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Claudia Gonzalez-Harmon, MS

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THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL AND RESILIENCY ON POST  
SECONDARY EDUCATION ATTAINMENT: A RETROSPECTIVE  
CASE STUDY OF LATINA TEENAGE MOTHERS

by

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ABSTRACT

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL AND RESILIENCY ON POST  
SECONDARY EDUCATION ATTAINMENT: A RETROSPECTIVE  
CASE STUDY OF LATINA TEENAGE MOTHERS

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This qualitative multiple-case study examined factors that contributed to five Latina teenage mothers' success in obtaining a post-secondary education. A demographic survey, individual interviews and focus group interviews were used retrospectively to gain insight from the participants regarding their perceptions of the challenges and assisting factors in completing high school, and, in earning a college degree. Exploring the stories of successful degreed Latinas aimed to identify factors that could contribute to their resiliency to overcome barriers. This study seeks to identify specific strategies, resilience factors, and practices that contributed to their accomplishments. The findings showed the social capital behind the Latinas' success in accomplishing their goal was their family and school system coupled with their resiliency.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables .....	x
List of Figures .....	xi
Chapter .....	Page
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	12
Need for the Study .....	12
Purpose of the Study .....	14
Research Questions.....	14
Significance of the Study .....	15
Summary .....	16
Definitions of Key Terms .....	17
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW .....	19
Risk Factors .....	19
Impact of Adolescent Parenthood on Latinas .....	26
Impact of Pregnancy on Educational Attainment of Latinas .....	31
Theoretical Framework.....	39
Summary .....	48
CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY .....	50
Overview of Research Problem .....	50
Research Purpose and Questions .....	52
Research Design.....	52
Participant Selection .....	53
Data Collection Procedures.....	55
Data Analysis Procedures .....	59
Qualitative Validity.....	60
Privacy and Ethical Considerations .....	60
Research Design Limitations .....	60
CHAPTER IV RESULTS.....	62
Demographic Characteristics of the Participants .....	62
Viviana.....	67
Veronica .....	68
Maria .....	70
Leticia .....	72
Christina.....	74

Barriers to Obtaining a Post-Secondary Degree .....	76
Sharing News of Pregnancy .....	76
Family Dynamics .....	81
Relationships .....	85
Culture .....	89
Health .....	93
Multiple Obligations .....	97
School Mobility .....	100
Stigma of Teen Pregnancy .....	106
Low Socioeconomic Status (SES) .....	109
Summary .....	119
Factors that Assisted in Obtaining a Post-Secondary Degree .....	119
Educational Resources .....	120
Factors of Influence .....	128
Religion .....	137
Community Support .....	142
Personal Transformation .....	146
Positive Outcomes of the Pregnancy .....	148
School Stability .....	149
Value of Education .....	152
Summary .....	154
Resiliency Factors .....	154
Desire to Learn .....	156
Mindset .....	157
Embracing Challenges .....	160
Persistence .....	163
Inspiration .....	167
Summary of Findings .....	168
Conclusion .....	170
 CHAPTER V SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	 171
Introduction .....	171
Summary of the Findings .....	171
Implications .....	184
Policymakers .....	185
Educators .....	186
Community Leaders .....	189
Parents .....	190
Limitations of the Study .....	192
Recommendations for Future Research .....	192
Conclusion .....	193
 REFERENCES .....	 195



APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT (ENGLISH).....	212
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT (SPANISH) .....	217
APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY.....	221
APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	225
APPENDIX E: SUPPORT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	228
APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS.....	229

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
Table 1 Enrollment Characteristics by Income and Generation Status .....	37
Table 2 Sources of Support.....	63
Table 3 Demographic Data of Research Participants .....	63
Table 4 History of Teenage Pregnancy.....	64
Table 5 Marital Status.....	64
Table 6 Educational Achievement .....	66

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
Figure 1 Breakdown of the 9.4 Billion .....	33
Figure 2 Social Capital.....	41

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Christina has just learned she is pregnant. She is an unmarried, Hispanic, 15-year-old U. S. high school sophomore. She wants to keep the baby, but what will her life be like? She has seen other girls like her drop out of school and give up on their career goals as a result of their pregnancies, and she knows that most of them struggle to provide for themselves and their children. Without high school diplomas, teen mothers and their children's fathers have limited opportunities to earn good incomes or receive health benefits from their employers. Most of them come from families with limited means and end up relying heavily on charity and government assistance programs to meet their housing, grocery, clothing, childcare, and health care needs. Christina does not want that for herself or her family. She has always wanted to be a nurse. How can she balance her responsibilities as a mother and a student, so she can finish high school and nursing school without neglecting her child? What internal and external resources does she have access to?

While there is much research on the consequences of U.S. teenage pregnancy, there is limited research on the factors that lead to Latina teenage mother's successfully completing a college degree. This study seeks to help fill that gap by examining the experiences of several Latina mothers who had children as teenagers and successfully completed both high school and secondary education programs. This study identified the specific strategies, resilience factors, and practices, which contributed to their accomplishments, and which may help others achieve similar results.

#### **Need for the Study**

Teenage pregnancy has been a major U. S. public health problem (Corcoran & Pillai, 2007; Gilliam, 2007; Rocca, Doherty, Padian, Hubbard, & Minnis, 2010; Ryan,

Franzetta, & Manlove, 2008). Teenage pregnancy has cost taxpayers \$9.4 billion in healthcare expenses and other state aid (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2017). Furthermore, pregnancy in adolescence is closely correlated with reduced educational performance, increased financial hardships, and dependence upon state aid (Doğan-Ates & Carrión-Basham, 2007; Gilliam, 2007; Hoffman, Foster, & Furstenberg, 1993; Moore, Morrison, & Greene, 1997).

Teenage pregnancy also has posed economic costs and social consequences, specifically for some groups more than others (Maynard, 1997). Substantial disparities persist in teenage birth rates for non-Latina Black and Latina teens; birth rates were more than two times higher (57%) than the rate for non-Latina White teens (Martin et al., 2017). Although teenage pregnancy has declined since 1991, it continues to be a prevalent problem in the U.S. compared to other western industrialized nations (Sedgh, Finer, Bankole, Eilers, & Singh, 2015). In 2015, a total of 229,888 babies were born to women aged 15–19 years in the U.S. (Power to Decide, 2016).

Data from CDC (2010) show that 50% of teen mothers have received high school diplomas and only 30% have earned General Education Development (GED) certificates. This is compared to 90% of women who did not give birth during adolescence who received high school diplomas (CDC, 2010). The Pew Research Center (2013) found that the subpopulation of young Latinas has the highest rate of teen parenthood of any major racial or ethnic group in the country. There is concern in the U.S. about the number of children born to Latina teen mothers and the impact on the mother's educational attainment (CDC, 2016; Ventura, Mathews, & Hamilton, 2001). Currently the Latino population in the U.S. is 17%, but it is expected to reach 31% by 2060 (Pew

Research Center, 2014). The increasing Latino population indicates a potential societal and educational challenge regarding teenage pregnancy (Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Adolescence is a stage in life in which teenagers experience biological, physiological, and social changes. One of the experiences they have faced has been the initiation of sexual behavior, which may have caused consequences for which they were ill prepared, such as contracting sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy (O'Sullivan, Cheng, Harris, & Brooks-Gunn, 2007). Findings indicated the number one predictor of at-risk behavior leading to pregnancy is poverty (CDC, 2016; Djamba, Davidson, & Aga, 2012; Finer & Henshaw, 2006). Research implies the number one predictor for overcoming the cycle of poverty is education (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the factors that contributed to Latina teenage mothers' success in obtaining a post-secondary education. What does research say about the track to overcoming the situation? How were Latinas able to overcome their obstacles and go on to get an education? What was it that allowed them to surpass their situation? The focus of this study was to add to the scholarly discourse on Latinas' success to completing a college degree with this subgroup in mind.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to examine the factors that contributed to Latina teenage mothers' success in obtaining a post-secondary education.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What factors do Latina teenage mothers identify as possible barriers to obtaining a post-secondary education?
2. How do Latina teenage mothers work through educational barriers to obtain a post-secondary education?

3. What educational practices do Latina teenage mothers identify as helpful in obtaining a post-secondary education?
4. What resiliency factors do Latina teenage mothers identify that contribute to obtaining a post-secondary education?

For the purposes of this study, a multiple case study approach was used to examine how high-risk Latina teenage mothers managed to graduate from high school and earn a college degree. The theoretical framework used to guide and support this study was social capital theory and resiliency. The purposeful sample chosen for this study were five adult Latinas who earned their degree from a higher education institution. Additionally, the participants' demographic information was obtained from the completed survey. There were individual interviews per participant. Focus groups were conducted to gather further information regarding Latina mothers' perception of their path to completing a college degree. Qualitative data were analyzed using QSR International's NVivo 11 (QSR International, 2013) qualitative data analysis software to analyze the data.

### **Significance of the Study**

Although there has already been a great deal of research on the consequences of teenage pregnancy for the general population, there has been limited research on the factors that have contributed to Latina teenage mothers successfully completing a college degree. As the U.S. Latino population has increased, there has been a need for reforms and intervention programs that promote positive adaptive behaviors for this growing segment of the population. The research findings from this study could potentially benefit the development of support programs for the Latino community (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). This study sought to find factors that could make the difference between success and failure for Latinas who become pregnant as teenagers.

## Summary

Adolescent pregnancy is not a novel social problem, yet its effects are increasingly more evident in today's world. Teenage parents have been disadvantaged by their increased financial and social responsibilities that had to be met while they attended school (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, & Morgan, 1987). There are fewer resources available to aid young parents because they are perceived as children even though they are now parents. The burden of parenting becomes too much, and the teenager may make drastic changes, such as, choosing to drop out of school and engaging in risky behavior (Estrada, 2012, Solomon-Fears, 2016; Wright & Davis, 2008). Some teenage parents use abusive behavior towards the child (Hoffman & Maynard, 2008). The adverse effects of teenage parenting ultimately cause the parent and child to become a liability to society instead of becoming contributing members of society by obtaining an education (NCPTUP, 2013). Educational attainment has become even more crucial in the marketplace. Without an education, the likelihood of earning the federal minimum wage rate decreases for unskilled workers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). This study focused on five Latina mothers who were the exception and did not drop out of school, regardless of becoming pregnant and raising a child while in high school.

This qualitative dissertation study is structured into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the topic, the need and purpose of the study, and the research questions to consider. Chapter Two outlines the literature review. Chapter Three details the research design of the study. Chapter Four present the results of this qualitative study. Chapter Five contains the summary, implications of the research results and recommendations for future studies.



## Definitions of Key Terms

The following definitions apply to the key terms used throughout dissertation.

*Acculturation.* The degree to which a person from a different culture adopts the norms and values of his or her new culture (Rocca et al., 2010).

*Adolescent/Teenager.* A young person between the ages of 15 and 20 (Rocca et al., 2010).

*Assets.* Positive internal factors that protect the individual against the negative effects of risk (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

*Dropout.* A student who fails to complete school (Burrus & Roberts, 2012).

*Educational Resilience.* Success in school and in other life accomplishments, despite environmental adversaries (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993).

*Familism.* Emphasizes the needs of the family unit over the individual desires (Rocca et al., 2010).

*Federal Poverty Level.* The estimated minimum income a family needs in order to provide for basic needs. It is used as the basis for eligibility for federal and state assistance programs (Department of Health and Human Services, 2016).

*Higher Education.* Education beyond the secondary level; especially: education provided by a college or university.

*Hispanic or Latino.* In this study, the terms Hispanic and Latino(a) have been used interchangeably to describe the ethnic category of individuals.

*Human Capital.* Skills, competence, and other attributes embodied in an individual that are relevant to future economic activity (Zhang, DeBlois, Deniger, & Kamanzi, 2008).

*Resilience.* The process of overcoming the negative effects of risk exposure, coping successfully with traumatic experiences, and avoiding the negative trajectories associated with those risks (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009).

*Resources.* External to the individual and typically come from the environment (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

*Risk Factors.* Potential external and internal barriers to development and learning (Center for Mental Health in School at UCLA, 2016).

*Protective Factors.* Conditions that buffer against the impact of barriers (risk factors) (Center for Mental Health in School at UCLA, 2016).

*Social Capital.* Relations and interactions that a child has with its parents, friends, other adults, the community, the school, and the networks where certain norms and values regulate and shape these relations and interactions (Zhang et al., 2008).

*Socioeconomic status (SES).* Socioeconomic status (SES) is usually measured by determining education, income, occupation, or a composite of these dimensions (Winkleby, Jatulis, Frank, & Fortmann, 1992).

*Success.* The achievement of something desired, planned, or attempted.

*Teenage Mother.* Female under the age of 20 who becomes pregnant (Doğan-Ates & Carrión-Basham, 2007).

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

A national survey indicated that nine out of ten teenagers (87%) and adults (90%) believe reducing teenage pregnancy is a very effective way to reduce the high school dropout rate and improve academic achievement (Albert, 2010). Although the need to reduce the teenage pregnancy rates of Latinas is on the forefront of the National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL] (NCSL, 2016), more studies are needed to examine the contributing factors that help teenage mothers overcome obstacles and lead to successful adulthood for them and their children. The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the factors that contributed to five Latina teenage mothers' success in obtaining a post-secondary education.

The researcher examined literature on adolescent parenting and its effect on the educational attainment of Latina mothers. Chapter Two is divided into five sections. The first section identifies risk factors contributing to teenage pregnancy. The second section describes the impact of adolescent parenthood on Latina teenagers. The third section describes the impact of adolescent parenthood on the educational attainment of Latina teenagers. The fourth section describes parenting students in higher education. The fifth section is a review of the literature on the theoretical framework of social capital theory and resiliency.

#### **Risk Factors**

To understand adolescent pregnancy, the leading risk factors that may lead Latina teenagers to become sexually active and possibly become pregnant need to be considered. It is important to keep the following statements in mind regarding the risk factors. Risk factors can be interrelated and may be the cause and/or consequence of teenage pregnancy and childbearing. While some risk factors may be more prevalent, there is no

order of importance. The subsequent risk factors: culture, low socioeconomic status, low parental involvement, low self-esteem, susceptibility to media influence, and low academic achievement have shown to influence Latina teenagers to become sexually active and possibly become pregnant.

**Culture.** Latinos are the nation's largest minority, and one of its fastest growing ethnic groups (Pew Research Center, 2014). It is estimated that by the year 2030, more than one-quarter of all teenagers will be Latino (NCPTP, 2016). Latina teenagers were found to be twice as likely as White and Black teenagers to desire pregnancy according to the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth (Rocca et al., 2010). While there is not a single explanation for the higher rate of pregnancy intention for Latinas, the authors list a combination of cultural, familial and individual explanations mentioned in the literature (Rocca et al., 2010). Acculturation, familism, home life and high school enrollment, educational aspirations and extracurricular involvement were factors found in the literature explaining Latinas pregnancy intentions (Rocca et al., 2010). According to the Center for Disease Control & Prevention analysis of 2010 census data, 4% Latinas give birth by age fourteen and 19.3% by the age of seventeen. This compares with 6% Black females give birth by age fourteen and 16.6% by the age of seventeen, 1% White females give birth by age fourteen and 6.7% by the age of seventeen, and 1% Asian females give birth by age fourteen and 3.3% by the age of seventeen (Hamilton, Martin, Osterman, et al., 2015). Researchers have requested further research to investigate the disparities in rates of unintended pregnancies in subgroups such as Latinas (Finer & Henshaw, 2006; Gueorguieva et al., 2001; Kahan, 2010; Peterson, Buser, & Westburg, 2010; Rocca et al., 2010).

**Low socioeconomic status (SES).** Low socioeconomic status (SES) is a major risk factor that leads to greater instances of teenage pregnancy, which results in many

young women living in poverty, having health problems, and having lower educational achievement (Burrus & Roberts, 2012; Crespo, 2015; East, Chien, Barber, 2012; Gueorguieva et al., 2001; Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011). The rate of unintended pregnancies among women whose income was below the federal poverty line was three times that of women whose income was at least double the poverty line (Finer & Henshaw, 2006). Low SES populations tend to place an extraordinarily high social value on children (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). As a marginalized group, there are not many educational alternatives to engage them in and minimal promising opportunities in their communities. The systemic inequality is both a cause and a consequence to their low SES status. They anticipate having children and the social role of parenting, because unlike middle-class teenagers, they do not see other alternatives in their future (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Marginalized populations combat inequalities in educational opportunities by being in overcrowded, unsafe schools that are often under-resourced and tend to underperform (Welner & Farley, 2010). The educational path, quality of instruction and student performance are systemic problems (Welner & Farley, 2010). It is not surprising then that the intergenerational cycle is perpetuated according to the results of the Edin and Kefalas (2005) study which revealed that although the unintended pregnancy rate was high among poor women of all races, Latinas had a particularly higher rate (East et al., 2012; Finer & Henshaw, 2006; Rocca et al., 2010).

Socioeconomic status (SES) and health are closely related, and SES can often have profound effects on a person's health (National Center for Health Statistics, 2015). Research findings show that low SES may result in less formal education, fewer community resources, and lower use of contraceptives (Geronimus, 1992; Hovell et al., 1994; Johns, 2011; Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011). Although the use or lack of use of contraception may be influenced by numerous factors (e.g., lack of sex education,

personal feelings, cultural values and attitudes regarding sexuality and childbearing), an alarming finding is the expense of, and lack of access to, birth control (Finer & Henshaw, 2006). Effects on mother's health are due to differences in ability to access health care as well as dietary and other lifestyle choices that are associated with both finances and education. Winkleby et al., (1992) found the best predictor of good health to be higher education.

The preliminary data show 8% of Latinos under 18 years of age and 27.2% 18-64 years of age did not have health insurance in 2015; by comparison, 3.6% of Whites under 18 years of age and 8.8% 18-64 years of age, 2.9% of Blacks under 18 years of age and 14.5% 18-64 years of age and less than 1% of Asians under 18 years of age and 7.3% 18-64 years of age did not have health insurance (National Center for Health Statistics, 2015). The Title X Family Planning Program, enacted in 1970 as Title X of the Public Health Service Act, is a federal grant program dedicated solely to providing individuals with comprehensive family planning and related preventive health services. The program provides access to contraceptive services, supplies and information to all who want and need them. By law, priority is given to persons from low-income families (LeMier, 2014). Although Title X was intended to give low-income females the same fertility control as higher income women, public financial support and services are being cut back (Finer & Henshaw, 2006). This would negatively impact women of low SES.

**Low parental involvement.** There are several risk factors contributing to teenage pregnancy that are related to the family such as communication, parental involvement, and quality of the relationship between the teenage and parents. Parental involvement in students' education plays an important role in their success in school (Burrus & Roberts, 2012). Poor parent-child communication puts teenagers at increased risk of engaging in delinquency, drug use, and risky sexual behavior (Davidson &

Cardemil, 2009; Estrada, 2012; Moncloa, Wilkinson-Lee, & Russell, 2010). Lack of communication about sex with parents and/or guardians may raise the rates of potentially risky sexual behavior (CDC, 2014; Davidson & Cardemil, 2009; Colon & Sanchez, 2010). One study revealed that nearly 60% of Puerto Rican and Mexican American women received no sex education from parents nor from the school (Zambrana, Cornelius, Boykin, & Lopez, 2004).

Parental involvement specifically the father's presence is an issue (Draper & Harpending 1982). Paternal absence may increase the probability a female teenager may engage in sex and subsequently the chance of teenage pregnancy (Katz & Van Der Kloet, 2010). While the father may be present, several researchers have found the father's level of involvement has an effect on a girl's sexual initiation and reproduction (Draper & Harpending, 1982; Katz & Van Der Kloet, 2010; La Guardia, Nelson, & Lertora, 2014). Lower levels of involvement may adversely affect the daughter's sexual behavior whereas higher levels of involvement may help delay sexual behavior (Katz & Van Der Kloet, 2010). These findings support the importance of parental involvement especially from the father.

**Low self-esteem.** Teenagers with lower self-esteem and lack of sex education have a higher risk of becoming pregnant (Kahan, 2010; Lerman, 1997; Peterson et al., 2010; Rocca et al., 2010). Self-esteem is a personal assessment of self and reflects how an individual perceives themselves to be worthy or capable (Anderson & Polmhausen, (1999). Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2003) asserts that self-esteem is facilitated by the teenagers' actual accomplishments; whereas negative academic experiences may lead to low self-esteem (Estrada, 2012). Students internalize their negative experiences and label themselves as "dysfunctional" or "abnormal" (Estrada, 2012). They see their abilities and intelligence as fixed and do not have high levels of

self-efficacy, which leads to low self-esteem (Dweck, 2006). Low self-esteem places a teenager at risk of dropping out of school by doubting they are have the ability to learn (Dweck, 2006; Harris, 2011; Kaplan, Peck, & Kaplan, 1997). Females experiencing low self-esteem may find themselves dropping out of school or becoming pregnant, preferring the latter as motherhood gives them a sense of success (Lerman, 1997). Consequently, low self-esteem may cause teenagers with frustrated feelings to be easily susceptible to behavioral problems (e.g. substance use, sexual risk) (Estrada, 2012).

Peterson, Buser, and Westburg (2010) corroborated these findings in a study of 610 high-poverty minority high school students. Eight high school health education classes were randomly selected to look at the substance abuse and risk behaviors. Students were given surveys to complete to determine if the six variables showed a relationship between protective factors and adolescent high-risk behaviors. The findings of the study found a link between substance use and sexual risk taking (Peterson et al., 2010). The likelihood of teenagers presenting at-risk characteristics increased their probability of engaging in sex and possibly becoming pregnant. The research suggested that higher levels of social support increased self-esteem, which lowered the levels of risk behaviors (Peterson et al., 2010).

**Susceptibility to media influence.** Teenagers receive the most influence from their family, mainly their parents, and society, specifically the media (Albert, 2010; Doğan-Ateş & Carrión-Basham, 2007; Eaton et al., 2010; Gilliam, 2007; Guilamo-Ramos & Bouris, 2008). Research finds if teenagers are lacking parental involvement and have low self-esteem, they may be more susceptible to the influence of the media. The media is a source of sexual socialization for some Latino adolescents (Albert, 2010; Eaton et al., 2010). The extent of exposure to the media increases its influence on teenagers' decision-making (Gurman, 2009). The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation conducted a



national study that found Black and Hispanic youth consume nearly 4.5 hours more media a day compared to White youth (Kaiser Foundation, 2010).

The content in the media may also influence a teenager's decision-making. Gurman (2009) conducted a study to measure the implications of sexual content in fictional narrative television programs popular among Latino adolescents. Three bilingual coders collected data by watching randomly selected programs in English and Spanish and coding it during a specific period. Fifteen episodes were randomly selected. Findings revealed a difference in the gender initiating sexual behavior in teenagers. More males initiated the sexual behavior regardless of scene language (43.5%) but more females initiated in English than the Spanish language scenes (70.6% versus 29.4%; Fisher's exact  $p=.016$ ). The dominating portrayal of the male, may explain why females hesitate to take charge of their sexual experience and insist protection be used (Gurman, 2009; Small, Weinman, Buzi, & Smith, 2010).

**Low academic achievement.** Low academic achievement and grade retention were two of the 13 At-Risk Indicator Codes used by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to identify students who are at-risk of dropping out of school (TEA, 2016). Academic underachievement or underperformance puts a student at risk for grade retention. Latinos have the highest high school dropout rate (12%) and one of the highest grade-retention rates in the U.S. compared to other racial and/or ethnic groups (Pew Research Center, 2016). Latinos are more likely than Whites and African Americans to be retained (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011). There may be several reasons for the retention of a student but most of the times it is due to low academic achievement (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011). Low academic achievement is an at-risk predictor of early pregnancy (Gueorguieva et al., 2001; Lerman, 1997).

The mentioned literature recognizes the risk factors: culture, low social-economic status, low parental involvement, low self-esteem, susceptibility to media influence, and low academic achievement as contributors to adolescent parenthood. It is important to keep in mind risk factors are not extrapolative and may occur in isolation or inclusive and do not have a specific order. While uncovering the risk factors may not be the solution to preventing adolescent parenthood, they can serve to help identify susceptible adolescents. This would allow the targeted population to receive early interventions to help prevent teenage pregnancy.

### **Impact of Adolescent Parenthood on Latinas**

Adolescence is an important period for one's psychosocial development. It is often the peak time of growth physically, mentally, and socially (Lerner, 2005). Adolescence is often portrayed as a carefree, fun time in one's life. More often, this is not the case for adolescents who become pregnant. In Taylor (2009) the authors conducted secondary analysis of data from The Wisconsin Longitudinal Study (WLS). The analysis included three waves of data from the start in 1957, 1975, and 1992. Taylor (2009) looked at 548 adults who gave birth during adolescence compared to those who gave birth after adolescence. The authors have focused on the midlife outcomes of adolescent child bearers. The findings showed women who gave birth during adolescence had a reduction in completing school, fewer options in occupations, health problems and were more likely to have unstable marriages (Taylor, 2009). East et al. (2012) study analyzed adolescents' assessments of their pregnancies. They have used cross-lagged analyses to examine how one hundred unmarried, first-time-pregnant Mexican American adolescents felt about their pregnancy. Specifically, the authors research set out to answer how the adolescents' pregnancy intendedness or 'wantedness' related to their adjustment to parenting. East et al. (2012) study found similar outcomes

to Taylor (2009) study, showing the teenagers pregnancy to be highly stressful, a health risk, a financial burden and a strain on relationships. Specifically, some of the results showed the pregnancy 'wantedness' declined significantly prenatally to post birth (76% to 26%). This change led to higher parenting stress and frequent harsh parenting of the child at 6 months postpartum. This stress impedes positive parent-child relationships "wherein this cycle is perpetuated across the child's early years, setting in motion a dynamic and circular cycle of high maternal regret leading to parenting stress, which leads to poor mother-child relations and children's behavior problems" (East et al., 2012, p. 181).

**Highly stressful.** Adolescence is often synonymous with stress in the sense that stress is natural for this period of development (Lerner, 2005). To add pregnancy to the already "stressful" adolescence intensifies the stress. East et al. (2012) studied 100 pregnant Latina teenagers pre-and postpartum. The participants completed a short interview and a self-administered questionnaire at the three study time points during pregnancy and postpartum. The results revealed teenage pregnancy could be highly stressful because of its uncertainties and the teenagers' lack of readiness for the responsibility of parenthood. Pregnancy is also a major interruption to their schooling and future.

Conversely, teenage pregnancy can be a favorable adjustment for those Latinas wanting to be pregnant (East et al., 2012). In the conclusion of their research East et al. (2012) advise professionals working with pregnant adolescents to inquire if their pregnancy was wanted, if so, they may fare better in parenting. Data show there is a high number of Latina teenagers desiring pregnancy, thus it can be assumed the pregnancy would be a rewarding experience (East et al., 2012; Finer & Henshaw, 2006; Rocca et al.,

2010). While this may be true for some, others may find being pregnant as teenager to be stressful.

Like East et al. (2012) these authors found similar findings. Edin and Kefalas (2005), spent five years interviewing 162 (Black  $n = 63$ , White  $n = 52$ , Latina  $n = 47$ ) low-income single mothers living in some of America's poorest inner-city neighborhoods and found that such women see a baby born as their opportunity to prove their worth. One of the Latina participants in Edin and Kefala's study (2005) saw having children as a normal part of life. There are different explanations for teenage mothers' desire for pregnancy such as children seen as, "necessity, an absolutely essential part of a young woman's life, the chief source of identity and meaning" (Edin & Kefalas, 2005, p. 6). The authors of the study almost never heard the participants describe having children as negative but instead credited the children as having "saved" them (Edin & Kefalas, 2005).

**Health risks.** Latina teenagers currently have the highest birth rate among all teenagers, more than one and a half times higher than the overall teenage birth rate (Hamilton, Martin, & Osterman, 2016). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), pregnancy in the teenage years is associated with an increased risk for potentially serious health problems for both the mother and child. Teenage girls who are pregnant are at risk of not getting adequate prenatal care for mother and child (CDC, 2016). Teenage mothers are more likely to develop anemia during their pregnancy and have a higher risk of getting high blood pressure and suffer pregnancy complications such as premature birth, which is a leading cause of having low-birth-weight babies (CDC, 2016). According to the CDC, pregnant teenagers may also be at higher risk for postpartum depression (CDC, 2016).

In addition to health risks there are mental health concerns. East et al. (2012) found teenage pregnancy to be associated with Latina mothers' experiencing mental health issues such as postpartum depression and anxiety. In response, Boyd (2016) started a support group for Latinas to help with their mental health after seeing the need to address self-harm and suicidal attempts, "at an age when identity development, which relies on the intersection of gender, sexuality, socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, is at its peak, the way a girl manages the stress of negotiating gender roles and pressures in her Latino household is crucial to her mental health" (Boyd, 2016, n.p.).

In addition to health risks to the teenage mother there are health risks to the children of adolescents. According to the CDC (2016), children of teenage parents are at a higher risk of low birth weight and infant mortality. Children of teenage parents tend to not only have poor health outcomes but behavioral and socioemotional problems as well as (CDC, 2016). Therefore, these children tend to have behavioral problems and chronic medical conditions (CDC, 2016). Consequently, they have lower school achievement and drop out of high school, and more likely to be unemployed or underemployed as young adults and give birth as teenagers (CDC, 2016). This negatively impacts the adolescent mother as more time, attention, and resources are required of her to care for the child. She must miss more school to take the child to doctor appointments, which causes her to fall behind in school work and possibly lose graduation credits. This prevents the mother from dedicating time and effort to school. She is faced with a choice to make take care of her child or attend school. More often the choice is to drop out of school (Simuforosa & Rosemary, 2015; Taylor, 2009). Thirty percent of females who dropped out of school cited pregnancy as the reason (Solomon-Fears, 2016).

**Economic and social effects.** According to the Pew Research Center (2014), about 30% of Latino children under 18 live in poverty as compared with about 20%

nationwide. The financial strain from the pregnancy is felt from the onset. There is a cost for the prenatal care and doctor visits, maternity clothes, hospital fees, baby products and childcare. Smithbattle (2007) described teenage pregnancy as the “beginning of a downward spiral that includes dropping out of school, depending on welfare or minimum wage jobs, and remaining single, poor mothers” (p. 409). Future financial capital for adolescents is highly dependent on educational achievement. Obtaining an education is one of the most apparent challenges facing teenage mothers because unlike obtaining work, it is not perceived as an immediate need, but it can be the forecaster of lasting financial capital (Kahan, 2010). Educational achievement makes economic stability and success possible (Wright & Davis, 2008).

Teenage pregnancy places an unusual strain on the teenager’s social relationships specifically, with her and the biological father, her parents, her friends and school personnel. The pressure of the pregnancy on the couple often leads to a disruption in the relationship. Pregnancy as a teenager increases the likelihood of the mother being single and less likely to marry the father of the child (CDC, 2016). Most romantic relationships between the teenage mother and biological father end before the child’s preschool years (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Edin and Kefalas (2005) research revealed that the mothers preferred to remain single rather than to be tied down in a relationship they felt was not going to be successful. The biological father is often not present in the child’s life and does not provide financial support (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). In addition, the teenagers’ immediate family is affected by the news of the pregnancy. Anger is often the initial reaction to the pregnancy from the teenage mother’s family and in some cases, the pregnant teenager is kicked out of the home (National Network for Youth, n.d). At school, the pregnant teenager may encounter stigma and at times blatant discrimination from educators due to the pregnancy (Doğan-Ates & Carrión-Basham, 2007; Estrada,

2012). She may also disconnect with her friends because of the different path (Estrada, 2012).

Parents have a significant role in Latino adolescents acquiring the norms and values of the mainstream culture (Doğan-Ates & Carrión-Basham, 2007; Guilamo-Ramos & Bouris, 2008; Moncloa et al., 2010). The parents are the primary caretakers that comprise one of the three immediate environments of a teenager (Zhang et al., 2008). Most adolescents value their relationships with their parents and have core values that are consistent with those of their parents (Lerner, 2005). The developmental trajectory of many Latina youth is interconnected rather than an independent course. This is in line with familismo, the value placed on the family system (Guilamo-Ramos & Bouris, 2008; Feldman & Pittman, 2008; Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006). Latinas have a greater amount of involvement in the family's dealings and responsibilities. More often, the family is accepting of the teenage pregnancy; this has been one reason noted for the higher number of Latina teenagers becoming pregnant (Doğan-Ates & Carrión-Basham, 2007). The teenager trusts her family to be there to help. This strong relational interaction of social capital increases the human capital for both the teenager and the child (Zhang et al., 2008). This aids the teenage mother to obtain help with the role of motherhood from family members (Doğan-Ates & Carrión-Basham, 2007; Estrada, 2012).

