complicate the dominant deficit-based view of young mothers and that this new knowledge can be used to facilitate a shift in how educators support teen mothers. Specifically, a better understanding among educators of the lives of teenage mothers may help to diminish the current challenges that teenage mothers face in confronting limited opportunities to graduate, preparing for higher education, and improving their economic circumstances.

Research Questions

1. How do young mothers of color describe their lived experience in and out of schools?

2. What factors, such as particular people, services, or circumstances, do young mothers of color identify as instrumental in their lives in and out of schools?

    a. What factors have contributed to their being successful?

    b. What factors have created obstacles to their success?

3. What recommendations do young mothers of color have for educators to help identify and build upon their assets in order to provide for more supportive and encouraging educational spaces?

Research Design

Since this study focused on hearing the stories and experiences of teen mothers, I utilized narrative inquiry and photography. I conducted open-ended semi-structured interviews with young mothers along with photo elicitation in order to capture stories as a way of responding to deficit and simplified perspectives that have dictated discourse and interventions of teenage pregnancy. Like other feminists, I am interested in hearing the voices of those marginalized, particularly women of color (Hesse-Biber, 2006). In considering my own identity as a Chicana and a school psychologist working with this vulnerable youth, I felt compelled to document the raw stories of those often unheard, like my own grandfather. Although a huge component of my profession as a school psychologist is to engage students in counseling, another component is greatly data-driven. As a data-driven professional, I felt the need to extract conversations that are sacred within the inner circle of teen moms in order to highlight their truth for others. I accomplished this through a skill I have used while counseling my own students: interviewing and questioning.

Consequently, I used in-depth interviewing to ask open-ended questions while participants narrated their photographs regarding their experiences in their school, community, and family life as related to the research questions. Participants were asked to photograph places, things, and people that reminded them of their experiences as teen mothers. Photographs often allow marginalized groups to have another medium to amplify their own voices and tell their own stories. Using narrative inquiry and photography with young mothers led to exploring issues related to societal structures, support and resources in and out of school and brought light to in/equitable opportunities in urban communities that young mothers of color identify.

Research Setting

Participants were young adult mothers of color in the San Francisco Bay Area who reflected back on their experiences as teen mothers. Participants were recruited based on recommendations from staff at local high schools with teen mother graduates, through snowballing and reaching out for referrals to communities and organizations in my own networks. I shared and discussed my research prospectus with my request for participants, so they could make an informed decision on their referral. In order to deter from any conflicts of interest with my role in the school district where I am employed, I only worked with participants with whom I had not conducted any psychoeducational assessments or had any counseling sessions while they were students.

I contacted the pregnancy and parenting high school staff for recommendations. The academic counselor, social worker, and administrator referred several students. Additionally, an onsite provider that works with the youth beyond high school also recommended young mothers for me to interview. All of the young mothers I interviewed

that attended the Pregnancy and Parenting high school, met with me in a private office at the site where they regularly visit due to either working there, volunteering there, or taking their child there for daycare. Otherwise, I interviewed two participants at different study rooms at local libraries.

Participants

I intended to interview eight to ten participants, with a minimum of six, who identified as previously having been a teen mother (mother during their high school years). According to Creswell (2015), sampling in qualitative research is selective in order to best understand the central phenomenon by using "voices of individuals who may not be heard otherwise" (p. 205). In this study, purposeful sampling was used to select participants who:

1. Self-identify as a mother of color

2. Be aged 18-25 at the time of the interview

3. Be open and eager to tell their stories and experiences

4. Be willing to allow the researcher to record and transcribe the interviews

5. Be willing to participate in a study that may eventually be published (e.g. academic journal)

To find participants, I sent messages and/or a survey via social media and e-mail to organizations that work with teen mothers. The message included the purpose of my study, the criteria for participation, my email address, telephone number, and how to contact me. When participants contacted me, I provided more information regarding this study, protecting confidentiality of their identity and data, and timelines for interviews either in person or via email. At that time, I sent or gave a copy of the consent form for

their review if they wanted to participate in the study. I collected the consent form before conducting the first interview.

Most of the participants were interested in participating in the study. However, due to their heavy load of work, school, mothering, and so forth, several signed consent forms but could not meet for our interview. Many young mothers had to cancel and re-schedule often, and a few were not able to follow through with our interview. I went through many rounds of asking for referrals due to the time constraints limiting the participants who could complete the study. I was disappointed that I was unable to secure final interviews by my initial timeline deadline of December 2018.

When I continued having to re-schedule several participants, I asked for more referrals from school staff to ensure I could get the minimum number of participants. I still fell short one interviewee, but I am so thankful for the young mothers whom I was able to interview. Ultimately, I was able to interview five young Latinx mothers. Many factors may have contributed to the difficulty with recruiting participants that could remain in the study – meeting in person, not being able to work with students I know in my professional capacity, the extraordinarily busy lives of young mothers, especially those still in the thick of surviving young parenthood while trying to work and go to school, etc. Luckily, each of the five young mothers trusted in me to give their stories, to bond over motherhood, and to wonder how we are all able to balance it all.

Data Collection

Following a feminist methodological framework, I used narrative inquiry by conducting in-depth interviews and utilizing photographs taken by participants. Recruitment of participants and interviews of the study was conducted from September

2018 to February 2019. Using the research questions as a guide, I developed formal questions in a semi-structured interview format that I asked throughout the interview as it related to the participant's stories. When participants first contacted me, I talked to them either in person or via text. Each participant was provided with information of the research process, the time involvement, how photographs would be integrated, the rights of participants, potential risks to the participants, how these risks could be minimized, and how to use consent forms. After two weeks, I followed up with any of the women who had not returned consent forms to see if they were still interested in participating.

Once a participant agreed to the research process, we set a date and time to meet. The location of the meetings depended on the participants' comfort level and convenience for them. The purpose of the first meeting was to build a rapport and relationship with the participant by conducting a brief interview, collecting background information, and discussing the next part of the process. I gave the participant the opportunity to come up with or select a pseudonym of their choosing at this time, but some of them decided to use their own name. We discussed the second part of the process and scheduled our second meeting about two weeks out.

This second part of the process involved photographing people, things, and places that remind them of their experiences of being a teenage mother. I informed them that our second meeting included a more in-depth interview and a review of the photographs they took. Participants were asked if they prefer to take photographs with their phone; otherwise a disposable camera would be provided. Participants using their phones were asked to text or e-mail the photographs as they take them for the researcher to store until the second meeting. None of the participants opted to use a disposable camera.

During our second meeting, the participants and I reviewed the photographs together. Only one of the participants sent the photos before our interview. All other participants showed the photos to me on their phones during the interview, while one of them asked to just show the ones she had posted on Instagram so she didn't have to download and send them. Another participant said that she avoids the area that reminds her of her time as a teenage mother due to a traumatic experience with a medical care provider. She showed up to our interview describing the places she would have taken photos of if she had felt comfortable going back to that neighborhood.

All of the participants took similar photographs, mostly of their children. The photos of their children were often taken at sites of special significance, such as their former high school or current childcare centers. The photos either documented their children playing at nearby parks or snuggling with their fathers at home. For example, Gaby showed a photo of her son wrapped in a blanket while carrying him from her car to school, which she said was a daily act. Nearly every participant showed a photo of their child with them at graduation day. Other photographs portrayed their children during different significant events, such as at birth, first day at daycare, and first birthdays. Gloria's photo focused on her certificate of admission into college with her son looking at it along with her. Some photographs revealed images of themselves pregnant or postpartum, such as selfies in a mirror. While pregnant, Gloria took a photo of her shoes after a long day of work and school to symbolize all the walking she had to do each day.

During this process, I asked each participant to narrate the story behind the photographs. If participants had a difficult time with this narration, I helped facilitate by asking questions about why the photograph was important to them and why they chose to

take a certain photograph (McIntrye, 2013). I also asked interview questions as they arose organically from the narration of the photographs. The narration of the photographs as well as the interview was recorded digitally. This multi-sensory data not only offered triangulation, but also provided the participants with a better chance to express themselves more accurately (Booth & Booth, 2003). Rather than describing the photograph itself, the participants instead tended to talk about a memory elicited by the photograph .

I personally transcribed all of the interviews, so I could better understand the voices of the participants in the study. Then, I shared the transcription with each participant via email to ensure that it honored their voice and story accurately (Mayotte, 2013). Following our final meeting, I sent the narrator a thank you note for taking their time to interview with me, as it can be a taxing and time-consuming process (Mayotte, 2013). Additionally, during this process, I kept a researcher's journal and took voice notes to record my reflections.

Data Analysis

After transcribing the interviews, I analyzed the interview transcriptions to code and find common themes in the individuals' stories. First, I personally transcribed all of the interviews myself, which was a very time-consuming but beneficial process as I heard their stories again from their own voices. I printed out the transcriptions and re-read them. Then, I read through the transcriptions again highlighting sections that related to the research questions. I collated all of the participants' reflections and organized them by research question. Next, I went through the transcriptions again and highlighted themes that emerged by finding patterns between participants' narratives.

Creswell (2015) describes this coding process as Open Coding, in which the researcher analyzes the data to find common themes. I looked at the data through the theoretical framework of critical feminist mothering, based on the themes of community cultural wealth, third space, and intersectionality to make sense of the participants' experiences and narratives. Then, I organized the participants' responses by themes and subthemes as related to the research questions.

