Entanglements of Teenage Motherhood Identities:
A Critical Ethnography within a Community-Based Organization

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Dedication

For my mom and dad.

Abstract

The social construction of adolescence as a distinct developmental stage is based on a hierarchy of age, race, social class, and gender that affords some individuals with the privileges of full participation in the United States yet positions others as subordinate within the progress of the nation (Lesko, 2012). The organization of school as an institution relies on the assumption that development occurs in linear stages where grade levels and labels such as elementary, middle, and high school predict certain characteristics found within each context. Oftentimes, teenage mothers are positioned as those subordinate or deficit within these formal systems of education as they do not "fit" into these traditional labeling practices. Negative labels such as "stupid slut", "teen rebel, teen mom", "the girl nobody loved" and "dropouts" show evidence of this deficit mindset (Kelly, 2000). The impact of such labels manifests themselves in perceptions of disengagement within formal school settings (Kalil, 2002; Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2008) and the policing of aged, racial, social classed, and gendered bodies (Jones, 2007).

The purpose of this critical, ethnographic study is to deeply explore the experiences of teenage mothers participating in a community-based organization (CBO) as potential opportunities to take up issues of age, race, gender, sexuality, motherhood, and social class within their ongoing identity construction and schooling experiences. This study takes a critical perspective on the social construction of adolescence in order to contribute to scholarly work that attends to how teenage mothers are socially, politically, and educationally positioned within Western schooling and society. By focusing on hybridity and the intersectionality of identities this research pays attention to the ways in which educational practices have been both disrupted and maintained

discriminatory when conceptualizing what it means to educate and involve teenage mothers and their children within existing systems.

Findings show that the chronological passing of time as well as the physical representation of the pregnant female figure is reflected within women's stories as one form of oppression and/or agentic negotiation. Additionally, mixed perceptions around if and how local and alternative high schools provide space for the hybridity and intersectionality of teenage mothering identities was engaged by participants within embodied "fitting in" or "pushed out" discourses. These perceptions seek to complicate traditional practices and identities of student, athlete, and parent within formalized educational spaces. Also, Real Moms both provides opportunity for authentic senses of caring (Noddings, 2005) as well as has limitations in "protecting" participants from the risks of being vulnerable within relationship and storytelling.

This study will extend the literature by looking at the ways in which teenage mothers are both disrupting and reinscribing discourses of chronological developmental stage theories (Lesko, 2002; Lesko, 2012) by attending to the multitude of social factors that influence the cultural construction of adolescence and adolescents (Vagle, 2012). Additionally, this work looks at how schools are sites for the perpetuation of social contracts that implicitly exclude or push out specific student identities, such as race, social class, and teenage motherhood that do not adhere or assimilate to existing normalized practices (Milner, 2015; Noguera, 2003). For example, the quarantining of teenage mothers into all-female alternative schools or limited participation within local schools attempts to de-sexualize female students against discourses of desire (Fine, 1993). In thinking about authentic, caring relationships (Noddings, 2005), this study also

complicates the notion of creative, narrative expression as an automatic form of empowerment as opportunities for vulnerable storytelling stir up both damaging stereotypes (Edell, 2013) and self-interpretations of empowerment (Kelly, 1997). By contextualizing the lived experiences of the female teenage mothers and mentors within this community-based organization, this study thoughtfully and reflexively attends to the existing discourses of teenage motherhood.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Ten women position themselves in a loosely-structured circle on the carpet, their bodies in close proximity. Some women are lying on the floor on their stomachs, using pillows and blankets to cover up their bodies while others are more unreservedly strewn upon the furniture and one another. One woman lies on her side, intuitively resting her hand upon her visibly pregnant midsection. From a glance, it's difficult to know who's a teenage mother and who's a mentor within this camp cabin context.

Conversations are free flowing and informal until eventually one of the mentors asks the group to describe a time when something surprised them, whether that be good or bad. She starts off the conversation by sharing a moment when she first found out she was pregnant. It happened to be one of the times she was at this particular summer camp. She recalls both surprise and relief when she realized her bodily responses were first trimester pregnancy symptoms and not an unknown illness. Her sharing launches other women to contribute, in great detail, about the moments they first found out they were pregnant. Parts of stories connect as teenage mothers and mentors share related narratives stemming from intense emotions such as shock, loss, shame, joy, and hope. Bodies collectively shift towards the author of the stories as women share about their experienced sexual abuse, fluid sexual identities, and wide range of familial reactions in response to who they are as women, teenagers, and mothers.

Trina, a teenage mother who just shared a story of grief in watching her father pass away, looks up from the floor and rotates her head in my direction. She smiles and says, 'Your turn. Your turn to share'. Acknowledging the blurring of a relationship and positionality I have constructed with these women over time, I look down at my uncharacteristically blank researcher notebook and then back up into the eyes of the women surrounding me. I hesitate with just enough time to think to myself, what parts of my life am I willing to share? In what ways does my story connect with theirs? (Reflective Memo, July 19, 2016).

Trina's direct invitation for me to share is exemplary of several moments throughout this research process where I was called to reflect upon my own lived experiences in relation to these particular women and to their stories. While my research focuses on the identities of these teenage mothers, I have come to realize that it's impossible to work with and represent these women without acknowledging the collision this topic has with my own experience as a Korean American, female, adoptee. I acknowledge that I can only speak to my experiences and decisions in how I take up these multiple identities in a world that thrives on normalizing and compartmentalizing assumptions of who someone is based on race, age, social class, religion, gender, and

sexuality. In the same way, the representations of these teenage women whom have shared their time, relationships, and stories with me seek only to represent their experiences, through my interpretation, within this bounded context of the research study.

In the moments following Trina's invitation I felt compelled to share a choppy, fact-focused version of some significant life moments, including my unexpected change in marital status and aspects of my adoption. This sharing felt like a rehearsed performance rather than an artful expression of my reflective self. In that performative moment, I felt guarded and obligated to simplify two extremely life-changing moments into an either-or story of loss or hope in representing these identities. Since elementary school, I've learned to be observant and cautious when sharing as a necessary way to protect myself from being scrutinized for being different (in any way). What I later realized was that in my story as well as the stories of others, multiple identities were woven into the fabric of narratives which speak to a negotiation of fluid identities and a sense of self when taking ownership and navigating the process of storytelling. Reflecting on her own narrative, Latrice, another teenage mother in this study, shared, "My story is my story. If I have to stick with my story, I'll keep my story" (Interview, September 29, 2016). My thoughts echoed her sentiments as I've thought long and hard how I might have more accurately responded to Trina's invitation to share who I was as a person and how I have come to be sitting among these bunk beds and among these women.

When asked a similar question as queried by Trina, each of the women present in this reflective field memo provided her own response of what led to her decision to continue to participate (or not) in the Real Moms program. Real Moms was a community-based organization (CBO) with programming intended to support the lived

experiences of teenage mothers through authentic relationships and mentorship. Many of the stories shared during the bi-weekly Real Moms meetings and weeklong summer camp experience referred to some degree of explicit impact of their identity constructions within multiple contexts, including in- and out-of-school experiences. The ways in which these women's commentaries drew from the intersectionality of identities and conceptions of hybridity led me to consider how they were entangled within micro and macro systems of both dominant and marginalized discourses, particularly within their high school and out-of-school, Real Moms contexts. Thus, these interpretive themes around multiple identity constructions, perceptions of school, and significance of Real Moms mentorship are important for educational research in calling attention to these teenagers' perceptions of being read and represented as females, mothers, students, partners, athletes, and daughters within the social and political histories of positioning women (and particular racial and classed identities of women) within the United States.

In addition to my commitments to the hybridity and intersectionality of identities, this scholarly work was also personally significant to me because of my histories of interactions with teenage mothers in both formal and informal educational settings. As a third grade teacher, I formed relationships with former teenage mothers through their various parental involvements in my classroom. During this time, I also formed relationships with current and former teenage mothers through a mentoring program within the local community. I began to wonder why many of the women I spoke with described their disengagement with the local high schools and, instead, attributed much of their current aspirations to the opportunities they had within a particular community-based organization. Through these school and community experiences, I have worked

with teenage mothers who identify with different racial, mothering, sexual, gendered, and social classed identities. In thinking about the conversations I have had with these women, each of their experiences has been unique in the ways in which they narrate their lives. I have observed how they've engaged their racial, mothering, and classed identities to shape their own positioning and experiences as pregnant women.

My relationships with these women influenced my decision to go to graduate school and to consider working with teenage mothers as part of my scholarly interests. What was most interesting to me was how these women took up and perceived their multiple identities once they became pregnant and eventually young mothers. Many of these women shared with me how this biological change also shifted their social and educational positioning. In some ways, the shift into motherhood collapsed an individual's identities where mothering identities became a primary identity placed upon them. Within the context of formal educational systems, the identity of the teenage mother appeared to trump pre-existing identities in interesting ways. Therefore, I am interested in how spaces, such as community-based organizations might provide opportunities to extend, not collapse, these women's identities.

Continual self-reflexivity and collective processing leave possibilities for multiple readings of this camp cabin experience. I am reminded of Fanon (1952) as he both chooses to react and act in his desperation for racial identity, that belonging is not in the choosing of one identity over the other but also in choosing how to respond to the ways in which identity is placed onto oneself. One way of being resistant to the colonizing surveillance is to embrace the ways in which myself and others move in multiple spaces. I am beginning to articulate how these constant readings of the narrative and counter

narrative can be transformative and, hopefully, open dialogue as teenage mothers, such as Trina and Latrice as well as myself exist within multiple identities and possibilities. Is there space for relief or will there always be a voice reminding me that identity is placed on (some of) us? I bring this question with me as I engage in this scholarly work.

In thinking about the stories of teenage mothers, this research seeks to consider how each of these individual's stories are entangled within their own identities and experiences within particular moments of time and influence, including popular discourses. The ways in which these teenage mothers are being read and represented within media includes emotional, social, and physical ways of being. For example, popular media portrayals of teenage motherhood such as *Riding in Cars with Boys (2001)*, *Juno (2007)*, and *Precious* (2009) perpetuate versions of the teenage motherhood story with explicit and hidden racial, sexual, and social classed connotations. Within news media, coverage of Bristol Palin's pregnancy is an example of how privilege and power afford some with the ability to choose privatized experiences while others are left to varying degrees of more public exposure. For Bristol Palin, compensation and the political public eye led to opportunities for prestige around abstinence-only programs and public support from some prolife supporters. The ways in which race, gender, sexuality, and social class are attended to or hidden within these mainframes of representation serve as reminders that the issue of teenage pregnancy has been taken up in different ways with varying intentions.

Background of the Issue

The constructions of identities are fashioned from elements of one's lived experiences as well as one's perceptions and positioning within the social, cultural and

psychological world. Race, social class, gender, and motherhood are examples of constructed identities, each with their own historical trajectories within society. These historical trajectories are contextualized by specific moments in time and place as they collide among an individual's multiple identities. Individuals take up these identities as well as have these identities placed upon them in ways that merge, mold, change, and/or adhere particular identities together. Therefore, the construction of identities is fluid as multiple identities are layered and contextualized both within one's lived experiences and well as because of one's lived experiences.

Specifically, the perceptions and responsiveness regarding the identity of teenage motherhood "as a social and educational problem" have been discussed in different ways depending on the specific social, political, and economic needs of the time and place (Pillow, 2004, p. 18). An attitude that teenage motherhood is a problematic status is related to the ways in which the construction of adolescence has been delineated differently for males and females. During the turn of the 20th Century the social construction of the adolescent stage prescribed to a pre-determined set of characteristics and roles for young people that served to control fears of the unknown and to "reinforce dominant social norms" within the ever-changing demographics and industrialization of the United States (Lesko, 2002, p. 182). Through prominent psychologists such as G. Stanley Hall, known as the "father of adolescence", components of social Darwinism are applied to development theory in hopes that the training during adolescence will advance society through Western ideals (Lesko, 2002). This historical and social construction of adolescence continues to separate young people from adults through a linear stage development theory, thus, marginalizing young people, including teenage mothers, who

deviate from the accepted developmental stages. Not only are teenage mothers contending with their new roles and responsibilities as mothers but they must also continue to navigate through this system of dominant stage theories of development. A binary between adolescence and adulthood becomes even more complex as motherhood is oftentimes reserved for the stage of adulthood and adolescence is oftentimes reserved for particular ways of "becoming".

The social construction of adolescence is based on a hierarchy of age, race, social class and gender that affords some with the privileges of full participation in society yet positions others as subordinate within the progress of the nation. Lesko (2012) states:

> Within the framework of recapitulation theory, adolescence was deemed a crucial divide between rational, autonomous, moral, white, bourgeois men and emotional, conforming, sentimental, or mythical others, namely primitives, animals, women, lower classes, and children. Adolescence became a social space in which progress or degeneration was visualized, embodied, measured, and affirmed. In this way adolescence was a technology of 'civilization' and progress and of white, male, bourgeois supremacy (p. 29).

This overt means of control is seen in both past and present positioning of teenage women as schools continue to perpetuate white, middle-class, male norms.

A common thread is to brand pregnant and teenage mothers "invisible" and excluded from public schools. Up until the early 1970s, a "curriculum of concealment" resulted in the discouragement or expulsion of pregnant teenage girls from school (Burdell, 1998; Shultz, 2001). Negative labels such as "stupid slut", "teen rebel, teen mom", "the girl nobody loved" and "dropouts" show evidence of deficit mindset

attributed to teenage mothers in society (Kelly, 2000). The impact of such labels manifests themselves in perceptions of disengagement within formal school settings (Kalil, 2002; Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2008). As women fight for opportunities for education and public presence, the dominant trajectory prevails. Education is to come before marriage, and marriage is to come before motherhood. In this way, the lived experiences of teenage mothers are concealed and remain solely for private spaces.

During a time of growing industrialization and urbanization in the United States, women were becoming more present in the public workforce as women began demanding equal education, employment and wages (Lesko, 2012). The economic shifts and societal changes slowly called for and allowed women to take a more public role in education and employment, but these changing roles also impacted society's views on motherhood and the workplace as distinctly separate (Burdell, 1998). The passage of Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendment mandates that pregnant students have the same rights and responsibilities as other students, including traditional school programs and extracurricular activities (Burdell, 1998). However, as society expects students, including young women, to complete high school and higher education conflict may arise for some teenage mothers as they navigate through a political system that primarily supports men and childless women (Burdell, 1998). This intentional discrepancy in gender differences has a significant impact on the ways in which teenage mothers might become doubly constructed as the Other in adolescence and the Other in motherhood.

G. Stanley Hall wanted separate schooling for boys and girls through a "fear of feminization" of the traditional curriculum in order to guard boys' masculinity. With the primary focus of adolescence as a way to mold young men into patriotic citizens, the

roles of young women are wrought with connotations of sexual promiscuity and naivety (Lesko, 2002). Expectations for male and female youth were different where the social implications not only silenced discourses around sexuality for young women but also dictated an almost hostile attitude towards those girls who attempted to publically express themselves as sexual beings (Renold, 2006).

In guarding adolescent women from developing too quickly, the teenage mother becomes positioned as an individual who has diverged from the dominant trajectory of development where little attention or responsibility returns to the political systems or social construction of adolescence. Lesko (2002) states:

> Girls, like boys, were dangerous when they failed to go through the right steps and slow pace of socialization to their future status and girls' bodies were examined to interpret their moral status. For girls, too much independence, early paid work, or experiences without school or family oversight made precocity imminent (p. 183).

Lesko (2002) reiterates that at the turn of the century a slow, coming-of-age process was encouraged as adult like responsibilities are to be removed. This still dominant conception of adolescence becomes challenged when young girls are pregnant. Motherhood brings with it a new set of responsibilities that are not characteristic of adolescence. In this way, secondary schooling becomes both the context for fostering dominant notions of adolescence as well as a context for marginalizing teenage mothers.

Many teenage mothers must juggle the responsibilities of providing for their child, for themselves, for their educational attainment, and for finding economic security when macroeconomic policies have made these opportunities hard to attain. Furstenberg

(2007) discusses a shift in the effects of teenage pregnancy where larger societal policies, such as welfare programs may have more impact on teenage mothers than pregnancy itself. Pillow (2004) emphasizes the difference in how policies and societies have socially constructed teenage motherhood based on race and social class. In thinking about race, social class, and schooling, Jones (2007) states, "The policing of working-class women by middle-class women in an attempt to regulate household and parenting practices is reinforced by mainstream beliefs about women living within particular groups in society" (p. 166). As historical trends have shown various ways that race and social class have impacted the lived experiences of teenage mothers, the topic of economics (or capital) automatically gets attached to teenage mothers in general as a threat to the economic stability of a community (Pillow, 2004).

Teenage mothers and their economic futures have often been the site of new policies and programs to prepare these girls for vocational training and work (Pillow, 2004). While this may appear to be a practical and helpful way to assist young mothers, this dual-role training not only situates the young mother as "deficit" but also implies that the onset of motherhood is when social class disparities begin. Instead, Pillow (2004) reminds us, "Teens most impacted by teen pregnancy are young women who are already living in impoverished conditions prior to becoming pregnant" (p. 117). Her research on dropout rates also indicates that motherhood may become a motivation to go back to school or find more stable work/living conditions.

What is interesting is how teenage mothers living in poverty prior to pregnancy are more likely to continue living in poverty after childbirth (Basch, 2011; Mollborn & Jacobs, 2012). The reproduction of low-income levels suggests that a teenage mother's

economic challenges are a result of intergenerational poverty rather than solely young motherhood (Basch, 2011; Mollborn & Jacobs, 2012). Macroeconomic policies have also decreased the amount of welfare aid available to certain teenage mothers, leaving basic needs unmet (Furstenberg, 2007; Mollborn & Jacobs, 2011). For some teenage mothers, the inequalities of housing, transportation, and job availability create new concentrated regions of poverty within metropolitan areas. These regional inequalities lead to geographic disparity, as low-income and racial minority residents are isolated from resources and opportunities often granted to those in higher social classes (Anyon, 2005). Teenage mothers continue to be situated within a society that has historically ostracized them as well as limited the economic assistance in providing for themselves and their child.

Statement of the Issue

Biological and sociohistorical understandings of development fail to consider how modern viewpoints on adolescence culturally and socially construct time, race, gender, and citizenship (Lesko, 2012). Being a teenage mother disrupts stage development theory yet that understanding is so engrained in societal and school systems that oftentimes high school dropout or negative consequences fall on the individual and not the current systems. The cost of the adolescent-mother binary is ultimately on the individual woman who must navigate her way through a socially constructed adolescence and a dominant understanding of development. As much of the research looks at the perceptions and experiences of teenage mothers in high school (Kalil, 2002; Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2008; Manlove, 1998), it becomes problematic not to question the way schools are constructed to influence these perceptions and lived experiences.

The structure of the school environment relies on the assumption that development occurs in linear stages where grade levels and labels such as elementary, middle, and high school predict certain characteristics that would be found within each context. The social construction of adolescence has been accepted as typical stages of development and is oftentimes supported and perpetuated by the school institution. It is necessary to question these assumptions of developmental stages. Vagle (2012) argues, "Of equal importance is that the education of young adolescents continues to launch from the assumption that young adolescence is a distinct developmental stage- an assumption that in effect 'freezes' students in time and space without agency, context, politics, or power" (p. 17). Conformity to both school and societal norms becomes associated with successful development. For teenage mothers, their presence in school disrupts the social norm of both the chronological timing of adolescence and timing of motherhood. The social repercussions of these disruptions potentially disadvantage these women through negative perceptions of engagement in schools as well as social isolation.

In disrupting dominant views of adolescence as a developmental stage, it can be overwhelming to think of the necessary shifts in both societal and school practices that would need to change in order to accept this multiplicity of trajectories of the teenage mother. Are we telling women when it is appropriate or not to have children or are we trying to come up with ways to support their experiences as a mother (and other roles they have)? Through a reimagining of schools as space for multiple trajectories of development, the movement from the individual response to a societal response should focus on the collective relationship of how teenage mothers and schools can reconceive what it means to be teenager, student, and mother.

Postcolonial theory calls for a rereading and troubling of contained binaries that restrict the possibility of multiplicity (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001). Part of the development of this binary discourse is where or how popular memories and histories have chosen to represent certain groups. As engaged citizens, there is a need for teenage mothers to continually make and remake themselves and their world through the questioning of the ways of society. A call for new social orders is possible as policies such as Title IX require schools to acknowledge and make visible the multiplicity of identities and experiences of students yet this is not enough. Teaching and recognizing the multiplicity of associations allows educators and researchers to teach to transgress by leveling power hierarchies and decentralizing social efficiency education (hooks, 1994).

My growing concern is how the social construction of adolescence contributes to marginalization as young women respond to these slow-moving political changes. Within the context of a social efficiency curriculum, an initial reading of teenage motherhood situates these women as marginalized or oppressed because their physical ways of being have disrupted a linear developmental trajectory of child to adolescent to adult. In contrast, Vagle (2012) states:

> Adults in schools and government are allowed to control, study, measure, anticipate, and redirect the individual. Therefore, contrary to common-sense assumptions about the emancipatory aims of policies and practices for educating young adolescents, constructing and re-constructing a developmental adolescence can be read as serving the adults and society more than the adolescents (p. 18).

If developmental adolescence is itself a social construction then the focus should not be on how the responsibility to disrupt this adolescent-motherhood binary is on young

women but instead how the accountability can be shifted back on societal and school structures.

I continue to question the ways in which schools have responded to aspects of postcolonial theory in relation to existing and emerging policies. Not only have policies assigned alternative schools and subsequently alternative curriculums for these teenage women but also this difference is problematic because it perpetuates the ideology that the norm for the adolescent experience is as a childless young adolescent. Kumashiro (2002) states:

> Perhaps we desire teaching and learning in ways that affirm and confirm our sense that *what we have come to believe is normal or commonsensical in society* is really the way things are and are supposed to be. After all, imagine the alternative: imagine constantly learning that 'what is normal' and 'who we are' are really social constructs maintained only through the Othering, marginalization, or silencing of other possible worlds and selves (p. 57).

Just because we acknowledge that teenage mothers are "normal" or as important as "normal" does not necessarily mean that people are willing to change what they view and value as the normal teenage or motherhood experience. This is oppressive education.

It is becoming evident to me that the enactment of policies, addition of alternative curriculums, or changes in dominant discourses revolving around teenage motherhood are not enough if the acts and perspectives of society and schools do not also reflect changes in oppressive education. Antioppressive education (Kumashiro, 2002) and liberatory practices (hooks, 1994) seek to disrupt binary relationships by acknowledging and providing multiple routes to reading the complexities and contradictions that emerge

through experiences. Additionally, terminology or language does not automatically result in liberatory practices just in the way that one can resist structures of power without ever referring to these practices as revolutionary (hooks, 1994). In order for educators, schools, researchers, and the community to enact antioppressive practices, they must also be willing to reflect on their own ways of reading and rereading their work and world.

Oftentimes, research makes teenage pregnancy a social or health policy issue while it has not historically been situated as an educational issue. Pillow (2004) states, "Understanding why education has been absent in national policy discussions, how schools track pregnant/mothering students, and how school personnel make decisions about the educational needs of pregnant/mothering students is integral to situating teen pregnancy as an educational policy issue" (p. 5). The call must be made for those creating and enacting policies to consider the descriptive data of ethnographic research in order to situate the policies in the lived experiences of those it impacts. Attention has been removed from the entanglements of identities or the acknowledgement that educating teenage mothers is already about policies and practices to educate female students. By placing the individual woman/student before the categorical label of a subgroup removes the delusion that the teenage mother's experience is universal. It is through a research process and representation of ethnographic data where the "messiness" of qualitative research can work with teenage mothers in meaningful ways.

Statement of Purpose & Research Questions

The purpose of this critical ethnographic study is to deeply explore the experiences of teenage mothers within a community-based organization as potential opportunities to take up issues such as race, gender, sexuality, motherhood, and social

class within their ongoing identity constructions and schooling. This study takes a critical perspective on the social construction of adolescence as a developmental stage in order to contribute to scholarly work that attends to how teenage mothers are socially, politically, and educationally positioned within Western schooling and society (Lesko, 2012). The research questions that guide this study are: *1) How are teenage mothers taking up identities such as race, gender, sexuality, motherhood, and social class within a community-based organization designed to support teenage mothers? 2) How do teenage mothers perceive and navigate both their schooling experiences as well as their participation within their children's schooling experiences? and 3) In what ways do community-based organizations work with teenage mothers and their children?* Considering the research questions, the audience for this study includes practitioners, policymakers, educational researchers, and other stakeholders who must consider the lived experiences and perceptions of teenage mothers in their decision-making opportunities.

Rationale & Significance

From this work there is a call to consider disrupting dominant notions of developmental theories as an opportunity for women to narrate their own experiences. Theoretically, this study supports a critical examination of traditional theories of development as teenage mothers disrupt a linear trajectory towards dominant conceptions of adulthood (Lesko, 2012). It is imperative to explore the ways in which adolescence as a social construction has become an accepted way of positioning particular groups from the very structures our society has deemed the proper means towards economic and future stability.

Politically, it is necessary to examine how educational policies and practices provide sites of exclusion as well as sites of possibility in response to the education of the teenage mother. This study aims to contribute to previous educational research that seeks to explore the political effects of educational programming and resources for teenage mothers (Furstenberg, 2003). Within this study, I assert one must explore individual's experiences in relation to the structures that identify what it means to be "educated" or existing within the standards of a particular society.

In practice, educators and community members must begin or continue to make the narratives of teenage mothers more visible in order to understand their perceptions of their identities and school experiences. In the same way, researchers should be reflexive and consider ways to foster agency within the research process. Angrosino and Rosenberg (2011) state, "The overall goal of this process is to empower the community to take charge of its own destiny- to use research for its own ends and to assert its own position relative to the power elite. A researcher may well retain a personal agenda (e.g. collecting data to complete a dissertation), but his or her main aim should be to work with the community to achieve shared goals that move it toward a more just situation" (p. 474). By working with participants in the field and throughout the interviewing process, this study is designed to tease out what participants find most effective in maintaining and changing their educational and relational experiences.

The following chapters explore the theoretical and empirical ways in which I take up this critical, ethnographic work. I begin Chapter 2 by describing my process of settling into the theoretical frameworks of hybridity (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bhabha, 1990; Bhabha, 1994; Voicu, 2011), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill-Collins, 2000), and a theory

of contingent and recursive growth and change (Lesko, 2012) as lenses to reimagine the topic of teenage motherhood. I draw the reader's attention to a selective review of the literature around teenage motherhood as a public and/or private embodied language as well as in relation to school engagement and/or disengagement. I conclude this chapter by discussing how this research study extends the literature around antioppressive education (Kumashiro, 2002) and liberatory practices (hooks, 1994) in order to trouble binary relationships and static categories of identity construction. This research also seeks to extend the literature around an asset-based, authentic approach to working with marginalized populations as one way to combat the negative stigmas and quarantine practices of pushing out those deemed as not "fitting in" mainstream curricula and representations.

In Chapter 3 I discuss critical ethnography as my methodological approach for data collection and analysis. Drawing on the work of critical ethnographers such as Britzman (2003), Foley (2002), Gildersleeve (2010), Jordan & Yeomans (1995) and Lather (2007), I describe how this critical approach to the research process attends to the naturalistic, contextualized ways of working with participants in the field. I introduce Real Moms as the CBO research site as well as introduce the ten focal participants who shared their experiences and stories with me. Utilizing an inductive methods process of open-coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) I provide examples of data collection and analysis. I also attend to the political and ethical considerations of working with and representing teenage mothers. This chapter concludes with attention to the tensions of my own multiple identities and researcher positionality as intertwined within this topic of research throughout field work, analysis, written representation, and reciprocity.

Chapter 4, "Reflections of Our Constructed Identities: 'Teen moms, we all have a story, of course'", is the first of three data chapters where I illustrate interpretive themes from data collection and analysis. In this chapter I highlight how some of the focal participants are constructing their embodied age, sexual, gendered, and racial identities in relation to dominant discourses and histories of teenage motherhood. The chronological passing of time as well as the physical representation of the pregnant female figure is reflected within these stories as expressive narratives of one's lived experiences.

Chapter 5, "Negotiating School, Agency within the Oppression: 'Yes, everything shifted…'", looks at school as a potential site for identity construction and a sense of belonging and/or exclusion. Focal participants share mixed perceptions around if and how local and alternative high schools provide space for the hybridity and intersectionality of teenage mothering identities. These perceptions seek to complicate traditional practices and identities of student, athlete, and parent within formalized educational spaces.

In Chapter 6, "Mentoring Real Mom Relationships: 'Like, this isn't the end…'", I explore how Real Moms both provides opportunity for authentic senses of caring (Noddings, 2005) as well as has limitations in "protecting" participants from the risks of being vulnerable within relationship. With a desire for lifelong relationships among women, this CBO is comprised of women with varying perspectives and interpretations of the significance of such out-of-school spaces. I also draw attention to the fluidity of a teenage mothering identity as both mentors and mentees perceive different ways of holding onto or shedding "teenage mother" as an identity marker.

The final chapter of this dissertation looks at how this work extends existing literature and educational research around teenage motherhood and perceived identity constructions. I provide a summary of the findings from each of the three data chapters in making the case that racial, aged, gendered, sexualized, and social classed identities are being perceived as both possibility and problematic within in- and out-of-school contexts, including Real Moms. Returning to Latrice's declaration, "My story is my story. If I have to stick with my story, I'll keep my story" (Interview, September 29, 2016), I assert that it is vital to pay attention to the ways in which new and existing experiences, relationships, and discourses are woven and folded onto one another within the expression of storytelling and reflective processing. I conclude with recommendations for those working with teenage mothers to consider the historical, emotional, political, social, physical, and mental impacts of teenage motherhood within the United States to reimagine and re-narrate dominant, marginalizing discourses.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework & Review of the Literature

This chapter focuses on my process of settling into selective theoretical frameworks as well as my search process for blending the theoretical and empirical work around identity constructions of teenage mothers within public and private contexts. Considering my research focus on teenage mothers, I identify nuanced ways that hybridity, intersectionality, and theories of contingent and recursive growth and change intersect with my own ideas, experiences, and philosophies around educational research and teenage motherhood. As I read through much of the literature around teenage motherhood, I am specifically interested in a deeper understanding and analysis of how this identity marker is being positioned within discourses of development as well as fields of educational practices. Through my search process, I am more aware of the significance of intergenerational relationships, specifically mentorship as having some influence on shaping the perceptions and experiences of mothering and school. The ideas that I highlight in this chapter are helpful for me as I unpack both the theoretical and empirical ways in which teenage mothers perceive the intersections of multiple identities through storytelling (private and public) within and outside of traditional organizations of education.

First, I discuss the ways in which I draw on conceptions of hybridity (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bhabha, 1990; Bhabha, 1994; Voicu, 2011) as well as a theory of contingent and recursive growth and change (Lesko, 2012) in order to consider the complexities of power and privilege attached to dominant notions of binary or contradicting identities. Within my selective review of the literature, I then look at the ways in which critical ethnographers reflect on researcher positionality in their work with teenage mothers.

Next, I review the literature around teenage motherhood and a process of public and private storytelling as represented and read through feminine language and a reading of the body. I conclude this chapter by tracing the ways in which the construction of school as an institution intersects with perceptions of engagement and disengagement with teenage mothers. After identifying contexts of power and privilege positioning of teenage motherhood stories based on age, race, social class, gender, and sexuality, I assert the need to reimagine the ways in which identities within discursive practices construct counter narratives within school and community spaces.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on theoretical conceptions of hybridity as well as a theory of contingent and recursive growth and change when considering the intersectionality of identities teenage mothers take up within different moments and spaces of their lived experiences. This layering and entanglement of identities varies by individual as each identity is impacted by socially constructed time and place considerations, resulting in numerous ways of positioning power and privilege within dominant discourses. Ngo (2012) discusses, "Identities are contextual (i.e., contingent) and recursive (i.e., continually constructed) because of the central role of discursive practices in identity formation" (p. 46). Significant to this research are the dialogic practices among teenage mothers and the Real Moms staff through the process of reciprocal storytelling and re-narration within the community-based organization programming. In thinking about teenage motherhood, it is necessary to consider the ways in which the intersectionality of racialized, classed, and gendered discourses collide with new or emerging identities as a mother within socially constructed contexts. Therefore, the ever-changing policies and

practices in education and society impact the educational and social perceptions of teenage mothers.

I acknowledge there are multiple ways of approaching identity constructions. I am choosing to focus on how conceptions of hybridity and the intersectionality of identities offer ways of opening up possibilities for teenage motherhood identities against traditional notions of development as well as run the risk of placing a static identifier on an individual based on a brief, yet significant moment in one's life. This research is not meant to essentialize a general experience of teenage motherhood. Instead, Voicu (2011) asserts "…hybridity is positioned as an antidote to essentialism" (p. 125). I draw on the ways in which intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and hybridity foster an engaged action of resistance and agency among identities by challenging the historical and political construction of adolescence and adulthood/motherhood as distinct, separate developmental stages.

Black feminist critique to treating gender and race as "mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" examines how a single-axis framework marginalizes Black women's experiences from feminist and antiracist policy discourses (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139). Crenshaw (1989) asserts that "[F]ailure to embrace the complexities of compoundedness is not simply a matter of political will, but…imports a descriptive and normative view of society that reinforces the status quo" (p. 166-167). Rejecting complacency around a single-axis framework for identity analysis offers "the inclusion of marginalized groups for whom it can be said: 'When they enter, we all enter'" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 167). This theory of intersectionality is necessary in thinking

about the multiplicity of identities as several of the teenage mothers within this study feel and experience the world as Black, as women, as Black women.

Intersectionality is traced as a "work-in-progress" in order to engage Black women, Black men, multiple disciplines as well as domestic, national, international movements around the mobilization of social change (Carbado et al., 2013; Hill-Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Carbado et al. (2013) discuss Crenshaw's definition of intersectionality as "all intersectional moves are necessarily particularized and therefore provisional and incomplete. This is the sense in which particularized intersectional analysis or formation is always a work-in-progress, functioning as a condition of possibility for agents to move intersectionality to other social contexts and group formations" (p. 304). For example, Ladson-Billings (1995) draws on Hill-Collins' (1991) Black feminist thought as Ladson-Billings "attempted to search for theoretical grounding that acknowledges my standpoint and simultaneously forces me to problematize it" as she works with successful teachers working with African American students (p. 471). This methodological approach to problematize a single-axis standpoint situates the theoretical and empirical processes of working with participants who are constantly reading and being read within the social world.

Hybridity also offers a way to think how multiple identities are positioned within normative, dominant ways of being categorized. Oftentimes hybridity is used to discuss the ways in which race, culture, geography, and power attempt to maintain a "pure" identity in relation to divergent identities (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bhabha, 1990; Bhabha, 1994; Voicu, 2011). Recognizing the ways in which hybrid identities disrupt the sense of a "pure" identity requires thinking about the implications of an individual's identity

formation within and outside of dominant identifications. For example, teenage motherhood becomes positioned as marginalized yet can also become a new identifier that is positioned or displaced in different ways on its own (Voicu, 2011). While teenage motherhood disrupts more recent developmental and social characteristics within the category of an adolescent stage, I am cautious not to essentialize the experiences of teenage motherhood as a standalone identity by assuming that a static identity of "adolescent" or "mother" simply mixes to form this new identity of "teenage mother".

Anzaldúa (1987) argues for the individual to take up a borderland space where one can exist in both or multiple identities. The need to navigate when to switch identities is based upon contextual circumstances that have the potential to marginalize the individual from any sense of belonging. Anzaldúa (1987) states, "At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes" (p. 78). In this way, identities will oftentimes not fit into static, clear cut ways of being and may even occupy contradicting identities. The momentum of such contradicting identities has the potential to lead to reaction and action in how one chooses to take up and navigate among identities (Voicu, 2011).

When one physically embodies a hybrid identity the shift from reaction to action can take many forms. Anzaldúa (1987) states, "The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react" (p. 79). To move beyond binaries of "teenager" or "mother" as well as to move beyond discourses of "socially young" does not require replacing one identity with another but, instead, opens space for one to embody and embrace all identities and trajectories within her experiences. Anzaldúa (1987) states, "She has a

plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode- nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else" (p. 79). I assert that the dynamic nature of one's lived experiences and stories provide an opportunity for individuals to push back on dominant discourses by calling out and resisting the ways they have been historically and socially positioned and represented.

Cultural hybridity offers a way to rethink these representations into "something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Bhabha, 1990, p. 211). With the cultural construction of adolescence as a distinct stage of development, a "new identity" is constructed when girls of this chronological age become pregnant. Bhabha (1990) states, "But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and set up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom" (p. 211). Instead of marginalizing those individuals that disrupt the dominant trajectory and identity of Western culture, this theoretical third space provides space for the "new" (Voicu, 2011). New language of "teenage mother" and new narratives emerge and therefore must be negotiated against existing discourses.

While colonizing and dominant perspectives attend to an "either-or" discourse, resistance and agency embrace a "both-and" discourse that breaks apart a singular perspective. While all interrogations might not provide opportunities for a dialogic or accepted understanding of a teenage mother hybrid identity, it is necessary to consider

just how political this conception is in rethinking colonial discourses. Bhabha (1990) states, "So I think that political negotiation is a very important issue, and hybridity is precisely about the fact that when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them" (p. 216). This need for possibility is precisely what moves identification and representation into action.

This brings to my attention how community spaces and schools can utilize concepts such as third space to open up the possibility of multiple developmental trajectories that these women already experience in such a way that would look different than the ways in which some teenage mothers are currently experiencing high school. Gutiérrez (2008) states, "People live their lives and learn across multiple settings, and this holds true not only across the span of their lives but also across and within the institutions and communities they inhabit-even classrooms, for example" (p. 150). By looking at movements as both horizontal and vertical, the theory of contingent and recursive growth and change also flows through lived experiences. Drawing on the importance of relationships in engaging teenage mothers in schools, this collective third space expands possibilities. I argue that in order to develop this collective third space there needs to be a shift in how schools perceive stabilized adolescence through stage development theory into a phase much more complex and nuanced.

Both Anzaldúa and Bhabha acknowledge the messiness and political nature of hybridity. Whether these in-between spaces are referred to as "third space" (Bhabha, 1994) or "borderlands" (Anzaldúa, 1987) the action of disrupting traditional constructions carries with it implications for one's lived experiences. Bhabha (1994)

states, "The 'right' to signify from the periphery of authorized power and privilege does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are 'in the minority'" (p. 3). In some ways the gaze of others might essentialize teenage mothers yet the narratives and lived experiences of individual teenage mothers will not be fixed or static. The context of one's lived experiences is ever changing throughout time. With each new context, possibility through reaction and action requires certain vigilance on how one continues to find agency. A contingent and recursive theory of growth and change provides a way of thinking about hybridity in relation to constructed, separate adolescent and motherhood stages of development.