### **Impact of Pregnancy on Educational Attainment of Latinas**

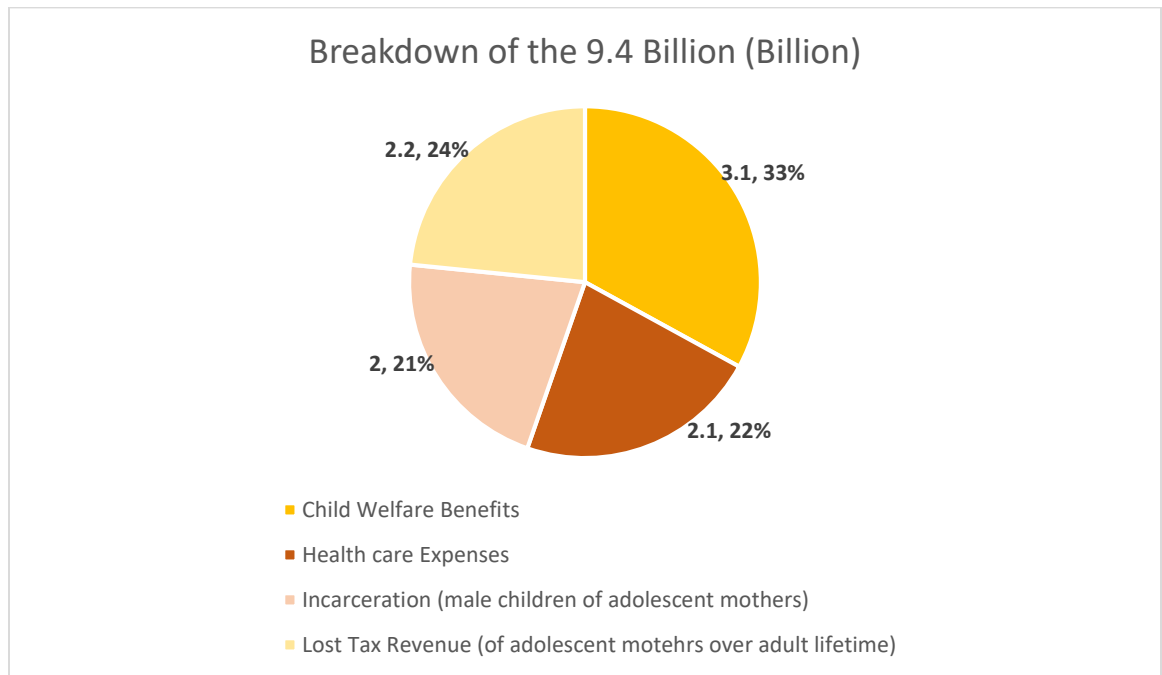
Adolescence is an important period for an individual's educational attainment. The teenage years are often associated with the completion of high school and preparation for one's career (TEA, 2016). A common undesired consequence to teenage pregnancy is the forfeiture of an education. According to research, the number of teenage mothers who graduate from high school is only 50% compared to 90% of mothers who

did not give birth during adolescence (CDC, 2016). In a pioneer, longitudinal study by Furstenberg (1976) the adolescent participants cited pregnancy and/or marriage as the principal reason for leaving school. The individual may not see the long-term effect of her immediate needs. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs not until the most basic needs are met can other needs be met (Simuforosa & Rosemary, 2015). There can be negative consequences when compensating for an unmet basic need such as dropping out of school to get a job to put food and shelter.

Teenage pregnancy poses a diminished financial capital for all involved. For starters, educational attainment is negatively impacted for Latina teenage mothers, thus affecting their subsequent financial capital, which may eventually cause them to turn to society for various forms of public assistance (Chase-Lansdale, Brooks-Gunn, & Paikoff, 2015; CDC, 2016; Doğan-Ates & Carrión-Basham, 2007; Stranger-Hall & Hall, 2011). The decrease in tax dollars to the American economy continues for teenage mothers who lose years of education because of the hardships that come along with unplanned pregnancies (CDC, 2016; Chase-Lansdale et al., 2015). Following is the breakdown of the \$9.4 billion (Figure 1) per year teenage pregnancy costs U.S. taxpayers (NCPTUP, 2013). Other barriers to graduation for pregnant teenagers include lack of day care options, lack of interest, and stigma (Doğan-Ates & Carrión-Basham, 2007; Estrada, 2012).



Figure 1  
Breakdown of the 9.4 Billion



**Day care.** A lack of day care is a barrier for a teenage parents' education. Often the primary responsibility for childcare falls on the teenage mother (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003). Given that most of the teenage mothers come from low SES families who must work, there is a lack of day care options within the family. If they are lucky, they may find a family friend or other social support to help care for the child. Expectantly the social support is nearby and dependable to prevent the teenage mother from missing days from school. An option is to seek government assistance to pay for the day care. This tends to be a lengthy and complicated process, which discourages applicants. Additional transportation may be required to get to the facilities, which is also a deterrent. In addition, knowing the baby was with strangers often have caused the mother to worry and be unable to focus on school (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003). Often, this leads to teenage mothers opting to drop out of school and care for their child.

**Lack of interest.** A noted cause of teenage pregnancy and dropping out of school is the lack of interest in school (Peterson et al., 2010). In their study, Legault, Green-Demers, and Pelletier (2006) define academic amotivation and the academic consequences for high school students. Their definition of amotivation comes from one of the three types of motivation in the self-determination theory. According to the self-determination theory motivation is either intrinsic, extrinsic or lacking motivation, which would make it amotivation (Legault et al., 2006). According to the authors when an individual is in an unmotivated state, they are unable to see the root cause or ramification of their behavior (Legault et al., 2006). This may cause some to feel disconnected and have a reduced belief in their ability (Legault et al., 2006). The researchers look at the four subtypes of amotivation: ability beliefs, effort beliefs, characteristics of the task, and value placed on the task (Legault et al., 2006). Amotivation has been a reason behind students dropping out of school due to poor academic performance, misconduct in school, or merely undervaluing school and school work (Legault et al., 2006).

The disconnect and the lack of interest in school drives some teenagers to seek a purpose to belong and be loved (Simuforosa & Rosemary, 2015). This void is often satisfied by having a child (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Some prefer motherhood as they have an interest and know-how (Lerman, 1997). Although their initial desire to become pregnant is short lived, the consequences may not be easily undone (East et al., 2012).

**Stigma.** Teenage pregnancy in the U.S. is more often seen as a social problem and teenage mothers may become synonymous with “welfare mothers” (Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014). Latinas must combat the stigma of the pregnancy and lower expectations of them in school. The school is one such institution that may limit Latinas’ economic, academic, and professional achievements. This limits opportunity for young Latinas to reach their full potential (Schuster, 2003). The combination of low

expectations from society and their own expectations for the future may result in Latina teenagers' becoming pregnant and dropping out of school (Doğan-Ates & Carrión-Basham, 2007; Estrada, 2012, Wright & Davis, 2008).

Assuming the teenage mother can overcome the odds and receive a high school education and goes on to college, their struggle is not over, research depicts they continue to face struggles in college (Gama-Rodriguez, 2016). Young Latina mothers face multiple factors challenging their completing a college degree. If they are a low-income and first-generation student, they tend to lack preparedness for college, lack of financial aid knowledge, and struggle acclimating to the university setting (Gama-Rodriguez, 2016).

**Lack preparedness for college.** A lack of academic participation is a barrier to college for Latino students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), 93% of White female students receive a high school diploma compared to only 68% of Latina students. The comparison of students earning bachelor's degrees displays an even larger gap with 36% of White female students compared to only 16% of Latina students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

The premise of the Windsor (2013) study was on the participation in college preparatory courses, such as Advanced Placement (AP) and Dual credit courses; to increase post-secondary attainment. Windsor (2013) study explored 171 Latino senior students' college readiness regarding social capital. The high school students included 43.9% ( $n = 75$ ) males and 56% ( $n = 96$ ) females. Specifically, the study considered the relationship between Latino students' social capital and the students' high school course selection. The findings of the study showed the advance courses helped students gain admittance into college and the courses gave students the ability to earn college credit while in high school (Windsor, 2013). The findings showed the difference in academic

achievement was due to the imbalanced access to advanced courses and challenging curriculum of Latino students (Windsor, 2013).

**Lack of financial aid knowledge.** Research demonstrates one reason for the lack of interest in academic participation is the uncertainty in how to pay for college (Feeney & Heroff, 2013). Most of the literature suggests that there is some correlation between completing the Federal Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) and college attendance (Feeney & Heroff, 2013). The financial hardship of paying for college is made more complicated for the parenting student being they are not a traditional student. As a first generation and non-traditional-college student, they are in need of financial aid. Yet, research suggests this population are the least likely to complete the FAFSA (Feeney & Heroff, 2013). Part of the deterrent in completing the FAFSA is the amount of information required to complete the application. The FAFSA application asks for detailed parental information, as it is presumed there is parental support even when that is not the case for non-traditional students. Completing the FAFSA application is a complex process and timely. The process intensifies for first-generation students and their parents, as neither is familiar with the college application process (Feeney & Heroff, 2013). The lack of financial aid knowledge causes eligible students to not complete the FAFSA or complete it too late to qualify for state aid (Feeney & Heroff, 2013). This greatly diminishes the chance the student may pursue college due to a lack of funds.

**Struggle acclimating to the university setting.** Money is not the only deterrent to college. For a low-income and first-generation student, there may be a greater struggle acclimating to the university setting due to social and cultural factors. Once a student gets into college, they find unanticipated barriers such as lack of exposure to college life and lack of self-efficacy (Smith, 2010). One explanation for the lack of confidence is due to the overwhelming feeling of guilt from breaking away from *familismo*, or the family

system (Banks-Santilli, 2015). First-generation students experience conflicting feelings. On one side, their college trajectory may be viewed to help the family and break the poverty cycle, but on the other side, it may be viewed as a rejection of their culture (Banks-Santilli, 2015). The mixed feelings may cause a student to experience a loss of sense of belonging and become disengaged (Smith, 2010). Low-income, first-generation students are 26% more likely to leave higher education after the first year (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Another explanation low-income, first-generation student struggle to acclimate to the university setting is due to their multiple obligations outside of college (families, work, children) and characteristics that affect their enrollment (Table 1).

*Table 1*  
Enrollment Characteristics by Income and Generation Status

Characteristics	Low-Income, First Generation	Not Low- Income and Not First- Generation
Delayed Enrollment	53%	24%
Live Off- Campus	93%	74%
Attend Part- Time	52%	43%
Work Full- Time	37%	26%

The multiple obligations require students' time and focus which then jeopardizes the time and focus they must apply toward their course work. The multiple obligations also take away from the student being fully engaged in college life. Students underperform in college when they do not interact with peers and faculty, make use of study groups and other support services (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

**Parenting students in higher education.** Parenting students incorporate at least five (noted with \*) of the seven factors that put students at risk of leaving postsecondary education without acquiring a degree. The seven factors include (Engle & Tinto, 2008):

Delaying entry into postsecondary education after high school.

\*Attending part-time.

\*Working full-time while enrolled.

\*Being financially independent from parents.

\*Having dependent children.

\*Being a single parent.

Having a GED.

Although pregnancy as a teenager is not an ideal predicament, it does not justify treating the teenager as a castaway and discounting their future. There is hope for the teenage mother and child. They can prevail. Supporting research implies it is not the maternal age that has an adverse effect on educational outcomes (Levine, Emery, & Pollack, 2007).

Research supports that an important variable contributing to a successful outcome in an adolescent pregnancy is maternal education (Gueorguieva et al., 2001). In their research, Wright and Davis (2008) acknowledge early childbearing creates social and economic disadvantages for the individual and child. Their study have focused on the resiliency of teenage mothers and the social support provided by nonparental adult

support figures in the school setting. Specifically, their study set out to find out how educators support teenage parents to obtain their education. The researchers found the main predictor of the subjects' success was the pregnant teenager's mindset on their held belief of educational ambitions and goals, which are highly influenced by the educators (Wright & Davis, 2008). Ameliorating some of the negative consequences of teenage parenthood is possible with intervention programs targeting the Latina population (Gueorguieva et al., 2001). According to this suggestion, intervention programs along with social capital, human capital, and financial capital may be able to facilitate the production of human capital in a teenager (Zhang et al., 2008).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework used to guide and support this study was social capital theory and resiliency. Studies have shown the benefit of social capital theory and resiliency for disadvantaged teenagers (Zhang et al., 2008). In line, social capital theory and resiliency address risk factors (e.g., Latina, low social-economic status, lack of parental involvement, low self-esteem, susceptibility to media influence, and low academic achievement) faced by teenagers by upholding and highlighting certain qualities and contextual factors that help teenagers to accomplish successful adaptation and change (Zhang et al., 2008). Social capital theory and resiliency focus on the social capital and resources supporting at-risk teenagers in overcoming difficulties (Zhang et al., 2008).

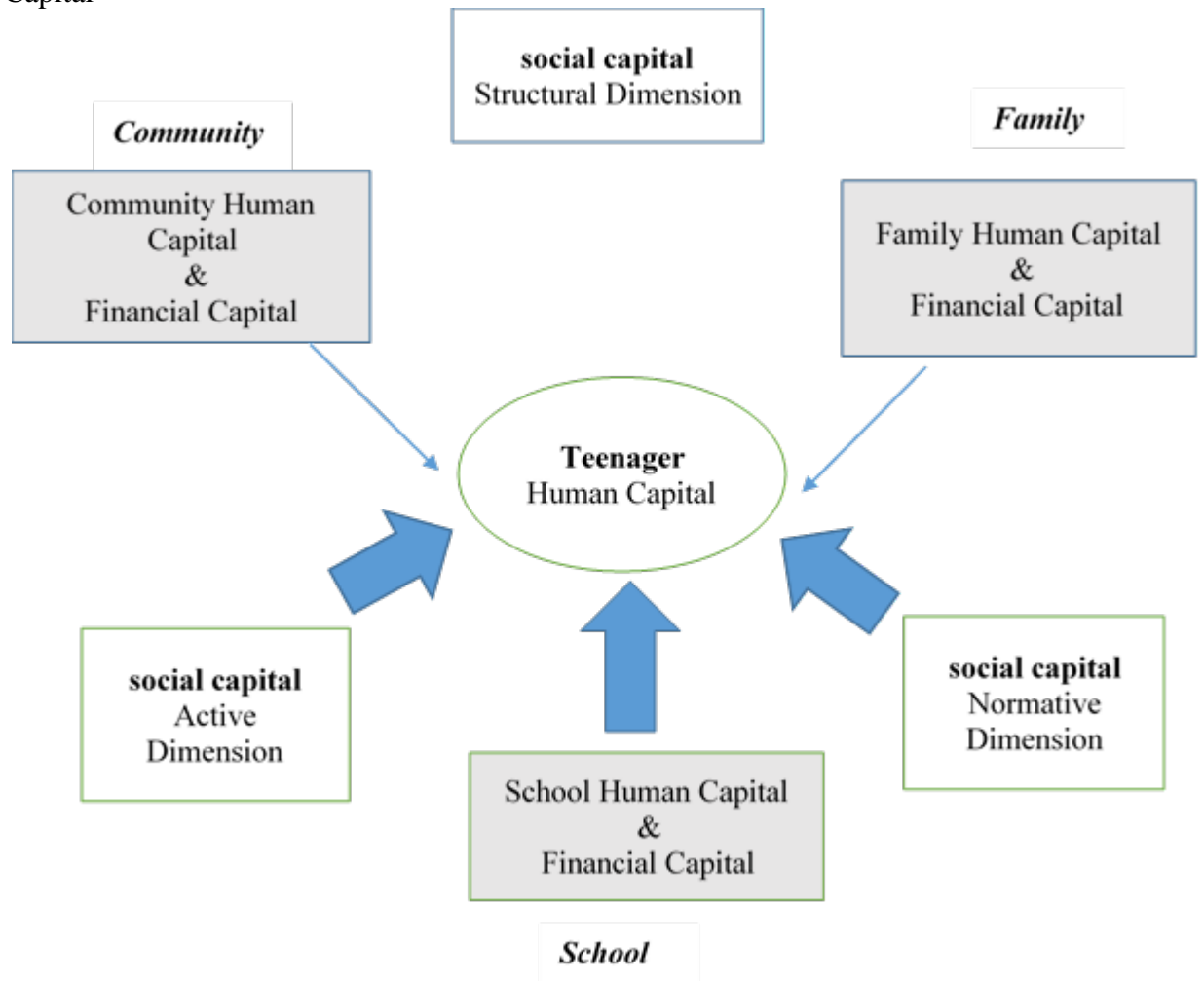
Lin (2005) points out the different theoretical types of capital. Lin (2005) starts by noting capital is both a concept and a theory. Adding that as a concept, capital “represents investments in certain types of resources of value in a given society” (p. 3). Capital as a theory, “describes the process by which capital is captured and reproduced for returns” (p. 3). Regardless of the form referred to as capital, at-risk teenagers are

valuable in society and need resources from family, community, and school to reproduce positive gains in society. Social capital for this study and in the context of education has been theorized in position of its purpose in producing human capital in the immediate social environment of a teenager (Zhang et al., 2008). Human capital for this study refers to “skills, competence, and other attributes embodied in [teenagers] that are relevant to future economic activity” (Zhang et al., 2008, p. 106). For this study, the definition of resilience by Perez et al., 2009 has used. Resilience is the process of overcoming the negative effects of risk exposure, coping successfully with traumatic experiences, and avoiding the negative trajectories associated with those risks. Social capital theory and resiliency examined factors that generate positive outcomes and efforts that create or reinforce the protective conditions and processes a teenager employs to overcome their hardship of teenage pregnancy and become a contributing member in society.

The three immediate environments of a teenager include the family, community, and school (Zhang et al., 2008). Specifically, social capital premise is on the structure of relationships between a teenager and parents, other adults in the community, and friends (Zhang et al., 2008). The interactions or functions of social capital generate human capital. social capital is defined as “relations and interactions that a child has with his or her parents, other adults, and his or her friends in the family, the community, the school, and the networks where certain norms and values regulate and shape these relations and interactions” (Zhang et al., 2008, p. 106). Human capital refers to “skills, competence, and other attributes embodied in a school child that are relevant to future economic activity” (Zhang et al., 2008, p. 106). The connection between social capital and human capital along with immediate social environments is illustrated in Figure 2, social capital structure consists of three social capital environments family, community, and school compound dimensions exist (Zhang et al., 2008).



Figure 2  
Social Capital



Within the three social capital environments consisting of the family, community, and school compound dimensions exist (Zhang et al., 2008). The social capital is further divided into three dimensions: structural, normative, and active (Zhang et al., 2008). The social capital theory proposes that capitals are interrelated. The structural social capital is the collective institute to which a child has contact with other members and setting where relations happen (e.g. the family with family member, the school with teachers) (Zhang et al., 2008). The Normative social capital involves the customs and beliefs (i.e. obligation, expectation, and trustworthiness) rooted in the social structure that control the

communication and actions between participants who share the same social structure (Zhang et al., 2008). The Active social capital involves social skills and relations that happen on the structural setting controlled by the customs (Zhang et al., 2008). It is important for the relational interactions between the individual and adult be meaningful to make an impact on the individual (Zhang et al., 2008). The Active social capital is the most influential, as it allows the social capital to generate human capital through actions and interactions that is relationships (Zhang et al., 2008). Accordingly, for disadvantaged individuals' social capital along with school human capital and financial capital shield the negative effects of low family and community human and financial capital (Figure 2) (Zhang et al., 2008). Research on resilience has shown that certain factors can help at-risk individuals overcome problems regardless of their opposing atmosphere (Zhang et al., 2008).

**Resiliency.** The study of resiliency started in the late 1970s in psychiatry, clinical psychology, and human development and it continues to be a popular topic. Garmezy and Masten (1991) define resilience as “a process of, or capacity for, or the outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging and threatening circumstances” (p. 459). Werner (1993) uses the concept of resiliency to refer to those children who successfully cope with biological and social risk factors. The resiliency aspect is especially relevant for ethnic and racial minorities because it “seeks to identify protective, nurturing factors in the lives of those who would otherwise be expected to be characterized by a variety of adverse outcomes...precisely because it emphasizes hope and potential” (Resnick, 2000, 159). Resiliency characteristics (i.e., easy temperament, autonomy, self-esteem and self-efficacy, problem solving skills, senses of purpose, and aspiration) have been shown to help teenagers resolve conflict and cope with peer pressures (Garmezy, 1993). Resiliency helps teenagers to adapt to new situations (Zhang et al., 2008). Bernard

(1993) describes resiliency as “the ability to bounce back successfully despite exposure to severe risks” (p. 44). Resilience, at one time was considered inherent and static; but a shift of focus has transpired to a combination of character traits and external protective factors (i.e., family, school, community) (Zhang et al., 2008). This shift became popular with educators as it allowed them to focus on students’ strengths and/or on the strengths in the environment. In the educational context, the factors that promote positive school-related and developmental outcomes are rooted in environmental interactions among three systems: family, school, and peer group/community (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Zhang et al., 2008).

**Family factors.** The family is the first social capital unit where norms, values, expectations and sanctions are shared and regulate behavioral dispositions (Zhang et al., 2008). Primarily the parents are the first form of social capital and attachment in a child’s life. If the attachment is that of “good and caring relationships” this will be beneficial to the child’s success in school and other areas (Zhang et al., 2008).

Research confirms that the primary influence (or lack thereof) for a teenager stems from a stable family or home environment. A survey conducted by the Power to Decide, the Campaign to Prevent Unplanned Pregnancy in 2010 found that 46% teenagers indicated that their parents were the strongest influence in their decisions regarding sex (Albert, 2010). This same survey found Latino teenagers (55%) were more likely than their non-Latino Black (50%) and non-Latino White (42%) counterparts to say that parents most influence their decisions about sex (Albert, 2010). Not only did this survey acknowledge parents as the strongest influence regarding sex education, but it also emphasized teenagers’ need for parental approval and open communication (Doğan-Ates & Carrión-Basham, 2007; Guilamo-Ramos & Bouris, 2008; Moncloa et al., 2010). These findings demonstrate the influence parents have on their teenagers’ decision-making.

One characteristic in a traditional Latino family that can be perceived as either a risk or protective factor is the importance of the role of motherhood (Estrada, 2012). The role of motherhood is held in high esteem in traditional Latino culture (Doğan-Ates & Carrión-Basham, 2007; Estrada, 2012). Because of its perceived value, when a teenager becomes pregnant it may not be viewed as a problem, but rather an expected part of womanhood. The rigid gender roles of women in traditional Latino culture does not allow much deviation from that of being daughter, sister, wife, mother and caretaker (Estrada, 2012). The acceptance of the teenage pregnancy and helping by the family falls in line with the value of *familismo*, which refers to reciprocal support and obligation between family members (Calzada, Huang, Linares-Torres, Singh, & Brotman, 2014). Familism emphasizes the needs of the family unit over the individual desires (Rocca et al., 2010). Thus, less emphasis is on the education of females, which perpetuates the low educational attainment for Latinas (Estrada, 2012).

**Acculturation.** The level of acculturation has been associated with the level of educational attainment for Latinas. Research supports the belief that culture does shape a person's attitude, beliefs, and behaviors (Guilamo-Ramos & Bouris, 2008; Padilla & Perez, 2003). To improve efforts aimed at supporting Latina females, it is necessary to understand how acculturation influences their choices. Acculturation is the process an individual goes through while adjusting to the norms and values of his or her new culture (Guilamo-Ramos & Bouris, 2008; Rocca et al., 2010). It is important to note that not all Latinas personify the norms and values of the dominant culture at the same time (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). A disparity in education between Latino boys and girls has been linked to the acculturation level (Colon & Sanchez, 2010). Parents with traditional backgrounds tend to be more lenient with their sons and allow them more freedom than with their daughters. Latinas tend to be restricted to the home, which causes them to be

less acculturated (Colon & Sanchez, 2010). This may also help explain the disparity between Latinas continuing their education. Studies have reported the greater the level of acculturation the higher educational level achieved (Guinn, Vincent, Wang, & Villas, 2011). A higher level of acculturation has been found to be a factor in academic achievement (Guinn, et al., 2011). Some researchers view acculturation as a multidimensional phenomenon due to its dual processes of accepting or rejecting the dominant culture and maintaining or rejecting the original culture (Colon & Sanchez, 2010). Still others view acculturation as a linear process. Yet not all researchers agree that being more oriented towards the U.S. mainstream culture yields positive educational outcomes (Colon & Sanchez, 2010). These researchers attribute factors such as recent immigration and generation status to the positive educational outcomes. Second generation children tend to achieve better in school than third generation children (Colon & Sanchez, 2010). The immigrant parents transmitting their values of success to their children explains why second-generation children tend to do better in school (Colon & Sanchez, 2010). One thing researchers agree on is the connection between the value placed on education by Latino adolescents and their educational trajectory (Colon & Sanchez, 2010). A limitation to this fitting together could be due to Latinos residing in communities with diminutive economic opportunity where education does not have much value (Colon & Sanchez, 2010). This is why the school and community settings are important. One way to aid in the acculturation process is to create a culturally safe environment, “which is safe for people; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of who they are, and what they need” (Williams, n.d. p. 2). A culturally safe environment is one in which there is, “shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, or learning together with dignity, and truly listening” (Williams, n.d. p. 2). One way in which a culturally safe environment is carried out is using appropriate

language and behavior (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Williams, n.d.). The normative social capital can facilitate the teenager in using other capitals available, by doing so the teenager shall produce more human capital (Zhang et al., 2008).

**School factors.** The school setting serves as a structural social capital (Zhang et al., 2008). This is more apparent for individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Zhang et al., 2008). The school compensates for the lack of human capital and financial capital to be able to produce the same amount of human capital for these individuals (Zhang et al., 2008). Individuals need to have access to good peers, teachers, counselors, and administrations to help facilitate the production of more human capital. Similarly, Legault, Green-Demers, and Pelletier (2006) found that social support within the student's environments were influential in their academia.

Lee and Burkham (2003) take a nontraditional look at the causes of high school dropout. Instead of focusing on the students' social and academic ability as factors for dropping out, they explore the schools' influence on a student as reasons of dropping out of high school. They shed light on the two parties involved in the outcome of dropping out, the institution and the individual, school and student. They emphasize dropping out is not an overnight decision. The study's sample consisted of 3,840 high school students. Their respective high schools, totaling 190 (public, Catholic, & independent) located in the 30 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. Lee and Burkham (2003) looked at three elements in the organization of the high schools involved in the study: structures, academic organizations, and social organizations (Lee & Burkham, 2003). The enrollment size of the structure was found to be the most influential dropout factor. It was noted that the larger the enrollment in high school and in middle school, the more likely a student would dropout. Size mattered in regard to the attention given to students,

building relationships, attitudes of teachers, and delivering effective instruction of the curriculum.

The social organization of the school looks at social relationships in regard to student-teacher relationships. This is considered part of the school because it involves teachers consequently making it part of the support offered by the school. They cite prior research by Lee and Croniger (1998) and use their findings as premise to their study. The school is perceived to be at the macro level whereas the student is at the micro level. Social capital is in the macro level.

Lee and Burkham (2003) define social capital as it “includes norms, traditions, and behavior patterns that shape both the goals that people pursue and their opportunities for doing so” (p. 363). Following the background for the connection between the student and school as social organization, they cite several studies supporting the connection, or lack thereof, between social organization and dropping out. In conclusion, they stress relationships between teachers and students as being a deterrent to student dropout. The findings of the study reinforce Collins (2001) contention of having the right people on the bus. It is vital to have caring individuals working with students, especially with an at-risk population. The staff also needs to be willing to put forth greater effort. Collins (2001) also stresses the need for individuals in the teaching profession to have a natural calling to education.

**Community factors.** Healthy communities are an integral part of the social capital theory as it makes human capital and financial capital possible for the individual thus adding human capital (Zhang et al., 2008). This is especially true for at-risk individuals. The community capital must compensate for the lack of human capital and financial capital to be able to produce the same amount of human capital needed for these individuals (Zhang et al., 2008). Healthy communities accomplish this by providing

support to families and schools; establishing high expectations and clear norms; and encouraging active participation and collaboration in the life and work of the community (Bernard, 1991). This is achieved through the available resources and work or volunteer opportunities made possible through valuable connections. Research has shown that community service work helps develop teamwork, positive relationships, and social capital in teenagers (Bortree, n.d.).

The resources made possible in communities can support the educational resilience of pregnant youth whereas the lack of resources can reduce the educational attainment. Mollborn (2007) studied previous research on the lack of material resources available to teenage parents and the negative impact it had on their education. The participants noted the most needed and lacking resources in the community were housing, childcare, and financial support. Research supports these findings and stress the problem is a social issue, not an individual issue (Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014). Bernard (1991) comments that “communities exert not only a direct influence on the lives of youth, but perhaps even more importantly, exert a profound influence on the lives of the families and school within their domain, and this, indirectly powerfully affect the outcome for children and youth” (p. 16).

### **Summary**

Although the odds are against teenage mothers succeeding, there is a small population of Latina mothers who overcame the odds placed against them and are phenomena worth studying (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn & Morgan, 1987; Murry, Bynum, Brody, Willert, & Stephens, 2001). Studying the factors that have made the pursuit to higher education possible for Latinas, may possibly be replicated with teenagers in similar situations and/or add to knowledge base to better inform policymakers, educators, community leaders and parents. Therefore, there is a need to examine why some teenage



mothers remain in high school through graduation and are able to go on to earn a college degree while, so many others do not. This qualitative study proposes to view the factors that contributed to adolescent Latina mother's educational attainment. In studying Latinas who became pregnant as teenagers, carried out the pregnancy and obtained a post-secondary degree, the question to consider is, how did these Latinas accomplish their goal?

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to examine the factors that contributed to Latina teenage mothers' success in obtaining a post-secondary education. The researcher looked at factors that influenced the educational path of Latina teenage mothers to go on to earn a higher degree regardless of their teenage pregnancy while providing a forum for their voices. Through their narratives, they provided insight into the obstacles they faced and how they overcame them. This was investigated through conducting interviews with Latinas, who were teenage mothers while in high school, and graduated college. This information can help address risk factors, promote and reinforce resiliency qualities in individuals in similar situations. In a wider context, it can guide educational research, inform policymakers, educators, community leaders and parents.

This chapter presents an overview of the research problem, research purpose and questions, research design, participant selection, data collection procedures, data analysis methods, validity, privacy and ethical consideration, and the research design limitations for this qualitative study.

#### **Overview of Research Problem**

In the U.S., teenage pregnancy is often a barrier to educational attainment and socio-economic advancement for the mothers and their children (Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011). This phenomenon disproportionately affects U.S. Latina adolescents, as evidenced by both their higher rates of pregnancy and their failure to complete high school or a GED compared to other ethnicities (Doğan-Ates & Carrión-Basham, 2007; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2011; Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011). With the Latino population predicted to increase, both in total number and as a percentage of the total U.S. population, in some measure as a direct consequence of teenage pregnancies, there is a

need for reforms and intervention programs that promote positive adaptive behaviors for this growing segment of the population (Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011).

The consequences of teenage pregnancy in the U.S. are reduced educational performance, increased financial hardships, and dependence upon state aid for these young families (Doğan-Ates & Carrión-Basham, 2007; Gilliam, 2007; Hoffman, Foster, & Furstenberg, 1993; Moore et al., 1997). Power to Decide the Campaign to Prevent Unplanned Pregnancy estimated adolescent childbearing cost U.S. taxpayers (federal, state, and local) about \$9.4 billion per year; \$2.1 billion in public sector health care expenses; \$3.1 billion in child welfare benefits; and \$2.0 billion in spending on incarceration (for the children of teenage parents) (Power to Decide, 2013). Research indicates that teenagers who give birth are less likely to complete high school and go on to college, thereby reducing their potential for economic self-sufficiency, which is a \$2.2 billion loss in tax revenue (Solomon-Fears, 2016).

The impact of the teenage pregnancy does not only affect the teenage mother, but the effects continue to surface with the child. Teenage pregnancy is a perpetuating intergenerational cycle that may cause children of teenagers to experience problems in school and drop out of high school. In adulthood, they are more likely to repeat the cycle of teenage pregnancy and poverty (NCPTUP, 2013; Solomon-Fears, 2016).

While some programs have successfully reduced teenage pregnancy rates, a complimentary approach is to provide teenage mothers with assistance that enables them to continue to pursue educational and professional goals while pregnant and while raising young children (Crespo, 2015). This study seeks to contribute to the success of the latter approach by examining the experiences of Latina teenage mothers, who successfully completed both high school and secondary education programs, to identify specific strategies, resilience factors, and practices that contributed to their accomplishments.

## **Research Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to examine the factors that contribute to Latina teenage mothers' success in obtaining a post-secondary education.

The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What factors do Latina teenage mothers identify as possible barriers to obtaining a post-secondary education?
2. How do Latina teenage mothers work through educational barriers to obtain a post-secondary education?
3. What educational practices do Latina teenage mothers identify as helpful in obtaining a post-secondary education?
4. What resiliency factors do Latina teenage mothers identify that contribute to obtaining a post-secondary education?

## **Research Design**

Case study methodology is a highly-regarded methodology to use in sociological studies (Stake, 1995; Tellis, 1997; Yin, 1994). A case study approach permitted the researcher to look closely at the individual and tell the story through their "voice" to determine themes across the participants (Tellis, 1997). A case study allowed participants to reveal the impact their upbringing had on their ability to persevere through the challenge of being a teenage parent yet be able to pursue and succeed in obtaining a post-secondary education. This study relied on a collective case study design to gain insight regarding the perceptions of former teenage mothers on their influence to persevere through high school and go on to earn a college degree (e.g. bachelor's, master's, doctorate).

Case study was the ideal methodology for this study to portray the viewpoints of the participants as the researcher sought to gain their perspectives (Tellis, 1997). The

participants in this study are considered people “on the margins of hegemonic discourses” (as cited in Brikmann, 2013, p. 25). As a marginalized population, teenage mothers are rarely consulted to offer their thoughts on teenage pregnancy (Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014). Stake (1995) focused primarily on the specificity of cases on how their uniqueness contributes to further understanding and argued against using case study research to generalize the findings of a case or a collection of cases to the population at large. Stake (1995) suggested three main types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. An intrinsic case focuses on one particular area of a phenomenon whereas, an instrumental describes a more general phenomenon. The collective type was employed in this study to allow for a more complete picture as it included five lived experiences of Latina teenage mothers. Through qualitative data collection and analysis this study examined how high-risk Latina teenage mothers managed to graduate from high school and earned a college degree. This method provided a forum for the voices of the teenage parents to be heard. An understanding of the issue was sought through dialogue with participants. The conversation piece was critical to capture the participants’ retrospective on their experiences without judgment.

### **Participant Selection**

The sample chosen for this study were five adult Latinas who earned their degrees from a higher education institution. The sample size was not expected nor intended to be representative of the general population. Qualitative research seeks to gain in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of these participants rather than to generalize to the entire population (Cowan, 2007; Lichtman, 2010). The sampling approach was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling refers to selecting study participants based on specified criteria essential for a thorough analysis of the topic (Cowan, 2007). The criteria for the study included:

- must be female and Latina;
- became pregnant from a mutual relationship while attending high school;
- carried out the pregnancy and still in custody of child;
- earned a high school diploma;
- earned a college degree (bachelor's, master's, or doctorate); and
- willing to voluntarily participate in the study.