The themes that emerged from this process were: Nepantla as a transformative space, ventajas/assets, herstories of my body, all-encompassing stigma, self-advocacy and agency, and education as value. The subthemes that emerged were: graduation day, motherhood, their transformation, family, balancing roles, family support, the importance of education, medical care, school experiences, gendered expectations, inequitable treatment, and recommendations for youth and educators.

Ethical Considerations

I received formal approval from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco on May 30, 2018. I reached out for participants in the manner described above. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all interviewees had the option to either choose or receive a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and protection for the participants. The women were able to choose their own pseudonyms to foster empowerment in the process of interviewing. Two of the women opted to use their own names. Also, the participants signed forms of consent.

Ethical issues to consider when gathering interviews are not to solely rely on one story, but to triangulate the data, collaborate with participants, and engage in member checks (Creswell, 2015). Creswell (2015) recommended consideration of several key

issues, particularly the necessity for participants to trust the researcher. The purpose of

the study was disclosed to the participants. The required procedures of Institutional

Review Board (IRB) for obtaining consent and keeping the research confidential was

followed closely. Additionally, as a researcher, my responsibility is to ensure that the

participant's dignity is preserved and their privacy is respected.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the major findings from my interviews with young mothers who were pregnant and/or parenting while in high school. It is important to view a young mother not only as someone who is still considered a child, but also as someone who is responsible for a child. While some research studies, such as Anwar & Stanistreet (2014), and Wood and Hendricks (2017) have portrayed teen mothers' voices through interviews, stories that specifically explore the experiences of young mothers of color are scarce. By centering the experiences of teen mothers in the United States, this study aims to challenge the dominant narrative by being based in the knowledge production of young mothers of color living in transition.

First, I introduce the young mothers and provide their background information in the section, Mother Sheroes. In the following section, I synthesize the findings according to the emergent themes: Nepantla as a transformative space, ventajas/assets, herstories of my body, all-encompassing stigma, self-advocacy and agency, and education as value.

Mother Sheroes

This section provides a brief introduction to each of the five participants in order to make sense of the narratives. Table 1 exhibits demographics for the participants, which align with the criteria for participant selection in this study.

Name	Age Now	Age When Pregnant	Self-Identification	Family's Country of Origin	Documentation Status
Adarmaris	20	16	Latina	Mexico	Born in US
Blanca	21	18	Latina	Mexico	Born in US to undocumented parents

Danielle	23	17	Mexican	Mexico	DACA. Came to US at age 2 with mom
Gaby	19	16	Latina	El Salvador	Born in US to undocumented parents
Gloria	20	15	Latina	Guatemala	Born in US to undocumented parents

Adamaris: Born in the United States, Adamaris became pregnant while attending high school. During her early high school days, she was responsible for taking care of her younger siblings (e.g. picking them up from school and caring for them in the evenings) while her mother worked two to three jobs. Adamaris rebelled during this time by drinking, smoking weed, and running away to youth shelters. However, when she became pregnant at age 16, her priorities shifted. She stayed at her comprehensive high school until a month before giving birth and then transferred to a high school for pregnant and parenting teens. She currently volunteers at a non-profit organization for young mothers and attends community college, where she will graduate this semester. She plans on continuing college in order to become an immigration lawyer. She lives with her daughter and her partner. Adamaris was born in the United States and her family is from Mexico.

Blanca: Blanca moved with her family from the United States to Mexico when she was 18 months old and then returned while eight months pregnant to give birth to her son. She attended a pregnancy high school in the U.S. While she still lives here with her brother and son, she regularly talks to her mother and boyfriend who reside in Mexico. Blanca is currently employed through CalWorks and goes to school full-time at a local

community college. She has a personal goal of becoming more fluent in English to be able to communicate with more people.

Danielle: Danielle is an undocumented immigrant from Mexico. She became pregnant during her last semester at a continuation high school and resisted transferring to a pregnancy high school when a trusted teacher offered this option. Although Danielle received mixed treatment from school staff while pregnant, she stayed enrolled through graduation. Now married with three children, she works at her mother's daycare center. While interested in studying to be a narcotics officer, she is not sure when she will have the time to return to college.

Gaby: Gaby, whose family is from El Salvador, was born in the United States. She became pregnant in high school and voluntarily transferred to the pregnancy high school. Gaby commuted at least an hour with her son across a heavily trafficked bridge in order to attend school every day. Currently, she works at her son's daycare center as an administrative assistant and is attending school to work in the medical industry. Presumably due to shyness, Gaby was not as forthcoming with her history as were other participants.

Gloria: Gloria was born and raised in California by immigrant parents from Guatemala. She first became pregnant while attending a public high school with her now husband, whom she married when they both were 16. Her first pregnancy was a miscarriage. She had a second pregnancy during the later years at a comprehensive high school. Although she received mixed treatment from school staff, she denied a transfer to the pregnancy high school. Currently, she has two children and is attending college while pursuing a career in criminal justice. She hopes to be a lawyer one day.

Even though the participants revealed many similarities and differences, they all shared their common experience of motherhood in high school and described their lives in and out of school. They also spoke about other related topics, such as their experiences with families and in-laws, medical treatment, and future aspirations. Most participants met with me at the pregnancy high school that they previously attended since they were still taking their child there for daycare or preschool. One woman met me in a study room at a public library in her neighborhood; another in a study room of the library on her college campus.

Research Question 1:

How Do Young Mothers of Color Describe Their Lived Experience In and Out of Schools?

As I listened to the interviews, I noticed a similar pattern begin to surface. Most of the young mothers started out the interview by showing me their graduation photo with an explanation of how they were feeling that day. This explanation was strikingly brief, as if they did not have all the words needed to describe their feelings on that day. The interviews evolved into sharing stories of their experiences of being a teen mother, what they learned, and who they became in the process. This change in identity led to my identification of the theme, nepantla, to describe this transformative space. This concept fit because while these young women were in transition from adolescence to adulthood, they also experienced motherhood, leading to an abrupt shift toward maturity and responsibility. In this process they also were transforming into strong young women.

Nepantla as a transformative space

Anzaldúa (2012) described nepantla as a feeling of in-betweenness, "not quite this and not quite that" (p. 211). When listening to the young mothers' interviews, I could see how their experiences of living in that in-between space of adolescence, adulthood, and motherhood became a space of transformation. As Gloria stated, she first had "kid problems;" then, one day she realized she had transformed into a mother - proud of who she had become. She noted that she would not be the person she is today without having had the experience of being a teenage mother.

In this section, the participants describe their transition from childhood/ adolescence to motherhood and adults as living in a space of transition. Their narratives flow between who they were before getting pregnant, their move into motherhood, and their emotions on graduation day as they walked across the stage. These young mothers were adolescents with adult responsibilities, all while receiving splintered treatment from school staff and outside providers. As Adamaris explained, "My mentality changed, and I knew I couldn't continue the life I had. I had to change my lifestyle in order to give my daughter another one." Thus, they sometimes had to leave friends behind in their transformation. For example, Adamaris gave up her friends who partied, drank, and took drugs.

As the young mothers showed a photo and memory from their graduation day, I could feel the emotions behind their statements with the pause and brevity of their description of that day. They expressed the difficulty in crossing that stage, how strong their emotions were, and how it was a very special day. It seemed like crossing that stage on their graduation day was like walking across a bridge between who they were as

adolescence, who they became as mothers, and the beginning of entering adulthood. They emerged as strong, capable young mothers with so much life ahead of them. Four of the five young mothers had their baby with them at graduation, noting how old their baby was in their graduation day picture. It was almost as if that day was mostly about demonstrating to their children their willingness to make any necessary sacrifices to give them the best they deserved and showing how much they could achieve and accomplish with such young children.

> *At the beginning, it was kind of scary. I didn't know what I was getting myself into…it was hard to get used to being a mom and having to look after someone else. But I got used to it.* (Gaby)

Like Gaby, most young mothers perceived motherhood as being really hard. The transitional space of motherhood itself was noted among all of the participants. They all expressed how motherhood was special and yet difficult at the same time. They were adapting to a new reality, a reality different than those around them. Their experience of social exclusion while occupying in-between spaces created a new reality for them. Most of the young mothers mentioned the difficulty of becoming a mother when their baby was first born, such as Gaby noting, "It was definitely a challenge." One participant (Gloria) felt like she became a mother from her very first pregnancy, even though it had ended in a miscarriage. They all felt a sense of responsibility shift from taking care of themselves to being responsible for someone else.

For example, Blanca discussed how being alone in this country as a mom is "super, super hard," but that her baby makes it easy. She feels lonely, adding that when she gave birth to her son, she cried saying, "Where is my family?" Except for living with

her one brother, Blanca is by herself in the United States. She gave birth alone at a hospital in Texas only a month after returning to the United States from Mexico, where she had lived since she was 18 months old. Blanca felt really sad at the time of her son's birth, remembering how difficult that experience was. Now she feels okay about it all because her baby behaves so well.

