

Running Head: THE SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES OF PR SCHOOL-AGED  
MOTHERS

**“We are Beautiful People:”**

**The Schooling Experiences of Puerto Rican School-Aged Mothers**

A dissertation

submitted by

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**Abstract**

“We are Beautiful People”:

The Schooling Experiences of Puerto Rican School-Aged Mothers

Guided by Sociocultural Perspectives of Human Development (Mistry et al., 2016; Rogoff, 2003), and Critical Race Feminisms (Bernal Delgado, 2002; Vaught, 2011; Crenshaw, 1991), this study explores the educational attainment, trajectories, and schooling experiences of Puerto Rican (PR) school-aged mothers in Massachusetts (MA). Together, the theories emphasize the importance of situating human outcomes, trajectories, and experiences relative to the sociocultural and historical contexts in which development take place. Inherently, this requires that structural level factors, in the form of policies, programs, practices, and ideologies, and how they contribute to social organization and to the development of people be critically examined. In this study, a multi-method longitudinal approach, including descriptive statistical analysis and Testimonio Inquiry Analysis were employed. Quantitative and qualitative data from 145 PR school-aged mothers, including the collection of Testimonios from a subsample (n=10) comprised the data corpus. The analysis revealed four main findings: (1) Prior to pregnancy, participants attended schools that were fundamentally different than most students in MA. Their schools were largely segregated, economically disadvantaged, with long histories of educational inequities, all of which contributed to negative schooling experiences. Upon becoming pregnant, (2) participants experienced school-based policies in practice that made completing their education increasingly laborious. (3) Despite these challenges,

participants had heterogenous educational outcomes and trajectories. (4)

Familial, social support, as well as their own aspirational capital were instrumental in navigating educational contexts. Together, the findings elucidate how the schooling lives of the participants, pre and post pregnancy, were largely shaped by racist and gendered ideologies of unbelonging. Specifically, the Testimonios demonstrate how the power of the state, through public schooling, is mechanized to uphold gendered, racialized, classed, aged, and an anti-parental writ at large and how schooling, as a developmental context, is shaped by larger intersecting systems of oppression that privilege majoritarian notions of normative development. Recognizing their own beautiful humanity, however, PR school-aged mothers resisted and persisted in pursuing their educational dreams.

### **Acknowledgments**

My uncle Luis Colón was the most respected elder in our family. Through a lot sacrifice, he single-handedly planted the seeds that lifted us out of intergenerational poverty. From a very young age, he valued education and genuinely believed in the importance of mutuality and reciprocity. As a teenager, for example, he helped to launch an adult learning program and volunteered to be one of its teachers. At that time, many of our elders had never had the opportunity to attend school. Because he was a natural born teacher, he believed in everyone's capacity to dream, and ultimately helped many people in our community learn to read and write, including his own mother. This is one of the innumerable things he did to help others.

I envisioned visiting Puerto Rico after completing my doctoral studies to personally thank him for creating this path for me, for us. But my Tío Luis died three days after Hurricane Maria hit Borikén. He was one of several family members, and one of the thousands, who tragically lost their lives because of the political and humanitarian crisis that ensued in the post Hurricane period. Like many Puerto Ricans in the Diaspora, I was overwhelmed by the despair of wanting to help while at the same time not being able to be in contact with loved ones. As the news of the disaster started to trickle in, the invisibility of Puerto Rican voices and the discourse monetizing the lives of Boricuas were too much to bear. I could not write, never mind work on my dissertation. I felt helpless, paralyzed.

It was during this period that I felt that my Tío, along with other ancestors, who toiled, who resisted, and that *contra viento y marea* built a life that we could be proud of, came to me. Their lives reminded me of the importance of authoring our own stories and of reimagining and working towards a world that we deserved. I listened and began to see how this dissertation was my own *granito de arena*, part of a larger story yet to unfold. Thank you Tío, thank you *familia*, for when in doubt, you reminded me of why I took this journey.

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hope you can forgive me for the times that I have missed. I hope that with every breath you take, you know that I breathe for you. And to Herb, my husband whom I met when I was only 19 and whose love has strengthened me since, you are the person I need.

None of this would have been possible were it not for the women who agreed to be part of this study. Thank you for trusting me. Thank you for loving our children and our community. You are a true testament of strength and perseverance.

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**Acronyms**

AY	Academic Year
AYP	Annual Yearly Progress
DCF	Department of Children and Families
DTA	Department of Transitional Assistance
DYS	Department of Youth Services
ELA	English Language Arts
ELL	English Language Learner
FOB	Father of the Baby
IHE	Institutions of Higher Education
MCAS	Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System
MDESE	Massachusetts Department of Secondary and Elementary Education
MHFE	Massachusetts Healthy Family Evaluation
OSS	Out-of-School Suspension
PR	Puerto Rican
SOC	Students of Color
SPED	Special Education
TIER	Tufts Interdisciplinary Evaluation Research
WOC	Women of Color

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Isis<sup>1</sup>, a young Puerto Rican woman living in a low-income segregated post-industrial city in New England, found out she was pregnant while in the seventh grade. Despite gaining "a lot of weight" and experiencing a host of medical complications that often caused her to be absent, she did not tell anyone at school, and no one seemed to notice. During her mandatory summer school session, Isis and her mother informed the Principal that Isis was going to give birth in the fall. Shortly thereafter the Principal told them that Isis' middle school was not "safe" and she was transferred to an alternative high school designed for school-aged mothers, where she was told she would finish the 8th grade. Isis really wanted to graduate from middle school with her friends and go on to regular high school, neither which she was permitted to do. Overcoming tremendous hardships, after completing the eighth grade Isis insisted on transferring to a local high school. On her own, she carefully completed a petition for a transfer. The following fall, she rejoined her friends and was on track to meet her educational goals on her own terms.

Although Isis's ability to persevere may leave us in awe, her story also raises important ideological questions about the role of schooling in the lives of young mothers.<sup>2</sup> How is it possible that no faculty or staff at her middle school

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms have been used.

<sup>2</sup> Terms such as "young mother" or "early parenting" are culturally situated. In this study, I prefer to use the term school-aged mother to refer to students who became mothers while completing their secondary education. Consistent with public discourse and scholarship on school-aged

noticed that a student was pregnant? Why was she removed from her school? Why is school unsafe for pregnant students? What, if any, is the responsibility of schools to support the developmental and academic needs of students with children? These questions are particularly important because schools are spaces in which the construction and ideology of teenage pregnancy as a social problem intersects with schooling processes that (re)produce anti-parental gendered, classed, and racialized notions of unbelonging (Augustin, 1997; Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2003; Rios, 2013).

In the contemporary United States (US), despite relatively low rates of adolescent parenting,<sup>3</sup> teen pregnancy is largely constructed as a social problem. Research across a myriad of disciplines documents the negative associations between adolescent parenting and outcomes for both the parent and their child. One of the most enduring narratives is that becoming a teen mother will likely result in “dropping out” of school and a lifetime poverty (Rios, 2013). This idea is often substantiated by studies which suggest that adolescent mothers are less likely than their non-parenting peers to earn a high school diploma and/or a college degree (Kane, Morgan, Harris, & Guilkey, 2013; Maness, Buhi, Daley, Baldwin, & Kromrey, 2016; Perper, Peterson, & Manlove, 2010). Though less publicized, studies have also revealed that the relationship between educational attainment and teen parenting is quite complex. School achievement before childbearing, for

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mothers, I also use the terms "young," "teen" or "adolescent" when referenced as such by the cited authors, or to convey the nature of the rhetoric of pregnancy or parenting during adolescence. These are also the terms the participants of this study used to describe themselves.

<sup>3</sup> In the US, the teen birth rate in 2015 was 22% births per 1,000 females aged 10–19, a record low (Martin et al., 2017).

example, has been found to be consistent with achievement after childbirth (Leadbeater & Way, 2001; Way & Leadbeater, 1999). In addition, while many school-aged mothers struggle to complete secondary education, others navigate parenting and education successfully (Mistry et al., 2016; Oxford et al., 2005). From a developmental perspective, in the current social climate of the US, becoming a parent during adolescence precipitates navigating conflicting priorities of simultaneously completing secondary education and early parenting which can impact how school-aged mothers make decisions about their education (Mistry et al., 2016).

Although there is an abundance of public concern regarding teen pregnancy and a substantial body of research on risk and protective factors that impact the development of adolescent mothers and their children, “school-aged mothers have remained marginal to educational discourses of curriculum, school reform, and pedagogy” (Lesko, 2012, p.217). Much of the research on this population primarily focuses on individual and familial level factors and how they might mediate school achievement. Largely absent from these inquiries are analyses of the role that schools, as a developmental context, play in the educational outcomes and trajectories of this population.

In response to this gap, scholars have begun to study the schooling experiences of school-aged mothers. This body of work acknowledges that adolescent parents often suspend their schooling due to the hostile environment and stigmatization they experience in school. School-aged mothers have identified inflexible attendance policies, limited credits accepted from home

study, inadequate maternity leave policies, lack of reasonable transportation between home, school and childcare, and negative interactions with school administration, teachers, and students as reasons for why they terminate their schooling (Bermea, Toews, & Wood, 2016; Vinson & Stevens, 2014; Zachry, 2005). These findings bring attention to three aspects of adolescent parenting that have been under-examined in the literature: (1) the heterogeneity present within the schooling experiences and educational attainment of school-aged mothers; (2) schools as a developmental context that impacts the educational trajectories of young parents and their children; and (3) the ways in which educational policies, programs, and practices map on to existing ideologies regarding teen pregnancy and parenting.

For school-aged mothers of Color, who experience a relatively high incidence of adolescent parenting and lower education attainment, the challenges of being a parent and a student are intensified as their pregnancies are often framed as “the problem” that keeps them from completing their secondary education and establishing economic security (Augustin, 1997; Luttrell, 2003; Rios, 2013). This rhetoric, in part, has contributed to the implementation of numerous first and repeat pregnancy prevention programs and campaigns that target Black and Latina<sup>4,5</sup> high school students (Luttrell, 2003; Rios, 2003). Not only are many of these programs culturally insensitive (see Rios’ analysis of “The

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<sup>4</sup> The terms Latina, Latino Latinx (a genders inclusive term), and Hispanic, are typically used to refer to individuals of Latin American ancestry. While the appropriateness of these terms is often debated, in this study, I use the terms that are used by the referenced authors. To the extent possible I prefer to use racially and ethnically specific data, scholarship, and terms.

<sup>5</sup> Black and Latina are not mutually exclusive categories. Again, in this inquiry, I use the terms as referenced by the authors cited.



National Campaign to Prevent Teenage and Unplanned Pregnancy Latina Initiative”), they also often lack analysis of the sociocultural and historical contexts which has systematically limited access to high-quality educational opportunities, including comprehensive sexual education, to Students of Color (SOC). Lastly, most of these initiatives largely ignore the desires and choices of young mothers of Color. They intentionally position Black and Latina pregnant women, and subsequently Black and Latinx children, as unruly and disruptive to White heteropatriarchal notions of normative adolescent development.

Attending to the inherent heterogeneity of experiences and imaginations of school-aged mothers, this study focuses on the educational trajectories and schooling experiences of Puerto Rican (PR) school-aged mothers. This population choice was intentional. First, although the birth rate among women between ages 10–19 has decreased substantially in the US since the 1990s, the teen birth rate among Hispanics of the same age is 35%, the highest among all racial and ethnic groups (Martin, Hamilton, Ventura, Osterman, & Mathews, 2017). Second, PRs comprise the second largest Hispanic origin group in the US, (Stepler & Brown, 2016). PR women, compared to their non-PR peers, also have a relatively higher rate of becoming adolescent mothers (Contreras, 2004; Gilbert, 2012; Martin et al., 2017).

Although PR communities exist throughout the continental US, the northeast corridor has traditionally benefitted from long-standing PR enclaves. Massachusetts (MA), the site of this study, has one of the oldest PR communities in the US, and the fifth largest PR population outside of Puerto Rico (Centro,

2016). MA has the lowest teen pregnancy rate in the nation (9%) (Martin et al., 2017). MA's public schools have also been nationally recognized as "leading the nation" in student achievement (MDESE, 2017). In theory, this would suggest that PR students in MA would have the opportunity to attend excellent public schools in communities with low teenage pregnancy rates. Contrary to this assertion, the Latina teen pregnancy rate in MA is more than three times the state average (32%) (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2017). Massachusetts' municipalities with the highest teen pregnancy rate are also places with high concentration of PR residents (Lozano, Granberry, & Mattos, 2017; Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy, 2014). These are also communities whose schools have long-standing records of significant achievement and opportunities gaps that vary by student subgroups (MDESE, 2015; Gastic, Colón, & Flannery Aguilar, 2010). As such, in spite of living in a state that is nationally recognized as an innovative leader in public education, data suggest that PR students<sup>6</sup> have some of the lowest educational attainment rates in the Commonwealth (Berardino, 2014, 2015; Rivera & Nieto, 1993). This is consistent with research which has found that similar to other native-born "minorities," PRs have some of the lowest levels of educational attainment across most engagement and academic outcomes (Nieto, 2000; US Census, 2015).

Yet despite the well documented "gaps" in the education of PR youth, the invisibility of the experiences of PR students in public discourse and scholarship

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<sup>6</sup> Data on PRs students are often included as part of the broader Latinx category. To the extent possible, I use data and scholarship that are specific to PRs.

is palpable. Withstanding some notable exceptions (e.g. Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007; Nieto, 2000, Rolón-Dow, 2007, 2010; Sokolowski et al., 2010) the majority of existing studies tend to highlight possible but incomplete explanations for their lower educational attainment compared to other ethnic groups, often citing culture as an explanatory factor even though PR culture was not the focus of the study. Scholars of the Puerto Rico and PRs, in and out of the Diaspora, have emphasized the need to examine the educational attainment of PR students, including school-aged mothers, in light of their sociocultural, political and historical context (García Coll et al., 1996; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007; Nieto, 2000, 2004). Like other groups that experience racialization and marginalization, their own lived experiences in facing structural barriers that have reduced their opportunities to high-quality education for themselves or their children are largely ignored.

### **Research Questions and Summary of Study Design**

In alignment with scholarship on PR children, youth, families, and communities and with a deliberate rejection of deficit-based research paradigms in this study, I argue that because schools are a critical development context for adolescents, understanding educational outcomes, trajectories, and experiences of PR school-aged mothers necessitates the examination of the sociocultural and historical contexts in which schooling takes place. This requires exploring the role of structural level factors, in the form of policies, programs, practice, and ideologies, and how they shape the educational lives of this population.

Furthermore, I posit that focusing on how PR school-aged mothers themselves make meaning of their experiences is an essential epistemological approach for the co-construction of knowledge. With these organizing principles in mind, this dissertation is guided by the following three questions:

- 1) What are the structural barriers that PR school-aged mothers report as experiencing in schools?;
- 2) How do PR school-aged mothers make meaning of those barriers?; and
- 3) What are the sources of supports that PR mothers' view as facilitating their educational attainment?

To explore these questions, my analysis is guided by a transdisciplinary theoretical framework that benefits from a synthesis of Sociocultural Perspectives of human development (Mistry et al., 2016b; Rogoff, 2003), and Critical Race Feminisms (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 1991). The use of these theoretical perspectives allows for a focus on structural factors, or what is often referred to in developmental science as ecological circumstances, as well as the personal interpretative frames that center on the lived experience of the participants. Methodologically, I employ a multi-method approach (Creswell, 2012) that consists of three distinct but complementing phases. First, using data from the Massachusetts Healthy Families Evaluation (MHFE), an evaluation of a universal home visiting program for first time adolescent parents in MA, and publicly available data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE), I use descriptive statistical analysis to develop a

demographic portrait of the educational outcomes and trajectories of PR school-aged mothers in MA. Second, using longitudinal qualitative data, by means of Testimonio Inquiry Analysis (Beverley, 2008; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012; Pérez Huber, 2009), I examine how PR school-aged mothers make meaning of their schooling experiences, and how these experiences map against policies, programs, practices, and ideologies that shaped their educational lives. In the final phase, I integrate the findings of these components to address the study's questions.

### **Significance of Study**

I anticipate that findings from this study will contribute new insights to the growing body of critical scholarship that interrogates the importance of schooling as a developmental context. Addressing transdisciplinary methodological concerns on research that focuses on adolescent parents, and more broadly on children and youth who have experienced marginalization, the use of Testimonios as a nested methodological approach presents an opportunity to contribute to ongoing debates on what knowledge, theories, and methods are deemed legitimate (and why) in scholarly engagements that examine the developmental outcomes, trajectories, and processes of these populations. By centering my analysis on the experiences of PR school-aged mothers I hope to contribute to scholarship that elevates the importance of understanding outcomes and trajectories of Latinx students, and specifically PR students, against dominant ideologies that essentialize them as deviant.

It is also important to recognize that this project took place at a time when Puerto Rico and PRs was undergoing a political and humanitarian crisis. On September 20, 2017, a category four Hurricane, Maria, hit Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, leaving the islands in what has been described as a post-apocalyptic state. This was the second major hurricane to hit the region in a four-week period. Following the storms, Puerto Rico and its people experienced an unparalleled collapse of public health, energy, economic, agricultural, education and environmental management systems. By every measure possible, relief to PR and its people has been deliberately slow, resulting in the death of thousands of people. The failures of the US federal government to take care of its “citizens” have highlighted the liminal status of PRs as colonial subjects, most evident by the unnecessary loss of human life and the ongoing insecurity, suffering, and collective trauma experienced by PRs in the archipelago and the Diaspora. Regardless of the perseverance of the PR people, it is now estimated that the rebuilding of Puerto Rico will be a decades-long process.

In response to the economic crisis, which preceded the hurricanes and has worsened exponentially, a surge in the population of PRs in the continental US is currently underway (Meléndez, 2017). Given the long history of PRs building communities in MA, it should be of no surprise that thousands of PRs are resettling again in the state. Different from other migrant groups, the migration of PRs to the US has typically included women and children. They come, as they always have, looking for security and opportunities for a better future. Many fear that this wave of PR students will face the same hostile environments and

structural barriers that PRs have historically endured (Alvaréz, 2017; Roman, 2017; Meléndez, 2017; Superville, 2017).

As such, it is also my hope that this study, in a small but meaningful way, contributes to a broader humanizing project that disrupts deficit-based notions of PR mothers, families, students, and children as inherently deficient. I aim to bring attention to the unseen labor, agency, self-determination, and the dignity of the PR students relative to schooling processes they have withstood and survived.

### **Organization of the Study**

The remainder of this dissertation is organized as follows: In Chapter Two, I begin by presenting the theoretical foundation of this study. I then provide a synthesis of three interrelated transdisciplinary bodies of scholarship that explore the educational attainment and experiences of (1) PR students in US schools, (2) adolescents who are parents, and of (3) PR school-aged mothers. In the final section, I discuss how the integration of these bodies of literature, coupled with the theoretical framework, guides my analysis. Chapter Three focuses on the study's methodological approach. I describe the study participants, the data utilized, and the analytic plan, including the use of Testimonios as an analytic and theory building tool. I conclude the chapter by describing my positionality. In Chapter 4, I present the findings of the quantitative analysis (Phase I). The findings from the Testimonio Inquiry Analysis are presented in Chapter 5. In the concluding chapter, I converge the quantitative and qualitative analysis and present four core findings. I also discuss implications to policy, programs, and

practice as well as transdisciplinary methodological questions related to research that focuses on PR students and more broadly on children and youth who experience marginalization.



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In a study that asks, (a) What are the structural barriers that PR mothers experience in schools?;(b) How do PR mothers make meaning of those barriers? and (c) What are the sources and supports that PR school-aged mothers view as facilitating educational attainment? one must be prepared to critically engage with issues of race, gender, and the mechanization of social stratification in schools. To answer these questions, I use a theoretical framework that (1) acknowledges the importance of schools as a developmental context that is powered by broader social mechanisms, as well as (2) values meaning-making to understand how these structures are operationalized and re(produced). This proposed framework (See Figure 1) benefits from Sociocultural Perspectives of Human Development (García Coll et al., 1996; Mistry et al., 2016; Rogoff, 2003), and Critical Race Feminisms (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Vaught, 2011; Crenshaw, 1991) both which I describe below.

#### Theoretical Framework

##### Sociocultural Perspectives of Human Development

Before outlining the key elements of Sociocultural Perspectives of Human Development, and their importance to this study, it is important to first describe their relationship to the field of developmental science (DS) and more broadly to research on People of Color. First, DS is primarily understood as a field that is concerned with understanding biopsychosocial outcomes, mechanisms, and the relational interplay between risk and protective factors that influence development

across the human lifespan. Relational systems theories, which posit that (1) human development inherently occurs through mutually influential integrated dynamic connections and interactions of individuals and their contexts and (2) that contexts are defined by social and cultural practices, as well as the structures and institutions that humans experience over the course of their lives, are currently used in DS research (Lerner, 2006; Lerner & Overton, 2008; Mistry, et al., 2016; Rogoff, 2003). Despite the recognition of the importance of social context in the development of humans by developmental scientists, the history of DS, as is the case with many other academic disciplines, is one that is marred with deficit-based assumptions to explain the developmental outcomes of People of Color. One of the most persistent critiques of DS is the use of White European American middle-class culture as the norm, while variations were pathologized and considered to be deviant (García Coll et al., 1996; Rogoff, 2003; Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997). In addition, most developmental research, on populations that have been defined as “at risk” or “marginalized,” examines individual-level outcomes, processes, and behaviors without addressing the social structures and ideologies that contribute to the adverse circumstances that children and families may face (Obrist, Pfeiffer, & Henley, 2010; Ungar, 2011). By neglecting to address social context, including the impact of intersecting systems of oppression in the lives of humans, the act of only focusing on individual-level analysis erroneously supports the notion that one’s ability to recover from exposure to adversity is solely an individual trait to be cultivated (Bottrell, 2009; Obrist, Pfeiffer, & Henley, 2010).

In response to these limitations, developmental science scholars have begun to advance the use of Sociocultural Perspectives of human development to examine the developmental outcomes and process of individuals who experience marginalization. García Coll and colleagues (1996), for example, used past research on African American (AA) and PR children to argue that the lack of longitudinal investigations on the normative development of minority children as well as the insufficient examination of developmental processes, intragroup variability, and the effects social stratification systems on lifespan development in the existing scholarship necessitated the creation of new conceptual tools to examine the development of minority children. Their work resulted in the well-cited *Integrative Model of the Study of Developmental Competencies in Minority Children* (1996) which unequivocally positions racism, discrimination, oppression, and segregation as critical features of the developmental contexts of ethnic and racial minorities in the US and maintains that the effects of social stratifications systems must be deliberated when examining the developmental processes and outcomes of children (García Coll et al., 1996).

This is one of several conceptual models which accentuate that human development is a cultural process that cannot be separated from its social and historical context (Nieto,1999; Rogoff, 2003). By this very nature, Sociocultural Perspectives privilege the notion that humans are shaped by the contexts in which they live, their participation in cultural communities, and recognizing individual agency, that contexts are also transformed through human interaction (Rogoff, 2003). Sociocultural developmentalists argue that developmental differences by

various social groups (i.e. PR families) are informed by population-level experiences, history, and social conditions, as well as by shared beliefs, values, and practices (García Coll et al., 1996; Mistry et al., 2016; Rogoff, 2003; Spencer et al., 1997).

With this perspective in mind, it is then possible to locate schooling as a critical developmental context for children that are racial or ethnic minorities in the US (García Coll & Marks, 2009; Eccles & Roeser, 2001). To begin with, in the US, children and adolescents spend more time in school than anywhere else (Eccles & Roeser, 2001). In addition to being exposed to specific content knowledge and skills, schools are places in which children socialize, forge and test relationships, practice teamwork, and engage in the activities (academic and otherwise) that can prepare for their participation in their communities. Teacher characteristics, teacher-student relationships, curricular tasks, and classroom environments, school organization, and policies and practices also play an instrumental role in the intellectual and social-emotional development of children and adolescents (see Eccles & Roeser, 2011 for a comprehensive review).

US schools, however, are not and have never been equal. Schools vary in terms of their quality, pedagogical approaches, programming, and resources. A robust body of literature has documented that social stratification intersecting along the lines of race and socioeconomic status allows or denies children and adolescents access to specific school-based resources critical to their development (García Coll & Marks, 2009; Kasnitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway, 2009; Nieto, 2013; Orfield, Ee, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2016; Warikoo &

Carter, 2009). By and large, in the US, schools continue to be segregated on the grounds of race and class with material consequences to the lives of children, families, and communities (Orfield et al., 2016). Schools are also spaces where the transmission, enforcement, and the ultimate reproduction of social ideologies takes place (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Vaught, 2011). As such the type of school a student attends can inhibit or promote children's development across multiple domains.

For this reason, even though Sociocultural Perspectives acknowledge the importance of individual cognition (abilities, talents, and disposition, for instance), scholars argue that as it pertains to schools and learning, “context is always implicated” (Nieto, 1999, p.1). In her description of Sociocultural Perspectives of learning, Nieto (1999) writes:

The way we learn, what we choose to learn, the opportunities and resources available for learning, and the social and political status of our identities all influence how and the extent to which we are successful as learners (p.11).

As it relates to this study, sociocultural theories teach us that to understand the educational outcomes, processes, and trajectories of SOC, the context in which school takes place must be directly addressed. Influenced by this perspective of human development, this study emphasizes that people, in this case, PR school-aged mothers, cannot be separated from their sociocultural and political context and that the context that we live in and how we make meaning of it has material consequences across various developmental domains, including

educational attainment. This is particularly significant for research on PR school-aged mothers given the internal dynamics of reconciling one's social position relative to accessing opportunities and resources that may impact developmental outcomes across various domains (García Coll et al., 1996).

### **Critical Race Theory → Critical Race Feminisms**

The theoretical framework is also informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminisms (CRF). With the goal of illuminating and transforming the relationships between race, racism, and power, CRT interrogates ways in which ideologies, policies, and practices explicitly and implicitly maintain racial inequality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Originating in the 1980s, as a response to the limited examination of racism in critical legal theory, a group of scholars began to theorize a jurisprudence that accounted for the role of racism in the American legal systems (Crenshaw, 2001). Using legal history as the basis for analysis, the founders of CRT asserted that: (1) race and racism are an endemic and permanent part of the American ethos; (2) that the law (and therefore the legal system) is a racialized project that is largely based on the protection of property rights; and (3) that constructions of who has “rights” and who is worthy of “rights,” per the law, are used to reproduce raced based hegemony (Crenshaw, 2001; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Gotanda, 1991; Harris, 1993).

Essential to understanding CRT is the idea that race and racism are central and permanent constructs that define and explain how US society functions. This

is most evident by systematic state-sponsored oppression, across various dimensions that are inflicted upon People of Color, and in particular Black people. Because of this CRT scholars argue that a jurisprudence committed to social transformation requires directly challenging White supremacy as well as an acknowledgment of how various systems of oppression work in sync to reproduce hegemony (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). The lived experiences of people who themselves experienced racism, which was largely ignored in legal studies, they argue, must also be recognized as a legitimate source of knowledge (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Yosso, 2005). The intercentricity of race and racism and the importance of experiential knowledge are two of the five foundation principles of CRT.<sup>7</sup> The other three are the importance of challenging dominant ideologies, the significance of utilizing interdisciplinary approaches, and a commitment to social justice (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000b; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005).

Fundamentally, CRT provides a framework for examining racialized systems of oppression, and structural inequities and acknowledging the lived experienced as a legitimate source of knowledge production (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, 2005). This is a crucial demarcation from other academic traditions that position race, or racism as chiefly an individual level construct (i.e., identity status, "perceived" discrimination,

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<sup>7</sup> I include a full description of each tenant in Appendix A.

personal biases) versus a structural one, reinforced and reproduced by the state through both custom and code.

Critical Race Feminisms (CRF) broadened CRT's scope by incorporating feminist perspectives in theory, knowledge, and movement building. Originating from Black Feminist Thought, CRF uses CRT's five tenets while privileging the epistemologies of Women of Color to analyze and create knowledge about how systems, structures, and institutions operate (Crenshaw, 1991; Cruz, 2001; Hill Collins, 1991). Explicitly, CRF scholarship acknowledges that experiences of marginalization and systems of oppression imposed on WOC, and in particular Black women, cannot be separated from their gender and race. In other words, for Black women, sexism and racism could not be detached from one another as both construct their social realities at the same time (i.e., racist patriarchy) (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1981).

Intrinsically, one of the most important contributions of CRF is the theory of Intersectionality. Scholars such as hooks, Crenshaw, Hill Collins, Lorde and hundreds of other Black feminist scholars, both in and outside of the academy, have contributed to the unpacking of how the intersection of multiple systems of oppression permeates and organizes life in the US (Crenshaw, 1991; Cruz, 2001; Hill Collins, 1991; hooks, 1981; Lorde, 2003). By emphasizing the relational and mutually constituting aspects of racism and sexism in the lives of Black women, the theory of Intersectionality provides a way to understand how systems of oppression simultaneously operate and impact the lives of people at the nexus of various social locations (gender, race, sexual orientation, immigration status,



religion, etc.), all of which can play a role in shaping the experiences and outcomes of groups (Crenshaw, 1991).

CRT and CRF have been used “to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices, and discourses” (Yosso, 2005, p. 70) in the field of education. Using these theories and their conceptual tools, scholars have examined how entrenched Eurocentric epistemologies and constructs, including meritocracy, colorblindness, objectivity, and deficit-based approaches have been used to explain differential education outcomes by race and gender and how schools, as an apparatus of the state function to (re)produce existing economic, social and political ideas and divisions, including the reproduction of gender, class, and racial stratification, as well as hierarchies of knowledge and knowledge production (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Giroux, 1983, Spring 1976).

The work of CRT and CRF scholars, for example, has revealed how the right to have access to and enjoy a high-quality education is a racially motivated project (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Pérez Huber, 2009; Vaught, 2011; Yosso, 2005). The “best education” opportunities are systematically given to those who have the most resources, primarily those who have property, and access to those resources are classed, gendered, and raced (Kasnitz et al., 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In addition, CRT and CRF studies have demonstrated how English only policies, per-student spending, the absence of culturally relevant and sustaining practices, and the differential enforcement of discipline policies (just to name a few) have had an intentional and disproportional negative impact on SOC (See

Tung et al., 2015 and Warikoo & Carter, 2009 for a full review). The writings of critical race feminist scholars, such as Patricia Hill Collins (1986, 1991) have also elucidated how institutions, including schools, are sites where intersecting systems of race, class, and gender oppression are powered, reproducing expectations of womanhood. Yet to date, most scholarship on differential educational outcomes by race, gender, and class locate these differences at the individual and familial level, rather than investigating the social structure that (re)produce hegemony, and ultimately enforce social stratification (e.g., Warikoo & Carter, 2009).

In this study I use CRT and CRF to critically analyze the different ways racist patriarchy is entangled within educational ideologies and structures and how these entanglements are acted upon through policies and practices (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Vaught, 2011; Vaught, 2012). Furthermore, I unambiguously recognize PR school-aged mothers as legitimate knowledge producers in the analysis of how race, racism, and gender operate in schools. As subsequently described, central to this investigation are the participants' own words and meaning-making which provide concrete examples that illuminate how racist patriarchy is mechanized in school and how that mechanization has material consequences in their lives.

### **Integration of Theoretical Perspectives**

The integration of Sociocultural Perspectives, CRT, and CRF allowed me to comprehensively examine the educational trajectories and experiences of PR

school-aged mothers from various perspectives. Sociocultural Perspectives allows me to foreground how developmentally PR mothers make meaning of their schooling experiences relative to the sociocultural and historical context they experience and the ways in which they resist marginalization. CRF provides a lens from which to examine the mechanization of intersecting systems of oppression, including how schools (re)produce hegemony or the social, cultural, ideological, and economic position of the dominant group.<sup>8</sup>

Important to note is that while each of these theories offers a unique perspective, I use them collectively and iteratively to purposely shift my analytic lens from the majoritarian logics of the teen mother as "the problem" to the educational structures, policies, and ideologies that they experience in school (Pillow, 2004). Doing so allowed me to examine the ways in which schools are spaces where the discursive construction of "the problem" of teenage pregnancy is exacerbated along the lines of race, age, class, and gender. Using the experiences of the participants, and considering how policy is lived (Dumas, 2014), in this study, I map the policies, programs, practices, and ideologies present in their schooling experiences and the ways in which they reflect majoritarian perspectives of normative development, including achievement, and social order.