After the interviews were completed the researcher asked the participants to check with their sources of support if they would be interested in being interviewed. The only two criteria were the participant identified the individual(s) as a source of support and referred the individual(s) if they were willing to be interviewed. The researcher provided contact information to be given to the support people. If the support people were interested, they would either directly contact the researcher or send communication through the participant. Once the support people agreed to be interviewed, the researcher made direct contact to arrange the interview. All attempts were made to obtain at least one support from each participant. All, but one participant provided an individual to interview. Consent and confidentiality were secured from anyone identified by the participants as a significant source of support. A consent form in English and Spanish was provided to interviewee. The consent forms included the purpose of the study, that participation in the study was strictly voluntary and could stop at any time, the interview times (1) and length (30-45 minutes), and that their identities would remain confidential. It was explained and noted on the consent form that the interviews would be audio-recorded with notes taken by the researcher and possible follow-up interviews scheduled for clarification purposes.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher gained approval from the University of Houston-Clear Lake's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS). Upon CPHS approval, the snowball method was employed to secure participants. First, the participants were recruited through referrals from colleagues and personal contacts. Second, contact information was collected from the participants who fit the criteria for the study. Third, participants who met the criteria were contacted and secured for the study.

After sharing the information regarding the study with potential participants, a consent form in English (Appendix A) or Spanish (Appendix B) that explains the demographic survey, interview, and focus group was provided to every participant. The consent form included the purpose of the study, that participation in the study was strictly voluntary, the timeframe for taking the demographic survey (30 minutes), interview times (2-3) and length (30-45 minutes), and focus group length (1-2 hours), that their identities would remain confidential, and that participation could stop at any time without penalty. It was explained and noted on the consent form that the interviews and focus groups would be audio-recorded with notes taken by the researcher and possible follow-up interviews scheduled for clarification purposes. Additionally, the consent form helped collect general contact information and serve as acknowledgment that participants would be contacted for follow up. The participants were contacted through their preferred method to arrange a time for interviews and the focus group.

At the first contact with the participant, three main points were covered. The purpose of the study and details of what their commitment would involve was reviewed. Participation in the study would require the subject to be contacted throughout the course of the study for interviews and/or follow up questions and be willing to dedicate between 3-4 hours for the survey, interviews and a focus group. The interviews took place face-

to-face and via the phone. Second, the researcher confirmed participants met the selection criteria. This time was also used to answer questions from the participant about the study. Finally, after the participants were deemed a good fit for the study, met the criteria mentioned above, and could dedicate the time commitment, they were scheduled for the first formal interview.

**Survey.** The demographic survey (Appendix C) included name, birthdate, place of birth, information on the birth of the child, and educational background. Participants were given the option to share the information verbally during the interview. After receiving the demographic survey responses, the data were used to provide descriptive information on participants. The survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

**Interviews.** The second contact took place after the participants were confirmed and pre-screened and would be the first formal semi-structured interview. The two goals for the first formal interview were to establish rapport between the researcher and participant and to review the initial demographic information collected and gather any additional demographic information from the participants. This first formal semi-structured interview was between 30-45 minutes long. The interview began with broad questions to make the participant feel comfortable. The second formal semi-structured interview included the interview questions (Appendix D) regarding how participants overcame the obstacles to achieve their education and what educational practices or other factors were helpful and their sources of support. Participants were asked to talk about how their sources of support facilitated or inhibited their success. Interviews concluded with questions about what the participants saw that the future held for them and their children. The second interview was one-on-one and lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. Interviews were all conducted face-to-face. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' written consent. Notes were taken. The participants were reminded they



had the right to stop the interview at any time. The location of the interview was either a public place, their work site, or their residence, wherever was most convenient for the participants and had adequate space and atmosphere for the recording. The recordings were downloaded to a password-protected file. The researcher had the recordings transcribed for purposes of analysis.

**Viviana.** For our interview, Viviana brought her daughters. A conflict arose with her sitter who was to watch the girls. Instead of cancelling our interview, she decided to bring them along. She did not see a problem with them being within earshot of our conversation and was confident they would be well-mannered. I was impressed with how well-behaved the girls were and praised them after the interview. The girls shyly smiled and looked up at their mom for her approval. I observed the mutual love between the girls and their mother. I also observed Viviana's patience with them.

**Veronica.** For the first interview, I met Veronica at her work site. She waited for me outside of her building. She explained the campus was like a maze and didn't want me to get lost. As I walked towards her, I was welcomed by a very friendly smile. I observed her youthful appearance and curly long hair. She was casually dressed, but her confidence was evident. She did not strike me as a reserved type of administrator. I found her to be very personable and engaging. I followed her fast-paced walk to her office. After a quick introduction and giving her coworker some directions, we made our way to her desk. She apologized as she answered a phone call and automatically gave out the steps to take. Sitting there I could observe her professional, yet energetic exchange with the caller. I could see how she accomplished all her goals. After she silenced her phone we got started with the interview. We ran out of time as she was scheduled to meet her mother and her boyfriend for dinner. The second time we met at a public restaurant near her daughter's job. I met her daughter before she left for work. I

could observe how proud Veronica was of her daughter through their interactions and how she lovingly looked at her daughter. During the second interview, I could observe a different side of Veronica, a calmer, motherly side. I was surprised by how comfortable I was with Veronica the second time. It was like meeting up with an old friend.

**Maria.** I met Maria at her worksite for the interview. It was late in the afternoon, so the school was mostly unoccupied. The only other staff I saw were the after-school personnel. I walked beside her as we made our way to her office which was located at the back of the building. The office was decorated with school related memorabilia. It gave the office a traditional elementary school ambiance. We sat across from each other at a round table and swiftly got started with the interview.

**Leticia.** I met Leticia at her high school campus. It was after school hours, but, since she had afterschool duty, it was convenient for us to meet at her campus. Leticia unlocked the door for me since it was past school hours and regular entry was closed. She conversed with some of the students waiting in front of the school for their rides. You could tell she was very familiar with the student population based on the way she chatted with them. I followed her to the library, which was on the first floor and closer than her classroom, to conduct the interview. The library had glass walls where the rest of the building was visible. We had the whole library to ourselves. We sat at a table in the center of the library. I was impressed with the openness of the library and the comfortable, cushioned rocking chairs.

**Christina.** Our interviews took place at her residence. We sat in the comfort of her living room. Family pictures filled the side tables and walls. Diagonally to the ceiling-high windows were crosses and other scripture decorations. There were a few hand-painted pieces resting above the chimney shelf. She said her husband was now into painting. Christina was the reason I wanted to study other women and their extraordinary

perseverance. Although her speech was understandable it was best for her to type lengthier responses to avoid exhausting herself. For this reason, the interviews were conducted through text and written response.

**Sources of support.** In addition to the participants, anyone identified during the interview by the participants as support during the pregnancy were contacted for data collection purposes. The following were the identified support people of the participants. Viviana referred her mother. The interview took place at a local coffee shop. Veronica referred her mother. The interview took place at a local restaurant. Leticia referred her sister. The interview took place over the phone. Christina referred her husband. The interview took place at their residence. Maria did not provide a support to be interviewed. The researcher assumed it was due to privacy. The researcher had the recordings transcribed for purposes of analysis. The topics to cover with participants included personal and educational barriers, contributing factors to obtaining a post-secondary education and resiliency.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The intent of this study was to gather and analyze data to identify contributing factors to the educational attainment of Latina teenage mothers. The researcher listened to, read the transcriptions and made anecdotal notes to the data. QSR International's NVivo 11 qualitative data analysis software was used to analyze the data (QSR International, 2013). To code the data, the researcher read each data source and looked for emergent ideas or concepts. Once coding was complete, a matrix was used to organize the codes and condense them into themes. The codes were sorted in one of three themes: perceived obstacles, effective educational practices and helpful practices that helped overcome obstacles. The consistent findings were clustered into thematic labels to reveal the core themes of participants' experience.

### **Qualitative Validity**

Validity was obtained through peer review and triangulation (Lichtman, 2010). Peer review was utilized to check the data for verification (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Through peer review of the interpretations and conclusions, the feedback from peers helped the researcher enhance the findings of the research. The researcher used peer review at the analysis and writing phase of the research. Multiple data sources were used for triangulation and to provide multiple views of the phenomenon. Doing so allowed a more accurate and less biased interpretation of the findings (Lichtman, 2010).

### **Privacy and Ethical Considerations**

The researcher gained approval from the University of Houston Clear-Lake's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) prior to starting data collection. A consent form was provided to every participant in the study. The consent form included the purpose of the study that participation in the study is strictly voluntary, the timeframe required of participating in the study, participants' identities would remain confidential, and participation could stop at any time without consequence. There were no anticipated risks involved to the participants of this study. To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were assigned. During data collection, every attempt was made to minimize inherent bias. At all times, the data were secured in the researcher's office in a locked file cabinet. Once the study is complete, the researcher maintains the data for five years as per the required time set forth by CPHS. Once the deadline has passed, the researcher shall properly destroy all data files.

### **Research Design Limitations**

There were limitations to the findings of this study that warrant consideration. First, data on pregnancies was collected retrospectively. As a result, some respondents may not accurately recall the dates and events. Unintended consequences could include

reliving the past which may cause some emotional stress. The present study called for volunteers and required a time commitment; which may have limited the pool of participants. Due to the small sample size results may not generalize to the larger population. The researcher assumes that the participants were candid and responded openly to all questions.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of a qualitative multiple case study used to examine the factors and characteristics that contributed to Latina teenage mothers' success in obtaining post-secondary degrees. This study is important due to the current high number of teenage pregnancies among Latinas and the low number of Latinas attaining an education (The National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). This qualitative study provided an opportunity to gain insight from five Latina teenage mothers regarding their perceptions of the influence to persevere through high school and go on to earn a college degree. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What factors do Latina teenage mothers identify as possible barriers to obtaining a post-secondary education?
2. How do Latina teenage mothers work through educational barriers to obtain a post-secondary education?
3. What educational practices do Latina teenage mothers identify as helpful in obtaining a post-secondary education?
4. What resiliency factors do Latina teenage mothers identify that contribute to obtaining a post-secondary education?

This chapter begins by presenting a detailed description of the demographic characteristics of the participants followed by the data analysis. Included is a table with the participants' demographic information.

#### **Demographic Characteristics of the Participants**

During the spring of 2017, data were collected from the five Latina participants and their support systems. For confidentiality purposes, the researcher identified the support individuals by their roles and not their actual names, outlined in Table 2. The

five Latina participants completed a demographic survey as the initial data collection instrument. For confidentiality purposes, the researcher have used pseudonyms rather than the participants' given names: outlined in Table 3. Table 3 also provides the participants' demographic data, including their current age, age they became pregnant, total number of children, date of high school graduation and highest degree completed. The participants were listed in the order in which the interviews occurred. At the time of the interviews, participants ranged in ages from 26 to 42. They became pregnant between the ages of 16 and 17. All participants grew up and attended public high schools and colleges in the state of Texas.

*Table 2*  
**Sources of Support**

Participant	Role of Supporter
Viviana	Mother
Veronica	Mother
Maria	None provided to be interviewed
Leticia	Sister
Christina	Husband

*Table 3*  
**Demographic Data of Research Participants**

Participant	Current Age	Age of Pregnancy	Total Number of Children	Graduated High School	Degree(s)
Viviana	26	17	2	June 2008	Bachelor's 2014
Veronica	36	17	2	May 1997	Master's 2014 Bachelor's 2004
Maria	42	16	2	June 1992	Master's 2006 Bachelor's 2000
Leticia	38	16	5	May 1997	Master's 2017 Bachelor's 2007
Christina	40	16	3	May 1995	Master's 2011 Bachelor's 2000

Four of the five participants had a history of teenage pregnancy in their family. The family member who experienced the pregnancy as a teenager is listed in Table 4. The family member who experienced the pregnancy was older than the participant.

*Table 4*  
History of Teenage Pregnancy

Participant	History of Teenage Pregnancy
Viviana	No
Veronica	Yes, mother & grandmother
Maria	Yes, grandmother
Leticia	Yes, sister
Christina	Yes, cousin

Out of the five participants interviewed, four married the biological father of their first child (Table 5). At the time of the interview, two out of the four were still married to the biological father of their first child. The other two participants were divorced. Viviana married the father of her second child.

*Table 5*  
Marital Status

Participant	Marital Status (*to biological father)
Viviana	Married
Veronica	Divorced*
Maria	Married*
Leticia	Divorced*
Christina	Married*

The participants not only graduated high school, but all went on to earn a bachelor's degree and three earned a master's degree (Table 6). Leticia completes her master's degree in December 2017. Viviana aspires to obtain her master's degree after her husband earns his bachelor's degree. The reason for the delay was an agreement made to focus on Viviana's degree completion then on his education. Only one of the biological fathers has a bachelor's degree. Three of the five participants self-reported



they were first-generation college students. All participants confirmed receiving some form of financial aid to help pay for college. Table 6 lists the educational achievement of the participants and as a point of reference, the highest level of education of the parents and the biological father.

*Table 6*  
**Educational Achievement**

Participant	Graduation	Highest Degree	Financial Aid	First-Generation College Student	Highest Level of Education:		
					Father	Mother	Biological Father
Viviana	June 2008	Bachelor's 2014	Yes	No	Some College	Bachelor's	Associates
Veronica	May 1997	Master's 2014 Bachelor's 2004	Yes + loans	Yes	Non-high school graduate	Associates	Some College
Maria	June 1992	Master's 2006 Bachelor's 2000	Yes + Loans	Yes	Some College	Some College	Some College Peace Officer License
Leticia	May 1997	Master's 2017 Bachelor's 2007	Yes+ loans	No	High school	Bachelor's	Associates
Christina	May 1995	Master's 2011 Bachelor's 2000	Yes	Yes	High School	High School	Bachelor's

The data collected show how these five Latinas managed to obtain their education despite their challenging circumstances. The following sections begin by describing the background for each participant. Included risk factors such as: culture, low socioeconomic status, low parental involvement, low self-esteem, susceptibility to media influence, and low academic achievement. The themes found extending across all participants have been discussed. Next, the barriers to obtaining a post-secondary degree have been covered as the first theme as well as a discussion of how they overcame the barriers identified. The factors that influenced them the most in obtaining a post-secondary degree follow, and lastly, the resiliency factors have been detailed.

### **Viviana**

**Introduction.** Viviana was born in Laredo, Texas to parents of Latino descent. Her family moved to Houston, Texas when she was still an infant. Her parents were public servants; her father was a law enforcement professional and her mother was an educator. Viviana was the oldest of two daughters. There was a four-year age difference between the two sisters. Viviana's parents divorced when she was about seven years old. Viviana and her sister remained with their mother after the divorce. Viviana's father did not remain involved with the girls. For much of her life Viviana was raised by her single mother. The three of them, Viviana, her sister, and mother, were the constant members of the family. While they did not consider themselves poor, they did have to work for their daily living.

**Pregnancy.** Viviana became pregnant her senior year in high school. She and the biological father had dated for about a year at the time of the pregnancy. They did not meet in school, but through a mutual friend from her job. Her boyfriend was approximately three years older than her. The pregnancy was not planned, nor did they

use protection to prevent the pregnancy. She had not had any prior desires to become pregnant. When asked what her description of a stereotypical teen mother was before she became pregnant and after, Viviana responded, “Um, a party person (giggles). I was not a party person (laughter). I didn't have a lot of ... Well, I didn't have a lot of friends and I also thought that they were irresponsible, and I'm responsible.” Viviana recalled:

Whenever I found out I was pregnant, I had my best friend with me, which was the one I knew since 7th grade when we had those ... that, that connection. Um, I was really scared. I, just, I found out that day and I didn't tell the biological dad until maybe two days later. I drove to his house and I told him, and he said that I should not have the baby. That it should be aborted and, um ... and then, so I just left it at that. And then he came back and he apologized, and he said that we could go ahead and tell my mom together.

The biological father kept the pregnancy a secret from most of his family and only let his mother know. He was present during the pregnancy and a short time after the birth of the child. He was no longer present even before the child's first birthday.

**Present.** Viviana is happily married. She and her husband live in their suburban area home with their two daughters. Her focus is raising her daughters. She is supportive of her husband while he attends college. She plans to pursue a master's degree after her husband earns his bachelor's degree. She works as an elementary teacher at the same school as her mother. She and her mother have a relationship they both describe as a friendship. On occasion, her mother babysits Viviana's daughters.

### **Veronica**

**Introduction.** Veronica has an intricate story. Veronica grew up believing her grandmother was her mother and her grandfather was her father. It was not until she was in her twenties she learned her biological mother was the person she thought of as her

sister growing up. Veronica learned she was born in Louisiana to a 14-years old Caucasian woman and a Latino father. Veronica identified herself as Latina with a biracial background.

Veronica's complex story seems to have stemmed from good intentions. Her mother was only 14 years old when she became pregnant. The mother stated that back in those days, pregnant teenagers were not common, and were often sent off to live with family until the baby was born. Veronica's grandmother wanted to hold onto her partner by having a baby. She told him she had had a baby, Veronica, when in fact she was the grandmother. She raised Veronica as her daughter. When Veronica was six months old, her grandfather left them. In adulthood, Veronica learned the real reason for the separation was domestic violence and his gang affiliation. Veronica was raised in a single parent household. She grew up believing her mother was her sister. Her grandmother worked the late shift and was always having to work overtime. A neighbor, who eventually became her godmother, babysat Veronica while her grandmother worked. She helped raise Veronica until she was about five years old.

**Pregnancy.** Veronica's full-term pregnancy was not her first time getting pregnant. Her first unplanned pregnancy at the age of 14 ended in a miscarriage, and that relationship also ended. Her second pregnancy at the age of 17 was, to a certain degree, intentional. Veronica recalled:

It kind of was intentional. It's not like we were going through all kinds of methods to prevent it and, oops, had an accident or something. We were both pretty happy. Looking back on it, I really think that we looked for pregnancy and a child to fill voids within ourselves.

Veronica was a senior in high school when she had her daughter. Prior to the birth, Veronica moved out of her grandmother's house into an apartment with the

biological father. During the pregnancy, she continued to attend school and work. She described the pregnancy and childbirth as normal with no major complications. She and the father lived in the apartment until the six-month lease ended. Then, after the baby was born, they moved in with her in-laws. She eventually married the biological father and had a second child, a boy.

**Present.** Veronica and the biological father of her two children divorced after 18 years of marriage. Her two main areas of focus, her children and her job. Although her children can care for themselves, she remains active in their various activities. Her oldest is a freshman in college, and her youngest is in high school. Veronica and her mother have a relationship they both describe as a “friendship”. Veronica holds an administrative position at a public institution and is extremely involved in various projects at her job. One main project she is proud to oversee is a program that specifically targets and serves first-generation college students. The purpose of the program is to offer resources and mentoring to help first-generation college students complete their associate's degree and transfer to a university. Through the mentorship program, she has helped hundreds of students and impacted their lives for the better.

## **Maria**

**Introduction.** Maria was born in Texas. Her parents were both Latinos of Mexican origin. She is the oldest of three siblings. She described growing up poor. Her father was the provider while her mother was a stay-at-home wife until Maria and her siblings entered middle school. Her mother’s main responsibility was to care for the children while her father worked.

Maria did not provide a support person to interview. Although she mentioned her mother as a huge supporter, she did not indicate she was someone to interview. She also failed to offer her husband as a support person to interview. She brought up a friend from

school with a similar story, but did not get her permission to be interviewed. Therefore, Maria's story is of her own account.

Maria and her family grew up in an industrial area of town. She described her family as always being a very tight-knit group even as adults. Maria stated:

Even to this day every Thanksgiving we have a Thanksgiving meal with my family and they do it on the Sunday before Thanksgiving, so it doesn't interfere with all the in-laws on Thanksgiving Day and everything. We have our meal. The table gets bigger and bigger every year, but we all sit around the table or what have you and everybody says something they're thankful for. . . It never fails, any guest that come they get emotional. They say we never see anything like that before. My sister-in-law, my husbands, my brothers-in-law that are part of this, they also are very appreciative that we bring everybody together. The kids see it, all the nieces and nephews and everybody, my kids. That's basically my upbringing is that family was always that strong unit that you could depend on no matter what.

Another example of their closeness was the proximity of their first house. The first home she and her husband purchased was across the street from where her parents lived. Maria's father was the one who pointed out the house was for sale when he learned they were looking to purchase a home.

**Pregnancy.** Maria became pregnant at the age of 16 years old when she was a junior in high school. She met the biological father, who was older than her, in high school. They dated for three years. They did not plan the pregnancy and they did not use protection.

Maria recalled that her pregnancy was not a phenomenal occurrence in her community or school. There were a lot of teenagers having babies. She mentioned

having had a classmate return to school after she had a baby, her sister-in-law had a baby, and another classmate was expecting. Maria made a striking observation of the girls who were getting pregnant at that time. She recalled:

It just so happened ... And I'm not trying to say I'm a perfect person, but the good girls were the ones getting pregnant. It was the good ones. You don't expect those, you didn't expect those. All of us, I remember all of us the ones that got pregnant, we were the good girls.

When Maria became pregnant she kept her education as her focus and tried to do her best to maintain passing grades. She did not want her pregnancy to wipe away her possibilities. Instead the pregnancy propelled her to strive to do her best.

**Present.** Maria celebrated 20 years of marriage to her high school sweetheart and biological father of her two children. She and her husband reside in their recently constructed dream house. Even though her oldest child is employed and her youngest is enrolled in college, Maria's focus is still to provide for them. She and her husband have made it their goal to help cover the cost of their children's college tuition. Maria works as a principal at the school where she started her career as a teacher.

## **Leticia**

**Introduction.** Leticia was born in Texas to Latino parents. Leticia was raised by her mother along with her half-sister who was three years older than her. Neither her father, nor her sister's father, were involved in their childhood, so they were primarily raised by their single mother and her family. Leticia described growing up poor which caused her mother to always work. Their mother remarried when Leticia was a teenager. Her step-father had two children from a previous marriage. The combination of the families caused conflicts which caused Leticia's half-sister ran away. When Leticia did not feel she belonged with her new step-family, she tried to join her sister. That plan did



not work and soon after she ran away with her boyfriend. It may be that because Leticia always sought to feel she had a family she was a part of, that led her to become pregnant to form her own family.

**Pregnancy.** Leticia was living with her in-laws-to-be prior to her pregnancies. She had run away with her boyfriend at the age of 14. She was a freshman. Her boyfriend was three years older than her. She and her boyfriend lived with her in-laws-to-be for several years while she continued attending school. Leticia's first pregnancy was unintended and resulted in a miscarriage. Afterward Leticia purposefully set out to become pregnant. Leticia reflected on the reason for becoming pregnant:

I guess in thinking about it now I was seeking that unconditional love. I guess I didn't get from either one of my parents. Having something to love so much, I mean it didn't matter to me what people said or how they judge, and it still doesn't.

She became pregnant for the second time at the age of 16. She had her son in the summer and returned to school her sophomore year as a teenage mother. Leticia was left traumatized from the first birth and sex was the furthest thing from her mind. Her boyfriend did not feel the same and he kept pressuring her to have sex. After quarrelling, her boyfriend convinced her to have sex soon after the birth of their son. She got pregnant and had a daughter in the summer and returned her junior year as a teenage mother of two. She graduated from high school in 1997 with two children under the age of two. She had three more children after she graduated from high school and while attending college. She had a total of five children by the time she earned her bachelor's degree. By then Leticia and her husband moved out of his parents' house. His parents had gifted him a house across the street from their home. Leticia laid boundaries regarding what she allowed at her house and her mother-in-law respected her boundaries.

On the same street lived her husband's sister and great-grandmother. Leticia's children had their immediate family nearby. She commented, "My kids would go between my house and her house and little grannies house, then sometimes they'd go to aunt's house." The close-knit family is what Leticia missed when she divorced and moved from the area.

**Present.** Leticia resides with three of her five children. Her youngest child is set to graduate from high school. She is divorced from the biological father of her children. She earned her master's degree in December. Leticia works as an educator in the public-school system in the community where she grew up.

### **Christina**

**Introduction.** Christina was born in Texas to Latino descent parents. Her parents were married young and shortly thereafter had her. The marriage did not last long. Christina's parents divorced when she was an infant. When Christian was four years old, her mother died, and Christina went to live with her paternal grandparents. They raised her since her father was unable to care for her because he was dealing with his own personal problems. Her Spanish-speaking grandmother showed her unconditional love and took good care of her. Christina said:

At four years old, my grandmother took me in, she only spoke Spanish to me. So, I learned Spanish at home and English at school. I learned to read and write in Spanish just because I knew my English sounds. . . I had morals though, given to me by my grandmother. She told me I was so smart and so I just believe it.

Christina grew up in a household full of aunts, uncles, and cousins. As a teenager, Christina moved in with her father. By then, he had remarried and had a daughter, Christina's half-sister.

**Pregnancy.** Christina became pregnant at the age of 16. She was a junior in high school. The biological father was 16 years old and in the same grade. They met in the ROTC program. The pregnancy was not intentional, and they were not using protection. Christina naively believed the biological father when he said she would not get pregnant. Christina said, “No way, but we didn’t use protection. My husband (then boyfriend) convince me that we couldn’t get pregnant, don’t ask me how, I believed him.” At the time of the pregnancy, she was living with her father, step mother and half-sister. Christina mentioned her pregnancy was good until the last trimester when she developed psoriasis. She had a normal delivery but had to stay a few extra days in the hospital because of the psoriasis. The baby was born healthy. She lived with them after the baby was born, but only for a month. Then she moved out with the biological father.

**Present.** Christina celebrated 23 years of marriage to her high school sweetheart. She was supportive of her husband as he completed his bachelor’s degree after she earned her master’s in education and was promoted as assistant principal. She sustained her support of him when he started his master’s in education even though this occurred after Christina suffered a stroke that left her speech impaired. Christina and her husband had an understanding that no matter the trial they faced, they would continue to move forward with their lives. Christina’s personal focus is to continue to make progress from her stroke. She has made enormous strides to regain her health to what it was before the stroke. Her oldest child is expected to graduate with her bachelor’s degree in December. Her second child is a senior in high school and her youngest is a junior. Her two sons have been involved in extracurricular activities through their school. Their family remains active in their church. Christina recently completed her seventeenth years as an educator. She is currently employed in an administrative level as a specialist overseeing a department she is passionate about.

## **Barriers to Obtaining a Post-Secondary Degree**

The following barriers to obtaining a post-secondary mentioned by the participants. The barriers extending across all participants were family dynamics, relationships, cultural expectations, health, multiple obligations, school mobility, stigma, low socioeconomic status, lack of rigorous academic preparation, and lack of assistance navigating college. These were the biggest problems the participants faced and how they overcame them. While these may have been barriers to most of the participants, the gravity of the problem was relative to their unique experience, i.e., in some instances, the barrier posed more of a problem than in other cases. This is not a comprehensive list but highlights of some of the major barriers to obtaining a post-secondary degree.

### **Sharing News of Pregnancy**

One of the first barriers all five participants had to overcome after becoming pregnant was sharing the news about their pregnancy to their family. All five shared how their family's first reaction was that of anger and disappointment. Each pregnancy was eventually accepted prior to the births. Viviana shared how her family reacted to the pregnancy, she said:

It was very devastating for everybody because for me, no one was expecting it because I was just ... I was always doing what I was supposed to do and I never really ... was in the wrong or it, it just wasn't expected so it was really heartbreaking for a lot of my family and for, I guess for my dad, too, and for ... it was just very difficult for my whole family.

Her mother confirmed this reaction, saying, "To me, it was a really big surprise when Viviana was pregnant. I was like, oh Viviana, I didn't expect this from you."

During the pregnancy, her stepfather and mother had separated. Viviana, her mother, and

sister resided with her uncle. This was her mother's reaction after the initial shock had worn off, and she had time to self-talk through the news, she said:

It took me a while just to say okay, well, Viviana you're 17 years old, you're pregnant. That was me thinking, not saying it to her. I said, okay, well, what is the next step. I would just say, you need to go to school. Even if you're pregnant, you need to go to school.

Viviana's mother was very supportive of Viviana during-and post-pregnancy. She watched over Viviana to make sure she was taking good care of her health during the pregnancy. Once the baby was born she helped with the baby and continued to encourage Viviana to remain focused on her education.

Veronica had a similar experience when she told her family about her pregnancy. She shared:

So yeah, at first the family was very angry. My grandmother's very upset, then my mom comes over, and they're like, have you really thought this through? You was gonna go to college. I said, I still am. I'm still going to. You don't understand, Veronica, I've been there, blah, blah, blah." My grandma said this.

Veronica kept the pregnancy a secret from her family until she knew it would be too late to have an abortion in fear she would be made to abort. Once her family learned of the pregnancy they tried to give her other options, but Veronica would not be dissuaded from having the baby. She wanted the baby and felt she could take on the challenge. She viewed herself as grown, stating, "I'm already paying bills. I'm already working. I'm putting myself through school. I drive myself where I need to go. I give you [grandmother] money. I'm driving you [grandmother] to a probation officer. Why can't I be a mom?" This was Veronica's viewpoint and guiding force. She felt she was already

in a mother role with her grandmother and was capable of being a mother to a child of her own.

Veronica and the biological father were happy about the pregnancy. She said, “I knew what I was doing. I knew getting pregnant, we were actually happy about it.”

Veronica’s mother had a very different reaction and she was concerned. She recalled:

I wasn't very happy because I didn't want history to repeat itself. And I was so proud of her in the direction she was going, and I wanted her to have the opportunities I never had. I wanted her to finish school, go to college, so on and so forth.

Her grandmother prohibited her boyfriend from visiting Veronica for some time. In the following months, Veronica turned 18, and decided to move out to an apartment with her boyfriend. This quote from Veronica demonstrates how the family came to accept the news of the pregnancy:

By then, everybody was on board and I had a little baby shower and my grandmother was calling me every day or we'd go to the bank together or to the grocery store together and she'd try to help teach me different things about grocery shopping and stuff like that.

At her school and with her peers, there did not seem to be much of a reaction, almost like it was a common occurrence. Veronica recalled:

Students and friends that I was in school with, it wasn't a big shocker. It was like no surprise whatsoever. I was in the health science technology program in high school, so I was doing clinicals where I would go to the hospitals or go to the elderly homes, stuff like that, and it was just no big shock, because there were several other girls that were pregnant or had already had a kid. I was just part of one of those.

Veronica matured quickly due to her having to fend for herself and care for her grandmother. Veronica viewed the baby as another person to take care of and she felt confident in being able to do so. Veronica did not view the baby as an obstacle to her future.

Maria was the only participant who mentioned being accompanied by her boyfriend when they went to find out she was pregnant. They went to the community clinic to get a pregnancy test. When Maria received the news she was pregnant, she recalled:

We [boyfriend] just walked out [of community clinic], and ... we literally walked out of the clinic and just started laughing. We just started laughing like it was a joke. Started laughing and then we got into the car and I just started crying, because the next thing I think of was, I got to tell my parents.

Her parents forbade Maria's relationship with her boyfriend to continue. She explained, "They didn't want nothing to do with him. I couldn't talk to him, couldn't see him, nothing." Her parents pressed charges for statutory rape and took Maria's boyfriend to court. Maria rebelled and ran away to her boyfriend's parents' house. While at court, Maria remembered that the judge asked all the adults to leave and spoke to only Maria and her boyfriend. He reassured them that all the drama and problems would be gone once the baby was born. Maria recalled what the judge told them, saying, "You all are going to be just fine. When that baby comes, these people are going to change completely I promise you." He asked them to sympathize with their parents and comply with their wishes. Maria, her boyfriend, and parents came to an arrangement they could all agree on and adhered to. Maria went back to her parent's house. Over time her parents came to accept their relationship and allowed them to visit. Maria explained:

They would allow him to come over and we'd have to stay in the front room or on the porch and all of that. Eventually he didn't leave. He was still coming around and he didn't just leave. He was ready to take care of the baby. He understood his responsibility, and he was fine with it. He was like, I'm not going anywhere, I'm going to take care of my baby. He held his word. He never left.

The first sign of acceptance from her family was the inclusion of Maria's boyfriend at the baby shower. Maria recalled:

Like I remember he was even there for the shower. They threw me a shower and everything and he was there for that. He was even there, obviously he was there when I gave birth. By that time, I think they were okay with him. They love him now. They just adore him and think he's the world now.

Over time, Maria's parents accepted the pregnancy and allowed the boyfriend to visit. Maria remained living with her parents until the baby was four. They eventually moved out after they married and had their own home.

Leticia had been living with her boyfriend's parents and wanted to start a family. Leticia intentionally got pregnant, after she miscarried, and gave birth to a son. Leticia was happy about the idea of them being a family and her boyfriend was excited about the pregnancy. When she learned she was pregnant, she recalled, "I was very happy because that's what I thought I wanted. . . which I love him to death." His family was not too upset. Leticia did not worry about her mother's reaction as she felt her mother had abandoned her. Leticia had a different reaction the second time she became pregnant. Leticia was angry as she had not planned it and felt it was too soon after having her first child. Leticia said, "I did not plan [the pregnancy of] my daughter. It was the first time I had sex after I gave birth, I ended up pregnant with her." Her in-laws were accepting of



the second pregnancy but cautioned them to use protection and follow through with their responsibilities.

Christina recalled experiencing a range of emotions when she learned she was pregnant. She commented, “I felt happiness, worried, scared and excitement. I’m pregnant? Yay, I’m pregnant! Oh no, I’m pregnant! I’m pregnant.” She wondered if the biological father wanted to be part of their life and how her parents would take the news. While her family was happy about the baby they were saddened because they thought Christina had ruined her life. “Everyone was on a roller coaster of emotions. They were happy [for the baby] and sad [I was ruining my life],” she said. Her father had the same sentiment. His outlook did not change until Christina earned her bachelor’s degree and then he saw the likelihood of a successful future. She shared her perceptions of her father’s view, stating, “It wasn’t until I got my degree that he realized I was going to be someone and that when I felt that he was truly proud of me.” Her father did not live to see Christina earn her master’s degree.