Adamaris explained that her transition to motherhood was "hard – it was really hard." Her personal life was already so complicated by her strained relationship with her mother, caretaking responsibilities with her younger siblings, and use of drugs and alcohol, that she was deeply impacted by the transition into motherhood. The complication of her personal life combined with school and new motherhood made things difficult for her. However, Adamaris learned that she had to be selfish with her time. She prioritized spending time with her daughter over anything else, explaining, "my priorities changed and they have to understand it. If they don't…then I don't care." She learned that mindset a little bit at a time and changed her lifestyle to the point of just going to school and then going home.

> *It feels that people want to 'fix' teen moms and we're our own person. They make*
>
> *us feel like we made mistakes, but they're not mistakes. That's gotten embedded in*
>
> *my mind. It's a learning process that I needed to take for me to be who I am.*
> (Gloria)

Four of the five young mothers described how their lives dramatically changed from before they were pregnant until finding out about their pregnancy and having their baby. The young mothers noted that before their pregnancy, they did not prioritize school or make the best decisions. Adamaris explained that before she was pregnant, she was

hanging with the wrong crowd, drinking, smoking marijuana, running away from her home, and staying in a youth shelter. Now she volunteers at an organization that supports teenage mothers, attends community college, and is applying to transfer to get a degree in law. Similarly, Gloria noted that she rarely used to attend school on time, coming as late as lunch time and not prioritizing school. She commented, "I had done really bad the first two years of high school." But when she first became pregnant, she changed and started to become more responsible. She began to feel that she needed to make school more important in her life. Gloria stated that becoming pregnant matured her a great deal, noting that she had to face kid problems as well as many personal issues. Now she is graduating college, majoring in criminal justice. Overall, she expressed, "I feel very happy with what I have become."

Gloria described her transition to motherhood as gaining more responsibilities like waking up in the middle of the night to breastfeed: "I was still an adolescent - I had the willpower - this idea that I had to prove to everybody that I could do it." Gloria reflected that even though her first pregnancy was a miscarriage, she felt the shift in her responsibilities when she was first pregnant. She stated, "I didn't physically have the baby anymore, but I feel like I had a sense of responsibility even though I didn't have a child with me. Even though physically I didn't have a baby with me, mentally my brain was changing like haywire mom brain."

As Blanca noted earlier, being a mom is lonely and "super, super hard." However, although her son is young, she feels like he is easier on her sensing her loneliness in the United States without support from her mother or boyfriend. She is thankful for the ease her son provides her. While stating that motherhood is hard, she then described her joy at

watching her son when he wakes up in the morning, saying, "Hi mommy. Good morning." She fell back on the couch we sat on saying, "Awww" while holding her heart. Blanca said, "The experience (of motherhood) is amazing. I love it so much being a mom, but they grow up so fast." Blanca's portrayal of motherhood was the perfect example of the *borderlands of motherhood*: it is tough, but it is so worth it. Gloria reiterated this point in describing the challenges of balancing life as a teen mom.

> *I was in high school, working, and going to school, and I was pregnant. And I was a wife and it was a lot.* (Gloria)

These borderlands of mothering caused all the women to find balance in the difficult and rewarding aspects of being a mom.

Three of the five young mothers mentioned the balancing act required by all the roles they had as teen mothers. While showing a photo from high school of the shoes she was wearing on her feet. Gloria related how assuming all the varied responsibilities while pregnant had caused her to almost go into pre-term labor. Her shoes embodied all of the work and walking she had to do at that time of her life. She learned the importance of slowing down for both herself and her baby. Adamaris revealed that she kept a very organized schedule in her mind and in a planner to make sure her tasks and priorities were recorded. Sometimes she thought she would get to a task later and had to remind herself, "There is no 'later.' Later is just sleep and when you wake up…you gotta go to work or you gotta go to school." She created a schedule to make sure her work, volunteering, classes, cooking, cleaning, and homework are all incorporated into her day.

Ventajas/Assets

Most think of wealth or assets in regard to currency. However, in this study, I use the term, "ventajas/assets," to refer to the strengths and supports that these young mothers possessed in order to become the strong women they now are. Their ability to navigate social programs, receive unconditional family support, resist the obstacles against being a teenage mother, aspire to furthering their education, and maintain bilingualism all together demonstrate the vastness of their knowledge and assets. Gloria described her sense of the stigma against teen moms as "basically your life is over and you have nothing - you basically messed up your whole life." She realized, "I feel like it helps you - it helps you a lot."

> *My whole family was like, 'oh my god, this is going to be our first grandchild of the family.' The first baby. First ever mixed baby. First ever for the whole family.* (Danielle)

Four of the five young mothers conveyed their parents' negative emotions toward the announcement of their pregnancy. Most parents were described as angry. One parent was sad since she had been a teenage mother herself and knew what her daughter would be facing. Another participant's mother was very supportive from the beginning, going out of her way to make sure her daughter stayed healthy by making her smoothies and getting her prenatal pills. Ultimately, all of the families were ultimately very happy when the babies were born. Every one of the young mothers received much love and help at home from their family, whether parents, sibling, partner, or parents of their partner. Gaby explained that due to all the support she received, she "was able to make it through."

Adamaris' mother did not want the baby to go to the onsite daycare at such a young age, so she quit her morning job to watch the baby while Adamaris finished high school. During her childhood, Adamaris was parentified from a young age, having to care for her younger brothers while her mom worked multiple jobs. She became "out of control" due to the many responsibilities she had from caring for her younger siblings, picking them up from school, taking them home, and not being able to go out after school or weekends in order to care for them. Adamaris expressed that she did not want that life for her daughter, "I don't want her to do that. I wouldn't do that though. I want her to be my priority. I want to go to all her events." Her father was in and out of her life, so when she found out she was pregnant, Adamaris advocated for her daughter by expressing to her mom, "If I can't have consistency, then I can't really have nothing with you," noting that she would not take any inconsistency when it came to her daughter. In the face of a lack of structural support, Adamaris and the other young women occupied spaces that were uncharted territories. Within those spaces, they engaged in acts of creation from birthing to launching a new life to developing new norms that worked for them, often interrupting intergenerational cycles.

Two of the five young mothers currently live with their first child's father. Gloria married her husband when she was 16 and moved in with her husband and in-laws, where she still lives today. Although Danielle is no longer with her high school boyfriend, she explained that he was supportive and understanding when they were together. Similarly, Blanca's boyfriend currently resides in Mexico, but they talk regularly. Adamaris and her partner have been together since they were 14 years old (now they are 20). They are very

supportive of each other in that he works while she attends school, and she hopes to arrange their schedules so he can return to school as well.

> *I was like 'Whoa I can't believe I got accepted.' I was very proud because I got into this school*. (Gloria)

All five young mothers emphasized the importance of education and their aspirations to continue through college for a professional career. Each young mother aspires to work in her community in fields of law, medicine or child development. Both Adamaris and Gloria are interested in a career in law to give back to their community in some way. Adamaris wants to be an immigration lawyer to help mothers and children. Since Gloria attended a comprehensive high school, she first had to complete certain graduation requirements in order to attend a four-year university right away. Graduating this semester with a degree in criminal justice, she wants to help support her community.

Adamaris is currently finishing community college with an associate's degree in both Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies. She is applying to transfer to a four-year university to study criminal justice. Danielle explained that she wished she never stopped going to school because, "it's too hard to go back." She has been taking community college courses when possible in hope of becoming a narcotics officer one day. While Gaby currently works at her onsite daycare, she just enrolled in a program to become a medical assistant after taking time out of school to help care for her mom.

Two of the young mothers described their faith in God getting them through difficult times. Adamaris mentioned when she feels she is carrying a heavy load, "God doesn't put a lot on your plate that you can't handle. He knows how much you can handle." Gloria reflected back on isolating herself when she became pregnant and

married. In doing so, she isolated herself from going to church, but feels that if she would have stayed connected, she would have received a great deal of support from that community. She since now has returned to her childhood church and explained that the church community is now a part of her life again. Unfortunately, I did not probe into why she isolated herself from her church community, but Gloria mentioned that she isolated herself from many aspects of her life stating she, "only thought about myself during that time."

My Story of My Body

My body just kept getting bigger, bigger, bigger. (Adamaris)

Four of the five women described their bodies when identifying their transition from girlhood to motherhood, usually accompanied with a photo of their pregnant or postpartum bodies. The transformation of their body and reclaiming themselves postpartum came up organically. They did not provide much detail, but Adamaris remembered how when she was pregnant at her comprehensive high school, her body just kept getting "bigger, bigger, bigger." Gloria took a photo of herself after her son was born, and she remarked that she "felt very confident at that time with my postpartum body." Not all of the young women were thrilled about postpartum life. Blanca was ready to have her body back after breastfeeding her son for five months. Gloria shared her post birth story and how the medical industry had failed her. This experience was further complicated by the negative treatment of two of the women during their medical treatment, as further discussed below.