Placing hybridity in conversation with a contingent and recursive theory of growth and change considers how a teenage mother might identify with this particular moment in her lifetime. Just as reaction has the possibility of remaining in a static phase, hybridity also has the possibility of becoming a fixed identity. Voicu (2011) states, "While transgression is a potential tool of resistance which upturns taken-for-granted hierarchies, hybridity plays dangerously on the boundary and taken out of context can become a source of dichotomies…" (p. 127). It is imperative to explore the ways in which adolescence as a cultural construction has become an accepted way of positioning particular groups. Lesko (2012) presents an approach to cultural constructions of development as she states:

> I think that if we assumed that growth and change are *contingent*, we would need
> to specify the contingencies and that would lead us to examine and document
> multiple microcontexts. I also think that a conception of growth and change as

recursive, as occurring over and over as we move into new situations, would

reorient us (p. 183).

As a developmental identifier, the microcontext of teenage motherhood binds a brief

moment in time when an individual is considered both adolescent and mother. When

moving into a new situation, this microcontext must be examined in relation to the

intersections of other identified microcontexts for the individual and collective is not

separated from ongoing practices of being read and represented. Therefore, it is with

urgency and resilience that the reading and representing of new, ever-changing narratives

scatter the privileges of dominant sense-making and, instead, provide possibility for

ongoing fluid ways of being.

The concept of social age refers to how an adolescent might *feel* his or her age to

manage oneself-a *produced* character- instead of relying on the structural, chronological

and curricular age expectations (Lesko, 2012). For pregnant and teenage mothers, their

bodies are part of themselves and, therefore, it is this intersection of trajectories where

young mothers are able to disrupt the field of every day sense-making that has positioned

these women as part of a marginalized, stratified social structure. Lesko (2012) states, "In

order to see teenage mothers in different ways, we need to add a sense of contingency to

coming-of-age narratives, perhaps via a concept of social age. The concepts of social age

and reproductive rights for sex education make school-aged mothers visible to us as

figures of both necessary change and hope" (p. 136). Pregnant teenagers physically

embody the intersection of two accepted trajectories, adolescent and mother. Atwell-

Vasey (1998) states, "Our bodies take up space and time, and so do our thoughts, and if

you are always in space and time, you cannot be outside of space and time, watching the

action from a transcendent or universal position" (p. 75). The gestation period does not allow for theoretical or physical concealment or an erasure of one trajectory over the other.

This duality between trajectories and the blurred boundaries of the self and inside other complicates representation (Luttrell, 2003). The development of the teenager towards womanhood and motherhood provides the young mother with space to construct her narrative through her own body, as the body is a space of expression. Women must be able to think, write and read through their bodies because they are their bodies (Atwell-Vasey, 1998; Luttrell, 2003; Minh-ha, 1989). It is through one's body that one is able to discover and engage within the spheres of space. For pregnant and teenage mothers, their public and private bodies and narratives are part of themselves and, therefore, it is this intersection of hybrid trajectories where young mothers are able to disrupt discourse as linear space.

I assert theories of hybridity provide a lens for thinking about the ways in which teenage mothers react and act through active engagement within their identity formation. Dominant, culturally constructed discourses such as "socially young" have situated particular individuals within a static, contextual identity. By placing these theories in conversation with Lesko's (2012) contingent and recursive theory of growth and change they offer a way to consider the multiplicities of experiences when engaging and educating the teenage mother over time. In thinking about ways in which schooling reimagines the impact of the cultural construction of adolescence, Vagle (2012) states, "A contingent and recursive conception of growth and change allows one to spend less time dividing time into past, present, and future and instead locates the growth in particular

contexts" (p. 22). Situating the lived experiences of individual adolescen(TS) versus a general stage of adolescen(CE) provides a more asset-based approach to growth and change by revealing the ways in which cultural constructions "are not neutral acts" but political acts that must consider the multiplicity of an individual's experiences (Vagle, p. 27, 2012). A theory of contingent and recursive growth and change also considers identity construction and the particularized experiences of youth/individuals as continually "becoming" (Lesko, 2012; Luttrell, 1997; Ngo, 2012; Vagle, 2012). Within a contingent and recursive theory of growth and change, an individual's experiences contain "the *blizzard* of social factors that influence the lives of adolescents, rather than a straight line in which one factor occurs after another" (Vagle, p. 15, 2012). Thus, the intersectionality of identities emerges within the blizzard of opportunities that influence identity formation.

While it may be useful to theoretically consider the ways in which newness emerges from conceptions of hybridity, identity is a profoundly personal endeavor that involves this continual process of imagining and reimagining oneself within internal and external experiences. As one takes up a hybrid identity there is often a reaction to this shift. Bhabha (1994) states, "We are no longer confronted with an ontological problem of being but with the discursive strategy of the moment of interrogation, a moment in which the demand for identification becomes, primarily, a response to other questions of signification and desire, culture and politics" (p. 71). By tracing both the historical and political construction of the teenage mother it is evident that the ways in which her multiple identities collide positions her within the social world. The conceptions of hybridity and intersectionality within theories of growth and change recognize the impact

of such collisions and allow for possibilities to conceive the lived experiences of teenage mothers as an interpretive and fluid identity process.

This study also draws on the aspects of theoretical intersectionality as it explores the nature of Real Moms to provide opportunities for teenage mothers to take up their multiple identity constructions. Scholars such as Jones (2007; 2012b; 2012c), Reay (1998a; 1998b), and Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody (2001) discuss the intersectionality of gendered, racial, classed, and aged identities of teenage mothers or mothers. Much of Jones' (2006; 2007; 2012a; 2012b; 2012c) work looks at the ways in which young girls consider their own future trajectories by exploring the intersections of multiple identities. Jones (2007) considers the psychosocial tensions within gendered mother-daughter relationships using theoretical frameworks such as Bourdieu but she asserts that capital goes beyond the four capitals (economic, cultural, social, symbolic) to ground women's lived experiences in both the psychological and the social (Jones, 2007, p. 160).

Similarly, Walkderine et al. (2001) call for a consideration of the discursive practices historically and presently associated with young, single mothers. Depending on other identity markers, these discourses include stereotypes of being deviant or welfare cases. The narratives or discourses of what it means to be a young mother are also attached to surveillance and "welfare-scrounging" identities that fixed young women within static identities (Walkerdine et al., 2001, p. 189). In this way, gender and the bodily knowledge of the female representation collide with topics of social class and economic positioning. Voicu (2011) states, "Although individuals may have multiple identities, specific contexts and circumstances dictate which identity becomes more important (to the extent that it takes primacy over any other) at a particular time." (p.

128). When an individual contradicts these fixed and linear perceptions of what is means to be classed and gendered, new discourses emerge. Drawing on the theoretical and empirical works of these scholars and others, my selection of the literature around perceptions of and from teenage mothers seeks to support an understanding of the ways in which theories of hybridity, intersectionality, contingent and recursive growth and change, and the work of Real Moms makes space for these women to re-narrate their lived experiences through multimodal ways of being.

Selective Review of the Literature

Much of the literature looks at the theoretical ways in which teenage motherhood has been positioned with schools and society. Additionally, teenage motherhood is oftentimes a subject for public health journals, situated as a political issue rather than a central focus for educational change. In this selective review of the literature, I have chosen to both review some of the work around the theoretical understandings of teenage mothers narrating their lives as well as the few, yet significant ways in which empirical research has been representing the educational experiences and perceptions of teenage motherhood.

One theme across the empirical, critical research around discourse and perceptions of teenage motherhood is the ways in which the researchers are reflexive of their own researcher positionality. For example, Zachry (2005) acknowledges how her identities as a White, Harvard doctoral student and the teacher of the class site called upon many privileges and hierarchies of power as all of the teenage mothers identified as her students and women of color with fewer years of formalized education. SmithBattle (2007) attends to how racial identities are engaged within her research process and how

this might impact the relationships between researcher and participant. Identifying as a White, public health nurse, the researcher made the choice to interview the White families in the study while a nurse who identified as Black chose to interview the Black families in the study. SmithBattle (2007) also acknowledges that both nurses have doctoral or master's degrees in their education where participants had fewer years of formalized education. Considering researcher positionality, Hunter (2007) spends several months working in the alternative high school setting prior to data collection as part of her critical ethnographic methods in order to gain entry as well as build relationships with participants. In Chapter 3, I spend time wrestling with my own researcher positionality within this work as I have realized how central dialogic relationships between participants and researchers are within feminine language, narratives, and storytelling.

Public and Private Narratives of Teenage Motherhood: Embodied Language and Storytelling.

Conventional ideologies of teenage motherhood oftentimes make assumptions around "socially young", single motherhood identities where deficit-perspectives are attached to working class and racial minority identities (Pillow, 2004). Teenage mothers are physically, psychologically, and socially propelled into motherhood and social adulthood yet are also labeled developmentally "too young". Assumed discourses around "socially young" female youth expose the cultural and social norms that marginalize girls who disrupt traditional schemas for "teenage girl". A "socially young", teenage, pregnant female embodies a time and space disruption to the binary between female youth and female adult (Atwell- Vasey, 1998). Within the construction of the "socially young" label there are also constructed gender differences that have worked to maintain a normative perspective of gender roles and bodies.

While it is dominant discourse that tends to dictate the timeliness of such static trajectories, the body continues to develop as teenager and teenager with child. Luttrell (2003) states, "Despite the fact that children are understood to use their bodies to discover and act upon the world, schooling and most educational practice cease to acknowledge bodies as a primary tool of expression and communication" (p. 178). It becomes problematic when gestation becomes a biological change to the body that produces Otherness in the teenage female's educational or social experiences. While the body serves as a primary tool of expression, it is the active engagement in the thinking, writing and reading of one's embodied narrative that creates space for multiplicity and intersections of trajectories. Bhabha (1994) discusses, "The borderline engagements of cultural differences may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definition of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress" (p. 3). Therefore, an individual's experiences are highly contextual in different ways over time.

In the private sphere, pregnant and teenage mothers are forming how they see their physical bodies as well as their positionality as set apart from a public, normative experience. Their lived experiences are absent or are misrepresented through the political or social connotations of disapproval by diverging from the white, middle class norms for teenagers and motherhood (Coffel, 2011). For example, most published stories of teenage female youth portray narratives that do not include teenage motherhood, instead highlighting the conventional adolescent identity development and experience.

Additionally, these stories do not attend to the intersectionality of race, social class, gender, and sexuality.

Private, feminine narratives emerge into public, male discourse spaces as teenage women contradict a linear way of being and knowing. Public spaces, such as schools are viewed as the place where linear trajectories of hegemony dictate whose voice appears in dominant curriculums. I argue that the diversity and multiplicity of experiential living and variety of narratives enrich spaces. Atwell-Vasey (1998) states:

> One of the most powerful critiques of epistemology to come from feminist theory is that what we might call private life, experiential life, or personal life, is *not* a retreat from public life; rather, it is objectivity that is a retreat from the richness of experiential life (p. 39).

Through a rupturing of the dominant discourses, the narratives of or by these women transcend singularity and create spatial multiplicity. These liberations are not distinct or "add to" the dominant narratives but instead have always been in existence as counter narratives. The school curriculum is one mode of public discourse that oftentimes does not include literacies or narratives of the teenage mother yet there are ways these women are taking up their own identities and representations.

This shift from private to public results in the voluntary and involuntary submersion into the public, dominant discourse. The multiplicity of trajectories of pregnant and teenage mothers does not confine these women into one singular group to be represented as identical young mothers and should not create static ways of being. At the same time, the historical representations of marginalized groups situate their involvement or exclusion from the dominant discourses. Luttrell (2003) states:

It is not as if one can present a distinct 'narrative' or set of alternative images about teenage pregnancy without engaging the dominant discourse. Moreover, there is a class- and race-based history of teenage pregnancy that shapes how these representations are understood by different groups of Americans (p. 4).

It becomes problematic when many of these teenage girls continue to place themselves in the present, and these same young women portray themselves in the private past rather than in the public future (Luttrell, 2003).

Drawing on feminist, critical antiracist pedagogy and research around the experiences of teenage mothers, Kelly (1997) disputes a "conventional wisdom" that teenage mothers are caused or produced by poverty (p. 422). In her analysis of Canadian print coverage around teenage motherhood, Kelly (1997) considers the ideological agendas within discourses of media representations since 1980. Drawing on Foucault, Kelly (1997) asserts there are multiple discourses around the stigma of teenage motherhood yet they are not given equal representation within media spaces. Kelly (1997) states, "A common problem with nonlongitudinal studies is that the researchers, the various consumers of the research (such as policymakers, advocacy groups, news reporters), or both go beyond the research findings to make unwarranted generalizations and predictions" (p. 426). Attending to this concern, my research does not attempt to generalize findings but to view these particular women's perceptions within a context and within this moment in time, knowing that these perceptions and identities are continually fluid and changing.

Kelly (1997) interviewed current and former teenage mothers and found that teenage mothers advocated for themes of empowerment in contradiction to the mass

media deficit-representations. Themes of empowerment from these self-interpretations include: "First, the right to choose, including motherhood and adoption, is essential… Second, choosing to keep one's baby should not be stigmatized… Third, choosing to give one's baby up for adoption should not be stigmatized… Fourth, high school programs dealing with sexuality as well as mothering should carry less stigma… Fifth, teen mothers are each other's best support system, which schools can encourage" (p. 438-440). While many of these self-interpretive themes are representative of my current research findings, the ways in which these women have come to share their stories are as varied as the decision-making processes resulting in the listed interpretations.

Kelly (1997) draws on her larger, ethnographic work with twelve teenage mothers to look at the ways in which these women produced and performed a play around the topic of their lives. Kelly (1997) states, "Nevertheless, practices like play-building hold educational promise if not oversold to students as an opportunity to fuse individual stories into one coherent statement capable of displacing opposing ideologies" (p. 165). Discussing the tensions within the process of sharing individual stories and the construction of, ultimately, a collective script, Kelly (1997) asserts that teenage mothers were vocal and resisted a storyline that focused on the negative stigmas around teenage motherhood or a prevention storyline. Her analysis of the interpretations from teenage mothers and audience members were centered around the play, "Teen Moms in the Nineties" and looked at the intentions or purpose of this creative space from each of the multiple roles involved. Even with a feminist lens, the challenges with constructing counter discourses into one collective script when individual teenage mothers experienced their lives quite uniquely (considering their multiple identities) was apparent

as teenage participants were forced to justify their decisions and audience members continued to interpret any takeaways from the play. Kelly (1997) states, "Teen mothers' 'stories' consist in their continual reflecting on their experiences and actions, talking about them to others, and reconstructing them after the fact; thus, the stories are always representations. In making sense of their experiences, teen mothers, like all of us, inevitability draw on existing ideologies" (p. 167). In taking up the language of existing ideologies and the language of the oppressor, teenage mothers' counter narratives may be reflected against normalized storylines *and* be produced as something new.

The ability for contradicting narratives to rupture dominant narratives reflects the pluralistic perspectives and experiences of minoritized groups in the United States. Shultz (2001) states, "We can only engage students in honest dialogue that respects their perspectives and avoids the trap of always seeing their stories in relation to more 'acceptable' ones by de-centering the traditional scripts" (p. 603). Being explicit about the struggles of resisting this deficit viewpoint allows space for empowerment and the voice of those marginalized to be heard, not in contrast to the dominant discourse, but as another discourse reality.

Challenging these historical narratives is that the decisions of childbirth and childrearing can be motivating for these women and can aid in the decisions to continue through school and provide for their children (Luttrell, 2003; Shultz, 2001). Again, it is the white, middle-class norm of childbirth and childrearing that many teenage mothers are resisting. As women become pregnant, they accommodate to the new realities yet find themselves needing to explain their new positionality in reference to the norms of this established structure (Shultz, 2001). Among other factors, female youth use these

narratives to shape their positionality as successes or failures in reference to motherhood (Shultz, 2001).

Just as motherhood changes the biological body of a teenager, so must her narratives assume this ownership of discourse as writing as a woman to "write your body" (Minh-ha, 1989). By conceiving of certain writing as attached to gendered or sexual ways of knowing it is no longer a singular discourse but a narrative that man cannot participate in due to his inability to possess the "womb" of women's writing. Luttrell (1997) states, "… that telling life stories can provide impetus and direction for new ways of being and acting in the world" (p. 119). In this way, pregnant and teenage mothers can construct their own narratives as organic and fully living yet it is still imperative to think about the structural inequalities that are also placed upon (some of) us.

The multiplicity of space and the public presence of narratives challenge society's traditional norms of adolescence and motherhood as developmental stages. Massey (2005) states, "…a genuine, thorough, spatialisation of social theory and political thinking can force into the imagination a fuller recognition of the simultaneous coexistence of others with their own trajectories and their own stories to tell" (p. 11). Young mothers disrupt this trajectory by exemplifying multiple future life courses and publically portraying these experiences.

High percentages of low-income, racial minority teenage pregnancies are often represented as narratives of deficit and constructions of failure (Schultz, 2001). Shultz's (2001) work with teenage mothers draws from critical theories, such as poststructuralist theory to reimagine and (re)present the narratives of these young women within society

(Shultz, 2001). Acknowledging that teenage pregnancy aligns with challenges of pre- or post- economic hardships, Shultz (2001) concludes that teenage females often discuss motherhood in their future goals and motivations as they use these narratives to shape their positionality as successes or failures in reference to motherhood. For some, teenage motherhood is an obstacle to be avoided in order to fulfill their career aspirations while for others motherhood became a motivation for school completion and job attainment in order to provide for her child. Shultz (2001) references Davies (1993) as she states, "A poststructuralist framework allows us to see the ways that individuals are continually shaped by discursive practices even as they remake those practices in their daily lives" (p. 587). This theory supports the notion that there are multiple trajectories for a life course versus a linear, "correct" form of one's private and public life. In this way, researchers and educators should listen to the ever-changing narratives of these women as this dialogue allows them to remake their lives in multiple ways that works against "Othering".

The power of the media distorts racial minoritized, low-income groups through a lens of white, middle-class ideologies of representation. In the public, a linear white, male trajectory has been constructed through otherness (Frost, 2005). It is identity formation in relation to a linear trajectory within hegemonic society that places women, especially young, racial minority women, into a subordinate role of "without child" as norm and accepted. This "problem" with teenage pregnancy is assumed to have one reason for occurrence, oftentimes a deficit life choice by the mother. The media portrays these women as sexually promiscuous or irresponsible. The attention and public

discourses centers on the mother and not the father, leaving the woman to assume responsibility of the child and the stigmatization of early childbirth.

Language occupies a masculine affinity where women are situated and compared to a standard not their own. In choosing to write, there is guilt as women are "language stealers", those who take from the male or father figure (Coffel, 2011; Minh-ha, 1989). As pregnant and teenage mothers self-represent their narratives through writing, they are enacting the femininity of language.

The language of pregnancy and motherhood in high school becomes a discourse that young females face as they position and dream of their futures (Shultz, 2001). If the narrative of possible pregnancy is already in existence, then it is the idea of a sphere of space that would be the possibilities of these women to agree with or resist the white, middle-class norm of motherhood. Minh-ha (1989) discusses, "Remember, the *minor*-ity's voice is always personal; that of the *major*-ity, always impersonal. Logic dictates. Man *thinks*, woman *feels*. The white man knows through *reason* and logic- the intelligible. The black man understands through *intuition* and sympathy- the sensible" (p. 28). If this is the case for discourse, then the resistance narratives of pregnant or teenage mothers is to resist the man's view of writing as the dominant discourse.

In contradiction to a linear life course for teenage females, pregnant and teenage mothers exemplify intersections of duality. Through multiplicity of the body and space, these young women exist as both developing teenager and producing mother. Questioning the static stages of development from childhood to adulthood displaces both traditional views of the time and space. Historically isolated from the dominant narrative, the discourse surrounding pregnant and teenage mothers shifts from deficit to asset as

multiplicity and language generate narrative. In this way, pregnant and teenage mothers use feminine language to construct their own personal narratives in relation to and alongside the existing narratives. It is through the intersections of both the dominant discourse and the personal narrative that pregnant and teenage mothers no longer represent the Other but represent the personal.

School Engagement and the Teenage Motherhood Experience.

Schools play a key role in maintaining the ever-changing aims of current society as curricula, both implicit and explicit, is implemented to inform the knowledge and skills it takes to move youth towards adulthood. Curricular content and structure have been of utmost concern and controversy throughout United States history (Kliebard, 2004; Symcox, 2002; Watkins, 2001). Symcox (2002) states, "[Traditionalists] feared that the very explosion of new histories had fragmented historical scholarship into a series of competing voices, overlooking the fundamental beliefs and enduring themes that unite us as a nation" (p. 33). Historically, schools act as a space for youth to proliferate through developmental, social, and academic constructions. The understanding of a central, pure national identity is guarded through school structures that maintain dominant perspectives of normality. It becomes problematic when the construction of school curricula perpetuates a dominant narrative (white, middle-class, male) that marginalizes populations, such as pregnant and teenage mothers, apart from mainstream education.

The dominant perception of adolescence prescribes to common characteristics, behaviors, and potential assigned to a particular age group where adults are "responsive" to adolescent knowledge formation (Vagle, 2012). This developmental perspective of

adolescence not only illustrates a distinction between adolescence and adulthood but also presents a linear form of development that marginalizes those who do not adhere to the status quo of development. In order to disrupt this "natural" frame of development, educators should view adolescence as a social construction of young people's lived experiences outside of time restriction for this phase is truly "contingently and recursively relational" (Vagle, 2012). This newfound realization has led me to trouble the ways in which society and schools limit the possibility of teenage mothers through systematic norms of development.

Pregnant and teenage mothers differ from the dominant childless stage of adolescence and are oftentimes discriminated by overt and covert ways within the school structure. A high percentage of high school dropout among teenage mothers has also become an alarming statistic that is often attributed to young women's new roles in motherhood (Manlove, 1998). It is important to question whether schools are oppressing youth through the social construction of adolescence as well as what limitations have been associated with youth motherhood.

In the early 1900s, Hall's theory of development promoted play and health as foundations of the curriculum through observations of the child study and a desire for individualization. Hall firmly believed health and individualization were necessary in order to appropriately educate students. This health advocacy was manifested in his desires to see separate curriculums and schools for males and females during adolescence (Kliebard, 2004). Kliebard (2004) states, "Hall advocated special versions of botany, biology, and chemistry designed for girls, one with a curriculum that emphasized 'motherhood and home life' for 'the vast majority of women' and another for those who

wished to pursue a career" (p. 41). At the time of developmental stages curriculum reform, this distinguishing factor between genders situated male and female purposes of education as distinct. In Hall's vision there was not a deep need for social reform, but delineation between male acquisition of core knowledge and females' subordinate knowledge potential (Kliebard, 2004). To this day, teenage mothers oftentimes transition to these new schools with motherhood curriculums whereas teenage fathers remain in mainstream schooling with access to mainstream curricula.

Burdell (1998) unpacks four distinct curriculums that have impacted the education of pregnant and teenage mothers since the mid-1900s. Of these four curriculums, a "curriculum of concealment", a "curriculum of domination", and a "curriculum of protection" position the teenage mother invisible or excluded from the mainstream curriculum (Burdell, 1998). Burdell (1998) states:

> The crisis of teen pregnancy in school sets up the dilemma as a binary opposition of two clear-cut choices, that of schooling (and rewarding, well-paid work) or that of adequate motherhood of a particularized quality and kind that fulfills society's ideological needs and expectations for framing the family space. Failure to maintain this separation at a certain age-this is, in high school-violates norms, which, in turn explains why the motherhood in inadequate and/or schooling and work potential are short-circuited (p. 219).

In this way schools are structured to prepare a particular status quo of teenagers for adulthood through educational practices and curriculums. What become problematic are the institution's overt and covert intentions of separate schooling in relation to specific groups of students.

Throughout the 1900s, public discourse around teenage pregnancy varied, politically and socially, in how public schools should address these young mothers. Separate schooling and/or curricula were common ways of "fixing" the issue. Oftentimes these separate schools provide parenting courses in lieu of more rigorous and academic electives. The mother was then viewed through a deficit lens where schools were responding to those that deviate from the norm through isolation and alternative pathways for the future. She was trained to be a mother instead of scholar or career woman.

These competing narratives were part of the controversies of the adoption for national standards. The 1970s and 1980s were a period when dominant narratives were becoming aware of the fact that the narratives of blacks and women could no longer exist removed from the histories of the white, middle-class man (Symcox, 2002). Pregnant and teenage mothers were one of many marginalized groups that were at risk of being situated within a curriculum of concealment. I suggest that instead of isolating these women from the dominant curriculums and standards that schools reflect on ways to create a cohesive, and pluralistic learning environment for all students. In this way, the school institution would embody many of the curriculum concerns that Symcox (2002) discussed with the history standards.

As both teacher and researcher, Zachry (2005) worked with nine teenage mothers from the Young Parents Program, a nonprofit program in Boston around their perceptions of their educational experiences before and after giving birth. In this study, the teenage mothers ranged from eighteen to twenty years old and identified as Latino, Cape Verdean, African American, and Indian. Data sources included multiple-choice surveys, in-depth interviews, and field notes from the program lessons. Zachry (2005) asserts that,

contrary to previous educational research, teenage motherhood may be a factor in a woman's positive perception of the importance of schooling, including the quality of the enrolled educational program. Acknowledging how discourses around teenage motherhood focus on particular political and racial ideologies, Zachry's (2005) work with teenage mothers reframed teenage pregnancy and its effect on perceptions of education. Themes of reframing the effects on educational decision-making included views on welfare, pregnancy versus motherhood, and the importance of a positive school environment. Zachry (2005) states, "Narrowly focusing on teen mothers as welfare recipients or low academic achievers limits the broader ways in which these individuals may think of their economic and educational opportunities. Although becoming pregnant as a teenager may put women at more risk for negative economic and educational outcomes, the event of pregnancy does not have to be seen as the sole defining moment in the lives of these women" (p. 2595). We must reframe ideologies that ascribe to singular definitions of people as the consequences of this norm limit access to education and full participation as active citizens for some populations.

Similarly, SmithBattle's (2007) work with teenage mothers drew from a larger hermeneutic, longitudinal study looking at these women's educational aspirations with the anticipation of motherhood. Working with a section of the larger participant pool, SmithBattle worked with nineteen teenage mothers. Nine of the teenage mothers, ages fifteen to eighteen, identified as White and ten identified as Black. This study looked at how demanding and sometimes contradicting priorities shifted with motherhood. SmithBattle (2007) states, "Teen mothers' motivation to remain in or return to school was often complicated, and sometimes thwarted, by competing work demands, family and

child care responsibilities, and educational barriers" (p. 354). Again, a focus on the multifaceted demands of motherhood instead of accusing the individual mother has the potential to lead to educational and political possibilities.

In thinking about the importance of context, Hunter (2007) provided another perspective with thinking about teenage women from rural backgrounds that became pregnant. Over the span of one year, Hunter drew on critical ethnographic methods when engaging participant observation, individual interviews, and focus group interviews with "mothers' group" meetings at a rural, alternative high school. While research on teenage motherhood tends to contextualize an urban space, Hunter argues that rural, alternative high school spaces have their own characteristics that can both hinder and support teenage mothers. Hunter (2007) states, "However, these women find that even after giving birth, when they no longer possess the physical signs of 'immorality', the obvious pregnancy, they can still no longer return to the mainstream high school" (p. 90). This resonates with the findings of my research as labels become fixed attachments to a person's stories instead of a temporary (and oftentimes necessary) relief or support. Separate schools and curricula, seen as the "quick fix", become the "only fix".

In order to understand the intentions behind separate schooling, I investigated the ways in which separate schools approach developmental stage reforms for student learning. The Dewey School focused on humanist Harris' five "windows of the soul" (grammar, literature and art, mathematics, geography and history) as well as the development of the child through social occupation training and the experience of working within the world you live (Kliebard, 2004). Vocational schools and Kilpatrick's Project Method also drew on the interest and life experiences of the child to facilitate

learning (Kliebard, 2004). Among criticisms of these schools, the concerns were how well prepared these students would be for college and transferring the learned skills and knowledge. This continues to be the case in schools for teenage mothers as parenting electives typically replace advanced academic electives. I question the balance between core content and life skills curriculums in preparing pregnant and teenage mothers for future economic success.

While the Dewey school focused on the interest of the child, separate schools emerged to educate specific minoritized groups under the guise of giving them opportunity to develop the skills necessary to be active in society. Armstrong created the Hampton Institute as one way to deal with the Black population of the defeated South (Watkins, 2001). While racial identity should not be an assumed association with teenage motherhood, research suggested disproportionate percentages of pregnancies in urban, low-income, and racial minority youth (Basch, 2011). Similar to how Watkins (2001) discusses the formation of the Hampton Institute, curriculums and schools were created to manage new groups of people, though underlying construct was that these groups become trained in relation to the dominant narrative. While the Hampton Institute varied greatly from the structure of separate schools for teenage mothers, the mission of a training school held similar ideologies of the opportunities available for marginalized groups. Part of the publicity of the Hampton Institute was showcasing that Black students and teachers could live up to the same norms as Whites (Watkins, 2001). Teenage mothers were also compared to their ability to succeed in this White, male-dominated society. This oppressed-oppressor interaction must be addressed in order for equitable education (Friere, 2000)

The marginalization of pregnant and teenage mothers is perpetuated by their isolation from the dominant curriculum by means of separate schools that emphasize alternative curriculums. Separate schools for pregnant and teenage mothers often modify mainstream curriculums to attend to the immediate health and psychological needs of students (Coffel, 2011; Luttrell, 2003). Secluded from a mainstream school system that currently emphasizes a social efficiency model, how are these women given the opportunity for future educational and economic success within a highly capitalistic and efficiency driven society?

My growing concern with this separate school model is the lack of preparation for student success in a social efficiently modeled society. Pregnant and teenage mothers in these schools are not academically "achieving" and are often instructed in remedial coursework (Burdell, 1998). While I had not previously questioned the development of separate schooling for pregnant and teenage mothers, I am discovering that schools implementing a primary developmental curriculum may be hindering opportunity and future economic access compared to those enrolled in the mainstream curriculum. The structures of mainstream schools, presently more socially efficient, appear to coincide with the dominant discourses of a hegemonic and capitalistic society. In this way, separate schooling is a form of social reproduction where mothers- often, urban, poor, racial minority- are not given the opportunities for success (Basch, 2011).

While the benefits of separate schools and curricular choices attend to the immediate health and psychological needs of pregnant and teenage mothers, one must take caution in separate school structures so as not to isolate or deny these women from rigorous academics or academic electives. A developmental curriculum oftentimes does

provide pregnant and teenage mothers opportunities and resources that might not be available or be emphasized in the mainstream curriculum. What becomes problematic is when separate schools for pregnant and teenage mothers run the risk of educating women to become mothers, neglecting or deemphasizing their roles as students and future engaged citizens. This dynamic balance between two of the major forces-developmental and social efficiency- in curriculum reform signifies the controversial ways in which the American curriculum represents and serves diverse populations. It is necessary to continue to examine the intentions of such establishments for liberatory practices. Fundamental in the evaluation of such curriculums is to make sure that this marginalized group does not continue to be oppressed by the institutions or curriculums.

Schools with greater resources, sex education programs, and high teacher expectations may influence the decision to prolong motherhood as well as educational persistence (Manlove, 1998). I still find this problematic because the inclusion of programs and positive relationships appear to consider ways of upholding this binary where the school institution is attempting to show that motherhood should wait until after high school completion. I would argue that schools covertly react to this reimagining of the adolescent-motherhood binary by affirming their position that the binary should exist. This covert message is hidden behind abstinence programs, sex education, and even positive relational supports after childbirth (Manlove, 1998). I will note that I am not arguing that I think teenagers should become pregnant during their high school experiences, because there are many negative educational and psychological factors that are associated with this divergence from dominant system (Kalil, 2002; Manlove, 1998). Instead, I think it is necessary to recognize that the systems in place make it difficult to

reimagine teenage mothers as one of many developmental trajectories even within

schools with greater resources.

In a similar way that schools offer preventative services for teenage pregnancy, I

found instances of the "banking" model where teenagers are viewed as almost ignorant

without adult supervision or guidance. Freire (2000) criticizes the "banking" model as it

looks at the ways in which teenagers are knowledge receptacles who represent and act out

certain behaviors and identities at a particular point of development. Freire (2000) states,

"Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings

and the world: a person is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others; the

individual is a spectator, not re-creator" (p. 75). The oppressive "banking" model aligns

with the same social construction of adolescence. Instead, the contingent and recursive

relation between lived experiences provides agency within the teenage mother to

constantly and continually shift through spaces as she develops. How does one practically

support multiple trajectories of development once this re-imagination of the adolescent-

mother binary is present?

Educational attainment appears to be a significant cost associated with teenage

motherhood. High school dropout rates are found in considerably high percentages

among teenage mothers (Manlove, 1998). Factors such as disengagement, low

motivation, and deviant attitudes are among some of the perceived reasons for dropout

(Burdell, 1998). In contrast, many low-income youth and teenage mothers display

mainstream motivational values yet few actually attain these goals due to perceived lack

of opportunity or support to attain these goals (Kalil, 2002). There appears to be a

disconnect between the academic and psychological needs of teenage mothers and the

types of education offered by school institutions. I argue that the structures within the educational system are designed in such a way as to perpetuate a societal norm of marginalization for teenage mothers. With perceptions and motivations for educational attainment and future economic stability, it is necessary to examine how the structures or other factors have limited teenage mothers from increased high school completion rates.

Teenage mothers have been shown to prepare for their future educational and career goals as they now consider both their future as teenagers as well as their role as a parent (Kalil, 2002; Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2008; Schultz, 2001). Teenage mothers' perceptions of the social context of schools have been shown to be predictors of their academic motivations and school engagement though perceptions of differential treatment due to parenthood have been perceived as discrimination and inequitable treatment (Kalil, 2002). Teenage mothers are more likely to show declines in their educational expectations if they perceived teachers undervalued or devalued their intellectual abilities by taking less demanding academic courses (Kalil, 2002). The goal structures are no longer for mastery but for completion.

The level of performance (grades) versus mastery goals (understanding) in both teacher expectations and the school focus on standardized tests continues to situate students, including teenage mothers away from the academic engagement. There remains isolation from perceived positive teacher supports within the school institution. Kalil and Ziol-Guest (2008) state, "Perceptions of caring and respect from teachers might also serve as a broader measure of social support for the teenage mothers, helping to alleviate stress and allowing them to respond more effectively to academic challenges and

opportunities" (p. 542). When students are removed from the school context, the system is also removing her from academic opportunity.

The reimagining of multiple trajectories allows a young woman's experiences to expand and reject the notion of a linear trajectory of development. Possibility extends to opportunity as adolescent motherhood would no longer be viewed as deviant and divergent. Teenage mothers embody one of many multiple trajectories for childhood, teenager, and parenthood as well as reject the stabilized age requirements for each state. The cost of these structures should not be surprising in that the current structures do not appear to be supporting teenage mothers and their educational experiences. There is clearly a disconnect between curricula, pedagogy, and assumptions around teenage pregnancy.

It is not until recently that a "curriculum of redemption" has emerged to show that these women can be "good mothers" and should be given the opportunity to voice their narratives of success and not failure (Burdell, 1998). Through this notion, teenage mothers have shown themselves to be "good mothers", "good students", and "good decision makers". In this same way, mothers are taught that their situation does not have to limit them from future successes. Changing the discourse of pregnant and teenage mothers has become a central component to contending the dominant narratives of failure and deficit. This appears to be one way the oppressed can liberate the oppressor through language and praxis.

Freire's (2000) discussion of the oppressed liberating the oppressor begins to shift my attention to the ways in which pregnant and teenage mothers can liberate themselves and these separate schools through humanizing their narratives. In liberating themselves

and oppressors, pregnant and teenage mothers engage in acts of resistance or limit acts in order to overcome limit-situations. Freire (2000) states:

> Thus, it is not the limit-situations in and of themselves which create a climate of hopelessness, but rather how they are perceived by women and men at a given historical moment: whether they appear as fetters or as insurmountable barriers. As critical perception is embodied in action, a climate of hope and confidence develops which leads men to attempt to overcome the limit-situations. This objective can be achieved only found (p. 99).

As humans, and not animals, pregnant and teenage mothers live and not merely exist in the subjective socio-historical world. Through acts of livelihood, pregnant and teenage mothers can take ownership of their narratives, rupturing the dominant discourse through limit acts, producing their own "curriculums of redemption" (Burdell, 1998).

It is necessary to look at how the school institutions can best support these women as their lived experiences are now part of the school narrative. When looking at the current effects of teenage pregnancy in schools it becomes clear that high percentages of dropout among teenage mothers is likely to have detrimental effects on their future economic and educational attainments (Manlove, 1998). Vagle (2012) states:

> I fear that by continuing to rely solely on a linear, uni-directional, and time-bound conception of development and without serious consideration of critical perspectives regarding young adolescence, those interested in the education of young adolescences will fail to achieve their ultimate goal- to create the best schools possible for youth 10-15 years old (p. 14).

As schools uphold the societal standard of linear development, I would argue that we have not created the best schools to serve teenagers, especially teenage mothers.

For both teenage mothers and non-mothers, school relationships and engagement are critical factors in engagement. Similar to their non-parent peers, teenage mothers also respond to high teacher expectations and positive relationships in their school engagement processes. Unfortunately, these effective practices are not always emphasized for teenage mothers' school experiences. It is necessary to re-image authentic, caring relations as part of the constructive space of telling stories and changing discourses. Noddings (2002): "Ordinary conversations, is they are more than mere banter, provide opportunities for telling personal stories. Students get to reveal something of themselves (whether, for example, they have brothers or sisters), and teachers become real persons" (p. 144). This process of reciprocal storytelling has the potential to transform hierarchal role positioning by both affirming the personal story and building awareness of the inequitable social or educational practices. Noddings (2002) asserts, "Teachers in all subject areas can use stories effectively, and it is not necessary that the stories always illustrate opposing positions. Sometimes stories can make students aware of continuing social and political problems and assume them that their teachers share the social conscience of a thoughtful community" (p. 70). I am continually challenged to reimagine concurrent development in relation to childbearing as the impact of teenage motherhood within our current system needs continued and different ways of conceiving this reality.