There was an elevation of conflict in Christina’s household when she became pregnant. Christina’s step-mother worried about the influence a pregnant teenager might have on her daughter. This created tension and arguments between Christina’s father and step-mother. Her father was caught in the middle. Christina was not comfortable and soon found a solution to the problem which was to move out of her parent’s house. She moved in with her boyfriend at his parent’s house when the baby was one-month old. She did this because she wanted her boyfriend to be a part of their lives.

### **Family Dynamics**

Family dynamics have been central to many aspects of daily life. The dynamics of the family can help or hinder a problem. In some instances, the participants’ family dynamics increased the number of barriers they had to overcome to obtain their post-

secondary degree. In some, while there may not have been an increase in obstacles, family dynamics was still a barrier for these participants. The family dynamics include the make-up of the family and living arrangements.

Four of the five participants were raised by a single parent or by their grandparents. For three of the participants the single parent was their mother. The primary caregiver for one of the participants was her father, but she was ultimately raised by her paternal grandparents. For four participants, their single parent eventually remarried, which caused an added layer of problems to the participants' lives. Their home lives were not stable and eventually the participants had to move out. Only one of the five participants, Maria, was raised by both parents. Maria mentioned this served to improve her focus on school instead of on the relationship with the biological father.

Maria stated:

And I think that the fact that my parents didn't force me to go get married or force him to move in or me to live with him or anything like that, I think they keeping me as how can I say? Being pregnant, still going to school, going to college these were a whole bunch of factors, but then you want to add on being a wife and running a household and doing all this other stuff. I think those early years of me just learning how to be a parent and still grow up at the same time I didn't have to have all of this [relationship], I just had [school] here to deal with. Then I got [relationship] later. Once I learned how to deal with [balancing school as a mother]. I think that's just thinking about it that way I think that helped and it helped me be more mature about the situation and being able to handle instead of having everything on top of me at one time and then just crumbling because it was too much.

Maria worked to maintain the relationship as she did not want to cause her daughter to grow up without a father or to have to endure conflict with a step-father.

Maria said:

But I don't want to be with another man that's not my daughter's father. I remember thinking being fearful of anything happening to her. God forbid anything happens to her you know things were happening and stuff I won't be able to trust any other man with my daughter but him, but her dad. I think in the back of my mind I just knew we're going to eventually end up together. We got to grow up first. I think that's what did it, was just knowing yeah, we'll probably end up together.

Leticia, Veronica, and Christina lived with their future in-laws through the four years they attended high school and thereafter. Leticia's story is an example of the turmoil the participants had to overcome in their primary home prior to moving with their future in-laws. When Leticia was in the seventh grade her mother married a man, who had two teenage daughters. When the new family members moved in, Leticia recalls it was chaos in the home. There were four teenage females in the same household with two very diverse upbringings. By then Leticia's half-sister was rebelling against her mother. Leticia observed the differences between her mother and step-father's parenting, she said:

He was very free with his daughters and we had so many rules. Even in the same house with his daughters doing as they pleased, we still had rules and bed times. There was no joint parenting, it was his daughters and your daughters, it was just not good.

Leticia's half-sister moved out at the age of about 15 because of the struggle between their mother. Leticia tried to leave with her, but her mother would not allow it. Leticia recalled feeling alone, explaining, "Then I stayed there by myself, that's what I

felt.” Leticia remembers not being supported by her mother whenever her step family was mean towards her. Her mother did not take any action to protect her or stop them. Leticia was dating the boy who would become her husband and father of her children. At the age of 14, she ran away with him to live at his parents’ house. Her mother did not try to locate her and take her back home. Leticia thinks this was because, “I was the last hurdle to her perfect family.” Leticia remained living with her future in-laws through the four years she attended high school and thereafter.

Living with their in-laws was also the case for Veronica and Christina. They mentioned this was an enormous support. Veronica commented:

Yeah, they were extremely helpful. I still contributed, obviously, to groceries and keeping up with the house and things like that, but if I had school and my mother-in-law was there, I needed to go to class, she would help feed her while I helped get dinner going. We really helped a lot with that. A lot of people would be like, "Oh my God, you live with your in-laws or your in-laws always lived close by you." Like even when we lived in the big house, they lived in a little apartment on the property. It was never a problem. They were never in our business or condescending in any way. They were really great people. They kept their distance. The same way that they did with him growing up and his sister. They did the same thing with us. They never meddled. They never told me how to raise my daughter or my son.

The participants overcame the barrier by establishing a stable home for themselves with their boyfriend’ family, or in two of the instances, with their parent(s). The stability of their residence made it possible for them to remain in school. The stable environment contributed to their abilities to overcome and complete their post-secondary educations. Had they stayed in dysfunctional homes without support for them or their

children, they may not have been able to achieve their educational goals and obtain a post-secondary degree.

### **Relationships**

The interview data showed that teenage pregnancy can place an added strain on relationships. Marital problems can impede obtaining a post-secondary education by prolonging the educational path. In both Veronica and Leticia's cases, even though they enrolled in college before their high school graduation, this did not expedite their graduation. The delay was due to their marital problems which caused them to extend the time to earn their college degree. This was a barrier that could have halted their educational tracks. Veronica and Leticia divorced the biological father of their children. They came to realize the relationships they had with their partners was not one they wanted to continue to be a part of. Leticia, for example, was a victim of domestic violence. After several years of marriage, Leticia and her husband divorced. They had a toxic relationship she could no longer endure. She suffered verbal and physical abuse. Prior to getting to this point she tried to get his family to help, but they either chose not to or, at times could not help. She had to take the drastic step of leaving. Leticia marks the divorce as the most negative experience thus far in her life. She recalled:

I mean my divorce was probably the most detrimental part of my life because at that point, I knew family was important and I did everything I could for many years to keep my marriage, but it got to the point where I was like, I can't do this anymore. I can't do this anymore because my younger two were being affected by it so much, that's when I left. I left not knowing where I was going or if I had money or what was happening, but at that point in life, I did not care.

During Veronica's marriage, while she was embarking on her bachelor's degree, she and the biological father were going through difficulties in their relationship. They

separated and reunited multiple times during her track to obtaining her bachelor's degree. Veronica said, "I failed some classes. My husband and I, at the time, we separated. Then we got back together." There were also gaps where she was not able to take the full number of hours to be considered a full-time student. This would cause her to lose some of the financial aid funds.

Leticia had to stop attending college after a year due to the separation from her husband. During the separation, Leticia went to stay with mother. She had to work to pay for her expenses and her mother was unsupportive. Leticia commented that she did not want to raise her children in an unsupportive environment, like she grew up in, so she risked her well-being and happiness for a better outcome for her children and went back with her husband. Leticia's sister said their mother convinced Leticia to return to the biological father even though there were still problems. Leticia eventually reunited with the father of her children. She said, "My alternative was to go back with him and try to raise our kids the way we're supposed to." She resumed college in 2000 and went on to have two more children with him. During the time she attended college, Leticia had more children with him, for a total of five children overall. She earned her bachelor's degree in 2007. At the time of the interview, she was working on her master's degree and was expected to complete it in fall 2017; ten years after completing her bachelor's degree.

Two of five participants remain married to the biological father of their children. Christina and Maria mentioned their husbands as an important support system throughout the relationship. Maria did share there was a great amount of effort required to make their relationship work. Due to the living arrangements where Maria lived with her parents and the baby, while the biological father lived with his parents, more of the

caretaking responsibility was placed on Maria. It was difficult for Maria and her boyfriend to have a typical courtship as parents. Maria described:

It's like you're having this boyfriend-girlfriend relationship where it's just a childhood relationship here, but then you have adult responsibilities. It's like we were still living this little teenage life, yet we had to be back over here and be parents. That was really challenging I can say for the most part.

The stress caused Maria and the biological father to temporarily break up and seek other companionships. While it was short-lived, it did cause problems in their relationship and stress on Maria. Maria wanted to settle down, but her boyfriend was living a carefree teenage life. She explained:

He was still being a guy and wanting to do whatever he wanted to do kind of thing. Here I was trying to keep us together. He was my first boyfriend, never been with anyone else, you're the only one I know. I can't lose you.

Maria was adamant about making it work between them to prevent her daughter from having a step-father. She said, "I don't want to be with another man that's not my daughter's father." She had to allow time for them to grow up. Maria appreciated the fact her parents did not push them to get married. The time she spent living under her parents' roof allowed her to learn to be a mother. Once she and her boyfriend were ready to marry, she was ready to learn to be a wife. Maria recalled:

I think those early years of me just learning how to be a parent and still grow up at the same time, I didn't have to have all of this [marriage]. Then I got this [marriage] later. Once I learned how to deal with [motherhood]. I think that helped and it helped me be more mature about the situation and being able to handle instead of having everything on top of me at one time and then just crumbling because it was too much.

The living arrangements also caused conflict and arguments between Maria and her parents, especially with her mother, after the birth of the baby. Maria recalled feeling frustrated over being told what to do when she was now a parent, commenting, “I have my own daughter.” Her mother would tell her how to care for her daughter, which frustrated Maria. This would spark arguments between Maria and her mother, and her father would have to intervene. She would turn to her dad, saying, “Dad, I’m the mom. Why doesn’t she just let me be the mom? I’ll bathe her when I want to bathe her, and I will change her when I want to change her.” Her dad became the mediator between them. Maria now acknowledges her mother’s role was that of a caring mother. Eventually Maria came to appreciate her mother’s support. Maria explained, “She knew she was basically still raising me, still and helping me take care of her [her baby].”

Leticia also mentioned she had the responsibility of caring for her children per Leticia, parenthood did not deter the biological father from getting into his vehicle to go party with his friends. He would leave Leticia and the babies behind at home. While he would leave them to go to work that did not bother Leticia like the times he would leave to socialize with his friends. Leticia did not have the same flexibility to pick up and leave. She did not work, so when she was not in school, her time was dedicated to caring for her two children. Leticia recalled:

I never went out with friends, I pretty much stayed at the house and hung out with his sister. He had his own truck, so he would do whatever he wanted to do and go out and hang out with friends and stay out. He would go out and hang out with his friends, come home the next day I mean that kind of stuff.

Leticia has a total of five children. Four of them were fathered by her husband and the middle child was from a different man during their separation. She had her first two children from husband, the third child was from a different man and when she and



her husband reunited they had two more children. Leticia recognized she was a different parent to her two youngest children, whom she had later in life, than she was to her first two children since she was a young teenager when she had her first two children and did not have the parenting skills she later learned. She attributed the change in her parenting style to the knowledge she gained in parenting her first three children, and through the educational classes she took. Leticia said:

I mean just being so young and parenting and the mistakes that you make, because I'm a different parent to my younger two, than I am to my older two. Not because I love them more is because I understand now what this is supposed to look like.

There were intricacies of the family dynamics that can be attributed to pre-existing factors in the teenager's life prior to the pregnancy, such as single-parent, however, some of those were augmented with the teenage pregnancy such as conflict. The teenage pregnancy presented another element for the participant to consider - their future and work towards making it a better one for their child. They had to overcome their family dynamics and cultural expectations imposed on them as Latinas.

### **Culture**

The cultural expectations posed a barrier to obtaining a post-secondary degree. Leticia noted cultural expectations were an obstacle Latinas need to overcome to get an education. Leticia said:

The whole mindset of needing a man or being submissive to that piece, no, that does not work for me. To me it's like they have to play a certain role because of the culture and they get stuck in that because if you're not doing that piece, then they don't feel like they are living up to what they are supposed to, being the woman.

Leticia went on to add the way Latinos can overcome this obstacle is through obtaining an education. The participants expressed that the cultural expectations posed a conflict to their educational aspirations. Veronica provided insight into the obstacle Latinas face from her experience working in higher education. Veronica elaborated:

I think in some cultures, let's say for example, a Puerto Rican family that may be similar to a Mexican family, but that lives maybe in the city, versus lives in a rural community, is gonna be different and have a different mindset in regard to the futures of their daughters. Let's say if their daughters are teen moms in both situations, it tends to be a little different. A generational history, if you look at Latinos who have a Doctorate, were like less than two percent. That machismo type thing, "If you get this, then you think you're better than us, or if you move up to this social class, you think you're better than us." Yet, it's okay for the men, especially in this community, to go out and make more money working the refinery, but let the woman choose to go out and get an education to go into an industry to make more money, like, "Why would you want to do that?" Well, what difference is it that the woman want to go out and be a foreman and make more money? It's those roles, because you need to take care of your husband and your kids and your household and your everything else before you do the other. For me being from a mixed household, there was still that mindset of if you're married, you take care of your house, you make sure your house is clean all the time, you make sure everything is taken care of, and you work. That's just what you did.

Veronica noted the importance of an education was stressed in her family and it was viewed as the change agent. She also noted the importance of self-efficacy and

motivation to be able to overcome barriers to obtaining a post-secondary degree.

Veronica stated:

My grandmother always instilled that education, and I knew my education was the only way out of poverty, so that was why I did it. But if another young girl who's more submissive, financially is taken care of, because the boyfriend is out or the husband is out making good money, then their sole role is the house, the kid, and the husband. It's those three things first. So, if they're not aspiring or have a desire or maybe they never did feel too smart or just did enough to get by, just didn't have the motivation.

Several of the participants spoke strongly on how they did not want to be thought of as just a caretaker. Yet, while they fought the norms they could not avoid falling into the typecasts at times. This seemed to be an internal conflict the women battled throughout their lives. Reflecting on this, Veronica viewed her actions in her life as a form of fulfilling the culture role of a wife, which was to be the caretaker, the one taking care of the children and the husband. Veronica felt she became a mother and wife at such an early age because it was expected of her as a woman. Veronica did not view becoming pregnant as a big shock or change in lifestyle. In Veronica's view, she saw it as normal occurrence of what is expected of women to show their love for their men and fulfill their role as women. She was young and impressionable, needed to have something of her own to love, and she thought having a baby would satisfy this need. Her mind was set on having a baby and that is what she did. Growing up she saw women as the caretakers of the children and husbands. This was the message ingrained in her. Veronica recalled:

I was fulfilling my role of what a wife was supposed to do. I felt like if I work, contribute to the home, and I have food for you, I fulfill your needs, you've no need to go anywhere else, for any of it. This is what a wife is supposed to do. This was taught and reinforced by her grandmother, mother and other women in her life. Veronica said:

One of the things my grandmother told me was, and even though I saw it when she was in a relationship, you took care of your man. You did whatever it took to take care of him. I saw it amongst other women. I saw it in my mom.

Maria mentioned how cultural expectations prevented her from going to her mother for advice about relationships in general. While Maria remembered always feeling respectful towards her mother, she did not have a friendship with her, per se. She recalled how her sisters sought advice from their mother about anything, but Maria just didn't see that as part of their relationship. She commented, "I never had that with my mom. It's not that we didn't want it, it's just she was my mom, I didn't tell her things like that." The nature of the relationship could be due to Maria being the oldest and having different cultural expectations placed on her as such. Although Maria hinted at wanting to talk with her mother, she felt embarrassed and viewed it as a form of disrespect to talk about topics like boyfriends and sexual issues. Instead Maria saw her mother as a very supportive and nurturing mother. Maria explained, "She made sure we had everything we needed." Her mother would give advice such as how to always look presentable, the importance of a first impression, keeping a commitment, and never backing down.

When asked for advice participants would give teenage mothers, several of the participants cautioned against falling into the expectations of culture. They encouraged teenage mothers to seek ways to overcome the barrier of their cultural expectations by striving for an education, like they did. Veronica shared her observation:

I think Latinas in the traditional . . .family household, have this ... I mean, I've worked with so many girls that are getting married so young, because that's what's expected or because you want to go live on your own or, "You're gonna live with him, then you need to get married," you can't go to college because you need to help take care of your siblings. It's that common, reoccurring theme in our culture that you have to be the provider. You come last, because you're Latina. You, for yourself, come last. You take care of your husband, you take care of the kids, you take care of the house, and then if there's anything left for yourself, then you do it, and that includes an education. The majority [response when the females have opportunity to go off to college] is, "Why would you want to leave [home]? You can't leave [home]. Your family's here. Your siblings are here. You need to help take care of your mom. You need to help take care of the kids." So sometimes [the cultural expectations are] the biggest obstacles.

The cultural expectations placed on Latina women were barriers the participants had to overcome to obtain their post-secondary degree. The cultural expectations were barriers because they prescribed the role of Latinas as one of a wife or caretaker instead of allowing them to choose their future aspirations. The participants overcame the barriers posed by the cultural expectations with an education and setting new standards for themselves. While the family dynamics and cultural expectations were a social and societal structure the participants had to overcome, they were also faced with health barriers concerning their own health and their child's health.

### **Health**

The health condition of the teenage mother or baby can pose a barrier to obtaining an education. Four of the five participants experienced minor health complications

during their pregnancies. Two of the four continued experiencing health complications after birth. In both cases, it caused them to be hospitalized, and had long term effects.

Leticia had complications with both pregnancies that caused her to be hospitalized; nonetheless, both babies were healthy. The school absence caused Leticia to miss a state test, so she had to retake the test later. The state test was a requirement for graduation.

Viviana experienced anemia, which, according to the CDC, is a common health complication in teenage pregnancies (CDC, 2016). Although she was not hospitalized for the anemia she was under the doctor's care for the duration of the pregnancy. Viviana could receive adequate medical care because she was covered by her parents' insurance. If she had been under the state's healthcare, she would not have been able to receive as tailored medical care. The doctor instructed her to eat more. She was petite and underweight prior to her becoming pregnant, so it was necessary for her to gain weight. She was unable to gain weight during and after the pregnancy. Her mother tried to tell her the importance of taking care of herself during the pregnancy, but Viviana would not listen. Viviana recalled, "The challenge I guess for me was having that knowledge of ... and my mom would tell me, but I wouldn't listen to her sometimes." Viviana thought she was doing enough by taking prenatal vitamins, but when that was still not producing the results needed she turned to reading pregnancy books and doing research. In reading about pregnancy, she realized the importance of her being healthy to sustain and breastfeed the baby. Veronica said:

Before I was driven to be successful, but after I got pregnant, and I started to realize that it wasn't about me anymore and that it was about my baby that's inside, and I needed to start doing things that were better for our future. So, I felt having her has changed me immensely, where I was more driven, like I said. It's

something small, but I would never take pills for anything. I would, like, it would . . . I could not do it but whenever I found out I was pregnant, and I had to take prenatal vitamins, that's whenever I started, like, taking those vitamins 'cuz it wasn't for me anymore. It was for her. I had to do it for her. I had to do everything so that I could be a good role model.

The onset of a long-term health condition is another barrier affecting teenage mothers in obtaining a post-secondary degree. Such was the case for both Maria and Christina. They experienced a health complication for the first time during their pregnancies that would develop into long-term condition. The health condition may cause the loss of a typical high school experience. In Maria's case, she missed her junior year of high school due to health problems. Maria had heart problems and arthritis in the legs in her second trimester. Due to her health complications, Maria was out of school most of the fall semester and the spring semester prior to giving birth. She spent the year on homebound. Although Maria did not consider her heart murmur as a complication, it did impact her after the pregnancy. Maria said:

No, no complications during, it's just that I had the heart murmur, so they just had to put a monitor on me to monitor my heart during the birthing process, but not necessarily complications. Everything was fine, more for monitoring my heart to make sure I was going to be okay.

Maria remembered returning her senior year like any other student. She said, "I came back to school the first day of school my senior year, I mean I wasn't pregnant anymore I had already had her. I just came back like nothing. Had my first day of school." In addition to her health problems, both of her children suffered from febrile seizures as infants. Later in adulthood, Maria had to undergo a medical procedure after she suffered a mild stroke and required heart surgery to repair the problem. She recalled:

[Doctors put a device] because the heart murmur was still present [in the second pregnancy] and they did it as a precaution. Then right after, well my son was maybe a year old or two years old and then I ended up with a mild stroke and then the doctor was like, okay we need to get this fixed already.

Maria overcame the stroke and recovered from the surgery. She resumed work and school. She did not permit her health complications to deter her educational goals of obtaining a post-secondary degree.

Christina also suffered major health complications that caused her to be hospitalized after the birth of her daughter. She developed psoriasis which affects the immune system and can become worse over time. Christina noted, “I did have some complications with my pregnancy because I had my first break out with psoriasis.” Her stay in the hospital was extended which postponed her college enrollment. The courses she needed to graduate were not offered the following semester, so she had to delay the completion of her bachelor’s degree by one semester. She did not permit the health complication, and extended hospital stay, to deter her plans to obtain her post-secondary degree. In her forties, Christina suffered a stroke that left her speech impaired. While the stroke was not directly related to her psoriasis, she did suffer serious complications due to the psoriasis’ medications. Although she has made great strides to recovery, she is still undergoing therapy.

Most of the participants overcame their health complications by educating themselves, or simply following doctor’s orders. Instead of falling victim to the uncertainty of their conditions, they sought out knowledge. Viviana read about the importance of prenatal care and put into practice what she learned. Maria heeded her doctor’s orders and took part in the Homebound Program to be able to reduce the strain on her body. She educated herself on febrile seizures and could provide better care to her



second child after she gained awareness of the condition. The participants affected by a health complication did not allow it to permanently hinder their future. They managed the health complication(s) and surpassed the odds to obtain a post-secondary degree. They managed to do this while fulfilling multiple obligations.

### **Multiple Obligations**

The participants experienced multiple obligations as teenage mothers, that affected their educational journeys. As teenage parents, they experienced some challenging times and faced new opportunities. They were recipients of stigma, missed opportunities, faced with new challenges, and had to learn new skills. They had to learn to handle new obligations as mothers and students. The participants had new skills to acquire as teenage mothers and students. The added responsibilities posed a barrier to obtaining their post-secondary degree. At times, the multiple obligations were more of a distraction, and complicated their situation. One of these was the responsibilities of being a mother.

Veronica had to learn to manage her school work and other priorities while being a mother. She stated, “I never really had to buckle down and learn real study skills. It wasn't until I transferred to the university that I actually feel like I started to really learn study skills.” She was faced with having to learn how to learn. Her academic struggles caused her to take a longer track to earn her bachelor's degree. She had to also factor in her added responsibilities, which were unlike those of traditional college students. Due to her transient student status, she did not have the time to utilize all of the resources college offered. Veronica recalled:

Because I was married and had my daughter, I was that student that just came in to come to class, came on campus to go to class and went back home or went to work, because I still worked the whole time, too.

Academically, Veronica continued to struggle with the basic courses, so she decided to attend a different community college. From there she transferred to a university where, after some time wavering on her major, she earned her bachelor's degree in 2004. By the time she earned her degree, she had a second child. Veronica continued with school, and proudly shared that she earned her master's degree ten years after her bachelor's degree in 2014.

As a teenage mother, there were additional changes Maria faced that other teenagers did not. She recalled, "It was tough. Still having to get your work done. Still saying up at night and doing all those things." These changes impacted her education. She remarked how she had to mature more quickly than her peers, have priorities other than herself, and an added sense of urgency. She noticed these changes once she had her daughter. Maria recalled:

You grow up right away. You grow up right away and you stop thinking about yourself. I started thinking about her and being able to provide for her. Before, of course you're just you and you got plenty of time to do all this stuff, but then once you have a child that changes because then you realize you still have all that time, but you really don't because you want to make sure that things are taken care of.

One barrier Maria faced when she attended college was the time she had to spend away from her children. During the time her daughter was an infant, Maria worked part time and attended college full time. She kept this routine until she became pregnant with her second child. Maria recalled, "Going to school all that time a lot of time was taken away from my kids because they had to be with somebody else all the time." During her second pregnancy, she took a break from school and focused on work.

Maria's goal was to earn her bachelor's degree; she never planned to earn her master's degree. She attributed earning her master's degree to the influence of certain

people. She explained, “Then I think once I got into teaching and of course you're around other people and sometimes other people make those influences on you, then I decided okay I want to do my master's, I can do this.” Maria did not go straight from her bachelor's studies to her master's studies, but she does not fault her being a teenage mother for the gap in her studies. She waited to continue her studies because she wanted to gain more years of experience to be able to lead a school. She remembered waiting until both of her children were in school, so she could continue school for her master's degree in school administration. Her oldest was 12 and going into middle school, and her youngest was five and starting Kindergarten when she began her graduate studies. These multiple obligations including her children and her career, affected her choice to pursue higher education.

Leticia recalled struggling with her school work in her English class. She remembered the senior English paper was a daunting task. She had to spend time working on the paper outside of regular school hours. This was a challenge because the time after school was dedicated to her two children. She recalled, “It was like after school I was in mom mode. Completing that assignment, which was a required assignment for graduation was difficult.” She did manage to get it done by working with her teacher. Leticia described how she handled such stressful times. She said:

Most times I would just put the baby to sleep and didn't have a choice but to get it [her schoolwork] done. I don't remember like crying or being depressed or angry anything like that it was just like I don't have a choice, I have to get this done and just kind of mustered through it.

Leticia was not able to use any of the resources in college due to a lack of time. She went from school to home, school to work to tending to her children. Leticia did not seem bitter about this. Instead she, compared herself to any other parents that were

attending college. She did not expect special treatment because she was a teenage parent. She recognized she made her choice and had to work just like any other adult. Leticia reflected:

I guess because by the time I was in college I knew I was where I was because of my own choices. I didn't want anybody to make any kind of special arrangements. I didn't feel like that was needed. Because other parents were in college.

The five participants took responsibility for their actions and did not want any special treatment or pity because they were teenage mothers. Instead they did what was needed to be successful and obtain a post-secondary degree. They were prepared to give their best effort and worked hard to balance their multiple obligations.

### **School Mobility**

Moving or changing schools, and to a larger degree, school districts, can be a barrier to obtaining an education as the continuity of learning is disrupted. Teachers must get to know the student and vice versa. Students must get to know the school expectations and acclimate to the school culture. Most of the participants described experiencing a move during an important time in their schooling that left an unforgettable impression on them. At any one time they could have been a statistic and dropped out due to the difficulties of the change, but they did not instead they worked through the transition.

Viviana experienced a lot of transitions during her education. The changes occurred at pivotal times. She moved several times during early childhood. Changing schools did not help her reading problems. With each move, there were notable differences in curriculum, expectations, and demographics. In middle school, she attended school in an urban district, where Latinos were a majority. Then for grades 9-

11<sup>th</sup>, she moved to a suburban district that was more competitive. As a Latina, she was a minority in that district. Her mother regretfully recalled:

Here we're going through a struggle and I realize Viviana was doing so well in reading and it's like, and all of a sudden, she doesn't really know how to read. ... I took her out from this school... and I moved her to another school to see if they could help her out. That was something really ... It affected her. I moved to another school. It was a struggle from there all the way through, let's say sixth grade. In sixth grade, my husband and I, the stepdad, would always keep track of her, trying to see what was best for her, talking to the teachers, trying to get her in the right direction. I feel that after sixth grade she was doing well in school.

The final move came during her senior year when she moved back to the urban district. Viviana reflected:

I honestly wished I would have stayed at one elementary, transition to one middle school, transition to one high school. I feel that moving so many schools, it was hard for me to connect with people, and it caused great instability.

With each move Viviana had to adjust and work through it as best she could.

There were times she felt like she didn't belong. Viviana mentioned:

Because of the school that I went to. It was majority White, and I was a minority except that whenever I moved back to my other school Hispanics are the majority but whenever I'm there, I don't fit in quite right, either, so it's like I'm in the middle of, White race and Hispanic, so it's like, in the middle at both places.

Like Viviana, Veronica also experienced social adjustments due to changing schools. There was a major transition during middle school that Veronica recalled as "horrible." In sixth grade, she had to change schools because of their attendance zone. Although she only moved from one side of the neighborhood to another, the change was

as drastic as if she had changed cities. This was a major culture shock for Veronica. She experienced racism for the first time as a Latina at a majority Black and White school. There were differences between the two sides that were immediately evident. While some of the Black students befriended her at school, she could not hang out with them outside of school. She was not considered Black, so she could not be in their part of town. The White kids ostracized her. The racism caused her to feel unaccepted which affected her level of comfort at school. She said, “The [lack of] confidence and the uncomfortableness came from not feeling a part of the rest of my class, and that was mainly in middle school.” She started to rebel in hopes to be sent back to her previous school. Veronica recalled, “I started skipping class and getting in trouble, because I thought that if I got kicked out I'd get sent back to my home school. I didn't really rationalize, or know, why we moved.” She did not know moving back was not an option. After she got in trouble, her grandmother told her to make the most of it because they would not be moving back. It only took one time of serving detention for Veronica to learn her lesson. She said, “I did one Saturday assignment and I was like, I hate this, so I guess I have to make the most of it.” Veronica did make a change for the better. In seventh grade she became involved in every extracurricular opportunity available to “prove [students] wrong.” Veronica recalled:

I got involved in every club, every sport, cheerleading, student council, everything possible, to prove them wrong. But to also make the most of it. But then, to also occupy my time. By eighth grade I ended up being voted cutest and most popular, and crazy awards now that I'm like, I don't know how in the world that happened.

Veronica was not one to shy away from telling people how she felt, or her viewpoint. There was an incident with a classmate where Veronica felt she needed to set

the record straight. A teammate's mother gave Veronica a ride, when during the ride, the girl let Veronica know she was glad they were friends. Veronica was in disbelief, given previous treatment from this girl and others. She recalled:

But there was a time, we came back from a cheerleading camp and one of the girls said, I'm so glad we became friends. I told her, I said, we're not friends. When have you ever invited me to your house? When have you ever invited me to any of your parties? Just because I do all this doesn't mean that we're friends. The mom was like ... I remember this big, old-school suburban, and she's looking in the rear-view mirror, and she's just thinking something's about to happen. I was like, I'm not trying to be mean, I said, "just that's the way you all treated me. I said, why? I don't understand. Why did you all treat me like that? They would stick their foot out in the aisle when I'd walk by, or they would look at me like I was filthy. It's not like I was some dirty, lice-infected kid. They said that they had heard rumors about me, when I moved from [previous school], that I had fought a lot and that I had stabbed somebody. I was like ... That was the rumor mill of those kinds of schools.

Veronica was unable to contain her frustration and pretend everything was fine. She let the teammate know how she felt, and the reason she felt the way she did. Veronica wanted the teammate to know she was not trusting they were friends given the previous treatment.

Veronica experienced a different type of transition when she entered high school. Although she remained at the same high school for all four years, she was going through a change. She started high school on the "right" path. She played basketball her ninth grade year, but after hanging out with the wrong crowd, she started skipping classes, getting into fights, and falling behind academically. She remembered not feeling like she

fit in and disconnected, so she gravitated towards her previous friends. Veronica recalled:

I was very conflicted as far as culturally fitting in, and where I fit in, because I was mixed. My Spanish wasn't all that great. I didn't know who to hang around. It's kind of like in the Selena movie when they say you're not Mexican enough for the Mexicans, but you're too Mexican for the Whites, and you're not White enough for the Whites. Then my hair is really, really curly, so sometimes I'd be confused for other races. Or I'd come back from California and I'd be super tan. It was like ... you're either White, Mexican, or black. There was no other diversity in the community. Yeah. I had a hard time with that.

The rebellious period did not last long, but it made an impact. That was the time she started skipping and ended up pregnant which resulted in a miscarriage. The significance of her possibly being a mother somewhat settled her. She went from being in one relationship to another; she recalled, "Then, pretty much, right after him, is when I started dating who became the father of my two kids, my ex-husband." She had a better sophomore and junior year of high school. She attended school and was passing her classes.

Maria described herself as a straight A student until middle school. While in middle school, she made her first C. Maria's mother thought it was the school setting and decided to move them to a different school. Maria remembered her mother giving them a choice: they could go to the school their attended or to a school in a very different neighborhood with a predominantly White student population. It scared Maria to go to school where the majority of students were not Latinos. She explained, "I started thinking, no. It's going to be too different for me." She was used to attending schools with a predominately Latino student population. She and her brother chose to go to the



school their mother attended. The change was difficult for Maria. She recalled, “That’s probably that one point in my school that I just did not like at all. I ended up not liking it at all.” Maria struggled to make friends while her brother flourished at the new school. To cope with missing her friends, Maria would ask her mother to take her to visit her friends at her former school. Maria attributed those friendships to getting her through the transition. She said, “I think that kind of helped with that transition just having those close friendships nearby.” Once Maria got used to the change and made some friends, she stopped going to her former school to visit. According to her, however, she never made lasting friends like the ones at her prior school. Maria recalled the transition of middle school as the least favorable experience of her school years. She said, “You already have a hard time adjusting during that time of your life and being taken from your comfort zone to a new school where there’s new people and all of that, that was really tough.” During the tough transition, Maria still maintained passing grades. She recalled, “I can’t say that it affected my grades because I always made sure my grades were fine, I think it was just the whole experience of it.” Her parents never knew Maria had such a hard time with the transition; it was something they found out once she shared the experience with them as an adult.

The school changes were difficult because that is when the feeling of isolation was made real. Most of the participants shared feeling alone or isolated. The participants mustered through the school changes and found ways to compensate. Some gravitated to an individual, whether a friend, or most of the time, a boyfriend. They struggled through the school mobility problems on their own without really expressing their concerns to their parents. This could have been because they knew they had no other choice or because they had learned to make their situation work for them. The events prepared them for the stigma they would experience as teenage mothers.

## **Stigma of Teen Pregnancy**

Stigma can be prevalent in the educational setting and can hinder, or negatively impact, an individual's education. All five of the participants described experiencing some form of stigma related to their pregnancies from either their teachers, classmates, or community members. Viviana described how being pregnant in high school was very disgraceful. Viviana recalled:

It's very shameful to be pregnant in high school and to be that young, too. [I felt] very judged and especially since I even look younger than what I actually am, so I felt very, um, excluded, um, very judged.

Viviana also lost friendships over being pregnant. People she considered friends stopped associating with her. She recalled, "All of my ... I thought were my friends, stopped talking to me so it was a very hard time." Viviana felt isolated and ostracized by her school community. The treatment caused her to keep her pregnancy a secret as much as possible. She wore clothes a size larger to avoid calling attention to her growing body. She only shared the news about her pregnancy with some of her closest friends fearing rumors would start if others found out. Viviana did not inform her teachers about her pregnancy. She was embarrassed to let them down. She said, "I felt ashamed. I didn't want them to be disappointed in me." Although none of her teachers ever verbalized their thoughts, she did pick up on their body language. When Viviana and some of her friends stopped by to visit one of their teachers after her daughter was born, she recalled:

I did go visit one of my teachers after I had her [my daughter], and I could tell that she was very disappointed that I ... 'cuz I came in with, with my little one. She looked very disappointed but tried to be positive, but I could definitely tell that there was disappointment in the potential that I had.