It was a nightmare. (Danielle)

Two of the five young mothers related the nightmare experiences they had with medical treatment. They both felt that their young age contributed to their mistreatment. Danielle described her experience with a middle-aged Hispanic doctor she had seen since childhood who began threatening to tell her mother she was pregnant if she did not have an abortion. He continued to call and tell her, "You're not ready for one - you're not even graduated, your mom is going to be disappointed," portraying that he thinks her age will impact her ability to take care of a child. The doctor called her "week after week, week after week." Due to this harassment, Danielle did not pay any attention to her baby. Ultimately, the doctor convinced Danielle to go to a clinic to get an abortion, where Danielle pretended to take a pill that was offered. When the doctor left while she was supposed to get undressed, Danielle instead went to find her boyfriend in the waiting room, and they ran away from the clinic. The doctor's office then called Danielle's mother and disclosed to Danielle's mother that she was pregnant – an illegal act for medical professionals. Thankfully, she ultimately had a positive experience at the hospital where she later gave birth; yet to this day she will not go into a major neighborhood in her city because it brings back memories of the "nightmare" situation with that doctor. Danielle actually began her interview with this story. She explained that it was too traumatic to take photos of the places she intended to. Instead, her "photos" were represented by explaining what she *would* have taken photos of, one of which was her memory of the doctor's office.

They didn't care about my life. (Gloria)

Gloria described her first birth experience as "terrible…I hated it." The nurses kept pushing drugs on her even though she insisted on not having any. They kept asking

her, "Are you sure?" She talked about her whole birth story, the lack of proper medical care she experienced, how scared she was, and she was not sure how she had the willpower to say no to the drugs they were offering. After the baby was born, she was "high on life," but a few days later, she described that she was hemorrhaging. "I was bleeding, bleeding, bleeding," but all the nurses told her that the bleeding was normal. Eventually, they sent her to the emergency room alone without the baby, separating her from the newborn for almost two days. Gloria had to scream for the nurses to come change her bed sheets because there was "so much blood." "I was bleeding so much. I thought I was going to die." The hospital staff did not tell her family where she was. With one exception, the nurses brushed her off, and she described them as "very mean." Ending up with a retained placenta, by the time a doctor saw her the next day, they said she might need a hysterectomy. Fortunately, they were able to remove the entire placenta without a hysterectomy.

After giving birth, Gloria became very emotional, could not stop crying, and had very engorged breasts from not being able to express her milk. She expressed, "They didn't care about my life. Obviously, it feels like because I was really young that they didn't really care. But since I was young, I didn't know. I trusted them." Gloria thought that because she was young, she did not know how to advocate for herself in the health care system and felt alone in the experience. She had wished someone had been there to advocate for her, assuming incorrectly that the predominately White nurses and doctors on site would take on that role. Instead, she felt that her young age was a factor in why they failed to provide the medical care that she deserved, saying that if she were older she would have been able to advocate for herself better.

Later while listening to and reading the transcripts, I wondered if this experience as a teenager made Gloria more aware of the need to advocate for herself while dealing with the medical industry in that her age at the time might not have mattered. Instead, the experience of being failed by medical providers at any age can trigger a feeling of needing to advocate for yourself in future encounters with nurses and doctors. Evidently, during Gloria's second birth during college, she was able to advocate for herself by describing her previous birth experience to make sure the same issues did not arise again.

The All-Encompassing Stigma

The young mothers did not convey experiencing as much stigma in the community as I had anticipated, based on my prior work with pregnant and parenting teens. However, Gaby said that she "sensed it" and that it felt like people were always judging her and looking at her on the bus. Gloria noted that she was too much inside her own head to notice it, but upon reflection, people did probably stare at her when riding the bus or walking her baby in the stroller. Although Gloria was the only teenager in her group prenatal classes, she did not feel stigmatized since all the women were Latina and "in that culture most moms are very young, so I think they saw it as something normal."

However, Gloria did note that her mother-in-law wanted her to take on the traditional role of a Latina wife, explaining, "she wants me to be the same way they are" by telling her what to do and not do with her kids, that she needs to cook more and act more like a conventional mother. She stated, "there's a lot of stigma in Latino families" from being expected to be waiting on their husbands, cooking, and cleaning. While these expectations make her feel "perfectionistic," she wants to have her own identity. She often has had to push back against the expectations to wait on her husband and uphold

other cultural norms her mother-in-law pressures her to follow, causing her a great deal of anxiety. These expectations to be the "perfect" mother and wife, all while going to school and working appeared to be a sexist mindset that Gloria was pushing back on while trying to keep the peace at home. She knows who she wants to be, but also lives with her mother-in-law who wants her to act and be a certain way that contradicts her own beliefs.

Interestingly, I had expected that the young mothers would talk more about the impact of being women of color as the reason for the many obstacles they faced. However, when describing their negative experiences in the community, at school, and with the medical establishment, they all attributed the mistreatment as being primarily due to their young age, even though the adults with whom they had negative interactions were mostly White and often Male. In the interviews, no one explicitly attributed these issues to race, racism, or sexism beyond difficulties for themselves or their partners to find good paying jobs due to documentation status.

Regrettably, I did not probe deeply enough around race and racism while interviewing. At the alternative high school for parenting and pregnant teenagers where I am employed, more than 84% of the students are Latinx. The neighborhoods of the city are segregated; people of color are more concentrated in the areas where the young mothers live, with more than 36% of the residents identifying as Latinx. This may have decreased their feelings of stigma when out in the community. Since the young mothers all attended high schools that are majority students of color (between 33-52% Latinx), they might not have felt that race played a major role in navigating life as a teenage mother.

Surprisingly, the teen mothers did not attribute their negative interactions either at school or in the community to sexism. Neither of the two of the young mothers who had boyfriends while pregnant in high school mentioned any differential treatment towards them. However, I am fairly sure that the fathers were not pressured to switch schools, get abortions, or deemed to have negative outcomes in their futures. Nevertheless, the young mothers did not raise any evidence of sexism. This might be due to what the young mothers perceive as 'normal' motherhood, in that the mother generally takes on the emotional labor of child rearing; this phenomenon is particularly true in Latinx culture. Interestingly, Gloria noted that teen fathers are often left out of the narrative about young parents. My own view is that young fathers are left out because society views teenage pregnancies as the women's fault and responsibility. But Gloria mentioned that although she sacrificed greatly, "he has too" and that no one talks about the "effects of having a child for a young man." In a similar vein, Adamaris noted that her partner works to help support her and their child, sacrificing his ability to attend school at this time. Yet, she is consciously trying to make room in their schedule so he can attend college too.

Research Question 2:

What Factors, Such as Particular People, Services, or Circumstances, Do Young Mothers of Color Identify as Instrumental in Their Lives In and Out of Schools?

a. **What factors have contributed to their being successful?**

Self-Advocacy and Agency

I feel like if I hadn't pushed myself or motivated myself, I don't think I would be where I am....I knew I could be something. I know how smart I am. (Adamaris)

Three of the five participants discussed how their own self-advocacy and agency was integral to moving forward in their education and graduation. Their own motivation and ability to navigate the available support services and resources supported their success as teenage mothers in high school. Gaby remembered her commute from across the bay, stating they "still made it to school every day." Without her determination to wake up early enough to get to school on time, she might not have been able to finish high school, as the teen parenting and pregnancy school was the only one in the nearby region.

Additionally, although Adamaris received much support at school, she felt like the primary inspiration came from within since she was consistently pushing and motivating herself. She added that her school has since changed, and she can see how it offers more support to motivate other teen mothers today.

Support is not always given. In fact, Gloria, who attended a comprehensive high school, continually stood up for herself by advocating for her own wants and needs with school staff, who were mostly White. Many educators tried to convince her to go to the pregnancy high school, making statements like, "You're not going to be able to do it…you missed already a whole month of school and we don't want you to get behind." Her administrator, a middle-aged White male, once said to her, "Just terminate the baby." Gloria, not knowing the law, stood up for herself with school staff anyway. She held her ground with what she wanted and believed in, stating in her interview, "I needed to challenge myself … I decide this. I don't tell you what to do." It is important to note that Gloria's husband also attended the same school with her when she became pregnant. Although I did not follow-up with Gloria about any differential treatment between her

and her husband by school staff, I assume he was not being similarly pressured to switch schools due to the pregnancy.

Never forget this school. (Blanca)

Blanca came to the United States from Mexico when she was eight months pregnant, gave birth in a hospital in Texas, and then moved to the West Coast where she started attending a local comprehensive high school. Due to having her baby, she transferred to the pregnancy school, knowing she could receive the additional support offered that extended past high school, such as daycare. The young mothers who took advantage of all the support and wrap-around services available to them were very grateful. All of the young mothers who attended the pregnancy high school have since returned back to the school site to work or volunteer in some capacity in order to express this gratitude.

The students who attended the alternative high school for pregnant and parenting teenagers spoke highly of the access to support and outside services available to them. They had access to onsite daycare and preschool until their children were school age. They were given a space to get their work done when unable to bring their children to daycare; thus, they were still able to complete their schoolwork without missing classes.

The wrap-around services offered on site were discussed with great enthusiasm and appreciation. Offerings like the onsite daycare, counseling services, weekly no-cost farmers' market, and sense of community with students and their children were all mentioned in a positive light. Students were taught about community, technology, media, child development, resume writing, and how to return to school to either volunteer or work. Two of the young mothers now work in some capacity in the services provided

onsite, and one participant had served as a teacher assistant at the onsite daycare. Each of the young mothers who attended this program mentioned certain teachers, school counselors, and/or social workers who provided support for their success and became people in whom they could confide.

