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**The Dissertation Committee for Nancy Rios Certifies that this is the approved  
version of the following dissertation:**

**Sexuality and Schooling in the Borderlands:  
The Deconstruction of Latina/o Teenage Pregnancy as a Social Problem**

**Committee:**

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Martha Menchaca, Supervisor

---

Pauline Strong

---

Kamala Visweswaran

---

Richard Valencia

---

Angela Valenzuela

**Sexuality and Schooling in the Borderlands:  
The Deconstruction of Latina/o Teenage Pregnancy as a Social Problem**

**by**

**Nancy Rios, B.A.; M.A.**

**Dissertation**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to Isaiah, Gabriela, Xavier, Victoria, and Camila. The world is yours.

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**Sexuality and Schooling in the Borderlands:  
The Deconstruction of Latina/o Teenage Pregnancy as a Social Problem**

Nancy Rios, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Supervisor: Martha Menchaca

This dissertation is based on an ethnographic study of the lives of six student-parents (four young women and two young men) from Barlow High School in northwest Austin, Texas. The lived experiences of student-parents from a predominately Latina/o high school and my interactions with Barlow High School's student body, staff, educators, administrators, and social workers from an on-campus organization called A-Space illustrate how the discursive construction of teenage pregnancy as a social problem intersects with the schooling process to (re)produce gendered, classed, and racialized notions of belonging in the American body politic. My analysis considers the development of an American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy through a history of reproductive and racial politics, and it examines the work of The National Campaign to Prevent Teenage and Unplanned Pregnancy, which, I argue, is a racializing campaign. An American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy has yielded a discourse of teenage pregnancy prevention that constructs the solution to teenage pregnancy around responsibility rather than access to contraception and information. The lives of Barlow High students and student-parents highlight the complexity of deterritorialized lived experiences, which sometimes include early family formation. While Barlow High School's student body of color learned about belonging in the first decade of the new

millennium, educators vacillated between understanding the intersecting hierarchies of power impeding socioeconomic mobility and academic achievement in the community and believing that they did the best they could in the given situation. Educators and social workers, as agents of the state, failed to recognize their role in creating community. In sum, this dissertation documents a borderland or the creation of a borderlands in the new millennium.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	xiv
List of Figures .....	xv
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Interpretive Frameworks .....	7
Mexican/Mexican Americans and Culture in the United States - A Brief History.....	12
An American Cultural Concern with Teenage Pregnancy - A Brief Introduction.....	16
Research Site and Participating Organizations .....	20
Austin, Texas .....	20
Barlow High School.....	21
A-Space.....	22
Methodologies.....	24
Observations .....	26
Interviews.....	27
Other Research.....	28
Cultural Informants .....	28
Barlow High School Student-Parents .....	29
Barlow High School Students.....	32
A-Space Caseworkers .....	33
Barlow High School Staff and Educators .....	35
"No baby, if you ge pregnant we'll be together. I wanna be together forever" - Laura Cervantes.....	39
Chapter Two: Deconstructing the Discourse of Teenage Pregnacy as a Social Problem.....	51
The United States, Adolescent Sexuality, Poverty and Belonging.....	52
Critiques of the Discourse of Teenage Pregnacy as a Social Problem .....	58
Conclusions.....	67

"Fight to survive." - Hector Rodriguez.....	72
Chapter Three: The National Campaign and the Threat of Latina/o Teenage Pregnancy .....	79
The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.....	80
The National Campaign and Its Latino Initiative .....	90
Conclusions.....	104
"I didn't really know about sex when I had sex for the first time." - Brooke Thomas.....	108
Chapter Four: From Mexico to Fiskville to North Meadows - Life and Schooling in North Austin .....	117
The Mexico and Texas Period: Anglo Immigration and Anglo Settlement, 1821 - 1965 .....	118
The Austin Period: Immigration and Growth, 1965 - 1995.....	120
North Meadows: A Changing Landscape, 1990s - 2010.....	125
Barlow High School in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century .....	135
"Needs Improvement" .....	136
Student Body.....	138
Administrators and Teachers .....	140
A Note on Mexican American Schooling Experiences .....	144
Conclusions.....	146
"I don't know what life would be like over there, so I chose to stay." - Isaac Aguilar.....	148
Chapter Five: Educators Celebrate Diversity .....	155
Diversity and Segregation.....	157
Diversity and Parental Involvement.....	169
Diversity, Segregation, and Poverty .....	174
Diversity, Segregation, Poverty, and Culture .....	179
Conclusions.....	184

"Where the whole story begins." - Isabella Diaz .....	187
Chapter Six: "Performing Triage": Pregnancy, Schooling, and Citizen-Building in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century .....	194
Federal and State Sex Education Policy .....	195
Barlow High School's Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Efforts .....	200
A-Space.....	204
A-Space's Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Efforts.....	211
Performing Triage: Pregnancy Intervention at Barlow High.....	217
A[Spaces]'s Pregnant and Parenting Support Group .....	219
Parenting for School-Age Parents.....	225
Conclusions.....	231
"My dad never let us have boyfriends, and he would freak out if he knew I was talking to a guy if he was older than me." - Sophia Hernandez .....	236
Chapter Seven: Conclusions .....	242
Bibliography .....	253
Vita .....	271

## List of Tables

Table 6.1: PPSG Workshops.....	223
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## List of Figures

Figure 3.1: U.S. Pregnancy Rates for women age 15 to 19 and by Race and Ethnicity .....	90
Figure 3.2: U.S. Birth Rates for women age 15 tp 19 and By Race and Ethnicity .....	91
Figure 4.1: Travis County Immigrant Population.....	121
Figure 7.1: U.S. Pregnancy Rates for women age 15 to 19 and by Race and Ethnicity .....	248
Figure 7.2: U.S. Birth Rates for women age 15 tp 19 and By Race and Ethnicity .....	249

## Chapter One: Introduction

This dissertation is based on an ethnographic study of the lives of six student-parents,<sup>1</sup> four young women and two young men, from Barlow High School<sup>2</sup> in northwest Austin, Texas. Following the directive of feminist anthropologists (Ginsburg and Rapp, eds. 1995), my study, which was conducted from January 2009 to October 2010, uses reproduction<sup>3</sup> as an entryway into a social analyses of the (re)production of American society. More specifically, the lived experiences of student-parents, along with my interactions with Barlow High School's student body, staff, educators, administrators, and social workers from an on-campus organization called A-Space provide insight into the construction and reproduction of contemporary notions of belonging in American society. In this dissertation, I illustrate how the discursive construction of teenage pregnancy as a social problem intersects with the schooling process to (re)produce gendered, classed, and racialized notions of belonging. It also documents how Barlow High School's educators and social workers vacillated between discourses of Latina/o teenage pregnancy and education and liberal ideologies of individualism, personhood, and education in their cultural logics of American society. While Barlow High School struggled to understand how best to address the varied challenges at their high school, administrators, teachers, and social workers became "social brokers" in the borderlands. These "social brokers" were the guides for immigrant students and students of color into the American way of life, and, thus, they contributed in this borderland, or the creation of a borderlands. The actions of these

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term student-parent as a way to identify the six research participants who shared with me intimate details about their personal lives and their schooling experiences, while transitioning from the so-called care-free and innocent stage of adolescence to that of parent (for a critical analysis of adolescence see Lesko (2001)).

<sup>2</sup> All names, excluding city names, used from herein out are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of all participants.

<sup>3</sup> At issue in my dissertation are both the biological practice of human reproduction and the social logics of cultural reproduction.

educators were often constricted by educational policies, while the high school student-parents did their best at living their lives with dignity in a society marked by “stratified-reproduction” (Colen 1995). This study could not have been completed without the generosity of the people of Barlow High School and the North Meadows community who let me into their lives so that I could illuminate the narratives of teenage pregnancy that discourses of teenage pregnancy as a social problem have traditionally silenced.

In the 1990s, scholars began documenting a shift in the scholarship on reproduction in anthropology. Faye D. Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp describe this shift as from one that produced cross-cultural scholarship on reproductive practices to one that began theorizing and examining the “transnational inequalities on which reproductive practices, policies, and politics increasingly depend” (1995: 1). Ginsburg and Rapp suggest that the production of culture in society can be best understood when human reproduction is at the center of social analysis. They write,

By using reproduction as an entry point to the study of social life, we can see how cultures are produced (or contested) as people imagine and enable the creation of the next generation, most directly through the nurturance of children. But it has been anthropology’s longstanding contribution that social reproduction entails much more than literal procreation, as children are born into complex social arrangements through which legacies of property, positions, rights, and values are negotiated over time. In this sense, reproduction, in its biological and social sense, is inextricably bound up with the production of culture (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995: 1-2).

The following account of one Latina/o community’s high school response to teenage pregnancy is, therefore, grounded in the location of adolescence and the location of teenage pregnancy in the cultural logics of American society. It demonstrates that teenage pregnancy in the United States is not just about biological reproduction, but it is more pointedly about the social complexity in which women procreate and into which children are born.

Hence, in order to demonstrate how the construction and reproduction of contemporary notions of belonging in American society are achieved through teenage pregnancy and schooling, I situate this analysis in two different, but interrelated, historical contexts. Firstly it is situated in the history of reproductive politics. An American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy is embedded in struggles over reproductive freedom, which ultimately stem from ideologies about belonging or what has been often referred to as *fitness* in sociohistories of reproduction. Secondly, it is situated in the histories of Mexican/Mexican Americans in the United States and their schooling experiences. These histories are also about belonging but are experienced through the schooling process. Both of these historical contexts are shaped by gendered, classed, and raced ideologies and when they collide in the lives of Latina/o pregnant and parenting teens in Austin, Texas, we are able to track the locations and processes that aid in the (re)production of difference, inequality, and stratification. In this study, the location in which difference, inequality, and stratification were (re)produced included individuals, non-profit organizations, and schools, while the processes of this (re)production included policy, media, and research. As varied as these locations and processes may be, they currently all work together to replicate a rhetoric of self-responsibility, which silences the humanity and narratives of young Americans trying to live a more complete life in an increasingly globalized society. These narratives are highlighted in the vignettes of the six student-parent cultural informants that I provide between each chapter.

The vignettes are reconstructed snapshots of a student-parent's life during their participation in this research. They are a compilation of my informal and formal interviews with the six student-parents and may also include information from my observations of their participation in a support group for pregnant and parenting students and my observation of their

participation in one classroom. While I endeavored to have students direct the conversation during our interviews, giving them space to discuss their own priorities and interests, I also attempted to elicit answers to a preset list of topics. The vignettes are abbreviated sketches of the six student-parent's experiences at the time they were becoming new parents.

The reader will find that my analysis differs from popular logics about teenage pregnancy, since I begin from the position that the concern with teenage pregnancy in the United States stems from its function as an ideological construct. *Chapter Two: Deconstructing the Discourse of Teenage Pregnancy as a Social Problem* provides a historical overview of government and scholarly attention and interest in teenage pregnancy in the United States. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy is about classed and raced reproductive politics, which are also about belonging in the body politic. A concern with teenage pregnancy gained legitimacy through the use of alarmist rhetoric, which constructed teenage pregnancy as problematic because of the very existence of adolescent sexuality. Soon after, classed and racialized logics were stretched further to blame teenage pregnancy for poverty and other social ills. The construction of teenage pregnancy as a social problem is continually reproduced through the media, through legislation, and through academic research. This construction has also constructed another discourse – the discourse of teenage pregnancy prevention. The aim of *Chapter Three: The National Campaign and the Threat of Latina Teenage Pregnancy* is to demonstrate that the United States advances a “racializing project” through the National Campaign to Prevent Teenage and Unplanned Pregnancy. The National Campaign, for short, presents Latina teenage pregnancy as particularly problematic given the fast rate at which the Latina/o population is growing and the unquestioned costs of teenage pregnancy to the state and federal government. The organization uses long-held

beliefs about teenage pregnancy to construct Latina teenage pregnancy as a subgroup or cultural problem that should be solved by the Latina/o family and Latina/o communities. The National Campaign aims to create a discourse about teenage pregnancy prevention, which focuses on self-responsibility, rather than access to sex education and contraception. This organization wields incredible influence in a political space that has less powerful dissenting voices, and its platform of equating teenage pregnancy with a character flaw only further creates and maintains inequality and difference.

Then, in order to illustrate that teenage pregnancy and schooling are complexly related I turn my attention to the North Meadows area of Austin, Texas and to its high school, Barlow High School.<sup>4</sup> *Chapter Four: From Mexico to Fiskville to North Meadows: Life and Schooling in North Austin* provides the reader with a deep description of North Meadows. In this chapter, I describe the historical development of this area from an upwardly mobile rural Anglo community to an invisible immigrant enclave inhabited predominately by Latinas/os in an expanding urban landscape. This chapter is about space and it considers peoples' perceptions of the area. It also continues my discussion about teenage pregnancy and schooling. The prevailing discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem suggests that the relationship between teenage pregnancy and schooling is a simplistic cause and effect relationship. Teenage pregnancy is understood as leading to dropping out of high school. However, this dissertation challenges this ideology by considering the history of *de facto* and *de jure* segregation that has impacted the schooling experiences of Mexican/Mexican Americans in the United States.

*Chapter Five: Educators Celebrate Diversity* examines how the schooling environment, in which staff and administrators work in and in which students learn, is where social meanings

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<sup>4</sup> Barlow High School was located in the Glynn Brook neighborhood, however, Barlow High served families from a much larger area in North Austin. For that reason, I will refer to the area served by Barlow High School as North Meadows.

about life are created and recreated. Despite the efforts of well-intentioned educators at Barlow High school, powerful gendered, aged, classed, and raced discourses intersected with the educational system and (re)produced social differences. Finally *Chapter Six: "Performing Triage": Pregnancy, Schooling, and Citizen-Building in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, demonstrates how two sociohistories have converged at Barlow High School through its management of teenage pregnancy on campus. In this chapter, I discuss Barlow High's management of teenage pregnancy at length. These management strategies included intervention strategies such as support groups offered by the on-campus social work organization, A-Space, and the high school's accredited parenting classes. The national discourse on teenage pregnancy contends that teenage pregnancy is a social problem because it is a barrier to educational and economic prosperity and so preventing teenage pregnancies is the solution. However, Barlow High's response of intervention should be understood as a result of this dominant discourse coupled with discourses about sexual health and education policy. Since the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem presents teenage pregnancy as a cause for dropping out of school, Barlow High's response was to protect the school's livelihood by implementing intervention programs aimed at graduating pregnant and parenting students, students deemed highly at-risk for dropping out. Furthermore, administrators did not provide meaningful prevention efforts given the discourse of teenage pregnancy prevention, which deems adolescent sexuality immoral and prevention as the responsibility of individuals and families. In the end, Barlow High's and A-Space's intervention efforts illustrate the neoliberal citizen-building process, which is also about gendered, raced, and classed notions of belonging.

*Chapter Seven: Conclusions* summarizes my findings. In accordance with the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem, pregnant teenagers and parenting students at Barlow

High were viewed as highly “at-risk” of dropping out of high school, and given state and federal accountability standards, Barlow High went to great strides to provide pregnant and parenting students assistance to help them graduate. This included offering special courses and outsourcing students to A-Space. In turn, the student body, while feeling that there were too many teenage pregnancies on campus, interpreted this response as an acceptance of teenage pregnancy. These practices and feelings towards teenage pregnancy took place in a borderlands in which educators guided students in a borderlanding.

It is my objective in this dissertation to begin to fill the absence of Latinas/os in the histories of reproductive politics in the United States. Additionally, I seek to contribute to an understanding of the racialization of people in the United States, while highlighting the experiences of Mexican/Mexican Americans and Latinas/os (Omi-Winant 1994; Haney-Lopez 1996; Menchaca 2001; Ladson-Billings 1998; Delgado-Bernal 2002). In the end, I argue that the real problem of teenage pregnancy is with the American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy as it stigmatizes young women and young families while simultaneously further dividing an already stratified society. In the remaining introduction, I provide the reader with details about my interpretive frameworks, a short overview of the raced and classed histories of the Mexican people in the United States, and a brief introduction to the American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy. I then provide an overview of my research methodologies, and I end this chapter with brief introductions to Austin, Texas, Barlow High School, A-Space, and my cultural informants.

## **INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORKS**

My academic pursuit into Mexican/Mexican American teenage pregnancy is based on my own experiential knowledge obtained by living in the U.S. as a daughter of working-class

Mexican immigrants. I have relied on the public education system for my formal education but I have witnessed family and friends tracked into vocational training rather than into college prep courses. I have seen family members reach high school graduation only to turn to working-class jobs or military service. I have seen students' funds of knowledge<sup>5</sup> devalued, and I have been most impacted by being part of a family, with a brother who withdrew from high school, became a teenage father, and is now a hard, working-poor father to his young family. Moreover, I worry about my nieces and nephews. I worry that when they attend the same public schools my brothers and I did in Aurora, Illinois they will also be devalued, tracked, and ultimately precluded from achieving their life's aspirations. The odds are against them, as research shows that second-generation Mexican Americans achieve less academically than the generation before them. However, and most importantly, I remain hopeful. I hope for a more just future that begins with healing by acknowledging the richness of our full experience of who we are, where we are, and what we envision.

My academic training in Mexican-American studies has led this dissertation to be influenced by the work of Chicana and Third Wave feminists, Critical Race Theorists (CRT) and Latino Critical (LatCrit) Scholars in the field of education, and Chicana and Chicano anthropologists. The most fundamental of influences in my work is by Chicana feminists and Third Wave feminists who have argued that a multiplicity of oppressions shapes the lives and experiences of women of color. The position of women of color, therefore, can only be understood by exploring both the pernicious and nurturing experiences we have endured in an oppressive society. For Chicana feminist scholars, the act of conducting critical research is part of their praxis and activism for a more just society, and their experiential knowledge informs

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<sup>5</sup> "Funds of knowledge" refers to ways of knowing that are learned in the home of people of color, which are important but different than the ways of knowing that are validated through society and institutions (Delgado Bernal 2002).

their research agendas that highlight the multiple intersections of oppressions (i.e. race, class, gender, sexuality, and others) that organize lives (Delgado Bernal and Elenes 2011).

As with Chicana feminist thought, experiential knowledge is also a foundational tenet of CRT and LatCrit epistemology, pedagogy, and praxis. CRT and LatCrit scholars first foreground the existence and the structural maintenance of racism in our society, and thereby argue, much like Chicana feminists do, that “Crucial to overturning the normalcy and neutrality of White privilege are the stories by people of color whose experiential knowledge of structural racism provides the ‘necessary contextual contours to the seeming ‘objectivity’ of positivist perspectives’ (Ladson-Billings 1998: 11)” (Villenas and Deyhle 1999: 414). Thus I employ CRT and LatCrit in education to foreground my research in the history of schooling experiences of Mexicans/Mexican Americans in the U.S.<sup>6</sup> Since the 1930s sociological studies of schooling have shown how schools are organized to maintain class and racial privilege (Foley 2011). Accordingly, foundational and recent scholarship that critiques the idea that the U.S. public education system is a meritocracy frames this dissertation (Bettie 2003; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Delgado Bernal 2002; Foley 2011; Ladson-Billings 1998; Solorzano 2000; Valencia, ed. 1997, 2011; Valenzuela 1999). Finally, another tenet of CRT is the deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction of history, which is what this dissertation attempts to do with regards to the reproductive politics of Mexicans/Mexican Americans and Latinas/os.

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<sup>6</sup> For many CRT and LatCrit scholars, documenting how Latina/o students use their *funds of knowledge* or *race-gendered-epistemologies*, obtained in the home, to survive in a Eurocentric environment provides a counternarrative to the discourse that Latinas/os are deficient (Delgado Bernal 2002). Thus I want to explicitly state that although influenced by the work of CRT and LatCrit scholars in education, this influence has been more of a method of organizing my own educational experiences in the U.S. public school system. Furthermore, while a foundational aspect of CRT and LatCrit is the employment of the narrative or storytelling, I did not set out to look at how students’ ways of knowing helped them succeed in school. Thus as an anthropologist, this is where I depart. Instead I focus on using student-parents lived experiences as an entry and access point for a critical reading of teenage pregnancy.

Additionally, because I rely on critical research on teenage pregnancy, the work of Michel Foucault (1978) and his discourse theories, especially the use of sexuality in society in *The History of Sexuality*, also frames this dissertation. Foucault argues that Western civilizations have had increasing concern with sex throughout history and is evidenced by increased discourses and discursive practices about sex, which, Foucault suggests, function to police behavior through power and self-discipline (1977, 1978). He reasons that, for centuries, Western civilizations' proper decorum has been partially defined by particular conceptualizations of sex, the individual, and society, resulting in the rise of professions and ideologies that analyze behaviors associated with sex. Foucault explores the concept of " 'population' as an economic and political problem," which he argues led to government interest in collecting demographic information related to births, deaths, fertility, health, illegitimacy, and so on (1978: 25). Foucault's theorizations on the construction and power of discourses and discursive practices have been significant to critical scholars of youth studies who challenge the argument that youth are a danger to themselves and to society. Summarizing her use of discourse in her case study about the schooling of pregnant teens, Wendy Luttrell (2003), an education scholar, nicely summarizes the operation of discourses in U.S. society. She writes,

Discourses are institutionalized and taken-for-granted ways of understanding relationships, activities, and meanings about the way the world works, in this case sexuality, pregnancy, and motherhood. These understandings emerge through language and symbols (From media images, to laws, to educational curriculum, to medical practices, to folk wisdom, and common sense), and influence what people take to be true, 'right,' or inevitable. Discourses direct our relationships – both with ourselves and with others... Discourses are not neutral; they rest on and are responses to power relations. Competing interests shape dominant discourses – medical, religious, legal, governmental, to name a few (Luttrell 2003: 26).

Critical scholars contend that understanding the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem and its function in society as an ideological construct, means also understanding that

social problems are social constructs. Joseph Gusfield (1981), as well as Malcolm Spector and John Kituse (1977), have advanced theories regarding the construction of social problems in society or what is called a social constructionist approach. Within the field of women's reproductive history, Constance Nathanson (1991) and Elena Gutierrez (2007) also deploy a social constructionist approach in their research, while Nancy Lesko (2001) has done so in regards to the notion of adolescence. Gutierrez (2007) summarizes the social constructionist approach as follows:

The construction of a social problem is a collective process within which individuals or groups define some set of putative circumstances as unduly problematic...Contextual constructionists argue that social problems do not objectively exist, but are fundamentally conceived by certain interests within a particular context...Proponents of contextual constructionism argue that it is impossible for any given set of conditions to be considered a social problem outside of its sociopolitical context, and thus historical analysis is necessary to any project engaging the construction of such a problem. The epistemological approach offered by social constructionism relies on an empirical focus on the actors, historical moments, and interests that construction of...[something] as a matter of public interest and concern (6).

This "collective process" of constructing social problems is informed by other logics in American society, most notably, race.

Therefore Omi and Winant's concept of *racial formation* or the "sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" frames my concept of race in this dissertation (1994: 55-56). Throughout this dissertation I apply the concept of racial formation to my analysis of the Mexican/Mexican American and Latina/o experiences in the United States. I argue that in the past and today citizenship laws and *de jure* segregation have adversely affected Mexican/Mexican American by racializing them through U.S. immigration policies and laws (De Genova 2005; Menchaca 1993, 1995). Furthermore, racial formation took place at various locations and moments in my ethnographic research but

most notably in the National Campaign's creation of Mexican/Mexican Americans and Latinas/os as cultural others and as a people who chose to remain marginally integrated into the social fabric of the United States. Thus other influential scholars include those who have examined the economic and political relationship between the United States, Mexico, and its people (Cockcroft 1986; Donato 1994; Hoffman 1974; Masset et al. 2002; Zavella 1987) and scholars who have examined both discursive strategies (Chavez 1998; Flores 2002; Gutierrez 1995; Limon 1978; Paredes 1958; Vigil 1998) and government policies and laws (Chavez 1998; DeGenova 2005; Gutierrez 1995, Menchaca 1993, 1995, 2005) to discuss the *othering* process experienced by the Mexican/Mexican American population. The history of the Mexican/Mexican American people in the United States contains the persistent condemnation of people of Mexican origin for their socioeconomic position in U.S. society. These logics are constructed from an understanding of culture as static, and, thus, in order present culture as constantly influx and impacted by a variety of factors, I follow the Chicana/o anthropologists and Chicana feminists tradition of historicizing our research.<sup>7</sup> Examining the lived experiences of student-parents from Barlow High School necessitates that time and attention be given to the historical record of both the schooling experiences of Mexican/Mexican Americans and the attempts at controlling the reproductive capacity of Latinas/os, in general, and Mexican/Mexican Americans, in particular.

## **MEXICAN/MEXICAN AMERICANS AND CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES – A BRIEF OVERVIEW**

In *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, Marcus and Fischer (1986) wrote, “The cultures of world peoples need to be constantly rediscovered as these people reinvent them in changing

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<sup>7</sup> While Romano-V (1968), Paredes (1978), and Limon (1978) are early pioneers in the field of anthropology, which historicized the Mexican American experience, recent revisionist contributions have been made by Chavez (1998), DeGenova (2005), Flores (2002), Menchaca (1993, 1995, 2001), Velez-Ibanez (1996), Vigil (1998), and Zavella (1987, 1991).

history circumstances” (24). Marcus and Fischer pointed out that culture is not static but constantly changing giving the political, economic, and particular historical circumstances. This has become anthropological creed, but popular acceptance of this conceptualization of culture has yet to materialize. The experiences of people of Mexican origin in the United States illustrate the failure in the popular imagination to view culture as dynamic and contested. Since embarking on this dissertation research, I have always explained my scholarly pursuits to people whom I meet for the first time as “research on Mexican/Mexican American teenage pregnancy.” Presenting the subject of my research in this manner was an inadvertent exercise on gathering how average Americans interpreted the subject matter. Responses to my research typically mirrored stereotypical conceptions of the Mexican American family: “they value big families,” “they don’t use contraception because of their Catholic devotion,” and “teenage pregnancy is a cultural norm.” These responses are worth mentioning because they reflect the power of discourses to generate certain truths, albeit misconstrued, in society.

Michel Foucault (1978) suggested that discourses or the manner in which a subject is discussed in society are powerful ways that organize society. Nancy Lesko (2001), in her analysis of the social construction of adolescence, elaborated on Foucault’s theory on discourses by adding that discourses function as “systems of reasoning.” “Systems of reasoning” and discourses “typically rely upon identifiable sets of ideas, metaphors, stories, and feelings that are meaningful, repetitious, and take on the banner of truth and goodness” (Lesko 2001: 15). These discourses not only construct popular images of individuals, but they also become institutionalized when they influence policy. An example of how the discourse of teenage pregnancy operates in our daily lives was repeatedly apparent in my polite small talk with individuals. People consistently had an opinion on the subject of Mexican/Mexican American

teenage pregnancy, and typical responses included peoples' culturally based conclusions on why "so many of them have babies at such young ages." For me, this not only indicated that the discourse of teenage pregnancy also had an apparent Latina shading, but it was also based on persistent stereotypes about people of Mexican origin in the United States.

The pathologizing of racial and ethnic groups and the placing of blame on individuals for social ills has a long and dark history in the United State and Chicana/o anthropologists and education scholars have critiqued this trend since the 1960s. In the 1960s and 1970s, Chicano scholars in anthropology questioned earlier depictions of Mexican Americans as being pathological people who were unable to advance from their social status because of their traditional culture (Limon 1978; Paredes 1978; Roman-V 1968).<sup>8</sup> Chicano scholars argued that these early studies of Mexican Americans were more accurately a representation of the institutionalized racism found in U.S. society, in academia, and in individuals, which were also reproduced in society given that these pathologizing studies were used to frame policy (Parades 1978; Romano-V 1968). Moreover, scholars, educators, and policymakers used deficit-thinking paradigms, which were particularly prominent in the 1960s and early 1970s, yet still influential today, to explain the academic failure of poor racial/ethnic minority students (Valencia 1997, 2011). Deficit-thinking paradigms perpetuate an understanding of failure as consequent of one's own internal deficits, and they do not consider external attributes found in society (Valencia, ed. 1997). Furthermore, the ideological notion known as the *culture of poverty* builds from deficit-thinking paradigms and perceives culture as a static socialization model. This static socialization perception of culture is then used to explain poverty or failure by blaming those individuals struggling in such a state (Foley 1997).

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<sup>8</sup> In Anthropology specifically, these Chicano Anthropology scholars critiqued the representations of Mexican Americans as proffered by Anglo-American Anthropological scholars like Edmonson (1957), Landes (1965), Madsen (1964), and Rubel (1966).

Chicana/o scholars and researchers have launched an intellectual assault on the discourse of Mexican educational failure by historicizing the educational experiences of this population and by revealing how families of Mexican origins have not idly accepted these educational trends and have, in fact, throughout history challenged a system that tries to dispossess children and youth of their cultural heritage (Allsup 1979; Alvarez 1986; Cárdenas and Cortez 1986; DeLeon 1974; Garcia 1989; Hernandez 1995; Muñoz 1984, 1989; O'Connor and Epstein 1984; Romo 1986; Rosen 1973; San Miguel 2001; San Miguel and Valencia 1998; Santana and Esparza 1974; Valencia 2005, 2011a, 2011b). Scholars have also used qualitative research among people of Mexican origin to challenge the perception that Mexican-descent families do not value education and have identified the structural forces these families must contend with in order to succeed academically (Romo and Falbo 1996; Valenzuela 1999). Chicana/o scholars have been commanding in examining how xenophobia and racism have structured society, in general, and the educational system, in particular, but in analyses of the educational struggles of youth of Mexican origins, scholars have repeatedly identified teenage pregnancy as a gender specific *barrier* to academic achievement for young women, which is aligned with the dominant discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem that suggests that teenage pregnancy leads to dropping out of school.

Critical social analyses of the disproportionate occurrence of teenage pregnancy and births among young women of Mexican origins are missing in the literature, but the lived experiences of African American teens, who were the first to be negatively stereotyped as the problem of teenage pregnancy, suggest that schooling should not be overlooked. Critical ethnographic research among pregnant and parenting African American teens suggests that teenagers leave school or drop out of school even before they become pregnant thus reflecting

the student's disaffection with schooling prior to pregnancy (Luttrell 2003; Pillow 2004).<sup>9</sup> Thus, in an effort to provide a critical analysis of Mexican/Mexican American and Latina/o teenage pregnancy, I rely on Renato Rosaldo's (1993) use of the term culture, which he argues is constantly in motion so that culture is created when in dialogue with the material world. Raymond William's (1977) notion of culture is also valuable as it clearly delineates how society and culture work together and create one another. In this dissertation, thus, I do not posit that teenage pregnancy is endemic to one racial or ethnic group in the United States because of that group's culture, nor do I suggest that there is a culture of teenage mothers as some researchers suggest.<sup>10</sup> Instead, in this dissertation, I offer an example of how cultural explanations that blame the marginalized ignore the structural and ideological realities that shape the lives of young Americans. Moreover, I suggest that teenage pregnancy is more accurately understood as an American cultural concern that has persisted for over thirty years. This American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy is continually (re)produced in order to alarm, raise fear, and control the body politic in a continually changing society (Luttrell 2003; Nathanson 1996).

#### **AN AMERICAN CULTURAL CONCERN WITH TEENAGE PREGNANCY – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION**

Teenage pregnancy is accepted as a legitimate government concern and discourses of teenage pregnancy are embedded into the social fabric of the nation. The federal government became interested in teenage pregnancy when it accepted it as a social problem. Remarkably, teenage pregnancy was first constructed and introduced into congress as a medical problem (Cocca 2002; Joffe 1993; Kelly 2000; Lawson 1993; Luker 1996; Luttrell 2003; Macintyre and Cunningham-Burley 1993; Nathanson 1991; Pearce 1993; Phoenix 1993; Pillow 2004; Rhode

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<sup>9</sup> Romo and Falbo (1995) provide a brief discussion about this reality in regards to Mexican Americans.

<sup>10</sup> For one example of the culture of teenage mothers see Gregson (2009), *The Culture of Teenage Mothers*, which is written as a resource to help social service providers better understand the young women they serve.

1993; Schultz 2001; Ward 1995). The idea of teenage pregnancy as problem, and hence a public policy issue, was first forwarded by birth control advocates, principally the Planned Parenthood Federation of America who presented teenage pregnancy, in the 1970s, as a medical problem in an effort to obtain public and political support for the expansion of publicly funded family-planning services to teenagers (Luker 1996; Nathanson 1991; Pillow 2004). At this point in history, Planned Parenthood only just recently gained popular and political validity, and the organization turned their attention to the sexual and reproductive lives of adolescents, in an effort to expand their work. Planned Parenthood's strategy was to convince U.S. Congress and the American public that teenage pregnancy was an unnecessary situation that threatened *any* girl. Furthermore, the solution lay in giving youth access to contraception (Nathanson 1991). They were triumphant in their first task but not in the latter task. Ultimately, the Evangelical Christian Right and moral conservatives began to argue that the real problem of teenage pregnancy was taxing welfare costs and the very existence of teenage sexuality, which they proposed indicated that something was morally wrong among American teenagers (Cocca 2002; Harari and Vinovskis, 1993; Joffe 1993; Kelly 2000; Lawson 1993; Luker 1996; Macintyre and Cunningham-Burley 1993; Nathanson 1991; Pearce 1993; Pillow 2004; Rhode 1993).

One of the hallmarks of the American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy is that teenage pregnancy is a social construct. Critical scholars highlight the fact that since 1957 the rates of childbirth to teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 had been on a general decline even into the 1980s, with the majority of births to this age group being to women aged 18 and 19 years of age. However, other documented trends like the rise in births to unmarried, single women, the increased attention on the sexual behavior of college-aged women, the legalization of abortion, and economic and fiscal policies that adversely affected people of color were fodder for a

powerful conservative movement that attacked the changing social trends through the sensationalist rhetoric of the problem of teenage pregnancy (Harari and Vinovskis 1993; Joffe 1993; Luker 1996; Luttrell 2003; Nathanson 1991; Phoenix 1993; Pillow 2004; Rhode 1993). In other words, although there was an overall change in women's sexual and reproductive behavior during this time – an increase in the number of single women having sex, an increase in abortions, and an increase in the number of children born out-of-wedlock – teenage pregnancy became the cultural symbol of what was wrong with society, and research, focusing on finding a solution to the problem of teenage pregnancy, flourished.

Another hallmark of the American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy is that it conflates a concern over teenage pregnancy (read adolescent sexuality) and teenage childbearing (read poverty and dependence on welfare) so that the real issues at hand are easily obscured. For example, policymakers, educators, social workers, scholars, and community members have all been interested in understanding the behaviors behind the U.S.'s teenage pregnancy and teenage birth rates in order to prevent teenage pregnancies. Intriguingly, there is great variation in the teenage pregnancy rate and birth rate by states and regions in the United States. States in the northeast have teen birth rates that are lower than the average U.S. teen birth rate and are more similar to the rates of other industrialized nations, while southern and southwestern states have teen birth rates that are significantly higher than the national average (Kearney and Levine 2012; Ventura et al. 2012). Kearney and Levine (2012) put it most pointedly when they wrote, “A teenage girl in Mississippi is four times more likely to give birth than a teenage girl in New Hampshire - and *15 times* more likely to give birth as a teen compared to a teenage girl in Switzerland” (141, emphasis added). However, for more than thirty years the prevailing dominant understanding of teenage pregnancy and teenage childbearing has been fueled by

moral values rather than by sexual and socioeconomic realities. As a social construct, it also ignores the root causes of teenage pregnancy and perpetuates divisions and inequalities in society (Kelly, 2000; Lawson and Rhode eds. 1993; Luker 1996; Luttrell 2003; Nathanson 1991; Pillow 2004).

This social construct has been (re)produced throughout history and throughout society through research and through the institutionalization, in 1996, of the National Campaign to Reduce Teenage Pregnancy, which recently changed its name to the National Campaign to Prevent Teenage and Unplanned Pregnancy, reflecting its reinforced efforts at the discourse of teenage pregnancy prevention and adding “unplanned” pregnancies as their target. The disaggregation of demographic data on teenage pregnancy rates and teenage birth rates along race and ethnic divisions has enabled a persistent research focus that interprets teenage pregnancy and teenage childbearing as the problem of one particular race or ethnic group. This type of research once focused primarily on African Americans, but more recently, Latinas/os are the subject of interest, since Latinas/os, as a group, currently have higher teenage pregnancy and birth rates than any other racial/ethnic group in the United States. This, combined with the fact that Latinas/os are the fastest growing population in the United States thus makes the reproductive capacity of Latinas/os an easy target. In the end, the American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy places fault and blame on getting pregnant and choosing to parent and would have us believe that poverty is a choice and avoidable if only we control and prevent teenage pregnancies. I discuss this American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy in more detail in *Chapters Two and Three*.

## RESEARCH SITE AND PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

### *Austin, Texas*

Austin, Texas is geographically located in the U.S./Mexico Borderlands. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) theorized that a geographic and psychological space – the borderlands – emerges and exists when two worlds collide. Even though Anzaldúa’s physical borderlands in *Borderlands/La Frontera* was geographically located alongside the U.S./Mexico border, the borderlands could be found in many places. Anzaldúa wrote,

In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy (1987: 19).

Anzaldúa, reflecting on her personal lived experiences of life in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, used her reflection as a place from which to give birth to theory and gave new meaning to the Mexican and American borderlands experience. This dissertation is wholly interested in the borderlands experiences of youth of Mexican descent and is an effort to document and theorize that millennial American experience.

In recent years, Austin has had a continual influx of immigrants from around the globe, but especially from Mexico and other Latin American countries. These new immigrants have settled alongside residents of established Mexican American communities and alongside residents of other working-class communities in a rapidly growing urban landscape. According to the 2010 census, the city of Austin had a population of 790,390 people of which 35.1% were Hispanic/Latino, 48.7% were Anglo/Non-Hispanic White, 7.7% were African American, 6.3% were Asian, and 2.2% had self-identified as Other (Robinson 2011). This capital city, whose majority population is ethnically/racially non-White, has been growing rapidly since 1990. Twenty years ago, Austin had almost half the population it has today and the proportion of both

Whites and African-Americans has declined, while it has increased for every other racial/ethnic category of people (Robinson 2011).<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the state of Texas has one of the highest rates of pregnancy and births among young women between the ages of 15 and 19 and had the highest rate of repeat pregnancies for this group of young women (Martin et. al. 2007). Texas also receives the most federal funding than any other state for abstinence sex education (Wiley et al. N.d.).

Barlow High School is geographically located in the Glynn Brook neighborhood of north Austin, however the high school serves families from a much larger geographical area, which I will refer to as North Meadows.<sup>12</sup> Twelve years prior to my research, a portion of North Meadows was considered the suburbs of Austin, Texas and was settled predominately by Anglo American families. Today the area is the northern most sector of the City of Austin, and, while the area is still home to working- and middle-class families, it has become a major area of settlement for immigrant families. In addition to Barlow High School, I also conducted significant fieldwork with a non-profit organization of social workers – A-Space, which is housed within the walls of Barlow High School. In fact, A-Space was my entrée into the community and to Barlow High school.

### ***Barlow High School***

Barlow High School is a Texas public school and its main building has housed this school since 1966, when it catered to a predominately Anglo American student body. Today, however, the community of North Meadows has become a majority immigrant community. Barlow High's 2009/2010 student population of 1,433 was 80.5% Latina/o, 12.6% African

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<sup>11</sup> Twenty years ago 61.7% of the population was Anglo/Non-Hispanic White, 22.8% was Hispanic/Latino, 11.9% was African-American, 3.3% was Asian, and 0.3% self-identified as Other (Robinson 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Glynn Brook is a part of the North Meadows area.

American, 5.0% White, 1.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% Native American (Texas Education Agency 2010a). Furthermore, the majority of Barlow High's families were poor families and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) reports that 84.9% of Barlow High's 2009/2010 student body was "Economically Disadvantaged," while 80.2% of its students were labeled "At-Risk" (Texas Education Agency 2010a). Still, administrators at Barlow High School liked to point out that it is the most ethnically diverse high school in the Austin Independent School District (AISD), with 53 countries being represented amongst its student body. This exaltation masked the reality that Latinas/os were the majority of its population. Barlow High School was not some utopian vision of integration, after all Barlow High was a predominately ethnic school with only 5% of its student body being Anglo. Barlow High was indeed a segregated school and a history of segregation has led to adverse affects, both academic and social (Valencia 2011b). Furthermore, the image of North Meadows in the cityscape is one of marginality bordering on invisibility.

### *A-Space*

Barlow High and its student body receive what is referred to as "on-campus support" from A-Space. A-Space is a national not-for-profit corporation operating in the school districts of 27 states and of the District of Columbia. Incorporated in 1977, A-Space's mission is to provide a network of support and services to public school students who are deemed "at-risk" for dropping out of school. They have become the "nation's leading dropout prevention organization," and A-Space advertises themselves as "serv[ing] the most vulnerable students in the most dropout-prone school districts."<sup>13</sup> A-Space programs across Central Texas operate

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<sup>13</sup> Data on the national A-Space corporation was obtained from the organization's website but in order to maintain the organization's anonymity I have not disclosed their URL (uniform resource locator, i.e. website address). Subsequent references obtained from A-Space's website will be referenced at [www.aspace.org](http://www.aspace.org)

within K-12 schools and a program manager who is either a social worker or a licensed counselor runs each program.<sup>14</sup> Program managers typically have a small staff of caseworkers, interns, and volunteers, and all staff, including the program manager, provides case management services to their student-clients. Caseworkers are social workers and/or licensed counselors and interns are placed at A-Space from the various social work and counseling graduate university programs in Austin, Texas. Volunteers are either community members or AmeriCorps members. In fact, it was during my service as an AmeriCorps that my relationship with A-Space began. Before continuing with the details of my involvement with A-Space, let me conclude this introduction to A-Space by adding that A-Space program managers have the freedom to run their programs according to the specific needs of their particular school, however, programming is constantly changing given that the organization's employee turnover rate is high.<sup>15</sup> Change and expansion were recurring subjects of A-Space in Barlow High during the year and a half of this research, and the program would eventually become the largest A-Space program in the Austin area. Despite the constant changes, A-Space in Barlow was committed, since 1994, to serving "at-risk" youth by "empowering" students, offering them resources, and creating a "safe-place" on their school campus.

My relationship with A-Space began in 2005 when I served as an AmeriCorps mentor with the organization. AmeriCorps volunteers provide mentoring and tutoring to student-clients at one A-Space program during the volunteer's tenure. During the 2005/2006 academic year, I mentored twenty students at A-Space in Perkins Middle School, a middle school that feeds into

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<sup>14</sup> Unless otherwise noted, information about A-Space in Austin, in Barlow High School, and in Perkins Middle School was obtained through conversations with A-Space's employees.

<sup>15</sup> From discussions I had with both Grace Peterson of A-Space in Barlow High School and Kevin Johnson of A-Space in Perkins Middle School, I gathered that A-Space's high employee turnover was a product of hiring young recently licensed social workers and licensed counselors, who were mostly women and who often moved on in their careers after a couple of years with A-Space or went on to start a family.

Barlow High School, and, thus, I served families from the North Meadows area. As an AmeriCorps mentor, I quickly learned that the North Meadows area had been rapidly changing over the last decade and a half from a Anglo-dominant neighborhood to an immigrant neighborhood. Furthermore, North Meadows' schools were struggling to adapt to this new environment and teenage pregnancy was becoming a growing concern for the schools' administrators and organizations that serve this community.

In 2006/2007, I approached A-Space in Barlow High School's program manager, Julia McAllister, about my research proposal of working with A-Space as an entrée into the pregnant and parenting population at Barlow High. Julia, who was pregnant at the time, had been receptive to my research interests, but by the time I was ready to resume talks with A-Space about beginning my research, Julia had left the organization and Grace Peterson was the new program manager. Fortunately, Grace was also open to the idea and even suggested that I could observe A-Space's new Pregnant and Parenting Support Group (PPSG) that she had just organized. The PPSG at Barlow High had begun meeting once a week in 2007, and, upon receiving IRB approval from both The University of Texas at Austin and the Austin Independent School District, I began my fieldwork by conducting participant observations of the PPSG during the spring semester of 2009. I would continue my participant observations of the PPSG throughout my research.

## **METHODOLOGIES**

In order to interrogate how dominant discourses of teenage pregnancy and Latina teenage pregnancy interact with pregnant and parenting teenagers of Mexican descent at the local level and in order to address the scant but important findings that suggest that disaffection with schooling predates a teenage pregnancy, I situated my research in a schooling environment. The

research methodologies that I employed were used to provide multiple perspectives on teenage pregnancy in one community. Thus, I formally and informally interviewed student-parents, students, social service providers, and school administrators and staff. In total, I interviewed 22 cultural informants, who either lived or worked in North Meadows. I also volunteered as a tutor and mentor, observed pregnant and parenting students and classroom activity in two separate Parenting for School-Age Parents classes (PSAP), and observed A-Space and the support groups they offered to pregnant and parenting students all between January of 2009 and October of 2010. Before continuing to discuss my methodologies I want to briefly iterate the sensitivity of the subject matter I wanted to cover with teenaged girls, teenaged boys, and the community that serves them.

The student-parents in this dissertation were going through a major transition in their lives, a transition into parenthood. The youth in this study were still making sense of life only they had the added factor of becoming a parent in a gendered/classed/aged/raced society. Many times I asked them to discuss with me these experiences quite candidly so I may share them with the reader, but because of the nature of the questions, there is a possibility that my questions may have come off like I was scrutinizing and investigating their behavior and this may have affected their responses. However, I tried to remain free of judgment and offered myself as a resource to them in however they felt I could be of help. The young women in this dissertation sought my opinion and advice on a number of scenarios ranging from applying to community college, managing their dual roles as parent and daughter, managing job-related issues, as well as managing their romantic relationships. In the end, my goal is to illustrate the complexities of their lives and how dominant discourses affect those complexities.

After obtaining Internal Review Board approval from the Austin Independent School District to conduct my research in one of their schools, I received official approval from The University of Texas at Austin (UT-Austin) in January 2009. UT-Austin's IRB closely reviewed my research design given that my research objectives relied on interviewing minors and discussing the topic of sex. The type of research project that the UT-Austin IRB was asking for was, in many ways, antithetical to the ethnographic research process that I had trained and prepared for, one in which I would strive to let a story be told. Either way, I finally began collecting ethnographic data in the Spring of 2009. In the beginning, I concentrated my efforts on "hanging out" at Barlow High and in A-Space's office, in order to get an overall feeling of the high school and the work that A-Space did on campus. On average, I spent 30 hours a week at Barlow High volunteering, observing support groups, observing PSAP classes, conducting interviews, and attending school-wide functions. I made and recorded observations in the high school's common areas, classrooms, and at public school- and district-wide meetings. As mentioned earlier, A-Space served not only as my entrée into the pregnant and parenting student population at Barlow High School but also into the school itself. With their help, I recruited my six primary cultural informants –four school-age mothers and two school-age fathers. I also recruited three non-pregnant/non-parenting high school students through my volunteer work and I identified and interviewed four administrators, three staff, and five social service providers from A-Space to interview.

## **Observations**

Beginning in the Spring semester of 2009, I began attending and making observations of A-Space's Pregnant and Parenting Support Groups (PPSG), which met once a week. I observed the PPSG in order to gather information about the groups' interests, concerns, questions,

challenges, and triumphs. In the spring semester of 2009 there were two PPSGs that accommodated a total 16 pregnant and mothering students. The PPSGs would eventually serve fathering students in the following academic year. During the 2009/2010 academic year, a new accredited course began to be offered to pregnant and parenting students – Parenting for School-Age Parents (PSAP). Two PSAPs courses, accommodating a total of 24 students of which all were served by A-Space, were offered and taught by Ms. Leal. Eventually, I also conducted observations of both of Ms. Leal’s PSAP classes, which met two to three times a week. Throughout the year I could also be found in the library, cafeteria, and attending assemblies, recitals, and award ceremonies.

## **Interviews**

I conducted both informal and formal interviews with student-parents to try to learn about their lives, both before and after their pregnancies. Our interviews took place in the school with the exception of Laura Cervantes’ interviews. Laura Cervantes, a student-parent cultural informant, lived in North Meadows but was enrolled in a different high school so our interviews took place at her home. In my interviews, I was particularly interested in their family life history, their schooling experiences, and their education and knowledge regarding sex and sexuality. I also conducted my interviews with these student-parents in order to get their views on how they reacted and understood what it meant to become a teenage parent. I recruited the non-pregnant/non-parenting high school student participants as a mentor with A-Space and through my volunteer work as a reading and writing tutor with EducationNow!, an organization that trains volunteers to conduct reading and math tutoring in Austin’s schools. The participation of non-pregnant/non-parenting high school students allowed me to gather a scope of students’ experiences at Barlow High and allowed me to assess their sex education experiences

as well as their perceptions on teenage pregnancy. The interviews with other students also took place at school. My informal and formal interviews with Barlow High administrators and staff allowed me to understand the school's self-assessed strengths and challenges, as well as their perspectives on teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood on their campus.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, my informal and formal interviews with A-Space staff members led me to comprehend how the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem interacted with social workers approach to teenage pregnancy.

### **Other Research**

Aside from conducting research on teenage pregnancy and Mexican/Mexican American experiences in the U.S., I also examined the work of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and their Latino Initiative. My analysis of the National Campaign focused on the organization's portrayal of teenage pregnancy and Latina teenage pregnancy. I reviewed the organization's reports on the "teenage pregnancy problem" and critically assessed the content of their published reports for social service providers.

### **CULTURAL INFORMANTS**

As I mentioned earlier, the cultural informants in this study provided various perspectives on teenage pregnancy and teenage parenthood in their community. I recruited the student-parents through A-Space and the Parenting for School-Age Parents (PSAP) classes, and I identified and approached other cultural informants based on their work with the pregnant and parenting population at Barlow High and/or based on their role in the high school. Thus, this

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<sup>16</sup> Mr. Thomas was interviewed for his role in the school but also as a student-parent's (Brooke Thomas) father. Mr. Thomas was interviewed along with his wife Mrs. Thomas who had lived in the community for eight and a half years.

dissertation focuses on the lives of six primary cultural informants (four teenaged girls and two teenaged boys). Other cultural informants include non-pregnant and non-parenting students (two teenaged girls and one teenaged boy), whom I met by tutoring and mentoring at Barlow High. Cultural informants also include Barlow High's Principal, Barlow High's Academy Director, two of four of Barlow High's Assistant Principals, the Parent Support Specialist, the Drop-Out Prevention Specialist, the girls soccer coach/Freshman English teacher/parent of a student-parent, and the PSAP teacher. Lastly, four of A-Space's employees were cultural informants, including one of A-Space in Barlow's intern from the 2008/2009 academic year. Below I present short introductions to all of this dissertation's cultural informants.