Veronica faced stigma as well from some of the school staff when she was pregnant. She remembered a teacher getting upset with her because she would have to leave the room to vomit. The teacher did not show any compassion for the side effects from the pregnancy. Veronica said:

When I became pregnant in high school, I did have a math teacher that made me feel pretty uncomfortable. But I think it was more so that, "Oh, you're pregnant. Another teen mom" kind of thing and I'd have to leave her class because I was getting sick every morning until she moved me to be closer by the door, so I guess I was a little bit of a disruption having to walk across the front of the class.

Veronica had to be resourceful even in the face of humiliation. She heard an announcement over the school speaker about financial aid to help pay for college. She went to the counselor's office to get more information. The reaction she received from the counselor left her astonished and determined. She recalled:

She looked at me, and she looked at my stomach, and she looked at me, she said, "You're going to go to college?" I'll never forget it. I can see it so clear all the time that I talk about it. I said, That's the plan. She goes, "Well, all the information you need is right over there." It was file cabinets, so it was a wall of file cabinets. She turned around and walked away from me. I was like, okay, well.

Veronica did not let the stigma of teen pregnancy, or the counselor's lack of support, deter her from enrolling into college but rather used that experience to push her to follow through. She went to the community college and enrolled for the summer session which would start right after graduation. She would start as a college student taking Developmental Mathematics in the fall of 1997.

Maria encountered stigma when she took part in a program intended to provide support. What should have been a positive experience left a negative impression on

Maria. It was not the program itself, but something that happened because of the affiliation with the program. Maria recalled someone from the school newspaper stopping by during one of the meetings. They asked to take a picture of the group and informed them they would be running a story. Maria did not see any problem and posed for the picture, as did the other young mothers in the group; some even held their babies. Maria felt insulted and exploited when she saw the article and the caption that read, "Babies having babies." Maria tried to complain to the school newspaper teacher, but the teacher replied it was out of her control. She explained she could not do anything about the slant the writer decided to take on the story, and added it was too late, as the story had already been published. Maria felt betrayed.

While Leticia said she did not feel she experienced stigma because of her pregnancy, she did share some instances where she felt judged. One such time was when she felt people were disapproving of her nursing her children. She had an incident during school where she leaked through her shirt and had to get a change of clothes. She encountered shock and judgment from staff and peers instead of assistance. She would receive negative comments from different people when shared the number of children she had. She shared some of the offending comments she received from her peers, saying, "I did get the . . . oh, you're Mexican, they do multiply a lot. Like the nasty comments, that kind of stuff. You didn't have TV at your house, that kind of thing."

Christina attended a majority Latino high school where she said teachers had low expectations of the students. She recalled a negative comment made by one of her teachers belittling their magnet status as not important: "All you magnet kids are just like everybody else." Christina wanted to disprove her teacher but instead ended up confirming her teacher's comments. She commented, "I felt as if I had to prove to her that I was awesome, then I got pregnant and I could not say anything anymore. She just

looked at me and she would smirk.” Christina felt stigmatized by other teachers as well. Even her extracurricular teacher made a negative comment after she became pregnant, Christina remembered, “My advisor teacher said I was not going to be anything and my ROTC teacher also looked at me as if I was doomed.” Some of her peers criticized her situation behind her back. She stated, “I looked White, so they always said things like, . . . she thought she was going somewhere.” Other peers were shocked she was having sexual relations. She did not allow these negative comments to determine her future.

The participants used the stigma as a drive to achieve their educational goals and successfully prove the naysayers wrong. Their resiliency helped buffer the comments. They maintained their focus on their ultimate goals, obtaining a post-secondary degree.

#### **Low Socioeconomic Status (SES)**

Low socioeconomic status posed a barrier to obtaining a post-secondary degree. One reason for this is the lack of engaging and educational opportunities in a low SES community. Christina noted the discrepancy in the communities she resided in growing up; Christina noted teenage pregnancy was an uncommon event in the community she grew up in. The focus was on attending school. The community she moved to with her in-laws had a high Latino population and low socioeconomic level. It was a high-poverty working class environment. Christina remembered teenage pregnancies were more common in her in-laws’ community. Christina said, “In my community, it was uncommon. I lived in a good part of town and everyone around me was in school.” Veronica also mentioned that teenage pregnancy was not uncommon in her community. Veronica said, “It was not an uncommon thing like when my mom was pregnant with me. For me it was just, you’re just another young Latina working at the grocery store pregnant. No big deal.”

Three of the five participants described their childhood as poor. Two of them described their upbringing as working class. All five participants sought an education to break the poverty cycle and improve their socioeconomic status.

Christina and Viviana described their childhood as working class. Viviana's mother described her children's childhood as a difficult time one in which, "All we were trying to do is survive, like financially moving on." Growing up, Veronica recalled they were poor. Veronica's grandmother worked all the time, but it was not enough to cover all the bills, so they often had someone staying with them to help cover costs. Due to their socioeconomic status, they did not remember having family outings, much less vacations. Veronica did fondly remember going to California during the summers from the ages of about six to 16. Initially she would go stay with her uncle and his wife since her mother worked shift hours and was unable to supervise her, but after they had children, she would help watch the children during the summer. Veronica recalled these times as, "The most memorable childhood experiences." The summers offered respite from the hectic school year.

When asked what made Christina's experience different from other Latina teenage mothers, she noted, "I had a family to support me, I had insurance, I had a doctor, and I didn't need food stamps or any other assistance." Christina attributed these economic factors as the main reasons she was able to overcome the barriers to obtaining a post-secondary degree. Christina's life did not remain financially stable for long. After she had the baby and moved with her in-laws, they experienced financial struggles. It was a difficult time for her and her boyfriend. They were teenage parents, going to school, and struggling financially. Christina recalled:

It was one big challenge after another. Getting married to a 17-year-old, having a kid and he was still in high school. Living with in-laws and paying for

[daycare]...the list can go on forever. There was one time we didn't have any money, but we needed pampers. We cracked open [baby's] piggy bank and had enough. We went through Christmas, Easter, birthdays, and lots of other activities where we could not buy things, but we also had no vehicle to get anywhere. It was definitely hard.

Veronica also experienced financial struggles and had to move in with her in-laws. She mentioned:

I remember being on welfare and having to go to United Way to beg for money. My husband at the time would get laid off, and then we'd be in the hole. We'd have to move in with his parents. We lived with his parents for a really long time.

Overwhelmingly, the participants mentioned the desire to improve their situation for their child. Christina said, "I wanted more for my daughter, so I went to school." Christina's husband shared the same goal. He said they discussed and decided the way to improve their situation was through an education. He said, "We made the decision. No matter what it took, we're going to get out. And it was going to start with [Christina's] education."

After a bad experience with her daughter at the community clinic, Veronica resolved to improve their situation. She wanted better for her daughter and knew education would be the way to improve their social environment. She reflected:

I took her to the clinic right here down the street to get shots one time, and the girl was just trying to be so quick she left the needle in my daughter's leg. I was just like, "This ... I'm tired of living off the government." I was like, "I'm not going to live like this." I just refused to live like that. I didn't want to be another generation that raised another teen daughter that lived on welfare. I just did not want that for my daughter at all.

Because of their low-SES environment, the participants lacked educational opportunities such as rigorous academic curriculum and college preparation. While the lack of participating in rigorous academic and college preparatory courses can be attributed to pre-existing factors in the teenagers' life prior to the pregnancy, the long-term consequences pose an even greater barrier to obtaining a post-secondary degree.

**Lack of rigorous academic preparation.** The lack of participation in advanced courses and challenging curriculum may pose a barrier to obtaining a post-secondary degree because the participants were at a disadvantage when it came to academic success and college preparation. All participants attended public high schools in the state of Texas. All participants graduated from a high school situated within the context of low-income neighborhoods. All participants were in general education classes. Overall, they mentioned a lack of academic support or encouragement to take rigorous academic courses. Without an exposure to challenging curriculum, the participants were at a disadvantage of an equitable college preparation. For example, Christina, even though she was in a magnet high school, did not feel the rigor was at the same level as advanced courses. Christina met the criteria for the magnet program in career technology since she wanted to be in the ROTC program. The magnet program was a specialized area (for example, math, or science, or career technology) and to enter the program there was an application process. The magnet program targeted children at-risk, and those with high ability. Christina noted the magnet program did not compare to Advance Placement (AP) courses. She recalled:

I was in the magnet program, and people seemed to think that was better, but actually it was just a way to bring in more people into the school. My classes were higher than general education classes, but they were not [rigorous] like AP.



Viviana was the only participant who mentioned attempting advanced courses. She made the attempt at the high achieving school where there was a strong emphasis on college. She did not continue in advanced courses, however. She mentioned the advanced courses, were too difficult, and did not feel prepared. Perhaps with the proper support, Viviana would have remained in the advanced courses, but because she was not confident in her abilities, she did not continue. Viviana recalled:

I tried them in high school, but it was really hard. My first [high school], because everyone else was doing it so I wanted to fit in with them. Me and my friends, we wanted to be in the same classes.

Both Veronica and Leticia did not feel they were informed, nor encouraged, to take advanced classes while in school. Veronica mentioned she was not the type to stand out as an academically strong student and, therefore, did not attract attention from her teachers or counselors when it came to be recommended for challenging coursework. She said, “I wasn't that top-notch student that counselors would approach me.” In elementary school, Veronica noticed the students were purposely separated by ability. She was in the higher ability grouping but even in this group, she recalled being unnoticed. She recalled:

Elementary and fifth grade is when I realized that they had us separated by the lower-performing students and the more academically-excelled type students. I noticed it because in the other class that was next door to us, a lot of my friends that lived like I lived, was in that class, but I was in the other class. I had a lot of the dual family households were the middle-income type households, there were more White kids in my class. In the other class it was like all minority kids. I knew there was some kind of difference, and then it really hit me whenever our teacher she announced to the whole class that the one student who was like a best

friend of mine, made it into GATE and I didn't know what that was. She explained it and she said it's for gifted and talented students. Well, I always knew that student was smarter than all of us. But then I remember thinking, "Well, why didn't I get into GATE?" I felt like I was pretty smart, too, and for whatever reason it requires teacher recommendation and then she went forward with testing. That's when I realized there was a difference between our classes.

Leticia had a similar experience where she felt capable of the work but was not aware of the opportunity. She commented, "I should have been in AP or pre-AP because I'm pretty smart. I just wasn't aware." Similar to other participants, none of Leticia's teachers recommended her for AP/pre-AP.

The lack of preparation in advanced courses posed a barrier once the participants entered college. The lack of preparation caused Leticia to need tutoring when she enrolled in college. Veronica had to take remedial math and struggled with College Algebra. She overcame the barrier by seeking an alternative and after three unsuccessful attempts at College Algebra, she changed to a major that did not require College Algebra. She also changed community college systems. She was more successful at the new community college. Veronica recalled:

Even when I did drop classes, like my college algebra, that math teacher, there was nothing about me that she was gonna come chase me down or call me because I missed class or, "I notice you've taken this class already three times. Is there anything I can do to help you?" That wasn't being done. There was a math tutoring lab, but I think I might've went there like twice, because I didn't want to stand out as a person who didn't know what they were doing. I just tried to find out on my own. It still wasn't challenging for me. Community college was still a lot like high school. I did my homework, I turned it in, and I made it by. College

algebra was the only struggling class I really had. Then when I changed to sociology and we went over my degree plan, that same counselor, he was like, "Oh, you're not gonna need college algebra, and probably a good thing, because it looks like you're struggling here. You're gonna need contemporary math." I was like, "Okay, but I'm not taking that here, I'm done with math here. I'm gonna go to [new community college], so I went to [new community college], I did my sciences and my math, excelled, did fine, and finally made my transfer. Even then, I don't ever remember a time that I was just like, "Oh my God, I don't know what I'm doing. I'm lost."

The lack of participation in a college preparatory course put Veronica at a disadvantage when it came to study skills while in college. Veronica overcame the barrier by being resourceful, observant, taking notice of how other students studied. Veronica stated:

There were times I felt like I didn't really know how to study and I'd kind of look at the way other people were highlighting and writing stuff out in the margins, and I would kind of mimic that, but I still felt like I over-wrote notes. I think I just kind of taught myself. I never went to workshops, really, that taught me how to study or take notes.

Although the participants did mention they were at a disadvantage and struggled because they did not take advanced courses, they did not let this obstacle discourage them from attending college. They had it set in their minds they were going to attend college and they worked to make that possible. They recognized their abilities, knew they were not unintelligent, and simply would need extra effort.

**Lack of assistance navigating college.** The lack of assistance navigating college posed another barrier to post-secondary education. This is a magnified barrier for the

teenage mothers given they have bigger responsibilities while embarking on the unknown without guidance. They could have easily stopped once they graduated high school, but they were cognizant that a college degree was going to be their way out of their situations.

Viviana noticed there was a difference in the expectations of students where in the more affluent community (her first high school) students were expected to go to college and in the low-SES community (her second-high school) the expectations were low.

Viviana recalled:

I think that my counselors at my first school were very helpful. They were really driven and told us that there was no other way, you're going to college no matter what, so you just have to decide where you want to go. So that was really helpful, just knowing I had no other option. Like this is your only option. . . My peers at my first high school um, helped me because they were, I promise, they're completely different than my second-high school. They had their planners and they had all these different things. I mean there was some of those at my other school, but like there was a majority here that were more driven. They knew where they wanted to go and what they wanted to do.

The lack of college exposure and awareness may have reduced the possibility of a college trajectory for the participants. Based on Christina's husband's response this was a common occurrence in their community. They had to make a conscience effort to break the cycle. He reflected:

I said I was not going to have that [nondegree] in the house because, being that we came from a socioeconomic- a low socioeconomic, uh, community, it was either we stay there and relive the cycle to just keep- that same cyclical

environment that would happen to Latinos back then, or we made the decision to get out.

Three of the five participants were first-generation college students; Veronica, Maria, and Christina had to navigate the college pathway on their own. The three participants were the oldest in their families and the first to attend and graduate from college. Veronica did not have anyone in her family to rely on for help and did not feel she was prepared to navigate college. While Veronica acknowledged being encouraged to attend college, she was not provided with assistance. Veronica said:

But as far as how I was gonna do it, how was I gonna pay for it, that was my job to figure out. That's where counselors, teachers, all that, none of those helped in high school. No one discussed graduation plans with me. I didn't even know what a GPA was until my senior year when other kids were getting their GPA and their class ring. I was like, "What does that mean?" I got mine and I was like, "Oh, I'm this. What are you?" And they were like, "Oh, I'm this," and I'm like, "Oh. What does that mean?" and there were like, "Oh, to get into college and stuff." I was like, "What do you have to have, like what is it?" I remember one of the girls telling me like, "Duh. From ninth grade to this grade, your grades-," and I was like, "Everything I've done from ninth grade 'til now went into that number?" and she was like, "Yeah." And I'm like, "Oh." I'm like, "Damn, I fucked that all up." I just felt if I pass the six weeks, I'm good. Just go on to the next six weeks and you're good.

Viviana and Leticia mentioned having had an immediate family member, their mothers, graduate from college. Although Leticia was not a first-generation college student, she was the only one of her siblings to attend college and earn a degree. Leticia sought out college information on her own accord. She worked through the enrollment

process on her own. Viviana's mother mentioned it helped being surrounded by good role models. She said:

Well, I feel that her coming to my school and seeing me teach lots of kids, going on functions, being part of something good, going to church. I don't know. I feel that because she's in that environment, she's looking at my teacher friends and looking at her little friends, their moms are educated. I feel that that has something to do with it.

As a first-generation college student, Maria had to navigate the college process on her own. She was not able to get help from her parents as they were not familiar with the process. She did not have anyone in her family she could turn to for help. So, she turned to the school for help with navigating the path to college. She explained:

I remember being back my senior year and going looking for scholarships for school. I did all that myself. I did looking for scholarships and applying for college. My mom and dad didn't know too much about that so I did all that myself.

Both Maria and Christina sought out college information and made most of the academic decisions on their own. Maria, who took part in a monthly mentoring group for first-generation students to help navigate them through college entrance, learned about scholarships through either her monthly mentoring group or by visiting the counseling center at her high school. She remembered following up on the scholarships she qualified for. She also explained that she was not able to go off to college like other peers. She recalled:

Later on it even became tougher because I didn't get to go out and do all those things that the other girls got to do. I didn't get to go away to college because I couldn't go away to college.

Maria did not let this deter her from her goals of attending college. She found a way that worked with her situation. She went to the local community college and later transferred to a four-year university.

The attainment of their college degrees was not on a typical four-year track like most college students. Their teenage pregnancy caused them to take longer to achieve their degree. In Viviana's case, there was a span of six years between her high school graduation and bachelor's degree; for Veronica, there was a span of seven years, for Maria, a span of eight years, for Leticia, a span of ten years; and for Christina, a span of five years. They worked through their barriers to obtain their post-secondary degrees.

### **Summary**

The above-mentioned barriers (family dynamics, multiple obligations, cultural expectations, relationships, school mobility, stigma, health, low socioeconomic status, lack of rigorous academic preparation, and lack of assistance navigating college) encountered by the participants could have halted their attainment of post-secondary education, but they did not allow the barriers to halt their dreams. Instead, the five Latina women embraced the challenges and gave their best effort to achieve their goal of a post-secondary degree. The participants faced their biggest problems and overcame them by employing influences such as the educational resources within their reach, their supportive family, and their resilience. The following external factors assisted the participants in obtaining a post-secondary degree.

### **Factors that Assisted in Obtaining a Post-Secondary Degree**

The participants mentioned factors that helped them overcome their barriers to obtaining a post-secondary degree. Analysis of the data demonstrated how participants succeeded to obtain a post-secondary degree. Six prominent themes emerged through the data analysis process. The order of the themes is not significant. The first theme was the

educational resources and educational support systems, which contributed to obtaining a post-secondary degree. The second theme was the factors of influence including family, boyfriend, religion, community support, and role models that contributed to obtaining a post-secondary degree. The third theme was the participant's personal transformation, which contributed to obtaining a post-secondary degree. The fourth theme was the positive outcomes of the pregnancy which contributed to their overall happiness and emotional well-being. The fifth theme was school stability that provided consistency in their education. The sixth theme was the value placed on education which established the importance of obtaining a post-secondary degree.

### **Educational Resources**

The educational resources were the practices, or programs, the participants identified as helpful in obtaining a post-secondary degree. There was not a common educational resource used by all participants. One reason for this could be they attended different schools/districts. Another reason for the lack of a common educational resource is the different graduation years. Educational resources change over the years based on an understanding of social change and district or state needs. Some of the common educational resources the participants used in college were financial assistance, the writing lab, and the library.

Maria made use of more resources than the rest of the participants. This could be attributed to her need for support outside of the home environment. Although she was the only participant living at home with both parents, she was the participant with the most siblings. This would have made it difficult for her working parents to give her undivided attention. While in high school, Maria pursued most of the resources herself after she would hear about them through word of mouth. Her senior year, Maria learned about a mentoring group from a friend. Maria also participated in the monthly lunchtime



meetings where they discussed college and scholarship information. Maria recalled, “There was even another program my senior year where they would meet with us, I think it was once a month or something and you go and have lunch and they would talk to you about colleges and give you information about colleges and, so I found out about that through friends and stuff, so I went to it.” Another resource Maria sought out was Communities in Schools (CIS). She went to the program manager and asked questions about the program. Through CIS she learned of the resources to help find a job and received help with other things such as counseling regarding boyfriend-girlfriend relationships. There were two resources to which she did not initiate involvement in but did willingly participate. One of them was taking part in the Homebound Program. The Homebound Program was offered by the school system under their Pregnancy Related Services (PRS). It allowed the student to receive instruction in their home while they are unable to attend school due to health complications. Another resource she did not initiate taking part in was a support group for teenage parents during school hours. The administrators would bring the teenage parents together to cover different topics, such as how to care for their child.

Viviana was the only one to mention being coded as a homeless student, a more recent program. The status of teenager and pregnant qualified her to be considered independent, and as a homeless student. As a homeless student she qualified for more assistance in college as it expedited her financial aid to help pay for college. Her mother recalled, “You're going to have to apply for financial aid, because they're going to tell you that you're a homeless person.” She also received tutoring both in high school and college.

Leticia was the only one to mention attending an alternative school. The alternative school was a campus for students to remediate work at a quicker rate. The

campus was not set up at full capacity like a comprehensive high school. The school had more flexibility with their schedule and smaller classrooms. The campus was much smaller and with limited course offerings, or programs. The program offered the state graduation courses and did not have any extracurricular activities. Because of the setup, some classes were combined with different levels, or in an online format. Leticia commented, “That was me teaching myself and doing packets of paper. I don’t feel at the alternative school that I was getting a quality education.” Leticia did not find the format of the alternative campus to be helpful for her learning style, and after a semester, she went back to her home campus. While she was at the alternative campus, Leticia was able to get daycare for her two children. Another support she received while enrolled at the alternative school was the covered fee to attend night school. Attending night school allowed Leticia to advance in her credits and graduate on time. The alternative school also paid for her to obtain her driver’s license. This would permit her to be able to legally drive and be able to transport her children to daycare. This was helpful because the nanny watching them was no longer available to care for her children during this time in her life.

A resource that both Christina and Veronica used to earn their master’s degrees was the availability of online universities. The online format provided the flexibility needed to remain working and start their degrees. The online format provided accessibility and flexibility. Christina’s husband noted about the practicality of this resource. He said:

Now we're looking at a master's, so now everything's a lot more attainable. Not just more resources. And I got to say, if you've gotten pregnant in the last ten years and you haven't capitalized on online services or trying to get some type of certifications, then that's something that's a motivational issue. That's not

something that you're challenging, because tuition now the way it is and all the resources that are available to you, there's no reason why you can't get an education.

The participants were assisted in obtaining a post-secondary degree through the educational resources available at the institutions they attended. Most of the educational resources were in place to assist similar students. The resources were for the most part voluntarily and benefited the student to remain in school. This was the result for the participants that used the resources, they did get the support and remained in school.

**Educational support systems.** One important educational support for Viviana was a teacher. However, it was not until high school that Viviana made the connection with her teacher. This gave her confidence in her ability to learn. Viviana recalled:

Um, I believe it was my 10th year in high school and like I said, I really struggled with reading forever, but it was 10th grade English class and my teacher was very positive and just upbeat. And she had all these creative ways that I could display my work instead of having to write it all out, or she never called on me to read, which was amazing, but she was just very helpful, and very guiding, and I think she's probably, someone that helped me change from not really like reading to 'I really like it'.

The teacher designed participatory and relevant learning, for Viviana, which made her feel successful. The feeling of success inspired Viviana to focus on developing her skills. The teacher's support allowed Viviana to have the mindset of being able to learn. Viviana also shared how high school counselors placed in her mind a post-secondary degree as a must. She said:

I would go and visit with them to talk to them about what next. I think that my counselors at my first school were very helpful. They were really driven and told

us that there was no other way, you're going to college no matter what so you just have to decide where you want to go. So that was really helpful, just knowing I had no other option. Like this is your only option. As far as teachers, um, they were inspirational to me, my ones that were the highlights, I guess. And they were inspirational to me that I wanted to be as good as them or do their things.

Maria had multiple teachers who offered support, and, she shared several experiences where the teachers challenged her in a nurturing way. Maria appreciated how two teachers encouraged the students and made the work seem doable. She explained:

Those two teachers would talk to us like, “This is easy stuff, you can do this, you got this, you're smart, you know what you're doing” and we don't, but they made us feel like we did. You can tell they cared about us. There was a few teachers there that they were really trying to reach us. That's why I think I felt good about going to school and wanting to be there.

While in high school Maria remembers a successful experience in her science class that assured her she had the ability to attend college. She commented:

I don't remember it now, but at that time I learned a lot from him [science teacher] and around that time is when I really felt like I can do college, I can do this, he [science teacher] made it seem like it's possible. Not that he just spoke [about] college, but if I can get chemistry, yeah I can do this.

The confidence she gained from being able to learn the material gave her the mindset she could attend college. Her teacher made it possible for her to have success in a difficult subject. Maria rationalized that if she could be successful in a difficult subject, she could also be successful in college. Maria felt many teachers contributed to her success in obtaining a post-secondary degree.

Another meaningful relationship Maria had was with the CIS staff member. Maria knew she could turn to her for advice on things such as boyfriend-girlfriend relationships. Maria said, “She would be very kind to me and talk to me and try to make me see that it's going to be okay. I reached out to her.” Maria did not have anyone else to turn to for advice on relationships. Maria did not feel she could talk to her parents about those things, and her sisters were too young to understand. She also figured her friends were her age and could not offer much insight. Maria recalled, “I didn't really talk to my mom and dad about those things and my sisters were a lot younger than me. I guess my friends, I would talk to them, but they're just as young as I am.” Whenever Maria and her boyfriend were arguing or going through problems, she would go to the CIS staff for advice. The CIS staff would help Maria see both sides of the issue and gain a better perspective on the problem. Maria stated she felt grateful to have had someone to talk to about such problems.

Leticia felt her high school teachers worked with her after she had her first child. Her English teacher allowed her to work on a graduation required paper during the school day, working out a schedule between periods to finish. The teacher also extended the due date on the paper for Leticia. A staff member at the alternative school also informed Leticia about the resources available to her as a teenage parent. Leticia shared, “She always gave me resources and never let me have an option of not doing something. She always sought me out.”

Veronica also felt supported by staff at her school; however, in contrast to the other participants, it was her coaches, rather than a teacher, who assisted her. Veronica recalled having her coaches sponsor her equipment and occasionally, give her a ride home. She recalled:

If anything in middle school, when I was involved in all the sports and stuff, there was like an assistant cheerleading coach that would help give me a ride home and they would sponsor me for like uniforms and stuff. But I never knew that until years later.

Veronica was the only participant that did not have a recollection of teachers, while in middle or high school, encourage and build her self-confidence. She said:

There was never a teacher that took me under their wing and was like, you know you're really smart or you could really do this, or you could really do that. I never had that in high school. I never had it in middle school.

In college, towards the end of her bachelor's degree course work, Maria recalled having a professor reach out to offer help during her teaching internship. The professor knew that Maria was a wife, parent of two, and worked. The professor arranged for Maria to start her internship sooner, which enabled her to complete the program, and begin teaching. Maria recalled:

She helped me so that I could graduate after the observation and then I went into an internship for the following semester. I was able to start teaching already and getting paid. Then I had to pay for the internship. She kind of helped me. She was probably during my college years, she was probably the one that was a little bit influential as far as just informing me of what I can do and things like that.

Leticia also felt supported during her time in college. In the last trimester of her fourth pregnancy, and a professor inquired about how she planned to get her work while out; it had not occurred to her to make plans. He suggested she get a classmate's number to keep up with the notes and workload. His prompting, and the few credits remaining, motivated her to keep going. At the time, she was taking 15-17 credit hours, and earned her associate's degree in a year and a half. Leticia said:

The teacher watched me for I guess a month and then finally came up to me. He's like you're due any day I need to know what your plans are for the class. I was like oh God! I am due any day, what am I going to do? I never thought to not go to school when I was pregnant, I was like I am going to get through it. I said I haven't thought about that and so he said, well I need you to make sure you keep in contact with someone and that you stay on board with what we're doing in class so you don't come in last. That was the first time in college anybody had ever approached me like that. I was taking 15, 17 hours to get my associates so yeah.

Veronica did experience more support from staff when she was in college. She received guidance from a career counselor. The advice helped narrow down her career choice and studies. She recalled:

I went back again, and I happened to find a good counselor this time and I said, I can't do medical. I can't do this. He was like, what have you always thought in the back of your mind? What is some reoccurring thoughts? Not just about a career. Don't worry, I'm not asking you about that. And that just hit [it for me]. I said, "Why do people do what they do? . . . He was like, like a social work type job, helping people. Okay, I'll do that. That was how it started.

According to Veronica, one of her professors noticed the remedial math class was too easy for her and made it possible for her to get her removed from class. This helped her progress to the next level without having to spend time and money on a course not required for graduation. Another professor shared his disappointment when admittance to the Family Therapy program was denied, given her wealth of experience. This showed Veronica that her professors believed she could pursue a master's degree.

Overwhelmingly, the educational support the participants received, came from an educator. Their support was either through a warm and accepting nature, or, building the confidence of the participants. The support was instrumental in the participants realizing, their potential in obtaining a post-secondary degree.

### **Factors of Influence**

The participants shared several common factors of influence that assisted them in obtaining a post-secondary degree. Among these were the influences of family members, their partners, and their children. Overwhelmingly, these individuals were the most instrumental in the participants obtaining a post-secondary degree.

**Family members.** A major factor that assisted in participants obtaining a post-secondary degree was a stable place to call home. This freed the participants to continue with their studies. All five participants had a stable place to call home during their pregnancy. Four of the five left their primary homes seeking a better place. They found a stable home in their boyfriends' parents' house. A second contributing factor was they had supportive family members. Maria had both her parents. The other four mentioned their in-laws were good to them and supported their educational endeavors. Some had additional family members as support.

Viviana's immediate family was an integral part to her achieving her educational goals. Viviana's family and social network was made up of her mother, stepfather, uncle, and her husband, the man she would eventually marry later in life. The family would step in to help as needed. Her mother recalls, "Everything was provided for her. Whenever she needed [something], she knew that she had my brother, her uncle, and myself to help. I feel that Viviana had a smooth transition because of the family." Even though Viviana worked to cover her expenses, her family helped financially. Her mother recalled:



I know that Viviana didn't need money. Because here is an 18-year-old with all this money in the bank, she always had what she needed. Even when she was pregnant, we helped her out, paying the bills. We had the health insurance. Viviana had her little car, her baby. It's like we bought her everything that the baby needed.

Her extended family helped Viviana and husband, the man she would eventually marry later in life, get off to a good start. Her mother recalled:

My family, my brothers and sisters, my sister-in-law, everybody would get together and we would help out somehow. Because it's like whenever they got married, whatever they needed, we bought all of it. We bought them. We gave them \$500 just to go and get the stuff for their kitchen or we had a little gathering with my family and they all knew, they all bought her stuff. It's like us, growing, growing in a poor family, you know what I'm saying, that we struggled, and yes, we did get ahead. We understood.

Viviana's mother and step-father were supportive when it came to her education, too. They considered options to find the best education for Viviana. If they had a concern, they would go to the school and try to seek help. Her mother recalled, "My husband and I, the stepdad, would always keep track of her, trying to see what was best for her, talking to the teachers, trying to get her in the right direction." Her stepfather supported Viviana financially and even with homework. Viviana said, "My stepdad would help me with the math and things like that."

Viviana credits her husband, whom she met and married while in college, for his support while she earned her college degree. She recalled, "He put his college on hold so that I could go because I was more driven and, so he worked, and I went to school and stayed with the girls." By not working and staying home, Viviana was able to focus on

her studies and daughters. Viviana's success was greatly impacted by her family and their support. Her immediate family, consisting of her mother, step-father, and uncle were there to help in any way before, during and after the pregnancy. Viviana was raised by a small-knit family that valued helping each other.

Veronica's home stability and family support were an integral part to achieving her educational goals. Veronica's uncle purchased a house for her and her grandmother, providing a stable home. Prior to that, Veronica remembered moving a lot. Veronica recalled:

We would move apartments a lot. We'd get evicted. But we'd always live in [same] the area. We never really moved cities. We would even lie, or use an address so I could stay at [the] elementary [school]. As much as my grandmother put up with the things she put up with, she still worked all the time, and she always tried to maintain some kind of consistency as far as a schedule with me.

The permanent home provided stability for Veronica during her high school year. It allowed her to attend the same school through high school. After she had the baby, she moved in with her future in-laws. They took her into their home without any reservations. Veronica did not have to worry about not having a place to call home for her and her daughter. She could form a family of her own under the safety of her in-law's home. They lived with her in-laws for six years. Her in-laws were the constant family members she relied on for help while she finished high school and worked on her college degree. The stability and support she received on her basic needs from her in-laws was the force she needed to be able to succeed in her educational attainment.

Veronica recalled:

Yeah, they were extremely helpful. I still contributed, obviously, to groceries and keeping up with the house and things like that, but if I had school and my mother-

in-law was there, I needed to go to class, she would help feed her [the baby] while I helped get dinner going. They really helped a lot with that. A lot of people would be like, "Oh my God, you live with your in-laws or your in-laws always lived close by you." Like even when we lived in the big house, they lived in a little apartment on the property. It was never a problem. They were never in our business or condescending in any way. They were really great people. They kept their distance. The same way that they did with him growing up and his sister. They did the same thing with us. They never meddled. They never told me how to raise my daughter or my son. Even now they'll tell me, "You're a great mom. You're great for the kids. You'd do anything and everything for them," so it's not like I was, "Oh, you're here, okay, put my kids off on you while I go run the streets." I never did that. I was too busy working and school. School was a huge priority for me.

This quote offers evidence of the support Veronica received from her in-laws. She appreciated that they encouraged her parenting style, provided her, and her building family, a place to live and occasional child care.

Another form of support Veronica received was advice and encouragement from both of her mothers. During the pregnancy, Veronica leaned on her grandmother for help, stating, "I called her for everything." Veronica's mother tried her best to be there for Veronica as much as possible. She offered what she could, which at the time, was reassurance. Explaining how her mother supported her, her mother said:

Just encouragement. Encouraging comments such as, "you can do this" or "you got this." Explaining to her, talking to her how situations are and if you want anything in life, you've gotta go get it. It's not gonna come to you.

Veronica valued the support from both her mother and her grandmother. Their encouragement and belief in her capabilities contributed to her successful graduation from high school and completion of her post-secondary education.