Blanca described the pregnancy school with great enthusiasm, showing photos of herself, her baby, and other students at the farmers' market and field trips they attended in the past. She talked about how much the school helped and supported them, even organizing field trips for students with babies to places like the zoo and the beach. Blanca described a photo of a free farmer's market, noting all the food they offer on a weekly basis. She then showed a photo of herself with some of her classmates and their babies posing during a field trip to the zoo. Blanca greatly appreciated that the school coordinated field trips with their babies, which they might not otherwise have been able to attend on their own. She mentioned the deep sense of community, feeling of being valued, and just how "awesome" everything was that the school and staff offered the students. She expressed how the school was life-changing for her and how it helped her "to feel comfortable."

The young mothers who did not attend the pregnancy high school mentioned the teachers and school staff who supported their success in high school. Both Danielle and Gloria named teachers who supported them judgment-free. Gloria spoke of friends in school who supported her and with whom she has remained friends today. Notably, Gloria showed a photo of her son looking at one of the three certificates documenting acceptance at a local state college; this was clearly deeply meaningful for her. She singled out a school counselor who took the time to fill out her college applications since

Gloria felt too overwhelmed to do them herself as a new mother. She reported that if it were not for the support from the school counselor and principal, she would not have been able to finish high school or college. During our interview, she had a realization that she needed to go back and thank them. She felt that it was because of them that she will be able to get a degree. She expressed that although you need family support as a young mother, you also need "a lot, a lot" of academic support.

b. What factors have created obstacles to their success?

Not all of the students gained those supports and had to navigate their paths alone. Two of the five young mothers (Danielle and Gloria) stayed at their comprehensive high school, never attending the pregnant and parenting high school. Adamaris remained at her high school until she was about eight months pregnant. Danielle and Gloria stayed at their comprehensive high school by advocating for themselves and expressing their desire to stay. However, they did not have access to the extensive services that would have benefited them, such as case management from an organization working with parenting and pregnant teens, daycare, child development classes, and prenatal support.

> *I didn't pump (at school). I pumped at home. No one ever gave me an offer and I didn't know…I was being forced through the whole day and waited until I got home.* (Gloria)

Gloria reported that the gendered responsibilities of mothers such as, gaps in childcare, along with lack of breastfeeding support, access to a space for pumping, and help from select school staff, created significant barriers. The inability to pump represents a health hardship, as when a mother does not breast pump often enough, she can get an infection (mastitis) and lose her milk supply. As she showed a photo taken by her

husband of their baby outside the school, Gloria explained that sometimes her husband would bring their baby to the school, waiting for her since she was still breastfeeding. The benefit of Gloria staying at her comprehensive high school was that it offered the A-G requirements for admission to four-year universities, in contrast to the pregnancy high school. Since Gloria continued at her comprehensive high school, she was able to fulfill the necessary requirements to apply and be accepted into a local university. During the interview, she showed a photo of her new student ID at the college where she was admitted. She uploaded this photo onto Instagram with the hashtags (#youngmommy, #teenmom, #forus), portraying how proud she was to be admitted.

In contrast, Adamaris remained at a comprehensive high school until she was eight months pregnant due to her school's request. While she wanted to transfer to the pregnancy high school earlier, her comprehensive high school insisted that she stay. Adamaris noted she thought they did this to "keep their numbers," referring to enrollment numbers.

> *I didn't say nothing cuz I'm young. I saw the difference in the treatment I got. The way people looked at me and treated me. They looked down on me because I was pregnant. They didn't understand why I kept going to high school when I was pregnant. But now, I see many of them, like bump into them. I see them at college and I'm about to graduate and they don't understand why. The expected me to probably drop out. (*Adamaris)

The negative stigma that Adamaris identified is not unique. Every young mother at a comprehensive high school as a pregnant teen reported negative interactions with teachers, school staff, and peers. These negative interactions were more often from White

teachers, yet all of the young mothers described their mistreatment as being due to their age rather than racist, sexist or a combination of the three. For example, White teachers persisted in urging the girls to transfer to the pregnancy high school while expressing negative outlooks about their future. For example, Gloria explained that a middle-aged White male administrator recommend that she get an abortion without ever asking her about her future plans. Many teachers were not accommodating about late assignments due to medical appointments or tardiness from morning sickness.

Instead, the teen mothers encountered negative attitudes from school staff that were undoubtedly due to racist, sexist, and ageist perspectives. As Danielle expressed about one of her teachers (a middle-aged woman of color): "She was evil…even she was pregnant at the same time and was terrible with me with her attitude to me all the time." However, Danielle did have another teacher (a middle-aged White male), who was very supportive through offering extra credit and a reduced workload, letting her come to school tardy when needed. He even offered Danielle a transfer to the pregnancy high school, but she refused since she wanted to stay at her current school.

Similarly, Adamaris described how she completed an assignment while in the hospital receiving medical treatment during her pregnancy and turned in her assignment late with a doctor's note to explain why. Nevertheless, her White male teacher did not give her full credit. Adamaris stated, "I was sick in the hospital and he still didn't give me my full grade. So I was mad, because he shouldn't have done that. I didn't say nothing cuz I'm young. I saw the difference in the treatment I got." Adamaris further explained that peers looked down on her as she continued to attend high school,

I had gone to school that day, but I had felt like - I felt very sad I couldn't be there

because I had school and he was sick. (Gloria)

Gloria noted that she felt sad when her baby was sick and had to go to school

without him since her comprehensive high school would not accommodate for absences.

Gloria showed a photo that her husband had taken of their baby crawling near the

concrete steps outside her high school while he and the baby waited for her. In contrast,

the pregnancy high school provided many accommodating options for the teen mothers

based on their current situation. Sometimes they could bring the baby to school to work

on school packets in a separate area of the building, take assignments home as short-term

independent study, and, in rare cases, bring the baby to class to make sure they did not

miss out on earning credit toward graduation. These accommodations also kept the young

mothers engaged in school as a preventive measure of possible truancy.

Research Question 3:

What Recommendations Do Young Mothers of Color Have for Educators To Help

Identify and Build Upon Their Assets in Order To Provide for More Supportive and

Encouraging Educational Spaces?

Education as Value

My life would be more at peace if when I was younger, someone would've said,

"Stop." (Gloria)

Every young mother emphasized the importance of valuing education, continuing

her schooling, having educators "actually support them," and having adults who stressed

the importance of regular doctor visits with the intention of making health care a first

priority. Gaby noted that she would like educators to find ways to get new students

involved to help them open up and build relationships. While Gloria felt pressured to be perfect and to "take on the whole world," she wanted to emphasize that youth stop moving so fast. Gloria recommended that educators give their students a sense of agency by providing them with choices rather than telling them what to do. She felt like she wanted to decide what was best for her rather than having adults push things onto her, causing her undue stress. When others told Gloria what she should be doing, she responded with much stress, anxiety, and a feeling that she needed to prove herself. Gloria advised, "Everybody can tell you things on how to raise your kids, on how to do well in school, but in the end, you need to go at your own pace. This is not a race, this is a marathon."

Adamaris had a hard time knowing what she was supposed to do when starting community college. She wished she had been better prepared for college. For example, in having to write essays in high school, she would have liked instruction in such elements as what an essay entails and what components are necessary so she could transfer those skills to academic writing in college.

Motivante adelante (Blanca)

Blanca wanted to offer advice to young mothers, encouraging young mothers to move forward in their education - to finish high school, attend college, and study in order to have more future opportunities. Adamaris noted that young mothers should think about their future while still in high school. She emphasized the importance of being thoughtful about what they want to do and where they want to go with their life after school, stating that "there is more to it" than just attending high school.

Summary of Findings

I feel like it has helped me be more empathetic to others. I understand your struggle and I'm not going to make you change to fit my views because that's your world, not mine. (Gloria)

When stepping back from the data, I realized how difficult it is to synthesize the complex experiences of teen mothers of color. Their stories are intimate, multilayered, and full of wisdom. Each of their narratives gave insight into the robust experiences of teenage mothers of color. Each young mother described the labor of their motherhood – pregnancy, birthing, breastfeeding, postpartum, and juggling it all with the many complex aspects of their lives.

When I wrote about the young mothers, I aimed to preserve their voices, so I inserted their statements in their own words while trying to honor their intention. Among the five participants, six themes emerged among their stories: nepantla as a transformative space, ventajas/assets, my story of my body, all-encompassing stigma, self-advocacy and agency, and education as value. Within these themes, the young mothers' stories converged into important subthemes. I could see a striking difference between their experiences in a comprehensive high school and alternative high school for pregnant and parenting teenagers. All of these findings point to the need for a greater understanding of the experiences of teen mothers through rejecting a deficit perspective in order to better serve them in and out of school. In Chapter V, I discuss the major findings through the lens of critical feminist mothering while situating this study in the research literature, examine implications for educational practice and policy, and offer recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Reflections on the Research Process

When I initially applied to USF, I had no idea why I was going to graduate school. When I read the university's values and class topics, I just knew I needed to learn whatever I could. Not to get a better paying job. Not to advance my career. In fact, this degree does not benefit me in any way financially. If anything, I will be forever in debt with tuition. However, the personal meaning it has for me is soulful and nourishing. I come out of this process a more confident, informed citizen of the world. I am now so very critical of everything I do, see, experience, and think, which better informs my personal and professional life. I am a better mother, daughter, sister, partner, friend, and educator because of this program and this dissertation. I learned who I really am, and the fluidity of my identity has been shaped and molded to fit what I want rather than what society thinks. I have learned how much privilege plays a role in all of our lives and how much I need to constantly check myself.

