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Pensadoras in the New Latino Diaspora: Latina Girls Navigating the Intersections of Their Social, Emotional, and Sexual Lives

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Pensadoras in the New Latino Diaspora: Latina Girls Navigating the Intersections of Their Social, Emotional, and Sexual Lives

Abstract
The social, emotional, and sexual experiences of adolescent girls in the United States are often framed as superfluous, negative, and distracting from academic activity, rather than as significant learning experiences in girls’ developmental and academic trajectories. Specifically, the social, emotional, and sexual experiences of Latina adolescents living in poverty are commonly characterized as causing them to make poor choices, to drop out of school, or to become teenage mothers or the girlfriends of gang members (Denner & Guzman, 2006). However, most Latina girls’ experiences do not match these characterizations and little research has been conducted on the relationships between the social, emotional, and sexual experiences of Latina adolescents and their educational trajectories. Using ethnographic techniques, this research aims to the roles that Latina girls’ social, emotional, and sexual experiences play in their identity development and experiences as students in one New Latino Diaspora town called Marshall. This research will enrich feminist, educational, and developmental psychological scholarship and will provide a deeper understanding of how scholars and practitioners can provide nurturing developmental spaces for Latina girls to support one another’s academic and personal trajectories.

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PENSADORAS IN THE NEW LATINO DIASPORA: LATINA GIRLS NAVIGATING THE INTERSECTIONS OF THEIR SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND SEXUAL LIVES

Katherine Clonan-Roy

A DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

To my girls.

And to one girl in particular who, in many ways, led me to this point. Although she is no longer with us, she continues to guide me in advocating for educational and gender equity.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am incredibly fortunate to have so many meaningful people to thank for their support and guidance, which has carried me to and through my graduate school experience. Finishing this dissertation has encouraged me to reflect on my trajectory, and the experiences and actors that have led me to this point. When I graduated from college, with degrees in Spanish, Women’s Studies, and Neuroscience, I felt that I lacked pointed purpose and direction. On a whim and a hope for impact, I applied to Teach For America. Now, I often feel embarrassed or shameful that I was a Corps Member because I have so many critical opinions about the organization, but it was that experience that directed me to pursue study in Education. I must first thank my students and fellow teachers at Cardozo Senior High School in Washington, DC for teaching me about the complexities of education inequity and, especially to my students for providing with a clear vision of how resilience and resistance are enacted in powerful ways.

Extreme episodes of violence impelled me to leave Cardozo and to apply to graduate school. Stanton Wortham, my advisor and chair, fought for me to be accepted to Penn, and I felt, in some ways, rescued me from an unbearable situation. I am incredibly grateful for his faith in me, dedication, and support since the application process and through the present. Over the past five years, Dr. Wortham has fostered my development as a scholar, shown me how to conduct engaged ethnographic research that aims to give back to the communities you are in, and introduced me to my dissertation project. I could not have asked for better and more consistent mentorship.

Dr. Wortham provided me with entrée to Marshall Middle School and connections to the staff and girls I would work with at MMS. For the sake of confidentiality, I will ambiguously thank the administrators, counselors, teachers, and social workers, who allowed me to come into your building, ask questions, and develop relationships with your students. You truly are a special
gem of a school community and your students are so lucky to have such committed, loving educators.

It feels impossible to describe my gratitude for the girls that I have worked with in simple words. These girls have given me such incredible gifts, of knowledge, insight, and support, over the past five years. In the most challenging moments of graduate school, you girls have fueled my momentum and happiness. Often, you referred to me as a therapist or teacher and, I think, were under the impression that I was “giving” to you: I hope you know that I have an inverse outlook on our relationship and feel forever indebted to you. Thank you for sharing your brilliance, emotionality, and resilience with me. I promise to continue working to girls in diverse contexts in their academic and personal trajectories and to imagine better educational spaces in which we can collaboratively do that important work.

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respect, and care always made me feel comfortable to go into your office and test out ideas with you: thank you for turning on so many light bulbs for me. You gave me academic confidence and allowed me to create a vision of the type of scholar that I want to be. I am so grateful to have a mentor that I feel so close to and inspired by and I am excited to continue down a path of lifelong collaboration and friendship.

Graduate school is a challenging and emotional experience. I have met so many inspiring women who have supported, listened, and guided me: Clara, Joanna, Briana, Charlotte, Nicole, and Julie. You ladies have offered such meaningful friendship, faith in my work, and insightful personal perspective. Thank you for riding this wave with me. Michael and Charlotte, thank you for being you. I love our friendship threesome: it simultaneously provides me with the best laughs, and amazing inspiration for engaged scholarship and praxis. To Charlotte especially, your personal and academic partnership has allowed me to think more critically and feel supported ever step of the way. Finally, to Grant, for giving me a constant enjoyable escape from my graduate school bubble and for all of the love and support in the last, and probably, most challenging years of graduate school.

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ABSTRACT

PENSADORAS IN THE NEW LATINO DIASPORA: LATINA GIRLS NAVIGATING THE INTERSECTIONS OF THEIR SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND SEXUAL LIVES

Katherine Clonan-Roy
Stanton E. F. Wortham

The social, emotional, and sexual experiences of adolescent girls in the United States are often framed as superfluous, negative, and distracting from academic activity, rather than as significant learning experiences in girls’ developmental and academic trajectories. Specifically, the social, emotional, and sexual experiences of Latina adolescents living in poverty are commonly characterized as causing them to make poor choices, to drop out of school, or to become teenage mothers or the girlfriends of gang members (Denner & Guzman, 2006). However, most Latina girls’ experiences do not match these characterizations and little research has been conducted on the relationships between the social, emotional, and sexual experiences of Latina adolescents and their educational trajectories. Using ethnographic techniques, this research aims to the roles that Latina girls’ social, emotional, and sexual experiences play in their identity development and experiences as students in one New Latino Diaspora town called Marshall. This research will enrich feminist, educational, and developmental psychological scholarship and will provide a deeper understanding of how scholars and practitioners can provide nurturing developmental spaces for Latina girls to support one another’s academic and personal trajectories.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Andrea is an undocumented, Mexican immigrant girl (originally from Puebla, Mexico) who arrived in Marshall, a New Latino Diaspora town, with her mother and father when she was three years old. I met Andrea when she was thirteen and in eighth grade at Marshall Middle School (MMS). I became close with Andrea through the Latina Girls’ Group that I facilitated at MMS and then got to know her family, when Andrea was fifteen and asked me to be a godmother in her quinceañera. Andrea lives with her parents and three younger siblings in a very small, one-bedroom apartment. Her mother and father sleep in the master bedroom, while Andrea and her three siblings crowd on a queen bed together in the living room. Andrea’s mother and father both work two jobs, and Andrea is often responsible for taking care of her younger siblings and completing the household work.

When Andrea was in seventh grade, an uncle that had been one of Andrea’s care-takers in Marshall when she was little, but who had since returned to Mexico, was murdered by “narcos” in Mexico. Andrea had been incredibly close to her uncle and did not know how to manage her grief after his murder: she began cutting herself, to feel less numb, as she knew many of her peers had done during challenging times. Her counselor, Mr. Drake, heard rumors from other girls that Andrea was cutting and he placed her in counseling with the school clinical social worker. Mr. Drake strived to understand Andrea’s emotional change; to me, he often wondered aloud, “why was she cutting like many other Latina girls in MMS”, and “what is it about Latina girls, their culture, and the context in which they are developing that causes them to experience such emotional challenges?”

Despite the counseling, in seventh grade, Andrea was still working to overcome her grief and her level of engagement in school and grades were declining. In the fall, Andrea started going out with a boy named Vicente, a high school sophomore. Vicente convinced Andrea to skip
school with him and to sneak out and go to parties. At one party, Vicente took Andrea into a bedroom and began pressuring her to take off her clothes and have sex. He pleaded with her to not use protection, because it would not feel as good for him. After that night, Vicente broke up with Andrea on facebook. As Andrea recounted this to me, she explained that she felt devalued and used by Vicente and she was mad at herself because skipping school had caused her grades to drop even further. Furthermore, now girls were spreading rumors about her and calling her a “slut”; Andrea explained that she knew that “everybody in the school thinks that Latina girls are whores,” but she did not think of herself as one until now. She posted on facebook that she just wanted “to be the old me”.

Today, Andrea is a high school senior. She attends Marshall High School in the mornings for general education classes, and she attends the Marshall Vocational School in the afternoons. Her specialization is cosmetology: she loves cutting and styling hair and connecting with clients, and has built a strong relationship with an owner of a salon in downtown Marshall where she will work when she graduates. Although she continuously struggles with mental health issues, she has formed a supportive group of friends and adult allies, including a therapist and her vocational instructor, who she turns to when she feels distressed or considers cutting. She is in a respectful and caring relationship with a boy who is also a senior in high school and she often goes to Planned Parenthood to get information or resources that support her sexual health. Despite many extraordinary challenges, Andrea is agentically navigating many social worlds and creating positive personal and professional trajectories.

Generally, the social, emotional, and sexual experiences of adolescent girls, like Andrea, in the United States are often framed as superfluous, negative, and distracting from academic activity, rather than as significant learning experiences in girls’ personal, developmental, and academic trajectories. Specifically, the social, emotional, and sexual experiences of Latina adolescents living in poverty are commonly characterized as causing them to make poor choices,
to drop out of school, or to become a teenage mother or the girlfriend of a gang member (Denner & Guzman, 2006a). However, most Latina girls’ experiences do not match these limiting characterizations and little research has been conducted on the nuanced interactions between the social, emotional, and sexual experiences of Latina adolescents and their educational trajectories. Additionally, these experiences are often framed with deficit assumptions, and we rarely acknowledge that within these experiences, girls are developing their own strategies of regulation (of others and themselves), resistance, and resilience. Using ethnographic techniques, this research aims to examine how Latina girls understand these experiences in relation to their identities and experiences as students, how they learn about themselves and their social worlds through the emotional processing of their experiences, and how educational spaces can be constructed to encourage the development of Latina girls’ critical consciousness and subjectivities. This research will enrich feminist, educational, and developmental psychological scholarship and will provide a deeper understanding of how scholars and practitioners can provide nurturing developmental spaces for Latina girls to support one another’s academic and personal trajectories.

The site of this research is Marshall, PA, a New Latino Diaspora (NLD) town in the northeastern U.S. that has only recently been populated by large numbers of Latinos. Over the past 26 years, this rapid growth has increased Marshall’s Latino student population from 3% to 36.7%. At Marshall Middle School (MMS) staff have struggled to understand and support their new population of Latino students, and specifically Latina adolescents. In the past couple of years, MMS staff have become concerned that Latina students face unique emotional challenges within their families and peer groups, date boys who are considerably older than they are, and have sex, become pregnant, and experience sexual abuse at earlier ages and more frequently than girls from other ethnic backgrounds. Since January 2012, I have conducted preliminary ethnographic research at MMS, including participant observation with Latina girls in classroom
and social settings and interviews conducted with Latina girls and school staff. At the request of MMS educators, I also created an after-school girls’ group for Latina girls in January 2012, which provides the girls with a safe, supportive space to share and analyze their experiences, and me with greater insight into their lives. The context of Marshall and MMS is interesting and unique, and it is important to consider these community and schooling contexts when examining the central themes of my dissertation.

**The Context of Marshall**

Marshall is a suburban, NLD town of 35,000 in the Northeastern U.S. that has only recently been populated by large numbers of Latinos, the majority of them Mexican. From 1990 to 2010 the percentage of residents of Mexican origin in Marshall grew from 2.7% to 28.3%. This rapid growth has drastically changed student demographics in Marshall schools: in 20 (1990-2010) years, the Latino population in the district has increased rapidly, from 2% to 28% (Wortham, Mortimer, & Allard, 2009). Today, 36.7% of students in the district are Latino and Latino students comprise the largest demographic group in the district. Currently, 12.4% of the district’s students are identified as English as a Second Language (ESL) students, and 78.5% are classified as low-income students. At MMS, 35.2% of students are Latino, 32.5% are black, 23.4% are white, and 8.9% identify as belonging to some other racial or ethnic group (D. Borgo, personal communication, February 8, 2016).

Marshall is a rich case for studying the relationships between Latina girls’ social, emotional, and sexual experiences and schooling for many reasons. Due to the lack of a traditional Latino presence in Marshall, long-term residents do not have local models of Latino identity to call upon and are more flexible in how they understand and construe Latino identity. This uncertainty poses challenges and opportunities for educators and adolescents in Marshall’s schools. Although Latino students are often construed as model minorities in Marshall (Wortham
et al., 2009), educators have also struggled to accommodate the recent and rapid arrival of Latino students and construct their presence as a challenge to resolve. Specifically, MMS educators have explicitly constructed Latina students’ behaviors as problems of schooling that need to be solved and have struggled to conceive of a response to this problem which acknowledges the relationships between girls’ social, emotional, and sexual experiences, developmental learning, and engagement in school. Meanwhile, Latina girls at MMS understand their social, emotional, and sexual experiences and construct their identities in unique ways: they manage the typical challenges of adolescence, while also serving as the first in their families to navigate middle school and American teen culture, making sense of their sexualization and social positioning in their school community, and developing understandings of the power dynamics in their social worlds and how to critique them.

**A Note on Methods: Ethnographic Research and Girls’ Group Praxis**

As I will discuss in my methods section, this is an ethnographic research project. In any ethnography, researchers enact roles somewhere on a spectrum that ranges from observer to participant. In this project, I enacted roles that fit in a variety of places on that spectrum. In the girls’ group space, I enacted a researcher positionality that mirrored a participant and a group facilitator or practitioner. This shaped my roles in other spaces when I was with the girls, because they not only saw me as a researcher and observer, but also as a mentor, friend, teacher, and sometimes, therapist. This role often allowed me greater access to data and intimate details about girls’ experiences, but it also often placed me in tricky, ethical situations. In my methods section, I will reflect upon the complexity of this role and how it shaped my research relationships and data collection and analysis. Although I did not set out to examine how girls’ group can function as unique educational and empowering spaces and cultural resources, the girls’ group space
became an important piece in and implication of this research, which is reflected in my research questions.

**Research Questions**

This research asks: **What roles do the social, emotional, and sexual experiences of Latina middle school girls in Marshall play in their identity development and experiences as students?** Specifically, **what roles do emotions play in how the girls make sense of these experiences and their identities?** Within that central question, I ask multiple sub-questions to specify key themes that are important to examine in order to understand my participants’ experiences.

1) What roles do these social, emotional, and sexual experiences play in Latina girls’ understandings of themselves (as Latinas, girls, and students), their educational experiences (school engagement, attitudes towards education, long term expectations for educational achievement), and their social worlds?

2) What roles do the social, emotional, and sexual experiences of Latina girls play in their understandings of their peer group, school, and community and how their peer group, school, and community, in turn, understands and identifies them?
   a) What roles do the school community’s understandings of Latina girls and their social, emotional, and sexual experiences play in how the school community disciplines, regulates, and socializes Latina girls?

3) How do Latina girls understand and respond to the regulation of their social, emotional, and sexual lives in school and how to Latina girls respond to, participate in, and resist such regulation?
   a) What do Latina girls’ strategies of resistance look like if they are mediated by critical consciousness, or not, and what effects do those strategies have on the girls’ social, emotional, sexual, and academic lives?
   b) How do Latina girls enact the developmental competencies of regulation, resistance, and resilience, and what are the relationships between those three competencies?
   c) What roles do emotional learning (emotional artifacts and integrators) play in the development and enactment of those three competencies?
4) How do Latina girls use the girls’ group to grapple with, understand, and critically analyze their social, emotional, and sexual experiences?

   a) What are the girls’ impressions of various educational spaces in their lives and what makes an educational space safe so that girls are comfortable enough to examine their social, emotional, and sexual experiences and to develop critical consciousness and subjectivities which critique their social worlds?

   b) What are the qualities that girls’ group spaces and adult facilitators need to possess in order to support the development of critical consciousness, healthy regulatory strategies, resistance, and resilience?

**Key Concepts**

Although this dissertation examines a variety of important themes in the girls’ lives, and specifically, in their social, emotional, and sexual experiences, seven key concepts cut across this dissertation and multiple dimensions of the girls’ experiences and social worlds. Although I will discuss these themes in greater detail in my conceptual framework, I will provide a brief overview of these important concepts here.

In this dissertation I examine emotional processes and learning. Social experiences often produce emotional responses, which I conceptualize as *emotional artifacts*. An example of an emotional artifact could be the sensation of shame that a girl experiences following her first sexual experience. I also use the term *emotional integrators*: How girls feel, in response to social experiences, allows them to make sense of themselves and meaning from their social experiences. One example is that the sensation of shame that often accompanies a first sexual experience, might encourage a girl to understand herself and her actions as “bad” and not living up to expectations of moral, Latina girlhood, set by values in her family, school, and community. I conceptualize *social injuries* as discriminatory and offensive narratives, comments, phenomena, or actions that leave the girls feeling “hurt” in some way. These injuries, related to the girls’ identities and intersecting power dynamics in their social worlds, produce emotional artifacts and
integrators, which allow the girls to reach new understandings of themselves and their social worlds. I argue that the emotional signals that the girls receive, often cue them to regulate or resist, or inform their developing resilience and critical consciousness.

In this dissertation I also examine how critical consciousness mediates the enactment of regulation, resistance, and resilience. I look at three forms of regulation, in which different social actors are contesting control over their social environment, other social actors, or themselves. Often, these forms of regulation are related and can happen simultaneously. I also examine how girls enact resistance, towards oppressive actors or issues in their lives. Janie Ward (2007) describes two types of resistance, and I see these types in my data. At times, the girls enact resistance for survival by employing strategies that stem from anger, fear or guilt, which provide short-term solutions. Other times, they enact resistance for liberation, which is oriented towards dismantling dominant power structures and practices in society. Smith and Carlson (1997) characterize resilience as “the presence of protective factors or processes that moderate the relationship between stress and risk, on the one hand, and coping or competence, on the other”. As I will show, Latina girls often experience multiple forms of marginalization and adversity, and therefore strive to develop attitudes and behaviors that prevent them from internalizing these experiences.

Finally, I discuss critical consciousness as an important developmental competency. I draw on Paulo Freire (2007) and many chicana feminists’ work, to conceptualize critical consciousness as a reflective awareness and analysis of the differences in power present in society, and an orientation to social justice. Delgado Bernal & Elenes (2011) reference Chela Sandoval, who argues that that a critical, mestiza consciousness is born from life lived at the crossroads, or as Gloria Anzaldúa (Anzaldúa, 1987) says, in the borderlands. Delgado Bernal & Elenes (2011) also argue that everyday Latino experiences and practices of teaching, learning, and communal knowing are educational and contribute to this critical consciousness. Although
most of this literature refers to Latina women, I argue that nurturing the seeds of developing
critical consciousness in early adolescence can empower Latina girls to successfully navigate
multiple marginalities and promote change in their communities. Adolescent, Latina girls often
experience multiple marginalities, cultural dissonance, and role confusion, which can prevent the
development of a positive sense of identity. Developing the skills to critically question and
analyze power relationships in the social world can empower adolescent girls of color to navigate
these multiple marginalities and to not attribute marginalizing experiences to the self. In my
conceptualization of the term, pensadora, to purposefully position my participants as creative and
active thinkers who build on their cultural foundations to form political and practical meanings
about learning, knowing, teaching, and power. The examination and conceptualization of these
key themes holds scholarly and practical purpose and significance.

**Scholarly and Practical Purpose and Significance**

This dissertation targets themes that are rarely discussed in education, adolescent
development, and feminist literatures and aims to enrich scholarship that has historically
marginalized the experiences of girls of color. Perhaps most importantly, this work targets under-
theorized arenas of girls’ development. It investigates how social, emotional, and sexual
experiences shape adolescent Latina girls’ lives, develops a vocabulary and theoretical framework
for discussing this convergence, and demonstrates the complex relationships and interactions
between these experiences, education, and developmental learning. Additionally, this project
merges bodies of literature that have traditionally been siloed and sheds light on the gendered
experiences of immigrant youth, the relationships between social, emotional, and sexual
experiences and developmental learning and schooling, and how nurturing educational spaces can
be constructed for girls to promote their development of a critical consciousness.
This work also presents methodological significance. In new and fluid ways, I use the girls’ group space, as a participatory, ethnographic space, where youth act as co-researchers who aid in directing the research project. I also pair traditional ethnography with newer, virtual participant observation in social media, and my dissertation provides many insights into conducting this type of research and managing ethical dilemmas that arise.

Finally, this research will also benefit educators and Latina adolescents who are facing dynamic change in NLD schools across the country by determining best practices for supporting Latina girls and their academic achievement and personal trajectories. In my conclusions chapter, I imagine many implications for educational initiatives, teacher professional development, and girls’ group spaces that support Latina girls’ positive youth development.

**Dissertation Chapter Structure**

This dissertation includes three analysis chapters. The first investigates the social landscape of Marshall, forms of marginalization that my participants endure, and their emotional and resistant responses to such discrimination. The second examines forms of trauma, emotional experiences, and mental illness that are related to the immigrant experience and analyzes how girls’ process and regulate their emotions privately, on social media, and in school spaces. The third illuminates the emotional impact of girls’ sexual experiences, the hypersexualization of Latina girls in schools, and the critical, sexual subjectivities that Latina girls often exercise in their relationships. The conclusion of my dissertation will imagine how researchers, practitioners, and Latina adolescents can collaborate to create educational programming for girls’ that supports their positive development. This project will make important, new innovations in educational, feminist, and developmental psychological scholarship by merging literatures that have been traditionally siloed, creating a theoretical vocabulary that can be used to examine the convergence of middle school social, emotional, and sexual experiences, and envisioning implications for
programs that support Latina girls, like Andrea, in their optimal development and personal and educational trajectories.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Broadly conceived, the question my dissertation research intends to investigate is as follows: What roles do the social, emotional, and sexual experiences of Latina middle school girls in Marshall play in their identity development and experiences as students? Specifically, what roles do emotions play in how the girls make sense of these experiences and their identities? In order to answer this central question (and the sub-questions identified in my introduction), I examine five bodies of literature:

a) Youth social identification and adolescent identity development in diaspora contexts;

b) The educational experiences of Latina youth;

c) The regulation of girls’ social, emotional, and sexual lives in school;

d) Youth, psychological processes, and mental wellness;

e) Girls’ group spaces, feminist pedagogies, and critical consciousness and subjectivities.

In the first section of this paper, I ask, how have scholars conceptualized immigrant youth’s experiences with social identification and adolescent identity development in diaspora contexts? To answer this question, I connect sociological and anthropological perspectives on social identification with developmental psychological theories of adolescent identity development, while emphasizing feminist perspectives that seek to revise classic theories of identity that speak only to the male experience. In the second section of this review, I examine the social and educational experiences of Latina youth by asking: what are the common themes in anthropological, sociological, educational, and feminist literatures on the schooling experiences of Latina youth, especially themes pertaining to gendered aspects of the immigrant schooling
experience? In the third section of the review, I employ black feminist theories of intersectionality to focus on gendered socialization, policing, and discipline, and ask: what have scholars found about how Latina girls, and girls of color more broadly, are socialized, policed, and disciplined within private and institutional spaces? How have scholars discussed the roles that gender, emotions, and sexuality play in these processes? In the fourth section of this review, I examine phenomena that are related to social and psychological processes, which shape Latina girls’ mental wellness, experiences in their schools and communities, and perspectives on their social worlds. I connect sociological, educational, developmental psychological, and medical literatures that examine psychological issues and effects of phenomena like microaggressions, cutting, and social media. Finally, in the fifth section of this review, I ask, how have scholars conceptualized the purpose and potential of girls’ group spaces? What are the educational goals of creating safe spaces for girls and how can girls’ group spaces promote critical consciousness and critical subjectivities? By examining these questions in existing literature, I seek to understand how scholars have conceptualized the relationships between Latina adolescent girls’ personal and academic lives, in order to arrive at a more nuanced account of these intersections with my own research.

I. Youth Social Identification and Adolescent Identity Development in Diaspora Contexts

In this section, I examine anthropological, sociological, feminist, and developmental psychological literatures to develop an account of the experiences of social identification and adolescent development that Latina youth experience in the New Latino Diaspora. First, I discuss the context of the New Latino Diaspora and the unique challenges and opportunities that this context poses for Latina youth experiencing processes of social identification and adolescent
development. Then, I engage in a broader discussion of the processes of social identification that immigrant youth often experience and how scholars conceptualize youth’s responses to that identification in their performances of gender, race, class, sexuality, etc. Finally, I argue that social identification and adolescent development are parallel and interacting processes. In this discussion of adolescent identity development, I emphasize how the peer group and gendered, patriarchal scripts for academic performance, romance, and sexuality shape girls’ emergent sense of self and social, emotional, and sexual development.

**The New Latino Diaspora**

As Latino students become more numerous in U.S. schools, their educational success becomes central to America’s prosperity—not only in traditional immigrant destinations but also in New Latino Diaspora locations, previously unfamiliar with Latinos. Marshall, the focal community of this dissertation, is a suburban town of 35,000 in the Northeastern U.S. that has only recently been populated by large numbers of Latinos, the majority of them Mexican. From 1990 to 2010 the percentage of residents of Mexican origin in Marshall grew from 2.7% to 28.3%. Such rapid demographic changes have been seen across the country, especially in areas that are part of the “New Latino Diaspora” (NLD). The term New Latino Diaspora (NLD) was first used in the late 1990s to describe the trend of increasing numbers of Latinos settling temporarily and permanently in areas of the United States that had not traditionally been home to Latinos (Hamann et al., 2002). NLD locales, such as North Carolina, Maine, Georgia, Indiana, Arkansas, rural Illinois, and resort communities in Colorado contrast with places that have had a longstanding Latino presence, such as Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, and Texas (Hamann & Harklau, 2010). From 2000 to 2010, the
U.S. Latino population grew from 12.5% to 16.4% of the nation’s total population, with increasing numbers of Latinos settling in NLD regions (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010).