Maria's upbringing and close family ties provided her with a shield that enabled her to be strong and confident. That strength made it possible for her to be able to work through the challenges she faced. Her family taught her values and expectations that facilitated her learning other lessons such as good work habits and seeing projects to completion. The stability the family provided helped Maria maintain her focus on her end goal, earning a post-secondary. Her family, as her first source of social capital, was a huge contributor that allowed Maria to reach her educational goals.

*Familismo* was evident in Maria's family. Maria mentioned that her family was very much into doing what was needed for each other, stating, "It was always we took care of each other." It was an expectation the family practiced. There was no resentment over having to help, but rather an honor, a bond, that got tighter with use. Her parents would remind them of the importance of family and unity. They were very family-oriented, often holding family gatherings. As adults, they came together at a designated house and celebrated Christmas, or Thanksgiving. There were times when they invited friends to their family gatherings, and the family was complimented on the unity, and warmth. "That's basically my upbringing is that family was always that strong unit that you could depend on no matter what," recalled Maria.

Maria credited her family for her daughter's upbringing, saying, "I always say she was raised by my family. She was raised by everybody basically for at least the first four years." The whole family was an integral part of providing child care. Maria's mother would have the younger siblings help care for the baby to allow Maria time to attend college and study. The family also stepped in to help when they discovered the baby had

health complications. There were times her parents would take the baby with them when going out to give Maria a break. She explained, “If they'd go somewhere they would want to take her with them. They would do that. It kind of gave me a break sometimes, too. They were good about it.” When the baby was four, Maria and her boyfriend married and moved into their own home; a house they purchased across the street from her parents. Maria recalled the change caused her daughter some confusion. Her daughter would ask to go home, back with her grandparents, once it got dark. After some time, the child did get used to their new home and living arrangements.

Leticia credits her in-laws for her success in school. They were proponents of obtaining an education and supported her throughout her studies. It helped that they were both educated and held good jobs. Leticia said:

Then my in-laws, my mother-in-law is a nurse and my father-in-law is a graduate from Rice University, so they were educated. When I moved in with him, it was never an option. That was never a discussion or an option not going to school.

Leticia recognized her in-law's contributions, “Because they supported me and let me know that [not going to] school wasn't an option. Like I didn't have to work, they helped me with the baby, if I had homework they were always there.” For about the first six months after the birth of her son, her in-laws paid for a nanny to help Leticia. Leticia credits her in-law's financial stability as a factor that spared her from being a Latina teenage mother without a college education. She remarked:

Well after I became a statistic, I don't think I was any different other than I had a great support system and my in-laws had money. The outcome would not have been the same had it been a poor family.

Leticia's friends provided support as well. Her friendship with her sister-in-law was instrumental in helping her get through a challenging senior year. She had two small

children, school work and the pressure of trying to get everything completed to graduate. She also had her husband's cousin as a support system. She would help with the babies or just spend time with Leticia whenever Leticia's husband went out. This really helped Leticia not feel alone or as if she was missing out on what other teenagers were doing.

Leticia stated:

I guess she was just supportive for me because I was so young, and I didn't get to go hang out with my friends. She would come over and hang out with me or watch movies, I never felt like I was missing out on anything because I always had her to hang out with or to do things with.

Having friends to keep her company, and help with the baby, allowed Leticia to complete her senior year. Rather than feeling left out from social interactions, her husband's relatives would visit her and provide her with support and companionship. She credits the support of her husband's family for her ability to obtain an education.

Christina views her husband as her biggest support system. Christina and her husband created their own family when they married at 17-years-old. Their pact to help each other motivated Christina to continue studying. They have been there for each other for over 22 years. Early on in their relationship, they made a commitment to each other and ruled out divorce. They viewed divorce as a form of defeat. Christina explained:

That's what we agreed. If we took that option out [divorce], then we took the option of giving up, and that would mean that any problem that happened, we would have to work on it together.

Christina's in-laws were also very supportive in various ways throughout the years. After Christina and the baby moved in with her in-laws, they would often help take care of the baby. Her mother-in-law would help watch her daughter while Christina attended college. Christina shared, "In-laws and parents: they watched her when I went to

school.” Christina and her husband bought a small two-bedroom house on the same side of town as her in-laws. Her father-in-law helped remodel their house. Even after moving out, her mother-in-law would help watch her two kids while Christina attended college. Her in-laws would also encourage her to continue studying. This support made it easier for Christina to complete both high school and Viviana recognized her mother’s constant motivation as a key component to her attaining post-secondary education.

**Role models.** Three out of the five participants considered their mother as the dominant influence or support to stay in school. While Veronica did not specifically state her grandmother was a role model, she did attribute her resiliency and success in obtaining a post-secondary degree to her upbringing. She mentioned it was her “mother’s” tough love that enabled her to face her challenges. Christina did not provide the name of a role model. Viviana, Maria, and Leticia did provide the name of a role model.

Viviana praised her mother as her greatest influence, saying, “She has always been a very hard worker and very inspirational in how she communicates, and she's just been really inspirational towards me.” Her mother was a constant support throughout Viviana’s education. Viviana recalled her mother as being “really concerned about my education and ... was involved, in the most part. She would go to the parent-teacher conferences or she would go to all the parent-teacher, I guess, the activities that they offered.” Often, her mother would help watch the baby while Viviana attended school or studied. Viviana recalled:

My mom was really motivating for me and she offered to watch her [baby] so that I could take my classes and um, I ... my family too 'cause they lived in the area so they would watch my oldest one on Fridays so that I could go to school. Then I would go to work.

Viviana viewed her mother as a role model. Viviana recognized her mother's constant motivation as a key component to her attaining her education. This support made it possible for Viviana to attain a post-secondary education.

While several of Maria's family and in-laws were a huge support, her mother was an integral support system. When her parents learned of the pregnancy, Maria's mother reminded Maria she did not have to get married or stop going to school because of the pregnancy. She encouraged Maria to continue her path to finish school and go to college. Maria recalled, "Even when I did get pregnant, yes they had a hard time accepting everything, but [my mother said] still you're going to school, and you don't have to get married."

Leticia saw her mother as a role model; someone who succeeded through hard work and education, she did not consider her a mother figure. She provided an example of hard work, dedication, and focus for Leticia, who explained, "I guess because that's what my mom did. She would go to night school while we were younger. She would work all day and then go to school because she wanted a better job." She gained this perspective from watching her mother work her way through school and making something of her life. Leticia reflected:

With my mom even though she was not the most nurturing, education was never [not] an option. . . Because now she is very successful, she owns her own commercial real estate and, so she has her own business and she makes a lot of money and she is wealthy.

Most of the participants named their mother as a role model. Three of the four participants' mothers held a college degree. While Maria's mother did not have a degree, she worked in a school and recognized the importance of an education. These role models were someone the participant looked up to for working hard and persevering.



Their influence contributed to the participants' success. Yet, having a role model was not essential to completing school, as evidenced by Christina's experience.

## **Religion**

Spirituality can assist an individual in overcoming difficulty. While religion did not seem to play a major factor for the participants, it was considered important to their family members. All five participants were Catholic. The findings showed three of the participants relied heavily on their religion; this may have been because they were the ones who experienced a major problem, beyond the pregnancy. Maria and Christina experienced a major health problem, and Leticia had major marital problems. Viviana and Veronica discussed the influence religion had on them, but not in a significant way.

Although religion was mentioned more frequently by Viviana's mother than by Viviana, it was evident that it played a significant role in Viviana's life. Religion may not have been perceived by Viviana as contributory to her educational success, but it was by her mother. Viviana's mother credits religion for Viviana's success. She said, "I feel that it helped her in some way. . . because [Viviana and her friends] would go to church." She attributes Viviana's good qualities to growing up as a Catholic. Since childhood, Viviana participated in Continuing Christian Education (CCE) classes. She remained involved in church groups throughout middle and high school. Her mother recalled being concerned when Viviana stopped wearing a piece of jewelry she wore often. It was a religious symbol of her purity or saving her virginity for marriage. Her mother recalled, "Then there was changes there. We don't have our ring anymore." At around the time, Viviana was rebelling by going out with friends and talking back to her parents. Viviana told her mother, "I lost [the ring]". But her mother did not believe Vivian lost the ring, but rather chose to stop wearing it. Her mother felt Vivian engaged in behavior due to

peer pressure and did not stand up for her beliefs because she lacked the confidence to make her own decision. Her mother said:

She wasn't strong enough to say, no I don't want to do that. I feel that she just went along with it. Other people influenced her. I just feel that. You can say no, but I feel that she didn't say no. I feel that she just did what at the time felt good for her.

Soon after, they learned about the pregnancy. It was very stressful for her mother to deal with the news. Viviana's mother looked for support from her fellow parishioners. Although Viviana did not elaborate on the influence religion had on her, her mother noted fellow parishioners were helpful to both Viviana and the mother. She mentioned they talked to Viviana during her rebellious stage and were great support to her as a parent.

Veronica was baptized Catholic but does not remember her family practicing Catholicism. She remembers going to church, but not belonging to one congregation. Church attendance was also not on a regular basis. Their attendance depended on the situation. In middle school, Veronica would attend Baptist youth groups to have something to do, and somewhere to go, since her grandmother worked. Whilst their practicing religion alternated, she did recall the Bible being a constant item in their home. Growing up, Veronica struggled to understand her grandmother's faith because of the constant contradictions in her lifestyle. Veronica remembered thinking:

You're so hypocritical. You want to drink and get drunk, or you're doing this. Or one time we went to Mississippi, and I actually watched her, and her brother cook crack. She was helping sell drugs and moving drugs across state lines. I'm driving her to her probation officer while I'm in high school, and I'm just like,

Really? You preach about God, and doing this, and then you do this. I'm like, what the heck?

Years later, and once she became an adult and a mother of her own, Veronica understood that it was not that her grandmother was being hypocritical, but rather was trying to make ends meet as she knew how. Despite having witnessed her grandmother make these lifestyle choices, Veronica credits her grandmother for her belief in God. While her grandmother may not have lived the ideal life, she made efforts to show Veronica that God was present in their life. She took Veronica to church events, and she had a Bible in their home as a symbol of reverence. Veronica's faith deepened while attending the master's program. Veronica appreciated the faith-based master's program because it gave her more than an education; it helped ground her in her faith, preparing for greater challenges occurring in her life. She attributes that specific methodology for keeping her sane during a rough patch in her life. Veronica recalled:

Through those years that me and my husband were up and down, and things were bad ... It really helped keep my sanity, a little bit. My grandmother ended up passing away right after that. I felt like that was building my strength up for all the things I was about to have to deal with. I was actually in my last year when she passed away.

Although religion was not explicitly taught and practiced in Veronica's household, to be a believer, was still an unspoken expectation. It did not matter which religion was followed, but that one had a belief in a higher being. Religion assisted Veronica during difficult times.

Religion played a major role in Maria's household. Her mother was the driving force behind their Catholic education. Maria's mother made sure they had all their sacraments. While they did not attend mass every Sunday, her mother made sure the

family attended church on a regular basis. Maria also remembered the neighbors coming together to pray over her daughter when she had her first seizure. Praying was the first resort when emergencies arose. Maria referenced God throughout the interview indicating her religious beliefs. She referenced God when she recalled frightening events, celebrations, and uncertainties. She brought up God when she shared the first scare as a parent; witnessing her baby have a seizure. She praised God for her many successes and blessings. She acknowledged that whatever her future holds, it is God's will for her. She was especially grateful for the past year. She said:

God, I don't know what I did to deserve all of these things. 'Cuz I know that I've had these troubles and these struggles throughout. And I don't know what I did to deserve all of this, but thank you for all of, you know, these blessings.

Maria mentioned having biblical verses around her home to remind her of God's blessings, "I even have this little saying in my new home that says, thank you God for blessing me more than I deserve." The decorations in her home serve as symbols of the beliefs she holds on to that help her persevere through daily life.

Leticia also found religion to have a positive influence throughout her life. As a young child Leticia remembered her maternal grandmother would take her to church. As a teenager, when she moved in with her in-laws, they made sure she completed her sacraments. They took her to Continuing Christian Education (CCE) classes for her First Communion and Confirmation. These measures would serve as a haven for Leticia during a challenging time. The impact religion had on Leticia would become evident when at 21 years old, Leticia had a third child, but from a different man who would end up dying. Leticia and her husband had separated at the time. Leticia entered a relationship with this man and became pregnant. Shortly after she gave birth, the biological father was killed. A way Leticia tried to heal from the loss was to turn to what

she knew would help her, and so she started attending a non-denominational church. She found solace in her faith in dealing with the death of the biological father of her third child. Leticia recalled:

When I was raised my grandma was Catholic and she would make us go to church. I can't say like that church really embraced spirituality I want to say like it wasn't until I was 21 that I started going to a non-denominational. That's when my third baby his dad died in a really bad car accident. I started going to church with his sisters.

Christina's grandmother saw to it that Christina received her sacraments. Her grandmother imparted the need to turn to, and trust in, God in times of need. She also taught Christina to pray the rosary. Christina explained:

It started off with my grandmother. I remember always seeing her pray. She has the Virgin Mary on my wall and she would tell me pray to her when I needed help. Once I got older, I just knew I had to go to church.

Christina practiced the same with her three children. She made sure they celebrated their sacraments. They attended church as a family, but her husband was not an involved Catholic. After the family moved to a different side of town, the children, then teenagers, became involved in the church. Their involvement eventually led her husband to become involved in the church. He started by making presentations to the youth group. The experience was awe-inspiring, and it awakened a desire in him to do more. He became more involved in the church in different areas, as well. As he became more involved, Christina was drawn deeper into her faith. She was pleased with her husband's level of involvement which carried over to the whole family. She commented:

I took my kids to church too, even though they behaved terrible! After many years of going to church with my three kids, my husband started to come, and he finally

got involved. Hearing him speak to the kids in Lifeteen made me rethink how I always thought I had to go and I started to want to go. I learned a lot more about my faith because I went to classes for the teens, classes for myself, and classes that I was asked to attend.

Their faith proved to be instrumental in their road to recovery when Christina suffered the two strokes. Her husband's faith gave him the fortitude to provide the support to his wife and family. There was a lot of uncertainty in the recovery process. Faithful prayers were made while she was in a medically induced coma. The recovery process would require a lot from her family. Her husband took a leave from work to be by her side. Her daughter, who was taking college classes, rearranged her schedule to allow time for her to be home to care for her mother. The church members pulled together and offered prayers and assistance. Their prayers were answered in the form of the school district permitting her husband to take an extended leave of absence. Coworkers donated days, so he could still get paid for the missed days. Christina made steady progress. A year after suffering the two strokes, Christina could walk into church. She continues physical and speech therapy. This experience deepened their faith.

Overall the participants mentioned religion had some level of influence on them directly, or indirectly. While all participants mentioned religion during their interview. None stated they did not believe in a higher being. For most, their faith influenced their state of mind, and gave them a sense of purpose. It also helped them persist when challenges were overwhelming, as evidenced by Veronica's, Leticia's, Maria's and Christina's experiences. The support they received from their religion, which kept them moving forward, contributed to their abilities to overcome the obstacles to their education.

### **Community Support**

The community is one of three immediate social capital environments of a teenager (Zhang et al., 2008). In Structural social capital, the student has contact with community members (Zhang et al., 2008). All the participants grew up in the inner-city where the residents were predominately working-class. Overall, the community was not a huge factor in assisting the women in obtaining a post-secondary degree. There were some resources available to them as young parents, but not impactful ones, in their opinions.

Viviana had a part time job during high school; she continued working for the same employer for the duration of the pregnancy. She was very appreciative of the stability her job offered during this time. “Probably the most stable place that I worked. And they were very supportive, and, um, very kind. I was really thankful for them,” she commented. After she had the baby, Viviana was eligible to get help through the government. She applied for WIC, which provides families with young children with nutritional food items. Viviana and her mother did not feel comfortable using the assistance offered; they described even feeling guilty accepting some of it. They decided to discontinue applying for WIC. They felt they could manage without these resources.

Veronica recalled minimal ethnic diversity in her community growing up. She said, “You're either White, Mexican, or Black.” She grew up in what she referred to as Section 8 (federal) housing. She enjoyed reading and used it as a way to escape her reality, “I think for me as a kid, especially with the things always going on in elementary, it was my escape. So, I'd live in those books. It was my escape from reality.” Because it was a low-income neighborhood, the city would send out mobile libraries. This was a resource the community provided to its members since most did not have a form of transportation to get to the library. Veronica reminisced:

You'd go on this little Book Mobile and you'd rent books, or you could sit there and read for a little bit and after a certain time it would leave, but you could check the book out and then it would make its circle back through the neighborhood. A couple weeks later or whatever you could check it back in.

Having the mobile libraries as resource made it possible for Veronica to practice her reading. She was able to exercise her passion for reading through the books the mobile library made available. The resource not only provided a safe outlet, it also allowed her to gain reading skills and see other possibilities. She was especially fond of books that provided different endings. She recalled:

Babysitter's Club and they used to have books like, if you think this happens next, go to this chapter and then you'd go to that chapter and then you'd get the story. Well, I'd be the one[wondering], well what if I would've went to the other chapters? I'd go back, and I'd go to where it gave you that choice and then I'd go to that chapter and then see where it took you. Aw, it was a totally different ending! Yeah, I love, love reading.

Through such genres, Veronica could see how different choices made for different endings. This allowed her to be able to see different possibilities in her life as well. The love for reading continued for her throughout adulthood. Reading was a strong skill that made her educational attainment possible.

Another resource she turned to for help in her community was the United Way. When Veronica and her husband moved out, they experienced trials. She explained, "I remember being on welfare and having to go to United Way to beg for money. My husband at the time would get laid off, and then we'd be in the hole." The United Way offered short-term financial assistance to help pay for utility bills and lists of local agencies that provided food pantries. Veronica was able to rely on her community for



help growing up and later in her life, once she had her own family. She was fortunate enough to have avenues for help. She sought help when needed. Her life experiences caused her to learn to self-advocate and find solutions to her problems. These skills were instrumental as she navigated her way through college.

The industrial community in which Maria lived during the pregnancy, was majority Latino. There were government-run clinics in the community for the residents. Maria went to the health clinic to find out if she was pregnant. Maria recalls that pregnant teenagers were not an oddity in the neighborhood. Another community resource was the courthouse. Maria's parents threaten to place a restraining order against her boyfriend. This caused all of them to face a judge in court. After listening to the case, the judge spoke to Maria and her boyfriend. The judge took time to reassure Maria and her boyfriend the outcome was going to be good but asked them to comply with the parents' wishes. She recalled:

He goes, just don't worry about it, but this is what we're going to do. He explained, you can't just go to their house. We're going to have to make arrangements. The judge happened to be friends with my parents as well so he kind of knew them a little bit.

The advice the judge gave Maria and her boyfriend provided them hope. The judge was someone honored in the community and had experience in such situations. It spoke volumes to the care he had for the residents to have someone in his position take time to share these insights. There was care and concern with the insight the judge shared with the two young, would-be-parents. The possibility that their situation would work out was encouraging to them, and, made it worth making the effort. The services offered through the participants' communities, assisted them in meeting both their educational and personal needs.

## **Personal Transformation**

The significance of being a mother seemed to have centered some of the participants. Most of the participants mentioned the baby transformed them and made them want a better life. For example, Viviana, said she had a sense of purpose and aspired to have a better life for her children. Viviana frequently mentioned wanting a better life for her daughter. She said, “It was for her. I had to do it for her. I had to do everything so that I could be a good role model for my [baby].”

After she became pregnant, Veronica visualized she would have a better life and be able to provide for her children. She knew that education was the way to overcome and succeed. Veronica stated, “Whatever I was gonna do, I'm gonna do it. I'm still the same way. Don't tell me I'm not gonna do something, because more of the reason I will do it.” This quote demonstrates how Veronica was determined to have the baby and make a life of her own. She was not allowing her family, or anyone else, influence how she felt or thought about her pregnancy. She set her mind to becoming a mother and not let this deter her from earning a college degree. Veronica had a desire to make her life better than what she experienced growing up. Veronica's mother noted what drove Veronica's desire for a better life, saying, “She was determined to get away from the situation, if you will. To make changes and things like that.” Veronica did her best, not only for herself, but for others as well. Her mother noted, “She's so focused on doing better for herself and for other people.” Veronica recalled an incident in which she had to take her daughter to the local community clinic for vaccinations; she had a bad experience. Veronica was tired of living off meager means and dependent on the government. She told herself:

I'm not going to live like this. I just refused to live like that. I didn't want to be another generation that raised another teen daughter that lived on welfare. I just did not want that for my daughter at all.

Wanting a better life for her daughter was a recurring theme for Veronica. She explained:

For me, it was one of those things like, especially when I got pregnant with my daughter, it was like, "I want to be a role model for her. I don't want to live on welfare anymore. I'm not gonna be another number".

Like Veronica, Maria's focus became more purposeful when she had her daughter. She was determined to take control and responsibility for her future, stating:

This is my child and I'm going to take care of her, I wanted her. I knew from the beginning, no, she's my child and I'm going to keep her. I think it was just a matter of accepting this is what I have to do.

She attributes her focused intentions to the birth of her daughter. One example of this is her career choice. At first, Maria wanted to be a doctor, but when she saw how much time was required away from her family, she changed her career focus and instead chose one that allowed her time with her family. She changed her major to education. Describing her motivation for the change, she said, "She [her daughter] was my reason, like I need to do something different because I need to be there for her." Maria's mind was always scanning her options. She made a choice to select a profession that allowed her to spend time with her daughter. She made this decision after she witnessed how much time doctors had to spend away from their family during the short time job showing at a hospital.

Like the other participants, Leticia also became more focused with her school work after she had her son. Regarding her sophomore year in high school, she recalled:

I already had my baby. That's when I was like; I really have to do good. I got really good grades, I graduated top half of my class. I want to say like my history class, my math classes; those are the ones I really enjoyed.

Leticia viewed school as a way out of her situation, commenting, "Like I knew that school was never optional, in order for me to do what I needed to do, or to live the life I wanted to live I had to go to school." Leticia acknowledges her motivation to remain in school was, "I wanted to make a [better] life for them [children]."

When Christina learned she was pregnant, she did not expect it to change the way she felt or saw life, but she did feel different. This perplexed Christina, but then felt a sense of resolution, stating, "It confused me. At first, I thought I would not be anything, but something changed in me, and what I said, I did." She became more purposeful with her actions. She was determined to finish high school and go to college. She worked with her counselor, so she could take additional courses to graduate earlier than scheduled. She was determined to graduate college in four years, and had she not gotten ill, would have reached her goal.

The participants' circumstances varied, but they shared in gaining a renewed determination when they had their child. They no longer only had their future to consider, but their child's future as well. They matured quickly and with their renewed determination, reclaimed their lives and built a better future for themselves.

### **Positive Outcomes of the Pregnancy**

There were positive outcomes secondary to the pregnancies that contributed to the participants' overall happiness and emotional well-being and in turn made the pregnancies less stressful. Two of the participants, Viviana and Maria, mentioned a

positive change in their home dynamics related to the pregnancy. The pregnancy helped reunify the family. Viviana mentioned the news of the pregnancy helped her mother and stepfather reunited, saying, “[It was] a couple months before she was born, that my stepdad came back [home].” Things started to improve at home and Viviana’s parents were excited about being grandparents. Viviana felt this contributed to her happiness, making her less stressed over her home life.

One positive change that Maria observed after her pregnancy was how her dad became more involved with the family. He stopped going out with his friends on the weekends, opting instead to spend time with the family. Maria wondered if her father felt guilt and was trying to make up for lost time. She said:

Myself being pregnant kind of shook my dad up and so instead of being out or doing other things he started to be home with us more and trying to do more things with us. I tell my kids all the time [grandpa is] not the same man he was when I was growing up. He was the working hard man and then he would hang out with his friends’ kind of man growing up, but now it's like it's all about the family and about the kids and about the children.

The participants’ home dynamics varied, but the pregnancy created positive changes in their home dynamics. This created an optimistic outlook on the situation. The positive change the participants experienced permitted them to feel supported by their families and continue to better their future by continuing their education.

### **School Stability**

As one of the three immediate social capital environments of a teenager, school stability is vital (Zhang et al., 2008). The importance of school stability is equivalent to the stability of their home environment. School stability allows the continuity of

learning. Teachers get to know the students. Students get to know the school expectations and acclimate to the school culture. All these factors assist students in obtaining a post-secondary degree as they facilitate academic success.

The reason Viviana's fondest recollection of school was during middle school was because she was able to remain in the same school for three years. This allowed her to establish friendships. She stated:

And then in middle school, I stayed for the whole entire three years, and it was probably ... Well, I mean, it's middle school so it's like [an] awkward age, but it was a lot of fun for me. I had made a lot of really good connections and friendships there.

She credited friends for helping her deal with the changes, saying, "I made two really good friends in 5th grade, and I feel that they really helped me from the transition from 5th to 6th grade during that time." It was also in middle school that the teachers referred her for testing which resulted in her being diagnosed with a reading disability. The intervention occurred because the teachers had time to get to know her and notice the problem. She remained at the school long enough to get tested and follow the procedures to get accommodations. Prior to her diagnosis and receiving help, Viviana struggled in school. She recalled:

There was times that I did not feel confident because of my reading abilities, and I felt that a lot. It made me uncomfortable ... and I dealt with it by all sorts of different way. Like, I'm just trying to think. ... Um, I figured out [a] trick ... tips and tricks to get away from having to read aloud, or trying to do the assignment and you only use words that I knew how to spell so I wouldn't get embarrassed of people telling you, 'You don't know how to spell that?'

Viviana persevered through this problem, but it was not until much later that she finally gained the confidence in her academic ability. Getting help in school was the confidence boost. She shared:

Which I felt like that, I knew that I was, like, separated but I feel that it helped my confidence in my reading because I was doing really good compared to the other kids in there, so it was like, 'Oh, okay. I'm okay'.

Maria attended the same school throughout her elementary years. Of all her schooling, she had the fondest memories of elementary school, saying, "It felt so warm and I knew that for the most part they cared for us and they provided fun things for us to do." She recalled field days, nice teachers, and elementary school being fun overall. She remembered having kind teachers: "I remember my kindergarten, second, and fourth grade teachers. Those were my teachers that stand out that were just kind and they cared about us and it was very obvious." She also remembered being a part of the choir program, and she viewed it as a positive experience as well.

Another reason her elementary school years were memorable was because of her mother's high level of involvement. Maria remembered her mother always being at the elementary school and doing things with her and her siblings. Maria's educational path started off with many positives. She attended the same school, had kind teachers, excelled in her academics and her mother was readily available. Her middle school years were different. Maria's mother started working part-time and was not readily available. Maria entered a new middle school she did not have friends at the new school, she started to struggle academically. The change was difficult for Maria. She recalled, "That's probably that one point in my school that I just did not like at all. I ended up not liking it at all." She moved onto high school where she had great teachers, made friends, and her grades improved. She was on track to obtaining a post-secondary education. She

enjoyed learning and attended school on a regular basis. The combination of experiences taught Maria she was capable of success, the joys of success, and how to work toward earning her success. Her educational pathway prepared her academically as well as instilled skills useful in her pursuit of a post-secondary education. These experiences prepared her to overcome the educational factors she would face as a teenage mother.

### **Value of Education**

The value participants placed on education was another recurring theme. Its frequency of use shows that it is a factor that participants perceived assisted them in obtaining a post-secondary degree. The verbalized value placed on education made it stand out and be considered as important. College and the importance of an education were frequently mentioned by their parents, especially the mother, or other significant member, as an expectation as well. Education was well-regarded as a means to an end. For example, Viviana acknowledged her mother for having achieved her educational goals. Viviana stated, “[The thing that helped me reach my goals was] the support of my mom and her constant motivation for me to finish.” Viviana’s witnessing her mother finish school motivated her to do the same.

Veronica’s grandmother always stressed the importance of an education. She also modeled how important an education was through her actions. For starters, she made sure that no matter how hectic their personal lives were, Veronica kept her schedule and went to school. “She was very good about maintaining a consistent schedule with me. I’ll never stay up late at night.” said Veronica. Following a routine permeated the idea that an education was part of their everyday.

Maria attributes her academic success to her parents because they stressed the importance of an education. Maria noted, “Yeah, they pushed and pushed, no excuses.” They would not allow Maria, or her siblings, to miss school. They were constantly



encouraging their children to attend college. As a result, all but one of Maria's siblings earned a college degree. Maria remembers how her mother, in particular, made their education a priority. She volunteered at their school and remained a stay at home mom until Maria entered middle school. When Maria's mother got a part time job she managed to schedule her work hours around her children's schedules. She also drove them to and from school, and to after school commitments. She would constantly tell them they were going to college. Maria explained:

She always instilled that you're going to college. She always said, "You're going to go to college." She always had that in our minds, no matter what you're going to go. I know it had to do with because she didn't get an opportunity to attend so she wanted that for her own children.

Maria was determined to continue school and attend college. She did not settle for anything less. Her focus was on her future. She said:

I just keep moving along. I don't see it as I was stuck in this rut. I was still supposed to go to school so I'm going to still go to school and then I'm going to get my bachelor's. You don't quit you just keep going.

Once in college, Maria thought about only getting a certificate to be able to join the workforce and start earning money. She mentioned the idea to her mother who quickly discouraged her from this route and instead reminded her of the long-term goals. Maria remembered her mother telling her, "Nope, no you're not going to do that. Keep going, keep going, you're going to be fine." Maria heeded her mother's advice and continued the path to earning a bachelor's degree. Years later when Maria earned her master's degree, she remembered her mother saying to her, "'You went further than I even had planned for you to go." Her mother is proud of Maria's accomplishments.

Leticia viewed education as absolute. She gained this perspective from watching her mother work her way through school and making something of her life. Her mother was a poor and single mother who went on to earn her college degree and own a prosperous business. She provided an example of hard work, dedication, and focus. Leticia said, “I guess because that’s what my mom did. She would go to night school while we were younger. She would work all day and then go to school because she wanted a better job.”

Overwhelmingly, the participants mentioned the importance of education was stressed to them from an early age. They not only received the message that education was important, they were also able to see someone in their family work hard and obtain a degree. In most of the cases, the mother was the example.

### **Summary**

The above mentioned external factors made it possible for the participants to be equipped to overcome the challenges they faced as they embarked on their education. The social capital made it possible for them to remain strong, and have a stable sense of belonging, as they faced obstacles along their journey. The actions of these five Latina women proved, “success is not coming to you, you must come to it” (Dweck, 2006 p. 195). Yet, there remains the underlying question of how was it that others in similar situations, and with the same factors of support, were unable to overcome their challenges? To find the answer to this question, it was necessary to consider the individual’s characteristics and the personal resiliency factors they employed to achieve their goals.

### **Resiliency Factors**

The external factors previously mentioned (educational resources, factors of influence, personal transformation, positive outcomes, school stability, and value of education) made it possible for the participants to obtain a post-secondary degree. The external factors alone were not enough to make the difference. More important to the participants' success were the internal characteristics of resiliency and grit, or *ganas*. The concept of resiliency refers to individuals who successfully cope with biological and social risk factors (Werner, 1993). Grit is "resolve or strength of character" (Couros, 2015, p. 37). *Ganas*, is "a deeply held desire to achieve academically fueled by parental struggle and sacrifice" (Easley, Bianco, & Leech, 2012, p. 169).

All five participants concurred they were resilient. Viviana confidently agreed. She stated:

Yes, absolutely. I've done some research on my statistics on all of the things that have happened to me and all of my challenges and I am one of the high percentage like of people that don't I guess- I think I said that wrong, but I am the one percent that is successful after all the things that I've had happen to me.

Veronica agreed she was resilient. She said, "Yeah, definitely [I am resilient]." Maria's definition of resiliency was, she said, "Being able to come back from anything. Any obstacle that gets in your way. You being able to overcome that obstacle and still be smiling and still feel okay about everything." Leticia described resiliency as, "Being able to overcome these types of things and it not hindering your life." She added resiliency was achieved by, "Wanting a different outcome than what you're living." She considered herself resilient, "At times." Leticia described herself as bold, able to set boundaries, and committed. Christina agrees she is resilient, saying, "YES! I never let them keep me down." Christina defined being resilient as, "Getting knocked down, but still going forward." The participants demonstrated their resilient traits throughout their

experiences. One of the first ways they showed their internal resilience is through their desire to learn.

### **Desire to Learn**

Resilient people tend to have a desire to learn (Dweck, 2006). Learning can be a form of adaptation for some. It is likely that when there is an interest in learning, and a joy in reading, students may be academically successful. All five participants mentioned how they love to learn. They had an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. This worked on their behalf and may be why they remained in school all the way through college. Their internal drive to acquire knowledge facilitated the pathway. Although she struggled during the school transitions, Viviana's love for learning and motivation never wavered. She said, "I really like school. I was not the best at it, but I was really organized, and I just enjoyed going. I liked the idea ... I like the idea of learning and the act of learning." The passion she had for learning is one of the traits seen in resilient people (Dweck, 2006). Veronica also enjoyed learning and attending school. She mentioned how she loved learning and "absorbing information". Growing up, she used reading as a way to escape her situation, saying, "Yeah, I think for me as a kid, especially with the things always going on in elementary, it was my escape. So, I'd live in those books. It was my escape from reality." The academic skills facilitated learning and instilled a passion for reading. Like Veronica, Maria enjoyed reading from a very young age. She read all genres and always had a book with her, even to this day this is a practice she honors, as an adult. She also enjoyed attending school and liked to learn new things. Maria reflected on her overall educational experiences and recalled:

From everything [that happened in my life], I eventually learned and then going into college you learn [to apply the knowledge]. You learn how to learn on your

own and be independent and things like that. I was always very independent too. Even if they weren't teaching me I tried to learn myself.

Maria was a seeker of information, saying, "I was always looking for more things to do or to help me better me, better myself." She did her own research to get into college, stating, "I was independently seeking all this information." In addition, she took it upon herself to research her children's medical symptoms and side effects of the medications they were taking; offering another example of how she searched out information.