Most of all, I have learned the importance of giving space to others. And to that end, I hope to expand this topic so that young mothers of color are constantly praised, elevated, and admired rather than being viewed from the deficit lens that our society currently possesses. As Hill-Collins (2008) explained, in order to understand the students that we work with, we need to truly get to know them, build a positive community, and create ally-ship. This research has solidified my passion to work alongside young mothers. Expanding this study in a way that can be digestible by the general public is one

of my major goals. I hope to continue working with young mothers using different media more assessible to the public, such as blogging, social media, and podcasts.

My own identity and role as a professional educator are vastly different from those of my participants. Most, if not all, of my participants are young women of color from working class families, living in spaces between what the dominant society has constructed as childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and motherhood. I may never understand their experiences first hand, and I will always be an outsider to those spaces. Quite possibly, the participants viewed me as a white academic conducting research on them, which can cause an imbalanced power dynamic, which may have altered how they shared their stories and what they shared. My hope is that they understood that my interest in their stories is because of the continued injustices I have witnessed as an educator of teen mothers and my own drive to change that for future students. The voices of young women I heard from are often voices in the shadows - voices that may never be read in books, on the internet, in the news ... at least most likely not in a positive light. Having the privilege to hear and provide a space for these voices to have power was worth the risk and anxiety of feeling like the outsider, the researcher, the person deemed to hold power because of my role in the school district. However, their counter-narratives embody an act of resistance, and that is worth all the risks. Critical feminist motherhood is going back to what we know of our own bodies and ancestral voices, for that is how I will guide my own children and will help me better understand the students I work with.

Summary

The findings of this study clearly depict the experiences of Latinx teenage mothers navigating life in and out of school. Moreover, the transitional period they

endured shows the beautiful transformations that came of those experiences. Their experience is different than what mainstream society expects motherhood to be. Instead of mothering as a collective, they were often alone, isolated, and are experiencing painful realities. However, due to the teen mothers' ability to navigate multiple spaces and the range of cultural capital they possess, their strength as women and mothers is undoubtedly evident by their voices that shine through. Through their narratives, six themes clearly emerged: nepantla as a transformative space, ventajas/assets, my story of my body, all-encompassing stigma, self-advocacy and agency, and education as value.

These themes are similar to those found in research by Anwar and Stainistreet (2014) which were: mother identity, stigma, social support, and future aspirations, with young mothers feeling overall that motherhood was a positive experience. The main difference with my study was that Anwar and Stainistreet (2014) conducted their research in North West England with teenage white mothers. Moreover, my study revealed a striking difference in narratives from the teen mothers who stayed at their comprehensive high school facing ageist, sexist, and racist encounters compared to the teen mothers who attended the alternative high school for pregnant and parenting teenagers. The Anwar and Stainistreet (2014) study did not mention the teenage mothers' experiences in school, but did find that the teenage mothers had negative experiences when out in the community. In my study, the young mothers did not stress this feeling of stigma from those in the community as much as I expected. In both this study and the Anwar and Stainistreet (2014) study, most of the young mothers had a dislike for school prior to becoming mothers. Their transition into mothers swiftly changed their mindsets, altering their perspectives to focus more on the importance of education.

In the following section of this final chapter, I discuss the study's findings to align with the key concepts of critical feminist mothering: community cultural wealth, intersectionality, and nepantla. These concepts combine to make a beautiful tapestry interweaving the borderlands of teenage motherhood. I conclude this chapter with recommendations for policy, practice, and possible directions for future research.

Discussion

Community cultural wealth

Teenage mothers of color face many challenges and obstacles; yet these women challenged those odds and came out as strong, transformed mothers. Advocating for inclusivity and acceptance of teen mothers of color in school can greatly support a student's well-being. The purpose of hearing the lived experiences of young mothers of color is to provide a counter narrative to the deficit perspective and highlight the assets these strong women hold in their everyday lives. It is time to disrupt the hetero-normative perspective of what motherhood should look like and instead guide and support our pregnant and parenting teenagers by viewing them from a place of cultural wealth.

Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth serves to re-shift the deficit view of teen mothers toward understanding their cultural wealth. It is imperative that educators use this vantage point when working with our pregnant and parenting teenagers so they can focus on students' strengths and assets. Applying Yosso's (2005) framework, students of color bring six forms of capital into the classrooms from their home and community environments that counteract any deficit-based assumptions: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant.

Extending Yosso's (2005) theory, Rendón, Nora, and Kanagala (2014) found four additional capitals when working with Latinxs in higher education: these uncovered themes (ganas/perseverance, ethnic consciousness, spirituality/faith, and pluriversal cultural wealth) were seen in the young Latinx mothers as well. These capitals are conceptualized below.

All five of the young mothers shared their future aspirations in the form of higher education and professional careers (Aspirational capital). They highly value the importance of education, and all have attended college in some capacity. Three of them are currently attending community college or a university, while one is attending a vocational training program. Danielle has taken classes at community college and aspires to continue her education in the future.

Spanish is the first language of each of the young mothers (Linguistic capital). Given their varying forms of bilingualism, often the interviews took place in a mix of Spanish and English. They are able to code-switch and navigate different spaces based on the language they know. Valuing their bicultural identity, the young mothers all speak Spanish to their own children to support their children's bilingualism. One participant expressed that she is working really hard to be fluent in English so she is able to communicate bilingually with more people.

The young mothers described the critical support that they received from their families and the positive impact this had on their lives in order to balance all that motherhood offered and to still thrive (Familial capital). Each of the young mothers has had an immediate family, extended family and/or their partners supporting them throughout their pregnancy and motherhood journey. In turn, the value of having this

familial support has been transferred to their own mothering skills. The love and support they received, or may not have received, informed them of what kind of parent they want to be for their own children.

The social supports that teen mothers navigated varied depending on whether they attended a comprehensive high school or alternative setting for pregnant and parenting teens (Social capital). Most of the young mothers who attended the alternative high school did so for the expansive opportunities for support they could receive. As an educator in this setting, I meet many teenage mothers who were pushed out of their comprehensive high school, told they could no longer attend. However, the young mothers I interviewed wanted to go to the alternative school. They appreciated all the programs, support, and services offered to them at the alternative site: daycare, counseling, job training skills, prenatal and postnatal care, and community with other young mothers.

The students who did not have access to the alternative high school, stayed at their comprehensive high school out of resistance, which I discuss below, but still held social capital. One of the young mothers who insisted she stay at her comprehensive high school navigated the social system very well. Although she relied on her husband and family as her support network for taking care of her son, she had strong relationships with staff and longtime friends at her school. Insisting that she stay at her school afforded her to be able to apply to four-year universities. This choice worked to her benefit as she was accepted into three of these universities, had staff support her at school while applying to college, and developed close friendships with people she could confide in and count on through her pregnancy and postpartum.

The young mothers were able to navigate many different conflicting worlds among their home lives, school lives, motherhood, friendships, and ties between their network in the United States and their extended families in other countries (Navigational capital). The young mothers who attended comprehensive high school truly gained the skills to navigate unsupportive environments due to their experiences with certain staff who clearly wanted them out of their school. Their ability to navigate multiple worlds is strategic capital to survive high school as a teenage mother.

The young mothers who stayed at their comprehensive high schools did so out of resistance (Resistant capital). They knew they had the willpower to continue and finish school at their regular site. They stood up for themselves and what they thought was right, and in doing so stayed at their comprehensive high school. In their interviews, they reflected that they did not know it was illegal to have school staff pressure them to switch schools, but at the time, they stood their ground anyway.

Reflecting on the concept of ganas and perseverance capital, I think of how strong these young mothers were as they transitioned from girlhood to motherhood while also balancing the demands of school. They are self-reliant and carry a sense of pride to be who they are today. They are resilient. The two young mothers' refusal to switch schools, in addition to all of their sacrifices they made to achieve all that they have achieved so far, fits into this form of capital.

Each of the young mothers shows a sense of giving back to the community by being in a helping profession (Ethnic consciousness). All of the young mothers aspire to have professional careers that serve others from immigration or housing lawyers, working in the medical field, being an officer, or working with children and youth. Their shared

experiences of inequity drove them into professions that can benefit their Latinx community as a whole.

Two of the young mothers mentioned their faith in God in their interviews (Faith/Spirituality). Gloria explained her commitment to her church was put to the side when she got married and pregnant in high school, but has since re-committed herself to her church community. Adamaris explained that when she feels like she has a heavy load, "God doesn't put a lot on your plate that you can't handle." Their faith appeared to give them a sense of belonging and strength through difficult situations.

Pluriversal is related to Anzaldúa's (2012) concept of nepantla or mestiza consciousness, in that the young mothers moved between many spaces that often contracted each other: being a student and mother, home life versus school life, creating a versatile woman as they navigated different identities and shifts in their behaviors. Each of the women have responsibilities that often contradicted each other. All of the teen mothers were still children themselves, while also mothering their own babies. A few of the young mothers also have siblings that they have helped care for. Their expectations at school are vastly different than their expectations at home or as a mother to their children. They are constantly code-switching identities and behaviors depending on who they are with and where they are at any given time. Furthermore, the young mothers are all bilingual and bi-cultural, so they are also navigating code switching cross culturally and linguistically.