This theoretical framework also guides my analysis of the literature, which I now turn to. I begin with a brief review of scholarship on the educational attainment and school-aged mothers. I then provide a brief history and portrait of

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<sup>8</sup> This is primarily accomplished through the reinforcement of codes, artifacts, language, values, and practices of the dominant culture, and the provision of differential educational opportunities based on social positioning, resulting in the academic underachievement of certain groups (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Giroux, 1983).

PR students in US schools. In this section, I focus on three concepts that are important for understanding the sociopolitical realities of PR students in US schools: colonialism, migration, and racialization. I explore these ideas paying close attention to how they reveal themselves in education discourse, ideologies, policies, programs, and practices experienced by PR student and families in US public schools. In the final section, I bridge these threads of scholarship together by presenting critical perspectives on “the problematization” of teen pregnancy, including a brief case study on the existing research on PR school-aged mothers.

### **School-Aged Mothers and Educational Attainment**

Teen pregnancy and parenting have captured the interest, imagination, and curiosity of scholars across a myriad of academic disciplines. There are thousands of research studies that focus on this phenomenon, resulting in a rich and complex body of scholarship. The vast majority of this research focuses on (1) risks factors that are associated with becoming a young parent, (2) adverse outcomes attributed to it, and (3) its ultimate prevention (e.g. Basch, 2011; García Coll, 1989; Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2004; Rios, 2013). Collectively the literature suggests that early childbearing is a lifespan “risk factor” for parent and child on numerous health and social outcomes, including educational attainment (e.g. Kane, Morgan, Harris, & Guilkey, 2013; Mollborn, 2010, 2010; Perper, Peterson, & Manlove, 2010; Ruedinger & Cox, 2012; Way & Leadbeater, 1999). Studies have found that school-aged mothers are, for example, substantially less likely than their non-parenting peers to obtain a high school diploma and are also less likely to have college degrees, which contributes to their and their children’s

potential for economic stability and advancement (Hoffman, 2008; Kane et al., 2013; Kasnitz et al., 2009; Mollborn, 2010, 2010; Perper et al., 2010). The assumption, both in research and public discourse, is that there is an underlying causal effect between early childbearing and truncated educational attainment (Hoffman, 2008; Kane et al., 2013; Oxford et al., 2005). Subsequently, one of the most enduring narratives regarding early parenting is that school-aged mothers will end up “dropping out” of school and face a lifetime of poverty (Rios, 2013).

Findings on the relationship between educational attainment and early childbearing, however, have fueled rigorous debates (Kane et al., 2013; Mollborn, 2010; Oxford et al., 2005). These debates primarily rest on the notion that past studies have principally focused on individual and familial characteristics to examine their relationship to educational attainment neglecting to account for the context in which their education takes place. A growing body of work suggests that the differences between school-aged mothers and their non-parenting peers are not statistically significant when sociopolitical factors are accounted for (see Kane et al., 2013 and Hoffman, 2008 for a full review). Using data from The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health survey, Kane and colleagues (2013), for example, found that while teen mothers had between .7 and 1.9 fewer years of schooling than their non-parenting peers during the adolescent period, these differences were not discernable over time as teen mothers tend to recover educational losses by returning to school or specialized training in their 20s and 30s (Kane et al., 2013). Congruent with this finding, Mollborn’s 2010 longitudinal study of teenage parents’ odds of completing high school found that

even though young mothers were more likely to drop out than non-parenting peers, most of them were in the process of completing high school, and 75% of them eventually did. Most importantly, the Mollborn study found that even before having children, school-aged parents were economically and educationally disadvantaged, both of which are associated with lower educational attainment.

The focus on context has been further substantiated by research which has demonstrated that the educational achievement prior to childbearing is consistent with achievement after childbirth (Leadbeater et al., 2001; Way & Leadbeater, 1999). In addition, though many young parents struggle to complete secondary education, some do not. Although not well represented in the literature, research studies have documented heterogeneous responses to early childbearing and educational attainment (Greenstone, 2012; Mistry et al., 2016; Oxford et al., 2005). Greenstone's 2012 qualitative study of 45 White teen mothers' one year postpartum, for example, found variant educational achievement and goals prior to parenting, as well as responses to pursuing their education postpartum. For some mothers, pregnancy and parenting activated an educational script that served as a motivation to enroll or continue to stay in school; others attributed their inability to sustain their educational progress to the challenges of being a parent (Greenstone, 2012).

The educational policy context for school-aged mother presents another vital consideration. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 ("Title IX") is a Federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, in any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance (Education Amendment

Acts, 1972). This bill is popularly known for the protection it offers students who have experienced sexual assault and harassment in schools, as well as the rights of women identifying student-athletes in secondary and college settings. Lesser known is that from its inception activists advocated for the inclusion of a provision that protects the rights of pregnant and parenting students, in part, as a result of the widespread practice of expelling young women from public schools upon becoming pregnant (National Women's Law Center, 2009). Currently, under Title IX, pregnant and parenting students have the right to the same educational opportunities as their non-parenting peers (National Women's Law Center, 2009). Pointedly, Title IX states that schools cannot discriminate against or exclude any student from any educational program or activity, including any class or extracurricular activity, on the basis of a student's pregnancy status, childbirth, or recovery therefrom.

The irony is that despite the long-standing documented public and political concerns and interventions regarding teen parents and their children, "school-aged mothers have remained marginal to educational discourses of curriculum, school reform, and pedagogy" (Lesko, 2012, p.127). For this reason, scholars have increasingly used qualitative methods to forefront the voices and experiences of school-aged mothers (Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014; SmithBattle, 2007).

SmithBattle's longitudinal qualitative study (2007) examined the schooling perspectives of 19 school-aged mothers before and after giving birth. She found that all the participants wanted to have a "good future" for themselves and their children and that the anticipation of being a parent and parenting itself led them to

reevaluate their priorities and motivated them to return or stay in school. These findings are consistent with other studies which have found that pregnancy and parenting, for many adolescent mothers, represents a critical moment in which they begin to enact a series of steps, including a recommitment to their education, to ensure their and their children's wellbeing (Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014; Greenstone, 2012; Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2006). SmithBattle's (2007) work also revealed that despite the participants' stated commitment to their education, participants were frustrated by school policies and practices, including cumbersome re-enrollment processes, inflexible attendance and tardy policies, social isolation and ostracism, inadequate support and programs during maternity leave, and bureaucratic mismanagement which they reported negatively impacted their ability to persist in meeting their educational goals. This is congruent with other research that has documented that school-aged mothers often suspend their schooling due to the severe stigmatization and hostility, principally embodied and enacted upon through anti-parental policies, practices, and ideologies, that they experience in school (Bermea et al., 2016; Luttrell, 2003; Vinson & Stevens, 2014; Zachry, 2005).

Overall, the existing scholarship on the relationship between educational attainment and teen pregnancy is at best inconclusive. First, while some research suggests negative associations between early children bearing and educational attainment, studies also indicate that teen mothers close the educational attainment gap over time (Kane et al., 2013; Mollborn, 2010; Oxford et al., 2005; SmithBattle, 2007). Second, while many school-aged mothers struggle to



complete secondary education, others navigate parenting and education successfully (Greenstone, 2012; Mistry et al., 2016; Oxford et al., 2005). Third, scholars have also found that school-aged mothers are confronted with anti-parental school-level policies, practices, and ideologies which make their pathways to educational attainment “fragile and beset by multiple obstacles” (SmithBattle, 2007, p.366). Finally, scholars agree that there is a relationship between the educational attainment of school-aged parents and the social context in which schooling takes place (Basch, 2011; Harding, 2003; Vinson & Stevens, 2014).

Despite the inconclusive nature on the causal relationship between early childbearing and educational attainment, ubiquitous depictions of adolescents mothers’ parental status as maladaptive and as a reason for their lack of educational success influences research, public discourse, and policymaking (Kane et al., 2013; SmithBattle, 2007). Not only does this rhetoric dismiss the significant institutional and social barriers that many school-aged mothers face in accessing and staying in schools, it also promotes a gendered, classed, and racialized anti-parental education writ at large that reedifies notions of unbelonging.

### **“The Puerto Rican Problem:” Colonization, Migration, Racialization and Puerto Rican Students in US Schools**

In her book, *Puerto Rican Students in U.S. Schools*, Sonia Nieto (2000), expertly begins by reminding readers that “Puerto Rican students are no strangers

to U.S. Schools” (p. xi). Student population records from as early as the 1910s indicate concentrations of PR students in public school districts in what would soon become historic PR enclaves (Nieto, 2000; Sánchez Korrol, 1994). As of date, there are an estimated 5.4 million PRs residing in the continental US, which is approximately two million more than in Puerto Rico itself (Centro, 2017). PRs make up the second largest Hispanic origin group in the US, second only to Mexican origin individuals (Stepler & Brown, 2016). The large and growing number of PRs in the US is not a new phenomenon. PR have been migrating and building communities in the US for over 100 years. The largest wave of PR migrants arrived in the US during the post-World War II period and settled primarily in the northeast corridor of the US. Due to the ongoing economic, humanitarian, and political crisis in Puerto Rico, a surge in the population of PRs in the US is underway and expected to grow (Meléndez, 2017). This suggests that communities nationwide will experience a rise in the number of PR students that enroll in public schools.

As it pertains to educational attainment, a robust body of literature has documented that PR students have some of the lowest academic and engagement outcomes of any student group in the nation (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2013; Nieto, 2004; Sokolowski, Antrop-González, & Maldonado, 2010). In 2014, only 77% of PRs 25 years or older in the US were high school graduates compared to 92% of the White population (Centro, 2016b). In that same year, only 18% of PRs in the US held a bachelor’s degree or higher, a marker of middle-class status (Centro, 2016b). The rate for Whites and Blacks was 34%, 20% respectively

(Centro, 2016b). Most concerning are reports on the rates of non-participation in school or work of PR youth (ages 16-24) in the US. The rate in 2014 was 19% which was almost double that of White youth (Meléndez, 2017).

Consistently lower outcomes in educational attainment and workforce participation relative to other racial and ethnic groups are two of many “social indicators” that have been widely used to pathologize the PR community (Rodríguez, Olmedo, & Reyes-Cruz, 2004). The pathologization of the PR community, families, and children is so pervasive that the phrase “The Puerto Rican Problem” has been extensively used in public discourse as well as in the academic literature to characterize this community (Briggs, 2002; Cordasco, 1967; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2013; Morrison, 1958; Nieto, 2000; Rodríguez, Olmedo, & Reyes-Cruz, 2004). A simple online academic search on PR families and youth will yield hundreds of research studies and reports that frequently focus on the "maladaptive" behavioral patterns and public health concerns, including but not limited to low educational attainment, substance abuse, involvement with criminal "justice" system, and mental health disorders of this population. Much of this research employs deficit-based paradigms that describe PRs as the sole protagonists in their own behavior resulting in negative outcomes (e.g., low literacy rates, "dropping out" of school or delays in meeting developmental benchmarks in early childhood) without addressing the sociocultural and political contexts in which they emerge.

Worth noting is that this type of research has primarily been conducted by academics who have limited experiences in PR communities (in the Puerto Rico

or the Diaspora), scholarly or otherwise, and have who use Eurocentric paradigms and frameworks to draw their conclusions (Rodríguez et al., 2004)<sup>9</sup>. There has also been a tendency to generalize from small numbers or extreme cases and to attribute the findings to PR cultural values without actually studying the cultures or cultural processes of PR communities (Rodríguez et al., 2004). This background is noteworthy because while an expansive body of work has documented the educational attainment and trajectories of this population, scholars of the PR Diaspora argue that the educational lives PR students in the US are not well understood (Antrop-González, Vélez, & Garrett, 2008; Garrett, Antrop-González, & Vélez, 2010; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007; Nieto, 2000; Rolón-Dow, 2010). Despite their large and growing numbers, their long history in the US and “their” underachievement the invisibility of the experiences of PR students in public discourse and scholarship is palpable.

Three salient and interconnected themes are essential to understanding the experiences, including in schools, of PRs in the US. They are colonialization, migration, and racialization (Donato & Wojtkiewicz, 1996; Duany, 2000; Flores, 2010; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2013; Nieto, 2000; Rodríguez et al., 2004). To begin with, it is important to understand that the people of Borikén<sup>10</sup> have experienced persistent colonialization and resistance to it for over 500 years.

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<sup>9</sup> Rodriguez and colleagues (2004) provide a detailed history of the representation of PRs and the use of cultural deprivation models across academic disciplines.

<sup>10</sup> Borikén is the Arawak name for the largest island of Puerto Rico, which is an archipelago. Borikén means “Land of the Valiant Lord,” and it is a name that is often used to refer to Puerto Rico. The gender-neutral term Boricua is a term popularly used to describe a person who identifies as PR. Hereinafter, I use the terms Borikén and Boricua, respectively, and interchangeably with Puerto Rico and PR.

Prior to becoming a US colony in 1898, a result of the Spanish American war, Puerto Rico was deemed a possession of the Spanish empire, this a consequence of brutal conquest and genocide of the Arawak and other Indigenous nations by the Spaniards and other European invaders. Since 1898, PR children, in Puerto Rico or in the continental US, have been educated in US controlled schools.

It is imperative to address this historical context in examining the schooling experiences of PR students for several reasons. First, disruptive to incessant ideas of PRs as “newcomers” or as “immigrants,” PR students have been schooled under the American public education system for more than 100 years. Remarkably, one of the first directives by the US Congress, after asserting control of Puerto Rico, was to require that schools teach PR children English and the American way of life (Alers-Montalvo, 1985; Sonia Nieto, 2000). Just three years after colonization, in a report on the public education system on the island, the Commissioner of Education of Puerto Rico, a federally appointed position stated: “The spirit of American institutions and the ideals of the American people, strange as they may do seem to some in Puerto Rico, must be the only spirit and the only ideals incorporated in the school system of Puerto Rico”(as cited by Alers-Montalvo, 1985, p.54). As such, in Puerto Rico and for PRs in the Diaspora, schooling is a mechanism that reproduces US imperial power.

Second, migration patterns, largely a result of Puerto Rico’s colonial status, also play a role in the schooling experiences of PR students. In 1917, the US Congress passed the Jones Act, which contained a citizenship provision for all PRs, a provision that the PR government itself did not advocate for. Historians

have proposed that the citizenship provision was passed to cement the permanence of the relationship between Puerto Rico and the US at a time when PRs were actively being drafted into the US military to fight in World War I (Sparrow & Lamm, 2017; Venator-Santiago & Meléndez, 2017). Since then, like all other US citizens, PRs have the right to travel to and from any state or US territory.

The proximity to the Caribbean, economic conditions in Puerto Rico, and advancements in travel technologies, including its affordability, contributed significantly ongoing circular migration patterns to and from Puerto Rico (Duany, 2000; Reyes, 2000). As it relates to children and families, unlike immigrant groups, migrating to the US has not generally served as a single life transformative experience for PR children (Nieto, 2000). For many PR families, movement between Puerto Rico and the US is expected, so much so that it is colloquially referred to as *el vaivén*, the coming and going (Duany, 2000). More recently, PR families have been described as nomadic for their tendencies to move from place to place, always seeking better resources for families and children (Meléndez, 2016). This pattern is often an adaptive response to economic crises either stateside or in Puerto Rico.

Interestingly, even for PRs in the US who no longer have family on the archipelago, visiting and living in Borikén is a pressing possibility and dream (Hidalgo, 1992). This is such a distinct aspect of the PR Diaspora that Puerto Rico and Boricuas are often described as a “nation on the move” (Duany, 2000). PR students have also been described as “children of the skies” or “the students in

between” suggesting their sense of belonging neither in Borikén or in the US (Reyes, 2000). Although the impact of migration or school mobility on PR student’s educational attainment and or trajectories have not been well studied, research on mobility suggests that students can suffer psychologically, socially, and academically from repeated and ongoing school moves (Rumberger, 2003; Skandera & Sousa, 2002).

Culturally, however, *el vaivén* has contributed to the maintenance of strong cultural and familial ties between PRs in the Diaspora and in Puerto Rico (Duany, 2000; Nieto, 2000). This has often placed PR children and their families in conflict with assimilation paradigms implemented by most US schools which require students to disrobe themselves of their home language and heritages (Nieto, 2000; Reyes, 2000; Sokolowski et al., 2010). The PR community has been purposeful in its rejection and resistance to assimilation practices, primarily through their strong affinity to PR identity and cultural values, including bilingualism and familism and by their sustained participation in school reform efforts that recognize the right of children and families to maintain cultural ties (Nieto, 2000, 2004; Reyes, 2000).

Race, race making, and racialization is a third theme that is central to understanding the schooling experiences of PRs in the US. Unlike European immigrants who were granted access to Whiteness as a propertied right (Harris, 1993) most PRs could not or would not be racialized as White (Almaguer,

2003).<sup>11</sup> Scholars have suggested that the experiences of PRs in many aspects are similar to those of AAs and Native Americans because of mutual and traversing experiences with colonization, settler conquest, liminal citizenship, economic suppression and racialization (Rodríguez et al., 2004; Rodríguez Dominguez, 2005). Like other “native” minorities, their US citizenship status conferred upon them social and legally sanctioned segregation and marginalization. PRs, as a multi-racial group, present(ed) a crisis to the US White-Black racial order (Briggs, 2003)

One of the first longitudinal and multi-site qualitative studies on the schooling experiences of PR students in US schools, *The Losers* (1968), for example, concluded that even though PRs were US citizens, like AAs children, they were burdened by an unjust education system that treated them as perpetual strangers. “The Puerto Rican child and the Negro child,” Margolis wrote, “share many humiliations, not the least of which is a system of even-handed injustice” (Margolis, 1968, p.1). The report identified widespread patterns of racially-based discrimination against PR children and their families including being unfairly retained, being purposely placed in schools with a reputation of low-quality instruction, and of students’ language and culture being degraded by teachers and administrators.

Margolis’ findings were and continue to be consistent with other studies (from as early as the 1930s) which suggest that PR children and their families

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<sup>11</sup> The works of Almaguer (2003), Rodríguez Dominguez (2005), Urciuoli (2013) and Vidal-Ortiz (2004) provide comprehensive analyses on the socio-historical and political context of the racialization processes of PRs in the US.



experienced hostile learning environments where they were made to feel unwelcomed, faced teacher bias and bigotry, received little to no support in learning English, were systematically tracked into nonacademic programs, and were disproportionately punished and excluded from school, all contributing to limited educational opportunities (Nieto, 1995, 1998, 2000; Frau-Ramos & Nieto, 1991; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2013; Kasnitz et al., 2009a; Nieto, 2000, 2004; Sánchez Korrol, 1994; Walsh, 1998). Notwithstanding the scholarship that documents inequitable practices and opportunities and the differential outcomes by PR students, and despite the activism of students, parents, and community members who have endured and resisted purposeful neglect and dehumanization, how the state, through compulsory schooling as chief developmental context for children and adolescents, reproduces, legitimatizes, and ultimately normalizes social stratification and inequity is under-theorized.

The enduring poverty experienced by PRs in the Diaspora is another context that scholars connect to PRs' colonial, migratory, and racial status. Again, differing from Europeans immigrants, most PR migrants arrived in the US after the industrial boom, with little to no work experience in jobs that required technical skills (Alers-Montalvo, 1985). Entering the marketplace during the Jim Crow era, at a time when professional and technical skills were needed to secure jobs that would allow them to access middle-class status, PR migrants were vulnerable to experiencing high levels poverty (Briggs, 2003; Duany, 2000).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The level of poverty experienced by PRs served as a push and pull factor for migration (Duany, 2000). PRs in Puerto Rico who experience poverty often choose to migrate to the US seeking economic security, similarly PRs in the US who experience persistent economic insecurity return to PR.

Not surprisingly, the majority of PR migrants quickly found themselves working in low wage jobs that offered little long-term economic security (Fitzpatrick, 1971). In light of these circumstances, PR migrants and their families settled where they could, mainly in high poverty, low resourced, postindustrial racially segregated ghettos (Fitzpatrick, 1971; Weales, 1955).<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the vast majority of PR children in the US attend public schools in districts that are racially and economically segregated and that have a history of low educational outcomes (Sonia Nieto, 2000, 2004; Sokolowski et al., 2010).

The longitudinal research on residential patterns, school enrollment records, and educational outcomes (since 1964) of Gary Orfield and colleagues exemplifies this point. Their work confirms that Latino students are significantly more likely to attend racially and economically segregated schools when compared to other racial/ethnic groups, and that segregation has been rapidly growing in the states where Latinos have the largest enrollments (Orfield et al., 2016). PR students in northeast urban areas have been identified as experiencing extreme levels of school-based segregation (Orfield & Yun, 1999). A 2016 study by Orfield and colleagues found that in New York, 57% of Latino students attend schools where 90-100% students who are economically disadvantaged and Students of Color (SOC). Consistent with these findings, in MA most Latino students, the majority of which are PR, are concentrated in a handful of districts

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<sup>13</sup> Borges-Méndez study (1994) on the settlement patterns of PRs in Lowell, Lawrence, and Holyoke MA provides a detailed description on how the inflow and outflow of particular racial and ethnic groups can transform patterns of segregation. For instance, rapid White flight was associated with rapid flows of PRs and Latinos residents leading to increases in racial/ethnic concentration and segregation in MA's gateway cities(Borges-Méndez, 1994).

(Bloomabloom, 2011; Fox, 2015; Gastic et al., 2010). In academic year (AY) 2010, MDESE's enrollment data indicated that 64% of all Latino students attended school in only 15 of its 392 school districts (Gastic et al., 2010). In the same year, cities with long-established PR enclaves had the highest concentration of Latino students (Lawrence (89%), Chelsea (82%), Holyoke (77%), and Springfield (57%) (Gastic et al., 2010).

To further understand the schooling experiences of PR students, in the last decade scholars have begun to turn their attention to the heterogeneity of outcomes, trajectories, and experiences of PR students, as well as the desires, strength, and resilience of PR communities (Antrop-González, Vélez, & Garrett, 2005; Garrett et al., 2010; Irizarry, 2009; Lloréns & García-Quijano, 2012; Rolón-Dow, 2005, 2007, 2010; Sokolowski et al., 2010). The work of these scholars has continued to identify long-standing structural challenges faced by PR children and their families, including discriminatory policies and practices. Rolón-Dow's (2007) two-year ethnographic study of the school engagement of PR middle school girls in a northeast urban school district, one of very few studies that exclusively focuses on the schooling experiences of PR girls, found that despite variation between individual girls in academic achievement, participants suffered negative consequences from the limited ways that school engagement was constructed at their school. While the students expressed a desire to "pass" school, "passing" was less about achievement and learning and more about how the girls were expected to perform the rituals, conventions, and the gendered and racially based expectations that their school deemed important (Rolón-Dow,

2007). In this way how the girls learned to “pass” was to some extent analogous to the ways in which in US history individuals have crossed racial lines to transgress “legal, social, or economic boundaries imposed on a particular social group” (Rolón-Dow, 2007, p.351). To “pass” as an engaged student, the participants had to learn to participate in classroom practices and rituals that were often meaningless, and that lacked analytical or critical approaches to learning about that were nevertheless compulsory to gain educational credentials. As such the girls' descriptions of schooling experiences were often bounded by notions of "passing time," school was something they simply had to endure. The consequences of this type of "passing" grew over time, as the study's participants were not appropriately prepared for advanced educational opportunities.

Antrop-González and colleagues' study (2005) on the experiences of ten high achieving PR high school students also raises questions about the rigor and academic preparation provided to PR students. First, among high achieving PR students, the authors identified four key factors that contributed to their participants' high academic achievement. These included (1) the acquisition of social capital through community-based extracurricular activities, including church groups, (2) having a strong PR identity, (3) the influence and support of their mothers, and (4) having caring teachers and other school staff who encouraged their academic achievement (Antrop-González et al., 2005). The study also revealed that despite being “high achieving students,” PR students in the study were not receiving a college preparatory education. The researchers also found that the school's curriculum and instructional practices did not include

PR students' linguistic, historical, and or cultural traditions or perspectives. In addition, while many PR students shared their appreciation for the care a teacher or staff member demonstrated towards them, they made it clear that most of their teachers did not demonstrate concern for their educational futures (Antrop-González et al., 2005).

These studies are but two examples of a growing body of scholarship that asks us to pay attention to the educational lives of PR students. Specifically, scholars are increasingly turning their attention to examining the sociocultural and political context of schooling, including racism, and its role in educational outcomes and trajectories (Antrop-González et al., 2005; Flores-González, 2002; Irizarry, 2009; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2013; Nieto, 2004; Rolón-Dow, 2010). The work of these scholars has also contributed to calls for an emancipatory praxis that works towards the promotion of changes in pedagogy, practice, policy, and knowledge production to transform the educational experiences of PR students. Inspired by these principles of these scholarly engagements, this study examines the schooling experiences of school-aged PR mothers as nested within broader historical, political, and structural contexts. To further understand their schooling contexts in the following section I discuss findings on the educational attainment of school-aged mothers as well as critical perspectives on that research. I then provide a brief review of the literature that focuses explicitly on PR school-aged mothers.

### **Critical Perspectives on Early Parenting**

Given this background and the relatively low rates of adolescent parenting in the US, why are school-aged mothers ubiquitously constructed as a social problem? From a critical and sociocultural perspective, their mere existence requires that we interrogate hegemonic productions of adolescence. Traditional developmental science typically positions adolescence as a “universal coming of age” period, where young people are experimenting and preparing for their possible adult roles (Lesko, 2012). Relative to this study, adolescents in the US are expected to complete their state-mandated compulsory schooling and transition to the workforce (which may require additional education or specialized training) (Lesko, 2012). After adolescence, the presumed goal is to get a good job, settle down, marry (a member of the opposite sex), and have children; all in that order. Central to this chronology has been the postponement of sex, chiefly for women, until an adequate (and possibly final) partner is found. Of course, this is a very narrow view of adolescence, but it continues to be the majoritarian perspective that is often referenced when describing the “ideal” order of development (Lesko, 2012).

Considering these expectations, the adolescent female pregnant body is disruptive. Having a child out of order presents a violation of what is socially acceptable; to reinforce hegemony corrective action is required (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Lesko, 2012). Schools, as sites where the interlocking systems of race, class, and gender oppression are powered and where the expectations of womanhood are transmitted and reproduced (Hill Collins, 1986) have served to

surveil, regulate, and contain the sexuality, sexual behavior, and sexual reproduction of adolescents who do not meet or resist majoritarian expectations of normative development (Pillow, 2004). The prevailing discourse espoused by school agents, including teachers, administrators, and policymakers is to frame school-aged mothers as deviant, hyper-sexualized, irresponsible, narcissistic and as the ultimate as “teen” social pariah; their sexuality, choices, and offspring deemed irreparable (Bentley, 2005; Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2003; Pillow, 1997; Rios, 2013; Vinson & Stevens, 2014). To prevent “contamination” to other students of the fictional teen pregnancy “epidemic,” the swift removal of pregnant or parenting mothers from schools remains quite common (Pillow, 2006; Vinson & Stevens, 2014). Ignoring statutory precedence under Title IX, school agents often pressure pregnant women to leave their high schools and enroll in offsite alternative education programs. Administrators often lure students out of their high schools by adopting a rhetoric of safety for themselves and their unborn children (Pillow, 2006). These alternative education programs, however, seldom offer educational opportunities that are comparable to what their non-parenting peers have access to. Many also employ a “personal responsibility” rhetoric which stigmatizes young women for choosing to become mothers (Luttrell, 2003). In effect, many of these off-site programs serve to permanently erase school-aged mothers from high schools (Bentley, 2005; Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2004). As a point of contrast, school-aged fathers are seldom pressured to leave their high schools due to their parenting status (Pillow, 2004).

Contradicting majoritarian constructions of pregnancy and parenting during adolescence as out of order, and needing to be “contained,” historical, longitudinal, and cross-cultural analyses suggest that adolescent “sexual activity and pregnancy in the past, as well as presently, have been considered normative, expected, and almost universal occurrences” (García Coll & García, 1997, p 294). Across cultures and contexts, for most of human history, having a child before the age of 21 has been the norm rather than the exception. In the US, about 50% of states, including the District of Columbia have a teen pregnancy rate of 25% or higher, which essentially means that one in four women has a child before the age of 20 (Martin et al., 2017). For school-aged mothers in the US, however, the anti-parental writ at large embodied by schools advances the idea that wanting to parent and be a student is a conflicting priority (Mistry et al., 2016).

Though a full review of the history of the problematization of early childbearing as racialized is outside of the scope this project ( see Hill Collins, 2005; López, 2008; Rios, 2013; Rivera, 2008 for a detailed review), in response to the expansive neoliberal state, pregnant and parenting young WOC have long been subjects of policy debates and social interventions whose primary focus has been to control their bodies and reproductive choices. Adolescent AA, Native American, and PR mothers have been conspicuously constructed as perpetual "welfare queens" that drain public coffers and are responsible for the erosion of the traditional American family values (Augustin, 1997; Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014; Briggs, 2002; Hill Collins, 2005). This vilification of young mothers of Color has been found to have contributed to the punitive welfare reform efforts of



the 1980s and into the 1990s, as well as the to the implementation of a numerous first and repeat pregnancy prevention programs and campaigns that target Black and Latina high school students (Briggs, 2002; Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2004; Rios, 2013). Black and Latina school-aged mothers are also over-represented in separate school placements which do not offer the same educational opportunities as traditional high schools (Pillow, 2006). Not only are many of these programs and approaches culturally insensitive and exploitive (Rios, 2013), they are also void of the sociocultural and historical context which has limited their access to high-quality educational opportunities with grave consequences. Thus, for school-aged WOC who experience a relatively high incidence of adolescent parenting, poverty, and lower education attainment (Basch, 2011), the challenges of being a mother and a student are heightened as completing secondary education and going on to post-secondary education in an age where access to the knowledge-based economy is the most direct path financial stability in due course becomes an issue of economic survival (Augustin, 1997; Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014; Luttrell, 2003; Rios, 2013).

The study explicitly focuses on examining the educational experiences of school-aged PR mothers in MA. Bringing these threads of literature in conversation with one another, I now present a brief case study on the literature on PR school-aged mothers and their schooling experiences.

### **The Case of School-Aged Puerto Rican Mothers.**

Before discussing some of the research on the schooling experiences of PR school-aged mothers, background on early childbearing and PR motherhood are necessary. Demographic data indicate that PRs, whether on the continental US or in Puerto Rico, experience relatively higher rates of teen pregnancy when compared to other racial and ethnic groups (Contreras, 2004; García Coll, 1989; Gilbert, 2012; Martin, Hamilton, Ventura, Osterman, & Mathews, 2017). In 2015, the teen birth rate in the US was 22% per 1,000 females aged 10–19, a record low for the nation (Martin et al., 2017). Among all racial and ethnic groups, Hispanics had the highest adolescent birth rate at 35%. This compares to a rate of 33% for Black females, 30% for American Indian or Alaska Native females, 16% for White females, and 7% for Asian or Pacific Islander women of the same age group (Martin et al., 2017). PRs living in the continental US have a teen birth rate of 33% which was only one point lower than PRs living in Puerto Rico of the same age (34%) (Martin et al., 2017).

Scholars have offered several theories to explain the propensity of teen parenting among PR women. These include a cultural preference of starting families younger in life, the general attitudes and religious views towards gender roles, sexual behavior and the use of contraception, as well as the high cultural value placed on motherhood (García Coll & García, 1997; Comas-Díaz, 1988; García Coll, 1989; López, 2008). Generally speaking, PR communities do not adhere to a universal framework of “incompetence” or “deviance” if a woman has a child before the age of 20 (García Coll & García Vázquez, 1997; García Coll, 1989). In

a series of studies of PR and White adolescent and adult mothers living in PR and in the US, García Coll and colleagues (1989; 1997), for example, found that PR mothers, regardless of their age, did not espouse negative attitudes towards becoming a young mother. Differing from the White participants, the PR participants, regardless of their age, were also more likely to be in a committed relationship with the father of the baby (including being married), planned their pregnancy, lived with family members, and had members of their families who were also teenage mothers. These findings emphasize that the context in which teen pregnancy occurs plays a role in how the pregnancy is perceived by PR families (García Coll, 1989). To be clear, the existing research does not suggest that PR communities encourage or desire that their daughters become mothers at an early age. Instead it appears that the cultural orientation among PR families is that with the right supports in place, primarily that if there is a commitment from the biological father of the baby and the extended family to support the new mother and the baby, motherhood during adolescence does not signal a permanent crisis (García Coll & García Vázquez, 1997; Comas-Díaz, 1988). This present study, however, is not concerned with the reasons why there is a higher rate of teen pregnancy among PR women. Regardless of why this phenomenon may exist, having a child during adolescence in MA, where secondary education is compulsory until the age of 16, and an expected criterion to access economic security, for women, having a child while completing secondary education has implications to their educational attainment and schooling experiences.