### **Barlow High School Student-Parents**

Except for Laura Cervantes, the student-parent subjects for this dissertation attended Barlow High School during the period that I collected my data in 2009 and 2010. Thus, while my interviews and observations of five of the student-parents occurred primarily at Barlow High School, I interviewed and observed Laura Cervantes in her home. Additionally, because of my interests in the Mexican/Mexican American experience and my familiarity with the history of people of Mexican origin in the U.S., I tried to focus on student-parents of Mexican origin. However, two of the six primary participants in this research study are not of Mexican descent. Brooke Thomas is Anglo and Sophia Hernandez is Guatemalan, but the fathers of these young women's children are of Mexican descent and thus their children are of Mexican origin. In the section below, student-parents will be introduced in the order in which their vignette appears in this dissertation.

#### ***Laura Cervantes***

Laura Cervantes had just turned 16 years old and was a junior in high school when she got pregnant in late 2008. Although Barlow High School was her neighborhood high school, she had been attending Middleton High School since she was a sophomore. During her freshman year at Barlow High, she and her boyfriend, Cesar, requested and were granted a transfer to Middleton High. In spite of Cesar's, the baby's father, desertion and suggestion that she give their son up for adoption, Laura and her family were raising Matthew, as Laura started her senior year in high school. Laura and her family were from Mexico and had been living in the U.S. for about eight years when I began this research.

### ***Hector Rodriguez***

Hector Rodriguez was 14 years old and in eighth grade at Perkins Middle School when he and his girlfriend Karina, a seventh grader, got pregnant in early 2009. The couple welcomed their daughter at the end of that same year, while Hector was 15 years old and a freshman at Barlow High School. Hector, Karina, and their daughter Daisy lived with The Rodriguez family who helped raise Daisy. Hector and his family were from Mexico and had been in the U.S. for about seven years when this dissertation research took place.

### ***Brooke Thomas***

Brooke Thomas was 18 years old and a junior at Barlow High School when she and her boyfriend, Isaac Aguilar, got pregnant in the early months of 2009. Before the end of that year and before the arrival of their son Elijah, Isaac moved in with the Thomas's, who helped raise Elijah. Brooke was a senior in high school and just shy of turning 19 years old when she gave

birth. Brooke is Anglo American and had moved to Austin after her mother remarried eight and a half years prior to when this research took place.

### ***Isaac Aguilar***

Isaac Aguilar was 16 years old and a sophomore at Barlow High School when he and Brooke Thomas conceived in 2009. Later that same year, Elijah was born but by that time Isaac was 17 years old and a junior in high school. Isaac lived with the Thomas's, but had been homeless for a short period of time during Brooke's pregnancy. Isaac and his family had migrated to the U.S. from Mexico when Isaac was about three years old, but his parents returned to Mexico and left Isaac in the care of his brother and sister-in-law, who later kicked Isaac out of their home.

### ***Isabella Diaz***

Isabella Diaz was 15 years old and a sophomore at Barlow High School when she and her boyfriend, Fernando, got pregnant. Isabella gave birth to their son, Diego, at 16 and while a junior at Barlow. Diego was almost a year and a half old and Isabella was a senior at Barlow High School when she participated in this research. Isabella was a third generation Mexican American whose paternal and maternal grandparents were from Mexico. At the time of this research, Isabella was living between her maternal grandparents' home and her mother's home. She and Fernando co-parented Diego.

### ***Sophia Hernandez***

Sophia Hernandez was 14 years old and an eighth grader at Perkins Middle School when and she and her boyfriend Sergio conceived. She gave birth to Elizabeth while still 14 years of age, but

was, by then, a freshman at Barlow High. Elizabeth was 3 years old and Sophia was a senior at Barlow High School when she participated in this research. Sophia was born in the U.S., but her family had emigrated from Guatemala. Edgar was of Mexican descent and co-parented with Sophia. Sophia and Elizabeth lived with Sergio and his mother.

### **Barlow High School Students**

Through my volunteer efforts at Barlow High School with EducationNow!, a local tutoring organization, I met a number of Barlow High students. The three students below are students that I saw on a regular basis, and was able to conduct informal and formal interviews about schooling at Barlow High School.

#### ***Jesus Estrada***

Jesus Estrada was a senior at Barlow High School when I met him during the spring semester of 2009. I met Jesus during EducationNow's tutoring sessions held after school at Barlow High. Jesus and his family migrated from Mexico to Austin in 2003, and upon arrival Jesus was held back and placed in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. When Jesus was a sophomore at Barlow High he decided he would try to graduate early, and, when I met him, he was expected to graduate a full year ahead of schedule.

#### ***Lucia Davalos and Ursula Hernandez***

Lucia Davalos and Ursula Hernandez were both juniors when I met them in the spring of 2009. I met Lucia and Ursula during EducationNow's in-class tutoring sessions in Barlow High's AVID class. AVID stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination, and the course was explained to me as an academic enrichment course for first-generation students whom Barlow

hand-selected as having great potential to attend college. I met with both of these students once a week during their class, where we worked on various assignments, while also talking about high school life. During the 2009/2010 academic year we continued to meet to discuss their future aspirations and life at Barlow High.

### **A-Space Caseworkers**

At the very beginning of this research I found myself “hanging-out” frequently in and around A-Space, but as I began observing Ms. Leal’s PSAP classes and as A-Space continued to expand, I came around their offices less frequently than before. I always felt quite comfortable in and around A-Space because of my previous experience with the organization at Perkins Middle School and because the staff and interns were welcoming of my inquiries.

### ***Grace Peterson***

Grace Peterson was program manager of A-Space at Barlow High from 2007 and through the 2009/2010 school year. Under her leadership, A-Space’s reach on campus expanded greatly. As program manager, she oversaw all of her case managers and interns in addition to providing services to students and their families and devising ways to “enlarge their footprint” on campus. Grace began offering the Pregnant and Parenting Support Group (PPSG) in 2007, which led her to apply for grant money to hire a full-time caseworker that could work specifically with the pregnant and parenting population at Barlow High School. Grace Peterson was not originally from Texas, but had made Texas her home after completing a Masters of Science in Social Work.

### ***Georgina Escamilla***

Georgina Escamilla was an intern at A-Space during the 2008/2009 academic year. I met her in the spring of 2009 as she was facilitating the PPSG that semester. Georgina was working towards her Masters in Marriage and Family Therapy and a License in Professional Counseling. Georgina was born and raised in another one of Austin's communities and she did not live in the Barlow High School community during my research.

### ***Melissa Clark***

Melissa Clark was hired as the Pregnant and Parenting Caseworker at A-Space at Barlow High in 2009 and she began facilitating the PPSG in the Fall of 2009. Melissa was a recent graduate of one of the universities of Austin and had come to Austin by way of one of Texas's coastal towns, however she also had roots in another state. Melissa did not live in the North Meadows area.

### ***Maclovio Esmithe***

Maclovio Esmithe was the longest tenured full-time employee at A-Space in Barlow High. He had been with the organization since 2005 and he ran the Young Men/Young Leaders Program. Maclovio had spent most of his childhood on both sides of the Texas/Mexico border and obtained his B.A. in sociology in a nearby state university. He had lived in Austin since 1991, but he did not live in the North Meadows area of north Austin.

### ***Kevin Johnson***

Kevin Johnson was the program manager for A-Space in Perkins Middle School, which feeds into Barlow High. Kevin had been with A-Space since 2004 and although he did not live in the area, he was able to provide some context to the middle school's response to teenage pregnancy

and the community. Kevin is a Texas native who moved to Austin for his undergraduate and graduate degrees in social work.

### **Barlow High School Staff and Educators**

Barlow High School's administrators and staff were all very open to my research interests and welcomed being interviewed for research purposes. All administrators and staff that I interviewed had been at Barlow High prior to my research endeavors.

#### ***Azucena Leal***

Azucena Leal was the Parenting for School-Age Parents (PSAP) teacher during the 2009/2010 academic year. Ms. Leal began teaching at Barlow High School the same year that this research took place and the year in which the PSAP was first offered as an accredited course. Although Ms. Leal did not have previous experience with the subject matter of teen parents, she was familiar with Barlow High and its student body because of her previous substitute teaching experience at the school. Ms. Leal was working towards her Masters in Teaching in Family Consumer Science. During the 2009/2010 academic year, Ms. Leal taught three child development classes, a Peer Assisted Leadership (PALS) class, and two PSAP classes. Ms. Leal was an Austin native having grown up on the east side of Austin, Austin's most well known Mexican enclave. However, she had attended a Catholic High School in an affluent township near Austin. At the time of this research, Ms. Leal did not live in the North Meadows area of North Austin.

#### ***Mr. and Mrs. Thomas***

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas are Brooke Thomas's, a student-parent, parents and they both worked at Barlow High School. Mr. Thomas had worked at Barlow High since 2000 as a popular teacher.<sup>17</sup> Mrs. Thomas had worked part-time at Barlow High since 2005 and helped with Barlow's attendance records during 2009/2010 academic year. The Thomas's lived down the street from Barlow High School and were well known in the Barlow High School community.

### *Ximena Vega*

Ximena Vega was the Drop-Out Prevention Specialist, who, since 2002, worked with Barlow High School, Perkins Middle School, and the four elementary schools that fed into the middle and high schools. Ximena described her job as trying to connect the most "at-risk" families with social service agencies able to assist the family in their particular need. On average she had a caseload of about three hundred families. Ximena is of Mexican descent, but originally from the Rio Grande Valley in Texas. She came to Austin for her university studies and had lived in the area ever since. During this research, Ximena lived in the suburbs of Austin and not in the North Meadows area.

### *Efrain Salazar*

Efrain Salazar was the Parent Support Specialist at Barlow High School and he had started working at Barlow High in 2008. As the Parent Support Specialist he was responsible for helping organize the Parents-Teachers-Students Association (PTSA) at Barlow High. During this research, the PTSA was unable to obtain the 25 active members needed for voting rights in the Austin Independent School District. Efrain was not originally from Texas, and he did not live in the North Meadows area at the time of this research.

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<sup>17</sup> I have withheld Mr. Thomas's specific job duties at Barlow High School to maintain participants' confidentiality.

### ***Valerie Schofield***

Valerie Schofield was Barlow High School's Academy Director during the 2009/2010 academic year but a year earlier, before the high school had to restructure itself to meet accountability measures, she had served as an Assistant Principal at Barlow High. She had been at the high school since 2005. Ms. Schofield was my first contact with Barlow High School and its administrators. Once the principal, Ophelia Hanks, gave AISD approval on my research proposal, Ms. Schofield was formerly assigned as my contact. Ms. Schofield expressed to me that she had a specific interest in the topic of teenage pregnancy having created bonds with pregnant teens when she was pregnant in 2007/2008. She described teen pregnancy on the campus as an epidemic. As Academy Director, Ms. Schofield described her duties as a mediator between assistant principals and teachers, in addition to meeting with students who wanted to withdraw from school. Ms. Schofield had extensive experience in various schooling environments, and she was not originally from Texas. Although she had lived in the North Meadows area when she first started working at Barlow High, she had since bought a house in a different area of Austin.

### ***Miguel Fernandez***

Miguel Fernandez was an Assistant Principal at Barlow High School during the 2009/2010 academic year and he had started working at Barlow High in 2008. After the restructuring of the campus into four different small learning communities or "houses," Mr. Fernandez became the Assistant Principal of one of those small learning communities, which housed 13 core teachers and students in ninth through twelfth grades. Mr. Fernandez was a native of Mexico but had

worked in education for five years prior to the 2009/2010 academic year. Prior to becoming Assistant Principal at Barlow High, Mr. Fernandez had also worked as a Spanish teacher in other Central Texas school districts. Mr. Fernandez did not live in the North Meadows area of North Austin.

***Ronald Taylor***

Ronald Taylor was also an Assistant Principal at Barlow High School during the 2009/2010 academic year and in addition to being Assistant Principal of one of four small learning communities, Mr. Taylor was also in charge of the night school program that began in 2009/2010 and the special education program at Barlow High School. Mr. Taylor had worked at Barlow High since 2007. Mr. Taylor did not live in the North Meadows area of north Austin.

***Ophelia Hanks***

Ophelia Hanks was Barlow High School's Principal and had worked at Barlow High since 2005 when she joined Barlow's administrators as its Academy Director. Ms. Hanks became Barlow High's Principal in 2007. Ms. Hanks was originally from the Texas/Mexico border region, and she did not live in the North Meadows area of north Austin when this research took place.

**“No baby, if you get pregnant, we’ll be together. I wanna be together forever.”**

### **Laura Cervantes**

Laura Cervantes<sup>18</sup> was 16 years old, a senior at Middleton High School,<sup>19</sup> and had just given birth to her son Matthew in August of 2009. Laura and Matthew lived with Laura’s mother, Mrs. Hinojosa,<sup>20</sup> and their blended family of seven in a two-bedroom apartment located on the southern edge of North Meadows. Throughout the 2009/2010 academic year, Laura and her family faced numerous challenges generated by their growing mixed-status family living in the U.S./Mexico borderlands.<sup>21</sup> Laura, having started the academic year on homebound,<sup>22</sup> spent the majority of her senior year at home. After returning to Middleton High, Laura accepted the school’s offer to let her attain her remaining school credits from home. She also spent the year worrying about her family, while striving to succeed for the sake of her son and trying to protect him from the consequences of his father’s betrayal.

Laura’s small apartment complex was one of a handful of apartment complexes clustered together on Pima Drive, a street that intersected with Harrison Lane, which demarcated the

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<sup>18</sup> I met Laura Cervantes in the fall of 2005 when I began my tenure as an AmeriCorps mentor with A-Space in Perkins Middle School. That year Laura’s math teacher referred her to the program because of her behavioral “problems” in class. Soon after her referral, I was selected to be her A-Space AmeriCorps mentor, which meant that we met once a week to discuss everything from school, family, friendships, boyfriends, and her future aspirations. Laura and I remained in touch after that year and I had grown to know her family fairly well. Laura’s family is the only family in this research subject that I got to know well. In total I conducted 8 hours of informal interviews with her, 45 minutes of a formal interview and spent another 15 hours “hanging out” with her. When we hung out, it was typically the two of us and Matthew, either at her home, at the mall, running around the lake, helping her figure out how to enroll at Austin Community College, and helping her prepare for Matthew’s first birthday party.

<sup>19</sup> Laura had transferred to Middleton High her sophomore year from Barlow High School, her neighborhood school.

<sup>20</sup> Hinojosa was Laura’s stepfather’s surname.

<sup>21</sup> Mixed-status refers to the fact that some individuals in her household were living and working without legal status while others were native-born citizens.

<sup>22</sup> Homebound was the status of pregnant students who received education assistance from home because of medical reasons and of parenting students who received education assistance from home after giving birth. Grace Peterson from [A]Space had described the process, of obtaining homebound approval as a pregnant student, as “a mess.” She explained that a lack of communication and collaboration between the Dropout Specialist, the school board, and pregnant students resulted in many student-parents being ticketed for their absences. Ticketed student-parents would then have to appear in court to straighten out an infraction that was not warranted.

southern boundary of the North Meadows area of Austin. Pima Drive contained both mid-size apartment complexes and single-family homes, but the liveliest section of the street was around the clustered apartment complexes. On some of the days that I visited Laura at home, the street would be busy with young men, presumably residents of those apartment complexes, playing soccer in the street. The Cervantes-Hinojosa apartment had been the family's home for the previous five years and it was the second apartment home that Laura had lived in since arriving in the United States in 2001.

Laura was the eldest in her family, and she and two of her siblings, Ignacio (14 years old) and Vanessa (13 years old), were born in Michoacan, Mexico. In 2001, Mrs. Hinojosa fled her abusive husband and made the journey, with four children in tow, to Austin, Texas, where Mrs. Hinojosa's brother resided. Laura recalled this memory one afternoon while we sat in her bedroom. Laura remembered her mother coming home and telling them that they would be going to the store and then to their uncle's home. Laura recollected that she watched her mother pack some clothes, and, with exigency, they boarded a bus without their father. Laura said, "we were taking bus, after bus, after bus, and we came here," where they joined their uncle. At the time of this study, Laura's biological father was in Mexico, but he occasionally visiting Austin. Still, the Cervantes siblings preferred not to see him, because he regularly blamed their mother for the breakup of their family.

Laura's mother, Mrs. Hinojosa, remarried a Mexican immigrant from *el Distrito Federal de Mexico (D.F.)* soon after arriving in Texas. The couple had two more children, making the family a total of seven members. The Cervantes-Hinojosa apartment was small for the expanding family, but it was tidy and did not feel overcrowded. Mrs. and Mr. Hinojosa shared a bedroom with their two year-old daughter, Cynthia, while Laura and her sister, Vanessa, shared the

home's second bedroom. Once Matthew was born, Vanessa slept in the living room with Henry (5 years old) and Ignacio. The living room was furnished with a sofa, a twin bed, and a television on a media console. Over the console hung a grandiose framed portrait of Laura, lavishly dressed in her *quinceañera* gown. Laura's family had celebrated her *quinceañera* almost two years prior to this research. This picture was one of two impressive portraits that captured the observer's attention as they walked through the home's front door. A visitor would also notice a framed depiction of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*,<sup>23</sup> which was hung at the end of the hall that led to the bedrooms. Family pictures, taken in Mexico and in the United States, were also displayed on and around the media console.

At the time of this research, Mrs. and Mr. Hinojosa were the only ones working and contributing to the family income. They both held multiple jobs in the service industry, specifically custodial and restaurant work. To further supplement their income, Mrs. Hinojosa, with the help of Laura and Sophia, prepared cornhusk and banana leaf *tamales* on Saturdays. This was an entrepreneurial endeavor that Mrs. Hinojosa had begun when she arrived in Austin. After a short hiatus, the family resumed preparing and selling *tamales* on Saturdays in order to help with the rising costs of their growing family. This was a family affair as Laura explained that once the long and arduous task of making *tamales* and cleaning up was done, Mr. Hinojosa would drive the family around town selling their *tamales* to repeat customers and area businesses. If the family sold out of *tamales*, then they would profit about \$100, but this did not always happen and when they did not sell out, they donated the *tamales* to a homeless shelter.

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<sup>23</sup> *La Virgen de Guadalupe* is Mexico's patron saint and is lovingly referred to as the *La Madre de Mexico* (the Mother of Mexico) by the Mexican people. She appeared to Juan Diego, a Nahuatl speaking Christian convert in 1531 at Tepeyac. Tepeyac was also the site of devotion to the Aztec Goddess Tonantzin. These circumstances are often cited as the reasons for native devotion to the Virgin Mary and as the driving example of syncretism between native and Christian religious practices. She is considered to be the first apparition of the Virgin Mary in the Americas. *La Virgen de Guadalupe* is also distinguished by her dark skin, and, for that reason, she is also affectionately referred to as *La Morena* (the dark skinned one).

Laura's neighborhood school was Barlow High, where she attended her freshman year despite her cousin's efforts to convince Laura that attending Middleton High from the outset was in her best academic interest. Middleton High did not have any of the difficulties that Barlow High had in meeting state and federal accountability standards.<sup>24</sup> However, Laura did not heed her cousin's advice and started high school at Barlow High, where she met Cesar, Matthew's father. Ultimately, because of Cesar's repeated troubles at school, Laura suggested that they both transfer to Middleton High. Laura explained her reason for seeking a transfer by saying, "I guess I didn't want to be the girlfriend whose boyfriend is always getting beat up," and added that Cesar had enemies because he "acted like he was better than everyone else." Even though Laura had to acclimate to the race dynamics at Middleton High, she admitted to being happy there. Before her pregnancy, Laura had played on the school's basketball team and had explored her talent for art, but she also often skipped classes and her academic performance eventually suffered.

Before this research had taken place, I had visited with Laura in 2007 when she was just starting at Middleton High as a sophomore. At that time she said that she was happy at Middleton and that she was doing well at school. She also remarked that she had to "get used to" being in an environment with "so many white girls," since over half of Middleton High's student body was Anglo.<sup>25</sup> In September of 2009, I returned to the subject of race and ethnicity with Laura while sitting in her bedroom. Laura commented that during the 2009/2010 academic year, Middleton High had received "a lot" of transfer students from the eastside of Austin, to which

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<sup>24</sup> Middleton High had consistently met No Child Left Behind standards and received an 'acceptable' state accountability rating for consecutive years.

<sup>25</sup> In 2009/2010, Middleton was 59.8% White, 25.2% Hispanic, 8.7% African American, 6.0% Asian, and 0.4% Native American. Additionally, only 0.4% were classified as "First Year Enrollment," 21.8% as "Economic Disadvantage," 36.1% as "At-Risk," 7.0% as "Limited English Proficiency," and 6.0% as "English as Second Language" (Texas Education Agency 2010b).

she added, “there goes the school.”<sup>26</sup> Upon further discussion, Laura evaluated a successful school based on race, because of the differences she had experienced at Barlow High and Middleton High. However, it was also apparent that race and class were conflated in her understanding.

Laura reasoned that the schools were different because of segregation, which she identified along class and racial lines. Laura had observed that Middleton High’s student body was predominately rich and White while Barlow’s was poor and Brown, which she believed ultimately affected the quality of schools. She also noted differences in the school’s neighborhoods, in the quality of classrooms, and in the quality of athletic programs. However, Laura also stressed that having more money did not mean that Middleton High was a perfect environment. She explained that students at Middleton High frequently consumed drugs and alcohol, even during the school day. She had often witnessed students carrying fake soda cans that contained concealed compartments in which students could carry drugs while on campus. She also commented that, during school pep rallies, she could smell alcohol on other students, but they hardly ever got caught unless they were acting erratically.

Laura’s experiences also included blatant forms of racism and sexism from teachers and students at Middleton High, and she believed that teachers did not value students of Mexican descent and often gave up on them. Additionally, Laura felt that there was a double standard of dress code for young women based on race. Laura explained that if a “White girl” wore short shorts she could “get away with it,” but if a “Mexican or Black girl” wore short shorts then she would “get in trouble.” She understood teachers’ lack of desire to motivate Mexican students

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<sup>26</sup> Between the 2007/2008 and 2009/2010 academic years, the student body had shifted slightly with an increase in African American and Hispanic students, from 1.2% and 2.2% respectively, and a decrease in White students by 3.5%. Concurrently, between the same three years, there was an increase in students labeled “Economic Disadvantage” by 3.3% and a very slight decrease in the label of “At-Risk” by 0.3% (Texas Education Agency 2008, 2009, 2010b).

and a double standard towards dress code for young women as examples of racism. More explicitly still, Laura's visibly pregnant body made her more susceptible to racist and sexist remarks. One afternoon Laura recalled overhearing a male teacher, who was standing outside his classroom while students were going to their next class, say "What else do you expect from Mexicans?" as Laura, who was visibly pregnant at the time of the incident, walked past his classroom. I asked Laura how it made her feel to hear those things, and she explained that she realized people assumed she was worthless and a "ho" because she was pregnant. However, she clarified that her decision to keep her child was not a bad decision nor did it define who she was completely. At the time of her pregnancy, Laura was aware of three other young women who had decided to carry their pregnancies to term, and she had heard of other young women who had chosen to have abortions. In regards to the incident with the male teacher, Laura said, "It made me feel bad. I don't want people to think that I just fucked up, cuz it's not that. I mean, I know I'm smart, and I know I can get somewhere, you know?" Laura added that hearing those words just further motivated her to prove people wrong.

Yet despite attending a school where students performed better on standardized tests than students at Barlow High, Laura admitted that she had never been really interested in academics. Furthermore, we cannot disregard how racism and sexism may have influenced how she felt about academics. Prior to her pregnancy, Laura had played on Middleton High's basketball team and she developed her talent for art, two things she was very proud of. However, academically, her grades suffered because, as she put it, she "did not care about her grades." She explained that she had put very little effort into her schoolwork and preferred to skip classes several times a week to hang out with her friends at the lake or at a friend's home. She elaborated that she usually skipped her first period of the day given her lack of transportation options. She relied on

the City of Austin's bus service to get to school, which meant she either arrived an hour before her first period or arrived tardy. She conceded that prior to her pregnancy she did not believe school or an education were important for her and that she only went to school because her mother made her go. In fact, most mornings, before her pregnancy, she pretended to get ready, but would go back to bed once her mother left for work.

Laura's schooling experiences seem complicated at best. When I first met Laura in 2005, she was a middle school student at Perkins Middle School and her math teacher had referred her to A-Space in Perkins because of his assessment that Laura had behavioral problems that affected his classroom teaching.<sup>27</sup> In fact, her math teacher could not understand why Laura, who he described as a natural at math, could not control her behavior in class and instead preferred to be a detriment to herself and to her classmates. Laura's schooling experiences indicate that she may have never fully felt a part of the schooling project. As an AmeriCorps mentor at Perkins Middle School, I often heard students accuse teachers of being racists. Whether or not those accusations were substantiated, it was clear that students felt that they were not accepted in the schooling environment.

One thing that was clear, on the other hand, was that upon learning that she was pregnant, Laura began to change her attitude and behavior towards schooling. Laura began to feel the weight of responsibility engendered not only by her changing role from non-parent to parent but also by the realization that she did not have the love and support that she believed she would have from Cesar. Despite Cesar's promises of a committed future together, soon after hearing from Laura that she was pregnant, Cesar chose not to be a part of Laura and Matthew's life. Realizing that a child would soon be dependent on her, Laura said that she began to view a

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<sup>27</sup> According to Kevin Johnson, Program Manager at A-Space in Perkins, so called "behavioral problems" were, and still are today, one of most common reasons a teacher would refer a student to A-Space, others included attendance problems and academic problems.

college degree as vital in order to provide for her son. This led her to slowly change her behavior towards schooling. In our formal interview, I asked her about the importance of education since becoming a mother, and she replied, “Well it’s really important, because I wanna provide for my baby so he can have whatever he needs.” She understood education could lead to better economic earning power, and, once she became aware of her pregnancy, she began taking the earlier city bus to school and used the extra hour to do her homework.

Still, choosing not to skip school to hang out with friends was a bit more challenging and ultimately led Laura into some serious trouble. During her pregnancy, Laura skipped less, which led to her friends accusing her of changing, to which she replied, “she had to” for her baby. Despite this, Laura was caught skipping school and was given a ticket and a court summons. This incident was Laura’s second school-related ticket. The first was related to a fight she had had before her pregnancy with a fellow student. Her truancy ticket resulted in a fine and a sentence of community service hours. Laura explained that she had served her community service hours but had never paid the fine. Subsequently, she was summoned to court again for her unpaid fine, but she failed to appear in court. Her failure to appear in court resulted in a warrant for her arrest, an outstanding warrant that had yet to be taken care of at the time of this research.

Mrs. Hinojosa wanted Laura to focus on school, which she did amidst Ignacio’s and Vanessa’s own growing troubles with school and the law. In September of 2009, Laura was on homebound and a school official would visit her once a week to deliver her weekly assignments and to discuss her progress. Soon after Laura returned to Middleton High, the school arranged it so that she could obtain her remaining credits for graduation by doing independent schoolwork from home. Laura accepted this arrangement and admitted that it also removed the temptation to

skip school with her friends. Additionally, at home there was plenty to deal with. When Laura's participation in this research began, her brother Ignacio was 14 years old and had just been released from his second sentence to *juvie* or Travis County's Juvenile Justice Center.<sup>28</sup> Upon his release, Ignacio left home, and the family only sporadically heard that he was okay. I had visited the Cervantes/Hinojosa home on a number of occasions prior to my dissertation research, so I had been surprised to find gang graffiti on the apartment complex's walls with my visit to the household in September of 2009. Laura explained that "gang bangers" were now living in the complex and that the graffiti was the work of Ignacio and his friends. Ignacio's gang affiliations eventually got him removed from Barlow High School and ultimately landed him, with an even longer sentence, at one of the state of Texas's Juvenile Correctional Facilities.

Meanwhile, Laura's sister, Vanessa, also had her share of troubles with the law. Vanessa was a middle school student at Perkins and academically did well. Laura had proudly shared with me that Sophia had recently scored a perfect score on her Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. However, their mother had also just finished clearing Vanessa's record after having been charged with stabbing a schoolmate in the arm with a pencil. Laura explained that Vanessa justified her actions against this "racist White boy," by reasoning that he deserved it since he had been "telling her things like she's this or that because she's Mexican." Ultimately Vanessa's ticket turned into a warrant, since she tried to hide the incident from her mother and failed to appear in court. Laura was also worried about a rumor that was being spread about Vanessa being a "ho." This rumor also led to Ignacio's arrest for vandalizing the car of the person who started the rumor. Laura knew that her sister was sexually active and felt a responsibility to talk to her about it but did not know how to approach the subject.

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<sup>28</sup> Juvenile detention is colloquially known as *juvie*, which is the term I prefer to use.

Aside from her sibling's troubles, Laura had also been coming to terms with the dissolution of her relationship with Matthew's father, Cesar. The couple's relationship had been on- and off-again for almost three years before they got pregnant. The year they started at Middleton High was also the year that Laura celebrated her *quinceañera*, and Cesar was her *chambelan de honor*, or the young gentleman chosen by the family to escort the *quinceañera* on her special day. Soon after that day and on Cesar's birthday, they began having a sexual relationship. Laura explained that they never actually discussed the topic of sex and only knew that they were both virgins. She explained that their first sexual experience "just kinda happened." She revealed that once they had started having sex it became a frequent occurrence, and they got pregnant a year into their sexual relationship. Cesar was the one responsible for providing male condoms, which the couple used consistently in the beginning.<sup>29</sup> They realized the possible consequences that inconsistent use of condoms posed, but "it didn't matter" because she believed that they were in a long-term committed relationship. Laura explained that although they did not talk about sex, Cesar would often talk about their future family together.

When Cesar stopped providing condoms consistently, she said that he would say such things like "No baby, if you get pregnant, we'll be together. I wanna be together forever," and "If you get pregnant it would be alright." I asked her what went through her mind when Cesar suggested they have sex without a condom, and she said "nothing." Nothing went through her mind because if she were to get pregnant, she knew that would not be alone. She said,

It didn't really matter if I got pregnant or not because he was going to stay with me and we would be all right. We knew it was going to be difficult. That's why we wanted to go to college first, but if it did happen it would be ok.

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<sup>29</sup> There was a short period in which the couple abstained from having sex because Mrs. Hinojosa found out that Laura's relationship with Cesar had become a sexual relationship. Her mother's discovery had made Laura feel ashamed, which led her decision to abstain from sex for a while.

Up until this point, Laura had approached her relationship as many American women before her had, that is having a sexual relationship with someone they believed they were going to spend their life with. In the past this was marked by marriage. A pregnancy, for the couple, would simply accelerate their lifetime plans, since he had said, and she believed, that they would stay together, forever.

The day she told her parents about her pregnancy became one of the most heartbreaking days for Laura. Not only was she feeling that she had disappointed her parents, but Cesar rejected and humiliated her in front of her family. Laura told her parents about her pregnancy and they asked Laura if she loved Cesar, to which she responded yes. Laura and her parents then went over to Cesar's house to discuss Laura's pregnancy. Unexpectedly, Cesar said that he did not love Laura, and, furthermore, he did not want to be a part of the child's life. Cesar suggested that they give the baby up for adoption. Laura was shocked, rejected, and humiliated since she believed that she was in a long-term committed relationship with Cesar. Laura explained that he would often say, "when we grow up, we're going to do this, we're going to do that, we're gonna have babies, gonna get married, but we're going to go to college first." Furthermore, Laura had believed that she had "what all teenagers were looking for," that is "the perfect guy." She said,

Well, I mean, I really thought I loved him, and, I mean, I thought we were going to be together for some time, because, like, I don't know. To me, it just seemed like he would like never do this to me. Like, he just seemed, like, I guess, the perfect guy.

During my study, Laura was still trying to manage a relationship with Matthew's father. Cesar did not want to be involved and even denied paternity, however, his parents tried to rebuild a relationship with Laura and their grandson.

Laura did not want to file for child support, because she did not want to give Cesar visitation rights. Furthermore, Laura did not want to get Matthew involved in a child support battle, since

she knew, firsthand, the effects of placing a child in between two people who do not get along. To some Laura's life in the borderlands might seem chaotic, but for Laura that was life in the borderlands. Her pregnancy brought her true attitudes toward schooling into sharp focus, and she became determined to build a better life for her son through education. At graduation she had earned a 1.9 grade point average, and, although she wanted to enroll at Austin Community College, she was struggling to initiate and navigate the institution.

## Chapter Two: Deconstructing the Discourse of Teenage Pregnancy as a Social Problem

A teenage pregnancy, at its most basic and biological understanding, results when teenagers engage in unprotected sex. Teenage births, on the other hand, result when a teenage pregnancy ends in birth and not in fetal loss or abortion. Teenage pregnancy in the United States, however, is not just about biological reproduction and should be understood as a cultural concern. In other words, teenage pregnancy is a construct defined by gendered, aged, classed, and raced logics about belonging in American society. Furthermore because it has operated as a construct in society for over thirty years, I refer to it as the American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy to convey this construction as a cultural practice. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that sexual activity amongst high school students in the United States increases steadily with age and that, in 2011, an average of 47.5% of high school seniors were sexually active (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2012). This trend is similar to the trend seen in European countries, however, teens in the United States and teens in Europe differ in their contraceptive use. Teens in the United States do not use contraception as consistently as teenagers in other industrialized countries. Not surprisingly, other industrialized nations have much lower teenage pregnancy and birth rates<sup>30</sup> than the United States (Guttmacher Institute 2012).<sup>31</sup> In spite of these numbers and this logic, teenage pregnancy prevention in the United States centers on self-responsibility and not on having access to contraception.

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<sup>30</sup> Pregnancy rates are estimates based on births, abortions, and fetal loss in a given year.

<sup>31</sup> In 2008, the U.S. had a teenage birth rate of 39 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 years old, which was higher than the average teenage birth rate in 10 European countries, Canada, and Israel. Even with a decline in the U.S. teenage birth rate the following year, the United States was still one of the industrialized countries with the highest teenage birth rate (Guttmacher Institute 2012). However, I this analysis is for birth rates and not pregnancy rates and I do not draw comparison between the social context in Europe and in the United States that leads to a teenage parenthood.

Critical scholars of women's reproductive rights and teenage pregnancy have referred to this country's cultural concern with teenage pregnancy as the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem, which has a specific sociohistorical context. This concern is bound up with gendered, classed, and raced ideological constructions about biological reproduction, and, hence, belonging. In this chapter, I provide a brief historical overview of the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem. I detail how teenage pregnancy first became a public concern, and how it became deemed as a social problem. I also detail the critiques of the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem. I illustrate how the American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy is gendered, classed, aged, and raced, and how it evolved into such a pressing concern. Throughout this overview, I highlight ideologies about adolescence, sexuality, and reproductive choice, which have most significantly shaped the United States cultural concern with teenage pregnancy. This discussion leads into the next chapter, *Chapter Three: The National Campaign and the Threat of Latina Teenage Pregnancy* where I discuss the work of the National Campaign, and I argue that this organization has not only become the spokesperson, or, as Constance Nathanson (1991) would phrase it, "the owner" of the teenage pregnancy problem in the United States, but it is also a racializing project.

### **THE UNITED STATES, ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY, POVERTY, AND BELONGING**

Government interest in the reproductive behavior of women in the United States has an extensive gendered, classed, and raced history, which are apparent in discourses about fertility, contraception, poverty, and morality. These topics have often been linked throughout history in ideologies and policies related to the all-encompassing ideology of fitness. Fitness, or ideas about who is and who is *not* "fit" to reproduce the nation, is an integral part of the history of the United States and has served to police the U.S. population (Luker 1996). The idea of *fitness* in

the United States, as Kristin Luker illustrates, “became linked with the desire to promote social control and eliminate poverty” (1996: 34). Through her social history on teenage pregnancy, Luker also demonstrates how determining fitness in the past has been a classed and raced process in the United States. For example, different fertility patterns among White Protestants and Catholics, Blacks, immigrants, and the poor in the mid-nineteenth century led to a legal ban on abortion and contraception. This ban also included limiting the availability of information on contraception in an effort to promote the fertility of White, middle-class, married women (Luker, 1996). However, these nineteenth century laws did not necessarily change behavior, it merely changed women’s access to fertility control. Restrictive laws of the mid- to late-nineteenth century, gave physicians authoritative power to prescribe contraception or perform abortions if the woman’s life or health depended on it. Thus, this led to a class-based approach to fertility control, where White, middle-class women who could afford privatized medical care could also find doctors who would perform abortions and prescribe contraception. These laws produced very little change in the differential fertility patterns of the mid- to late-nineteenth century and led President Theodore Roosevelt to express a concern over “race suicide” in 1903 (Luker 1996; Nathanson 1991). The ideology of fitness was also expressed in the eugenics movement in the United States, which ushered in sterilization laws and policies that sought to prevent those deemed “unfit” from reproducing.

Kristin Luker writes, “Limiting the right to marry, incarcerating ‘wayward’ girls, and passing laws to sterilize the poor, the criminal, or the ‘feebleminded’ were different routes to...preventing the ‘unfit’ from reproducing” (1996: 43). Additionally, anti-miscegenation laws of the twentieth century not only sought to limit the reproduction of the unfit, but also institutionalized ideologies of race hierarchy. These laws prohibited racial mixing and denied

citizenship rights to those of mixed racial ancestry, including people of Mexican origins (Haney-Lopez 1996; Menchaca 2001, 2005; Solinger 2005). Eugenic policies and the denial of citizenship rights based on race both serve to effect the biological reproduction of the nation and to maintain governing and political power among the few who already have power. Moreover, laws not only provide a direct way of policing people and behavior but they also help cement the ideologies contained within the law so that they may persist long after the law has been struck down. Luker notes that even though marriage restriction laws and sterilization laws were successfully challenged and eventually deemed unlawful, professions continued the work that had once been legally institutionalized. Luker writes,

... social workers and private physicians took up where state laws had left off, recommending the sterilization of certain individuals and thus continuing to sever the right to marry from the right to procreate. Through the 1960s, doctors and social workers urged disproportionate numbers of poor women – particularly African Americans and recipients of public assistance – to be sterilized, and they seemed to be doing so out of concern over the women’s fitness rather than concern for their welfare (1996: 35).

Concerns over fertility, poverty, and fitness persisted into the early 1960s but with a new twist given the advent of the birth control pill.

Fears and concerns in mid-twentieth century society still stemmed from anxieties over fertility patterns among those deemed fit and those deemed unfit, but the worry shifted to the consequences as a result of *not* having access to birth control. In particular, society worried about the reproduction of women who had become dependent on public assistance or “welfare.”<sup>32</sup> The oral contraceptive pill or “the pill,” as it has become known colloquially, had

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<sup>32</sup> Luker (1996) notes that the Social Security Act of 1935 was initiated to provide public assistance to several different sectors of the poor: the elderly, the disabled, the infirm, and single mothers. These single mothers were traditionally women who had been widowed. However, the advent of widower’s life insurance and other social behaviors like an increase in the national divorce rate, an increase in the number of deserted families, and an increase in out-of-wedlock births after WWII, led to drastic changes to those women and families on welfare. Furthermore, because of an overrepresentation of African Americans in government aid programs, the perception of programs like

only received U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval as a “safe and effective contraceptive” in May of 1960 (Solinger 2005). After only five years on the market, “the pill” became “the most popular contraceptive among married women in the United States” (Luker 1996: 52). The advent of “the pill” was monumental for the American way of life as it gave women the ability to control their own fertility, thus the ability of separating sex from procreation (Luker 1996; Nathanson 1991; Solinger 2005). Kristin Luker writes, “Americans now had the ability to control their fertility almost completely; for the first time in history, sex and procreation were truly separate. As a corollary, unwanted or untimely pregnancies came to be viewed as technological failures rather than inescapable realities” (1996: 51). Before the advent of “the pill,” any form of birth control was constructed as immoral and obscene; immoral, since it permitted sex without consequences, and obscene, since it related to sexuality. Thus the position that the state had no business in providing poor women with contraception since birth control was considered immoral was replaced with President Richard Nixon’s War on Poverty, which proposed that controlling fertility of the poor was a solution to ending poverty (Luker 1996; Nathanson 1991; Solinger 2005).

Parental fitness and concern over birthrates became framed in terms of the “excess” fertility of the poor (specifically the “undeserving” poor), rather than the fertility “deficits” of the rich. The initial allocation of federal funds for birth control was very small. However, federal interest and public approval grew so great that within the decade, “birth control funding had assumed the status of a natural government function” (Luker 1996: 60). Fertility among the poor had thus become a particular interest of the state, and this interest would soon focus on the fertility patterns of adolescent women. When Planned Parenthood suggested to the U.S.

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Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) became associated with women who had failed at marriage and whose partners had failed at work.

Congress that teenagers needed access to contraceptives in the 1970s, poor sexually active teenagers had already gained some access to contraception with amendments to the Social Security Act.<sup>33</sup> However, increasing attention to teenage sexuality and their reproductive behaviors, led moral conservatives to object to what they saw as the federal government's sanction of adolescent sexuality.

Moral conservatives became powerful players in the debate on teenage pregnancy shortly after congressional hearings were held on the subject in the 1970s. They viewed federal family planning programs that included "services to minors" as governmental, and therefore societal, legitimization of adolescent sexuality (Joffe 1993; Nathanson 1991). The 1981 election of Ronald Reagan, along with a Republican Senate, allowed for moral conservatives to gain a platform for their position and eventual legitimacy of their cause (Nathanson 1991). Thus, moral conservatives sought to "restore" "traditional conceptions of sexual morality and parental authority" (Nathanson 1991; 59). Concomitantly, economic conservatives had resurrected the 1965 work of Daniel P. Moynihan, sociologist and Assistant Secretary of Labor during the Kennedy Administration. In *The Negro Family: The Case For National Action* also known as the *Moynihan Report*, Moynihan (1965) focused on single motherhood as the cause of poverty and argued that the poverty experienced by African Americans was a result of the breakdown of the family. Thus, the 1980s, Nathanson writes, produced three "identifiable constructions" of the teenage pregnancy problem that were "in competition for command of the adolescent pregnancy turf: the public health-preventive medicine construction; the moral construction; and the economic or 'neo-Moynihan' construction" (1991: 140). Ultimately, the latter two, when combined, became a powerful construction of adolescent pregnancy, which not only saw teenage

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<sup>33</sup> Luker (1996) also states that during the span of the 1960s and 1970s, Congress instituted Title X of the Public Health Act and Titles V, XIX, and XX of the Social Security Act, four major programs that provided contraception to people who could not afford it, including teenagers.

pregnancy as a social problem because of its moral implications, but one that was specifically a problem of Black teenage mothers on welfare (Cocca 2002; Joffe 1993; Kelly 2000; Luker 1996; Nathanson 1991; Pillow 2004).

Kristin Luker succinctly summarizes the rise of teenage pregnancy as moral concern deserving policy attention when she writes,

The issue of 'teenage pregnancy' thus entered public-policy debate at a critical historical moment. Eventually it became a focal point for conflicting views about the autonomy of young women and the role of the family. In the 1960s and 1970s, unmarried women had acquired greater rights to control their fertility by means of contraception and abortion. At the same time the government, by expanding federal funding for birth control services and contraceptive supplies, had made it easier for women to exercise these rights. Extending such rights to young women meant that minors still living in the family home could, with the tacit support of the state, engage in behavior that their parents might be ambivalent about or might disapprove completely (1996: 79).

The 1980s became marked by moral conservatives efforts to construct teenage pregnancy as a result of immoral behavior. African American teens were severely targeted, as economic conservatives had also pointed to the rising welfare rolls and used *The Moynihan Report* (1965) to argue that the breakdown of the family was at fault (Cocca 2002; Harari and Vinovskis 1993; Joffe 1993; Kelly 2000; Luker 1996; Nathanson 1991; Phoenix 1993; Pillow 2004; Rhode 1993). Reduction of the teenage pregnancy and teenage birth rate was presented as the solution to combating poverty, but, because teenage sexuality was considered amoral, reduction and prevention was not about teaching sex education. Reduction and prevention became about making youth and families responsible for preventing the immoral behavior of teens and teenage pregnancy.

Scholars assert that the 1990s saw a shift from viewing teenage pregnancy as an African American problem to a more general view of teenage pregnancy as a social welfare problem, evidenced by welfare policies designed and passed in the mid 1990s (Cocca 2002; Kelly 2000;

Luttrell 2003, Pillow 2004; Ward 1995).<sup>34</sup> These policies not only secured federal funding for abstinence-only sex education programs, but also mandated that a teen mother on welfare needed to be enrolled in a credential-seeking educational program. These policies reflect what critical scholars call the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem, which suggests that teenage pregnancy and motherhood lead to welfare dependency (Cocca 2002; Kelly 2000; Luker 1996; Luttrell 2003; Nathanson 1991; Pearce 1993; Pillow 2004; Ward 1995). The discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem has flourished and is based on the connection between education and biological reproduction. The logic suggests that motherhood limits a young woman's educational attainment, and this truncated educational trajectory and lack of educational success causes a cycle of poverty. Reducing and preventing teenage pregnancy is presented as in young women's best interest and as lessening the burden that they and their communities put on the welfare state. The discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem developed out of much deeper gendered, classed, and raced ideologies about fertility, contraception, poverty, and morality. Although legislation related to sex education and teenage pregnancy are not overtly about fitness and belonging, the reproduction of the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem reproduces contemporary notions of fitness and belonging.

### **CRITIQUES OF THE DISCOURSE OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM**

For the past 30 years, the question of what to do about teenage pregnancy has been a popular research topic. Research on teenage pregnancy comes from a multitude of fields including medicine, sociology, psychology, demography, economics, public policy and social

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<sup>34</sup> These welfare policies include the Personal Responsibility Act and Title I Block Grants for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

work. However most of this research mainly reinforces the discursive focus on behavioral and racial/cultural explanations to account for that variation in pregnancy and birth rates reflected in behavioral differences between racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Still, there is a smaller camp of researchers who offer critical perspectives of the sociohistorical context of teenage pregnancy. In the following section, I will first discuss critiques of behavioral research on teenage pregnancy. Then I engage the work of critical scholars and discuss “adolescence,” which is an important social construction in the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem. I add to this discussion the politics of sexuality and reproduction that are at play. I also discuss the connection between education and teenage pregnancy and the alarmist and sensationalist rhetoric used by the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem to win approval, which, in doing so, also stigmatizes teenage pregnancy and the teenage mothers (Kelly 2000, Luker 1996; Luttrell 2003; Nathanson 1991; Pearce 1993; Phoenix 1993; Pillow 2004).

The majority of research on teenage pregnancy is engrossed in identifying behavioral and psychological factors in order to: (1) identify risk factors that lead to a teenaged pregnancy, (2) identify the negative outcomes associated with teenage pregnancy, and (3) understand the motivations for becoming a mother while still a teenager (Adler and Tschann 1993; Breakwell 1993; Brindis 1993; Geronimus and Korenman 1992; Harari and Vinovskis 1993; Joffe 1993; Kelly 2000; Leadbeater and Way, eds. 1996; Luttrell 2003; Macintyre and Cunningham-Burley 1993; Moore, et. al. 1986; Nathanson 1991; Pillow 2004; Rhode 1993; Simms 1993; Upchurch and McCarthy 1990).

Critiques of the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a problem suggest that this larger body of research accepts the position that teenage pregnancy *is* a problem, without critically considering the politics of public problems or its sociohistorical context. The context of how

teenage pregnancy became a public concern is thus as important as understanding that interpreting teenage pregnancy as a problematic social phenomenon also has a politics and history of its own. Constance A. Nathanson, professor and scholar of Sociomedical Sciences at Columbia University, provides a succinct summary of Joseph R. Gusfield's (1981) scholarship on the politics of public problems. She writes,

Public problems, problems that have made it to the point of demanding public attention are not 'simple mirrors of objective conditions' (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988: 53). They have a history – they are the product of competition with other problems, as well as with alternative constructions of the same problem. And they have a structure... This structure – what it is and where it came from – is critical, for how a problem is defined bears a close relationship to how it will be, or fail to be, resolved (Nathanson 1991: 11).

Accordingly, solving the problem of teenage pregnancy has engendered another discourse, which is about prevention. The influence of the New Right and the moral majority in politics and in society has infiltrated discussions about sex and sexuality so that any discussion about sex, especially when it involves government, has been constructed as immoral (Earls 1992; Fine 1992b; Irvine 2002; Levine 2002; Sears 1992). In light of this, preventing teenage pregnancy is constructed as self-responsibility and not as access to sex education and contraception. In other words, preventing teenage pregnancy in America is about accepting the image the teenage pregnancy is negative and understanding that choosing to parent as a teenager is condemning oneself to a lifetime of poverty. Preventing teenage pregnancy in America is *not* about having access to medically accurate sexual health and reproductive health information and contraception. Furthermore the majority of research on teenage pregnancy seeks to explain teenage pregnancy and teenage birth rates, because people who work in the field of teenage pregnancy prevention are reliant on scholarly research to inform their efforts. However this body of research ultimately produces and reproduces the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a

social problem by (Adler and Tschann 1993; Breakwell 1993; Kelly 2000; Leadbeater and Way, eds. 1996; Luttrell 2003; Macintyre and Cunningham-Burley 1993; Nathanson 1991; Simms 1993; Pillow 2004; Phoenix 1993). In this way, the majority of research on teenage pregnancy continues to perpetuate the racialized projects of yesteryear that help maintain White, middle-class values as normative and all who are not as deviants.

A concern over teenage pregnancy is entwined with the ideological component of progress, since ideologies regarding progress are embedded in the concept of adolescence. Over a century ago during the Progressive Era (1880 – 1920), reformers believed that American society was in crisis because of the breakdown of the family. This era was marked by a changing American landscape, with an increase in European immigration, the rise of cities and urban landscapes, and changing sexual and social mores. This changing social landscape, in turn, gave rise to professions, like social work, and the use of social science reasoning in biology, medicine, criminology, anthropology, child study, and pedagogy to address these changes. This period was also marked by gender, racial, and class challenges to society that led to a focus on reformation and it is also the period of the Eugenics movement. Lesko (2001) argues that due to the weakening of religious beliefs and the growth of social unrest during this era, the prestige of the sciences and scientists matured and strengthened, yielding scientifically established laws, which “offered a new, viable foundation for social and political action” (26). Furthermore, this era relied on the Great Chain of Being or the

hierarchy of animals, people, and societies, that portrayed evolutionary history and sociological ranking extending from European middle-class males and their republican government on the top, through women to savage tribes, with the lower animals at the bottom. There was also a moral, or spiritual, dimension to this Great Chain of Being, that is, the movement from lower to higher levels also signified the movement from chaos through human law to divine law (Lesko 2001: 22)

as the logic organizing society and ideas about progress. Social unrest combined with the growth in scientific reasoning cemented popular beliefs in the dualities of progress and decline and the dualities of society and individual, which informed ideas about civilization and framed popular and scientific interpretations of society. The gender, class, and race challenges to society led to the new White, middle-class obsession with the imposition of order on the social, economic, and domestic chaos, which were already entwined with racial ideologies about progress and civilization. Regarding this new White, middle-class, Lesko (2001) states,

They created new voluntary organizations that aimed to reform society and legitimate their perspectives and values. Many became preoccupied with self-determination and with purity and unity (28).