This study will extend the literature by looking at the ways in which teenage mothers are both disrupting and reinscribing discourses of chronological developmental

stage theories (Lesko, 2002; Lesko, 2012) by attending to the multitude of social factors that influence the cultural construction of adolescence and adolescents (Vagle, 2012). Additionally, this work looks at how schools are sites for the perpetuation of social contracts that implicitly exclude or push out specific student identities, such as race, social class, and teenage motherhood that do not adhere or assimilate to existing normalized practices (Milner, 2015; Noguera, 2003). For example, the quarantining of teenage mothers into all-female alternative schools or limited participation within local schools attempts to de-sexualize female students against discourses of desire (Fine, 1993). In thinking about authentic, caring relationships (Noddings, 2005), this study also complicates the notion of creative, narrative expression as an automatic form of empowerment as opportunities for vulnerable storytelling stir up both damaging stereotypes (Edell, 2013) and self-interpretations of empowerment (Kelly, 1997). By contextualizing the lived experiences of the female teenage mothers and mentors within Real Moms, this study thoughtfully and reflexively attends to the existing discourses of teenage motherhood from this theoretical and empirical literature review.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study employs critical ethnographic methodology as I consider how power and privilege position participants, practices, and the researcher throughout all aspects of the research process. My continual process of reflection and analysis draws from field notes, interviews, and document analysis. These data sources inform my analysis of interpretive themes throughout my time in the field. For example, an initial field note about the departure of Drea, one Real Moms mentor, from the perspective of Latrice, a teenage mother mentee, describes a moment when Drea's storytelling was shared on social media and Drea chose to remove herself from the Real Moms community (Field Note, March 17, 2016). My analytic memo of this event indicates the significance of danger and betrayal around a violation of mentor privacy within Real Moms, a result that contradicts the program's vision to provide lifelong, authentic relationships of belonging. In an analytic memo I write, "This makes me think about consistency and building relationships as part of the role of mentoring. This also reminds me that mentors and all those involved in Real Moms come to this space with their own stories and backgrounds… How are mentees and mentors sharing their lives with each other? Are there boundaries within this space that prevent authentic sharing?" (Analytic Memo, March 17, 2016). I also use reflexive memos as a way to indicate my own participation as the researcher who will write and represent the interpretive themes. My reflective memo of this account highlights ongoing wonderings as "I continue to think about the intentions of mentors and mentees coming to Real Moms. This is work that I think will be teased apart during my individual interviews... I am interested in how Rose perceives the varying degrees of intentionality within this work. As I continue to spend my time here, I

am going to look at the ways in which mentors and mentees are interacting with each other. What language and discourses are being used to describe this space and their relationships? How is Real Moms positioning teenage mothers?" (Reflective Memo, March 17, 2016). This naturalistic design allows me to attend to interpretive themes within the data as well as attend to the impact of researcher positionality. Additionally, the practice of analytic and reflective memos provides me with space to consider how the politics and ethics of working with marginalized populations, such as teenage mothers, is taken up within this research design.

This chapter discusses the critical ethnographic design of this research study. I consider how power and privilege impact teenage motherhood experiences and the constructions of identities within this research design. I introduce both the research setting as well as the ten focal participants. Then I discuss key data sources such as interviews, field notes, reflective memos, analytic memos, and artifacts as these sources support my analysis. Next, I provide examples of a grounded theory, open-coding analysis to identify interpretive themes from the data. Important of critical ethnographic work, I conclude this chapter by considering researcher positionality and the ethics of working with and representing teenage mothers as well as learning from their stories.

Research Design

Naturalistic, qualitative ethnographic research draws from a post-positivist approach to conceiving social realities that utilizes inductive and interpretive processes (Cohen et al., 2011). In this way, qualitative research is more concerned with the process of study than merely objective data (Patton, 2002). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explicate, "Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate

relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (p. 8). From its origins, qualitative research processes can be traced to colonial anthropology and how researchers would come in and "do" research on native populations and then leave the population without reciprocal relations (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). Through this colonial process, the researcher sought to understand or "Other" participants in order to yield knowledge for research gains. As qualitative research evolves from its anthropological origins, it oftentimes includes the ideological strands of feminism, postmodernism, critical race theory, and critical theory in the representation of cultures and subcultures (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). These critical theories disrupt colonial anthropological ways of understanding the research design as they consider how power, privilege, and representation impact the research process (Britzman, 2003; Foley, 2003; Gildersleeve, 2010; Jordan & Yeomans, 1995; Lather 2007; Weis & Fine, 2012).

In this study I draw on critical, ethnographic methods as a means to challenge and disrupt dominant or harmful narratives surrounding teenage motherhood. When working with teenage mothers from marginalized backgrounds, it is imperative that this process of data collection and representation acknowledge the socially constructed nature of adolescence and mothering identities as well as the boundaries or limitations of any research process. I work with participants who continue their lives within a particular context and make strides to learn what is of importance to them within their stories. In this work, my role as the researcher is considered an instrument and thus I acknowledge how my ability to gain entry, my positionality, and potential biases contribute to the constructed relationship between researcher and participant. Jordan & Yeomans (1995)

argue, "Rather than providing expert knowledge, the role of the critical ethnographer should be oriented to facilitating the production and dissemination of really useful knowledge within the research site" (p. 401). This attention to providing participants spaces to share their perceptions allows for representations of their lives in ways they may find ongoing and beneficial to themselves and their communities.

Ethnographic research thus employs a variety of empirical methods such as observations, interviews, and document analysis in order to provide a rich, thick description of participants' experiences within a context (Patton, 2002). This paradigm emphasizes the process of collecting descriptive data in natural settings and using inductive thinking in order to understand participants' points of view (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In any research space, there are ethical and political concerns when conducting research on and with youth, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds (Fine 1994). For the critical ethnographer working with youth from marginalized backgrounds, every aspect of the research process invites a closer analysis to how power, identities, reflexivity, and discourse are engaged as empirical methods in the field and in the researcher's writings (Britzman, 2003; Foley, 2003; Gildersleeve, 2010; Jordan & Yeomans, 1995; Lather 2007).

A critical approach to ethnographic processes and representation acknowledges the tensions that might arise when representing someone else's experience and voice. Britzman (2003) states, "…a critical voice attempts the delicate and discursive work of rearticulating the tensions between and within words and practices, or constraints and possibilities, as it questions the consequences of the meanings fashioned from them" (p. 35). Any representation of an Other has consequences of meaning and repercussion of re-

inventing one's self as well as re-inventing the Other through a telling of someone else's story (Fine, 1994). Similarly, Pillow (2004) considers how ethnographic research acts as a "site of doubt" to explore the grounded ways in which the lived experiences of teenage mothers are positioned. Critical ethnography thus acknowledges the ways in which the research process and a critique of the research process are enfolding on one another as a constant reflexive act that works against "Othering" (Madison, 2005). It is thus necessary to be constantly attentive throughout the research process in attempting to balance the realms of researcher and working with participants. As discussed in the review of critical, empirical work around teenage mothers, this continual effort to conduct research with participants instead of conducting research on them characterizes critical ethnography as an ideological approach to attend to the power and privilege to theorize other people's lives within an academic positionality (Hunter, 2007; SmithBattle, 2007; Zachry, 2005).

Recognizing the ways in which power and privilege are manifested within the research process, I acknowledge the constant negotiations and spaces for dialogue between myself as the researcher in relation with participants. Dialogue with oneself as well as with participants is one way to avoid Othering. Described as an "ethnographic *presence"*, Madison (2005) explains, "This conversation with the Other, brought forth through dialogue, reveals itself as a lively, changing being through time and no longer an artifact captured in the ethnographer's monologue, immobile and forever stagnant" (p. 10). For example, in Hill's (2006) negotiations of representin(g) the field, he continues in dialogue with participants in order to reflexively consider what assumptions the researcher and participants were bringing to shared spaces.

In her critical ethnographic work, Britzman (2003) discusses her research between teachers and students in teacher education programs. By looking at curriculum and pedagogies, Britzman (2003) acknowledges the ways voice and language situate interpretive meanings and the power of the researcher. Britzman (2003) states:

> The reason we might read and do ethnography, then, is to think the unthought in more complex ways, to trouble confidence in being able to observe behavior, apply the correct technique, and correct what is taken as a mistake. Ethnographic narratives should trace how power circulates and surprises, theorize how subjects spring from the discourses that incite them, and question the belief in representation even as one must practice representation as a way to intervene critically in the constitutive constraints of discourses (p. 253).

Critical ethnography is thus grounded in the call to "trouble confidence in being able to observe" and "correct what is taken as a mistake" by acknowledging the partiality of the researcher (Britzman, 2003, p. 253).

Lather (2007) also asserts that new ethnography carries with it the tensions of a "crisis" of representation in her work with women living with HIV/AIDS. Similar to Pillow (2004), Lather (2007) writes against neat categories of labels or data. Lather (2007) states, "… I trouble the ethics of reducing the fear, pain, joy, and urgency of people's lives to analytic categories. Exploring the textual possibilities for telling stories that situate researchers not so much as experts 'saying what things mean' in terms of 'data,' the researcher is situated as witness giving testimony to the lives of others" (p. 41). This "double science", "double gestures", and "double writing" looks at the ways in

which binaries are deconstructed and reflexivity opens up possibilities for analysis and writing (Lather, 2007, p. 19).

As illustrated, critical ethnographers seek to research and write against "Othering", including those marginalized voices such as teenage mothers. This approach challenges a taken-for-granted simplification of a "teenage mother" unit of analysis and makes a call that power and privilege are constantly working on the social construction of this historically marginalized population. Madison (2005) explains, "The critical ethnographer also takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the *status quo*, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control" (p. 5). This research process situates the researcher, participants, and process within our subjective relation to one another within a shared cultural encounter.

Research Questions

Considering my research interests as well as my commitments to looking at how power, privilege, and a sense of relief are engaged within spaces, I have chosen to draw on qualitative, critical ethnographic methods in order to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of teenage mothers within Real Moms, a community-based organization. The research questions that guide this study are: *1) How are teenage mothers taking up identities such as race, gender, motherhood, and social class within a community-based organization designed to support teenage mothers? 2) How do teenage mothers perceive and navigate both their schooling experiences as well as their participation within their children's schooling experiences? and 3) In what ways do community-based organizations work with teenage mothers and their children?*

Research Settings and Participants

The site for this ethnographic research study was a community-based organization, Real (Relationships that are Engaging, Authentic, and Lifelong) Moms, whose mission was to support teenage mothers through local resources and mentoring relationships. This program site was located in a large, Midwestern city. Real Moms was of interest to me as many of the families of my former third grade students referred to a similar branch of this program as a resource for their active involvement in the school community. The majority of mothers with children in my classroom identified as single, former teenage mothers. As a novice teacher, I gradually realized one way to build relationships with families was to spend time together in our local community. Through time spent together, I heard their perspectives on schooling, and I heard their stories. What I realized through this time was that the stories of families, including teenage mothers, were nuanced and unique to each of their own experiences and representations of themselves within the world. Since my time as a classroom teacher and subsequent relocations, I have continued to work with various programs that support teenage mothers in my local community. One thing that I have observed through my travels and transitions was that there were remarkable and distinct differences with the ways in which organizations operated and perceived their role in the lives of teenage mothers. Through this network of organizations, the local programming for this particular site was chosen for the ways in which enactment of the Real Moms mission reflected the theoretical conceptions of this critical research study. To be noted, this was a new site for this study without previously established relationships with participants.

The research participants included one fulltime staff member, volunteer mentors, volunteer childcare workers, teenage mothers, and their children. Focal participants were recruited through a purposeful sampling of teenage mothers attending several of the local city, charter, and alternative high schools who also regularly attend Real Moms meetings (Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Recognizing the span of pregnancy through motherhood, participant criteria included pregnant teenage women as well as teenage women with children. My time in the field was from December 2015 through November 2016. Observational field notes included the Real Moms' twice-monthly meetings, planning meetings, social events as well as a weeklong, out-of-state, summer camp. While more details of the research setting and focal participants will be described throughout this paper, I have provided a brief introduction into these spaces and the lives of those involved in this work.

The Real Moms Meetings. Located in the basement of a local, non-affiliated community church, the twice-monthly meetings were a semi-structured space for socializing among teenage mothers, their children, and mentors. Upon entering the one-story, brick building the sound of children playing, women talking, and popular music were heard coming from the church basement. Walking down the open stairs to the basement, the combination of these noises along with the smell of a freshly prepared meal created a welcoming tone and environment. Real Moms meetings always started with a meal where teenage mothers, their children, and staff ate together and informally caught up on the previous weeks. While mentors and mentees were expected to meet outside of the Real Moms meetings, there wasn't a distinction to stay within those relational assignments during meetings. According to some of the teenage mothers, the

Real Moms space was designed with their intentions in mind, including meal choices.

Anna, a teenage mother, described Real Moms as a "teen mom organization where um

where teen moms can have a a chance to have like a mentor that their baby can [come]

along with you know" and "you're surrounded by other teen moms that maybe some of

them having those little parent issues or you got some people that going college you

know just some people that got something in common with you" (Interview, September

13, 2016). Typically, after dinner everyone cleaned up and children were brought to their

age-assigned childcare rooms. Teenage mothers and mentors walked through the

basement hallway to a large, multi-purpose room for additional socializing.

The multi-purpose room was spacious with limited decoration or clutter. Several

couches, office chairs, six-foot stackable tables, and metal chairs were arranged

throughout the room. It was easily observed that the couches were the hot commodity as

women entered, ran towards, and flopped down on the well-worn furniture. Each meeting

Real Moms staff and mentors took turns giving a brief sharing around topics such as love,

relationships, conflict resolution, and body image. Throughout my time, I observed the

varying locations of the furniture and bodies in this space. While initially more spread

out, the couches, chairs, and bodies were gradually drawn closer to each other,

particularly close in proximity to whoever was sharing her story at the moment. The

furniture shifted slightly as women shared their own responses and stories. Talks were

centered on a personal story and oftentimes, but not always included a religious

component about how this topic affected the speaker. Team building and ice breaker

games were played each meeting. A craft or creative activity was usually on the agenda

in an effort to provide activities that met the needs and interests of the regularly attending

teenage mothers. While this church basement location was the central location for Real

Moms meetings, Rose, the program leader, also invited teenage mothers and mentors

over to her nearby house as an alternative (and oftentimes welcomed) change of location.

Proximity to the residences of the teenage mothers and to their local communities was of

importance to Real Moms and was the primary reason why this community church site

was chosen.

      The Summer Camp. Perfectly manicured lawns, lake access, and pristine

buildings presented an idealized space that characterized the mission of this summer

camp experience. Part of this summer camp experience was to provide opportunities for

teenage mothers to experience "typical" teenage life in communion with the experiences

and responsibilities of motherhood. Identical cabins lined the lakefront, each with bunk

beds, living areas, and communal bathrooms. This was also a meeting space for other

groups that work with teenage mothers and their children. It was important to note that

each group were fairly distinct and did not have much interaction. Camp activities

included sharing time, swimming, mother-child activities, crafts, themed evening events

etc.

      Real Moms brought seven mentors to attend camp as well as twelve teenage

mothers with their children. Bubbles, a teenage mother, described the camp experience as

"It's just super fun and you know it's nice but then check out new experiences and do

different things in your life and check out other people's lives" (Interview, September 28,

2016). Bubbles also shared, "That we all got to be together and go through the whole

process together. I don't know. I love everything about camp like I did not want to leave

at all. I was the one person that did not want to go like I don't know I just want to stay

there forever versus come back home and deal with all the stress of everything. You don't have to stress about nothing there. You get to go go do stuff that's zipline, go do everything …Like you didn't have to worry about everything else that's going on the outside of the world. It was just that so that's what I loved about camp so" (Interview, September 28, 2016). Several of the mentors and teenage mothers commented to the juxtaposition of this pristine physical environment in relation to the more authentic, comforting feel of their local community Real Moms space. For Bubbles and others, this summer camp space offered excitement and temporary relief from the responsibilities of life. For Anna and others, this summer camp space felt so removed from daily life and led to feelings of homesickness for familiarity and family.

The Staff and Mentors. Rose is the fulltime staff leader for this local programming of Real Moms. There are twelve regular mentors that volunteer in the program. Two mentors identify as African American, one mentor identifies as an adopted Latina woman, and nine mentors identify as White. According to Rose, mentors are recruited on a volunteer basis through word of mouth. Of these mentors, three identify as a former teenage mothers. There is a range of mentors that live in or near the surrounding community of Real Moms as well as an age range between mid-twenties and forties. Mentor careers include teachers, nurses, non-profit workers, and retail workers.

I have identified Rose and two mentors, Tia and Lexie, as focal participants in this research study. Rose is identified because of her leadership role in the program. Tia and Lexie are identified because of the multiple references to their influence and support as mentors within the program from the teenage mothers. While other mentors are also

identified, these two are discussed more frequently for the particular ways in which they share their lives and stories with the teenage mothers.

Rose. Rose identifies as a white, heterosexual woman and the mother of two elementary-aged children. She shares, "My husband and I have lived [in the neighborhood] for thirteen years and know and see a lot of the kids that he works with because he's a teacher four blocks away from where we live and um it had just always been something that I felt like for probably the last ten years that I would in some capacity work with teen moms …and I live in the community where most of the girls would be coming from" (Interview, October 27, 2016). Her commitments to social and racial justice are transparent and explicit in both her personal and professional life decisions. She shares, "I think it just gives you more credibility and they know that you're like, you're in it in a different way in that you can identify to other experiences that you're having by living in the community that they live in and you run into them at the grocery store or you know they stop by your house on the way home from school and just different accessibility things that are not barriers to living somewhere else" (Interview, October 27, 2016). Rose frequently sends emails to Real Moms mentors with information about various racial and social justice events occurring in the community. On several occasions she states her desire to recruit mentors and staff members that demographically reflect the teenage mothers in the program as well as recruit members of the local community to participate in this program. Standing at approximately five feet, her shorter stature is an ongoing joke between her and several of the teenage mothers. During a game of charades, her name is one of the secret words to be performed. Kaleigh simply squats down, her hand raised to her forehead to indicate height, and several people immediately

guess, "Rose!". Rose responds with a whole body laugh and gives Kaleigh a high five for her acting. Standing well-over six feet, Rose's husband (and the high school teacher to many of the teenage mothers present) also laughs as he oftentimes stops in to say a brief greeting to the group of familiar women, students, and friends who- on occasion- take over their living room for Real Moms meetings.

Tia. Always with an inviting smile on her face and a warm demeanor, Tia is quick to reach out to more reserved teenage mothers, remembering snippets of previous conversations and asking questions about new events in their lives. Newer participants to Real Moms tend to gravitate towards her. It's also typical to see a more reserved toddler slowly inch her way into Tia's lap as her warmth is interpreted within a sense of comfort and security. Identifying as a heterosexual, White woman, Tia openly shares about her racial identity in relation to her husband who identifies as Black, and their blended family of children who identify as Black and biracial. Committed to open, honest relationships, Tia brings her understandings of family into many informal conversations. She shares, "I was a teen mom so I don't really know what it's like to not be a teen mom so a lot of times I can even ask questions to some of the girls like I'm struggling with this and they can give me some answers as to why this is happening" (Interview, November 7, 2016). As a lifelong resident of the local community, Tia learned about Real Moms because her friend used to be the leader of the program. Tia has been involved in this program for two years. In speaking about her role within Real Moms, Tia shares, "I'm a mentor of a teen mom and it's just like a friendship. I'm there to support her, befriend her. It's kind of like that aunt relationship where I'm not a mom. It's more of a friend but we're not going out

partying together. It has boundaries. Um and over time it just it just grows into something that it's kind of unexplainable" (Interview, November 7, 2016).

      Lexie. Brightly-dyed red hair, a single hooped nose ring, and tattoos on her shoulder, Lexie is energetic and immediately jumps into the action or activity at hand. Without hesitation, she asks for updates about current life events and jokingly yet firmly holds teenage mothers accountable for follow through on their most recent goals. While open to sharing her own past experience as a twenty-year old, White, heterosexual, single mother and college student, Lexie is vocal about when and how she chooses to become vulnerable. Oftentimes, she shares during informal spaces versus more structured times when mentors volunteer to share their stories. Lexie states, "We [teenage mothers and her] don't have to talk about deep things or anything like that but I love being able to connect with the girls on a personal level like sharing my story with them and not all of them are gonna share their stories cause they're not there yet. Which I don't expect them to but if being able to share my story for them to connect to it in some type of way is something that I wish we could more of but it's also something I'm not even 100% ready to do… so I can't expect that of them if I'm not even willing to do it yet" (Interview, November 7, 2016). In describing the mentoring program, Lexie shares, "You get to have a one on one relationship with but um also being able to support all the other girls and just showing up and the consistency of it because that was something that was hard for me at first to understand about the program is I was just coming and didn't really understand what the whole meaning of it was until even after getting matched with my mentee. The community that you create with all these girls as young teen moms so that's more so how I explain it" (Interview, November 7, 2016). Lexie found out about this

program because she had a friend who was involved in a similar high school program. Her friend thought that Real Moms would be a good fit because Lexie identifies as a former young, single mother. Lexie states, "I always knew there was a plan, but now I'm thinking that this [her teenage pregnancy] and this program might be my purpose" (Interview, November 7, 2016). Lexie has been involved in the program for one year.

The Teenage Mothers. The primary focus of the research study centers around the experiences of teenage mothers within Real Moms. Both the intention of myself as the researcher as well as the Real Moms staff and mentors is that the perspectives and opinions of the teenage mothers drive the events and activities during meetings. As will be discussed in more detail, much of the recruiting of participants to this organization came from word of mouth among the teenage mothers currently participating in the program. Each of these women came to this Real Moms space for a variety of reasons and each of them have shared the unique ways in which this space became part of their identity story. Table 1 provides some demographic (age, race) information on each teenage mother and child. An (*) denotes focal participants.

Table 1: Participants and Selective Demographic Data[1]

Name	Racial and Age Demographics	Child Name	Child Age Demographics
Jasmine	African American; 18 years old	Khadijah	3 ½ years old
Latrice*	African American; 17 years old	Elyja	9 months old
Trina*	African American; 20 years old	Jayden	2 3/4 years old
Sienna	African American; 18 years old	April	3 years old
Anna*	African American; 17 years old	Aubrey	1 year old

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[1] Focal participants chose their own pseudonym as well as the pseudonym for their child.

Bubbles*	African American; 19 years old	Emilio	2 ¾ years old
Lola	African American; 18 years old	Mason	1 ½ years old
Kaleigh	African American: 17 years old	Joey	2 ¼ years old
Alyssa*	African American; 18 years old	Chanelle	2 ½ years old
Monica*	Latina; 18 years old	Madeline	2 years old
Meshelle*	African American and Caucasian; 19 years old	Symone	3 ½ years old
Erin	Caucasian; 17 years old	Dora	1 year old
Jamie	African American; 16 years old	Celeste	10 months old

I identified seven teenage mothers who regularly attended the Real Moms meetings and weeklong summer camp as focal participants. Drawing on their own words, I included partial representations of their multiple identities within this section. Additional layers of their personalities and experiences are drawn on and represented throughout the following chapters.

Alyssa and Chanelle. Graceful and with a gentle laugh, many of the teenage mothers and staff are drawn to Alyssa's calm personality and way of being. At eighteen years old, Alyssa identifies as an African American, heterosexual woman. She describes herself, "I'm more outgoing. I'm not so shy" (Interview, September 13, 2016). During the time of this study, Alyssa is six months pregnant and expecting to give birth to a second daughter. Medical complications have made this pregnancy more difficult and she has been cautious of the physical demands on her body as she approaches her final trimester. Alyssa describes, "It's not good. It's not easy. I'm always sick. Um she was trying to come out the other day so it was hard because they [doctors] were telling me she's not

gonna make it" (Interview, September 13, 2016). With one protective hand on her stomach and another often reaching out for her daughter, Chanelle, Alyssa tends to be alert of her current surroundings and of her growing size. Alyssa lives with the father of her children, Prince, and his family. Prince's family includes his mother, his sister, Anna, and her daughter Aubrey (who are also participants in this study). Alyssa and Prince have been high school sweethearts and continue their relationship. Alyssa learned about this organization from the area director who was also her 9th grade volleyball coach. In describing her schooling experience, Alyssa shares that her mother was also a teen mom who made sure that Alyssa was able to experience as many traditional high school events as possible. Alyssa states, "I really didn't miss out on anything. I still went to prom. I still went to school dances" (Interview, September 13, 2016). Alyssa did eventually transfer out of this high school when she was pregnant, attending two different alternative high schools. After leaving both of those schools, she recently graduated from the local community college GED program. Alyssa has been part of this organization and went to summer camp for the past two years. At two years old, Chanelle steals the spotlight in the same way her mother's charisma attracts others. With her own physically affectionate personality, Chanelle loves to dance, play dress-up, and pose for pictures. When Aubrey is in the area, Chanelle is also quite watchful of Aubrey and will stay within range of her younger cousin.

Anna and Aubrey. Animated and playful, Anna finds pleasure in making people laugh. She is a storyteller and a planner, organized in both her delivery of narratives as well as her practical parental responsibilities. It is common to hear Anna greeted when she enters a room or to hear people looking for her in her absence. Anna identifies as an

African American, heterosexual woman. She lives with her daughter, her parents, Prince, Alyssa, and Chanelle within walking distance of her former city high school. Anna is seventeen years old and a senior at the local alternative high school for teenage mothers. While she could've stayed at one of the local public high schools with a teenage mothering program, she describes this new school as a more lenient environment that understands the physical changes and needs of pregnant women. When thinking about school options for her daughter, Aubrey, Anna shares, "I hope she loves school how much I used to love school cause I used to really like school and I loved the fact that we got homework. Yeah, I was the odd kid" (Interview, September 13, 2016). Much more reserved than Chanelle, it's always a treat when Aubrey smiles, for her eyes communicate ongoing assessment before a smile or giggle will emerge on her face. Both Anna and Aubrey have a particular quality of noticing and reading social situations. Anna learned and started attending Real Moms meetings one year ago. She was asking a friend to hang out one night and the friend shared with her that she couldn't hang out because she was attending the organization meeting. Anna was pregnant at the time and soon after decided to check out the organization.

Meshelle and Symone. Meshelle is known as a leader by her former non-parenting peers, many of the teenage mothers, and the Real Moms staff. Her openness to share her stories as an athlete, student, and teenage mother is reflected in how she advocates in her high school and college coursework for teenage mothers and their experiences. Currently in her second year of college, Meshelle is working on prerequisite coursework in order to apply to nursing school. She shares, "I really just like accepted that I'm a teen mom and I can't do anything about it and that like even though my dreams

are shifted a little I can still do what I wanna do like I've always wanted to be a nurse so I knew that I was gonna be a nurse or I will be a nurse. It's just gonna be a little different obstacle then what I was in before" (Interview, September 21, 2016). In her own writings Meshelle also shares, "I identify culturally as African American and Caucasian. I am mixed with both therefore I believe it is important to be equal to each side" (personal communication, September 21, 2016) and "I juggle with the identity of a mother, a bi-racial female, a daughter, a friend and many other identities. Struggling with trying to figure out who I am and still trying to make myself happy as well as the others around me is very difficult" (personal communication, September 21, 2016). At nineteen years old, Meshelle and her daughter, Symone, live in a residential home for women and children. This residential program offers a holistic approach to supporting mothers and their children through affordable housing, career and educational services, early childhood education, and life skills training. With access to childcare in the building and her own apartment, Meshelle is grateful for the available resources that allow for her and Symone to live independently. At three and a half years old, Symone is articulate and enjoys sharing about her day or asking questions about the present activities. The relationship between Meshelle and her daughter reflects a norm of openness and affection. Meshelle learned about Real Moms during her junior year of high school when her best friend brought her to a similar high school group. She's gone to summer camp two summers in a row.

Bubbles and Emilio. Bubbles expresses herself through her fashion style. She regularly shifts between different hair weaves, new piercings, long acrylic fingernails, and her own trendy style of dress. Her bubbly personality and artistic style of dress are

often captured through her documented selfies on social media. Bubbles shares, "Okay, I'm a Snapchat person so even if we can't talk people like least you know I can share what's happening something that's a big part of my life here you know something's that changed that I really enjoy being able to share that with the outside community" (Interview, September 28, 2016). Bubbles identifies as an African American, bisexual woman. At nineteen years old, Bubbles and her son, Emilio, live independently in an apartment complex. Prior to her pregnancy, Bubbles was enrolled and transferred to several high schools due to mental health. Bubbles shares, "Before him [Emilio] I was like really wild outside. I was partying and everything then after him kinda just changed my perspective of everything. I started taking like life more seriously in general so focusing on trying to go to school and that's when I like you know ended up finishing my GED" and "I work every day now so I barely even get enough time with Emilio so he's barely with his mom" (Interview, September 28, 2016). Nearing three years old, Emilio is highly energetic and loves being the center of attention. Even when engaged in an activity, his eyes and ears are alert, prepared to shift to a new activity that may grab more attention from others. For example, he'll grab a ball, grab a book, and grab a hand to nonverbally indicate that he wants to throw the ball while sitting and reading a book. Bubbles commented, "His speech is not good…so like we're reading more and trying like show him either his letters and his numbers and stuff like that…he probably just needs more time plus him being born two months early you know can have an impact on it" (Interview, September 28, 2016). Bubbles became involved with this Real Moms because her self-identified best friend, Alyssa, asked her to go to summer camp. Bubbles has been involved with the organization for a few months.

Trina and Jayden. While noticeably more soft-spoken than some of the other teenage mothers, Trina describes, "I'm a very talkative person so like you can talk to me about anything and I will listen" (Interview, September 12, 2016). Trina moved from out-of-state in order to live closer to her father, now deceased, and his side of the family. Trina currently lives with her mother and two-year old son, Jayden. When Trina relocated she had a few more credits to take at the local alternative high school. In describing her life as a teenage mother she shares, "It's really been great actually cause ever since my dad had passed away I've been a trouble child and stuff…but like after I got pregnant I told myself I will be a better person for him and for me" (Interview, September 12, 2016). Trina identifies as a heterosexual, African American woman. She also describes, "I'm not a teen mom anymore" and "I feel like maybe my time is done because I am turning twenty-one in February so I'm not a teen mom anymore" (Interview, September 12, 2016). When sharing about Jayden, she shares, "He loves to read books…Jayden is a very smart baby… and I'm trying how to teach him how to potty train. I'm trying to potty train but it's very hard" (Interview, September 12, 2016). Jayden is tentative and sweet. With visitors or strangers, Jayden is excited to show his toys and books, hoping for a few minutes of play. Trina is currently seeking day care for her son before she pursues finding work and enrolling in college courses for next semester. Trina became involved with Real Moms two years ago because one of the previous leaders came to the alternative high school and invited students to the program.

Latrice and Elyja. Latrice seeks out active, competitive activities such as basketball and volleyball. At seventeen years old, Latrice identifies as an African American, heterosexual woman. She currently lives with her parents, brother, sister, and

two nephews. During her high school experience, Latrice enrolled in several schools, and she is currently attending a technical, internship charter school. She describes this new setting as "It's really good. It's really good. They give us a iPhone. Um a bus card. They give us free drivers ed. They have basketball, cheerleading. They have I think they have football. Um, they have a lot of activities we can do. They have day care if you need daycare assistance and stuff like that. Um they have a food shelf. They have um little closet pantries for clothes and stuff like that and they help you with whatever you need. They have people who can help you with housing and stuff like that. I just like that" (Interview, September 29, 2016). Resources and access to resources are a frequent topic of conversation as she vies for resources with her older sister, another single mother. Latrice learned about this organization from Anna and has been involved for one year. In describing her experience being a teenage mother, Latrice shares, "When my baby came I felt happy because I knew he was like the only the only thing that'll keep me up and that'll like show me the right way so I was extremely happy when my baby came" and "Nothing mattered to me but him. I just felt like he was my main priority that I needed to take care of and love and stuff and show him love and affection and stuff like that" (Interview, September 29, 2016). Elyja is a talkative baby, verbalizing inarticulate noises on car rides and when playing with other children. During the time of the study, Elyja learned how to walk and celebrated his first birthday.

Monica and Madeline. Monica's enthusiastic energy is contagious as she embraces new activities or challenges with confidence and optimism. Monica is often found inviting others to try these new adventures with her in both the Real Moms meeting and summer camp contexts. When reflecting on her time at summer camp, she

shares, "The most um scary thingy that I was doing was the swing. I was like no I'm not gonna do it but I do it two times or three time" (Interview, October 25, 2016). The giant swing was a three-person ride which suspended you six stories in the air before a rider releases the cord and the pendulum swing goes rushing back and forth over the camp lake. Monica identifies as a heterosexual, Latina woman who is quick to share with her peers and staff that she is currently undocumented. Monica juggles her time between motherhood responsibilities, working in a factory, and going to school. She describes herself, "Well I'm crazy. Um I like to be happy. I like to race. Um I like see all the people happy. I like to help. Uh I like school. I like to be by myself" (Interview, October 25, 2016). Monica is currently enrolled and attending the local alternative high school within walking distance of her apartment. She shares this apartment with her daughter, Madeline, and her mother. At two years old, Madeline attends the alternative high school daycare when her mother is at school. Madeline mirrors her mother's characteristic gusto. With her dark brown ringlets bouncing to and fro, Madeline runs everywhere she goes, oftentimes with a giggle that appears to move in tandem with her active curls. Monica has been living in the country for the past eight years and has recently applied for citizenship. She learned about Real Moms from a previous leader who came and spoke at her high school. Monica has since been involved for almost three years. She shares, "it's kind of like a little family to you well for me" (Interview, October 25, 2016).

The brief glances into the lives of these teenage mothers tell partial stories of their lived experience. In reality, their stories are much more nuanced as their multiple identities interact and collide among contexts and individuals. This process of

representing the participants within the study draws on field notes, field logs, individual and partner interviews.

Data Sources and Analysis

Attending to the ethical and political concerns of working with teenage mothers impact the ways in which I move through the research process of data collection and analysis. It is thus necessary to address the influence of theory guiding the research process, as each aspect of the process "seems to necessitate a much clearer connection between the theoretical framework one brings to a research project and the methods of investigation" (Cooley, 2013, pp. 256-257). An awareness and willingness to recognize the political nature of research with participants and legitimizations becomes part of the process (Foley, 2002; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). Pillow (2004) also recounts:

> One of the main challenges I have faced as a researcher of teen pregnancy is how to discuss and represent an already overrepresented, hypervisible subject like the teen mother? Paradoxically it is the hypervisibility of the teen mother in social welfare debates and diagnoses of sexual immorality in the United States that reproduces stereotypical knowledge about teen mothers and masks potential other knowings (p. 5).

I am aware of how this challenge of the research process with this particularized overrepresented population requires ongoing reflexivity throughout data collection and analysis.

My role as researcher included being a participant observer within the field. Data sources for this study included field notes from fourteen Real Moms meetings, daily field notes from the weeklong summer camp, and field notes from eight Real Moms staff

planning meetings (total of twenty-eight field notes and twenty-eight field logs). While in the field, I took jottings of episodes within my field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Emerson et al. (2011) discuss, "…field notes tend to be episodic, a string of action chunks put down on the page one after another, a sequence of often loosely interconnected episodes *that reveal interactions unfolding and whose meanings might emerge through the telling"* (p. 113). Ongoing reflective and analytic memos assisted in the process of recursive identification of major and minor codes. In this way, field logs that included analytic and reflective memos were used to identify episodes within the field for ongoing inductive analysis as well ongoing reflexive accounts of my own participation within the field (Emerson et al., 2011). Participants also shared their experiences through personal communication artifacts such as high school and college essays. Screenshots of the program Facebook page as well as handouts from mentor trainings and the summer camp experience were also collected for document analysis.

As mentioned above, I identified seven focal teenage mother participants, the Real Moms staff leader, and two mentors who participated in individual or paired interviews around their experiences in the program. These interviews were conducted outside of Real Moms meeting or planning times and, instead, occurred at the participants' residences, parks, or Real Moms site. There were an additional nine meeting times for interviews. I used in-depth, loosely structured individual interviews in order to collect additional data around these women's experiences. The use of in-depth, loosely structured interviews allowed me, as the researcher, to use inductive thinking as I collected data from the participants' points of view (Patton, 2002). Member checks were also used throughout the interview process as I provided opportunities to understand

participant responses and intentions. The process of individual interviewing provided space for the participants to be more candid and to reflect on previous (and current) experiences of their pregnancy and motherhood (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Bryman & Burgess, 1994). Additionally, I used video and audio devices throughout my ethnographic fieldwork to capture dialogue and conversations for analysis.

In both the process of the interview activity as well as analyzing interview data, I considered the local context of the interview process as "interviews as inherently social encounters, dependent on the *local interactional contingencies* in which the speakers draw from, and co-construct, broader social norms" to acknowledge the need for sensitivity in order to avoid silencing or decontextualizing the features of talk (Rapley, 2001, p. 303). Rapley (2001) argues that the art(fulness) of open-ended interviewing must highlight that language is performative, talk is produced by both the interviewee and the interviewer, and the interview process is not neutral. Triangulation of field notes, informal interviews, and reflective memos continued to support my understanding of the topics and features within the interviews of focal participants. As a social practice, Talmy (2011) also argues for attention to the process-oriented "what" and "how" analytic focus of interview data. In this way, the interview shifted from isolated data points "by problematizing the assumptions that constitute it, treating interviews not as sites for the excavation of information held by respondents, but as participation in social practices (p. 28). Thus, I recognized that some themes from my data analysis were co-constructed with me as the interviewer as well as from the stories shared by the interviewees.

My process of data analysis was guided by the interconnectivity of the research questions and the purpose of the study (Patton, 2002). For this study, data analysis

included an inductive approach at identifying themes within the field notes and interview transcriptions (Patton, 2002). Themes were identified in relation to previous theoretical understandings as well as more grounded categories from the data (Patton, 2002). By identifying data that both converges and diverges from potential major and minor codes, this approach remained open to interpreting significant findings. Additionally, triangulation of field notes, document analysis, and interview transcripts were used (Patton, 2002). Data was stored in a secured electronic storage program for coding and analysis. Mishler (1986) discusses the limitations of research interview coding, particularly in interpretation of data collected from populations where the researcher may have a more etic perspective. As mentioned before, the use of member checks throughout the interviews supported the credibility of the data as I clarified participants' intentions.

Through an inductive methods process, I drew on Strauss and Corbin's (1998) methods of open-coding where phenomena were characterized and interpreted through categories and subcategories identified within the data. I also found similar affinity to what Johnson (2010) describes as her data analysis process of open-coding, "what coding enabled me to do was to follow a systematic procedure in order both to manage my messy, chaotic data and to read it carefully and consistently" (p. 2040). Once categories and subcategories (major and minor codes) were identified, I used axial coding to sort through the relationships for depth of conceptual understandings. Strauss & Corbin (1998) refer to axial coding as "the process of reassembling data that were fractured during open coding" (p. 124). This process was helpful in theorizing data themes that came from both my interview questions as well as my research questions. This process of reflexivity and acknowledging problematic notions of situating data within "emerging" or

interpretive themes was important from the researcher's position because central to critical ethnography was that it "begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain" (Madison, 2005, p. 5). The tables below display a snapshot of the codebook as well as provide examples of major and minor codes along with key data sources.