Yet even though PR school-aged women have some of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the US, there are only a few studies that focus on their educational experiences. The research of developmental psychologists Leadbeater and Way on AA and PR adolescent mothers in New York City (NYC) is one of a few longitudinal mixed methods studies that focuses on examining the outcomes and experiences, across various domains, including educational attainment, of these two populations (Leadbeater & Way, 2001; Way & Leadbeater, 1999). As it pertains to the PR participants, they found that school achievement before childbearing was consistent with school achievement after parenting commenced (Leadbeater et al., 2001; Way & Leadbeater, 1999). Furthermore, they identified that grade placement prior to childbearing was the only independent predictor of delayed grade placement at one and three years postpartum (Leadbeater & Way, 2001). The study also found that PR mothers were less likely than AA participants to pursue an education and had fewer educational gains over the course of the study. The authors attributed this to the “greater value of motherhood” in PR culture, yet neither PR nor AA culture were studied as part of the research design. Leadbeater and Way’s work raises questions about the context in which schooling takes place and how these contexts may contribute to the educational attainment of school-aged mothers. They, however, did not directly examine the schooling experiences of the participants nor did they address sociocultural, political, and historical context that has shaped public schooling for PR students in the NYC, one of the largest and oldest PR communities in the Diaspora.

With the goal of understanding the mechanisms that prompt PR young mothers' decision to pursue education, Diez and Mistry's (2010) ethnographic study of nine PR school-aged mothers living in New England examined the role of early childbearing in the educational trajectories of the studied sample. Although not directly focusing on what transpired in their schooling experiences per se, Diez and Mistry's study found that for school-aged PR mothers becoming a parent activated a family building script as the main task of motherhood (Diez & Mistry, 2010). They also found that some women could "juggle" being a student and mother, while others prioritized parenting tasks over their own educational goals.

Erdmans' study (2012) on the schooling decisions of pregnant and parenting high school students is one few studies that focuses on the schooling experiences of young mothers as means to address the efficacy of Title IX. The sample consisted of 62 school-aged mothers from Connecticut, a third of which were PR. Erdmans found that even though school policies, faculty, and staff were often hostile and unreceptive to school-aged mothers, mothers who dropped out were usually disengaged from school before pregnancy (Erdmans, 2012). The PR sample was more likely to drop out than any other group. PR participants described contentious relationships with their schools prior to, during, and postpartum. Although not the focus of her study, participants also identified structural inequities which exasperated their experiences. For example, Black and PR participants lived in neighborhoods with a high concentration of racial segregation and poverty and attended under-resourced schools. Rosa, one of the

PR participants, in describing her high school said, “It was all black people, black and Puerto Rican mostly. And it was ghetto” (Erdmans, 2012, p.63). Erdmans’ neglected to address the role that schools themselves play in reproducing social stratification systems, including the creation and reproduction of “ghettos”- a critique she identified. In her conclusion, similar to other scholars interested in lives of school-aged mothers, she recommended that understanding the manifestation of systemic problems such as economic and racial segregation in the lives of pregnant and parenting students merits greater scholarly attention.

Together, these three studies highlight several key points and limitations that shape the existing literature on this population. First, while there is a paucity of research on schooling experiences of PR young mothers, there is a robust body of research on the educational attainment of Hispanic/Latina and Black young mothers, which at times may include PR participants. These studies, however, tend to treat both or either groups as a monolithic and do not desegregate by ethnicity, nor do they address issues that are significant to the experiences of PRs in the US (colonialism, migration, and racialization). Though this is an important body of work, in this dissertation I purposefully chose to highlight scholarship that focuses on the PR experience.

The gap in the literature on the schooling experiences of PR school-aged mothers should not be conflated with a lack of research on PR mothers or their children. As previously discussed, PR mothers and their children have been the subject of a plethora of research, most of which employ deficit-based models to explain their relatively lower outcomes on a host of developmental domains

(Rodríguez et al., 2004). As presented in her article, *La Vida Moynihan and Other Libels: Migration, Social Science, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Welfare Queen*, Briggs (2002) uses primary source documents, media reports, and previous scholarship on PR women and their children to argue that the characterization of the “Puerto Rican Problem” was largely grounded on narratives that pathologize PR women, their families, sexuality, and reproductive choices. Young PR mothers, explicitly, have been over-represented in public discourse and scholarship, across numerous academic fields, as the source of “failures” of the PR community and described as a threat to not only themselves and their children but to society at large (Briggs, 2002; López, 2008).

To close, while under theorized in relation to adolescent parenting, the right to reproduce and to become a mother is an important aspect of PR feminist movements. Lopez, in *Matters of Choice: Puerto Rican Women's Struggle for Reproductive Freedom* (2008) provides a comprehensive analysis of sterilization and population control programs that have been forced onto PR women, reframing that reproductive freedom must also include the freedom to have children. As such even though these studies raise important questions regarding the complexities of simultaneously navigating parenting and schooling and the possible role of cultural expectations in the decisions of PR school-aged mothers, there continues to be a dearth in scholarship that focuses on the educational lives of this population as nested within the unique sociocultural and political and historical context of the PR Diaspora.

### **Overview of Study**

In line with critical scholarly traditions and using the discussed theoretical framework to guide my analysis, I am interested in uncovering structural components in the form of policies, practices, and ideologies that (re)produce as well as disrupt gendered, aged, and racialized hierarchies of school unbelonging in the schooling experiences of PR school-aged mothers. I situated this study within scholarly engagements that recognize:

1. Schools (and school-level factors) as an important developmental context that impact educational experiences and outcomes, and that this context is influenced by intersecting systems of oppression;
2. The pervasive construction of pregnancy and parenting as problematic as well as the “problematization” of the PR community as sociocultural and political phenomena that influence the schooling experiences of PR school-aged mothers; and that
3. How PR school-aged mothers make meaning of their schooling experiences is a legitimate source of knowledge that can challenge dominant ideologies entrenched in educational theory and practice.

As such this study is guided by the following key questions: (a) What are the structural barriers that PR mothers experience in schools? (b) How do PR mothers make meaning of those barriers? and (c) What are the sources and supports that PR school-aged mothers view as facilitating educational attainment? In the following chapter, I describe the embedded multi-method design I used to explore these questions.



### CHAPTER III

#### METHODS

This study consists of three distinct but complementary analytic phases: statistical (descriptive) analysis, Testimonio Inquiry Analysis, and an integrative analysis (See Figure 2). In this chapter, I describe each of these phases and discuss how I used them to explore the questions that guide this investigation. The primary data for all phases are from participants involved in The Massachusetts Healthy Family Evaluation (MHFE); for this reason, I begin by briefly describing it.

#### **The Massachusetts Healthy Family Evaluation (MHFE)**

Healthy Families Massachusetts (HFM) is an evidence-based voluntary home visiting program available to all first-time mothers aged 20 and younger living in MA. The goals of HFM include preventing child abuse and neglect, achieving optimal developmental outcomes in infancy and early childhood, promoting parental educational attainment, job, and life skills, preventing repeat pregnancies during the teen years, and promoting parental health and well-being. In 2008, the Tufts Interdisciplinary Evaluation Research (TIER), a research institute housed in The Eliot Pearson Child Study and Human Development Department at Tufts University began a longitudinal, mixed methods, randomized controlled trial experimental evaluation which examines the long-term impacts of the HFM on children and families (IRB Protocol # 0705005).

MHFE participants ( $n=704$ ) are first time parents who qualified for HFM services. Of these 704 participants, 433 (62%) received HFM services while 271

(38%) were part of the randomly assigned control group (TIER, 2017). Data were collected across six-time points (which represents a period of approximately nine years) using various methods including phone interviews, parent and child observations. Participant level data were also derived from public health, education, and social service agencies. In addition, a subsample of participants ( $n=473$ , 69% of the full sample), referred to as the integrative sample, completed a series of standardized scales, surveys, and a semi-structured research interview, three times, each approximately a year apart (TIER, 2017).

### **Phase I: Descriptive Quantitative Analysis**

The first phase of the study focuses on question 1: *What are the structural barriers that PR mothers experience in schools?* To answer this question, I used MHFE participant data in conjunction with publicly available data from MDESE to develop a descriptive statistical portrait of the educational outcomes and trajectories of PR school-aged mothers. The profile includes a mix of individual-level demographic data, as well as data on district and school-level variables that highlight structural factors associated with the academic achievement of SOC (Flores-González, 2002; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Skandera & Sousa, 2002; Tung et al., 2015; Warikoo & Carter, 2009). The profiles allow me to situate the educational outcomes and trajectories of PR school-aged mothers relative to other school-aged mothers, and Latinx students as well as the overall student population in MA. In doing so, I aim to raise questions regarding the context in which their schooling takes place.

## Participants

The participants of this study are self-identified PR MHFE study participants. During the intake process of the MHFE study, participants were asked to self-report on a series of demographic indicators, including their ethnic origins (or heritage). Of the 704 participants, 21% of the sample ( $n=145$ ) reported being of PR heritage.<sup>14</sup>

## Measures

### Individual-Level Measures.

*Demographic Variables.* Person-centered demographic variables include maternal age at first birth, race/ethnicity, place of birth, preferred language, relationship status, and income.

*Educational Outcomes and Trajectories* I used ten MHFE educational variables to create a baseline educational profile. These variables include: (1) self-reported school enrollment status at T1 and T3, (2) last grade completed at T1, (3) Special Education status (4) English Language Learners status, and (5) whether they ever received an out of school suspension (OSS). To track their educational outcomes and trajectories I analyzed four measures: (6) Educational Attainment, (7) MDESE High School Completion Status (T1/T3) (8) self-reported completion of one year of college (T1/T3), and (9) Final Educational Trajectory at T3, which tracks if a participant experienced continuity, interruptions, and/or

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<sup>14</sup> Consistent with other studies on ethnic and racial socialization of adolescents (e.g., García Coll & Marks, 2009) this study's sample includes individuals who reported having at least one parent who was PR. Of the 145 PR participants 26 individuals reported being "half" PR, which represents 18% of the total PR sample.

discontinuation during their completion of secondary education. I include definitions for all Individual Level Measures in Appendix B: *Variables: Definitions and Sources*.

### **District-level and School Level Measures.**

To examine the context in which schooling occurred, districts and schools were used as a grouping variable to create descriptive profiles. Districts were identified using four criteria: (1) the ten public school districts with the highest concentration of Latino students, (2) the ten school districts with the largest enrollment of Latino Students, (3) school districts with at least five MHFE PR participants, and (4) school districts of the participants who participated on the Testimonio component of this study (See Table 1). I created profiles for Boston, Chelsea, Holyoke, Lawrence, Springfield, and Worcester, which met all four criteria. Despite not meeting all the criteria, I also created a profile for Springfield because it has one of the highest concentrations of PR students of any school districts in the US (Berardino, 2014; Granberry & Mattos, 2017). Springfield was also not a catchment area for the MHFE study. If Springfield had been included in the MHFE, I anticipate that Springfield would have had a substantial number of PR participants.

To create school profiles, I identified the last high school each of ten participants in the Testimonio component of this study ( $n=10$ ) were enrolled in during the academic year (AY) of 2009, the AY when most participants began their participation in the MHFE study. Two Testimonio participants were not enrolled in school during T1; both had left high school before receiving a

diploma. For these participants, I used the local high school (where they could have been enrolled) to create a profile. This resulted in the identification of 11 schools. Because I used data from the districts as a point of comparison, two schools that were not located in one of the six profiled districts were omitted from the analysis.

To develop the district and school profiles I used a mix of individual-level SIMS data as well as publicly available data from MDESE (AY09) and analyzed a series of school and district level factors that have been associated with the structural challenges faced by SOC enrolled in public schools (Flores-González, 2002; Gregory et al., 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Skandera & Sousa, 2002; Tung et al., 2015; Warikoo & Carter, 2009). These included:

- Annual Dropout Rate
- AY09 Total Student Enrollment
- Churn Rate
- Four Year Grade High School Graduation Rate
- Percent of Core Academic Classes Taught by Teachers Who are Highly Qualified
- Percent of Graduates Who Attend College/University Student
- Percent of Latino Students and Students of Color
- Percent of Students Identified as Low Income, Student with Disabilities and English Language Learners
- Proficiency (and above rates) on the grade 10 Math and English Language Arts (ELA) standardized assessments
- The Rate of Out of School Suspensions
- Total per Pupil Expenditure (district)

In addition to these variables, I also report on the accountability status of each district and schools. Originating from federal accountability standards

established under *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) (2002), and currently maintained under *The Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), every district across the nation that receives federal funding is required to develop standardized accountability measures that, in theory, are designed to track student learning with the aim of closing the “achievement gap” among the nation’s most vulnerable populations, including students who are ethnic “minorities.” Districts and schools are required to establish yearly education outcomes goals for various student groups, focusing on improvement over time. Schools and districts that “fail” to improve student educational outcomes as expected are typically required to change their practices and invest in additional educational interventions “where they are needed most” (MDESE, n.d.-a).

In MA, all schools and districts (with sufficient data) are required to report on their progress on meeting their annual yearly progress (AYP) goals. MDESE classifies progress into one of five accountability and assistance levels. Classification into these levels is largely based on the schools' and districts' abilities to meet AYP goals, which is principally based on the previous year's student performance on the MCAS, testing participation rates, graduation rates as well as schools and districts' abilities to meet the established performance targets by all students and student subgroups. Schools and districts who meet their performance goals are categorized in Level 1; the lowest performing are categorized as Level 5. Schools and districts that are consistently and chronically underperforming are in jeopardy of being restructured or ultimately closed.

To understand the extent which PR school-aged mothers were attending districts and schools that were meeting AYP, I reviewed two MDESE measures: (1) Accountability Status for the Districts and Schools in AY09, the year of T1 interviews and (2) Accountability Status for the District and Schools in AY16, the most current available data at the time of analysis, across the sample ( $n=145$ ). I strategically choose to analyze AY16 data because in theory the accountability statuses are supposed to serve as a baseline for needed successive interventions (Stecher, Vernez, & Steinberg, 2010). Schools who received interventions during AY09 (or subsequently) should have improved over time. In essence, I wanted to see if the logics of “improvement” were actualized in the districts and schools included in this study. Appendix B: *Variables: Definitions and Sources* provides a detail description of all measures including the data sources, time point under study, and other variable construction notes.

### **Measures in Context.**

Given the theoretical frame and the questions that guided this study, the decision to use these measures requires contextualization. Since the passing of NCLB, the use of standardized tests for assessing educational quality and academic mastery has grown exponentially. Both the state and the federal government have imposed mandates on public school districts that require ongoing standardized testing for all public-school students. Despite concerns regarding the developmental appropriateness of the required standardized testing, advocates of this approach argue that standardization can serve as a mechanism to ensure that all children in American public schools receive a high-quality

education so that “no child is left behind.” The use of standardized tests has also been advanced by majoritarian epistemologies which promote and value the importance of performance standards, of empirically validated methods of assessment and evaluation, and of neutral and objective reporting of performance results as a means to ensure high-quality schooling (Love, 2004). The hyper-focus on objectivity, neutrality, and ultimately colorblindness, in these types of assessment approaches fundamentally places the focus on the “abilities” of individual students, while at the same time failing to address questions of inequity inherent in the history (and presently constituted) in the US public school system (Kasnitz et al., 2009; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995; Love, 2004).

Consequently, differential outcomes by race and ethnicity in standardized testing tend to be explained by focusing on the “deficits” of students, their families, and their communities rather than on system dysfunction (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). Some, however, have argued that the tests can serve as a racial equity tool. Proponents of this approach propose that “now” that the “achievement gap” by racial and ethnic minority students is well documented, differential outcomes by race or other demographic variables can finally be addressed through targeted interventions at the school, district, or state level (Stecher, Vernez, & Steinberg, 2010). Contrary to these assertions, including the well-documented history of racism in standardized testing<sup>15</sup>, the use of standardization as a policy in practice actively contributes to the reproduction of

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<sup>15</sup> The works of Kohn (2000), Berlak (2005), Garrison (2009) and William (2010) explores the sociopolitical history of the use of standardized tests by public schools, including how questions of racism have been addressed in the field of standardized assessments.



racialized educational hierarchies located at the nexus of race and class (FairTest, 2010; Love, 2004). Students with the greatest access to economic resources have continued to receive the “best” educational opportunities which equip them to meet the established performance standards, while those who have lower social positions face the material consequences of standardization, a direct result of inequitable public schools (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Kasnitz et al., 2009; Love, 2004; Taylor, 2006). For example, students who “fail” standardized tests are often placed in remediation classes, retained a grade, or even forbidden to take advanced coursework. Because Black, Latinx, and Native American students are more likely to have “lower” scores of the standardized assessments and are more likely to attend schools that are racially and economically segregated and disadvantaged, the consequences of these approaches are racialized. In other words, the differential outcomes of standardized tests systematically cause harm to Communities of Color (Love, 2004; FairTest, 2010).

Despite this background, I have purposely decided to use these measures in the descriptive analysis not bring attention to the “performance” of students but rather to the *failed logics of improvement*. Despite close to two decades of the most recent standardization educational movement, these efforts have not yielded a universal rigorous and high-quality education for all public-school students in MA. Given the reviewed literature on the schooling experiences of PR students in US schools, including the dispersion of PR communities in school districts that have a long history of “underperformance” in MA, I anticipated that the results of standardization would further illuminate the well-documented failures at the

district and school level. In other words, the endemic failure of the state is not new but is further cemented after almost two decades of the implementation of “high stakes testing” as a reformatory tool. Thus, despite MDESE’s claim to have the nation’s best public schools, I expected that the descriptive statistical analysis, which I subsequently explain, would further demonstrate how PR students have been systematically marginalized in schools, in a state that prides itself as “leading the nation.”

### **Analytic Plan: Descriptive Analysis**

I used descriptive statistical analysis to develop the profiles. Descriptive analysis is an appropriate statistical approach as the goal of this phase of the investigation is to identify patterns and salient features of the educational outcomes, trajectories, and educational contexts of PR school-aged mothers in this study. Reporting on means, ranges, and rates and using multiple variables and measures, I used a combination of tabulated descriptions (tables), graphs, as well as statistical commentary to summarize findings. This type of analysis allowed me to theorize, explore questions, and to consider possible hypotheses related to the barriers that PR school-aged mothers may encounter in school. Moreover, though the MHFE longitudinal database is complex, there are limitations to analyzing secondary data (Cheng & Phillips, 2014).

In this phase, the primary disadvantage was that existing data (and measures) were not collected to address the research questions of this investigation. While the MHFE data files include variables that speak to the ecological circumstances of adolescent moms, they do not include nuanced points

that are important in understanding the context of schooling, and standardization. This is one of several reasons why this investigation includes primary qualitative data collection and critical qualitative analysis.

### **Phase II: Testimonio Inquiry Analysis**

The second phase of the study focuses on questions two and three of this study: (2) *how do PR school-aged mothers make meaning of barriers they face?* and (3) *What are the sources of supports that PR school-aged mothers' view as facilitating their educational attainment?* To answer these questions, I used Testimonio Inquiry Analysis as the basis for data collection and analysis. Using longitudinal primary and secondary qualitative data, collected from a subsample of PR mothers who are MHFE participants, I examined how they made meaning of their schooling experiences, and how these experiences map out against educational ideologies, policies, programs, and practices. Before I begin to outline the logistical aspects of data collection and analysis, I start by positioning *Testimonio as Methodology*. I do this because one of the secondary goals of this study is to address transdisciplinary methodological concerns in research that focuses on school-aged mothers, and more broadly on children and youth who experience adversity. The use of Testimonios as a nested methodological approach presents an opportunity to contribute to ongoing debates on what knowledge, theories, and methods are deemed legitimate (and why) in scholarship that examines the developmental outcomes, trajectories, and processes across these populations.

### **Testimonios as Methodology**

Largely attributed to Indigenous and Latin American oral traditions of liberation and human rights struggles, Testimonio Inquiry Analysis is a transdisciplinary qualitative methodological approach that has been used to capture and disseminate knowledge and theory by people who have experienced marginalization (Beverley, 2008; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Pérez Huber, 2010). Validating the importance and complexities of the lived experience as a legitimate source of knowledge, it involves the collection and sharing of first person, self-conscious narrative account(s), or testimonies, guided by the will of the narrator to tell events as she sees significant (Beverly, 2008). Differing from other qualitative approaches which seek to document the lived experienced (e.g. oral histories, autoethnographies, person-centered ethnographies), Testimonios are motivated by a social and/or political urgency to give voice and raise awareness of shared struggle, survival, and resistance (Pérez Huber, 2009), in order “to bring to light a wrong” (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012, p. 525).

Testimonios as a methodology has also been associated with Paulo Freire’s theory of *conscientização* (1970) or consciousness-raising, which refers the process of developing a critical awareness of one’s social reality through reflection and action (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). Grounded in post-Marxist critical theory, Freire critiqued traditional schools and pedagogical approaches that treated students of “oppressed communities” and as “empty vessels” (1970). Schooling, Freire argues, primarily served to reproduce and maintain existing social hierarchies (Freire, 1970). Instead, he called for a

liberatory pedagogical praxis that engages learners in questioning the nature of their social context and position (Freire, 1970). Dialogically remembering, creating, and sharing a first account narrative provides meaningful entry to the process of *conscientização* (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). A Testimonio engages the *testimoniolista* (the narrator) and the audience, in critical reflection about their social, cultural, and political realities. This serves as the first step towards solidarity and collective social action by eliciting moments of “awakenings” for the Testimoniolista and audience regarding systems of oppression present in the human experience (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). As Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona (2012) illuminate, by bearing witness to Testimonios, new understandings about how marginalized communities “respond to and resist dominant culture, laws, and policies that perpetuate inequity” are unearthed (p.363).

Testimonios, as a methodological approach is well aligned with the core tenets of this study’s theoretical frame. Challenging dominant ideologies of knowledge production and acknowledging the centrality of experiential knowledge in understanding social structures and organization, the Testimonio approach reclaims the authority of the testimoniolistas as producers of knowledge (del Alba Acevedo, 2001). Drawing from Latina and Black feminist thought, the Testimonios approach also unambiguously acknowledges WOC as uniquely positioned to understand and identify the mechanization of intersecting systems of oppression and how they impact the trajectories of our lives (del Alba Acevedo, 2001; Hill Collins, 1991; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015).

From a research implementation perspective, the Testimonio approach has been described as a “demotic and heterogeneous form” with no single definitive prescription on its technical implementation and ultimate production (Beverley, 2008, p. 571). There are, however, several central principles that guide their collection and analysis. First, consistent with feminist praxis, the collaborative aspects of this approach cannot be understated. A Testimonio requires a Testimoniolista and an interlocutor. The Testimoniolista and interlocutor must establish a sense of mutuality, vulnerability, respect, and trust in order to create space to open up and critically reflect on aspects of their lives which may be difficult. Typically, in the beginning stages, the interlocutor poses open-ended questions for the Testimoniolista to consider. While the Testimoniolista is sharing, the interlocutor’s primary role is to listen and process the Testimonio, emphasizing the participant’s role as the authority on her experience (Beverley, 2008). Second, from a production perspective, the interlocutor typically records the Testimonio and works towards its public dissemination. Testimonios can be presented in numerous formats, including manuscripts, memoirs, oral histories, qualitative vignettes, prose, and even spoken word (Pérez Huber, 2010). How they are presented varies, but that they are is necessary. Despite their heterogeneous form what is certain is that a “Testimonio is not meant to be hidden, made intimate, nor kept secret” (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012, p. 525).

As part of a Research Fellowship funded through the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at Tufts University, I had the opportunity to collect Testimonios from PR school-aged mothers (IRB Protocol #1611003).

## **Participants and Data Collection**

### **Testimonios Participants.**

Purposeful sampling was used to select self-identified PR women involved in the MHFE that met the following weighted criteria:

1. Participation in the integrative sample;
2. Completed at least two of the three semistructured interviews of the MHFE, including at Time One (T1) which was the time point in which TIER researchers conducted the first in-depth life chronology interviews;
3. At T1 they had less than a high school diploma;
4. Attended at least one public school in MA; and
5. Lived in MA during the Testimonio collection period (January-June 2017).

These criteria were established to ensure that participants had secondary schooling experiences while pregnant or parenting in MA. Of the 145 PR participants, 43 participants met the above criteria (32% of the total PR sample).

### **Recruitment Process.**

After receiving IRB approval, I used the last known address of participants who met the criteria and put them into two groups: (A) Eastern and Central MA and (B) Western MA. I began by recruiting participants that were placed in Group A. I sent a recruitment letter and email to ten potential participants who lived closest to me. All recruitment materials were available in English and Spanish. The introductory letter described the nature of this study and provided

the principal investigator's contact information. Two weeks after the introductory letter had been mailed, using the consent form as guidance, I called the potential participants to invite them to participate in the study. If a potential participant was unreachable by phone, I sent a follow-up email. Until contact was confirmed, I did weekly follow up emails and or calls for a four-week period. This was recommended given the high mobility rate of participants. If a participant was not reachable after four weeks, I stopped trying to reach them and moved to another eligible potential participant from the full list.

In all the recruitment materials, as well as in my conversations with potential participants, I informed them that I was collecting Testimonios from PR women who were pregnant or parenting as they were completing their secondary education. I explained to them that they would have to commit to meet with me twice at a date and location of their choice, and their Testimonios would be audio recorded. Following TIER's participant incentive protocol, each potential participant was also offered a \$50 gift card to a local store, for each session. If a participant expressed interest in the study, I scheduled a meeting time for the first session and emailed (as well as mailed) to them a copy of the consent form for their review. I followed this recruitment protocol until I had 12 confirmed participants.

From the 43 eligible participants, I only had to send 18 letters to confirm the participation of 10 participants. Of the 18 participants who were sent letters, I was unable to locate five. All the women I spoke to reported being familiar with the term Testimonio and were interested in participating in the study.



Unfortunately, one potential participant no longer lived in MA, and two others, although interested in the project, could not participate due to travel, work, and moving conflicts. This left a total of 10 women who agreed to participate in the study and whose Testimonios I collected.

### **Testimonio Collection Protocol.**

Testimonios were collected at a date and location of preference for each of the participants. After introducing myself, and reviewing the consent form, I encouraged them to ask questions about the process and answered any they had. I also gave them time to read the consent form on their own. Once they completed the consent form, I gave them their incentive and asked them to complete a very basic demographic worksheet, as I explained to them, would help them to start thinking about their schooling experiences.

When we were ready to start, I informed them that the first session would focus on their schooling experiences from the elementary years until the present time. To help them get started, I told them they could do "*un historial*" [a timeline] beginning with elementary school to the present, or a retrospective look, in which they described their last educational experiences and told their story backward, or a mix of the two. I emphasized that there was no right way to share their Testimonio, and they could tell their story as they saw best saw fit. I also informed them that the session was a dialogue, "*una conversacion*" and that I may periodically ask them questions. I encouraged them to speak in the language they felt most comfortable and reminded them we could stop at any time they wished. At the end of the first session, I informed each participant that in

preparation for the next session I would listen to the Testimonio, and review, if they agreed, their old transcripts from previous interviews. They all agreed.

I choose to read their MHFE T1-T3 interviews *after* their first session because I wanted to arrive at the first session ready to listen, learn, think, and ask questions about how they made meaning of their schooling experiences without any preconceived notions or assumptions about their past. I also wanted the opportunity to get to know each participant on her own terms. As I prepared for the collection of the second Testimonios my goal in reviewing the audio of the first session and the T1-T3 transcripts was to identify areas that I wanted to explore with the participant in more detail. Intrinsically, the second session, which typically took place a month after the initial interview, primarily consisted of me asking them to clarify and expand on salient aspects that emerged from the first session as well as to identify challenges and sources of support present in their schooling experiences.

During both sessions, I had a list of questions that I used as prompts, if necessary. I ended each session by asking participants to share what they believed was the most important thing that they wanted people to know about their schooling experiences. The sessions lasted between one to two and a half hours. After all the Testimonios were collected, all sessions were transcribed using a transcription service. I then reviewed each transcription for accuracy.

**Data**

For each of the participants ( $n=10$ ), the data for this phase of the study consisted of the qualitative interviews (MHFE T1-T3), the collected Testimonios, and my field notes.

**MHFE T1-T3 Interviews.**

The MHFE qualitative interviews consist of semi-structured interviews conducted by TIER research staff across three different time points, each about a year apart. Each interview focused on documenting participants' accounts of their lives as well as key experiences including circumstances and reactions to pregnancy and early parenting; motivations and hopes; educational history; background circumstances (e.g., immigration, family moves); and support systems. The T1 interview took place between 2008 and 2009 when the participants were either pregnant or with a child under the age of one. Each interview was transcribed and reviewed for accuracy by TIER research staff.

**Testimonios.**

All Testimonios transcribed. Each participant had two sessions; therefore there are a total of 20 transcriptions of Testimonios.

**Field Notes.**

Throughout the entire Testimonio collection process, I kept detailed field notes which I organized by each participant. These field notes consisted of at least three parts. First, after each Testimonio session, I wrote field notes focusing on the content of the Testimonio as well as the context in which they took place. In

these notes I made sure to document the emerge of salient themes, as well as ideas and questions that I wanted to follow up on. Second, in my field notes, I purposefully recorded how the Testimonios mapped against the scholarship that I was reviewing. Finally, I also took detailed notes after reading each of the T1-T3 qualitative transcripts, again, documenting patterns, themes, and questions that arose from this analysis.

In sum, data for this component of the study represent retrospective accounts of the participants schooling experiences as well as qualitative data that was collected during their adolescence and transitions to adulthood, when they were most likely still in the process of completing secondary education.

#### **Analytic Plan: Thematic Analysis**

My primary reason for collecting Testimonios was that *I wanted to learn directly from young PR mothers*. I wanted to understand how they navigated school while parenting, how they made sense of the structural barriers they encountered, and their ideas regarding sources of support that could have, or indeed, were helpful navigating their schooling experiences. As I anticipated, the process of collecting Testimonios, in conjunction with the use of MHFE T1-T3 qualitative interviews, resulted in a rich data corpus. Understanding that there is no definitive or singular prescription on how Testimonio Inquiry Analysis should be conducted, my analytic choices, which ultimately resulted in a qualitative analytic plan, were driven by the notion that a “testimonio is not meant to be hidden, made intimate, nor kept secret” (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012, p. 525).

My goal was to elevate the voices and the participants and what I have learned from them.

After considering several qualitative analytic approaches, I decided to use a thematic analysis approach to explore Question 2 (meaning making of structural barriers) and Question 3 (sources of support) of this study, within and across participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is an appropriate fit for this data corpus as it is a qualitative approach that is not bound to any pre-existing epistemology or academic discipline. Thematic analysis also privileges an iterative process for data collection, construction, and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Relative to the foci of this study, thematic analysis is often used to understand the experiences of people who share a common phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using a thematic analytic approach, I aimed to develop a rigorous and systematic process of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data, and across participants which would result in elaborate and detailed descriptions of the phenomena under study (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). To do this, I implemented the following steps:

1. **Organization of Data:** First, I created a file for each participant that included their T1-T3 interviews, the two sessions of Testimonios, as well as my field notes. This allowed for ease of reading and analysis by participant.
2. **Initial Review:** The goal of this step was to become familiar with the data. I read all the transcripts and field notes several times, including

listening to the audio. I wrote analytic memos which documented initial ideas I wanted to explore.

3. **Holistic Coding:** After becoming familiar with the data, using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software system (NVivo, n.d.), I employed a holistic coding process which focused on the questions of interest (Huberman, Miles, & Saldana, 2014). Specifically, I focused on identifying significant statements (usually in the forms of paragraphs, not lines) in which the participants referred to the structures, policies, and ideologies that they experienced in school as well as sources of support. These included, for example, references to curriculum and instruction, program participation, challenging circumstances, special accommodations, faculty and staff, and peer interactions. The process of creating holistic codes was iterative. In other words, new codes were created to capture the essence of what the participant was conveying. These codes served as the basis for identifying salient themes. They also permitted me to discover regularities and variations within and across participants and data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2015).
4. **Categorizing:** The goal of this step is to begin to develop themes. I did this by collating all holistic codes into categories and then ordering categories into potential thematic areas. After organizing the data in this fashion, I then reviewed the raw data affiliated with each theme and created conceptual maps to help me graphically represent the development of themes.