The NLD resulted from changing labor market patterns in the US. Several industries, including agriculture, construction, landscaping, assembly and manufacturing, and poultry and meat processing, inspired Latino migration to new, often rural areas (Zúñiga, Hernández-León, Shadduck-Hernández, & Villarreal, 2002). The characteristics of migrants are also changing. Migration has evolved from a male-dominated to a family-dominated phenomenon. Since 1986, Latino migration has stopped being principally a “male, seasonal, circular, undocumented” flow of people to traditional Latino diaspora regions across the U.S. (Zúñiga et al., 2002, p. 99). Latino migration to the NLD now typically involves nuclear and extended families that are likely to settle for years in one location (Wortham & Rhodes, 2012). Additionally, the newcomers in these regions are more likely than other residents to be young and to have children (Hamann & Harklau, 2010), which creates significant implications for educators and schools.

In NLD communities, educators must manage language barriers and strive to understand who their new Latino students are and how to best support them (Hamann, Wortham, & Murillo, 2002). One of the biggest problems that NLD communities and schools face is the lack of established systems to accommodate the new Latino population’s needs. Often, teachers are untrained in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) and have little prior exposure to Latino culture; ESL programs are experimental, and communication between home and school is hindered by a lack of bilingual staff (Hamann & Harklau, 2010). Furthermore, with such dynamic social change, educators and students must make sense of who each other are: for Latina girls’ specifically, their presentations of race, class, language identity, femininity, emotionality, and sexuality collude to shape how they are positioned and understood within schools. Such understandings often shape school disciplinary practices and learning opportunities for Latina girls.
Immigrant Youth and Processes of Social Identification

In Marshall and other NLD locations, the rapid growth in the Latino population produces questions about identity: long-term residents and educators question who Latino immigrants are, and Latino immigrants must also make sense of their own and others’ identities in this new context (Wortham et al., 2009). Furthermore, because there are fewer historically entrenched models of Latino identity in NLD contexts, there is more flexibility in understanding and constructing models of Latino identity (Hamann, Wortham & Murillo, 2002). The dynamic NLD context makes Latino adolescent identities, which are complex and rapidly evolving, especially hard to decipher for MMS staff, parents, and peers. To capture the complexity of Latina, immigrant, girls’ experiences with processes of social identification, I review literature which demonstrates how bicultural frameworks are employed in diaspora contexts to understand immigrant youth, the ambiguity that long-term residents and immigrant youth face in construing their identities, and how models of personhood are constructed in such contexts to facilitate understanding who new community members are.

Biculturality, Ambiguity, and Ambivalence

Immigrant youth identities in diaspora contexts are often explained, by popular and academic discourses, with problematic bicultural frameworks and are positioned on racialized axes of whiteness and blackness. Bicultural frameworks assume that U.S. and immigrant cultures are in conflict and often position immigrant youth as traditional or Americanized (Lee, 2005). Similarly, immigrant identities are often dichotomized on scales of whiteness and blackness in popular discourses. Although Mexican adults in Marshall are often cast as model minorities and likened to Anglos, while contrasted with African Americans (Wortham, Allard, Lee, & Mortimer,
2011), such dichotomized positioning is more dynamic and is complicated by factors such as class, gender, sexuality, and peer group divisions in Marshall Middle School.

Ngo’s (2009) concept of ambivalence claims that immigrant youth identities are: 1) hybrid; 2) situated in specific contexts and power structures, and; 3) sub-divided, inconsistent, and incomplete, like adolescent identities of non-immigrant youth (p. 204). Ngo argues that the term ambivalence “is able to signal the continual fluctuations, contradictions, incompleteness and messiness” of adolescent identity work that bicultural and racialized frameworks do not capture as well (p. 205-206). Ngo’s argument emphasizes the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), which explains that immigrant experiences of living on the ‘border’ between two cultures are always fractured by race, class, gender, and sexuality, and the work of Lisa Lowe (1996), which understands identity as socially constructed and situationally specific. This more flexible conception of identity allows for the inconsistency, hybridity, and incompleteness found in adolescent identity performances. Although the concept of ambivalence implies that adolescent identities are fluid, it does not imply that they are not shaped by the stability of macro structures like race, class, gender, etc. Opposed to more dichotomized models of ethnic identities, Ngo’s model of ambivalent identities accounts for how intersectional power structures shape the context of development and impact adolescent experiences and identity work.

Models of Personhood

As community members try to make sense of such ambiguity and ambivalence in immigrant youth identities in diasporic contexts, they often construct “models of personhood”. “Models of personhood”, as described by Wortham and colleagues (2011), are characterizations of the dispositions, moral strengths and weaknesses, typical behaviors, and life prospects of a person or group. Wortham and colleagues (2011) examined social identification and racialization in Marshall by analyzing community narratives that exist largely among adults. The authors found
that in community narratives of “pay-day muggings”, Mexicans are constructed as model minorities in terms of being family oriented, having a hard work ethic, and being model citizens. They are often compared to Italian, hard working immigrants who have traditionally had a presence in Marshall and contrasted against African Americans who are constructed as lazy, criminal perpetrators, and welfare dependent. However, these authors also found that Mexicans are not depicted as model minorities in terms of school work (Wortham et al., 2011). These models are especially important for adolescent youth, who are attuned to questions of identity. As I will explain in section three of this paper, many scholars (García, 2009; Lundström, 2006; Rolón-Dow, 2004) have found that Latina adolescents’ social, emotional and sexual behaviors and the perceptions of these behaviors aid in the creation of models of Latina personhood, which are used by educators, non-Latina peers, and Latina girls themselves, to make sense of what Latina girls are like and what it is about their culture and context that positions them to have such social, emotional, and sexual experiences.

“Doing” Identity

Social identification impacts how youth perceive themselves and perform their perceived identities. Fenstermaker & West (2002) theorize that youth learn to enact such perceptions of identity, and specifically gendered identity, by “doing gender”: performing, accomplishing and recognizing gender in everyday practices. Doing gender means to “perform complex societal activities of perception, interaction and of micropolitics which define certain activities and pursuits as either masculine or feminine” (“‘Doing Gender’ by Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman– article review and summary,” 2011). These authors argue that gender is “done,” accomplished through interaction with others, in a continuing and context-related manner.
West and Fenstermaker (2002) extend their analysis of “doing gender” to consider the relationships among gender, race, and class and to reconceptualize “difference” as an ongoing interactional accomplishment. The authors invoke Patricia Hill Collins’ (1991) descriptions of gender, race, class, and other axes of social difference, as interlocking categories of experience and Cherrie Moraga’s (1981) warning against the danger in ranking oppressions, versus considering their synergistic effects on experience. West and Fenstermaker (2002) conceive of race, gender, and other types of social difference as ongoing accomplishments and locate their emergence in social situations, rather than within the individual or role expectations. Hill Collins and colleagues (2002) respond to the authors and demand that the “doing gender, doing difference” theory must also acknowledge the power relations that construct difference, how it is “done,” and the social situations and contexts which produce its emergence.

In this way, gender and difference, and the gendered, raced, classed performances of emotionality and sexuality, are done in the interactions that Latina adolescents have with other social actors in diaspora communities and schools. Latina girls “do” gender and difference according to the social scripts they receive and the role expectations they perceive. When they “do” gender and difference, they provide other social actors with information that help them to socially identify who Latina girls are and what they are like in a specific social context. In turn, as they do and accomplish gender and difference, and are socially identified by others, they shape their understandings of their developing adolescent selves.

**Adolescent Identity Development**

Such dynamic social change in NLD locations complicates the processes of social identification and adolescent development: as long-term residents socially identify Latino youth, Latino youth must make sense of their new communities while also managing the tension between the public perceptions of their identity and their developing private assessments of self.
Adolescent development theorists Michael Nakkula and Eric Toshalis (2006) explain that as “adolescents adjust to a changing body, develop abstract thought, acquire more complex interpersonal skills, negotiate new relationships with caretakers and significant others, reformulate a value system, and set goals for future achievement, they are forming an identity” (p. 18). The authors claim that adolescent identities are especially complex: because “so much is in flux in adolescence, the question ‘Who am I?’ is asked with greater passion and urgency” than it is often asked in adulthood (p. 18).

For immigrant youth and children of immigrants in NLD locales, the question, ‘who am I?’, may be more difficult to answer than for non-immigrant youth. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2002) emphasize that in all societies, “a critical role of parents is to act as guides for their children” (p. 90). Immigration, however, “undermines this function by removing the "map of experience" necessary to competently escort the children in the new culture" (p. 90). Through schooling, immigrant children and children of immigrants, often come into contact with American culture sooner and more intensely than their parents do and are forced to manage acculturation stress while learning new American cultural rules. Furthermore, these youth are often vested with responsibilities, like translating, caring for siblings, working alongside parents, beyond what is culturally expected for children at their stage in development (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). These changes in relationships, contexts, and roles can be highly disorienting and create a sense of cultural dissonance and role confusion, potentially compromising the adolescent’s ability to develop a strong sense of identity.

Thus, immigration and social context play a significant role in who immigrant children and children of immigrants understand themselves to be, and how that “understanding is shaped and lived out in everyday experience” (Nakkula, 2008, p. 11). Although older models of adolescent identities described identity as an individual endeavor, newer models describe identity
as a collective one, where relationships and social context impact identity development greatly (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006). In section two of this literature review I will focus more on conceptions of the minority and immigrant experience with identity development and schooling, but here, I examine these conceptions of adolescent development which emphasize relationships and social context and focus on theories of relational, gendered, and sexual identity development in order to better understand how Latina girls’ adolescent development and is shaped by their social, emotional, and sexual experiences.

Relational and Social Development

Erik Erikson was an American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst, most known for his stage theory of adolescent development and his conception of identity crises. Erikson (1959) claimed that each phase of the life cycle is “characterized by a phase-specific developmental task which must be solved in it” (p. 14). His theory is rooted in Freudian conceptions of psychosocial development, which argue that “psychological well-being requires an ongoing negotiation between the individual’s innate biological drives (sexual and otherwise) and the normative expectations of the family and society” (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006, p. 19). The model is fundamentally psychosocial, arguing that we forever confront “incongruities between our internally defined selves and those selves that are defined, confirmed, or denied by others” (p. 19).

Although Erikson acknowledges the role of the social, he has been criticized by many feminist theorists for developing a model that is too individual and based on the male experience. Carol Gilligan (1982) has explained that female adolescent development is much more relational than male development and that girls develop morality differently. Gilligan claims that in contrast to male models of morality, which are often based on rules and justice, women make moral decisions based on responsibility to others and care. Gilligan says that “the centrality of the
concepts of responsibility and care in women’s constructions of the moral domain, the close tie in women’s thinking between conceptions of the self and of morality” requires a revised, “expanded developmental theory that includes, rather than rules out from consideration, the differences in the feminine voice” (1982, p. 25). These gender differences are not accounted for in Erikson’s model, which warps girls’ different developmental and relational abilities into deficits, such as dependency and a lack of initiative.

For adolescent girls especially, the peer group plays a significant role in their development. Reference group theory explains that adolescents organize “social interaction and experience such that norms are internalized and the [peer] group becomes a frame of reference for organizing future action” (Lightfoot, 1997, p. 31). Cynthia Lightfoot (1997) explains that to participate socially is to construct a frame of reference that determines norms, group codes of conduct, and peer group collective culture. By examining oneself in relation to the peer group, the individual has new identity opportunities and a higher self-awareness in relation to others in the group. The peer group often holds the most influence in how girls understand their social, emotional, and sexual experiences.

Gendered, Romantic, and Sexual Scripts

Carol Gilligan (1982) emphasized the confining patriarchal pressures imposed upon girls’ identity development. Nakkula and Toshalis (2006) have explained Gilligan’s description of girls’ development as, in many respects, “learning how to act within overly prescribed roles” and claim that “by early adolescence, according to the archetype, exuberant self-expression gives way to insecurity and self-silencing” (p. 103). Gilligan refers to this self-silencing process as an inward flight into hiding, or going underground, which occurs as a response to social and patriarchal messages which define females as supportive, accommodating, and passive. In order to maintain social relationships, many girls in adolescence force “parts of themselves into hiding, thereby
making themselves more acceptable to the local status quo” (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006, p. 103). For instance, smart, athletic, or tough girls are often ostracized at school for not adhering to the patriarchal feminine script and going underground is often a preferred alternative to risking the performance of non-conformative behavior. Michelle Galley (2008) explains that “Gilligan has found that pressures of trying to succeed academically by speaking up, but also trying to be attractive to boys by staying quiet, can cause girls to silence themselves in school” (p. 91). Girls often “fall silent” in the classroom as they struggle to succeed academically yet still meet expectations of female attractiveness and docility.

Patriarchal archetypes also mold social scripts that determine gendered roles and expectations for adolescents’ romantic relationships and sexual interactions. These types of social rules are acquired through processes of socialization, which expose “individuals to the accepted attributes and characteristics of the prevailing culture or cultures” (O’Sullivan & Meyer-Bahlburg, 2003, p. 222). Scripts allow us to understand the norms that determine appropriate or expected gendered sexual behavior, such as “behavior on first dates, one-night stands, long term sexual relationships, and break-ups” (p. 222). Scripts regarding appropriate sexual conduct become especially salient during adolescence. By fourth and fifth grades, the mysteries of human sexuality begin to assert a different kind of developmental pressure than what has typically been felt beforehand” (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006, p. 177). During adolescence, girls especially are able to explore romantic feelings and ideas about sexuality with friends, simultaneously “learning the cultural, gender, and sexual scripts that are expected in romantic relationships, without necessarily having to negotiate a relationship themselves” (O’Sullivan & Meyer-Bahlburg, 2003, p. 223). The scripts of desire, morality, power, and privacy often govern sexuality. These scripts are often cultivated by the media, family, larger society, friendship networks, and anywhere else that young people congregate.
Because Latino family culture and practice are often so strict and silent regarding sexuality, peer influences are more highly related to sexual expression than family influences, even for girls who face cultural pressure to remain abstinent (O’Sullivan & Meyer-Bahlburg, 2003, p. 234). Although Latina peer culture is more impactful in this arena, girls still talk about sex in reserved ways to guard their reputation among their peers. Even sexually active girls are concerned about their reputations; “maintaining the public image of a virgin is of paramount importance to most girls” (Dietrich, 1998, p. 60). Additionally, Latinas are more likely to “engage in sexual behavior such as kissing when they believe their peers are sexually involved” and condom use is higher among Latina youth who believe that their peers are also using condoms (Denner & Coyle, 2007, p. 284). Thus, the peer group is incredibly significant, not only for the developing sense of self, but for the sexual development and experiences of adolescent Latina girls.

In conclusion, this section has called upon sociological, anthropological, feminist, and developmental psychological literatures in order to theorize the complex processes of social identification and identity formation that Latina youth experience, some of which are unique to the NLD context, where long-term residents do not have local models of personhood to make sense of who Latina youth are. I have looked to literature on the social identification of immigrant youth and emphasized anthropological and sociological theories of biculturality, ambiguity, and ambivalence for their explanatory power of social identification processes that occur in the NLD. This section has also emphasized how youth make sense of the social identification they experience: how they in turn, “do” or perform gender, identity, and difference through ongoing interactional accomplishment and how they manage public perceptions of their identity while developing private assessments of self as adolescents. Because this paper seeks to address how social, emotional, and sexual experiences influence identity and girls’ academic lives, I call upon classic and feminist conceptions of social and relational adolescent identity development and
gendered, romantic, and sexual scripts in their role in development. Next, I examine how Latina youth navigate identities specifically within the realm of schooling.

**II. The Educational Experiences of Latina Youth**

In order to understand how the social, emotional, and sexual experiences of Latina youth intersect with their academic lives, it is critical to grasp a broader understanding of how Latina youth are faring in schools more generally. With a gendered lens, this section will emphasize theories of minority schooling and how minority student capital is often devalued in school spaces. I first present gendered patterns in the schooling and achievement of Latina youth in the U.S. to provide a picture of how Latina students are faring generally. Next, I examine theories of minority schooling and immigrant student assimilation and accommodation while paying close attention to how gender impacts the immigrant student experience. Third, I highlight applications of Pierre Bourdieu’s (1997) theories of cultural capital and social reproduction, which emphasize how schools devalue minority students’ capital and how schools can ameliorate educational inequity by valuing minority students’ funds of knowledge and cultural practices. Finally, I examine theories of minority student resistance to schooling and specifically emphasize studies which focus on Latina girls’ resistance to gendered and sexualized identities and role expectations and how that relates to their experiences in schools. Examining these theories and literatures will allow me to better understand Latina girl’s academic lives, and how their personal lives, and social, emotional, and sexual experiences, intersect.

**Gender, Schooling, and the Achievement of Latina Youth**

Strikingly, little attention has been paid to the role of gender in schooling in New Latino Diaspora regions. In fact, Desirée Baolian Qin-Hilliard (2003) explains that “few studies have examined gender differences in recently arrived immigrant students’ ethnic identity development...
over time and how that may relate to their educational outcomes” (p. 93). Similarly, Linda Harklau (2013) explains that although we know that Latinos account for over 20% of school-aged children in the U.S. and are more likely to leave the educational pipeline early, and there is a prodigious amount of research on Latinos’ academic performance and the risk factors which are thought to contribute to underachievement, only in recent years have scholars examined the role of gender in Latino/a achievement.

Recent scholarship confirms the “heterogeneity and diversity found in the individual schooling paths” of Latinas and emphasizes the necessity for research on Latinas’ educational and social experiences and trajectories (Harklau, 2013, p. 1). Zambrana and Zoppi (2002) explain that in general, Latino achievement is compromised by a variety of factors, including “poverty, lack of participation in preschool, attendance at poor quality elementary and high schools, placement into lower-track classes, poor self-image, limited neighborhood resources, and the presence of few role models, and gender role attitudes” (p. 41). We do know that Latina girls’ achievement lags behind that of girls from other ethnic backgrounds and that Latinas remain less likely than White, Black, or Asian American women to graduate from high school and enroll in college, to take the SAT and to be enrolled in gifted and talented or AP classes (Harklau, 2013; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002). Explanations for these gaps in achievement often focus on social factors, such as their social networks at school (Harklau, 2013) or socialization into traditional Latina sex roles (Rolón-Dow, 2004; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002). Zambrana and Zoppi (2002) also document how Latinas are at a higher risk of depression, suicide attempts, and the use of alcohol and other illegal drugs than African American girls, and how they are less likely to use condoms during sexual activity than White girls. The authors emphasize that these factors, in conjunction with “low family socio-economic status, immigrant status, inadequate negotiating skills, low value concordance with U.S. dominant culture, and institutional racism and discrimination, may push Latinas into early exits from school due to uncertain futures” (Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002, p. 45).
However, Latina students are now fairing better than Latinos: although Latino males outnumbered Latina females in high school graduation and college enrollment until the late 1980s, that trend has now reversed (Harklau, 2013). This is hypothesized to be the combined result of multiple factors, including mismatched classroom expectations and a largely White, female teaching force, gender-differentiated experiences with discrimination, cultural expectations for Latino males to enter the workforce early, and male’s higher rates of military enlistment and incarceration (Harklau, 2013). Many scholars have explored protective factors, which serve to promote girls’ educational achievement. Qin-Hilliard (2003) has found that “girls from immigrant families across most ethnic groups tend to have higher educational aspirations and higher educational attainments than their male counterparts” (p. 92). She explains that this could be because parents are more likely to support girls’ education here than in their country of origin, because they perceive their daughters’ education and future job opportunities as closely linked to the family’s sense of “making it” in the United States. Additionally, immigrant parents often place much stricter controls on their daughters than on their sons in their activities outside the house. This strict parental monitoring “may have unanticipated benefits for girls’ schooling by minimizing their exposure to violence and toxic environments, particularly in the inner-city context” (Qin-Hilliard, 2003, p. 92). Furthermore, teachers in Qin-Hilliard’s study had overwhelmingly more positive perceptions of the girls’ behaviors and engagement at school than of the boys’ and she posits that girls might have higher aspirations, achievement records, and reputations with teachers because they may be “protected from risk factors like harsh school environment by the supportive network of teachers, peers, and parents they meet in their pursuit of education” (p. 104).

Ricardo Stanton-Salazar (2001) echoes some of Qin-Hilliard’s (2003) findings and explains that success in school is often a matter of familial obligation and that doing well in school honors the sacrifices of immigrant parents. He also claims that although teenage daughters
have significantly more conflicts with their immigrant parents due to restrictive parental standards for behavior and girls’ desires for independence, relative to boys, girls are more in touch with and invested in their relationships with parents and family, which may support girls’ academic success. These types of gendered factors, which support educational aspiration and achievement, may also shape girls’ social, emotional, and sexual experiences, and how they direct girls’ future academic and personal trajectories. Besides examining these gendered trends, it is important to examine how Latino youth’s educational experiences are shaped by their immigrant status and experiences as minorities in schools.

**Theories on Minority Schooling, Assimilation, and Accommodation**

Children of immigrants and immigrant children confront unique experiences in negotiating identities in schools. Some scholars have attempted to predict minority adolescents’ responses to school depending on if they belong to minority groups that were incorporated into the nation voluntarily or involuntarily (Ogbu, 1974), while others have reported that minority adolescents adopt student identities due to local contextual factors (Gibson, 1988). Gibson (1988) explains that two main theoretical perspectives are used to explain the school performance of minority students: cultural discontinuity theory and structural inequalities theory. The cultural discontinuity theory assumes that educational problems arise due to a mismatch between the culture and language of educational institutions and their students. The structural inequalities perspective “emphasizes the status of a particular minority or social class group within the socioeconomic structure of the host society and the group’s relationship with the dominant majority” and it “assumes that low achievement in school is an outgrowth of the system of social stratification and that schools function to maintain the status quo” (Gibson, 1988, p. 30). With either theory, the identities that immigrant students adopt influence how they are understood by educational institutions and, often, students’ educational trajectories.
Scholars who discuss these theories of minority schooling often use the terms assimilation, acculturation, and accommodation. Gibson (1988) defines assimilation as the process whereby individuals of one society of ethnic group are incorporated or absorbed culturally into another, where, at the individual level, cultural assimilation “implies loss of identification with one’s former group” (p. 24). Acculturation is defined by Gibson as a “process of culture change and adaptation which results when groups with different cultures come into contact”, where old and new traits may be blended, cultures may be transformed, and old cultural traits are not necessarily lost (p. 24-25). Finally, Gibson defines accommodation as a process where immigrant groups choose in “certain situations to subordinate their ways to those of the dominant group when they believe this to be in their best interests or those of their children” (p. 25). Although many scholars have described linear processes of assimilation, Gibson’s account of these processes allows for more cultural fluidity in the identities and practices that immigrant groups adopt and for bi-directional cultural transformation.

Mary C. Waters (1994) and Alejandro Portes and colleagues (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Portes & Zhou, 1993) also reject the notion of linear or straight-line assimilation, which assumes an undifferentiated monolithic American culture. Instead, these authors stress the fact that immigrants enter a pluralistic society in which a variety of subcultures and racial and ethnic identities co-exist. Waters (1994) and Portes & Zhou (1993) advocate for segmented assimilation, which focuses not on the extent to which one assimilates into American society, but into what sector of society that assimilation occurs. Portes and Rumbaut (1996) explain that outcomes of the adaptation process are never uniform due to the interactions between social context and individual acculturation processes. Specifically, these authors explain that color, geographic location, and changes in the structure of labor markets greatly impact educational and economic opportunities and to what sector of society that assimilation occurs. Although in the past straight-lined cultural assimilation or accommodation has been assumed to have beneficial consequences
for schooling, economic progress, and psychological well-being, models of minority schooling now account for the role of social context and cultural fluidity.

In recent years, scholars have not only expanded their conceptions of minority schooling to account for social context and cultural fluidity, but they have started to examine how gender shapes immigrant youth experiences of schooling, accommodation, and assimilation. Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco (2001) have examined how parental anxieties around the acculturation of Latina youth are more severe than for male youth and Stanton Wortham (2002) has emphasized gendered patterns of accommodation in the NLD. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) claim that children of immigrants often face acculturation stress (stress rooted in the process of learning new cultural rules and interpersonal experiences) more intensely than their parents. Immigrant parents often panic when they see their children experiencing processes of Americanization and while many parents encourage their children to pick up certain cultural competencies, such as the English language, they fiercely resist others. This anxiety around Americanization is gendered: Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco explain that the anxieties around Americanization are most clearly articulated in parental concerns about their “daughters’ exposure to the cultural repertoire of the American peer group” (p. 79). In some immigrant communities and families, “becoming Americanized is synonymous with becoming sexually promiscuous” and as a result, the “activities of girls outside the home tend to be heavily monitored and controlled” (p. 79).

Wortham (2002) examined how gender impacts the ways that adolescents confront questions of identity in the NLD context and argued that “we need to develop more complex accounts of minority adolescents’ cultural identification and school success if we want to explain the complex dynamics of schooling and cultural identity in Latino diaspora communities” (p. 119). Wortham found that Latino students confronted an “either/or choice”: “—either the Latino adolescents in Havertown would “act white” and conform to mainstream Anglo expectations or
they would maintain their minority cultural identities and resist the schools’ mainstream expectations” (p. 118). Wortham also observed that some students fit patterns of accommodation without assimilation, where “students conform to mainstream expectations enough to do well in school but also preserve their own cultural identities” (p. 118). He claimed that there was a gendered trend in this identity work: “adolescent males mostly identified with working-class Mexican role models and rejected the mainstream Anglo expectations of the school” while “most adolescent females adopted some of the mainstream Anglo values they encountered at school and managed to accommodate without assimilating” (p. 118). Wortham claimed that the female adolescents adapted by “conforming to mainstream values and practices while in school and to Mexican values at home” and they “hoped to retain this dual identity throughout their lives in the United States- to succeed in the mainstream world, but to maintain their cultural traditions at home” (p. 137). As Wortham and Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2001) both demonstrated, assimilation and acculturation are not only influenced by social context, but by gendered traditions, values, and expectations.

The Devaluation of Latina Capital and Funds of Knowledge

As the aforementioned scholars explain, immigrant youth have different experiences of assimilation and accommodation depending on many factors, including their school and social context and gender, which can determine their educational opportunities. I now focus on theories of minority schooling that are influenced by Bourdieu’s (1997) conceptions of cultural capital and social reproduction and that address how immigrant students’ assimilation to the dominant culture shapes their educational success. Bourdieu (1997) defines capital as “accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its ‘incorporated’, embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor” (p. 46). To Bourdieu, capital structures our social world and its
unequal distribution perpetuates social inequality (p. 46). In this section, I discuss how Bourdieu (1997), Valenzuela (1999), Bettie (2003), and González, Moll, and Amanti (2005) call upon the theories of cultural discontinuity and structural inequalities that Gibson mentions (1988) to demonstrate how the cultural capital of Latino students is not valued in schools and to make recommendations for how educational institutions can ameliorate these inequities.