Table 2: Codebook Key

Name	Interviews	Field Notes (FN)	Writings
Latrice	L	L	
Trina	T	T	
Meshelle	M	M	M
Anna	A	A	
Alyssa	AA	AA	
Monica	MM	MM	
Bubbles	B	B	
Rose	R	R	
Lexie	LL	LL	
Tia	TT	TT	

Table 3: Major and/or Minor Codes and Key Data Sources

Major/Minor Codes	Key Sources	Examples
Major Code ▪ Process of Storytelling Minor Codes ▪ Representation ▪ Who tells Story ▪ Privilege	Field Notes Interviews	▪ "my story is my story. If I have to stick with my story, I'll keep my story" (L1) ▪ "we all have a story of course"; informal storytelling spaces (A1) ▪ finding out you were pregnant; going to tell someone (a peer not your family first; nervous; scared (A1) (AA1) (T1) ▪ impact of social media and storytelling; hurt; leaving the program (FN1) ▪ deciding when to share stories; not ready (LL1)
Major Code ▪ Relationships	Field Notes Interviews	▪ Active involvement in teenage mothers lives that go beyond Real

Minor Codes	Artifacts	Moms spaces- Intervene when fights might break out among teenage mothers; always there for you and you are there for her; reciprocal relationships; long term commitment to one another; communication; authentic relationships; "just connected"; consistent presence; sense of community; balance of when and how to intervene (L1) (MM1) (A1) (T3) (R2) (LL3) (TT1) (B2) (FN1)
▪ Teenage Mothers ▪ Mentor-Mentee ▪ Community ▪ Family		▪ Potential adoptive parents, coaches (M2) ▪ Existing relationships with family are impacted; family trying to understand sexual and teen mothering identities (L1) (T1) (B1) (M1) (LL1) ▪ Abusive (sexually, verbally) male figures (M1) (MM1) (FN1)

Based on these major and minor codes, I then sorted through the relationships among codes in my interpretations of conceptual understandings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I have placed in italics the interpretive data theme that will be more defined in Table 5.

Table 4: Axial Coding for Conceptual Understanding

Axial Coding for Conceptual Understanding	"Reassembling Data" Example (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)	Interpretive Data Themes
Reflections of Our Constructed Identities	"Teen moms, we all have a story, of course."	*Constructed "Out of Time": Disrupting Developmental Discourses* Entanglements of Constructed Identities such as Race, Class, Gender & Sexuality Embodiment and a Mirroring of Identities

Negotiating School, Agency within the Oppression	"Yes, everything shifted…"	*"Pushed Out": Choice-Making and the Role of High School* "Fitting In": Choice-Making and the Role of High School "Benched": Being an Athlete and Mother Schooling for Me and My Child
Mentoring Real Moms Relationships	"Like, this isn't the end…"	Mentor Vulnerability as Both a Sense of Betrayal and Belonging *Authentic Relationships, Authentic Lives* Making Real Moms Real

Using both my theoretical framework as well as the empirical data, I defined these identified themes within the context of this research study. Examples for each theme were included as well as the number of times the theme was identified within key data sources. The table below provides an example of the thematic organization of key data sources. More in-depth analysis is found within each data chapter.

Table 5: Interpretive Data Themes from Key Data Sources

Theme	Definition of the Theme	Example(s)	Number of times theme interpreted
Constructed "Out of Time": Disrupting Developmental Discourses	Ascribing to and/or disrupting normative perspectives of physical, social, and emotional developmental stages.	"They [schools] want you to still do everything on time. As a person who never had to go through nothing. They just wake up every morning by theirselves and go to	Interviews: 39 Field Notes: 34 Artifacts: 4

		school come back and do whatever they want. Not wake up, get yourself dressed, get your baby dressed, go to school, come back, make sure she's fed." (Anna Interview)	
"Pushed Out": Choice-Making and the Role of High School		"She [Alyssa's mom] didn't really want me to miss anything. Cause she missed a lot herself cause she's a teen mom too so she was really big on making me do a lot of stuff" (Alyssa Interview)	Interviews: 39 Field Notes: 22
Authentic Relationships, Authentic Lives		"…it's not just about are you raising your kid the right way or do you have the education you need as a parent or it's sort of like this holistic just coming around you connection that's consistent" (Rose Interview)	Interviews: 63 Field Notes: 34

Recursive data analysis throughout fieldwork attended to the ways in which I was continuously interpreting and analyzing experiences during data collection. Patton (2002) emphasizes how the role of the researcher impacts the quality of the qualitative study (p. 5). As this research study intended to shed light on the experiences of teenage mothers for policies, practices and research, I was committed to be vigilant in reflection and my own reflexivity throughout data collection and analysis. Vincent and Warren (2001) state, "All attempts at reflexivity should be recognized as highly partial" (p. 41). As the researcher, I identified my findings (grounded theory) over time as well as acknowledged my positionality in analyzing reoccurring themes and in representing within my writing.

Hill (2006) discusses the tensions between writing and representation of ethnographic data when the researcher is an active participant in the field. An awareness of intentions, power, context, and partiality of representation were recursive throughout my time in the field as each of these areas called out ethical and political issues of ethnographic research. The triangulation of interviews, field notes, and artifacts was one form of member checking that I used as I considered the representation of data. Active member checking went beyond participants sharing their narratives as counter narratives. Fine (1994) asserts, "Here, at the Self-Other border, it is not that researchers are absented and Others fronted. Instead, the class politics of translation demands that a researcher is doused quite evidently in status and privilege as the Other sits domesticated" (p. 80). This required asking questions and being aware of how my role as a researcher impacted the questions I was not explicitly asking within interviews and time in the field (Nygreen, 2006).

When considering representation within ethnographic research, the writing product becomes one telling of the lapsed time and relational aspects of being in the field with participants. While collecting data and writing for particular audiences is a component of most research processes, there is strangeness in this familiarity. Madison (2005) states, "Nothing is stranger than this business of humans observing other humans in order to write about them" (p. 5). The issue of whose perspective is being represented is crucial as part of the research process.

This qualitative work is about telling stories- stories about ourselves and stories representing others. Britzman (2003) asserts, "…researchers have the power to reinterpret and hence authorize the experiences and voices of others in ways that may clash or not

resonate different kinds of representation, made possible by theoretical investments of the researcher" (p. 38). This brings together the importance of the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of any research process. Foley (2002) states, "No matter how epistemologically reflexive and systematic our fieldwork is, we must still speak as mere mortals from various historical, culture-bound standpoints; we must still make limited, historically situated knowledge claims. By claiming to be less rather than more, perhaps we can tell stories that ordinary people will actually find more believable and useful" (p. 487). This notion of movement within writing considers why are we writing and for whom do academic writings benefit.

Representation within critical ethnographic research then becomes writing about others without Othering them. Britzman (2003) states, "Re-presenting the voices of others means more than recording their words" (p. 35). It is necessary to express the ways in which ethnographic writing is a selective, partial representation of the experience, oftentimes written from the researcher's experience and standpoint. Ethnographic writing leaves space for addressing the ways in which researcher identities, power, and other contextual factors influence the representation of participants. Angrosino and Rosenberg (2011) state:

> The overall goal of this process is to empower the community to take charge of its own destiny- to use research for its own ends and to assert its own position relative to the power elite. A researcher may well retain a personal agenda (e.g. collecting data to complete a dissertation), but his or her main aim should be to work with the community to achieve shared goals that move it toward a more just situation (p. 474).

In this way the intentions and goals of the participants are at the forefront rather than the aims of the academic researcher.

Research Approach: Political & Ethical Considerations

At the convergence of qualitative, ethnographic research methodology and teenage mother experiences are the political and ethical considerations of this work. As part of the research process, my role as the researcher is considered an active instrument within the research setting. This means my ability to gain entry, my positionality, and any potential biases contribute to the constructed relationship between myself and the youth participants. I discuss the ways in which the "teenage mother" as a single unit of analysis has positioned youth mothers into a streamlined and static way of being. It is not so much the "best" education of teenage mothers as it is a particular attention to the ways in which research, policies, and practices are funneling or narrowing educational opportunities for these women. I assert that when working with youth from marginalized backgrounds, a process of data collection and representation must attend to the socially constructed nature of youth identities as well as the boundaries and limitations of any research process.

While it is necessary to consider the ways in which ethnographic research with youth from marginalized backgrounds is problematic, research on or with teenage mothers include its own particular problematic issues. In her ethnographic research working with teenage mothers, Pillow (2004) asserts that policies and practices do not yet attend to the focus on the "best" education for the teenage mother in relation to the Title IX policies. While school institutions can no longer discriminate based on pregnancy, the implications of youth motherhood continue to carry a negative connotation or

"stigmatized" social consequence. While it is important to consider these policies of the "best" education for the teenage mother, it is also necessary to trouble the ethical implications of "teenage mother" as a universalized identity or unit of analysis.

Since much of the discourse around teenage mothers has been wrapped around social and educational policies, it is necessary to consider how political and ethical issues regarding teenage mothers has evolved over time. The isolated identity marker of the "teenage mother" has been engaged in different social and political ways within the United States (Pillow, 2004). Educational research also attends to the theoretical (Lesko, 2012; Pillow, 2004) and empirical (Luttrell, 2003) ways in which the teenage mother has been positioned within micro and macro systems.

One ethical concern of conducting ethnographic research is essentializing the experience of the teenage mother as a universal teenage mother experience. This strips away the influence of other social identities such as race, class, and sexuality in relation to historical and social policies and practices. In order to move away from a "teenage mother" unit of analysis, this ethnographic research process and representation must trouble the broader systemic policies and practices that position young girls prior to motherhood.

In her theoretical discussion, Pillow (2004) moves away from "teenage mother" as a unit of analysis towards a tracing of the political, historical, and social construction of teen mothers based on class, race, and other identities markers of difference. Instead of nested categories, ideological narratives such as "good girl" and "bad girl" generalize the experiences of the teenage mothers by stripping away the ways in which other identity markers (race, social class, etc.) influence an individual's experiences within a social

world (Kelly, 2000). Pillow (2004) states, "However, many frontline decisions are not based upon research or experience, but rather on epidemic logic, fear, and heightened morality discourses, all of which focus on control, regulation, and surveillance of the pregnant/mothering teen" (p. 83). In this way, teenage pregnancy has been labeled as a disease, disability, or a "special need" instead of thinking about the individual woman (Kelly, 2000; Pillow, 2004).

In contrast to Kelly's (2000) notion that a teenage mother's success or failure focuses on one's social class or race, Shultz (2001) discusses how motherhood itself is an intentional topic for the majority of teenage female youth as they think about their futures. Through her longitudinal, ethnographic study in an urban high school, Shultz (2001) depicts how dominant views of motherhood after school completion were contended as previously private narratives of persistence and motivation become attached to teenage motherhood as well as childless adolescence. Furstenberg (2003) also concludes that while early childbearing has adverse consequences, many teenage mothers in his Baltimore study were doing as well as their childless peers. The ability for contradicting or counter narratives to rupture dominant narratives reflects the pluralistic perspectives and experiences of marginalized or minoritized groups in the United States.

In order to address this ethical concern about the nature of ethnographic research with teenage mothers, a dialogic and reflexive approach to the "teenage mother" as a unit of analysis considers the entanglements of social class, race, gender, and mothering identities as multiple identities trace back to particular ways of being and knowing in the social world. Luttrell (1997) states, "When referring to social identities I mean cultural processes by which traits, expectations, images, and evaluations are culturally assigned to

different groups of people…Social identities give us a sense of what we have in common with, and what separates us" (p. 7). This intersectionality and entanglement of identities is precisely why ethnography and grounded theory is a qualitative method and methodology that must address some of the existing ethical concerns of the research process and representation.

Another research approach consideration when working with teenage mothers is the potential states of emotion that may arise due to the sensitive nature of the topic (sharing lived experiences). When asking youth to reflect and participate in spaces that are explicitly attending to a marginalized identity marker, it is possible that these topics may be sensitive and stir up tensions that a young mother is not yet interested in exposing. The threat of vulnerability is great. One way to attend to the potential threat of vulnerability is to provide spaces and outlets for teenage mothers to engage in practices that provide participants with choice in how they want to represent their own stories and narratives (Luttrell, 2003).

Luttrell (2003) describes the school institution as "split at the root" where objectivity and evidence are pitted against emotional participation and artful engagement. For many students, including teenage mothers, these artful opportunities have the ability to foster identity development, self-awareness, and restoration of the power of play for psychological well-being. Creativity, intentional play, and artful expression engage the imagination and can build levels of trust. Luttrell (2003) discusses how the teacher-student relationship forms within the educational settings and builds trust in a gradual process. The interactive nature of play increases the process in building these trust relationships through less formal interactions. Oftentimes, students' perceptions of

teachers and mentors are dramatically changed when students are given the space and experiences to view teachers and mentors as relatable. This creative outlet can also be a tool to empowerment and communication about the strength of teenage mothers. Effective programs for teenage mothers teach them how to advocate for themselves in communicating their needs and concerns to those in authority as well as how to "deflect" negative judgments (Kelly, 2000).

Community-based organizations, such as Real Moms provides space for creative expressions of song, dance, lyrics, and artwork in order for teenage mothers to create their own narratives and be in relation with others. This ethnographic work with Real Moms does not intend to essentialize or generalize the experience of the "teenage mother" but, instead, seeks to understand a rich, thick description of the entanglement of identities (race, sexuality, social class, etc.) of these women who have voluntarily chosen to participate in this organization.

In choosing to conduct research with participants in this out-of-school context, it is also necessary to examine the ways in which political concerns may arise in representing and working with teenage mothers. Much of the political concerns of ethnographic research with teenage mothers stems from the ways in which societal structures, such as educational institutions are called to educate teenage girls who become pregnant. Instead of a universal trajectory of educational support, varying degrees of environmental and circumstantial influences position teenage mothers' academic achievement and school attendance (Burdell, 1998). Basch (2011) states, "Teen pregnancy is associated with adverse educational, health, and economic outcomes for both mothers and children. Teenagers who become pregnant are less likely to complete

high school or college" (p. 614). What is important to note is that disparities are seen between social class and racial backgrounds where resources prior to pregnancy and after pregnancy are more available for White, middle-class teenagers as a way to "hide" the problem (Kelly, 2000). Therefore, it is necessary to contextualize ethnographic fieldwork for social and educational change in ways that challenge how power and privilege have been engaged when working with and representing teenage mothers (Nygreen, 2006).

Another political concern of conducting ethnographic research with teenage mothers is connected to the ways in which ethnographic data has been received and used with policymakers. Policymakers want to simplify and streamline data (Donmoyer, 2012). Cooley (2013) states, "[Policymakers] see complexity reflected in qualitative work as symptomatic of the method not being able to create testable variables that can be isolated, examined, and then improved" (p. 255). Anfara, Brown, & Mangione (2002) propose the following criteria for assessing qualitative research for quality and rigor: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Anfara et al. (2002) state, "The primary point we argued for is the accountability of the researcher in documenting the actions associated with establishing internal validity (triangulation), theme development, and the relationship between research questions and data sources" (p. 33). As part of this triangulation, I explicate my analysis in ways that call out power and privilege as well as in ways that will attend to social change and action. Part of this credibility also includes my own researcher identities and positionality in relation with this topic of study.

Researcher Positionality

It's not a single story or universal narrative that shaped how I have come to this moment within my graduate work. Each time I'm asked the questions, "What led you to work with teenage mothers?" and "Why is this work important to you?", I find myself yet again cautiously negotiating just how much of myself I'm willing to share in my response. The answers to these questions are far more personal to me than I imagined, and the emotional exhaustion around my own understandings of family, identity, and belonging resulted in countless conversations with trusted loved ones as I processed these themes in my own life. My intention is that this work provides space for the reader to also enter into the collective story-sharing process so that we might find ways to question any assumptions of taken-for-granted identities and recognize the forfeiture around sharing "single" stories (Adichie, 2009).

For me, the overlapping of multiple stories shared over time, with the usual storytelling tweaks here or there, have always been a part of my family's way of communicating a sense of belonging and a sense of mutual vulnerability when in relationship with others. As a child, family car rides were viewed as opportunities for sharing stories of my parents growing up in rural, upstate New York during the 1960s and 1970s. Stories included times of uncles wrestling in the living room, 4-H competitions, hunting and fishing the property, and extended-family spaghetti dinners every Sunday. Photographs that corresponded to these stories lined our hallways as still-life reminders of Irish-German and Italian immigrants, vineyards, farms, and large, Catholic families.

I was also part of these stories. Stories of two sets of young parents, biological and adoptive, both sets wrestling with a decision that would alter their lives forever. Stories of two women who now call themselves "mother". Stories that included over fifty

friends and family waiting in anticipation at the airport gate for a glimpse of a three-month old infant's first moments on United States soil, her first time held in her adoptive mother's arms. Stories of becoming an American citizen, naturalization as my immigrant pathway. My understanding of a sense of belonging grew from laughter, jokes, and a steadfast commitment to the importance of family where those bonds transcended many ignorant comments of "You're too different" and "She couldn't be your child" by presumably well-intentioned peers, teachers, or strangers. For too long I let those micro-aggressions tell my story where I actively rejected external identities of "difference" while simultaneously combated internalized feelings of rejection. One thing I understood was that I was the daughter of a young mother who, for many unknown reasons, did not keep her child.

Some have labeled my life story a mistake. Others have labeled my story an opportunity. Others have called it a blessing, a gift, a hard road, a political injustice. I think the most painful thing that one might call my story would be to call it a "typical adoption" or simply a "response to international politics", ignoring the personal nuances completely. My story is the compilation of choices and intentional decisions influenced by an international (and local) historical, political, and social context. My story is shaped by a willingness of others to open their lives and their hearts to take on the unknown of what is means to be a nontraditional story and a nontraditional family. One thing I understand is that I am the daughter of Joe and Margie LoBello who, for many unknown reasons, chose adoption.

My understanding of family also grew from equally important stories of what it means to be the only multiracial family in a racially White homogeneous community.

Due to my presence, there has always been racial diversity within my family as well as open discussions of racial and cultural identity construction that have been necessary and welcomed. While I'm vocal within certain familiar spaces to discuss my experiences as an Asian American adoptee, I oftentimes struggle to bring these conversations into more formalized spaces, including educational institutions. There is this constant internal battle when asked to justify to others (and myself) why I do or do not fully represent or take up an Asian American and/or dominant, White cultural identity. Binary discourses of these familial and racial identities have contributed to the self-silencing of my reaction and, consequently, my actions. What does it mean to be a nontraditional family in a community that continues to uphold normative views of family? Defending my status as legitimate on a daily basis led me to question what assumptions we make about others, particularly those identities that are so closely related to what it means to be family and to belong.

I have accepted that many of the questions that influence my decisions will remain unanswered. Stories are stripped when we attempt to break them down into nice, neat packages of what it means to be a particular identity. In thinking about my own birth parents and their decision to place me up for adoption, I can't help but think about the complexities of their own stories in relationship with my new emerging life. My story takes me across the ocean from one place into a new place I will always call home. The choice to represent yourself can lead to chameleon disguises where one can be whatever seems to hold the largest commodity or value in the moment. I got very good at perceiving a context and figuring out what partial story to tell so as not to reveal too

much of who I really am or who I hope to become. It's my experiences and perceptions of both belonging and discomfort that have led me to this research.

Recursive reflexivity is one way to consider how both the process and representation of the lives of teenage mothers are situated within educational research (Madison, 2005). One way to do this is through dialogue with participants as part of the process and reciprocity (Pillow, 2003). A dialogic relationship with participants is one where we are working together to consider authentic spaces for teenage mothers to express themselves.

In connection with reflexivity are the ways that power and positionality are embedded in the research process and "is also about doing research differently" (Pillow, 2003, p. 178). As mentioned, one concern is the intersection of word-of-mouth relationships when learning about this particular branch of Real Moms. It is possible that the point of entry opens up spaces for trust and more open, dialogic discussions. On the other hand, the divulgence of information and sharing may also lead to ethical dilemmas for me as the researcher. In order to move away from a "teenage mother" unit of analysis, part of this ethnographic research process and representation must trouble the broader systemic policies and practices that position young girls prior to motherhood.

Within these relationships, there may be tensions when thinking about where ethnographic research starts and stops. The boundaries of ethnographic research become more complicated when pre-existing or new relationships develop between the researcher and participant. In some ways, there is loss when a researcher must sever (to some degree) ties with participants in order to return home. Jordan & Yeomans (1995) state, "…We must aim to learn and impart skills which will allow our subjects to continue

investigating the world in which they will go on living" (p. 401). For the teenage mothers who I worked with in the field, they will most likely remain in their local communities, and any type of reciprocal relationship will shift at the end of the research process. As was highlighted in the above sections, critical ethnography seeks to empower participants to continue living their lives in ways that look at power and identities long after the researcher has left the field.

Therefore, I must consider how I share my observations with participants as well as how much dialogic practice will be integrated within the research process. Lather (2007) explains, "Situating our textual moves within and against the historical and normative status of the new ethnography, we try not to position ourselves as knowing more about these women than they know about themselves" (p. 145). Keeping this in mind, the role of the researcher to represent data continues to hold a level of power that is not completely afforded to the participant. One way of challenging the dominant discourses surrounding teenage motherhood is to provide opportunity for these women to voice their own narratives rather than allow historically dominant perspectives to perpetuate a deficit-based stigma (Atwell-Vasey, 1998; Lesko, 2012; Luttrell, 2003). This opportunity for participants to voice their own experiences is one form of reciprocity within my research process.

Reciprocity

Conducting ethnographic research with teenage mothers also considers the ways in which reciprocity is determined throughout the research process. This attends to the short and long term effects of teenage motherhood experiences. I have discussed short and long term ways of reciprocity with participants. This includes possible grant writing

for the organization, relationship building, and mentoring throughout my time in the field as well as access to resources from my position at the university or prior experiences within the school district. Being in dialogue with participants and spending time in their community has been beneficial in identifying ways in which the research process and representation will assist in their (already) ongoing work.

The organization of this dissertation intends to share the narratives of the women who have shared their stories and lives with me over the course of one calendar year. While I draw data from each of the focal participants within this research study, there is an overlapping in the ways in which some stories and themes reoccur throughout the chapters. I have intentionally included more of some narratives and less of others as the content of their narratives in relation to the themes as well as the personalities of their participants appears to be more authentically represented in the amount of sharing and types of sharing that brought comfort to each individual.

Chapter 4: Reflections of Our Constructed Identities:
"Teen moms, we all have a story, of course."

Rose invites teenage mothers and mentors to her house for a Friendsgiving dinner. Childcare is prearranged just a few blocks north of her residence where children celebrate their own dinner together with familiar childcare workers. At Rose's residence, tables and chairs are set throughout the spacious first floor dining room, living room, and kitchen. The space feels casual and inviting, decorated with Rose's eclectic style of thrift store antiques and do-it-yourself, funky décor. Mismatched, fragrant candles placed on each table both complement and clash with the smells of turkey, ham, and side dishes coming from the kitchen. Rose cooks her first turkey for this occasion. Women gather and are actively engaged in conversation, only interrupted by the arrival of a new woman and a new pan of food. Comments such as "That smells amazing," "Did you make that?" and "I have been looking forward to this all day!" can be heard as each new person sets down their homemade or store-bought food item. It's time to eat.

"You don't need to stand alone. Find a chair, and sit with us," says Tori as she invites me to sit at the corner of one of the tables in the dining room. Tori, Latrice, Sienna, Kaleigh, Jamie, two mentors, and two recently new teenage mothers to the program are eating at this table. Each of us have a heaping plate of food, and for a few minutes conversation seems to yield to sounds of enjoyed eating. Eventually, the women at my table begin to make jokes over who made the greens, mashed potatoes, and gravy. Conversation remains fluid with women talking over one another, vying for attention. Women share stories about family recipes as well as getting their hair and nails done. Storytelling overlaps and topics naturally flow with seamless cohesion. I notice Latrice and Tori are engrossed in a conversation about the identity of Elyja's father. Phones are out as stories are complemented with social media posts and photographs. This includes stories about body image and joking rumors of who might be pregnant again at the table. A comment is mentioned that sparks the sharing of bodily responses when giving birth: bowel movements, sweat, and after birth. The contributions and energy around this topic crescendo until someone says "You don't want to know what was coming out of me. I'll wait until after we're done eating." Instead of a change in topic, several of the teenage mothers respond with stories of their own bodily experiences until eventually Latrice pulls out her phone and notices that three of them have the same phone. They place them together and shift conversation towards phones, boyfriends, and returning back to hairstyles. For the most part, I sit and listen, unnoticed since the initial invitation to join the table.

Turning my attention towards the rest of the room, I hear Anna and Alyssa enter the house through the kitchen. Anna's already joking with several women who are fixing their plates in the kitchen. Alyssa walks through the door into the dining room first and is greeted by two of the mentors, both named Alyssa. All three of the women named Alyssa are pregnant and have similar due dates. They immediately begin sharing stories of second and third trimester symptoms, comparing belly sizes. Several women ask Alyssa about the recent baby shower for her, Prince, Chanelle, and the expected baby. They tell her she looks beautiful and healthy. In typical fashion, Anna is also surrounded by several women as she's sharing about recently accomplishing a math score goal. Beaming and with a smile, she announces December 1st as her next math goal for a score

where she'll be able to take the biology class that she wants. From across the dining room she makes eye contact with me. Anna extends her arms forward and then moves them outward in an attempt to clear the crowd of women talking with her as she makes a beeline towards my position at the corner of the table. Anna says, "Hey, how's your writing going? Have you used my story yet? What do they think?" (Ever since her individual interview, Anna has asked me these questions whenever she sees me) (Field Note, November 17, 2016).

Within this field note, there are several moments where the visibility of teenage motherhood stories is engaged within a variety of identity stories. This organic, fluid way of sharing stories and partaking in the storytelling process reflects a particular way of agency and relief as teenage motherhood stories oftentimes stem from deficit discourses of failure, sexual promiscuity, and welfare queens (Burdell, 1998; Coffel, 2011; Luttrell, 2003). Instead, these women's stories are permeated by contradicting ways of being and knowing, both reinscribing dominant discourses as well as resisting a deficit mindset. Challenging fixed and/or binary identities, the ways in which these women fluidly move through spaces and time contextualized their personal stories and responses as they took up hybridity and the intersectionality of socially constructed identities. Kelly (1997) warns consumers (researchers, policymakers, community members) of the tendency to generalize the experiences of teenage motherhood within representations as an oversimplified subcategory within societal and educational discourses. Therefore, this work does not intend to generalize experiences and instead seeks to draw on the narratives of these particular women as individual stories of expression through their varying degrees of both empowerment and marginalization (Luttrell, 1997; Shultz, 2001).

In this chapter I explore how teenage mothers formally and informally share counter narratives to represent the multiple identities and experiences they have had throughout their transition into motherhood. Interpretive themes around the constructions

of identities are closely connected to the ways in which storytelling is both active and reactive within "in-the-moment" re-narrations of individually and collectively constructed fluid identities (Minh-ha, 1989). Moments such as this Friendsgiving dinner illustrate the ways in which gendered storytelling is actively engaged among dominant discourses of what it means to be a teenager and a mother.

First I address the ways in which teenage mothers use physical and relational spaces as a means for disruption to discourses of a gendered, linear stage theory of development, including adolescence as a stage (Lesko, 2002; Vagle, 2012). The perceptions of several teenage mothers and staff are responding to ideas such as being exposed as physically present as well as the impact of such positional discourses such as "socially young". Then I discuss the ways in which teenage mothers are taking up hybridity (Anzaldúa, 1987; Voicu, 2011) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) within the entanglement of their own racial, social classed, gendered, and sexualized identities. Disrupting a static "one size fits all" approach to identity constructions, these women recursively and contingently (Lesko, 2002) take up and grapple with chosen identities as well as identities placed upon them. The last section of this chapter looks to Monica's reflective story and how a mirroring of traditional and counter narratives has the potential to distort the way she reads her body as a repulsive object and/or in her ability to grow a baby.

Appendix A illustrates the featured focal participants who share their stories within each of the three data chapters. Organized by interpretive themes, Appendix A reminds the reader that this fieldwork includes multiple stories that are woven and folded onto one another as social space is constructed among the participants and researcher.

The table below zooms in on the themes and definitions of the themes within this data chapter as interpreted from field notes, interviews, and artifacts (writing pieces). Examples of key data sources are illustrative of the stories and perceptions that will be addressed within the subsequent sections of this chapter.

Table 6: Interpretive Themes from Key Data Sources (Chapter 4)

Theme	Definition of Theme	Examples	Number of Times Themes Interpreted
Constructed "Out of Time": Disrupting Developmental Discourses	Ascribing to and/or disrupting normative perspectives of physical, social, and emotional developmental stages.	"They [schools] want you to still do everything on time. As a person who never had to go through nothing. They just wake up every morning by theirselves and go to school come back and do whatever they want. Not wake up, get yourself dressed, get your baby dressed, go to school, come back, make sure she's fed." (Anna Interview) "It's [teenage pregnancy] viewed as like being childish… but you become responsible and it feels good when you know like I accomplished this by myself." (Bubbles Interview)	Interviews: 39 Field Notes: 34 Artifacts: 4
Entanglements of Constructed Identities: Seeking Relief through Stories	Fluid, socio-historical, and cultural constructions bound up with perceived, ascribed, or self-identified body traits/physical characteristics, behaviors, categories of feminine/masculine, sexual practices and preferences, nationality, ethnic heritage/identity, place as well as complex	"Why do you think I'm adopted? Because I'm mixed? Like, I'm I'm so like black but my mom is white and it just that was that's another like core hurt that I have about racism and race … Like they don't have to label you as like oh the black girls are getting pregnant this year, you know." (Meshelle Interview) "I was lesbian for like a long time then like I started messin' with guys and then I became like bisexual then I became pregnant so it was like it threw my dad	Interviews: 71 Field Notes: 20 Artifacts: 4

	processes of performativity.	completely off cause he thought I was fully just gay" (Bubbles Interview).	
Embodiment and a Mirroring of Identities	See "Entanglements of Constructed Identities" definition (above).	"I don't want the baby because it gonna see the baby and see his her father." (Monica Interview)	Interviews: 71 Field Notes: 37 Artifacts: 2

Constructed "Out of Time": Disrupting Developmental Discourses

The idea of a theory of contingent and recursive growth and change calls for a recurring examination of microcontexts, such as teenage motherhood in order to continually see situations in different ways and through new perspectives (Lesko, 2002; Lesko, 2012). Teenage motherhood disrupts traditional stage development discourses that have historically been bound within chronological time. Instead, the social age of how one might feel and act within the social world is in accordance to and/or disruption to established expectations of stage development theory (Atwell-Vasey, 1998; Lesko, 2012). The interactions and fluid relationships of the Friendsgiving event was illustrative of the practices of embodied storytelling and interactive natures of both the mentors and teenage mothers participating in Real Moms. The physical space of Rose's home brought bodies close together as women moved around mismatched furniture, touching shoulders, ducking around arms full of food, and displaying other physical gestures of familiarity. Just as dinner conversation and eating followed its own pace, so also did the ways in which these women represented themselves follow their own, organic time frame[2].

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[2] This practice of sharing aspects of one's ongoing identity constructions in different places and times, both recursive and contingent, is addressed to varying degrees in each of the three data chapters (Lesko, 2002; Lesko, 2012).

To be locked within a chronological "either-or" sense of time (i.e. childhood, adolescence or adulthood) would have halted the organic flow of interaction, formalizing the space and focusing on a hierarchy of roles and relationships. For instance, teenage mothers as adolescents and mentors as adults. While language such as "mentee" or "mentor" were chosen within roles, over time the degree to which these distinctions were bounded became muddled and undone. While there was some structure in the ways that Rose planned the start of the meetings, dinner commenced in a more fluid timeframe where people were free to move, eat, and socialize at their own pace. This seemingly simple yet courteous informal structure allowed for movement and a comfort that depended on familiar relationships and interests among its members. Some Real Mom staff were vocal in their desires for more formalized curricula and activities yet Rose and the teenage mothers actively pushed back against the need for more staff control. Rose described the Real Moms meetings:

> I think that they [teenage mothers] really look at it [Real Moms] as like their thing... like it's their time that they get to be teenagers and they don't have to worry about what they're eating or what they're making or who's with their kid if it's them or they have to work or like there's nothing else they have to worry about…besides like being present and interacting with you know the leaders and each other that are there and I think they really love that and that they get loved on and they get to laugh and they get to just like be teenagers (Interview, October 27, 2016).

Rose's description of "their thing", "it's their time", "being present", and "they get to just like be teenagers" depicted her vision for how this space was designed to support teenage

mothers in their own decision-making processes. Instead of an oppressive, hierarchal way of transferring information from mentors to teenage mothers, moments of sharing were reciprocal and organic. For example, the three pregnant Alyssas (two mentors and one teenage mother) disrupted controlled, separate ways of being which led to reciprocal sharing of the mutual experience of pregnancy and motherhood. It was common practice for the three women to share trimester updates and resources both in this space and outside of Real Moms meetings. And yet, there wasn't an expectation that these women would only bond with each other throughout the entirety of the evening. Their personal interests led them to mingle among women.

Moments such as the Friendsgiving event did not intend to promote an "all adult" vibe either. Teenage mothers oftentimes had common interest in normative social characteristics of adolescence, such as dating, attention to physical appearance, and popular culture. As the above field note stated, "Phones are out as stories are complemented with social media posts and photographs". In many ways these teenage mothers ascribe to normative discourses of what it means to be a teenager in the United States in 2016, grounded in popular culture and social media. These normative, highly visible stories are represented by the teenagers' own interests and were documented on their Facebook pages and frequent references to Snapchat conversations. These normative topics of conversation were common in many formalized high school setting spaces and have become characteristics of popular culture. Therefore, Real Moms was also a space for these interests.

Teenage mothers also contradicted these same spaces in ways that made sense to them. Several of these women used social media platforms to make pregnancy

announcements and share photographs of their growing bodies. This documentation both shared and legitimized their motherhood and high school experiences together. There was no way of separating or disjointing their experiences from normative teenage topics. This contradictory sense-making was also evidenced through their common experience of the birth of their children. The topics of the birthing process and motherhood were not this cumulative or summative indicator of the end of social media stories or mealtime conversations. As the Friendsgiving scenario suggested, the teenage mothers jumped right back into their conversations of dating, physical appearance, and social media after discussing birth and breast feeding.

Each woman literally and figuratively was present at the table of her own lived experience. This was true in the ways in which these women came together in a space and yet embodied varying experiences of pregnancy and motherhood. Some teenage mothers would gently touch their first, second, third trimester bodies. Others both lovingly and lamentingly touched their postpartum bodies. Still others would constantly hide their bodies using pillows, blankets, and oversized clothing, intentionally guarding themselves from others' gazes. Stories and experiential knowledge was shared openly. This was not meant to be a banking model of knowledge transfer but the attached story of one woman's experience in order to ease and/or support another woman's experiences. The knowledge that these women had regarding the care of their children was not intended to be quantified nor did it find itself in standardized ways of knowing. Everyone was learning together.

Just as the presence of these women was disrupting developmental stage theories of growth and change, the fight for visibility still came at a physical, emotional, and

social cost. Many of these teenage mothers were seeking ways of being known beyond this singular identity marker of pregnant and/or with child. Meshelle argues, "Just because I had a baby doesn't mean I am not like I don't have the same knowledge and stuff" (Interview, September 21, 2016). Disputing common-sense narratives of what teenage mothers want and need were being called for within private table conversations but also within the feminine narrative of writing. Meshelle wrote, "Bashing and calling out teen mothers is not going to do anything besides have people view them differently. Society should not degrade the teen for becoming pregnant but instead give a helping hand to the young mother or even just show support. Telling a teen mom, 'you believe in her', can go a very long way" (Writing Narrative, September 20, 2016). Meshelle indicated that using deficit language of "difference" was powerful in that it shifted a collective society to "degrade the teen" as an individual.

Anna and Bubbles were also thinking through their own experiences as teenage mothers and the societal perceptions and social connotations of this contradicting identity. Being locked within chronological time positioned these teenage mothers in a deficit lens that historically required them to hide or neglect the ongoing experiential knowledge they had in exchange for a "lesser" knowledge of growing a child in their wombs and continuing to care for their children (Burdell, 1998; Coffel, 2011). The act of being hidden or "out of time" was evident throughout the data collection and analysis process as some women actively covered their bodies in shame, self-critique, and protection. In contrast, teenage mothers such as Anna and Bubbles openly moved their bodies in free expression.

With her body sprawled out on the grassy parkway near her home, Anna shared her perceptions of teenage motherhood while simultaneously with a watchful eye on Aubrey as the toddler played nearby. Anna shared her frustrations with navigating the dominant culture:

> Nope, I don't let nothing get to me. Well I mean yeah no. People will want you to like after having a baby and going through all that traumatic stuff. Taking the six to eight weeks off and all of that. They want you to still do everything on time. As a person who never had to go through nothing. They just wake up every morning by theirselves and go to school, come back and do whatever they want. Not wake up, get yourself dressed, get your baby dressed, go to school, come back, make sure she's fed… And it makes it real hard to kindda get to your goals cause it's like you're trying to hurry up and get to, you know, make everybody else proud. And go at your pace… (Interview, September 13, 2016).

The language of time-constructed and time-sensitive pathways, such as "taking the six to eight weeks off" "still do everything on time" "real hard to kindda get to your goals" and "you're trying to hurry up" addressed the ways in which Anna felt the pressures of following a continual "becoming", normative developmental pathway which did not consider the numerous social factors that influenced her adolescent experience (Lesko, 2012; Luttrell, 1997; Ngo, 2012; Vagle, 2012). She associated much of this discourse to a distant "they" who monitored the progression of the individual. Anna's listing of her new found responsibilities speak back to discourses of "out of time", "socially young" and "irresponsible" teenage mothering practices (Burdell, 1998; Coffel, 2011). The idea of trying to "make everybody else proud" was indicative of Anna's ongoing need for

approval and yet she stated, "I don't let nothing get to me". This idea of being the same or going at the same pace did not work. Pacing and timeliness were constructs that went beyond an efficient controlling of students in schools and positioned teenagers as "a person who never had to go through nothing". While untrue for many teenagers this was also particularly false for the teenager mothers in this study.

Anna then discussed how spaces, such as Real Moms provided her and others to move through life within an asset-based perspective of time frames. She said:

> They're always like you can do it. Go at your pace. Like they don't be like you better graduate this year cause this is your year. They're like keep on going. You had a whole baby cause they're more understanding that's how yeah. And they understand that it's gonna take a little more time and than usual to do things (Interview, September 13, 2016).

This language of "go at your pace" "keep on going" "they understand it's gonna take a little more time and than usual to do things" contrasts her previous reflections of the "they" of schools and society. In Real Moms, the "they" that Anna referred to recognized "you had a whole baby", your life has dramatically changed.

This life event of having a baby brings with it unexpected responsibilities and changes. It's important to note that for many of these women, the unplanned pregnancy brought with it both a child and a new perspective on how they take up the topic of teenage pregnancy. It's not that some females were automatically destined or labeled to be teenage mothers.

Bubbles also reflected on the topic of "socially young" females by acknowledging the ways in which she had also internalized aspects of the dominant narrative of

developmental stages prior to becoming pregnant. Proud to give me a tour of her

apartment complex community room, Bubbles adjusted pillows on the couch (moving

them out of her way) as she made room for the two of us to sit for an interview. Emilio

was spending the day with his grandfather because Bubbles worked the night shift.