Additionally, during the Progressive Era, concerns over the sociological process of progress and decline left society preoccupied with classificatory schemes, where the exclusive domain of White men was as the producers of civilization located at the apex of the racial evolutionary spectrum.

Lesko argues that the discourse of civilization “with its desire for progress and fear of decadence, drew from and cemented middle class beliefs about race, gender, and millennialism” at the turn of the twentieth century (2001: 25). And so while a certain set of beliefs and values were normalized with the assistance of “protectionist” laws and organizations, notions of degeneracy and deviancy were simultaneously established. This, not only, describes the history of the United States, but it is the specific history of an American concern with teenage pregnancy. American psychologist G. Stanley Hall popularized the idea of adolescence in 1904. In early twentieth century America, “adolescence” became a way to approach those worries over White racial progress, male dominance, and the building of a nation with unity and power (Griffin 1993; Lesko 2001). Various professions and professionals, especially psychologists,

addressed these worries by invoking the study of adolescence and implementing techniques to ensure “normal” and slow development of youth. Nancy Lesko argues,

...adolescent development became a space for reformers to talk about their worries and fears and a space for public policy to enact new idea for creating citizens and a nation that could lead and dominate the particular problems and opportunities of the modern world (2001: 21).

Lesko further adds, “adolescence became a kind of switching station in which talk of racial degeneration could easily be rerouted to issues of nation or gender” (2001: 22).

Childhood and adolescence became marked as a period of innocence and leisure, and youths who did not follow the expected trajectory, based on White middle-class norms, were constructed as deviant. Thus teenage pregnancy is, first and foremost, easily accepted as a problem because of what and how we have been taught to believe about adolescence.

Adolescence is believed to be a dangerous transitioning period from childhood to adulthood and full citizen. Furthermore, a truly evolved and compliant citizen is one who graduates high school, abstains from sex until marriage, or at least waits to have children once married, and has children when it is best economically feasible. Today, school’s use poverty as the first indicator of being “at-risk” of dropping out of school, but the “at-risk” label is more accurately suggesting that poor students are at-risk of not belonging.

The discourse of teenage pregnancy as social problem also relies on particular politics of sexuality and reproduction. Constance A. Nathanson (1991) argues that the social history of teenage pregnancy is about social control over sexuality and reproduction, which can be seen in the battles over who gets to define and who gets to own the “reality” of women’s reproductive behavior and its management. Nathanson’s theorization of the social control of women’s private behavior rests primarily on the location of women in a patriarchal society, a location, which she describes as integral to the formulation of the need to control women’s sexuality. In a patriarchal

society, sexual autonomy is only the right of adults, particularly men. Nathanson adds that moral conservatives, much like nineteenth century women before them, view sex as a bargaining tool where women are to exchange their bodies with a man only for their economic support and protection of themselves and their offspring. As social, economic, and ideological changes occur in society the “traditional patriarchal bargain” is threatened. Nathanson asserts, “Until, and unless, another system is developed to insure the support of mothers and children, the sexuality of an adolescent woman will continue to be regarded as a source of danger to her and to others” (1991: 208). Young women who have sex and bear children outside of marriage thus threaten the “patriarchal bargain.” Furthermore, a woman’s identity and future are defined by her sexual behavior, and thus, “[I]imiting adolescent women's access to birth control is seen as a means to control not only their sexual behavior, but the sexual behavior of males as well” (Nathanson 1991: 70). The politics and debates over sex education in public schools are a significant component of this discourse, and successively the 1990s also saw numerous debates on sex education, with the moral conservative platform coming out on top. Gendered, classed, and raced discourses about adolescence, sexuality, and reproduction have constructed the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem, and ideologies associated with schooling and education help reinforce that discourse.

The association between teenage pregnancy and schooling is complex. Although teenage pregnancy is not interpreted as an educational policy issue, teenage pregnancy and schooling intersect at multiple junctures, especially for the pregnant and parenting teen. At this point I would like to make two notations. Firstly, schooling is more than just a teaching of curriculum; schooling also performs a vital social component. Since the 1920s, schools have served as the central scene for dating and romantic relationships and dating is the main entry into sexual

relationships (Harari and Vinovskis 1993). Secondly, critical scholars suggest that a disaffection with schooling predates a young woman's pregnancy and subsequent birth (Breakwell 1993; Brindis 1993; Geronimus et. al. 1992; Kearney and Levine 2012; Luker 1996; Luttrell 2003; Moore et. al. 1986; Pillow 2004; Rhode 1993; Romo & Falbo 1995; Upchurch et. al.1990). Unfortunately, researchers have not actively pursued this angle of inquiry, but doing so would suggest looking critically at the state of our public education systems. Although this has not been researched in the context of teenage pregnancy, critical scholars and critical race scholars in education have been fruitfully contributing to the education field and challenge the view that the U.S. public education system is a meritocracy (Bettie 2003; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Delgado Bernal 2002; Foley 2011, Ladson-Billings 1998; Solorzano and Yosso 2000; Valencia, ed., 1997, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). Still, discerning whether choosing to parent and that alone led withdrawing from school is difficult. However, most recently, Kearney and Levine (2012) conducted a statistical economic analysis of teenage pregnancy in the United States and concluded that it does not have a "direct economic consequence" (142). The authors wrote,

Our reading of the totality of evidence leads us to conclude that being on a low economic trajectory in life leads many teenage girls to have children while they are young and unmarried and that poor outcomes seen later in life (relative to teens who do not have children) are simply the continuation of the original low economic trajectory. That is, teen childbearing is explained by the low economic trajectory but is not an additional cause of later difficulties in life. Surprisingly, teen birth itself does not appear to have much direct economic consequence." (Kearney and Levine 2012; 142).

While the impact of this research still remains to be seen, similar findings and suggestions have been ignored in the past so that the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem prevails.

A final critique of the discourse of teenage pregnancy as social problem is that it emerged and has withstood the test of time due to the alarmist and sensationalist rhetoric that it employs

to garner approving attention. The majority of research on teenage pregnancy makes minimal differentiation and analysis between the pregnancy and birth rates for those young women who are of high school age, that is, between 14 and 18 years of age, and those young women who are, in most states, declared a legal adult and typically out of high school, that is, 18 and 19 year olds. The discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem interprets teenage pregnancy as problematic because a pregnancy in a teenager's life indicates the occurrence of adolescence sexuality. When teenage pregnancy was first introduced as a public policy issue, moral conservatives successfully changed the conversation to one that condemned adolescent sexuality. Thus, teenage pregnancy is problematic first and foremost because teens should be choosing to abstain from sex until marriage or, at the very least, not making their sexual transgression public with a teenage pregnancy. Additionally the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem interprets teenage pregnancy as problematic because of the belief that choosing to parent as a teenager will likely lead to dropping out of school and a lifetime of poverty has become accepted as truth. In this construction, teenage pregnancy is not so much the problem as is teenage parenthood. Furthermore and, most compelling, critiques suggest that to speak of a teenage pregnancy problem is misleading because it is the 18 and 19 year old subgroup that accounts for a larger proportion of the pregnancies (Adams et. al. 1993; Breakwell 1993; Kelly 2000; Lawson and Rhodes 1993; Luker 1996; Luttrell 2003, Nathanson 1991; Pillow 2006; Pearce 1993; Phoenix 1993). In fact, two-thirds of teenage pregnancies are to women in the 18 to 19 year-old bracket (Guttmacher Institute 2012).

The practice of using data for the 15 to 19 year-old group when talking about teenage pregnancy, Pillow (2006) argues, is explained by Michel Foucault's notion of "incitement to discourse." In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978) argues that sex and sexuality is used to

control the body politic by constructing discourses about sex and sexuality. The “incitement to discourse” emerges by making a subject seem sufficiently controversial that it impels individuals to discuss such a topic. This is illustrated in the use of the “children having children” moniker, which is often invoked in “alarmist rhetoric” about teenage pregnancy (Kelly 2000; Lawson and Rhode 1993; Luker 1996; Pearce 1993; Pillow 2006). Scholars have argued that the moniker “children having children” was initially used to convince the public that teenage mothers were themselves innocent victims, thus needing protection (Luker 1996; Pillow 2004). Pillow (2004) adds that although it may seem compassionate in nature, critical analysis of social history reveals that this concern arose out of a fear that sexual attitudes of White teenagers in the 1980s were beginning to reflect the sexual attitudes of Black teenagers. Nevertheless, the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a problem is maintained by not offering a more critical analysis that takes into consideration the social complexities reflected in the sex and reproductive behaviors of teenagers between the ages of fifteen and nineteen years old.

The discourse of teenage pregnancy as social problem has been staunchly critiqued by a handful of critical scholars in the United States as a discourse that fails to situate teenage pregnancy in its sociohistorical context and thus ignores class structures, promotes racializing projects, and stigmatizes teenage mothers (Cocca 2002; Kelly 2000; Luker 1996; Luttrell 2003; Macintyre and Cunningham-Burley 1993; Nathanson 1991; Pearce 1993; Phoenix 1993; Pillow 2004; Rhode 1993; Ruddick 1993; Schultz 2001; Simms 1993; Ward 1995).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy reasons that an occurrence of teenage pregnancy, in and of itself, is problematic because it publicly exposes teenage sexuality, which is immoral. Furthermore, it reasons that a pregnancy in a woman’s teenage years will

limit her educational attainment, and, consequently, if she chooses to mother it will result in a lifetime of struggle, poverty, and dependence on the state. These concerns are founded on the patriarchal nation's support of marriage and the gendered division of labor (Kelly 2000; Luker 1996; Nathanson 1991; Pearce 1993), but also rests on the relationship between income and education, which shows that an individual's income level is directly related to the amount of education that that individual has attained. The logic also rests on the idea that the U.S. public schooling system is a meritocracy. But even though this concern has ties to schooling and education, teenage pregnancy is not constructed as an educational policy issue (Pillow 2004; Luttrell 2003; Luker 1996). Nor is it constructed as a public health issue and subsequently research has purported to show that a teenaged pregnancy directly results in lower "status attainment" (Nathanson 1991; Pearce 1993).

Since its "emergence," a concern with teenage pregnancy has been tied to poverty. Pillow (2004) and Luker (1996) both suggest that Senator Edward Kennedy's 1975 National School Age Mother and Child Health Act (NSAMCHA) and the subsequent hearings on the bill marks the official emergence of linking teenage pregnancy as a social problem that causes poverty. Although the act did not pass, the act stated, "pregnancy among adolescents is a serious and growing problem...[and] such pregnancies are a leading cause of school dropout, familial disruption and increasing dependency on welfare and other community resources" (Luker 1996; 71). The debates on this issue not only led to growing attention on teenagers and their pregnancies but also led to Congress's approval of Senator Edward Kennedy's second attempt at teenage pregnancy legislation in 1978 under the Adolescent Health, Services, and Pregnancy Prevention and Care Act, which stressed and supported the relationship between poverty and early pregnancy (Luker 1996). Luker argues that supporters of this ideology believed that the

pregnancy rates and out-of-wedlock childbearing among teens would decrease with publicly funded contraception and would have the added effect of declining welfare dependency.

However, these assumptions ignored the structures that make economic upward mobility difficult and suggested that poverty was an individual choice (Luker 1996). Luker states:

Pregnancy rates among teens did not come down (although they did not increase as much as they should have, given the increase in the numbers of young people who were sexually active). Early childbearing, though on the decline, continued to be concentrated among poor and minority women. And out-of-wedlock births became even more common (1996: 75).

These social behaviors helped shift the rhetoric of teenage pregnancy from one that viewed a lack of access to contraception as the cause of the problem of teenage pregnancy to one that viewed the very existence of adolescent sexuality and poor decision-making as the cause of poverty and other social ills.

The suggestion that adolescent sexuality, poor decision-making, and teenage pregnancy cause social ills has resulted in a concerted research focus that seeks to understand the behavior and motives of teenagers in order to design prevention models. This has also created a market in which entire businesses on the subject have emerged. These include companies that make and distribute abstinence-only sex education materials and not-for-profit organizations that provide supportive and teenage pregnancy prevention services in communities. Currently, although prevention efforts are varied, federal and state governments would rather eschew debates on sex education in schools and instead support teenage pregnancy prevention models that place responsibility on social service providers, not schools, to help individuals make better, more responsible choices. Thus, I argue that the American concern with teenage pregnancy has produced a discourse of teenage pregnancy prevention that focuses on individual responsibility and not sexual and reproductive health.

Finally, the “emergence” of a concern with teenage pregnancy should be best understood as developing over time from previous related ideologies regarding women’s gendered roles as wives and mothers in American society. In other words, the American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy is about reproductive politics and Dorothy Roberts has argued, “*Reproductive politics in America inevitably involves racial politics*” (1997: 9). In the United States, reproductive politics emerges from late-twentieth century activism and scholars deploy it to discuss “the struggles over who decides whether, when, and which women can reproduce legitimately,” and to discuss “struggles over which women have the right to be mothers of the children they bear” (Solinger 2005: 38). Roberts reminds us that reproductive politics have been in place since the creation of this nation given that the reproductive capacity of enslaved women was controlled based on the economic and labor needs of the slave owner, and the enslaved woman’s value lied in her ability to labor both by tending plantations and by birthing additional slaves (Roberts 1997: 24). Roberts notes, “Because race was defined as an inheritable trait, preserving racial distinctions required policing reproduction” (1997: 9).<sup>35</sup> Using the history of African Americans in the United States, Roberts expounds how racial hierarchies were institutionalized through citizenship laws, which had further implications for ideologies about belonging and those deemed worthy of citizenship. In today’s society there are legal codes that define belonging within the context of the nation-state. Citizenship is typically thought of within the context of these legal codes. However, belonging is not simply restricted to the legal parameters which define who is and who is not a part of the legal nation. Ideology and popular culture have defined the exclusionary tactics that also restrict how some citizens and non-citizens belong or do not belong into the national body politic. Within the context of Latina/o teenage

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<sup>35</sup> The experiences of Black women are important to this work because it lays the foundation of U.S. treatment of reproductive matters of non-White women.

pregnancy, Latinas/os, whether citizens or non-citizens, are the targets of these exclusionary tactics. Thus the policing of reproduction of the people of Mexican origin can be seen throughout history through racial citizenship laws (Menchaca, 1993), anti-miscegenation laws (Menchaca 2005), sterilization campaigns (Gutierrez 2008) and in ideological constructs like teenage pregnancy.

Soon after its emergence on the public scene in the 1970s, teenage pregnancy became an entrenched ideological construct in the social fabric of the United States and researchers, politicians, and organizations have and continue to reproduce the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem. One said organization is the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, which has become the accepted spokesperson for the problem of teenage pregnancy in the United States. The organization is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, but a critical reading of their initiatives and reports reveal that the organization's stance on teenage pregnancy is based on a set of values founded on gendered, classed, and raced definitions of the role of women's reproductive lives, their reproductive choices, and the management of those lives and choices. I now turn my attention in the following chapter to the National Campaign.

## **“Fight to survive.”**

### **Hector Rodriguez**

Hector Rodriguez<sup>36</sup> was a freshman at Barlow High and an expectant father at the beginning of the 2009/2010 academic year. Hector lived with his family in a three-bedroom duplex on the northern border of the North Meadows area. Soon after the arrival of his daughter, Daisy, in November of 2009, the Rodriguez's welcomed Daisy and Karina, Hector's girlfriend, into their home. The Rodriguez household consisted of a multigenerational mixed-status family of seven. Hector was 15 years old at the time of this research, and he displayed a great deal of thoughtfulness in many of our conversations. Throughout the academic year, Hector was balancing his new role as father, his relationship with his parents and Karina, his distancing from “the lifestyle,”<sup>37</sup> his deepening religious devotion, and his continuous struggle with school, especially with mathematics.

Hector is of Mexican descent and was born in Monterrey, Mexico as were his two older siblings Sonia (21 years old) and Francisco (20 years old). Mr. and Mrs. Rodriguez left for Dallas, Texas with their three children in January of 2003, only to move again a year later to Austin, Texas, where extended family members were already settled. The Rodriguez family had been living in the North Meadows area since arriving in Austin, but had only been in their duplex home for two years. The two older siblings still lived at home while Sonia attended The University of Texas at Austin and Francisco attended Austin Community College. Both siblings

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<sup>36</sup> I met Hector Rodriguez his freshman year at Barlow High during the Fall of 2009. He participated in A-Space's Pregnant and Parenting Support Group (PPSG), and he was enrolled in Ms. Leal's first period Parenting for School-Age Parents (PSAP) class. Hector was only able to take the PSAP class in the Fall semester since, come spring, he had to retake his freshman algebra class. Hector preferred that we meet during school hours, which meant that the only available period to do so was during Advisory, a 25 minute class. In total I collected 21 hours of data from Hector - 2 hours of Informal Interviews, 15 minutes of a Formal Interview, which was recorded, 17.75 hours of Observations during the PSAP class (9 hours) and during A-Space's Pregnant and Parenting Support Group (8:45 hours).

<sup>37</sup> “The lifestyle” referred to gang activity and gang association. An Austin Police Department resource manual on gangs called it the “gangster lifestyle,” but Hector simply called it “the lifestyle.”

had graduated from Barlow High School. In fact, Sonia had graduated in the top 10% of her senior class and had received academic scholarships from both UT-Austin and the Glynn Brook Neighborhood Association. At the time of this study, only Mr. and Mrs. Rodriguez were contributing financially to the household income. Mrs. Rodriguez worked in management of housekeeping services at a local country club, and Mr. Rodriguez worked in maintenance at a local restaurant. Seven people under one roof may seem overcrowded, but Hector said that it worked out “good” since the family got along well. Even though there were times throughout the year that Hector struggled with his relationships with his parents and with Karina, it was his family and his religious community that helped through those difficult times. Hector’s struggle with academics, on the other hand, was an individual battle.

The Rodriguez family left Mexico when Hector was nine years old in an effort to shield their family from the violence and danger that was widespread in the urban landscape of Monterrey, Mexico. However, the family soon discovered that Austin was not exempt from some of the same social environmental risks that they had tried to circumvent. Despite their efforts, Hector, their youngest son, got involved in “the lifestyle,” which he was exposed to as a repeat fourth grader in Austin.<sup>38</sup> As a fourth grader, Hector befriended the brother of a gang member of the neighborhood’s Crip sect.<sup>39</sup> Subsequently, Hector met other Crips and by sixth grade he was regularly hanging out with this neighborhood gang. The following year, Hector’s involvement in “the lifestyle” intensified and he was “repping,” or representing the Crips. In our formal interview Hector explained, “The lifestyle gets you and you got to survive. You gotta fit

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<sup>38</sup> Upon arriving in Dallas, Texas, Hector enrolled in the fourth grade, but he was held back and reenrolled in fourth grade in AISD.

<sup>39</sup> Austin had four major gang nations (Bloods, Crips, Folk Nation, and People Nation) operating in the city during this time. Each of the four nations had various sects operating under its nation. The Crips had 5 sects in Austin, each associated with a different “territory” or area of Austin. Each sect was its own gang and Austin had a total of 17 sects (Austin Police Department and Austin Independent School District N.d.).

in. Well, I don't mean [survive] to live, but I mean to be with them. I guess you gotta follow what they do and there's a lot of them." I asked Hector to further explain what he meant by "the lifestyle," and he added that he got involved with people who "weren't really good in life," describing how these people not only "did weed, drugs, pills, and all that stuff," but also sold drugs. Then he explained that *repping* a gang meant that you weren't "jumped in" but you just "chill with them [and] do what they do." He added that in eighth grade he got into a lot of trouble, which led him to realize that as his involvement with "the lifestyle" deepened, his problems increased. He said, "As I started getting more money coming in, money from the things I sold, the things I did, you could say that more problems came." At the height of his involvement with the Crips, only a year prior to this research, he had been caught with marijuana at Perkins Middle School, which became a turning point in his young life. After this event, Hector began changing aspects of his life that he saw as troublesome, and he received support from a Catholic youth group.

Hector was able to make these changes on account of two things: first, the Crips that he had been "repping" "turned on him," and, second, he was more actively involved in the religious community that his parents founded. Hector did not offer many details about his relationship with the Crips, but simply said, "one day to the other they didn't like me." Thus, he said he stopped "repping" them and poured more thought and energy into living a life in accordance to the teachings of God. Religious devotion was a major principle of the Rodriguez family and they had recently started their own Christian church, having been asked to leave the Catholic diocese. Hector explained that his family often spoke about non-sanctioned religious Catholic doctrine, which included salvation, demons, and spirits, and, so, they were asked to leave. They often gathered for retreats with other churches in Dallas, Texas. In many of our conversations it

was unclear whether Hector was simply explaining how finding God improved his life, or if he was a young man learning to proselytize. It was, most likely, a combination of both, as he once replied to my questions about his life with, “every problem is in the bible and they tell you how to fix it.” Hector always carried his Bible with him despite getting taunted and ridiculed by some students. He reasoned that he had to “treat them with love.” From one year to the next, Hector had gone from doing what he had to do fit in, to being made fun of for doing what he believed was right.

He added that while he was living “the lifestyle,” he had felt that life was incomplete, as if something was missing, but he did not know what that was. He now believed that he had been looking for the “same thing that every young teen is looking for,” that is, love. He believed teens turned to romantic relationships in search for love, but the only true love was a love for God. Hector felt that teenagers were confusing a “lifestyle” with a way of life, and he believed that the only way of life worth living was through God. Upon further discussion on this subject, he also said that he believed that today’s society was based on “other things” and was no longer based on love, which led many to searching for love in the wrong places. In fact, Hector said that when he met his girlfriend Karina, she was “half destroyed” because of her marijuana use.

The couple had met the year prior to this study at Perkins Middle School. Karina is Mexican American, a year younger than Hector, and was enrolled in eighth grade at the time of this study. Their middle school relationship quickly became a sexual relationship two months after becoming boyfriend and girlfriend. Neither of the teens was a virgin, and they used condoms inconsistently. Hector was solely responsible for providing contraceptives, and he did so by purchasing condoms with money from his marijuana and pill sales. Four months into their relationship, they couple conceived. Karina did not, as Hector put it, come from a “good

family.” Hector explained that Karina’s family was poor and they often had “many problems.” He did not want to raise his daughter in that environment so he asked Karina to move in with his family. Hector admitted that the young couple had their share of problems, but they decided to leave their problems behind and were communicating “better.” He explained that the improvement in their relationship was because Karina had also “found God,” but it was still a fragile relationship.

In fact, by the end of March, Hector’s relationship was becoming harder to manage. According to Hector, Karina had been threatening to return to her mother’s house with Daisy. It seemed that Karina was unhappy and stressed. Hector said that Karina was feeling overburdened by being solely responsible for Daisy’s doctor appointments. Karina had spent the last month and a half of her pregnancy on bed rest, and Daisy had more doctor visits than the average newborn, due to health concerns. Hector, however, reasoned that he did not attend doctor appointments because he was unfamiliar with the language that doctors used, and he felt it was best for Karina and her mother to take care of it on their own. Additionally, Karina was still attending Perkins Middle School, which, according to Hector, caused her to fear that he would cheat on her while at school. She often asked him to stay home from school, but he would only skip school if no one else could watch Daisy. Lastly, Karina preferred that Hector did not talk to his parents about their issues, but Hector simply dismissed her concerns. He reasoned that Karina’s behavior stemmed from her not being “ready” to be a parent. Despite their troubled relationship, the teens did their best at working things out.

Still Hector felt that his biggest hardship, at the time, was providing Daisy with adequate daycare. Even though the entire Rodriguez family helped in caring for Daisy, there were days that Hector was absent while he cared for Daisy. Hector’s grades fluctuated throughout the year,

and his most challenging subject was math. In the spring, he was anxiously awaiting his score on his Math TAKS and feared that he did not do well. He assured me that he “tries to pay attention,” yet he still “doesn’t get it.” Hector was not alone. In fact, about half of Barlow High’s freshman failed freshman Algebra, which he had already done in the fall semester. This statistic was alarming given research findings, which suggest that failing ninth grade increases a student’s chances of never graduating high school. Hector recalled that math had always been difficult for him. In middle school, he said, it only got harder, and the fact that he liked to “play and mess around in class,” did not help his situation. Although he could have benefited from a math tutor, he said that this was not a viable option since he had to care for Daisy after school.

Hector understood that going to school might afford him a “better life,” but he was also cautious of this ideology. In his experience, he said he had met many people with a college education but their lives were not necessarily better. Hector admitted that although he enjoyed history and he enjoyed learning “the mistakes” of the past, which he thought were important in order to “do better,” he “did not like school.” Hector still believed that school was important, but he was unable to put into words why in fact he did not like school. Furthermore, he was not thinking about what type of career he would pursue. He reasoned that he never actually had a goal in life, but he often made it clear that he wanted his daughter to have a “better” future.

During the A-Space’s Pregnant and Parenting Support Group (PPSG) and in Ms. Leal’s Parenting for School-Age Parents (PSAP) class, Hector generally kept to himself. Towards the end of the fall semester, Hector began to interact more frequently with some of the female students in his PSAP class, but he dropped the class in order to retake Algebra during the spring semester. Still, in the PPSG and PSAP, Hector did what he was asked to do and showed interest in the material that was taught, especially when the subject was parenting skills and/or craft

making for their children. Through our conversations throughout the year, I got the sense that his transition from “the lifestyle” to a life in accordance with God was not only a big achievement for him, but was also one of his primary concerns, that and caring for his daughter. Hector explained that his family hoped to move soon since it was, as Hector put it, “not the community I want my daughter to be raised in,” adding that the presence of gang activity and drug use in his neighborhood was a detriment to her upbringing. The birth of his daughter marked a turning point in Hector’s life, and one morning he recalled thinking, “Imma make this bad thing turn into a good thing. Why am I going to worry? Imma raise her right. Read the books, and do it. I messed up, but I gotta make the best out of it. I gotta get back on my feet.” For Hector, becoming a thoughtful parent and instilling his daughter with his values was a worthy cause.

A few months after Daisy’s birth, Hector had thoughtfully expressed how being a dad gave him a different perspective on life. One morning he had been sharing with me details about his weekend, specifically how Daisy had been very fussy and neither Karina nor his sister could put Daisy to sleep. This night, Hector offered to give it a try and, to everyone’s surprise, was successful. After inquiring what it was that he did to quiet her, he thoughtfully told his sister and girlfriend “my intention was not to quiet her, my intention was to just be with her.” Hector had only been living in the United States for six years, but he felt that the United States was his home, especially now that he had a U.S.-born daughter. However, as a teenaged student-father, he struggled to offer his daughter the same protection that his parents offered him by leaving Mexico. Hector believed that there was little difference between life in the United States and life in Mexico, since in both countries people had to “fight to survive.” So what mattered most, he opined, was an individual’s determination to succeed.

### **Chapter Three: The National Campaign and the Threat of Latina/o Teenage Pregnancy**

The American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy is about “legitimate” reproduction or belonging in the U.S. body politic. Since 1996, the National Campaign to Prevent Teenage and Unplanned Pregnancy has been particularly influential in defining worthy citizens. The National Campaign has not only become the spokesperson, or, as Constance Nathanson (1991) would phrase it, “the owner” of the teenage pregnancy problem, but as “owner” they have also defined the solution to the problem. Currently that solution is prevention, but, as I have stated earlier, preventing teenage pregnancies is not about access to contraception nor is it about access to sexual and reproductive health education. Teenage pregnancy prevention, instead, means: (1) constructing teenage pregnancy and motherhood as undesirable and detrimental, because of its moral implications and because it threatens the patriarchal bargain, and (2) self-responsibility, or making individuals and communities responsible for preventing teenage pregnancy, teenage parenthood, and, ultimately, poverty. In this chapter, I discuss the National Campaign, a not-for-profit organization that receives both federal and private funding, and its (re)production of the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem and the discourse of teenage pregnancy prevention through their research, reports, and media campaigns. Even though various organizations volley over ownership of the teenage pregnancy problem, the National Campaign has been the most powerful and influential. I also discuss the National Campaign’s Latino Initiative, which (re)produces the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem by constructing Latinas/os as hyperfertile, sexually irresponsible, and threats to the nation.

## **THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT TEEN AND UNPLANNED PREGNANCY**

The National Campaign to Reduce Teenage Pregnancy was formed in 1996 to raise awareness of the “teenage pregnancy problem” in the United States, and it is a powerfully influential not-for-profit organization.<sup>40</sup> The organization receives funding from the federal government and from private donors to disseminate a gendered, raced, and classed discourse of teenage pregnancy, a discourse that is concerned with why it’s a problem, who is to blame, who is responsible, and what should be done. The National Campaign is the principal resource for organizations, service providers, and legislators on teenage pregnancy in the United States (National Campaign N.d.e). Their website contains a collection of self-published demographic reports,<sup>41</sup> legislative pointers, survey data,<sup>42</sup> and research on teenage pregnancy in the United States, and an independent evaluation of the organization has concluded that they are “the nation’s number one resource on preventing teenage pregnancy” (National Campaign N.d.e). The campaign is viewed as an objective source for information on a topic that is both politically and ideologically controversial.

The National Campaign began as a coalition of politicians, medical personnel, researchers, clergy, actors, and media in 1996 shortly after President Clinton singled out teenage pregnancy as one of the nation’s seven “ ‘greatest challenges’ ” in his State of the Union Address (Pillow 2004: 46).<sup>43</sup> Today, the campaign continues to maintain this organizational structure, however, the continual decline in teenage pregnancy and birth rates over the years has led the

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<sup>40</sup> The National Campaign lists 37 foundations on their website as their funders, as well as The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other agencies of the U.S. Department of Health and Humans Services (National Campaign N.d.e.)

<sup>41</sup> The National Campaign self-publishes reports based on demographic statistics compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Guttmacher Institute.

<sup>42</sup> The National Campaign states that they have been conducting and releasing survey data since 1996.

<sup>43</sup> Wanda S. Pillow (2004) also notes that missing from this coalition are educators and educational researchers, which, also reflects their lack of involvement in national policy on the issue of teenage pregnancy.

organization to change its name. In May of 2007, the original active verb in its name, “Reduce,” was changed to “Prevent” and its target was expanded to include “Unplanned” pregnancies in general.<sup>44</sup> The organization is, thus, known today as the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, and they produce and reproduce the position that teenage pregnancy (and unplanned pregnancy) is a problem because it leads to a host of social ills; social ills that could be mitigated by preventing teenage pregnancy. The rhetoric of the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem is about preventing teenage pregnancies, but as I will demonstrate shortly, it uses teenage childbearing to discuss the costs of teenage pregnancy. Nevertheless, it is useful to consider Constance Nathanson’s (1991) argument that when women’s reproductive practices are constructed as *cultural symbols* of what is wrong with society, it is warranted that we interrogate the function of these *cultural symbols* by looking at what the problem is, why it is a problem, and what the solution should be.

The National Campaign’s website states, “Simply put, if more children in this country were born to parents who are ready and able to care for them, we would see a significant reduction in a host of social problems in the United States, from school failure and crime to child abuse and neglect” (National Campaign N.d.d.). The organization and its researchers have prepared a number of reports available on their website, under their *Why It Matters: Teen Pregnancy* series, that not only links teenage sexual activity to other “risky behaviors,” which The National Campaign argues go hand-in-hand (National Campaign N.d.b.), but it also posits that preventing teenage pregnancy would lead to increased educational attainment and conversely better economic earning power (National Campaign 2012), fewer infant health complications (Kaye 2012), better “overall child well-being” (National Campaign N.d.a), an

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<sup>44</sup> Unplanned pregnancies, however, have always been the target, as I shall demonstrate in subsequent chapters, and the National Campaign change can be read as a strategic plan that allows them to continue their work (for a history of social movements for sexual control see Nathanson 1991).

increased likelihood of children being born into two-parent households and thus improving overall child well-being (Ng and Kaye 2012), a lower likelihood of domestic violence (National Campaign N.d.c.), and would break the cycle of child abandonment leading to foster care (National Campaign 2010). My fundamental concern in this dissertation is with the particular claim that poverty could be solved by preventing teenage pregnancy, so I begin here by examining the National Campaign's construction of teenage pregnancy as a problem, their use of media to raise awareness of the "teenage pregnancy problem," and their use of media to construct images of the teenage mother.<sup>45</sup>

A significant component of the National Campaign's work, aside from working with legislators, is presenting themselves as the definitive spokesperson for the teenage pregnancy problem and its solution. This work includes self-publishing reports that define what the problem is and what should be done to solve the problem. This work also includes using the media to bring awareness of the teenage pregnancy problem. In a series of reports, titled *Counting it Up: The Public Costs of Teen Childbearing*, the National Campaign uses an economic argument to persuade the reader of the teenage pregnancy problem, and it provides national and state reports on the economic costs of teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood. Their most recent cost "conservative" estimates were prepared from 2008 data collected by Saul Hoffman, Ph.D. of the University of Delaware. The National Campaign concludes, "The cost to taxpayers (federal, state, and local) of teen childbearing in the United States in 2008 alone" was \$10.9 billion, with \$1,647 being "[t]he average annual cost to taxpayers associated with a child born to a teen mother" (National Campaign 2011a). More specifically they estimate these costs to include "\$2.3 billion in increased public sector health care costs... \$2.8 billion in increased

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<sup>45</sup> The National Campaign demands a closer reading of both its work and its inner workings, unfortunately that is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

child welfare costs ...[and] \$2.3 billion in increased costs of incarceration” (National Campaign 2011a). Those estimates were achieved by calculating the negative “consequences” of teenage childbearing, which are the child’s likelihood of being reliant on public healthcare and welfare, as well as their increased chances of becoming incarcerated. Incarceration estimates were calculated using research that suggests that sons of adolescent mothers are 2.2 times more likely to spend time in prison than sons of mothers who delayed childbearing until their twenties. Still, the most egregious of estimates is the “\$3.2 billion in lost revenue due to lower taxes paid by the children of teen mothers over their own adult lifetimes as a result of lower education and earnings” (National Campaign 2011a). This cost estimate uses circular reasoning and propose poverty is a choice. They apply this research and provide cost estimates to each state and the District of Columbia.

The National Campaign estimates that teenage childbearing cost Texas taxpayers “at least \$1.2 billion in 2008, 57% were federal costs and 43% were state and local costs” (National Campaign 2011b). The State of Texas was the state with the fourth highest teen pregnancy and birth rate in 2010 (Martin et al. 2012). The National Campaign suggests that most of the public sector costs of teen childbearing are associated with negative consequences for the children of teen mothers, during both their childhood and their young adult years. In 2008, the National Campaign suggested that Texas taxpayers paid \$221 million in public health care (Medicaid and CHIP) and \$111 million in child welfare because of teenage childbearing. Furthermore, The National Campaign also suggested that Texas taxpayers would be responsible for \$175 million because of the increased rates of incarceration of the children of teenage mother and \$378 million in lost tax revenue due to decreased earnings and spending (National Campaign 2011b).

This economic cause and effect explanation is enough to keep the construction teenage pregnancy as a social problem in place and is disseminated through the media.

The National Campaign uses the media to raise awareness of the teenage pregnancy problem, as well as to construct images of who the teenage mother is. The National Campaign has relationships with “over 100 major media leaders,” which includes “every major television broadcast network” and “many of the top cable networks most popular with teens and their parents” (National Campaign N.d.e.). They help produce a number of television shows on the subject of teenage pregnancy, including MTV’s popular shows, *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom*, and ABC Family’s *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, and they “weave prevention messages into the content” of the television programs (National Campaign N.d.e.). The organization boasts on its website that it has been cited in “approximately 6,000 newspaper clips, including the New York Times, Washington Post, and USA Today,” has appeared on “such broadcast outlets as NBC, Fox News, ABC, National Public Radio, and nationally-syndicated shows like the Dr. Phil Show and The View,” has won “six national awards for cyberspace excellence” and “several prestigious national awards” for their public service announcements, and have received “nearly 14 million” visits to their website between 2000 and 2007 (National Campaign N.d.e.). The organization also has a number of “sister” websites like [stayteen.org](http://stayteen.org), [bedsider.org](http://bedsider.org), and a blog called *Pregnant Pause*, and they estimate that over 300 million people have been exposed to their work (National Campaign N.d.e.).<sup>46</sup> Thus, the influence of the National Campaign, particularly, its influence in maintaining the discourse of teenage pregnancy

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<sup>46</sup> Both [bedsider.org](http://bedsider.org) and [stayteen.org](http://stayteen.org) are websites about “birth control,” and the National Campaign maintains that they “strive to be factual, unbiased, and open to a variety of viewpoints....,” stressing that they “aren’t the abstinence people” nor are they “the people handing out condoms on street corners to every teenager we meet” (National Campaign N.d.f.). The goal of the National Campaign could be best described as stressing personal responsibility when it comes to sexual health and reproductive capacity.

as a social problem and the discourse of teenage pregnancy prevention, cannot not be understated.

Although I am unaware of when The National Campaign began “weaving” their message into television shows, Wanda Pillow (2004) reviews several television programming episodes that aired between 1999 and 2001 on *Dawson’s Creek*, *Popular*, and *Boston Public* to illustrate how the campaign uses the media to construct raced and classed messages about teenage pregnancy and the teenage mother as “bad girls” as part of the incitement to discourse about sexuality. In *Unfit Subjects: Educational Policy and the Teen Mother*, Pillow (2004) pointedly describes one episode of the show *Popular* to demonstrate how teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood are racialized and sexually stigmatized constructs. In the *Popular* episode in question, a White, middle-class girl experienced a pregnancy scare, which was dramatized with a daydream sequence that the girl had while sitting in her classroom. Pillow describes the daydream sequence, which featured a Black female singing and dancing group, reminiscent of The Supremes, and they sang the following:

That fetus inside of you growin’  
The silent shame is now showin’  
Girl aint gonna graduate  
Schedule for the Jerry Springer Slate  
Dirty Ho,’ Dirty Ho,’  
Whatcha’ havin’ that baby for  
Dirty Ho,’ Dirty Ho,’  
Gonna be a Prom Mom on the floor  
That child ain’t got nothin’ to claim but shame (2004: 173)

Pillow calls these types of episodes “cautionary tales” that transmit a raced and sexually stigmatized message about teenage pregnancy and the teenage mother at the turn of the twenty-first century. In this *Popular* episode, Pillow argues that the Black woman was portrayed as “naturally wanton” and sexually experienced, while the White girl had agency, rationale thought,

and the ability to make responsible choices when it came to sex. Pillow further argues that these images are used to construct “cautionary tales” for the viewer, the White, middle-class teen. The tale, she continues, is “told in a language she [the White, middle-class teen] can understand and by women from whom she can situate herself as different” in order to “resituat[e] and recirculat[e] concern about the sexual activity” of White middle-class girls and to justify abstinence sex education (Pillow 2004: 174).

Pillow also uses the National Campaign’s “Sex Has Consequences” poster campaign from the turn of the twenty-first century to further substantiate her argument of how the teenage mother is used by the media as an incitement to discourse about sexuality. The posters that Pillow analyzes were from a 2001 campaign, which featured various portraits of ethnic- and working-class-looking young girls. Each poster captured one young woman from her hips to her head, which contained a large-print derogatory word in capital letters across the girl’s torso. The composition was used to grab the viewer’s attention and possibly lead the viewer to read the fine-printed sentence running up the left margin of the portrait, which was written as if quoting the girl about a reality of teenage pregnancy. For example, the Latina-looking young woman had dark hair, dark eye make-up, hoop earrings, and wore a short-sleeved Oxford white shirt that was half unbuttoned from her chest up and tied at her waist, exposing her mid-drift. She stood looking at the camera with a hardened yet innocent expression on her face, her right hand ambiguously holding one side of her opened collar, her left thumb casually resting in her pocket, with the word CHEAP plastered across her chest. If the reader bothered to read the entire poster, they would have also read “Condoms are CHEAP. If we’d used one, I wouldn’t have to tell my parents I’m pregnant” (Pillow 2006: 187). The portrait of the White girl read “NOBODY,” the

portrait of the Asian girl read, “DIRTY,” and the portrait of the Black/Caribbean girl read “REJECT.” Pillow concludes,

The posters exemplify the incitement to discourse surrounding teen pregnancy. They reinforce and reproduce constructions of sexually active teen girls as slutty, as not upholding female morality and femininity, and as deserving the consequences of their behavior (2004: 174).

In Pillow’s (2004) assessment, the question of race is null as these representations are already *othered* by their sexual transgressions, and any girl who sees the poster should not want to identify with her. But at play, I would argue, are also racialized and classed constructions since viewers would most likely have their already preconceived notions about the teen mother confirmed by these posters given the power of the discourse on teenage pregnancy as a social problem.

My own consumption of today’s television shows like MTV’S *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom* and ABC Family’s *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, leads me to conclude that the National Campaign’s messages can still be described as “cautionary tales.” Although the advent of reality-based television programming has changed the media circuit, the campaign continues to produce and reproduce racially and classed discourses about teenage pregnancy as a social problem, albeit less overtly racialized and sexually stigmatized. The campaign still maintains that prevention of unplanned pregnancies will solve many of the social ills of the nation. Whether the key to prevention is abstinence or contraception use does not matter, because, as in their construction of the problem, they also construct individual responsibility as the solution (I further discuss the topic of responsibility in *Chapter Six*). Currently there are three popular television shows devoted *entirely* to the subject of teenage pregnancy and motherhood – MTV’s *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom* and ABC Family’s *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*. While I am not able to say just how much the National Campaign is involved in the production of these

television shows, a quick reading of these shows illustrates that, with or without the campaign, these shows do not diverge from the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem and continue to stigmatize sexuality and young women.

MTV's programs are reality-based television shows, which is important for two reasons. First, the show's producers conduct casting calls, meaning that pregnant teenagers have to have a desire to appear on the show and must submit an application. MTV's *16 and Pregnant* began airing in 2009 and is currently casting for their fifth season. The show's website states, "This show seeks to allow young women to share their personal story in their own voice and how others could potentially learn from their mistakes and decisions" (MTV 2011). Furthermore, they state that their goal is to "show *what* teen-aged pregnant women, from varying backgrounds, experience in their lives and relationships as a *result* of their unplanned pregnancies" (MTV 2011, emphasis added). The drama that unfolds in each teenaged girl's life, which focuses primarily on her relationships with her family and her baby's father, is portrayed as resulting from her mistake in getting pregnant and/or choosing to parent. The messages in these television dramas are similar to the messages found more than ten years ago in the *Popular* episode, which is that the viewer should view these young women's lives as cautionary tales, and the viewer should disassociate from the pregnant teenager. MTV's *16 and Pregnant* is a success, and it has led to another reality-based spin-off called *Teen Mom*.

In *Teen Mom*, MTV follows a handful of girls who appeared on *16 and Pregnant*, and they portray their persistent struggles. Today, many of these young women continue to receive public attention and often appear on the front pages of tabloid magazines, where they are put under a microscope for their continual bad decision-making in both relationships and financial matters. It is unclear if and how these young women earn money from their stories, but the same

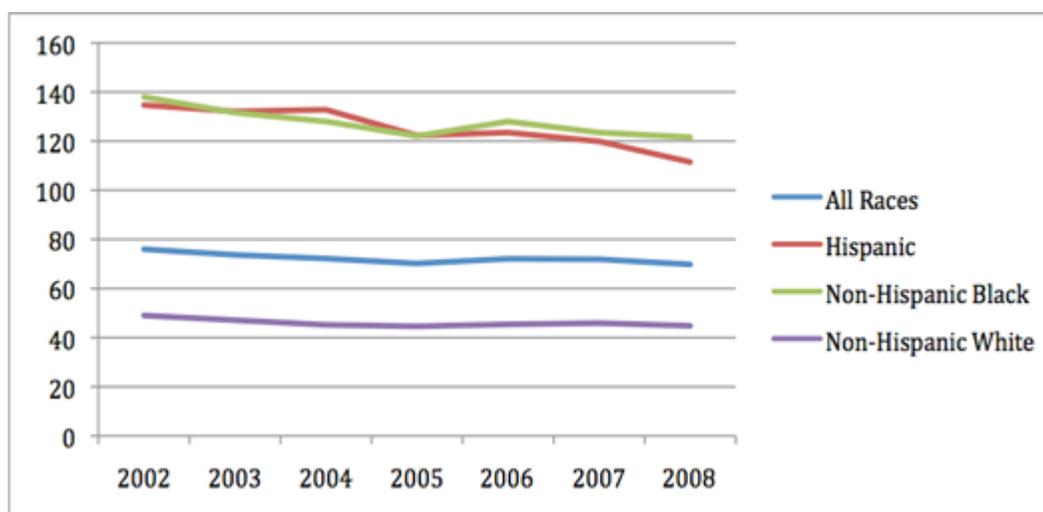
gossip tabloid magazines prominently feature young women who have had cosmetic surgeries since their appearances on MTV's television shows. This spotlight thus becomes a new way of the incitement to discourse while simultaneously stigmatizing these young women. It is important to consider how the use of reality television is contributing to the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem, especially given the lasting affects of the gendered, classed, aged, and raced discourse. Finally, the dramatized television show, *The Secret Life of The American Teenager*, also deserves a closer look. This show began airing in 2008, and its series finale will aired this spring in its fifth season. *The Secret Life of The American Teenager* focuses on the family and friendships of one White, middle-class teen, Amy Juergens, who gets pregnant at band camp after having sex with the "bad boy." Over the course of five seasons the familial and sexual relationships of those around Amy Juergens are dramatized.

In its construction of the problem, the National Campaign simultaneously uses raced and classed logics in its portrayal of teenage pregnancy and the teenage mother. The organization also stigmatizes sexual activity and teenage mothers in its production of cautionary tales. The National Campaign ignores the reality that the economic benefits of delaying pregnancy are only available if equitable and viable opportunities to becoming financially independent are available to begin with. Our current public education system does not offer that opportunity, although it is widely believed to do so. Furthermore, we should not have to stigmatize sexuality and young women to prevent teenage pregnancy. Our educational curriculum for a healthy and sustainable future as a nation should encourage open and honest discussions about sexuality, and it should provide honest and medically accurate information about sexuality and our biological bodies, but currently moral values dictates sexual health curriculum.

## THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN AND ITS LATINO INITIATIVE

Since 1991 there has been a general decrease in the rates of teenage pregnancy rates and teenage births<sup>47</sup> in the United States, but, enlivened attention refocused on teenage pregnancy when a report compiled by the Division of Vital Statistics at the National Center for Health Statistics of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, illustrated that in 2006 teenage pregnancy and teenage birth rates increased slightly between 2005 and 2006 (see Figure 3.1 and 3.2).

Figure 3.1: U.S. Pregnancy Rates for women age 15 to 19 and by Race and Ethnicity. N = out of 1,000.<sup>48</sup>



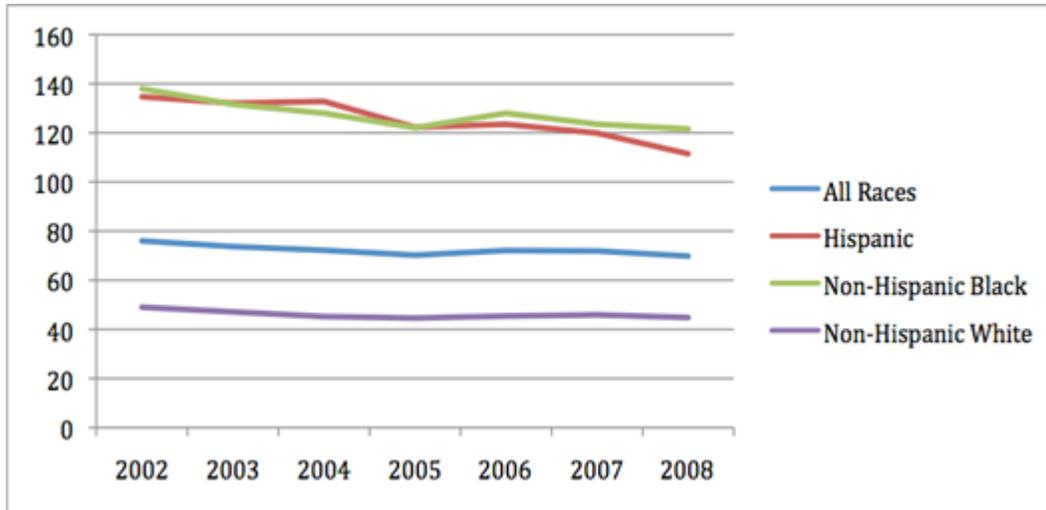
Intriguingly, between 2005 and 2006 the rates of teenage pregnancy among African Americans slightly surpassed the rate of teenage pregnancies among Latinas (Figure 3.1), but the teenage birth rate of Latinas was the highest among all racial/ethnic groups (Figure 3.2). In 2007, the National Campaign made the reproductive capacity of Latinas/os a priority in its education efforts about the problem of teenage pregnancy. They explained this effort as resulting from the

<sup>47</sup> Teenage pregnancy rates and teenage birth rates in this section refer to rates for the 15 to 19 age bracket unless otherwise noted.

<sup>48</sup> Data for the years 2002 – 2004 (Ventura et al. 2008). Data for 2005 – 2008 (Ventura et al. 2012).

fact that birth rates of Latina/o teens have trended higher than the respective rates of other racial/ethnic groups since the late 1990s.<sup>49</sup> This effort was also a result of the fact that the Latina/o population is growing twice as fast as the total U.S population.<sup>50</sup>

Figure 3.2: U.S. Birth Rates for women age 15 to 19 and by Race and Ethnicity. N = out of 1,000.<sup>51</sup>



The National Campaign launched its Latino Initiative in 2007, immediately following published reports that noted the slight increase from 2005 to 2006 (N = 1,000) in the Latina teenage pregnancy rate and birth rate. The Latino Initiative is described as an effort to better understand teenage pregnancy among Latinas/os so that the campaign may provide resources for social service providers working with the Latina/o population. The campaign suggests that targeting Latinas/os in teenage pregnancy prevention efforts is needed, while also “ensur[ing] that these families receive culturally – and linguistically – appropriate information and support”

<sup>49</sup> Meaning all racial/ethnic rates exhibit the same general trend of incline and decline over the years.