Leticia enjoyed school, she stated "Like I knew that school was never option in order for me to do what I needed to do, or to live the life I wanted to live I had to go to school." School seemed to offer a routine and a place for her to be productive. It was a haven when she was going through problems at home. While she was the only participant to mention she did not enjoy reading as a child, she did pick up the love for reading as an adult. Christina always enjoyed learning; she said, "I love school." The participants' passion for knowledge may explain the reason they were all attracted to the field of education as a career choice. Dweck (2006) stated that teaching is a way to learn. The participants may view education as a way to impart the gift of learning with others and instill a desire for knowledge. However, having the desire to learn was not sufficient to attain their goal of a college degree, they also had to have the right mindset.

### **Mindset**

Mindset is the belief one has of their qualities (Dweck, 2006). Dweck's (2006) research shows "that the view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life" (p. 6). The participants' points of view made an impact on their outlook on life and life's challenges, particularly in achieving a post-secondary education. Their mindset was the way they viewed something, which framed their action steps, and their frame of

mind set in motion the approach they would take. Some of the participants mentioned using strategies they found helpful. For example, Viviana used her organizational and motivational skills. Viviana said, “I really like school. I was not the best at it, but I was really organized, and I just enjoyed going. I like the idea of learning and the act of learning.” Viviana attributed her success in school to this approach. Veronica followed a set of steps to complete her homework. She said, “The first thing I did was homework. I changed out of school clothes, I got into play clothes. Then I did homework before anything. Once that was done, then I could do whatever.” An organizational strategy also helped Maria stay motivated once she was in college by checking off completed classes on her degree plan. This system proved to really help Maria feel a sense of accomplishment. She said:

I had my degree plan and I was checking off each time and I would go back again next semester and just check them off again. I had to keep pushing myself to come back. Just keep going and keep going.

The participants also expressed how a positive mindset helped them achieve a degree. Viviana, Maria, and Christina mentioned trying to remain positive when things were not ideal. Maria used her experience as she transitioned from one middle school to another to help her handle the challenge. She recalled taking it one day at a time, meeting new friends, staying focused on her school work and making that her priority. Her attitude was, “I think I just dealt with it and just got through. That's basically what I think, I just dealt with it. I just took it on.” Christina’s positive outlook in life facilitated positive end results. She shared this mindset even in her reading genre, stating, “I like to read about how life has a happy ending after going through many trials and challenges.”

Maintaining focus was another feature of mindset shared by the participants. Viviana and Maria mentioned maintaining their focus on their education. During the

pregnancy, Maria still maintained passing grades and stayed current with her work, saying, “I still was responsible, I [would] still take care of my grades I still followed through with whatever I needed to do.” Viviana stayed focused with her goal to attend college even when it was not the case for her friends. She did not allow peer pressure to derail her plans of attending college. She stated:

Like I said, my high school that I went to my senior year, there was a lot more Latinos and education was not looked at as that amazing until the last semester, and then people are asking where you're going. They're like, "Oh, I didn't do anything."”

Despite her peers’ lack of desire to attend college, Viviana maintained her motivation and did not let her peers negatively influence her.

Problem-solving was another feature used by some of the participants. A time Viviana tried to problem solve was when she sought a job that would help her earn money and, at the same time, allow her to spend more time with her daughter. She went to work at a daycare. She could take her daughter to the same daycare; and was able to do both at one location. Veronica’s thought process was such that she would see problems as challenges to tackle. She also sought ways around problems. Her problem-solving skills were applied whenever she faced a problem. It was as if she were back reading the books with different endings. When her middle school situation was difficult she turned to positive outlets, saying, “I was trying to make the best of the situation by getting involved in everything.” She joined every club she could, including student council, and took part in every sport, such as basketball and cheerleading. These same skills were used in obtaining a degree.

Planning was another feature of mindset employed by some of the participants. When Christina and her husband learned they were expecting, they discussed on their

long-term goals. Her husband analyzed the long-term plan to improve their situation. Christina explained, “We understood that if one of us got a degree, then that would help us out financially, get us better benefits. I mean, we're looking at the whole package.” Christina’s own determinations and not wanting to be a statistic, allowed her to agree to the plan: “I said I was not going to be a barefoot, pregnant Mexican woman in the house.” Christina and her husband wanted to break the poverty cycle and create a better life for themselves and their children. Early on, her husband strategized, he stated:

I said I was not going to have [a nondegree] in the house because, being that we came from a socioeconomic- a low socioeconomic, uh, community, it was either we stay there and relive the cycle to just keep . . . that same cyclical environment that would happen to Latinos back then, or we made the decision to get out. We made the decision. No matter what it took, we're going to get out. And it was going to start with her education, because it was easier for her to get an education than for me to get an education.

The participants’ mindset allowed them to work through challenges. Their mindset permitted them to view the challenge as an obstacle that can be overcome instead of a barricade. When they embraced the challenge, they could overcome the problem.

### **Embracing Challenges**

One example of viewing a problem as an obstacle, not as a stop point, was when Viviana and Maria faced academic challenges. The academic problems did not become a reason for them to quit school. Attending college was always in their plans. In middle school, Viviana was diagnosed with a reading disability. When faced with this problem, she looked for ways to compensate, and would often reassure herself. Prior to her diagnosis, and receiving help, Viviana struggled in school. She recalled:



There were times that I did not feel confident because of my reading abilities, and I felt that a lot. It made me uncomfortable ... and I dealt with it by all sorts of different way. Like, I'm just trying to think. ... Um, I figured out [a] trick ... tips and tricks to get away from having to read aloud, or trying to do the assignment and you only use words that I knew how to spell so I wouldn't get embarrassed of people telling you, 'You don't know how to spell that?'

Viviana persevered through this problem, but it was not until much later that she finally gained the confidence in her academic ability, she received help in school. She explained:

Which I felt like that, I knew that I was, like, separated but I feel that it helped my confidence in my reading because I was doing really good compared to the other kids in there, so it was like, 'Oh, okay. I'm okay'.

Maria embraced school challenges as she struggled in her high school Spanish class. This was an odd experience because, although she is Latina, and her parents spoke Spanish, she was not fluent enough in Spanish to pass the class. She was in a class where all her Latino peers were passing, and she was not. It was not like her to fail a class. She remembered how she tried to learn the material and pass the class. She stated:

I would try and try, but I just didn't feel confident in it. The way I got through it was just [I] would practice it myself. He [the teacher] would give us all these verbs and how to conjugate them and all of those [steps]. I would go home and practice it where other kids didn't have to practice as much as I did. I would just take it upon myself to practice more at home.

Maria's mindset was she was going to learn the material. She put an effort into practicing until she mastered the material. She embraced the challenge and achieved her goal. Maria also embraced the challenge of her children's medical problems. Both of her children suffered health problems as infants. This was a very frightening experience.

When the febrile seizures happened the first time to her daughter, Maria did not know what was wrong. By the time febrile seizures happened to second child, Maria, and her family, knew how to handle the condition. She took the time to educate herself about febrile seizures. As a result, she was more confident handling the medical condition with her second child. She said, “I’m like, no, this is just febrile seizures, I just have to watch out. And I knew what to do by the time he came.” Another time Maria embraced her challenges was when she had to undergo a medical procedure; she suffered a mild stroke and required heart surgery to repair the problem. She overcame this and resumed work and school.

Leticia showed resiliency when she beat the odds of graduating high school given her upbringing and having had two children. She beat the odds once more, having earned her bachelor’s degree as a mother of five. At the time of the interviews, she was in the process of completing her Master’s degree. Leticia witnessed very different outcomes in her life, compared to her step-sisters and sister-in-law, when having to embrace challenges. Leticia could not understand why her step-father’s two daughters did not pursue college while she and her half-sister did. The only explanation Leticia had was that her step-sisters did not have the desire instilled in them. Leticia tried to persuade her sister-in-law to get an education to be able to provide for herself, saying, “At the same time, you have to educate yourself and maybe this is where I was very strong with it, was because my mom was a single parent.”

A time Christina used resiliency to overcome her challenges was when she used the negative comment made by a high school teacher to motivate her to do better; saying, “I guess I never forgot what she said, and I kept fighting to get out of the predicament that I got myself into. I knew I had to go to college to get a good job and to show my

daughter she needed to ask for more.” Christina credits her resilient nature to her upbringing. She stated:

I think my resilient nature comes from not having my mother and father present with me and having to fend for myself. I had morals though, given to me by my grandmother. She told me I was so smart and so I just believed it.

Her husband credits their success to adhering to their strategy. He said:

But we still followed the plan. Years later, I would go back, I would finish my degree, but it was all about getting us stable first. And the problem is, too many people are worried about the drama of who's going to be the daddy, who's going to do this, how am I going to pay my bills. Well, that was decided between us two that we were going to do it ourselves. We didn't rely on anyone else, and when you don't have that crutch, it forces you to get your ass out there and work.

Through the participants' efforts, their abilities led them to their accomplishments. They saw their efforts had the power to transform them and their situation. They wielded effort when faced by a problem. Their persistence resulted in academic achievement.

### **Persistence**

Persistence was mentioned by several of the participants as a characteristic they possessed and attributed to their academic success. They persisted through several personal, and academic, barriers. They persisted as they worked through external factors such as maintaining their relationship with their partners, balancing work, and learning to be a mother to their children. The persistence was possible because they possessed the internal characteristic of persistence. The persistence was revealed as grit, or *ganás*.

Viviana experienced challenging times with the frequent school moves, her parents' separations, and having a special needs sister. While Viviana was described as a

healthy baby by her mother, her sister had developmental challenges. Her mother noted it was not easy for Viviana to deal with this additional challenge, saying, “It took a while for her [Viviana] to realize, well, this is my sister and she needs help... it's probably until she became a mom that then she was motherly to [her sister]. It's like okay, I understand.” Viviana’s parents’ attention was primarily on helping her sister. Vivian did not receive the same parental involvement when she struggled in reading. Viviana had to learn to compensate and work harder on her academics to achieve success. Viviana did not permit those events to become discouraged, but rather embraced the challenges, and persisted in the face of those setbacks. The challenges allowed Viviana to grow as an individual and be able to persist through obstacles she faced to achieve her post-secondary education.

Veronica said, “I just never let anything get in my way.” Veronica’s mother described Veronica as having several resiliency characteristics. She described Veronica, she said, “Very determined. She's always been real determined and driven. Independent as she could possibly be.” Both Veronica and her mother mentioned not leaving anything they started undone. They discussed how their determination made it possible to achieve their goals.

Veronica’s mother decisively agreed Veronica was resilient. She said:  
Just her ability to bounce back. It doesn't matter what life throws at her, she just bounces right back. It's like ... She amazes me at every turn. Honestly, she does. Nothing's gonna stop her. I'm like the sky's the limit with this girl. She'll find a way past the sky if she can.

Veronica would question decisions that she did not find fair. She was an advocate for her education. When she was in elementary school, she noticed that her friend was selected to be in a gifted and talented program and she wasn’t. She questioned this

selection, asking, "Well, why didn't I get into GATE?" I felt like I was pretty smart, too." Many years later, when applying for her master's program, and after she did not get accepted, she questioned her professor to find out the reason. When Veronica was not accepted at the university of her first choice, she did not quit. Instead, she sought out an out-of-state university, to pursue her education. She later contemplated how the out-of-state university was the best fit for her during a very difficult time in her personal life. Her marriage ended before she earned her master's degree and her grandmother passed away shortly after she completed her master's degree. She found comfort in having faith-based coursework that helped her overcome the challenges she faced during this time. Veronica's path to her educational attainment was not easy. She experienced setbacks that would have caused others to quit, but she did not. She worked through the hindrances. She did not allow the challenges to stop her, but rather used them to propel her forward. She looked for the positive spin in situations. She managed to remain in school despite problems at home, having had a baby, and in college, through marital problems. She persisted whenever she was faced with an obstacle while pursuing her education.

Like Veronica, Maria recognized her ability to achieve her goals was due to her perseverance and personal expectations. She explained:

Just keep going and keep going. I think just looking back on how you overcome all of that, is just pushing yourself forward. It's nothing out of the ordinary for me. I just kept doing what I was expected to do or what I expected myself to do.

Leticia's sister agreed Leticia was resilient, "She is resilient. Experienced loss and was able to get done [with her education]. She was going to do it no matter what. A lot has to do, we want to do better, be different parents to our kids." Leticia's sister acknowledged their childhood was not ideal, but as parents, they wanted to establish a

better foundation for their children. Leticia embraced her challenges and gave her best effort to improve her life. She sought to improve her life in order to improve the lives of her children.

In high school, Christina set out to make As and would not give up. An approach Christina used to be successful in high school was to get to know her teachers and their expectations. She explained, “I just kept trying, I got to know what the teachers were asking for. I got to “know” the teacher. And, I did not give up. I had ‘true grit’.” Through this she learned the importance of grades and the value of determination. Christina did not permit the negative comments made by some of her high school teachers discourage her from going to college, but instead used them as a form of inspiration, saying, “I decided to prove them wrong and go to school.” Perseverance made it possible for her to remain in school through all her challenges. She managed to graduate high school with honors, even after having a child. She learned to live with health issues that caused her to be hospitalized several times. She then graduated Cum Laude while having two young children, at home. In her early thirties, she was determined to honor the memory of her father by earning her master’s degree. She completed the online college degree while holding a full-time job and, by then, being the mother to three children. She supported and encouraged her husband to go onto to earn his bachelor’s degree. This meant she would carry more of the household financial responsibilities. She gladly took on the challenge because it was a commitment they had made, and it was a move to improve their situation. She survived a stroke and relearned all motor skills. She trusted she would return to full capacity and would not accept any pity. Christina said, “I have determination, even after my stroke; everything was against me, but I kept going, I kept working, and I am still working towards getting back to where I was.”

The persistence and determination the participants exhibited allowed them to overcome barriers. The process of overcoming serves as an example and inspiration to others. Resilient individuals embrace their challenges in hopes to share the secret with others.

### **Inspiration**

Resilient people tend to influence others. The participants were willing to share their stories in hopes of inspiring others to overcome barriers. Maria's husband praised her for inspiring him to go further in his career. Maria said, "He's says because of me, but he got that inspiration to want to do better for himself and not just take whatever job." Veronica also wanted to inspire others, by setting up a mentoring program for first-generation college students. The purpose of the program is to offer resources and mentoring to first-generation college students in completing their associate's degree and transferring to a university. Through the mentorship program, she has helped hundreds of students and impacted their lives for the better. She saw a need in an area she felt she could provide relief, so she responded by becoming involved. She helped expand the mentoring group to help many more students. She does this not just for the current students, but for generations to come. Her organization has helped spark other diversity groups to form at her college. When asked about her contributions, Veronica modestly recalled:

It's kind of funny, because what I've done has almost come full circle to what I wish I would have had as a teen mom or just even as a teenager period, but it's not be intentional. It's not that I sought out my mentoring program and I asked my president to bring it to my campus. It was all God. God put me on that path and had me cross these different roads at certain times for a reason. I've been asked to speak to different youth groups. I'm on a mural. My students did a mural of

different people that have contributed to making our community better and I was their keynote speaker last year when they unveiled the mural.

The participants exhibited resiliency throughout their journey to obtain a post-secondary degree. They had a desire to learn and embraced challenges. They believed in their abilities and intelligence and worked towards making a better future for themselves and their children. Through their actions these Latinas inspired others to do their best and demonstrated it was possible to achieve goals by overcoming challenges.

### **Summary of Findings**

A resilient person uses their life experiences to overcome challenges and reach their goals. These five Latina women's educational attainments were a combination of their resilient nature and the support received from their families. Maria summed it up when she stated resiliency was possible through encouragement. She stated:

It takes a lot of encouragement and it could be from your family, it could be from friends, from a teacher. I think just another person that's right there beside just pushing and encouraging you to keep going keep moving forward and you're going to be fine.

It was the determination and endurance of these Latinas that made it possible for them to earn their college degrees. The following characteristics have been part of the personal resiliency factors employed to achieve their goals. All participants exhibited autonomy as they maneuvered through their paths. The five participants exhibited self-efficacy in their ability to earn their education. The participants employed problem solving skills to achieve their goals. They all mentioned a sense of purpose for achieving their goals. It was either their family, child, or themselves, or a combination. They aspired to do, have, be more than experienced in childhood. After reaching their goal,



they used their status to reshape the world around them. These women became role models for several of their students, and other meaningful people in their lives.

In this chapter, the perspectives of five Latina women's influence to persevere through high school and go on to earn a college degree were captured. A 22-question demographic survey, as well as individual responses to 69 interview questions, a focus group with 13 questions, and interviews with the participants' identified support system were used. Analysis of the data revealed the factors that influenced the participants to succeed in obtaining their education. The factors that made the pursuit to post-secondary education possible for these five Latinas were social capital, comprising of their family, and school, along with resiliency.

Research Question One, which asked to identify barriers, indicated time management and the balancing of the roles of mother, student, and wife was the most challenging. Daycare was also indicated as a barrier for half of the participants. Findings to Research Question Two indicated the women viewed the barriers as something they just had to keep working through. Several mentioned their determination and tenacious nature cultured in childhood, helped them persevere through the barriers faced. These Latinas did not see an alternate option, nor did they want to give up. On Research Question Three, the most prominent school support mentioned by all participants was a genuine and caring school staff. They noted such staff allowed purposeful and meaningful relationships which were beneficial in motivating them in an educational setting. Participants expressed, through the focus groups, the educational practices they found helpful were programs such as CIS, or Pregnancy Related Services (PRS), which included homebound and list of resources such as daycare providers. Research Question Four illustrated numerous and frequent resiliency factors mentioned in the interviews

describing the participants. The participants mentioned their family and culture as an imperative influence on their resilient nature.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this qualitative study set out to discover the factors that facilitated these five Latina women to persevere through their teenage pregnancy and earn a college degree. The most compelling factors were the participant's mindset and family support. The study used retrospective interviews to tell the remarkable experiences, characteristics, and resiliency factors of these five Latinas who accomplished their goals. While this study has a limited number of participants, it does provide results that facilitate the pathway to an educational attainment for minorities.

In the following chapter, the summary, implications of these findings, and recommendations for future research have been discussed. This information can help address risk factors and promote and reinforce resiliency qualities in individuals in similar situations. In a wider context, it can guide educational research, inform policymakers, educators, community leaders, and parents.

CHAPTER V  
SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Introduction**

This final chapter presents the summary of the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research. The summary of the findings provides an analysis of the most prevalent factors. The implications section follow with the limitations of this study. The recommendations for future studies conclude the chapter.

**Summary of the Findings**

This multiple-case study examined factors that contributed to success of five Latina teenage mothers' success in obtaining a post-secondary education. A demographic survey, individual interviews and focus group interviews were used retrospectively to gain insight from the participants regarding their perceptions of the challenges and assisting factors in completing high school, and, in earning a college degree. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What factors do Latina teenage mothers identify as possible barriers to obtaining a post-secondary education?
2. How do Latina teenage mothers work through educational barriers to obtain a post-secondary education?
3. What educational practices do Latina teenage mothers identify as helpful in obtaining a post-secondary education?
4. What resiliency factors do Latina teenage mothers identify that contribute to obtaining a post-secondary education?

Themes were developed by triangulating data gathered from 22 survey questions, five participants' responses to the 69 interview questions and a focus group with 13 questions and interviews with identified support individual. QSR International's NVivo

11(QSR International, 2013) qualitative data analysis software was used to code the data. Analysis of the data revealed reoccurring themes identified by the participants in their quest to obtain a post-secondary education. The overarching themes that emerged were familial and school support and resiliency. Familial support was essential in the participants' pursuit of a higher education. The resilient nature was of the participants was the connecting piece to their successful attainment of a post-secondary education.

The theoretical framework used to guide and support this study is social capital theory and Resiliency (Zhang et al., 2008). Zhang et al. (2008) found social capital theory and resources helped individuals accomplish successful adaptation and change. For this study, the summary of findings have been formatted by restating the research question followed by the identified social capital and resources from the data analysis.

Research question one: What factors do Latina teenage mothers identify as possible barriers to obtaining a post-secondary education? One factor identified by the participants in this study was how most of the responsibility of problem-solving the arrangements of childcare fell on them. Most lived with their family, or, with their boyfriend's family. While Maria and her baby lived with her parents, the biological father lived with his parents. This living arrangement meant Maria was handling the daily caretaking responsibilities. Maria and Viviana's family had to rearrange their schedules to help take care of their respective baby. Dominguez and Watkins (2003) discussed how the problem is not solved by simply securing a daycare facility. Their study found that often teenage mothers were not at ease knowing their child was in the hands of a stranger. This was the case with Viviana, "I didn't want her to be at the daycare for so long. So, I felt more comfortable with her being with my family; and then whenever I was there for my four hours a day, she would just go with me." To ease the stress, Viviana changed jobs and went to work at a daycare where she could take her

daughter. The findings in this study were similar to Taylors' (2009) study showing teenagers pregnancy to be highly stressful and a strain on relationships. The participants experienced problems in their relationships because of the living arrangements as well. It was difficult for Maria, Christina, Leticia, and Veronica, and their respective baby's biological father to have typical courtships as parents. They were either living separately, or with family. Some became resentful of the biological fathers who were able to continue with their normal lives. Yet, the participants attempted to make the relationships work, and they aspired to have a cohesive family. The stress caused Maria and the biological father of her baby to temporarily break off the relationship and seek a relationship with someone else. She explained, "He was still being a guy and wanting to do whatever he wanted to do kind of thing."

Another barrier, which the participants verbalized was the most challenging, was the balancing of the roles of mother, student, and wife. Leticia found herself struggling to find time to balance the role of student and mother. She tried to complete all her work during school hours because she wanted to be able to dedicate afternoons to her children. She stated, "It was like after school I was in mom mode." Leticia shared she handled stressful times by, "Most times I would just put the baby to sleep and didn't have a choice, but to get it done. I don't remember like crying or being depressed or angry anything like that it was just like I don't have a choice, I have to get this done and just kind of mustered through it."

Stigma was another barrier the participants mentioned. Schuster (2003) established a connection between stigma in the school setting and its limitation on young Latinas' full potential. Veronica experienced stigma from her counselor when seeking college information. Veronica recalls, "She looked at me, and she looked at my stomach, and she looked at me, and said, "You're going to go to college?" Veronica did not permit

the experience to deter her from enrolling into college, but rather used that experience to push her to follow through. Maria had an experience that left her feeling exploited and stigmatized. The school's newspaper ran an article about pregnant teens at the school. Maria felt that instead of celebrating the teenage mothers for their continuation in school, the article ridiculed them. Maria did not allow her outrage to go unheard. She advocated for herself and the group by complaining to the newspaper teacher. Although in the end it did not change the outcome, it did allow Maria to articulate her frustration and speak out against something she found unfair. Leticia recalled being the target of harsh comments. She said, "I did get the . . . oh, you're Mexican, they do multiply a lot. Like the nasty comments, that kind of stuff. You didn't have TV at your house, that kind of thing." Leticia did not allow her self-esteem to be rattled by such comments. Christina attended a majority Latino high school where student expectations were low. She recalled a negative comment made by one of her teachers belittling the students' magnet status as not important. Christina's extracurricular teacher also made a negative comment after she became pregnant. She was also criticized by her peers. Planning together, Christina and her husband discussed their long-term goals. Their mindset was that they would break the poverty cycle and create a better life for themselves and their children to combat the stigma. Dweck (2006) found that how individuals view themselves determines how they live their lives. Although these women received comments that were demeaning and demoralizing; they did not see themselves as such. Their view of themselves was positive and they believed they had potential. This mindset is what lead them to their accomplishments.

The National Center for Education Statistics (2017) found 16% of Latina students earn a bachelor's degree. This is a low percentage compared to the total population of Latinos. One reason for such a low percentage of Latinas with a bachelor's degree is the

lack of Latino students' participation in college preparatory courses. Windsor (2013) studied the level of access to advanced course and challenging curriculum for Latinos on their college attendance and found it does make an impact. The results showed that Latino students who were enrolled in advanced courses and challenging curriculum had an increase in academic success and college preparation (Windsor, 2013). Windsor's premise was that the imbalanced access to advanced courses and challenging curriculum of Latino students led to a difference in academic achievement. Furthermore, the results found that enrollment in such courses influences teacher expectations and interactions, school wide support, and guidance and counseling (Windsor, 2013). Windsor (2013) noted a major discrepancy between Latino and White students who did not participate in college preparatory courses, such as Advanced Placement (AP) and dual credit courses, to increase post-secondary attainment. Similar conclusions can be reached based on the findings of this study. Only one of the five participants were in a magnet program that had some emphasis on college. Christina recalled, "I was in the magnet program . . . My classes were higher than general education classes, but they were not like AP." One of the participants attempted advanced courses for the first time in high school, but did not continue. It is worthy to note she attempted the advanced courses at the academically rigorous high school she attended for the first half of her high school years. At that school, there were higher expectations of the students. Viviana did not feel she had the ability to remain in the advanced courses and dropped them. The other three participants shared that they did not recall being offered advanced courses. Veronica and Leticia did not feel they were informed nor encouraged to take advanced classes while in school. Leticia described her schools as mostly low SES with a high Latino population.

Hindering the pathway to college for the participants was the lack of assistance they received at their school. Three of the five participants were first-generation college

students. They had to seek out information on the college admissions process and financial aid. Their autonomy and self-efficacy made college obtainable. Their mindset was that through their efforts they could improve their possibilities.

Legault, Green-Demers, and Pelletier (2006) researched the subject of self-determination theory and learned that motivation is either intrinsic, extrinsic or lacking motivation. Motivation was mentioned numerous times by the participants. Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned a lack of interest in school. Instead they all mentioned how they enjoyed learning so much so that all five hold a job in an educational setting. This ties into Dweck's (2006) contention that a person's desire to develop their potential creates a yearning for learning. The participants' continuing their educational trajectory and seeing it to completion gave them a sense of purpose. It appears their mindset may have been a protective factor that enabled the participants' success in obtaining a post-secondary education.

In terms of educational achievements, these women surpassed research by Engle and Tinto (2008) showing that low-income, first-generation students were 26% more likely to leave higher education after the first year. They had multiple obligations outside of college but nonetheless, they did not quit their studies. The findings of this study contend the reason they did not quit college was in large part because of their resiliency and support system.

Research question two: How do Latina teenage mothers work through educational barriers to obtain a post-secondary education? Familial support was the most influential theme participants credited for their success. Time after time the participants mentioned how much their family helped them. In Maria's case, her mother even required and taught Maria's younger siblings how to take care of the baby so they could help. The families help not only assisted the teenager, but also the baby. Viviana, Maria and



Leticia mentioned how their family saw the baby as their own child and showed the baby unconditional love. In terms of the theory under review, the obtainment of post-secondary degrees of the participants confirm how with strong relational interaction of social capital, there was an increase in the human capital for both the teenager and the child (Zhang et al., 2008). In other words, due to the support of their family and other support systems and educational support the participants overcame their environmental obstacles and earned their college degree for the betterment of their future. The social capital provides support to the teenage mother with the role of motherhood (Doğan-Ates & Carrión-Basham, 2007; Estrada, 2012).

Another factor that allowed the participants to be able to overcome the barriers to obtain a post-secondary education was they had a place to call home. Two of the participants remained living with their immediate family and three moved in with their boyfriends' parents. The home is one of three immediate social capital environments of a teenager (Zhang et al., 2008). In this Structural social capital, the student has contact with family members (Zhang et al., 2008). An individual is more likely to thrive in a safe, stable, and nurturing home environment. Safety and stability in a family were central and can help everything else fall into place.

*Familismo*, which refers to reciprocal support and obligation between family members was demonstrated throughout the case studies (Calzada et al., 2014). In Viviana's case, her mother and uncle helped tremendously. They offered emotional and financial support. Veronica's in-laws took her into their home and offered support in any way possible. Maria had her family and her in-laws to help care, raise, and support her and her child. Leticia's in-laws took her in when her mother abandoned her. They provided financial support to her and her husband and children. They helped her care for the babies, so she could attend school. Christina's in-laws helped take care of the babies

whenever she needed to attend school. Her husband was by her side from the onset of the pregnancy and throughout the struggles they experienced as a married couple.

As with any culture there have been positives and negatives. The participants experienced a positive aspect of traditional Latino culture in *familismo*. They experienced a negative aspect of the culture as they had to overcome traditional gender expectations of them because of their gender. They constantly had to prove they were more than daughters, sisters, wives, mothers and caretakers (Estrada, 2012). Veronica stressed the need to dispel the cultural expectations placed on women. She said:

It's that common, reoccurring theme in our culture that you have to be the [caretaker] provider. You come last, because you're Latina. You, for yourself, come last. You take care of your husband, you take care of the kids, you take care of the house, and then if there's anything left for yourself, then you do it, and that includes an education. It's an awareness thing.

A change suggested by Leticia is the need to change the mindset held by Latinas. Leticia said:

The whole mindset of needing a man or being submissive to that piece, no, that does not work for me. To me, it's like they have to play a certain role because of the culture and they get stuck in that, because if you're not doing that piece, then they don't feel like they are living up to what they are supposed to, being the woman.

Maria mentioned the need to exhibit confidence when facing obstacles. Maria said:

Just obstacles they need to overcome. I think Latinos in general really are shy and quiet and don't feel confident all the time that they can do something or be someone and get that far. But I think you know, I think that's one of the obstacles

is just having that confidence and that desire to just keep pushing further. And not to be afraid. Going for whatever, you want. Like set those goals and achieve those goals and get there.

Christina was determined not to be a stereotype, she said, “I said I was not going to [be] a barefoot, pregnant Mexican woman in the house.”

A way the participants worked to overcome the educational barriers was through their role models who valued education. Researchers Colon and Sanchez (2010) agree that if value is placed on education Latino adolescents’ educational trajectory can be certain. For most participants, they said their mother was their role model. The mother-daughter relationship did not have to be intact for the participant to view her mother as an inspiration to obtain their post-secondary degree. In fact, with a couple of the participants the mother-daughter relationship evolved over the course of the participants’ life. Viviana’s mother stressed the importance of getting an education and its value. Veronica’s grandmother always stressed the importance of an education. She made sure that no matter how hectic their personal lives were, Veronica kept to her schedule and went to school. Her mother’s expectation was for Veronica to complete her homework before starting an activity. Her mother taught her through “tough love.” Maria’s mother reminded Maria she did not have to get married or stop going to school because of the pregnancy. She encouraged Maria to continue her path to finish school and go to college, “She always instilled that you're going to college. She always said you're going to go to college. She always had that in our minds, no matter what you're going to go [to college].” Maria remembers how her mother made her children’s education her priority. Leticia’s mother stressed the importance of school and set the example. Leticia viewed her mother as a role model as she set the example of hard work while putting herself through school and she reached her goals. Christina’s inspiration to get an education was

her cousin. Watching her cousin leave for college made it attainable for Christina, and she told herself she would go to college

Research question three: What educational practices do Latina teenage mothers identify as helpful in obtaining a post-secondary education? Resilience can be a combination of character traits and external protective factors (i.e., family, school, community) (Zhang et al., 2008). The factors helped the participants to accomplish successful adaptation and change (Zhang et al., 2008). As a result, there were positive outcomes in the participants' human capital - "skills, competence, and other attributes embodied in that were relevant to future economic activity" (Zhang et al., 2008, p. 106). According to Garmezy (1993), some of the resiliency characteristics that helped teenagers resolve conflict and cope with peer pressures were: easy temperament, autonomy, self-esteem and self-efficacy, problem solving skills, senses of purpose, and aspiration. The participants exhibited resiliency characteristic throughout their experiences. The participants and members of their support system were asked if they felt they were resilient. When asked if she considered herself a resilient person, Viviana confidently agreed, "Yes, absolutely." Her mother agreed that Viviana was a resilient person due to her experiences. She described Viviana as someone who listened to advice, and was determined, outspoken, and open minded. Veronica's mother decisively agreed Veronica was resilient. She described Veronica as very determined and driven, independent, a quick learner and always up for a challenge. Maria modestly agreed she was resilient. She described herself as responsible, a seeker of information, someone who follows through, and meets expectations. Maria acknowledged resiliency is possible through encouragement. Maria said:

It takes a lot of encouragement and it could be from your family, it could be from friends, from a teacher. I think just another person that's right there beside just

pushing and encouraging you to keep going, keep moving forward and you're going to be fine.

Leticia considered herself resilient at times. The way resiliency is achieved is, she said, “Wanting a different outcome than what you're living.” Christina embodied several of the resiliency traits--perseverance, competitive, determined, a hard-worker, outspoken, intelligent, compassionate, a life-learner, spiritual, and organized. Christina’s positive outlook in life facilitated positive end results. Her perseverance made it possible for her to remain in school through all her challenges.

Several of the participants mentioned mindset and religion when asked about the resiliency factors that contributed to them obtaining a post-secondary education. Wright and Davis (2008) found the main predictor of pregnant teenagers’ success was their mindset. Specifically, the mindset they held about their educational ambitions and goals. Their view was that possibilities were limitless with years of desire, hard work, and training (Dweck, 2006). The desire for hard work was referred to as *ganas* or grit. Grit is “resolve or strength of character” (Couros, 2015, p. 37). The participants also exhibited the resiliency and growth mindset described by Dweck (2006) “In this mindset, the hand you’re dealt is just the starting point for development. This growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities consist of things you can cultivate through your efforts” (p. 7). Their lived experiences lead them to have a desire to learn, to embrace challenges instead of hiding from them, to persist in the face of setbacks and overcome them in their own time and style. They used their status to reshape the world around them. These women became a role model for several of their students and other meaningful people in their life.

Research question four: What resiliency factors do Latina teenage mothers identify that contribute to obtaining a post-secondary education? The school is one of

three immediate social capital environments of a teenager (Zhang et al., 2008). In this Structural social capital, the student has contact with teachers (Zhang et al., 2008). For individuals from low SES backgrounds, the school compensates for the lack of human capital and financial capital to be able to produce the same amount of human capital for (Zhang et al., 2008). One way the school provides this for individuals of low SES is to provide access to good peers, teachers, counselors, and administrators to help facilitate the production of more human capital. Zhang et al. (2008) state that the social capital is defined by the relations and interactions between a student and teacher. If the interactions were positive, then positive outcomes shall come of them but if they were not than the outcomes may be negative. The school is the second most influential setting as it is where the students spend their majority of time. Four out of the five participants mentioned the school staff as a form of support. Overall, they mentioned how caring teachers made them feel they could be successful. Viviana recalled, “[My teacher] was just very helpful, and very guiding, and I think she's probably, someone that helped me change from not really like reading to ‘I really like it’.” Viviana credits such teachers for her desire to succeed, “and they were inspirational to me that I wanted to be as good as them or do their things.” Maria had similar experiences with teachers that encouraged the students and made them feel successful. Maria explained:

Those two teachers would talk to us like this is easy stuff, you can do this, you got this, you're smart you know what you're doing, and we don't; but they made us feel like we did. You can tell they cared about us. There was a few teachers there that they were really trying to reach us. That's why I think I felt good about going to school and wanting to be there.