Bubbles admitted:

> I just think that's just gonna be how people think. You're still young. Maybe if I
>
> wasn't sixteen and pregnant I would've felt the same thing if I seen like one of my
>
> classmates pregnant and they're still a kid theirself. Like we're still kids. We're
>
> still living our life. Like why are you pregnant? Why are you a mom? So I like I
>
> feel like that too there's general judgement that you have about anything like you
>
> know just regular judgement that you shouldn't have regardless you shouldn't be
>
> judging people no matter what but it's it's gonna happen there's no taking it back.
>
> So I think the only thing that can really happen is the person who is pregnant like
>
> they can just change what they're doing. Change so they can't they somebody can't
>
> say oh you're not doing what you're supposed to do like when they are doing
>
> whatever they have to do to take care of their child and not forcing it be where it's
>
> like now your grandparent is taking care of the child and you like for you to
>
> actually get on your stuff and take care of your own child and yourself (Interview,
>
> September 28, 2016).

Experience shifted Bubble's ways of knowing. Bubbles acknowledged that she might

also judge a teenage mother if she hadn't found herself in this same situation. Throughout

her sharing, her language of developmental discourses continued to situate the

motherhood identity as something the individual was responsible to "change so they can't

they somebody can't say oh you're not doing what you're supposed to do". Again, the "they" referred to distant yet influential societal expectations of surveillance.

Bubbles also positioned her own experience as her responsibility and against the norm where "that's just gonna be how people think". In some ways, she thought of her classmates as "a kid theirself" and viewed herself as "we're still kids" and "we're still living our life". She took up the development stage discourse by addressing how such a general perspective on development was not productive because "you shouldn't be judging people no matter what but it's it's gonna happen there's no taking it back". Just as Anna listed the responsibilities of motherhood, Bubbles also acknowledged that more was placed upon an individual static identity marker of "teenage mother" rather than challenging oppressive structures (Voicu, 2011; Walkerdine et al., 2001). Bubbles' reference to the "they" of school and society in how teenage mothers have to disrupt the general judgments shifted into a more personal and specific "they" as she shared her own story of being labeled and positioned as a "socially young" mother.

For Bubbles, a judgmental "they" also referred to organized religion, specifically her perceptions of Christianity. In her story of motherhood, gender, and sexuality, Bubbles' counter narrative disrupted traditions of established Christian religion and the ways in which religious life molds what was acceptable or not. Bubbles stated:

> I think it's [teenage motherhood] viewed as like being childish and like irresponsible obviously. Um I don't I was just viewed as a bad thing like they should've been more responsible and should like I don't know and then if you bring religion into it it's like that's automatically bad. You should wait for marriage so I just realize it being bad and people automatically thinking like

automatically you're just gonna fail in life which is like it occurred to me to not

fail in life cause everybody already thinks well you got pregnant at sixteen. Now

what're you gonna do? You're still a kid yourself (Interview, September 28, 2016).

The dominant discourse of teenage motherhood was "irresponsible obviously" "viewed

as a bad thing" and "automatically bad". Bubbles referred to the ways in which people

associated teenage motherhood with "you're just gonna fail in life". She used this

realization to resist the dominant narrative using aspects of her own counter narrative.

Agency was evident through her decision when "it occurred to me to not fail in life cause

everybody already thinks well you got pregnant at sixteen". It was important to note that

even within this agentic move to "not fail", both Bubbles and Anna still reflected their

success and failure against the normative views of teenage and motherhood stages. As

discussed in the literature review, this theory of development has become so engrained in

United States discourses (Lesko, 2002).

Agency within the multiplicity of identities was also exemplified in the ways in

which both Meshelle and Bubbles considered perceptions of age expectations on mothers.

Just as Meshelle used her example of scripts for "young" and "old" motherhood, Bubbles

also contested a "socially young" narrative by presenting multiple perspectives on

motherhood. She shared:

It's both. It's positive and negative. Cause like now you were still a child, still a

teenager. Now you have to skip a few years and become an adult automatically

without getting to enjoy that, those days, your youth. Time like have to skip a

bunch of that so that's like a negative part of it. You don't get to actually enjoy

your childhood time. But positive time is that you become an adult. You become

responsible and it feels good when you know like I accomplished this by myself and like with that stuff. So it's like positive and a negative (Interview, September 28, 2016).

Language such as "become an adult automatically" "become an adult" "become responsible" carried a linear movement from enjoying "your youth" "your childhood time" into a personal "I accomplished this by myself" and continued to position Bubbles as the individual within an either-or discourse of failure or success (Voicu, 2011; Walkerdine et al., 2001). Bubbles later shared concrete ways in which there were pros and cons to teenage motherhood that reimagined the either-or mentality of childless adolescent or adult motherhood:

> I'll still be young. And I don't feel like that takes me back cause like well people are like fifty with these young young young younger that they can't even do nothing with them cause they're all old and stuff. Me, I'm still be active and young and still be able to do stuff my kids and go outside and be active with them like versus being an old person so I think that's like a benefit of that cause I get to do more (Interview, September 28, 2016).

Here, Bubbles uses the "I" pronoun in sharing her own personal experience with this concept of chronological time. She considered the relief and positivity in "I'm still be active and young and still be able to do stuff my kids… versus being an old person". Sitting more upright on the couch, Bubbles flicked both of her hands up as if putting her upper body and face on display as she declared, "I get to spend more time live with my child versus be old and dead" (Interview, September 28, 2016). The language of time and stages was complicated by shifting positionality towards her own constructed asset-based

perspective of development. Discourses were being built as these women were creating an image for themselves through the presence of counter narratives as possibility (Gee, 2014).

Entanglements of Constructed Identities: Seeking Relief through Stories

In this section I looked to several teenage mothers who took up the entanglements of their constructed identities in relation to and/or response to dominant ways of conceiving identities as well as their own experiential understandings of their fluid identities. Drawing on theories of hybridity as multiplicity of identities (Anzaldúa, 1987) and "third space" as the possibility for "new identities" (Bhabha, 1990), teenage mothers were both implicated within existing discourses as well as challenging normative languages around their experiences. Throughout my process of analysis, resiliency and a sense of relief became a common thread within their stories yet each woman was taking up what it meant to be resilient or find relief in her own way. While I highlight particular ways that these women were taking up hybrid identities, I very much acknowledge the entanglements of these identities. I have chosen to focus on the ways in which teenage mothers represent and discuss their experiences by thinking about race and social class as well as gender and sexuality as identity markers.

<div align="center">

Racial and Social Classed Identities.

</div>

Just as with other markers of identity, racial identities were engaged in unique ways by each of the teenage mothers. This section focuses on Meshelle's narrative of how she took up her racial identity within school and society's expectations of normality. Meshelle was very open about her opinions of racial connotations in relation to teenage motherhood and societal expectations. While she shared her experiences during summer

camp, Meshelle went into greater details about her advocacy work during an interview at her apartment.

On each wall of their two-bedroom apartment in their residential home hung canvas-printed photographs of Symone, Meshelle's daughter. These professional photographs captured the free-spirited Symone twirling in the park, blowing dandelions into the wind, and curled up within her mother's arms. Sitting cross-legged on her couch, Meshelle grabbed a pillow, covered her body, and then adjusted her body to a more comfortable position. I sat next to her, similarly positioning myself (without a pillow) as we went through the interview questions. Questions shifted from her own experience with Real Moms to her experience in both high school and college. Before responding to my questions about teenage motherhood, Meshelle leapt from her comfortable, covered position and walked towards a computer desk on the opposite wall from the couch. With a few moments of silence, Meshelle returned and told me that she had several writings on this topic that she wanted to share with me. Her pillow dropped to the floor.

Meshelle discussed multiple aspects of her high school experience that I will address in more depth in the following chapter. It is evident that this school experience was one space where Meshelle both took up her identity as a biracial female as well as verbalized the ways in which racial identities were positioned, particularly for those women who became pregnant in school. She shared:

> I feel like people are expecting or like have like idea that only um non-White people get pregnant… None of our moms were white in high school and so it was like oh all the Black girls are having babies, all the Mexicans are having babies. And it's really not it's two [two fingers held up for emphasis], two Mexicans. Four

African Americans. And so I just feel like um people put that um image on

African Americans and Latinos or Latinas and it's not fair … I just feel that um I

have a best friend, love her to death, she's White. Her family doesn't really like

me because I have a baby and so she was just like well, doesn't she have any

home training? and she went into like, does she [have] her mother and father in

her life? They went into that racial background of saying like well, is she low

income? Does she not have money? Why did she have sex? Why did she...? And

she like my best friend. She dates an Asian and she loves like loves loves

loves Symone and…she tells us straight up like my parents are racist and she

[friend's mom] thinks like you had a baby because you didn't have family

support, you weren't financially stable, you were looking for love and la dee da

dee da (Interview, September 20, 2016).

Similar to Bubble's storytelling structure, Meshelle also called upon generalized

perceptions of racial identities around teenage motherhood before situating her story

within and apart from these deficit, ignorant perspectives "that only non-White people get

pregnant". Meshelle's comment, "none of our moms were White in high school and so it

was like oh all the Black girls are having babies, all the Mexicans are having babies. And

it's really not it's two [two fingers held up for emphasis], two Mexicans. Four African

Americans. And so I just feel like um people put that um image on African Americans

and Latinos or Latinas and it's not fair" attends to the visibility and stereotyping of

teenage pregnancy within schools. Kelly (2000) discusses the ways in which White,

middle class teenage women were oftentimes able to hide or prevent the public viewing

of motherhood while minority, working class women were more publically viewed and

ostracized. For example, Bristol Palin's teenage pregnancy was afforded avoidance of particular discourses around race and social class positioning in part due to her White racial and classed identities. In contrast, Meshelle felt automatically read by her White friend and friend's family as a racial minority woman with associated, deficit-mindset assumptions around her family background and decision-making capabilities. Bristol Palin's reaction was privileged in her access to national, public involvement in abstinence-only and prolife movements whereas Meshelle's personal being became the site of scrutiny and it was perceived to be acceptable by others to question her choice to also go through with her pregnancy.

Tracing Meshelle's concern, negative connotations around race, social class, and family were placed upon her through the story of her relationship with her White friend and friend's family. Powerful was Meshelle's description of this interaction where assumptions were completely placed upon her. This speaks to the ways in which the privilege of certain identities to question or place stories upon others results in an inaccurate and one-dimensional perception of others, ignoring intersectionality (Jones, 2007). The questions of "doesn't she have any home training?" "does she [have] her mother and father in her life?" as well as "is she low income? does she not have money? why did she have sex? why did she…?" directly speak to the spiraling effect of deficit assumptions and mindsets. Meshelle went on to share about how she used writing as a space for reflection on her experiences as well as resilience in advocating for a shift in deficit perspectives around teenage motherhood:

> So in a paper I wrote I said like, picture yourself as a mom and there's a fifteen-year-old girl walking like with her one-year-old daughter and then looking at a

thirty-five-year-old walking with her two-year old or one-year old or whatever

and I was like how many how many people would look at the fifteen-year old or

sixteen-year old because literally she's younger than the thirty-five-year old? But,

just to like sum it up the point of the paper was, a mom is a mom like regardless

of the age or regardless of the race. And I know like um it's just I know it's a

problem that people literally would judge you off of your race and why you have

a baby but like with like my mom people always ask me when she would come to

like field trip cause she's white like are you adopted? and I just would just never

understand like why do you think I'm adopted because I'm mixed like I'm I'm so

like Black but my mom is White and it just that was that's another like core hurt

that I have about racism and race because it just always like it doesn't make sense

to me. I feel like no matter the color, no matter like you could be purple and you

could still have a baby and you're still a mom. Like they don't have to label you as

like oh the Black girls are getting pregnant this year, you know (Interview,

September 20, 2016).

All within what seems like the same breath, she shared her experience. Meshelle then

went back to the stereotypical perceptions of teenage motherhood being "oh the black

girls are getting pregnant this year" as the intersectionality of identities privilege some

more than others (Pillow, 2004; Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001). Her verbal and

written description of this age-based vignette around motherhood was layered with

ideologies of representation of multiple identities, including being read by the color of

your skin or assumed age of your physical body. Meshelle was sorting through her hybrid

identities of racially identifying as both Black and White. For Meshelle, a "core hurt" of

racial and social class associations with being a teenage mother was around being misidentified and simplified as a biracial, female, teenage mother. Unlike my experience of constantly reminding people that I am related to my White, adoptive mother, Meshelle found herself constantly reminding people that she is the biological daughter of her White mother and her Black father. As she shared that she also got pregnant this year (thus lumped into the "Black girls" category), this comment felt like an erasure of her hybrid racial identity while at the same time carrying an assumption about teenage motherhood being a non-white, working class phenomenon (Pillow, 2004).

Meshelle went on to use her freshman college writing courses as a space to write about her own experiences in high school in order to advocate for herself and for other teenage mothers. In this way, she used the cultural and social capital that she had (she referred to her mother's position as a local principal) to take advantage of the opportunities found within standard curriculum to focus on her topic of choice. Through both research papers and critical reflection essays, Meshelle researched teenage pregnancy policies in combination with her own experiential narratives. This platform became so important to Meshelle as she took ownership of new discourses to "write her body" (Minh-ha, 1989). Meshelle concluded, "I'm a teen mom and that's okay. And I don't know I always like advocated for young moms like in all in all my projects in high school. I did like stuff on teen moms"[3] (Interview, September 21, 2016).

In a similar way, Anna was also re-narrating perceptions of teenage motherhood through semi-public platforms, this being humor and comical storytelling. Anna shared, "Teen moms, we all have a story of course" (Interview, September 13, 2016). The joy

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[3] The next chapter looks more specifically at the ways Meshelle began to re-narrate her story using writing as one of her public platforms.

seen on Anna's face as she shared her math scores at the Friendsgiving dinner reminded me of a comment she made several times throughout our time together. Anna used humor as one way of informally taking up her racial and classed identities. Quick to add blurbs of "We Black" or "you know we're Black" were oftentimes punch lines to Anna's stories. While using some of the same stereotypical "core hurt" language that Meshelle addressed in her interview, Anna used humor in processing stereotypes around being a racial minority, teenage mother.

When she wasn't telling jokes, Anna's actions were very focused on contradicting stereotypes around racial and social classed identities in relation to a teenage motherhood identity. In her own ways of taking up her racial identity, Anna associated this with her schooling experience as opportunity as well as this added responsibility of negating deficit mindsets. Again, this acknowledged the ways in which she felt an individual need to prove herself against a normed collective societal expectation. She shared, "You gotta prove yourself even more. You gotta give 120 instead of 100 like most people" (Interview, September 13, 2016). Anna's drive to academically compete and achieve high scores in math was evident of her determination to not become a stereotype of a Black, welfare queen, teenage mother.

While Anna attended to society's expectations for teenage mothers and the dominant perceptions associated with race and social class, she also reflected on how Real Moms was taking up this topic:

> I don't think we really got diverse yet. I think we have a lotta African Americans.
> I think we can find a lot of different other races that prolly don't know about these
> um opportunities and things that we have. It's not really nobody's being racist but

you know. We have people there that you know mostly stick to their kind of

people and so they go get their kind of people. Everyone doing the same thing

except for, like I just met some um Hispanic people that are doing the same thing

as me. Going through the same thing and they're really interested and they're like

oh really like so instead of like they didn't even know nothing about our program

that can help you get out the house and explore life. So I think we kindda stick to

[inaudible] be more diverse. And there's a lotta other cultures (Interview,

September 13, 2016).

Anna attended a local alternative high school specifically for teenage mothers. She

conveyed allegiance to her alternative high school as well as the Real Moms space,

noting that the racial and socioeconomic demographics of both contexts were similar.

Through possessives phrases such as "we have a lotta African Americans" "we can find a

lot of different other races" and "we kindda stick to", Anna continued to call her affinity

with these spaces and resources. This was her space. Speaking about Real Moms, Anna

was referring to the teenage mothers who majority identify as Black and/or African

American. In thinking about diversifying Real Moms, Anna saw this as a homogeneous

space where others who identify as racial minorities should be invited.

What was interesting was Anna's description of the racial makeup of both spaces

which was quite different than Meshelle's experience in her local, city high school.

Meshelle went on to share how all of the teenage mothers (who all identified as racial

minorities) were strongly encouraged to leave her local city high school for an alternative

high school approach. Meshelle recognized how access to rigorous curricula, sports, and

extracurricular activities was then restricted to these women, and she fought to stay in

this traditional context. Meshelle found herself racially and socially isolated as a result of her decision. Anna, who chose to leave her local high school, found the racially homogenous makeup of a (different) alternative program to also be restrictive as racial segregation was felt and more diversity was desired. These conversations around racial identity and perceptions of the racial identities of teenage mothers was closely associated with school as a social space. This practice of being read and represented by assumed public characteristics of identity was also taken up and/or rejected in terms of gender and sexual identities.

Gender and Sexual Identities.

Latrice and Bubbles were very intentional about their outward appearances in each of the multiple contexts- Real Moms meetings, summer camp, social community events- in which I worked with them. Their female gender representations were visible in their own unique styles. Latrice chose to represent herself with different braided weaves, dark colored clothing, and minimal makeup. Reserved and with a laid back personality, Latrice intentionally took her time to warm up to people as well as to express visible interest in the activity at hand, including following concrete time schedules. Typically, Latrice spent a long time in the mirror making sure her hair was neatly in place, her skin was moisturized, and her clothing was wrinkle-free. While at summer camp, she was always the last person to get ready and preferred to have the cabin and bathroom space to herself. Anyone walking by the communal bathrooms would hear the quiet sounds of Latrice's musical talents as she sung to herself and to Elyja as they got ready for the day.

After spending time getting to know Latrice, I would notice a slight smile and shift of her head that contradicted any verbal or physical decline as she would actually

volunteer to participate in most activities and conversations. She did not like talking with new people but was incredibly open with those whom had established relationships with her. This was also exemplified during the Friendsgiving dinner when a new staff member attempted to engage Latrice in small talk. After cautiously watching this new staff member exert her conversational energies, Latrice commented, "Is she for real?", turned her body away from the woman, and went about eating with her friends.

After nine months of working with Latrice, she guided our interview towards the topic of her experiences growing up as a female and daughter within her biological family. Latrice shared how her gender identity was both claimed by herself but also placed upon her by her family. To Latrice, this resulted in distinctly different treatment for her and her brother. In sharing about the moment when her family found out she was pregnant, Latrice shared, "My mom and my dad they really like all they talked about was me being a girl and that I had no rights to do what I had what I was doing or whatever and that I was just horrible for doing what I did" (Interview, September 29, 2016). Throughout my time with Real Moms, Latrice shared her struggles of living in a verbally abusive household. Latrice went on to share:

> Well they will always say things like oh um you've got this baby now so um you gonna have to take of yourself. How you going to raise a baby by yourself? Um you ain't nothing but a a little ass girl stuff like this. Um and then they be like the daddy's not gonna do nothing for him and stuff like this so they'll like badgered me about him and about myself and then about the baby. And then it will like stress me out and like I'll end up screaming or like fighting them or something.

It'll like stress my hair fell out a couple times because I was so stressed

(Interview, September 29, 2016).

Latrice internalized this deficit language of "you ain't nothing but a a little ass girl" that

manifested as physical stress, "screaming" and "fighting". What was initially internalized

as being a girl with "no rights" and being a girl who was "just horrible" impacted her

female body. A sense of being monitored and controlled became associated with her

gender identity and continued to reinforce those dominant discourses of "socially young"

females.

In thinking about how power and privilege become associated with gender

identities (Renold, 2006), Latrice's family positioned her and her teenage brother's

experiences distinctly differently in ways that did not go unnoticed. Latrice argued:

My brother gets treated way differently like right now they're dealing with this

problem. He smokes weed like almost every day. And then he comes home high

or he'll go to school and he'll leave the school for a little bit, go get high, and them

come back and get kicked out so um and they still don't do nothing to him. Like I

mean they talk to him about it but they don't stop him from doing it like they just

don't do anything about it like and he gets privileges to where he can just leave

and go anywhere and they don't care. But if it's me they blow my phone up. They

text me. They try to come to where I'm at. They do all this other stuff,

extraordinary stuff just to get to where I'm at and find me and stuff like that you

know (Interview, September 29, 2016).

The privilege of being able to freely move throughout the neighborhood without

surveillance was associated with male gendered ways of being (Renold, 2006). Parental

passivity towards male privilege was contrasted by how the extent to which Latrice felt her freedom was constricted by "this other stuff, extraordinary stuff".

In some ways, the perceptions of being a female in her family shifted when Latrice got pregnant. It was no longer about controlling and monitoring the "socially young" female daughter. For Latrice, she continued to negotiate her feelings of new found freedom. It was not because of an equal privilege with her male brother, but a shrugging of acknowledgement and deficit of no longer being responsible for their pregnant daughter. Latrice shared:

> Me being a girl um they just really didn't want me doing anything like all all the time they thought like I was just out there doing stuff with boys. Most of the time like I was when they really put me in sports well the let me get in sports I was really doing what I had to do in school playing in sports whatever but if I was I mean like every time I asked my dad to pick me up he would never like oh okay I'm finna come get you whatever. I would have to like sit out there for like hours until the bus came or something and my mom be like so what you was out there doing? hoeing or all this other stuff. so like I'll get downgraded about having to wait for the bus or wait for someone to come pick me up from sports and stuff because I'm a girl. And they really um like thought I was out there doing stuff with boys and all this other stuff but when I did actually get pregnant um by someone um they really like left me alone. They didn't wanna talk to me. Cursed me off for like four hours long. And it was just downhill from there like we fought almost every day if we ever talked to each other so (Interview, September 29, 2016).

Feelings of frustration arose as Latrice felt like she could not break this cycle of disapproval from her parents. In constructing her identity as a female, there was no room for agency because of her continual reliance on males, constructed against "hoeing" or "doing stuff with boys" as well as her reliance on her father for transportation. She felt trapped and constricted by her gender identity.

Latrice reflected on the perceptions of her family as she considered her gender identity at the birth of her son, Elyja. She shared:

> I have changed a lot like I mean now if they like say something towards me I just I just look at them and like how how am I a hoe? What did I do? Can you show me? Can you prove to me? or something like that. And then I'll like ignore. But when my baby came I felt happy because I knew he was like the only the only thing that'll keep me up and that'll like show me the right way so I was extremely happy when my baby came (Interview, September 29, 2016).

Again, this idea of a change in situation, motherhood, was associated with the ability to look at the oppressor and say, "Can you show me? Can you prove to me?". Instead of a constant comparison to dominant discourses, Latrice pushed back against the negativity and found her happiness in Elyja and her position as his mother.

While Latrice associated her gender identity with the ways in which her sexuality was controlled and monitored, Bubbles asserted her sexuality as a way to resist control and surveillance of family and religion. Adjusting the pillows to expose her fashion-adorned body, Bubbles batted her eyelashes, rolled her tongue ring, and openly shared about her sexual encounters with both men and women. Bubbles' personality was outwardly exuberant and energetic. She spent much of her time in the mirror posing and

applying brightly-colored makeup and jewelry. Bubbles oftentimes held up several clothing items to make sure her flowy outfits would match fashionable boots. During free moments at camp, Bubbles would frequent the shops and small cafes for trinkets and snacks. Bubbles regarded the well-dressed appearance of her and Emilio as incredibly important.

During one of the small group moments at summer camp, the following field note depicts how Bubbles was among the women strewn over the bunk beds, wide open to both listening and sharing a moment when she was surprised:

Bubbles shared about she was surprised that one of her partners was not the father of her child and it ended up being her next door neighbor. She shared how she 'dated females and girls' but 'liked having sex with guys just for sex'. She shared a lot about her time in a small school for people identified with bipolar. (This story was detailed and yet humorous in her retelling). She also shared how her father kicked her out when he found out she was pregnant and she lived in a shelter (Field Note, July 19, 2016).

With a hesitated pause and laugh (characteristic of Bubbles), she looked around in anticipation of the responses of those sitting around her.

Bubbles was also quick to share her perceptions and opinions of being a teenage mother, religion, and her sexuality during a later interview:

I used to be a lesbian which was really hard for my dad and my parents and stuff too then they ended up accepting that. I was lesbian for like a long time then like I started messin' with guys and then I became like bisexual then I became pregnant so it was like it threw my dad completely off cause he thought I was fully just

gay. So then that was hard and then like um you know prior to this stuff like with me being gay with God and everything it was like hard for me to conjoin the two. Cause like in that [inaudible] 'kay can't accept if you're gay so that was like hard for me to accept that too so I'm like okay well I guess I can't be Christian if I'm gay cause cause like contradicting it so I didn't really I just didn't think about it cause I'm like there's nothing I can do. I can't stop who I like so I didn't so that was with that religion and sexuality I guess and then I just realized like I don't I don't even care no more. I like God, hopefully he likes me. I like girls too so He's gonna have to accept that I don't I don't really care no more (Interview, September 28, 2016).

Bubbles traced her sexual identity through her relationships and sexual experiences. In a matter-of-fact tone, she labeled herself in a variety of sexual identities, "lesbian" "bisexual" and "gay". While Latrice shared her ongoing struggles of her parents labeling her within a static gender role, Bubbles appeared to share the confusion yet willingness of her father to understand her sexual identities. Her casual inclusion of "it threw my dad completely off cause he thought I was fully gay" along with her perception that his response to her sexuality was "hard for me to accept too" carried characteristics of a storytelling climax where the conflict of this story was already experienced and resolved. Bubble's comment that "they ended up accepting that [her sexuality]" also alluded to a possible passivity of choice in her family's understanding and story resolution.

What was seen as more challenging for Bubbles was how to navigate her fluid sexual identity with her perception of a more unyielding Christian doctrine. Her tone was unsure of God's perception of her "contradicting" identity constructions yet she was

unwilling to change. Simply put, "I like God, hopefully he likes me. I like girls too so
He's gonna have to accept that".

With an assertive tone, Bubbles appeared to be content with her stance on religion
and her sexuality:

I'm like, I like girls, I like guys. I don't know who I'm gonna end up with when I

marry and I hope God understands that. I don't I don't I don't know I don't want to

think about it too deeply cause then I'm just not gonna mess with God anymore so

I'm just like if I don't get far… It just like threw my dad off cause like first just got

on accepting me being girl now I'm like I'm back with a guy then I go back with a

girl. He just really he doesn't get it (Interview, September 28, 2016).

As much as Bubbles assured herself that "I don't really care no more", she backs up to
how God and her father either "understands that" or "just really doesn't get it".

For Bubbles, being fluid was an asset and something that she valued in all spaces.
She expressed annoyance during her previous schooling environments that would group
students together based on ability or mental diagnosis. This valuing or devaluing of the
individual based on ability or sexuality valorized normativity as society "punishes those
who do not conform, such as those who do not look normal, love the right kind of person,
or value important things" (Kumashiro, 2004, p. 52). In her sexuality, Bubbles
disregarded normativity of sexual identities as she saw this as fluid and something
contingent upon what was in the moment. Her appreciation for diversity and multiple
perspectives was also complemented by having commonalities that brought teenage
mothers together. Bubbles says, "I think we [teenage mothers] all got along really well.
Like at camp brought people together that would normally not be together. And then

realizing once you brought them together that we all have similar like stories and like like you know going through some of the same things together and you know create new friendships out of that too" (Interview, September 28, 2016). In many ways, the theme of the being read and represented through body image was central to expression.

Embodiment and a Mirroring of Realities

While many of these women were outwardly strong advocates for their stories to be heard, the tenderness and vulnerability of this storytelling process was also wrought with emotional and psychological trauma. Luttrell (2003) asserts that not only are these race- and class-based stories engaging dominant representations of a historically stigmatized population but also there is a tendency to hold stories of the present within a private past rather than public future. The notion of "acceptable stories" runs the risk of some private experiences being categorized as more or less valid than others (Shultz, 2001).

As an opportunity for expression, Real Moms was a space for teenage mothers to take up their own particular ways of being in the world. This open space allowed for possibilities of agency that oftentimes manifested as strength/resilience through vulnerability. Aspects of Monica's story illustrated the repercussions of reliving traumatic moments. As a mirror reflects an image, a slight movement and the combination of distance and angles distort this reflection for the viewer, never quite seeing the same image twice. Similarly, storytelling allowed for distortion and a mirroring of how the author chose to take up her reflective self.

One theme of the summer camp experience was presented through the lens of a reflection, both a physical and allegorical mirroring. The keynote speaker shared her own

story of motherhood, her atypical bodily responses during pregnancy as well as her ongoing struggles with body image. Afterwards, teenage mothers and mentors came together from their own local programming for an informal time of relationship building. Monica chose this space to share a narrative of objectification, sexuality, incest, and abuse. This moment was captured in my introductory reflective memo vignette in Chapter 1.

Trina, Latrice, Meshelle, Bubbles, Alyssa, Anna, and two mentors were sharing lighthearted moments about when they felt surprised, whether good or bad. Conversation flowed similar to the Friendsgiving structure of organically overlapping stories and humorous interjections. Stories included moments of surprise when women found out they were pregnant and the decisions of when and how to share this information with their families and/or partners. Using pillows and blankets to cover up her stomach, Monica was one of the women laying on the floor while others, such as Bubbles and Latrice were strewn over the furniture and each other. The following field note depicted this moment:

Monica softened the laughing mood when she shared about her stepfather raping her at the age of twelve. During her entire sharing, the rest of the teenage mothers were respectful and incredibly attentive to her story. Even when Latrice asked 'Why didn't you tell your mother?' Anna was quick to tell her that it would be difficult and she can see why Monica didn't tell her mother. This story included the police getting called and Monica having to share the details of her abuse. (Since Monica recently told her mom what happened, her stepfather was currently

in jail). After Monica's sharing, Meshelle also shared the pain there was when telling the police about abuse, using her own example (Field Note, July 19, 2016). Retelling the detailed account to the police of her multiple instances of rape was an initial agentic move that removed the source of abuse, at least temporary, from her life yet both Monica and Meshelle agreed that the fact-focused, common-sense narrative of a police report left no room for emotional responses or reprieve from the situation. A reflective silence took over the cabin space in a way that both acknowledged respect for Monica and Meshelle's stories as well as invited others to consider the ways they saw themselves in their stories.

A few months later, Monica shared her own thoughts and perceptions of Real Moms. Unlike her previously self-protective postures, Monica moved openly with confidence as she carried sleeping Madeline, her daughter, into the house where they both lived with Monica's mother, no stepfather. Without prompting, she guided our interview to this small group moment among the bunk beds. While much of her sharing revolved around camp activities, Monica once again took up a somber mood when sharing her perceptions of her body. Monica shared,

> When [area director] say how does you look in the mirror and I told everybody in the cabin I was like feeling broken. I was feeling that I was not cute. That I was too fat to be wearing a dress because my stepfather always told me oh you look like a bad person in that dress and everything so I was looking in the mirror and I was like told me about myself you're not cute you're ugly why you wearing this? Why you wearing that? So kind of like I was broken by myself but I just hold it and I would never speak to other one how I feel so I guess then I go to Real

> Moms and sometimes I was feeling horrible how I dress and everybody oh you
> look cute today. I was like how am I look cute in this but yeah. I feel really good
> to speak with someone and tell them how I feel and everything (Interview,
> October 25, 2016).

Monica's identity of who she was and who she was supposed to become were dependent on the perceptions of others, such as her stepfather. The language of judgments, such as "my stepfather always told me oh you look like a bad person in that dress" became engrained within her perception of her body and her being. Prior to this cabin sharing, the idea that "I was broken by myself but I just hold it and I would never speak to other one" became an isolating factor as well as a barrier to her agency to shift her own perceptions. So closely associated with the physical body, incest, and sexual abuse, Monica viewed her body through a lens of objectification by others and not as her own.

To think back on the numerous field notes of these teenage mothers getting ready for the camp activities of the day, I observed the mirror as an active, participating role within this process. Depending on the timely hustle of getting ready, Monica was one who would always pause and take a moment to look forward, sideways, behind, and sideways again into her reflective friend and foe. There was a familiar, automatic way of her movements that led me to believe this mirror dance was a common occurrence. Her self-critical gaze along with a heaping of negative discourses distorted her reading of her identities, including being female and as a sexual being. She confirmed my observations as she shared her external and then internalized narratives, "you're not cute you're ugly why you wearing this? Why you wearing that?".

Becoming pregnant brought with it fears but also a way of reimagining her previous, internalized readings of her body. Similar to Latrice, Monica attributed a shift in her self-image through the process of her continual, changing body. When she became pregnant with her stepfather's child, Monica enrolled in the nearby alternative high school where both Anna and Latrice attended. It was there that she first became involved with Real Moms and her reflective self was once again distorted, this time in ways that led to possibilities. Monica shared, "Yeah, it changed a lot because I was like I'm pregnant. I'm not fat. I'm pregnant. I have a baby inside of me. This is gonna go away when I'm nine months when my due date's coming. My pudge is going to go away and everything" (Interview, October 25, 2016). Her growing body had "a baby inside" where she recognized there could be multiple ways of reading her situation, multiple stories of her self-image.

Still using reflection as a guidepost, Madeline was the product and image of both trauma and a rebirth of Monica's perceptions of self. Monica shared, "I think I was in depression and first I was saying no I don't I don't want the baby because I gonna see the baby and see her father but and then I was like … I been through for more painful stuff I can do it so just put my head up and just keep going" (Interview, October 25, 2016). This fear of "I gonna see the baby and see her father" is quickly overshadowed by her firm belief that "I been through more painful stuff I can do it so just put my head up and just keep going". Several times throughout this research study, Monica watched Madeline as the toddler freely moved in space, her infectious giggles and ringlets bouncing to and fro on her petite shoulders. This proud mother would say just how much her daughter looks and acts like her. This was a change I observed as well as both mother and daughter

constructed an active life for themselves. This embodied experience of both a physical and emotional reminder of lived experiences takes a certain resiliency that cannot be fully appreciated unless one is willing to reimagine possibilities of multiple reflections.

In connection with Monica's embodied experience, Monica shared her own understandings of the entanglements of racial, cultural, and teenage motherhood identities. From her immigrant experience, Monica's narrative of cultural reproductions was closely tied to traditional gendered roles and privileges. Monica shared:

> My family say it is bad to be a single mom something like that. Um but I don't care… my family's like that. If you get pregnant you need to be married with the man. He's gonna be the father of your I don't know how many kids you want. Like no. That is not my culture because my culture is mine. Like no I don't want to have the same things like same paths, same paths, same paths, no (Interview, October 25, 2016).

Within her familial and cultural background as a Latina woman, females "need to be married with the man" if you were pregnant. This dominant narrative of traditional familial structures did not align with Monica's experience, particularly due to the distrust of rape and incest. She firmly stated, "my culture is mine" and that "I don't want to have the same things like same paths, same paths, same paths, no". This indicated a new way of viewing her family's perceptions, resulting in a rejection of a socially constructed norm. This constructed link between culture and race actually positioned Monica in ways that she has associated with sexual abuse and incest. She wanted to re-narrate her story with her own expectations.

Monica sought relationships and the idea of community on this personal exchange of a way of being. She shared:

> I think it's different. I mean we're humans. I mean it's not different like the culture can be different but it's like how you are to me because if you're a mean person well it's saying oh my culture like this. Don't put your culture first. Put your um how you feel because your culture is one and how you feel is another one. And like they say like okay if my culture say you don't need to talk with people. How's that gonna work? You need to speak with someone. So like I think that doesn't matter your race, your culture if you're Mexican Hispanic whatever you want to call. We're human and we're only one community. It doesn't matter your race (Interview, October 24, 2016).

Monica defined culture in her own terms, "it's like how you are to me" and "your culture is one and how you feel is another one". The emotional response and feelings of how one was treated or mistreated was more legitimated than upholding a particular set of values, in her case, sexual abuse and gendered silence. She restated her thoughts as "You need to speak with someone" and "We're human and we're only one community". Here, Monica was indicating that her experience was one among many other communities and ways of being. This echoed the ways in which she has found belonging within Real Moms.

The mission and vision of Real Moms was based on prioritizing relationships and community. For Monica, this space allowed her to freely take agency to share her story with a new collective, not necessarily her biological family ties. Moving from silencing herself and fear of speaking, Monica shared, "My story with Real Moms is really good"

and "It's good to like to put everything out and hear what about other peoples think about your life and for that get something good" (Interview, October 25, 2016).

Based on the above stories, these women were taking perceptions of what it means to be visible as a teenage mothers building themselves among multiple identities as the complexity of resisting and reinscribing normative narratives was recursive and contingent within their lives (Kelly, 1997). In thinking about a sense of control and a sense of belonging, these identities and embodiment stories were placed within contexts of society and schools. It is necessary to consider how these stories are woven into or ignored within dominant narratives of the purpose of schools. Going back to the initial field note for Anna's question, "Have you used my story yet? What do they think?". These private narratives were actively happening in all sorts of spaces if only the audience would notice.

Chapter 5: Negotiating School, Agency within the Oppression:
"Yes, everything shifted…"

I sat outside in my idling car, parked parallel to the building of the alternative high school. I could tell I was slightly irritated that we might be late for the weekly Real Moms meeting across town. I was also slightly irritated that this unexpected carpooling situation came up. It did give me an opportunity to see where Latrice attended school. This was the same school where a mentor and I had waited to meet with Monica a few weeks earlier. My mind wandered to this past moment. I remembered several women in each hallway that I walked through, some on their way to class and others heading towards the cafeteria for the provided school lunch. The hallways were bare minus the standard neon lights of most public school buildings; the long, rectangular tables of the cafeteria full of women eating their lunches though void of even conversational volume. The prominent sounds of squeaky shoes on the linoleum floor seemed to complement the institutionalized aura of the inside of the school and the ways in which women mechanically moved from place to place. Returning to the present moment, the only sounds in the car were the beating of thick raindrops on the windows and my slightly squeaky windshield wipers. I had turned off the radio earlier to take a phone call from Latrice as she explained that she would be a few more minutes in the building. After a few more minutes of waiting, I saw Door 4 open and a man and woman walked just outside of the door before turning around to escort Latrice out of the building. She was holding Elyja in his baby carrier in one hand and her backpack in the other hand. His diaper bag was slung over her shoulders.

As Latrice attempted to dodge the falling cold raindrops and walk briskly towards the car she gave me a head nod [in acknowledgement of seeing me] and got both herself and Elyja into the car. As Latrice buckled her seatbelt she shook off the rain that landed in her hair. We talked about our previous phone conversation from the day. She elaborated on our brief conversation. Latrice shared that the childcare [at the alternative high school] told her that Elyja had diarrhea and would need to go home. The school provided Latrice with a taxi home [across town]. When she got home Elyja no longer had diarrhea and so Latrice was advised to return to school. When she arrived [she called me at this time to report this information] school was over for the day and everyone had left early. Latrice waited the twenty-five minutes until I arrived to pick her up. [She was, understandably, frustrated with how her afternoon went]. [Presumably unaware of his mother's frustrations] Elyja started "talking"/babbling in his car seat as we drove to Real Moms. I noticed that once we were in the car and drove away from the school, Latrice's body language became less tense and she turned to the backseat to talk to her son. She then turned forward and said to me, "Thank you for the ride" (Field Note, March 17, 2016).