<sup>50</sup> In the 2010 census, the Latina/o population in the United States reached just over 50 million people accounting for 16.3% of the total population with an increase of 43% in population during the period between 2000 and 2010, thus also accounting for most of the U.S. population growth during the same time period (PEW Hispanic Center 2011).

<sup>51</sup> Data for the years 2002 – 2004 (Martin et al. 2006). Data for 2006 (Martin et al. 2009). Data for 2005, 2007 – 2010 (Martin et al. 2012).

(Sabatiuk and Flores 2009: 4). Below, I evaluate the seven online reports for social service providers, and I conclude that the Latino Initiative views Latina teenage pregnancy as a problem because, as they suggest: (1) as a group, Latinas have the highest teenage birth rates in the U.S. and these rates decline at a much slower pace than for other racial/ethnic groups, and (2) Latinas/os as a whole are disproportionately poor, disproportionately undereducated, and are the fastest growing population in the United States.<sup>52</sup> The National Campaign's depiction of the Latina/o teenage pregnancy problem is intended to incite fear in the American public of a large undereducated population that will be dependent on government assistance. Furthermore, the public is to believe that this could be avoided through teenage pregnancy prevention. In fact, the National Campaign suggests that preventing teenage pregnancy could solve the plight of Latinas/os since poverty is allegedly a result of teenage pregnancy and dropping out of high school. Furthermore, the organization proposes that the key to preventing Latina teenage pregnancy lies within working with Latina/o parents to help them talk to their children about the ill effects of teenage pregnancy so that teens make responsible choices.

The National Campaign's first publication for social service providers, *Bridging Two Worlds: How Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs Can Better Serve Latino Youth*,<sup>53</sup> was published in January of 2006, and the report was compiled because of an expressed need from service providers for information on how to best work with Latina/o communities. In this report, Vexler and Suellentrop (2006) and the National Campaign present "The Facts," a discussion about "Evaluated Programs," "Advice From the Field," and "Teen Voices." "The Facts" section explains the diversity of the Latina/o population in terms of country of origin, generational status, levels of education, language acquisition or acculturation, economic status, and family

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<sup>52</sup> These reports can be found on the National Campaign's website, <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/> and under their Latino Initiative series.

<sup>53</sup> This report was published before the official launching of the *Latino Initiative*.

size, as well as documented trends in risky behavior, pregnancy, childbearing, sexual activity, and contraceptive use. Based on “The Facts,” The National Campaign presents Latina teenage pregnancy as a problem because the Latina/o population is a rapidly-growing, hyperfertile, undereducated poor population with big families, and Mexicans, in particular, lead the group. Sociologist Elena R. Gutierrez (2008) illustrates, in *Fertile Matters: The Politics of Mexican-origin Women’s Reproduction*, that women of Mexican origin have been socially constructed as “hyper-fertile” throughout history.<sup>54</sup> Here, the National Campaign enacts this construction to incite fear, and they simplistically attribute the disproportionate rate of Latinas/os that drop out of school as “*undoubtedly* related to the high teen birth rate of Latinos” (Vexler and Suellentrop 2006: 3, emphasis added).

The organization’s solution to the plight of the Latina/o population is to encourage Latinas to maintain their cultural traditions regarding the family but delay having a family until it is socially and economically responsible. Vexler and Suellentrop write,

Although many teens and communities in America need some convincing – some explanation – about why avoiding pregnancy and parenthood in adolescence is wise, Latino teens may need extra discussion and explanation. In essence, the challenge is to support childbearing and family formation generally – strongly held values in Latino culture – while simultaneously explaining the social, economic, and health benefits to adults and children of postponing family formation after the teen years. In other words, the issue is timing (2006: 5).

The campaign blames, what they perceive as, Latinas/os inability to accept and comprehend the importance and benefits of waiting to have a family for teenage pregnancy. This construction of Latinas/os as sexually irresponsible has persisted since the early depictions of Mexicans/Mexican Americans, which Octavio Romano-V highlighted in his 1968 critique of the social science research on Mexicans/Mexican Americans. In 1968, Romano-V wrote, “In short, there has not been any significant change in views toward Mexican-Americans for the past 100 years” (24).

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<sup>54</sup> Wanda Pillow(2004) also briefly addresses this construction of Latina/o reproduction.

In this 2006 campaign report, the authors do not provide a “how to” encourage Latinas/os to delay pregnancy, because, they argue, there is a lack of information on evaluated programs. However, Vexler and Suellentrop (2006) do suggest that culture should be seen as a motivator and not as a barrier. Throughout this and other reports it is stressed that social service organizations should maintain cultural sensitivity when working with Latinas/os. They further suggest that organizations could help with the acculturation process by understanding that conflict could exist between the teen and parent because of this process, but organizations could help by providing role models. The authors also suggest that traditional gender roles could be promoted as a positive attribute. Specifically, they propose promoting *machismo* as a way for guys to be responsible, caring, and protective of his girlfriend. The organization upholds the traditional view of teenage pregnancy as problem in this report by maintaining that teenage pregnancy leads to dropping out and that the solution to a host of social ills can be found in teenage pregnancy prevention. Furthermore, they continuously use the “children having children” moniker, saying, “...children having children is particularly prominent among Latinas” (Vexler and Suellentrop 2006: 7). This incitement to discourse about sexuality has been and continues to be used (Kelly 2000; Lawson and Rhode 1993; Luker 1996; Pearce 1993; Pillow 2006). Lastly, what is sorely missing in this report is a *critical* discussion about the Latina/o population and how a diversity of experiences among this population could affect reproductive capacity.

In 2007, The National Campaign published *Voices Heard: Latino Adults and Teens Speak Up About Teen Pregnancy*, which repeated many of the same assertions found in their first report. However, this time, and based on their research, Vexler (2007) suggests that parents are the key to teenage pregnancy prevention. This report was based on their first nation-wide survey

of Latinas/os, and they considered it “a companion piece” to their larger national survey conducted with different racial/ethnic adults and teens about teenage pregnancy. The survey questions were developed by the organization but administered by a separate polling agency. Vexler’s report consists of adult and teen responses to 21 survey questions, along with analysis for each question. Teenagers polled were aged anywhere from 12 to 19 years of age, thus expanding the “teenage category,” in this instance, to include 12 year olds. This publication also explicitly invokes the “children having children” moniker as seen in the previous report as an incitement to discourse about sexuality. *Voices Heard* also serves as an incitement to fear because of the organization’s continued construction of Latina/o teenage pregnancy as problem posed by the hyperfertility and sexual irresponsibility of this group. Moreover, Vexler (2007) and the Campaign conclude that since parents are most influential in teens decisions about sex, out-reach efforts should be made with Latina/o parents to help them make their children understand the financial and social benefits to delaying childbearing and family formation.

The first question on the survey asks “When it comes to teens’/your decisions about sex, who is most influential?” and the overwhelming response to this question was parents. Teachers and sex educators were most influential in only 3% of the Latina/o teens surveyed and were believed to be most influential in teen’s decisions by only 4% of Latina/o adults surveyed, with seven or eight other influences offered and friends being the second most popular answer among teens and adults. The National Campaign’s conclusions are largely based on this finding, and they suggest that since parents are most influential when it comes to decisions about sex, parents are the key to teen pregnancy prevention. This suggestion then becomes the basis of subsequent research and reports that they self-publish. The parent angle gets reinforced in 9 of 21 survey questions and analyses. In one analysis they write “Given the huge influence parents have on

their teens and the important role family plays in the Latino community, it's important that we provide Latino parents with the positive support and the reinforcement they need to start talking with their teens about sex and related topics" (Vexler 2007: 9). The National Campaign's analysis of the first survey question also states that even though a "recurring theme" that they often heard "from Latino parents" was that "they frequently feel that, when it comes to sex, they have lost their children to the influence of peers and American popular culture," they suggest that Latina/o parents should ignore this sentiment since their research shows that Latina/o parents *are* influential (Vexler 2007: 6). The campaign urges service providers to encourage parents to keep talking to their teens about sex. The feelings expressed here by parents are compelling. Why do parents feel this disconnect? Why do they feel that peers and American culture are more influential? The National Campaign does not offer answers to these questions, which could help attain a more critically understanding of the Latina/o experiences in the United States.

Then elsewhere in Vexler's (2007) report, they also indicate that Latina/o parents are not doing as well as other racial/ethnic groups in talking to their teens about sex and pregnancy prevention. While, still, at other times, they draw conclusions about Latinas/os without substantiating their claims. For example, their analysis for survey question number thirteen centered on their finding that more Latina girls than Latino boys think it is acceptable to be in a relationship with someone who is three or more years older than them. In my ethnographic research I often heard this finding repeated as cultural norm of Latinas/os. The National Campaign's analyses continued with their critique, which stated, "Perhaps *even more distressing* is that fully one-third of Latino parents surveyed think that it is okay for teens to be in a relationship with someone three or more years older" (Vexler 2007: 19, emphasis added). However, immediately following this statement, which they present as a cultural norm, is a

caveat, which states, “This relaxed attitude regarding large dating age differences *isn’t* unique to Latino teens or adults” (Vexler 2007: 19, emphasis added). Nevertheless, the National Campaign not only highlight the fact that Latinas have the highest teenage birth rates and their finding that Latinas are more likely to be in a relationship with an older partner, but they also suggest that the explanation for this finding could be cultural. Furthermore, they make this suggestion even though they also note that it was *not* a cultural finding.

Ultimately, in *Voices Heard*, Vexler (2007) and the campaign not only stress the importance of parents in preventing teenage pregnancy, but they also provide superficial analysis to such topics as contraception use, sexual activity, sex education, and, too easily, suggest that their findings are cultural norms. They label behavior that is not exhibited by a significant portion of White, middle-class teens as a cultural norm of non-White teens. Lastly, the issue of timing and waiting to start a family is again addressed in question seventeen, verbatim from their first report, and they add, “No matter what your ethnic background is, teen pregnancy is one of the best ways to stay poor and uneducated” (Vexler 2007: 24) and “...we as a nation need to do a better job of getting teens to think about their risky behavior and act accordingly” (Vexler 2007: 25).

Not surprisingly, the next major publications released by The National Campaign were *Parent-Adolescent Communication about Sex in Latino Families: A Guide for Practitioners* in January of 2008, followed by the release of *What Research Tells Us about Latino Parenting Practices and their Relationship to Youth Sexual Behavior* a month later. While the content of these next two documents was less sensationalized than in previous documents, the campaign continued their focus on parents, and they propose that more research should be undertaken in order to understand the role that parenting practices have on adolescent sexuality. Ultimately,

the campaign still advocates cultural explanations for adolescent sexuality. In *What Research Tells Us about Latino Parenting Practices and their Relationship to Youth Sexual Behavior*, Allen et al. (2008) write, “There is a great need to understand the important role Latino parents play in establishing the beliefs and values that deter their adolescent children’s sexual behavior, and to identify challenges that may make parents’ efforts less effective.” By this point, the campaign has established the need for more research, but focus that research and successful parental efforts that “deter” adolescent sexuality. Additionally, Allen et al. (2008), once again, discuss the cultural components of the Latino family, but while acknowledging the diversity in the Latino category. They also discuss how the acculturation process could cause stress in the home, and how this may affect parenting effectiveness. They write, “Immigrant Latino parents may lack cultural knowledge about ways of interacting effectively with schools, creating discontinuity between home and school” (Allen et al. 2008: 10).

Another report, *Del corazon de los juvenes: What Latino teens are saying about love and relationships* (2008), focused on the importance of relationships in teens’ lives. This report is written for teens, parents, and service providers. It starts by saying that even though *familialism* is a part of Latina/o culture, there still is difficulty in families when it comes to talking about relationships, love, sex, and teen pregnancy. Furthermore, they stress that teens want their parents to talk to them about these topics. Their discussion is based on the survey that they conducted earlier, and they make little suggestion about the difficulty that most families, not limited to Latina/o families, have in discussing sex and sexuality. Their penultimate report, *Acculturation and Sexual Behavior among Latino Youth: Findings from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 – 2003* (2008), was based on survey answers from a different survey conducted by Child Trends in Collaboration with the CDC. Their objective was to

understand the effects of acculturation on sexual behavior. The National Campaign employed language use at home and generational status as markers of acculturation to analyze sexual activity, contraceptive use, and teenage parenthood. While this research yielded more nuanced results, a focus on *acculturation* as the determining factor in behavior can be easily manipulated by practitioners. The logic in this understanding of acculturation and behavior suggests that any behavior that is not White, middle-class behavior is anomalous. Atypical behavior can then be labeled as a cultural norm, because, as this article suggests, only through acculturation could the person exhibit normative behavior. In this report, the National Campaign describes Latinas as sexually irresponsible, and they encourage a process of acculturation that maintains gendered cultural traits as a solution to the problem of Latina teenage pregnancy.

The major findings in this penultimate report were that “first generation Latino teens were the *least* likely to use contraception the first time they had sex” as were teens living in Spanish speaking households least likely to use contraception at first sex compared to those that lived in English speaking households (Suellentrop and Sugrue 2008: 5). They also found that among Latinas, women of Mexican origin were more likely to have a child while a teenager. The National Campaign sees this information as valuable so that program providers can tailor their work to the groups they are working with. However, still a major weakness of this body of work is with their continual lumping of all teenagers in one category. Again the experiences of 18 and 19 year olds could vary greatly and can also be associated with immigration and generational status. Ignoring this simply assists in building the cultural argument about teenage pregnancy. For example, in this report the National Campaign notes that Latina/o teens of Mexican descent were more likely to be cohabitating or married when they gave birth. This

finding should satisfy questions of immorality related to out-of-wedlock births, but is negligible since what is most important is their bad decision-making, which will lead to a life of poverty.

Lastly in 2009, The National Campaign collaborated with the National Council of La Raza on another survey to understand the perspectives of Latina/o teens and Latina/o parents on sex, relationships, and contraception, with a special focus on differences exhibited by acculturation.<sup>55</sup> This survey<sup>56</sup> and its accompanying analysis were more nuanced than previous reports. *Toward a Common Future* focused on teenagers 12 to 18 rather than 12 to 19, and it found that there was great uniformity of beliefs, regardless of acculturation or country of origin, about the importance of an advanced degree, education, and sex. It also briefly discussed the challenges that new immigrants might face navigating the U.S. educational system. However, its focus remained on understanding “the beliefs and attitudes that influence those behaviors,” behaviors related to sex and pregnancy, which prevention efforts are trying to change (Sabatiuk and Flores 2009: 4). Additionally the survey question that was initially asked in The National Campaign’s first survey among Latinas/os was asked again in this survey – who is most influential when it comes to decisions about sex? And again, parents were found to be the most influential, furthering The National Campaign’s stance that parents are the key to pregnancy prevention.

*Toward a Common Future*, however, did diverge from previous reports, as it discussed statistically significant data that refutes three of the most pervasive stereotypes of Latinas/os and the Latino community. The first stereotype is that Latinas/os place greater value on starting a family than on other aspirations like finishing school, continuing to college, or having a promising career. Sabatiuk and Flores (2009) reported that 95% of teens and parents surveyed

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<sup>55</sup> Acculturation was measured by country of origin, generational status, and language preference.

<sup>56</sup> An independent research company administered the survey by phone in 2009, and the report was released in May 2009.

*believed* that either of these three things are more important than starting a family. The second stereotype is that Latina/o families silence any talk of sex at home. Sabatiuk and Flores (2009) reported 79% of teens surveyed said that their parents have spoken to them about sex at some point, but that a majority of parents felt that they needed more guidance on talking about sex. And the third most pervasive stereotype of Latina/o families with regards to teenage pregnancy is that contraception is not used because of religious beliefs. Sabatiuk and Flores (2009) reported 21% of teens say that they do not use contraceptives because they are afraid of parents finding out, while 15% of teens do not use contraceptive because of a lack of knowledge. These findings can be substantiated by recent scholarship on Mexican/Mexican American sexuality, which argues that sex and sexuality is not static and that it should be understood as shaped by social forces, economic forces, and in the context of immigration (Castaneda and Zavella 2003; Gonzalez-Lopez 2003, 2004, 2005; Juarez and Kerl 2003; Zavella 1997, 2003; Zavella and Castaneda 2005). The National Campaign and NCLR conclude,

Educating Latino teens and parents about the connection between teen pregnancy and critical social issues such as educational attainment and poverty can help provide motivation to prevent teen pregnancy. More importantly, Latino parents and teens need the tools and resources to realize their goals. Strengthening access to and engagement in healthcare and educational systems is an important place to start (Sabatiuk and Flores 2009: 30).

Admittedly, the tone of The National Campaign changes over the course of their publications for social service providers. Their collaboration with The National Council of La Raza results in a more nuanced view of the experiences of Latinas/os. However, throughout their publications on Latinas/os, they consistently promote a construction of the Latina/o teenage pregnancy problem that blames teenage pregnancy and teenage childbearing for the plight of Latinas/os. Subsequently, they repeatedly suggest that outreach efforts should be made with parents to help

them communicate with their children, not only about sex, but also about the economic and social reasons for delaying a family.

In the end, I argue that the Latino Initiative is a racializing project that constructs Latinas/os as others. Omi and Winant (2005) propose that in order to understand just how race operates in society, what is needed is a “critical, processed theory of race,” which neither holds race as an ideological construct or as an objective condition (7). That is race and the creation and maintenance of difference is a multi-faceted and continual process that often responds to other processes that shape lives. In a rapidly changing social landscape in which the Latina/o population is growing faster than any other population in the United States, demographic data about the reproductive capacity of this population are used to alarm society about the threat that Latinas/os pose. This perceived threat is not new but is replicated because of the varied avenues, which can still be used to incite fear. The National Campaign and its Latino Initiative use the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem in order to further construct Latina teenage pregnancy as an economic problem caused by hyperfertility and sexual irresponsibility. In its first publication, which the campaign reasons arose out of a need by social service providers seeking information on working with the Latina/o population, they suggested that Latinas/os were sexually irresponsible and ignorant because they did not understand the wisdom in “avoiding pregnancy and parenthood in adolescence” (Vexler and Suellentrop 2006: 5). They also recommended that service providers explain “the social, economic, and health benefits...of postponing family formation after their teen years” (Vexler and Suellentrop 2006: 5). However, they fail to mention that too few Latinas/os are given the opportunities needed to attain a lifestyle in accordance with White, middle-class norms, which makes delaying family formation

understandable. A college degree can increase your lifetime earning income, but Latinas/os first need to have access to a high school education that could lead to college.

The National Campaign, the most influential organization on the “teenage pregnancy problem,” also recommended that service providers concentrate on supporting families in talking to their children about sex. This recommendation arose out of their finding that parents were more influential than any other person in Latina/o youths’ lives. While this can be assessed as a strength in Latina/o families, it should be noted that talking about sex is NOT a strength of the United States and its people. This suggestion is dangerous because with few models available to guide families in talking about sex, the suggestion that families should be held responsible for preventing teenage pregnancy may have little chance of success. Furthermore, it should also be noted that the question of who is most influential in youths’ lives when it comes to sex only assesses what actually takes place. In other words, teachers cannot be influential in youth’s sex lives if they are prohibited from having medically accurate conversations about sexual health and reproductive health with students. Finally, the National Campaign continued to present Latina/o teenage pregnancy as a cultural norm by focusing on acculturation in understanding sexual behavior. Specifically, this was understood as assessing the cultural components of sexual behavior. The organization sought to understand what parents were saying to their teens about deterring teenage pregnancy, but concluded that they were not doing a good job of this. Nonetheless, the campaign also created a justification for more research on the subject of parenting skills in relation to sex education.

Finally the National Campaign’s reports should be critically evaluated because of their influence. Social service providers, who are passionate about their work, are reliant on research and “best practices” to design programs that make real differences in the communities they work

in. I conclude that the state partakes in this racializing project of Latinas/os by using Latina teenage pregnancy to “institutionalize racial meanings and identities in particular social structures” (Omi and Winant 2005: 7). The National Campaign’s construction of the Latina/o teenage pregnancy problem is aided by past constructions of Latinas/os and Mexican/Mexican Americans, in particular, as hyperfertile (Gutierrez 2008; Luker 1996) and sexually irresponsible (Romano-V 1968). Whether or not this is the intention of The National Campaign, a racializing project is set in motion when a subgroup of the U.S. population is identified as particularly problematic because of their reproductive practices and when fear tactics are used to convince the public of why the reproductive capacity of Latinas/os should be alarming. This becomes a more entrenched racializing project when cultural explanations are invoked and structural realities are ignored, especially with regards to schooling, in order to explain reproductive behavior. Subsequently, I argue that the American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy is a lens into an analysis about the *fitness* of Mexican/Mexican Americans and Latinas/os.

## CONCLUSIONS

Wanda Pillow (2004), a gender and educational policy scholar, argues that the explanations which are offered for the U.S.’s teenage pregnancy rates and teenage birth rates lies within understanding the political interest in controlling women’s reproductive capacity. She writes that teenage pregnancy has been

...defined differently at precise moments for varying political and social needs. What the problem of teen pregnancy is, who it is a problem for, and how government should intervene and on whose behalf (the teen mother, her child, or society) has always occurred within a shifting social context – a social context that defines and at times redefines the problem of teen pregnancy (2004: 18).

Teenage pregnancy in the United States is, thus, best understood as a powerful social construct, which gets reproduced through organizations like the National Campaign to Prevent Teenage and

Unplanned Pregnancy. In the (re)production of the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem, racialized interpretations of life in the United States are also (re)produced. Kelly (2000) argues that teen mothers are catch-all enemies, she writes

For people concerned about changing family structures and gender relations and sexual 'permissiveness,' teen mothers represent adolescent female sexuality out of control. For those worried about the breakdown of traditional lines of authority, teen mothers represent rebellion against parents and other adults. For those anxious about global economic restructuring, teen mothers represent dropouts who refuse to compete yet expect the welfare system to support their 'poor choice.' For those distressed about poverty and child abuse, teen mothers represent both the cause and consequence (26).

The National Campaign has not only helped (re)produce the discourse of teenage pregnancy as social problem but is a racialization project. Accordingly, when we read the organization's overall mission, which is to "improve the lives and future prospects of children and families and, in particular, to help ensure that children are born into stable, two-parent families who are committed to and ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation," we also need to understand that constructions about motherhood and acceptable families, in general, and single and unwed motherhood, in particular, are also at play (National Campaign N.d.g). Secondly, we also need to keep in mind that The National Campaign is in the business of raising awareness to "encourage increased discussion about the role that *responsible behavior* can play in reducing both teen and unplanned pregnancy" (National Campaign N.d.g., emphasis added). Prevention is thus constructed as hinging on responsible behavior, a topic to which I will return to in *Chapter Six*. Finally we need to understand that the National Campaign's very existence is dependent on teenage pregnancy *being* a problem. A problem, which they see as resulting from irresponsible behavior and leading to financial burdens on the state, whose very construction also makes their Latino Initiative a racializing project. While the organization may not be driving the stereotypes

it reproduces, their livelihood as an organization is dependent on these stereotypes and their perpetuation.

Furthermore, the suggestions about Latina/o sexuality as offered by The National Campaign stem from a persistent tendency by scholars and the public to view Latina/o sexuality as a static cultural trait. Ana Maria Juarez and Stella Beatrice Kerl (2003), anthropologist and psychologist, have analyzed scholarship in psychology, humanities, social sciences, intervention manuals, and studies concentrating on sexual practices, and they have concluded that Latina sexuality has been relatively marginalized in both quantity and quality. Furthermore, they argue that work that is currently available provides ethnocentric and essentialist views of Latina/o culture and sexuality, even Chicana feminists like Cherrie Moraga and Ana Castillo are implicated in this critique. This work, they argue, portrays Latina sexuality as inherently negative and dichotomizes Latina sexuality between liberated and healthy/normalized (read White or acculturated) and sexuality from a traditional view in which sexuality is repressed. Additionally they argue that ethnocentrism is evident in descriptions of Latinas sexuality when traits such as submissiveness and passivity are labeled “traditional” cultural traits and when sexual repression and oppression is as also labeled a cultural trait. This critique is profound given that sexual repression, sexual oppression, submissiveness, and passivity are engendered in patriarchal societies, irrespective of race and ethnicity.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, feminist anthropologist Shellee Colen (1995) argues that reproduction is a site where gender, race, and class intersect and societies produce stratified roles of reproduction. Colen offers the concept of “stratified reproduction,” which suggests that “physical and social reproductive tasks are accomplished differentially according to inequalities that are based on

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<sup>57</sup> For a more nuanced analysis of sexuality among Mexican/Mexican Americans see Castaneda and Zavella 2003; Gonzalez-Lopez 2003, 2004, 2005; Zavella and Castaneda 2005.

hierarchies of class, race, ethnicity, gender, place in a global economy, and migration status and that are structured by social, economic, and political forces" (Colen 1995: 78). Colen asserts that the maintenance of inequality is an integral function of the social reproduction of today's society, and the maintenance of inequality in the United States is achieved through unfair laws, policies, and ideological constructs that create and maintain difference.

In the case of Mexicans/Mexican Americans, these people have increasingly composed a significant segment of the social service work sector of the United States, including fields like construction, agriculture, domestic service, and the food service industry. Through their work, they play a vital role in the social reproduction of today's America. However, scholars argue that this sector of American society has been and continues to be exploited through the authorization of labor laws affecting agricultural workers (Barrera 1989; Zamora 1993), through a dual-wage system (Barrera 1989; Zamora 1993), through international trade agreements that encourage undocumented migration to the United States (Cockcroft 1986; Massey et al. 2002; Nevins 2002), and through educational policies that do not give students a fighting chance to succeed in this society (Valencia ed 2011; Valenzuela 1999). Furthermore, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy is one example of an ideological racializing projects, which, not only blames Latinas/os for a host of social ills, but also creates these people as cultural *others*.

**“I didn’t really know about sex when I had sex for the first time.”**

**Brooke Thomas**

Brooke Thomas<sup>58</sup> was 18 years old, a senior at Barlow High School, and was pregnant with her son Elijah at the start of the 2009/2010 academic year. Brooke delivered Elijah in November of 2009, a month shy of her 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. Mother and child lived with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas, Brooke’s mother and stepfather,<sup>59</sup> and with Elijah’s father, Isaac<sup>60</sup> who was also a Barlow High student. The blended family of five lived in a three-bedroom house in the Glynn Brook neighborhood of North Meadows. Brooke was an exuberant popular student and while a junior in high school she managed rumors about her pregnancy. The following year, the year that my study took place, Brooke focused her attention on motherhood, her familial relationships, graduation, and her future. She was also enrolled in Ms. Leal’s Parenting for School Age Parents (PSAP) class and participated in A-Space’s Pregnant and Parenting Support Group (PPSG). In her personal life, her relationships with Isaac and her parents were persistent concerns. Academically, she worried that she may not graduate high school because of her unsuccessful attempts at passing the math portion of the TAKS test.

Brooke is Anglo American and had lived in the Austin area for eight and a half years when this dissertation research took place. Shortly after her parents divorced, Brooke’s mother married Mr. Thomas and the newly blended family moved from the northwestern region of the United States to Austin, Texas. The Thomas family home was located just several blocks from

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<sup>58</sup> I met Brooke Thomas when she was pregnant during the Fall of 2009. Brooke participated in A-Space’s Pregnant and Parenting Support Group (PPSG), as well in A-Space’s after school doula sessions with Norma Morgan. She was also enrolled in Ms. Leal’s seventh period Parenting for School-Age Parents (PSAP) class. In total I collected roughly 77.75 hours of data from Brooke – 7 hours of Informal Interviews, 30 minutes of a Formal Interview, which was recorded, 40.75 hours of observations during the PSAP class and other activities related to the class (27.75 hours) and during A-Space’s PPSG and other activities related to the class (13 hours).

<sup>59</sup> Mr. Thomas was Brooke’s stepfather but she called him “dad” so I will also refer to him as her dad from here on out.

<sup>60</sup> Isaac Aguilar was also a participant in this research study.

Barlow High School and they had been at this residence for almost as long as they had lived in Austin. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas did not bear children of their own, and they focused on raising Brooke and Judy, Brooke's older sister. Mr. Thomas also had children from a previous marriage but they had lived with their mother while growing up.<sup>61</sup> By 2009/2010, Judy had already graduated from high school and was living on her own when Isaac joined the Thomas household. Isaac moved in with the family soon after the young couple told Mr. and Mrs. Thomas about their pregnancy. Mrs. Thomas invited Isaac into their home immediately after realizing that he had been kicked out of his brother's home and had been sleeping in his truck.

Brooke's schooling experience was unique since Mr. and Mrs. Thomas were deeply entrenched in their community by way of Barlow High School, but, like every family, they too had their struggles. Mr. Thomas had worked at Barlow High as a teacher for the past 8.5 years, while Mrs. Thomas also worked part-time at Barlow High. Both Brooke and Judy had been actively involved in their high school, which had also kept Mr. and Mrs. Thomas busy, since they always attended their daughters' sport and school band events. Adding to Brooke's unique high school experience was that Mr. Thomas was incredibly liked at Barlow High School, and he, himself, was very popular at school. His genuinely caring character, his ability to speak Spanish, and his "cool guy" vibe, helped Mr. Thomas stand out, and he was widely known on campus by his last name only, Thomas, not Mr. Thomas.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas never imagined their daughter would get pregnant while in high school. While they were aware of the expanse and frequency of teenage pregnancies at Barlow High, they believed they had done all the right things to provide their daughter with a healthy bright future. In our formal interview, Mr. Thomas said, "everything I believed about it [teenage

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<sup>61</sup> Brooke's biological father had also remarried and parented children from that marriage, however he and his family lived in a different state.

pregnancy] got shot down when my daughter got pregnant.” When I asked him to elaborate, Mrs. Thomas added,

Well, you know, you’re involved in your kids’ life. You know everything that they’re doing and a lot of these kids don’t have that. And here we’re very active in our kids. They got everything. They were into sports. We were at the schools. We were at their games. We were very involved. We knew where our kids were. They had their curfews. Everything.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas believed they had done everything right to prevent a teenage pregnancy, including talking to Brooke about sex. They recalled having had stressed abstinence in their “sex talk” with Brooke, but they also remembered mentioning contraception. Specifically, they remembered having told Brooke that if she did have sex then she should “wear protection.” Conversely, before my interview with Mrs. and Mr. Thomas, I had asked Brooke one afternoon in Barlow High’s empty cafeteria about the people in her life who had talked to her about sex. She responded, “Nobody” to my question. I prodded her further and I asked her explicitly if her mom had ever talked to her about sex, and she responded, “They just said to wait.” She thought about it for a few seconds longer and concluded that she did not remember if it was her mom or her grandma who advised her to wait, but she did recall that the advice was given to her when she was a freshman in high school. She also remembered that the advice was prompted by Brooke’s older sister’s experience with a sexually transmitted infection. Brooke’s and her parents’ responses to my questions about sex education in the family signifies a disconnect in this family’s oral history of sex education. Brooke’s parents believed they had been open and honest with Brooke about sex, but Brooke did not even consider this as a conversation about sex. I argue that this disconnect is reflective of the taboos associated with any discussions about sex, sexuality, and relationships in the United States. At Barlow High School, I found that discussions about sex and sexuality were also often fraught with tensions and contradictions.

For example, one afternoon when Ms. Leal was discussing in her seventh period PSAP class a concept of self-actualization, an exchange about sex caught my attention. The PSAP class had been covering American psychologist Abraham Maslow and his theory of a hierarchy of needs, which is represented in a “needs” pyramid. In the context of this class, self-actualization referred to an empowered knowledgeable being that understood the differences between biological and emotional needs, how they are related, and how they must be met to reach one’s full potential. This idea further underscored the idea of self-responsibility, which was commonly emphasized in the PSAP and A-Space’s PPSG at Barlow High School. Ms. May asked her PSAP students why sex was a basic need and after a student responded with “to bring more population,” the answer Ms. May was seeking, Brooke responded with “I like to do it because its fun,” which she quickly followed with “I’m just kidding.” Any further discussion about sex and sexuality was not pursued at this time and it was a missed opportunity for such a discussion. Honesty and openness is key to achieving self-actualization and yet this was rarely enforced on the topic of sex and sexuality because this nation has made such educational conversations taboo.

The exchange in Ms. Leal’s PSAP class is important especially given that months later, in our formal interview, Brooke then admitted that she did not like sex and that she did not receive physical or emotional pleasure from it. I had spoken to Brooke about her sexual experiences with Isaac about five months after the birth of Elijah and at that time the young couple had stopped having sex. The couple wanted to wait until they got married to resume a sexual relationship. Nevertheless, the above example illustrates that youth received a number of messages about sex but few opportunities to engage in meaningful discussions about sex and relationships. Brooke and Isaac had begun to feel dissatisfied with their sexual relationship and had mutually decided to not have sex until they were married. Brooke also attributed this

decision to her religious beliefs. She was very involved in her Christian community and volunteered consistently through her church. She agreed with her church's stance that one should abstain from sex until marriage, and she reasoned, "Yea, I made a mistake, but things happen for a reason."

Brooke's first sexual experience occurred when she was fifteen years old, during the summer between her freshman and sophomore year in high school. She recalled that she had been with her high school boyfriend, Alex, a popular soccer player, for a year before they had sex. The sexual encounter in question was both their first and occurred in Mr. and Mrs. Thomas's home when her parents were out of town. She explained that in her health classes she had received the same message about sex that she had received from her parents – to abstain or to use protection, but she added, "I didn't really know about sex when I had sex for the first time." She added that the situation was "quite uncomfortable" and "just awkward" because neither of them knew what they were doing. The teenage couple continued their relationship for another year after their first sexual encounter. When they broke up, Brooke was about to be a junior in high school and Alex had graduated from high school as his class' prom king. Then, in January of her junior year, Brooke and Isaac began a relationship. The two had met on Barlow High School's wrestling team. Brooke had been wrestling since she was a freshman and Isaac joined the team when Brooke was team captain. Isaac was a year younger and a sophomore when they met. Soon after becoming boyfriend and girlfriend, the couple began a sexual relationship. However, Brooke and Isaac shared conflicting recollections of how they got pregnant and how they found out.

Brooke believed that they got pregnant after their first sexual encounter and by February of 2009, she suspected that she was pregnant since she had not had her menstrual period since

December of 2008. Brooke recalled waiting until after spring break to talk to Isaac about the possibility of being pregnant, but she added that Isaac had suspected it much earlier since a mutual friend of theirs had told him in February about Brooke's missed menstrual periods and she had displayed signs of morning sickness. She explained that she had tried to get confirmation earlier with an over-the-counter pregnancy test. Brooke and a friend had walked over to the Target store, located a short distance from Barlow High, and bought a few pregnancy tests. Eager to find out if she was pregnant, she took the tests in the store's bathroom, but she recalled that they all came out negative, indicating that she was not pregnant. It was not until Coach Sullivan intervened in April, that Brooke was certain that she was pregnant. Coach Sullivan had suspected Brooke was pregnant because rumors had been swirling and she was constantly getting sick in class. The coach approached a friend of Brooke's, Esteban, and suggested Esteban take Brooke over to a neighborhood pregnancy services and abortion clinic during class to get tested. She remembered that date as April 16, 2009.

Coach Sullivan was one of a handful of the school's staff that intervened in Brooke's rumored pregnancy. Brooke was a well-known student among both students and staff. Her outgoing personality contributed to her popularity, which was augmented by her status as daughter of Mr. Thomas, the most popular teacher on campus. Thus there was no surprise that rumors about her pregnancy spread quickly. These rumors had lasting consequences for both Brooke and her parents. Mr. Thomas admitted to me that having his daughter pregnant while still at Barlow High was "embarrassing" and was "a shot to his ego." But what caused the greatest injury, for him, was finding out that his daughter was pregnant through word of mouth. Mr. Thomas blamed himself and saw Brooke's inability to talk to them about her situation as a parental failure. Brooke, on the other hand, reasoned that she and Isaac had planned to tell her

parents soon after getting confirmation of their pregnancy, but her former cheerleading coach, Ms. Tierney, had thwarted their plan. Days after Brooke obtained confirmation about her pregnancy but before actually talking to her parents about her pregnancy, Ms. Tierney paid the Thomas home a visit to speak with Brooke's parents about the circulating rumors. Ms. Tierney's actions not only upset Brooke, but also upset her parents and the principal, Ms. Hanks, and all agreed that it was not Ms. Tierney's responsibility to get involved. Ms. Hanks had also spoken to Brooke about the rumors, but this conversation had taken place before Brooke got confirmation of her pregnancy so she had told Ms. Hanks that the rumors were not true.

Curiously, student's reacted to Brooke's pregnancy quite pointedly. Aside from spreading speculations about Brooke's pregnancy, students also responded with racialized logics about teenage pregnancy. In particular, students expressed disbelief that Isaac had impregnated "a White girl," while others asked Brooke how is that she got pregnant if she's White or how was it that Mr. Thomas "let" her get pregnant. While the majority of pregnant and parenting students at Barlow High were Latina/o, there were a handful of Anglo American and African American pregnant and parenting students. Still Brooke's pregnancy received particular attention because of who she was in a predominately Latina/o high school and reactions to her pregnancy highlight the pervasiveness of racialized logics of teenage pregnancy.

Throughout her senior year, Brooke struggled to be more independent and this was a constant issue in her life. According to Brooke, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas were trying to push her and Isaac towards independence but there was a lack of clarity of what that meant. Brooke viewed achieving more independence as getting a job and moving out, while her parents felt she was too irresponsible to be on her own and that she ought to focus on school. Brooke often spoke about her family situation with Melissa Clark, with Ms. Leal, with myself, and at times she

even openly shared her conflicts with her PSAP class. Brooke was more likely to share what was going on at home than any of the other girls in the PSAP class and in the PPSG. Melissa and I both thought that Mr. and Mrs. Thomas were trying to create distance between them and Brooke and Isaac as a way of leading them to more independence. However, these actions were confusing to Brooke and often resulted in her feeling hurt. Part of her confusion also stemmed from feeling distant from her parents, while they expressed love and affection toward her son, Elijah.

That year was full of emotional highs and lows for the family and the teenaged couple. Conflicts also arose regarding multigenerational parenting and her struggles with passing the math portion of the TAKS test. Tensions between Brooke and her mother often surfaced when Brooke did not heed her mother's parenting advice. Brooke felt that she, as Elijah's mother, knew what was best for him. One such incident centered on Elijah's bedtime. Mrs. Thomas suggested that Elijah be put to bed much earlier than the teenage couple would typically put him to bed. However, Brooke reasoned that if she put Elijah to bed earlier then he would wake earlier, which would, in turn, greater effect her. Brooke had been sharing this latest conflict with the PSAP class one afternoon and she ended the conversation by saying "Its MY baby!" The PSAP and PPSG both sought to empower their students and help them become good parents but often this led to conflicts in the home regarding parenting, and these conflicts were rarely seriously addressed in the PSAP or PPSG.

Brooke had also been clearly bothered by the prospect of not graduating, but what was most hurtful, for Brooke, was that her parents did not confide in her ability to pass the math portion of the TAKS. Given her failed attempts, the Thomas' had provided her with a tutor, yet Brooke was hurt by their insistence that she was unlikely to pass. Brooke was particularly upset

that Mr. Thomas had convinced her grandparents not to make the trip to Austin for her graduation because he said that she was unlikely to graduate. She had also been upset by her biological father's decision not to attend her graduation, which she believed was made in response to her having legally changed her last name to Thomas. Throughout the 2009/2010 academic year, Brooke dealt with a number of emotions. Least of which was her relationship with Isaac. The young couple's relationship had progressed quickly having gotten pregnant a month into their relationship but they had a lot of support from Mrs. and Mr. Thomas even though there were particular strained moments. Nevertheless, despite the couple's occasional disagreements, they were working hard at their relationship and at co-parenting Elijah. By the end of the academic year, Brooke had finally passed the TAKS and graduated from high school. Brooke was planning on going to a technical school for a nurse's assistant degree and the young couple was planning a summer wedding.

## **Chapter Four: From Mexico to Fiskville to North Meadows – Life and Schooling in North Austin**

Barlow High School is located in the Glynn Brook neighborhood of Austin, Texas. The neighborhood boundaries include Main Street on the east, Major Highway on the south, and important gateway streets that insulate the area on the west and north.<sup>62</sup> Barlow High School not only serves Glynn Brook families, but it also serves families residing just outside the Glynn Brook neighborhood. I call this larger neighborhood, which includes Glynn Brook, North Meadows. Historically, North Meadows was an Anglo-American area located on the outskirts of Austin but, today it is one of Austin's largest immigrant enclaves in a burgeoning urban landscape. Even though this area is home to immigrants from a variety of countries, including Latina America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, Barlow High School and North Meadows are both predominately Latina/o. Barlow High's 2009/2010 student population of 1,433 was 80.5% Latina/o, 12.6% African American, 5.0% White, 1.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% Native American (Texas Education Agency 2010a). Furthermore, the majority of Barlow High's families were poor families, and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) reports that 84.9% of Barlow High's 2009/2010 student body was "Economically Disadvantaged," while 80.2% of its students were labeled "At-Risk" (Texas Education Agency 2010a).

This chapter describes the setting in which the issue of teenage pregnancy at Barlow High School unfolded by providing the reader with various vantage points of the high school and its neighborhoods. In this chapter I provide a historical context and description of the North Meadows area of Austin based on archival research and observations, including students' descriptions, observations by Barlow High's administrators and staff, and my own observations.

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<sup>62</sup> All neighborhood and street names, with the exception of Fiskville, are pseudonyms.

Over the past 150 years, the North Meadows area has transitioned from Mexican territory, to Republic of Texas territory, and to U.S. territory, while also transitioning from rural setting, to suburban, and currently a transnational urban landscape in the city of Austin. The details outlined in this chapter provide the reader with a sense of the world in which students learned about belonging, a world in which school played a prominent role. I conclude this chapter with a discussion about the Mexican/Mexican American schooling experiences. Schooling, in this dissertation, is understood as an institution in which class, race, gender, *and* sexuality intersect to continually shape youths' identities and worlds.

### **THE MEXICO AND TEXAS PERIOD: ANGLO IMMIGRATION AND ANGLO SETTLEMENT, 1821-1965**

The present day Glynn Brook neighborhood in Austin, TX occupies the same territory that was once Fiskville, Texas. Settlement of this area began in the late 1800s with Josiah Fisk who was awarded the land just north of Austin in a land grant for his service in the Battle of San Jacinto (City of Austin 2000). The Battle of San Jacinto was the battle that ended the Texas Revolution in 1836, which had begun one year earlier with the arrest of Stephen F. Austin in Mexico. In 1821 Mexico won its independence from Spain and soon after Mexico awarded land grants to Anglo Americans to settle and protect sparsely inhabited land in its northernmost territories. Stephen F. Austin brought the first Anglo settlers to *Coahuila y Tejas*, and with the passage of time, Anglo and European immigrants, along with their slaves, soon outnumbered Mexicans in the *Tejas* region of the state of *Coahuila y Tejas*. These immigrants felt that the *Coahuila y Tejas* state government did not represent their views and needs, especially when it came to Mexico's prohibition on slavery. This led to some settlers wanting to become their own Mexican state apart from *Coahuila*, while others wanted to be their own independent country.

Stephen F. Austin, a Mexican citizen, became the main political leader of the region and devised a plan for separation. In 1835, Austin went to Mexico City to appeal the Mexican Congress for separation, but he was arrested, forever changing history. Austin's arrest set in motion the Texas Revolution, which ended with the Battle of San Jacinto and led to the beginning of the Republic of Texas.

The Republic of Texas employed the Texas Rangers as their policing force, which were retained as a prominent policing force even after Texas' incorporation into the United States. Josiah Fisk, for whom Fiskville was named after, had also served as a Texas Ranger and fought in the Mexican American War. In 1845, the Republic of Texas was annexed by the United States as a slave state, but the boundary between Texas and Mexico was disputed between the two countries, which led to the Mexican American War of 1846. The U.S. forces ultimately defeated the Mexican forces resulting in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which led to the incorporation of Texas and most of today's southwestern states into the United States of America. The Texas Rangers become important combatants in several key battles of the Mexican American War, which gave them favor after the war to be kept on as an important police force to aid the military along the border in policing Mexicans and international skirmishes. For almost a century, the Texas Rangers committed numerous atrocities against Mexicans in Texas (Montejano 1987).

Once Texas was a U.S. state, Josiah Fisk built his home north of Austin in the mid 1850s. The area eventually grew in to a small farming community and was named Fiskville in the 1870s. At the height of its existence in the late 1800s, Fiskville had an estimated population of between 150 and 200 residents with a district school, a post office, a steam flourmill, a cotton gin, a general store, and a union church (Smyrl N.d.). The original home built in 1854 by

Fiskville's first postmaster, George Zimmerman, a German immigrant, still stands in the Glynn Brook neighborhood. Fiskville, with its stagecoach inn, was also once a resting area for northbound travelers, and it was a popular destination for many city dwellers wanting to spend the day in the country. Its first school was built in 1857 but was replaced soon after with a three-room frame structure when the original was destroyed by fire. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Fiskville's population began to shrink as people moved into the city. However, it was not until 1953 that the Fiskville county school district was consolidated with the Summit county school district, which was further consolidated with the Austin Independent School District (AISD) in 1959. The area known as Fiskville was eventually annexed by the City of Austin in the mid 1960s (Smyrl N.d.).

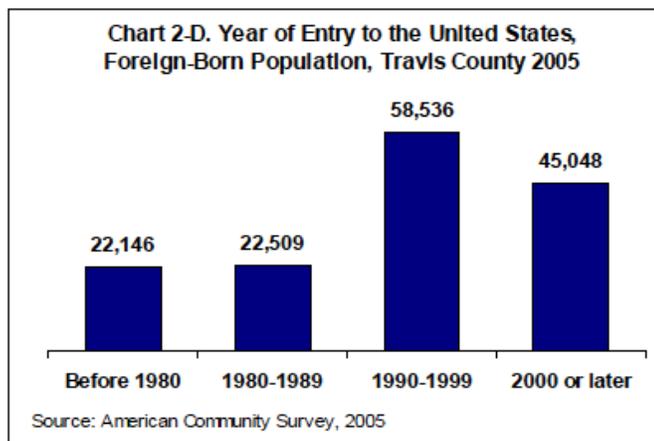
#### **THE AUSTIN PERIOD: IMMIGRATION AND GROWTH, 1965-1995**

The original Barlow Junior/Senior High School was built in 1961 and was located south of Major Highway, just south of the unincorporated region of Fiskville. This original building is still used today but now houses Perkins Middle School, one of two middle schools that feed into Barlow High School. Even in the 1960s, the original location of Barlow High was still considered Austin's northernmost high school. Then in 1966, a new building for Barlow High School was built just north of Major Highway in the newly incorporated land, and it opened its doors to a "virtually all Caucasian" student body (Barlow High School 2005). The majority of this area's single-family homes were built in the 1970s, which was followed by the construction of multi-family housing in the 1970s and 1980s (City of Austin 2000). The Glynn Brook neighborhood formally organized and registered its neighborhood association with the City of Austin in the 1980s and became the only neighborhood association represented in the North Meadows area. Through the second half of the twentieth century, this northern sector of Austin

prospered as an upwardly mobile economically diverse but racially homogenous Anglo American section of the city. Barlow High School received notoriety and accolades during this period for its academics and extracurricular activities, especially for it's Future Farmers of America agricultural program, but change was on the horizon. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the entire city of Austin experienced rapid population growth and Glynn Brook and North Meadows did not go unaffected. Glynn Brook remained home to a number of Anglo American families, but gradually it transitioned into a predominately working-class ethnically/racially-mixed area.

Between 1990 and 2005, Travis County experienced an influx of immigration in the realm of a 230% increase of its foreign-born population and a 50% increase in its total population (see Figure 4.1) (Travis County N.d.).

Figure 4.1: Travis County Immigrant Population (courtesy of Travis County Immigrant Assessment 2006/2007)



By 2005, 17% of the residents in Travis County were foreign born, which was proportionately 5% larger than the immigrant population in the United States (Travis County N.d.). The four largest immigrant groups that settled in Central Texas came from Mexico (51%), Asia (24%),

Central America (7%), and Europe (7%) (Travis County N.d.). Rapid expansion in the city's population lead to overcrowded schools, and thus, today the Barlow High School campus, like almost every other school campus in Austin, consists of its original building and both permanent and less permanent structures that house it's student population. Even with the addition of new construction to the high school in recent years, Barlow High still requires the use of portable classrooms to accommodate their student body.

The push and pull factors that created this influx of immigration are varied. The *Travis County 2006-2007 Immigrant Assessment*, which was conducted by the Research and Planning Division of the Travis County Health and Human Services and Veterans Service, found that immigrants migrated to Austin, Texas for a variety of reasons, but the most common reasons cited by immigrants were for "Reunification with family," "Higher wages in the U.S.," "Opportunities for employment and advancement," "Resources available in the community," and "The perception of Travis County as a 'safe haven' for immigrants" (Travis County N.d.: 13). Given that just over half of the foreign-born population is from Mexico, it is not surprising that the reasons cited in this report are consistent with what scholars have noted in the political and economic contexts of the history of immigration from Mexico (Cockcroft 1986; Donato 1994; Hoffman 1974; Massey et al. 2002; Menchaca 2011). These scholars have closely analyzed immigration trends, laws, and policies throughout history that have affected the push and pull factors of immigration. Cockcroft (1986), for example, contextualizes immigration in terms of the economic needs served by Mexicans as laborers throughout the history of U.S. /Mexico relations. Cockcroft suggests a "revolving door policy" metaphor to describe the relationship between the Mexican and U.S. economy, as expressed in official and unofficial policies on immigration and the exploitation of Mexicans as workers and scapegoats.

To comprehend the rapid increase in Travis County's foreign-born population between 1990 and 2005, I turn to the work of scholars who have critically analyzed immigration policies that affected Mexico and Mexicans during this period. Massey et al. (2002) examine eras of migration in the context of politics and economics from 1900 through the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA). Massey et al. describe IRCA and the immigration policies enacted thereafter as repressive and influenced by ideology and scapegoating practices. During the 1980s, Mexico had been experiencing an economic crisis at which point the United States agreed to help stabilize its southern neighbor. Mexico, whose economy has historically become reliant on remittances sent from its expatriates, was especially dependent on remittances during their economic crisis. In 1986 the United States granted amnesty to undocumented immigrants, allowing families to be reunified through the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act, also known as the Amnesty Act. Less than a decade later, Canada, the United States, and Mexico, created a North American trilateral trade bloc with the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, which had deleterious affects on the livelihoods of the Mexican people. NAFTA not only reinforced the maquiladora agreements on the Mexican border but also adversely impacted rural Mexican farmers by allowing U.S. and international agribusiness to expand their operations into Mexico. NAFTA's impact on the Mexican farmer prompted increased migration to the United States, as did the economic downturn in the urban areas caused by the closures of many factories as a result of NAFTA policies, which only further exacerbated unemployment and stimulated migration. In order to curtail illegal immigration, the United States instituted two important enforcement efforts along the southwest border: Operation Blockade/Hold-the-Line in El Paso, Texas and Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego, California.