**Subtractive Schooling**

Angela Valenzuela’s (1999) work on Latino immigrant experiences of identity work in educational settings focuses on disparities in capital and processes of subtractive schooling. Valenzuela argues that immigrants and U.S. born minority youth are often seen “by schools and society as lacking the linguistic, cultural, moral, and intellectual traits the assimilationist curriculum demands” and schools do not view immigrant and minority cultures, languages, and practices as resources (p. 4). Valenzuela claims that schooling for these youth is a subtractive process which divests them of “important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure” (p. 3). She explains that scholarship has not assessed the academic consequences “to many Mexican youth who “learn” perhaps no stronger lesson in school than to devalue the Spanish language, Mexico, [and] Mexican culture” and how that devaluation leads youth to “close off social and linguistic access to their immigrant peers, many of whom possess greater academic competence in this study” (p. 19).

Valenzuela (1999) explains that schools often dismiss the definition of education grounded in Mexican culture: Mexican culture values educación, which refers to “the family’s role of inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation for all other learning” and “competence in the social world, wherein one respects the dignity and individuality of others” (p. 23). The subtractively assimilationist practices which ignore the values of educación and divest Mexican students of their culture and language covertly
demands that students “embrace a curriculum that either dismisses or derogates their ethnicity and that they respond caringly to school officials who often hold their culture and community in contempt” (p. 25). In this process, immigrant youth may acquire useful skills and knowledge, but at the cost of losing significant cultural resources and prospects for fully vested bilingualism and biculturalism.

**Devaluing Latina Capital**

Julie Bettie (2003) has produced one of the few analyses that examines how Latina girls’ cultural and social capital is devalued by schools, and how that devaluation of capital and class position is perpetuated within social networks. In her analysis Bettie emphasizes that Bourdieu’s (1973) theory does not account for the ways in which social differences, like race and gender, influence the amount of cultural capital that one may have access to regardless of one’s economic capital. She intervenes in traditional notions of habitus by calling upon Judith Butler (1990) and claiming that class and capital as cultural identity, or habitus, are performative. For Bettie, habitus is thought of as performative because there is no interior, innate difference that is being expressed; instead, institutionalized class inequalities create class subjects who display or perform differences in cultural capital. Bettie integrates Bourdieu’s notions of habitus and Butler’s concept of performativity by employing the hyphenated terminology “race-class performances of femininity”, including emotionality and sexuality, to indicate that performances have class, capital, race and gender specific meanings (Bettie, 2003, p. 56).

Bettie’s (2003) examination of capital and social reproduction in the school setting is unique because while many school studies emphasize the reproduction of inequality “as it occurs through the curriculum or class and racial/ethnic bias of teachers themselves, less is usually said about the hierarchy students learn from each other and the injuries they inflict on each other” (p. 106). Bettie emphasizes that the disjuncture between middle-class and working-class capital has a
double exclusionary effect in schools: working-class performers counted themselves out of mobility by believing that success in school is “not for the likes of us,” and practices of exclusion by middle-class performers clearly told the marginalized students that their success is “not for the likes of you.” (p. 107). Without a language of class difference and cultural capital beyond money, “non-preps often internalized that the source of popularity and success was individual attributes, and therefore only personal character flaws remained to be blamed for their own inadequacy” (p. 107-108).

Bettie (2003) explains that working-class girls had their dignity wounded through exposure to preps, who routinely and unknowingly inflicted class and race based injuries. Working-class girls often employed gender-specific commodities and performances to “negotiate and construct differences between themselves and college-prep students” (p. 167). Girls used commodities such as hairstyles, clothes, and cosmetics to create styles and practices that worked as alternative badges of dignity. For instance, working-class, Mexican American girls who performed chola identity (which carried low cultural capital) used dark lipstick and heavy make up to make overt claims to adult status and to invoke “various kinds of claims to authenticity (racial, subcultural) as a strategy to heal various injuries of inequality” (p. 167). Unfortunately, because preps and school staff perceived such stylistic choice as cheap, the alternative badges of dignity also worked to reinforce the chola girls’ positions within the school hierarchy of cultural capital. Bettie’s analysis demonstrates how performances of femininity (often including performances of emotionality and sexuality) are perceived by peers and educators as signs of cultural capital and class, and thus, have the power and potential to shape students’ educational pathways.

**Funds of Knowledge**
González, Moll, and Amanti (2005) call for educators to increase their awareness of how disparities in cultural capital shape minority students’ educational pathways and to value students’ funds of knowledge and practice from their home environments within the school space. These authors claim that “public schools often ignore the strategic and cultural resources,” which they have termed “funds of knowledge, that households contain” (p. 47). They do not call for educators to value “culture” because “the term culture is loaded with expectations of group norms and often-static ideas of how people view the world and behave in it” and “presumes coherence within groups, which may not exist” (p. 10). Instead, these authors focus on practice, “what households actually do and how they think about what they do” and how “households draw from multiple cultural systems and use these systems as strategic resources” (p. 10). The authors explain that if we integrate these practices as resources in the classroom, academic learning and positive youth development will benefit.

The funds of knowledge approach assumes that from birth, one is socialized by others into particular cultural practices that become the tools for thinking, which mediate how we interact with our social worlds. González, Moll, and Amanti (2005) argue that by ignoring the cultural tools and practices of certain groups of students, schools work to the detriment of students’ thinking and development. They emphasize that human beings and their social worlds are inseparable, and students must be educated in a way that acknowledges the funds of knowledge that students’ households possess. Students’ funds of knowledge can only be incorporated into educational praxis when educational institutions no longer “reify culture, when lived experiences become validated as sources of knowledge, and when the process of how knowledge is constructed and translated between groups located within nonsymmetrical relations of power is questioned” (p. 42).

Similarly, Maria Pacheco (2009) discusses embracing students’ political-historical knowledge in the educational spaces to enhance students’ learning and critical thinking. She
focuses on Latino immigrant students and claims that when these students are given the “opportunity to discuss (im)migration in particular, the political-historical knowledge they demonstrated included sophisticated readings of the sociopolitical circumstances of their life and schooling experiences” (p. 19). Specifically, they were able to critically reflect upon and articulate the “intersectionality of being Mexican and Chicana/o, growing up in a working low-income community, descending from Latina/o (im)migrants, and the legal and political processes that reproduced their nondominant status” (p. 19). Pacheco says that this knowledge was developed across local contexts: in their homes with their families, in their social experiences within their community, and through their classroom projects. This political-historical knowledge, a social consciousness, enables students to draw upon local sensibilities to “recognize community injustice(s) and to develop the political praxis to affect community transformation in the service of social justice” (p. 22). Finally, Pacheco recommends that educators “use the critiques, stances, and world-views that communities promote among their children and youth—that is, their political-historical knowledge—‘as the center of students’ educational activities (p. 27). Both Pacheco’s and González, Moll, and Amanti’s (2005) conceptions of funds of knowledge and political-historical knowledge push educators to value Latina students’ forms of capital and the cultural practices they receive at home to promote their academic success and positive relationships with educational institutions.

**Gendered Resistance and Schooling**

Many scholars (Ogbu, 1974; Omi & Winant, 1986; Willis, 1977) have explained that minority students often adapt to limitations imposed upon their educational opportunity (through the devaluation of their cultural capital or funds of knowledge, or otherwise) with resistance. Girls’ resistance, both to schooling and to traditional gendered expectations, however, has not been studied as intently as male youth’s forms of resistance and girls’ educational successes and
failures should be re-examined for signs of agency and resistance. Resistance to schooling was theorized by John Ogbu (1974), who explained that school failure was an adaptation, a form of resistance, by subordinate minorities to education with limited opportunity. Recently, feminist scholars have engaged in the resistance dialogue to demonstrate how Latina girls use or abandon schooling to resist social constructions which limit their academic and personal opportunities.

For instance, Julio Cammarota (2004) argues that Latina youth are using school success to resist societal constructions that attempt to render them inferior to males and thus reinforce their subordinate social status” (p. 53). Cammarota explains that although both male and female students must contend with educational institutions which position them in racial and class hierarchies, female youth face distinct types of gender discrimination within their families, homes, and society and respond to these gendered pressures in multiple ways. Although stereotypical notions of Latinas as submissive underachievers may influence them to drop out of school, another reaction may “push female students to adopt a different orientation to school, in which they perceive the credentials conferred by schools as tickets to a higher status that challenges male domination and offers greater autonomy” (p. 55). Girls may use school to navigate and resist the mixed messages that their mothers proffer which “simultaneously tell them to become self-reliant yet place primary importance on becoming mujeres de hogar (women of the home)” (p. 55). Additionally, achievement in school may resist certain forms of Latina peer culture, which place higher values on pursuing the ‘traditional roles of “girlfriend, wife, and mother’ over professional or career success” (p. 55).

Cammarota (2004) explains that the achievement, particularly of marginalized students of color, is read as “conformist resistance” which suggests that “students simultaneously accept and reject cultural norms at home or school” and use “education, or at least persevering to obtain educational credentials, to counter societal inequalities without challenging the systemic oppressions of schooling” (p. 56). Valenzuela (1999) employs the term positive resistance to
describe student achievement that acts as a strategy to counter social oppression. Cammarota (2004) explains that for the Latinas he studied, negotiating their way through high school gave them hope to make “changes within their culture, family life, and communities that would herald a new perception of Latinas,” where the new Latina would “no longer be submissive to men, but respected as equal, capable, and worthy” (p. 63).

Linda Harklau (2013) examines resistance to schooling and conceptualizes the choice to forgo schooling for wage earning as a feminist project. Harklau points out that both research and popular images of Latina adolescents have depicted them as lacking in self-esteem, passive or submissive at school, and vulnerable to early marriage and pregnancy. From these perspectives, low educational aspirations and attainment among Latinas are presumed to be the “result of socialization and apprenticeship into traditional gendered household roles,” ultimately resulting in Latinas taking on traditional gender roles in the home, rather pursuing higher education or a career (p. 5). Harklau suggests, however, that the decision to forgo college and take on a wage-earning role can be a conscious, feminist, decision-making process. She examines this project with the case of Izzie, a Latina high school student in an NLD town. Izzie critically contemplated the structural constraints that complicated her pathway to college and realized that college enrollment at a community college would have meant continued financial dependence on her family, living at home, and tedious housework and care work for younger family members. Thus, “going to college presented few immediate incentives for Izzie and represented the continuation of low status and lack of autonomy within her family” (p. 22). In resisting college going, Izzie realized that wage earning would be a family-sanctioned way to fight “family strictures on her behavior and the double standard she perceived in her family’s domestic hierarchy” (p. 22). Harklau considers this to be a feminist choice and demonstrates how this case suggests “the mutability of gender roles in immigrant communities” and how Latina youth and their entire families are engaging in “an ongoing renegotiation of gender roles in regard to work and family”
Harklau argues that Izzie’s choice and resistance to college going demonstrates that the Latina youth’s “decisions about their futures may not be merely an accession to the cultural discourses around them or the passive reproduction of a gendered subject; rather, they can be powerfully agentive” (p. 24).

In conclusion, the literatures and theories discussed in this section have illuminated the relationships between Latina girls’ immigrant status, cultural capital, and educational opportunities. By calling upon theories of minority schooling, assimilation, and accommodation, I demonstrate how Latina girls’ experiences of assimilation, accommodation, and educational success are always shaped by their school and social context and by their gender. I connect theories of minority schooling to literatures that call upon Bourdieu’s (1997) concept of cultural capital and social reproduction to emphasize that the cultural capital, and specifically, the race-class performances of femininity (including emotionality and sexuality), that Latina girls bring with them into school spaces, shape how they are understood and evaluated by educators and their peer community and how they respond to the experience of schooling. Next, I take a closer look at the relationships between Latina girls’ experiences of assimilation and accommodation, cultural capital and race-class performances of femininity, and social, emotional, and sexual experiences to decipher how Latina girls’ are understood, socialized, and disciplined within the school space towards assimilationist ends.

### III. The Regulation of Latina Girls’ Social, Emotional, and Sexual Lives in School

Schools value and reward students with dominant forms of cultural capital, which often leads to educational success for those students. Alternatively, schools often discipline minority students who do not possess dominant forms of capital and who enact race-class performances of femininity, emotionality, and/or sexuality that do not match with schools’ vision of model, virtuous, assimilated students. Within this section of the paper, I explore how scholars have
conceptualized the ways that Latina girls are socialized and disciplined within institutional spaces, specifically with regard to their social, emotional, and sexual behaviors and experiences. I first offer a theoretical discussion of intersectionality (Collins, 1991) and explain how this theory allows us to better understand how girls are regulated within institutions like schools. I employ theories of intersectionality to frame my discussion of how Latina girls are sexualized and policed within schools and their emotions are regulated and controlled within educational spaces for the sake of turning girls into virtuous, model students who enact race-class performances of femininity, emotionality, and sexuality that are more aligned with the cultural capital of the dominant group.

**Intersectionality**

Theories of intersectionality emerged from black feminists in response to white feminist theory, which assumed that gender was the only axis of identity from which women faced oppression. Patricia Hill Collins (1991) has explained that “black women cant fully be empowered unless intersecting oppressions themselves are eliminated,” and “that U.S. Black Women encounter a distinctive set of social practices that accompany [their] particular history within a unique matrix of domination characterized by intersecting oppressions” (p. 28). Hill Collins clarifies “that there is no homogenous black woman’s standpoint that exists,” and instead, “it is more accurate to say that a black woman’s collective standpoint does exist, one characterized by the tensions that accrue to different responses to common challenges” (p. 28).

Hill Collins (1991) explains that there is a relationship between intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality and dominating images of women of color, which provide powerful ideological justifications for their existence. These intersecting oppressions objectify black women, and other women of color, as the other and these are often “constructed in contrast to white women and values associated with white women, like piety, purity, submissiveness, and
domesticity” (p. 76). She emphasizes that schools, the news media, and government agencies constitute important sites for reproducing these controlling images. In Marshall, and many other NLD sites, popular, sexualized images of Latina women and girls from the media and stereotypes from the traditional Latino diaspora, often shape interactions within schools and representations of identity made by and about girls of color. Hill Collins (1991) and hooks (2000) explain that universal claims and categories used to understand the complexity of socially constructed identities are inadequate. Bounded, universal definitions of what the bodies and emotional and sexual experiences of middle school girls should look like place Latina girls’ representations of self and experiences in opposition to the limited images perceived as “age-appropriate”, another widely circulating model of normative student behavior for middle school girls (Rolón-Dow, 2004). As the next two sections of this review demonstrate, intersecting oppressions, dominating images of Latina girls, and notions of “age-appropriate” bodies, identities, and performances of femininity collude to sexualize and shape educators’ disciplinary practices in reforming Latina girls’ sexual and emotional experiences.

The Sexualization of Latina Girls in Schools

Schools are spaces that often “sexualize adolescent female bodies and discipline that sexuality” (Hyams, 2006, p. 101). In Marshall, Latina girls are characterized as hypersexual and more likely to date older boys, have sex, and become pregnant than girls from other ethnic backgrounds. In and through schooling, Latina girls in Marshall learn lessons of sexual boundedness and their bodies are the principal site of this learning experience. Stevenson (2012) asserts that low-income, girls of color’s bodies, thoughts, and actions are still understood “through the lenses of moral panic, poverty, protection, and sexual risk,” and they are “policed by national and local political narratives, public policies, and individual interactions with peers, family, and public schools” (p. 4). Stevenson argues that public concern over black and Latina
girls’ sexuality is motivated by a moral panic: a “societal state of frenzied being, where national, local, and/or group norms are disrupted by an episode, person, or group of persons that are identified as threats to one’s lived experience,” or to society’s agreed-on “respectable behavior and civilized ways of being” (p. 12). Stevenson explains that hyper-sexualized and static representations of girls of color, such as the baby mama, welfare queen, and video ho, “incite the levels of moral and political panic surrounding the sexual activities and sexual decision-making” of adolescent females of color (p. 12). Sexualization, in this way, sends the reoccurring heteronormative message that sex and school do not mix because of the possibility of sexual risks and that a healthy sexuality, for girls of color, is no sexuality.

The sexualization of girls is often shaped by how race-class performances of femininity and sexuality are perceived by educators and peers in schools. Rosalie Rolón-Dow (2004) examines how sexualized images, created by and about Puerto Rican girls, shape their schooling experiences. She illustrates how images and representations created by and about the new population of Puerto Rican students in the school community focused on girls’ sexuality and cast sexuality “in opposition to cultural productions of what educated or educable girls should be” (p. 8). Rolón-Dow discusses how such images respond to the physical representations that the girls present but are also partially determined by the ethnic, classed, and gendered images that school faculty, staff, and students held of particular groups of students. Rolón-Dow uses a black, critical, feminist framework, to show how “dichotomizing the sexuality of Puerto Rican females against their intellectual development obscures the complex ways that identities are co-constructed and then affirmed, appropriated, or resisted within their school site” (p. 8).

Similarly, Catrin Lundström (2006) investigates sexualization narratives and how Latina girls navigate the boundaries of gender and ethnicity in Sweden. In her analysis, Lundström explores “the diverse meanings of the term ‘whore’, and how discursive categories such as ‘immigrants’ and ‘Swedes’ are elaborated” and demonstrates that the connotation of the term
‘whore’ is related to local constructions of ethnicity and femininity (p. 203). Lundström explains that in Sweden, “Latin Americans are, like other ethnic groups, made invisible – but visible – in the homogenizing discourse of ‘immigrants,’” but Latina women, “when visible, tend to be represented in sexualized ways” (p. 205). Lundström claims that this tendency is related to the Latin music boom, specifically of sexualized female artists, whose ethnic origin as Latinas suggests sex appeal. The Latina is represented as a figure of exoticism in opposition to white, moral womanhood. The term ‘whore’ is closely associated with Swedish girls, Chileans and Latin Americans, because of the cultural differences between them and other groups at school. In this multi-ethnic context, the Latina girls, were sexually positioned similar to the ‘Swedish girls’ and thus excluded from the ‘immigrant girls’, who come ‘from another culture’ where ‘you have sex when you are married’” (p. 207). Opposed to other groups of immigrant girls, Latina ethnicity functions as a marker of sexuality.

Lorena García (2009) also argues that race/ethnicity shapes how school authorities respond to students’ embodiment of gender and sexuality and claims that “Black and Latina/o students’ performance of heterosexuality is especially monitored and disciplined within schools” (p. 522). García explains that such treatment is informed by perceptions of youth of color as adult-like rather than child-like, as sexually promiscuous, and as potential gang members or criminals and teen mothers. She claims that in sex education spaces, masculinity and femininity were given meaning only by heterosexuality, femininity was tightly linked to this good girl/bad girl dichotomy, and racialized gender stereotypes produced specific lessons for Latina youth about “how they should engage sex education in the classroom and what sex education information was most relevant to them” (p. 528). Quite often, García’s Latina participants reported that in sex education classes, boys were disciplined by teachers for misbehaving, acting foolish, or not taking the lesson seriously, whereas girls were reprimanded for their active engagement with sex education in the classroom. For Latina youth, it was possible to be too
interested in learning about sex. In these types of sex education spaces, teachers and sex educator presumed that all students were heterosexual and invoked the good girl/bad girl dichotomy, which kept boys’ sexual behaviors invisible and undisciplined. Furthermore, this “dichotomy was racialized in that it both drew on and supported the notion that Latinas are culturally predisposed to fall on the “bad” side of feminine sexuality,” and that the Latina teen “is perpetually at risk for pregnancy because of “Latino culture”(p. 530, p. 536).

Garica (2009), Lundström (2006), Rolón-Dow (2004), and Stevenson’s (2012) analyses illuminate how race, ethnicity, class, and gender intersect to produce sexualized images and understandings of Latina girls. In schools, these understandings influence how educators discipline and evaluate Latina girls as students. Emotions, however, are another important piece of Latina girls’ race-class performances of femininity and recently, scholars have begun to discuss how Latina girls’ emotions are disciplined and regulated as well, in order to promote the development of emotionality which is more aligned with the cultural and embodied capital of the dominant group.

**Emotions and Schooling**

Emotions are defined in complex, disciplinary-specific, and conflicting ways, and the definition of emotions is often confused with feelings and affect. Eric Shouse (2005) explains that “feelings are personal and biographical, emotions are social, and affects are prepersonal” (p. 1). Shouse explains that a feeling “is a sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and labeled” and it is “personal and biographical because every person has a distinct set of previous sensations from which to draw when interpreting and labeling their feelings” (p. 1). He defines an affect as “a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential” and explains that affect is more abstract than feeling or emotion because “affect cannot be fully realised in language, and because affect is always prior to and/or outside
of consciousness” (p. 1). Shouse defines emotions as social and as projections or displays of a feeling. To Shouse, emotions can be either genuine or feigned: “we broadcast emotion to the world; sometimes that broadcast is an expression of our internal state and other times it is contrived in order to fulfill social expectations” (p. 1).

Similarly, Megan Boler (1999), Allison Jaggar (1997), and Ana Ramos-Zayas (2012) argue that emotions are social and inseparable from lived experiences and power relations. Boler (1999) emphasizes that despite the “increasing embrace of emotions over the last two decades as ‘socially constructed,’ the view of emotion as individualized is deeply embedded in our own language and conceptual frameworks” (p. 5). Specifically within educational research and praxis, emotions are often theorized as private, individual experiences that should be controlled in educational spaces and they are rarely understood as a collaboratively constructed terrain. Jaggar (1997) says that many classical epistemological theories regard emotions as disruptive, nonrational forces that need to be channeled or suppressed if knowledge is to be gained. Jaggar instead argues that not only is emotion implicated in all knowledge chains, but emotions can serve as the basis for critical social theory. Jaggar explains that emotions are shaped by cultures, value systems, and norms and emphasizes that subordinated individuals sometimes experience emotions that are conventionally deemed inappropriate. She urges that these “outlaw emotions” may provide clues to unjust practices and oppressive conditions.

Ramos-Zayas (2012) also explains that emotions are social in the sense that they depend on personal (and political) elements that to a large degree are common to members of a group living in similar circumstances. She says that emotions are “shaped through cultural stereotyping of experience as well as shared expectations, memories, and fantasies, an they can provide a "reading" of one's own responses, and a judgment of those who don't share in those similarities" (p. 13). Ramos-Zayas explains that emotions are a “deeply internalized and unrefined aspect of
action, but not because they do not contain enough culture and society in them, but rather because they have too much” (p. 14).

Social Difference and Emotional Habitus

Ana Ramos-Zayas (2012) conducted ethnographic work with Latinos in Newark, NJ and argued that emotions allow Latino youth to make sense of others and social difference. Ramos-Zayas explains that emotions, feelings, affect, and sentiment “are produced by and give meaning to racial belief and assessments of national belonging” (p. 199). She claims that acquiring and internalizing the knowledge of how race operates in social exchange became a “deeply emotive process for Latinos in Newark, as individuals both phenomenologically experienced these emotions and projected them onto others, particularly Africans Americans, as a way to render them legible” (p. 3). Ramos-Zayas explains that quotidian interactions in schools and neighborhoods allowed Latino youth to develop a heightened gaze of black bodies and emotional mannerisms in their communities and these interactions, and the historical, political, and economic contexts that enabled them, contributed to the formation of an urban emotional commonsense.

Ramos-Zayas (2012) demonstrates that urban emotional commonsense is crucial for successful capital accumulation in urban spaces: one must have “tacit understandings of appropriate affect, expressing adequate public emotions, and controlling the display of private emotions in public” (p. 12). In this way, individuals are socialized and taught what to feel and what not to feel, what kind of self to be and not be within their local context. She emphasizes that “communities and political regimes systematically seek to train emotions, idealizing some and condemning others, subjecting them to a normative judgment that would readily allow for their control or manipulation” (p. 52). Under such normative styles of emotional management, “emotions are enhanced and habituated in such a way that emotional meaning systems reflect
social relations and, through emotion's constitution of social behavior, structure them” (p. 52). In this way, she explains that emotions function as a form of capital and create emotional habitus, not only because they derive from “one's social bonds and one's position within those bonds, but also because emotional habitus is defined by one's social position and social identity and that, in turn, defines it” (p. 16). In Marshall, and many other urban and NLD contexts, the emotional habitus that Latina girls enact is not valued by the school system and white, middle-class educators. As a result, emotions are disciplined and regulated so that Latina girls learn to enact and emotional habitus that is more closely aligned with the schools’ view of the virtuous, model student who can control their emotions.

The Regulation of Emotions in Schools

In education research and praxis, there is a dearth of emotional theorizing, which is related to how emotions have been traditionally conceptualized. Megan Boler (1999) explains that historically, emotions have been constructed, by pathological, rational and religious discourses, as private, located within the individual, and something to be controlled. Based upon these discursive constructions, emotions have become a site of social control within institutions like schools. The drive for emotional control in schools is motivated primarily by two ideological forces: 1) explicit rules of morality, strongly influenced by Protestant values, and; 2) values of utility and skills measured through the neutral gaze of the social sciences, which frame the virtuous student in terms of efficiency and mental health (Boler, 1999, p. xxii). Constructed as antithetical to reason and social efficiency, “emotion is subdued by the emphasis on the rational functioning of the organism as one party of a larger industrial organizational harmony” (p. 46). Schools expect youth to “control themselves” rather than interpreting emotional expressions as a sign that something is wrong with the outside world. The social, economic, and political forces
that underlie these youth crises are masked, and the individuals are blamed for lack of self-control (p. xiv).

Boler (1999) employs Michele Foucault’s (1982) notion of pastoral power to explain how emotions are controlled within institutions. Foucault defines pastoral power as a form of governance, which teaches individuals to police themselves. Pastoral power is a technique which originated in Christian institutions, but which the modern Western state has integrated into new forms to maintain discipline and control. In schools, such techniques include surveillance, peers policing one another, increased governance between individuals, and the increase in the number of officials of pastoral power, like educators who monitor and “care” for students. Boler claims that emotions are prime sites for developing pastoral power because they are already discursively constructed as private, individualized, and under an individual’s self-control.