In the United States, schools act as a site for perpetuating explicit, hidden, and null curricula that impacts the perceptions of students, including those who have been marginalized due to their racial and/or social class backgrounds (Basch, 2011; Milner,

2015). Several of the teenage mothers in this study both challenge and reinscribe these curricular practices and discourses as these women reflect upon their decision-making (or lack of choice) in negotiating their schooling experiences. Decisions around continuing enrollment, dropping out, transitioning among schools, and future careers were influenced by perceptions of goal setting, engagement, and disengagement (Kalil, 2002; Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2008; Manlove, 1998; Schultz, 2001).

This decision-making process was highly influenced by the shift into teenage motherhood and the (oftentimes) inability to assimilate into existing educational expectations. Milner (2015) asserts, "Those who are schooled are coerced into assimilating into contexts that do not allow them [students] to build the types of attitudes, dispositions, skills, and knowledge necessary for them to analyze, critique, and contribute to their communities when education is in place" (p. 3). This perpetuation of assimilating practices is problematic if formalized spaces continue to exclude pluralistic ideologies and experiences. For Latrice, a constant battle to assert herself was perceived as society and schools denying her access from economic, social, and educational resources (Anyon, 2005; Furstenberg, 2007; Mollborn & Jacobs, 2011; Pillow, 2004). This ongoing negotiation was also perceived as associated with age, race, social class, and geographic inhibitors that fueled her frustrations and extended the message that, for teenage mothers, there will always be a struggle around "fitting in" or being "pushed out".

In the above field note, Latrice is once again left waiting just as she was left waiting for her father to come and pick her up from extracurricular sports. Latrice spoke about the impact of waiting as associated with a sense of reliance on others who might monitor where she was at particular places and times. This similarity of both waiting for

her father and waiting for me was part of her frustrations around the negotiation of her autonomy as a female teenager as well as her level of control as a teenage mother to care for herself and Elyja. Latrice articulated the responsibilities of communicating with childcare, caring for her sick son, and relying on transportation as reasons that I interpreted as "she was, understandably, frustrated with how her afternoon went". This particular day, the urgency revolved around these timely responsibilities as priority over any conversation around her responsibilities as an academic student, daughter, and/or athlete.

This also led me to reflect on this moment as "I could tell I was slightly irritated that we might be late for the weekly Real Moms meeting across town. I was also slightly irritated that this unexpected carpooling situation came up". In this way, I was perpetuating a sense of urgency around timeliness and my own commitments to being on time for the Real Moms meeting. Organizations such as schools and Real Moms as well as those staff who work for such programs operate on a certain level of time-centered scheduling. In this way, I was also implicated in this work as my desire to arrive to the central research setting might have shadowed the experiences of those directly in front of me. Latrice's perceptions of school (and Real Moms) went beyond physical buildings or the structure of time. Instead, this field note reminded me that these perceptions of school as a place and time site are entangled within the daily, felt experiences of moving through the world, in this case, as a single, Black, working class, teenage mother and student.

Throughout this research study, each woman shared with me her own perceptions of school. For Meshelle, Trina, Alyssa, and Bubbles, reflections on their school experiences were described as four individuals who completed their GEDs or graduated

from the alternative or city high schools. For Latrice, Anna, and Monica, they were currently working towards their high school completion in alternative or charter high schools. Just as it was impossible to separate the multiple identities that one takes up, it was also impossible to create distinct, separate categories of the school experiences of these women. In an attempt to consider the ways in which these women negotiated their school experiences in ways that fostered agency and provided relief, this chapter is organized around four interpretive themes.

First I look to Anna, Alyssa, Latrice, and Trina to discuss the way mobility, "missing out", and the removal of teenage mothers from local, city high schools led to varying perceptions of choice-making and the purpose (socialization, curricula, extracurricular activities) of school. Then I consider how hybridity is engaged within a "fitting in" school desire for Meshelle who actively resisted removal and chose to stay enrolled in her local, city high school. From there I look at Meshelle and Latrice's identities as athletes within the social aspects of the school experience. Each of these interpretive themes considers the ways in which the pregnant or mothering body has been positioned within the school structure. Lastly, I explore perceptions of school labels and identities through Bubbles', Trina's, and Monica's stories of their school experience in relation to hopes for their children's school experience. The table in Appendix B depicts whose stories are central to this chapter's interpretive themes.

Similar to the previous data chapter, the table below highlights themes as interpreted from field notes, interviews, and artifacts (writing pieces). Examples of key data sources are illustrative of the perceptions of student and athlete identity stories addressed within this chapter.

Table 7: Interpretive Themes from Key Data Sources (Chapter 5)

Theme	Definition of Theme	Example(s)	Number of Times Themes Interpreted
"Pushed Out": Choice-Making and the Role of High School	Cultural constructions bound up with perceived or ascribed traits and practices of institutionalized decision-making for particular populations and identities.	"She [Alyssa's mom] didn't really want me to miss anything. Cause she missed a lot herself cause she's a teen mom too so she was really big on making me do a lot of stuff" (Alyssa Interview)	Interviews: 39 Field Notes: 22
"Fitting In": Choice-Making and the Role of High School	Cultural constructions bound up with perceived or ascribed traits and practices of institutionalized decision-making for particular populations and identities.	"I did not come to college just to party and hangout all the time. I came to get the degree I want so I can provide for myself as well as my daughter" (Meshelle Interview)	Interviews: 39 Field Notes: 14
"Benched": Being an Athlete and Mother	Fluid, socio-historical and cultural constructions bound up with perceived, ascribed, or self-identified body traits/physical characteristics, behaviors and processes of performativity.	"I tried to like play basketball or do something like volleyball or something and they be like um you can't put your hands above your head because you're pregnant and all this other stuff" (Latrice Interview)	Interviews: 26 Field Notes: 10
Schooling for Me and My Child	Perceived or ascribed characteristics and practices of institutionalized decision-making for particular populations and identities.	"I mean she's still little but like probably when she grow up and I have my career she gonna appreciate that I was like go to school and give her like a more to like say oh I need to go to school too to get my career" (Monica Interview)	Interviews: 4 Field Notes: 11

"Pushed Out": Choice-Making and the Role of High School

One way that several of the teenage mothers characterized their school experience

was a highly mobile journey through different schools as each school became more

specific and homogenous as a space for those who did not fit the normed characteristics of being a teenager (Pillow, 2004). While some of these transfers were initially named as choice movements, other school institutions were more direct with the ways in which teenage mothers were categorized and removed from dominant curricula (Lesko, 2002). This section draws attention to the various degrees that school sense-making was responded to and/or agentic for some of these teenage mothers. Drawing on characteristics associated with a normative high school experience, these women were making sense of their own experiences of being a high school student. From this juxtaposition of experiences, these women were creating their own narrative of just how diverse the language of "typical" might be reimagined. The table below traces the school enrollment and current school status of the focal teenage mother participants. Brief descriptions of the different types of school institutions or programming are identified by letter (A, B, C…) for each setting in order to show the variety of local, city high schools within the geographic scope of Real Moms recruitment.

Table 8: Tracings of School Enrollments & Current School Status

Name	School Enrollment Tracing	Current School Status
Alyssa	- City High School A (found out pregnant) - Alternative High School - City High School F parenting program - Community and Technical College GED pathway program	Completed GED
Anna	- City High School A - City High School B - City High School A - City High School C (found out pregnant) - Alternative High School A	Enrolled in Alternative High School
Latrice	City High School E (found out	Enrolled in Charter

		Internship High School
	▪ pregnant) ▪ Alternative High School ▪ Charter Internship High School	
Meshelle	▪ Graduated from City High School D after four years of consecutive enrollment (found out pregnant) ▪ Started her freshman year at a local, private university ▪ Transferred to a local, four-year public university	Second year of college
Bubbles	▪ City High School B in level 3 program ▪ City High School F in level 4 program (found out pregnant) ▪ City High School G GED pathway program	Completed GED
Trina	▪ City High School (out of state) ▪ Dropped out in 12th grade ▪ Moved to new state (found out pregnant) ▪ Alternative High School	Graduated June 2016
Monica	▪ Alternative High School	Enrolled in Alternative High School

Pregnant with her second daughter, Alyssa was one of three pregnant women in

Real Moms during the time of this research study. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Alyssa

learned about Real Moms by her volleyball coach who was also an area director of the

program. When Alyssa became pregnant with her second daughter, she continued to

participate (besides some physical, health limitations) in Real Moms meetings. All three

of the women who were pregnant (Alyssa and two mentors also named Alyssa) would

touch base with each other as well as frequently answer questions around pregnancy and

preparing for the upcoming births. I observed that Alyssa freely offered suggestions

around the birthing experience to the two mentors who were both having their first child.

Alyssa was verbal about wanting to have a large family. In thinking about Alyssa's identity as a teenage mother and her identity as a teenage mother to two children, the work of Real Moms centered around a sense of community and belonging versus communicating a singular story of how to exist as a teenage mother (i.e. deficit perspective of having multiple children). This also included providing resources for those who chose to centrally take up their mothering identity as others chose to center attention and resources on their student, daughter, and /or partner identities.

When asked, Alyssa was eager to show pictures of the recent baby shower thrown for her by Prince, the father of her children, and his family. Alyssa was planning on continuing to reside with Prince and the rest of his immediate family, including Anna and Aubrey. In addition to Prince's side of the family, Alyssa gave credit to her mother, a former teenage mother, for her insistence that Alyssa have as close to normal of a high school experience as possible. While Alyssa characterized her high school experience as normal, the number of schools she attended contradicted dominant narratives of a singular school context from freshman year through graduation. Alyssa traced her high school contexts, "I went to [City High School A] til I was about three or four months pregnant with Chanelle and then I switched to [Alternative High School]. And then I stayed there for awhile. And then I ended up going to [City High School F] which is another alternative school. I didn't really like it cause I was in like the people there. So then I went to [Community and Technical College] and started this pathway program where they help you test out of school so I did that and then graduated" (Interview, September 13, 2016). Alyssa attended four different school contexts before graduating with her GED. This tracing showed how she started in her neighborhood, city high

school, and then transferred to two different alternative high schools during her pregnancy. Once Chanelle was born, Alyssa made her final move to a local community college for her GED completion.

Within her sharing, Alyssa narrated contradictions in the ways she positioned herself as not missing out on anything. She was adamant that "I didn't really miss out on anything. I still went to prom. I still went to school dances. Cause my mom's really big on that. She didn't really want me to miss anything. Cause she missed a lot herself cause she's a teen mom too so she was really big on making me do a lot of stuff" (Interview, September 13, 2016). Alyssa emphasized the social aspects of high school as the important things in that she did not "miss out on anything" (Kalil, 2002). This placing of value on what she perceived as important highlights a particular aspect of high school- the significance of social interactions and events- that was not always taken into consideration when school institutions remove and/or place teenage mothers and other marginalized students based on perceived difficulties they might have (Kalil, 2002; Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2008). Arguably, curriculum and content was different yet Alyssa saw the social events as remaining present in her school experience.

Alyssa also considered how others perceived the experiences of teenage mothers. In thinking about what was typical she shared, "It's stereotypical whatever that word it cause most people like you're not gonna graduate or you're not gonna be nothing. It's kind of makes it harder" (Interview, September 13, 2016). Here she associated that what "makes it harder" are the perceptions of others and not her multiple transitions.

The emphasis placed on the social aspects of high school as part of Alyssa's desires was also illustrated in how she perceived her summer camp experience with Real

Moms. During her first time at summer camp, Alyssa was not pregnant and could participate in each of the physical activities, such as the go karts, the giant swing, and the high ropes obstacle course. This year, Alyssa was pregnant and shared, "This time it was pretty boring cause I couldn't do anything cause I'm pregnant. So I was miserable. It was fun at times still though" (Interview, September 13 2016). While there were times where Alyssa could participate, the inability to be physically active and involved came at the cost of feeling bored or left out of the social time.

Anna had a different perception of what teenagers' perspectives on high school might mean for social acceptance and social isolation. Anna started off at the same local, city high school as Alyssa but then perceived a school transition as an opportunity to try new schools. This appeared to be her way of perceiving her highly mobile experience where she was active in the decision-making process. From her position currently enrolled in an alternative high school, Anna traced her school transitions:

I was in plenty of schools before that. Well okay so my home home school was [City High School A]. I started there I went to [City High School B] for like two months then I went back cause I that was my school and I was so used to it and I liked it. The way it was yeah. And then you know like any other teenager we want to try out a whole bunch of new schools so I went to [City High School C] but then I found out I was pregnant and they kind of um I could've stayed at [City High School C] because they have a [parenting] program also but [Alternative High School] was a little bit more lenient. Where if you were I was sick and I was always throwing up every morning so if you couldn't make it to school that day because you were really really sick you could stay home and you can just call em

like not feeling good you know you're pregnant and they'll be like okay. Excused. Whereas if you went to school you gotta be there or you'll be missin' a whole lot (Interview, September 13, 2016).

Many of her reasons for moving from school to school were attributed to the types of resources available to her and then her subsequent decision-making (SmithBattle, 2007; Zachry, 2005). Anna's characterization that these decision-making opportunities were also the desires of "any other teenager" because "we want to try out a whole bunch of new schools" exemplified her sense-making and actual experience of having multiple choices available. These resources were directly related to her needs as a pregnant woman who was "throwing up every morning" "really really sick" and "not feeling good you know you're pregnant". At her alternative high school, these bodily responses were "excused" where you were not "missin' a whole lot".

This idea of "missin' a whole lot" spoke to the ways in which the normative curricula and high school experiences continued to move chronologically through time regardless of a student's experiences. It then became the responsibility of the individual student to figure out a way to adjust her experiences against an established structure. For example, Anna placed this adjustment on herself versus placing blame or responsibility on a rigid, unforgiving school institution. She said, "I mean I couldn't go back to volleyball but that wasn't because you know I had to miss out on it cause there's I could've went back to [City High School A] and then have my baby in the daycare still but I just chose not to. I feel like you just choose not to do certain things. I feel like you do the same things someone else can, just with a babysitting" (Interview, September 13, 2016). This matter-of-fact, sense-making was evident through Anna's statement of "I

couldn't go back to volleyball… you know I had to miss out" where there was this established cause and effect trajectory that could not be challenged. And yet still, she said, "I just chose not to. I feel like you just choose not to do certain things." Resources such as childcare and babysitting (now viewed as a basic need) were considered to be one way for a teenage mother to use her decision-making choices and yet this was placed against a structure that determines who participated and who missed out (SmithBattle, 2007; Zachry, 2005).

Both Latrice and Trina brought up the ways in which their gender identities were exploited into these alternative high schools, creating one form of homogeneity. Schools were not places that affirmed hybridity as their identities as teenage mothers became more prominent than other identities. Frustrated with the ways her family continued to position her based on her gender identity as a girl who needed to be protected, Latrice reflected on her reasons for enrolling in a charter, career-readiness program instead of remaining in the alternative school (described in the chapter opening field note). Latrice described her experience within this alternative school as "I transferred because I really didn't like [Alternative High School]. I really didn't like the all-girls school. I didn't really wanna stay there with lotta children and stuff" (Interview, September 29, 2016). With the constant gaze of well-intended school staff, Latrice felt that possibilities were missed by attending a school for pregnant women and their children. Latrice felt discomfort in the sterilization of the physical space as well as the lack of engaging curricular and extracurricular opportunities. Similar to her frustrations expressed in the opening field note, Latrice felt that this alternative high school flattened her school experience around her responsibilities and identity as a teenage mother, no longer a multifaceted woman and

student. Enjoying being active, this new charter school provided resources for daycare and parenting while also providing space for Latrice to work with her hands. She was proud of her accomplishments: building walls, removing tree stumps, learning to drive. Unlike Anna and Alyssa, Latrice viewed the curricula as something that was missing from her high school experience.

Identifying herself as a former teenage mother, Trina provided yet another perspective on schooling since she, like Alyssa, completed her high school degree and was no longer enrolled in school. Sitting on the floor of the house she shared with her mother, Trina whispered to me about her experiences as a teenage mother. Our hushed tones of the interview were in response to the sleeping child and man in the other room. When asked about her school experience, Trina connected this story with the close connection she had with her father. Trina moved from another state to live closer to her father. With the recent death of her father still bearing on her heart, Trina teared up as she spoke of the struggle of transitioning to a new state and neighborhood without the anticipated support of him. While grateful for her mother, Trina did not want to be surrounded by only female companionship.

Trina shared a similar concern about all-female enrollment in her school experience in this new area. She said:

There's like a lot of girls that can't like be around a bunch of women. You know that I'm talking. I don't know why that's that but like I hear it all the time at [Alternative High School]. When I was at [Alternative High School] and it's just weird to me. Why not be around a lot of women. It's better to be around a lot of guys. Right? But I think that's one of it. Like I heard a couple of them that they

just don't like to be around a lot of women. I don't know why but I think that's the

... I think that of course (Interview, September 12, 2016).

This pushback about not being gender isolated was positioned as "weird" and something that contradicted common-sense narratives for her school (or daily) experience. There was a sense of permanency in the ways Trina and others socially described this gendered school space as "a lot of girls" "bunch of women" "a lot of women". A sense of surveillance was felt as these all-female settings sought to de-sexualize the schooling experience by keeping females away from males (Fine, 1993; Lesko, 2002; Lesko 2012). Quarantined from coed experiences, these alternative schools for teenage mothers or "all-female" schools appeared to be the institutional design of de-sexualizing sexual beings and removing them from gender diverse settings by erasing any discourse of desire (Fine, 1993; Renold, 2006). What was interesting was the similar and different ways in which this alternative high school was perceived and described from both the teenage mothers as well as Real Moms staff.

Similar to the teenage mothers, Rose was also concerned about the ways in which schools were perceiving the needs of pregnant and teenage mothers. Rose shared:

I mean I think something like [Alternative High School] is a good like in between. Like if a girl has a baby so they don't fall too far behind and that they can stay you know connected in some way but I don't really feel like it's a long term like for your whole high school experience to be at something like [Alternative High School]. Cause I think I mean it's all girls there. I mean I haven't yeah I just I think it's probably. I just don't think it's the the best model necessarily of like educating them and I think they're capable of like the same expectations as other

high schoolers. Like, do they have other barriers? Yes. But I don't think that that

means we just give them worksheets and don't really like give them a full high

school experience. So I think the girls that have gone to high schools where they

still have the daycare option but they're in a traditional high school have a much

better high school experience, more well-rounded where yes they have some other

things going on but they still it's still coed. There's still like just your more

traditional high school experience rather than a place where you know there's not

sports. There's not those other opportunities and socially um not those

opportunities so. I personally think like long term it's better for them to be

somewhere where if they still can have their kid in day care and not be in an

alternative long term (Interview, October 27, 2016).

Echoing language of "it's all girls", Rose also attended to the permanence of purpose

within a space where she acknowledged this alternative school space could offer a

temporary relief but was cautious of a long-term benefit. Again, these "all girls"

alternative high schools appear to attend to policies such as Title IX, and yet they

continue to quarantine teenage mothers by removing them from gender diverse learning

experiences. This practice also continues to maintain traditional ways of gender

identifications around male and female binaries of sexuality and expression (Renold,

2006). Beyond this temporary relief, Rose spoke to the same curricular concerns as

Latrice in that "they're [teenage mothers] capable of like the same expectations as other

high schoolers. Like, do they have other barriers? Yes. But I don't think that that means

we just give them worksheets and don't really like give them a full high school

experience". This "full high school experience" included the social aspects named by

Anna and Alyssa as well as the curricular aspects names by Latrice and Trina. Therefore, I assert that a continual attention to access and the current needs and/or interests of teenage mothers must be taken into consideration with policymakers and other educational stakeholders as well as the teenage mothers themselves.

"Fitting In": Choice-Making and the Role of High School

While Alyssa, Anna, Latrice, and Trina traced their educational trajectories through a more fluid enrollment in different school contexts, Meshelle's school experience differed in how she spoke of her experience remaining in one school throughout her pregnancy and the birth of Symone. Well-researched in policies around teenage motherhood and schools, Meshelle was committed to promoting awareness on how the enactment of Title IX situates particular bodies in schools. Her actions were in conjunction with desires for antioppressive education (Kumashiro, 2002) and liberatory practices (hooks, 1994) towards a decentralization of a social efficiency model of education. A few years older than the majority of the teenage mothers involved in Real Moms, Meshelle lived in a neighboring city a few miles away from the Real Moms location. Meshelle was vocal about her decision to remain in her local, city high school and attributed this agentic move to her commitments to advocacy work around teenage motherhood. Similar to Alyssa, Meshelle referenced her mother's experience as a former teenage mother as a resource for her decision-making. She did not attend school with any of those who participated in this study and yet her description of her schooling experience had reflections of others' stories as well. Meshelle shared:

> Yeah, there was eight eight moms by the time I graduated in our class. So in our
> 2015 graduating class and like I said my counselor really pushed going to the

alternative school. All seven besides me went to the alternative school and I was the only one that graduated on time and in a in [City High School D] and so I was just angered by that because I felt like they totally just pushed like they trying to get us out because they know that we're gonna go through some struggles and we need teachers to like understand that. And so I was just like I couldn't believe it so for like um one of my laws in like American's Government or um Economics or whatever I mean was not like I already know like in the Title IX or whatever you can't really discriminate and so I just I was like couldn't believe it and so a lot of the moms like looked at me as like not saying anything but like they came to me as their mom and their support system and just would talk to me about things and their relationships and I just would like tell my teachers like well you guys really made them feel uncomfortable and you made them feel like they can't do it and it's not okay and and I feel like they heard my voice and all of like people who were like in the high school know that I was like the only one left and so I feel like they looked at me as like a normal but then they would be like for instance like I'll use um Gloria. They'll be like but Gloria has a baby and she's sixteen and they'll like kindda call her out and then I have to refocus like yeah I have a baby too. And I think just like by them separating us was a really hard because we are supposed to be like a class and they didn't have that really opportunity (Interview, September 20, 2016).

Meshelle's sharing was full of emotional language such as "angered" "I couldn't believe it" and "uncomfortable" around her school experience. The "they" of schools included policymakers, administration, and teachers who made Meshelle feel like "just pushed like

they trying to get us out because they know that we're gonna go through some struggles".
Meshelle alluded to a traditional curricular pacing schedule where uniformity and efficiency were more valued than the individual needs of students and families (Kliebard, 2004). This also included a silencing of discourses of desire where uniformity was maintained by de-sexualizing females (and males) as non-sexual beings who solely attend school for the purpose of particular learning (Fine, 1993). Meshelle vocalized that "we need teachers to like understand" and "in the Title IX or whatever you can't really discriminate". What was interesting here was that Meshelle's agentic move was something that benefitted her individual experience to stay within her local high school yet she was viewed as the exception and spokesperson for those who were either no longer present or who did not feel comfortable to speak up.

The practice of efficiency was addressed in relation to the ways in which teenage mothers were positioned within the school context (Burdell, 1998). The language of time was related to the positioning of being the only one and, therefore, independently responsible for the voices of others. Meshelle's language of "I was the only one that graduated on time" "I was the only one left and so I feel like they looked at me as like a normal" isolated her from those sharing any aspect of a common (hybrid) identity experience. Responsibility fell on Meshelle to remind the school that "yeah I have a baby too" after the physical visibility of her pregnancy (Symone now in childcare). From her perspective, teachers and "they" erased this significant part of her lived experience and identity as a mother that still existed. While Meshelle read and wrote about the policies that provided equal access to resources, the invisibility of motherhood within this traditional high school space was felt more than a bare-minimum access law.

The practice of separating women into alternative high schools and away from curricula, including such curricula as Advanced Placement (AP) classes, extracurricular activities, and learning communities also socially separated some teenage mothers, such as Meshelle from existing relationships with teachers and peers (Burdell, 1998). As Meshelle shared, "I just would like tell my teachers like well you guys really made them feel uncomfortable and you made them feel like they can't do it and it's not okay" and "I think just like by them separating us was a really hard because we are supposed to be like a class and they didn't have that really opportunity". Regardless of if the teenage mother stayed in school or transferred to an alternative program, the result of any change not only effects those in direct involvement but also impacts the high school experiences of the whole graduating class.

A unique aspect to Meshelle's experience was the way in which she chose to process her own tracing of her experience within and alongside societal images of what it means to be a teenage mother. In thinking about the ways in which teenage mothers were narrating their own stories, Meshelle found writing in her college composition courses as one way in which she shared both her stories as well as her critique on current educational systems. For example, in her writing narrative in her freshman composition course, she wrote, "The smallest form of discrimination can change the teen parents view on school… I believe that if teen parents felt more comfortable at school and got the support they needed, teen parents would feel better about staying in school which would make the graduation rate of parents go up" (Writing Narrative, September 20, 2016). She went on to write:

One of the challenges that I deal with from holding the identity of a mother and a college student, is I do not get to experience the typical college life, of partying and staying in the dorms. A lot of my college classmates always ask me to do things at the most random times and I usually have to turn them down because it does not fit well with my parenting schedule. Most of them understand but then other times people say 'why can't her dad watch her?' That makes the situation harder for me because it is not that easy. However, I did not come to college just to party and hangout all the time. I came to get the degree I want so I can provide for myself as well as my daughter. One opportunity that I will receive for having multiple identities is really finding out who I really am and just being able to make a mask out of all the identities I have now and turn it into one… I am not the only one still trying to find myself and that finding yourself is a process. Having privilege is a big thing in the world. Some people do not recognize the privilege they have and others take it for granted. It is always important to be well aware of the situations you are put in and be true yourself and the others around us…If changes could be made and more teens have the opportunity to learn about sex ed I strongly believe that the teen pregnancy rates will continue to go down. However, if they do not go down I do not think it is fair for myself or any other teen parent to get shamed on and put down because of the decisions that have made. Since being in the position personally, I do not feel that having a baby during your adolescent years is very surprising anymore. In high schools and colleges they are making resources for parents to still be able to go to school and parent their kids. I do not know what I would do if I did not have access and

success support and study rooms with child friendly play room. With the

convenient play room and study room, it makes studying so much easier.

Although there may be several causes for teen pregnancy that should be

prevented, I believe that solutions lie not in shaming teen parents but in educating

them on the importance of graduations and in providing the support for them to do

so (Writing Narrative, September 20, 2016).

Meshelle acknowledged how her hybrid identities were both engaged within different

moments in time and contexts as well as blended into "a mask out of all the identities I

have now and turn it into one". She spoke to the ways in which these identities as a

college student and mother were attached to particular role expectations such as "partying

and staying in the dorms" and establishing a "parenting schedule", respectively. Instead

of an either-or approach to pursuing her college degree, Meshelle claimed a both-and

approach where, "I am not the only one still trying to find myself and that finding

yourself is a process. Having privilege is a big thing in the world". In many ways

Meshelle has felt that "to get shamed on" as a teenage parent has been attached to an

individual, deficit mindset, but here she was adamant that societal structures and privilege

were responsible for positioning and marginalizing populations, such as teenage mothers.

This writing narrative piece directly addressed the issues that Meshelle viewed as

limiting access to teenage mothers. Instead of shaming teenage parents, Meshelle

attributed her college success to resources such as a playroom and convenient childcare

options in that "I do not know what I would do if I did not have access and success

support and study rooms with child friendly play room". These spaces where one can

write and exist as both a student and a mother do not require one to erase or leave behind

such as essential portion of her identity in pursuit of another identity (Atwell-Vasey, 1998; Luttrell, 2003; Minh-ha, 1989).

"Benched": Being an Athlete and Mother

As evidenced from these interpretive themes, high school was perceived as more than a strictly academic space for teenagers and/or teenagers who became pregnant in high school. The social dynamics of constructing multiple identities around race, class, gender, and sexuality were also being constructed around social identities such as academic, peer, and athlete (Kelly, 1997). For some of the teenage mothers I worked with, their social identity was closely connected to their abilities to participate in activities as athletes. As already mentioned, Latrice found the surveillance of her gendered body to get in the way of her access to transportation and sports participation. Meshelle also discussed the constant pressure to leave her public school and sports teams because of her ever-changing body. In some ways, these women were very aware of their bodies and claimed them as their own. In other ways, the public expansion of their pregnant bodies was also felt as a space for others to publically call out their limitations in contrast to their non-pregnant ways of being.

In thinking about the ways in which transferring schools and alternative schools have impacted the perceptions of education for these women, it was important to consider what teenage mothers might perceive as a loss or lack of agency within various contexts. Referring to both the title of this chapter as well as the chapter vignette, Latrice continued to grapple with her gender identity in relation to the various contexts she found herself. She stated, "Yes, everything shifted…it made me feel like I just destroyed my whole life" (Interview, September 29, 2016). Part of this shift included access to resources that

fostered her sense of self, her passions as an athlete, and decision-making around her body. Repeating her own sentiments, Latrice shared:

> Yes, everything shifted. Like I mean I didn't play any sports while I was pregnant. I didn't go outside. Well I went on like long walks and stuff like that but I didn't really like get to do any sports or anything cause every time I tried to like play basketball or do something like volleyball or something and they be like um you can't put your hands above your head because you're pregnant and all this other stuff. Um and yeah I couldn't really do anything. They just told me I couldn't… It made me feel like I just destroyed my whole life. That's that's how it made me feel. Like I just gave up but I felt like I'm just gonna get back up on my hard my high horse and start over again cause I know I can do it (Interview, September 29, 2016).

Latrice's sentiments showed how she placed blame on herself as a result of the constant messaging that she was solely responsible for her own predicament. The "they" of schools represented the rules and limitations of being a pregnant woman. Latrice repeated this idea as "they just told me I couldn't". This idea of "I couldn't" was similar to the messaging that Meshelle also identified as a potential access barrier. While Latrice felt like "I just destroyed my whole life", she also viewed the messaging of schools as something that she would prove incorrect as she would "start over again cause I know I can do it".

I noticed that Real Moms was one context where Latrice utilized the space to do the things she loved, to reclaim her athletic identity. Whenever possible, Latrice spent her time at camp on the basketball courts. While skillfully bouncing the basketball and taking

occasional shots at the basket, she frequently repeated the same sentiments of her later interview. She was active. She was an athlete. She felt that her former pregnant body removed her from the action that was so vital to her identity constructions. She didn't know how to regain or reclaim that part of herself. She was frustrated. And yet, dribbling the ball on the court while other teenage mothers and mentors watched Elyja she rooted for herself, "She shoots! She scores!". No longer "benched" from this identity, Latrice was active in reclaiming this sense of self.

Meshelle also shared the impact of her identity as an athlete in relation to the school structures that prohibited her from participating on the sports teams. Meshelle frequently shared about her ongoing struggles with body image and weight loss. Her identity as an athlete incorporated aspects of competition but also her pride with physical strength and a healthy lifestyle. Just as she was angered by her counselor's attempt to push her out of the public school, Meshelle shared how she experienced a shift in both her identity as an athlete and her identity as a social member of her graduating class:

> I came back my junior year and the year before I got pregnant I just went to the state tournament with for basketball and so losing basketball was really hard because basketball is such a long commitment for the season and so I couldn't play basketball so I was the manager for the boys' basketball team and I continued to play softball my when I came back my junior year um after having Symone and it was difficult cause I I would like pee on myself and I would I was like out of shape but my coach was still supportive and she like pushed me to continue to play…My senior year was a lot better. Yeah I played softball… transitioning from my junior to senior year it got a lot better cause I found like my

actual group of friends and I saw who like my real best friends were. And um I

was happy. I was like the um I can't even remember it right now um the super fan

for all the sports so I was in charge of like making things up and I bought candy to

like get the crowd going and I would throw it at football games so it was really

fun (Interview, September 20, 2016).

The physical toll of having been recently pregnant was a concrete obstacle that made it

more difficult for Meshelle to participate in softball. Her sharing of bodily responses "I

would like pee on myself" and "I was like out of shape" were two examples of new

things she associated with her body after pregnancy. Meshelle also mentioned two

transitions where she was forced to adjust her identity as an athlete towards a new "super

fan" identity in support of male basketball and football sports' teams. Even with the

opportunity to play softball her senior year, Meshelle referred to the timeliness of sports

seasons where the annual constraints of progression from freshman to senior year did not

leave much room for her to get back into competitive shape. Physical bodies change after

giving birth. Meshelle also continued to vocalize her need for a change with her desire of

socialization and a close group of friends.

What was interesting was the ways in which Meshelle chose to find her own way

of being both a mother and a student athlete within the amount of choice and autonomy

that she had. She shifted her identity as an athlete on a competitive sports team to being a

"super fan" who "was in charge of like making things up" and "get the crowd going".

This idea of being a cheerleader instead of the player who was getting cheered on was a

shift that Meshelle found "really fun" and yet she was now positioned on the outside of

the identity that she previously held so close.

Both Latrice and Meshelle's frustrations were valid as their high school experiences were wrought with assumptions of academic and athletic practices based on a distinct, adolescent "becoming" stage where conformity is equated with success (Vagle, 2012). This static understanding of distinct stages resulted in the individual student/athlete being denied agency or power to control her situation, particularly when hybrid identities such as teenage motherhood was considered. Additionally, the schools' decisions to restrict these pregnant women from participating in activities was both perceived as a way to "protect" the physical safety of the individual as well as a way to exclude the student-athlete-mother. There was no space for this multiplicity or hybridity within the existing programs. This decision-making process perpetuated a practice of surveillance in positioning the pregnant body as a sideline participant and, due to the highly competitive organization of high school athletics, ultimately denied these women from engaging in full participation. These decisions weren't always able to attend to the emotional and social "safety" of female students who tried to reclaim their previous identities. It is thus necessary to trouble the binary discourses of either "fitting in" or "pushed out" to see the possibility of multiplicity to transgress power hierarchies (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001). The hybridity of living and being within distinctly different spaces required these women to look for a "third space" of being who they were and who they want to become (Bhabha, 1990). The collision of many considerations continued to be muddled and without a clear "one size fits all" solution.

Situating School for Me and My Child

Another interpretive theme around the topic of school was the ways in which teenage mothers described how their own school experience influenced their hopes for

their children's school experience (Kalil, 2002). For most women, it was pregnancy that really shifted their own perspectives on their high school experience in positive ways because of this new sense of responsibility. Where students such as Alyssa, Anna, Trina, and Latrice considered their highly mobile journeys towards school as part of their choice-making, and Meshelle attributed her success to her static context, Bubbles positioned herself as receiving these multiple transitions due to her other identities and labels she took up and were placed upon her. Bubbles shared,

Schooling was hard because I guess like I didn't focus in school like cause I was wild like I would I already had attention problems too so like I didn't really focus on school so already didn't know what anything that they were talking about so that was really hard um I then like finally like they couldn't find my setting I guess for me so like every school like they'll try to try me out for like a month and realize I can't do it then transfer me around like I went to [City High School B] for like a month then you realize you know I can't be there. I'm not close something wrong with your paperwork realizing that was setting three they put me in. Was supposed to be in setting four so I was hopping around then [City High School F] was the school I had to go to yeah so that was that. And then it was hard because with all the jumping around and me not being able to actually learn what I was supposed to be learning when it came to getting my GED that was actually really really hard because I didn't know what they were talking about. It's like I had to start from the very beginning with like in elementary work. Like try to figure out how to do stuff like. How to figure out stuff and everything so that was hard. I thought I was never gonna do it. I wanted to give up a lot but then Emilio was my

motive cause I'm like I don't want him getting older thinking well you didn't

graduate why'd I have to graduate so so that was that but it was really hard cause I

don't know what they're talking about so (Interview, September 28, 2016).

Bubbles was describing her school identity as well as showing how others interpreted and

acted upon labels such as ADHD, teenage motherhood, mental illness. Her perceptions of

the ways in which both the public and alternative schools positioned her referred to how

she took up deficit mindsets that were commonly observed within schools. Describing

herself as "wild" and with "attention problems", Bubbles also named the common

situations that highly transient students face in schools, their records and labels became

detached from the student and yet the student was so closely connected to this label. For

example, the month-long stays and switches at each of these schools were the result of

misplacement by school personnel. Phrases such as "they couldn't find my setting"

"they'll try me out for like a month and realize I can't do it" "I can't be there" and

"jumping around" named the ways in which Bubbles characterized her school experience

in relation to what context, setting three or four, was capable of handling her. The direct

result of taking up this identity of a numerical label was what was lost along the way,

where Bubbles was "not being able to actually learn" and "it was really hard cause I don't

know what they're talking about".

Where the historical discourses viewed pregnancy as an indicator of school

dropout and/ or disengagement (Kalil, 2002; Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2008; Kelly, 2000),

Bubbles attributed her persistence to Emilio and his future perceptions of school and

graduation. It's not just the high school experience that comes to mind for these women.

Bubbles oftentimes referred to her elementary school experience as the place where her

perceptions of her school identity were being constructed. This was connected to her own concerns about Emilio and his future school experience. Bubbles stated,

> I want him just to learn a lot and actually focus**.** And then like [inaudible] just elementary to have the I didn't have the you know come home bring my homework to my parents have them help me I'm not understanding stuff I just act like I knew what I was talking about but I wasn't just doing it and then like copying off of all my like for that's how I made it through elementary and middle school. My friends who were smart. They helped me cause they knew I was kinda [inaudible]. So they'd be like oh finished my homework and I'd get their homework and I'd copy all their answers. That's how I made it through school so I'll definitely not have that for Emilio and I actually help him and active learn relearn with him like you know like go through that all over again so when he brings his homework it'd be like my homework we'd go over it together so I can make sure that he understands actually what he's learning versus just filling out stuff. Actually understanding it that will be what I want different from him for him to actually know what he's doing (Interview, September 28, 2016).

Bubbles referred to her friends and peers as being key players in her early school success. Contrary to deficit discourses that position particular populations as inactive or with passive parent involvement (Kelly, 2000), Bubbles actively desired to support Emilio's learning in (traditional) homework practices but with the end goal to be so "I can make sure that he understands actually what he's learning versus filling out stuff". Her concern with being able to support her son with his learning was indicated in her own elementary

school experience where "I'd copy all the answers" was not sufficient in authentic learning and yet she "made it through elementary and middle school".

Bubbles also made reference to the school policies that place students into particular school settings based on a characteristic, such as mental illness or teenage pregnancy (Pillow, 2004). When asked about her eventual transition into a level four school, she shared,

> Probably just the other people that like with them bring me to a school that's filled with people just like me. That'll probably make it harder because it's like I know they sending me there to help me cause they have different ways of helping me learn but didn't really help because now I'm filled with people who are just like me so it's not we're all not focusing together so versus having people who are all focused on to help get my attention back onto what they're learning cause like like okay nobody's fooling around with me you know so it's like now you know but now everybody's nobody wants to learn at that school. Nobody wants to sit in the class and do anything that makes me not want to sit in the class and do anything so that was probably hard about it (Interview, September 28, 2016).

While Bubbles acknowledged that some degree of differentiation based on student need was helpful, she used her example of ADHD to share that "now I'm filled with people who are just like me so it's not we're all not focusing together". While creating a binary of sorts, she grappled with what it might look like if "having people who are all focused on to help get my attention back onto what they're learning" would have some benefit. She shared, "Well yeah cause I was like before him I was like really wild outside I was partying everything then after him kinda just changed my perspective of everything. I

started taking like life more seriously in general so like focusing on trying to go to school

and that's when I like you know ended up finishing my GED and stuff last year and like

trying to get that out the way so I can get more opportunities and jobs. Cause they well

you have your GEDs and stuff so doing that. And then working so it just changed like my

perspective of things" (Interview, September 28, 2016). In thinking about how labels and

identifiers positioned and literally placed students on particular, singular pathways of

educational (and future) expectations, there was a need for spaces to consider hybrid and

intersecting identities.