Joseph Nevins (2002) has argued that, “the early 1990s saw the outbreak of... a historically unparalleled level of official and public concern about the U.S. government’s ability – or lack thereof – to police the U.S.-Mexico boundary and to prevent unauthorized or ‘illegal’ immigration from Mexico” (2). Moreover, “it is in this context that the ‘NAFTA-ization’ and ‘militarization’ of the U.S.-Mexico boundary simultaneously take place” (Nevins 2002: 7). Operation Blockade/Hold-the-Line was initiated in September 1993, and “there was concern that such a concentrated deployment of force would lead to violent confrontations and strain U.S. relations with Mexico on the eve of NAFTA” (Andreas 2000: 92). However, Operation Gatekeeper was launched on October 1, 1994, over a year after the implementation of Operation Blockade/Hold-the-Line and several months after NAFTA was in full effect. Operation Gatekeeper set the stage for the initiation of escalating border enforcement and immigration control into the present moment. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 as part of the increasing effort at immigration control and border enforcement. IIRIRA focused on increasing manpower along the southwest border, implementation of technologies and physical barriers along the border to combat immigration, as well as harsher sentencing for undocumented crossers and human smugglers (Andreas 2010). The act also implemented new deportation procedures and created new provisions for affidavits of support, which resulted in discouraging many permanent legal immigrants from sponsoring their family members (The Immigration Law Portal N.d.). Despite legislation trying to curtail undocumented immigration, up until very recently, undocumented migration has continuously taken place, and this has also come with rising nativist sentiments and movements.

Austin's growth between 1990 and 2005 is in large part due to the foreign-born immigration to the area, but not exclusively. The area's technological industry, which experienced a boom in the mid-1990s, also helps explain Austin's rapid population growth. In the mid-1990s, multiple companies opened industrial campuses in north Austin and the northern suburbs of Austin, which attracted professionals to the area. Travis County's population is not only ethnically and racially diverse, but it is also economically and educationally diverse. In 2005, 36% of the city's foreign-born population had less than a high school education, while 15% had a graduate or professional degree (Travis County N.d.). Additionally, while 8% of Travis County's native-born population had less than a high school education, 15% had a graduate or professional degree (Travis County N.d.). This proportion of professional/educated class can be explained by the fact that Austin is home to several major universities, which employs professional and recent university graduates. Furthermore, professionals often opt to stay and find work in Austin, Texas as was seen with teachers and administrators at Barlow High School and with social workers at A-Space. Also of note is that Austin is the State's Capital, which is another source of employment for the professional/educated class.

#### **NORTH MEADOWS: A CHANGING LANDSCAPE, 1990s-2010**

In 2000, the North Meadows area was one of Austin's nine residential areas (tabulated by zip code) whose population was at least 20% foreign-born (Travis County N.d.). A handful of the other eight residential areas on this list were well-established Mexican American neighborhoods whose settlement date back to the early 1900s. Settlement histories of Mexican American neighborhoods in Austin, Texas are histories marked with city-sanctioned segregation. These communities have remained ethnically homogenous given continuous waves of immigration from Mexico and other Latin American countries. In contrast to these long-

established Mexican American neighborhoods, the North Meadows area is quite unique given that historically this area was predominately Anglo American, but today it is an immigrant neighborhood that is ethnically/racially mixed, with a predominately Latina/o immigrant population living alongside Vietnamese, African, and Middle Eastern immigrants, as well as, Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans.

In 1998 the City of Austin selected the Glynn Brook Neighborhood Association to participate in its neighborhood-planning program, and in 2000 the neighborhood association submitted its neighborhood plan. The Glynn Brook Neighborhood is one of a number of neighborhoods that belonged to the North Meadows area of Austin; however it was the largest and most well established. Thus the neighborhood's proposal allows us to see the concerns that this area of North Meadows was facing at the onset of the new millennium. The Glynn Brook Neighborhood Association<sup>63</sup> saw this effort as an opportunity to improve and maintain its image as a "mature neighborhood," and they had identified various "critical development issues that threatened the neighborhood" (City of Austin 2000). Those issues included poorly maintained structures, city code violations, encroaching industrial and commercial complexes, poor traffic flow, the need for a more pedestrian friendly neighborhood, the loss of business, and consequently a desire to attract "more desirable" businesses back into the neighborhood, and increasing crime associated with gangs and drugs (City of Austin 2000). The Glynn Brook Neighborhood Association also listed 10 priorities, which they described as actions that would meet the needs of its expanding population and help improve their quality of life.

In their proposal, the Glynn Brook Neighborhood Association also estimated that 22,000 residents lived in the Glynn Brook neighborhood of North Meadows, and 73% of occupied

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<sup>63</sup> In 2009 I attended one Glynn Brook Neighborhood Association meeting and at this meeting the constituents present were overwhelmingly older Anglo-American homeowners.

housing units were renters. Despite that nearly half of the land used in the neighborhood area was dedicated to single-family homes (City of Austin 2000). Renters also lived in one of the 56 apartment complexes, which occupied another 10% of neighborhood land. One of those apartment complexes was dedicated public housing. North Meadows also had a small section of the area labeled as a “transient sector” of the city. This area is located near Major Highway and is occupied by individuals and families who are homeless and/or are living in short-term housing. The Glynn Brook neighborhood also had 12 acres of land dedicated to mobile homes, an area that was well hidden from the everyday passerby. Ms. Vega, AISD’s Drop-Out Prevent Specialist in North Meadows, had worked with families in North Meadows since 2002, and she believed that the rental housing market in the Glynn Brook neighborhood and the greater North Meadows area was what drew families to north Austin. Ms. Vega added that she believed that marketing strategies used by these apartment complexes, where they offered 1 to 2 months rent-free, helped lure immigrants into the area. She added that many of the families she worked with were from Mexico whose lives had been economically difficult in Mexico, and so the very idea of living rent-free was too good to pass up.

Soon after the submission of the Glynn Brook neighborhood-planning proposal, the Mulberry Park Festival was cancelled. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas, parents of Brooke Thomas, a student-parent, had lived in the Glynn Brook neighborhood since 2001 and were both employees at Barlow High School. In our formal interview they recalled how the Mulberry Park Festival once brought in many community members into the high school since the festival was held *in* the school. Mrs. Thomas described a scene in which festival booths were set up for community members to sell food and homemade crafts, and Barlow High students showcased their school clubs. The neighborhood-planning proposal contained a picture of the Mulberry Park Festival.

This photograph captures two young *ballet folklorico* dancers performing on a stage located in the open green space found inside Barlow High School. The young female dancer is dressed in a bright pink traditional *ballet folklorico* dress, while the young male dancer is dressed in a traditional *charro* outfit. Other *ballet folklorico* dancers can also be seen behind the performers and behind the stage under a multicolored banner that reads “Mulberry Creek Festival.” It was unclear to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas why the festival was ultimately cancelled, but they lamented its cancellation since the community and the high school no longer came together as they did in years past. Despite this, there was evidence of local support from the business community. Ms. Schofield, Barlow High’s Academy Director, spoke to me about how supportive the businesses are with their contributions to scholarships and by employing Barlow High students. But she also admitted that businesses depend on the work of teenagers because they are willing to stay at work late, and that can effect their school performance. Consequently, while students could be easily taken advantage of, area businesses were also providing a great service by providing students with jobs. Maclovio Esmithe helped add perspective to the changes taking place in North Meadows.

Maclovio Esmithe is the Young Men/Young Leaders case manager at A-Space in Barlow, and he was the cultural informant with the longest experience with the North Meadows section of town. Maclovio moved to Austin from South Texas in 1991. Although he did not begin working at A-Space until 2005, he had worked as a Detention Officer and as a Probation Officer for Travis County prior to that, and he was familiar with Austin’s various neighborhoods. One afternoon, during an informal interview in A-Space’s office, he explained to me how North Meadows has a bad reputation, which was commonly referred to as “ghetto.” He recalled that around 1994/1995 he and his wife were considering purchasing a house near one of North

Meadows' major intersections and the area had yet to become the densely populated area it is today. At that time, Major Highway, which today splits the North Meadows area near its southern edge, had not been constructed, and Main Street at that time was considered a convenient thoroughfare street for the city. Today, even though Major Highway allows motorists to bypass the North Meadows area, traffic on Main Street, Maclovio added, has quadrupled. Some of the changes that Maclovio had noticed over the years also included new constructions and the addition of new housing. He recalled that when he and his wife were looking to become Glynn Brook homeowners, the neighborhood was "ok," but that the area had "deteriorated" with "gang bangers" and "hoodlums" becoming ever more present in the area. He added that the area has become known as a prostitution zone, a gang zone, and a drug zone, with the worst area being located in the transient sector of North Meadows.

Crime and violence were a part of life in North Meadows, and people who lived and worked in North Meadows often referred to the community as "ghetto" and dangerous. During my research I had lived in the northern most sector of the North Meadows region in a large sprawling apartment complex. I did not live in the heart of the area, and I never personally witnessed physical expressions of violence, but I did hear, like many others who worked with students in the area, about the dangers in the neighborhoods. From my observations of the community and neighborhoods in North Meadows I ascertained that neighborhoods ranged from poor to working-class to middle-class and were Latina/o and Asian. Any motorist driving down any one of the two major streets that bifurcates the North Meadows area would have some clue to the ethnic mixture of the area by the variety of Latina/o, Asian, and American grocery stores, apparel stores, and restaurants that line the commercial districts.<sup>64</sup> I often had lunch with Melissa Clark and others from A-Space at Mexican or Vietnamese restaurants in North

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<sup>64</sup> The remaining land in the Glynn Brook neighborhood was industrial, office, civic, open space, or undeveloped.

Meadows, and my favorite Chinese BBQ restaurant in the city of Austin was also located in this area. Nevertheless, the term “ghetto” was often used to describe the North Meadows. Before detailing some stories of violence, I first would like to stress that despite public opinion, which suggests that immigrants, regardless of immigration status, were more likely to commit more crimes than non-immigrants, national research has concluded that immigrants have a lower crime rate than the general population (Travis County N.d.). Similar findings were found locally, that is fewer immigrants were incarcerated than native-born individuals, and immigrants committed lesser offenses than native-born offenders in Austin (Travis County N.d.).

Early on in my research, when Georgina Escamilla was interning with A-Space and working with the pregnant and parenting students, I accompanied her on her home visit to a student’s, Yesenia’s, home. Yesenia had moved in with her boyfriend’s, Michael’s, family’s house soon after finding out that she was pregnant. The household consisted of Michael’s parents (his mother was 7 months pregnant when Michael and Yesenia’s baby was born), his two sisters, a nephew, a brother-in-law, and a younger brother. Yesenia had just given birth to her daughter and was on homebound when we visited her. Despite the crowded living arrangements, Yesenia, Michael, and the baby had a room of their own. Their room was well kept and adorned with the typical teen adornments like pictures of friends, teddy bears, and all kinds of sentimental memorabilia, in addition to the baby’s playpen, and all their baby belongings. After catching up on how everyone was doing with the new baby, Georgina asked Yesenia about the safety of the neighborhood to which Yesenia replied that it was “so-so.” She elaborated by saying that although her block feels relatively safe, the apartment complex on the other side of Main Street was “ghetto” and that there had been shootings over there over the weekend. Given the potential for violence she said she preferred to stay inside or go walking at the mall. I continued to be

friendly with Yesenia, and the following year we talked about her plans after graduation. She expressed that Michael was working with his father and trying to finish up “school” or more specifically his HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) training. She added that Michael was determined to find a job so that they could move out into their own place.

Curiously, I asked if she planned on staying in the area to which she admitted that although Michael did not like the area because he felt that the daycares were “ghetto,” they did not know where they would go.

Some of my cultural informants were more personally familiar with crime and violence. Jordania was a student cultural informant and a freshman in 2009. I had met Jordania a year earlier through A-Space. While she was an eighth grader, Jordania and I built a mentoring relationship, and we met once a week. Jordania lived in an apartment complex behind the areas biggest grocery store, the HEB. Jordania was well aware of Barlow’s reputation as a bad school, and she often expressed anxiety about attending Barlow so we continued our mentoring relationship into high school. Over the period of a couple of weeks we discussed some of the dangers at her apartment during our mentoring sessions. She explained to me that in the past year there had been a family and a group of guys, known collectively as *Los Hondureños*, who had been causing problems in the apartment complex. One night there was a shooting at the complex, and at four in the morning her sister, who lives with her own family in a separate apartment but in the same apartment complex, got a knock on the door from someone pretending to be a neighbor and asking for help. Jordania and her family were well known in the complex and knew most, if not all, of their neighbors. The person at the door was a stranger so Jordania’s sister refused to open the door. While no one was physically injured, the incident had scared and

worried Jordania. But still, the most alarming incident I heard of happened to Laura Cervantes, a student-parent cultural informant.

Laura Cervantes lived in a small apartment complex south of Major Highway. Although the complex was small, it was located amongst a cluster of apartment complexes on the same street. I had known Laura since she was at Perkins Middle School as she had been one of my mentees when I was an AmeriCorps mentor. Since then I had gone to her home frequently and had become very friendly with her family. The apartment complex that she and her family lived in was a modest complex with an interior patio. The front doors to each apartment faced this concrete patio in which Mrs. Hinojosa,<sup>65</sup> Laura's mother, planted rose bushes in the centralized concrete planter. The homes bedroom windows faced the street, however, I had always found it perplexing that the windows of the first floor apartments were barely a foot off the ground. This observation seemed even more dreadful when a man crawled in through Laura's bedroom window while she was sleeping and tried to rape her. It was early in the month of April 2010 when I found out about this incident. It had been several weeks since we last spoke, and so I called Laura one evening. After catching up on how she was doing with school, she told me that she had a new job. She had started working Friday and Saturday nights from 6 pm until 4 am at a taco truck in the parking lot of a local Latino dance club. After I raised concerns for her safety she reassured me that she was safe. She told me that she worked with another woman, who was the cook, while she worked the cash register. This did not reassure me of her safety, so she added that her boss went by throughout the night to check on them.

Our talk about safety, eventually led her to tell me about the incident that had occurred a week prior to our conversation. She retold me the story of how man had climbed in through her

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<sup>65</sup> Cervantes was Laura's father's last name but since leaving him, Laura's mother had remarried and had become Mrs. Hinojosa.

bedroom window and tried to rape her. She recalled the horrifying incident of how she woke up to a knife-yielding intruder on top of her. She recounted how her screaming and kicking allowed her to wrestle the knife away from him, which led him to flee the way he had come in. While Laura's bedroom window faced the street, there was a small parking lot that stood between her window and the street. Parked cars could easily hide an intruder climbing into her bedroom window. Once the intruder ran off she called the cops, because her parents were not home, having had received a last minute phone call to attend to some issues at one of the buildings that they cleaned. Days later, Laura added that the most frightening part of the incident was that she suspected that it was one of the men that hung out outside her apartment complex. She recalled how he spoke to her in Spanish and his breath smelled of alcohol. He kept telling her "*calmate, calmate, calmate,*" (calm down) while he had his hand over her mouth. It was then that she managed to tell him that she could not breathe so he moved his hand, allowing her to take the knife away. The students' exposure to this type of violence was not restricted to their neighborhood in Austin. At times this exposure was also transnational.

There were several days in the Spring of 2010 that the students in Ms. Leal's first period Parenting for School-Age Parents (PSAP) class discussed amongst themselves current events in Mexico and the effects of the drug trade and the drug related violence that gripped many parts of the Mexican nation. In particular, students were personally impacted by the Mexican drug cartel, *Los Zetas*. One morning, Leticia, a student, tried talking to Ms. May about how her family in Mexico had been close to being targeted by *Los Zetas* but fortunately a family friend's connections spared them from harm. Cecilia, another student, added that she was all too familiar with the story, as incidents described by Leticia were a common occurrence in her village in Mexico. Cecilia added that her uncle belonged to the *Los Zetas* cartel while another relative

belonged to one of the competing cartels, *La Familia*. In the end, this topic did not get attention from Ms. Leal since she admitted to never hearing about the dueling drug cartels. Undoubtedly violence and danger were experienced differently depending on whether you lived in the community or merely worked in the community. All but two of my adult cultural informants, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas, who worked at Barlow High School did not live in the North Meadows region, and this greatly affected their perception and experience of the area.

For example, one October morning I rode with Melissa Clark, A-Space's Pregnant and Parenting Caseworker, to the local HEB which was rather close to Barlow High. Melissa always provided snacks for any after school event, and this afternoon she was hosting their after school doula workshop with Norma Morgan. Melissa had not had the time to buy snacks beforehand. So we rode over to the HEB, and, in the short car ride over, she said to me "I don't usually come to this HEB, don't really want to get stabbed." Since Melissa worked with various students she had become well aware of the crime and violence to which students were exposed to, and it affected her perception of the neighborhood. Another telling example came from Kevin Johnson, the A-Space program manager at Perkins Middle School, whom I worked for during my AmeriCorps tenure at Perkins Middle School. One afternoon during a formal interview we discussed the topic of the disconnect between teachers and the community. Perkins' principal had asked Kevin to spearhead an initiative to get the teachers better connected with the community. The principal had envisioned a community walk, and the idea was to have teachers walk through the neighborhoods in order to meet and greet the community that they served. Kevin shared that many teachers were reluctant because they did not want to give up their Saturday for something they did not feel was important and worse yet, some even joked that they would be risking their lives and might get shot. Other fears expressed by these middle school

teachers included that the families would be mean and unwelcoming. The principal convinced the teachers to take part in this neighborhood walk by incentivizing their work with an added day off before the beginning of their winter break. The neighborhood walk eventually did take place, and, in the end, teachers thought it had been well worth the effort. Furthermore, teachers were surprised at how wrong they were about the expectations since families were welcoming and polite. They were also surprised to witness first-hand these families' poverty and the clean but overcrowded homes in which people lived. This type of sentiment was common among adults who worked in North Meadows but did not live in the area.

Another layer to the dimension of the North Meadows area as space was that most of Austin's residents knew very little about the North Meadows section of town or even knew that it existed. Mr. Taylor, one of Barlow High's assistant principals who had been at Barlow High for three years, remarked on the area's invisibility and how he believed that this was a weakness.

He said,

Nobody knows Barlow. Nobody knows this part of Austin. It's like this forgotten world, as soon as all the White folk left and moved out to Round Rock; the IBM moved their research elsewhere; it's little things like that. It's kind of a forgotten neighborhood. It's really amazing. I think it's probably the least known high school in Austin. Barlow? Is that in Austin? Is that Leander? Is that Kyle? No it's been here for fifty years. So it's interesting. It's kind of like a forgotten neighborhood. It's like unless you have a reason to go to 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. and Main Street, you're not driving through here. You drive past Major Highway. We're a hidden gem, I like to think. But hidden, for sure.

At the time of my research, the entire City of Austin had been experiencing considerable growth, but no other area in the city was more unfamiliar to Austinites than the North Meadows area.

## **BARLOW HIGH SCHOOL IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

Barlow High School is an open campus and visitors to the school are required to sign in and wear a visitor badge while they are on campus, myself included. Upper classmen were allowed to go off campus for lunch, and those who stayed on campus could be seen in the cafeteria, in the school's courtyards, or in front of the school. Before and after school and during lunch, students were usually strewn about campus in small groups of friends, commonly ethnic- or interest-based, or romantically coupled. Barlow High School felt that one of their duties was to provide a safe space, for students and they went to great lengths to do so. Barlow High School had a zero-tolerance policy toward gang activity, which I will elaborate on in the following chapter, and on several occasions I witnessed AISD police, who had a strong visible presence on campus, arresting and citing young men and young women. Barlow High also had cameras and sensors installed after a 2009 break-in and on average the campus had to be locked down once a year.<sup>66</sup> These visible measures made schooling at Barlow High quite different from the schooling experiences of most of its teachers and administrators. Below I detail Barlow High's current federal and state standing, followed with more details about Barlow High's student body and administrators.

### **“Needs Improvement”**

Under state and federal law, Barlow High School, as a public school, is accountable to both state and federal academic standards, which are measured by separate state and federal evaluation systems. Barlow High School had struggled for a number of years to meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) set by the federal government under No Child Left Behind and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. At the state level, Barlow High School had received the

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<sup>66</sup> Various incidents led to Barlow High School being locked down, but it always occurred as a safety measure. The incident I witnessed in 2009 was related to suspicions of a gun on campus. The principal Ms. Hanks explained that previous lockdowns were related to neighborhood bank robberies.

“Acceptable” rating by the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) for the past five years. Furthermore, given that a large portion of Barlow High’s student body were deemed “economically disadvantaged,” Barlow High School was also designated as a Title One school, meaning that it was receiving federal funding under The Texas Title One Priority Schools (TT1PS) Grant Program. This grant program was intended to assist schools that were not meeting federal AYP standards. Having been unable to meet federal AYP standards for a number of years, Barlow High School was restructured around ninth grade academies when I began this dissertation research during the spring of 2009. These ninth grade academies were an organizational measure, which were put into place in attempts to remedy the schools inability to meet the federal AYP by focusing more of the school’s time and energy on students in the ninth grade.

During the 2008/2009 academic year, Barlow High School’s federal rating was a Stage 4 - Needs Improvement - and they were working on another restructuring plan that would be implemented in the 2009/2010 academic year since they had not been able to meet the AYP federal standard once again. At this point, Barlow High School had to choose from 7 restructuring plans to implement the following year, and they chose to reorganize their school into small learning communities (SLCS), which they believed was a less invasive plan in comparison to their other restructuring choices.<sup>67</sup> In 2009, Barlow High School opened with a restructured campus consisting of four small learning communities that administrators liked to say were modeled after the fictionalized boarding school, Hogwarts, from the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling. Barlow High’s small learning communities, or SLCs, were arranged by houses, with a total of four houses with distinct names. Each SLC or house consisted of about

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<sup>67</sup> Some of the other restructuring options included replacing 17% of their staff, replacing all administrative staff, or closing and restarting as a charter school.

400 students from ninth through twelfth grades, 13 core teachers, and one assistant principal. Students were assigned to one house for their entire high school career. The SLC philosophy was that interactions with familiar faces throughout a student's high school career would help in building community, which would in turn help students be more successful.

### **Student Body**

Barlow High School, in 2009/2010, had a total of 1,433 students enrolled in its schools (Texas education agency 2010a). As previously mentioned, of that student population, 80.5% were Latina/o, 12.6% were African American, 5.0% were White, 1.6% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% were Native American (Texas Education Agency 2010a). The student body consisted of native born students and students from a variety of countries, but they were predominately Latina/o. Demographic data compiled by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) indicates that 84.9% of students were "Economically Disadvantaged," while 80.2% of students were labeled "At-Risk" (Texas Education Agency 2010a). Furthermore, in 2009/2010 62.5% of students at Barlow High School were enrolled in the Career and Technical Education Program, 3.4% were enrolled in the schools Gifted and Talented Education Program, 13.6% were enrolled in the school's Special Education Program, and 34.1% were enrolled in Bilingual/ESL Education (Texas Education Agency 2010a). Of the Class of 2010, it is estimated that roughly 25% of them were college ready. However, students at Barlow High School were more than what these statistics portray. They were smart and rambunctious, supportive and kind, and, like many youth receiving education through the American schooling system, they were finding their place in society.

Barlow High School and its student body were unique. Ms. Schofield, Academy Director and the administrator who was most dedicated to working with the pregnant and parenting

population at Barlow High School, was amazed at how Barlow High was unlike any other school she had worked in. From her extensive experiences in various schooling environments in Texas, Chicago, and Africa, she felt that Barlow High was less defined by group affiliation than most schools. She added, “if you look at the cheerleading squad, you look at the football team, you look at any of those groups, gender diversity, race diversity, it just doesn’t seem to be real cliquy like it is some other places.” Cliques were definitely difficult to discern. This itself was the very first impression that I had from the first couple of months on campus. However, I did notice that students typically hung out within ethnic/racial groups, and it was less common to see cross cultural/racial mixing. Jesus Estrada, a senior during the 2008/2009 academic year and who I met at EducationNow!’s tutoring sessions, felt that there were cliques. He noticed that students of common interest hung out together – skateboarders, soccer players, football players, boys and girls club participants, and students who ate outside versus those who ate inside the cafeteria. Ms. Leal’s Peer Assisted Leadership (PALs) class, which consisted mostly of college bound students, expressed the same feelings when I spoke with them as a class one afternoon in the spring of 2010. The PALs described their high school as diverse but with a couple of cliques. They felt that what was unique about Barlow High was that the typical hierarchy of cliques that is portrayed in popular culture did not exist at their school, and they saw their school as more accepting of individuals, especially based on sexual orientation. The PALs felt that although some students were judgmental, Barlow High and its students were accepting of individuals. In fact, Barlow High’s sports teams were ethnically, racially, and gender mixed. For example, the cheerleading team had several young men on their squad, while a couple of young women wrestled on the wrestling team. Although without exhaustive attention into the social groupings at Barlow High School I cannot comment on the role that group affiliation played in students’

lives, I am confident in saying that Barlow High School was unique, as I heard students, on a number of occasions, refer to Barlow High as *family*.

### **Administrators and Teachers**

Barlow High's administration consisted of one principal (Ms. Hanks); two academy directors (Ms. Schofield and Mr. Wright); and four assistant principals (Mr. Fernandez, Mr. Russell, Ms. Soto, and Mr. Taylor), but each administrator wore multiple hats. For example, Ms. Schofield, as Academy Director, was responsible for helping mediate relationships between assistant principals and the teachers in their SLC, but she viewed her "biggest job" as "convincing kids to stay in school," which she said was how she spent most of her day. Mr. Fernandez, on the other hand, was assistant principal of one SLC, but he was also responsible for duties related to standardized testing, students needing educational modifications, and the custodial staff. Mr. Taylor was assistant principal of a different SLC, but his other duties included the special education program and the night school program at Barlow High School. While the student body at Barlow High School was predominately Latina/o (80.5%), administrators and teachers were predominately Anglo American.

Of the seven administrators during the 2009/2010 academic year, two were Latina/o. Furthermore 65.7% of teachers were Anglo American (Texas Education Agency 2010a). More specifically, of the 130 teachers at Barlow High School in 2009/2010, 19.1% were Latina/o, 10.7% were African American, 0.9% were Native American, 3.6% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 65.7% were Anglo American (Texas Education Agency 2010a). The average number of years of teaching experience that teachers at Barlow High School had was 10.3 years, with teaching experience ranging from 0 years to over 20 years (Texas Education Agency 2010a). However, the teaching staff at Barlow High School had recently been overhauled. In our formal

interview, Ms. Hanks, the principal, and I had talked about some of the changes that had occurred in 2005 when she first began at Barlow High as their Academy Director and the principal at that time had been Mr. Peña. I had broached this subject with Ms. Hanks having heard in informal conversations with various staff that life at Barlow High School had been remarkably different only several years prior to my dissertation research. Generally what I heard was that Mr. Peña was responsible for “cleaning up” the school by coming down hard on gang presence on campus and making significant changes to their staff. Ms. Hanks recalled,

We also had a huge staff change about that time. At the end of his [Mr. Peña’s] second year, my first year, we switched out 42 teachers and that’s about a fourth of our teaching staff. Now, not all of those teachers that left were not good teachers. Life happens – people get married, family members need them elsewhere, for some of them. But a lot of them had been around since way back when Barlow was a different type of school and [they] never made adjustments with the kids that they now had sitting before them and [they] didn’t have very high expectations, a lot of the times.

The “different type of school” that Ms. Hanks referred to was during the 1980s and 1990s when Barlow High School and Glynn Brook was home to predominately middle-class Anglo American families. During this period, Barlow High had a notable FFA program, notable sports teams, state recognized teachers, a handful of exceptional teachers that went on to receive Fulbright scholarships, and in 1997 Barlow High became a nationally recognized Blue Ribbon school by the U.S. Department of Education. Ms. Hanks, thus was referring to teachers who had remained at Barlow High School since its affluent period and had low expectations of the Latina/o students before them.

Ms. Hanks also added that, because of this transition, Barlow High School’s teachers were still relatively inexperienced. She validated this by commenting that it can take between five to eight years for a teacher to become an experienced and polished teacher, and, given that this overhaul took place during the 2005/2006 academic year, teachers at Barlow High were still

relatively “young” and inexperienced. My interaction with teachers and their classrooms was very limited during my dissertation research. Aside from Ms. Leal’s classroom, I did not conduct classroom observations. However, I would often enter the classroom to request to meet with a student-parent, and from these experiences I did witness some isolated incidents of questionable professionalism. One incident took with a prospective student-parent cultural informant. I was hoping to meet with her to talk about her participation in my study. I went to her class during the last 15 minutes of the period, and I asked the teacher if I could meet with the student for the remainder of the class period. I was met with apparent enthusiasm from the teacher as she exclaimed that I was more than welcomed to take the student because this way she would no longer have to deal with her. While I can understand the frustration of dealing with a “difficult” situation, the teacher’s comments seemed to humiliate the student. However, aside from these few types of incidents, overall I got the impression that the teachers at Barlow High tried to be genuinely understanding and helpful to their students.

Jesus Estrada, who had talked to me about cliques on campus, came to Austin from Mexico City in 2003 and was placed in the sixth grade instead of the seventh grade. Despite having been held back when he enrolled in AISD, he was about to graduate high school in three years. From his experiences, he felt that teachers really went out of their way to help their students out, but not all students felt this way. Ignacio Cervantes, a student-parent’s brother, had been a student at Barlow High School but was eventually removed from the school for suspected gang affiliation. After his removal and after spending some time at a juvenile detention center, Ignacio commented to me that Barlow High School was designed to fail its students. Both Jesus and Ignacio were Barlow High students, but their experiences could not be any more different. Barlow High School reasoned that it was doing their best and that its restructuring plans, along

with the varied and multiple roles that each administrator had at their school, were all designed to address Barlow High's biggest challenge - graduating its student body.

By attendance and graduation measures, Barlow High School fared worse than the AISD and state averages. For example, Barlow High School's attendance rate for the 2009/2010 academic year was 86.4%, while the State's average was 95.5% and AISD's average was 94.3% (Texas Education Agency 2010a). Its annual dropout rate for 2009/2010 was 7.5% compared to AISD's 4.0% and the State's 2.4%. Its four year completion rate for the class of 2010 was 63.7% compared to AISD's 78.6% and the State's 84.3% (Texas Education Agency 2010a). Most alarming of all was that only a quarter of Barlow High School's student body was college-ready (Texas Education Agency 2010a). Barlow High's administrators and staff believed that their students' academic performances were influenced most significantly by factors associated with overlapping issues related to immigration, poverty, and violence. In my formal interviews with administrators and staff I asked that they tell me about the strengths and challenges of Barlow High and its community. Many identified "diversity" as the community's and school's strength while they identified graduation rates, parental involvement, and violence as the students' and school's challenges. However, these challenges were understood as a product of immigration, poverty, and violence, factors that were also comprehended as "outside forces" that were brought into the school. I will discuss these issues in depth in the following chapter.

In the end, the student cultural informants that I spoke with felt that, overall, Barlow High School was a "good" school, a "decent" school, despite its reputation as being "real ghetto," which they felt it was not. Even though they felt that their school was too accepting of things they deemed as "bad," like teenage pregnancy, a lack of rigor, lenient teachers, and student/teacher relationships that were too personal, students also felt that Barlow High was a

good school, and that there was a niche for everyone. When Jordania was still at Perkins Middle School, she often expressed to me her wariness of attending Barlow High because of its “bad” reputation, but well into her freshman year she had begun to feel that it was not as “ghetto” as she had been led to believe. Grace Peterson, program manager of A-Space, felt that the administration was responsible for making Barlow High the positive space it was believed to be. Grace believed the administration was a strong team and that they set the tone of tough love with an emphasis on the love, which, she added, was rarely seen at a school. She also added that administrators spent a lot of time with students and that students really responded well by being less outrageous. In the halls I frequently observed administrators and students having friendly conversations with one another. Grace felt that because of the administration, incidents of overt violence did not occur as it used to, nor was there student desire to rebel. Grace went as far as arguing that students saw the administrators as parent figures. In fact, on a couple of incidents I also heard students refer to Barlow as an extension of their family, but I never followed up with students who expressed these sentiments. Thus it is unclear if students felt this way because of the administrators and teachers or because of the students and friends at Barlow High, or a combination of both.

#### **A NOTE ON MEXICAN AMERICAN SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES**

Most recently in 2002, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that the Mexican population in the United States had the lowest high school completion rate of all groups in the United States with only 1 out of every 2 Mexican origin adults over the age of 25 having at least a high school education (Ramirez and de la Cruz 2003). In the previous chapter I discussed how this data has been used to continue to support the construction of teenage pregnancy as a social problem. This data represents much more than a simple equation, and it is more of a reflection of the

relationship between the United States and people of Mexican origin. Nevertheless, it is a long-standing relationship built on unequal terms. The educational outcomes found at Barlow High School are all too common in the United States. This has led one scholar to aptly conclude that the Mexican people in the United States have experienced low academic achievement “persistently,” “pervasively,” and “disproportionately” due to neglect and due to *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination (Valencia 2011a). Achievement test data from the 1920s to the present reveals that students of Mexican origin academically achieve less than their White counterparts. Furthermore, educational psychologist Richard Valencia (2011a) argues that this trend is pervasive given that the trend of low academic achievement is found at all levels of comparison – national, regional, state, and local levels. And, lastly, the low academic achievements of the Mexican origin people has been disproportionate when compared to their White peers given that a greater portion of Mexican origin students academically achieve less than their White peers (Valencia 2011a).

Now in Richard Valencia’s third edition, *Chicano School Failure and Success: Past, Present, and Future* (2011) the compilation of scholarly articles tackles the issues just described from a variety of perspectives. In an article by Valencia in this volume, he reviews research on the subject. Richard Valencia briefly summarizes the theoretical perspectives that have been used to explain school failure. These theoretical frameworks include: cultural difference, or the mismatch between home and school which leads to school failure; John Ogbu’s caste theory, or that the status as involuntary minority leads students to be opposed to schooling; social reproduction and resistance, or the focus on the structural inequalities’ that lead to school failure and how individuals are agents in such an environment; and deficit-thinking, or the blaming of individuals because of their race and class for their lack of success. In the same article, Valencia

(2011a) also succinctly examines schooling conditions that have characterized the Chicana/o schooling experience and six outcomes of those conditions – all of which could be found at Barlow High School. Valencia finds that the main problems are school segregation, language suppression/cultural exclusion, school under-financing, low teacher-student ratio, and inexperienced teachers or uncertified teachers, which have contributed to low academic achievement, high rates of grade retention, poor schooling holding power, low matriculation rates to college, disparate impact of high-stakes testing, and school stress.

## CONCLUSIONS

The North Meadows area of Austin had undeniably experienced some very rapid changes in the past thirty years. Immigration policies and trade agreements had fostered an influx of immigration primarily from Mexico, and, political turmoil and ethnic conflict from other regions also fostered immigration. An affordable living has attracted and continues to attract immigrants to North Meadows, but the area also lives with its insular reputation as “ghetto” or as invisible in relation to the larger cityscape. This invisibility is augmented by the reality that some Latina/o students at Barlow High and their families were living in the U.S. without documentation, while many of the immigrants from other non-Latin American countries migrated through refugee status – statuses that inherently place individuals on the margins of U.S. society. Still, the geographical area that is North Meadows had a long rich history, and while it may have been invisible to outsiders, it was a commanding presence in its inhabitants’ lives.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> When White, working- and middle-class residents inhabited North Meadows, its visibility was not only connected to positive factors. It was also marred by two tragic events. The Texas Tower sniper’s wife taught at Barlow High School until she was murdered by her husband on the same day that he shot and killed fourteen people in a mass shooting at the University of Texas at Austin. Also, in 1991, two Barlow High female students and one Perkins Middle School student were murdered in a local yogurt shop.

In an effort to delve deeper into just how administrators and teachers felt about their school and the school's community, I asked that they share with me what they saw as the strengths and challenges that were particular to Barlow High School. Their views on the challenges were more plentiful; after all, the school's greatest struggle was graduating its student-body. My analysis of their responses is the content of the following chapter, and it is based on the responses to my questions to administrators and teachers and my observations of daily life at Barlow High School.<sup>69</sup> Consistently what I heard from four administrators, two teachers, and two staff members was that the challenges at Barlow High School all had to do with language acquisition, school and family relationships, poverty, and violence. It was widely understood that these issues were related to immigration. While discussion about strengths was limited, it was those conversations that were most intriguing. The trait most commonly identified by administrators as a strength was the school's diversity. However, this celebration of diversity seemed like a rehearsed response, less organic,<sup>70</sup> and more like common popular understandings of Americanness, because the challenges simultaneously raised by these administrators also described a world that was more cruel and unforgiving than the strengths of diversity. Diversity is at the core of liberal notions of multiculturalism in which diversity is not only viewed as a strength but also desirable. Furthermore, the challenges identified by teachers and administrators all had raced, classed, and gendered structural and ideological origins, and yet a critical engagement that considered those origins was missing. Thus to talk about diversity as a strength while simultaneously uncritically suggesting the challenges were to be found outside of the school resulted in few avenues for radical progressive changes.

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<sup>69</sup> These responses were offered in response to my general question about challenges facing the school and sometimes they were offered as a response to my prodding that they tell me about a specific subject.

<sup>70</sup> By organic I mean a critically situated knowledge that springs from engagement with the school as well as its surrounding communities.

**“I don’t know what life would be like over there, so I chose to stay.”**

### **Isaac Aguilar**

Isaac Aguilar<sup>71</sup> was 17 years old, a junior at Barlow High School, and an expectant father at the start of the 2009/2010 academic year. Isaac lived with his son Elijah, his girlfriend Brooke, and Brooke’s parents, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas, in the Glynn Brook neighborhood of North Meadows. While the Thomas family had magnanimously welcomed Isaac into their home, Isaac’s relationship with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas was repeatedly strained. Stress on this relationship mounted as the young family struggled to become more independent after the arrival of their son, Elijah, in November of 2010. Nonetheless, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas were very supportive of Isaac, and he was very appreciative of their efforts and capabilities. Moreover, despite the complexity of his personal life, Isaac demonstrated great focus and determination on being an exemplary father, boyfriend, student, and athlete.

Isaac is of Mexican origin and was born in the state of Jalisco in northern Mexico. He has three older siblings and, at the time of my study, his sister Marcie lived in Austin, while his brother Rodolfo lived in Mexico and his other brother, Felix, was incarcerated in a Texas prison. Isaac had come to the United States with his family in 1993, and he had been in the United States for about fourteen years when I conducted my research. Isaac’s life took a dramatic turn in the first few months of 2009, when soon after becoming aware of Brooke’s pregnancy, Isaac’s parents returned to Mexico, leaving him in an “impossible” living situation with his brother Felix. Isaac explained his parents’ return to Mexico as their effort to “straighten out” their immigration status so that they could reside in the United States legally. Isaac and his siblings,

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<sup>71</sup> I met Isaac through Brooke Thomas during the 2009/2010 academic year when he was a junior at Barlow High. Isaac occasionally joined A-Space’s Pregnant and Parenting Support Group (PPSG) and he was not enrolled in Ms. Leal’s Parenting for School-Age Parents (PSAP) class. In total I collected 8 hours of data from Isaac – 5 hours of Observations in the PPSG and 3 hours of Informal Interviews.

however, did not have legal status as residents or workers in the United States. Still Isaac had held various jobs over the years, including a short period working at a restaurant and working with an uncle during the summers.

Isaac had a few relatives living in Austin. These relatives were all related to his father and Isaac said that they “helped out” once his parents returned to Mexico, but Isaac had been living with the Thomas family since April of 2009. Isaac’s parents had given him a choice of either staying in Austin or returning with them to Mexico. At home he spoke Spanish with his parents but he had never once returned to Mexico after leaving as a toddler, and so he chose to stay. Isaac reasoned that he would rather reside somewhere that was familiar to him than somewhere foreign to him. He said, “ I don’t know what life would be like over there, so I chose to stay.” Feeling like they had no other choice, his mother and father left him in the care of his brother Felix and his wife, even though Mrs. Aguilar was uncomfortable with the decision. When his parents lived in Austin, Isaac, his brother Felix, and his parents had lived in a mobile home in the North Meadows mobile home community. This small neighborhood was located just north of Major Highway and was tucked away and invisible to the average commuter. The neighborhood also had a bad reputation and was known by social workers for its poverty and drug abuse. One afternoon in Ms. Leal’s empty classroom, Brooke, Isaac, and I were having an informal conversation, which led to the topic of his past. We had been talking about how the young couple’s relationship was much stronger today than when his parent’s left. Then Isaac shared with me that when he was in middle school he experienced a period of depression and had become a “drug addict.”

Isaac believed that his drug use fueled his feelings of loneliness and desperation. During this period he had suicidal thoughts and felt utterly alone. He described that he “felt like no one

cared” about him, and, in return, he also “did not care” for anyone. He added that he felt like he “did not belong here” and “was better off dying.” During this period, Isaac was not only using drugs but was also selling drugs. This led to his teachers at Perkins Middle School, where he was a student to be concerned. While in middle school, Isaac also received crisis intervention support from Perkins’ A-Space program. Isaac eventually stopped using and selling drugs and through it all he excelled academically. It is unclear where Isaac obtained his drive from, but he did demonstrate a great deal of independence and strength. He stated that while he was emotionally close to his mother he felt that his father did not like him because Isaac often “called him out.” Isaac explained that his father had a “drinking and smoking problem” and Isaac frequently voiced his disapproval of his father and his “problems.” He also had a bad relationship with his brother Felix. His two brothers and sister also attended Barlow High but his brothers both withdrew from school while in ninth grade. Eventually, his brother Ramon returned to Mexico but his brother Felix remained at home. When his parents left the United States, Isaac remained in the care of his brother Felix, and, as I mentioned earlier, this decision was made with trepidation. Felix, his wife, and their two children moved into the mobile home, but Mrs. Aguilar did not trust Felix’s new wife. Still, Mrs. Aguilar believed that Isaac was responsible enough to make things work out without their presence.

Isaac described this period of living with his brother as “horrible.” He added, “They didn’t want me there so they made my life impossible.” Isaac recalled how they would steal his homework assignments and hide food from him. Shortly thereafter they kicked Isaac out of the home. Isaac recalled going home to find his stuff on the porch and his brother told him, “ ‘My wife doesn’t want you over here anymore.’” Not sure of what to do, Isaac ate and stayed with friends for about a two months, and slept in his truck for another two weeks. Eventually Brooke

and Mrs. Thomas became aware of his situation and Mrs. Thomas invited him to stay at their home. By this time it was April of 2009 and Mr. and Mrs. Thomas had become aware of the couple's pregnancy. The young couple's relationship quickly progressed into a serious committed monogamous relationship as they got pregnant a month after becoming boyfriend and girlfriend.

The couple met on the wrestling team in the final months of 2008 and by January of 2009 they were boyfriend and girlfriend. While conducting research for this study, Brooke and I often texted and for a while her text signature, which appeared at the end of her text messages, read "Isaac 1/1/2009," commemorating the start of their relationship. Early on in the young couple's relationship, Isaac's dedication to physical fitness had led Mr. Thomas to question whether or not he was a good match for his daughter, fearing that Isaac was too vain. Still the young couple remained together and by the end January of 2009, the couple had begun a sexual relationship. Neither Isaac nor Brooke was sexually inexperienced but they also did not have a discussion about having a sexual relationship. Like other teenagers in this study, sex for them "just happened." It is unclear how consistently the couple used contraceptives. However, Isaac reasoned that he did not have condoms the first time they had sex since they "got carried away" and sex had been a "spur of the moment" occurrence.

Isaac's recollection of how he found out about Brooke's pregnancy differs from Brooke's. Whereas Brooke recalled that the over-the-counter pregnancy tests that she took resulted in a false positive, meaning that the test indicated that she was not pregnant when in fact she was, Isaac recalled finding out about her pregnancy because the tests from Target had indicated that she *was* pregnant. Furthermore, Brooke recalled telling Isaac about her pregnancy only after her visit to the neighborhood clinic in April, while Isaac remembered finding out in

February after she took the over-the-counter pregnancy tests. Isaac recalled that Mr. and Mrs. Aguilar were still in Austin when he found out about Brooke's pregnancy but that he did not tell his parents until the middle of March, a few weeks after they had left. Isaac recalled his mom being "pretty happy" on the phone, but they were unable to visit because of their "legal issues." Nonetheless, Isaac embraced his changing social role. While still pregnant, he and Brooke attended childbirth and parenting classes offered by the neighborhood pregnancy and abortion services clinic. Isaac was not enrolled in Ms. Leal's Parenting for School-Age Parents course, nor did he participate in A-Space's Pregnant and Parenting Support Group but he did often accompany Brooke to the after-school doula workshop offered by Norma Morgan through A-Space.

With the arrival of Elijah, the couple was often at odds with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas, which in turn affected the young couple's relationship. As expected, Brooke's parents had not been too happy with Isaac upon finding out about their daughter's pregnancy but by early February of 2010, Isaac had described his relationship with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas as "pretty good." He acknowledged that although they were very different than his family, they were very supportive, especially academically. Isaac found it "kinda weird" the different family styles between his family and Brooke's. He described his family as "really open" because everyone talked about their problems and the family joked with one another. He described the Thomas family as "quiet and conservative" and not as playful. However, he mentioned that his parents were unable to help him with his homework, something that Mr. and Mrs. Thomas could do. He reasoned that this was because Brooke's parents were "smarter than" his parents given that his parents had only obtained a middle school education. The relationship with Brooke's parents hit a rough patch when the couple told Brooke's parents that they were going to move out and live in Mr.

and Mrs. Aguilar's mobile home. By this time in mid-February of 2010, Isaac's brother Felix was incarcerated and his wife and kids had moved out of the mobile home.

The young couple were excited about their decision but Mr. and Mrs. Thomas were less than thrilled about the prospect of the three of them moving out on their own and living in the mobile home community. Their disapproval seemed to stem from various places. Firstly, while Isaac had been living with the Thomas family for almost a year, the couple slept separately and was not allowed to sleep in the same bedroom. Secondly, Isaac believed that the Thomas's disapproval stemmed from disliking him. Isaac recalled how soon after Elijah's birth, Mr. Thomas had made it clear that he did not want Isaac living there. And after the young couple proposed moving out on their own, Isaac had overheard Mrs. Thomas threaten Mr. Thomas saying that if they did move out then it would be his fault. Brooke believed that Mrs. Thomas was afraid of them living in the mobile home which seemed dangerous to her, a sentiment that hurt Isaac given that that was where he had grown up. Furthermore, out of concern Ms. Thomas repeatedly reminded Isaac that he was "illegal" and would not find a job. Isaac told me that these sentiments made him feel like he was "worthless," although he knew that was not true. While the feelings that arose because of their decision to move weighed heavily on their mind for a short period, the couple remained in the Thomas home.

By May of 2010, the couple was preparing to get married over the summer and was attending marriage classes at their church. As for the future, Isaac clearly believed that his future depended on his academic performance. He was a dedicated student and he achieved both academically and in extracurricular activities. During the 2009/2010 academic year, Isaac was one of the top five students of his class, and he was also on the high school's football and

wrestling team. Isaac hoped to secure a full-ride scholarship to attend college and reasoned that if he did not receive one, then he would enlist in the military.

## **Chapter Five: Educators Celebrate Diversity**

The lives of students at Barlow High School were shaped by a schooling system that reproduced raced, classed, and gendered stratifications. This chapter explores what Gupta and Ferguson (1992) call “the processes of production of difference in a world of culturally, socially, and economically interconnected and interdependent spaces” (14). By this I mean to draw attention to how the people of the U.S./Mexico borderlands, a place where multiple worlds collide, are created as different and distinct through political and economic processes of unequal power and through the production of difference. Specifically, the North Meadows area of Austin has been created and recreated throughout history and its identity “emerges by the intersection of its specific involvement in a system of hierarchically organized spaces with its cultural construction as a community or locality” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 8). In the previous chapter, I described life and perceptions about North Meadows and Barlow High School. I concluded that outsiders, even if they worked in North Meadows, perceived the area as “ghetto,” and while students acknowledged that this was its reputation, they were also the first to see the humanity of the inhabitants of North Meadows.

I focus, in this chapter, on Barlow High School and its role in creating difference. My discussions are based on my observations over the course of my field research from 2008 – 2010 and on the conversations I had with administrators and teaching staff about the strengths and challenges of “the community.” Thus my analysis engages the topics of immigration and poverty given that those were the subjects raised in all of my conversations with educators. Despite the very good and sincere educational intentions shared by Barlow High’s educators, most of them believed that students’ challenges were beyond their abilities as educators, but

sometimes also recognized that the schooling system was not designed to help poor and ethnically/racially diverse students achieve their potential.<sup>72</sup>

Although Barlow High was a predominately Latino high school during the 2008 – 2010 academic years, school officials proudly exalted the school’s distinction as the most diverse high school in Austin. The relatively new settlement of immigrants from at least 53 different countries in North Meadows resulted in this diversity, and educators identified diversity as the community and high school’s strength. However, this observation was merely the tip of the proverbial iceberg of what constituted “diversity” in North Meadows and at Barlow High School. I asked educators, in our formal interviews, what they perceived as the community’s strengths and challenges. My intention was to gather their perceptions of the community, so my question presupposed an easily identifiable geographic area, which I called “the community.”<sup>73</sup> Educators began their assessments with the community’s strengths, which were followed by a much longer discussion about the high school’s challenges. Furthermore, educators’ discussions about challenges revealed that they held a more narrow interpretation of these challenges as Latina/o issues. While some staff and administrators believed that Barlow High School was not doing enough to serve the families of the North Meadows area of Austin, Texas, educators most often expressed that they were doing the best that they could.