When looking at Community Cultural Wealth, the intersections of participants' age, class, gender, language, citizenship, and race serve as a multidimensional lens to understand how teenage mothers make decisions about their reproductive lives. In doing

so, two new capitals emerged from this study: Mothering and (re) producing. Each young mother described the labor of her motherhood – pregnancy, birthing, breastfeeding, postpartum, and juggling it all with all the many complex aspects of their life reproduced not only their children, but a new sense of self. Although their experiences are rich and poetic, they are painful and they are isolating. Understanding the capitals of mothering and (re) production as a teenager gives insight to the multifaceted women they are, the painful transformation they endured, and the disruption to the current narrative of teenage mothers. They endured women's work and caring labor while being triply marginalized and isolated for being a mother at an age society deems unacceptable.

Mothering capital entails the assets the teenage mothers possessed as their identity into motherhood emerged. Being a mother is invisible and unseen in educational spaces, along with the layering of mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion tied to the labor of being a mother. These teenage mothers were lonely, isolated, and breaking cycles of gendered expectations as they navigated motherhood as a teenager still in high school. With the transition into mothering, empathy and empowerment arose to be a better person and mother for themselves and their children. The experiences these young women endured shaped them into the mother and person they are today: empowered and empathetic.

Within the creation of their child, there was a physical act of creating space. There was birthing, lactating, and a shift in responsibility and reality that falls under (re) producing capital. These young women not only birthed a baby, but they reproduced a new woman within themselves with aspirations and goals that were missing in their lives before. Their reproduction created a shift in their own reality, a reality that is new to

them, that is different to everyone around them. It created a new reality that often goes unseen and unheard: teenage parenting. In the face of lack of structural support, these women occupied these spaces that are uncharted territories for them. Within those spaces, they engaged in acts of creation from birthing to creating new life, and then creating new norms that work for them, often interrupting intergenerational cycles.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, looks at the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, immigration status, ability, and other aspects of identities, can serve as a multidimensional lens to understand how young women make decisions about their reproductive lives. When looking at how intersectionality affects the lived experiences of teen mothers of color in the findings of this study, I provide examples of how intersectionality of interlocking oppression arises from the narratives of the young mothers. Specifically, I address their oppression related to the all-encompassing stigma of medical providers and school staff at comprehensive high schools due to age and race, all while having gendered expectations as a mother (sexism).

Two young women I interviewed attributed their poor treatment by medical care providers to their age. However, their poor treatment was undoubtedly due to their race and gender as well; this intersectionality was also evident in the National Partnership for Women and Families' (2018) survey of Latinx mothers' perspectives of their maternal care, finding mistreatment of Latinx mothers due to race, gender, and use of Spanish. The stigma that these young mothers endured as teenagers eventually taught them how to navigate what motherhood means to them even though it differs from the normative perspective of motherhood. For instance, Gloria went into much detail describing how

her experiences in the hospital, which has made her more aware of the importance of advocating for herself and her children. By her second pregnancy, she was able to voice her concerns at the hospital based on the treatment she had during her first birth and postpartum care. She now knew how she was supposed to be treated and had learned the importance of speaking up for herself and her children. As a result, an energy of confidence was felt during our interview that she would not let anything get in the way of having the care she deserved.

Although not discussed explicitly by the participants, class plays a huge role in the intersecting oppressions that the teenage mothers endured. All of the young mothers are assumingly working class. They all live in multi-family living situations, with their own family, siblings, and/or in-laws. Adamaris's mother quit one of her many jobs to care for her newborn grandchild, clearly illustrating that she as a single grandmother was working many jobs to make ends meet and provide for her family. A couple of the participants discussed their access to specific programs meant for low-income families, such as CalWorks. In regard to medical care treatment, the young mothers, some of them on Medi-Cal, have their lives on the line with limited economic resources. The interviews with the young mothers illustrate how their stories challenge the dominant narrative that they have poor academic outcomes and place an undue burden on U.S. tax payers. Even if receiving state benefits, these young women are clearly striving to provide for themselves and their families despite balancing work, school, and mothering.

It is not surprising that the participants omitted mention of class, race, language, and citizenship in describing their experiences. As teenagers living in a world ruled by age, they may be too young to understand concepts such as intersectionality and being

doubly or triply oppressed and the impact on their lives in and out of school. Even as young adults, these women are still in the "thick" of transitioning into the woman and mother they strive to be. Since they are still living in that in-between space, perhaps it still may be too difficult for them to critically analyze their high school.

Nepantla

In regard to intersectionality, nepantla is a concept that captures the intersection of multiple oppressions that these young women of color face every day. Third space/nepantla is the in-betweenness that young mothers of color are continuously navigating: home (mother, housework, baby rearing, family, partners), school (student, school work, homework, attendance), and communities (outside providers, medical providers) to become the young mothers that they are today. Although these young mothers have become multifaceted women, the multiple roles they navigate create a difficult path of obstacles for them to overcome that further complicates their gender roles in each space, with the additional layer of their bodies being regulated in school and while in medical care. Anzaldúa (2012) described this fluidity as something to celebrate, while Keating (2006) warned:

> Although it might be tempting to celebrate nepantleras for their ability to move among so many divergent worlds, it's important to recognize the painful dimensions of this world-traveling. Their inability or refusal to remain within a single group or worldview makes them vulnerable to rejection, ostracism, and other forms of isolation. (Keating, 2006, p. 9)

Findings from DeVito (2010) had similar results in that the teenage mothers she interviewed during their postpartum periods felt like they were stuck between two

worlds. They were still in a phase of needing their own kind of "mothering" by their own mother or support person and were having to be mothers themselves.

Although the young mothers' experiences and intersecting identities may have caused life obstacles, their brown bodies represent epistemologies of new knowledge (Cruz, 2001) created by the telling of their lived experiences and re-writing the stories brought onto them by their own mothers. For example, Adamaris wanted to break the cycle that her mom, also a teenage mother, created for Adamaris being parentified from a young age. Adamaris learned from the experiences of her mother and her own childhood to create a different trajectory for her own daughter. She is explicitly re-centering the traumas, emotions, and hope passed through her mother and shifting that way of knowing onto her own daughter. These young mothers' bodies are places of knowledge; while re-arranging their bodies to make physical space to carry a child, they are also producing actual life.

In this study, the young mothers who attended the pregnancy and parenting high school certainly had to balance the life of motherhood as a student, but instead of those two roles and identities being in opposition, the setting of the school allowed for a space of empowerment. In Lapayese's (2012) study on mother scholars, she found that motherhood could be a source of empowerment, and that all the identities of a mother are often unseen in the institution of education. However, in the pregnant and parenting high school, motherhood is supported and celebrated.

This paints a very different picture compared to what the current literature portrays (Pillow, 2004), stating that pregnant teens are often pushed out of their comprehensive high school to attend an alternative, less rigorous school. But what this

study highlighted is that most of the young mothers wanted to switch to the pregnancy school due to the support, services, and care they would receive. Although the alternative high school does not meet transfer requirements for a four-year university, all the young mothers in this study who transferred have gone on to community college and identified that getting an education is something they aspire to attain. The young mothers who stayed in their comprehensive high schools faced institutional oppression with a lack of childcare, a space or even acknowledgement of the need for a lactation room, and accommodations for the new role of motherhood. In other words, they needed guidance in seeing how their role as mothers could align with their role as students, instead of constantly being presented these dual roles as oppositional.

The gendered expectations for these young mothers can be attributed to Smith's (1987) ideas around "women's work" and "caring labor" in that birthing, lactating, preparing food, mothering, breastfeeding, housework, caring for parents and siblings is all undervalued, not paid, and expected to be deemed a "good mother." On top of all these expectations as a woman, teen mothers are expected to finish high school, go to college, and so forth. Meanwhile, no one mentioned how the schools treated the fathers of the babies differently. Most likely because there were no teachers and administrators telling the fathers to switch schools, to abort their babies, or that they were not going to have a positive future.

Recommendations for Policy

When looking at current literature, Anastas's (2017) meta-analysis found that none of the 41 studies included recommendations for policy changes. This is very concerning, as most of the research focused on the girl as the problem rather than on

systemic issues, Therefore, I want to take the time to document policy recommendations within this study based on the differences found between the experiences at a comprehensive high school and a teenage parenting high school. The recommendations for policy for this study is two-fold. First, students who do *voluntarily* attend an alternative high school should have the option of receiving high school credits that can lead to applying to a four-year university if they choose. Therefore, teenage mothers should be given the choice to stay at their current school or attend the parenting school without any encouragement one way or another from school staff. Second, the students who choose to stay at their comprehensive high school should still have access to the same services and resources as the students at the alternative high school: childcare, prenatal support, postpartum support, counseling, social support with other adolescent mothers, accommodations that fit their needs while pregnant and postpartum, breastfeeding support, and college and career guidance. Expanding on DeVito's (2010) study, providing expanded support for all adolescent mothers in mother/child bonding, and social supports outside of school and in community settings accessible to the teen mothers will be beneficial is fostering new supportive and positive friendships. This was noted in all participants who gained access to those supports as well.

When looking at the current study and past literature's recommendations for policies, it is important to understand what the current laws state. Title IX was enacted in 1972 as part of the Education Amendments Act. This act is federal law, stating, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (U.S. Department of Education, 2018)

including the treatment of pregnant and parenting teens, in order to receive federal funds.