Boler (1999) explains that emotions are a primary medium through which we learn to internalize ideologies as commonsense truths: for example, children are taught not to “express their anger, not to question authority, and not to resist those who have power” (p. 32). These rules “are taught through differing forms of emotional discipline (shame, humiliation, etc., depending on gendered, racialized norms, for instance); depending on their gendered, raced, or social class standing children learn different rules regarding what emotional expressions are acceptable” (p. 32). In schools, covert, self-discipline has become favored over more overt forms of control and discipline. Boler claims that care has become the “the basis of pedagogical techniques designed to avoid problems with overt surveillance,” such as cost, time, and effort (p. 42). Although adult society and officials of pastoral power in schools do really want to provide caring environments for children, the discourse of care also masks other rationales. For example, to teach young people to police themselves is more cost-efficient than outfitting a school with more overt forms of surveillance and discipline. Boler argues that stringent emotional rules and pastoral power impacts girls more: emotional and sexual self-control has been assumed, implicitly, as proper
feminine behavior and girls are taught an entirely other order of emotional rules, designed to force them to take responsibility for the control of themselves and others.

In sum, the literature reviewed in this section demonstrates that popular images of Latina girls and Latina girls’ emotional and sexual experiences converge to function as forms of capital and convey race-class performances of femininity that are not deemed “age-appropriate” or aligned with the cultural capital of the dominant group in many school contexts. With discourses of care, schools strive to assimilate Latina girls and promote their achievement, while also sexualizing and disproportionately disciplining and regulating their social, emotional, and sexual experiences. As my next section will discuss, the policing of Latina girls’ social, emotional, and sexual experiences hinders their ability to critically analyze those experiences and recognize and pursue their own personal and academic desires. I suggest that girls’ group spaces may serve as one mechanism for allowing girls’ to collaboratively analyze their experiences and empower one another to develop critical emotional and sexual subjectivities that can bolster their personal and academic trajectories.

### IV. Youth, Psychological Processes, and Mental Wellness

**Emotional Intelligence, Understanding, and Regulation**

**Emotional Intelligence**

Ciarrochi, Chan, and Bajgar (2001) explain that emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive, understand, and manage emotions that one experiences and that others experience. Emotional intelligence is positively associated with a number of factors including identifying emotional experiences, perceived amount of social support, extent of satisfaction with
social support, and mood management behavior. Ciarrochi and colleagues found that females report being better at managing other’s emotions and perceiving emotions, but did not report being better at managing their own emotions (p. 1116). However, it could be that females underestimate their abilities to manage their emotions. The term “emotional intelligence,” which has been cultivated by many scholars, is powerful because it recognizes emotional skills and capacities as a form of intelligence and bridges the age-old division and hierarchy between masculine: reason, feminine: emotional. However, the term has also been used in tricky ways in popular K-12 educational discourses: often, charter schools which are staffed by white middle-class folks but serve low-income children of color, use the façade of teaching emotional intelligence skills to devalue the forms of cultural capital, funds of knowledge, and unique social experiences and historical contexts that students bring with them into the classroom.

**Emotional Understanding**

Similar to emotional intelligence, Southam- Gerow and Kendall (2002) explain that emotional understanding refers to knowledge of and about emotional processes (emotional states and regulation) or beliefs about how emotions work. One nuanced difference between emotional intelligence and emotional understanding, as defined by Southam & Kendall (2002), is that emotional understanding involves a conscious awareness of and knowledge about emotional processes, where as emotional intelligence may involve knowledges and practices that are not conscious. These authors explain that “emotion understanding includes recognition of emotion expression (i.e., facial and bodily) and knowledge about (a) the causes of their (and others’) emotions, (b) the cues for their (and others’) feelings, (c) multiple emotions, (d) methods of intentionally using emotion expression to communicate to others (or vice versa; e.g., display rules and hiding emotions), and (e) methods of coping with emotions (i.e., knowledge about emotion regulation)” (Southam-Gerow & Kendal, 2002, p. 200).
Emotional Regulation

Many popular discourses characterize adolescence as a hyper-emotional and dramatic phase of life. However, research does support that adolescents experience unique emotional processes and developmental moments. Silk, Steinberg and Morris (2003) explain that adolescence is an opportune time to explore processes and correlates of emotion regulation for several reasons. First, these authors say that “the transition through adolescence is accompanied by physical, psychological, and social transformations that elicit novel experiences of emotional arousal” and that adolescents experience more frequent and intense emotions than younger or older individuals (p. 1869). Second, these authors have found that many of the hormonal, neural, and cognitive systems that are thought to underlie processes related to the regulation of emotions appear to mature throughout the adolescent period. Finally, “the prevalence of various forms of psychopathology, including affective and behavioral disorders, increases dramatically during the adolescent period” (p. 1869).

An important shift in social and emotional functioning also occurs in adolescence: as adolescents strive for self-sufficiency and autonomy in all realms of their lives (including the emotional), they also make conscious efforts to regulate their own emotions, instead of relying on attachment figures when stressed, like they had formally done throughout childhood. Of course adolescents will rely on their parents to help them regulate their emotions, but they are also “rapidly developing alternative methods ranging from relying on peers to using internal cognitive strategies” (Allen & Miga, 2010, p. 186). Many scholars have agreed that emotional regulation can be described as extrinsic and intrinsic practices and processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying one’s emotional reactions in order to accomplish one’s goals. Southam-Gerow and Kendall (2001) explain that emotional regulation is the dynamic ordering and adjusting of emotional behavior, and not simply the restraint of emotional processes. For
instance, emotional regulation can include increasing emotional arousal (for example, getting “psyched” up for a competitive sporting event) or restraining emotional arousal. Additionally, these authors explain that emotional dysregulation is not necessarily the lack of regulation, but that regulation is operating in a dysfunctional manner. As this dissertation will show, cutting may be one example of emotional dysregulation: the girls I work with are using cutting to regulate their emotions, but this strategy of regulation is dysfunctional in that it can be unhealthy and maladaptive.

Southam-Gerow and Kendall explain that emotional expression (in face to face interactions, or, as I would argue, on social media) serves a regulatory purpose by signaling to others (and ourselves) our emotional states, and often leads to efforts by others to offer regulatory assistance and support in coping through an experience (2002). Often times, expressing emotions to one’s closest relatives, to one’s families can serve this important regulatory purpose and families can support adolescents in figuring out how to regulate their emotions. However, in some families, “little discussion about the labeling of emotion, the causes and consequences of emotion, and coping with emotional arousal ensues with the result that children have difficulty identifying their emotions, let alone expressing them in adaptive ways” (Zeman, Cassano, Perry-Parrish, & Stegall, 2006, p. 163). Some of the girls that I worked with complained that their parents and other adult allies “just didn't get it” and that they could not speak to them about emotions: this may be linked to difficulty in expressing and coping with their emotions in healthy and adaptive ways.

**Social Injuries, Racial Bullying and Microaggressions**

Allen, Scott, and Lewis (2013) explain that microaggressions are brief, verbal, behavioral, or environmental insults or indignities that represent hostile, marginalizing, derogatory, denigrating, or painful messages to people of color (or other oppressed social groups).
Nadal and colleagues (2011) delineate different types of microaggressions: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. I am not concerned as much with these author’s specific definitions of terms, but these conceptual differences do emphasize an important point: microaggressions can range from direct, verbal insults, such as “go back to where you came from”, to nonverbal communication which demeans one’s racial/ethnic heritage, to symbolic practices of exclusion. These authors emphasize that some research has been done on the topic of microaggressions in the K-12 environment (for example: zero-tolerance policies, academic tracking, and hegemonic/hidden curriculum), yet not much has been done on the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality with microaggressions (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013). This is important, because many of the microaggressions that my participants experience are at the intersections of race, ethnicity, immigrant status, gender, and sexuality.

Allen and colleagues (2013) argue that racial microaggressions “assault students’ psychological functioning through ‘everyday behavioral and environmental encounters with inferiority’” (p. 123). They explain that some scholars have found that although microaggressions are often unconscious, they may lead to mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, trauma, or issues with self-esteem. Similarly, Nadal and colleagues (2011) found that LGBT youth experienced both conscious and unconscious microaggressions, and both forms affected their mental health. Almost all of Nadal and colleagues’ LGB youth participants reported feeling distressed and experiencing a range of emotions (ranging from anger, frustration, and sadness to belittlement and hopelessness) immediately after enduring a microaggression, and these aggressions negatively impacted their abilities to be comfortable with their identities. Similarly, Huynh (2012) found that experiencing microaggressions was related experiencing depressive and somatic symptoms. For adolescents, who are developing critical thinking skills and an awareness of how power dynamics work in society, being able to recognize a microaggression (which often can happen in unconscious ways), let alone the way that microaggressions affect their well being,
is incredibly difficult. We need educators to provide scaffolding to support youth in
acknowledging what is wrong with microaggressions that they have endured or perpetrated, and
how they can affect their communities and individuals’ wellbeing.

**Latina Girls and Traumatic Stress**

As I will show in this dissertation, the girls that I have worked with experience many
layers of emotionality and stress: some of their experiences are representative of typical
adolescent stressors, while others represent more traumatic forms of stress and emotionality
related to living in poverty and to the immigrant experience. Although the girls technically live in
a suburban context, the downtown area of Marshall shares many characteristics with urban
environments and the girls I have worked with have experienced high rates of traumas and other
severe life stressors, similar to urban adolescent youth: “poverty, homelessness, social conflict,
interpersonal violence and victimization, unwanted pregnancy, sexual or physical abuse,
incarceration, loss of loved ones to injury or illness, and personal health threats” (Ickovics et al.,
2006, p. 841). Ickovics and colleagues (2006) emphasize that “adolescents may be particularly
vulnerable to these threats because of their developmental immaturity, lack of skills to resolve
conflicts, limited resources, and struggles for identity formation” (p. 841). These authors report
that “teens who experience trauma are at increased risk for emotional distress- posttraumatic
stress disorder, substance abuse and dependence, and major depressive episodes—compared with
young and middle-age adults”, and that girls are more vulnerable than boys to adverse mental
health consequences of such events (p. 841).

Suárez-Orozco & Todorova (2003) specifically examine the stressors that youth can
experience due to their experiences as an immigrant. These authors explain that “immigration is
one of the most stressful events a family can undergo”: immigrants must “learn new cultural
expectations” and a new language; they “are stripped of many of their significant relationships”,

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and; they “also lose the social roles that provided them with culturally scripted notions of how they fit into the world” (p. 20). These authors say that these experiences can make immigrants feel like they lack a sense of competence, control, and belonging, which can produce sensations of marginalization. Many youth experience confusing moments of family separation, whether they are separated from a parent temporarily, they lose a relative to deportation, or never again see a grandparent who remains in their country of origin. These “changes in relationships, contexts, and roles are highly disorienting and nearly inevitably lead to a keen sense of loss” (p. 21). Suárez-Orozco, Bang & Kim (2011) conducted a study which examined the psychological effects of migration and family separation: they compared youth who had not undergone family separations to youth whose families had separated through the migratory process, and they found “that those who arrived as a family unit were less likely to report depressive or anxiety symptoms than children whose families had separated” (p. 27).

**Cutting in Adolescence**

The participants that I have worked with often use “cutting” (their emic term) to regulate their emotional experiences that accompany forms and layers of trauma. Many scholars use different terms and definitions to describe cutting behaviors: cutting, self-mutilation, non-suicidal self injury, etc. In this dissertation I use the term cutting in order to authentically represent how my participants talk about, use, and construct this behavior. Definitions of cutting vary: some scholars describe self-mutilation as superficially scratching the skin due to cutting with a sharp object, while others claim that self-mutilation can vary in depth from superficial scratches to deep lacerations (Zila & Kiselica, 2001). Often, cutting on the wrists or forearms is most common, although researchers have also recorded cuts to the face or even genitals. The girls that I worked with most often cut their wrists, forearms, thighs, or stomachs (often girls used their thighs or stomachs to avoid parental detection). Researchers say that cutting instruments can range from
needles, fingernails, and food bones, to razors and knives (Zila & Kiselica, 2001). Girls that I have worked with have also used wire hangers. Often, cutting does not result in the need for immediate medical attention and many authors describe the typical self-mutilator as adolescent or young adult, female, single, usually from a middle- to upper- middleclass family, and intelligent (Zila & Kiselica, 2001).

Adolescent girls cut for a variety of reasons. Zila and Kiselica (2001) say that causes or motivations for cutting can include “ritual and symbolism, sex, regression, existential statement, manipulation, risk taking, attention seeking, retaliation, frustration, depression, tension relief, inappropriate communication, self-punishment, and low self-esteem (p. 48). These authors report that many scholars support the theory of tension relief as an explanation for cutting: this theory suggests that the act of cutting brings an “immediate diminution of tension that results in a relaxed state” and that this is a way for “those who lack more adaptive means to achieve psychological homeostasis” (p. 48). In this way, cutting is used to regulate emotions that are intense and intolerable. Thus, although self-mutilation is detrimental, it may serve a type of therapeutic or regulatory purpose for its participants. Zila and Kiselica (2001) explain that many scholars have found cutting to be “a highly effective form of adaptation, bringing immediate beneficial results and allowing the self-mutilator to again experience painful emotions” and “cathartic” for participants (p. 49).

Zila and Kiselica (2001) summarize that many studies indicate that “self-mutilation is often preceded by what the individual considers to be an emotional impasse or threat of abandonment or loss by a significant other, such as a breakup with a boyfriend or an argument with a parent”, while others “report overwhelming tension, frustration, depression, rejection, restlessness, and then ultimately numbness, emptiness, and total self-absorption and depersonalization” (p. 50). They claim that often, a key issues for young women who cut is usually a combination of “difficulty with verbalization and functioning from a false self” (p. 50).
These authors explain that due to these issues, a key goal of counseling for cutters is to provide a relationship and the scaffolding where girls can begin to practice using words to channel and process their intense emotions, rather than destructive and dangerous mutilation practices.

Relationships Between Suicide and Cutting

Many popular mental health discourses often link cutting with suicide, although that link is not accurate. Cutting is a volitional act to harm one’s own body, with the intention to seek relief and without the intention to end one’s life (Zila & Kiselica, 2001, p. 47). A suicide attempt, obviously, intends to end one’s life, and typically offers no such relief. National data shows that Hispanic/Latina girls have higher rates of cutting and suicide that other groups of girls, and although we should not confuse the two types of behaviors, these high rates do indicate that this population is managing many emotional stressors and probably not receiving appropriate emotional support. Nationally, one in five Hispanic girls attempts suicide; this is a higher rate than for their non-Hispanic peers (Zayas, Lester, Cabassa, & Fortuna, 2005). Zayas and colleagues (2005) explain that the 1995 CDC Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance (YRBS) survey showed that a “startling 21% of Hispanic girls between the ages of 14 and 17 years had attempted suicide in the previous 12 months, in comparison with 10.4% of non-Hispanic White and 10.8% of African American girls in the same age group” and that subsequent YRBS data showed little change (p. 276). Suicide attempts “do not appear to be confined to one or two Hispanic subgroups”: although older studies indicated that suicide attempts were a primarily Puerto Rican phenomenon, later studies have indicated increasing numbers of adolescent female attempters of Cuban, Dominican, Mexican, Nicaraguan, and other Hispanic subgroups (p. 276).

One problem related to our understandings of Latina girls’ experiences with mental health issues, emotional distress, cutting, and suicidal ideation and attempts is that few studies, much less qualitative or ethnographic studies, have examined cutting and the motivations for
cutting amongst adolescents (Lloyd-Richardson, Perrine, Dierker, & Kelley, 2007). A number of functions related to cutting are discussed in clinical literature, including: relieving “negative emotions, such as anxiety, guilt, loneliness, alienation or self-hatred”; relieving “unpleasant thoughts or feelings”; releasing “anger, tension or emotional pain”; providing “a sense of security or control”; to punish the self; setting boundaries with others, and; ending “depersonalization/derealization, flashbacks or racing thoughts” (p. 1184). It is important that the clinical literature has investigated and identified these functions, but we have little qualitative understanding of the social issues related to cutting, for example: how girls talk about and understand cutting; how girls learn to cut from their peers; how schools intervene in cutting incidents, and; what local, contextual factors contribute to girls’ motivations to cut in certain populations.

Zayas and colleagues (2005) have contributed one important study that links suicide attempts to a complex constellation of gendered values and factors implicated in the Latino cultural value of familism (which emphasizes maintenance of family cohesion, obligation and intense attachment to relatives, and primacy of the family in the individual’s self-identity and social world). These authors argue that cultural family traditions “socialize Hispanic women to be passive, demure, and hyperresponsible for family obligations, unity, and harmony” and that a girl’s perception of “causing a breach in family integrity may be a precondition for her suicide attempt” (p. 279). These authors also point to migration, acculturative stress, discrepant levels of acculturation, and Hispanic sociocultural factors as important elements in understanding Latina suicide attempts. This study is one clear example of the directions that we need future research to investigate, but specifically related to cutting behaviors.

Peer Groups as Resources for Wellness and Harm
In academic and popular discourses, we often link peer group influences and activities with risk behaviors. It is rare that we conceptualize adolescent peer relationships as a vital segment of an adolescent social support network or as important factors in adolescents’ development of emotional intelligences and understanding, critical consciousness, and subjectivities. This shapes how we respond to adolescents: “we rarely respond to adolescent risk behavior by shoring up or strengthening adolescents’ peer support network” (Stanton-Salazar & Urso Spina, 2005, p. 380). This dissertation aims to add nuance to our understandings of how peer groups can operate, especially with regard to social and emotional support, and how can peer support in homeplaces can be an important resource for positive youth development.

Stanton-Salazar & Urso Spina (2005) explain that in the appropriate spaces and conditions, adolescent peer groups and friendships can provide a rich context for developing adolescents’ emotional intelligence and mitigating the damaging effects of environmental stress on adolescent mental health. Adolescents “depend heavily on their friends for multiple forms of social support and for staying psychologically healthy” and adolescent friendships provide “mutual validation, occasional critical feedback, and often just an attentive and empathetic ear” (p. 388). Early peer relationships hold the potential for many psychological and developmental benefits, especially when the peers involved are “acting in an ‘emotionally intelligent’ manner, when relationships are principled, and when communicative competence is high” and “such benefits may be particularly crucial to adolescents living within resource-poor and problem-plagued environments” (p. 388).

Stanton-Salazar & Urso Spina (2005) argue that peer support can allow youth to learn the cultural principles of trust and support, foster school achievement in spite of many environmental stressors, buffer the effects of environmental stressors to protect mental health, and “enable the adolescent to develop relationship-based coping strategies that foster resiliency (entailing forms of emotional intelligence) rather than reinforce distress patterns and emotional defenses that
reflect an alienated character” (p. 411). These authors point out that the formation of supportive peer relationships requires a facilitating institutional context and supportive adult allies: young people need opportunities to interact in contexts where they can get to know and learn to trust one another. They claim that “enhancing the social support networks of low-status youth entails working with youth to co-create an institutional culture that not only fosters authentically supportive peer and adult mentoring relationships and networks but also addresses the ongoing manifestations of racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, capitalist imperialism, and neocolonialism, rooted as they are in the ways our society appropriates and distributes social and economic wealth and political power” (p. 413). Throughout my analysis chapters, I will imagine how we can create such institutional spaces, especially in girls groups, and I will examine how youth are organically engaging in this important peer work in the virtual worlds of social media.

Adolescence, Social Media, Wellness, and Positive Youth Development

Changing discourses

Debates regarding the impacts of media and technology on youth are changing. However, these debates have often served as a focus broader hopes and fears about social change. Certain discourses represent digital technology as threatening or destroying childhood, posing risks (pornography, online pedophiles, etc.), and holding responsibility for a variety of social ills (addiction, antisocial behavior, educational underachievement, etc.). In recent years though, certain scholars, practitioners, and parents have begun to advocate for technology as a liberating force for young people (part of the digital generation), which holds the possibility for them to create new and autonomous forms of communication and autonomy (Buckingham, 2008).

New Forms of Literacy
In this newer, more positive perspective, technology is seen as enriching youth’s communication, interaction, community, and forms of literacy. Some authors argue that it has produced new styles of more playful learning, which differ greatly from the traditional and authoritarian approach of education and teacher-centered learning, which go beyond the teacher-dominated, authoritarian approach of old style education. Buckingham and colleagues (2008) argue that technology provides new ways of constructing and performing identity and enables young people to relate to the world and to others in more powerful and creative ways. On social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, youth construct and fashion their identities and emotions through creative combinations of images and words, often nodding to their interpretations of cultural phenomena or current events. Additionally, new forms of social media provide youth with opportunities for consciousness raising and new avenues for activism and civic engagement and participation. Online interactions require specific skills in language and communication, the ability to “read” subtle nuanced cues, and an awareness of rules and etiquette in online spaces. Participation in social media provides youth with the safe opportunity to rehearse certain identities and skills.

Socialization, Communication, and Emotional Intelligence

Many researchers now argue that routine engagement in social media can benefit youth’s communication, social connection, and emotional and technical skills. Schurgin O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson (2011) emphasize that social media provides youth with the opportunities for regular, meaningful social connection. These authors reported that in 2011, “22% of teenagers log on to their favorite social media site more than 10 times a day, and more than half of adolescents log on to a social media site more than once a day. Seventy-five percent of teenagers now own cell phones, and 25% use them for social media, 54% use them for texting, and 24% use them for instant messaging” (p. 800). Thus, a large part of adolescent development is now occurring in
virtual spaces, which should direct researcher’s focus and methodological choices when examining developmental issues.

Schurgin O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson (2011) point out five key developmental benefits of social media usage:

1. Social media provides opportunities for community engagement through greater access to information about community issues or current news events and providing a platform for discussing and questioning such issues.

2. Social media can enhance individual and collective creativity through the development and sharing of artistic expressions, endeavors, and projects.

3. Social media can encourage the growth of ideas from the observation of, engagement with, or creation of blogs, podcasts, videos, and gaming sites.

4. Social media can expand one’s online connections through shared interests to include others from more diverse backgrounds, which can increase youth’s tolerance, respect, and awareness of more global issues.

5. Social media can foster of one’s individual identity and unique social and emotional skills.

Throughout my research, I have seen many girls reap these benefits of social media use, although they are often not consciously acknowledged or discussed. As I will discuss in the data analysis, my participants express their emotions, beliefs about romantic relationships and sexuality, and developing critiques of power dynamics in their social worlds in novel ways on Facebook and Instagram; in ways that they do not express these sentiments in face-to-face spaces. Researchers need to begin investigating these spaces with qualitative methods so that we know more about these developmental benefits and how to harness them for educational purposes.

**Concerns Related to Social Media**

Of course, adults do have real and legitimate concerns about youth social media use and researchers have accurate trepidations about conducting research in social media spaces. Schurgin
O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson (2011) explain that because of their “limited capacity for self-regulation and susceptibility to peer pressure, children and adolescents are at some risk as they navigate and experiment with social media” (p. 800). Research shows that there are “frequent online expressions of offline behaviors, such as bullying, clique-forming, and sexual experimentation, that have introduced problems such as cyberbullying, privacy issues, and ‘sexting’” (p. 800). Other problems that have been recognized are internet addiction and sleep deprivation. In the future, researchers and practitioners need to look at how to support youth and how to engage youth in supporting one another through such concerning issues related to online engagement.

One problem for youth and for researchers is the “invisible audience”. In *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media*, Buckingham and colleagues (2008) explain that “while we can visually detect most people who can overhear our speech in unmediated spaces, it is virtually impossible to ascertain all those who might run across our expressions in networked publics” (in this case, networked publics being social media spaces) (p. 125). For youth who often do not closely examine privacy settings, besides blocking parents and older relatives, the exposure to such a broad invisible audience can be dangerous. This has implications for researchers: ones that I certainly encountered and ethically grappled with in my research. Even though girls signed consent forms allowing me access to their social media pages, they often posted things that were concerning enough, that as a mandated reporter, I felt obligated to report. In those moments, it was hard to distinguish if they knew I would see their concerning post, and they had made the post as a purposeful cry for help, or if they had forgotten that I was a part of their invisible audience. Researchers need to continue grappling with these concepts and methodological-ethical dilemmas in order to figure out how to conduct ethical and reliable research on social media spaces as developmental spaces.
V. Girls’ Group Spaces, Feminist Pedagogies, and Critical Consciousness and Subjectivities

Latina girls in the United States confront unique challenges and opportunities as a function of living in what Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) calls the borderlands. Denner and Guzman (2006a) explain that Latina girls have the opportunity to critically examine “their cultural values and beliefs against the dominant mainstream U.S. culture and to create themselves as transcultural individuals” (p. 3). At the same time, however, Latina girls often must navigate challenges such as poverty, attendance at poor quality schools, limited neighborhood resources, the presence of few role models, and gender role attitudes. As previous sections of this review have demonstrated, Latina girls must also manage assimilationist pressures, sexualizing characterizations, and disciplinary regulation of their emotional and sexual lives within school spaces. Denner and Guzman explain that because of the limited amount of available research that focuses on the experiences of Latina girls, “there is little to guide teachers, adult allies, or parents on how to support Latina girls to help them succeed and to make positive contributions to their communities” (p. 1).

Recently, however, many scholars have begun discussing the potential of girls’ group spaces and feminist pedagogies for marginalized girls of color. First, because mainstream education often values white, middle class cultural capital, girls’ groups can serve as spaces that value culturally specific funds of knowledge and capital (González et al., 2005; Noguera, 2008) and as “homeplaces,” where girls can have “safe exchanges of ideas, intimate discussions of desire, and expressions of anger and frustration felt in response to the external world” (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006, p. 108). Having lead girls’ group for Latina middle school girls in Marshall for the past three years, I have observed how girls use the safety of girls’ group spaces to collaboratively analyze and support one another through challenging experiences. Thus, I use this section of the review to examine literatures on girls’ group spaces and how feminist pedagogies can be employed in such spaces to promote girls’ critical consciousness and subjectivities. I am
not interested in the efficacy of girls’ groups as interventions: rather, I examine these literatures in order to theorize the potential of girls’ groups as safe spaces that Latina girls can take leadership over, in which their cultural capital and funds of knowledge can be valued, and where they can collaboratively analyze their experiences and empower one another to embark upon self-directed futures.