Narrow notions of teenage motherhood identities and the limiting of possibility

around these identities leads to categorical labels around the waste and value of certain

populations. Dyke & LoBello (2014) state, "[T]eenage mothers are devalued and

produced as waste in schools within and through modernist developmentalist discourses

that naturalize and universalize narrow and linear notions of progress and civilization

(versus space, culture, and time)" (p. 71). For example, Bubbles viewed earning her GED

and receiving her diploma as a linear, meritocratic process in order to "get that [diploma]

out the way so I can get more opportunities and jobs". These assessment practices act as

gatekeepers. Noguera (2003) argues that schools require obedience to particular social

contracts in exchange for their education. Dyke & LoBello (2014) argue, "This implicit

social contract, where students exchange submission and conformity for the right to gain

the credentials that would allow them to work in the world, legitimizes schools' right and

responsibility to push young moms into alternative programs or out of schools altogether.

This wasting serves to valorize those youth who appear to uphold their end of the social

contract" (p.75). If students are not willing to assimilate and submit to the normalized

characterization of teenager, then credentials such as the GED become gatekeepers that validate the practice of removing certain students from mainstream classrooms.

The impact of school engagement and adherence to these social contracts was much more lifelong in thinking about students' perspectives of learning, especially when the next generation of students was also considered. Trina shared more about how multiple factors shifted her perspective of her actions. She said, "It's really been great actually cause ever since my dad had passed away I've been a trouble child and stuff and like um I just never I don't know how to explain it I just never listened to anybody or um I'm just I got in trouble in school a lot too. But like after I got pregnant I told myself I will be a better person for him and for me. And I will finish school and just you know just be better you know" (Interview, September 12, 2016). Labeling herself as "a trouble child" also attributed pregnancy as a motivator to "be a better person for him and for me". School was associated with disengagement and as a context for trouble whereas Trina oftentimes referred to her family context as a place of engagement and real-life learning.

What was interesting was the ways in which Trina still placed responsibility on the school to educate her son. She said:

> Me, I read books to him of course but like he loves to read books. He's Jayden is a very smart baby but like he he needs to talk more you know I see like. I know all kids develop differently but like I see kids like younger than him or same age as him that are actually talking a lot more than what he's saying and that's what like I feel like that I try to help him talk more but he's like he doesn't want to talk you know. He just like laughs at me. So like but he does talk like some some

words I know what he's saying, it's just like the simple words we say to each

other every day but you know. I try to talk to him as much as I can but he's like. If

he gets into daycare I know they will teach him more than what I can teach him

(Interview, September 12, 2016).

School was perceived as the space where "they will teach him more than what I can teach

him", without the recognition that the same practices (of reading books, socialization,

relationship building) that Trina was already doing with Jayden were also knowledges.

Discourses of individual responsibility and views of meritocracy continued to be

carried out in the ways in which Trina discredited her knowledge against educational

systems in knowing the strengths and needs of her child. Trina continued to attribute

teaching and learning for Jayden as within the formalized school structure. Trina believed

that school was the path for economic security and upward mobility even though she

herself did not find the school context as a space for learning. Even though her personal

experience and perceptions of schooling were that these educational practices did not

meet her needs, this prevalence of such discourses were deeply embedded in her

understandings of school. Where were these discourses coming from and how might they

be reimagined? Without a significant change in these discourses, it is possible for a self-

deprecating, conflicting desire to strive for one's child to "fit in" to a system that actively

and repeatedly forced you out.

Monica shared a slightly different perspective where she viewed school as a

balancing act between being a student and being a mom. Monica shared:

Because you need like if you want to go to school you go to school. Work. Be a

full time mom it's kind of different because it's difficult to be a full time mom and

a be a full time job full time school so it's like a balance in the end. Sometimes

you cannot have time with your baby and when they gonna grow they gonna tell

you like when you were when I was needing you. You was working. You was this

and that. Now I don't want that for my daughter. I don't want to hear that from my

daughter told me where was you when I need this. You was working. You never

have time with me so I just decide to just just go to school and dedicate to my

daughter and I mean she's still little but like probably when she grow up and I

have my career she gonna appreciate that I was like go to school and give her

like a more to like say oh I need to go to school too to get my career (Interview,

October 25, 2016).

Monica viewed school as the social space where teenage mothers were continually

building relationships with one another throughout the process and experience of being a

student and raising their children together. She shared, "Me and Anna we're a mom and

everything and when she's like like worry about Madeline. How's Madeline doing? I was

like, good how Aubrey doing and everything. So we talk about the babies stuff like that

and we take care each other. Like in school we do we have a really good relationship like

friendship that's really good like I don't know just I mean I like babies so I just take care"

(Interview, October 25, 2016). From her experience in the alternative high school (with

Anna and Latrice), this was a space where hybrid identities of student and mother were

present and cultivated through an exchange of common experiences.

The school context was perceived as both a space for social isolation as well as a

space for sharing common experiences. In most stories, these teenage mothers were

sharing the ways in which they encountered some boundary or block that prevented them

from exploring and fostering the identities that they wished to take up (Pillow, 2004).

They language that was used to describe their experiences drew on the historical, deficit

language associated with those who were perceived as veering away from the typical

teenager or socially constructed adolescent.

In thinking about the research focus of this study, the importance of the context

(social, emotional, physical) and how it was perceived as a space for teenage mothers to

take up their multiple identities was necessary to consider. The language that these

women have carried into their own re-narrations was made up of the educational

language and available discourses that have marginalized them in some ways and to

varying degrees. When thinking of available discourses and identities, ongoing reflection

of the ways in which each of us is implicated within systems, including schools as well as

the ways in which we can challenge existing ways of being is necessary in order to take

action in the production of antioppressive discourses (Kumashiro, 2004). The contextual

and social dynamics of identity constructions within schools requires active vigilance in

being attention how even well-intentioned opportunities and discourses might come at the

cost of feelings of betrayal or harm for some individuals. Just as these women shared

their re-narrations of school perceptions, they also shared the ways in which out-of-

school contexts, such as Real Moms did or did not provide a space for them to take up

these identities within and despite of available discourses.

Chapter 6: Mentoring Real Mom Relationships: "Like, this isn't the end…"

Andrea, a current mentor, shuffles a few people around who are sitting in an arranged circle of metal folding chairs. She mentions that she will be sharing something very personal about her own story. Scanning the circle of women who are in transition to the new seating arrangement, she motions for Jamie and Latrice to occupy the two empty seats on either side of her. [I assume they know what she is going to be sharing]. Rotating her head in recognition of the circle of familiar faces, Andrea starts off by introducing herself by her formalized first, middle, and last name. She then goes on to share that she goes by the nickname, "Drea", and that she is adopted. Drea shares that she was adopted the day after turning three months old. She then shifts her gaze towards the floor and mentions that she is nervous and that this is a "healing process in telling my story". Drea shares that she is a city firefighter and that before being a firefighter she taught throughout the county. She taught CPR and EMT classes for two years. Drea also shares that she is interested in print and web design as well as runs a firefighter fitness studio. She is currently married to a man who has three children. Drea is a former teenage mother, and has one biological child. She shares that she is originally from Columbia and has one biological sister and two adoptive siblings. She grew up in a rural town a few hours away from this city. There is a long pause before Drea goes on to share that she didn't know she looked different from her family members until one Saint Patrick's Day when someone said to her, "You're not Irish". Grabbing a tissue from Latrice, Drea pauses again and then describes the emotional reaction to this childhood realization, including feelings of shock and embarrassment for not noticing this physical difference. Drea mentions that at certain points moving forward she hated her family as she could no longer ignore "how different" she was, a "fear of abandonment" replaced former feelings of security. For roughly half an hour, Drea continues to share moments in her life, including repeated sexual assaults from her adoptive father, various relationships or marriages to men, and an ongoing desire to belong and figure out who she is. [This is a very personal story and I do not take jottings for much of the Real Moms talk]. Without the typical conversational interruptions form the audience, all eyes are fixed on Drea throughout her entire story. Drea concludes by sharing with everyone that she has "peace through it all" (Field Note, March 3, 2016).

Intergenerational relationships are constructed and continuously shift over time as experiences and decisions are placed before the individual and the collective. In consideration of identity construction, Fanon (1952) states, "As the child emerges from the shadow of his parents, he finds himself once more among the same laws, the same principles, the same values… There is no disproportion between the life of the family and the life of the nation" (p. 109). In this way, intergenerational relationships and

performances draw on elements of familial and lived experiences and perceptions of the social, cultural, and psychological world. Pre-existing identities collide with others' pre-existing identities where it is possible for existing narratives to get lost or frayed by new ways of feeling, being, and knowing. To think about all the choices within a storytelling moment one must consider the possible weight that bears upon both the author and audience as responsive processes between the self and selves.

Within this storytelling space, Drea defined several identities she took up as a child, such as being Irish, female, a daughter, and part of a family. She noted that as she grew older these definitions became more concretely defined by the social context of gender, sexual, cultural, and racial identities within dominant discourses of normality rather than her personal characterizations. The pivotal moment of "You're not Irish" was experienced as a tearing away of a self-identified identity and signifier of a sense of belonging. Just a few weeks before the anniversary of this traumatic labeling, Drea reiterated the way she experienced how the language of "belonging" was replaced by language of "difference", initiating a self-reassessment of her position within her adoptive family and within the United States. Feelings of isolation were experienced that eventually led to actions: 1) removing herself from an abusive familial relationship, and 2) damaging a sense of belonging that bonded her to those she loved. For Drea, storytelling and re-narration was an agentic move where she had "peace through it all" and the "healing process in telling my story" while also breaking into spaces of known and unknown vulnerability.

Some of the teenage mothers were struck with how vulnerability was central to Drea's re-narration and how aspects of this sharing resonated with their own lived

experiences. Similar to the ways in which these women found solidarity within aspects of their peer teenage motherhood stories, particular moments within Drea's voluntary sharing were also identified as moments of connectivity to the lives of these women. Typical of the ways some of the teenage mothers processed and communicated was the response to share brief videos of Drea's talk along with reactions of solidarity on social media. On March 4, 2016 (one day later), Drea realized that portions of her sharing were publically posted on social media and by the day's end she had notified Rose that she would no longer be participating with Real Moms. Drea expressed that she felt her story was her story, and she was not ready for such a public sharing. Drea notified Latrice that she could no longer be her mentor and that she would be taking some time to figure out how this sharing impacted her. Drea immediately removed herself from the Real Mom's context. Latrice spent a week (and arguably longer) processing through what this move meant for her and her mentoring relationship. Latrice later came to the conclusion that Drea was "sharing something very personal about her own story" and that Drea felt disrespected. Latrice didn't quite understand but she knew that if Drea was feeling this then she had the right to react in whatever way would be best for her. Latrice also stated that if she was in Drea's situation, she would also want to be able to decide when and how to share her story.

This chapter seeks to highlight the ways in which mentorship as a reciprocal, mutually vulnerable relationship was experienced for the teenage mothers and mentors within Real Moms. There are several nuanced ways in which these relationships were experienced throughout different moments and contexts within this study as dialogic interactions. I draw on Noddings' (2005) conception of reciprocal, caring relationships

where "caring is a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviors" (p. 17). I acknowledge that the concept of mentoring and intergenerational knowledge have been discussed in multiple ways. My attention focuses on the dialogic, reciprocal relationships between some of the teenage mothers and mentors as they communicated how these interactions were central to their identities as former or current teenage mothers. Noddings (2005) states:

> Dialogue is open-ended; that is, in a genuine dialogue, neither party knows at the outset what the outcome or decision will be. It connects us to each other and helps to maintain caring relations. It also provides us with the knowledge of each other that forms a foundation for response in caring. Caring (acting as carer) requires knowledge and skill as well as characteristic attitudes. We respond most effectively as carers when we understand what the other needs and the history of this need. Dialogue is implied in the criterion of engrossment. To receive the other is to attend fully and openly. Continuing dialogue builds up a substantial knowledge of one another that serves to guide our responses (p. 23).

In this way, authentic and caring relationships are purposeful and unique to the ways in which multiple histories and identities are woven together within a process of connection. The mentoring relationship between Drea and Latrice is illustrative of how "neither party knows at the outset what the outcome or decision will be" and yet the desire to care understands the needs of the other (Noddings, 2005, p. 23). Each of the identified interpretive themes in this chapter are defined within the understanding of Noddings' (2005) conceptions of care. Additionally, these interpretive themes draw on hybrid identities, such as "former teenage mother", "current teenage mother", "adult mentor",

and "teenager mentee" as focal participants discuss living in both, some or all of these identities within particular contexts.

First, I discuss mentor vulnerability in relation to Drea's story as constructed in both visible and invisible ways within the process of storytelling. I argue that even through the betrayal of Drea's story, this space for vulnerable and honest stories is representative of authentic, fluid identity entanglements as Real Moms takes up the practices of care. Then I look to Rose's perceptions of mentorship to consider the ways in which Real Moms defines relationships as caring, dialogic, and authentic. Looking at the ways in which hybrid identities are engaged within a particular time and context, the last section of this chapter features Tia and Lexie, two current mentors, who identify as former young and/or teenage, single mothers as well as Trina who discusses her transition in identifying as a current to former teenage mother. The table in Appendix C provides an overview of the featured focal participants throughout all three data chapters, highlighting those who share their perceptions and stories within this chapter. Similar to the previous two data chapters, the following table lists and defines the interpretive themes that will be explored in this chapter as well as examples from key data sources:

Table 9: Interpretive Themes from Key Data Sources (Chapter 6)

Theme	Definition of Theme	Example(s)	Number of Times Themes Interpreted
Mentor Vulnerability: Constructing Community through Storytelling	Dialogic, caring relationships (Noddings, 2005)	"I'm not even 100% ready to do that like a Real Moms talk with them [teenage mothers] so I can't expect that of them if I'm not even willing to do it yet" (Lexie Interview)	Interviews: 15 Field Notes: 17

Authentic Relationships, Authentic Lives	Dialogic, caring relationships (Noddings, 2005)	"…it's not just about are you raising your kid the right way or do you have the education you need as a parent or it's sort of like this holistic just coming around you connection that's consistent" (Rose Interview)	Interviews: 63 Field Notes: 34
Making Real Moms Real	Dialogic, caring relationships (Noddings, 2005)	"she just always there so I just want us to keep our relationship going no matter where I'm at or where she's at" (Trina Interview)	Interviews: 54 Field Notes: 25

Mentor Vulnerability as Both a Sense of Betrayal and Belonging

Central to Real Moms was the "What's your story?" question that leaves open the

possibility for interpretation by both the storyteller and the audience. The public sharing

of Drea's story on social media was perceived by Drea as a violation of her privacy and a

sense of betrayal. She attributed this violation to the Real Moms program versus an

accusation towards the individual woman who posted the recording. A sense of betrayal

has the potential to invoke the inability to imagine the possibility of oneself within a

situation or context. Garrison (2010) states, "Through choice and action we not only

express the intentions of the present self; through the consequences of the act we also

form the future self" (p. 143). While Real Moms was structured (and experiences by

several teenage mothers and mentors) as a space for vulnerability, it is necessary to

acknowledge that this space did not guarantee a sense of protection against possible

emotional, mental, social harms for all those involved. In Drea's experience, mentor

vulnerability did not create a community where she felt she could continue to belong. Her decision to remove herself from this space was further evidence of the tensions that arise as spaces provide opportunities for taking up multiple identities and need for constant vigilance in how spaces construct both communities of belonging and communities of marginalization.

According to both Rose and Latrice, Drea's decision to leave Real Moms was directly influenced by this sense of betrayal. Approximately two weeks after Drea left, "Latrice brought up that Drea was no longer going to be part of Real Moms anymore. According to Latrice, someone shared part of Drea's story on Facebook and Drea was not happy about someone sharing her personal story. Latrice expressed that she didn't think someone should have posted this and she understood why Drea was upset. Latrice shared that her and Drea did meet for dinner as a last meeting between mentor and mentee" (Field Note, March 17, 2016). While not all mentors or teenage mothers might have known the details of Drea's departure, aspects of her rationale were shared from Latrice and Rose. As Real Moms was in an ongoing construction of community, any atypical absences or missed meetings did not go unnoticed by participants as there was a desire for each person's story and physical being to be included within this space of caring. (2010) states, "Tragic loss is a part of teaching [or mentoring] that we all live with every moment of every day" (p. 18). Yet, the acknowledgement and feeling of tragic loss becomes the first step in reimagining hopeful desires. By taking the time to reflect on the tragedy of a loss of agency, Garrison (2010) argues for a rethinking of agency through the aesthetic and moral imagination.

The experienced tragic loss and hopeful desires of Real Moms and Drea's betrayal experience calls attention to the social, historical, and political nature of collective spaces. Instead of positioning Drea as an adult/former teenage mother who thus already completed particular stages of identity construction (the "expert" teenage mother), Real Moms was a space that acknowledged the fluid and ongoing constructions of identities as part of dialogic, authentic care (Noddings, 2005). Learning from one another through intentional, aesthetic care has the potential to make multiple meanings around the tragedy of a loss of agency or sense of betrayal.

It is thus necessary for constant vigilance when seeking to construct a mutual, reciprocal community. Not only is mutual aid important for communities but also mutual trust. Freire (1993) states, "It would be a contradiction in terms if dialogue-loving, humble, and full of faith- did not produce this climate of mutual trust, which leads the dialoguers into ever closer partnership in the naming of the world" (p. 91). This mutual trust calls for conscious organization of Real Moms to work in dialogue with all community members from their own situation in the world.

For Bubbles, Monica, Trina and several others, Real Moms was described as a "caring" place (Noddings, 2005). Drawing on Noddings' (2005) idea of care, Drea did not perceive the structure of Real Moms as caring. For some, Real Moms was a space they sought out for expressing themselves and publically sharing their stories. For others, it was seen as a betrayal of privacy and vulnerability from protection. One commonality observed among these women's perceptions and reactions was the recognition that vulnerable moments impact the author and the sharing of vulnerable moments also impact the audience in nuanced ways, perhaps even long after the actual event.

Six months after Drea quit Real Moms (and during a completely different conversation), Trina asked me, "You were adopted, right? You and Drea were both adopted. How do feel about being adopted?" Initially, I was surprised that Trina brought this up as I didn't have a relationship with her at the point of Drea's sharing. Then I was reminded that I shared the fact I was adopted during one of the small group times at camp (See Chapter 1 Reflective Memo, July 19, 2016) when Trina asked "What's your story?". Trying to figure out the source of Trina's question, I also remembered Drea's sharing about adoption, concluded as a negative experience and in support of a mother's decisions to keep her children within the biological family unit. Yet again, I gave my "elevator speech" of how I was grateful for my parents and that we have a really strong, committed relationship to each other. When Trina pressed on to ask why I was adopted I shared my understanding of this story. My young birth parents made the decision to put me up for adoption so that: 1) I might have more educational opportunities in life, and 2) so that my birth mother would also be able to have more educational opportunities in her life. After sharing this brief rationale, I paused and considered my audience. How was Trina interpreting my sharing? Was she considering her own decision-making? Was she simply interested in hearing more of my personal experience?

In thinking about my own researcher positionality, there was a sense of vulnerability in the process of storytelling where I had another moment to author my own story, which included sharing and emphasizing particular details based on a multitude of factors, including audience, memory, context, and desire. In many ways, this is exactly what I was asking participants to do, to share potentially vulnerable, ongoing moments of their lives. This also made me think about the how each woman brought up her decision

to go through with her pregnancy. Though the reasons varied, not one of them viewed abortion as an option. The multiple perspectives and stories on adoption, abortion, and keeping your child were authored by each woman as she took up her (possible) identities as daughter, mother, girlfriend, biological, adoptive, and decision-maker.

What was important about Drea's storytelling was the ways in which her story continued to be a shadowed, "visible" presence within Real Moms throughout this study. While she chose to leave Real Moms and withdraw her role as Latrice's mentor, she was frequently referred to during informal conversations among the teenage mothers several months after leaving. Aspects of her thirty-minute story, such as her adoption, sexual abuse, and success with her physical health and discipline were called upon as women found similarities and differences in their own journeys. I bring up this moment as a reminder to myself and all those involved in social interactions that connectivity and varying senses of community are constructed that are both within one's control as well as beyond one's control. Once a story becomes public in any way, it is open to critique as well as solidarity. Even in solidarity with others, counter narratives in storytelling are not immune to the ongoing and personal wrestling of authoring a new perspective into a space. As I have mentioned in my own adoption story sharing, the space of a brief conversational social context oftentimes provides time for the fact-focused version of a story versus the necessary time or relation to convey the complexity of simultaneously experiencing difference and a sense of belonging, hybrid sources of identity construction. What does this mean for dominant narratives when counter narratives are given public space? Or also considered, what does it mean for the authors of counter narratives who share in these spaces? Space alone does not appear to be sufficient in either scenario.

Instead, the entanglement of relational interactions, identities, roles, and emotions require a new space of existing in community and/or solidarity with others.

Drea responded to her public storytelling by removing herself from the context she now associated with vulnerability and betrayal. After volunteering to share her story, she was the author of her counter narrative and when the semi-public moment came in the basement of a community church among teenage mothers and mentees, she chose to speak. Outside of her control was the ways in which this profound story was made public to a wider, unfamiliar audience, not out of violence but to say that the teenage mothers were united in understanding. In this way, Real Moms was perceived as a caring place for some while others, such as Drea found it to be a place of betrayal and danger. When spaces, such as Real Moms provide opportunity for stories that engage in the political and nontraditional topics of the dominant narrative, there is the potential for risk.

This is where systems must both provide space for counter narratives as well as be proactive in anticipating potential places of harm or danger that might be perceived by those sharing. For Drea, her role as "mentor" within this space appeared to have shadowed other racial, familial, sexual, classed and gendered identities. Instead of collectively working together as a community after her storytelling, the social media posting published her story as singular, individual, and complete. It was evident from her reactions that an authentic relationship had not been constructed between Drea and Real Moms. As has been signaled throughout this work, timing cannot be planned and will not be the same for all. This loose time frame of vulnerability was what constructed a freely entered, freely departed community among these women, ever-fluid, ever-changing. This was true for all of the women in Real Moms and the choice of timing to re-narrate

teenage motherhood scripts and other aspects of one's lived experiences was fluid, voluntary, and varied.

Eager and enthusiastic for many of the relational activities of Real Moms, one mentor, Lexie, was committed to community outreach regarding the mission of Real Moms as a space for sharing stories. Lexie also spoke about the timing of sharing one's story, "Yeah, we don't have to talk about deep things or anything like that but I love being able to connect with the girls on a personal level like sharing my story with them and not all of them are gonna share their stories cause they're not there yet. Which I don't expect them to but if being able to share my story for them to connect to it in some type of way is something than I wish we could [do] more of but it's also something I'm not even one hundred percent ready to do that like a Real Moms talk with them so I can't expect that of them if I'm not even willing to do it yet" (Interview, November 7, 2016). Within this reflection, Lexie called out the constraints of assumed chronological time in relation to the process of choice within re-narration and storytelling. She situated the space of building relationships "on a personal level" where "I love being able to connect with the girls" as different than expectations of sharing their stories. The relationships within Real Moms were not contingent on those participating to fulfill particular expectations in order to show progress, engagement, or participation. In thinking about this personal relationship Lexie was open and loved to share her story and yet also viewed this difference in public sharing, "I'm not even one hundred percent ready to do that like a Real Moms talk" where there was not an expectation to share in public spaces. As a mentor, she was committed to not asking the current teenage mothers to do things that she herself was not (yet) willing to do.

While Lexie didn't identify as a teenage mother, she related her story as a single, young mother who was also a college student and employee. Lexie shared:

I had [daughter's name] when I was twenty. I got pregnant when I was twenty, had her when I was twenty-one… I was in college my it was I was working at a restaurant and I had my friends, guys and girls, just totally fascinated about pregnancy and I'm like I don't know what the heck I'm doing either and I just wish I had that community to be able to confide in… Like this isn't the end (Interview, November 7, 2016).

The construction of a community around particular experiences that also provide space for the multiple trajectories and pathways of coming to the community was something that Lexie and others hoped for their lives. In this sharing, Lexie referred to this fascination that her non-parenting friends found in her experience. While fascinated with pregnancy and her fluid identity into a student-mother, Lexie made the notion that "I don't know what the heck I'm doing either" and "I just wish I had that community to be able to confide in". She also reflected on wanting to be seen as a woman and a mother. By finding informal ways of sharing aspects of her own experiences with the current teenage mothers in Real Moms, a constructed community around partial, ever-changing stories was not to be this idealistic space of feel-good emotions, but the reminder that labels of hierarchal roles or an increase in age do not come with this built-in protection from vulnerability or knowledge. For Drea, the cost of her vulnerability was betrayal. For others, the diversity of experiences might make space for vulnerable moments, that might have otherwise never been spoken or shared and exchanges of knowledges not always quantified within educational or career spaces. The beauty that comes from contradicting

stories was a reminder that the diversity of experiences was authentic in the ways in which each person comes to this space and to this work.

Tia, another mentor, also shared how this program has been helpful for her as she reflected on her own experience as a former teenage mother:

> You're transitioning through trying to figure out who I was and how do you just go from being a teenager to a mom. Like bam! You have this huge responsibility yet you don't really know how to do it. I made her [Tia's daughter] sleep in her car seat for four nights cause I was too afraid to pick her up and I thought I was going to kill her. My mom was like 'you finally you have to pick her up'. I'm like 'I don't really want to'. Um, so it's just yeah. The fact that these girls even have this as a community is just so amazing (Interview, November 7, 2016).

One of Tia's reasons for being a mentor in Real Moms was attributed the need during her teenage motherhood experience for a community. Tia shared that I'm "trying to figure out what I was and how do you just go from being a teenager to a mom". This swift, efficient change in labels from "teenager" to "mom" simplifies the collision of multiple identities and responsibilities into an either-or identification where "you don't really know how to do it". As a teenager and new mother, Tia was "too afraid to pick her [daughter] up" and yet the knowledges associated with motherhood and parenting were waiting for her, in this case, in the car seat. There are teenagers who have these experiential, crucial knowledges of raising and caring for their children. These such knowledges are oftentimes not accessible or given merit within educational spaces and yet the construction of such communities where these knowledges are given space

alongside traditional academic and social knowledges have the possibility to attend to the authentic and meaningful ways in which "difference" and a "sense of belonging" coexist.

Authentic Mentorship, Authentic Lives

In thinking about the vision of Real Moms as a space for community-centered relationships, much of the authenticity within the relationships among teenage mothers and mentors engaged the ways in which both roles chose to share aspects of their multiple identities within time and space. Since the racial and social class demographics of the mentors were more diverse (White, African American, Black, Asian; working and middle class) than the teenage mothers (primarily Black and African American, Latina; working class), Rose and other Real Mom staff were mindful of the ways in which power and privilege were engaged as an important factor of reciprocal relationships, particularly around race and social class within this local community.

Rose drew on aspects of shared philosophies of racial and social justice work that have been part of her and her husband's work in the neighborhood high school, City High School A. While Rose and her family live and work in the local community, the ways in which they established and maintained relationships with the teenagers in the neighborhood included welcoming them into their nearby home, attending their sports and extracurricular events, and building relationships with students in school around shared interests. Similarly, several of the teenage mothers welcomed Rose, her family, and the mentors into their homes, interest-based activities, and family events. In collectively choosing the spaces for interactions and relationship building, this reciprocal relationship was reflective of a "family connectedness", an observation from one teenage

mother, more so than a hierarchal, formalized mentor-mentee role (Field Note, July 17, 2016).

In thinking about the current teaching profession and the disproportionate number of white teachers to teachers of color, Rose and her husband both saw the need for more teachers and mentors of color as well as expressed the important need for authentic relationship building among White teachers and their students (or mentees) of color. Rose shared her perceptions of this issue:

> I think even though you might have White mentors or White teachers or people that don't reflect the community I still think if they are um the kids are gonna know if you're authentic and real and if you're there for the right reasons and they're gonna know that you're not. And so I think that those teachers and mentors and people that do social type work in communities that they don't live or the people are different of different cultures I think that that education and the resources that they have to like better their self and their understanding of what has come to give more context to like why things look the way they look today is really important and to understand um yeah that just the color of their skin and their experiences isn't doesn't void them of being able to like be legit and real and important in these kids' lives but there is other work that they have to do… I know most mentors I mean have a very different experience than our girls do (Interview, October 27, 2016).

Grounding her stance in being "authentic and real", Rose situated her residence within the local community as part of her definition of authenticity. While acknowledging that several of the mentors did "have very different experiences than our girls do", this

legitimization of being able to authentically connect and build relationships "doesn't void them of being able to like be legit and real and important in these kids' lives". This doesn't mean that this type of authentic relationship work was easy as "there is other work that they [White mentors] have to do". Milner (2010) discusses the importance of building authentic relationship between White teachers and students of color in his analysis of teachers as part of thinking about the opportunity gap in urban schools.

Attending to the multiple identities that teenage mothers took up was also an important vision for Rose and the Real Moms meetings. Unlike traditional structures or schools that tended to focus on one identity, oftentimes teenage motherhood through a deficit-mindset, Real Moms was committed to providing space for teenage mothers to bring themselves into a space where they could decide how and what was of importance to them and their identity constructions. Rose shared:

I think one of the biggest things that is of importance to the girls and maybe they said something different but that they know that somebody's there always. Like for them and like cares about them beyond like just more holistically care and not just like, it's not just about school, and it's not just about faith, and it's not just about are you raising your kid the right way or do you have the education you need as a parent or it's sort of like this holistic just coming around you connection that's consistent and so um I think if that is there and they know that and they feel secure in that I think it's gonna take awhile for them to like open up and be really real about things that are going on or things ways that they're feeling about things um but I think if that piece is there and they know that you're steady and

consistent and you care beyond this, this, and this that that connection will come (Interview, October 27, 2016).

Resisting the notion of "the right way" to parent, experience school or take up a spiritual or religious identity also resists this chronological time constraint of ways of being. Rose's perspective of "it's gonna take awhile" and "steady and consistent" represented the openness to when a "connection will come". Real Moms as a community-based organization was a space where those involved were dedicated to "more holistically care" and a "holistic coming around you connection" where relationships with teenage mothers were considered lifelong between people.

While there was a desire for holistic, lifelong relationships among women participating in Real Moms, Drea's departure from the program was a reminder that there was not a guaranteed positive outcome or "protection" from perceived harm for every teenage mother and/or mentor in the program. Despite this reminder, the responses from such moments of loss led to honest dialogue around changing community practices and being attentive to the variety of needs based on the perceptions and lived experiences of each woman. Instead of placing blame on the individual for not "fitting in" to the current practices of Real Moms, Rose, mentors, and current teenage mothers took time to process and construct norms for sharing intimate stories about their lives. For example, I observed informal norm setting whenever women gathered in a circle to voluntarily share personal stories during Real Moms meetings. Anna would frequently make comments of "remember how that one lady left" and "remember, no recording of any stories unless you ask permission" as people settled into their spaces on the couches and chairs. I noticed subtle physical expressions of discomfort such as shifting in a chair and looking

down at the floor as Rose verbalized feelings of remorse. Anna and Latrice rested their heads on Rose's shoulders as a few others provided clarifying comments for those unaware of Drea's departure (Field Note, October 20, 2016). This same Real Moms meeting space appeared to be both a reminder of the potential for dangerous betrayal as well as a possibility for authentic, dialogic closeness.

The physical and emotional closeness that was observed throughout this study was not an automatic response to being part of Real Moms. As mentioned, this did not occur between all participants which was not expected as this space fostered authentic relationship building by those that were attracted to one another around many aspects of their lives and interests. For Drea and Latrice, their relationship was abruptly cut short, though Latrice continued to process an understanding for Drea's choice as well as a shadowed relation from her departure. A story was shared and a story was received through the listener. While Latrice observed a certain sense of loss with the extinction of the visible relationship, the bond of respect in being vulnerable had a lasting, more invisible impact.

For other relationships between adult mentors and teenage mother mentees, the level of intimacy and the reciprocal bond was manifested in more long-term language and companionship. This level of intimacy and sharing was, sometimes, manifested in closeness of attachment where physical boundaries were gradually and mutually removed. In one field note observation:

> I noticed that Anna and another teenage mother were on either sides of Rose on
> one of the couches. Their bodies were pressed up against each other, legs
> touching and kind of cuddled into each other. Anna was flipping through Rose's

phone and looking at pictures from one of Rose's trips. Rose was pointing out

some of the men who were in a photo and Anna was quick to say that none of

them were attractive. Rose contested and said that [man's name] is attractive as

she pointed to the photo. Anna disagreed and then mentioned that Rose doesn't

think her boyfriend was attractive. They both laughed and continued to lean in

and chat with each other. Rose then looked up at me (who felt like I interrupted a

moment) and mentioned that they should probably start moving into the game

portion of the night (Field Note, April 21, 2016).

Physical closeness and a familiarity within conversational flow were outward signs of the

constructed bond between Rose and Anna. In all things related to Real Moms, it was

evident that Rose put the needs and concerns of the teenage mothers as the priority. She

shared, "I tried to get together with a bunch of them to just be like what do we want this

year and what do we want to see and what did you like and what did you not like? Um so

that we can better just meet meet them where they're at and have it be what their yeah

what they need" (Interview, October 27, 2016).

While always coming up with a joke or a lighthearted comment, Anna was one of

the teenage mothers always eager to share her thoughts on Real Mom meetings content,

food, and activities outside of the more formalized space for relationship building. Anna

also shared, "It's actually interesting cause like you would think most of these doctors and

nurses and lawyers and stuff came up off of something really like great. And there's

actually people out there that's high up there doing really good and were teen moms or

parents" (Interview, September 13, 2016). Anna viewed the relational aspects of Real

Moms meetings as a combatant to social isolation as well as a resource to obtain her own

career aspirations, always acknowledging, "That I can have a future. That I can do it…People say your life stops when you have a baby but when I see them [former teenage mothers in career fields] makes me hope. Yeah, maybe I can be a lawyer, doctor if they can" (Interview, September 13, 2016). To expose the process of daily decision-making around current responsibilities and future aspirations by those who have varying yet validated knowledges created this community.

Another aspect that Real Moms was committed to was the participation of those from the local community. During one of the Real Moms meetings I observed, "Latrice mentioned that she walks by this house all the time and didn't realize that Rose lived here. Now Latrice says that when she walks by she knows that that's Rose's house" (Field Note, February 4, 2016). Latrice and her peers were interested in having mentors and resources from their local neighborhoods and expressed that it was cool when they would run into each other at the grocery store or on the street. Rose echoed this sentiment as she shared, "I would love to have more mentors from the [local neighborhood] for sure and I would like to see our mentors reflect more of the girls that we work with um not just for them to see somebody else in a different um point in life and with different experiences that looks like them but also for mentors together as a group to have different experiences and perspectives that we can share and help each other better understand" (Interview, October 27, 2016). This way of learning from one another grounded the space and time together as reciprocal versus a separated, hierarchal organization.

Rose was also intentional about where she was investing her time and energy for partnerships. In thinking about the school experiences that many of the women had at the local alternative school, Rose expressed concern:

I'm still trying to figure out like which school would make the best sense to invest in long term. Um [Alternative High School] kind of seems like a mess. A lot of the time so I don't know if it would be in my best interest to like have the long term investment be there so I don't know if that means like [City High School A] or [City High School F parenting program] cause I know there's girls that go to [City High School F] and have their babies in the [City High School F] day care. Um so I think just still trying to figure like discern what school should that even be. Um and then hopefully being there as a consistent presence every week or every other week or something like that so that it doesn't it's not like oh I mean I think girls are gonna bring their friends and that's been the main way that girls have come. Um so we haven't and like teachers at [City High School A] tell girls about it. Like I think if staff and teachers know they know if it's something that a girl could use or want and so that's how we've gotten our girls so far. Um so I mean so far we haven't had a shortage of girls (Interview, October 27, 2016).

This word of mouth way of recruitment relied on the stories of teenage mother in relation to their experiences with Real Moms (Field Note, February 25, 2016).

In thinking about many of the programs and alternative schools that the teenage mothers attended, the constraints of policies and programs that provide access for resources beyond the high school or program years, Rose was also committed to thinking beyond the scope of traditional programs to think about being members of the community alongside these teenage mothers. Monica also agreed, "They [mentors] don't judge you how you look, how you act, how you speak, how is your traditional things. They just like like you because you're a person" (Interview, October 25, 2016). The perspective of Real

Moms was not to put a quick-fix solution to simply meeting the present needs and desires of the participating teenage mothers but to consider these as lifelong relationships within the community. Rose shared:

> I think our girls don't typically move or like go to college or go somewhere else when they graduate from high school and so I think that the transition from having the support of Real Moms to graduating from high school and not knowing what that next thing is for them is really hard and so I don't know I don't know if that's necessary for Real Moms to do or to create but I would love to have something else to be able to point them to and right now I don't have that um so I know for them you know through high school and the year after high school it's been really great for them and a really solid connection point but then I don't know what after that so (Interview, October 27, 2016).

This idea of finding the ways that one connected to Real Moms was also evident in mentor recruitment and the ways in which current teenage mothers were interacting with former teenage mothers, making "real" mom relationships. Additionally, this next section looks at the ways in which teenage mothers have transitioned their own identities from being "current teenage mothers" to "former teenage mothers" with this local community.

Making Real Moms Real: Former and Current Teenage Mothers

The "teenage mother" identity was one that was fluid in the ways in which it was referred to throughout the study. While many of the current teenage mothers were grappling with how to disrupt and resist the deficit-perspectives associated and assumed with teenage motherhood, a few of the participants and mentors identified as former teenage mothers. This journey of taking up this identity was one thing that made Real

Moms "real" and "authentic". Making Real Moms the teenage mothers' space included multiple modes of decision-making, interest, and using collective resources for community construction. Alyssa noted, "They [mentors] bring their life into it" and Rose "really asks you like what you want to do" (Interview, September 13, 2016).

Mentor reflexivity became an important aspect of thinking through the purpose of Real Moms and the ways in which some of the former teenage mothers chose to participate in an organization supporting teenage mothers. The sense of community was one reason why both Lexie and Tia chose to participate as they each wished that this opportunity was available to them when they were single mothers in their late-teenage years and early twenties. Lexie also shared that Real Moms was a space where reciprocal learning and teaching was shared. She shared:

> I have actually grown a lot myself from these girls. Um just as much any parent grows over time of having a child, watching them parent, being very aware of how they parent and what they need as a teen mom. I don't try to compare like my experience but it's always just like holy buckets like these girls just blow me away. Like I can't believe they are doing everything that they're doing and I was young but I was not a teen mom so it's just, it puts my life into persp- not my life per say but just puts life into perspective for me sometimes about struggles of other people and so it's just made me grow and be more aware of other people's lives and not just the teen moms but anyone in a struggle at all (Interview, November 7, 2016).