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<sup>72</sup> The role of educators in this study has made me contemplate the similarities of their roles with the role that *coyotes* play in the U.S. The *coyote* is a metaphor used in the context of immigration in the United States for people who guide transnational migrants across the policed border between Mexico and the United States. While there are some negative connotations related to the *coyote*, I find the comparison between the *coyote* and educators at Barlow High School provocative because these educators were responsible for “bringing people across” or to guide immigrants and cultural others across the illusory space that separates “us” from “them.” Furthermore, the educator, like the *coyote*, is a part of their own political and economic systems that aim to deliver and transform marginalized populations.

<sup>73</sup> Gupta and Ferguson (1992) problematize the anthropological effort of interpreting community, identity, cultural difference, and cultural change while increasingly living in a global economy, where identities are increasingly deterritorialized because of the fluidity of people and ideas.

## **DIVERSITY AND SEGREGATION**

Diversity captures the liberal image of what America should be, and diversity, in itself, is thought of as good and desirable. Diversity is the foundation of a multicultural world, and Barlow High School's diversity was hailed as positive because it existed "naturally" and without discord. Ms. Schofield praised the way in which the students themselves celebrated diversity, which she felt derived from "pride in the community" that positively "carried over" into the school. Although Ms. Schofield worked in "the community," it was implied in our conversation that she was not a part of the community she was referencing. Either way, she identified students' involvement in the redesigning of their cafeteria in 2006/2007 as an example of school strength. She explained that fifty students had been involved in the redesign process, and that these students had insisted on representing everyone at the school, which was eventually accomplished by painting portraits of different cultural icons on the cafeteria walls. Ms. Schofield interpreted student's celebration of diversity as a positive attribute.

Mr. Taylor expressed a similar sentiment but slightly differently, as he opined that the absence of hostility amongst people of varying backgrounds was a strength and a commendable attribute of the community. Mr. Taylor was one of the most-liked assistant principals at Barlow High School, and Grace Peterson believed that his popularity stemmed from his ability to show the right balance of "tough love" towards students. Regarding diversity, he remarked to me that he was most impressed with the "harmony" he saw on campus. Mr. Taylor reasoned that this harmony amongst students of different countries of origin was attributed to the immigrant work ethic. He said:

I think it is pretty incredible to think of the kind of harmony that we have in our community. I mean when you look at, whether it's the external community or how it even reflects itself here on campus, we don't have Black and brown issues like you have at some of the [other] Title One schools in Austin. I think that's

directly aligned to the diversity and the hard work. I think they're struggling so hard often to make it through the day and to be successful in school. And to be successful in school *and* in their jobs *and* in being parents *and* in being a son *and* in being a soccer player that they don't have time for squabble. While we have, I would say, considerable gang involvement outside of our doors we do a pretty good job of keeping that out. And so really, we don't have the kind of same tensions because I think it's so blended. We have African Americans, who aren't African Americans who are Afro Caribbean and we have African African Americans, East and West African African Americans. And so we have so much diversity within our sub pops [sic] that they blend in together and they're not just *Mexicano*, they're *Cataracho* or they're El Salvadoran. They're all these different kind of blends and so within that I don't think there's the need for adversary relationships. And so I think there's a real acceptance. The fact that we have *so many* cultures out here and we don't have, you don't hear of race riots. You don't have them in the community, you don't have them in the school. You don't hear about mass discrimination. You have this acceptance of this diversity, [which] is great.

Mr. Taylor's demonstrated that he made an effort to be a part of the community when he sometimes referenced the community, "our community," and his efforts did not go unnoticed as he was popular among students. However, he interpreted a lack of dissonance amongst students, as a positive attribute even though the implication is that racial disharmony was the expectation. Mr. Taylor believed the immigrant work ethic prevented people from interracial conflict. Ms. Schofield was also impressed with the lack of interracial fighting. Her interpretation also came from her knowledge of interracial fighting at other Austin schools. In our interview, Ms. Schofield further explained that the conflicts that were more likely to arise at Barlow High were intra-ethnic or intra-racial conflicts between people who, in appearance, seemed the same, but were from two very different backgrounds, i.e. African Americans and African immigrants or between individuals from different Latin American countries. These educators' evaluation of strengths on their campus seemed to be mostly informed by their knowledge of interracial conflict at other high schools. Furthermore, their contradictory evaluations point to the

complexity of the issue of diversity and race relations in North Meadows and at Barlow High School.

Illustrative of this point were the racial disparities in suspension rates that were raised as an issue at the Campus Advisory Council meeting that I attended at the beginning of the 2009/2010 academic year. The Campus Advisory Council (CAC) consisted of school staff and parents who met to discuss a variety of issues related to school life. At this particular meeting the co-chair noted that there were racial disparities in the suspension rates of African Americans, which was only 12.6% of the student population. At issue was the finding that Barlow High School issued home-suspensions to African Americans more frequently than they did to any other racial/ethnic group. The reporting of this finding received very little attention. A CAC member, from another school campus, offered the only response. This member reported that there was a similar finding at his school, but they had not reached an understanding. They postulated that perhaps the trend is related to miscommunication or cultural sensitivity. Educators at Barlow High understood interracial conflict as conflict between students of different cultures, but this CAC member began to suggest that interracial conflict could develop between students and teachers.

Another layer of complexity underlying diversity at Barlow High School its distinction as a segregated high school with a predominately Latina/o student population.<sup>74</sup> Barlow High School can be best understood as a segregated school since only 5% of Barlow High students were White, while the remaining population was 80.5% Latina/o, 12.6% African American, 1.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% Native American (Texas Education Agency 2010a). Furthermore, while the racial/ethnic and class backgrounds of the student body at Barlow High

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<sup>74</sup> 80.5% of the 2009/2010 student population was Latina/o, and, while there is rich diversity in the experiences of people from the varying Latin American countries, this diversity is hardly recognized in the United States.

has changed opening in 1966, the administration and teaching staff has remained predominately Anglo-American. Educational psychologist Richard Valencia (2011b) argues that academic achievement indicators (specifically state-mandated test scores, graduation rates, SAT registration, SAT scores, college prep enrollment rates, and college enrollment rates) are all adversely impacted by segregation. Valencia (2011b) documents this “negative connection,” in three Texas school districts – Austin Independent School District (AISD), Arlington Independent School District, and San Diego Unified School District. The Austin Independent School District happens to enroll more Latinas/os than any other ethnic group in its schools. Valencia found that as the percentage of students of color increased in AISD’s 78 schools, so did its failure rate on its state mandated test or the TAKS (Valencia 2011b). Deficit-thinking paradigms, or explanatory models that blame students and ignore structural components that adversely affect the education of a group of people, have been repeatedly invoked throughout history to explain the educational achievements of people of Mexican origins (Valencia 2011a). Valencia writes,

The deficit-thinking model, at its core, is an endogenous theory – positing that the student who fails in school does so because of his/her internal deficits or deficiencies. Such deficits manifest, adherents allege, in limited intellectual abilities, linguistics shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior. Deficit thinking is a pseudoscience founded on racial and class bias that ‘blames the victim’ for school failure, instead of examining how school are structured to prevent poor students and students of color from learning (2011a: 8).

Segregation, Valencia (2011b) contends, has both academic and social effects. The historical prevalence of racial and cultural segregation helped institutionalize the racial superiority of Whites and inferiority of Mexicans/Mexican American and African Americans. Even though *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) overturned *de jure* segregation and mandated racial integration in schools, *de facto* segregation has continued given residential settlement patterns, discrimination, and social apartness (Menchaca 1995). According to Valencia, segregated

schools have a higher student-teacher ratio, lack resources and teachers representative of the schools' student body, provide few college preparatory courses, provide more work training and certification, and practice language suppression and cultural exclusion – all present at Barlow High School.

Still, educators at Barlow High understood low academic achievement as engendered by “outside forces,” not segregation. Ms. Schofield began teaching at Barlow High in 2005 and had described her “biggest job” as “convincing kids to stay in school.” In our formal interview, she emphatically stated that what drove students to withdraw from school were “outside forces” and “cultural issues,” adding that they were not issues with the school itself or the difficulty of the curriculum. And yet, in my discussions with Ms. Schofield and with other administrators and staff, standardized testing and accountability measures routinely came up as particular challenges to the high school, but they were usually regarded as a challenge for the student who already had to overcome deficits acquired “outside” the school. Rarely was the educational structure questioned, and tests, like the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), were seen as “within,” “inside,” or simply a part of education that had to be mastered.

The majority of Barlow High students were from Spanish-speaking countries. In 2000, North Meadows had 1000 or more linguistically isolated Spanish speaking households and between 200 and 325 linguistically isolated Asian/Pacific Islander speaking households (Travis County N.d.). A linguistically isolated household is defined as a household “in which all members aged 14 years old and over have at least some difficulty speaking English” (Travis County N.d.: 18). At Barlow High School, I soon came to realize that the schooling realms of instruction and authority were exclusively in English, while social life at Barlow High School took place in *both* Spanish and English. However, the frequency with which it took place in

Spanish was one aspect that made this campus unique. I saw repeated examples of this in the cafeteria and in different classroom settings. I even found myself speaking Spanish regularly with some of the students in Ms. Leal's PSAP classes. This aspect of social life was apparent to me almost immediately, but it was not until one afternoon in the spring of 2009 that it began to really capture my attention. This afternoon I was standing in the lunch line with Isabella Diaz, a student-parent cultural informant. We had agreed to meet during lunch, and I had picked her up from her classroom a few minutes before the class was dismissed in order to avoid a long line. Isabella and I chatted while we waited for the lunch ladies to start serving the day's meal. When it was Isabella's turn, she engaged one of the lunch ladies and asked the woman how she was and how her weekend had been. This exchange alerted me to notice, at a later date, that almost all, if not all, of the women who worked in the cafeteria were Latinas,<sup>75</sup> as was the custodial staff, and Isabella was friendly with many of them. These instances made me pay closer attention to the way Spanish was enacted on campus.

On occasion I would catch up on my notes or plan out my day in the school's library. Some days I would linger until well past ten in the morning when eight or so Advisory classes joined me in the library for that period. An Advisory class was a twenty minute period that every student was enrolled in, and it functioned like a "homeroom" or "study hall" in which students and their teacher worked on a variety of matters related to schooling and their courses.<sup>76</sup> One repeated general observation that caught my attention was that students would often interact unreservedly with one another, as many teenagers do with their friends, but predominately in

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<sup>75</sup> One afternoon I had been in the cafeteria before any of the lunches had taken place and the cafeteria workers were eating their own lunches before the lunch periods would have them occupied for the better part of the afternoon. In all, I counted 14 women, who sat in groups talking in Spanish. I also noticed that the custodians were Latina/o and the security guards were African American men.

<sup>76</sup> During the 2009/2010 academic year, Barlow High School had implemented a couple of experimental Advisory classes – one all-female Advisory class and one all-male Advisory class. They hoped that this gender specific space would help improve student performance.

Spanish. Furthermore, when their teachers spoke to them in English they visibly retreated inwardly and did not seem to exude the confidence they had emanated when speaking in Spanish. Of course, some of this can be explained by how students typically act with people of authority, especially when they have been singled out, but what I observed seemed to go beyond that. Not only did students' body language seem to communicate a withdrawal when communicating in English, but also spaces seemed to be defined by language use.

Take for example students in Ms. Leal's first period Parenting for School-Age Parents (PSAP) class. The young women in Ms. Leal's first period PSAP class would often chat with one another in Spanish. Usually these conversations were about their weekend plans or their past weekends. *Bailies* or dances were a common discussion among this group. A *baile* could either take the form of a *quinceñera* or an 18 and over club, of which there were about four in Austin that allowed teens entrance when accompanied by an adult. One particular January morning in 2010 I sat off to one side, as I usually did, from the small cluster of students that usually formed in this class. This morning five students were sitting in a cluster working on an assignment about Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. These young women chatted in Spanish while they worked, when suddenly one student, Ophelia, turned to Ms. Leal and said to her, "Miss<sup>77</sup>, you know what would be the coolest thing? If you would speak Spanish to us because we all speak Spanish here." Ms. Leal responded by saying that although she could understand it, she could not speak it very well. Although the conversation did not go any further, Ophelia seemed to have been expressing how speaking Spanish was not only the preferred method of communication among them, but also that Ms. Leal, who was well liked, should also be a part of this Spanish-speaking world.

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<sup>77</sup> Students were in the habit of calling teachers, administrators, and any individual associated with the school by the generic term of "Miss" for females and "Sir" for males. I first noticed this when I served as an AmeriCorps mentor at A-Space at Perkins and the students I worked with called me "Miss." This habit continued into the high school.

I do not believe that students were resistant to speaking English. However, Spanish was a big part of their personalities and deterritorialized identities (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Furthermore, it was the identity invoked through language that many students preferred to use. Many students lived their lives in Spanish, and, despite the xenophobia exhibited in our country at this time, they were proud enlivened teenagers. At graduation both the valedictorian<sup>78</sup> and salutatorian gave heartwarming speeches of gratitude to their families, first in English and then in Spanish. But even though Spanish was a source of pride for many students, the Spanish language and language acquisition was one of the characteristics that administrators and staff believed most hindered students' academic success.

Educators identified two main issues related to the challenges associated with language acquisition. First was the effect of language acquisition on TAKS, and secondly was Barlow High's ability to integrate non-English speaking families into their school. The principal, Ms. Hanks, estimated that English was not the first language of about 85% of the student population. According to the Texas Education Agency, 35.9% of the student population had limited English proficiency (Texas Education Agency 2010a). However, for only 0.8% of the student population, or about 12 students, was the 2009/2010 academic year identified as their "First Year U.S. Enrollment" (Texas Education Agency 2010a). Both Ms. Hanks and Mr. Thomas spoke to me about how living in a linguistically isolated community hindered their students' English language acquisition, which in turn affected their standardized teaching scores and ultimately their futures. In our interview, Ms. Hanks said to me,

Our kids are unique, I think, in that they're really *really* good kids wanting to be successful, and I know every principal probably says that about their kids, but

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<sup>78</sup> The 2009/2010 valedictorian was a young man I had worked with through A-Space at Perkins Middle School. He and his family were from El Salvador and I met with him and a handful of other English Language Learners during the 2005/2006 academic year. This was a support group I initiated to give a handful of students a space in which to discuss their immigrant educational experiences.

they really *really* are. The struggle that we have is [that] they come to us with so many learning gaps and some of those are severe. The kids who come to us from different countries, which let me talk about that, because we have kids from all over the world. English is not the first language for most of our kids. In fact 85% of our students is not their first language. And 35% of them, they're still in what's called the ELL program or ESL program. So that means they have not shown mastery of the English language enough to exit out of that program and part of that is because we have so many kids [that] this is their first or second year in the United States all the way up to students who still struggle with mastering the language and that could be [for] a variety of reasons. Usually if you dig into it, it's because the only place they really are forced to talk and interact in English is at school. And so their academic language has big gaps in it because they don't also hear that elsewhere and it creates a little struggle for them. So that's our biggest barrier, is bringing them up academically...

Given his experience with students learning the English language, Mr. Thomas had a particularly nuanced perspective of the challenges associated with language acquisition. In my interview with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas, I asked Mr. Thomas what he thought interfered with graduation at Barlow High. He responded that it was a combination of a lack of English skills and a lack of student motivation but he continued,

Not all of those students that are listed under ELLs are non-English speakers or immigrants for that matter. There is a really large way of, not only at Barlow but in the United States, where a lot of our ELL students [well] their parents may have been immigrants, [but] they were born here in the United States. However they live in a community where English is not necessary and so they can go 12 years of school and still be labeled as an English language learner.

Mr. Thomas pointedly described the effects of segregation and social apartness, when he underscored that U.S.-born Latina/o youth are having problems with English language acquisition because of segregation. However, "linguistic isolation" was the preferred term to discuss what scholars have discussed as segregation. Further in our conversation, Mr. Thomas suggested that the state hinders a student's opportunity to hone her or his English skills because of the weight of standardized tests. He said,

By law there is an ESL program set up that states that a student should receive ESL services until they've been exited from ELL status. However, once you get

to the high school level, the weight of the TAKS test and the need to graduate under the No Child Left Behind makes it more important to take that student out of the ESL services because if they're in ESL services there are certain classes that they would not be able to take and they need those classes so that they can pass the TAKS test and graduate.

Mr. Thomas explained how enrollment in ESL classes in high school limited the amount of curricular courses a student could take. Thus students were prematurely removed from ESL courses to enroll them in content courses that would be tested through the TAKS test. In other words, students are doubly punished when a system does not provide a real opportunity to learn English and when it places more importance on a test than English language acquisition. He shared that his experience had been that students are often taken out of ESL for "what's best for No Child Left Behind," adding, "we say what's best for the student and then we hide that under the guise that what's best for the student is that they graduate but then graduating is what's best for No Child Left Behind."

Ms. Schofield also signaled out the TAKS and language as the number one barrier towards graduation. In our interview, Ms. Schofield said that the TAKS test was especially challenging for seniors who were first-time Texas students (either from another country or another state). The challenge, according to Ms. Schofield, arose when a student received their education through a different institution and was evaluated by the Texas evaluation system. Ms. Schofield said, "And so somehow I have to get them academically caught up enough that in 3 tries [they] pass TAKS." She continued,

And for our students, TAKS is what keeps them from graduating. It's not course work. It's TAKS. They do not test well, they don't really understand tests of that nature, they understand sitting in class doing what I'm told to do, doing my work and taking a test on what I just finished. But the other is of a significantly bigger struggle, particularly for our second language learners.

Ms. Schofield signaled out the TAKS as a barrier, but like most of the educators I spoke with, she had more difficulty acknowledging that TAKS testing itself was a problem (Valenzuela 2005). I argue that for some educators the difficulty in seeing the TAKS as a problem lay in critiquing a system they were a part of. Barlow High's educators expressed contradictions in their ideas of what the problems were at Barlow High School. Mr. Thomas most clearly illustrated this. Mr. Thomas was the only educator that I spoke with that directly acknowledged the cultural and structural components of the TAKS test, but, when he did, he also expressed uncertainty about what it all meant.

One afternoon, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas and I sat in a busy coffee shop on the southern edge of North Meadows to discuss life in North Meadows, schooling at Barlow High, and the pregnancy of their teenaged daughter, Brooke Thomas. This particular afternoon we spoke about a variety of topics since the family had lived in North Meadows since 2000. We were discussing the topic of Barlow High School's bad reputation in Austin and how in 2002/2003, Barlow High had "cracked down" on students suspected of gang affiliation. Mr. Thomas suggested that these newspaper articles had helped cement Barlow High's image as a "bad school." Then, Mrs. Thomas added that the school's academic standing based on federal and state evaluations systems "did not help" Barlow High's reputation. She believed that the school's assessment was unfair because it hurt English language learners, but the rating also projected a negative image of their school and the students at their school. Mrs. Thomas said that the general public did not understand that the school was "90% Hispanic" and that Barlow High's student body consisted of students who "didn't start speaking English until they're in high school, so yea, their test scores are going to be down." Mrs. Thomas continued, "It's not because the kids are bad or stupid, it's that it's not their first language," to which Mr. Thomas added,

And then I'm the ignorant majority there, being the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant male and you hear these things about how a test. You know, well, oh, this test is designed or geared for or it is biased towards, you know, upper middle-class Whites. And I'm thinking- how do you bias a test? How could it be biased? Well, when I'm reading released tests; you read things and you're, just, like how would an African American kid know that? This is so foreign to them and, you know, ok, yea, so it is but I don't think it was written biased. I don't know. But I'm looking at some of these things going there is no way a Mexican kid is gonna know anything, I mean they don't even have a context to put it in to.

The lack of context that Mr. Thomas referred to was due to the structural factors like segregation, inequality, and immigration status that lead to cultural isolation. However, teachers and staff did not demonstrate that they had this nuanced understanding of cultural and linguistic isolation. Administrators and teachers could acknowledge, at the very least, that TAKS testing was a structural barrier, but, since they saw this as "inside" the school, it was more difficult acknowledging that TAKS testing was influenced by American cultural values. In fact, through our conversations it became apparent that the TAKS was a hurdle even though the school did not view it as a hurdle. Some viewed the limited English proficiency of students or the lack of test-taking experience as the fault in the equation. TAKS was considered as "inside" the realm of education, unlike the "outside forces" that were thought of as producing barriers to graduation. The outside forces were issues related to cultural and linguistic isolation of students, barriers they needed to overcome in order to perform well on academic measures. Mr. Thomas was the only one who attempted to question if TAKS itself was an "outside force." Educators at Barlow High were unable to demonstrate an understanding that cultural isolation in the United States has a long structural history, and they also could not demonstrate that each of us have a hand in creating an "outside" and an "inside."

In an earlier period in U.S. history, American schools punished students for speaking Spanish in school as English-only mandates in schools were instituted as a means to Americanize

cultural others. Language itself, in this era, was constructed as a means of creating a homogenous American identity, but, given other social and institutional factors, this identity was never actually possible. Chicana/o literary figures have written about the effects of these English-only Americanization projects and what losing the Spanish language has meant to one's identity (Anzaldúa 1987; Rodriguez 1982). Principally these authors have found themselves confined to a borderlands experience, which was neither fully American nor fully Mexican. Today, youth at Barlow find themselves in a borderland that is still neither fully American nor fully Mexican but unlike the borderlands of yesteryear. Today, although English-only efforts occasionally make their way into state legislatures, it is also viewed as an overtly racist measure that undermines a more recent American narrative about multiculturalism, and it is not institutionalized to the same degree as in the past. However, when the narrative of multiculturalism and diversity is enacted as the vision of American society amongst a student-body that is culturally and linguistically isolated as a result of structural factors, it can become easy to blame Spanish-speaking individuals for "choosing" to speak Spanish and ultimately for still failing to become American. While I did not hear teachers and administrators explicitly say that students chose to not learn English, they also did not provide a critical reading of this, which leaves an interpretation that blames students too easily accessible.

## **DIVERSITY AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

The topic of family and school relationships is more commonly understood as parental involvement in the school and in the child's education. The integration of non-English speaking families into Barlow High School was also raised as a challenge but with contradictory understandings of the problem. Parental involvement was raised as a concern given that educators believed parental involvement benefited student achievement. Parental involvement

has traditionally referred to those rearing practices in the home that promote learning, that support teachers in the teaching process of children, and include volunteering in the school and providing monetary assistance for the purchase of learning materials (Moreno and Valencia 2011). In education, the scholarship on parental involvement is vast, having entered the pedagogical field of teaching and education in the 1960s, and diverse, covering topics such as what models of parental involvement produce the best academic achievement to critiques of models that deem poor racial/ethnic populations as deficient in their parenting ways and models that simply are not universally applicable (Moreno and Valencia 2011). Parental involvement at Barlow High School was described as “low,” and Barlow High School recognized that their family and school relationships needed improvement. More importantly, they believed that they, as a school, were responsible for those improvements. Educators at Barlow High not only believed that their students’ parents were supportive of their children’s education, but they also understood that there were structural and cultural barriers that prevented parents from being more involved in the high school.

The topic of low parental involvement was also raised at the Campus Advisory Council meeting that I attended in 2009 and in conversations with educators and staff. Mr. Taylor emphasized that although parental involvement, as it is traditionally understood, was low, parents were very supportive of their students and their education. He said:

I think we have pretty broad support of the school. I would say that parents generally support school different from the way, not necessarily the dominant White hegemonic kind of culture that says school support is about paying your \$15 and going to every PTA meeting. We don’t have that kind of support, but we have parents who certainly back us up. By and large they want their kids to be educated. They’ll come into [a] meeting. They’ll take time off of work, and so we’ve got great parent support.

While administrators and staff expressed that their students' parents were supportive of their students and the school, they also expressed that cultural and structural factors affected parental involvement in a more traditional sense. Structurally, poverty and the school itself were identified as effecting parental involvement, while cultural factors were related to language and the definitions of parental involvement.

In general, administrators understood that poverty was the most significant factor affecting parental involvement. Ms. Hanks and Mr. Taylor both believed that parents supported their students, but, because of the need to work, parents were not involved in the school. Ms.

Hanks noted:

Our parental involvement is low. Mostly I think it's because parents are out working 2 or 3 jobs. Not that they're not interested in their students, they are but they're not able to come in at a time to meet with us when we're open... You know when people's basic needs are not being met they're not ready to do extra things. So when students are worried about getting kicked out of their home, how the electric bill is going to be paid, where they're going to get food for their next meal they could care less how to factor a quadratic equation. So we spend a lot of time and energy helping to meet those other needs for families even before we can get up to the basics of education sometimes.

Helping to meet those basic needs were Ximena Vega and A-Space. Ximena Vega's sole responsibility as the Drop-Out Prevention Specialist was working with families, especially the parents, who were labeled most 'at-risk' and helping them connect to other agencies that could be of help in their situation or crises. In her nine years of experience with immigrant families, especially Mexican-origin families, Ms. Vega noted that students' problems in school stem from being caught in the middle, between American and Mexican. However, Ms. Vega saw this as the responsibility of the parents and families to learn how to bridge those two worlds.

Mr. Fernandez, an assistant principal from Mexico, suggested that the lack of parental involvement was partly cultural. During the 2009/2010 academic year, Mr. Fernandez was

serving his second year as assistant principal at Barlow High School, but prior to this he had worked as a Spanish teacher in Central Texas. Mr. Fernandez was a native of Mexico, and he received post-secondary educational accreditation in Mexico before pursuing a teaching degree in the United States. Mr. Fernandez believed there were different cultural understandings on the subject of parental roles in the schooling system. Mr. Fernandez believed that parents, especially parents from Mexico, viewed the school as the domain of teachers and administrators who were the professionals. He said,

My perception is that, at least in Mexico, the school knows what they do, supposedly. This is what I think people outside the school [think]. They know they're professionals. They know what they're doing. And they will take care of the stuff. And I don't have to be involved. And I think in the same way the parents and the people come with the idea that school should know what to do because they're the professionals so they don't they don't get involved with many things they can get involved.

Mr. Fernandez's own experience with education in Mexico led him to postulate that parental involvement had different cultural meanings for people of Mexican origin and for Americans. Furthermore, Mr. Fernandez suggested that Barlow High School was not doing enough to get immigrant families involved in the school. Mr. Fernandez said,

I think that for the non-recent immigrants there is a good interaction between the school and the community. For the recent immigrants, I don't think we have a lot of stuff that invites them to be here and involved and get involved like in other things.

Mr. Taylor echoed the connection between parental involvement and language and he believed that isolated language environments impacted parent involvement more than it affected the students. In our interview, he said,

Because of the very large amounts of immigrants or even just Spanish speaking, it is kind of a force, which is against acquisition of language. And so you have the capacity to live almost exclusively in a Spanish environment and so it simply limits some of the parents, not so much the kids, the kids to some degree, but the broader community. It limits their kind of impetus, I think, at times to really

charge up or have the opportunity. I mean if you can go through the whole day and have Spanish interactions, that's the easiest way to do it. [Pause]. I think it kind of hamstring the community a little bit. Although we have right now, tonight we are having the adult ESL school so the opportunity is there, but I think of it as a challenge for them, not a negative, but a challenge.

Again, much like Mr. Thomas had done, Mr. Taylor identified "isolated language communities" as having effects on the school, but he failed to see this as *de facto* segregation.

Efrain Salazar had been at Barlow High since 2008 as Barlow High School's Parent Support Specialist. Efrain also believed that the cultural practice of parental involvement was at issue. His remarks were specifically related to the Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) and his concern was related to parental involvement in grade school versus high school. He believed that the challenge in getting parents involved in their PTSA was related to parents not understanding the importance of their role in teenagers' lives, "in and out of school." Efrain commented,

We always struggle with PTSA. I think high school in general struggles with it. More so than the elementary school level. And so that's part of our challenge. Parents feel like they don't need to be as big a part of their student's lives as they did when they were younger. Obviously, it's kind of the reverse. They need them now a lot more because they need support and now that they're making their own decisions and their own relationships. And so as parents we need to be a little more supportive in a different way but unfortunately parents sort of feel like my kids don't want me here so I'm not gonna come.

Barlow High's PTSA meetings were not well attended. I joined one meeting in Spring 2010 with Efrain, five parents (including the PTSA president), three students, and zero teachers. No teacher participation took place at this meeting. When the PTSA had their first meeting of the 2009/2010 academic year, they were still trying to figure out the best practices for parental involvement. The meeting that I attended was held in both Spanish and English. Of the five parents, all were women and all were Latina except one, who was an Anglo American parent and the PTSA treasurer. The PTSA president was Latina and comfortably communicated in Spanish

and English, but the other three Latina parents were more comfortable in Spanish. The PTSA discussed finding someone to translate their by-laws into Spanish. They also discussed holding a cultural night that would represent the diversity of the student body and that would be open to the public. Other issues discussed included how to recruit other parents, having a Teacher Appreciation Day, starting a new initiative called parent coffees, and a new AISD initiative called Parent Connect. Barlow High's PTSA only had 16 active, paying members, but 25 members were needed for the association to have a vote at the district level. The PTSA was small and could not yet wield voting power in the district, but they continued to search for best practices, and they started with addressing the language barriers.

#### **DIVERSITY, SEGREGATION, AND POVERTY**

Poverty was identified in multiple logics of student academic attainment. Here I focus on educators' thoughts on the effects of poverty on mobility rates, violence, and academic achievement. The Texas Education Agency (2010a) reports that 84.9% of Barlow High's 2009/2010 student body was "Economically Disadvantaged." However, Barlow High's principal, Ms. Hanks, suggested that the percentage of "economically disadvantaged" students could be closer to 95%. Ms. Hanks noted that a large portion of the student body did not turn in the paperwork that is administered by the TEA, and she suspected that this was due to students and their families living in the U.S. without documentation that conferred them with the rights of citizenship. Nevertheless, poverty was understood as one of the "outside factors" that gravely affected students' academic performances, and violence was understood as a challenge brought on by poverty. The biggest challenge, Ms. Schofield opined, was the high school's mobility rate, which was understood as being caused by poverty. Mobility rate refers to the permanency of residential settlement, and it is determined by considering the number of students who attended

the same school all four years of high school. Mobility is understood as affecting both attendance and graduation rates. Barlow High's mobility rate was 30.7% during the 2009/2010 academic year compared to AISD's average of 22.6% and the State's average of 18.2%. Thus, during the 2009/2010 academic year, 548 students moved in and out of the different high schools (Texas Education Agency 2010a). In other words, 70% of the students would attend Barlow High throughout their four years of high school. Ms. Schofield attributes the high mobility of North Meadows residents to their status as a poor immigrant community. She explained that highly mobile students inevitably fall behind on school credits and academic knowledge. This lag, she continued, resulted from the toll that moving between different districts and schools had on a student's motivation and desire to excel academically. Ms. Schofield further explained that a student who moves from school to school not only has the challenge of continually recreating meaningful relationships with adults, an essential component of academic success, but the student must also navigate the different curriculum that they encounter at each school. Ms. Schofield shared:

It just takes a toll on the kids. They're exhausted to keep giving that much when its always catch up. You're always playing catch up. When you're always creating those relationships. I think it creates an environment that makes it hard to focus on being successful and studying. So in that way it hurts our graduation rates.

Furthermore, Ms. Schofield added a recent report concluded that Barlow High had the most students in the district that were on track to graduate but were overage, as well as the most students who were off track and overage. She added:

And the part of that that's interesting is the on track and overage, which means they came to us as a ninth grader, or a tenth grader, or whatever already too old for [or] an unusual age for that grade. It is not strange for us to get 18 year old freshman and it's their first time ever being a freshman. So that *kills* graduation rates because it's really hard to convince that kid to stay till 22 to finish things in a normal way.

She added that the state does not accept a two-year graduate. The earliest a student can graduate is in three years, so she not only has to convince overage students to stay in school, but she also has to figure out a way for them to finish in three years.

Aside from viewing poverty as inhibiting families' long-term settlement in one community, poverty was also to blame for violence and gang involvement. Mr. Taylor was of the opinion that a weakness of the community was its "abject poverty." He believed that poverty not only prevented students from partaking in sports and extracurricular activities because of a lack of money, but it could also lead to more dangerous practices, like gang involvement. Mr. Taylor cited the absence of working parents as a possible factor in student gang involvement. He said,

We're in an extremely hardworking community. And I think there is a culture of work that you have in our population that you don't in maybe some of the other Title One schools. I think part of that comes from the immigrant mentality. The acceptance of the fact that hard work is part of the program. We have kids who come from homes where the parents are working two or three jobs, one or both of them. Incredible work ethic and for many of the kids that translates over. For a lot of the kids, especially the new or more recent immigrants they tend to come with this idea of *mejor vida* is paved through education and the parents have instilled that. Some kids get lost amongst the shuffle. Some of them come here, I think, with that and, going into the negative, they get caught up with some of the community concerns where money and influence and power can be earned much quicker than through education and alternate routes. And so there is competing forces out there, but I think the hard work is the general value of our community.

Mr. Fernandez echoed similar sentiments. Mr. Fernandez, however, framed it in terms of freedom. Too much freedom is what led youth down a dangerous route, and this freedom was a result of absent parents who worked multiple jobs to make ends meet. He continued by saying,

Kids are kids and easily and really fast they're gonna find ways to get in trouble and if there's several of them and you don't have that support group, you're gonna get into gangs, which at times I don't think that they understand the consequences and the level of *peligrosity* [*sic*]; danger that they have by getting

involved, getting themselves involved in gangs. They just think it's a group, it's a group that I belong [to], that protect me, and are gonna help me.

Administrators understood that gangs existed in the community, and their response was to keep them out as best they could. Ms. Schofield said:

It's definitely a gang community. And there is a large percentage of kids who get jumped-in in middle school and by the time we get them they're pretty solidly in there.

But she added that the school has a zero tolerance policy. She continued:

We've done, I think, a very good job over the last six, five years of making it clear to the kids that I can't control what you do in the community but its not coming here. This is a school for everybody no matter what you represent so keep it off campus and we'll do everything we can for you.

These efforts climaxed in 2005 and 2006 under Mr. Peña's leadership as principal.

In 2004, Mr. Peña began his four-year tenure as Barlow High's principal. A year later, Ms. Hanks joined the administration as academy director. I was often told that before Mr. Peña's leadership, the gang activity in the community was greatly affecting the mission of the high school. On several occasions I heard various people credit Mr. Peña for "cleaning up" the school. Mr. Thomas posited that Barlow High had first acquired its bad reputation around 2002 and 2003 when the local newspaper was publishing articles about Barlow High's efforts at cracking down on gang activity in their school. Then in 2005/2006, with Ms. Hanks as Academy Director, Barlow High began to take a zero tolerance stance towards gang activity. Ms. Hanks recalls,

I remember one day we sent like about 20 kids at once to the alternative campus because they had been warned [and] they were still grouping up. They were still acting like they were gonna fight and/or [were] fighting and so we just cleared them out. Sadly for those kids it took a hit because not all of them ever came back to school but for the rest of the school it began to make a huge difference.

Mrs. Thomas added that students who were suspected of being gang members were watched closely at Barlow High. Mrs. Thomas added that the minute a student shows up to school wearing gang colors, they are closely monitored. Specifically, the school makes a notation of this in the student's school file, the student is called into the office, is questioned, and is then policed by educators.

I was able to obtain a perspective on Barlow High's zero tolerance gang policy through the experiences of Ignacio Cervantes, a student-parent's brother. Laura Cervantes' younger brother, Ignacio, was eventually removed from Barlow High by the administration because of his suspected gang involvement. I attended Ignacio's removal meeting between Mr. Taylor, Mr. Fernandez, Mrs. Hinojosa, and Laura Cervantes. Thirty minutes prior to the start of this meeting I received a phone call from Laura. Laura was wondering if I was on campus since she was in the front office with her mom waiting to talk to administrators about Ignacio's removal. I asked Laura and Mrs. Hinojosa if I could attend the meeting, and they both agreed. Mrs. Hinojosa only spoke Spanish, so Mr. Fernandez assisted Mr. Taylor with translations. While we waited for the meeting to start, Mr. Taylor and Mr. Fernandez spoke with Laura about her school plans. Laura expressed that she wanted to become an architect, to which Mr. Taylor responded by saying that even the brightest people found an architectural program challenging. Although both administrators were applauding Laura for her academic success and her aspirations, the manner in which they expressed themselves seemed rehearsed, which gave the impression that they were not paying attention to what she was saying nor could they be bothered to have a real conversation with her. Furthermore, the meeting was presented as an opportunity to discuss the school's decision to remove Ignacio from Barlow High and place him at an alternative schooling campus, but the meeting was dominated by the administrators' explanation of their decisions. In

the end, the meeting with the Hinojosa/Cervantes family and Barlow administrators was very much one sided, because, although Mrs. Hinojosa attentively listened, the administrators did not engage her in conversation. After the meeting, I asked Mr. Fernandez if Barlow High had supportive services for families whose children were in gangs, which they did not. He added that there were services at the alternative campus, and that the police department might have some but Barlow High did not. At this point it seemed clear that Barlow High's zero tolerance policy focused on removing and outsourcing the problem.

Later that afternoon I spoke with Ignacio at his home, and he denied being in a gang. However all the signs indicated that he was representing the *Mara Salvatrucha* or MS-13 gang. Ignacio would only wear the gang colors associated with this gang, and he had a small number 13 tattooed on his forearm. I had known Ignacio since he was at Perkins Middle School, and it had always been difficult to discern what Ignacio was truly feeling. Ignacio was very bright and enjoyed joking with me, partly because I took everything so seriously. However, this afternoon he said something that continues to resonate with me. Ignacio expressed that he did not like Barlow High because although administrators and staff argued that they understood, they really did not. In fact, he said that Barlow was built to make them fail. Although I prodded him to tell me what he meant by that, he did not. Ultimately, because of his troubles with school and his continued run-ins with the law, Ignacio was sent to a juvenile detention center operated by the Texas Youth Commission.

#### **DIVERSITY, SEGREGATION, POVERTY, AND CULTURE**

As I have stated earlier, the lack of a critical engagement about society and its affects on youth allows for interpretations that are rooted in deficit-thinking paradigms. As Academy Director and the administrator responsible for meeting with students who are seeking to

withdraw from school, Ms. Schofield also provided a gendered analysis on dropping out at Barlow High School. She added:

I have *a lot* (original emphasis) of conversations particularly with girls and their parents about needing to get married, needing to start their families. And they're relatively young students. Or with the boys about 'hey but my dad says he started working at my age,' that 'schools great, he's glad I got this far, this is so much further than anybody else in my family but its time for me to go to work.' So with those environmental issues there are definitely some cultural issues that we deal with a lot.

Ms. Schofield's explanation of the "cultural issues" that lead to dropping out of school are not new. Many studies suggest that because Latino families are poor they either ask the young men to go to work or seek a partner for their daughters. In many ways these are stereotypical answers, and because they are so stereotypical I cannot help but question their validity.

In my analysis, I suggest that a couple of things could be at play. Although it is likely that students and parents are giving these responses as explanations for why they must withdraw from school, I implore us to at least ponder some alternatives to Ms. Schofield's experiences. First, these explanations are pervasive in the literature, which suggests that educators are also coming across this research. If this were the case then I think it is plausible that educators could project these findings onto their students. If a student goes into a meeting about withdrawing from school, chances are the reason for withdrawing is complicated. If the student does not want to explain the entirety of the situation to a school official, then perhaps the educator suggests a reason, which has been found in the literature. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas had lived across the street from Barlow High in the Glynn Brook neighborhood since 2001. Mr. Thomas remarked that there have been times when students have told him that they were withdrawing from school because they had to return to their native country. But what troubled him, and what he could not explain, was why, weeks later, he would still see these students in the neighborhood but not in

school. Mr. Taylor's experience suggests that we should also be asking if students use the explanation that they are withdrawing from school to return to their native country as a path of least resistance? If a student needs to explain why they are withdrawing from school, they could be offering "forgivable" reasons, like returning to their sending country, and it is also possible that this could apply to other reasons which are forgiven because they are immigrants. Either way, I suggest that we be wary of simplistic explanations for school withdrawal as they suggest simplistic lives.

Mr. Fernandez and Mr. Taylor, on the other hand, did easily identify the complexity of students' lives. As my interview with Mr. Fernandez on Barlow High and its community came to an end, he candidly added that schools were not designed to support immigrant students, which is why, he believed, students would decide not to pursue their education. He said:

...then we have immigrants that I think they lose hope. They come with a lot of intensity and passion and desire to succeed because they're coming to America and the American dream but they get here and then they struggle with the language and then they start losing hope because, in some of the classrooms, prior and Barlow also, even [at] Barlow, sometimes, they are not getting encouragement or motivation and they lose the hope. So then what's the reason? What was the point of me getting an education since I'm just going to end up doing what my parents do, which is clean houses, mow the lawns, do some construction?

Mr. Taylor also suggested that one of the biggest challenges facing students was living in what he called a "shadowed world." He said:

I mean its hard for me to sit and to talk about the opportunities of college when I know that that students is not going to be getting any federal financial aid, I know that there are certain gatekeepers out there for them because of their citizenship status and so that's just a gatekeeper to a lot of kids. The inability of having a pathway to citizenship hurts them. And it hurts them sometimes before they even know it. They feel defeated, they feel like they're being left out of the culture of success or the opportunity to be successful and that they're just kinda playing a game for their parents so they don't go to court. And that they can't go to college cause they can't, haven't seen it. They don't feel it, they don't believe it, and so they quit in school before they really get a chance to see how they can make it.

Mr. Taylor demonstrated an understanding that the American dream was not actually accessible and available to all, and he believed that when students became aware of this mirage, they “quit” playing the game. Unfortunately, he failed to consider the game itself.

Analysis of dropout rates is difficult because the definition itself is not consistent and various sources collect the data (Rumberger and Rodriguez 2011). Still, of all Latino subgroups, people of Mexican origin have less education, and this has real consequences because as workers with less education their earning power is diminished (Rumberger and Rodriguez 2011). However, the difference in earning power between Latinos who have a high school diploma and those Latinos who dropped out is not as large as it is for Whites and Blacks (Rumberger and Rodriguez 2011). In other words, graduating from high school does not significantly improve the earning power of Latinas/os. Furthermore, scholars suggest that schools push Latina/o students out. In her ethnography, *Subtractive Schooling: U.S. – Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*, Angela Valenzuela (1999) powerfully argues that youth are opposed to a schooling process that disrespects them. Thus students demonstrate an opposition to schooling rather than an opposition to education, per se. Based on her research in a Houston public school, Valenzuela found that schools “are organized formally and informally in ways that fracture students' cultural and ethnic identities, creating social, linguistic, and cultural divisions among students and between students and the staff” (1999: 5).

Barlow High students were an exuberant and prideful group of students. The halls of this American high school were like the halls of many American high schools, full of loud obnoxious teenagers; however, this high school was Latina/o. Latina/o students owned those hallways, but the school itself was not exclusively Latina/o. Furthermore, while some cultural traits like “pride” could find acceptable forms of expression in the school, i.e. the paintings of cultural

icons as acknowledgment and celebration of the diversity on campus, at other times, other expressions of “pride” were less acceptable. For instance, one April afternoon while I waited to volunteer in Ms. Nelson’s AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) class, a male student approached and asked me if I would sponsor their “Hispanic Club.” I inquired about his interest in starting such a club. He explained that at one time there had been a Spanish club, but it was not very popular, which is why he wanted to organize a “Hispanic Club.” He elaborated on his vision, and he said that he wanted to celebrate popular Mexican holidays that celebrate national pride as well as students and teachers, specifically *Cinco de Mayo*, *Día del Niño*, and *Día del Maestro*. Unfortunately, because I was not a teacher, I was unable to sponsor his proposed club that celebrated a specific ethnic identity, and I did not follow this student’s quest. Still I found it interesting that this student saw an opportunity and need for such a club because of the predominance of Latinas/os on campus and given that no such celebration of the school’s ethnic identity existed. Also of importance was that he envisioned a “Hispanic Club” and not a “Spanish Club,” which suggested his belief that reinforcing cultural traits and holidays that celebrate students and teachers would be a positive attribute to campus life.

Another example of less acceptable forms of pride was students’ and families’ expressions of support. In fact, I was captivated by how students supported and expressed their enthusiasm for one another during various school performances. What made Barlow High unique to me was student expressions of support for one another, especially of those who may have been already ostracized by society because of mental or physical challenges. I attended games, dance recitals, band concerts, and academic award ceremonies, and no matter who was performing or the caliber of the performance, there was always a roaring applause from parents and students alike. But often administrators did not find this type of support appropriate. On several

occasions I witnessed administrators remind the audience of “appropriate” forms of appreciation, which did not include loud exaggerated excitement, whistling, and hollering. Moreover, even though school officials tried to curtail audience responses at certain events, the audience often ignored their request and showed their support on their terms.

In the end, Barlow High struggled to graduate its students, not to mention get its student-body college ready and enrolled in college. They understood these outcomes as engendered by the challenges posed by “outside” forces, specifically immigrant status and poverty. The position that diversity was a positive attribute of Barlow High School was turned on its head through the observation that Barlow High School was a segregated and a predominately Latina/o high school in which students often interacted with one another in Spanish, while receiving instruction and interacting with teachers and administrators in English. Latina/o students lived their social life in the halls of Barlow High school in Spanish, while Latina/o lunch ladies fed them, Latina/o custodians cleaned up after them, African Americans policed and protected them,<sup>79</sup> and Anglo Americans and/or middle-class Americans policed and guided them into America. Furthermore, administrators believed that the cultural, ethnic, and racial boundaries on campus were erased by the need to strive. The diversity on campus was seen as natural and not a topic that needed to be addressed and encouraged by the school. But in doing so, it also ignored those specific histories that explained the position of immigrants and people of color in the United States.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

North Meadows has undergone rapid changes, however, the United States, as a part of a globalized society, helped create the material conditions of North Meadows. In spite of this, the

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<sup>79</sup> The three security officers at Barlow High School were African American.

expectation was that individuals must strive to be incorporated. Many of Barlow High School's growing pains had to do with educating in an urban transnational landscape. The "diversity" of the school was seen as a strength, but Barlow High School was far from a utopian example of integration. Indeed, administrators and staff more easily identified challenges than strengths in the schooling process, and those challenges were overwhelming about Latinas/os. The fact is that Barlow High School was a segregated school in a highly segregated school district. As noted earlier, Valencia (2011b) concludes that, as a general rule, segregation of students of color is negatively related to academic achievement. Segregation has negative academic and social consequences. Socially, segregation leads to exclusion from inter-ethnic and inter-racial contact, and students of color and White students need to live and learn amongst one another in order to build a tolerant society.

In North Meadows, residents and educators were borderlanding, that is, mutually constructing a borderlands experience in a geographic space, which was structured by laws, policies, and ideologies. While residents lived their lives through deterritorialized identities, Educators tried to guide students into an idealized conception of multicultural America. I argue that most educators genuinely cared about their students. Barlow High was an environment in which students could interact in Spanish and doing so made them appear a little less different and more like any other teenager – loud, obnoxious, and jovial. However, educators were unable to critically consider the larger structural components that shaped the schooling experiences of their students, which prohibited them from creating the multicultural world they thought was ideal. Scholars argue that segregation has a negative effect on academic achievement, but educators viewed "linguistically isolated" communities as the problem. In effect, "linguistic isolated" communities describe segregated environments but fail to consider the historical and present-day

forces that maintain segregation. Furthermore, educators continued to create differences by seeing the challenges as “outside forces.”

Barlow High, in the end, felt ill-equipped to address the “needs” of their students as a school, and enlisted the help of A-Space. In the following chapter I will discuss the intervention and prevention efforts that Barlow High School took as a response to their pregnant and parenting student population. My analysis in the following chapter relies on a critical perspective of “at-risk youth.” Soo Ah Kwon (2013) writes, “Disturbingly, youth of color are not often imagined as futures agents of democracy, but as objects already under suspicion and state surveillance and regulation” (7). Indeed, Barlow High’s educators were not only supposed to assist in the cultural crossing over of student, but they were also building citizens in a neoliberal democracy, which entailed monitoring and policing youth. Barlow’s educators not only identified and labeled “at-risk youth,” but they also referred them to A-Space, a nonprofit organization that continued the effort of constructing neoliberal subjects. On “at-risk youth,” Kwon writes, “These youth (often poor, minority, and urban) are constructed and understood as an “at-risk” population in need of intervention, whether that takes the form of care or punishment...In other words, powers that promote youth empowerment are not separate from those of youth criminalization” (2013: 7 – 8). The following chapter focuses on the content of teenage pregnancy prevention and intervention strategies at Barlow High School, which were built around ideas of empowerment and self-responsibility. Speaking from her ethnographic research with a youth activist nonprofit in Oakland, California, Kwon writes, “‘Empowerment’ operates...as a strategy of self-governance to make the powerless and politically apathetic act on their own behalf, not necessarily to oppose the relations of power that made them powerless” (2013: 11).

## **“Where the whole story begins.”**

### **Isabella Diaz**

Isabella Diaz<sup>80</sup> was 17 years old, a senior at Barlow High School, and the mother of seventeen-month old Diego when I met her in the spring semester of 2009. Isabella and Diego lived most often with Isabella’s maternal grandparents, in the northeastern section of the North Meadows area of Austin. However, Isabella occasionally stayed with her mother and two sisters. Although she was very quiet in that semester’s Pregnant and Parenting Support Group (PPSG), she took her role as mother to seventeen-month old Diego very seriously. She was eager to learn about best parenting practices, and she was cognizant of her evolving role as a young adult. I witnessed Isabella’s confidence grow as she graduated high school and went on to get a job working with her aunt at a daycare center. She explained the day she met Fernando, Diego’s father, as life changing given that many of her joys and struggles had been shaped by that fateful day.

Isabella is a third generation Mexican American whose paternal and maternal grandparents immigrated to Texas from Mexico. Isabella’s living situation was unconventional since she split her time between her maternal grandparents’ home and her mother’s, Stacy’s, home. However, Isabella was most comfortable living with her maternal grandparents since they had raised her. She explained that she refers to her grandmother as “mom” and refers to her birth mother by her first name. She also clarified that when she spoke of “home” she was referring to her “mom’s” house or her grandmother’s home. Stacy had also been a teenage mother, and she

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<sup>80</sup> I met Isabella when I first started my data collection in January of 2009. Isabella is the only student-parent whose participation began during the 2008/2009 academic year at Barlow High School and her participation extended into the following academic year. She participated in A-Space’s Pregnant and Parenting Support Group (PPSG). In total, I collected 28 hours of data from Isabella – 4.5 hours of Informal Interviews, 1 hour of a Formal Interview, which was recorded, and 22.5 hours of Observations during the PPSG (15 hours), in A-Space (5.5 hours), and during a March of Dimes walk (3 hours).

had given birth to Isabella at the age of thirteen. Stacy had three daughters in total. She had her second daughter, Amber, when she was sixteen and had her youngest daughter, Maggie, less than a year before Isabella had Diego. Stacy left her parent's home to live with Isabella's father, Daniel, shortly after Isabella was born and left Isabella in her parent's care. Isabella had been raised alongside her aunts and uncles for the first ten years of her life. Although Isabella's grandparents had legal custody of her, she saw Stacy almost every day while growing up. She called both her birth mother and birth father by their first names but expressed that this was unsettling and made her feel "bad." Isabella had a strained relationship with her birth parents, especially her mother, but as a teenage mother herself, Isabella recognized the hardships that Stacy had endured while raising her sisters "all by herself." Isabella explained that her dad, Daniel, was "back and forth," meaning that he was in and out of the family picture. She explained that he battled with substance abuse, which was a source of conflict between Stacy and him. Daniel and Stacy were both of Mexican descent and had both grown up in Austin.