**Homeplaces, Feminist Pedagogies, and Critical Consciousness**

Homeplaces as sites of resistance have been theorized by bell hooks (1990) and have been adopted by educational and developmental psychological scholars (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006; Pastor et al., 2007; Ward, 1996) who study adolescent girls and girls’ group spaces. hooks (1990) explains that throughout history, black women have succeeded in creating a space of safety and dignity in the home, while working and struggling within the larger context of racism and sexism (Asher, 2007). hooks (1990) says that,

> “Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one’s homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world” (hooks, 1990, p. 384).

hooks (1990) explains that black women could not learn to love or respect themselves on the outside, in the culture of white supremacy, and that it was on the inside, in the homeplace, that black women could grow, nurture their spirits, and resist. hooks says that although sexism has assigned women to the domain of the home, black women reclaimed this conventional role and expanded it to “include caring for one another, for children, for black men, in ways that elevated our spirits, that kept us from despair, that taught some of us to be revolutionaries able to struggle for freedom” (p. 385).
Janie Ward (1996) explains that homeplaces provide girls of color with the space to adopt strategies of resistance to “the realities of an oppressive, demeaning, and judgmental sociopolitical environment” (p. 95). Specifically, “resistance for liberation” offers solutions that serve to empower girls of color through “confirmation of positive self-conceptions, as well as strengthening connections to” their broader communities (p. 95). With this type of resistance, “truth telling that is liberating replaces negative critique with positive recognition”, which helps girls to “experience constructive, critical affirmation of the individual and the collective by encouraging” them to think critically about themselves and their places in the world around them (p. 95).

Jennifer Pastor and colleagues (2007) say that girls’ groups can “provide insular homeplaces where young women can begin to learn how to transform their isolated analyses and make the “personal political” with profound opportunities for development” (p. 92). These authors explain that young women are “hungry for an us”, searching for ways to trust and connect with other girls and women, to create their own homeplaces and engage in social critique and in activist experiences of social justice (p. 92). By developing relationships within the group that are characterized by trust, respect, and support, girls’ groups can cultivate environments where girls can explore their frustrations with the social world, values and ambitions and direct their energies towards liberating resistance and social justice within their communities (Banister & Leadbeater, 2007, p. 121).

**Feminist Pedagogies**

Homeplaces, and other educational spaces, can be enriched with feminist pedagogies. My conception of feminist pedagogy is largely inspired by bell hooks’s notion of teaching to transgress. hooks (1994) explains that to make a revolutionary feminist pedagogy, we need to relinquish traditional ways of teaching that reinforce domination. hooks employs and critiques
Freire’s (2007) notion of the banking system of education and the reproduction of hegemonic knowledge. hooks advocates for pedagogical practices that are inspired by anticolonial, critical, and feminist perspectives and says that the blend of these perspectives allows one to “enact pedagogical practices that engage directly both the concern for interrogating biases in curricula that reinscribe systems of domination (such as racism and sexism) while simultaneously providing new ways to teach diverse groups of students” (p. 10). hooks (1994) celebrates teaching that enables transgressions, a movement against and beyond boundaries, which makes education the practice of freedom (p. 12). She translates Freire’s (2007) concept of “conscientization” to meaning critical awareness and engagement in the classroom, encouraging every student to be an active participant (rather than a passive consumer) who acts and reflects upon the world in order to change it. In this way, feminist pedagogies include an awareness of race, sex, and class and acknowledge that learning and teaching involves sharing, confessing, and other emotional, passionate acts. This method of education encourages students and teachers to think critically about the self and identity in relation to one’s political circumstance and social world and this knowledge should lead them to live differently.

Chicana feminist, Francisca E. Godinez, claims that feminist pedagogy should build on young Mexican girls’ cultural foundations to form political and practical meanings about learning, knowing, teaching and power (S. A. Villenas et al., 2006). According to Godinez, it should include a frame of intersectionality which analyzes the experiences of subordination in the lives of young Mexicanas and thus, promote an ethical commitment to egalitarian social relations. Dolores Delgado Bernal (2006) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) describe mujerista pedagogy as a pedagogy which understands “that there are different positions of truth as it values dialogue, questioning, dialectical exchanges, lived experiences, a commitment to social justice, and recognition of multiple identities among Latinas” (p. 107). In this way, Chicana/Latina feminist education scholars have constructed “alternative modes of thought about educational research
centered on their subjectivity, agency, cultural memory, and knowledge” (p. 114). Finally, Gaby Weiner (1985) explains that feminist education must take into account the experiences of women and girls, and provide girls and women a sense of solidarity with other members of their sex and hence a female-based confidence and motivation.

**Critical Consciousness**

The theoretical roots of critical consciousness lie in Paulo Freire’s (2007) conception of liberatory pedagogy. Freire claims that the thinking subject exists in relation to others in the world and that critical consciousness involves a reflective awareness and analysis of the differences in power present in social relationships and institutions (Freire, 2007; Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). Such an engagement in the critical examination of the social world should foster a “reorientation of perspective towards a commitment to social justice” (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009, p. 783). The development of a critical consciousness is “both cognitive and affective and leads to engaged discourse, collaborative problem-solving, and a ‘rehumanization’ of human relationships” (p. 783).

Many feminists have discussed the potential power of feminist pedagogies that promote critical consciousness for women and girls. Asher (2007) explains that the achievement of critical consciousness may allow girls and women to resist domination, negotiate self-representation, and work towards transformation (p. 66). Nakkula and Toshalis (2006) explain that by creating safe spaces which nurture the development of critical consciousness, girls can have “safe exchanges of ideas, intimate discussions of desire, and expressions of anger and frustration felt in response to the external world” (p. 108). Pastor and colleagues (2007) claim that the development of a critical consciousness allows female youth to critically deconstruct “the messages floating in the culture about gender, race, sexuality, and class,” and to aid in the development of critical social, emotional, and sexual subjectivities (p. 89).
In sum, homeplaces provide girls’ of color with safe environments where they can question power dynamics in their social worlds, learn about the connections between the personal and the political, and develop self-love in the midst of adolescent uncertainty and oppressive, demeaning, and judgmental sociopolitical contexts (Ward, 1996). Within such spaces, adult allies and girls can engage in feminist pedagogical practice by collaboratively, thinking critically about the self and the social world and directing such analysis towards active, ethical commitments to egalitarian social relations. Engagement with such pedagogies in safe, girls’ group spaces should nurture girls’ critical consciousness that leads to engaged analysis and discourse on power relations, both in the girls’ group space and in their every day lives and interactions.

**Subjectivity in Adolescence**

A critical consciousness enables one to think critically about accepted ways of thinking and feeling and to learn to see how received ways of thinking and feeling serve to perpetuate existing structures of inequality (Freire, 2007a; Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). Subjectivity, on the other hand, is more centered on the self. Subjectivity refers to the capacity to be aware of one’s feelings, to conceive of oneself as the subject of one’s acts, and to experience a certain amount of control in relationships and actions (Code, 1993; Schalet, 2010; Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000). Although these terms have different meanings, girls’ subjectivity and critical consciousness reciprocally shape one another: as girls learn to think critically about the world, they also develop the ability to think critically about the self and one’s place in the social world. In this section, I argue that girls’ groups should aim to promote the development and nurturing of Latina girls’ critical subjectivities, especially sexual and emotional subjectivities, and I provide evidence from the literature for why critical sexual and emotional subjectivities are so important for girls’ personal and academic lives.
Sexual Subjectivity and Desire

Although sexuality develops throughout the lifetime, adolescence is a period when many individual and social factors converge to form the foundations of one’s sexual identity. Feminist scholarship on adolescent sexual subjectivity “has demonstrated a troubling lack of such subjectivity in girls, as evidenced by, among other things, their lack of pleasure and agency in sexual decision making and heterosexual relationships” (Schalet, 2010, p. 304). Amy Schalet (2010) explains that starting in the 1970s, feminist scholars started focusing on female sexual agency and subjectivity, referring to women’s capacity to “be aware of one’s sexual feelings, to enjoy sexual desire and pleasure, to conceive of oneself as the subject of one’s sexual acts, and to experience a certain amount of control in sexual relationships (p. 305). Most of this early work examined the experiences of adult heterosexual women and found that many adult women still saw sex as something that “just happened to them” (p. 305).

Lorena Garcia (Garcia, 2009) examines how Latina girls construct their sexual subjectivity within the context of their first sex experiences. In the girls’ narratives, they explain that two types of relationships are appropriate for virginity loss: those defined by love and those by a mutual sentiment of caring. These understandings of relationships shaped how girls’ made sense of their first sex experiences and how they negotiated sexual curiosity and safe sex with partners (p. 601). Garcia explains that “young women who positively described their first intercourse experience were often informed about matters such as their bodies, pleasure, and safe sex, whereas those who were not as informed communicated that they thought they “had no sexual choice” with regards to their first intercourse experience” (p. 603). Such gender based differences in power surfaced in the first sex experiences of Latina girls who did not discuss safe sex with their partners prior to sex, often because they were too nervous or embarrassed to do so. According to the narratives that Garcia collected and the research she reviews, positive sexual experiences, especially virginity loss, were related not only to knowledge about safe sex and
“guys”, but also about their own physical and emotional pleasure, desire, and well being” (p. 614).

Scholarship on girls’ sexual subjectivity has focused on desire in the past, arguing that desire is closely linked to the development of nonsexual agency: “awareness of their bodies and desires helps girls to develop a sense of mastery and ability to act on the world more generally, while girls with greater confidence in their individual talents and accomplishments are also better able to recognize their desires as independent from the interests and needs of boys” (Schalet, 2010, p. 305). Scholars have argued that feeling desire is a fundamental part of being oneself, connecting to other people, and recognizing sexual violation. Unfortunately, in home, school, and media spaces, girls are encouraged to objectify their bodies, rather than develop subjective knowledge of their bodies. Like Carol Gilligan (1982), Deborah Tolman (1994) explains that during adolescence, girls begin to be vulnerable to losing touch with their own thoughts and feelings and, in a culture which values “nice girls” and “good women”, learn that their own sexuality is problematic and dangerous, diverting them from the possibilities of desire (p. 324).

Michelle Fine (1997, 2006) has argued that the anti-sex rhetoric surrounding sex education does little to enhance the development of sexual responsibility, subjectivity, and desire in adolescents. Fine (1997) explains that within today's standard sex education program in many public school classrooms, we find: “(1) the authorized suppression of a discourse of female sexual desire; (2) the promotion of a discourse of female sexual victimization; and (3) the explicit privileging of married heterosexuality over other practices of sexuality” (p. 31). With this mode of education, young women continue to be taught to fear and resist exploring desire. In such a context, there is little possibility of their developing a sense of their own desires of a critique of gender or sexual arrangements” (p. 31). Fine (1997) roots this in the fact that public schools, historically, have been sites for identifying, civilizing, and containing that which is considered uncontrollable, and specifically, girls’ sexuality. Fine explains that four forms of anti-sex rhetoric
are found in schools: 1) sexuality, and especially adolescent heterosexuality, is associated with violence; 2) sexuality as victimization, which teaches adolescent females to fear potential male predators to which they are vulnerable; 3) sexuality as individual morality, which introduces explicit notions of sexual subjectivity for women and values women's sexual decision making, only if decisions are made for abstinence, and; 4) a discourse of desire, only a whisper within schools, which names desire, pleasure, or sexual entitlement for females, only with reminders of emotional, physical, moral, reproductive, or financial consequences.

These discourses prevent the adolescent female from reflecting on her sexuality and engaging in a genuine discourse of desire, which would enable her to explore what “feels good and bad, desirable and undesirable, grounded in experiences, needs, and limits” (Fine, 1997, p. 33). According to Fine, “such a discourse would release females from a position of receptivity, enable an analysis of the dialectics of victimization and pleasure, and would pose female adolescents as subjects of sexuality, initiators as well as negotiators” (p. 33). Fine emphasizes that the absence of a “discourse of desire, combined with the lack of analysis of the language of victimization, may actually retard the development of sexual subjectivity and responsibility in students” (p. 49). Girls most "at risk" of victimization through pregnancy, disease, violence, or harassment (girls of color in low-income contexts) are the most likely to be victimized by the absence of critical conversation in public schools.

The nurturing of girls’ critical, sexual subjectivities would enable them feel like they are more in control of sexual decision making, have positive, safe sexual experiences, be aware of and enjoy their own desires, and be able to recognize sexual violation. Schalet (2010) discusses many recommendations for bolstering girls’ sexual subjectivity, including: bolstering “girls’ nonsexual subjectivity and the economic and psychic resources they have available, for such strengths also facilitate girls’ awareness and control with regard to sexuality”; teach girls to “distinguish desire for sex from desire for love” and to “recognize the nature of their own sexual
desire and to make that desire a precondition for their sexual acts with a partner”, and; “teach girls to recognize gender oppression in society and in heterosexual romantic relationships” (p. 307). The safety of girls’ group spaces holds the potential to provide appropriate environments for working towards these aims and collaboratively developing critical consciousness and subjectivities that empower girls’ sexual lives.

**Emotional Subjectivity and Epistemology**

Most of the experiences my participants share involve sexual and emotional experiences. Thus, homeplaces for girls must not only work to nurture the development of critical sexual subjectivities, but critical emotional subjectivities as well. Although emotions have been theorized as irrational throughout history, feminist philosophers explain that emotions cannot be understood as simply “rational or irrational” and that understanding emotions allows us to explore the revealed space between ideology and internalized feeling (Boler, 1999). For instance, Megan Boler (1999) is interested in emotions as “they are embedded in culture and ideology, as embodied and situated” and her conceptualization “resonates with cognitive accounts of emotions that understand emotions and cognition as inextricably linked” (p. xx). Lutz and White explain that emotions are one “cultural idiom for dealing with the persistent problems of social relationship” (Lutz & White, 1986, p. 406). These authors explain that “the ideal aspect of emotion is embedded firmly in the real by virtue of the fact that emotional judgments are seen to require social validation or negotiation for their realization, thereby linking emotion with power and social structure” (p. 407). A critical, emotional subjectivity would acknowledge these relationships between emotion, power, and inequality.

Acknowledging the relationships between the emotional and the social allows for understanding emotions as powerful sources of knowledge and the basis of critical subjectivities.
Unfortunately, the marginalization of emotion has been part of a gender politics of “research in which detachment, objectivity and rationality have been valued, and implicitly masculinized, while engagement, subjectivity, passion and desire have been devalued, and frequently feminized” (Anderson & Smith, 2001, p. 7). Allison Jaggar (1997) argues that many classical epistemological theories regard emotions as disruptive, nonrational forces that need to be channeled or suppressed if knowledge is to be gained. Jaggar points out that subordinated individuals sometimes experience emotions that are conventionally deemed inappropriate, and she urges that these “outlaw emotions” may provide clues to unjust practices and oppressive conditions. When these emotions are shared or validated by other group members, they can become the basis of oppositional perceptions, norms, and values— in other words, the basis of critical social theory. Jaggar and other feminist demonstrate that emotions should be recognized as ways of knowing, being, and doing and we need to theorize how emotional epistemologies are produced and deployed and how adolescents girls, in the midst of a very emotional period in development, can use their emotions to develop critical subjectivities.

Megan Boler (1999) advocates for a feminist politics of emotions, which holds solutions for how emotions can be discussed and understood within educational spaces. A feminist politics of emotions is “a theory and practice that invites women to articulate and publically name their emotions, and to critically and collectively analyze these emotions not as “natural,” “private” occurrences but rather as rooted in social context and reflective of gendered roles” (Boler, 1999, p. 113). Such emotional epistemologies can teach students how to combine passionate response with critical analysis and to recognize that emotions shape identity and perceptions of identity. Feminist practices of consciousness-raising and feminist pedagogy can “powerfully reclaim emotions out of the (patriarchally enforced) private sphere and put emotions on the political and public map,” recognizing emotions as a site of political resistance (p. 113). A feminist politics of emotions is promising for nurturing middle school girls’ critical emotional subjectivities that
question and analyze their own emotions and how their emotions are rooted in their social context.

In conclusion, this section of the review has theorized the potential power of girls’ group spaces, or homeplaces, and emphasized that the safety of such spaces may enable girls’ to develop empowered, critical consciousness and sexual and emotional subjectivities. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Latina girls in Marshall and other similar sites must navigate unique challenges and opportunities: they manage the typical challenges of adolescence, while also serving as the first in their families to navigate middle school and American teen culture, making sense of their sexualization and social positioning in their school community, and developing understandings of the power dynamics in their social worlds and how to critique them. Girls’ groups can provide unique spaces for Latina girls to critically analyze such challenges and opportunities, as well as their social, emotional, and sexual experiences and their developing transcultural identities. The reviewed literature suggests that such spaces and feminist pedagogies can allow girls’ to empower each other to have social, emotional, and sexual experiences which are self-directed and desired and for educators and adult allies to best support their academic achievement and personal trajectories.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

In this dissertation, I will argue that my participants often feel like they have a lack of control of themselves (especially, their emotions) and in their families, schools, and communities. This is often a common sensation for adolescents: as youth, they only have certain levels of autonomy in family, school, and community spaces. However, for the girls I have worked with, this common, adolescent, lack of autonomy and control is compounded by many local, contextual factors, including: strict, gendered parental monitoring, circulating narratives and stereotypes that characterize Latina girls in negative ways, and local and global power dynamics which shape
their intimate and institutional relationships in ways that are not aligned with the girls’ desires or needs. The girls make sense of their social worlds, and their relative lack of control and autonomy in their social worlds, through their emotional responses to events and social phenomena.

Here I will discuss these key competencies and how I conceptualize their relationships to each other.

**Emotional Learning**

In this dissertation I use two terms to describe processes of emotional learning: *emotional artifacts* and *emotional integrators*. Social experiences produce emotional residue, which I conceptualize as emotional artifacts of social experiences. An example of an emotional artifact could be the sensation of shame that a girl experiences following her first sexual experience. How
girls feel, in response to social experiences, allows them to make sense of and meaning from their social experiences and allows them to make sense of themselves and their developing identities. I use the term emotional integrator to describe this function of emotions: how we feel allows us to make sense of things (ourselves, events, our social worlds) in particular ways. A related example of an emotional integrator could be that the sensation of shame that accompanies a first sexual experience, might encourage a girl to understand herself and her actions as “bad” and not living up to expectations of moral, Latina girlhood, set by values in her family, school, and community. There are few, qualitative, explorations of emotional learning within education studies. Education and psychological scholarship often examines relationships between emotions and learning with quantitative methods and concepts like emotional intelligence and emotional regulation. Additionally, much scholarship focuses on how experiences in early childhood and attachment with parents can shape emotional intelligence and regulation later in life. By examining how emotional artifacts and emotional integrators shape learning about the self and the social world, with qualitative methods, we will have new understandings about relationships between emotions, learning, and identity development in adolescence.

**Regulation**

In this dissertation, I look at three forms of regulation, in which different social actors are contesting control over a social environment, themselves, or other social actors. Often, these forms of regulation are related and can happen simultaneously.

- **Regulating the social environment and narratives that circulate in the social environment**: Again, the girls that I have worked with often feel like they do not have much control over their own decisions, actions, and reputations in family, school, and community spaces. In order to resist that lack of control, and to gain a sense of autonomy and self-determination, the girls often strive to regulate aspects of their social environment, like narratives regarding social identification, by pushing back against those narratives or creating new ones. In chapter four, I examine the social injuries that the girls endure, related to power structures in their social context and to their developing, transnational identities. Often, these
injuries are inflicted in indirect ways: one example is that girls often feel marginalized because they are aware of narratives that circulate throughout town that characterize Mexicans as drunks, illegal, and not belonging. Girls often try to regulate these narratives, and their impact in their social context, by offering counternarratives which position Mexicans as model community members, and Blacks as aiding in the destruction of the community.

- **Regulating the self:** As adolescents who are slowly gaining autonomy and not relying on their caregivers as much for support, the girls that I worked with are constantly regulating the self in a variety of ways. For example: they strive to regulate their emotions and distress to seek reprieve from pain through strategies like cutting or talking about emotions in online spaces; they regulate their speech and actions in social spaces in accordance with peer group norms and values, and; they regulate their behavior in school spaces in order to succeed academically. Specifically, in chapter five, I examine how the girls regulate their emotions and distress by seeking support on social media and by cutting. In chapter six, I examine how the regulation of other social actors, Latina girls, via gossip and rumors, also functions in self-regulation: by observing other girls be isolated and ostracized for certain sexual events and behaviors, girls self-regulate their own activities so as not to receive similar social punishment.

- **Regulating other social actors:** Throughout this dissertation, there are multiple examples of how certain social actors regulate other social actors. In chapter five, I point out that girls’ often try to regulate the emotional expressions and actions (like cutting) of other girls, by seeking the support of adults to intervene, when girls’ emotional actions or expressions (like, threatening to kill themselves) seem dangerous. Similarly, in that chapter, I examine how MMS staff envision their roles in helping students to regulate their emotions and persevere through distress. In chapter six, I examine how Latina girls strive to regulate (often through gossip, rumors, and other forms of social punishment) their Latina peer’s sexual actions, in order to maintain or co-create a moral and virginous representation of Latina youth, especially in comparison to Black girls. Additionally, I examine how and why educators often become involved in regulating the sexual activities of Latina girls.

**Resistance**

In this dissertation, I examine how girls enact resist towards myriad factors in their lives, including: strict, gendered parental and school discipline, racial micro-aggressions inflicted by their peers, and non-reciprocal sexual relationships (to name just a few factors/ experiences).

Girls often enact resistance in order to regulate or gain control over some negative or marginalizing factor in their lives, so it does not affect their self-concept or life trajectory.
negatively. Ward (2007) defines resistance as “the development of a critical consciousness that is invoked to counter the myriad distortions, mistruths, and misinformation perpetrated about the lives of black women and men, their families, and communities” (p. 246). Ward also views the affirmation of one’s self and cultural group as part of the resistance process. A strong tie to one’s cultural group not only instills confidence in youth of color, but also aids girls of color in resisting negative messages about different aspects of their identities (Collins, 1989; Ladner, 1971; Ward, 1990b). Resistance, as a developmental competency, also requires the knowledge of understanding when and how to effectively resist so that others seriously consider the voice and actions of adolescent girls of color.

- **Resistance for Survival:** As Ward (2007) explains, “resisting for survival” provides short-term solutions to experiences of discrimination and injustice by employing strategies that stem from anger, fear, or guilt. These strategies typically require that youth “toughen up, mask your feelings, disguise your thoughts, and whatever you do, never let them see you sweat” (Ward, 1996, p. 94). By adopting these types of strategies, youth distance themselves from the unjust event or situation instead of critically engaging with the problematic facets of the encounter.

- **Resistance for liberation:** Adolescent girls of color should learn not only how to view their experiences with a critical eye, but also learn how to strategically deploy actions of resistance that work toward the larger goal of dismantling the dominant power structures and practices in our society that exist in person-to-person interactions as well as in larger forums such as the media and institutional structures (for example, education and the law). This is not work to be done alone, of course, but with the ample support of developmental allies, such as older girls and women of color. These allies might be teachers, parents and siblings, or natural mentors encountered through formal and informal activities.

**Resilience**

As I show throughout the dissertation, Latina girls often experience multiple forms of marginalization and adversity, and therefore need to develop attitudes and behaviors that prevent them from internalizing these experiences. Throughout my data, I observed the girls persevering through multiple forms and moments of adversity, and yet, their resilience was often not
recognized or appreciated. Because the Latina girls I have worked with are often framed as “at-risk” and because their resilience is not acknowledged, I will strive to reframe those characterizations by tracing how the girls’ develop resilience and examining what resources allow the girls to enact resilience. Investigating this specific developmental competency with the girls’ experiences, will allow educators and adult allies to reach new understandings of how girls process and persevere through challenges and how to create nurturing educational spaces and relationships that support the development of resilience.

Smith and Carlson (1997) characterize resilience as “the presence of protective factors or processes that moderate the relationship between stress and risk, on the one hand, and coping or competence, on the other”. Beale Spencer and colleagues (1997) define resilience as the ability to utilize self-righting tendencies (avoiding or downplaying the importance of certain people, places, or activities) during sensitive periods or in response to negative feedback and explain that resilience is shaped by the phenomenological experience of race, gender, physical status, and many other factors. These conceptions of resilience involve two factors: 1) a risk or threat to development, and 2) adaptation success. These authors emphasize that resilience is not a static concept, but a dynamic one, since people’s lives and the threats to development they encounter are always changing. Zambrana and Zoppi (2002) explain that by nurturing resilience and hope in young girls of color, positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development are more likely to occur. I will argue that individuals should not be characterized as either resilient or not based on moments in their developmental trajectory: the development of resilience is a dynamic process, and resilience should not be conceptualized as a trait.

**Critical Consciousness**

The conceptual roots of critical consciousness are found in the work of the Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire (Freire, 2007a), who claimed that the thinking subject exists in
relation to others in the world and that critical consciousness involves a reflective awareness and analysis of the differences in power present in social relationships and institutions. Such an engagement in the critical examination of the social world should foster a “reorientation of perspective towards a commitment to social justice”. The development of a critical consciousness is “both cognitive and affective and leads to engaged discourse, collaborative problem-solving, and a ‘rehumanization’ of human relationships” (p. 783).

The notion of critical consciousness has been further developed within feminist and developmental literatures to specifically discuss how women and girls can develop such a consciousness to critique and respond to the power structures within their lives. Asher (2007) explains that the achievement of critical consciousness may allow girls and women to resist domination, negotiate self-representation, and work towards transformation. Nakkula and Toshalis (2006) explain that by creating safe spaces that nurture the development of critical consciousness, girls can have “safe exchanges of ideas, intimate discussions of desire, and expressions of anger and frustration felt in response to the external world” (p. 108). Furthermore, these types of spaces offer girls the opportunity to deconstruct “the messages floating in the culture about gender, race, sexuality, and class” (p. 108). Adolescent, Latina girls often experience multiple marginalities, cultural dissonance, and role confusion, which can prevent the development of a positive sense of identity. Developing the skills to critically question and analyze power relationships in the social world can empower adolescent girls of color to navigate these multiple marginalities and to not attribute marginalizing experiences to the self.