Lexie's comment of growing with the current teenage mothers "just as much any parent grows over time of having a child" and "being very aware of how they parent and what

they need as a teen mom" was indicative of the way in which she positioned herself within Real Moms as learning beside one another and not the knowledge-holder who bestows skills upon the "receiver" within hierarchal positioning. Lexie became "more aware of other people's lives and not just the teen moms but anyone in a struggle at all" in seeing the complexities of being in relation and getting to personally know others. While given the label, "mentor", within Real Moms, Lexie took up this role through a sense of sharing.

Latrice also spoke to this reciprocal sense of sharing, "Well, caring for each other um well whenever we like tell them something that's like horrid or like bad or we just can't tell anybody else they will they're there to talk to us and we're there to talk to them whatever they have to talk about so I just think that's a big part of the discussion" (Interview, October 6, 2016). In her label as a "mentee", Latrice took up this role as carer (Noddings, 2005) where her sense of responsibility was to also be "there to talk to them [mentors] whatever they have to talk about" where "that's a big part of the discussion".

While Lexie felt she had her own stories to share that would support and add to the community of women in Real Moms, she was also aware of how her racial identity positioned her with this community. She acknowledged this difference in how many of the current teenage mothers read and are read in the world. Lexie shared

Being a White, female to them I don't fully understand it which as much as I always have thought that I do understand racial, gender, all of that. I've very much my eyes have come open that even the slightest bit that I thought I understood I don't even have a like tiniest grasp on that which is something that also kind of in my growth that I talked about with this program is that I'm so thankful for because

I feel like I've kind of been blind to it before when it was just like I'm aware but I

thought I was way more aware than I actually was which is something that I'm

also very thankful for of this program (Interview, November 7, 2016).

Listening to the storytelling of others was an important aspect of relationship building

and authentic mentorship. Through her participation in Real Moms, Lexie acknowledges

her own "growth" from being "blind" or "I thought I was way more aware than I actually

was" in relation to the ways racial, classed, and gendered identities impacted the readings

and rereadings of current teenage mothers. Lexie went on to share how she has become

more active in thinking through her White, female identity, something that she had not

previously done. Being a mentor or identifying as a former teenage mother did not

convey meaning of being beyond this type of identity work. Instead, the ability to learn

from and with one another was "something that I'm also very thankful for of this

program".

Just as Drea and Lexie chose ways of sharing their stories, Tia also shared how

she perceived her purpose within her role as a mentor. Deciding to meet at Tia's house,

Lexie, her daughter, and I knocked on the door and waited until Tia's daughter opened

the door and welcome us inside. Tia and Lexie introduced their daughters to each other.

After everyone was settled, sat on the floor on extra-large throw pillows for the interview.

Tia found that Real Moms was the time when she wanted to share how her experience as

a single, young mother was narrated throughout her life around this sense of community.

She shared:

And the sense of community like every Thursday after a Real Moms meeting I

just leave there with a smile on my face and I'm just glowing I swear for like

twenty-four hours like something with just everyone there and how much fun we

have and whether it's a super deep conversation or a light conversation. Every

time is just so much fun and I think something it's like the best part of my week. I

can just go and be me. I don't have to be mom. I don't have to be all of these

others roles and that's what I get how it's helped me (Interview, November 7,

2016).

Tia entered the Real Moms meeting space with an awareness of the multiple roles that

she took up throughout her life. She echoed many of the sentiments of the current teenage

mothers in that this space was where she could "just go and be me" and "I don't have to

be all of these other roles". This was the way that Real Moms helped Tia. She went on to

share:

The fact that these girls even have this as a community is just so amazing and I

see like some of them are so adamant to come at first and they're really quiet and

not sure what it's all about. After they come a few times and realize like it's just a

community and like nobody's judging you at all and just stop and if you need

some diapers or if you need a ride or if you just want to talk about something

that's stressing you out, let's let's talk because those things that you think are such

huge things really are really small things that can be huge things. Yeah, I wish I

had something like it which is why I'm such a supporter of Real Moms (Interview,

November 7, 2016).

Again, this sense of community was characterized as a space where "nobody's judging

you". This echoed the same sentiments that Monica repeatedly shared. Informal and

formal "talk" was open to interpretation to the significance of sharing where all degrees

of storytelling were welcomed. Tia's comment that "let's talk because those things that you think are such huge things really are really small things that can be huge things". Honoring the perspective of the author of the story has the ability to break down assumptions of lived experiences. Differing from Drea's response, both Tia and Anna continued to ask me how and when their stories would be publically shared within public spaces, such as the university.

Trina was another participant who identified as a former teenage mother. This was an interesting point as Trina participated in Real Mom meetings and the summer camp as a current teenage mother yet she was vocal about how this was a transition for her as she turned twenty years old during the research study. Trina shared, "I feel like maybe my time is done because I am turning twenty-one in February so I'm not a teen mom anymore so I just feel like um I need to leave and give other girls the time" (Interview, September 12, 2016). The shedding of a label was something that she took up herself as the organization did not have an age requirement for participation or exit from the program. Viewing her relationship with Tia (former mentor) as now a relationship between two current teenage mothers, Trina shared how this ongoing relationship shifted:

> One time uh I was Jayden or me didn't eat for a whole day. I couldn't find any food. Um my mom didn't have any money. She was struggling too. She was at work though. Me and Jayden were just here by ourselves. And like I didn't want to tell Tia because she's like she will probably freak out. So I was like I have to tell Tia. So I mean, I didn't want my baby to go out won't eat for the whole day so I just told her the truth that we have no food and she did freak out. She did freak out but um she was actually at her cabin when I told her and like so she

freaked out and then she called her husband. Her husband and had him take us to

the grocery store and get food so he took us to the grocery store and we had food

in the house which is great (Interview, September 12, 2016).

While Trina was matter-of-fact about her decision to go through with her pregnancy, she

spent more time pausing before sharing with me another story of vulnerability. This story

of vulnerability also attended to the ways in which she was attempting to build emotional

and financial independence from her family and the Real Moms program. Instead of a

complete break from the program or from Tia, Trina hoped for a lifelong relationship

with Tia. Trina shared:

I just want like I just want us to like communicate even if I go somewhere I still

like if I go somewhere far or something I just want us to be able to still

communicate because Tia helped me a lot. Like she helped me a lot. Like even

when I didn't have anything to eat she helped me. So like I just, even though even

though she helped me a lot that's not the only thing. It's just I can talk to her about

anything. She asks she asks me how I'm doing all the time. She just she just

always there so I just want us to keep our relationship going no matter where I'm

at or where she's at (Interview, September 12, 2016).

The hope for lifelong relationships or viewing a mentee or mentor as a person beyond the

scope of the formalized relationship was something almost expectant that came about as a

result of this deep, personal type of reciprocal sharing. The desire for lifelong, authentic

relationships fostered within Real Moms was the results of man factors addressed within

these three data chapters. In the sincere way that Monica articulated her own hope for

Real Moms, "If you decide to come with us we gonna waiting for you with the arms open" (Interview, October 24, 2016).

This desire for Real Moms to be a space for reciprocal, authentic relationships resulted in a cascading effect of embracing stories through caring relations where teenage mothers, such as Monica pointed to this program as an inclusive space for dialogue and the direct way of responding to the question, "What's your story?". Several of the participants, current teenage mothers and mentors, identified the positive aspects of this program as unique spaces for engaged dialogue around Noddings' (2005) conceptions of mutual trust and care. While Drea's experience contradicted the hopeful desire of Real Moms as a "safe space", these reactions and actions were reminders that vulnerable storytelling continues to be personal, situational, and fluid performances.

Noddings' (2005) notion of caring serves as a reminder that "we respond most effectively as carers when we understand what the other needs and the history of this need" (p. 23). Instead of ignoring Drea's departure, current teenage mothers and mentors engaged the histories of her vulnerable storytelling in recognition of the sensitivity of the intersectionality of identities as well as to construct language around what it means to be a visible and/or invisible presence within a space. This was also evidenced in school stories, such as Meshelle's conclusion that the invisibility of other pregnant teenage mothers in her local school were still visible messaging around whose stories were validated in school. Real Moms acknowledged and found necessary the partial stories and the ongoing nature of identity constructions based on social, emotional, political, histories of being. Drea's story added to the already-moving constructions of collective storytelling. Real Moms goes beyond just a well-intentioned, static program

implementation. Instead, the intersectionality of identities, experiences, and stories leads to reimagining the "tragic loss" of Drea's feelings of betrayal as both relationship damaged and a "hopeful desire" allows space for (Garrison, 2010). Real Moms continued to provide opportunities for a contingent and recursive caring relations through the fluid nature of relationships and those involved in the program. It's not a requirement to respond to the "What's your story?" question, but instead is viewed as an invitation to share where you are at this particular moment in time.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

"My story is my story. If I have to stick with my story, I'll keep my story."

(Latrice Interview, September 29, 2016)

Identity constructions continue to be fashioned from one's fluid perceptions as well as the perceptions of others within a historical, social, and political context. Based on these contexts, assumptions around identities are oftentimes positioned in complementing and contradicting ways. This is evident in the ways in which many of the women who participated in Real Moms experienced being read and represented as women, students, and mothers. A sense of belonging and care (Noddings, 2005) was taken up in various ways as these women considered the limitations and possibilities afforded to them within particular moments in time and context. Scattering the established privileges of dominant identities in ways that made space for fluid, hybrid identity constructions also made space for those stories that might otherwise remain private and/or silenced.

Taking a critical perspective on the social construction of adolescence as a dominant, linear stage development theory (Lesko, 2012; Vagle, 2012), this study draws on theories of hybridity (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bhabha, 1990; Bhabha, 1994; Voicu, 2011), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) as well as contingent and recursive growth and change (Lesko, 2012) in working with the Real Moms community-based organization. The research questions that guide this study are: *1) How are teenage mothers taking up identities such as race, gender, sexuality, motherhood, and social class within a community-based organization designed to support teenage mothers? 2) How do teenage mothers perceive and navigate both their schooling experiences as well as their*

participation within their children's schooling experiences? 3) In what ways do

community-based organizations work with teenage mothers and their children?

In this final chapter, I discuss how my work contributes to existing research around theoretical and empirical interpretations of teenage motherhood perceptions of school and identity constructions. Within these summary findings, I connect the interpretive themes of this work to existing literature around teenage motherhood. Next, I present recommendations for this research for educators, policymakers, and researchers who are also invested in reimaging the ways in which teenage motherhood might be reconceived. I conclude this descriptive, qualitative work by revisiting my own identities, including my researcher identity and reflexivity within the context of Real Moms as a community space that will continue to evolve and exist beyond the boundaries of this study.

Summary of Findings

While the research questions guided my research process and methodology, I also framed the discussion of interpretations by returning to a question that initially sparked my interest in pursuing this research: Is there space for relief or will there always be a voice reminding me that identity is placed on (some of) us? My attempt at answering this question for myself impacted the ways in which the data chapters were organized and representative of the physical, emotional, and relational way that this fieldwork was experienced by participants and the researcher. Central to each of the data chapters was a reflective memo or field note vignette that represented the various contexts of this field work as well as was representative of the images and narratives that several of the participants were building throughout time (Gee, 2014).

Settling into theoretical frameworks of hybridity, intersectionality as well as a theory of contingent and recursive growth and change, I identified several interpretive themes that considered the ways in which discourses and narratives informed identity constructions as well as dialogic practices among teenage mothers as mentees and mentors within the Real Moms context. By engaging these theories alongside the actions of resistance and agency of teenage mothers, I interpreted moments of reciprocal relationships among participants that offered ways of reimagining binaries and "pure" identities. I argue that this reimagining is crucial in opening up space for multiplicity of ideas and pluralistic narratives. In this section I discuss a summary of the interpretations of my findings as well as possible conclusions.

"Teen moms, we all have a story, of course."

The Friendsgiving vignette was illustrative of the ways in which teenage mothers and mentors were expressing feelings of shared experiences and/or emotions within this informal setting. Identities such as teenager, student, mother, friend were engaged through relational processes of storytelling. Anna shared, "Teen moms, we all have a story, of course" (Interview, September 13, 2016). Both Anna and Bubbles vocalized how established practices, such as chronological time and church doctrine positioned their abilities to respond within particular contexts in ways that both empowered and denied them access to a sense of belonging. This chapter also focused on the ways in which teenage motherhood disrupted a linear, timestamped identity of what it means to be either teenager or adult (Lesko, 2002; Lesko, 2012). I discussed how teenage mothers were both ascribing to and/or rejecting normative perspectives of physical, social, and emotional development stages. These women disrupted binary, "socially young"

language as they took hybrid identities and attached responsibilities of being a youth and a mother (Atwell- Vasey, 1998).

When the dominant discourses referred to teenage pregnancy as an "epidemic" and teenage mothers ran the risk of being portrayed as failures, the temptation was oftentimes to assume the identity being offered to you by the social media and school structures. Language such as "crisis" "epidemic" "failure" lines the narratives of these women and grouped them according to their present, singular situation (Burdell, 1998). Being explicit about the struggles of resisting this deficit viewpoint allows potential space for empowerment and the voice of those marginalized to be heard, not in contrast to the dominant discourse, but as another discourse reality. In order to avoid the trap of situating the stories of teenage mothers against language or frameworks of "acceptable" or "not acceptable" (oftentimes coded as white, middle class norms) teenage mothers shift and position their stories based on their own fluid identities as asset-based ways of being (Luttrell, 2003; Shultz, 2001).

The constructions of racial, gendered, sexual, and cultural identities were evident in the stories of Anna, Latrice, Meshelle, and Bubbles. Meshelle situated her experience using language of "core hurt" discourses where relief was not found within others' readings of her racial identity as a biracial, non-adopted woman. Using characteristic humor, Anna called out dominant discourses of "success" or "achievement" in relation to the additional efforts she experienced as a Black female, student to prove herself. For Bubbles, relief was viewed as the ability to be able to exist and find a sense of belonging within (possible) contradicting identities such as perceptions of a non-wavering church doctrine and fluid sexual identities (Kumashiro, 2004). Latrice described the shift into

motherhood as a gendered movement that gave her more freedom from constant surveillance being a daughter within her household. Common among these women were the ways in which they had an ongoing process of internalizing their experiences within dominant narratives of ways of being. Thus, their counter narratives offered alternative ways of reimaging possibilities.

While being cautious of the overgeneralization of these women's experiences (Kelly, 1997) and assumed empowerment stories (Edell, 2013), the constructions of identities that move with and move beyond traditional sequencing of childless to child-rearing identities tilt the readings of teenage motherhood. Being mindful to avoid generalizations, the representation of research and media coverage around teenage motherhood can be viewed as manipulative in its own way (Kelly, 1997). Kelly (1997) discusses, "Well-intentioned teachers may aim to empower students by encouraging them to create an 'authentic' statement that ostensibly grows directly out of their own experiences. Yet students with the same experiential background do not always interpret their experiences in the same way, and their self-interpretation are subject to pressure and even manipulation from outside interests that seek to stigmatize their stories" (p. 184-185). Considering Monica's self-interpretation of her embodiment and cultural identities, I acknowledge my own identities and intentions within this research process while attempting to include as much participant perspective as possible. Monica's story of both rejecting and celebrating the effects and perceptions of her body were found within the process of a reflective self. The mirror served as a physical, reflective tool and yet the discursive nature of colliding identities and perceptions has the possibility of distorting the images one takes up within any particular moment in time.

"Yes, everything shifted…"

Latrice's hectic, rainy day vignette was indicative of her frustrations with the imbalance of support and communication around her alternative high school experience. Forced to neglect important identities, such as academic or athlete, Latrice repeatedly mentioned, "Yes, everything shifted…" (Interview, September 29, 2016). Whether this meant the voluntary or involuntary removal from the city high schools or meant actively resisting removal, each of these women experienced a shift upon the onset of their mothering identity. Negotiations of what agency looked like in these stances were in resistance to the policies and practices of schools as well as the social stigmas attached to teenage motherhood (Burdell, 1998). Hunter (2007) states, "The women's perceptions of the mainstream high school and their subsequent treatment once pregnant suggest that they hold contentious views toward their schooling. Schools that create alternative school programs outside of the mainstream school building, especially in rural communities may be further contributing to reinforcing the stigma of teen pregnancy and further isolating teen mothers from their communities" (p. 90). Regardless of the geographic context, isolation was one result of the current practices and perception of the establishment of alternative schools.

This chapter makes the call for administrators, teachers, and policymakers to critically examine the ways in which school structures push specific identities of students out of mainstream curricula while also making it difficult for some students to "fit in" to the established structures (Dyke & LoBello, 2014; Noguera, 2003). Implicit within school practices of value and waste productions of certain student identities is the attempt to de-sexualize teenage mothers. This has been done through systematic practices, such as

alternative all-female schools as well as the monitoring of curricular (i.e.- preventative abstinence-only programs) and extracurricular (i.e.- athletics) activities that communicate messages that females should not have or act upon sexual desires if they wish to participate in the social contracts of schooling. As part of this implicit monitoring process, teenage pregnancy becomes a visible representation of the failed attempt of the individual to assimilate into traditional understandings of the purpose of school (to mold young citizens into the growth of the political aspirations of the nation) (Lesko, 2002). The ways in which the desires of teenage mothers perceive these "fitting in" discourses varied as these women contextualized their school experiences.

The importance of social relationships and events impacted Anna and Alyssa's perceptions of what was claimed as "missing out" or not. Latrice and Trina framed their "pushed out" school experience as gendered in the ways in which alternative schools became this homogenous, de-sexualized "waste" space for all-girls schooling and curricula (Dyke & LoBello, 2014). Athletic identities were shifted as what was perceived as embodied limitations for both Meshelle and Latrice as they described the loss of their athlete-participant identity for a "benched" or sideline support role. Reflections from Bubbles, Trina, and Monica were reminders that existing school policies and practices around teenage motherhood not only impact the mother but also the child. The overlapping and woven nature of multiple identities situates school practices as moving beyond a singular, linear trajectory. Two lives, multiple pathways.

The triangulation of field notes, interviews, and writing pieces draws from experiential shifts mentioned by these women. Particular attention was given to Meshelle's writing narratives and critical reflections on the stories (traditional and

counter narratives) around teenage motherhood. Using literacy practices, particularly writing as re-narration and making public multiple narratives around experiences goes beyond literary canons (Coffel, 2011). This work also looks at the health and psychological needs of teenage mothers that are oftentimes the focus of alternative or mothering-specific school programming where academic rigor is secondary within remedial schooling in comparison to traditional high school curricula as a form of social reproduction (Basch, 2011; Burdell, 1998; Coffel, 2011). Even with the inclusion of these "new" narratives of marginalized perspectives, the dominant discourse is engaged as the historical influence so deeply embedded into school practices and shaping representations (Luttrell, 2003).

Similar to those teenage mothers who used theater production as a public space to advocate for empowerment in contradiction stories, Meshelle also viewed her formalized college writing essays as space to represent her own story and advocacy around the topic of teenage motherhood (Kelly, 1997). Recognition of discrimination and inequitable treatment of teenage mothers as deficit or less capable of academic ability, goals and engagement are highly influenced by the perceptions of their teachers' expectations (Kalil, 2002; Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2008). Considering the quality of the educational programming as well as high teacher expectations from the perspective of the teenage mother was influential as the importance of the school environment was of high importance for continuing enrollment and engagement (Manlove, 1998; SmithBattle, 2007; Zachry, 2005).

"Like, this isn't the end…"

Drea's intimate and vulnerable storytelling vignette could be captured as both a visible and invisible presence within Real Moms. What is significant within this moment was the ways in which mentors shared their own counter narratives of imperfection in authentic vulnerabilities within the structures of the Real Moms space. Noddings (2005) asserts, "We need to give up the notion of an ideal of the educated person and replace it with a multiplicity of models designed to accommodate the multiple capacities and interests of students. We need to recognize the multiple identities" (p. 173). While acknowledging multiple identities, Lexie and Tia also expressed a desire for a community to share in the experience of having hybrid identities, one of which being a young mother.

What is important to note is that prior to pregnancy Real Moms also acknowledges that female (and male) teenagers are sexual beings. It is not a specific moment where all of a sudden the figure of the pregnant female body then "becomes" a sexual being. Instead, teenagers as sexual beings move into school spaces, and those school spaces then vary in responses to this presence. Oftentimes, a silencing of discourses of desire within schools attempt to situate sexuality as a topic for political debate (i.e.- sex education, abstinence-only education) with implications that such decisions will change the fact that teenagers are (or are not) sexual beings (Fine, 1993). Fine (1993) states, "[E]vidence of sexuality is everywhere within public high schools-in the halls, classrooms, bathrooms, lunchrooms, and the library- official sexuality education occurs sparsely…Despite formal silencing, it would be misleading to suggest that talk of desire never emerges within public schools" (p. 76-80). This discussion of desire, specifically girls' sexual desire exists and will continue to exist regardless of

inclusion or removal of females within spaces. Lexie's comment of "Like, this isn't the end…" (Interview, November 7, 2016) was a reminder that identity work, including the process of navigating hybrid identities was fluid and ongoing. It is how structures such as schools and Real Moms attend to these multiple identities where antioppressive practices have the potential to build community. For example, Rose situated Real Moms within social justice practices that reframe and shift hierarchy, traditions roles of knowledge transmission. This continued to be complicated as women choose for themselves how they perceived identities, including whether or not to take up or dismiss the time sensitivity of "teenage motherhood".

In addition to the relationships built among the mentors and teenage mothers was my relationship as the researcher and how this was positioned within the Real Moms context. This practice of learning with and from one another was also crucial to caring relationships within more formalized school settings. Noddings (2002) states, "As students and teachers slip into ordinary conversation, they learn about one another. But they also learn *from* one another" (p. 142). As noted in both the camp cabin experience as well as the Friendsgiving field experiences, there were several times when I was invited into the conversations and activities of the women. My ongoing awareness of how my physical presence was viewed as sharing aspects of my story with these women within conversational contexts impact the entire research process. Just as Drea became a "shadow" presence within Real Moms, I continued to consider how aspects of my story were also being woven into the experiences of these women's lives.

Scholarly Significance

Based on the interpretations of this critical, ethnographic work, I have identified several possible implications or recommendations in the areas of policy, practice, and research. Within any context, critical ethnography makes the call to explore these negotiations of power, privilege, and representation in ways that make explicit the role and relationships of the researcher with his or her participants. Drawing on the work of critical ethnographers (Britzman, 2003; Cruz, 2008; Fine, 1994; Foley, 2002; Gildersleeve, 2010; Pillow, 2004), I look to their experiences as teachers, researchers, and mentors in order to negotiate my research process and representation. My scholarly work with this community-based organization will contribute to the field of education as I address how CBOs offer out-of-school spaces for female teenagers, including teenage mothers to construct their multiple identities. Aspects of this relational work are necessary for both in- and out- of school spaces as female teenagers move among multiple contexts in ways that historically, politically, and socially converge and diverge from each other. It is at these multiple intersections of critical theories, methodologies, my researcher identity, and the lived experiences of participants where stories will be shared, constructed, and re-invented to best serve the needs and goals of this community of women.

This work contributes to other scholarly research that considers how access to equitable resources and basic needs contribute the decision-making processes of teenagers, particularly teenage mothers who find themselves responsible for themselves and their children. This research argues that it is not the individual teenager who is making asks for particular resources but larger, societal structures that limit access to transportation, health care, and job opportunities (Anyon, 2005; Furstenberg, 2007;

Mollborn & Jacobs, 2011; Pillow, 2004). Both Latrice and Trina specifically named access to resources as a main priority to their decision to transfer schools or remain active in a particular program, such as Real Moms. Based on this information, I recommend that attention be given to programs that holistically attend to the desires of teenage mothers, paying careful attention to the ways in which isolation or segregation can be harmful for those pushed out as well as those who remained in traditional educational settings (without their mothering peers). Another recommendation for policymakers is to reconsider the structures of programming under the Title IX policy, including how public schools and alternative schools are working with and positioning teenage mothers (Dyke & LoBello, 2014; Noguera, 2003). The thick, descriptions of the narratives of these women's lives serve as a reminder that changes in policies are socially and emotionally experienced in ways that are not oftentimes reflected or attended to in the enactment of law. This work also calls for a reimagining of bracketed roles to remind those searching for research implications that roles are also multiple and hybrid.

My role as a graduate student and teacher educator in the Elementary Teacher Education program at this university are two other positional (and hierarchal) identities that I have had throughout this research process, shifting between "both-and" language of both a graduate student and fulltime employee. Constantly navigating the theoretical and practical implications of this work, I cannot stress enough the need for authentic, relationships between teachers and students. It is through agency and vulnerability that we as teachers are able to respond to students "with our own unique style so as to secure our and our students' best possibilities" (Garrison, 2010, p. 19). While at first glance it may appear that there is a loose connection between my work with the Elementary

Teacher Education program and my graduate work with teenage mothers, I continually
go back to my conversation with Bubbles. As Bubbles was tracing her school
experiences, she specifically mentioned elementary school in relation to her GED
completion as moments where she cheated to get by and then passed the gatekeeping test
towards anticipated upward mobility. Associating her GED completion with career
opportunity, Bubbles discussed her studying process as "It's like I had to start from the
very beginning with like in elementary work. Like try to figure out how to do stuff like"
(Interview, September 28, 2016). Within the positive relationship of teachers and the
differentiated support in learning content, Bubbles' identity as an elementary student was
perceived as a missed opportunity to engage in authentic learning. It was in elementary
school where she began her transfers to various leveled schools and where she attributed
her mindset of just getting by. Ongoing dialogue around her early school experiences
serves as a reminder that students are lifelong learners and that grade level teachers must
consider holistic ways of interactions that move beyond the class roster of an academic
year.

Students are both assigned to a grade level roster for an academic year and also
humans who are lifelong social learners. Dialogue is necessary when thinking about the
need for this both-and mindset. Noddings (2005) argues:

Dialogue is also essential in learning how to create and maintain caring relations
with intimate others. Unfortunately, there is little real dialogue in classrooms. A
typical pattern of talk can be described this way: Teacher elicitation, student
response, teacher evaluation. Then the teachers moves on to someone else, and
the student- his or her turn over for the hour- breathes a sigh of relief and returns

to other thoughts. If dialogue cannot be introduced into formal lesson structures, it

must be provided somewhere. There must be time in every child's day for

sustained conversation and mutual exploration with an adult (p. 53).

It is not enough to know a few interest facts or generalized understanding of a students'

home life to be invested in a lifelong relationship. For elementary teachers, this is a

dispositional mindset shift where the individual student must be treated as a lifelong

learner versus an efficiency model of education where a teacher "passes along" students

from year to year. Schools, including elementary schools have histories of marginalizing

students based on race and social class assumptions that categorize and oftentimes

exclude individual students instead of attend to systemic inequities (Milner, 2015). These

exclusions and implicit messages do not go unnoticed. Again, this is where the

intersectionality of racial, classed, gendered, and sexual identities continuously position

students, including teenage mothers, within classroom practices and policies.

Schools and educational policies perpetuate white, middle class norms that

marginalize students who do not conform to the social contract of schooling (Noguera,

2003). Jones & Vagle (2013) state, "Although 'climbing the ladder' is often interpreted

as a logical, unquestioned goal, this sort of upward mobility discourse constructs classist

hierarchies in schools and classroom practice and is founded on misconceptions of work"

(p. 129). For the teenage mother, this time of secondary education and motherhood

appears to lead to a panic of sorts where schools find neither the need to educate teen

mothers in academics nor the means to educate them in terms of vocational training and

work. It is for this reason that there needs to be continuing responsiveness to what it

means to be is dialogue with teenage mothers and their education.

Stories "need not be victorious" (Britzman, 1991, p 59). These "victorious" or "non-victorious" stories are still foundational groundings where students and teachers can reflect and take up how identity positioning impacts individuals based on these entanglements of multiple identity markers. Edell (2013) states, "The stories we tell are the stories that were told to us. The stories that we tell are the stories that we dream, the we remember, that we feel in our bones, listened to from the inside… we cannot escape them because we do not even hear them anymore we cannot run from them because they are the legs we walk on" (p. 52). In thinking about Drea's experience, the process of storytelling did not lead to agentic or empowering performances of the individual to take up her multiple identities where issues of vulnerability and privacy damaged the moment of expression. This is similar to Edell's (2013) work with vibe Theater Experience (vibe), a community-based, performing arts education program designed to empower underserved teenage girls through original theater production as girls continued to reinforce damaging stereotypes. Edell (2013) critiques assumptions that all creative expression leads to empowering practices for youth and instead argues that "(miss)empowered" stories require diligence on the part of the critical listener to hear the subtle (and not so subtle) ways that dominant discourses. Given the opportunity to share her private, vulnerability within Real Moms stirred up moments attached to damaging stereotypes where the practice of storytelling no longer became a site of empowerment. This is critical as educators thoughtfully consider assumptions that literacy and creative practices automatically empower all students.

In thinking about Latrice's ongoing frustrations with the systemic obstacles that limited her autonomy and decision-making, this work also speaks to the need for schools

to consider the impact of historical implications of race and social class within conversations around supporting teenage mothers. Jones & Vagle (2013) propose for a theory for social class-sensitive pedagogy as a way to foster social class sensitivity in schooling. If schools are a primary site of maintaining and producing societal norms, than this shift in practice exposes the ways in which teenage mothers have been positioned as "economic burdens". Vagle & Jones (2012) assert, "[W]e are interested in situating the particular stories so that they can animate how social class runs through lives and relations" (p. 336). There has been a blaming and identification of "economic burden" that gets placed on teenage mothers. Disrupting the label of "economic burden" is to acknowledge how societal structures are a constant positioning tool for certain populations. Jones &Vagle (2013) state, "We have come to know and believe that students and families do not need special treatment; they need practices and policies in place that do not discriminate against them by default. In other words, they need schools that operate from an anticlassist and antipoverty commitment" (p. 137). Similar to the ways in which private and public narratives disrupt "a curriculum of concealment", social class-sensitive pedagogy calls for "analyzing educators' and students' experiences of class within broad social and political contexts" and "perceiving classed bodies in moment-to-moment interactive with educators, students, and families" as a way to think about the embodiment of teenage mothers within potentially oppressive systems (Jones & Vagle, p. 130, 2013). The lived experiences of teenage motherhood are more complicated than what can fit into a nice "one size fits all" policy or practice.

Additionally, antioppressive education (Kumashiro, 2002) and liberatory practices (hooks, 1994) both disrupt and resist binary discourses, resulting in the ability to hold

multiple trajectories and routes of being and learning. Going beyond the language or discourses of counter narratives, these liberatory practices call for reaction and agentic action on the part of educators and the community to be vigilant in reading and rereading educational practices. Space must be made for reflective literacy practices where students have the opportunity to create for themselves their own representations. Luttrell (2003) discusses the need for creative outlets and interactive play that contributes to the building of trusting relationships between teachers and students (or mentors and mentees). Programs that offer space for creativity and authentic relationship may open up possibility for empowerment and self-advocacy where students, including teenage mothers, are can deflect negative judgements (Kelly, 2000) as well as design and construct their own representations of being. What is important here is that the building of trust is a gradual process and oftentimes requires multiple moments of a caring relation (Noddings, 2005) in order for authenticity to be mutually and reciprocally experienced.

This research also contributes to the growing number of critical, ethnographic research around the perceptions and experiences of teenage mothers. As previously mentioned, much of this research continues to be situated as public policy and health care concerns versus the qualitative inquiry of the personal stories and lives of these women. This educational work also contributes to the growing body of research around the deep need for researchers to be reflexive about their own positionality with the research process. It is not enough to acknowledge that being in a physical space impacts the research site or the participants' views on the bounded time and space of a study. Just as Drea's momentary participation left an invisible presence during the time of this study, so

too does the researcher (no matter how much or little shared) leaves an imprint of her time in the field.

"Conclusion"

As with all of the stories represented within this work, the "conclusion" to this dissertation is not a clean-fitting ending. I once again acknowledge sincere gratitude to the many women and children who welcomed me into their homes and into their lives. As illustrated within the above chapters, much of this research included spending time with these women in very physical and emotionally intimate settings, such as summer camp, Real Moms meetings, and each of their residences and schools. In seeking to disrupt the status quo and neutrality of taken-for-granted notions of teenage motherhood, the contextualized and naturalistic approach to this work supported the breaking down of assumptions between the researcher and participants (Britzman, 2003; Lather, 2007; Madison, 2005). Just as Pillow (2004) considers ethnographic research as "sites of doubt" my negotiations within the analysis and representations of this work (Hill, 2006) seek to attend to the ways in which my inevitable role as researcher is attached to power and privilege within this process (Hunter, 2007; SmithBattle, 2007; Zachry, 2005). Part of this process includes attention to reflective field memos in relation to my own identities within these spaces.

From these reflective memos, I acknowledge that researcher positionality is intertwined in issues of power when entering into ethnographic research with participants. It is necessary for me to be explicit about this positionality in both my relationship with Real Moms as well as my writing representation of time in the field. Foley (2002) states:

Directing one's gaze at one's own experience makes it possible to regard oneself as 'other'. Through a constant mirroring of the self, one eventually becomes reflexive about the situated, socially constructed nature of the self, and by extension, the other. In this formulation, the self is a multiple, constructed self that is always becoming and never quite fixed, and the ethnographic productions of such a self and the 'cultural other' are always historically and culturally contingent (p. 473).

As mentioned, I identify as an Asian American, middle class, heterosexual, female from a multi-racial, adoptive family. While I have not been a teenage mother, concepts such as "mothering", "traditional family structures" and "unplanned/adoption pregnancies" have been of perpetual awareness to me as my lived experiences have been non-traditional in relation to dominant discourses of nuclear family structures.

In thinking about researcher positionality and the writing on the intersectionality of identities, I am aware of the need for researcher reflexivity. The ways in which Jones (2007) draws on her own classed, gendered, and racial identities calls me to also consider how my own histories and embodiments influence the social, psychological, and cultural spaces I inhabit. In Fanon's (2008) Black Skin, White Masks introduction, Sardar states, "It is about being oneself with all the multiplicities, systems and contradictions of one's own ways of being, doing and knowing. It is about being true to one's Self" (p. vii). While the search for identity is ongoing there are moments of self-reflexivity where contradictions emerge that mark how one comes to know and understand themselves in the world. The entanglement of identities and the ways that my identities have been

placed on me drive my interest in how collisions and layering of identities might impact an individual's experiences.

The tensions of my own entanglement of racial, classed, and familial identities remind me of the complexities of working with those who have been Othered based on social identities. Jordan & Yeomans (1995) state, "Reflexivity represents ethnography's attempt to resolve the dualisms of contemporary social theory i.e. object/subject, theory/practice, action/structure and so on. It seeks to overcome these by asserting that the research act and its product are constitutive of, and not separable form, the everyday world (p. 394). In order to avoid essentializing an experience within a dualism, there are spaces for connections, community, and growth through ethnographic research. This is precisely why I make the call for reflexive, recursive attention to researcher positionality and power.

In tracing my own educational opportunities, I am reminded that I started kindergarten in the same neighborhood as many of my participants. Walking past this elementary school in order to meet Anna and Alyssa for our interviews, I vaguely remember running in the same park just as Aubrey and Chanelle were chasing each other during our interviews. Moving away from this community, it was over two decades before I returned. Much of this time away was speckled with stories of school mobility, racial and social classed macroaggressions, and unplanned life changes where a sense of familial belonging and authentic relationship became my core confidences in combating assumptions around my multiple identities.

During the time of this research study, I discovered that my adoptive parents spent their first childless years walking the same paths and parks where I met these teenage

mothers. My parents recently recalled how these park spaces served as the context of decision-making when they chose adoption as their pathway to family. Unbeknownst to me, the physical space of these neighborhoods was both called "home" and a "research site". To go "full circle" with completing kindergarten to doctorate level degrees within the same community is, of course, too simple of a story to tell. Instead, I view this opportunity to work with these women in a familiar community as another collaborative, gentle fold in a well-worn pillow that can act as both a comforting warmth and physical barrier to hide or expose our partial (complete?) stories.

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Appendix A: Chapter 4 Featured Focal Participants within Interpretive Themes

Featured Focal Participants & Interpretive Themes (*) indicates introduction vignette (**) data chapter vignette	Alyssa*	Anna*	Latrice*	Meshelle*	Bubbles*	Trina*	Monica*	Rose	Tia	Lexie
Constructed "Out of Time": Disrupting Developmental Discourses	**	** X	**		X			**		
Entanglements of Constructed Identities: Seeking Relief through Stories		X	X	X	X					
Embodiment and a Mirroring of Realities							X			
"Pushed Out": Choice-Making and the Role of High School	X	X	** X			X				
"Fitting In": Choice-Making and the Role of High School				X						
"Benched": Being an Athlete and Mother			X	X						
Situating School for Me and My Child					X	X	X			
Mentor Vulnerability as Both a Sense of Betrayal and Belonging			**						X	X
Authentic Mentorship, Authentic Lives								X		
Making Real Moms Real: Former and Current Teenage Mothers						X			X	X

Appendix B: Chapter 5 Featured Focal Participants within Interpretive Themes

Featured Focal Participants & Interpretive Themes (*) indicates introduction vignette (**) data chapter vignette	Alyssa*	Anna*	Latrice*	Meshelle*	Bubbles*	Trina*	Monica*	Rose	Tia	Lexie
Constructed "Out of Time": Disrupting Developmental Discourses	**	** X	**		X			**		
Entanglements of Constructed Identities: Seeking Relief through Stories		X	X	X	X					
Embodiment and a Mirroring of Realities							X			
"Pushed Out": Choice-Making and the Role of High School	X	X	** X			X				
"Fitting In": Choice-Making and the Role of High School				X						
"Benched": Being an Athlete and Mother			X	X						
Situating School for Me and My Child					X	X	X			
Mentor Vulnerability as Both a Sense of Betrayal and Belonging			**						X	X
Authentic Mentorship, Authentic Lives								X		
Making Real Moms Real: Former and Current Teenage Mothers						X			X	X

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Appendix C: Chapter 6 Featured Focal Participants within Interpretive Themes

Featured Focal Participants & Interpretive Themes (*) indicates introduction vignette (**) data chapter vignette	Alyssa*	Anna*	Latrice*	Meshelle*	Bubbles*	Trina*	Monica*	Rose	Tia	Lexie
Constructed "Out of Time": Disrupting Developmental Discourses	**	** X	**		X			**		
Entanglements of Constructed Identities: Seeking Relief through Stories		X	X	X	X					
Embodiment and a Mirroring of Realities							X			
"Pushed Out": Choice-Making and the Role of High School	X	X	** X			X				
"Fitting In": Choice-Making and the Role of High School				X						
"Benched": Being an Athlete and Mother			X	X						
Situating School for Me and My Child					X	X	X			
Mentor Vulnerability as Both a Sense of Betrayal and Belonging			**						X	X
Authentic Mentorship, Authentic Lives								X		
Making Real Moms Real: Former and Current Teenage Mothers						X			X	X