Fernando, Diego's father, is also Mexican American and the couple was still together and co-parenting Diego when I met Isabella. During my research period he did not have steady employment, which left Isabella and her grandparents as Diego's primary providers. When I met Isabella she worked at a pizza chain restaurant located in North Meadows. She had obtained the job through Barlow High School's work program, and she had been employed there for a year. The work program gave her credit for holding a job and dismissed her from school an hour and a half before the official end of day. Isabella also had an "off period," meaning she was not required to take a course and instead she worked as an office aide for A-Space. When I first began recruiting research participants in January of 2009, five student-mothers from A-Space's PPSG expressed interest in participating, but of those five only Isabella actually participated in

this study. Since she was A-Space's office aide, I often saw her in the office and I was able to build a relationship with her.

One afternoon Isabella and I met in A-Space's group room, and we discussed her experiences growing up in North Meadows. She described her younger self as very obedient and considered herself a "good person." She said that although she acted "cool," she never gave into peer pressure. She reasoned she was a "good person" because while her friends "smoked weed and went out to clubs," she did not. She explained that her resistance to this peer pressure was out of fear of getting into trouble with her school and with her grandparents. She described her grandfather as very strict, and she also contended with his constant accusations that she was, or would grow up to be, just like her mother. Isabella admitted that this upset her because she "tried hard to be good," even if she did have "an attitude" like her mother and "talked back." Regarding the comparison, she said, "that would make me angry because I wanted to be my own person." She interpreted the comparison as a "bad thing" because she tried hard *not* to be like her mother. Isabella explained that she wanted to be a positive role model, and she felt that Stacy's actions of leaving one child and then having another one demonstrated bad decision-making and bad behavior.

This same afternoon she also described the day she officially met Fernando. She liked to refer to this as "where the whole story begins." Isabella and Fernando met the very last day of her eighth grade year, and she had the date, May 24<sup>th</sup>, ingrained in her memory. On that day in 2005, she and her friend, Maria, were to carry out their master plan of skipping the last day of school at Turner Middle School, a middle school that feeds into Barlow High School. Isabella and Maria each had a boyfriend who lived in a neighborhood apartment complex. The plan started with their boyfriends' friend picking them up from school. Isabella and Maria knew the

friend, Fernando, but Isabella had never formally met him. Fernando was supposed to take the friends back to his apartment complex where the boyfriends also lived, and they planned to hang out all day. Isabella and Maria were supposed to return to school before the final bell dismissed the school for summer break, but nothing went according to plan. The girls had walked off campus with the help of a security guard, and they waited for Fernando to pick them up; but fearing he was not coming, they walked to the apartment complex. The three teens eventually met up, and they waited for the girls' boyfriends in Fernando's family's apartment. When the boyfriends showed up, the girls thought it would be humorous to pretend they were not there, so they hid in another room to watch their boyfriends' reactions. Eventually their laughter gave them away, but the boyfriends were not amused by the prank, and they left. Isabella and Maria stayed and spent the rest of the day with Fernando.

When the time came to return to school, Maria did not want to go back, and she asked Isabella to stay with her. Isabella recalled that although she knew that her grandparents would be upset, she agreed to stay with Maria. The group of friends then went swimming at another apartment complex. Fernando and Isabella had been flirting in the pool and in a moment of isolation, Fernando kissed Isabella on the cheek, and, within minutes, the teens were holding hands. She first described the innocent flirtatious incident as "weird." She continued and tried to explain that the chemistry between she and Fernando made her disregard the fact that she already had a boyfriend. She added, "The whole thing just seemed right." After the friends had their fill of swimming, they went back to Fernando's house, and Enrique, Isabella's actual boyfriend, joined the group. Then, the day transitioned from one of joy to one of tremendous anxiety. Enrique's mother called Fernando's mother to let him know that he needed to go home because the police were looking for Isabella.

Isabella's grandparents had gone to pick her up from school, but when they discovered that she was not there, they worried and reported her as a runaway. Isabella explained that she and Maria began to understand the gravity of the situation when they realized that a lot of people were searching for them. After retelling the dramatic events, she said, "Now that I think about it, I don't know, sometimes, I'm kinda glad that that happened. Cause, I don't know, I like being with my boyfriend. I love him a lot." She also said that she often contemplated that perhaps she should have never "run away," but the thought led her to think that had she not done those things, then she may have never met her boyfriend; and, worse still, she might still be with Enrique. She added that Enrique is a cheater and the lessons or life she would have had with Enrique may not have been so positive. Interestingly, in the life that could have been with Enrique, she also included a pregnancy. She said,

If I would have been with my ex-boyfriend, I see myself with a child stuck, basically. And not being together no more. That's how I think I would've seen it. So I'm kinda glad it [the events] did happen. Sometimes. Sometimes no. Sometimes yes.

Her feelings of regret stemmed from the disappointment she caused her grandparents. She continued, "Sometimes no because my parents [grandparents] got upset but its [the ending] happy because I got to know my boyfriend and now I got a beautiful baby." Isabella and Fernando met at the end of her eighth grade year, when she was 14 and he was 16 years old. Isabella and Fernando got pregnant two years later when she was a sophomore, and she gave birth to Diego at the age of 16 when she was a junior. Fernando, on the other hand, had withdrawn from school by the time Diego was born, and he had not graduated from high school.

The Catholic Church was also very important to Isabella. As a child her grandparents took her to church every Sunday, but they had inexplicably stopped attending when Isabella was 10 years old. When I met her, she was attending baptismal classes. She explained that if felt

“nice” to go to church and that because of it she prayed more, she had a stronger bond with her grandmother, and she felt more comfortable. Isabella found refuge in praying, and her grandmother had also returned to Church and attended with Isabella. Isabella, however, wished she had greater support from Fernando. Isabella explained that Fernando did not share the same passion for religious devotion, and that he “did not like going to church.” She wished Fernando felt differently, and she believed that he had “gotten too far away from the church.” She wished he had a closer relationship with God, and that they could raise Diego in the Church. She also said that if it was up to her, and if it were economically feasible, she would enroll Diego in Catholic school. Fernando, however, did not agree that the Catholic Church was the best environment for his son.

The logistics of co-parenting were challenging, but the couple fought hard to figure it out. One particularly significant event involved the Texas Attorney General’s Office Child Support Division.<sup>81</sup> Isabella had received a letter from the Texas Attorney General’s Office, which “requested” that Isabella file a claim for child support since Diego received Medicaid without child support.<sup>82</sup> This caused a great deal of stress for the teenage couple because Fernando did not have steady employment, and he also had an outstanding warrant. In the end, he agreed to attend the appointment. I accompanied the couple to the child support office, and it was the first time I met Fernando. The couple waited in different parts of the waiting room. I sat next to Isabella, and she explained that Fernando was nervous about the meeting with the Attorney General’s Office. In the end, the couple and the Attorney General’s Office agreed not to officially file child support papers, as long as Fernando agreed to provide fifty-one dollars a month to Isabella and Diego. Isabella never had any interest of filing child support papers

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<sup>81</sup> I discuss this incident further in *Chapter Six*.

<sup>82</sup> Isabella had been told that her failure to appear at the Attorney General Office’s Child Support Division would lead to a court summons.

because, although Fernando was not the breadwinner in their family, he was, nonetheless, a part of their family unit. After the Attorney General's Office meeting I asked her if she and Fernando planned on getting married, and she answered that she would like to marry Fernando, but not at that moment in time. She explained that they had talked about marriage, but Fernando wanted to wait until they had enough money and steady work to provide for the family. Isabella graduated high school in 2009, but we kept in touch and met a couple of times during the following year. Before graduating high school she was exploring different career options related to childcare, and after graduation she obtained a job with her aunt at a daycare.

## **Chapter Six: “Performing Triage”: Pregnancy, Schooling, and Citizen-Building in the 21st Century**

The national discourse on teenage pregnancy contends that teenage pregnancy is a social problem because it is a barrier to educational and economic prosperity. Preventing teenage pregnancy is thus unquestionably the solution to resolving this problem. However, teenage pregnancy prevention is also fraught with competing political agendas, and, therefore, access to contraception has not been constructed as the solution. Nathanson (1991) has illustrated in her analysis of U.S. policy concern with women’s reproductive behavior that the solution to a social problem depends on the construction of the problem. Thus because the problem of teenage pregnancy has been constructed as an economic issue, more specifically, irresponsible reproductive behavior that leads to poverty, the solution is teaching responsible behavior. This construction of the solution also maintains that the immorality of adolescent sexual lives is at the core of the debate. This chapter focuses on Barlow High’s response to teenage pregnancies at their school since reproductive behavior is central to my social analysis. Between the spring of 2009 and the spring of 2010, Barlow High’s response to teenage pregnancy was overwhelmingly about intervention and less about prevention, although preventative efforts were also present and require thoughtful analysis.<sup>83</sup> Barlow High School’s responses to teenage pregnancy and their preventative efforts illustrate how the discourse of teenage pregnancy prevention gets reproduced, which ultimately reproduces gendered, classed, and raced notions of teenage pregnancy in a stratified society. Moreover, Barlow High’s response to teenage pregnancy not only reinforced the gendered, classed, and raced positions of Latinas in the United States, but its prevention and intervention strategies highlighting the state’s efforts at constructing neoliberal subjects (Ali 2002; Kwon 2013).

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<sup>83</sup> A-Space reported that it provided services to 23 pregnant and parenting students during the 2009/2010 academic year with an additional 10 pregnant and parenting students who had been retired and no longer received services.

In this chapter I first discuss the relationship between teenage pregnancy prevention and schooling, highlighting sex education in Texas and Barlow High's teenage pregnancy prevention efforts. I then introduce the reader to A-Space, and I continue my discussion about prevention efforts in Barlow High School. I end this chapter with a discussion about Barlow High's intervention strategies, which included A-Space's support groups and a new effort – the high school's accredited parenting class for pregnant and parenting students. I argue that much like its “gang problem” on campus, Barlow High “outsourced” its pregnant and parenting students to A-Space, which provided social services within the school to this population. This “outsourcing” of students deserves attention, and it should be understood as a part of neoliberal governance in which empowerment and self-responsibility are not only taught as the idealized notion of subjecthood, but multiple civil institutions are in place to facilitate the citizen-building process. This case study illustrates that when the schooling process of citizen building fails, i.e. the student exhibits supposed deviant behavior, students may be “outsourced” to the nonprofit sector, where the citizen-building effort is continued and reinforced. Citizen-building is transferred from the purview of the government to that of nonprofits; and while the nonprofit sector is often viewed apart from state institutions and governmentality, it operates within the same ideological frameworks as the state, participates in market-based capitalism, and reproduces notions of citizenship and responsibility (Kwon 2013). Finally, I argue that Barlow High was able to easily reproduce gendered, classed, and raced notions of belonging because of punitive education policies that worked in tandem with the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem.

## **FEDERAL AND STATE SEX EDUCATION POLICY**

In our recent past, pregnancies of any kind, including those of teachers, were not permitted in schools, lest a pregnancy send students messages about sex. The practice of removing pregnant teenage girls from school was a widespread customary practice for dealing with a high school teenage pregnancy before the United States Supreme Court protected the rights of teenage mothers with the passage of Title IX of the Education Act of 1972 (Luttrell 2003; Pillow 2004). Title IX of the Education Act of 1972 is also significant because it marks the first time in which teen pregnancy and education were linked as a legislative issue. However, the discourse of teenage pregnancy prevention and schooling relates back to the role of government, via schools, in promoting adolescent sexuality (Carlson 1992; Levin 2002; Sears 1992). For that reason, it is of little wonder that the National Campaign's proposed solution to the Latina/o teenage pregnancy problem does not focus on improving public school's sex education programs, but instead suggests that social service providers help Latina/o parents teach their children the value in delaying family formation and help them learn how to talk to their children about sex. While I agree that family communication about sex is integral to building one's knowledge about sexual health, it should be recognized that making families solely responsible for sexual health education is rooted in the politics of sexuality and sexual health in the United States. Teaching sex education is required in most public schools, as the topic falls under the rubric of health curriculum. However, communities have fought hard to keep abstinence-only sexual health curriculum a federal government legislative priority (Carlson 1992; Levin 2002; Sears 1992).

Controversy over federal regulation of adolescent sexuality education programs has continued to flourish over the last several decades. Between 1996 and 2005, Congress allocated \$1.1 billion dollars (in both federal and state matching funds) for sexuality education programs

that promote abstinence-only-until-marriage (abstinence-only) curriculum and allocated zero dollars for comprehensive sexuality education programs. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) grants abstinence-only education funding to states, local communities, and private organizations through three funding streams - the Adolescent Family Life programs (AFL), Title V from Section 510(b) of the Social Security Act of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (also known as the Welfare Reform Act) of 1996, and Community Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) grants under Section 1110 of the Social Security Act. Abstinence-only education is defined in Section 510(b)(2) of the Social Security Act, hereon referred to as Title V, as:

...an educational or motivational program that (a) has as its exclusive purpose, teaching the social, psychological, and health gains of abstaining from sexual activity; (b) teaches abstinence-only from sexual activity outside of marriage as the expected standard for all school-age children; (c) teaches that abstinence-only is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and associated health problems; (d) teaches that a mutually faithful monogamous relationship within marriage is the expected standard of human sexual activity; (e) teaches that sexual activity outside of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects; (f) teaches that bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents, and society; (g) teaches young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increases vulnerability to sexual advances; and, (h) teaches the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sex (United States Congress, House Committee on Energy and Commerce 2002).

Grantees receiving federal money for sexuality education programs through Title V, AFL, or CBAE are required to meet this eight-point definition. Of the eight points, only one of these points addresses sex and its consequences, albeit in value-laden terms. Point (c) suggests that sex before marriage should be avoided or else one risks a pregnancy before marriage, sexually transmitted diseases, and other unspecified health problems. The remaining seven points address and teach that sex before marriage is immoral. Abstinence-only sex education does not address contraception because adolescent sexuality is conceived as immoral. Those opposed to the use

of federal funds exclusively for abstinence-only education programs argue that this debate is one rooted in moral ideology against public health. That is, they argue that the provision of taxpayer dollars for abstinence-only education programs is rooted in efforts to promote marriage as the foundation of American family values and to stigmatize adolescent sexuality in efforts to prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies (Carlson 1992; Levin 2002; Sears 1992).

On the other hand, comprehensive sexuality education seeks to eliminate the value-laden perspectives on sex, and it seeks to include information about contraception. Advocates for Youth, an organization committed to program development and policy advocacy for adolescent sexual health, describes comprehensive sexuality education as “sex ed [which] stresses abstinence-only *and* [emphasis mine] includes age-appropriate, medically accurate information about contraception...also developmentally appropriate, introducing information on relationships, decision-making, assertiveness, and skill building to resist social/peer pressure, depending on grade level” (Advocates for Youth N.d). Furthermore, the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), an organization that calls itself “the national voice for sexuality education, sexual health, and sexual rights for over 40 years” suggests that comprehensive school-based sexuality education should be:

...appropriate to students’ age, developmental level, and cultural background [and] should be an important part of the education program at every grade. A comprehensive sexuality program will respect diversity of values and beliefs represented in the community and will complement and augment the sexuality education children receive from their families, religious and community groups, and health care professionals (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States N.d.).

Furthermore, despite research that shows that abstinence-only programs are ineffective at preventing teenage pregnancy, and that many of them do not present medically or scientifically accurate information, the federal government has been in the teen pregnancy prevention business

for three decades. Sex, even not talking about sex, is a business. In 2010, the federal government revived the Abstinence Education Program, in which states must provide a 43% match of funds in order to receive federal funding for abstinence-only sex education. However, that year the federal government finally expanded their position that sex education should only focus on teaching about the immoral nature of sex before marriage, and it gave states a funding source for implementing evidence-based pregnancy prevention programs. This funding source was distributed through the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) and was considered “free” money. States did not have to provide matching funds to receive the grant.

Texas, the state with the 4th highest teenage pregnancy and birth rate and highest in repeat teenage pregnancies, does not require that sex education be taught in its public schools. However, since 1995, the state of Texas has been an abstinence-only sex education state, and it receives more federal money for abstinence-only sex education than any other state. In 2010, Texas did not apply for the “free money” that came with implementing evidence-based programs offered by the PREP funds. Instead, Texas opted to continue to advocate that abstinence-only sex education works.<sup>84</sup> The Texas Freedom Network (TFN), an organization, which “acts as the state’s watchdog, monitoring far-right issues, organizations, money and leaders,” (Texas Freedom Network N.d.) found that 94% of school districts in Texas teach abstinence-only sex education, while 2% of school districts do not teach *any* sex education curriculum, and 3.2% of school districts teach more than abstinence-only (Wiley et al. N.d.). Furthermore, TFN’s evaluation of sex education curriculum in the State of Texas concludes that Texas students are taught falsified information about contraception, and that they are taught that sexuality is bad,

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<sup>84</sup> In contrast, the state of California, which used to have the distinction, before the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as having the highest teenage pregnancy rates, has refused federal funding for abstinence-only sex education since 2005, and is, today, a state with the lowest teenage pregnancy and birth rates in the union.

often equating premarital sex with death. Most importantly, the TFN found, in 2004, that 90% of Texans surveyed want medically accurate sex information taught in their schools.

Still, sex education in Texas is highly politicized, and sex education legislative policy is created in four hierarchically organized government entities. At the bottom of that hierarchy are School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs), followed by the Local School Board, then the State Board Of Education, and finally the legislature. SHACs are designed and organized to receive community input about the health curriculum in their schools. The purpose of the SHACs is to give community input to the school district. From TFN's perspective, participating in one's local SHAC is the first step in obtaining sex education curriculum that is not abstinence-only. In Austin, the Austin Independent School District (AISD) is an abstinence-plus school district. Abstinence-plus means that abstinence is stressed, but each school is allowed to expand the abstinence curriculum by seeking outside resources, pre-approved by AISD. Despite this contextual progressiveness, resources still must be, first, sought out, and, secondly, approved by the district. Barlow High's principal, Ms. Hanks, declined to give her opinion on sex education polices in Texas, reasoning that she had a duty to support "my board," that is the State Board of Education. Besides, she trusted that students came to high school knowing about sex and knowing how to use contraceptives. She assumed students were "opting to not" use contraceptives. Ms. Hanks believed that students made a personal choice when choosing to opt out, and she considered "knowing the consequences" as an effective prevention effort.

### **BARLOW HIGH SCHOOL'S TEENAGE PREGNANCY PREVENTION EFFORTS**

A consequence-based approach to sex education was taught to students at Barlow High in a number of ways. The first is through abstinence-only sex education curriculum, which teaches that adolescent sexuality is immoral and teenage pregnancy is irresponsible. Another popular

effort is the mechanical baby dolls that students are required to take care of. The health department used these dolls to teach students about the responsibility it takes to care for a baby. A third consequence-based approach to sex education was programming offered by Youth On the Move, an organization that envisions their mission as developing youth service programs to empower youth and to solve social issues. Specifically, Barlow High supplemented their sex education program with peer educators from Youth On The Move's *Real Talk: Teen Parenting is No Joke* program. *Real Talk* is a program that hires and trains teen parents to give talks at local middle and high schools about the "rights, responsibilities, and realities of teenage parenting."<sup>85</sup> Youth On The Move created the *Real Talk* program in partnership with the Texas Office of The Attorney General's Child Support Division. In 2006, Youth On The Move received a \$1.2 million grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services under the "Promoting Responsible Fatherhood" program.

In November of 2008, I sat in on two *Real Talk* presentations to Barlow High's health classes. These health classes were mixed gendered with predominately Latina/o students. Both presentations took place over a period of two days, covering the peer educators' personal experiences with teenage pregnancy and also stressing the importance of establishing paternity. The sharing of peer educators' experiences, along with a discussion of the costs of raising a child, were intended to prevent teenage pregnancy and adolescent sexuality by scaring the student. The *Real Talk* presentations were interesting, especially because the Texas Office of The Attorney General's Child Support Division created the *Real Talk* program. Thus, in these presentations the peer educators talked extensively about the importance and "how to" of establishing paternity. Through *Real Talk*, the State of Texas taught its students that fathers are financially responsible for the care of their children, not the state. This effort by the state was

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<sup>85</sup> Source withheld to protect the anonymity of the organization.

brought into sharp focus for me when Isabella Diaz, a student-parent cultural informant, spoke to me in April of 2009 about a troubling letter she had received from The Attorney General's Office.

Isabella was the only student I had recruited early on in my efforts, and she was preparing to graduate with the class of 2009. Isabella had a seventeen month old son, Diego, with her boyfriend of four years, Fernando, and she was A-Space's student worker her senior year. One April morning in 2009n, we both arrived to find A-Space's doors locked, which gave us an opportunity to talk while we waited for someone to unlock the doors. It was at that time that I found out that she was greatly concerned by a letter she had received from The Attorney General's Office, which was trying to gather information about Fernando, Diego's father. Diego had been receiving Medicaid benefits with Isabella's grandfather listed as head of household and with Isabella's wages from her part-time job. The Attorney General's Office, which is responsible for Medicaid, was trying to establish paternity in Diego's case so that the state would no longer be responsible for his care. They hoped to do so by forcing Fernando to pay child support. This was distressing for Isabella for a number of reasons. Most importantly, she was worried that if she and Fernando attended the state-mandated meeting, then Fernando would be jailed because of an unsettled warrant. This warrant, Isabella explained, had been issued because of unpaid parking tickets, and the couple was worried that appearing before the state would lead to Fernando's arrest. Furthermore, Fernando did not have a job, and Isabella and Fernando were still together as boyfriend and girlfriend and they co-parented Diego. The couple viewed the actions of the state as causing stress in their relationship. I helped Isabella look into the matter, and I found out that the state would continue to file these child support papers as long as the child is receiving state aid. In the end, after Isabella had been reassured that the Attorney

General's Office would not get involved with Fernando's outstanding warrant, she convinced Fernando that it was in their best interest to attend the Attorney General's Office meeting.

This episode caused great stress in this couple's lives. It demonstrated that, although Fernando was emotionally but not financially involved in Isabella and Diego's lives, Isabella and Diego were still dependent on the state. Furthermore, this relationship with the state was also fraught with anxiety for the state's ability to potentially take Fernando away. The state's efforts to make individual's "responsible" and the state's position that their interest is in the child's welfare are destabilized when we witness the stress and anxiety that these measures cause. The management of teenage pregnancy is not only about reproductive capacity, but it is also about the role of the state. Thus, there is an uncanny resemblance to international family-planning projects in non-western states, which, as Ali (2002) argues, are also about constructing the modern subject. Youth On The Move's *Real Talk* program is presented as a pregnancy prevention program with peer educators telling students the real consequences of teenage parenthood, but with its support from the State of Texas, it simultaneously tries to construct the neoliberal subject.

Ali's conclusions about family-planning initiatives in Egypt in the early 1990s includes that they are "embedded in the liberal narrative of managing populations with their own consent (2002: 59)." Ali's conclusions are based on definitions of modern personhood, which he says

"is constructed in this discussion of rights with a substantive 'core,' which has a capacity to reason and exercise moral judgment (Poovey 1992; Butler 1990). This understanding of Western political and legal thought situates the substantive core of the human being within the construction of the autonomous individual that can act freely of its own choice" (2002: 59).

In Egypt, this modern, autonomous self was achieved through the use of contraception and having smaller families, but in Barlow High School, one way of achieving this type of

autonomous self was by making good moral decisions, primarily avoiding adolescent sexuality and graduating high school. Furthermore, an individual's reliance on the state is presented as not fully responsible, not fully autonomous, and not fully worthy of citizenship. Any transgression that does not lead to a middle class lifestyle is constructed as an individual choice and as a refusal to participate. However, for some, especially teenage mothers, failing to comply with these constructions of subjecthood leads to other reform efforts. I will return to this argument when I discuss intervention strategies at Barlow High School.

### **A-SPACE**

Along with the sexual health curriculum, which stressed abstinence-only, the mechanical babies, and the *Real Talk*, a segment of Barlow High's student body also received sex education and teenage pregnancy prevention messages through A-Space. Ms. Schofield, the academy director, believed that the school had a responsibility to teach the scientific aspect of the reproductive body. She added that questions of morality and values should not impede what is taught in sex education and that families should be responsible for teaching the "morality piece of sex." However, as I have already mentioned, the school saw their position as limited in what they could teach and in their reach. For this reason A-Space in Barlow High stepped in and offered sex education to both parents and students. However, A-Space had to comply with AISD's abstinence-plus sex education policy and, technically, were not allowed to discuss contraception with AISD students. Furthermore, A-Space only worked with a fraction of the school's population and their efforts were either in the early stages of development or they relied on resources that reproduced gendered, classed, and raced definitions of sexuality and teenage pregnancy. Nevertheless, their sex education efforts included a sex-talk workshop with parents

of A-Space student-clients,<sup>86</sup> presentations to A-Space student-clients by Janice Kipling with Girl Empowerment, working with Peer Assisted Leaders (PALS), and sex education, with a focus on contraceptive use, with the pregnant and parenting students.

A-Space had been operating in Barlow High School since 1994. Employee turnover at A-Space was high, and, thus, various individuals had managed A-Space in Barlow over the years. As mentioned earlier, social workers and licensed counselors managed A-Space, and they, along with their staff of caseworkers, interns, and volunteers, served “at-risk” youth. In this context, the term “at-risk” referred specifically to a student’s likelihood of dropping out of school because of external hardships that affected her/his school performance. Moreover, the label of ‘at-risk,’ for the purposes of A-Space in Barlow, was ascribed to a student by Barlow High’s administrators and teachers. In other words, teachers and administrators were responsible for policing and labeling “at-risk” youth.

Most, if not all, pregnant students were referred to A-Space, but other reasons for referral included a student’s behavior or issues related to poverty. A-Space typically had more referrals than they had the capacity to serve. However, not all students who were referred to A-Space were provided with services given that parent permission was needed, and a number of students never returned these forms. In some respects, A-Space served the most marginalized students<sup>87</sup> in an already struggling high school. However, students suspected of gang affiliation were typically excluded from being referred to A-Space. Barlow High School’s zero tolerance policy meant that students suspected of gang affiliation were warned of the school’s suspicions of their gang affiliation, and they warned that a continual display of gang symbolism would get them kicked out of school.

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<sup>86</sup> I will refer to A-Space’s clients as student-clients to stress that the relationship between A-Space and the student is based on the student’s identity as student.

<sup>87</sup> At least those identified by Barlow High’s administrators and staff.

Nevertheless, A-Space served Barlow High's "at-risk" youth by providing their student-clients with either one or more of the following: one-on-one counseling, grief counseling, freshman assistance, and/or access to empowerment groups organized around such topics as female empowerment, healthy relationships, male leadership, and pregnant and parenting support. Additionally, all student-clients who participated in any of A-Space's programming were case managed. Case management meant providing the student with community resources that were available to them and their situation and/or helping the student and her/his family wrangle the bureaucracy of government programs. Case management also included monitoring a student-client's behavioral and/or academic progress. A-Space in Barlow not only provided self-empowerment groups and crisis counseling, but, over the course of this research, they also participated and/or organized and provided health fairs and workshops. Finally, in order to successfully operate in a school, A-Space pushed forward their image as a "safe place" or "safety zone" so that students saw A-Space as distinct and apart from the rest of the school, and, unlike the school, anything could be discussed "free of judgment" while in A-Space.

The following incident of one student's referral to A-Space captured not only her referral process but also Barlow's reliance on A-Space, as well as, A-Space's presentation of itself to the prospective student-client. One afternoon I found myself alone in A-Space as everyone else was either busy with student-clients, at a meeting, or simply not in the office. I had been sitting at Melissa's, the Pregnant and Parenting Caseworker, desk, working on some notes, when assistant principal, Mr. Taylor, came by looking for Grace Peterson. Grace had been out of the office at a meeting so I offered to relay the message. Mr. Taylor had a student in the nurse's office whom he said was suicidal, and he wanted to "extend all their available resources to the student." Upon her return, I gave Grace the message, and, just as she was leaving for the nurse's office, Mr.

Taylor returned with a student. On his second visit in the same afternoon, Mr. Taylor was accompanied by a female student who he was referring to A-Space. Mr. Taylor described this student to Grace as a “young woman who is struggling to make good choices and struggling with her identity as the oldest daughter in her family.” He then described A-Space to the young lady as the “best place in the entire campus,” and Grace added that A-Space was a “safety zone” on campus.

This exchange demonstrated that Barlow’s administrators believed in the resource that A-Space provided. Indeed, A-Space provided Barlow’s students with a valuable resource. Yet the idea of needing a “safety zone” in a school is intriguing. After all, we were talking about a school where one is *supposed* to be feel safe.<sup>88</sup> But A-Space was not alluding to safety from physical violence. Instead, a “safety zone” or “safe space” for A-Space meant a place where one could speak about their lives and their feelings, and they would not be judged by adults, including A-Space staff, or other student-clients participating in a group. Furthermore, Barlow High and A-Space believed that if student-clients took advantage of this “safe space,” and the other available additional community resources, then “at-risk” students could begin on a path towards self-empowerment that would teach them how to succeed in life despite their hardships.

Before Grace Peterson’s leadership, the previous program manager operated A-Space in Barlow as a crisis drop-in center, which was not Grace’s preferred approach. In one of our informal interviews, Grace said that she had tried to continue running A-Space in Barlow as a crisis drop-in center, but she found that it was too exhausting and burdensome on herself and her small staff. Instead, Grace believed that A-Space would be more effective at Barlow High if it

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<sup>88</sup>The safety of our schools has become a recurring theme in American society most notably since the Columbine High School shootings in Colorado and the most recent school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Connecticut. These discussions, however, are centered around gun violence and gun control with the National Rifle Association even suggesting that schools would be safer with armed security on campuses.

provided “proactive prevention” programming, much like its successful Young Men/Young Leaders program. Grace saw this as a way to “enlarge” A-Space’s “footprint” on Barlow High’s campus. Throughout the course of the year Grace worked her plan diligently, which included applying for grant money for new positions, encouraging Barlow High to take some responsibility for its crisis management, and strengthening the relationships between A-Space and the high school’s staff and administrators. In the end, Grace was successful on all three fronts as her vision came further into fruition. During the 2009/2010 academic year, Grace doubled her staff of caseworkers and interns in order to provide all of its new “proactive prevention” programming.

When I began my fieldwork during the spring of 2009, that is, during the 2008/2009 academic year, A-Space had two full-time employees and two interns. Grace Peterson was the program manager, and Maclovio Esmithe, the other full-time employee who had been with the organization since 2005, ran the Young Men/Young Leaders program. A-Space interns in the spring of 2009 came from two different social work and counseling university programs in Austin. Also, late in the spring of 2009, Melissa Clark joined A-Space as the Pregnant and Parenting Students Caseworker, their third full-time employee, but it was not until the following academic year that Melissa actually provided services. The following year, A-Space at Barlow High became the largest A-Space program in the Austin area with five full-time employees, one part-time employee, and two interns. The two new full-time caseworkers worked with “at-risk” incoming freshman<sup>89</sup> and the new part-time caseworker case managed Barlow High students who lived in the North Meadows government-housing complex. A-Space had quickly become the number one resource serving the emotional needs of Barlow High Students. It is important to

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<sup>89</sup> The students case-managed by the Freshman Caseworkers had been identified as “at-risk” by the student’s middle school. Additionally, one of those caseworkers worked only with the students enrolled in Barlow’s new Night School program.

note that more and more schools are becoming reliant on A-Space. A-Space currently operates in 27 states and in the District of Columbia. In central Texas alone, A-Space operates in 5 counties and in 55 school campuses.

The profession of social workers began as women's work based on the characteristics of good women – altruism. This helping profession also started with the need to protect the women and their-out of-wedlock children who were believed to be psychologically faulted, which explained their plight (Luker 1996). A century later in the halls of Barlow High, A-Space, a non-for-profit organization comprised primarily of social-workers, was performing similar work to that of social workers at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Only this time around, social workers were responsible for reforming “at-risk” youth and constructing neoliberal subjects through affirmative governmentality. Soo Ah Kwon (2013), an ethnic studies scholar, has theorized the rise of “affirmative governmentality” within neoliberal governments. Kwon describes “affirmative governmentality” as an “elaboration” on Foucault's ideas about governmentality, and she arrives at this elaboration through her ethnographic research with the youth activist group, Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership (AYPAL) in Oakland, California. Foucault's governmentality,

describes a system of liberal governance. Governmentality names the relationships and practices of power through which citizens and populations are subject to control and exercise that control on themselves. Foucault notes that the key to liberalism is the state's restrained exercise of police power and the practice of the art of government of ‘self-limitation.’ Governance in a liberal democracy is not an exercise of absolute state power (although it is not bereft of that power), and therefore neither are the practices that make up acts of citizenship. In other words, the relations of power within democratic liberal governance are as much about enabling its subjects to govern themselves – and enlisting their willing participation in the process” (Kwon 2013: 9)

Kwon's (2013) affirmative governmentality also rests on Antonio Gramsci's ideas of state power and civil society, in which nonprofits, much like schools, are one aspect of civil society.

Affirmative governmentality arises out of the institutionalization of nonprofits, and the “nonprofitization” of activism, which become responsible for empowering their communities to take care of themselves. In the following, Kwon cogently summarizes her argument,

Neoliberalism increases this shift in the art of government to render the individual as governmentalizable in a new fashion, one that is steeped in economic rationales. Contrary to liberal political thought that categorizes market forces as separate from the state, the neoliberal state, in Foucault’s view, is mutually constitutive of the economy. It is “a state under the supervision of the market rather than a market supervised by state” [Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 116]. Importantly in such a configuration, market values and reasoning extend to regulate individual conduct, constituting entrepreneurial subjects in an economic order. For citizen-subjects of a liberal democracy under neoliberalism, citizenship and political activeness do not mean just acknowledging one’s responsibility for economic growth and self-governance, but also the active and voluntary involvement in the management of one’s potential for social risks (for example, poverty, unemployment, and disempowerment). In other words, this mode of governance or “bio-politics” of the population, in which marginalized people (such as the poor and ‘at-risk’ youth) have become special objects of knowledge and targets of control, is amplified within a neoliberal regime that encourages self-responsibility and empowerment (2013: 9 – 10).

A-Space’s clients are all deemed “at-risk” of not graduating high school and not graduating high school is constructed as leading to poverty. These “at-risk” youth are identified, and with their own and their family’s consent, they are taught that their success in America is completely up to them. The efforts made with teenage pregnancy and teenage mothers at Barlow High illustrate this logic even more clearly since these teenage parents have already transgressed and must be aggressively re-educated. Kwon (2013) further argues that nonprofits are linked to the political state, and they are “also entrenched in its economic principles” since “the nonprofit sector and the philanthropic foundations in it are implicated in the expansion and development of capitalism and in mediating neoliberal governance both domestically and internationally” (15). While A-Space is not a youth activist nonprofit organization like AYPAL, those managing and working at A-Space are emerging from social work and counseling programs in which professionals, like

educators, are learning to promote self-responsibility and empowerment as the catalyst for social change.

### **A-SPACE'S TEENAGE PREGNANCY PREVENTION EFFORTS**

One effort, in its early stages of development, was A-Space's sex education workshops with parents. A-Space in Barlow High's *Sex Talk with Parents* was reflective of The National Campaign's Latino Initiative in which social service providers were urged to design and implement programs that would help Latina/o parents talk to their youth about sex. A-Space's effort was designed to help parents of A-Space's student-clients discuss the challenges they had in talking to their children about sex, and to offer them ideas on how to do so. In theory, the design of the workshop was well-intentioned and well thought out, even offering Spanish translation, but in the end only three sets of parents attended the workshop. Another effort was A-Space's use of Janice Kipling's Girl Empowerment curriculum, to teach about sex and relationships. This curriculum was influenced by discourses of teenage pregnancy as a social problem and discourses of sexuality as negative. Kipling is a licensed clinical social worker who had worked for a local charter school, but she had since then started her own independent contracting business – Girl Empowerment. As an independent contractor, Janice provides coaching and workshops on the lives of adolescent girls, and she is often consulted by local Austin news networks as an expert on issues related to the adolescent girl. Janice Kipling has also produced a DVD titled "The Wisdom of Girls: Teens, Sex & Truth," and she provides a facilitator's guide to aid group discussions on sex. This DVD has been approved by AISD as part of their abstinence-plus curriculum, and it has been adopted as an instructional video to assist health classes in their teaching of the subject.

In the spring of 2009, A-Space invited Janice Kipling to screen “The Wisdom of Girls: Teens, Sex & Truth” and to facilitate discussions with a group of A-Space girls and with a separate group of A-Space boys. I attended the screening and discussion of the video with A-Space’s boys. “The Wisdom of Girls” is a documentary-style video in which girls are interviewed on camera about the reasons they have sex and what having sex means to them. The young women that are interviewed are either young mothers who had their children while teenagers or are young women who have decided to remain virgins. In all, Kipling interviews Latinas, African Americans, and Anglo Americans. Remarkably, the young women in the video who have decided to remain virgins are all Anglo American, while all of the teenage mothers are young women of color. Kipling did not interview any women of color who had decided to remain sexually abstinent.

Furthermore, the reasons given by these young women for having sex include for love and security, love for someone, curiosity, acceptance/peer pressure, and to fill a void in life. That afternoon Kipling paused the video, and she asked the young men why guys had sex. The reasons offered by these young men were related to physical pleasure and status. These responses included that sex “feels good,” it increases your charisma, “it makes you happy,” “to look cool to your homeboys,” “to see who gets the most girls,” and to gain experience. Some young men, however, added that what makes you a man is staying with one woman, and that there is a double standard for men and women because women cannot sleep around without getting a bad reputation. This sentiment is expounded in the video, which depicts young women discussing how they feel emotionally bad after having sex. Kipling then followed this depiction with another question for A-Space’s student-clients – what emotional consequences did sex have for young men? Candidly these student-clients responded that men will feel bad if the woman is

not pleased or if she sleeps around because they cannot satisfy her. “The Wisdom of Girls” is an example of what Michelle Fine (1992) has called “the missing discourse of desire” that is found in conceptualizations of sexuality in schools.

Michelle Fine (1992) in “Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire,” argues that the missing discourse of female sexual desire in public school’s sex education programs denies women a discourse of sexual entitlement. Sex education programs, Fine (1992) argues, present young women only as possible victims of sexual desire, and they do not offer an avenue to discuss young women’s sexual feelings, needs, and wants. Her research and analysis is set in the 1980s, and it is based on her review of standard sex education curricula, national debates over sex education, student based health clinics (SBHCs), and her ethnographic research in a NYC high school. Fine’s discourse of desire is “The naming of desire, pleasure, or sexual entitlement, particularly for females,” which, she argues, would allow them to be subjects of sexuality (1992: 35). Fine concludes that there is “(1) an authorized suppression of a discourse of female sexual desire; (2) the promotion of a discourse of female sexual victimization; and (3) the explicit privileging of married heterosexuality over other practices of sexuality” (1992: 32). The silencing or denial of a discourse of sexual entitlement, Fine further argues, contributes to young women adhering to prescribed notions of femininity that keep them victimized when it comes to sex and sexuality and also contribute to unsafe sexual practices that lead to STDs and unwanted teen pregnancy.

Kipling and her program, Girl Empowerment, clearly reproduced this missing discourse of desire. Before leaving the workshop, Kipling asked the young men one final question – what had they learned? One of the responses was that young women usually feel bad after sex. What is more, the lesson used race to convey its message. “The Wisdom of Girls” not only taught that

sexuality led to bad feelings, but it also taught that women of color were bad because of their sexual experiences and their status as teenage mothers, and White women were good because they chose to remain virgins. This racialized message has endured, and it appears in various forms, another of which was directly seen at Perkins Middle School, the middle school that feeds into Barlow High School.

One afternoon Kevin Johnson, A-Space program manager in Perkins Middle School, recounted how back in December of 2009, his assistant principal urged him to organize a teen pregnancy prevention group because of the growing incidence of teenage pregnancy on their middle school campus.<sup>90</sup> Kevin had decided to move forward with the idea and teachers generated two lists: one list of students who they felt were “at-risk” for teenage pregnancy and another list of students who were exemplary and not labeled “at-risk.”<sup>91</sup> These lists contained only names of eighth grade girls, and not one boy was identified as “at-risk.” Kevin had also asked the school if they wanted a campus-wide intervention effort or a small group intervention effort, and the school responded that the girls on the list were at such a “high risk” of getting pregnant that it was best to only include them. This response led me to realize that when an entire student body is not receiving scientifically accurate, age-appropriate, information on sexual health and their body’s reproductive capacities then all students are “at-risk” for sexually transmitted diseases and a teenage pregnancy. Nevertheless, the girls that were identified as “high risk” included twenty Latinas, six African Americans, one Vietnamese American, and two Anglo Americans. Most disturbing of this pregnancy prevention effort was that “planters” were

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<sup>90</sup> During the 2009/2010 academic year at Perkins Middle School, there were three documented pregnancies but seven rumored pregnancies.

<sup>91</sup> I do not know how teachers at Perkins Middle School defined “at-risk” in this particular incident, but past referrals can provide some insight. As an A-Space volunteer, one of my Perkins Middle School mentees was referred to A-Space and was labeled “at-risk” because her body was “sexually mature.” Here, a girl’s biologically maturing body signaled to some adults the possibility of sexual transgression. Labeling her “at-risk” also made her solely responsible for her sexuality. In this incident sexuality was clearly envisioned as an individual trait uninformed by society or people.

placed in the groups to provide the “at-risk” girls with an “alternative perspective” on relationships and sex, but the “planters” that were chosen were two Anglo Americans and two African Americans. Not one Latina, in a Latina/o dominant middle school, was identified as being able to provide an “alternative perspective” on sexuality. In their teenage pregnancy prevention efforts, Perkins Middle School reproduced the discourse that Latinas are naturally/culturally hyperfertile and sexually irresponsible. These racialized constructions are also contained in the “cautionary tales” that the National Campaign has used, since its inception, in its media campaigns to inform the public of good and bad women (Pillow 2004).

Another sex education and teenage pregnancy effort by A-Space was achieved through the help of Ms. Leal’s students in her Peer Assisted Leadership class (PALS). A-Space straightforwardly suggested that the PALS organize a teenage pregnancy prevention fair. However, the PALS themselves felt this was too narrow of an effort given the lack of sex education available at Barlow High School. The PALS expanded A-Space’s initial idea and created a Sex and Sexuality Health Fair during the school’s lunch periods. The PALS made a total of 6 informational booths: 1) Healthy Relationships, 2) Gay and Lesbian Relationships, 3) Abstinence, 4) Ways of contracting STIs, aside from sexual intercourse, 5) STIs, and 6) Pregnancy Prevention. During the health fair, the PALS walked around the different lunch tables and invited students to check out their booths but few students did. Despite the low turnout, the PALS agreed that their work was important since students were only taught abstinence, and they were not given any other options. They also agreed that the PALS should continue to organize and improve this health fair since students should be educated on the options available to them.

Finally, A-Space’s last teenage pregnancy prevention effort was with the pregnant and parenting students, themselves. In fact pregnant and parenting students received more

comprehensive sex education than any other Barlow High student as an effort to prevent subsequent pregnancies. During the spring of 2010, Melissa Clark discussed reproduction and contraception options with Ms. Leal's PSAP classes. These discussions were a breath of fresh air in the highly controlled sphere of sex education in Texas. Melissa not only discussed the various contraceptive options available and how they work to prevent a pregnancy, but she was also able to get students to discuss what they knew about how pregnancy occurs, revealing misconceptions and allowing for Melissa to provide them with medically accurate information. For example, when Melissa introduced the topic of contraception, Hector Rodriguez asked for clarification of what contraception meant. These discussions also revealed that students were actively engaged on the topics of sex and contraception as many of the young women shared their personal experiences with various contraception methods. Melissa used scientific and technical terminology to discuss sexual health and the students responded with engagement. There were times when students referred to a particular sexual behavior or act as gross, but the conversation always progressed with Melissa's professional handling of the subject matter. However, it was recognized that these types of discussions were officially restricted on campus, but A-Space reasoned that the pregnant and parenting students could receive this information because it was A-Space administering the information, not AISD. They further reasoned that it should not be controversial since these students' previous pregnancies illustrated that they were already sexually active. A-Space saw this work as fulfilling a need; a need to prevent subsequent teenage pregnancies first by providing sexual health education.

In the end A-Space's sex education and teenage pregnancy prevention efforts reproduced the discourses contained in abstinence-only sex education and teenage pregnancy prevention. A-Space, as a non-profit organization of social workers, often relied on other resources already

available in society. One of these was Janice Kipling, from Girl Empowerment, who used constructions of good and bad women to try and invoke dialogue about sex with students. These constructions were also based on the ideas contained in abstinence-only education, which is that adolescent sexuality is immoral. Furthermore, the young men in Kipling's workshop learned that women are the potential victims of male sexuality, which Fine (1992) argues denies young woman their right to subjecthood. Still at other times, other resources were not needed to reproduce these discourses as schools did it themselves as was seen at Perkins Middle School. Although A-Space tried to provide student-clients with sex education that included information about contraception, they worked within the confines of the politics of sex education. Moreover, students at Barlow High understood that sex education was not only about teenage pregnancy prevention, and that their school was doing them a disservice by not providing them with medically accurate sexual health curriculum and they tried to make a real difference. But the only students who really engaged in discussions about contraception were pregnant and parenting students since social workers were giving them a real option at preventing subsequent teenage childbearing.

#### **“PERFORMING TRIAGE”: PREGNANCY INTERVENTION AT BARLOW HIGH**

Barlow High's response to teenage pregnancy was not only informed by the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem, but it was also informed by sexual health and education policies. The national discourse on teenage pregnancy as social problem presents teenage pregnancy as leading to dropping out of school, while high dropout rates threaten the viability and future of a high school in Texas. Punitive educational policies, thus, are what primarily informed Barlow High's response to teenage pregnancy. In order to protect the school's livelihood, the high school focused their attention on intervention, or as Mr. Taylor phrased it,

“performing triage.” In Mr. Taylor’s conceptualization of their response to teenage pregnancy, pregnant and parenting students were an “at-risk” priority, because it is believed that teenage pregnancy leads to dropping out of high school. Thus intervention, not prevention, was the high school’s focus. Barlow High’s intervention programs were aimed at helping pregnant and parenting students stay on track to graduate from high school. The school did not view teenage pregnancy as a problem, per se. Instead, they viewed the supposed consequence – dropping out – as the problem. Thus Barlow High School did not evaluate the effectiveness of their teenage pregnancy prevention efforts.

Interventions at Barlow High took the form of case management and supportive services provided by A-Space and the Parenting for School-Age Parents (PSAP) course taught by Azucena Leal, a first-time teacher. A-Space’s supportive services had been offered since 2007, but the PSAP classes were a recent endeavor that started the same year that I undertook this research. The standard protocol taken by Barlow High upon learning of a student’s pregnancy was to first notify the nurse, who would then encourage the student to tell their parents if they were not already aware of their daughter’s pregnancy. Then, Barlow High would refer them to A-Space, and in 2009/2010 Barlow High would also try to place the student in the Parenting for School Age Parents (PSAP) course. I was also aware of an additional intervention, the night school program, that was available to all students, and a number of the pregnant and parenting students I knew took advantage of it. Barlow High’s night school program was initiated in the Spring 2010 semester, so I was not able to further pursue this particular intervention effort. Either way, the intervention efforts at Barlow High could be understood as highlighting notions of belonging as seen through the construction of the neoliberal subject.

## **A-Space's Pregnant and Parenting Support Group**

Grace Peterson explained that in the years prior to 2007, the year that the Pregnant and Parenting Support (PPSG) group was formed, A-Space had only been providing one-on-one case management services to pregnant and parenting student-client. Seeing that A-Space was serving a good portion of the pregnant and parenting population at Barlow High, Grace began to envision a support group where pregnant and parenting students “could find common ground with one another,” and where the student could gather pregnancy and parenting resources. In the early stages of the PPSG, Grace herself facilitated the support group. Then in 2008/2009, Georgina Escamilla, an intern, facilitated the PPSG. Georgina was a graduate student at one of the universities located in Austin. Georgina interned at A-Space for a year as she worked towards her Masters in Marriage and Family Therapy and a License in Professional Counseling. In the spring of 2009, Melissa Clark was hired as the Pregnant and Parenting Caseworker and she began running the PPSG that fall. Participation in the PPSG was voluntary, and it was open to both female and male students, although only female students participated during its first couple of years. Pregnant and parenting students often participated in the PPSG both semesters, and new student-clients were welcomed to join at any point. The PPSG met for about an hour each week as a group, but participants were also provided with case-management services.

In an effort to empower its participants and give them a sense of ownership of the PPSG, each semester began with the group of student-clients devising their group rules and expectations. Usually these rules addressed privacy, confidentiality, trust and respect. Participants were also encouraged to suggest topics to cover and address during the PPSG. When the PPSG began in October 2008, its participants had expressed interest in learning about birthing, breastfeeding, baby development, and life changes, a clear indication that students were

interested in learning about the subject that would soon consume their lives. The PPSG was well attended, ranging from 3 to 7 students with 5 to 7 students in attendance being most common. Most participants were Latina. However, a few White and African Americans also participated. When I first joined the PPSG in the spring of 2009, it met on Tuesdays during the school day. However, the time of day changed weekly so that participants were not absent from the same class every week, and excessive school absences hindered their participation. The following academic year, 2009/2010, the PPSG was held on Fridays during Ms. Leal's PSAP class.