5. **Matrices Development:** As a data reduction tool, I also developed matrices to identify the frequency and the co-occurrence of codes across data sources and participants (Huberman, Miles, & Saldaña, 2014). This strategy served as an analytic tool that allowed me to do cross case pattern and variation analysis. The tracking of codes by data source and participant helped with to triangulate data across participants and themes I identified (Huberman et al., 2014).
6. **Finalizing Themes:** In the last step, I refined the specifics of each identified them. I did this by operationalizing each theme, extracting examples from the data that supported the theme, as well as writing textural descriptions to answer the questions under study.

Though I present this approach linearly, as previously mentioned, thematic analysis is always a reiterative process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As suggested by Erickson (1986) during the analysis I was in a state in which “induction and deduction are in constant dialogue” (p.121). This required that I move back and forth between the data collection, raw data, field notes, analysis, and the relevant literature to deepen my conceptualization of the themes that I identified.

Throughout the data collection, review and coding process, I documented my learning, noting emerging themes, and making explicit connections to the data, the reviewed literature as well as to my own positionality (Saldaña, 2015). My writing included textural descriptions of “what” participants in this study experienced and structural explanations that denote “how” they experienced it (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). I also paid attention to “outliers” in codes,

experiences, and participants, constantly interrogating the importance of what these alternative perspectives offered my analysis (Erickson, 2004; Sipe & Guiso, 2004). As I engaged with the Testimonios, what kept me most grounded was my commitment to deliberately privileging the participants' own words and meaning-making to answer the study's questions.

### **Phase III: Convergence**

This phase of this study represents the final analysis (Figure 3 and Table 2). As such, I converge the findings from the quantitative and qualitative phases to answer the research questions that guide this investigation. Before proceeding to explain the analytic approach for this concluding phase, given its integrative approach it is important to describe the logic of a multi-method approach for examining the questions under study. To begin with, as previously stated, despite the fact that descriptive statistical analysis is not an approach that can produce definitive conclusions about the population being studied, the process allows one to theorize, explore questions, and to consider possible hypotheses regarding the structural factors that impact the educational trajectories of PR school-aged mothers.

Similarly, some may argue that qualitative data of 10 participants cannot possibly be generalizable to the experiences of an entire population. Despite the fact making definitive generalizations of any population does not represent a research philosophy that I espouse, the convergence of data and analysis, which I do in this phase, allowed me to interrogate the complex and congruent



relationships between structural level factors and meaning-making germane to the schooling experiences of the study's participants. By employing a multi-method approach, these various analytic lenses served as tools to substantiate findings by using quantitative methods to support qualitative findings and vice versa (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007).

Important to underscore is that the purpose of this phase is not to “validate” the qualitative findings against the quantitative ones or to “enrich” the findings of the quantitative component, a strategy that is often used by quantitative researchers. A multi-method approach allows for the opportunity to straightforwardly couch the quantitative findings within the broader sociocultural and historical context of the schooling experiences of PR school-aged mothers, and more generally of PR students. Placing the Testimonios in conversation with the broader MHFE PR sample, and the MDESE publicly available data on MA public schools raises broader questions about the context in which schooling takes place and specifically the structural factors that inform ideologies and policies in practice that school-aged mothers must contend with.

In this phase of the study, I considered the findings for each question and asked how the analysis for each phase corroborated, challenged, expanded, or complicated the initial findings. For example, for question one (*What are the structural barriers that PR mothers experience in schools?*), I examined the school level factors that emerged as prominent from the statistical analysis and deliberated how those factors corresponded with what the participants in the qualitative study said they encountered in the schooling experiences. I did this for

each question, noting patterns and variations while emphasizing the participants own meaning-making. The iterative process of engaging with data, the analysis, and the literature was used to determine this study's core findings and to discuss the broader implications of this study. Using this approach, I was able to explicitly emphasize the centrality of social structures in the lives of the participants, while also privileging how human agency is discussed, developed, and transformed.

### **Research Positionality**

In light of my theoretical framework and methodological approach, I find that my positionality as a researcher warrants some discussion. I am a US born Boricua who has spent most of my adult life working on public education initiatives. In this work, I have worn many hats including serving as a youth worker, a public-school teacher, a community organizer, an executive director, and now as a researcher. Like many PRs who experience *el vaivén*, my family has been equally divided between Puerto Rico and the US, with frequent movements back and forth. I, myself, was born in MA but spent my childhood in a rural community in Borikén. Fleeing an economic crisis in PR, I was ten when my parents made their “final” move back to MA and relocated to the Greater Boston area, where half of my kin have lived for the past 60 years. I moved from a place in which children in my community had a lot of personal freedom to living in a small apartment in the “projects.” Outside my window, there was a gray withering gray sign with bold letters that read: *No Ball Playing*. It was precisely there that I played for countless hours, often with balls.

Although I loved school and learning, some of my most vivid memories of schooling in the US are tarnished with feelings of betrayal as I experienced firsthand the hostility and humiliation that thousands of PR children and their families face in US schools. My father and uncle often had to advocate for my cousin and me, and later my brother, to receive a high-quality education that recognized our intellect and our desire to be who we were. We were often made to feel like we were not smart enough, not good enough, not thankful enough, not quiet enough.

Perhaps it was because of these experiences that I ultimately decided that I wanted to be a teacher. I believed that schools, under the right conditions, could serve to disrupt social injustice and offer a path to liberation. Over the past 20 years, I have had the opportunity to work in education projects that have brought me to the schools and communities where many of this study's participants live. In these spaces, I have witnessed and resisted the ongoing dehumanization and erasure of PR children and their families. I have also been inspired by the dignity and tenacity of PR communities and the teachers and advocates who love them.

Early parenting has also always been a part of my life. Although I did not have children during my adolescence, most of my cousins and some friends had their first child before they were 20; several were still in high school when they became parents. Early parenting was never encouraged in my family, but the children that resulted from it were and continue to be welcomed and beloved.

As a Puertorriqueña, mother, daughter, and learner, with deep affiliation and membership to the PR Diaspora, some may argue that my analysis could not possibly be "objective." Some scholars might even suggest that I need to put my

own lived experiences aside and “bracket them,” so I can rein in the potential of bias in the analysis (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). As a critical race feminist developmental scholar, however, I reject false objectivity paradigms that are pervasive in social science research. Alternatively, I believe that my experiences as a member of these communities, and more specifically as a Boricua who grew up in MA, provide me with a unique perspective.

In this work, I have also been guided by what William Nelson (1996) refers to as “gradations of endogeny.” This requires that one actively magnify one’s idiocultural voice and recognize the degrees of acceptance and trepidations between oneself and the participants. I recognize the many axes that exist between me and this study’s participants across class, religion, race, sexuality, gender, migratory status, language abilities, and levels of education, and I actively engage in deliberating my insider/outsider status (Islam, Twine, & Warren, 2000). Though I share many similarities with the participants of this study, I am also very different. One of the most apparent differences is that I am not a “young” parent. In fact, several participants told me that I was older than their mothers. In addition to generationally situated interests, I also acknowledge that while I was entering adulthood and mulling over a multitude of future possibilities, during the same developmental period, the participants of this study were engrossed in the laborious work of mothering young children; many living in poverty and facing housing and familial insecurity, which I have never experienced. By and of itself, in this project, I am *just* the scholar, they are the “subjects,” and that is a relationship that is always powered (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000).

I share this background with the sole purpose of emphasizing that I arrive at this project with a complete understanding that the PR community is *not* a monolithic entity and that my role is primarily that of a learner, driven by an enduring curiosity to examine and document the Diasporic experiences of Boricuas, and to contribute to efforts that reimagine public education as an emancipatory project. I am not interested in contributing to pervasive discourses that essentialize PRs and, in particular, PR young mothers. I want to bring attention to the complexities of these experiences because simply put, they are complex. It is precisely because of my interests in understanding and deliberating the ever so multifaceted idiosyncrasies, past, present, absent, emerging, in flux, and into the future of the PR Diaspora as socially, politically, and historically situated and constructed that allows me to enter this project with a commitment to examine the schooling experiences of school-aged mothers with a “fresh” perspective. In other words, there is no one single story I desire to tell (Adichie, 2009).

Inherently, I recognize that no matter how sensitive I am to capturing the perspectives of the participants, I am humbled by the limitations of this endeavor and by the reality that I am *just* a bystander, and that they can and will always tell their stories better themselves. Because I know that they are better equipped to tell their stories, I accept full responsibility for any and all mistakes that I may have made in my analysis.

In closing, I do this work to understand the ways in which the state, with schooling as one of its most permeating apparatuses, reproduces discursive

notions of unbelonging for school-aged mothers and they generously agreed to help me. I acknowledge the participants as knowledge producers, and I am committed to a rigorous scholarly process in which I am continually interrogating my own positionality and, in which I ask myself what is the broader purpose of this inquiry? Whom does it serve? Why?

#### CHAPTER IV

#### DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

*Dame la mano paloma  
para subri a tu nido  
Dame la mano paloma  
para subir a tu nido  
Que me han dicho que estas sola  
Que me han dicho que estas sola  
y acompañarte he venido*

Across Puerto Rico and the Diaspora, one of the most important seasons in the collective cultural calendars begins in the last week of November and goes until the Christian celebration of the Epiphany. During this period Boricuas engage in celebrations of life, family, and community. As is the case in many cultural communities, one way this season is celebrated is through the sharing and singing of folk songs that are passed down from generation to generation. One of the most iconic folk songs of this season is *La Paloma*. *La Paloma* is a call and response song in the which the singer bellows rhymes about fictional community members and the audience then responds by singing the chorus. This song's chorus centers on *La Paloma*, a dove who sits high on her nest, making sense of

the world, while the audience attests their desires in joining her nest. As a child, we sang this song hundreds of times. I would imagine *La Paloma*, flying and observing from high above us. I believed that she, like all the birds, had the most magnificent perspective. They could see everything at once, while also having the ability to sweep in at a moment's notice to focus on the details of the everyday world. I wanted to see the world as they did.

With this frame in mind, in this chapter, I present a bird's eye view of PR school-aged mothers living in MA. Guided by a desire to examine structural barriers that PR mothers may experience in schools, the following descriptive statistical portrait was constructed using two data sources: (1) MHFE participant-level data, which includes student-level variables derived from MDESE's Student Information Management (SIM) system and (2) publicly available school and district level data from the MDESE. I present the results of these analyses in three sections. In the first section, I provide a brief demographic profile of the study's participants ( $n=145$ ). In the second part, I focus on their educational attainment and trajectories. In the final section, I present an analysis of measures which highlight structural factors associated with the academic achievement of SOC (Flores-González, 2002; Gregory et al., 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Skandera & Sousa, 2002; Tung et al., 2015; Warikoo & Carter, 2009). Analytically, in all sections, data are first presented using the "bird's eye view" approach, which means that I begin by first discussing the broader landscape in which the data are situated in, and then zoom down on the participants themselves. I do this with the purpose of understanding trends associated with

school-aged PR mothers while paying attention to the contexts in which they occur.

### **Participants in Context**

There are an estimated 5.4 million PRs residing in the US, approximately two million more than in Puerto Rico itself (Centro, 2017). As previously stated, MA has one of the oldest PR communities, and the fifth largest outside of Puerto Rico (approximately 308,000 individuals; Centro, 2016). In 2014, the PR population accounted for 4.6% of the state's total population and represented 42% of all Latinos in MA (Centro, 2016). While PR communities can be found throughout MA, concentrations of PR residents are typically located in urban areas and post-industrial communities where they first arrived to work in the manufacturing and agricultural industries. Since the economic crisis in Puerto Rico, the PR community in MA has grown. Most recently, during the aftermath of hurricanes Maria and Irma, migration estimates suggest that MA received the second largest number of PRs who were displaced in the six month period following the storms, approximately, 15,000 individuals of which 2,500 were school-aged children and youth (Centro, 2018). Community members have suggested that these numbers are underreported and that the number of PR children who have relocated is much higher.

As it pertains to childbearing during adolescence, as previously stated, compared to other racial and ethnic groups in the US, PR women have relatively higher rates of pregnancy during adolescence. In 2015, the teen birth rate in the US was 22%; however, PRs living in the continental US had a teen birth rate of



33% which was only one point lower than PRs living in Puerto Rico of the same age (34%) (Martin et al., 2017). Around the same time period, the teen pregnancy rate in MA was 9%, the lowest of any state in the US (Martin et al., 2017). The Latina teen pregnancy rate in MA was 32%, which was more than three times the state average (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2017). Communities with the state's highest teen pregnancy rate are also places that have relatively higher rates of PR residents (Lozano et al., 2017; Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy, 2014).

This background is important in understanding the demographic characteristics of this study's sample (See Table 3). Of the 704 MHFE participants, 21% ( $n=145$ ) reported being of PR heritage, making PRs the largest ethnic group of the MHFE sample. PRs also accounted for 55% of all Latina MHFE participants. Consistent with research on racial identity development in PR communities (Almaguer, 2003; Flores, 2003; Rodríguez Dominguez, 2005; Urciuoli, 2013), when provided with a list of racial categories, most PR participants in this sample (77%) choose "Other" as their race. This is different from the "Multi-Racial" category of which only 3% of PR participants chose. The choosing of "Other" as a category is suggestive of how current racial categorizations may not speak to the specificity of the PR experience. It is important to recognize that this is not indicative of a lack of experience with US racialization processes as most of the PR participants were born in the US (65%); 51% of PR participants being born in MA.

At the commencement of the MHFE study (T1), the average age of PR participants was 18. At the time of their first child's birth, mothers' ages ranged from 15.05 to 21.4 years ( $M = 18.5$ ,  $Mode = 16.85$ ,  $SD = 1.4$ ). Consistent with previous research on PRs in MA, which has found that the PR population in MA is both English dominant and bilingual (Centro, 2016), 47% of participating PR mothers reported that English was their preferred language, 42% reported a preference for Spanish and English, and only 10% reported that Spanish was their preferred language.

The PR participants lived in 32 different communities across the state and were dispersed in urban, suburban, and rural communities. Most of the PR sample participants lived in communities which would be characterized as urban. Forty-two percent of participants reported living in neighborhoods that were categorized as low to moderate income (median household income approximately \$40,000) with an ethnically diverse population, while 35% of participating mothers reported living in a low-income "minority" majority neighborhoods (median household income approximately \$33,000 and predominantly ethnic "minority" residents). This is consistent with research on the economic status of PRs in MA which has found that 38% of all PRs in MA live in poverty (Centro, 2016).

Regarding their household and familial context, at T1 74% of the PR participants reported living with an adult relative which was only one point higher than the MHFE non-PR sample. During the same period, 65% were involved in romantic relationships with the biological father of the baby. Eighty-five percent

of participants reported having a family member who was a teen parent, which was seven points higher than the non-PR sample.

### **Educational Profiles (Outcomes, Enrollment, and Trajectories)**

At T1, 32% of PR participants were still enrolled in high school, 24% were high school graduates, and 43% had seized attending school without receiving a high school diploma. The rate of dropout rate<sup>16</sup> among PR participants was substantially higher than the non-PR sample (22%). By T3, the percentage of PR participants who were enrolled in high school was 7%, while the rate of high school graduates increased to 44%. During the same period, the rate of PR participants who had left high school without obtaining a high school diploma increased to 49%. Non-PR participants shared a different profile. At both time points, they were more likely to have completed high school and more likely to go on to college than their PR counterparts (See Table 4). It is important to emphasize that even though “dropout” rates were relatively higher at both time points for the PR participants, ending secondary education did not mean the end of pursuing educational opportunities.

An analysis of school engagement across T1-T3 indicated that dropping out of high school did not appear to be a static state. As noted in Tables 4 and 5 regardless of participants’ educational attainment, most were engaged in some type of educational program, including those who left high school without obtaining a diploma. Many participants who did not graduate high school

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<sup>16</sup> The term dropout is typically used to refer to a student who has left high school before receiving a high school diploma. In this study, I use the term dropout in two ways: (1) when referencing scholarship or a data source that use this term or (2) when the participants use it.

enrolled in GED or in job training programs; others returned to high school hoping to meet this educational goal. Similarly, those who completed high school went on to enroll in two or four-year colleges or sought additional job/vocational training opportunities. By T3, the second highest grouping among PR participants were those enrolled in a college (13%).

The heterogeneity of educational attainment and engagement is apparent in their varied educational trajectories (See Table 6). First, most PR participants (41%) experienced some type of interruption to their schooling after their pregnancy but then went on to pursue secondary or post-secondary education. Second, contrary to metanarratives regarding becoming a young mother and dropping out of school, 22% of PR participants completed high school before becoming pregnant, and 15% did not experience any schooling interruption. Finally, only 14% of PR participants who experienced a schooling interruption did not pursue additional schooling. At T1, a large number of PR participants were still enrolled in high school *and*, the majority of respondents reported a desire to continue their education (78%), either in college (55%) or vocational training (23%). At T3, 90% of PR participants reported that they wanted to continue their education beyond high school with 64% wanting to attend college.

### **District and School Level Profiles**

The educational contexts of the participants were considered by using districts and schools as a grouping variable to create various descriptive profiles that focused on structural factors associated with the academic achievement of

SOC (Flores-González, 2002; Gregory et al., 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Skandera & Sousa, 2002; Tung et al., 2015; Warikoo & Carter, 2009). Using publicly available district and school-level data from MDESE, I created profiles for six different school districts (Boston, Chelsea, Holyoke, Lawrence, Springfield, and Lawrence) and nine high schools that the Testimoniolistas attended. The analysis of these variables resulted in the emergence of statistical trends which I now discuss.

### **Demographics**

Massachusetts has 392 operating public school districts, each with its own set of schools that are managed by local school boards. The six profiled districts (and affiliated schools) represent different geographical areas of the state. Boston and Chelsea (a small city) are located in the Greater Boston metropolitan area, which is internationally known for its knowledge-based economy, high tech and medical industries, as well as an epicenter for education, research, and innovation. The Greater Boston metropolitan area benefits from a diverse group of Latinx communities from across the Caribbean and Latin America, including a PR community that is over 100 years old. Springfield and Holyoke are located in the western region of the state. Springfield is the second largest city in MA; Holyoke is a small post-industrial city. Both municipalities have some of the oldest PR communities in the US. Holyoke and Springfield have some the highest concentration of PR students in any public school district, outside of Puerto Rico (Meléndez, 2016). Worcester and Lawrence, located respectively in the center and northeast region of the state, are medium-sized “gateway” cities for

(im)migrant populations seeking jobs in manufacturing industries. Both cities have diverse Latinx populations. Worcester's Latinx residents are mostly PR, and Lawrence's Latinx residents are predominately Dominican and PR. The location and histories of these municipalities and affiliated school districts are important as they speak to the diversity and dispersion of Latino experiences across the state (Lozano et al., 2017).

This history is also reflected in patterns of student demographics and enrollment (see Table 7). Statewide, Latino<sup>17</sup> students represent 14% of MA's overall student population; with the profiled districts having the largest concentration and number of Latino students in the state. 55% of all Latino students in the state during AY09<sup>18</sup> and 54% of all PR MHFE participants attended schools in one of these six profiled school districts. This is not surprising as these are districts that have well-established Latinx communities. For example, during AY09, at the commencement of the study, 89% of all students in Lawrence were Latino. In Boston, 38% of students were Latino, representing approximately 21,000 students, an amount larger than the total of total enrolled students in most of districts in the state. These profiled school districts are not only spaces with a large concentration of Latino students; they are also districts in which the majority of students are SOC. While only 30% of all MA students are SOC, all but Worcester had a student population that was over 80% SOC. The high concentration of Latino students and SOC can also be

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<sup>17</sup> It is not possible to report on the number of PR students as MDESE does not report by specific ethnic and/or national groups.

<sup>18</sup> Unless otherwise noted all data reported in this section are for AY09. AY09 aligns with the T1 of the MHFE study.

observed in the profiled schools (See Table 8). This description is consistent with longitudinal research which has found that Latino students are significantly more likely to attend racially and economically segregated schools when compared to other racial/ethnic groups and that PR students, in particular, experience extreme levels of school-based segregation (Orfield et al., 2016; Orfield & Yun, 1999). To summarize, the PR participants of this study attended schools that have a high concentration of both Latinx students and SOC.

In addition to the high concentration of Latinos in these school districts and schools, other factors distinctly differentiate them from other districts in MA. MDESE data, for instance, suggest that these districts have a high concentration of students who qualify for English Language Learner (ELL) services and students who are economically disadvantaged. While MA's rate of ELLs students is only 6%, all the profiled school districts have more than triple that rate (range 17-22%). Similarly, only one-third of MA public school students were identified as economically disadvantaged, but the profiled districts and schools had rates that were more than double state averages (range 66-89%). For example, in Lawrence 89% of students were identified as low-income. Of the 145 participating PR mothers in the current study, 93% were economically disadvantaged, suggesting that most PR participants experienced poverty as well as lived and attended schools in districts where the majority of students were also economically disadvantaged.

Among the six profiled school districts, out of school suspension (OSS) rates were also disproportionately higher than state averages. In AY09 the

statewide OSS was only 4%. Every district and school profiled had higher rates (see Table 7 and Table 8) with Holyoke having the highest OSS rate (22%). The schools with the highest OSS rates were The High School of Commerce (Springfield) and South Community High School (Worcester), both with rates of 23%. In addition, 55% of PR participants experienced an OSS. The impact of exclusionary disciplinary practices on educational and life trajectories are outside the scope of this project, noteworthy however is that a robust body of literature suggests that (1) Black and Latino students are subjected to disparate exclusionary school disciplinary practices and (2) receiving an OSS increases the likelihood of dropping out of high school (see Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002).

The profiled school districts also reported substantially higher mobility rates among their student populations. During AY09, the state's Churn rate<sup>19</sup> was 10%. Every profiled district had a higher churn rate, ranging from 17% to 29%. Every profiled school, except for Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational High School, which accepts students from several communities, also experienced relatively higher churn rates (range 10%- 45%). High mobility rates have associated with disruptions in student learning and overall school engagement (Gruman, Harachi, Abbott, Catalano, & Fleming, 2008; Rumberger, 2003; Skandera & Sousa, 2002). Specifically, there is overwhelming evidence that

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<sup>19</sup> MDESE's Churn rate refers the number students transferring into or out of a public school or district throughout a given academic school year.



mobility during the high school years increases the odds of dropping out of high school (Rumberger, 2003).

## MCAS

As part of Massachusetts's Education Reform Act of 1993, all public-school students are required to participate in the MCAS (the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System), a set of standardized assessments designed to measure skill level and content knowledge based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Students receive a score for each assessment and the ranges of scores are grouped into four categories: *Advanced*, *Proficient*, *Needs Improvement*, and *Warning*. In addition to completing other graduation requirements, in AY09, in order to be eligible to receive a high school diploma, students had to receive a *Proficient* (or higher) score in the English Language Arts (ELA) and Math tenth-grade assessments. Historically, most MA public school students have met the proficiency levels required for obtaining a high school diploma. In AY09, proficiency rates for Math and ELA assessments were 75% and 81%, respectively. As noted in Table 9 these districts profiled performed at much lower rates, with most profiled districts having less than a 50% "passing" rate on the required exams. In Lawrence, 70% of the student body did not meet competency on the Math assessment. Rankings of districts by MCAS scores suggested that four out of the six districts were part of the ten lowest performing districts in the state. Latino student performance on the MCAS, across the state and in the profiled districts and schools, was also substantially lower than state averages. As it pertains to the schools, all ten schools (see Table 10) had

considerably lower scores on the MCAS relative to state averages on both exams. In Commerce High School (Springfield), for example, only 28% of students (and 20% of Latino students) met proficiency on the tenth grade Math exam. Moreover, on both exams, seven out of the ten schools had lower scores than the district average, which again was lower than state averages.

### **High School Graduation and Drop Out Rates**

In this section, I present high school graduation<sup>20</sup> and dropout rates<sup>21</sup>. There is an implicit relationship between these two measures. Districts that have a high graduation rate typically have low annual dropout rates, and vice versa. During AY09, the statewide graduation rate was one of the highest in MA's history (82%). During the same year, Latino students in MA had a graduation rate that was 22 percentage points lower (60%). Similarly, the high school graduation rates for the profiled districts were markedly lower ranging from 48% to 70%. Lawrence and Holyoke reported that less than 50% of their student body graduated in the expected four-year period.

During the same year, the statewide dropout rate was 3%, one of the lowest in the nation. The statewide Latino dropout rate during the same year was 8%, more than double the state average. Likewise, four out of the six school districts had an annual dropout rate that was double the state average, and all districts in the same had some of the highest dropout rates in the state. The high

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<sup>20</sup> In this analysis I present MDESE's four-year graduation rate which refers to the percentage of students who graduate with a regular high school diploma within the expected four-year period.

<sup>21</sup> MDESE's dropout rate refers to the percentage of students in grades 9-12 who left school without receiving a high school diploma and did not return to school by October of the following academic year.

school graduation and annual dropout rates of the schools under study mirrored these trends. All schools profiled had a lower high school graduation rate (an average of 25 points lower) than the state average. As it pertains to the dropout rate, all the schools in the sample, apart from Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational School, had higher dropout rates than state and district-wide averages. The schools with the highest dropout rates were Charlestown High (Boston) and High School of Commerce (Springfield), which had a dropout rate of 17% and 13%, respectively. The dropout rate for Charlestown High school was five times higher than the state average, one of the highest dropout rates in the state. These trends are consistent with the educational attainment of PR participants of the study, a large portion of whom experienced educational interruptions.

### **Enrollment in Institutions of Higher Education**

During AY09, 72% of MA's public-school graduates went on to institutions of higher education (IHE) with 71% attending four-year colleges/universities. The rate among Latino graduates who went on to IHE was 15 percentage points lower at 57%. Differing from statewide trends, most Latino graduates attended two-year colleges (55%). In general, the profiled districts had lower rates of graduates who enrolled in IHE. Like MA's Latino graduates, most graduates from the profiled districts who enrolled in an IHE did so at two-year colleges. For example, high school graduates from Holyoke had the highest enrollment rate in IHE (72%) with 67% enrolling in a two-year college. Worcester emerged as the only exception to this trend; 52% of Worcester high

school graduates who enrolled in IHE did so at a four-year college/university; however, most Latino high school graduates (60%) from Worcester enrolled in two-year colleges. A similar pattern was evident in the profiled schools.

### **Accountability Status**

In this final section, I discuss the accountability status of the school districts where PR participants were enrolled during AY09 and AY16. As previously stated, every public-school district across the nation that receives federal funding is required to develop accountability measures that, in theory, are designed to track student learning with the aim of closing the “achievement gap” among the nation’s most vulnerable populations, including students who are ethnic “minorities.” In MA, districts and schools are required to establish yearly education outcomes goals for various student groups, focusing on improvement over time. Progress is subsequently classified into one of five accountability and assistance levels. Schools and districts who meet their goals are categorized as Level 1; the lowest performing are categorized as Level 5. Schools and districts that are chronically underperforming are in jeopardy of being restructured or ultimately closed.

MDESE has consistently reported that approximately 80% percent of MA students attend schools that have been classified as Level 1 or 2 (MDESE, 2018), the highest performing levels. Yet in AY09, only 4% of this study’s PR participants ( $n = 145$ ) lived in districts that were classified as Level 1 or 2; by AY16 this figure increased to 7%. Most PR participants lived in districts that were classified as being in corrective action or were being restructured for not

meeting AYP for the entire student population or a student subgroup (See Table 11). As a point of contrast, in AY09, 88% of participants lived in a district that was classified as Level 4 or 5; by AY16, when most of the participants were out of school, this figure had dropped to 63%. Level 4 and Level 5 are considered the most “serious designation” (MDSE, n.d.). Districts with schools that consistently receive a Level 4 designation are in jeopardy of being placed under state receivership (Level 5), which principally means that the state (MDESE) seizes control from the local school boards and manages all schooling operations. Receivership is extremely rare in MA, yet it appears that is not such a rare occurrence for PR students. In AY18, of all 392 districts in MA, only three school districts were classified as Level 5: Holyoke, Lawrence, and Southbridge (MDESE, 2018), all communities with large PR enclaves. Fifteen percent of this study's sample lived in one of these communities. This is important because it suggests that these districts have not been able to meet the AYP goals consistently.

As it refers to the schools profiled, in AY09 all but one school was classified as either in restructuring or correction action, suggesting that interventions were needed to improve student outcomes. Five years later, two of the nine schools were closed, and no school was classified as Level 1 or Level 2, which as previously mentioned is the category that most MA schools are in.

### **Summary of Findings**

The analysis suggests that PR participants experience schooling in educational environments that are radically different from most students in MA. PR participants are more likely to live in districts that are racially segregated, with a high rate of economically disadvantaged students, ELL students, and students who have experienced an OSS. These are also school districts that have high mobility rates. In terms of educational outcomes and trajectories, four important trends are worth noting. First, the districts and schools profiled have substantially lower proficiency rates on the MCAS, suggesting that students who are enrolled in these districts have a higher risk of not receiving an education that will adequately prepare them to meet the requirements for high school completion eligibility. Along the same vein, the districts and schools profiled have some of the lowest graduation rates and highest dropout rates for all students. Thirdly, compared to state averages, the districts and schools profiled also have substantially lower rates of their graduates enrolling in IHE. Additionally, differing from statewide trends, graduates from the profiled districts and schools who enroll in IHE are more likely to attend two-year colleges. The accountability status analysis indicates that across T1 and T3, PR participants lived in school districts where the schools not only had depressed educational outcomes but also received the lowest state designations for meeting AYP. Successive failures at meeting AYP, in theory, should have led to interventions to improve student learning; however, the data reviewed suggest that progress by these districts, is at best limited. In sum, PR participants of this study attend some of the lowest

performing districts and schools in the Commonwealth. Prior to pregnancy, they attended schools where most of the students had lower educational attainment and outcomes when compared to MA's public-school students.

It has not escaped my notice that a large number of scholars have argued that district and school level outcomes should not be decoupled from individual and familial level factors that have been found to be associated with educational attainment. The demographic profile of the PR sample including their educational outcomes suggests that they have experienced a significant number of "risk" factors linked with lower educational attainment. These include but are not limited to being economically disadvantaged, being ELLs, experiencing OSS, and having interruptions to their schooling. They are also, of course, all school-aged mothers. The analysis of the data, however, also indicate that consistent with previous research on school-aged mothers, while many mothers struggle to complete secondary education, others navigate parenting and education successfully (Greenstone, 2012; Mistry et al., 2016; Oxford et al., 2005). PR school-aged mothers in this study had heterogenous responses to their parenting status in relation to their educational attainment and engagement. While most PR school-aged mothers experienced schooling interruptions following their pregnancy, some graduated high school before parenting and others continued their education with no interruption at all. Also, at both T1 and T3, most participants were engaged in some type of educational programming and most importantly, 90% (at T3) aspired to continue their education and go on to college. Together, these findings elucidate that the educational attainment of PR school-

aged mothers in this study do not vary significantly from students in their school districts who may not have experienced early parenting. This requires reconsideration of what are the biggest educational “risks” that PR school-aged mothers face.

Some may argue that there is nothing new or definitive about these findings. I would agree. These findings, however, must be understood and situated within the scholarship on the experiences and outcomes of PR students. This body of work has long documented that PR students not only have some of the lowest educational attainment rates in the Commonwealth but that they also live in high poverty racially segregated communities whose schools have long-standing records of chronically low student achievement and educational inequities between varying student subgroups (Berardino, 2014, 2015; Bloomabloom, 2011; Fox, 2015; Frau-Ramos & Nieto, 1991; Gastic et al., 2010; Nieto, 1995, 2000). These findings are also consistent with the Center for Puerto Rican Studies latest report (2016) which found that “the level of educational attainment for Puerto Ricans in Massachusetts was lower than for U.S Puerto Ricans as a whole, as well as those on the island” (p.1).