Some of the ways teachers provided support was by being flexible with the deadlines on assignments. Leticia's English teacher planned with Leticia, so she could

complete and turn in her assignments. Christina recognized the benefits of getting to know her teachers. This was the approach she utilized to be successful in high school. She would get to know her teachers and their expectations, she recalled, “I just kept trying, I got to know what the teachers were asking for. I got to “know” the teacher. And, I did not give up. I had ‘true grit’.”

Additional educational practices included counseling resources. Christina’s counselor encouraged her to attend college. Support groups were mentioned as an educational practice that helped the participants. Both formal and informal support groups were mentioned. Communities in Schools (CIS) facilitated resources such as groups or programs to help at-risk students. Maria took part in a group for teenage parents where she could share and interact with other teenage mothers. Maria also learned about college and scholarship information through the monthly lunchtime mentoring group. Instructional resources included math and writing labs.

One of the educational practices that helped the participants was the Homebound Program. Homebound is offered by the school system under their Pregnancy Related Services (PRS). It allowed students to receive instruction in their home if they were unable to attend school due to health complications. Prior to her started in the Homebound Program, Maria remembered one of her high school teachers went out of her way to get work dropped off to Maria’s house while she was pregnant.

Another educational practice that helped one of the participants obtain her education was the alternative school. An alternative school is a campus for students to attend and remediate work at a quicker rate. They offer flexibility and smaller classrooms. Leticia attended an alternative school during her second pregnancy. While there, she was informed about the resources available to her as a teenage parent. The alternative school paid for Leticia to attend night school, which allowed Leticia to

advance in her credits and graduate on time. They also covered the fee for her to obtain her driver's license. This made it possible for her to transport her children to daycare.

An educational practice that facilitated completion of coursework was the alternative online school format. Some of the participants utilized the online format while in high school, but more than half used the online format to earn their college degree. The online format provided accessibility and flexibility. Leticia and Christina received some of their high school coursework via online format. Half of the participants' college degrees were earned from online universities. Veronica, Christina and her husband were able to maintain a full-time job while they took coursework to earn their college degree.

These women worked hard to overcome their circumstances and remained on track with their graduation plans. They credit their family for instilling in them a sense of resilience and perseverance. They hope to pass these qualities on to the next generation.

### **Implications**

This research set out to study the factors that made the pursuit to higher education possible for Latinas, to possibly replicate with teenagers in similar situations and/or add to the knowledge base to better inform policymakers, educators, community leaders and parents. The study presented the obstacles that the five participants faced. Recognizing the signs of risk and protective factors, which contribute to resilience in Latino youth, may increase the cultural competence of policy and practice, and research with this population. The participants were asked to share their recommendations based on their lived experiences. Their feedback is listed under the appropriate subheadings: policymakers, educators, community leaders and parents.



## **Policymakers**

Data from a national survey found 87% of teenagers and 90% of adults considered reducing teenage pregnancy would be a very effective way to reduce the high school dropout rate and improve academic achievement (Albert, 2010). Thirty percent of females who dropped out of school cited pregnancy as the reason for doing so (Solomon-Fears, 2016). The problem is expatiated when it involves Latinos because of the expected increase in numbers. Power to Decide the Campaign to Prevent Unplanned Pregnancy (2016) estimated that by the year 2030, more than one-quarter of all teenagers will be Latino. Teenage pregnancy rates continue to rise. Latina teenagers currently have the highest birth rate among all teenagers, more than one and a half times higher than the overall teenage birth rate (Hamilton et al., 2016). Drop outs negatively impact society in the areas of education, healthcare, economy, and state aid (Smithbattle, 2007).

A more comprehensive approach to address teenage pregnancy and its health risks needs to be mandated. Policies need to be implemented to make healthcare accessible to all individuals regardless of their SES. It is unjust that 8% of Latinos, under 18 years of age, and 27.2% of adults 18-64 years, do not have health insurance (National Center for Health Statistics, 2015). Without healthcare coverage, the already at-risk pregnant teenagers may not receive adequate prenatal care for mother and child (CDC, 2016). In the Rio Grande Valley, the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH) and the Center for Reproductive Rights (2015) completed a report showing the health disparities Texas Latinas have and demanding their human rights. The report details the steps to take to create change. This was established by mobilizing to educate women and strategizing to combat the politics. One way this is accomplished is through the Community Health Workers (CHWs), or *promotoras/es*, who were knowledgeable leaders in the community who go around the communities educating women about their

reproductive health, provide counseling, and connect women to health care providers and other services. The report outlined recommendations to make access to sexual and reproductive health goods, services, and information affordable and attainable. This would be a model to replicate as it builds capacity within the community, while using trusted leaders who were familiar with the language and social-cultural norms of the culture. The report also summarized the impact of the 82nd and 83rd Texas Legislatures, which did away with affordable contraception and preventative health care for women. The regressive policies were particularly impactful to low-income women.

Furthermore, funding needs to continue for programs such as The Title X Family Planning Program, a federal grant program intended to give low-income females the same fertility control as higher income women. In addition, funding programs that provided meaningful connections were needed in low-SES communities. Leticia recommends allocating monies to establish supervised, enrichment programs for youth. School systems need to have financial support to provide necessary interventions and remediation and have adequate staffing in place to carry out the tasks with fidelity.

### **Educators**

It is imperative students receive an education. Obtaining an education is the forecaster of lasting financial capital (Kahan, 2010; Wright & Davis, 2008). It is a way to improve lives. Educators need training on recognizing the risk factors that lead teenagers to pregnancy and how to work with teenage parents. Having educators aware of risk factors that lead teenagers to become pregnant can allow them to provide interventions, whether it is in the form of referring students to counselors, advising them to become engaged in school related activities, or being there as supportive teachers. Training educators regarding how to work with teenage parents could help reduce teenage parents' school related stress. Trained educators would be aware of the need to

adjust school work requirements and set up a flexible schedule for their students. They would also be familiar with parenting programs to refer as a resource and be sympathetic instead of disparaging and possibly causing students to drop out of school. Building relationships is essential in creating bonds between teachers and students. Leticia recommends, “Communicate that each individual matters.” Leticia suggests informing the students and parents of the role of educators and how they can help the student/family. This may help the students advocate for their needs.

Actions need to be taken to address the lack of sex education. The CDC (2014) showed 83.3% females aged 15-17 years did not receive formal sex education. Sex education is not being addressed in the schools or the home, causing teenagers to be unaware of the ramifications when engaging in sexual intercourse. Similar findings were discovered with the participants. Viviana, Maria, and Christina shared how they engaged in sexual relations without using protection and did not expect to become pregnant. The pregnancy was a surprise to them. One even believed her boyfriend when he told her sexual relations would not cause her to get pregnant.

The topic of sex education was not being addressed at home either. The lack of sex education at the home environment was found to be the case in this study. One out of the five participants used birth control and it was to regulate her menstrual cycles, not for its intended purposes, whereas none of the other four participants had any awareness of protection. They shared how there was no communication about sex education with their parents. Maria even mentioned how she knew not to discuss the topic with her mother. Being that students spend more of their time in schools and were expected to receive a health-related class, it would be logical to cover the topic of sex education in school. Sex education is a preventable measure that should be covered in the school settings. Viviana expressed this need when she said, “Educating [teenagers] about pregnancy itself and

about what's next, and about healthy relationships and what that looks like and what it should feel like.”

Wright and Davis (2008) found educators can influence pregnant teenagers' mindset on their held beliefs of educational ambitions and goals. Research by Dweck (2006) also found educators to have a high influence on students' mindset. They stress educators can help cultivate a growth mindset. One suggestion Dweck (2006) makes is for educators not to lower standards for their students. Setting high standards is not enough. Dweck (2006) cautions the need to teach the students how to reach the high standards. He explains, “when students don't know how to do something and others do, the gap seems unbridgeable” (p. 199). This needs to take place in a nurturing atmosphere where there is trust (Dweck, 2006). The high standards were taught by teaching them the basics, to love learning, to learn and be self-thinkers all in a nurturing atmosphere (Dweck, 2006). Dweck states:

When teachers are judging them, students will sabotage the teacher by not trying. But when students understand that school is for them--a way for them to grow their minds --they do not insist on sabotaging themselves. (Dweck, 2006, p. 201).

Schools need to develop research-based Teen Pregnancy Programs. These types of programs would help support teenage parents and reduce dropout rates. Through such programs, teenage parents/students would receive assistance on how to balance parenting and being a student; they would also learn about relationships, resources available for teenage parents, such as daycare and receiving WIC. More importantly, support groups could help address mothers experiencing mental health issues such as postpartum depression and anxiety (Boyd, 2016; East et al., 2012). Viviana shared she would like to see support groups for pregnant teenagers. Parenting and relationships were skills that need to be addressed in community resources for teenage parents. It would have been

beneficial to find a resource to help address these deficits for the young parents. The Center for Latino Adolescent and Family Health ([www.clafh.org](http://www.clafh.org)) is an establishment that offers support and programs for Latino family. Veronica also mentioned teaching skills such as studying and time management. Veronica and Christina made a similar suggestion to offer financial literacy classes, so students have a full understanding of the cost of raising a family and were financially literate. Veronica ended by expressing a need for college exposure by taking the students on fieldtrips to college campuses.

### **Community Leaders**

More initiatives need to be implemented in low-SES communities. The community capital must compensate for the lack of human capital and financial capital to be able to produce the same amount of human capital needed for individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Zhang et al., 2008). It is a disproportion that the pregnancy rate is three times higher for women living in low-income communities (Finer & Henshaw, 2006). These women do not see educational alternatives to engage in, and there were minimal promising opportunities in their communities. They were a marginalized group. The participants in the study shared similar experiences. Maria recalled that her pregnancy was not an unusual occurrence in her community or school. Christina noticed more pregnant teenagers when she moved in with her boyfriend, who lived in a community with high Latino population and low socioeconomic level. Her husband stated if they remained living in the community and did not make a choice to change, then they would “relive. . . that same cyclical environment that would happen to Latinos back then.” More needs to be done to increase opportunities for teenagers residing in low-SES communities. The participants made recommendations based on their lived experiences. Victoria suggested establishing networking opportunities between the community and students. The community members would serve as a role

models or mentors to the students. Veronica mentioned a similar recommendation having intentional mentors. Leticia suggested, “Develop supervised programs and activities which attract youth away from unstructured leisure time.” Programs that encourage women planning to become pregnant to make healthy lifestyle choices. Another recommendation is for historically low-SES religious and academic institutions to offer training focused on preconception health.

### **Parents**

Communication was a recurring theme the participants mentioned as missing between them and their parents. Research shows a lack of communication about sex with parents and/or guardians has the potential to raise the rates of risky sexual behavior (Davidson & Cardemil, 2009; Colon & Sanchez, 2010). Maria recommends having a two-way line of communication. Leticia would like to see Latinas start shifting their mindset, so they may start believing in their abilities. She explained that one way is through involving and educating the parents on the importance of nurturing a close family. Research by Burrus and Roberts (2012) found parental involvement to be a vital factor in students’ success in school. Parents need to seek ways to stay involved with their children throughout their school years. For the majority of the participants their mother, since they were the ones mainly involved, either stopped or were unable to stay involved in their daughter’s school through high school. Maria’s mother entered the workforce when Maria entered middle school. This was a pivotal time for Maria and she did not have her mother’s full involvement. The mothers of Veronica, Leticia, and Viviana were engrossed in their personal lives and were unable be involved in their daughter’s secondary education. Christina did not her biological mother growing up. This research found similar results like Katz and Van Der Kloet (2010) that paternal absence increased the probability of the teenagers engaging in sex and subsequently

becoming pregnant as teenagers. All five participants either did not have a steady father figure or did not have a good relationship with their biological father. Leticia mentioned this was a reason she got pregnant, she said:

I guess in thinking about it, now, I was seeking that unconditional love. I guess I didn't get from either one of my parents. Having something to love so much, I mean it didn't matter to me what people said or how they judge, and it still doesn't.

Viviana shared a similar insight, she stated:

I did not realize that my father-issues came into play whenever I was looking for, I guess, a suitor or a partner, or whatever it was, um, because my biological father was never really here in the first place. He was really busy all the time and I hardly ever saw him, and I didn't really want to see him. And my stepdad, he was a really good father-figure but my parents, they always were in-and-out, in-and-out, so I . . . I really feel that, uh, they weren't a really good role model for me, per se, as far as relationships until, like, I met my husband and then everything just came into play, like, I understand.

Maria was the only participant whose father remained in the picture. She explained, "My dad was basically the provider all those years and did the dad thing." Christina was another participant who did not have a change in father figure although there was separation between them. When she went to live with him she mentioned they did not have a close relationship. Maria suggested adding an educational piece to groups for parents on how to help and communicate with their teenagers. These findings support the importance of parental involvement particularly from the father. Communication needs to start when the children are young.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were limitations to the findings of this study that warrant consideration. First, due to the small sample size, results cannot be generalized to the general population. The experiences of the participants and their identified support cannot be generalized to the overall population. This study was done with only Latina mothers residing in Texas and is not representative of the general population. The design for the qualitative study was retrospective. The participants were asked to recall information on the pregnancies from years past. As a result, some respondents may not accurately recall the events, or their view of the events may have since changed.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The following recommendations have been suggested for future research. A study focusing on the effectiveness of counseling at-risk females and goal setting would be beneficial. The findings may help to facilitate ways to help students stay engaged in school and further their educational endeavors.

Another recommendation for future research would be a longitudinal study on the impact of support groups for teenage parents could provide some useful information. This recommendation considers the fact that the teenage pregnancy cycle is perpetuated. Ideally, the study would have both males and females and/or those participating and not-participating in the support group. The findings of the study may show whether teenagers' participation in a support group could break the cycle so that their children do not become pregnant.

Furthermore, the methodology of this study could be changed to a quantitative study to reveal data not available in this research. Increasing the number of participants would also generate more general findings. Studying a different ethnic group or participants from a different area could generate interesting findings. Another suggestion



for future research would be to study the teenage pregnancy stats by religion and explore if it is more common in certain religions than others and the reason.

Future studies could examine the resiliency factors displayed by minority females and non-minorities. Also, a study of the support systems identified by the different groups would be beneficial. Such studies would add to research on the personal, environmental, and social-cultural factors that lead individuals to succeed academically.

Another area that requires further investigation is to explore whether an interest in school/learning is a protective factor that permits teenage parents to continue in school and earn their diploma. The study could have two identical groups of teenage parents with the only difference being their interest or lack of interest in school/learning.

Including the biological fathers in the participant pool would add to research as they have not often the main subject of study. There were several themes to study such as their view on relationships, what fatherhood means to them, and their knowledge of sex. A deeper study into the biological father and the relationship between their influential members would help gain insight into their childhood and factors that influenced their choices. The findings of this study may result in the development of strategic approaches to help male students.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative case study provided an outlet for five Latina women to have their stories heard. They courageously shared their experiences so that others in similar situations could see that it is possible to overcome and succeed. They boldly listed the support that helped them so that it could be improved and duplicated. They appreciably shared who or what was their greatest support to remind that every action and every person matters. They shared not solely to inspire, but in the hope, that stating the

challenges they had to overcome, decision makers make necessary and much needed changes.

This study set out to learn how Latina mothers overcame the odds placed against them. The study looked at factors that made the pursuit to post-secondary education possible for Latinas, to replicate with teenagers in similar situations and/or add to the knowledge base to better inform policymakers, educators, community leaders and parents. The major forces behind the Latinas success in accomplishing their goal was their family and school system coupled with their resiliency.

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## APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT (ENGLISH)

### Informed Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in the research project described below. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate, or you may decide to stop your participation at any time. Should you refuse to participate in the study or should you withdraw your consent and stop participation in the study, your decision will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you may be otherwise entitled. You are being asked to read the information below carefully and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

Title: The influence of social capital and resiliency on post-secondary education attainment: A retrospective case study of Latina teenage mothers

Student Investigator: Claudia Gonzalez-Harmon

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Judith Márquez, Ph.D.

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is to examine the factors that contribute to former Latina teenage mothers' success in obtaining a post-secondary education.

### PROCEDURES

You will be asked to answer a questionnaire, participate in 2-3 individual interviews, and participate in a focus group. You will be contacted to arrange a time for interviews and the focus group. The interviews and focus groups will be audio-recorded with notes taken by the researcher and possible follow-up interviews scheduled for clarification purposes. In addition, if you identified anyone as a support system (best friend, family, significant

other, teacher etc.) and they agree to participate, I will follow up with them to conduct a separate interview.

#### EXPECTED DURATION

The total anticipated time commitment is approximately five hours: (demographic survey (30 minutes), interview times (2-3) and length (30-45 minutes), and focus group length (1-2 hours). The interviews and focus groups will take place during a two-month period.

#### RISKS OF PARTICIPATION

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in this project. Your participation in the study is strictly voluntary and participation can stop at any time without penalty. Your identity will remain confidential.

#### BENEFITS TO THE SUBJECT

There is no direct benefit received from your participation in this study, but your participation will help the investigator(s) better understand the obstacles teenage parents face to attain an education.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your study records. The data collected from the study will be used for educational and publication purposes, however, you will not be identified by name. Information collected as part of this study will be kept entirely confidential and will be reported only in summary form so that the individuals cannot be identified. Participants' names will be coded with pseudonyms to keep the interviewee information confidential. For federal audit purposes, the participant's documentation for this research project will be maintained and safeguarded by the

Faculty Sponsor, Dr. Judith Márquez, for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. After that time, the participant's documentation may be destroyed.

#### FINANCIAL COMPENSATION

There is no financial compensation to be offered for participation in the study.

#### INVESTIGATOR'S RIGHT TO WITHDRAW PARTICIPANT

The investigator has the right to withdraw you from this study at any time.

#### CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

The investigator has offered to answer all your questions. If you have additional questions during the course of this study about the research or any related problem, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Claudia Gonzalez-Harmon, at phone number or by email. The Faculty Sponsor Dr. Judith Márquez, Ph.D., may be contacted at phone number or by email.

**SIGNATURES:**

Your signature below acknowledges your voluntary participation in this research project. Such participation does not release the investigator, institution, sponsor or granting agency from their professional and ethical responsibility to you. By signing the form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

The purpose of this study, procedures to be followed, and explanation of risks or benefits have been explained to you. You have been allowed to ask questions and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. You have been told who to contact if you have additional questions. You have read this consent form and voluntarily agree to participate as a subject in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time by contacting the Principal Investigator or Student Researcher/Faculty Sponsor. You will be given a copy of the consent form you have signed.

Subject's printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Using language that is understandable and appropriate, I have discussed this project and the items listed above with the subject.

Printed name and title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-CLEAR LAKE (UHCL) COMMITTEE FOR  
PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS HAS REVIEWED AND APPROVED THIS**

PROJECT. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UHCL COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (281-283-3015). ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT UHCL ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. (FEDERALWIDE ASSURANCE # FWA00004068)



## APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT (SPANISH)

### Forma de consentimiento para participar en un estudio

Se le pide a usted que participe en un estudio de investigación que se describe a continuación. Su participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria y usted puede negarse a participar, o puede decidir dejar de participar en cualquier momento. Si usted decide no participar en el estudio o retirar su consentimiento y dejar de participar en el estudio, su decisión no implicará penalización ni pérdida de beneficios a los cuales usted tiene derecho. Se le pide que lea cuidadosamente la siguiente información y haga preguntas sobre cualquier cosa que no entienda antes de decidir si participará o no.

**TITULO DEL ESTUDIO:** La influencia del capital social y la resiliencia en el logro de la educación postsecundaria: un estudio de caso retrospectivo de madres adolescentes latinas

Investigadora: Claudia Gonzalez-Harmon

Profesora: Judith Márquez, PhD

### PROPÓSITO DEL ESTUDIO

El propósito de este estudio es examinar los factores que contribuyen a que algunas latinas logren seguir sus estudios a pesar de haberse embarazado durante su adolescencia.

### PROCEDIMIENTOS

Para participar en este estudio se requiere que conteste una encuesta, que participe en dos o tres entrevistas, y en una sesión de discusión en grupo.

### DURACIÓN ANTICIPADA

Se anticipa que este estudio requerirá aproximadamente 5 horas de su tiempo a través de dos meses. La encuesta le tomará como 30 minutos para completar. Las entrevistas durarán de 30 a 45 minutos cada una y el grupo de discusión durará de una a dos horas.

### RIESGOS EN PARTICIPAR

Usted no correrá ningún riesgo al participar en este estudio.

#### **BENEFICIOS PARA EL PARTICIPANTE**

No hay ningún beneficio directo al participar en este estudio, pero su participación le ayudará a la investigadora a comprender las razones por las cuales algunas latinas logren seguir sus estudios a pesar de haberse embarazado durante su adolescencia.

#### **CONFIDENCIALIDAD DE DOCUMENTOS**

Se hará todo lo posible para mantener la confidencialidad de sus documentos relacionados a este estudio. Los datos que se recolectarán de este estudio se usarán para propósitos educativos y para publicaciones, sin embargo, usted no se identificará por nombre. Se le asignará un código con seudónimo para mantener la información de la entrevista confidencial. Para propósitos de auditoría federal, la documentación de las participantes en este proyecto se guardará en la oficina de la profesora Judith Márquez por un mínimo de tres años después de que termine el proyecto. Después de ese período de tres años, la documentación se destruirá.

#### **COMPENSACIÓN FINANCIERA**

No se ofrecerá ninguna compensación financiera por participar en este proyecto.

#### **DERECHO DE LA INVESTIGADORA DE RETIRAR A CUALQUIER**

#### **PARTICIPANTE**

La investigadora tiene derecho a retirar a cualquier participante del proyecto durante el período del estudio.

#### **A QUIÉN CONTACTAR SI TIENE PREGUNTAS O PROBLEMAS**

Si tiene preguntas acerca del estudio o algo relacionado al estudio durante su participación en el proyecto, se puede poner en contacto con la investigadora, Claudia González-Harmon o por correo electrónico. Se puede poner en contacto con la profesora Judith Márquez, PhD o por correo electrónico.

**FIRMAS:**

Su firma en esta forma indica su participación voluntaria en este proyecto. Su participación no exime a la investigadora, la universidad, o a la profesora de su responsabilidad profesional y ética a usted. Al firmar la forma, usted no renuncia ninguno de sus derechos legales.

Usted ha recibido una explicación del propósito de este estudio, los procedimientos y los posibles riesgos y beneficios. Se le ha permitido hacer preguntas y las preguntas han sido contestadas satisfactoriamente. Ha recibido información acerca de a quién contactar si tiene algunas preguntas adicionales. Ha leído esta forma y consiente participar voluntariamente en este proyecto. Puede dejar de participar en cualquier momento al contactar a la investigadora o a su profesora. Usted recibirá una copia de la forma de consentimiento que ha firmado.

Nombre en letra de molde: \_\_\_\_\_

Firma: \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

Usando lenguaje apropiado y comprensible, he discutido este proyecto y lo mencionado anteriormente con la participante.

Nombre en letra de molde y título: \_\_\_\_\_

Firma de quien obtiene el consentimiento: \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

EL COMITE PARA LA PROTECCION DE SUJETOS HUMANOS DE LA UNIVERSIDAD DE HOUSTON-CLEAR LAKE HA REVISADO Y APROBADO ESTE PROYECTO. SI TIENE ALGUNA PREGUNTA ACERCA DE SUS DERECHOS COMO SUJETO HUMANO HAGA EL FAVOR DE LLAMAR AL COMITE PARA LA PROTECCION DE SUJETOS HUMANOS (281-283-3015).

TODOS LOS PROYECTOS QUE SE LLEVAN A CABO POR INVESTIGADORES  
DE LA UNIVERSIDAD DE HOUSTON-CLEAR LAKE SE RIGEN POR LOS  
REQUISITOS DE LA UNIVERSIDAD Y DEL GOBIERNO FEDERAL.  
(FEDERALWIDE ASSURANCE # FWA00004068)

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Directions Section I: The following questions will let me know some basic information about you and help me understand your answers. Please circle your answers or fill in the blank as appropriate. All information will remain confidential.

I - Background Information (see demographic survey)  
Demographic Information. Your answers will be confidential.

What is your full name?

What is your age?

- |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 22-25                 | 26-30                 | 31-36                 | 37-41                 | 42-50                 | Over 51               |

How do you classify yourself?

- |                        |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | African American      | Caucasian/White       | Hispanic              | Other                 |

What is your primary language?

- |                       |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| English               | Spanish               | Other                 |

Do you speak more than one language?

- |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Yes                   | No                    |

What is your current marital status?

- |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Divorced              | Married               | Single/never married  | Widowed               | Would rather not say  |

How old were you when you became pregnant?

- 13     14     15     16     17     18     19

What grade were you in when you became pregnant?

- 9th     10th     11th     12th     Not enrolled in school

When was your child born?

What is the gender of your child?

- Female     Male

Do you currently have sole or shared custody of your child?

- Sole     Shared

What month and year did you graduate from high school?

Did you enroll in college shortly after graduation or was there a time gap?

- YES     NO     OTHER

If there was a time gap, how long was the time gap?

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- High school or equivalent     Some college     Associates degree     Bachelor's degree     Master's degree     Doctorate degree     Professional degree     Other

(MD, JD,  
etc.)

List the month and year for each degree you have earned in chronological order.

Did you receive financial aid to pay for college?

       
YES      NO

Were you a first-generation college student?

       
YES      NO

What is the highest level of education your father completed?

                                           
High      Some      Associates      Bachelor's      Master's      Doctorate      Professional      Other  
school or      college      degree      degree      degree      degree      degree      degree  
equivalent                                    (MD, JD,  
etc.)

What is the highest level of education your mother completed?

                                           
High      Some      Associates      Bachelor's      Master's      Doctorate      Professional      Other  
school or      college      degree      degree      degree      degree      degree      degree  
equivalent                                    (MD, JD,  
etc.)

What is the highest level of education the biological father completed (if known)?

                                           
High      Some      Associates      Bachelor's      Master's      Doctorate      Professional      Other  
school or      college      degree      degree      degree      degree      degree      degree  
equivalent                                    (MD, JD,  
etc.)

Is there a family history of teen pregnancy?

- YES       NO

Thank you for taking the time to fill out our survey. Your input is greatly appreciated.



## APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

In an effort to be consistent with the purpose of the study and an effort to understand the factors that affected the Latina mother's academic experience, they will be asked to recall lived experiences.

1. Tell me about yourself. Where were you born?
2. Describe your upbringing and childhood. Include your siblings and other family members.
3. What were your parents' occupations?
4. How would you describe the relationship between you and your mother?
5. How would you describe the relationship between you and your father?
6. What can you tell me about the schools you attended i.e., what were the students and setting like?
7. Describe your fondest memory of school and tell me why it is your fondest memory.
8. How did you feel about school?
9. Tell me about a class where you felt successful?
10. Tell me who and/or what contributed to your success in school.
11. Who influenced you the most as a child? How?
12. Who in your life had the most spiritual influence on you?

In an effort to understand how Latinas worked through academic obstacles and how they were academically supported, they will be asked:

13. Describe your least successful memory of school and tell me why it is your least memorable memory.
14. How did you overcome this experience/time – get past this stage in your life?
15. Do you enjoy reading? Why or why not?
16. Who or what influenced you the most- made the most difference at the time.
17. Were you a non-English speaker when you started school?
18. Were you ever in a situation where you did not feel confident and comfortable in your classes / school? How did you deal with it?
19. Did you ever experience a time when you felt someone treated you unfairly or discriminated against you because of your ethnicity? How did you deal with it?
20. Do you believe your school contributed to or impaired your academic success? Explain.
21. Tell me how you think your academic needs were met.
22. Tell me how you think your academic needs were not met.
23. Tell me what you would ask for if you had the opportunity to go back in time and why.
24. Were you in any advanced classes in junior high? Did you feel that you had the opportunity to take them? Who encouraged you to take them?
25. Did you try to further your education beyond a bachelor's degree but were deterred? How?

In an effort to understand the resiliency factors to their academic success, I will ask them:

26. What does being resilient mean to you?
27. How does one become resilient?
28. How do you think the resiliency came about?
29. Do you think you are resilient? Explain

In an effort to understand the lived experiences, I will ask them:

30. Take me back to the time when you learned you were pregnant. What thoughts ran through your mind? How did you feel about being pregnant? How did the father of the child feel? How did your family feel? Did you feel people (students, teachers, administrators, and parents) influenced the way you felt about your pregnancy?
31. Was it an intentional pregnancy?
32. If not, did you know about using protection?
33. What career did you have in mind for your life at the time?
34. Describe your experiences living in your community during your time of pregnancy. How did you feel? What did you see?
35. How were you treated within your own racial and cultural community before you were pregnant?
36. What was life like before and after you learned of the pregnancy? Did you have a healthy pregnancy?
37. What was life like before and after the birth of the child? Did you have any complications during birth or after birth? Did the baby suffer any health complications?
38. What was your description of the stereotypical teen mother before you became pregnant?
39. How, if any, were you different from that model?
40. How did you find the strength to face the challenges of being a teenage parent?
41. Once you had the baby who helped you? How?
42. How did Latino administrators react to your presence in school before you were pregnant?
43. How did administrators from other races and cultures react to your presence in school before you were pregnant?
44. How did Latino teachers react to your presence in school during pregnancy?
45. How did teachers from other races and cultures react to your presence in school during pregnancy?
46. How did Latino parents react to your presence in school before you were pregnant?
47. How did parents from other races and cultures react to your presence in school before you were pregnant?
48. How did Latino students react to your presence in school during pregnancy?
49. How did students from other races and cultures react to your presence in school during pregnancy?

50. Was there anything different about your educational experience before or after the pregnancy that may have been different from other Latinos in your community?

In an effort to understand the key contributors to their academic success, I will ask them:

51. Did you face any challenges during and after the pregnancy? If so, what were they?

52. How were you able to endure the challenges and remain in school after your pregnancy?

53. Describe what made it possible.

54. How were you motivated to stay in school and do well?

55. Who was influential in helping you to continue attending school during and after the pregnancy? What did they do to make it possible for you to attend school?

56. What was the level of your parents' involvement in your education? In what ways were they involved. How did you feel about their level of involvement?

57. Can you give an example of a time when your teachers communicated with your parents? Why? In what way?

58. Who helped you make academic decisions and set goals for the future?

59. How did counselors, teachers, peers, and parents help prepare you for college? Did they discuss graduation plans with you?

60. Can you give an example of a time when your professor(s) communicated with you about your progress in a college class?

61. Did you use any resources in school or on campus to assist with your classes? If so, what were they?

62. Tell me what you would ask for if you had the opportunity to go back in time and why.

In an effort to bring closure to the interview, I will ask:

63. What obstacles do you think Latinas need to overcome to get an education?

64. How do you think Latinas can best overcome these obstacles?

65. What interventions do you recommend encouraging pregnant students to remain in school?

66. As an adult, what activities have you been involved with or currently involved with as a direct result of your teenage pregnancy?

67. If you could go back and talk to yourself as a pregnant teenager, what advice would you give yourself?

68. How did you feel about recording our interview?

69. Is there anything you would like to add?

## APPENDIX E: SUPPORT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions will be tailored to the member identified as support system. I will start of by letting them know the participant identified them as a support system. I will then move on to the interview questions.

FAMILY	PARTNER	FRIEND	SCHOOL
How did you provide support to the teen mother?	How did you provide support to the teen mother?	How did you provide support to the teen mother?	How did you provide support to the teen mother?
Why did you choose to get involved?	Why did you choose to get involved?	Why did you choose to get involved?	Why did you choose to get involved?
How did the pregnancy affect you? How did you feel about it?	How did the pregnancy affect you? How did you feel about it?	How did the pregnancy affect you? How did you feel about it?	What obstacles do you think Latinas need to overcome to get an education?
What do you wish you could have done more or less of to help when she was a pregnant teen?	What do you wish you could have done more or less of to help when she was a pregnant teen?	What do you wish you could have done more or less of to help when she was a pregnant teen?	What interventions do you recommend encouraging pregnant students to remain in school?
Do you think your support made a difference in the teen mother's life? How so?	Do you think your support made a difference in the teen mother's life? How so?	Do you think your support made a difference in the teen mother's life? How so?	As the institution, what support was offered to the teen mother?
Do you think _____ is a resilient person? Explain.	Do you think _____ is a resilient person? Explain.	Do you think _____ is a resilient person? Explain.	Do you think _____ is a resilient person? Explain.

## APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

### Ground Rules:

1. Confidentiality is an expectation of all participants at all times.
2. Active listening -- respect others when they are speaking.
3. Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing ("I" instead of "they," "we," and "you").
4. Participate to the fullest of your ability.

### Focus Group Questions

1. What are your current perceptions about teen pregnancy?
2. What has been your greatest accomplishment?
3. As a Latina woman who was pregnant as a teen, what do you want your legacy to be? What would you like people to remember most about you?
4. What is getting educational attainment all about?
5. Do you think it is important that teenage mothers/parents complete their education? Why?
6. How can family and educators help teenage mothers continue onto higher education?
7. What were your plans after high school graduation?
8. Did you feel prepared for those plans? What helped you be prepared? How or how not?
9. In what areas did you feel you could have been better prepared?
10. Were you in any advanced classes in junior high? If you were not, did you feel that you had the opportunity to take them?
11. How did counselors, teachers, peers, and parents help prepare you for college? Did they discuss post-graduation plans with you?
12. If you could mentor a pregnant teenager, what advice would you give her?
13. Is there anything you would like to add?