A-Space's PPSG programming relied on resources that were already in the community. For example, during the spring of 2009, A-Space brought Amy Mitchell from Metamorphosis, a university affiliated social service organization that provided services to youth and families in the Austin area, to conduct various workshops with their student-clients. Amy Mitchell was a case manager with Metamorphosis' Teen Parent Services program, and she was brought in to share her resources and knowledge.<sup>92</sup> Amy Mitchell presented material in 10 of the 15 groups that met over the course of the spring 2009 semester. The information that Amy presented included budgeting and career planning, stress and relaxation techniques, age-appropriate activities for children, safety, early childhood development, guidance and discipline, healthy relationships and self-esteem, communication, and sex education and birth control. While Amy disseminated this information, Georgina attempted to get the participants engaged in conversation on the topic. A few participants always had something to say, but others were often most comfortable remaining silent. My initial summary of the PPSG in the spring of 2009 was that the students involved were interested in the information that was provided, but the students were not actively engaged in conversation about the topic. The PPSG in 2009 could be described as a very basic introductory workshop on specific topics related to personal

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<sup>92</sup> Metamorphosis' affiliation with a university included a social work research center.

development, child development, and healthy relationships, but because it was typical to only spend one meeting on a topic, there was never an opportunity to engage in and discuss the specifics of the topic as a group. Thus at times there seemed to be a lot of lecturing and repetition of messages of “love yourself” and “respect,” with the assumption that these student-clients needed these messages reinforced. However, there was never an opportunity to identify how student-clients already did this, nor an effort to identify behavior that was not indicative of the message.

Georgina had once described to me that it was during the individual sessions that she was able to delve deeper into specific issues that the student-parent was having, and it was then that she could offer support and counseling. As part of the case management that Georgina provided, she also monitored the student-clients grades, and she helped them set goals and monitored their progress. Georgina shared with me that most often these goals were about graduating in order to attain a good job to support their child, or to go to college. While student-clients showed an interest in college, they often had little knowledge about the application process. Many of these girls often faced the same challenges, but these challenges were not discussed in a group setting. Instead, they were left to the individual counseling session. These challenges also included the lack of safe and affordable daycare, finding jobs that were flexible with their schedules, and finding resources that did not require a social security number. Georgina said that she spent a lot of time finding resources for her student-clients that were either free or had minimal fees in the city of Austin. A-Space thus functioned as a liaison between the community and the pregnant or parenting student.

The organization expanded its reach with the hiring of Melissa Clark as a full-time Pregnant and Parenting Caseworker. Melissa Clark had received her B.A. in social work from an

Austin university, and she was familiar with the work of A-Space since she had interned with A-Space at another Austin high school. As an intern, she had facilitated a group for students who had parenting roles, which included many teen parents. Also, she had worked temporarily as a replacement for an A-Space program manager who had been on maternity leave. From March 2009 until the end of the school year, Melissa focused on getting acquainted with the PPSG. She also networked, joined coalitions, and planned, researched, and designed the following year's PPSG. The position of Pregnant and Parenting Students Caseworker entailed both prevention and intervention components. Prevention focused on sex education, healthy relationships, and leadership building, while intervention continued through its supportive services model. During the 2009/2010 academic year, the PPSG maintained the same general structure as it had the previous year. The PPSG still met once a week, and it was still designed as a place for both support and education. However, with the initiation of Ms. Leal's Parenting for School-Age Parents (PSAP), the PPSG would now take place during that class time. The other major difference from the previous year's structure was that young men were involved in the group, given that each PSAP had one father enrolled in the class.

During the fall of 2009, the PPSG focused on getting to know one another and many of the activities were centered on emotions and relationships. Often the participants were asked to discuss how they were feeling or how their week had been. They also discussed familial relationships and romantic relationships. During that semester Melissa also worked closely with Ms. Leal to bring resources into the PSAP class. One of those resources was Josephina Sanchez of the Girl Scouts, who attended the PSAP class several times to make crafts with PSAP students. Melissa also had a doula attend the PSAP classes to discuss pregnancy and delivery.

Doulas are referred to as “labor coaches,” and they support the pregnant woman during labor by helping the expectant mother use birthing techniques to assist in a vaginal birth.

This one-day workshop ultimately led Melissa to organize a six-week Pregnancy Workshop with Norma Morgan, a doula and middle school teacher. Norma’s Pregnancy Workshop was held twice during the 2009/2010 academic year, and pregnant students attended this after school workshop to learn more about their pregnancies and to prepare for labor and delivery.

In the spring of 2010, the PPSG began to meet as one large group on Wednesdays and there were more presentations from people working with organizations in the community (see Table 6.1 for a list of organizations involved and the topics covered).

Table 6.1: PPSG Workshops

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Topic Covered</b>
<i>Stronger Families</i>	Baby Massage, Discipline, Guidance, Role-modeling, Communication
<i>Haven</i>	Healthy Relationship, Domestic Abuse, and Self-Violence
<i>Metamorphosis</i>	Co-parenting, Fathering, Child support, Relationships
<i>Family First</i>	Discipline, Guidance, Role-modeling, Communication,
<i>Women’s Health Clinic</i>	Birth Control Methods
<i>Rising Youth</i>	Values & Decision Making

The spring 2010 semester also saw a field trip to a “Safety Conference” held by one of the local hospitals. This conference brought together student parents from the various local high schools to discuss safety issues and car seat safety. Organizers also provided student-parents with a free car seat. Student-parents were most engaged in discussion when the PPSG topics were centered on familial relationships and birth control. Another topic that was most often raised by the

student-parents themselves was their lack of daycare options. Barlow High School did not offer on-campus daycare, and although many student-parents qualified for free daycare from the city, the city's facility was regarded as inconvenient and dangerous because of its location.<sup>93</sup>

This subsidized daycare was located south of the North Meadows area, and it was not easily accessible by public transportation. Furthermore, the area in which the subsidized daycare was located had an even worse reputation than North Meadows, and it was regularly in the news for drug-related and prostitution offenses. A student-parent who enrolled her daughter in the subsidized daycare raised another objection. She wanted to remove her daughter from the daycare because she objected to the lack of autonomy she felt she had. This lack of autonomy stemmed from the stipulation that student-parents were required to be passing their courses in order to receive subsidized day-care. The trouble with this was not that student-parents had to be passing their courses, but it was the manner in which the daycare demanded that the student-parent show them her grade report. To the student-parent in question, parenting, A-Space's PPSGs, and the PSAP had given her a sense of autonomy, but she was simultaneously and constantly reminded that she was not allowed to exercise that autonomy.

Despite being repeatedly told to voice their needs as part of the process of self-discovery, self-empowerment, and building healthy relationships, student-parents primary need, financially viable and respectable daycare options, was unavailable. Furthermore, student-parents could not understand why the school could not provide them with daycare on campus since the school repeatedly told them about the importance of a high school education, and the inability to provide daycare was their biggest challenge to continuing their education. Pregnant and parenting students were not only receiving messages of self-discovery, self-empowerment,

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<sup>93</sup> Interestingly, Barlow High's Night School initiative did offer childcare. However, the Night School was introduced in the Spring 2010 semester and although it was called "Night School," the program was based on having students complete assignments on the school's computers for accreditation.

building healthy relationships from A-Space, but they were also receiving this message in their Parenting for School-Age Parents course.

### **Parenting for School-Age Parents (PSAP) <sup>94</sup>**

Parenting for School-Age Parents (PSAP) was a credited course that was first offered at Barlow High School during the 2009/2010 academic school year. When I first met Valerie Schofield in 2008 she spoke to me at length about her desire to do more about teen pregnancy at Barlow High. At the time she described teenage pregnancy at Barlow High School as an epidemic. Her interests intensified a year earlier when she, herself, was pregnant, and she had “created bonds” with some of the pregnant students. As Academy Director, Ms. Schofield described her biggest responsibility as “convincing kids to stay in school.” She described how she met with students who were in the process of withdrawing from school to try and figure out what it was that was keeping the student from graduating. She added that in the process she realized that student-parents were a “good portion of that population,” that is, the population of high school dropouts. Regarding her first impression of the pregnant and parenting population at Barlow High School she said,

When I first started here, and I’ve heard many other people say this, I could not believe how many pregnant students I saw. And how many students, when I was having conversations with them, whether male or female, we’d started talking about their children. *Really* blew me away. I’d never been on another campus that it felt so prominent. And so that’s what initially got me involved with working with the nurse and working with A-Space to try to figure out what’s going on (laughs). And then what are we doing because they were dropping out like flies....I sort of feel like that’s where it all started. I feel like there are a lot of people that come on campus who their first thing is ‘man you have *a lot* of pregnant kids.

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<sup>94</sup> I conducted observations in about 60% of the total PSAP classes held throughout the 2009/2010 academic year. During these observations, I was present for the entire class period and sat just slightly distant from the group of students in class. I sat at a desk and took notes of my observations. Occasionally I participated in discussions with the class.

Ms. Schofield added that she had worked in many diverse environments, where she taught science and psychology. These environments included schools in Texas' Rio Grande Valley, on a Navajo reservation, in Africa, and in Chicago, but Barlow High was "...like no place I've ever seen" because of the pregnant and parenting student population.

Ms. Schofield eventually developed the idea of a course for pregnant and parenting students. The PSAP would not only let students earn a credit towards graduation, but, more importantly, she thought it provided a space for students to bond and support one another. She described the rationale for her efforts in funding a PSAP like this:

I think what keeps kids in school, if the reason why they're thinking of dropping out is because they have a child or they've gotten pregnant, is that community of other teen parents discussing the issues going on at home; discussing how they've solved them and feeling like there is a place at school where I can talk about my real life. And it can't just be a counselor that I pop into. It has to be something that's scheduled that I know every other day for 90 minutes I'm gonna go and these people are gonna get me because they don't in my math class and they don't in my English class.

Ms. Schofield's experience with student-parents was that they were dropping out of school because of the challenges posed by teenage parenthood. And Ms. Schofield admits that preventing pregnancies was never the goal. The goal was to get pregnant and parenting students to graduate. Ms. Schofield's vision of a parenting course for pregnant and parenting students entailed providing them with a resource (Ms. Leal and other students) and a guide (parenting education and child development knowledge). However, pregnant and parenting students had to have accumulated enough credits to enroll in this elective course. Thus only a fraction of the pregnant and parenting student body could benefit from this course since incoming freshman and students with too many failed courses lacked enough credits to enroll in one of two PSAP classes offered that year. Official numbers of pregnant and parenting students were not kept by Barlow High School, but it was estimated by Ms. Schofield that anywhere from 10% to 17% of the

student body or between 146 and 249 students were either pregnant or parenting during the 2009/2010 academic year.<sup>95</sup> In that first year of the PSAP, a total of 24 students were enrolled for at least one semester in a PSAP class. Ms. Schofield's hope that a built-in community of pregnant and parenting students, by way of the PSAP class, would keep pregnant and parenting students in school ignored the structural realities of the students' lives, and it was based on the assumption that a dropout from teenage pregnancy resulted from bad decision-making. In fact, one of the PSAP's struggles as a class was attendance.

The PSAP was a new course on campus, and a recently certified teacher, Ms. Leal, taught it. Ms. Leal was responsible for designing and teaching this new course. Ms. Leal, however, had previous teaching experience at Barlow High School as a substitute and student-teacher. Years earlier when Ms. Leal was exploring the field of teaching by substituting, she had specifically chosen to work at Barlow High School given its reputation as a "rough Mexican school." She admitted in our interview that her initial expectations of Barlow High as a "rough" school were proven wrong. She also told me that she decided to remain a permanent substitute at Barlow High because, even though the challenges were different than what she had envisioned, the students were nice and diverse, and she was happy. In all, Ms. Leal had been a substitute teacher at Barlow High for three and half years, and she completed her student teaching at Barlow High as well. In fact, she decided to stay with her teaching specialization of Consumer Sciences because of encouragement from Ms. Schofield. Ms. Schofield and Barlow High were very happy with Ms. Leal's performance and Ms. Schofield had been telling Ms. Leal that they would hire her when the time came. The time finally came in the spring of 2009. Ms. Leal admitted to me that in her early discussions with Ms. Schofield about a course for student-parents, she felt

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<sup>95</sup> Barlow High's student body totaled 1,463 students during the 2009/2010 academic year.

unsure of her desire to teach this type of course, simply because she had never given it any thought nor was it something she was passionate about. But she added that she eventually became excited about the possibility of teaching parenting skills because she wanted to help eliminate abuse and neglect through parenting education. She explained that she had found literature on teenage parenthood, abuse, and neglect, and she believed parenting education for student parents was thus necessary.

However, even though she became excited about this teaching opportunity, she had been left with little time to design the course. Ms. Leal was offered a teaching job for the 2009/2010 academic year in the Spring of 2009. She had less than half a year to prepare for this course and four other courses, while still attending school full time. During one informal interview at the beginning of the school year, Ms. Leal said she was still trying to wrap her mind around the fact that she was designing and teaching a new course on a subject matter that she had no previous experience with. In fact, she started the PSAP without any planning or curriculum. Although she did try to use lessons and assignments provided by *Morning Glory Press* on teen parenting, the students complained about them, and they were abandoned. Instead, Ms. Leal and Melissa Clark collaborated throughout the year, and the few lessons that were presented stressed personal, as well as child development.

I began attending Ms. Leal's PSAP classes regularly in November. Each class met three times a week, twice as a class and once for A-Space's PPSG. By the end of the year, Ms. Leal's first period PSAP had a total enrollment of thirteen students (twelve young women and one young man), while Ms. Leal's seventh period PSAP had had a total enrollment of eleven students, (ten young women and one young man). Still, only an average of four or five students were ever present at one time in each of the PSAP classes, and the majority of pregnant and

parenting students were of Latina/o descent. One lesson that remained consistent throughout the year was the journal assignment. Each morning Ms. Leal would write a journal question on the board and students had to write a full-page response to this question or prompt. Ms. Leal's journal questions and prompts were written so that pregnant and parenting students could reflect on their situations and then focus on something positive. Ms. Leal also asked questions designed to get pregnant and parenting students to envision the type of parents and people they wanted to become. Journal prompts also included themes about self-actualization, successful parenting, individuality, and healthy relationships. All-in-all these journal assignments asked pregnant and parenting students to put to paper their thoughts and feelings about their past, present, and future, an exercise meant to empower them to be their best by taking control of their lives.

Every class started with pregnant and parenting students working on their journal entries and then the class would evolve based on whatever a student might bring up as a topic of conversation. For example, early in November a female student, Genevieve, made it known to the class that she was pregnant with her second child. Genevieve was already enrolled in Ms. May's PSAP class because she had a three-month-old baby. The topic of Genevieve's second pregnancy dominated class for a number of days, and it led to Ms. Leal asking Melissa to come and discuss birth control with her students. This in turn became a very illuminating conversation, which I discussed previously, on the extent of their knowledge and experience with birth control. Aside from feeling that it was a good idea to discuss how to prevent subsequent pregnancies, Ms. Leal wanted to have this discussion in order to dispel myths about birth control given that the female students repeatedly discussed how they preferred some birth control options to others because it did not cause them to gain weight.

Student parents also had a portfolio that they worked on throughout the year. This portfolio had to contain 15 sections on parenting skills, which was an elaboration on the class assignments they completed on developmental milestones, birthing, feeding, and sleeping. In the spring semester, they were also required to participate in a blog about teenage parenting, and they were required to compile a memory book. While this ad-hoc organization appeared to stress Ms. Leal at the beginning of the year, she eventually decided that as long as she was meeting the criteria outlined by the Texas Educational Knowledge Skills (TEKS), there was nothing to worry about. Still, one challenge to the PSAP was in the design and evaluation of skills learned. Since students of varying grades and skills were enrolled in the PSAP, sophomores and seniors could be in the same class thus making evaluation difficult because students of different skill sets were required to do the same work. For example, a senior may be more comfortable doing independent research than a sophomore would because of previous experience, which could put the sophomore at a disadvantage. But the biggest challenge of the PSAPs was attendance.

Both PSAP classes had low enrollment and poor attendance. This discrepancy between the number of pregnant and parenting students and those served by the PSAP did not go unnoticed by students. One morning during Ms. Leal's first period PSAP, she let her exaltation for the day's perfect attendance, a total of 7 students, known to the class. This led Tina, a mother of a two-year old, to ask why their class was so small if there were "so many pregnant girls." The students went back and forth talking about how in every class there's either a parent or a pregnant student in class. They estimated that half of Barlow High girls had been pregnant at some point in their lives. Ms. Leal responded by explaining the credit requirements needed for enrollment in the PSAP. Not only was the PSAP not reaching a significant portion of the population it intended to serve, but also some of the students who were enrolled hardly attended.

Reasons given for absences ranged from students going on homebound because of giving birth, not having reliable daycare, and choosing to stay home. I believe letting the class develop organically based on what the students were discussing and experiencing had its benefits, but the existence of the class alone was not enough to create the space and community that Ms. Schofield had envisioned.

These intervention efforts with “at-risk” youth, that is pregnant and parenting students, highlight how the construction of a neoliberal subject were behind most efforts. All intervention efforts stressed self-responsibility and good decision-making. Barlow High and A-Space saw their work as empowering students to make good choices, and both organizations also saw their work as providing them with the information they needed to make those good choices. Ali (2002) reminds us that the construction of subjecthood “is not always intended to produce full-fledged, right-bearing citizens. Rather, the move is to construct, particularly in women, an individualized sensibility that would diligently follow the advice of a benevolent state. The crucial aspect to bear in mind in this mechanism of inclusion is the production of consent (Ali 2002: 59).” In this case study, teenage parents illustrated that they had already failed the citizen-building process by becoming parents prematurely in the accepted progression of youth to adult (Lesko 2001). However, teenage parents, especially teenage mothers could still be reformed and become an autonomous neoliberal subject through the help of non-profit organizations.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In an examination of educational policies specifically addressing the education of pregnant and mothering teenagers, Wanda Pillow (2004) concludes that the discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy have been very powerful in constructing teenage pregnancy as a social welfare issue and consequently affecting how the education of this group of young women

is addressed. Pillow further concludes that there is a lack of research and discussion in academic communities about the teenage mother's educational experience, including a lack of discussion of Title IX of the Education Act of 1972. Title IX was enacted in 1975 and gave pregnant teenagers the right to an education equal to her peers by mandating practices of exclusion and separation illegal. Prior to this legislation, pregnant teenagers, as well as pregnant unmarried teachers, were denied an education or a place in schools. Pillow (2004) also notes that currently there is no case law challenging educational practices in violation of Title IX despite questionable educational practices that persist.

Critiques of educational programs for teenage mothers range from blatant violations of Title IX to a lack of interest from the public precisely because of the politics of teenage pregnancy and sex education. The National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education report in *Title IX at 30: Report Card on Gender Equity* (2002) that schools are not complying with the provisions mandated in Title IX when it pertains to the education of pregnant and parenting teens. They also found that pregnant or parenting teens most often cited "(1) being strongly encouraged to attend stand-alone alternative programs of questionable academic quality, and 2) unlawful leave and absence policies" as barriers to their education (2002: 56). The National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education gave the education of pregnant and parenting teens a grade of C+, and they cite a lack of governmental data collection and a lack of enforcement policies as responsible for this situation. Pillow (2004) adds that there is a lack of state educational policy to coordinate with schools' treatment of teen mothers, a lack of data on teen mothers at the state and district level, a lack of coordination between schools and community programs for teenage mothers, and a simple fear of discussion about teenage pregnancy. While these critiques are important, I argue that until an American cultural concern with teenage

pregnancy is upended through a cultural revolution then more simplistic data collection will most likely continue to reproduce the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem.

Teenage pregnancy prevention and sex education at Barlow High School was focused on teaching responsible moral behavior, a message that was reinforced through A-Space's own prevention efforts. These efforts reproduced gendered, classed, and raced notions about teenage pregnancy because teenage pregnancy is believed to lead to poverty, but the logic of teenage pregnancy prevention also rests on its construction as a problem of adolescent sexuality and immoral behavior. Furthermore, what was most revealing was that A-Space's intervention strategies laid bare the neoliberal subject-making project. Pregnant and parenting students were told that their economic trajectory was a result of their bad decision-making – that they could change their lives and their children's lives if they became self-actualized “empowered” beings, and they could change their futures and future generations if they learned to parent the “right way.” This is similar to the Americanization programs that took place in California schools between 1915-1929 (Sanchez 1984). During this period of massive migration of Mexican laborers to California, the Commission of Immigration and Housing viewed Mexican immigrant women as responsible for the assimilation of their children. This belief was informed by the "traditional American belief in an exalted role of the mother in shaping the future political citizenry of the republic" (Sanchez 1984: 482).

The Americanization logic viewed the second generation as the most capable of assimilation. These programs initially focused on mothers, and they sought to help them change family habits related to health, diet, and cleanliness because it was believed that the home environment needed to fit an industrial order. However, these programs viewed poverty as an outcome of bad family habits, and they eventually failed. Concomitantly, American industries

drew Mexican women into domestic work, clothing manufacturing, and food service industries, making these industries women's work in the Southwest. Sanchez (1984) argues that the economic realities of Mexican immigrants and a lack of residential and social integration led to second-class citizenship and failed Americanization programs. By 1927, Mexican immigrants were viewed as causing social problems in society, and by the Great Depression Americanization programs came to an end (Sanchez 1984). While Americanization programs may have come to an end, the logics of citizen-building are still present and displayed through schools' and nonprofit organizations' focus on "at-risk" youth. This display was most easily visible through the lives of pregnant and parenting students, which was another example of affirmative governmentality.

Kwon's (2013) affirmative governmentality suggests that the art of neoliberal governance is in recruiting marginalized people to willingly participate in the "active and voluntary involvement in the management of one's potential for social risks (10)." Pregnant and parenting students had to consent to participate, and, because they were minors, they also had to get their parents' consent. Some students never returned their consent forms, but still many did, as A-Space in Barlow High was the largest program in Central Texas. Students who were referred to A-Space were given a parent permission form which they were instructed to take home and share with their parents. Consent, in my example, is not as complex as in Kwon's (2013) example, which theorizes the institutionalization of activism in neoliberal governance. However, it is just as important because it produces an avenue by which to justify the blaming of individuals and communities for their positions in society. Student-clients consent to share intimate details about their lives, and in return they are connected to other community resources and are reeducated in self-responsibility and empowerment. If after this reeducation, these student-clients still fail, it is

their fault. Teenage pregnancy has been used to create difference by ignoring and failing to see poverty and schooling (and the sociopolitical and economic forces that contribute to poverty and schooling) as contributing factors of teenage pregnancy. Furthermore, continuing to view teenage pregnancy as a problem only because it leads to dropping out, constrains the possibilities for real change because that view is founded on gendered, classed, and raced conceptions of teenage pregnancy, which reproduce a stratified society.

**“My dad never let us have boyfriends, and he would freak out if he knew I was talking to a guy, especially if he was older than me.”**

### **Sophia Hernandez**

Sophia Hernandez<sup>96</sup> was 17 years old, a senior at Barlow High School, and the mother of 3 year-old, Elizabeth, at the start of the 2009/2010 academic year. Both mother and daughter would turn a year older in October of 2009. Sophia was co-parenting with Elizabeth’s father, Edgar, and the family had gone from living on their own to living with Edgar’s mother throughout the course of the academic year. Sophia had been a mother for four years, and she worked diligently at earning enough credits to graduate high school, at working and providing for her daughter, and at managing several strained relationships as she readied to enter the “real world.”

Sophia is a U.S.-born daughter of Guatemalan immigrants. Mr. and Mrs. Hernandez married in Guatemala in the late 1980s, and soon after the birth of their first child, Sergio, Mr. Hernandez migrated to the United States in search of employment. A year later, the small family reunited in Austin, Texas, and, eventually, the Hernandez family grew to a total of five, with the addition of two daughters, Denise and Sophia. Mr. and Mrs. Hernandez divorced when Sophia was 11 years old. At the time of this study, Mr. Hernandez had remarried and had started another family, while Mrs. Hernandez was living in a domestic partnership with a woman. All three Hernandez siblings went to school in North Meadows. However, Sergio withdrew from Barlow High School, and he never graduated. Sophia and her nuclear family represented the one relationship that most often shocked social workers in North Meadows. She and Edgar were five

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<sup>96</sup> I met Sophia in Ms. Leal’s seventh period Parenting for School-Age Parents (PSAP) class in the fall semester of 2009. However, her participation did not commence until the spring semester and she no longer was enrolled in the PSAP. In total I conducted 6 hours of Interviews with Sophia – (4.5 hours of Informal Interviews and 1.5 hours of a Formal Interview).

years apart and she had gotten pregnant when she was fourteen years old and in eighth grade. Social workers often remarked that Latina/o families' acceptance of their daughters' relationships with older men was a major barrier to teenage pregnancy prevention. However, Sophia's lived experiences complicate that view.

Two years after her parents divorced, Sophia met Edgar, who was of Mexican origin and was five years older. Edgar was a friend of Sergio's, Sophia's brother, and, around 2004, he had started coming by the Hernandez home quite often. At this time, Sophia was 13 years old and in the seventh grade, while Edgar was 18 years old and had already withdrawn from Barlow High School. Sophia explained the details of her relationship one late morning in the school's library. She recounted how at 13 years of age she had thought that Edgar was cute, but her brother insisted that she forget about him because Edgar was never going to pay attention to a little girl. In spite of her brother and sister's insistence that she move on, Sophia's crush on Edgar only deepened, and she convinced a mutual friend to call Edgar on her behalf. Mr. Hernandez did not allow his daughters to have boyfriends, and Sergio's disapproval forced her to keep the teens' relationship a secret. Sophia explained, "My dad never let us have boyfriends, and he would freak out if he knew I was talking to a guy, especially if he was older than me." At first, Sophia and Edgar would talk whenever she visited her cousin's house, but the teens soon tired of not being able to hang out. Sophia decided to skip school to spend the day with Edgar. She enlisted the help of her uncle's wife, who agreed to drop off Sophia at Edgar's house. Soon Sophia was skipping school every two weeks, but the teen's rendezvous came to quick halt once her father became aware of her school absences.

She described that day in detail, which had been much like her past dates with Edgar, only this day, Mr. Hernandez interrupted their fun with a phone call. The startled teen answered

her cell phone, and she immediately tried to hide the truth by telling her dad that she was at school, but in the girl's bathroom. Mr. Hernandez already knew she was skipping because he, in fact, was at the school, and the administrators "could not find her." He demanded to know where she was, and, feeling trapped, Sophia confessed that she was with her boyfriend. Mr. Hernandez demanded that she be dropped off at school immediately, where he would be waiting to talk to Edgar. Sophia recalled that she was terrified. Yet she could vividly remember approaching Perkins Middle School and seeing her father standing underneath the school's name marquee. Sophia continued retelling the day's events of how Mr. Hernandez asked Edgar if they "did anything" or if he "touched her," to which the answers were no. Sophia said that she realized that her dad was referring to sex, but the teens had not even kissed up until that point. She also recalled how her father told Edgar that he was going to verify his answers by taking Sophia to the doctor, which he never actually did. Sophia explained that Mr. Hernandez thought that the couple had ended the relationship. He had become stricter with her, and she was no longer skipping school. She recalled that her dad had told her to forget about Edgar, and that she should not be interested in guys right now because she had "a long way to go in life." But to this she said, "I thought he was crazy. I would just nod my head but really I was like nothing's gonna stop me from talking to him [Edgar]." Sophia continued talking to Edgar, and she drifted further away from her father.

Edgar asked her to be his girlfriend on the last day of seventh grade. The couple would still see each other while she was at her mom's South Austin home on the weekends, when she decided to spend the summer at her mother's home. By July, Sophia recalled, she was sneaking Edgar into her room, where he would stay until four or five in the morning. Sophia said that it was on one of those nights that "I guess you could say that I lost my virginity." Her mother

knew Sophia's boyfriend, but she did not know about the age difference. On the other hand, her mother's girlfriend, Mary, always expressed disapproval of Edgar. Throughout their sneaking around, the only one who knew all about Edgar was her paternal grandmother, whom Sophia was very close with. Once the school year resumed, Sophia began skipping again, and her father caught her again. Mr. Hernandez threatened, once again, to take her to the doctor to verify her virginity. Thus, Sophia asked for her grandmother's help in telling her father she was no longer a virgin. The news upset and disappointed her father, but he decided to allow the couple to continue seeing one another as long as they were honest about their relationship. Then during the spring semester of 2006, Edgar asked Sophia about her desire to have kids. Sophia said that she wanted to have kids, but when she was older and in her twenties. Sophia recalled having sex on the day of that conversation and later finding out that, in spite of her desires, Edgar had not used a condom. Deeply upset, Sophia did not speak to Edgar for a couple of weeks. In the meantime, she missed her period, and she found out in March that she was pregnant. She was asked by multiple people around her, even Edgar, if she wanted an abortion, but she did not and was angered that Edgar would even suggest the option.

Sophia said that telling her father about her pregnancy was the most difficult thing she ever had to do, and that he cried at the news. Sophia described the feeling of watching her father cry and disappointing him as follows: "It's like having something that you really love just chatter." Her decision to move in with Edgar only strained her relationship with her father further. Soon after Perkins Middle School found out she was pregnant, standard protocol dictated that they had to report her relationship to state authorities because Edgar was 18 years of age or older, and he had sex with a minor, in spite of it being consensual. In fact, when I talked to Sophia about my research she said she wanted to help, but she wanted to make sure that she

was not going to “get in trouble.” Also, she reassured me that she had “already fixed things through the court.” I met Sophia in the fall semester of Ms. Leal’s PSAP class. In class she was typically reserved and quite, but when she did share personal aspects of her life it was about her weakened relationship with her father. She was visibly anguished at no longer being close to her dad. When I met Sophia, she had already been with Edgar for five years.

The following semester Sophia only attended school for one computer-based course where she worked independently to earn enough credits towards graduation. Her plan was to do well and earn credits in three subjects over the course of a couple of months, so that after spring break she could just attend Barlow High’s night school, two times a week. In order to graduate, Sophia also had to make up fifty-four hours due to absences, but, as we neared the end of the year, the attendance committee reduced those hours from fifty-four to fifteen. Apparently, students had to do volunteer work to make up their hours, and she was given permission to count the times we met towards her goal. Sophia may have only been at school for a short period of the day, but she also had a part-time job. She worked most days at a retail store, but she was unhappy there because they continued to schedule her to work on days she explicitly had said she could not work. Still, she was determined to work there for at least six months so it would not reflect negatively with her next employer. Eventually, in the final days of March, I helped her draft her resignation letter.

Soon after we met, Sophia, Elizabeth, and Edgar moved in with her mother-in-law. Sophia referred to her as her mother-in-law, but she and Edgar were not officially married. A home invasion in Sophia and Edgar’s apartment prompted this new living arrangement. Not only was this living situation added stress in her life, but Sophia was also struggling to resolve her feelings about Edgar, which came into sharper focus in April of 2010. One morning, Sophia

and I were on the phone trying to schedule a meeting, and she asked if we could meet immediately because she had something she wanted to talk about. I met her at the public library, and she explained the stressful situation she was in. Sophia was struggling with leaving Edgar. She wanted to be on her own, and she wanted to go to school. However, she also realized how difficult it would be because of her responsibilities as a mother. Still she was ready to leave Edgar, but she did not trust that she could do it. She promised her grandmother that she would leave him when she got a full-time job. Edgar was homophobic and controlling. He prohibited Sophia and Elizabeth from seeing Mrs. Hernandez and Mary, but Sophia would try to see her mom anyway without him knowing. However, the last time Sophia saw her mother, Edgar found out and he threw her out of the house. This not only upset Sophia, but it also upset Elizabeth who was caught in the middle. This April morning she was ready to move on, having just found out Mary had been diagnosed with breast cancer. Sophia felt she had to be there for her mom and for Mary, and so she had to confront her feelings about Edgar.

It had always been difficult to meet with Sophia as she was only at school for a short period, and life was getting more and more complicated for the, soon-to-be, high school graduate. By late April, she was still living with her mother-in-law, and in July I received a text message from her. We texted back and forth for about half an hour, and she told me that she was no longer with Edgar. She was living with her mom and Mary, but she thought she had made the wrong decision. She needed someone to talk to and she told me that she now realized that being together was best for her small family, but now she was worried about disappointing her mom and Mary. Days later we talked again, and she had moved back in with Edgar.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusions

An American cultural concern with Latina teenage pregnancy is an effort to control the body politic. Most recently, in 2006, the reproductive capacity of Latinas/os attracted the attention from the National Campaign to Prevent Teenage and Unplanned Pregnancy and a year later the organization launched their Latino Initiative. The organization has described their mission as educating the public of the “teenage pregnancy problem,” and their educational efforts include working with legislators, designing media campaigns, and providing resources to social service providers. A critical analysis of the work contained in the latter two avenues of influence has led me to conclude that the National Campaign is a racializing campaign that constructs Latina teenage pregnancy as a cultural problem that should be solved by the community itself. This construction is not new, but it is the latest embodiment of the American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy.

Teenage pregnancy only became a legislative concern when it was constructed as a social problem that supposedly signaled immoral behavior. Moral and economic conservatives helped construct adolescent sexual behavior as immoral and teenage pregnancy as a behavior that led to poverty. Furthermore, the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem constructs pregnant teenagers as irresponsible. The principal driving force in today’s American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy is poverty and the people responsible for poverty. Furthermore, these views are also embedded in the politics of sex education, because sex education in the United States is linked to the same history of the New Right and the moral majority’s influence in politics. Yet, Laura, Hector, Brooke, Isaac, Isabella, and Sophia provided a window into the lives of student-parents in the first decade of the new millennium in Austin, Texas, and their lives and the responses to teenage pregnancy at Barlow High School highlighted the complexity

and range of experiences, which often challenged the stereotypes and assertions that are outlined in the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem.

The six student-parents in this study revealed five significant similarities or patterns in their lived experiences. The first is an awareness of the stigma associated with teenage pregnancy and teenage parenthood. In order to feed the social construction of teenage pregnancy as a social problem and keep it alive, teenage mothers and teenage pregnancy continues to be stigmatized in the United States. The National Campaign's media campaigns have powerfully driven the image of teenage mothers as sexual transgressors, with specific racialized and classed meanings. Their 2001 "Sex Has Consequences" media campaign labeled the Anglo teenager as a "Nobody," signaling her sexual transgression, while labeling the teenager of Asian descent "Dirty," the teenager of African descent a "Reject," and the teenager of Latina/o descent "Cheap." Not surprisingly, this stigma was present in the public imagination and in the student-parents' lives. For example, Ms. Leal's students in her Peer Assisted Leaders (PALs) class tried to understand why Barlow High administrators accepted teenage pregnancy on their campus if they have been told repeatedly through various avenues that teenage pregnancy was "bad." The racialized logics of teenage pregnancy were further illuminated with Brooke's pregnancy, which surprised many at Barlow High School because she was White and respectable, given that she was the daughter of a popular well-liked teacher. The reaction to Brooke's pregnancy brought into relief the position on Latina teenage pregnancy at Barlow High, which students' interpreted as an acceptance of teenage pregnancy.

Still, student-parents in this study most profoundly repeatedly demonstrated their awareness of the stigma associated with a teenage pregnancy and teenage parenthood. Isabella, herself a daughter of teenage parents, was constantly warned by her grandfather, the man who

raised her, not to grow up to be like her birth mother. Having let her grandfather down by getting pregnant as a teenager, Isabella had to learn to parent, amidst the disappointment she had caused. Hector also demonstrated an awareness of the stigma associated with his decision to parent when he said, “Imma make this bad thing turn into a good thing...I messed up, but I gotta make the best out of it...” Then there was Laura Cervantes, who commented that she realized that people at her school, Middleton High, where teenage parenthood was less frequent, thought that she was a “ho” because of her decision to have sex and to keep her baby. However, Laura was also convinced that her actions and her decisions did not define her as whole being, and she viewed her decision to raise Matthew, with the support of her family, as the best decision given her circumstances. Furthermore, she was not a “ho” since she had been in a monogamous relationship with Cesar, who was her first sexual partner.

Laura’s lived experience reminds us that teenage pregnancy was not a concern for the United States when “school was the main arena for dating, and dating was the main entry into sexual relations,” which was the social climate in American neighborhoods by the 1920s (Harari and Vinovskis 1993: 33). It was only with significant changes in society during the 1960s and 1970s that teenage pregnancy emerged as a concern. One major change was white, middle-class women’s entrance into the professional work sector of the economy, which ultimately led to delaying marriage and delaying family formation. Furthermore, White, middle-class women’s access to contraception kept their reproductive behavior hidden from scrutiny but it simultaneously highlighted the reproductive behavior of racial/ethnic others (Harari and Vinovskis 1993; Joffe 1993; Luker 1996; Luttrell 2003; Nathanson 1996; Pillow 2004; Rhode 1993). This affected teenage pregnancy since middle-class teenagers have greater access to contraception and are thus able to hide their sexually activity.

Thus the second pattern found among the student-parents in my study is that they had either been in what they considered long-term committed relationships or struggled to stay together after their pregnancies. Student-parents in this study had initiated sex like many in the past had done before them, that is, in relationships they believed were, as Laura put it, “forever.” Consequently, because of this and their lack of access to medically accurate sexual and reproductive health information, this pattern led to a third similarity, which was that for the six student-parents in this study sex “just happened.” Student-parents not only had sex without having a clear scientific understanding of sexual and reproductive health, but they also had sex without knowing how to talk to their partners about sex. Thus, sex may have “just happened,” but it did not “just happen” between two fully knowledgeable human beings on the topic of sex. Furthermore, a pregnancy resulted because students did not use contraception or used contraception sporadically. In their relationships, the young men were responsible for providing contraception, but the reality was that they had little access to it. Money was needed to buy condoms, but their access to legitimate money was also restricted by poverty, age, and immigration status. Still, despite the stigma associated with their decisions, all student-parents in my study made the decision to parent and they took their parenting roles very seriously. These student-parents displayed great thoughtfulness and agency when they chose to keep their children.

The fourth pattern or similarity that their lives exhibited was that they viewed their pregnancies as a wake-up call. Some, like Laura and Brooke, tried pouring more energy into their schoolwork in order to secure a good-paying job. Others, like Isabella, Laura, and Sophia, added paid work onto their responsibilities as student, parent, daughter/son in an effort to provide for their children. Still others, like Hector, Isabella, and Isaac, sought to learn as much as they

could about parenting. While the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem depicts pregnant teenagers and student-parents as sexually irresponsible, these student-parents demonstrated a great understanding of responsibility, only their access to economically viable futures was already constrained by poverty and segregation.

By the time a high school student is a senior in high school, nearly half of their classmates will have engaged in sexual relationships. This pattern is common throughout the United States and Europe, although U.S. teens do not use contraception as consistently as European teens. Thus, Texas' abstinence-only sex education policies deserve serious scrutiny as the state's policies are not working to reduce or prevent teenage pregnancies and teenage childbearing. The State of Texas not only teaches its students that sex is only acceptable in a heterosexual marriage, but it also reasons that since high school students are not likely to be married then they should not have access to sexual and reproductive health information and information about contraception. In contrast, the State of California, which continues to see drops in their teenage childbearing rates, instituted a sex education policy to inform students about sexual and reproductive health. California, unlike Texas, does not accept any federal funding for abstinence-only sex education.

Texas' refusal to teach medically accurate, age-appropriate sexual health in their schools and their refusal to give students' access to reliable contraception information is similar to the 1873 Comstock Law, which prohibited the United States Postal Service from delivering pamphlets and information regarding contraception and abortion. Kristin Luker (1996) argues that the Comstock Law was intended to help promote the fertility of White, middle-class married women by denying them information on how to prevent pregnancies. However, their class positions ultimately gave them access to doctors who could provide them with options for

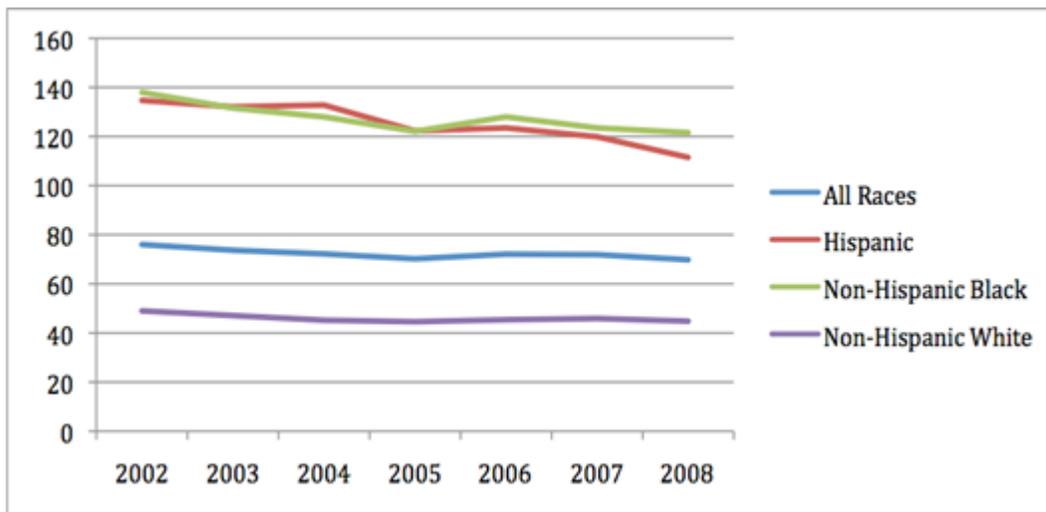
fertility control, hence, these restrictive policies did not greatly affect the fertility rates of White, middle-class women. In a similar manner, abstinence-only sex education is also about restricting access to information, only these restrictive policies end up promoting the fertility of groups of people who do not have the monetary means of accessing fertility control and then they are blamed for being sexually irresponsible. Thus, we cannot ignore the actions of a state that simultaneously promotes and stigmatizes the fertility of poor.

As mentioned earlier, the student-parents in this study did not only not have access to sexual and reproductive health knowledge, but they also had few avenues for making legitimate money, money that was needed to buy contraception. Thus the fifth and final significant pattern was that all student-parents' lives were shaped by poverty with parents working multiple jobs to make ends meet and some families being marked by mixed immigration status. Furthermore, they all reported to having used contraception but their contraception-use was inconsistent. Hector admitted that he used the money he made from selling drugs to buy contraception but it was unclear what prohibited him from using contraception every time. Nevertheless it is clear that more research is needed on contraception use among American teenagers, especially among the poor. Furthermore, subsequent research should consider Kearney and Levine's statistical economic analysis that found that teenage pregnancy does *not* have a "direct economic consequence" (2012: 142). Or that the economic futures of poor women who have a child while still a teenager are not affected by their decision to parent. At the very least all youth deserve to be given an opportunity to live and learn in a nurturing environment and the state and public schools should support that by giving youth access to medically accurate age-appropriate information about the human body and its reproductive capacity. Time and again youth in this study demonstrated that they were having conflicted feelings about sex but did not have an

avenue in which to explore those feelings in a healthy, judgment-free environment. The state does not have to promote adolescent sexuality but it should promote an environment where science, not moral judgment, comes first.

However, as I have demonstrated, critical scholars of teenage pregnancy and women's reproductive freedoms have argued that attempts to control women's sex lives and reproductive behaviors have always been intertwined with political, social, and economic changes in society, and the present moment is no exception. Demographic data, which is disaggregated by race and ethnicity for pregnancy and births, is used in different ways depending on the message one wishes to communicate. For example, today's shift in focus towards Latinas/os was magnified when the teenage pregnancy rate for the United States began to slightly increase after a period of general decline (Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1: U.S. Pregnancy Rates for women age 15 to 19 and by Race and Ethnicity. N = out of 1,000.<sup>97</sup>

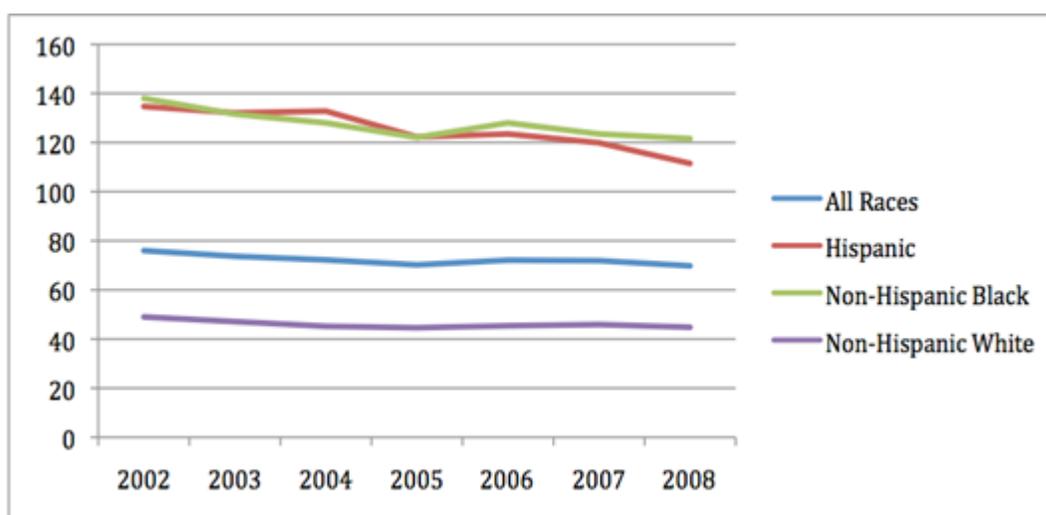


In Figure 7.1, one will also note that the teenage pregnancy rates of African Americans and Latinas/os are similar but more than 2.5 times higher than the teenage pregnancy rate of Anglo

<sup>97</sup> Data for the years 2002 – 2004 (Ventura et al. 2008). Data for 2005 – 2008 (Ventura et al. 2012).

Americans. These racial disparities have helped maintain the American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy. However, the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem is also maintained by focusing on the teenage birth rate, and it even depends on the easy conflation of two different behaviors, pregnancy and motherhood, in order to keep teenage pregnancy as a public concern. The different raced responses to the data contained in Figure 7.1 and in Figure 7.2 illustrate this point.

Figure 7.2: U.S. Birth Rates for women age 15 to 19 and by Race and Ethnicity. N = out of 1,000.<sup>98</sup>



Differences between a pregnancy rate and birth rate reflect fetal loss and abortion. Some have interpreted Figure 7.1 and Figure 7.2 as illustrating that although African Americans and Latinas get pregnant at about the same rate, African Americans are more likely to have an abortion.<sup>99</sup> One anti-abortion organization crafted and erected a billboard campaign, which depicted an African-American toddler and text reading, “The most dangerous place for an African American is in the womb.”

<sup>98</sup> Data for the years 2002 – 2004 (Martin et al. 2006). Data for 2006 (Martin et al. 2009). Data for 2005, 2007 – 2010 (Martin et al. 2012).

<sup>99</sup> Abortion rates are not tabulated but would be needed for a more complete analysis of differences in behavior between Latinas and African Americans.

The National Campaign, on the other hand, used the data in Figure 7.1 and Figure 7.2 to raise alarm about the nation's future and the role of Latinas/os in it. They use Latina teenage birth rates, and findings that the Latina teenage pregnancy is slower to decline than in other racial/ethnic groups, in conjunction with population estimates that find that the Latina/o population is the fastest growing population in the United States to incite fear. They replicate the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem by continuing to advance the idea that teenage pregnancy leads to dropping out of school and to a lifetime of poverty and by calculating a bill of local and federal costs of teenage childbearing. Prevention is clearly the solution, but prevention, according to the "experts," is not about access to contraceptives and sexual and reproductive health information. The National Campaign's solutions are inherently flawed since they never question the assumptions contained in the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem. Their conclusions are mostly based on their own flawed research and surveys, still they assert that families are the key to solving the teenage pregnancy problem and the plight of the Latina/o population. This is the construction of the Latina teenage pregnancy problem that the National Campaign, who is considered the expert source on the subject, disseminates to social services working with Latinas/os.

Finally, educators and social workers at Barlow High sought to do their jobs as best they could, but they were limited by multiple discourses that obscured the power of multiple intersecting hierarchies in shaping the lives of students. Barlow High School and A-Space were two civil institutions that were designed for making good citizens with the important attribute of self-responsibility. A focus on building good responsible citizens is used to absolve the systems, which have created racist, sexist, and classist laws and policies throughout history that push poor people of color out of the body politic, of responsibility. As a public institution, Barlow High

School believed they tried their best given the “outside forces” that interfered with academic achievement. Furthermore, the school itself did not have a mechanism in place to deal with the “needs” of “at-risk” youth, and so outsourced these students to A-Space, a social work organization. This nonprofit organization is best understood as another civil organization with the goal of rehabilitating youth in the citizenship building process. Kwon (2013) argues that nonprofit organizations are informed by the same ideological frameworks of the state and participate in market-based capitalism, and thus they too reproduce ideologies regarding citizenship and responsibility. Kwon further points out that the hypocrisy lies in making poor communities of color responsible for a living situation that has been largely created by the state.

Furthermore, educators saw their work as helping immigrants cross over into a multicultural American society, but this multicultural world did not actually exist. The chances of achieving White middle-class norms were small given that accessing this lifestyle is contingent upon racial and class power. These poor immigrant students and students of color had little chance of attaining the lifestyles from which their current lives were judged. Regarding academics, I found no general pattern. The students-parents in this study were both high- and low-achievers. Still, educators vacillated between understanding some of the structural hurdles that impeded socioeconomic mobility, but in the end conceded that they did the best they could in the situation given to them and they failed to see how they participated in creating difference. When I asked students at Barlow High how they felt about teenage pregnancy at their school, they overwhelmingly responded that teenage pregnancy at Barlow High School was normalized. Barlow High students believed that teenage pregnancy was accepted at their high school given the responses from administrators, which was to support pregnant and parenting students by modifying their curriculum in order to help them graduate. Students did not see educators

address teenage pregnancy, which youth have always been told is undesirable. Instead they saw an acceptance of teenage pregnancy.

An American cultural concern with teenage pregnancy, which helps maintain stratified reproduction cannot be successfully dismantled without a simultaneous critique of multiple intersecting hierarchies of power. I suggest that we adopt a critical view towards teenage pregnancy given that the history of reproductive politics and racial politics have informed this concern, and given that this concern is ultimately about belonging and control. Barlow High School opened in 2009/2010 with a restructured learning plan, which, ironically, was designed as four Small Learning Communities (SLCs). The idea was that students might achieve more academically if their four years of high school were experienced with a quarter of their class. While the effect of the SLCs remains to be seen, I argue that the idea of “community” at Barlow High School and North Meadows needs to be further problematized. Teachers and administrators must first recognize their role in creating communities.

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## **Vita**

Nancy Rios was born and raised in the Chicagoland area of Illinois. She graduated from Aurora West High School in 1997. She received a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2001, and after working two years as a case manager for youth and as a community organizer with single mothers, she entered the Graduate School at the University of Texas at Austin in 2003. She received a Master of Arts in anthropology in 2005.

Permanent address: 1446 Beau Ridge Dr., Aurora, IL 60506

This dissertation was typed by the author.