While I recognize that although this statistical approach helps to paint a portrait of the educational outcomes, trajectories, and contexts of the schooling experiences of PR school-aged mothers, it does not produce definitive causal conclusions. Instead, these preliminary findings in conjunction with the scholarship on PRs in the US, strongly suggest that when studying educational trajectories and outcomes of PR school aged mother and PR students in general,



context must always be implicated, and specifically the ways by which racism, discrimination, oppression, and segregation are critical features of the developmental contexts of PR students in the US must be interrogated (Coll et al., 1996; Nieto, 1999). In the case of PR school-aged mothers in MA, in the face of omnipresent constructions of their pregnancy as “the problem” which may hinder their ability to pursue an education, it appears that the “risk” of school failure begins long before their pregnancies. The “risks” of being born into families that face intersecting systems of oppression, that have limited economic and housing opportunities, and that live in communities with low “performing” schools, the result of well documented pervasive social stratification systems, are entrenched by custom and code. These risks, therefore, exist before and after their right to motherhood.

Questioning long-standing and often context void risk and resilience paradigms used to study children, families, and communities that face adversity, in the next phase of the study, I focus on the lived experiences of PR school-aged mothers, and more specifically on how they make meaning of the barriers they faced in school. Guided by the theoretical frame, and Testimonios as methodology, I position schools as sites where the interlocking systems of race, class, and gender oppression are powered, where the expectations of womanhood are transmitted and reproduced (Hill Collins, 1986). Using the experiences of the participants and their own words, I map out the policies, programs, practices, and ideologies present in their schooling experiences and the ways in which they

reflect majoritarian perspectives of normative development, including achievement and social order.

## CHAPTER V

## TESTIMONIOS

*We are sitting on the cold living room floor, facing each other. Karelys, legs crisscrossed, on a zebra print pillow, me, with my back against the newly painted heather grey wall. Her apartment was stunning, with large bay windows, pristine white crown molding, onyx floors, and brand new modern appliances, radically different from the homes I have visited in the past few months. It was also completely empty except for several dingy plastic bins filled with clothes, our bodies, and the brilliant sunlight seeping through the windows.*

*Karelys has lived here for less than two weeks and explained to me how she "got this apartment." She was sobbing, alone, in a corridor of a courthouse, after a judge denied her custody of her children, in part because she did not have her own apartment, a difficult asset to obtain as a now single low-income mother of two small children in one of the tightest housing markets in the nation. A stranger saw her crying, consoled her; they started talking. The stranger, a woman, told her about some affordable units available in one of the many luxury buildings sprouting all over the city. Karelys called the same day, completed the paperwork, and within two weeks had fiercely negotiated and secured this apartment. Now, she was anxiously waiting for her next court date, a month away, to show the judge what she has been able to accomplish.*

*While sharing her Testimonio, Karelys slowly pulled down the collar of her shirt. On her brown body, across her chest, she shows me a carefully composed black cursive tattoo that read, Beautiful Disaster.*

*"Life isn't perfect for everybody," she told me. "Throughout everything I go through in life, that doesn't make you a bad person."*

*"I am a beautiful disaster, I am a beautiful person."*

*We are beautiful people inside."*

I began the last chapter by sharing the story and cultural relevance of the song, *Dame La Mano Paloma*. I did so with the intention of accentuating how quantitative findings from a bird's eye perspective can provide important insights into how developmental contexts are structured. The song, however, is most beloved not for the panoramic views it offers but for the stories it tells about individuals and specific communities, "*En el pueblito de Coamo...*" This requires, theoretically, that the Paloma swoop down and capture stories about the

mundane, the mythical, the disappointments, and triumphs of everyday life.

These stories affirm the lives of the listeners.

In this chapter, I take a “deep dive” and address two primary lines of inquiry: *How do PR school-aged mothers make meaning of the barriers they encounter in school?* and *What are the sources and supports that they view as facilitating educational attainment?* Guided by these questions and employing a thematic analysis approach, the organization of this chapter is grounded on the principle that a “testimonio is not meant to be hidden, made intimate, nor kept secret” (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012, p. 525). My primary goal is to share what I have learned from the Testimoniolistas, all of whom like Karelys, courageously opened their lives to me in complex and unexpected ways. I begin by providing a brief profile of the Testimoniolistas. In the section that follows, I present a conceptual map which outlines the salient themes that I identified. I then describe each theme, providing an exemplary case as well as giving rich descriptions that answer the questions under study. In the closing section, I present a brief analysis of an “exceptional case” which further clarifies the questions and findings of this phase of the investigation.

### **Testimoniolistas’ Profile**

The Testimoniolistas sample consists of 10 women. During T1 of the MHFE study, they were between the ages of 15 to 19. In 2017, during the Testimonios gathering period, their ages ranged from 24-27. The Testimoniolistas were a diverse group with notable variations in life experiences,

trajectories, beliefs, outcomes, family compositions, careers, social economic status, and day-to-day practices. Despite their differences, there are some notable demographic patterns.

All but one of the Testimoniolistas lived the majority of their lives in MA, mostly residing in urban Black and Latinx neighborhoods. All 10 participants<sup>22</sup> were also English-fluent; eight identified as bilingual. Residential mobility was common among the participants; however, mobility was typically restricted to the geographical areas where the Testimoniolistas went to high school. In fact, despite experiencing multiple moves, by 2017, all the participants either lived in the same cities they did in high school or in a nearby community. Important to note is that the moves were often attributed to their parent's, and later as adults, their own desires to live in safer and more affordable neighborhoods. Eight of participants had previously visited Puerto Rico, but only two, Amaya and Karelys, experienced *el vayven*. Although familial responses to the announcement of their pregnancies varied, all reported having familial support as they transitioned to motherhood. At T1, for example, all the participants lived with at least one family member, typically their parents and siblings. In addition, all participants reported having adolescent parents in their families, including their own mothers. I include a detailed profile of the Testimoniolistas in Table 12.

Table 13 and Table 14 provide a summary of self-reported educational trajectories and outcomes. Their educational outcomes and trajectories are similar to those in the broader PR MHFE sample. First, most of their education took

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<sup>22</sup> In this chapter, unless otherwise noted, the term 'participant' refers to the Testimoniolistas.

place in public schools where the majority of students were SOC and economically disadvantaged. Second, when compared to MA's averages, the Testimoniolistas had a higher rate of participation in ELL programs, SPED, and in OSS. Six out of the 10, for example, experienced an OSS before getting pregnant. Third, the participants also had heterogeneous educational responses relative to their pregnancy status. Towards this point, as it pertains to high school completion among the 10 participants, there were two educational pathways: participants either persisted or disappeared. In the “persisted” pathway are participants who graduated from high school. In the “disappeared” are the participants who ended their secondary high school education without ever receiving a high school diploma. In this sample, five participants completed high school (persisted), and five dropped out (disappeared) (Table 15).

Similar to the quantitative findings, the qualitative data also suggest that these two pathways were not fixed. During the first year of their children’s lives, participants experienced episodes of enrolling and un-enrolling from school. The data also indicate that irrespective of their high school graduation status, their educational trajectories were not static. By 2017, all but one Testimoniolista had continued their education, with varying degrees of educational attainment (Table 14). In total, nine had received a high school diploma or GED, seven had completed vocational training, and four had completed at least one year of college.

Given the enduring narrative that early parenting will likely result in dropping out of school and a lifetime of poverty, questions regarding the role their

pregnancies played in their decision to leave or continue with their schooling naturally arise. While that is an interesting line of inquiry, what the Testimonios demonstrate is that the heterogeneity of educational trajectories and outcomes must be understood within the context of their schooling experiences and the educational policies, programs, practices, and ideologies they experienced. For this reason, as suggested by Pillow (2005), my analytic lens now moves from the individual outcomes and trajectories of teen mothers to “the structures and discourses of schools and educational policies” (p.5) that they contend with.

### **Conceptual Map: Policies in Practices**

The focus of the qualitative analysis was to understand the schooling experiences of PR school-aged mothers. Longitudinal thematic analysis of the qualitative data revealed three core themes that map against the experiences of the Testimoniolistas. First, prior to pregnancy, the Testimoniolistas described schooling environments that made them feel unwelcomed, unwanted, and as though they did not belong (Theme I). Second, upon becoming pregnant, they experienced racist, gendered, and anti-parental policies in practice that heightened their sense of unbelonging (Theme II). The Testimoniolistas also identified sources of support that helped them navigate their educational contexts (Theme III).

To illustrate the essential features of the themes, I begin the descriptions of each thematic area with an exemplary story from one of the Testimoniolistas. I then draw from the experiences of other Testimoniolistas to demonstrate how the theme, and in particular ideologically based policies in practices, were enacted in

their schooling lives. Table 15 demonstrates the intersections between each participant's educational trajectories and the themes identified. Figure 3 provides a visual guide of the themes relative to the educational pathways of each of the participants.

### **Theme I: Unwelcomed, Unwanted, Unbelonging**

*It was just a horrible school system honestly. I just felt like they were just passing kids to the different classes, just get over them really. Then there was this kid who's been failing for like three times and he was like the oldest out of the bunch and he was still there. And it was just like, why are you still here? But he was just there lingering around and I feel like they really didn't care about the kids' education.*  
-Bianca

I met Bianca in her apartment, which was located in a housing development complex near where I grew up. When Bianca opened the door, she looked like many of my high school friends. Hair pulled back in a tight bun, dark black lined eyes, a too-large T-shirt, tight jeans, and hoop earrings. What struck me most about Bianca were her dark eyes. They had the look of a mother of a newborn who had not slept in months; her son, though, was nine years old. Bianca quickly led me to her kitchen. In a quiet but direct voice, she said, "I am glad to be doing this," and this is how her Testimonio began:

Throughout my whole school I had to struggle. Kindergarten, coming from a mother who don't speak English, my first language was Spanish. And Kindergarten, I had to repeat. I had to repeat Kindergarten because I didn't know English.

Kindergarten marked the beginning of a series of negative schools-based experiences that came to shape her opinions of schools. Bianca remembered that



as a small child her mother told her that she was going to love school. She would make friends, try new foods, and play a lot. As an adult, Bianca believes that her mother “told me that so I wouldn’t be scared” since, despite being born in MA, at the age of five Bianca was not yet English-fluent. But her mom’s promises failed to come to fruition. Bianca’s first memories of school were not of the playfulness that many children experience during early childhood or the kindness of a kindergarten teacher. Twenty years later, what remains intact were the punishment and shame she felt simply for being who she was.

School was a place where she endured loneliness, where she was relentlessly bullied, where her learning disability went largely ignored, where she was punished for struggling with depression, where she witnessed teachers and administrators mistreating children in need, and where she felt academically unprepared, consistently falling behind. It was also a place where she never felt safe enough to tell anyone what was happening at home, primarily that her father was brutally abusing both she and her mother. This abuse ultimately led her mother to "go on the run" with her kids, moving from place to place, until they found a safe and affordable place to live.

By the time Bianca completed high school, she had attended at least ten different schools, more than any other Testimoniolista. Although each school was different, the schools were all located in urban areas where most students were like her: economically disadvantaged, not White, and often on the go. According to Bianca, it did not matter what school she attended, they were all "pretty much the same." As noted in the opening quote, for Bianca schools were spaces where

neglect was normalized, failure was justified, and where she felt othered. Like most Testimoniolistas, before getting pregnant, school was a site of suffering (Dumas, 2014). Yet despite the challenges Bianca endured, she remained steadfast to her goal of graduating high school. In trying to explain the complex relationship she had with school Bianca said:

Ever since I stepped my foot in a school system, I never liked school. I just never liked it. I thought it was a waste of my time, but I know I had to do it because without your high school diploma you can't do nothing with your life.

Though Bianca's history of relocation makes her unique among the Testimoniolistas, they all shared similar schooling experiences. Despite their varied educational achievement, trajectories, and communities, notwithstanding having attended different schools in different communities, the Testimoniolistas were consistent in their descriptions of schools as spaces that were riddled with psychological and physical violence, racism, low cognitive demand and expectations, bureaucratic dysfunction, harsh disciplinary practices, limited resources and opportunities, and cultural erasure. The Testimoniolistas consistently described their schools using similar words. The schools were "the ghetto," "bad," "disorganized," "loud," "unsafe," and "a waste of time." Classes were "boring," and often taught by teachers they believe did not care about them. The Testimoniolistas described feeling frustrated because they were not well prepared to pass the MCAS or go to college. Beginning in middle school, they reported that there were few academic consequences for skipping class, leaving campus, and not completing assignments. It was easy to be invisible, to disappear,

and to pass. Similar to Rolón-Dow's (2007) construction of "passing time" in school, and as Bianca alluded, "they were just passing kids to the different classes, just get over them really." The Testimoniolistas learned that "passing" in school was less about learning and more about compliance with classroom practices they often found meaningless, just so they could "pass."

Participants also described their schools as punitive. Harsh punishments for what seemed to be minor infractions like chewing gum, talking in class, or being late to school, were widely discussed. Expulsions are a very rare occurrence in MA, yet three of the Testimoniolistas experienced being expelled prior to getting pregnant. Luz, the only participant in this sample who dropped out before getting pregnant, was expelled her sophomore year for truancy and fighting after two years of constantly getting in trouble for what she believed were minor offenses. Luz recalled that when the Principal told her and her mother she couldn't come back to school, she was stunned. Emphasizing that hers was not a singular experience when asked what her school could have done differently, she said, "There were kids who didn't want to go on the right path, and they didn't help them. They were just like, whatever. Get out of this school."

Despite the focus on punishment and control, most participants described feeling unsafe in school. Arguments, fights, drug, and alcohol use were common occurrences. Several participants were also victims of severe bullying. Isa, a self-described serious student who in high school aspired to be a forensic scientist, shared how after numerous calls and meetings with teachers and administrators and feeling concerned and disappointed by the lack of follow up,

her mother felt that their only option was to move. With the help of her grandparents, they relocated to a nearby suburban town. It was the first time that Isa felt “good about going to school.” She noticed the quietness of her new school, as well as the large number of activities and services the school offered its students.

Examples of bureaucratic dysfunction were also abundant. Participants detailed how their schools would often lose paperwork, inconsistently communicate with families, delay following up, incorrectly assess their credits, or even fail to enroll them in classes they had registered for. Amaya’s Testimonio illuminates this point.

Amaya reluctantly moved to Boston as a rising junior after her mother lost her nursing job in Puerto Rico. In Puerto Rico Amaya was being scouted by several universities to be part of the track and field teams and she was eager to get to college. After arriving, her mother began the process of enrolling Amaya and her brother in school. To her surprise, it took almost three months to find them a placement due to issues with language testing, transcripts, and other paperwork. When they were finally placed in a school, Amaya was assigned to a sophomore cohort as, according to the district, she did not have enough credits to qualify as a junior. She was distraught as she was hoping to graduate as soon as possible and return to Puerto Rico. Within weeks of starting school, Amaya had to take the MCAS and was told she needed to pass them to be eligible to graduate; she knew she would not be able to pass. She tried to remain positive and told herself that

she would just make the best of it, focus on improving her English writing, and maybe even apply to college in the US.

The next year, in what would have been her fourth year in high school, Amaya was shocked when she was pulled out of AP classes and placed in an MCAS remedial test preparation course. “Yeah, it was very discouraging, because of that. I was getting ready for college,” she shared. “I wanted to take some AP classes and everything because it gets you ready. That’s why they told me that AP classes give you *puntos*, they count as credits, *y es una buena preparación para la universidad* [it’s good preparation for college].” She asked the school to reconsider their decision. “Nothing worked. I was like, but I have to have some AP classes, they were like, ‘No, because MCAS.’” She was not able to take AP classes that year. Like many students in her school, regardless of the mandatory MCAS preparation program, she did not meet the MCAS proficiency requirement in one of the exams and had to retake them the following year.

Throughout the data collection process, I asked the Testimoniolistas to reflect on what they have learned about PR history and culture in school, their interactions with PR faculty and staff, and more broadly how they made sense of their PR identity while in school. Although they were able to articulate the importance of their PR identity, what was most palpable about their schooling experiences relative to their PR identity was its invisibility. Eight participants reported never learning about PR culture or history in school or having a PR

teacher or administrator that they were aware of.<sup>23</sup> Other than support staff, like the janitors, cafeteria workers, or administrative assistant, the only PRs in the building that they knew were the students and the parents. The participants' recollection of what it was like to be a PR student in their school were largely grounded on incidents of overt racist practices and speech. Isa's bullying included often being called "Puerto Rican trash" by her fellow students. Kayla, who grew up in a PR neighborhood in central MA casually shared that in elementary school a White school teacher called her a "spic" in the front of the class, "but that only happened once," she said, trying to minimize its effect. Participants also reported how PRs were often described as "lazy," "thugs," and "drug lords" by teachers and other students. Bianca explained:

They just look at us like we don't belong here, or they look at us in a different way, or it's like, 'Why are you speaking Spanish? This is America. Speak English.' I hate that with a passion. I really do.

As subsequently discussed, incidents of racially based discrimination and hate speech increased as they entered motherhood.

Despite these challenging circumstances, the Testimoniolistas also spoke in detail about the importance of education in their lives. As adolescents, all but one had aspired to go on to college. As mothers, they all expected their children to excel academically and pursue higher education beyond what they had achieved. They also understood schools as spaces that were not just about

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<sup>23</sup> Amaya and Karelys were the only participants who reported learning about PR history and culture in school and having PRs teachers and administrators. They were also the only participants from the Testimoniolista sample that went to school in Puerto Rico.

“academics.” School was also a place to make friends, including romantic relationships, explore personal interests, as well as to be part of community life. Eight of the 10 participants described being part of school-based extracurricular activities, including sports teams and student clubs. Many stayed in school long after the school day was over, completing homework, hanging out with friends, or participating in special events. Every Testimoniolista also named at least one adult that over the course of their schooling showed care and concern for their wellbeing. Two participants described their schools as a “refuge” where they received emotional and social support when dealing with difficult home circumstances. What is notable about these experiences is that even while contending with challenging school environments, the Testimoniolistas recognized the complex importance of schooling in their lives.

These are just but a few examples that characterize the schooling environments of the participants before parenting. In sum, the qualitative data suggest that prior to pregnancy, participants had negative schooling experiences that made them feel unwanted and unwelcomed in school, promoting a sense of unbelonging. Yet they valued the possibilities an education could present and wanted to secure better opportunities for themselves and their children.

The terms unwanted, unwelcomed, and unbelonging warrant unpacking. In deliberating the schooling experiences of the Testimoniolistas, I was reminded of sociologist Avery Gordon’s (2008) essay “*her shape in his hands*” where she asks readers to consider the “complicated workings” of what is unseen in constructions of knowledge. In this essay, Gordon addresses Ralph Ellison’s use

of the term *un-visible* in his introduction to the *Invisible Man* (1952). Ellison asserts that Black men live in a state of constant surveillance while at the same time their ideas, experiences, contributions, fears, emotions (etc.) are not valued and are unseen. According to Ellison, Black men's congruent hyper-visibility and invisibility render them *un-visible*. Ellison's notion of *un-visibility* encourages scholars to "interrogate the mechanisms by which the highly visible can actually be a type of invisibility on its own." (Gordon, 2008, p.17). Calling attention to Toni's Morrison's argument that "invisible things are not necessarily not-there," Gordon describes this type invisibility as a "hysterical blindness" that reinforces hegemony (p.17).

Inspired by the idea on un-visibility and hysterical blindness, I locate PR students, and in particular PR school-aged mothers as both highly visible and unseen in and by schools. The state reproduces this precarious position through the implementation and enactment of policies and practices whose goal is to make them disappear. Scholars have also argued that students who experience this type of school-based marginalization are aware of their "low status" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Portes, 1995; Waters, Tran, Kasinitz, & Mollenkopf, 2010) and experience what Bourdieu (1990) described as school-based malaise "from a growing consciousness that what they are promised as educational opportunity is unlikely to lead to greater social or educational mobility" (Dumas, 2014). Dumas' (2014) work on desegregation policies and practices in an urban school district expands on these points and positions schooling, contemporarily and historically, as a site of suffering for Black people. He argues that schools and teachers, in particular,



inflict suffering on Black communities through the implementation of policies and practices that are designed to enforce and (re)produced students' marginalization.

The Testimonios suggest that schools were too a site of suffering for the participants. While the participants were required by both custom and code to attend school, which inherently suggests that they "belonged," the ideologies and policies in practice that they experienced in their everyday educational lives made them feel unwanted and unwelcomed, cementing their sense of unbelonging. This sense of unbelonging in school was further magnified as they entered motherhood.

### **Theme II: Motherhood and (Re)producing Unbelonging**

*"I asked my mother. No one ever came for me. There were no calls, no letters, no nothing. No one cared."*  
-Crystal

Crystal found out she was pregnant the fall of her junior year. After the initial shock settled, her and boyfriend began to make plans for their future. Crystal was aware of the potential challenges that being pregnant in high school could present but she earnestly believed that with the support of her loved ones she could graduate high school and go on to college, fulfilling a lifelong goal. Her positive temperament, however, quickly dimmed as she was confronted with school-based obstacles that she believed were unfair, unprofessional and that ultimately contributed to her decision to drop out.

The challenges became apparent early in her pregnancy. Her first-trimester presented physical challenges that would often cause her to miss or be

late to school. Crystal had always been an A student and cared about her grades. She tried to keep up and would ask the teachers for missed work; her requests often went unmet. She quickly noticed that being absent, late, or not completing assignments “was not a big deal.” Crystal explained it as follows:

I found out I was pregnant, October, and I was nauseous, I was sick, and the days I felt like I couldn't make it, I didn't make it. The next day, it wasn't like, ‘You need makeup work?’ or, ‘What's going on? Are you all right?’ It was nothing like that.

Growing increasingly worried about the impact of the absences and tardies, she decided to talk to a guidance counselor and let them know what was going on.

The encounter was disappointing:

I'm like, ‘The reason I've been absent so much is because I'm really sick.’ She [the guidance counselor] was like, ‘What's the reason? Why are you sick?’ I'm like, ‘It's because I'm pregnant.’ They were like, ‘You're so young.’ I'm like, ‘I know, but I am, so that's what it was.’ Then they were like, ‘Okay,’ and that was the end of that conversation.

The meeting was a turning point for Crystal. She already knew she went to “one of the worst high schools in the city,” but the lack of concern and empathy by the counselor confirmed for her that the school was not going to “to help her.” With the hopes of finding more support, shortly thereafter she decided to transfer to a school that was closer to where her mother lived. But at the new high school, things went from bad to worse.

Starting at a new school in the middle of the year is always hard, but harder as a now a visibly pregnant student with no friends. To her surprise, the school

administrators had placed her in classes that were below her level in math and science but was told these were the only spots available. There was no orientation process, and Crystal didn't know whom to ask for help. She quickly began to feel depressed and overwhelmed. Her mother and sister encouraged her to meet with the new guidance counselor, thinking that at the very least they would discuss what would happen after she gave birth. Crystal recalled how the counselor mostly stared at her blankly and told her "Keep trying your best." The counselor also told Crystal that she had information about offsite programs for "pregnant girls." But Crystal wanted to graduate from "a regular high school," so she could go to "a real college." She said:

At [name of high school], I felt like even if one guidance counselor would have called and be like, 'All right. Can I come to you and we can talk about your decision? Maybe we can get packets out to you, or maybe when you do feel well you can come in. We can give you some of the things that you've missed.' It wasn't anything like that. I had to go to her and be like, 'Can I have a packet?' When I didn't produce it, it was never a question of why or where this is. I felt like if there was pressure there, I may have made more of an effort.

Crystal was further discouraged when, upon sharing her fears of failing her junior year and not having secured child care, which could lead her to not graduate from high school on time, to a teacher who had been kind and compassionate, the teacher said, "Maybe you should think of night school or GED." In other words, the only person Crystal had grown to trust in the school advised her to drop out. For Crystal, the teacher represented the totality of

negligence she experienced. Shortly thereafter, Crystal gradually stopped coming to school, disappearing in plain sight.

I asked Crystal if she remembered whether she received any official communication from the schools regarding her whereabouts after she stopped attending. She immediately responded that no one had ever reached out to her. The next time I saw her, she told me that she had been thinking a lot about my question regarding follow up or lack thereof by the school. Crystal told me it "hurt" her to think about the fact no one school had attempted to reach out to her given that she just "a kid" with a dream to graduate high school and attend college. This memory so struck her that she wanted to confirm with her mother if anyone from the schools had followed up. Reporting on her conversation, she said, "I asked my mother. No one ever came for me. There were no calls, no letters, no nothing. No one cared."

Crystal's testimonio is demonstrative of policies in practice that the Testimoniolistas experienced in school once they were pregnant and parenting. Despite the protections outlined in Title IX, across the nine participants who were in school at the time of their pregnancies, there appeared to be no coherence in the qualitative data regarding maternity leave policies, home study opportunities or even who was the point of contact regarding their emergent needs. Across all participants, however, I was able to identify three salient themes, which I refer to as policies in practice, that worked in concert to contribute to hostile learning environments. These practices were (1) *Willful Neglect*, (2) *Push Out*, and (3)

*Dubious Compliance.* Table 15, shows which participant experienced the identified practices.

Before describing these practices, it is important to situate them within prevailing discourses on teen pregnancy. Reflective of majoritarian constructions of pregnancy and parenting during adolescence as out of order, and needing to be “contained” (Lesko, 2012; W. Pillow, 2006), the Testimoniolistas spoke of the damaging narratives they struggled against. *You are too young. Your life is ruined. Think about your baby. You are going to drop out.* The awareness of this omnipresent rhetoric made them fearful of the stigmatization they could face in school, and ultimately influenced their decisions to delay informing their schools of their pregnancy status. Their fears were valid as upon revealing their pregnancies, the schools began to take steps that were often contrary to the participants’ own wishes. Five participants, for example, reported that their schools had violated their privacy by telling their parents, other teachers, and administrators, and even other students about their pregnancy status without their consent.

For most participants, once the pregnancies were public, the “Puerto Rican Problem” narrative, which as previously detailed is largely grounded on pathologizing PR women, their families, sexuality, and reproduction (Briggs, 2002; López, 2008) was enacted. In addition to having to struggle against racialized stereotypes of PRs as “lazy,” “thugs,” and so on, they had now become a PR teen mother. Eight of the participants shared examples of teachers and other school personnel who asked them why PR women had babies so young and called

up the ‘babies having babies’ rhetoric, suggesting their lives were ruined. Crystal was surprised at how often and freely her friends used tropes about PR women to explain her pregnancy:

When I was pregnant, it was a stereotype that I was pregnant young because I was Puerto Rican, it wasn't because of my own actions, because I know tons of Puerto Rican people that didn't become moms until later in life or until they were in their 20s. It was just automatically assumption, ‘Oh, of course, she's pregnant because she's Puerto Rican.

Later she added, “It's like, ‘Oh my goodness, she ruined her life. She's 16 and she's pregnant.’ They'd be like, ‘It's because she's Puerto Rican.’” Bianca also discussed the stereotypes she experienced as a pregnant PR senior. But what she found equally concerning was that she upon becoming a mother, she was no longer viewed as a complete student. She explained this idea as follows:

I felt they looked at me not as a student no more, but as just a mom. Like, ‘Okay, well, Bianca didn't come in because her child's sick, something like that. Okay, that's fine.’ Or, ‘Bianca didn't come in because she didn't have no child care.’ I feel like it was just always something because of my child. It wasn't because, ‘Okay, well she's not coming to school because she's struggling with this, this, and that.’ It's just not because I'm a mom. It was other stuff involved.

The stigma they faced was simultaneously raced, classed, aged, and gendered with material consequences in their lives. Regardless of their academic achievement or educational trajectories before their pregnancies, the “PR problem” served as part the infrastructure that shaped the three salient anti-policies in practice.

## 1. Willful Neglect

Willful neglect refers to a school's unwillingness to take any action to support the educational circumstances and needs of school-aged mothers. Schools' reluctance to act is a form of educational neglect that contributes to the disappearance of school-age mothers from their schools. *Willful Neglect* becomes a form of vanishment, or the practice of punishment that is automated through the state's refusal to record, register, and recognize the disappearance of girls from school (Vaught, 2018).

While Crystal's Testimonio best illustrates how *Willful Neglect* operates, she was not the only Testimoniolista to experience it. Prenatally, the participants reported receiving no follow-up from schools or teachers after extended absences or dropping out and no concrete advice or information about how to access resources or prepare for their maternity leave. Postnatally, after returning from maternity leave or other schooling interruptions, they were often placed in the wrong classes or grades, with recommendations to repeat courses they believed they had already completed. The consistent lack of information, action, and follow up contributed to their disappearance from schools.

In Crystal's case, after her son was born, she tried to re-enroll in school and despite her own confirmatory paperwork in hand, on the first day of school was told that the school did not have a record of her re-enrollment. She had not been assigned a homeroom or any classes and was told to sit in the main office and wait. After she spent hours waiting, Crystal was finally told by a secretary that she needed to take assessment tests so that they could find the right placement

for her, and she could not start school until the assessments were complete. When she showed up on the designated date and time, she was again informed that they had no record of her appointment and was again sent to the main office to wait. Only when Crystal became visibly upset did the administrative assistant tell her that she would try to accommodate her. But after waiting more than two hours, Crystal decided to leave. In recalling the event, she said:

If I enrolled like everybody else, why don't I have a schedule, or why am I being delayed by taking the assessments or whatever it might be? What's going on? Why are you not telling me what's going on? It was frustrating. I was angry about the situation. I'm like, I can't keep doing this. I'm leaving my newborn at home for this, to sit here for hours and not know what's going on, just to be told to come back. I'm not doing it.

For Crystal, this was the last straw. After this incident, she opted to get a GED with the hopes of getting a job. Going to college would have to wait.

*Willful Neglect* was the most common practice experienced by the participants.

*Willful Neglect* (re)produces unbelonging in school.

## **2. Push out**

*Push Out* refers to the school-based policies in practice that explicitly encourage school-age mothers to terminate their secondary education. Like *Willful Neglect*, it is a form of punishment; its ultimate goal is the disappearance of school-aged mothers. It is mechanized through the enactment of explicit and implicit exclusionary practices sending a message to other school-aged mothers and young women students that “out of order” motherhood has no place in school (Pillow, 2006).



*Push Out* strategies were experienced by eight of the Testimoniolistas including those who graduated from high school. Compatible with the existing literature, the most often used tactic was to pressure pregnant women to enroll in offsite alternative education programs. Matters of safety, of the importance of prioritizing "their child," and the unique needs of their pregnant bodies were the arguments often employed by school agents to try to convince the participants to leave their schools.

*Push Out* strategies were often presented as acts of kindness. During Amaya's second trimester, for example, she was called to a meeting with a guidance counselor she trusted. The guidance counselor proceeded to tell her about a special high school for pregnant women. She told Amaya that the school offered free breakfast and lunch, parenting classes, frequent breaks, a relaxing environment, opportunities to become friends with other young moms, and support during their transition back to their regular high school after the baby was born. Amaya shared that she had heard that other schools "kicked some girls out because they were pregnant" and was relieved that her school had a different approach. She added, "in my school, instead of kicking us out or keeping us in school 'cause it's made scary and stuff, they transfer us to [name of program]." Of note are the words she chose to describe the strategy, "they transfer us," suggesting that notwithstanding Title IX protections which stipulate that participation in alternative education programs must be presented as completely voluntary options and that pregnant students may not be pressured to attend them (U.S. Department of Education & Office for Civil Rights, 2013), students are

“transferred instead of kicking us out.” Amaya enrolled in the program for pregnant mothers and reported enjoying her time there. When it was time for her to return to her high school, however, she did not have access to childcare and had to temporarily drop out.<sup>24</sup> She completed her secondary education in an evening program for adults, never returning to her high school as she had always hoped.

Karelys’ Testimonio presents another example of how *Push Out* is mechanized in conjunction with other strategies; in this case *Willful Neglect*. After reluctantly informing the Principal of her pregnancy, he told her that all pregnant students had to attend the district’s alternative program as it was “safer” for the baby. Aware of the alternative school’s negative reputation, Karelys told the Principal she was not going, and that she intended to stay in her high school. The Principal then proceeded to tell her and her grandmother that because she was not yet 16, she was required *by law* to attend the program. Karelys was shocked and believed that her high school was punishing her for being pregnant. Risking getting in trouble for not attending school as a minor (truancy), she refused to go to the alternative high school. She explained her decision as follows: “because that was a school for the thug people, people who would always get in trouble, people who were always fighting, and I wasn’t that person. I was just pregnant.” She never showed up, and there was never a follow up; she simply disappeared.