Therefore, pregnant and parenting teens have the right to continue participating in classes

and extra-curricular activities, cannot be pressured to participate in alternative programs,

do not have to provide doctor's notes for their pregnancy, and should be provided

accommodations not limited to the following: having access to a larger desk, access to an

elevator, and frequent bathroom breaks. After birth, schools must have all absences

related to the birth as excused, place students in the same academic and extra-curricular

status as before childbirth, have the opportunity to make up missed work, and provide in-

home programming when special circumstances, such as temporary medial conditions,

inhibit the student from being at school. Additionally, alternative programming for

pregnant and parenting teens have to have the same programming and enrichment

opportunities in all of the following: academics, extra-curricular activities, and

enrichment programs.

Bringing awareness to school staff about the laws around Title IX and the

findings of this study is important to consider including in ongoing professional

development in high schools. Focusing on how these policies are *embodied,* by showing

how the treatment of teen mothers are raced, gendered, and sexed in school and how it

further complicates their experiences and continues the regulating and surveilling of

young women's bodies would support the understanding and importance of this law.

Specifically, Assembly Bill No. 2289 (AB-2289) in California, addresses the rights of

pregnant and parenting pupils, and was amended in September 2018. Within this bill,

many of the concerns that arose from this study are outlined. Specifically, in 2015 over

24,000 children were born to teenagers in California, with 70% of young parents being

pushed out of school nationwide. This bill addresses that pregnant and parenting students face overwhelming obstacles to graduating and having access to equitable education.

Furthermore, pregnant and parenting teens are more often getting inconsistent family leave absences, involuntary pushout of school, rigid requirements for proving when their children are sick, varying levels of educator support when absent, and the lack of awareness of their rights under Title IX. The rights in this California Assembly Bill addressed that pregnant and parenting teens extends beyond Title IX, explaining that teens should not be required to participate in alternative programs and if they do voluntarily agree and the programming must be equal to the regular education program. School districts must notify students of their rights, with options to return, with granting students eight weeks of parental leave if the students want it without requirement of academic work, and may remain enrolled for a fifth year to complete graduation requirements. However, the rights included in this bill are not being protected, at least not in the comprehensive high schools as detailed in the narratives of the young mothers in this study.

Recommendations for Practice

There are millions of students of color…for whom spirit murder is most significant in their educational lives. (Erevelles & Minnerar, 2010, p. 143)

Based on the current literature and the findings from this study, I have several recommendations to better support our young mothers in and out of school. Given that teen mothers are constantly navigating contradictory spaces in and outside of school, educators need to be critically aware of how they are regulating young women's bodies. Examples abound in the narratives in this study, like the administrator who told the teen

mother to get an abortion and the teachers who told several teen mothers they should not attend their school anymore. Instead educators need to be creating spaces for the teenage mothers to reclaim their multiple identities through listening to students' stories through culturally competent curriculum and relationship building. Rather than assuming what educators think are best for these teen mothers, there needs to be a close relationship and trust for teenage girls to make their own decisions, especially when it comes to their own bodies.

I recommend that high school educators have access to formal professional development on how to better serve teenage mothers. Based on the interviews in this study, young mothers benefited from adults who consistently tried to gain their trust, who offered resources (e.g. counseling, food, daycare), and guided them rather than told them what to do. They deeply appreciated teachers who taught them life skills, filled out college applications, and offered a place to pump. It is imperative that educators understand the young women's struggles, assets, inner wisdom, and transformations taking place in the process of becoming mothers. With this understanding, teachers and staff can then serve as a source of support. Additionally, these same principles should apply to teenage fathers as well. Supporting teenage fathers could also result in lightening the load of motherhood demands for teenage moms.

As a school psychologist, I could apply the findings from this study to the profession of psychology and/or counseling. When conducting psychometric assessments, evaluators could gain a better understanding of the struggles that teen mothers are facing in and out of school and be able to look at students more holistically. Too often teen girls of color are being mis-identified as in need of special education for

emotional disturbance due to resistant behavior. For example, when students feel disrespected or misunderstood due to differing world views, then can sometimes act out in a way that makes educators label them as defiant or resistant. In fact, when a student of color is resisting adult authority, they may be responding to a school environment that pressures them to act White (McIntyre, 1993).

As a result, gaining a clearer picture of what life is like as a teenage mother might lead to alleviating disproportional identification of teen moms of color into special education. Furthermore, a school counselor needs to develop understanding of the transformation process that teen mothers experience, so they can provide meaningful and appropriate counseling techniques during this difficult transition. If teen moms can have more access to trusting adults who can identify their struggles as a common part of the transformational process, perhaps they would feel less angst in that isolated, in-between space of teenage mothering.

Recommendations for Research

As stated earlier, an abundant amount of research, most often quantitative in design, has viewed teenage mothers from a deficit framework that emphasizes prevention of pregnancy. For example, Wood and Hendricks (2017) found that for young women, having a child while in school resulted in negative impact on their future. However, the researchers approached their study from a focus on how to prevent teenage pregnancy, rather than viewing the young women as full, complex women who could mature in the process of becoming mothers.

In contrast, this study attempted to understand young mothers of color as full, complex human beings. Future researchers should enter into interviews with little to no

assumptions, which might give participants more space to portray a positive picture of their experiences. Future research should "position young mothers as the experts in their own lives" (Brand, Morrison, & Brown, 2014, p. 178). Therefore, more qualitative studies of young mothers about their transition into adulthood is warranted to reframe the deficit vantage point of teen moms, particularly those of color.

As researchers, it is important to understand how much young mothers have on their plate. They are so busy trying to balance motherhood with adulthood, while often working and going to school. Often the young mothers in my study had to cancel or re-schedule our interviews, and a few even had to discontinue being a participant altogether due to the inability to meet in person. Having alternative ways of interviewing young mothers rather than meeting face-to-face would be an important consideration in future research.

Due to my role as a psychologist (who often listens instead of speaks) and also wanting to limit assumptions in my probing questions, I regrettably did not inquire as much as I would have liked about the possibility of sexism or racism accompanying the ageism that the young mothers experienced. Reflecting back on our interviews, I wish I had asked the young mothers if they attributed any other factors besides their age to their negative experiences with educators and medical professionals. This issue is important to include on the interview questions protocol (Appendix A) for future studies. Additionally, follow-up interviews with participants that included the concept of intersectionality might have built rapport between the researcher and participants, as well as engaged the participants in remembering past experiences that were not already shared.

My recommendations for further studies include taking a closer look at teenage fathers and the supportive environment of high school for teen parents. As Gloria mentioned during her interview, teenage fathers are not often selected as participants in research studies. Extending this study to include teenage fathers and/or interviewing the couples together would raise insights that could better serve young dads. Comparing the interviews of both teenage mothers and fathers based on their experiences in both a comprehensive high school and a teenage parenting school could provide a deeper understanding of how a supportive environment and structural supports in high schools could more fully meet the needs of our teenage parents.

Conclusion

So their dreams will not reflect the death of ours. (Audre Lorde, 1997, p. 255)

Audre Lorde's words resonate with me as a reminder of how much sacrifice these young mothers endured - and continue to endure - in order to provide a supportive, loving, and healthy lives for their children. Their childhood was abruptly ended with very little transition into taking full-blown responsibility of not only themselves, but also of another human very much reliant on their love and support. Throughout the findings of this study, the young mothers' bodies were regulated based on their age, race, class, and gender. Despite these challenges, these young mothers prevailed. Through their voices, we can hear how their transformation into motherhood changed their lives for the better, quieting the narrative of poor outcomes for teen moms.

As Keating (2006) warned, it is important to understand the difficulty in navigating so many worlds. Although the transitional state the young mothers were in ultimately served to benefit them long-term, that place of transition can be lonely and

isolating as compared to their peers of the same age. We often romanticize young

mothers, when instead we should be supporting them by lessening the blow of the

sacrifices they make. The abrupt change in their identity in order to show they are "good

mothers" is "hard," as many of the young mothers described. The lesson of this study for

educators is that we need to help make the transition between childhood and motherhood

to be full of support, love, and care. We can make this happen in three ways: 1) building

trusting relationships with our students, 2) creating a space of agency for them to make

their own decisions about their bodies and futures, and 3) providing constant

unconditional love.

> *This is the sacrifice that the act of creation requires, a blood sacrifice. For only through the*
> *body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed. And for images,*
> *words, stories to have this transformative power, they must arise from the human body--flesh*
> *and bone--and from the Earth's body--stone, sky, liquid, soil. (*Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 75)

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol Questions

[Participants and researcher will go through each photograph individually. For each photo, the participant will be asked, "What does this photo represent of your experiences as a teenage mother?"] The following interview questions will be used as a guide for possible follow-up probes to elicit deeper meanings to the narratives of participant's photographs:

1. Describe your transition from girlhood to motherhood

2. How would you describe your experience(s) in your high school during your pregnancy and time as a mother?

3. How would you describe your experience(s) with social supports and social networks as a teenage mother in school and in the community?

4. As a teenage mother, tell me about your future aspirations for education and work.

5. Tell me about your experience(s) being in the community as a teenage mother.

6. What additional reflections would you like to share on your experience as a teenage mother?

7. What recommendations do you have for current high school students who are pregnant or parenting?