**Critical Consciousness as Mediating Competency**

As I have argued elsewhere (Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula, 2016), critical consciousness can mediate resistance, resilience, and regulation in a variety of ways. If girls **resist**, with a critical consciousness, their resistance (resistance for liberation) is aimed at
promoting long term, social change of oppressive structures and practices (instead of just resisting for survival, in an angry and reactive manner). If girls’ resilience is mediated by critical consciousness, they not only persevere through adversity, but they have the ability to analyze and challenge power laden social structures that produce the adversity they have experienced. If girls’ strategies of regulating (these strategies often involve resistance) their social environments, other social actors, and themselves are mediated by critical consciousness, then they will be critically aware of power dynamics which shape marginalizing issues and relationships in their lives and aim to challenge and change those power dynamics, issues, and relationships. Additionally, they will strive to employ regulatory methods and strategies (such as, resistance for liberation) that foster their resilience and promote long term social change in their worlds. Throughout this dissertation, I will examine these conceptual themes (emotional learning, regulation, resistance, and resilience), and I will point out where and how the presence or lack of a critical consciousness mediates these competencies.

CONCLUSION

This chapter began with the question: what roles do the social, emotional, and sexual experiences of Latina middle school girls in Marshall play in their identity development and experiences as students? Specifically, what roles do emotions play in how the girls make sense of these experiences and their identities? In order to answer this central question (and the sub-questions identified in my introduction), I examined five bodies of literature:

a) Youth social identification and adolescent identity development in diaspora contexts;

b) The educational experiences of Latina youth;

c) The regulation of girls’ social, emotional, and sexual lives in school;
Youth, psychological processes, and mental wellness;

Girls’ group spaces, feminist pedagogies, and critical consciousness and subjectivities.

I have also introduced seven key concepts that frame the ways in which I analyze my data:

a) Emotional learning
   1) Emotional artifacts
   2) Emotional integrators

b) Regulation

c) Resistance

d) Resilience

e) Critical Consciousness

Through my examination of these literatures and key concepts, I have demonstrated how scholars from a variety of disciplines envision the relationships between the social context of schooling, identity development and social identification, the regulation and experiences of girls of color in school spaces, and adolescent experiences related psychological processes and mental wellness. Examining these bodies of literature has allowed me to develop a rich account of the relevant experiences, challenges, and opportunities confronting Latina middle school girls in their intersecting academic and personal lives. Finally, I have turned to feminist literature to imagine the potential of girls’ group spaces as unique environments which can foster girls’ critical consciousness and subjectivities and allow them to self-direct their future trajectories. As I proceed through this dissertation, these framing theories, literatures, and concepts will guide my analysis.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Research Site

Marshall is a suburban, NLD town of 35,000 in the Northeastern U.S. that has only recently been populated by large numbers of Latinos, the majority of them Mexican. From 1990 to 20010 the percentage of residents of Mexican origin in Marshall grew from less that three to almost 30%. This rapid growth has drastically changed student demographics in Marshall schools: in 20 (1990-2010) years, the Latino population in the district has increased rapidly, from 2% to 28% (Wortham et al., 2009). Today, 36.7% of students in the district are Latino and Latino students comprise the largest demographic group in the district. Currently, 12.4% of the district’s students are identified as English as a Second Language (ESL) students, and 78.5% are classified as low-income students. At MMS, 35.2% of students are Latino, 32.5% are black, 23.4% are white, and 8.9% identify as belonging to some other racial or ethnic group (D. Borgo, personal communication, February 8, 2016).

While technically a suburban community, downtown Marshall has the population density of an urban area, as well as neighborhoods that are more racially integrated than in most cities. Although surrounded by affluent suburbs, it is one of the poorest towns in the county and shares many challenges with large, urban centers. White residents are the dominant group in the affluent suburbs, while Blacks and Latinos comprise the majority of the down town area. Black and Latino residents frequently live in close proximity, often in narrow row homes. Sometimes this racial mixing is positive, while at other times it fuels narratives about racial difference. While there are intense racial tensions to between Black and Latino community members, White residents are fairly welcoming to Mexican residents. Due to a history of Irish and Italian immigration, but a lack of a traditional Latino presence, residents are more open to Latino
migrants because of an assumed shared experience of immigration and less resources for residents to call upon to make sense of Latino immigrants.

The main drag in Marshall is called Marshall Street. Although the street once represented economic downturn, Mexican businesses and restaurants have revitalized the area. There are non-profits in town, and some on Marshall Street, which specifically work to support the Latino population. Row homes surround Marshall Street. Beyond conducting participant observation in MMS and the girls’ group space, I also conducted ethnographic observations in downtown Marshall, while walking around with my participants, in Mexican restaurants, in nail salons, in non-profit spaces, and in girls’ houses. When I visited girls’ homes, I found that they often lived in apartments in divided row homes, often squeezing an entire family or more into a small, one bedroom apartment unit.

**Forming the Girls’ Group and Building Relationships**

My advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Stanton Wortham, has conducted research in Marshall for over a decade and has partnered with the Marshall District and many community organizations for many of his research projects. Dr. Wortham provided me entrée to the district in the fall of 2011, and I immediately began developing relationships with the administrative, counseling, and teaching staff of MMS and the Marshall School District ESL coordinator and the social worker. I also worked to develop relationships with Latino/a community leaders, activists, and health care providers. I led a summer session of girls’ groups at Arts Org, a local non-profit that serves Latinos, and partnered with Arts Org and Planned Parenthood to provide sexual health workshops for Latina girls in Marshall in 2013. I built close relationships with two staff members at Marshall’s Planned Parenthood who were Liaisons to the Latino Community. These staff members came into the MMS girls’ groups multiple times to facilitate sessions on sexual and reproductive health, self-esteem and healthy relationships. As I will discuss in chapter five, both
of these women were also children of Mexican immigrants, and I often turned to them for support when navigating tricky situations at the intersections of Mexican cultural practices and sexuality. I built these relationships with adults in the community as I worked with MMS staff and Latina students to form the MMS girls’ group. These relationships allowed me to better understand girl, family, school, and community perspectives on the issues I examined.

The evolution of the girls’ group was a collaborative effort between the staff, the group members, and myself; the staff recruited girls and helped me design the logistical structure of the group, the girls selected discussion themes, and I created activities and facilitated all group meetings. Although I was the adult facilitator, the group was very student-centered. At the beginning of each group session, I asked the girls what the most important and challenging issues in their lives were, and the girls brainstormed and chose the topics they wanted to discuss. Each group meeting was comprised of discussion and simple activities taken from various girls’ group and counseling curricula. During each meeting, we engaged with one theme that the group members suggested. The themes included: “drama” with girls, sexuality, engaging in healthy relationships with boys, self-esteem, body image, racism, dealing with sexual harassment, loss, family, and setting positive personal and academic goals. I will further discuss how the girls’ group operated in a future section of this methods chapter.

After months of planning in fall 2011, and consulting with MMS staff and scholars who have experience in creating and facilitating girls’ groups, the first session of groups began in January 2012. From January 2012- June 2015, I ran sessions of girls’ groups. Each group meeting lasted for one hour after school, one day a week, and each group was comprised of 8-12 girls. I held multiple sessions of girls’ groups, with membership changing as girls moved districts, became involved with other after school activities, etc. MMS is fortunate enough to have an “after school bus,” often called “the 4:15 PM bus,” which transports students from their after
school activities to their homes and neighborhoods. The girls’ groups would not have been possible without that resource.

In the first year of the groups, I lead two groups: one comprised of fifth and sixth graders and one comprised of seventh and eighth graders. In the academic year of 2012-2013, I decided to separate the groups and ran them on an alternating, bi-weekly schedule: fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth graders each had their own groups. In the 2013-2014 academic year, I accepted my last group of fifth graders, and decided that from fall 2013 to June 2015, I would aim to focus on and work with older girls (since I observed more critically conscious conversations with girls later in middle school). In the 2014-2015 academic year, I only ran groups for 7th and 8th graders, in order to limit the number of participants that I was focusing on. Over the course of the past five years, I have worked with 70 Latina girls. All of the girls in the groups are Latina and the vast majority of them are Mexican immigrants, 1.5 or second generation.

Throughout these group meetings and discussions, I observed that girls constantly reflected upon and analyzed their social, emotional, and sexual experiences and how those experiences related to their developing concept of self and schooling. Observing these patterns led me to center my research focus on what roles the social, emotional, and sexual experiences of Latina middle school girls in Marshall play in their developing identities and experiences as students. I did not aim to measure the efficacy or impact of the girls’ group and I did not conceptualize of the group as an “intervention”; rather, the girls’ group was a space for the girls to collaboratively analyze their experiences and developing identities and subjectivities and to provide me with insight into how girls understand themselves and their social worlds.

This girls’ group space allowed me to build relationships with the girls outside of the girls’ group as well. I frequently met with Latina MMS girls during lunch times to hold informal meetings and conduct informal and relaxed focus-group-like conversations. In January 2013, I began to meet with 9th grade girls (who were 8th grade MMS girls’ group members in the spring
semester of 2012) after school (bimonthly) to talk about their experiences in high school. However, the high school staff could not find physical space for me to run a high school girls’ group in, so these meetings gradually fizzled out and I never initiated a high school girls’ group, although I maintained relationships with many girls after they transitioned to high school. My work inside and outside of girls’ group meetings has allowed me to build close relationships to many Latina girls and their families. For instance, I became a godmother to two girls’ group members through their quinceañeras, and built relationships with their family members. Although the girls I worked with often preferred to speak English (and, as a result, my Spanish language skills have rusted significantly) my Spanish language proficiency, developed through undergraduate work, a three-month study abroad experience in Spain (2007), and ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Mexico (2008), allowed me to communicate and form relationships with Latina girls’ family members.

**Participant Selection**

In the fall of 2011, MMS staff recruited Latina girls who they thought would benefit from the girls’ group: most of the selected girls had repeated disciplinary issues related to conflict with peers or teachers, self-harm, or sexuality. Some girls were described as needing to increase their self-esteem or assertiveness and were recommended for the group for those reasons. In this way, the MMS staff and I engaged in “purposeful selection” in order to deliberately examine cases that are relevant to the issues and theories that we were interested in (Maxwell, 2005, p. 90). After the first session of girls’ groups in the spring semester of 2012, the girls’ group gained a positive reputation and Latina girls who were not directly recruited wanted to sign up. Members often told their friends about it, who would then sign up. In this way, many girls were “recruited” through “snowball sampling”, where current group members help to recruit future group members (Weiss, 1994).
Latino students at Marshall Middle School students at the present moment are, mostly, part of the 1.75 and 2.0 generation. Rumbaut (2004) calls immigrants who come to the U.S. between 0-5 years old the 1.75 generation, since they share much in common with U.S. born children of immigrant parents (the 2.0 generation) in that they “retain virtually no memory of their country of birth, were too young to go to school in the parental language in the home country (and typically learn English without an accent)” (p. 1167). I refer to the girls as Latino, instead of Mexican, because not all of the girls identify as Mexican and many girls have one parent that is from Mexico and another parent from a different Latino country in Central America.

From the greater pool of the 70 participants that I worked with, this dissertation closely focuses on the experiences of 39, 1.75 and second-generation, Latina adolescent girls in Marshall. These 39 girls were selected, or self-selected, because we developed close, trusting relationships with each other and they expressed continual interest in working with me and participating in the girls’ group and my study. Of these 39 girls, only 10 girls, who are all in eighth grade, are still in MMS in the 2015-2016 year. The remaining 29 girls are in Marshall High School or have dropped out of school. We maintain connections via texting and social media, and I occasionally schedule social visits with the girls (we will go to a restaurant or to shop or get our nails done) in Marshall. My focused data collection year was the academic year of 2014-2015. In that year, I concentrated on the group of 8th graders that I was working with (although I was also leading a group for 7th graders), because they expressed interest in collaboratively examining the themes that my dissertation was examining: with those 8th graders, I conducted group and individual semi-structured interviews about the themes that my dissertation focuses on.

**Girls’ Group: A Participatory-Ethnographic Space**

**Girls’ Group Activities and Membership**
Between January 2012 and June 2015, I ran multiple, semester and summer long sessions of girls’ groups for 5th-8th grade Latina girls. During the school year, we met in the MMS library, after school. At the beginning of each session, the girls would brainstorm topics that they wanted to discuss on a large easel paper. We would also jot down the group norms and rules that we thought would be productive for the group. From these topics, we determined a thematic schedule for the upcoming semester. For each topic, I examined different girls’ group curricula that I had access to, to get and adapt activities that the girls could do around various topics. I often drafted a series of questions for us to talk about as a group. When I brought in more rigid activities, the girls commonly would signal that they did not want to do the activity, by not participating, and talking amongst themselves about the topic at hand. For instance, I often tried to encourage the girls to journal about various topics, and instead of writing anything, they would begin talking to each other, but about the topic for that meeting. Quickly, I became very flexible and followed their lead: I was not tied to the activities that I brought in; rather, I wanted to use them as discussion starters.

Sometimes, “drama” would arise between group meetings. I worked with this “drama” in different ways, based on the type of drama, how recent the conflict was, and who was involved. Sometimes, if different sub-groups of girls were experiencing “drama” with each other, I would allow them to work in different spaces in the library. Other times, if it felt right, I would encourage us all to discuss the drama and resolve it. Again, I followed the girls’ lead in these types of situations, and often did not push the girls to resolve their issues if their anger and frustration levels were high.

Most girls’ group members had 100% attendance at girls’ group meetings (unless they had to take care of sibling or go to a doctor’s appointment, for example). If I was ever late or had to miss a meeting due to campus activities, the girls would express their disappointment. The girls had created a space that functioned as a cultural resource, where they found a greater level of
autonomy than they did in other spaces, and they looked forward to staying after school and
meeting with me and their friends. Often, girls would take pictures of all of us in the library and
post them on Facebook with positive captions, such as, “I miss Latina girls club”.

Our group never developed a more creative title for the girls’ group. Administrators
called the group a variety of things: one ESL coordinator called it the “pregnancy and self-esteem
initiative”; a librarian called it the “Latin girls group”; and most of the girls called it the “Latina
girls’ group/ club”. I often asked the girls what we should call the group, and they often
responded with silly, giggly answers, such as, “the Mexicans” or “the crazy girls”. When
considering how the group functioned, it is important to consider my positionality.

Researcher Positionality

As a white, mid-twenties, middle-class woman conducting research with Latina,
adolescent girls in low-income contexts, I often carefully considered my positionality. My racial
identity was not always obvious to the girls due to my dark hair and complexion: for instance,
after knowing me for two years, one seventh grader once explained to another girl that I was
Puerto Rican, and I had to correct her. I acted in a way that was authentic to myself and my
beliefs, and often expressed critical views about White, conservative folks, like certain groups of
people that I had grown up with in Ohio who held racist/ classist/ anti-immigrant/ etc. beliefs.
Knowing that I had such critical views, I think allowed the girls to talk about race with more
freedom and comfort, although they sometimes would preface a comment about White or Black
people with the phrase “I don’t mean to be racist.”

In the group space, I was not authoritarian (unless the girls were loud enough to
disrupt others or were doing something that appeared to be dangerous to their heath (like
cartwheels in the library)), and I let girls use whatever language they wanted, whether that was
Spanish, English, or even an array of curse words. Girls appreciated this lack of discipline, and as
I will discuss further in my conclusion, I believe that my non-authoritative nature allowed us to grow closer as a group and provided me with greater access to data on sensitive topics that girls would not tell other adults.

Most of the staff at MMS is my age (I am now 28 years old) or older, white, and middle class. I tried to distance myself from the MMS staff, because I did not want girls to view me as friends with their teachers or as a person who would potentially “snitch” on them. When girls’ were critical of their teachers, I was empathetic and often echoed their critical opinions (if I thought their were fair), which I think allowed the girls to believe that I was “on their side”.

Similarly, I distanced myself from the girls’ families for similar reasons. The girls that I worked with had many adult, female figures in their lives (aunts, god mothers, etc.), and most of these women were close with their mothers and often surveilled the girls and reported their behavior back to their mothers. Again, I wanted the girls to know that I was committed to being their ally, and protecting the information that they divulged to me (unless I was mandated to report something).

Being a mandated reporter did complicate my relationships with the girls. At the beginning of every session, I reminded the girls of my mandated reporting status and gave them examples of scenarios that I would have to report. Often, they told me that they were thinking about telling me something, but did not want to “get in trouble”. When I heard comments like this, I usually checked in with the school clinical social worker, who often reassured me that unless the girls told me something specific, there was not much that I could do or report. Girls often did divulge that they were cutting or experiencing abuse or depression, and although I feared that reporting would compromise their trust in the future, reporting rarely damaged my relationships with girls. In fact, it often strengthened our relationships. This communicated to me that girls were hungry for the safety of girls’ group spaces and allies that they could confide in when they were ready to cry for help.
Participant Observation

In order to observe the relationships between girls’ social, emotional, sexual, and educational experiences, I conducted participant observation in a variety of spaces. First, I conducted participant observation in the girls’ group space, and when I was not actively facilitating a meeting, I was jotting down field notes or audio recording the girls’ discussions. After meetings, I would expand the fieldnotes with detail. Capturing fieldnotes in such a participatory, ethnographic space was difficult and in the future, I want to engage in thinking about methodological implications of existing as a researcher in such a participatory, ethnographic space.

I also conducted observations within MMS classrooms and social spaces. In 2014-2015, I conducted regular, weekly observations in the 8th grade girls’ math, science, and social studies classrooms. Although I originally wanted to conduct observations in ESL and mainstream classes, I did not have participants who were in ESL classes in 2014-2015, and so I did not observe in ESL spaces, although I did observe push-in models of ESL in the mainstream classrooms that I observed. These observations will also provided me with insight into how the girls are situated within the larger context of the school and school peer subcultures.

I also conducted observations in girls’ houses, neighborhoods and other social spaces (the mall, fast food establishments, etc.), allowing me to examine the lessons that girls receive from their families and peers about their social, emotional, and sexual experiences, and how girls analyze these experiences in out-of-school environments. These observations also allowed me to understand how the girls, typically under strict parental surveillance, arrange meetings with boys and negotiate the social, emotional, and sexual events which often lead to disciplinary intervention.
**Interviews**

I conducted semi-structured, individual and group interviews with Latina girls and structured interviews with MMS staff (see Appendix A). Although I documented (either through fieldnotes or audio recordings) a number of informal, yet interview-like, conversations with MMS staff and Latina girls, I conducted formal interviews with 10 Latina, 8th grade girls, and five MMS staff members (two administrators, one counselor, one clinical social worker, and one teacher). These interviews ranged from 30 minutes to two hours.

Because “qualitative interviews regularly bring the ordinarily private into view,” and because I am a mandated reporter, I had to be prepared to report incidents of abuse or self-harm that come up in interviews with the girls (Weiss, 1994, p. 121). In my preliminary work, I worked with MMS staff to navigate the appropriate channels of reporting and accompanied girls as they went through the reporting process of self-harm and sexual abuse with counselors, community liaisons, and social workers. Again, these events produced many important questions about doing ethnographic work with youth and how to handle such ethical issues related to mandated reporting: I hope to engage in thinking about these ethical and methodological issues in my future work.

Conducting interviews with the girls and facilitating girls’ meetings at the same time was an iterative and productive process. Interviews, and common issues that arose in interviews with multiple girls, allowed me to identify issues that needed further exploration. I often used the girls’ group space (sometimes for an entire meeting, and other times, for just part of a meeting) as an informal focus group, where I could ask the girls, as a group, what they thought about a specific issue. These focus-group-like conversations allowed me to also observe “intersubjective performances of self, distancing from, projections onto and alliances and confrontations with others” (Fine & Sirin, 2007, p. 29).
I employed structured interview techniques with MMS educators and asked them about their work with and concerns about Latina girls and how they position them as learners, girls, and Latinas. I will interview the two ESL teachers, two counselors, two administrators and two classroom teachers from each grade at MMS. These interviews helped to illuminate how Latina girls and MMS staff understand and position one another. To supplement these interviews with staff, I gathered “material” evidence (electronic and hard copy documents) of the moral panic surrounding Latina girls at MMS. These documents included disciplinary policies and forms and emails sent to me and other staff members regarding events involving Latina girls.

Social Media Analysis

Early on in my fieldwork, girls frequently asked me to be their Facebook or Instagram friend. At first, I consistently, but politely, rejected their requests because such virtual friendship seemed inappropriate or unethical. However, I realized that these virtual, social worlds are significant developmental spaces and where the girls often engage with social, emotional, and sexual content. In 2014, I gained IRB approval to follow the girls on social media (including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Kik, although I predominantly used Facebook and Instagram) and began accepting their friendship requests. Entering this kind of world can unearth a different set of ethical issues. In order to navigate such issues appropriately, I did not request girls as friends on these sites, but I did accept their requests. Whenever a girl requested my friendship, I spoke with her in person about what “becoming friends” with me meant: I explained that I would be doing social media research and, if she consented, I may be screen-shotting any of her posts at a given time. I also had the girls and their parents sign additional consent forms, once I gained IRB approval and began engaging in this research. As a mandated reporter, I also clarified to them that I had to report posts or pictures which represented signs of self-harm, abuse, or threats towards others to the appropriate school channels. This type of transparency allowed
the girls to make informed decisions about their consent to participate with me in these virtual worlds.

Girls often represent their identities, express their feelings and ideas about issues, and build relationships with others on Facebook and Instagram through posts, comments on images, or comments on friends’ walls. I examined these posts to understand girls’ and beliefs about identity, race, nationality, immigration politics, and social, emotional, and sexual experiences and I analyzed how girls employ social media to communicate their ideas and emotions and with each other and perform collaborative social critique (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012). Boellstorff and colleagues (2012), claim that examining social media activity in this way is a type of participation observation: ethnographers “step into the social frame in which an activity takes place,” and in this case, the social frame is a virtual world (p. 203).

As a participant observer in the virtual worlds of Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Kik, I participated by commenting on or “liking” the girls’ posts that naturally came up in my facebook “newsfeed” or instagram scroll and responding to the private messages that they sent me. Because the forms of media that youth use and value most often change quickly, I stayed attuned to girls’ comments about the forms of media that they use. Furthermore, during the girls’ groups sessions that I facilitated, we usually spent one session talking about social media. During this session I asked the girls what forms of media they were using in order to ensure that I had an up-to-date awareness of the forms of media that I should be observing. Using the girls’ groups in this way, also allowed me to understand social media usage differences between grades and different groups of girls.

I conducted observations in these virtual worlds by taking fieldnotes and screenshots of posts, pictures, and conversations that were relevant to the themes of my project. Boellstorff and colleagues claim that these virtual artifacts, screenshots, “can be incredibly rich data points as a source of in-depth analysis when used in the context of other materials” (p. 337). Besides taking
fieldnotes and capturing screenshots of the virtual artifacts that came up in my personal account feeds, I frequently, systematically went through the participating girls’ posts (on their Facebook or Instagram timeline) once per week and took fieldnotes and screenshots of the artifacts representing themes relevant to my research questions.

**Youth Co-Research**

The MMS girls’ group sessions functioned as “contact zones”: participatory research endeavors between youth and adults across “different racial, ethnic, and social class backgrounds,” who collaboratively “investigate the contours of exclusions, oppression, and violations of dignity and to generate strategies for youth-based resistance and possibility” (Fine & Sirin, 2007; Ravitch & Riggan, 2012, p. 54). The group activities and discussion themes were determined by what the girls expressed was the most important to their lives or what they found the most challenging or frustrating in their social worlds. My research objectives are in line with what the girls think is significant in their lives, as my research interests have evolved according to the topics they talk about with the most frequency and fervor. In line with my feminist methodological orientation, Fine and Sirin (2007) explain that participatory research rests “on the assumption that social research should be sculpted through the knowledge carried by young people and adults most intimately affected by injustice and struggle” (p. 8-9). In order to achieve this type of knowledge production, I aimed to call upon the girls’ heterogeneous standpoints (Collins, 1991). Throughout dissertation research, I involved group members, at different times and in different spaces, as Youth Co-Researchers (YCRs). YCR methods emphasize that youth are holders, constructors, and negotiators of knowledge surrounding their experiences (Knight, Dixon, Norton, & Bentley, 2006, p. 44) and as YCRs, the girls helped me “refine the research questions, articulate the design and methods, and think about the ethics of research on/with politically vulnerable young people” (Fine & Sirin, 2007, p. 61). I frequently asked the girls to
help me think through preliminary conclusions and contradictions in my analysis and older girls often helped me to work through ethical issues that I was facing with younger girls (of course, I never divulged identifying information to girls when seeking their support and expertise in specific situations). I do not think of this work as youth participatory action research because the girls did not want to take on formal research roles or create research questions; rather, they were expert consultants who helped to ensure the accuracy and validity of my analysis.

**Data Analysis**

Hammersley and Atkinson (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) emphasize the importance of a “dialectical interaction between data collection and data analysis” (p. 205). I adopt Hammersley and Atkinson’s (2007) concept of “grounded theorizing” which treats analysis of data “as not a distinct stage of research [but something that] begins in the pre-fieldwork phase, in the formulation and clarification of research problems, and continues through the process of writing reports, articles and books” (158). Thus, my original research design and plans for analysis were informed and adapted by early findings while in the field and by my youth co-researchers’ recommendations.

**Interviews, Audio Recordings, and Transcription**

For data analysis, I used Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software. I originally tried using Dedoose qualitative analysis software, but Dedoose failed to successfully load accessible audio recordings of girls’ group meetings, and social media fieldnotes. After months of frustrating problem solving attempts with Dedoose support staff,, I unsubscribed from Dedoose, moved my data to Atlas.ti and began re-coding my data. My database is now comprised of 300 documents, including fieldnotes, audio recordings, transcripts, and social media fieldnotes.
Atlas.ti allows for very user-friendly and simple coding of audio recordings. I did not transcribe audio recordings of girls’ group meetings, but I did code those audio recordings in my database. I hired and paid a transcriber, from the online site Upwork, to transcribe my individual interviews with Latina girls and MMS staff. The transcriber and I shared a password-protected dropbox file, which contained the audio recordings and, as the transcriber completed them, the transcripts. Once the transcription was completed, I unshared the dropbox folder with the transcriber. Once the transcriptions were complete, I loaded the transcripts into Atlas.ti and coded the transcripts, as I listened to the audio recording of the interview. Later in my data analysis process, I thematically re-examined the Latina girls’ transcripts outside of Atlas.ti. I re-read each girl’s transcript and copied and pasted relevant chunks of interviews into thematic word documents, such as “cutting”, “first sexual experience”, or “racism in school”, so that I could easily access data that I knew that I wanted to use for different parts of my dissertation.