Nancy’s testimonio presented one of the most punitive examples of the *Push Out* tactics used by schools. Nancy learned she was pregnant amid a

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<sup>24</sup> Three participants reported that they had extended their de facto “maternity leave” and temporarily dropped out, with the intention of returning to school.

challenging episode in her home life. Although school staff were aware of Nancy's mother's substance abuse history and her related extended absences, she was often labeled as a "truant." After missing an entire week of school, she heard a knock on the door. It was a DYS affiliated truancy officer. Nancy immediately knew that the school had contacted him and that she and her mother could get in trouble. Nancy explained that because she was 16, "They brought the paperwork, [and said] you either come to school right now, or you can sign out." Nancy was feeling overwhelmed, hopeless, sick, and wondering how she would ever make it through school pregnant. She signed the paperwork, making her dropout status official. Almost ten years later, reflecting on that moment, Nancy recognized the true and uneven power dynamics of the "choice" presented to a vulnerable student by a school official. Nancy closed her Testimonio as follows:

The only thing that I'm really disappointed in is that when they came to my house, knocking on the door saying, 'Do you want to sign out?' I feel like that was the worst option you can give a 16-year old that doesn't want to go to school.

### **3. Dubious Compliance**

Dubious compliance refers to the manner in which schools and their agents made on-site supports available to school-aged mothers. Despite the presence of *Willful Neglect* and *Push Out* practices, some Testimoniolistas were able to secure in-school supports that helped them meet their educational goals. These on-site supports included parent groups and parenting classes, classroom accommodations, home study options, maternity leave, and in one case child care.

However, the Testimoniolistas indicated that the supports available for pregnant or parenting mothers in their schools were at best unevenly available and often contingent on self or familial advocacy. Compliance to ensure that pregnant and parenting students benefited from school-based accommodations as mandated by Title IX were dubious.

The most common school-based support identified by the participants was that of teachers who offered special accommodations for pregnant and parenting students in the form of breaks, extended deadlines, access to elevators, or makeup work. At their request, three participants also participated in home study, where a school representative brought them school work during their maternity leave so that they would not fall behind academically.<sup>25</sup> Three participants were also offered the opportunity to either take a child development class or participate in a parenting group with other teen mothers. To emphasize, in theory, all participants who were enrolled in high school were eligible for accommodations that would ensure equal access to the same educational opportunities as their peers, a few schools only dubiously complied. This compliance was often contingent on the participants and their families' advocacy. As noted in Table 15 and Figure 3 regardless of the quality of the on-site supports, the participants who experienced dubious compliance graduated from high school.

A related point to consider is that when outlining school-based supports that helped, the Testimoniolistas often detailed their own efforts to secure

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<sup>25</sup> The merits of home study for school-aged mothers who have recently given birth are debatable. As described by the Testimoniolistas, home study requires that mothers complete school work during their maternity leave. This is contradictory to maternity leave best practices which ideally encourage mothers to focus on infant and self-care.

childcare so that they could attend school. This was the school-based support they most desired and the one that was least readily available. This is an important point because when the participants experienced a childcare failure, which they often did, their grades and academic life suffered. Kayla was the only participant who had access to on-site school childcare. Her schooling story, exemplifies how the three practices of *Willful Neglect*, *Push Out*, and *Dubious Compliance* work in concert with one another to (re)produce unbelonging in school and how participants used their own cultural community wealth to navigate these difficult spaces.

### **Theme III: Sources of Support**

*I kept telling them over and over during the meeting, 'Don't you hear yourself? Every time you guys keep talking you guys keep saying, 'we think.' Well, guess what. That whole "we think" can go in the trash because you don't think the way that I do. I'm not going. I'm staying in this school, and I'm going to graduate from this school.*  
-Kayla

Kayla did not want to delay letting people in her high school she was pregnant. Given her difficult history in schools she was worried that the school “would do something crazy” and together, Kayla and her mother decided the best approach was to let the Dean of Students know as soon as school started. She was most worried about “getting shipped off again.”

Kayla had missed most of her sophomore year, and some of her junior year due to being “locked up.” Kayla ended up in “jail” when after years of secretly dealing with physical and psychological abuse from her father she “snapped” and physically attacked him. Her father claimed that Kayla tried to kill

him; she told the judge it was self-defense. After completing her time in DYS detention, and being placed in mandatory DFC care, Kayla returned home to live with her mother and her two little sisters. By that time, her father had moved out.

Despite the many obstacles she faced trying to complete school work while incarcerated, with mother's support and advocacy, Kayla successfully completed all her sophomore credit work. Upon returning to her high school as a junior, all she wanted was to stay focused and graduate high school on time.

Kayla recalled getting mostly "good grades," never getting in trouble, and for the first time in her life falling in love with a popular and well-liked student who was a star athlete. She found out she was pregnant a few weeks after the end of her Junior year. Initially, she was worried about telling her boyfriend as his dream was to go away to college and play sports. He had said, "a kid would ruin his life." But Kayla wanted to have the baby and knew she would have her mother's support. When she finally told her boyfriend, although scared and disappointed, he said he and his family would support Kayla and the baby in any way they could.<sup>26</sup>

As soon as the school year started, Kayla and her mother informed the school of her status. At the initial meeting, Kayla was told that the best option

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<sup>26</sup> Although this study was not focused on the experiences of young fathers of Color, I find it important not to implicitly contribute to their invisibility. At the time of their pregnancies, eight of the ten Testimoniolistas were in long-term relationships with the fathers of their children. Nine of the Testimoniolistas spoke about how the fathers and the paternal families of their children provided support, with varying degrees, while they were in the process of completing high school. Nine years later, relationships had shifted. For example, some participants married the father of their children while others had new spouses and partners. Regardless of the relationship status between the participant and the biological father of their first child, all but one participant spoke of the importance of paternal familial lines. Some participants were very satisfied with the relationship between biological father and child, others longed for better ones.

was for her to attend a special high school program designed for teen mothers, located in a building next to her high school. “They didn't feel like [name of high school] was a fit place for a pregnant mom,” she explained. But Kayla did not want to go as she wanted to graduate from the high school that she had worked so hard to get back to. She also wanted “a real high school diploma” as she too had begun to think about going to college. After her initial refusal, she was called into more meetings where she was told about the great things the program had to offer, including access to free on-site child care and transportation. She recalled the following:

I kept telling them over and over during the meeting, ‘Don't you hear yourself? Every time you guys keep talking you guys keep saying, 'we think.' Well, guess what. That whole "we think" can go in the trash because you don't think the way that I do. I'm not going. I'm staying in this school, and I'm going to graduate in this school.

Every time they tried to push her out of her school, she resisted. After the school accepted Kayla's refusal to disappear, dubious compliance and willful neglect worked in unison.

As news of her pregnancy spread her teachers were increasingly flexible and would often let her take breaks during class. The cafeteria workers would often give her extra food. The father of the baby and her friends at school also would try to protect her in the crowded hallways so that no one would accidentally bump into her. She also found out from a friend that she could take a child development class. Her mother, who was a lactation consultant, signed her

up for birthing classes, a home visiting program, a young parents group at a community clinic, as well as several economic assistance programs.

With her mother's help, Kayla also began asking for information on how her absences, after the baby was born, would affect her grades. Like all the participants, she was most worried about childcare as her mother could not watch the baby during the day. Kayla asked the Dean of Students and her guidance counselor numerous times for information about her impending maternity leave and about how to sign her baby into child care center next door. They ignored her requests, and she was often given the "run around," making her incredibly frustrated. When she was a week from her due date, despite numerous requests, she still did not have a plan for maternity leave or child care. Days before giving birth she was told she could take between four to six weeks and that she needed to fill out some forms which they would send to her. The forms never arrived.

Days after giving birth, she found out that her school had neglected to follow up on her childcare request. Without childcare, she worried about what missing school for a month or the half, or more, would mean. Every day Kayla and her mother called the school trying to secure a space for the baby until they finally did. She recalled the ordeal of preparing for her maternity leave and childcare as follows, "I knew if I took four to six weeks I was not going to graduate. I was going to fail. That's too much time. I didn't even have any paperwork still there." Kayla continued,

I wanted the school work, and I was freaking out over the school work while taking care of [baby's name] at the time. I was resting. I was doing whatever I had to do with him, but in the back of my mind every day I'm



thinking, "I really need to get my school work. I need my school work because if I don't get my school work, I'm going to fail. Then what am I going to be? A Puerto Rican mom that failed school with a child." That's all I kept thinking is, "I'm not going to make enough money. I'm not going to be a good parent. Then my kid is going to be like, 'Why did you have me so early?'"

Feeling pressured, Kayla returned to school only two weeks after having her son. The caregivers at the childcare center helped her make a plan for breastfeeding, and ultimately Kayla was allowed to take breaks as needed. Kayla graduated with her classmates, a few months after giving birth.

Kayla's Testimonio presents an exemplary case of how willful neglect, push out tactics, and ultimately dubious compliance work in conjunction to contribute to negative schooling experiences for school-aged mothers. Furthermore, it exemplifies how the supports present in the participants' lives helped them navigate difficult schooling environments. Kayla benefited from the support she received from her mother and friends, as well as from her own advocacy skills. Regardless of whether the participants persisted or dropped out of high school, all Testimoniolistas detailed sources of support that helped during their transition to motherhood and, in particular, facilitated their educational attainment.

To explain the various sources of support identified by the Testimoniolistas, I draw from Yosso's community cultural wealth (CCW) model (2005). Epistemologically grounded in CRT, the model is an appropriate framework because it focuses on the various types of capital present in

Communities of Color, and how these capitals are fostered through cultural wealth in order to survive the institutional neglect of the US public school system (Yosso, 2005). In doing so, the CCW model inherently challenges conventional thinking regarding the educational structures, practices, and dominant ideologies that SOC experience as well that sources of support that help students navigate their educational contexts (Yosso, 2005). The model identifies six mutually constituted forms of community wealth. Irrespective of their high school graduation status, the qualitative data showed evidence of how all six forms of capital helped the Testimoniolistas transition to motherhood while pursuing an education.<sup>27</sup> In this section, I describe the three sources of support that were most germane.

### **Familial Capital**

The most prevalent source of support identified was familial. Yosso (2005) defines familial support as familial wealth, or the cultural knowledge nurtured among families that represent a commitment to wellbeing not just for one's self but to one's expanded understanding of kin. Every participant reported receiving familial support as they worked to complete their high school education. Like Kayla's mom, families provided participants with material and emotional support in the form of housing, transportation, food, and childcare, as well as encouragement and advocacy so that they could attend school. Mia, who was the youngest Testimoniolista, recalled that when she and her boyfriend found out she was pregnant, they were 14. While they worried about their parents' responses,

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<sup>27</sup> I include a description of each wealth in Appendix C.

both sets of parents, after the initial shock, came together and told them that they would help them and the baby so that they could finish school. Mia and her boyfriend promised each other that “there's nothing that's going to stop us from finishing school.” With the support of their families, they both graduated.

The first year after having a baby, the participants' own mothers were most likely to provide childcare so their daughters could attend school. Other family members, including the baby's father and his family, would also coordinate with each other to take care of the baby and provide material and emotional support. Familial support was also reciprocal. The Testimoniolistas provided support as caregivers for siblings and other children so that other families members could attend school and work. They also contributed to the function of the family home by cooking, cleaning, and, when possible, contributed financially.

### **Aspirational Capital**

The second most cited source of support was aspirational capital. Aspirational capital refers to the ability to be inspired and maintain hopes and dreams for the future in the face of challenging circumstances (Yosso, 2005). In detailing the challenges they overcame in and outside of school, the participants often described their own agency, which was grounded in their vision for a better future. Several participants used metaphors to explain how their hopes enhanced their perseverance. When facing the possibility of homelessness, a toxic relationship, the birth of her daughter, and the likelihood of not being able to complete high school, Amaya explained that she saw the challenges presented

before her as a “mountain” that she needed to climb even if she didn’t know how. The only path forward was “*pasito a pasito* [step by step],” as the other side was the promise of a better life. She said:

I am a person that I'm really tough to give up. You tell me I can't do it, and I'm like, just to mess with you, I will do it. You don't know how to climb that mountain. I will be scared to death, but I will be on top of that mountain. When I'll get down, I'll be like, shoot. Scoot down, but I'll do it. So, no, and that's me. I don't give up.

Karelys described the challenges of trying to complete her education as a looming staircase; at the very top, the possibility of new life existed. She explained it as follows:

You never let yourself down, it's always *escaleras* [ a stairway], you go up, you keep on going up and yeah I might get stuck or tumble down, but those stairs keep on going so I keep on going up.

When facing hardships that impeded their abilities to meet their educational goals, rather than giving up, participants maintained their ability to hope and reimagined their future. They took steps towards improving their lives and that of their children and families.

### **Social and Navigational Capital**

Participants also described in tandem the importance of navigational skills and their social networks. Navigational skills (navigational capital) refers to the abilities and knowledge necessary to navigate through social institutions that were not necessarily designed or created to meet the needs of Communities of Color (Yosso, 2005). Social capital refers to the networks of people or community

resources available to a person (Yosso, 2005). Most participants reported that they found out about education and social programs from family or friends, who either participated in the program themselves or knew someone who had. Their social networks also advised them on how to access the services they needed. Ultimately, it was up to the participants to navigate through social programs by completing paperwork, following up tasks, asking questions, and, when necessary, advocating for what they were entitled to. When asked how she was able to get an apartment, get a job, and go to college, all before the age of 18, Karelys specifically attributed other PR mothers. She said:

Our people are set up to help. You come across somebody and that person's like *m'ija*<sup>28</sup> *te quiero dejar saber que esto es bueno* [daughter, I want you to let you know that this is good], they are familiar with it, and they tell you, listen I'm familiar with this, go and get it.

Karelys further explained,

Everything I've learned, I've learned from people who have gone through it. Those are the people who have helped me. I don't need someone who's read a book. I could sit down and read a book myself.

To summarize Testimoniolistas attributed their educational success to their families, their social networks, as well as to their own agency even when up against mountains.

### **On Outliners: Jahlys**

*After a long summer full of first trimester woes, including several hospitalizations, you were back where you belonged: school. You were so happy*

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<sup>28</sup> *M'ija* is a term of endearment, meaning my daughter, that is commonly used among PR women.

*to see your friends, teachers, and get back to your routine when it happened. You were working in the main office, when he looked at you and said, loud enough for others to hear, "I hope that night was worth it." He was the Dean of Students, your boss, someone you looked up to, and he just noticed that you were pregnant. You stared at him in silence until he finally looked away. He wanted to hurt you. He did.*

*Everyone knew you weren't the type of girl to "hug up" on anyone. "A good girl," a straight A student, a dreamer, "the responsible one." You were always going to be the first one to go to college. You were going to buy your parents a house. You were going to "be somebody." You weren't the first and certainly not the only girl pregnant at your school. There was a room full of mamas who welcomed you right in. And so, despite all the haunting doubts, you had your best year ever. Honor roll. College Tours. College Applications. Baby. Prom. Graduation. College. You walked across that stage, baby in hands, and straight to college, knowing that you did what everyone thought you or none of us girls could ever do and, you did, smiling.*

*And then your eyes opened so wide as if something came inside you.*

*You grew silent, just for a second, enough for the tears to well up.*

*"I don't want to cry," you said to me softly, quickly wiping the tears away so that I wouldn't see, so to your hija wouldn't see. But we saw you. We see you.*

*You arrived at campus for a mandatory summer program. First, they said you had to go for a campus tour. "Good idea," you thought. You followed along until the guide took to a door and showed you a key said, "Okay, so take this key, because this is the dorm you're going to stay in." Then she opened the door. They didn't know. Here was the dorm room you would never decorate, the friends you would never make, the life that you would never have. "I can't stay. I have a baby at home," you finally managed to say. "I'm sorry. There must be some kind of mistake," she responded. You? Her? Both? And for the first time, the loneliness set in. There was no Maria, Anitza, Yomara, here, your Mami wasn't here, your Papi wasn't here, your sister wasn't here, your love wasn't here, your baby wasn't here. Just an empty room and you were all alone.*

Guided by the research questions, the use of thematic analysis as a qualitative approach requires that researchers look for patterns within the data to identify central themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When identifying themes, a valuable analytic tool is to examine how the experiences of outliers map against the salient themes identified (Phoenix & Orr, 2017). The "exceptional data" can help clarify and complicate how the themes deviate or converge with unique cases

which can produce important knowledge about the questions under investigation. From an outcomes perspective, it can be argued that Jahlys is an outlier, an “exceptional case.”

Jahlys was the only Testimoniolista who graduated from high school and went immediately on to college (without any interruptions), ultimately graduating with a degree in social work. She was also one of only two participants who did not experience significant residential mobility. She lived with her family in the same apartment from when she was a toddler until she moved out with her spouse at the age of 21. Before going to college, Jahlys attended only two schools, both in her neighborhood.

Jahlys described herself as a high achieving and focused student whose goal was always to attend a competitive college and help her family out of poverty. She enjoyed school, excelled academically, and had lots of friends and positive relationships with her teachers. In high school, she participated in several student groups and after-school programs. She also had a part-time job at a local hospital. When Jahlys became pregnant during the summer before her senior year, she knew her life's course was permanently changed, but she never doubted that she would complete high school and go on to college. Yet despite her unique profile she too experienced discursive practices of unbelonging identified in this study.

First, as it pertains to the first theme (Unwelcomed, Unwanted, Unbelonging) Jahlys, like all participants and most Latinx students in MA, attended an urban racially segregated school with a concentration of economically

disadvantaged students and a well-documented history of inequities. In her school, the student population was 80% SOC, with Latino students being the majority (62%). In AY09, only 57% of students met proficiency on the ELA MCAS and only 48% on math MCAS, both significantly lower than state averages. In addition, only 50% of Latino students graduated in the expected four years. Statistically speaking, even prior to getting pregnant, the chances of her graduating on time and going on to college were stacked up against her. But Jahlys “never wanted to be a statistic.”

Jahlys did not plan her pregnancy and like most women in this study was afraid to tell the administrators and teachers at her school. Her fears came to fruition when the Dean of Students humiliated her by talking about her sexuality in such a public way. Jahlys spoke of the “I hope that night was worth it,” incident several times during our conversations. Aware of the power dynamics between a student and an administrator she explained that while she was humiliated, what troubled her most was how powerless she felt. While she understood that it was extremely unprofessional for a man in charge of students to make such remarks, she also believed everyone in the school was looking at her the same way: with disdain, distrust, and disappointment.

Like the other mothers in this study, regardless of the fact that she was a straight-A student, and had given no indication of dropping out, after becoming pregnant, she was constantly contending with policies in practice that made completing her senior year as a pregnant and parenting student unnecessarily difficult (Theme III). Referencing teachers, staff, and students in her school, she



said, "Nobody thought I was going to finish, I know. They probably didn't say it directly to my face, but I know." The stigma of being a pregnant student made Jahlys feel that if she were going to graduate and to go to college, she would have to figure things out on her own. "I just had to prove myself that even though I had a baby young, I was still going to go to school. Whatever it took, I knew I had to do it."

Using her drive to succeed (aspirational capital) as well as her navigation skills, first, she met with her teachers and guidance counselor and told them that she was still planning on applying to colleges and that she would need their support. She also joined a mother's group at her school, which to her surprise had more than 25 students in it. After learning about home study options from another student who was already a mother, Jahlys also made arrangements to have a tutor come to her home during her maternity leave. The school complied with everything she asked for. But as Jahlys mentioned several times during our meetings, the quality of the services were often less than she expected, and they were only given to her because she requested them. She explained the situation as follows:

It wasn't something that like I went to the office, and they had a sign saying like, 'Sign your name up for parenting class,' or something like that. I heard it from my friend who was much more far along in her pregnancy than I was, who she heard it from another girl. And that's how we found out about it.

Jahlys did what many doubted she could. She graduated with honors and went straight to college, just as she had always hoped and planned for.<sup>29</sup> She attributed her success to her family members, including the father of her child, all who categorically supported her educational goals. Her previous academic achievement, as well as her disposition and agency, are also unquestionably significant.

In this study, however, my goal was to shift the gaze from *not only* the students' own trajectories, abilities, and outcomes but rather to complicate their meaning by positioning them within "the structures and discourses of schools and educational policies" (Pillow, 2004, p.5) that they contend with. As such, despite her "exceptionality," and the sources of support in her life, just like the other women in this study, she faced (and had to resist) discursive ideologies in the form of policies in practice that made her educational journey unnecessarily more arduous.

When Jahlys cried about her experiences during her first day of college, she was not crying for a life she could have had, but for the life that she did have. Despite always being a "good girl," always wanting to do "the right thing," and "working hard," she was tired of being unseen. It was as though being an academically successful PR school-aged mother was impossible. It was a thought she didn't exist.

The findings of this phase of inquiry suggest that for PR school-age mothers, despite their own educational attainment, trajectories, dispositions, and schooling

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<sup>29</sup> In college Jahlys also confronted anti-parental ideologies.

contexts, upon becoming pregnant, participants experienced school-based policies in practice that precipitated a heightened sense of unbelonging in schools. The participants also identified familial, social, and aspirational capital as instrumental in navigating their educational contexts. Together, the Testimonios illuminate the importance of schooling as a developmental context for school-aged mothers. In school, they contended with discourses that framed them as social problems and structures that promoted anti-parental gendered and racist practices that (re)produced heteropatriarchal logics of belonging.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter represents the last stage of the analysis where I converge the “birds’ eye” quantitative findings with the salient themes I identified from the “deep dive” qualitative analysis (See Fig 2: Study Design). I begin this chapter by presenting the four core findings that this convergent analysis elucidates. In doing so, I weave in connections to scholarship, provide reflections on implications to policy and practice, as well as address theoretical and methodological concerns regarding knowledge production about children and adolescents who endure and resist marginalization.

**FINDING 1:** *PR school-aged mothers experienced schooling in educational environments that are fundamentally different from most public-school students in Massachusetts. Their schools were largely racially segregated and economically disadvantaged with long histories of educational inequities.*

Since the passing of the state’s Education Reform Act of 1993, MA public schools and students have been nationally and internationally recognized for their achievement (Education Week, 2018; MDESE, n.d.-b). The vast majority of PR school-aged mothers, and PR students, however, experience schooling in educational environments that are fundamentally different from most public-school students in the state. PR school-aged mothers mostly attended racially and economically segregated schools that had some of the state’s lowest academic outcomes. Analysis of the data indicated that across multiple measures their educational outcomes were substantially lower than state averages but were

comparable to students in their own school districts and high school, and more generally to Latinx student in MA. Differing from national headlines on MA public schools, the districts and schools profiled had some of the lowest graduation rates, highest dropout and suspension rates, and the lowest state designations for meeting AYP. In addition, despite individual varied educational attainment and having attended different schools in different communities, the Testimoniolistas were consistent in their descriptions of their schools as spaces that were riddled with bureaucratic dysfunction, psychological and physical violence, racism, low cognitive demand and expectations, limited resources and opportunities, and cultural erasure making them feel unwelcomed and unwanted.

**FINDING 2:** *Upon becoming pregnant, the Testimoniolistas experienced school-based policies in practice that heightened their sense of unbelonging in schools.*

Upon becoming pregnant, the Testimoniolistas experienced school-based policies in practice that made completing their secondary education increasingly laborious. They contended with (1) *Willful Neglect*, (2) *Push out* strategies (2), and (3) *Dubious Compliance* while in school. Consistent with previous research on school-aged mothers, the Testimoniolistas described rigid attendance, tardy, and maternity leave policies, social isolation and ostracism, cumbersome re-enrollment procedures, limited childcare, and bureaucratic mismanagement as obstacles which played a role in their abilities to persevere in meeting their educational goals (Basch, 2011; Bentley, 2005; Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 1997, 2004; Rios, 2013; SmithBattle, 2007; Vinson & Stevens, 2014). Many of the reported actions taken by the schools were at odds with statutory precedence

under Title IX (National Women’s Law Center, 2009a). For example, alternative education programs for pregnant or parenting students must always be presented as a choice (U.S. Department of Education & Office for Civil Rights, 2013). Nonetheless, as Pillow (2006) has extensively documented, and as experienced by the Testimoniolistas, schools ignored Title IX mandates and pushed pregnant women out of high schools, often luring them by adopting a rhetoric of safety and wellbeing for their unborn children. The identified policies in practice functioned in concert with one another and contributed to hostile learning environments intensifying notions of unbelonging in school.

**FINDING 3:** *PR school-aged mothers had heterogenous educational outcomes and trajectories.*

Despite challenging educational environments, PR school-aged mothers had heterogenous educational outcomes and trajectories. Contrary to meta-narratives regarding becoming a young parent and dropping out of school, while most PR school-aged mothers in the MHFE sample experienced an interruption in their education following their pregnancy, some graduated high school before parenting and others continued their education with no interruption. In addition, analysis of school engagement across the three-time points reveals that “dropping out” of high school did not appear to be a static state. Eighty-six percent of participants who experienced a schooling interruption returned to school or continued their education in non-secondary school settings, including GED programs or vocational training (see Table 4 and Table 5). These findings are consistent with the educational aspirations of participants. At T3, 90% of the

participants reported wanting to continue their education beyond a high school diploma. These findings coincide with the experiences and outcomes of the Testimoniolistas. Approximately nine years after giving birth, nine of the 10 received a high school diploma or GED, seven had completed vocational training, and four had completed at least one year of college. Although not well represented in the literature, this finding is also consistent with research studies that have documented heterogeneous responses to early childbearing and educational attainment (Greenstone, 2012; Mistry et al., 2016; Oxford et al., 2005).

**FINDING 4:** *Familial, social support, as well as their own aspirational capital were instrumental in navigating of their educational contexts.*

The lived experiences of the Testimoniolistas provided insight into the sources of support that were instrumental in navigating their educational contexts. Principally, they identified their families and social networks as helpful in securing resources that assisted them in reaching their education goals. Family members provided instrumental and emotional support. The Testimoniolistas also described how members of their communities were essential in helping them access and navigate social services. Finally, throughout all the Testimonios, aspirational capital was present. Testimoniolistas' ability "to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances" (Yosso, 2005, p.78) and to maintain hope for themselves and their children helped them focus on meeting their educational goals.

### **Findings in Context: “De tal palo, tal astilla” and the Insidious Nature of False Empathy**

Like several of the Testimoniolistas, I offer a metaphor in the form of a *dicho*<sup>30</sup> to contextualize this study’s core findings: *De tal palo, tal astilla*. Often repeated at the site of a man that disappoints, a parent who injures, resulting in an unruly, hurt, and disenchanted child, an unsurprising result; the apple doesn’t fall from the tree, a chip off the old block. *De tal palo, tal astilla* brings attention to the interconnectedness of past and present, to the lineage of context, processes, and outcomes, to the “interpenetrating relation between individual and context” (Mistry et al., 2016, p.1014) and to heteropatriarchal racialized power present in the forced individual-state relationship (Brown, 1992). When the state, in the shape of compulsory schooling is purposefully mechanized to replicate existing economic, social and political ideas, divisions, and hierarchies including the reproduction of gender, class, and racial stratification, what can one expect? *De tal palo, tal astilla*.

This metaphor helps to illuminate the innate relationship between school-aged mothers, their educational outcomes, and their schooling experiences. To be clear, the educational attainment, experiences, and trajectories of PR school-aged mothers did not begin or end with the onset of pregnancy. Corresponding to

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<sup>30</sup> In PR cultural traditions, *dichos* are folk proverbs, metaphors, or sayings that are widely used to reinforce cultural knowledge (Andrés-Hyman, Ortiz, Añez, Paris, & Davidson, 2006; Bernal, Jiménez-Chafey, & Domenech Rodríguez, 2009). *Dichos* represent transgenerational wisdom and convey collective truths about the conditions, conventions, and practices (Andrés-Hyman et al., 2006). Karelys’ description of overcoming challenges as she ascends a looming *escalera* [stair case] and Amaya’s depiction of scaling an ominous mountain and not giving up are examples of widely used metaphors by PRs to describe structural challenges.



scholarship on the schooling experiences of SOC, and more specifically to PR students, prior to pregnancy, the participants struggled against long-standing sociopolitical histories, discourses, and practices that provided them with an inequitable education and that simultaneously made them feel unwelcomed and unwanted in school (Frau-Ramos & Nieto, 1991; Kasnitz et al., 2009; Nieto, 2000, 2013; Orfield, Ee, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2016; Warikoo & Carter, 2009). Reminiscent of Spring's (1976) metaphor of schools as a "sorting machine" which systematically awards students who have the most resources, the most rigorous education, and best opportunities, the social position of the participants contributed to their being "sorted" to attend mostly under-resourced, economically disadvantaged, and racially segregated schools with well documented histories of "under" achievement (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Vaught, 2011). These schools were also spaces where the transmission, enforcement, and the reproduction of the social, cultural, ideological, and economic position of the dominant group was reified, consistently (re)producing PR students' marginalized status of unbelonging (Brooks, 2007; Hill Collins, 1986, 2005; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Their sense of unbelonging was further compounded when after their pregnancies, despite individual commitments to graduating high school, school-aged mothers were challenged by school-level policies, practices, and ideologies which largely framed them as deviant, and negatively impacted their schooling experiences

Although these findings are in alignment with previous research, what is distinctive about this study is that the use of a multi-method approach shifts the

gaze to “the structures and discourses of schools and educational policies” (Pillow, 2004, p. 5) while simultaneously centering on how the Testimoniolistas made meaning of their circumstances. In doing so, it was possible to identify policies in practice that (re)produce gendered, raced, aged, anti-parental writ at large. Given their social status, it is not surprising then that the schooling experiences and outcomes of PR school-aged mothers in this study, like most PR students in the US, are principally characterized by inequitable practices, disproportionate punishments in the form of exclusions, tracking into non-academic programs, and hostile learning environments both pre and post pregnancy (Rolón-Dow, 2007; Flores-González, 1999; Frau-Ramos & Nieto, 1991; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2013; Kasnitz et al., 2009; Margolis, 1968; Nieto, 1995, 1998, 2000, 2004; Orfield et al., 2016; Orfield & Yun, 1999; Sánchez Korrol, n.d.). This study also brings attention to the importance of schooling as a developmental context that promotes or inhibits educational success and specifically how schools allow or deny students’ access to resources critical to their development based on their social positioning (García Coll & Marks, 2009; Eccles & Roeser, 2001). Recognizing the inseparability of people from their sociocultural and historical contexts in the examination of developmental outcomes and processes, it is possible to locate the schooling experiences and educational trajectories of PR students as an example of *de tal palo, tal astilla* (García Coll et al., 1996; Nieto, 1999). The participants’ educational outcomes mirrored those in their school districts. In other words,

none of this is accidental; it is enforced by both custom and code, and by ideologies, policies, and lived practices.

The Testimoniolistas also generated new understandings about how PR school-aged mothers “respond to and resist dominant culture, laws, and policies that perpetuate inequity” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2009, p.363). Disrupting fatalistic metanarratives, the participants had heterogenous educational attainment and trajectories relative to their parenting status. To survive the institutional neglect that the public school systems afforded them, they utilized their own cultural assets to transform their schooling experiences and resist their challenging circumstances (Yosso, 2005). While they unambiguously recognized the limited opportunities present in their own schools and longed for “better schools” for themselves, their children, and their communities, they did not “give up.”

The findings of this study also raise important questions regarding the forced individual-state relationship (Brown, 1992). As discussed by scholars who examine the experiences of women involved in public institutions, schools serve to surveil, regulate, and contain the sexuality, sexual behavior, and reproductive choices of women who do not meet or resist majoritarian expectations of normative development which suggest that having a child during adolescence is “out of order” (Augustin, 1997; Hill Collins, 2005; Lesko, 2012; Pillow, 2004). Schools do this work by closely monitoring, regulating, and containing the behavior of young women (Pillow, 2004). Even though pregnant bodies have been, are, and will continue to be in high school settings, school-aged mothers

continue to face marginalization, and scripts of the allegedly conflicting priorities of concurrently completing secondary education and parenting are widely espoused.

Contributing to the (re)production of these ideologies, most education-related research on school-aged mothers continues to focus on their outcomes, trajectories, dispositions, and personal/familiar traits without considering the role of the state as they try to complete their secondary education. In many ways, this approach applauds the agency and abilities of individuals who complete their secondary education without directly interrogating how the state is powered by their exclusion and coercion. Despite calls by developmental scholars for the “rigorous specification of context and social stratification” (Mistry et al., 2016, p. 1015), there appears to be a gap in the literature that introspects how schools themselves contribute to school-aged mothers’ abilities to meet their educational goals.