Coding

Like I stated previously, fieldnotes from girls’ group meetings and participant observation, audio recordings of group sessions, interview and focus group transcripts, and facebook fieldnotes (screen shots of posts on facebook) provided for triangulation and were analyzed with Atlas.ti data analysis software. Data were held on my password-protected laptop and names were not identified in fieldnotes, transcripts, etc. Before I coded and while I was coding, I developed organizational, descriptive/substantive, and theoretical/analytic codes and I will examined how these codes co-occur and deductively detected patterns for analysis (Maxwell, 2005, p. 97). Throughout my research process, I also had access to my research team’s Atlas.ti database, which contains ten years worth (almost 700 documents) of ethnographic data from various projects in Marshall, and which is stored on a secure server in a protected lab in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. I was able to use this data for
greater context on the history of Marshall and how schools have responded to new Latino students across the district. As I coded, I jotted down notes and identified themes that I wanted to write memos about.

Memos

As I code, I looked for emergent themes and concepts, which I will reflected upon and summarize in memos. Between December 2014 and December 2015, I wrote 40 analytical memos, which I kept in a secure file on my laptop. In these memos, I analyzed and wrote about specific pieces of data or themes that I found interesting. Although this process was constant and laborious, this commitment to writing about interesting data and themes allowed me to make great analytical process and connect themes that I originally had not viewed as connected. From these memos, I identified the central, and connected themes that I wanted to explore in my dissertation, and throughout the summer of 2015, I drafted multiple outlines, including data and analysis, for each of my analysis chapters.

Social Media Data Analysis

The analysis and representation of social media “fieldnotes” (screenshots of posts, online conversations, and online comments) has been complicated. It was important that my social media data was complimented by ethnographic data from face-to-face spaces: for instance, when I analyzed social media images, comments, or conversations, I was able to analyze that content with great knowledge about the girl who posted that image and her experiences related to the image she posted or comments she was making. Sometimes, I would take a screenshot of the image, paste that into a word document, memo about the social media artifact in that word document, and then upload that word document to Atlas.ti. If I saw something that I did not understand, I often asked the poster about the post in the next girls’ group meeting to get
clarification. Unfortunately, I sometimes saw posts related to self-harm and suicide that I had to report to counseling staff at MMS. As a part of the social media consent process, I was transparent about these reporting responsibilities with the girls, and I usually involved the girls in the reporting: I would tell a girl that I saw something concerning, and that we were going to go talk to her counselor about it together. Representing this data in my dissertation has been tricky: I always black out the screen names, and additional identifying information, which at times, takes away from the power of certain images.

Member Checks with Youth Co-Researchers

As I analyzed data, developed patterns, and began to draw conclusions, I checked my emerging conclusions with the girls from my group, MMS educators, and my research team members at Penn GSE who know my research site and the community context well. I was often in the middle of data analysis and would text one of my participants to ask for clarification on a specific theme or issue that I found confusing. My Latina participants were constantly eager to be helpful and were honest and comfortable in telling me when I was “getting something wrong.” These member checks support the validity of my conclusions and allowed me to position my participants as the experts of their experiences and social worlds.

Summary of Research Schedule

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CHAPTER 4: EMOTIONAL WORK AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING: Navigating and Resisting Social Injuries and Constructing Transcultural Identities

In this chapter, I paint a picture of the girls’ social landscape and the multiple worlds in which they exist, which will help the reader reach a deeper level of understanding of the themes that I discuss in chapters five and six. I use this chapter to examine how social injuries, related to the girls’ transcultural identities and intersections of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality, produce emotional residue, which allow the girls to reach new understandings of themselves and their social worlds.

I conceptualize social injuries as discriminatory and offensive comments, phenomena, or actions that leave the girls feeling “hurt” in some way. Other scholars have conceptualized related processes with terms like “microaggressions” or “racial bullying”. I employ the term social injuries for a number of reasons. First, the term links the power-laden social processes with emotional experiences and the production and sensation of pain. Second, I believe that terms like microaggressions or racial bullying are specific and do not capture the myriad actions and processes that can and do converge to produce different types of social injuries and painful or marginalizing experiences. Social injuries are created in a variety of ways and in diverse spaces: for instance, they can be directly produced by other social actors, or indirectly created by circulating stereotypes that the girls are aware of and that function to control girls’ lived experiences. They are not created solely by hierarchical power structures (related to the girls’ race, class, gender, immigration status, etc.), but also by more complex, horizontal and heterogeneous actions that take place in the multiple worlds that the girls exist in. Most importantly, these injuries produce painful experiences and leave the girls feeling marginalized. Like I will demonstrate, the emotional residue that these types of injuries produce is varied: some girls become angry or frustrated, while others feel stress or fear. As I examine these injuries, I
will not only focus on the production and the girls’ experiences of the injuries, but I will emphasize how the girls react critically to, persevere through, and resist these social injuries and what developmental assets allow them to do so.

This chapter is split into three sections, as I examine social injuries that are related to dynamics in the girls’ various social worlds: 1) the family (emphasizing how their cultural heritage and families’ cultural practices become relevant in a variety of worlds), 2) the community, and, 3) the peer group. As I discuss the three sections and cases, it will become apparent that the girls’ group space often allows the girls the unique opportunity to process these social injuries and the emotions that accompany them.

Throughout this chapter, I will closely track and examine five conceptual themes: emotional learning, regulation, resistance, resilience, and critical consciousness. I employ feminist, intersectional perspectives on the social context of development, which allow me to illuminate the unique convergences of hierarchical power structures and heterogeneous, local actions, that shape girls’ development, educational experiences, and experiences of social injuries. I trace how those social injuries promote emotional learning about the self and the social world, and often, the development of a critical consciousness that is able to detect how power dynamics shape lived experiences and how one might change those dynamics. Finally, I closely examine how the girls’ respond to social injuries and other forms of marginalization in relationships ranging from the intimate to the institutional, with resistance, and how practicing the enactment of resistance can promote girls’ resilience. In this chapter, I emphasize the nuanced relationships between resistance, regulation, resilience, and critical consciousness. Often, girls strive to regulate their social worlds by resisting social injuries in a variety of ways: if critical consciousness mediates that resistance, their resistance can promote long-lasting social change. I will also argue that girls often aim to regulate and resist social injuries (and the actors related to
social injuries) in order to persevere through adversity, and (although, often not consciously) promote their own resilience.

I. Family, Culture, and Heritage: Traversing Multiple Worlds and Developing Transcultural Identities

Salomé, Emma, Julia, and Amanda, all 8th graders, often discuss their family immigration histories, transcultural practices at home and in school, and sense of pride in their racial/ethnic identities in the girls’ group space. Once I asked how the girls’ identified, racially or ethnically, and the girls had a range of responses, from Mexican (even Julia, who was born here in the U.S., said she identified as Mexican), Mexican American, and “both”.

On another occasion, I asked these girls if and how they kept in touch with their families in Mexico and with Mexican cultural practices. Julia said that her mother does not let her celebrate American holidays or hang out with many Americans. Amanda said that the food her parents make remind her of Mexico: tamales, sopa de zanahoria, and helado de queso. Amanda explained that her family always speaks Spanish and they also attend Spanish mass at the local church. The girls all explained that they have family still in Mexico and frequently have to deal with the threat of parents, older siblings, or extended family returning to Mexico because of the difficulty involved in “getting papers.” The girls then began sharing border-crossing stories that either they or their families had experienced. The stories involved intense heat, health-threatening conditions, and the sense of constant danger. Julia said, “All that to get to
America? What’s so good about America? My mom said that it gives us opportunities, but all Americans do is discriminate against Mexicans. So, what’s the point?”

The girls, in frustration, exclaimed that often, they were treated poorly or even punished at school because of issues related to their Mexican heritage and identities. Amanda reported being very “pissed” that her teacher told her that she was not allowed to speak Spanish in class. Emma was angered when her brother got in trouble at his alternative high school for wearing a rosary: his teacher asked him, “Is this part of your gang uniform?” Julia said that she frequently got in trouble for dressing like a “chola” at school—wearing skinny jeans and a baggy shirt. She said that the teachers told her that she could not dress like that because she is a girl. Julia said, “They were only sayin’ that because I’m Mexican.” She said that she turned around to her teacher and said, “fuck you.” Amanda said that she is proud to be what she is: Mexican. She said that she does not care what people say to her because she is proud of “what she is.” When I asked if people said offensive things to her about her being Mexican, she said, “No, because my Mexican friends will tell people ‘if you mess with Amanda, you mess with us.’”

In this vignette, Amanda, Emma, Julia, and Salomé recount experiences surrounding numerous social injuries: threats of deportation, regular racial, ethnic, and language discrimination, and the devaluation of one’s performance of certain identities. As these girls grow up in Marshall, they are developing transcultural identities (Denner & Guzman, 2006a) and must persevere through social injuries that threaten to damage their positive sense of self and esteem in
their racial/ethnic and cultural heritage. In this section, I explore how the girls navigate, emotionally process and learn from, and resist and regulate these injuries related to their families’ immigration status and migration histories, Mexican cultural heritage, and their race-class performances (Bettie, 2000) of identity.

The majority of the girls that I have worked with are part of the 1.75 or second generation, meaning that they either migrated to the U.S. when they were young children and have experienced mostly all of their schooling in the U.S., or they were born in the U.S. to parents that had recently migrated to the U.S (Rumbaut, 2004). Unlike other areas of traditional migration, Mexican parents have settled down in Marshall, instead of participating in more seasonal migration patterns. The parents of my participants often work in landscaping or hospitality, clean offices, and/or own small businesses (restaurants, food markets, or artisanal shops) in downtown Marshall. Parents often work in landscaping or in a hotel during the day and then clean offices at night. This overwhelming workload shoulders large responsibility on older children in the families I have worked with, and especially girls, which is a trend found amongst many diverse communities (Fine & Zane, 1991). Many of my participants are responsible for household chores and childcare when their parents are at work. When I once asked a group of 6th grade girls what challenges their families faced being immigrants in the U.S., they listed these responsibilities. Jacqui added that sometimes her mom “has a hard time in the school or when cable people come to the house, speaking English” and Jacqui has to be there in case she needs help. Breanna also said that sometimes her mom “messes up her English” and Breanna wants to help her, but does not say anything, because she does not want her mom to think that she is being disrespectful.

These types of parent-child relationships can be stressful. With these types of responsibilities and constant contact, the girls are often very close with the other members of their families, and together, they work to develop a home in Marshall and transcultural senses of self.
Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2002) emphasize that in all societies, “a critical role of parents is to act as guides for their children” (p. 90). Immigration, however, “undermines this function by removing the "map of experience" necessary to competently escort the children in the new culture" (p. 90). Through schooling, immigrant children and children of immigrants, often come into contact with American culture sooner and more intensely than their parents do and are forced to manage acculturation stress while learning new American cultural rules (p. 73). Like previously mentioned, these youth (and girls more often than boys) are often vested with responsibilities, like translating, caring for siblings, working alongside parents, beyond what is culturally expected for children at their stage in development (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). These changes in relationships, contexts, and roles can be highly disorienting and create a sense of cultural dissonance and role confusion, potentially compromising the adolescent’s ability to develop a strong sense of identity.

Besides demonstrating the experience of those types of stressors, the previous data illuminate how parents attempt and encourage their children to keep Mexican cultural practices in their households and, also, the types of social injuries that the girls endure due to their racial/ethnic background and cultural practices in Marshall. Julia mentions that her mother prevents her from hanging out with American youth. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) claim that immigrant parents often panic when they see their children experiencing processes of Americanization and while many parents encourage their children to pick up certain cultural competencies, such as the English language, they fiercely resist others. The anxieties around hanging out with American youth and processes of Americanization gendered are: the authors explain that the anxieties around Americanization are most clearly articulated in parental concerns about their “daughters' exposure to the cultural repertoire of the American peer group” (p. 79). In some immigrant communities and families, “becoming Americanized is synonymous
with becoming sexually promiscuous” and as a result, the “activities of girls outside the home tend to be heavily monitored and controlled” (p. 79).

Amanda discusses the culinary, language, and religious practices that her family keeps which are culturally meaningful for her. These practices are prevalent throughout the Marshall community: on the main street in town, Marshall Street, many lucrative Mexican restaurants have been established, many businesses and social services have bilingual services in the community, and the Catholic town in church is often a symbol of Mexican, Irish, and Italian (the town was settled by Irish and Italian immigrants) cultural fusion. These forms of cultural representation in the community and maintaining certain cultural practices, on the one hand, provide the girls with a strong sense of racial esteem, and on the other, make Mexicans a more visible target of discrimination in town. Besides maintaining cultural practices in the U.S., the girls spoke about keeping in touch with family in Mexico and dealing with the constant fear and stress of deportation. The comments from Julia, especially, illuminate how the stress of deportation and sense of marginalization and discrimination in the community contribute to the creation of social injuries. These injuries are indirect: not one person is necessarily perpetrating a discriminatory act, yet circulating stereotypes about Mexicans, local police politics and procedures aimed towards deportation, and a sense of loss of family members produce the injuries and ensuing emotional residue of pain.

Alternatively, Emma, Amanda, and Julia report that many social injuries that are more direct (which, again, involve both hierarchical power structures and individual, heterogeneous actions) and happen in the school space. These injuries are produced by teachers and/or students discriminating against the girls’ language and cultural practices and/or race-class performances of identity (dressing like a cholo, wearing a rosary, etc.) (Bettie, 2003). I argue two things about these in-school injuries which revolve around the girls’ racial/ethnic background and their families’ cultural practices: 1) the injuries produce emotional residue of pain and a sense or
marginalization, which leads the girls to interpret society as a world which discriminates against Mexicans, and; 2) the girls respond to these types of injuries with three different forms of resistance in an attempt to control or regulate the actors in their social world who discriminate against them. Often, this resistance allows them to persevere through specific forms of adversity and, at times, aids the development of their resilience.

A number of scholars have examined how girls of color practice resistance in response to marginalization. For example, in contrast to previous research that highlights the phenomenon of primarily middle and upper-class White girls going ‘underground’ once they enter adolescence (Brown & Gilligan, 1992), Niobe Way (1995) found that girls of color in her study were willing to speak their minds and express their feelings (including feelings of resistance) in most of their relationships, which they felt enhanced rather than endangered their relationships. Ward (2007) defines resistance as “the development of a critical consciousness that is invoked to counter the myriad distortions, mistruths, and misinformation perpetrated about the lives of black women and men, their families, and communities”. Ward (1990b) also views the affirmation of one’s self and cultural group as part of the resistance process and argues that a strong tie to one’s cultural group not only instills confidence in youth of color, but also aids girls of color in resisting negative messages about different aspects of their identities.

Ward (1996, 2007) also conceptualizes two different forms of resistance: resistance for survival and resistance for liberation. Ward (1996) explains that “resisting for survival” provides short-term solutions to experiences of discrimination and injustice by employing strategies that stem from anger, fear, or guilt. These strategies typically require that youth toughen up, mask their feelings and thoughts, and not let perpetrators of discrimination see them “sweat”. By adopting these types of strategies, youth distance themselves from the unjust event or situation instead of critically engaging with the problematic facets of the encounter. I argue that youth often engage in resistance for survival in order to regulate, or feel like they have some sense of
control over or against other social actors or their environment (for example, narratives and stereotypes that circulate in their environment, Marshall, about Mexicans). This form of resistance lacks mediation by critical consciousness: an awareness of the power dynamics that contribute to the specific social injury and an orientation towards promoting social change in their response.

On the other hand, “resistance for liberation” involves analyzing one’s experience with a critical eye and learning how to strategically deploy actions of resistance that work toward the larger goal of dismantling the dominant power structures and practices in our society that exist in person-to-person interactions as well as in larger forums such as the media and institutional structures (for example, education and the law). The developmental competency of critical consciousness does mediate resistance for liberation. As I go through examples of how the Latina girls I worked with resisted, I will draw connections to these conceptualizations of resistance in the literature.

First, the girls often respond to discrimination with angry expressions of resistance for survival (Ward, 1996) (for example, Julia telling her teacher, “fuck you”), which unfortunately, result in the girls being punished in school spaces, rather than promoting social change. Even though the result of such an interaction, lacking mediation by critical consciousness, is not positive for Julia, her resistance and maintaining her sense of control over her self and her stylistic self-expression and pride is important. As Julia resists the comment from her teacher, she is also trying to regulate a social actor: her comment aims to stop or push back against the social injury being perpetrated by her teacher.

Second, the girls’ resist such marginalization by reinforcing their and their peers’ sense of Mexican pride. The girls’ close friend groups are racially segregated: although they have some Black and white acquaintances, most of their close friends are all Latina. Within these Latina
social circles and on social media, they often express and reinforce a sense of “Mexican pride” in response to the discrimination they experience. For example, Amanda says that she “does not care” what people say to her because she is proud to be Mexican: she resists the injury by reminding herself of and affirming her heritage. In Figure 2, Danna also expresses this sense of pride on Instagram and says that Latin dancing is what she “lives for”, giving her a reason to persevere through discriminatory moments. Additionally, when I asked the girls to make an identity map, Julia put “Mexican” at the center (Figure 3), indicating the importance of her racial/ethnic identity and cultural heritage to her positive sense of self. Expressing this sense of pride may promote a positive racial identity, which has been found to serve as a protective factor.
against experiences of racism and discrimination, and boost their self-esteem (Kiang et al., 2006; Rowley et al., 1998; Martinez & Dukes, 1997). Thus, engaging in this type of prideful resistance can serve to promote girls’ coping skills and resilience.

Finally, the girls often respond to and resist discrimination by angrily disparaging the U.S. or Marshall, and often describe these geographic spaces as full of people who discriminate against Mexicans, as “ghetto”, or as “dirty”. Once, an 8th grader named Gabriela said that “instead of calling it Marshall” they should call it “Ghetto-town”. Maria said that she lives on “a ghetto ass street, man, by Gabriela”. Gabriela added “where they rob everybody”. Describing one’s community and members of that community as ghetto or dirty, and different from themselves and their families, may allow the girls to try to “brush off” such discriminatory social injuries, because they feel like they are “better than that” or “better than others [usually racialized as Black others] are”. This form of resistance lacks mediation by critical consciousness and it is striving to regulate or control negative stereotypes about Mexicans that circulate in their social environment by offering a counternarrative about other racial communities and about Marshall. However, feeling like their “home”, Marshall, is “ghetto” and discriminatory may also contribute to a sense of role confusion and not belonging.

Social injuries, related to the girls’ transcultural identities and families’ cultural practices, are produced in the multiple worlds in which they exist. I have demonstrated that these types of social injuries produce emotional residue and often allow the girls’ to develop new understandings about their social worlds and discriminatory nature of institutions and local social actors. It is important to acknowledge that the girls I have worked with do not passively accept the discriminatory acts and phenomena which produce these injuries: they react with resistance, and hopefully as they grow up and gain more critical thinking skills and resources to call upon to inform their resistance, they will be able to transform that resistance into critical consciousness
and social change. Next, I will more closely examine racial tensions and immigration politics in the Marshall community and how girls process social injuries related to those dynamics.

II. The Community: Understanding and Emotionally Processing Racial Tension and Immigration Politics in Marshall

During one meeting in 2012, I asked an 8th grade girls’ group about their experiences related to being an immigrant in Marshall. Bianca exclaimed that she constantly felt the threat of “being kicked out” and that that was “racist”. She said, “it’s just because we’re colored”. Emilia said that in Marshall, besides the racist police officers, it is mostly Black people who say “go back to Mexico” or whisper about you as you walk by. Maria said that her family hates Black people because “Black people hate us”. Maria recalled racist comments and jokes her family members had told. Her brother once said, “Black people should wear white in the night time because I almost ran over somebody the other day”. Her father often says, “mira los changitos” (look at the monkeys). The other girls in the group commented that their families had similar racist beliefs towards Black people in Marshall.

Maria said that her family would never allow her to date a Black boy and most of the girls agreed, although Guadalupe and Emilia said that they were not sure. The girls reported that they believed that Black people were the cause of the drug and crime problems in Marshall. Gabriela recalled a notable event: a Black man broke into her father’s car and stole his radio. Her father was very angry, but Gabriela insists that her dad still does not hate Black people and he is not racist.
Nonetheless, Gabriela reports that her dad “thinks that they [Black people] are the reason why there are so many drugs in Marshall”.

Maria then said, “We’re not racist, alright?” Vania objected and said, “I’m racist . . . well at points I will be racist because Black people like to walk down the street and comment on what I am wearing.” I asked if black boys or girls did this and Maria and Vania both responded “black girls.” Vania added, “black boys are always checking out my butt.” I asked her what black girls say about her clothes. She said that they make fun of her for not having expensive clothes. I asked if Black girls had expensive clothes and Maria jumped in and said “Ya, that’s why they’re poor as shit man.” Vania added, “Ya, that’s why they are poor and can’t afford a good house. But I have a good house and a lot of electronics.” Vania added, “They’re the one’s that are racist because they’re always the ones that say I that I should go back across the border...They just do that because we’re the easiest ones to target since we’re already on the news, we already have Mexicans...um, the drug cartel, and all that other stuff, we’re just really easy to target.” Bianca added “and we come here because we want a good education and want to work, unlike them.” Maria told everyone “people were talking about how Mexicans should leave and be deported,” but, “if the Mexicans left, Marshall would be like shit, man.” She said that there “would be trash everywhere because Mexicans are like the cleanest people ever.” Maria added that “Marshall is going to be fucked up in a few years,” when Mexicans make more money and leave the community.
This vignette illuminates how the girls use the girls’ group space to discuss their experiences of navigating immigration and racial dynamics in Marshall, their frustration with their community, and the injuries that they have endured and resisted from Black community members and peers. I selected this vignette because it emphasizes that the girls’ react to social injuries created by discriminatory dynamics and actions with anger, resistance, and frustration towards their community. However, as with all of the vignettes presented in this dissertation, it is important to acknowledge that it only offers a snap shot of the girls and their perspectives during a particular developmental moment (for the girls represented in the vignette above, this moment was 8th grade). Since then, the girls have developed, as have their ideas about race and community, as they have transitioned to and through high school and encountered important resources which have shifted their racial ideologies and models of personhood. In this section of the chapter, I will closely examine immigration and racial dynamics in Marshall and how those dynamics produce social injuries for youth. I will specifically analyze how the girls’ (in their middle school years) react to and process those injuries and how navigating and attempting to regulate these injuries can lead to resistance and the development of critical consciousness.

**Racial Dynamics in Marshall**

While technically a suburban community, as I noted previously, downtown Marshall has the population density of an urban area, as well as neighborhoods that are more racially integrated than in most cities. Black and Latino residents frequently live in close proximity. This racial heterogeneity gives Mexicans many experiences with Black people. Sometimes this exposure is positive, while at other times it fuels narratives about racial difference.

Wortham et. al. (2009) describe how Mexicans in Marshall are represented as “model minorities” by white residents, insofar as they are family oriented and hardworking, but also as lacking academic ambition and success. Wortham, Allard, Lee & Mortimer (2011) discuss
racialization in Marshall by analyzing narratives of “pay-day muggings,” in which Blacks are positioned as violent and criminal, while Mexicans are positioned as naïve victims. Both of these widely circulating narratives in Marshall are resources that influence the racial models of personhood Marshall residents adopt. Speaker positionality matters in terms of how they depict specific racial models of personhood. Both White and Mexican speakers tend to compare Mexicans to the town’s Italian residents, as hard working immigrants, contrasting them with African Americans who are often constructed as lazy, criminal and welfare dependent. These narratives shape the ways that Mexican adults characterize and talk about Black people, which affect how youth then understand and interact with their Black peers.

Pedro Noguera (2008) points out that adolescence, for racial minorities, is a “period when young people begin to solidify their understanding of their racial identities” and of the politics associated with race, racial hierarchies, and prejudice (p. 25). These types of racialized narratives, discourses, and characterizations that circulate throughout Marshall shape how the Latina girls think about their own identities and the identities of their Black peers: these characterizations often lead to the girls in my groups’ racialization of African Americans as poor/ghetto, smelly/dirty, and violent. In contrast to African Americans, the girls characterize Mexicans as poor, but not ghetto, clean, and hard working. This example of racialization exemplifies the MMS girls’ theoretical thinking about race relations in their community: they make assumptions about how race works from the narratives the adults tell in their communities, and then these assumptions are tested out through experimentation, and often affirmed in experiences like conflict with Black peers. This affirmation and accumulation of “such tested knowledge comes to define adolescents’ beliefs about how the world works and how they should position themselves within it” (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006, p. 3). The girls’ discriminatory remarks in the vignette at the beginning of this section reflect affirmed and accumulated knowledge that characterizes Black peers and community members in negative ways and express instances of “resistance for survival”, short-
term defenses that are rooted in anger directed towards individuals or groups who the girls perceive as perpetrating social injuries.

The vignette offers examples of multiple social injuries, which are processed and interpreted with a lens that is colored by those types of narratives and stereotypes that circulate. The girls recount: 1) being made fun of for the type of clothing one can afford; 2) being told to “go back to Mexico” and that they are going to be “kicked out”, and; 3) feeling that Black people “hate us”. The girls report that it is mostly Black people who discriminate against them in these ways in neighborhood spaces. There are layers of offenses in these types of injuries: not only are the girls experiencing racial conflict, racism and assumptions about their immigration status, but the overriding message is that they do not belong. These overt offenses compound with other, more implicit, daily signs and signals (in school and community spaces) to leave them feeling marginalized in multiple ways. These racial narratives also shape and structure peer groups at school, which I will examine in the next section of this chapter.