### **False Empathy**

In sharing vignettes of the Testimoniolistas and the initial findings of this inquiry at community forums, conferences, and academic events with colleagues and students, I was often confronted with doubt about the soundness of the experiences of the Testimoniolistas, a topic I more fully address in the next section. Considering the omnipresence of ideologies that position schools as benevolent and meritocratic, and in light of my descriptions of protections under Title IX, now over 45 years old, it was difficult for some to make sense of how these harsh exclusionary and punitive practices continued to take place in

federally funded schools. Generally, speaking, there was a tendency by people who reviewed my work to want to situate the specific strategies that the schools enacted as possibly being “in the best interest” of the Testimoniolistas and their children. I have been asked, for example, to consider (1) how participating in an offsite education program could be beneficial for mother and child, (2) what other services, besides schools could have helped these students meet their educational goals, and (3) how their own familial circumstances or “risky choices” may have contributed (more) to their negative schooling experiences and outcomes.

Questions regarding the broader social context in which in their schooling took place, have at best, been minimal.

This discourse was reminiscent of what Testimoniolistas experienced in schools and what CRT scholars refer to as *false empathy*. False empathy is a “sentimental, breast-beating” misdirected urgency by a person with the power to act on behalf of a person who is experiencing suffering (Delgado, 1996, p. 7). False empathy is insidious and exists to maintain and reproduce hegemony and in particular, the paternalistic state that is bounded by racist patriarchy (Delgado, 1996; Duncan, 2002; Vaught, 2011). For PR women who experience a relatively high incidence of adolescent parenting and lower educational attainment (Martin et al., 2017), the ways in which false empathy is enacted cannot be decoupled from their racial status. The characterization of the “Puerto Rican Problem” has been grounded in narratives that pathologizes the actions and choices of PR women. Young PR mothers, explicitly, have been over-represented in public discourse and in scholarship as the source of “failures” of the PR community and

described as threats to themselves, to their children, and society at large (Briggs, 2002; López, 2008; Souza, 2000). Yet despite the long presence of PR students, and in particular of PR school-aged mothers, there continues to be a paucity of research that focuses on their educational lives (Dow, 2007; Rolón-Dow, 2010). At the same time, PR school-aged mothers, face a higher risk of being pushed out and mistreated by their schools under the guise of benevolence, just like other young mothers of Color (Pillow, 2004).

For the Testimoniolistas, false empathy looked like an administrator asking “a child” to sign themselves out of high school since “they are going to fail anyway.” It looked like a principal telling a young woman that school is not safe. It looked like a nurse, telling a student that in the “pregnant school” you can take naps, have food, and not take the stairs, never once questioning why these options are not available in their own school. It looked like a teacher, with kind eyes, asking a student “to put the baby first” and “maybe get a GED” as she encouraged a student to drop out. It looked like a tutor not having any work for a student “because you are a mom now.”

In MA, one of the epicenters for the global knowledge-based economy, where graduate degrees have become an expected qualification for living wage jobs, where the cost of living continues to grow, and where PRs have been identified as one of the region’s most economically disadvantaged groups (Muñoz et al., 2015), coercing PR school-aged mothers to disappear from their high schools, without ever asking what they would envision for themselves or interrogating why school-aged mothers don’t belong in high schools, now and

into the future, is an act of violence. False empathy has material consequences, and it unequivocally promotes intergenerational suffering.

### **Implications for Policy & Praxis**

*From: Isa <xxxxx@gmail.com>*

*Date: Mon, Jun 12, 2017 at 12:26 PM*

*Subject: Re: Can you still meet Friday morning?*

*To: Melissa Colón <m.colon@tufts.edu>*

*Hi Melissa! I want to thank you for coming and meeting with me and just taking the time in general to get to know me, know about my life story and just to listen to me. It really means a lot! I also want to thank you for supporting my idea of having the high schools and DTA partner up and focusing on the core of education for our kids and their future! I'm glad that I was able to express myself, my concerns and my ideas to you and you trying to help me achieve them! It means the world to me! Hopefully we start up a chain reaction and this leads and blossoms into something amazing!*

Scholars who are concerned with understanding the outcomes, processes, and experiences of children and adolescents are often expected to address how their scholarship contributes to practices that will optimize development. Scholars typically attend to this call by articulating potential implications to policy and practice. While I attempt to do this here, I begin with the initial understanding that to improve the schooling experiences of PR school-aged mothers, and in general PR students, radical and emancipatory change is needed (Freire, 1970). Schooling must be reimagined. This charge requires that scholars and practitioners rigorously engage in the process of understanding “the problem” including its sociopolitical and historical origins, complexities, as well as the hegemonic racist and gendered ideologies that contribute to its (re)production. Unfortunately, scholars, educators, and practitioners are often pressured to try to

make recommendations without adequately having the time, resources, and experiences to understand the context in which “problems” arise.

With this in mind, I hope that this study’s unique multi-method and transdisciplinary approach contributes to discourse, scholarship, action, and praxis that centers the importance of understanding the sociocultural, historical, and political contexts of “problems.” I argue, then, that scholars and practitioners who are interested in the education of young people who suffer, resist, and disrupt marginalization must interrogate (1) how and why schools have been purposefully designed to maintain social hierarchies and (2) how intersecting systems of oppression, including racialized heteropatriarchal logics of belonging, are powered by the state and purposefully enacted in schools. In the field of developmental science, for example, scholars must increase their intentionality in addressing how social structures produce and influence developmental contexts, processes, and outcomes and challenge dominant ideologies that locate schools and social programs as innately benevolent. For scholars who are interested in evaluating the efficacy of programs or in developing social policy it is essential to consider how majoritarian ideologies inform policies and how policies in turn influence program development for children and adolescents who face systematic marginalization (Weiss, 1983). In sum, like other critical scholars, I suggest that the ways in which oppression constitutes an essential feature of the developmental contexts of SOC must be directly addressed in scholarship and practice (García Coll et al., 1996; Spencer et al., 1997). Scholars must pay attention to experiences with colonization, settler conquest, liminal citizenship, economic



displacement, segregation, racism, xenophobia, and patriarchy, and how they intersect and are compounded by and in schools. This recommendation is aligned with Sociocultural Perspectives of human development which acknowledge that individual abilities, disposition, and processes cannot be separated from the sociocultural and historical contexts in which they arise (García Coll et al., 1996; Nieto, 1999) and that how individuals make meaning of their social settings is a developmental process (McAdams, 2013; Mistry & Dutta, 2015).

The need to address policy and practice, however, remains. In the spirit of Testimonios as methodology, I want to bring attention to the imaginations and solutions that the Testimoniolistas reported would have improved the quality of their educational lives. First, the number one challenge that the Testimoniolistas identified was their need for high-quality affordable childcare. Having a childcare facility at their high schools, which only one of the Testimoniolistas had access to, was preferred. Second, the Testimoniolistas described the arduous process of trying to access and coordinate services as overwhelming and inefficient. Deciphering what they were eligible for, how to access programs, and as related to this study, how programs could help them meet their educational goals, was more difficult than they anticipated. As Isa articulated in her email, mothers often wished for these services to be better connected and more importantly that they worked in sync to promote the development of mothers and their children. Because high schools are such an important place for adolescents, several Testimoniolistas expressed a desire to have their schools be a home base for service coordination. Isa expanded on the idea as follows:

I wish that I can help fund a freaking program to try to partner up high schools with DTA programs or YPP programs or with a WIC program or something... We can hire professional teachers that work with babies and kids, and have one pediatrician there on call, and help with the kids while the parents are at school. I wish that I could do that.

Perwith Title IX, all of the participants in this study should have been informed of school-based accommodations that could have assisted them while they were still in school. Although none of the Testimoniolistas mentioned Title IX, bringing schools into compliance with Title IX could help pregnant and parenting students access the educational services and opportunities they are entitled to.

Of note in Isa's explanation is the use of the word "I." The Testimoniolistas saw themselves as key actors in improving their lives and in opening opportunities for other mothers in similar situations. Their Testimonios were full of care, compassion, love, grounded in a desire to be in community with others, and to help others. This finding highlights another important practice implication that has been well addressed in the literature concerning the needs of Latinx students and that Testimoniolistas themselves discussed.

All the Testimoniolistas recognized the vital role a school-based caring adult, especially a teacher, can play in their lives. The desire for caring relationships is compatible with the Latino cultural value of *personalismo*, which refers to a cultural driven expectation that values interpersonal warm, caring, authentic, and reciprocal relationships (Ayon & Aisenberg, 2010; Collins, 2011; Marin & Marin, 1991; Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002). The importance of caring relationships between students and teachers and the

embodiment of an ethic of care has been well studied (see for example Noddings, 1988; Valenzuela, 1999). For Latino students, poor teacher-student relationships have been found to contribute to negative feelings toward school and to dropping out (Calabrese & Poe, 1990; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Collins, 2011). In addition, in MA, Latino students and their educators have identified the importance of caring relationships as salient to school engagement (De los Reyes, Nieto, & Diez, 2008; Tung et al., 2015). While the Testimoniolistas were highly critical of the teachers they believed did not care, they equally expressed a desire for authentic connections with their educators. Bianca, expounded on this point as follows:

I mean, thinking back school wise, I noticed that particularly teachers ... I know that's their job, but some of them, it's like they do it because it's their job. They really don't have the passion for it, or excitement for it, or willing to help. In my point of view, what got me through the school is teachers that really cared about the students. They were honest with them. They gave you the one-on-one. They gave you the 411. They were really on you. They really were compassionate about you, basically like a second family type of thing. People like that gets you going. It's gets you, motivates you to get to school, and make you want to come to school. Seeing teachers that just don't care about you and just really turn their back on you, it kind of hurts a little bit. But I feel like that's part of the whole thing why kids don't come, because they don't get the help, the support, the love that a student should receive.

Important to understand is that Bianca was not asking for teachers to perform false empathic notions of just “being nice” (Nieto, 2008). The Testimoniolistas’ call is for teachers to embody an ethic of critical care. Critical

care requires that educators understand the needs of individual students relative to their sociocultural and political contexts and that they provide rigorous and culturally sustaining education (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Rolón-Dow, 2005). As Bianca said, teachers should be “on you,” provide you with “the 4-1-1” and be compassionate.

The last recommendation comes from Karelys, who was pushed out of her high school at the age of 15. Karelys, like all the Testimoniolistas, expressed a desire to graduate and go on to college and was disheartened to discover that the schools themselves were obstacles to meeting her educational goals. When asked what schools could do to support the needs of PR school-aged mothers she said, “Just keep me.” Clarifying, she added,

They had me, it’s not like I wanted to drop out of school or anything. Just keep me. I didn’t think that being pregnant was a good enough reason to take me out of school.

### **Limitations**

In light of the findings and discussion, there are some limitations worth deliberating. First, all the participants were previously involved in the MHFE study, and some may argue that they are not a representative sample of the population due to their long-term participation in an intervention study. Second, the Testimonio sample consisted of 10 participants, which represents a small portion of those involved in the quantitative component. Third, unlike most research on school-aged mothers, I did not address or control for individual and familial level factors. In general, these limitations are grounded on positivist,

quantitative, and experimental designs and the ways in which they address threats to the validity of findings before data collection (Maxwell, 2010), all of which are outside the scope and theoretical foundations of this study.

Grounded by a multi-method approach, and in particular, Testimonios as Methodology, as detailed in Chapter 3, I addressed threats to validity throughout the data collection and analysis process. I employed several recommended mixed methods strategies for validation including the analysis of a rich data set, which included longitudinal qualitative and quantitative secondary and primary data from a diverse group of individuals and settings using various data collection methods (Maxwell, 2015, p. 117). To substantiate findings, and to more fully address questions about the context and ideologies that informed the policies in practice that school-aged mothers experienced, I meticulously and purposefully put the qualitative data in conversation with the broader MHFE and the MDESE quantitative data. I also developed matrices to identify the frequency and the co-occurrence of codes across data sources and participants (Huberman, Miles, & Saldaña, 2014). This strategy resulted in the tables included in this study and served as a data triangulation tool that allowed me to perform cross case pattern analysis across participants, codes, themes, and various data points. Likewise, I paid attention to “outliers,” such as the experiences of Jahlys, and mapped how alternative trajectories plotted against the findings.

I wanted to vet my findings with the Testimoniolistas themselves, but I did not have an opportunity to do so. To address this limitation, I engaged with the scholarship and theories that guided my analysis as well as participated in

scholarly forums and community spaces, including in PR led community-based programs, initiatives, and with PR community members, to deepen my thinking and skills regarding the participants and the social conditions that are salient in the lives of PRs in the Diaspora. Finally, the perspectives of teachers, school administrators, and other social service agents could have strengthened my analysis. This approach is one that I hope to explore in future research.

There is an additional “limitation” that is important for me to address. Since the commencement of this project, and in accordance with the Testimonio methodologies, I was motivated by a social urgency to raise awareness of shared struggle, survival, and resistance (Pérez Huber, 2009) of PR school-aged mothers. As Reyes and Curry Rodríguez (2012) described with the Testimonios approach, I wanted “to bring to light a wrong” (p. 525). To do this, throughout the analysis, including during the quantitative component, I centered on the practice of critical and personal engagement between the Testimoniolistas and myself, recognizing that collaborative learning and the co-construction of knowledge is part of long-standing dialectical feminist approaches of my own cultural traditions. Together, we focused on the importance of telling our stories, which historically, for PR women is an act of resistance (Morales, 2001). We share our Testimonios to remember, to keep and build knowledge, to convey love to our children and communities, to build our collective strength, and to resist and disrupt the stories others say about us. By sharing our Testimonios, we “inscrib[e] into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure” (del

Alba Acevedo, 2001 p. 2). Ultimately, the act of giving and sharing Testimonios is a form PR feminist praxis (del Alba Acevedo, 2001).

For some scholars, this methodological approach may raise questions about the blurred lines between researcher and researched, of objectivity and subjectivity, of activism and scholarship, when the scholar, in this case, me, is also engaged in a process of transformation. It may also raise questions about the limitations of Testimonios as a methodological approach, or empirical tool, that is dependent on memories and imaginations of past, present, and to the future, and how the call for social transformation may bias how participants tell their life stories.

These are critiques that are well known to critical scholars. I addressed them through the conception, development, and implementation of this study, beginning with my use of theoretical frames that guided my data collection and analysis. First, from a developmental perspective, there is a body of scholarship that asserts that the socioemotional development of humans, in part, occurs through retrospective self-analysis (McAdams, 2013; Mistry & Dutta, 2015). Retrospective self-analysis, or meaning-making, allows individuals to make sense of their lives relative to social structures they are exposed to and the cultures they participate in (McAdams, 2013; Mistry & Dutta, 2015). This type of sensemaking is congruent with what humans experience over the course of their lives (see McAdams, 2013 for a full review).

Critical race feminist (CRF) epistemologies also argue that given WOC's distinct social position, their concrete experiences and how they make meaning of

those experiences, can serve as a starting point to produce knowledge about the broader social world operates ( Brooks, 2007; Hill Collins, 1986; 1991; hooks, 1981). As such, CRF advances the notion that the experiential knowledge of WOC as subjects, researchers, and scholars is a legitimate and necessary source of knowledge for understanding social structures. CRF, along with Critical Race Theory (CRT) also challenge dominant ideologies that are primarily based on majoritarian values that reinforce hegemony. For example, CRT repudiates claims of objectivity, neutrality, meritocracy, and equal opportunity by researchers and educational institutions and exposes deficit-informed discourses that “silences, ignores and distorts epistemologies of People of Color” (Yosso, 2005, p. 73).

Thus, one of the distinct contributions of this study is the direct acknowledgment that the Testimonios of PR school-aged women are an epistemological tool that illustrates how majoritarian perspectives on normative development, including achievement and social order, can be amended and disrupted. As such, like many critical race feminist developmental scholars before me, I maintain that rigorous scholarly engagement does not necessitate that we turn away from the self or from broader sociocultural and historical contexts or from the meaning-making of the participants we engage with. Rather, I suggest that this is the work that we are called to do.

### **Conclusion: “Esa Risa No Es De Loca”**

*I'm not exactly sure when it was that I began to feel crazy, but I think it has something to do with being Puerto Rican, and working class, from a woman*



*headed family, and a girl child who has come of age in the late 20th century. It is quite a feat to be a Puerto Rican woman in the late Twentieth Century. You barely exist outside your own imagination except in the form of vicious stereotypes. The only way to bring your own self out of oblivion is to remind folks about the peculiarity of that colonial relationship the United States has with a small island in the Caribbean and its people in the diaspora. The huge wall of silence that always stops a conversation on people in the United States whenever you bring up, those “controversial” issues they'd rather forget speaks the very way Puerto Rican women get continuously erased. It always makes me feel so crazy.*  
*(Souza, 2001, p.114)*

In describing the limitations of this inquiry, I alluded to a challenge that I faced during the completion of this study: doubt. While I am aware that academic skepticism has long been part of scholarly engagements which requires that scholars are rigorous and transparent in their mapping of questions, methods, data, engagement with the existing literature, and findings, ultimately strengthening the nature of scholarship; what I experienced was different. In deliberating the findings of this study questions regarding the relative importance of focusing my inquiry on *just* PR school-aged mothers were always at play. I often found myself having to defend the focus on PR school-aged mothers and their experiences, while also having to provide basic background information about Borikén and Boricuas (including location, citizenship status, and why it is that most PR in the US speak English). This occurred time and time again at conferences, special presentations, and even during classes where the experiences of children, youth, and families contending with adversity were the primary focus.

Making a case for the importance of studying the experiences of PR communities, and in particular, PR young women was not new to me. I am also cognizant of countless scholars and activists long before me (and after me) that

have had (and will have) to struggle against the inescapable politics of invisibility. Claridad Souza (2001) beautifully articulates in her own Testimonio, how the isolation, the doubt, the erasure, the pain of being unseen can drive a person to feel “crazy.” And while this was not the first time that I felt this, what was significant was the context in which these illiteracies and invisibilities were being reinscribed. During the exodus of thousands of PRs to the continental US due to the political and humanitarian disasters that followed the economic crisis and hurricanes, while the number of lives lost was being debated as though we were inanimate objects, as thousands upon thousands of PRs didn’t have access to clean water and electricity, as the number of PR children enrolled in US public school steadily increased, it was as though we didn’t exist.

In confronting moments of doubt, I was strengthened by the wisdom and *cariño* that Testimoniolistas extended to me. The way the mothers looked at their children when sharing their Testimonios, their boundless generosity in opening and lives to me, their courage in exposing their vulnerabilities, their pride in being members of a community that is often pathologized, and their infinite optimism for reimagining the future were inspirational. I also remained epistemologically grounded on the notion that “testimonio is not meant to be hidden, made intimate, nor kept secret” (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012, p. 525). By sharing their Testimonios with me and participating in this project (and other studies), these women demanded that we, in the academy, “pay attention” to their words and wisdom and I too wanted to “give justice” to their belief in me (Pérez Huber, 2009).

In this process, I have come to realize that in the moment of madness there was also a profound clarity. Reyes and Curry (2012) describe this awareness as moments of “awakenings” or of *conscientizaçã* (the process of further developing a critical awareness of one’s social reality through reflection and action). Giving, listening, and learning from the Testimoniolistas elevated my cognizance of shared struggle, survival, and resistance (Pérez Huber, 2009). This is an expected outcome of the process of gathering and analyzing Testimonios which require that the interlocutor and the Testimoniolistas purposefully engage in critical reflection about their social, cultural, and political realities. As such, the often painful and joyful awareness that this process brought to me resulted in a newfound sense of collective wisdom that rebirths strength. This was also reminiscent of what Souza’s Testimonio teaches us when she writes, “*Esa risa no es de loca*” [that laughter is not of madwomen].

By calling attention to the importance of understanding the educational outcomes and educational trajectories PR school-aged mothers within the sociocultural, historical and political contexts in which they occur, with this study I hoped to have raised questions that disorder fatalistic metanarratives of school age-mothers, of PR students, and more broadly of children and youth who experience marginalization. I hope I also have provided an example of transdisciplinary scholarship that resists majoritarian frameworks that essentialized them, us, as deviant and asks questions about how the state maps on to our bodies with material consequences. I recognize that this work has and will continue to lead me to territories that are difficult to navigate. In a sense, the

findings of this study, the approach, and my own trajectory as a scholar are disruptive to ideologies that shape developmental science, education, and evaluation research. And it is unsettling.

This inquiry, and what will come of it, in many ways has become my own Testimonio, one in which I constantly and purposefully ask all of us to courageously consider the differential outcomes and trajectories of a people, across time, as situated within a complex and mechanized hierarchical social world order that has deemed some of us unworthy. The Testimoniolistas' voices, experiences, and knowledge will stay with me. Like them, I am guided by a belief that our stories matter, that we deserve a world that recognizes our humanity, and that "we are beautiful people." In helping bring attention to their lived experiences, even if it just for a moment, a breath, I aim to disrupt hegemonic forces that have ever so skillfully tried to render us invisible. Yet, here we are. Here we are.

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Tables

Table 1

*District Criteria and Configurations*

<b>Top 10 by Total Latino Enrollment</b>	<b>Top Ten by % of Latino Students</b>	<b>MHFR PR Participants Location T1</b>	<b>Testimonio Participants Location 2017</b>	<b>Final Districts</b>
Boston	Lawrence	Worcester	Boston	1. Boston
Springfield	Chelsea	Boston	Cambridge	2. Lawrence
Lawrence	Holyoke	Holyoke	Chelsea	3. Worcester
Worcester	Springfield	Lowell	Lawrence	4. Holyoke
Lynn	Lynn	New Bedford	Peabody	5. Chelsea
Holyoke	Revere	Lawrence	Worcester	6. Springfield
Chelsea	Fitchburg	Haverhill		
New Bedford	Boston			
Lowell	Worcester			
Revere	Somerville			

Table 2

*Study Design Summary*

Phase	Procedural Notes	Deliverable(s)
<p><b>I. Quantitative Data Analysis</b></p> <p><i>(1) What are the structural barriers that PR mothers report as experiencing in schools?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Data Screening</li> <li>▪ Descriptive Analysis</li> </ul> <p>Analysis of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Participant Level Data (MHFE)</li> <li>-District/School-Level Data (MDESE)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participant profiles</li> <li>▪ School/District Profiles</li> </ul>
<p><b>II. Qualitative Data Analysis</b></p> <p><i>(2) How do PR mothers make meaning of those barriers? (3) What are the sources of supports that PR mothers' view as facilitating their educational attainment?</i></p>	<p><i>Data Collection</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recruitment of Participants</li> <li>▪ Interviews</li> <li>▪ Transcriptions</li> </ul> <p><i>Data (n=10)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ T1-T3 Interviews</li> <li>▪ Testimonios, two for each participant</li> </ul> <p><i>Data Analysis</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Holistic Coding</li> <li>▪ Identification of Salient Thematic Analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sample Description</li> <li>▪ Participants Matrices</li> <li>▪ Salient Themes (structural)</li> <li>▪ Salient Themes (supports)</li> </ul>
<p><b>III. Integrative Analysis</b></p> <p><i>(1) What are the structural barriers that PR mothers report as experiencing in schools?</i></p> <p><i>(2) How do PR mothers make meaning of those barriers? (3) What are the sources of supports that PR mothers' view as facilitating their educational attainment?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Convergence of Data</li> <li>▪ Person-Centered within and across group analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identification of main findings (Cross thematic themes/across data)</li> <li>▪ Discussion and implications by Question</li> </ul>

Table 3

*Sample Characteristics (TI)*

Characteristic	PR Sample ( <i>n</i> =145)	Non-PR Sample ( <i>n</i> =559)
Age (in years)	18.4 (16.08-21.01)	18.64 (16.06-21.09)
Age at the birth of first child <sup>a</sup>	18.5 (15.05-21.40) (M =16.85)	18.8 (15.95-21.44) (M=19.09)
Place of birth <sup>b</sup>		
US	64.8%	84.9%
Puerto Rico	34.5%	0
Outside the US	.7%	15.1%
Born in MA <sup>c</sup>	51%	72.6%
Language preference		
English	47.2%	80.5%
Spanish	10.4%	4.2%
English & Another Language	42.4%	14.5%
Other	0%	.7%
Relationship status with FOB <sup>e</sup>	64.9%	65.3%
Lives with an adult relative <sup>f</sup>	73.9%	72.9%
Family Member was a teen mother <sup>g</sup>	85%	78.3%

<sup>a</sup> PR=142; Non-PR= 552<sup>b</sup> Non-PR= 558<sup>c</sup> Non-PR= 558<sup>d</sup> Non-PR= 550<sup>e</sup> PR=134; Non-PR=539<sup>f</sup> PR=134; Non-PR=538<sup>g</sup> Non-PR= 530

Table 4  
*Educational Profile (T1)*

Variable	PR Sample (n=135)		Non-PR Sample (n=540)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<b>High School Participation and Completion</b>				
Enrolled in High School	43	31.85%	149	26.65%
Graduated High School	33	24.44%	192	34.35%
Less than High School, (includes Drop Out, GED)	59	43.70%	122	21.82%
ELL Services <sup>a</sup>	18	21.7%	30	11.5%
SPED Services	30	36.1%	69	26.5%
Out of School Suspension	45	55.2%	145	55.8%
Economically Disadvantaged	77	92.8%	208	80%
<b>District Accountability Status<sup>b</sup></b>				
<i>Level 1-2</i>	2	2%		
<i>Level 3</i>	4	3%		
<i>Level 4-5</i>	125	87%		

<sup>a</sup> Bold indicates the use of MDESE data. For these selected variables SIMS data was only available 83 PR participants

<sup>b</sup> Based on last address at AY2009

Table 5

*Educational Participation and Outcomes (T1, T3)*

	T1 PR Sample (n=135)		T3 PR Sample (n=127)		T1 Non-PR Sample (n=540)		T3 Non-PR Sample (n=540)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Enrolled in High School	43	31.85%	9	7.1	149	27.59%	26	5.5
Enrolled in GED Program	12	8.89%	13	10.2	44	8.15%	23	4.8
Enrolled College <sup>a</sup>	5	3.70%	17	13.4	23	4.26%	59	12.4
Enrolled in Training Program	4	2.96%	9	7.1	15	2.78%	34	7.1
Less than High School (Drop Out) <sup>b</sup>	41	30.37%	34	26.8	106	19.63%	73	15.3
High School Graduate	15	11.11%	15	11.8	132	24.44%	123	25.8
Completed GED	6	4.44%	9	7.1	33	6.11%	46	9.6
Completed Training Program	n/a	n/a	8	6.3	1	0.19%	23	4.8
Completed at least 1 year of College	9	6.67%	13	10.2	37	6.85%	70	14.7

a: Excludes participants who may have been enrolled but who have completed at least one year of college

b: Includes participants who dropped out of high school but were enrolled in a GED program

Table 6  
*Educational Trajectories (T1-T3)*

Variable	PR Sample ( <i>n</i> =106)		Non-PR Sample ( <i>n</i> =394)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Completed HS, then became pregnant	23	21.7	114	28.9
No interruptions, went on to pursue secondary or post education	16	15.1	69	17.5
Interrupted, went on to pursue secondary or post education	43	40.6	136	34.5
Interrupted, did not resume	15	14.2	61	15.5
Interruption unknown, pursuing education	9	8.5	14	3.6

Table 7

*District Profiles- AY09 Demographics*

Districts	MA	Boston	Chelsea	Holyoke	Lawrence	Springfield	Worcester
Total Student Enrollment	958,910	55,923	5,602	6,025	12,221	25,360	23,109
% of Latino Students in the Districts	14.3	38.1	81	76.4	89.1	54.8	36.4
% of Students of Color	30	86.37	91.4	80.7	97.1	84.3	61%
Low Income	30.7	74.3	77.8	76.3	89.1	77.8	65.8
English Language Learner	5.9	18.9	17	24.2	22.8	17	20.3
Out of School Suspension (AY13)	4.3	6.2	8	21.5	5.9	10.5	10.5
Students with Disabilities	17.1	20.5	13.9	25	18.6	23.9	20.3
% Churn	9.8	25.3	19.4	28.9	24.5	23.1	17.3
Total Expenditures per Pupil	\$13,003.91	\$18,021.87	\$12,901.91	\$15,108.17	\$12,642.54	\$14,415.38	\$13,101.34
% of Core Academic Classes Taught by Teachers Who are Highly Qualified	96.5	95.9	95.9	94.2	81.3	90.4	98.6
Student/Teacher Ratio	13.6 to 1	12.8 to 1	13.4	11.5 to 1	13.1	13.5	14.1 to 1

Table 8

*School Profiles- AY09 Demographic*

Name of School	Total Student Enrollment	% of Latino Students in the Districts	% of Students of Color	Low Income	English Language Learners	Out of School Suspension 2013	Students with Disabilities	% Churn	Total Expenditures per Pupil (district)	% of Core Academic Classes Taught by Teachers Who are Highly Qualified	Student/Teacher Ratio
MA	958,910	14.3	30	30.7	5.9	4.3	17.1	9.8	\$13,003.91	96.5	13.6 to 1
Boston	55,923	38.1	86.37	74.3	18.9	6.2	20.5	25.3	\$18,021.87	95.9	12.8 to 1
Charlestown HS	1,017	29.6	94.1	80.3	21.5	9	23.7	44.9		89	10.6 to 1
East Boston Hush	1,445	62.2	82	72.9	2.4	2.5	19.6	31.3		96.7	15.6 to 1
Noonan Business Academy	245	26.5	98	71.8	1.6	N/R	24.1	38.5		94	14.3 to 1
Urban Science Academy	327	37.6	89.3	73.4	4.3	8.4	21.7	32.7		89.1	9.8 to 1
Chelsea	5,602	81	91.4	77.8	17	8	13.9	19.4	\$12,901.91	95.9	13.4
Chelsea HS	1,424	78.7	90.4	66.8	12.7	17.1	14.4	23.5		100	12.2 to 1
Lawrence	12,221	89.1	97.1	89.1	22.8	5.9	18.6	24.5	\$12,642.54	81.3	13.1
Grtr Lawrence Regional Voc/Tec	1,170	76.8	79.2	54.5	3.2	8.2	20.9	9.8	\$21,248.54	96.4	8.4 to 1
Business Management & Finance HS	469	91.9	96.8	86.6	5.1	19.7	16.4	25.7	\$12,642.54	89.7	14.1 to 1
Springfield	25,360	54.8	84.3	77.8	17	10.5	23.9	23.1	\$14,415.38	90.4	13.5
HS Of Commerce	1,265	54.4	91.1	76.3	11.1	22.3	20.3	32.6		91	12.7 to 1
Worcester	23,109	36.4	61%	65.8	20.3	10.5	23.9	17.3	\$13,101.34	98.6	14.1 to 1
South High Community	1,376	40.9	71.3	73.3	18.1	22.3	20.3	29.1		95.3	15.9 to 1



Table 9

*District Profiles-AY09 Outcomes*

School Districts	Proficiency + All Students 10 Math	Proficiency+ Latino Students 10 Math	Proficiency+ All Students 10 ELA	Proficiency+ Latino Students 10 ELA	4 YR High School Graduation Rate	4 YR Latino High School Graduation Rate	Annual Drop Out Rate	Latino Annual Drop Out Rate	% of Graduates Who Attend College/University	% of Latino Graduates Who Attend College/University	AY09 Accountability Status	AY16 Accountability Status
<b>MA</b>	75	48	81	57	82	60	3	8	72	57	n/a	n/a
<b>Boston</b>	62	56	64	59	61	53	7	9	63	55	(SUB)Corrective Action	Level 4
<b>Chelsea</b>	43	42	48	46	50	47	9	10	50	45	Correction Action	Level 3
<b>Holyoke</b>	42	31	52	38	49	41	10	12	72	67	Correction Action	Level 5
<b>Lawrence</b>	30	29	46	46	48	48	10	10	70	70	Correction Action	Level 5
<b>Springfield</b>	36	28	50	41	55	47	10	12	63	57	Correction Action	Level 4
<b>Worcester</b>	57	43	67	54	70	61	5	8	62	53	(SUB)Corrective Action	Level 4

Table 10

*School Profiles – AY09 Outcomes*

Name of School	Proficiency+ ALL Students 10 Math	Proficiency+ LATINO Students 10 Math	Proficiency+ ALL Students 10 ELA	Proficiency+ LATINO Students 10 ELA	Proficiency+ ALL Students 10 Math	Proficiency+ ALL Students 10 ELA	4 Year Grade High School Graduation Rate	Annual Drop Out Rate	% of Graduate Who Attend College/University	2009 NCLB Accountability Status	2017 NCLB Accountability Status
MA	75	48	81	57			81.5	2.9	72.3	n/a	n/a
Boston	62	56	64	59			61.4	7.3	62.9	(SUB)Corrective Action	Level 4
Charlestown HS	64	47	74	56	64	74	43.3	17.4	61.2	Restructuring Year 2 - Subgroups	Level 3
East Boston HS	48	53	56	57	48	56	55.4	6.6	50.2	Restructuring Year 2 - Subgroups	Level 3
Noonan Business Academy	47	57	57	58	47	57	37.1	9	67.9	Restructuring Year 1	Closed
Urban Science Academy		52	59	60		59	74.6	3.4	59.6	Improvement Year 2	Level 3
Chelsea	43	42	48	46			49.7	9.4	49.8	Correction Action	Level 3
Chelsea HS	42	42	47	49	42	47	51.4	9.3	49.8	Restructuring Year 2 - Subgroups	Level 3
Lawrence	30	29	46	46			48.5	10.2	70.3	Correction Action	Level 5
Grtr Lawrence Regional Voc/Tech HS	41	37	55	58	41	55	74.6	2.8	50	Restructuring Year 2 - Subgroups	Level 1
Business Management & Finance HS	32	33	57	54	32	57	51.3	10.2	73.2	Restructuring Year 2 - Subgroups	Closed
Springfield	36	28	50	41			54.5	9.6	63.4	Correction Action	Level 4
HS Of Commerce	28	20	43	37	28	43	42.5	13.1	70.4	Restructuring Year 2	Level 4
Worcester	57	43	67	54	57		70.1	5.1	61.6	(SUB)Corrective Action	Level 4
South High Community	51	30	65	46	51	65	64.6	7.9	53.5	Restructuring Year 2 - Subgroups	Level 3

Table 11

*Districts' Accountability Status AY09, AY16*

Districts	# of PR MHFE Participants	AY09 Accountability Status	AY16 Accountability Status
<b>(Florida)</b>	1	n/a	n/a
<b>(Kentucky)</b>	1	n/a	n/a
<b>(New York)</b>	1	n/a	n/a
<b>Barnstable</b>	2	1 No Status	Level 2
<b>Boston</b>	18	4 (Sub) Corrective Action	Level 4
<b>Brockton</b>	4	4 (Sub) Corrective Action	Level 3
<b>Brookline</b>	1	1 No Status	Level 3
<b>Cambridge</b>	3	2 Improvement in Subgroups	Level 2
<b>Chelsea</b>	3	4 Correction Action	Level 3
<b>Chicopee</b>	2	4 (Sub) Corrective Action	Level 3
<b>Fall River</b>	4	4 Correction Action	Level 4
<b>Framingham</b>	3	1 No Status	Level 3
<b>Haverhill</b>	5	4 (Sub) Corrective Action	Level 3
<b>Holyoke</b>	15	4 Correction Action	Level 5
<b>Lawrence</b>	7	4 Correction Action	Level 5
<b>Leicester</b>	2	1 No Status	Level 3
<b>Lowell</b>	11	4 (Sub) Corrective Action	Level 3
<b>Lynn</b>	1	4 (Sub) Corrective Action	Level 3
<b>Marlborough</b>	2	4 (Sub) Corrective Action	Level 3
<b>Milford</b>	1	1 No Status	Level 2
<b>New Bedford</b>	8	4 Correction Action	Level 4
<b>Newburyport</b>	1	1 No Status	Level 2
<b>Peabody</b>	1	5 Restructuring (Sub)	Level 1
<b>Pittsfield</b>	1	4 (Sub) Corrective Action	Level 3
<b>Quincy</b>	1	2 Improvement in Subgroups	Level 3

<b>Randolph</b>	1	4 (Sub) Corrective Action	Level 4
<b>Raynham</b>	1	4 (Sub) Corrective Action	Level 3
<b>Revere</b>	2	4 (Sub) Corrective Action	Level 2
<b>Somerville</b>	1	4 (Sub) Corrective Action	Level 3
<b>Springfield</b>	4	4 Correction Action	Level 4
<b>Taunton</b>	2	1 No Status	Level 3
<b>Webster</b>	1	1 No Status	Level 3
<b>West Yarmouth</b>	1	4 (Sub) Corrective Action	Level 3
<b>Westfield</b>	1	4 (Sub) Corrective Action	Level 3
<b>Worcester</b>	32	4 (Sub) Corrective Action	Level 4

Table 12

*Testimoniolistas Demographic Profile*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age (2017)</b>	<b>Age birth of baby</b>	<b>Place of Birth</b>	<b>English/Spanish Fluency</b>	<b>Residence (Ages 10-18)</b>	<b>Living Arrangement (T1)</b>	<b>Living Arrangement (2017)</b>	<b>Family Members Teen Parents</b>
<b>Amaya</b>	27	18	Puerto Rico	Bilingual	PR/MA	With Nuclear Family	Own Apartment	Y
<b>Bianca</b>	27	19	MA	English (Limited Spanish)	CT/MA	With Nuclear Family	Own Apartment	Y
<b>Crystal</b>	26	17	MA	English (Limited Spanish)	MA/FL	With Nuclear Family	Own Apartment	Y
<b>Isa</b>	24	16	FL	Bilingual	MA	With Nuclear Family	Own Apartment	Y
<b>Jahlys</b>	25	18	MA	Bilingual (Prefers English)	MA	With Nuclear Family	Own Apartment	Y
<b>Karelys</b>	24	16	Puerto Rico	Bilingual	MA/PR/FL	With Nuclear Family	Own Apartment	Y
<b>Kayla</b>	25	17	FL	Bilingual (Prefers English)	MA	With Nuclear Family	Own Apartment	Y
<b>Luz</b>	24	17	Puerto Rico	Bilingual	MA	With Nuclear Family	Own Apartment	Y
<b>Mia</b>	24	15	MA	Bilingual	MA	With Nuclear Family	Own Apartment	Y
<b>Nancy</b>	25	17	Puerto Rico	Bilingual	MA	Own Apartment	Own Apartment	Y

Table 13

*Testimoniolistas Education Profile*

Name	Advanced Course Work BC	ELL	OSS	Grade Retention BC	SPED	Academic Achievement BC	Educational Experiences BC	Academic Achievement AC	Educational Experiences AC	High School Graduate
<b>Amaya</b>	Y	N	N	N	N	+	+	+	-	Y
<b>Bianca</b>	N	Y	N	Y	Y	-	-	+	-	Y <sup>31</sup>
<b>Jahlys</b>	Y	N	N	N	N	+	+	+	+	Y
<b>Kayla</b>	N	N	Y		Y	+	-	+	+	Y
<b>Mia</b>	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	+	+	+	-	Y
<b>Crystal</b>	Y	N	Y	N	N	+	+	-	-	N
<b>Isa</b>	Y	N	N	N	N	+	-	-	-	N
<b>Karelys</b>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	+	-	+	-	N
<b>Luz</b>	N	Y	Y	N	N	-	-	n/a	n/a	N
<b>Nancy</b>	N	Y	Y	N	Y	+	-	n/a	n/a	N

Legend:

*Advanced Course Work*= Enrollment in Honors/AP Classes

*BC*= Before Childbirth

*AC*: After Childbirth

+ *Positive Descriptions of Achievement and Schooling Experiences*

- *Negative Descriptions of Achievement and Schooling Experiences*

<sup>31</sup> Bianca completed all her high school credits, participated in her schools' graduation, and received a certificate of completion. She did not, however, pass the MCAS.

Table 14

*Testimoniolistas Educational Trajectories*

Name	Age (2017)	Age at Birth Child	Parenting Status AY09	Educational Status at T1	Educational Trajectories T1-T3	Last Grade Completed	High School Graduate	GED	Additional Training	1-year College	Educational Status 2017
<b>Amaya</b>	27	18	Pregnant	Enrolled	Interruption/Continued	12	Y	N/A	Y	Y	HS (working on BA)
<b>Bianca</b>	27	19	Pregnant	Enrolled	No Interruptions	12	Y	N/A	N	N	HS
<b>Crystal</b>	26	17	Parenting	Unenrolled	Interruption/Continued	10	N	Y	Y	Y	GED (working on BA)
<b>Isa</b>	24	16	Pregnant	Unenrolled	Interruption/Continued	9	N	Y	Y	N	GED
<b>Jahlys</b>	25	18	Pregnant	Enrolled	No Interruptions	12	Y	N/A	N	Y	BA
<b>Karelys</b>	24	16	Parenting	Unenrolled	Interruption/Continued	10	N	Y	Y	Y	GED (working on AA)
<b>Kayla</b>	25	16	Pregnant	Enrolled	No Interruptions	12	Y	N/A	N	Y	HS (working on AA)
<b>Luz</b>	24	17	Parenting	Unenrolled	Interruption/Continued	10	N	Y	Y	Y	GED
<b>Mia</b>	24	15	Pregnant	Enrolled	Interruption/Continued	12	Y	N/A	Y	N	HS
<b>Nancy</b>	25	17	Parenting	Unenrolled	Interruption, Did not resume	10	N	N	N	N	Less than HS

Table 15

*Salient Policies in Practice by Participants*

Name	Disappeared/ Persisted	Willful Neglect	Push Out	Dubious Compliance	High School Graduate
<b>Amaya</b>	Disappeared/ Persisted	✓	✓	✓	Y
<b>Bianca</b>	Persisted			✓	Y
<b>Jahlys</b>	Persisted	✓		✓	Y
<b>Kayla</b>	Persisted	✓	✓	✓	Y
<b>Mia</b>	Disappeared/ Persisted	✓	✓	✓	Y
<b>Crystal</b>	Disappeared	✓	✓		N
<b>Isa</b>	Disappeared	✓	✓		N
<b>Karelys</b>	Disappeared	✓	✓		N
<b>Luz</b>	Disappeared	n/a	n/a	n/a	N
<b>Nancy</b>	Disappeared		✓		N

+ *High School  
Graduate*- *Did Not Graduate  
from High School*



Figures

Figure 1

*Study's Theoretical Framework*

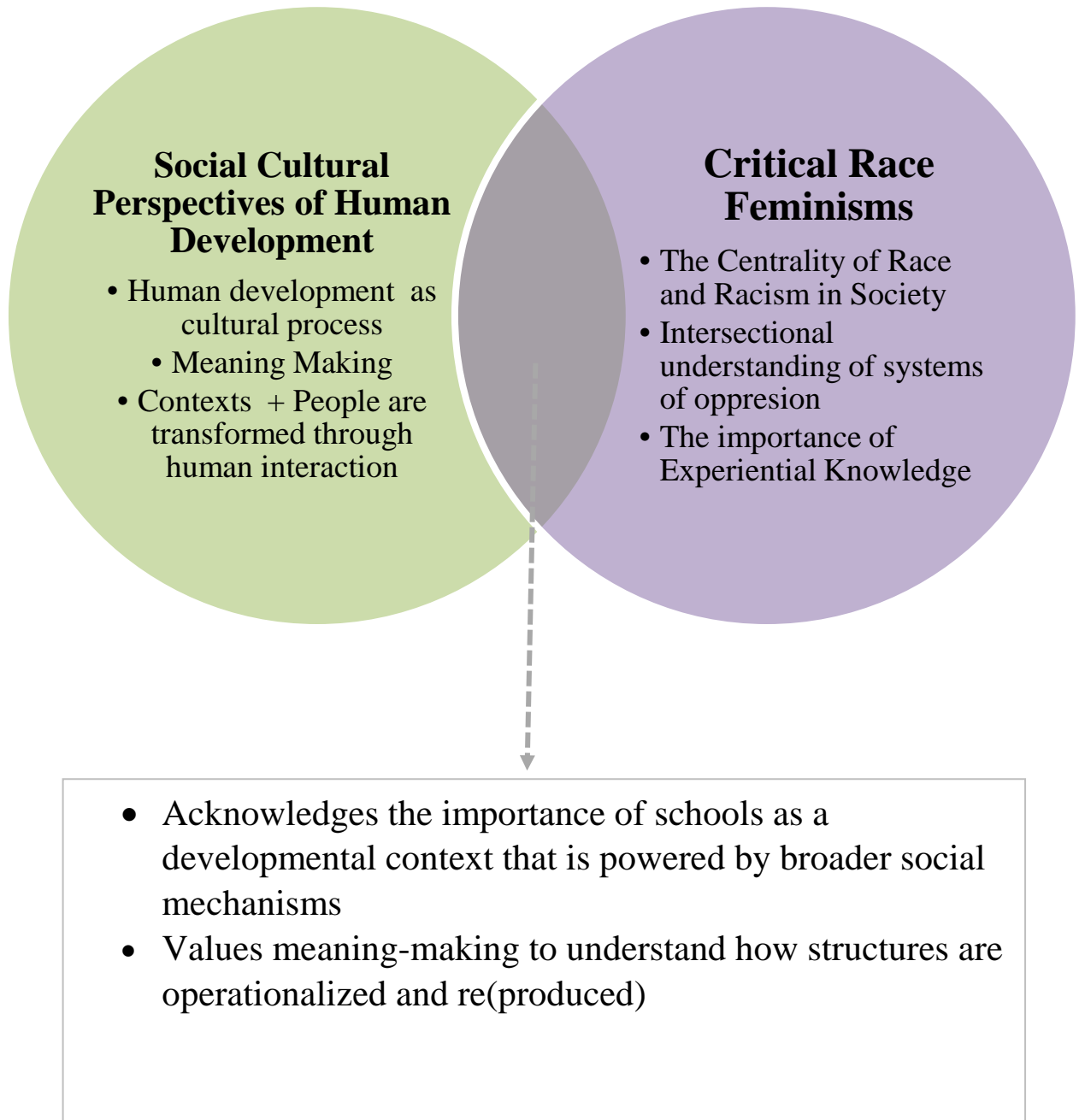


Figure 2  
*Study Design*

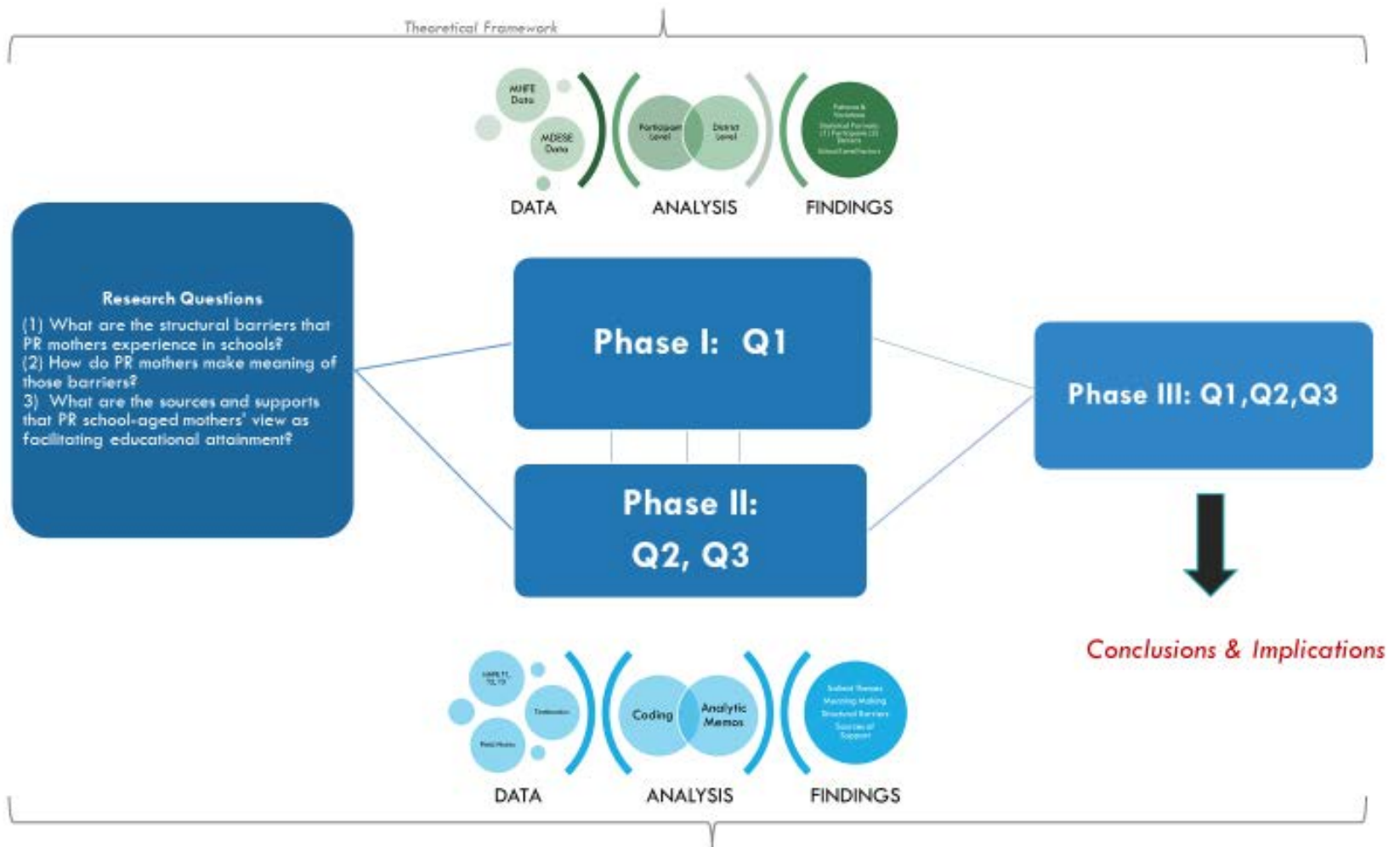
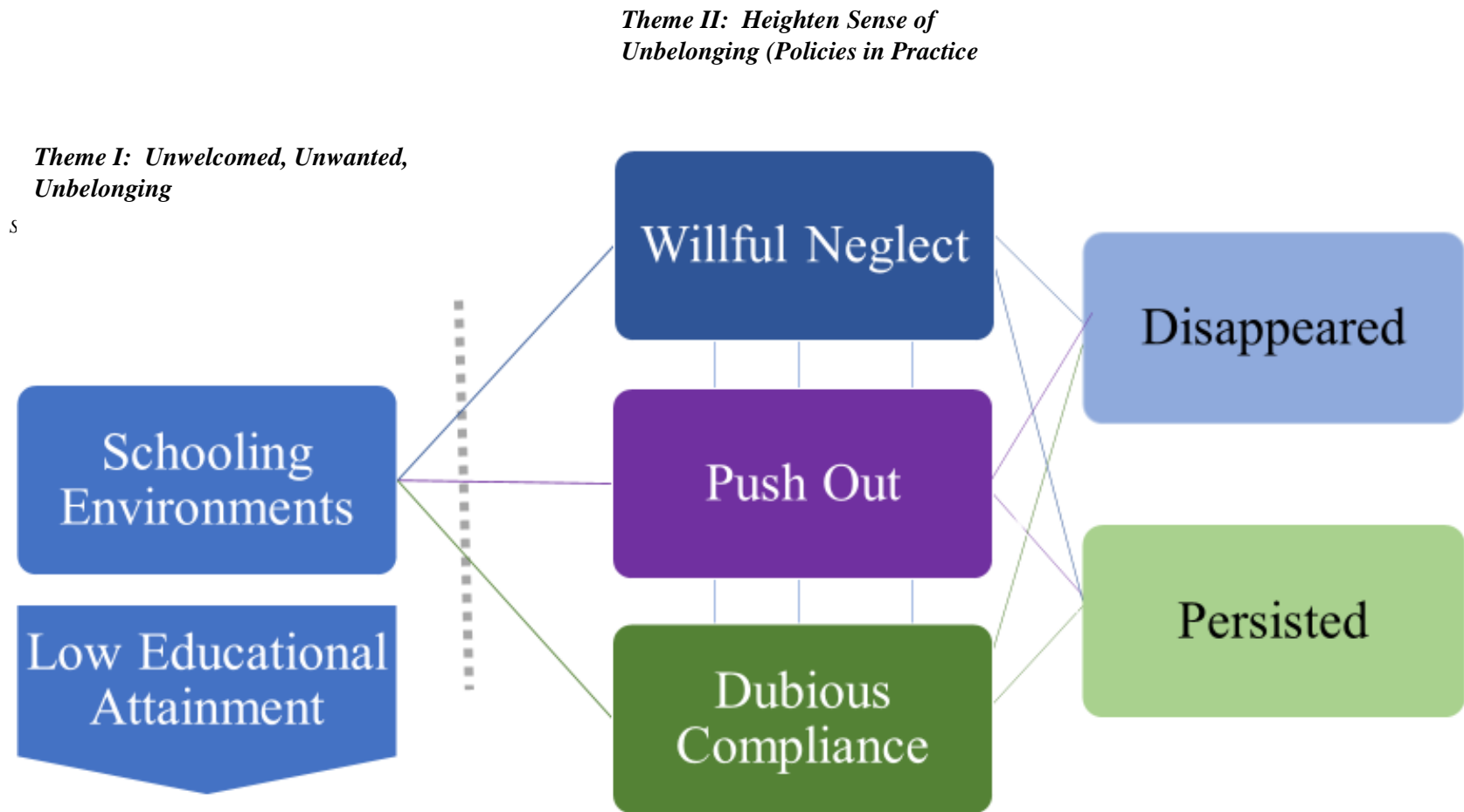


Figure 3

*Conceptual Map*



## Appendix

### A. *Five Tenets of Critical Race Theory*

1. *The Intercentricity of Race and Racism in Society:* Fundamental to understanding CRT is the notion that race and racism are central and permanent constructs that have come to define and explain how US society functions. This is most evident by the systematic oppression inflicted upon People of Color. CRT also acknowledges the inseparable layers of racialized subordination based on other systems of oppression include gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality.
2. *The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge:* CRT advances the notion that the experiential knowledge of People of Color as subjects, researchers, and scholars is a legitimate and necessary source of knowledge when analyzing race and racism.
3. *Challenges to dominant ideology:* CRT challenges dominant ideologies that are largely based on majoritarian values that reinforce hegemony. For example, CRT repudiates claims of objectivity, neutrality, meritocracy, and equal opportunity by researchers and educational institutions and exposes deficit-informed discourses that “silences, ignores and distorts epistemologies of People of Color (Yosso, 2005., p. 73).
4. *The utilization of interdisciplinary approaches:* CRT scholars draw from a myriad of academic disciplines to analyze how racism and other forms of oppression operate in US society.
5. *A commitment to social justice.* CRT is explicit about its goal to offer a liberatory response towards oppression. In the field of education, CRT positions schools as a place that can serve to empower groups that have experiences marginalization to transform society.

Sources: Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, 2001; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Pérez Huber, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2006; Matsuda, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005

*B. Variables: Definitions & Sources*

**Participant Level Demographic and Education Variables**

Unless otherwise noted all participant-level data were self-reported.

<i>Variable/Measure</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Definition</i> <sup>32</sup>
<b>1 yr of College</b>	MHFE	T1, T3	Mother finished at least 1 year of college =1 or not=0
<b>Address by Town/City at T1</b>	MHFE	T1, 2017	Addresses at T1 were used to determine school district. Addresses in 2017 were used to determine eligibility status for Testimonio component.
<b>Age at time of birth first child</b>	MHFE	T1	Age at time of birth first child
<b>Born in MA</b>	MHFE	T1	Mother born in Massachusetts 0=no, 1=yes
<b>Educational Attainment</b>	MHFE,	T1, T3	Highest completed education (0=Still in HS/GED, 1=Finished HS, 2=Finished GED, 3= In or finished a training program, 4=Some college classes, 5=Finished at least 1 year of college, 6=Dropped out)
<b>English Language Learners Services*</b> <i>An asterisk indicates that variable were reconstructed or recoded as described.</i>	MHFE MDESE	AY6-AY12	<i>NSR (not self-reported)</i> Agency Data. Recoded. During the 6-year data collection period did student receive LEP classification?
<b>Ethnic Background*</b>	MHFE	T1	Open-ended: <i>What Country/ies are your ancestors came from.</i> I recoded to identify PR participants Recoded by National Origins/Ethnic Groups. To determined PR sample, place of birth was also reviewed.
<b>Final Educational Trajectory*</b>	MHFE	T1, T3	TIER researcher created an Educational trajectory variable based on qualitative interviews. Education trajectory was scored as one of five values related to a participant's high school completion (1) Completed HS, then became pregnant, (2) No interruptions, went on to pursue secondary or post education, (3) Interrupted, went on to pursue secondary or post education, (4) Interrupted, did not resume, (5); and Interruption unknown, pursuing education
<b>Hispanic</b>	MHFE	T1	<i>Is the MOB Hispanic/non-Hispanic?</i> 1=Not Hispanic or Latina, 2=Hispanic or Latina

<sup>32</sup> Unless otherwise noted definitions were derived verbatim from the MHFE codebook and MDESE Data site.

<b>Hopes and Dreams*</b>	MHFE	T1, T3	Open Ended: <i>What are your hopes and dreams for your education?</i> I recoded to Less than High, High School Diploma, GED, Post-Secondary Degree, Graduate Students, Job or Vocational Training, None, Other
<b>Last Grade Completed</b>	MHFE	T1, T3	Mother last grade completed
<b>Lives with Adult Relative</b>	MHFE	T1	Lives with adult relative =1 vs all other living arrangements =0
<b>Neighborhood Composition*</b>	MHFE NSR	T1	Created by TIER researchers. Scoring: Respondents' T1 addresses were geocoded and linked to Census 2010 data at the block group level. Block groups are areas containing 600 to 3,000 residents and is the smallest geographical unit for which the Census Bureau publishes data. Participants in the analytic sample lived in 144 block groups (1-3 participants per block group). Hierarchical cluster analyses was run to derive community cluster profiles including median household income, population density, and ethnic composition as inputs to characterize the different types of communities in which participants lived at enrollment in the study. Three community clusters were identified: 1 = moderate income residents (median household income approximately \$60,000), predominantly of European descent; 2 = Low to moderate income residents (median household income approximately \$40,000), ethnically diverse population; and 3 = Low income (median household income approximately \$33,000), predominantly ethnic minority residents."
<b>Out of School Suspension*</b>	MHFE- MDESE NSR	AY6-AY12	Agency Data. Recoded. During the 6-year data collection period Did the Student receive an out of school suspension?
<b>Place of Birth*</b>	MHFE	T1	Recoded by TIER Mother born in Massachusetts 0=no, 1=yes, Mother place of birth 0 =US, 1= US territory, 2=outside of U, 0=US, 1= US territory, 2=Outside of US, -9999=Missing
<b>Preferred Language*</b>	MHFE	T1	Open-ended: <i>What is the MOB's preferred language?</i> Recoded by TIER to report preferred language English, Spanish, Spanish and English, Other
<b>Race</b>	MHFE	T1	Self-Reported: <i>What is the mother's race category?</i> 1= American Indian/Native American/Alaska Native, 2=East Asian, 3=South Asian, 4=Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 5=Black or African American, 6=White; 7=Other, 8=Multi-racial; 9999=Missing
<b>Relationship Status</b>	MHFE	T1	Self-Reported: <i>What is the MOB's current relationship status?</i> 1=Single, 2=Dating someone other than the baby's father, 3=Dating the baby's father, 4=Engaged/committed relationship with someone other than baby's,

			5=Engaged/committed relationships with baby's father, 6=Married to someone other than baby's father, 7=Married to father of baby, 8=Other
<b>Special Education Services*</b>	MHFE MDESE NSR	AY6-AY12	Agency Data, I Recoded. During the 6-year data collection period <i>was the student identified as having an IEP?</i>
<p><b>District- School level:</b> All data are from the MDESE publicly available aggregate data by district and school. For AY09. Unless otherwise noted, all definitions are from the MDESE data resource information center.</p>			
<b>Annual Drop Out Rate</b>	“Indicates the percentage of students in grades 9-12 who dropped out of school between July 1 and June 30 prior to the listed year and who did not return to school by the following October 1. Dropouts are defined as students who leave school prior to graduation for reasons other than transfer to another school.”		
<b>Churn Rate</b>	“The churn rate measures the number students transferring into or out of a public school or district throughout the course of a school year”		
<b>District-level/ School Level Accountability Status</b>	<p>AY09, AY16: “Massachusetts' Framework for District Accountability and Assistance classifies schools and districts on a five-level scale, classifying those meeting their gap narrowing goals in Level 1 and the lowest performing in Level 5. Approximately eighty percent of schools are classified into Level 1 or 2 based on the cumulative Progress and Performance Index for the "all students" and high needs groups. For a school to be classified into Level 1, the cumulative PPI for both the "all students" group and high needs students must be 75 or higher. If not, the school is classified into Level 2. A school may also be classified into Level 2 if it has low assessment participation rates for any group (between 90 and 94%). Schools are classified into Level 3 if they are among the lowest 20 percent relative to other schools in the same school type category statewide, if one or more subgroups in the school are among the lowest performing 20% of subgroups relative to all subgroups statewide, if they have persistently low graduation rates (less than 60% for any subgroup over a four-year period), or if they have very low MCAS participation rates for any group (less than 90%). The lowest achieving, least improving Level 3 schools are candidates for classification into Levels 4 and 5, the most serious designations in Massachusetts' accountability system.” Level 5 is the most serious category in Massachusetts' accountability system, representing receivership. The Commissioner may place a Level 4 school in Level 5 at the expiration of its redesign plan if the school has failed to improve as required by the goals, benchmarks, or timetable of its redesign plan; or if district conditions make it unlikely that the school will make significant improvement without a Level 5 designation.”</p> <p>Note: Before AY13, Massachusetts’ district and schools used NCLB designations for school and districts as follows: No Status (1), Identified for Improvement Year 1(2), Identified for Improvement Year 2(3), Corrective Action (4), and Restructuring (5). The category No Status represented the highest performing schools and districts. The criteria for advancing to a higher accountability level depended on whether a school or district met AYP. A consequential timeline was followed by required various the implementation of various interventions to improve</p>		

	teaching and learning (Stecher et al., 2010). For example, if a school did not meet AYP for two consecutive years, it is identified for improvement (Year 1). If a school did not meet AYP for three years it was classified as Identified for Improvement Year 2, and so on. Failure to meet AYP for four years resulted in a corrective action status, a fifth year placed the school and/district in final restructuring stage. Restructuring typically indicates state-level intervention, including being placed in receivership.
<b>Graduates Attending Institutions of Higher Education</b>	The percentage of “high school graduates into institutions of higher education within 16 months of graduating high school.” Includes enrollment in two years or four-year IHE (private or public). Excludes job training programs.
<b>Graduation Rate</b>	“Indicates the percentage of students who graduate with a regular high school diploma within 4 years”
<b>Latino Students</b>	“A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.”
<b>Low-Income</b>	“Indicates the percent of enrollment who meet ANY ONE of the following definitions of Low-income: (1) The student is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; or (2) The student receives Transitional Aid to Families benefits; or (3) The student is eligible for food stamps.
<b>Limited English Proficient</b>	“Indicates the percent of enrollment who are limited English proficient, defined as “a student whose first language is a language other than English who is unable to perform ordinary classroom work in English.”
<b>MCAS Proficiency Rates</b>	Using MCAS district and school reports I calculated proficiency rates of various student groups on the 10 grade Math and English Language Arts (ELA) standardized assessments within each district.
<b>Out-of-School Suspension Rate</b>	“The percentage of enrolled students in grades 1-SP who received one or more out-of-school suspensions.”
<b>Per pupil expenditures</b>	Per pupil expenditures are “calculated by dividing a district's operating expenditures by its average pupil membership, including in-district expenditures per pupil and total expenditures per pupil.”
<b>Special Education</b>	“Indicates the percent of enrollment who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).”
<b>Students of Color</b>	This MDESE is not variable. For each district, I calculated the percentage of “Students who did not self-identify as White.
<b>Student Enrollment</b>	Indicates the total number of students enrolled in district as of October 1 of the reported AY.
<b>Teachers Licensed in Teaching Assignment</b>	“Percentage of teachers who are licensed with Provisional, Initial or Professional licensure to teach in the area(s) in which they are teaching.”



C. *Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth: Sources of Support*

1. *Aspirational Capital*: The ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even as a person faces incredible challenges.
2. *Familial Capital*: The cultural knowledge nurtured among family that represents a commitment to wellbeing not just for one's self but to one's expanded understanding kin.
3. *Linguistic Capital*: This wealth refers the various languages and communication skills and styles People of Color have.
4. *Navigational Capital*: The ability, skills, and knowledge necessary to navigate through social institutions that were not necessary designed or created to meet the needs of Communities of Color.
5. *Social Capital*: The networks of people or community resources available to a person.
6. *Resistance Capital*: The possession of knowledge and skills grounded in the legacy of resistance to subordination.

Source: Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91.