**Examining and Emotionally Processing Social Injuries**

Examiing and emotionally processing social injuries. This vignette offers an opportunity for examining how these social injuries are produced and processed. For instance, Emilia recounts being told to “go back to Mexico” by Black people and Maria responds by saying that her family “hates Black people”. These injuries are not simply “done” to them by Black community members. Rather, these injuries are produced by hierarchical power structures and dynamics as well as more complex, horizontal and heterogeneous actions: for example, national and international immigration policies and discourses, broadly circulating stereotypes about Mexicans and immigrants in the U.S., local histories of Mexicans “displacing” Black residents in Marshall, and intrapersonal conflict can all converge to produce these types of injurious moments.
The comment “go back to Mexico” is fueled by power structures including immigration politics and widely circulating stereotypes about Mexicans and immigrants, as well as local and national racial histories and dynamics which create and maintain tension between Blacks and Latinos in Marshall. Emilia does not specify whether this injury was inflicted directly or indirectly: whether someone (or multiple people) told her to “go back to Mexico” or if she has heard that Black people make these comments in narratives that circulate throughout her social network and community. Thus, these injuries are produced by the convergence of many processes, including interactions and conflict between Black and Latino social actors in Marshall, circulating local models of personhood, and interactions between racial events and circulating narratives, etc. It is important to note that the girls have a role in the production and perpetuation of these types of social injuries: they often perpetuate racial tension and aid in producing injuries for others when they talk about hating Black people and make racially offensive comments, like “they’re [Black people are] poor as shit”.

These “injuries” do social work in the community (i.e., maintain racial borders between Mexican and Black youth and adults), but they also produce emotional residue, which affects girls’ sense of belonging and hopelessness, relationships with peers, and feelings of anger towards others. This emotional residue shapes the social work that these injuries do: as the injuries compile and Mexican families learn to “hate Black people” as a resistant response, racial divisions are further cemented. Emotions act as integrators and artifacts of these types of experienced racial-social injuries.

- **Emotions as artifacts**: The discrimination that the girls’ experience produces emotional residue: the anger, hurt, and dejection. These emotions function to maintain racial borders in the community as well as in the girls’ peer groups.

- **Emotions as integrators**: The sense of anger, hurt and dejection that these girls experience when they are told to “go back to Mexico” by their Black peers, allow them to make sense of Black people in specific ways. The offensive comment
and the emotions that they experience in response to it, lead them to characterize Black people as “hating Mexicans” and to react with hate towards Black people.

The artifacts of such injuries can also include hopelessness and overwhelming frustration, which shapes how the girls understand and act in their community. Once, a group of 6th grade girls had told me that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) had been circulating through town, conducting traffic stops, and deporting people. Later in a meeting with 8th grade girls, I asked if they had also witnessed this happening. Gabriela said that she heard that ICE was supposed to be looking for people at the local Wal-Mart. She said, “Fuck everybody, I was ready to get takin’ away.” Gabriela’s comment reflects a sense of feeling emotionally overwhelmed from the marginalizing injuries produced comments made by Black people, the constant threat of ICE and “being kicked out,” and being “the easiest ones to target.” It is important to note that the racial segregation of the girls’ group provides the girls with the unique space and safety to discuss these experiences (and, implicitly, process the emotions that accompany them) and to examine their experiences, frustrations, and developing racial beliefs and critical consciousness.

**Resistance, Justice, and Critical Consciousness**

Although Gabriela’s response reflected a sense of hopelessness, others react with anger and defensiveness. When the girls react to social injuries inflicted by Black peers or community members, they often react defensively and in racist ways: they exclaim that Black people can not afford a good house, that they do not want to work, and that their actions and dispositions are going to lead to the demise of Marshall. Again, these are angry, short-lived, resistance for survival (Ward, 1996) strategies: with this resistance the girls are not passively accepting the infliction of injuries, but they are striving to offer a counternarrative which characterizes Black people as bad community members and more worthy of marginalization than Mexicans are. Resistance and regulation are related in the girls’ responses to social injuries. In this type of
resistance for survival, the girls are striving to regulate their social environment (specifically, push back against discriminatory narratives about Mexicans that circulate in Marshall) by offering this (racist) counternarrative.

The girls often respond to such social injuries with angry and defensive comments (with resistance for survival), yet I have also observed moments that reflect that having to engage with overt and covert racism begins to mold a critical consciousness (Freire, 2007a; Hooks, 1990), which may eventually allow the girls to resist in more powerful ways. For example, in another meeting with the same group of 8th grade girls, Maria asked if we ever noticed that the majority of characters on TV were white and “then, like that one black guy”. She gave “Family Guy” as an example. I asked why they thought that the majority of characters on TV were white people. Bianca said that she thought that “only white people allowed, only black people allowed” was coming back. I asked her if she meant segregation and she said yes. Bianca clarified that she worried about formal segregation policies returning because of the racial segregation she observed on TV and “if you go somewhere fancy like Red Lobster, all you see is white people. . . And if black people come in, they don’t serve them right”. Emilia asked, “if segregation came back, would they [Emilia, and her Mexican family and friends] be considered white or black?” Maria said, “I bet we would be with the black people because we are not white”.

This conversation reveals that having to process social injuries related to their immigrant status and race so frequently forces them to engage in examining racial and class dynamics and divisions in their community and broader social world. Although they make racist and defensive comments to resist these social injuries, this conversation reflects that they are at least beginning to recognize how systemic white privilege marginalizes both Blacks and Latinos in similar ways. As I have shown in another paper (Clonan-Roy, Wortham, & Nichols, 2016), I have observed that as my participants have developed more sophisticated critical thinking skills and transitioned through high school, they have adapted their racial beliefs, begun to think more critically, and are
less racist towards their Black peers. This type of racial consciousness, which, in part is produced by experiencing social injuries and ongoing discrimination, can allow girls to invoke “resistance for liberation”: strategies which promote social change, rather than perpetuating racism and racial divides in their communities.

III. The Peer Group: Navigating Drama at the Intersections of Race, Sexuality, and Friendship

The girls often use the girls’ group to talk about “drama” in their peer group. This can involve gossiping about others, expressing frustration (or a range of emotions) with a social event that recently happened, or sharing something that happened to an individual that they perceive is dramatic (but which has not yet circulated throughout their peer group). Over the past four years, I have found that drama often swirls around two themes: 1) racialized issues, and, 2) sexual events. The following vignette offers a snapshot from one girls’ group meeting where both types of drama were discussed and processed.

I was having lunch with my 7th grade girls group in the spring of 2015 and on the way upstairs to the library, Renata and Alma rushed up to me and told me they had to tell me something. Alma said, “black kids are talking about us”. I asked what happened and they said that they were in class and “black people” told the teacher that “the Mexicans” called them “niggers”. Renata said that “they” [the black youth in her class] said that Joaquín said “it”. Joaquín is a Mexican student who recently migrated to the U.S., is new to MMS, and does not have high English fluency. Renata said that “they” [again, Black youth] are always blaming things on Joaquín. The teacher wrote “the Mexicans” names down. To
me, Renata and Alma recounted who “the Mexicans” were in class, naming themselves and 3 other boys. They reported to the teacher that the “Black people” had actually been talking about “the Mexicans”. Renata specified that they “Black people” were talking about “the ones [Mexicans] who just came, not us”. At the end of lunch, Mr. Gonzalez, the assistant principal, called the library for Renata and Alma to come down to talk to him.

I saw the girls at the end of the day for their after school girls’ group meeting. While we were working on a warm-up activity, Renata told me about what else happened with Mr. Gonzalez. She said that she went into meet with him and Alma, Mr. Gonzalez, Mr. Drake, and Ms. Hanson. She said that she was very nervous in front of all of these adults and she turned red. She said that she just had to explain what happened in class, and that it did not seem like she was in trouble, but still, it was stressful. She was not sure what was going to happen next.

After the warm up activity, I told the girls that today we would be thinking about the range of social, emotional, and sexual experiences that their peer group has. One of the girls shouted out, “Fernanda!” Fernanda is a Latina, 7th grade girl who was recommended for the girls’ group by her counselor, but never came to the group meetings. I asked how Fernanda was doing. Alma asked “why do you care?!”. Renata said, “she lied and said she was pregnant!” Zoe said that Fernanda told people that she was pregnant because she wanted the boys to know that she has already “done it”. Alma said, “she’s a slut”. Zoe said that Fernanda’s parents are approving of her dating a “30-year-old” and Fernanda
has been telling people about her boyfriend. Matilda clarified that he is actually 18. Renata said that Fernanda got kicked out of Arts Org, a local non-profit that serves Latino youth, for “flicking off” the leader of the organization.

I stopped the girls and I asked if they felt bad for her. They all exclaimed “no!” and said that she was a “slut”. Renata said that she is friends with Fernanda, but that she does not really feel badly for her because she [Fernanda] chooses to act that way. When I asked if she thought that Fernanda had low self-esteem, she said “no” and that Fernanda is happy because she is with Javier, her older boyfriend. Renata said that “Javier made Fernanda cut”. I asked why he would want Fernanda to cut herself and she said that “it wasn’t like that”, but she did it for his attention, so that she could say, “if you leave me, I will hurt myself”. At this point it was time for the girls to run down and catch their bus, and as they scurried off, I was left wondering about the anger and excitement they projected as they talked about Fernanda, and more broadly, how emotional reactions fuel peer group drama.

Since January 2012, I have lead girls’ group sessions in the fall and spring (totaling two sessions per year) at MMS. During the first meeting of each session, I always ask the girls’ to brainstorm the different topics they would like to discuss during the semester-long session by jotting down topics on a sheet of large easel paper. This practice maintains the student-centered nature of the group and it provides me with insight into the topics that the girls think are most important in their day to day lives or that they want to process collaboratively. Every time I have gone through this activity, the girls write down “drama”. Each group meeting is devoted to a topic that the girls want to discuss and when we meet to discuss “drama”, the girls’ often describe this
emic concept as including problems with boys, fights with girls, gossiping and rumors, and racial conflict. Over the past four years of work with these girls, I have observed that the girls talk the most (and at length) about racial conflict and racial divisions in their peer group, and rumors about sexual events that Latina girls have participated in. In talking about these topics they evaluate others, create peer group norms, and maintain or dissolve boundaries between peers. Although racial conflict and sexual events might seem like very unrelated topics under the umbrella of “drama”, I will show in this section that racial dynamics and conflict in MMS might actually exacerbate the spread of gossip and rumors about Latina girls who are (supposedly) involved in sexual events. In this section, I will tease out the peer group and racial dynamics which undergird these two forms of drama and I will examine how Latina girls receive and perpetrate social injuries related to race, gender, and sexuality. Finally, I will analyze the types of social work that these specific injuries (related to drama) do, the emotional residue that they produce, and what girls learn about their social world through participating in and emotionally processing drama. Specifically, I will emphasize that the girls often participate in drama through gossip and spreading rumors or racialized and sexualized narratives, in an attempt to regulate their social environment, other social actors, and themselves (although it is not always conscious).

**Racial histories and dynamics in MMS**

The Marshall School District (MSD) has three middle schools: Stewart, Eisenhower, and Marshall Middle School. According to one participant, Vania, Stewart had mostly Black and Latino students, Eisenhower had mostly Black students, and MMS was mostly white when she was in middle school (2008-2012). MMS has a complex racial history. Before 2007, MMS was the smallest physical middle school and it catered to the mostly, white students who lived close to the school, in East Marshall. As the district grew, however, they needed more space for middle schoolers. The MMS building was renovated and expanded in 2007, and more a more diverse
population (in terms of race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, and neighborhood in Marshall) of students was bused to the larger building.

MMS is in a more affluent section of town, East Marshall. Educators refer to it as the ‘country club school’ and youth often refer to it as ‘the white people school,’ despite the fact that White students are in the minority. When a larger number of Black and Latino students were transferred from their neighborhood schools to MMS, teachers reported that there was a lot of racial tension and the new students were angry about having to go to a school in a different neighborhood. Teachers, as well as Latina youth, reported conflict in school and on buses, often involving Black youth saying that Mexican youth did not belong in the school and community and telling them to “go back to Mexico”. Redistricting thus increased racial mixing and surfaced new racial tensions. According to educators, these tensions were accompanied by an increase in performances of gang affiliation. The tensions have been reduced over time, but there are still occasional racial conflicts and peer groups continue to be racially divided.

Although a few MMS staff members have claimed that all students “just kind of mix” and there are not major racial divisions between friend groups, I have observed and been told otherwise by the girls and other staff members. There is some racial-social mixing, especially in classroom spaces when students are assigned seats and groups for projects. This type of structured mixing encourages Latina youth to have many Black and white acquaintances. However, almost all of the Latina girls I have worked with have explained that their close friends are predominantly other Latinas. Once, a group of 8th grade girls was talking about race and friendship. Lara said, “not to be racist, but we don’t have many white friends”. She explained that they do not have many white friends because “white girls talk very preppy” and “they always talk about grades”. She added that “sometimes white people try to act black and its dumb”. Corroborating these findings of racial-social segregation, I once asked Mr. Gonzalez, an assistant principal, if he thought there was a lot of racial integration in friend groups and he told me to look
at the cafeteria during 8th grade lunch (the only grade that is permitted choice-seating),
emphasizing that black students sit with black students, Latinos with other Latinos, and white
students with white students.

The girls that I have worked with do not often talk about cliques, popularity
or hierarchies of popularity. Rather, they talk about different groups of friends or “squads”. Zoe, a 7th grader, however, kept a journal that she would often share with me and she let me take a picture of her outline of the various social groups in her grade at MMS and her conception of rankings of popularity. At the top of the chart are girls who are “popular”, “niggas”, and “kinda popular”. Zoe places herself and her close friends in the popular category. Interestingly, Zoe presents as Black, but identifies as Latina (her parents are from Mexico and Puerto Rico).

Although this outline could be explored even further, as well as the diverse ways that the term “nigga” is used by the Latino population in Marshall, what is relevant here is that “niggas”

*Figure 4. Zoe’s Account of Social Groups.*
comprise their own category on the social hierarchy, demonstrating that Latinas (even those who present as Black) often perceive social divisions between Black students and others (including themselves) in MMS.

Racial Borders and Social Injuries

These types of racial borders in the peer group are relevant to the production of social injuries and the emotional residue that accompanies them. Renata and Alma’s discussion about the racialized event in their classroom shows how racial dynamics can shape peer group and classroom drama and conflict. This vignette also illuminates borders and solidarities between Mexican youth that were born in Marshall, more recently arrived Mexican youth, and black youth.

I argue that these types of dramatic events, like the one that took place with Renata, Alma, and Joaquin in their classroom, maintain racial boundaries within peer groups and the characterization of Mexicans as being “picked on” by Black youth or victims. These types of incidents, which are acknowledged by school staff and managed with formal disciplinary measures, add to other peer group incidents like I have discussed before, where Black students tell Mexicans to “go back to Mexico”. Although the Latina girls I work with certainly say racist things about their Black peers, I have never recorded stories that involve Latina youth perpetuating direct racist offenses to Black peers (although, of course, it may occur), or initiating racial conflict, which may contribute to the maintenance of the staff’s (and perhaps the broader community’s) perception of Mexican students and adults as victims. Although it was reported that Joaquin called Black students “niggers”, Joaquin and the other “Mexicans” who were identified in the conflict were not disciplined by the administration and it seems that staff attributed this incident to Black students picking on Mexican students with low English fluency. This type of social injury is common. For instance, Salomé, who has parents from Mexico and the Dominican
Republic and who presents as Black, told me that most of her friends are Latina because the Black students at MMS are mean to her and make fun of her for not knowing English. She told me that Black students often told on her for doing things she had not actually done and she frequently visits Mr. Gonzalez (a Puerto Rican man who is very sensitive to the needs and assets of the Latino population) for help.

These types of social injuries and the borders and drama that they produce are accompanied by emotions, which function as integrators and artifacts of experiences.

Emotions as artifacts:

- Alma and Renata’s urgency to talk to me about the racial incident represents that the incident was racially and emotionally stressful. Renata especially was nervous about having to talk to Mr. Gonzalez.

- Because school is the social site where these types of racialized dramatic events take place, administrators often have to intervene, which can produce additional emotional residue related to the feeling that one is being disciplined, such as shame, stress and anger.

Emotions as integrators:

- These kinds of social, racial injuries and the tension that the girls feel as a result of them pronounces the differences between them, recently arrived Mexican youth, and Black youth. It distinguishes recently arrived Mexican youth as victims and it divides Black and Mexican youth.

- For girls like Salomé, the injuries not only produce emotional pain, but they force her to manage the complexity of physically presenting like one racial/ethnic group and simultaneously being ostracized by that group, which can produce sensations of cultural dissonance.

As the girls process their emotional responses to such racial, social injuries, they learn about their peer group, themselves, and the social world. It is important to acknowledge that these girls do not just passively receive these injuries. In events like the classroom, racial drama which Renata and Alma must navigate or the racialized peer conflict which Salomé faces, they have learned to strategically and resiliently seek out resources or adult allies, like Mr. Gonzalez, to help them
persevere through such challenges. In the next section of this chapter, I will emphasize how such racial borders and social injuries shape drama that is centered on sexual events in MMS and I will explore how racial and sexual peer group dynamics are related to the Latina girls’ desire to regulate their social environment, other social actors, and themselves.

**Drama and sexual events in MMS**

As I mentioned previously, although there is some racial-social mixing, and Latina youth have many Black and white acquaintances, the girls’ close friends are predominantly other Latinas (similarly, their families’ friend networks are comprised of other Latinos). During an 8th grade group meeting, Vania explained that her and her Mexican friends did not have many Black friends. Her friend, Maria clarified to me, “We’re not racist, alright?” Vania said, “I’m racist, well at points I will be racist because Black people like to walk down the street and comment on what I am wearing.” I asked if black boys or girls did this and Maria and Vania both responded ‘black girls.’ Additionally, Latina girls predominantly only date Latino boys. During one girls’ group meeting in 8th grade, Vania explained that Mexican boys are the “ones we usually go out with” and that Mexican girls “don’t really date Black boys,” often because their parents would not permit them to do so. Camila, during her 8th grade year, told me that a Black boy liked her and wanted to ask her out, but she “felt weird about it” and did not think she would be able to talk to him like she does with other Mexicans. As I explored in the last section of this chapter, these types of racial boundaries and racial-social injuries are produced by hierarchical power structures and dynamics as well as more complex, horizontal and heterogeneous actions, including the Latina girls’ strategies of resistance and regulation.

In Marshall, the Mexican diasporic community is very close knit and often segregated from other racial/ethnic groups in terms of social connections (in part, due to these types of racial borders and conflict amongst youth in schools and adults in the community). Because of the
close-knit nature of the Mexican diasporic community in Marshall and the racially segregated peer groups in MMS, when something “dramatic” happens regarding a Latina or Latino, the rumor often spreads rapidly and widely amongst youth in MMS (like with Fernanda). For instance, I have often heard girls talk about what their madre or their tía thinks about what another girl has done, specifically with regard to sexual events. Thus, not only do gossip and rumors spread amongst peers, but they bleed into adult social circles as well.

When the girls react to narratives/ gossip/ rumors that circulate about Latina girls, they often talk about the narrative or dramatic event with a very excited or angered temperament. The Latina girls are keenly aware that MMS staff and students position them as the “sluttiest” group of girls in the school space, and when a Latina girl does something to reinforce that characterization (like Fernanda did), they girls often respond with judgment and anger, and ostracize and abandon that girl socially. I will examine the following theme further in chapter five, but it is important to note here that Latina girls’ sexuality serves as a site for discipline and control, in which educators, family members and Latina girls themselves police sexual actions which violate school expectations, Latino family values, and peer group codes of conduct. When a Latina girl participates in a sexual event that violates peer group value systems (which are comprised of school expectations, Latino cultural and family values, and more general peer group codes of conduct) other Latinas become more agitated with and excited to talk about that violation than they would if a Black or White girl were to violate the value system, because they often know the Latina girl who participated in the sexual event and her family in a more intimate way and have higher expectations for other Latina girls to uphold relevant value systems. Thus, racial boundaries play a role in Latina girls’ heightened desire to regulate the behavior (often, sexual) of other Latina girls. As Latina girls use gossip and rumors to regulate other Latina girls, they are cementing standards of behavior for themselves, and indirectly regulating their own actions by participating in the co-creation of such peer group values and standards. Again, as I
will further explore in chapter five, these forms of regulation are also related to Latina girls’ desires to resist narratives that position them as the sluttiest group of girls in MMS, and to offer a counternarrative that positions Black girls as the “most promiscuous”, which aids in the fortification of racial boundaries.

The emotional responses to such incidents function as integrators and artifacts. These agitated, excited or angry emotional reactions to sexual dramatic events in the peer group, allow girls to make sense of those types of events as exciting to talk about, which encourages the girls to gossip and spread rumors and to perpetuate patterns of reacting to drama and ostracizing others. Seeing how girls who participate in scandalous sexual events and violate peer group value systems are talked about and ostracized, makes the girls (often participants in the gossiping) also fear engaging in similar behaviors and teaches them to act in ways that abide by peer value systems. Although this will be more of the focus of chapter five, these behaviors also produce emotional artifacts, or residues of shame for the girls being ostracized, like Fernanda.

Observations of these emotional artifacts serve as emotional integrators for girls participating in gossiping: seeing others being shamed teaches those participants to avoid specific behaviors. In chapter five, I will more deeply examine the intersections of racial and sexual dynamics in peer group spaces and the emotional responses that they produce.

IV. Conclusions

This chapter provided a glimpse into the multiple worlds that my participants navigate, their families, community, and school/peer groups, and the challenges and social injuries present in each world. Throughout the chapter, I examined social injuries that are related to racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual dynamics in the girls’ various social worlds: 1) families’ cultural heritage and practices, 2) community dynamics, and, 3) peer group dynamics. Through each vignette, I illustrated the complexity of social injuries: injuries are not only produced by societal power
dynamics, but also by complex, heterogeneous local actions. For instance, I demonstrated how power dynamics, like racial hierarchies, interact with community and peer group actions, events, and dynamics to create racial conflict and racial models of personhood in Marshall and MMS.

It is critical to acknowledge and expand our understandings of how youth emotionally respond to these types of social injuries. I argue that emotional responses to such social injuries include emotions acting as artifacts and integrators. Social injuries produce emotional artifacts of experiences: hearing “go back to Mexico” or being asked “is that part of your gang uniform?” produces emotional residue of shame, anger, and frustration. These forms of emotional residue often encourage Latina youth to engage in resistance for survival and to perpetuate social injuries against others. These social injuries also produce emotional responses that function as integrators: how Latina youth feel about the social injury allows them to make sense of the experience, those involved, and the social world in particular ways. Feeling angry at Black peers for telling them that they “don’t belong” or making derogatory comments about their clothes and class positions often fuels racist sentiments towards Black peers, which maintains racial boundaries in the community and in the peer group. These emotional responses undergird and allow the girls to make sense of social dynamics related to their family, community, and school and their place in those worlds.

The girls are not simple “victims” of these injuries, however. In order to regulate or feel like they have some sense of control over an oppressive social environment, other social actors, and themselves, they often engage in resistance for survival strategies. By enduring such constant social injuries and engaging in regulation and resistance strategies, their critical consciousness, awareness of how power structures our social worlds and interactions, and ability to eventually resist in more productive ways later in their developmental trajectories is fostered. For instance, Maria, Gabriela, and Vania, girls that I have followed from 8th through 12th grade, made very racist comments about their Black peers in 8th grade, and now, as 12th graders, are able to make
more sophisticated racial critiques about power dynamics that oppress both Latino and Black folks in Marshall and how those patterns shape their experiences in high school. Additionally, we saw girls like Renata and Alma purposefully seek out adult allies, like Mr. Gonzalez to help process these injuries. Finally, it is important that the girls are seeking spaces to talk about these social injuries and range of emotional residue that they produce. The girls talk about these issues with fervor in the girls’ group space and they frequently post on social media about injuries or with signs of resistance (like “Mexican pride”) of those injuries.

Understanding these types of injuries and how youth emotionally process them is critical for educational researchers and practitioners. We cannot let these types of injuries linger in our communities and schools. Instead, we need to nurture facilitated, sensitive, critical and compassionate conversations with youth about these injuries and problematic power dynamics in their worlds. We can not gloss over racialized social injuries as bullying: we need to support youth in teasing out the issues that contribute to the creation and perpetuation of these types of offenses and in figuring out how to create more critically conscious and supportive peer group dynamics. Once, Ms. Easly, a counselor at MMS was commenting on conflict between different groups of girls in MMS and loosely nodded to the idea of sisterhood and girls needing to support each other in a patriarchal society: while that is true and an important notion, educators should also support students in examining social issues that fracture sisterhood and in resolving peer group conflict in ways that acknowledge such local and global histories and dynamics. These types of conversations, scaffolding, and support might work to reduce the pain of social injuries, foster critical thinking skills, and allow students to mature into more critical and active citizens and social actors. In the next chapter, I will work to emphasize what happens when traumatic events are layered on top of the emotional residue produced by these social injuries. Similarly, I will argue that it is critical for educators to examine and understand these interactions in order to best support students.
CHAPTER 5: NAVIGATING THE EMOTIONAL TERRAIN OF SEXUALITY

This research project began because MMS staff were concerned about Latina girls’ sexual practices: they worried that Latina girls were dating much older boys/men, engaging in sexual practices at early ages, and getting pregnant and dropping out of school at higher rates than other racial/ethnic groups of girls. Throughout my five years of research, many girls commented to me that they knew that their teachers and peers thought that Latina girls were “sluts”. In her tenth grade year, Vania once said to me, “teachers are less obvious about it, but we all know that they think we [Latina girls] are sluts”. This represents the social injury that the girls and I spent the most time examining over my five years of research: knowing that your school community characterizes you as sexually promiscuous indirectly causes repetitive social injuries. In this chapter, I examine girls’ understandings of their sexual experiences, experiences with navigating, regulating, and resisting this specific social injury, and their development of critical consciousness and sexual subjectivities.

In this chapter, I examine the girls’ accounts of their sexual experiences and how emotional artifacts of their sexual experiences often allow them to make new meanings of themselves and of their social worlds. I co-created the MMS Latina Girls’ Group in response to staff members’ requests to gain insight into their experiences and to figure out ways to better support Latina girls through challenging experiences. In this space, I found that the girls were eager to talk about sex and sexuality and that their stories of sex and sexuality were often wrapped with thick emotionality. This chapter is important because, by focusing on the emotional undercurrents in their sexual experiences, it will add an important and rarely examined angle to the body of scholarship that studies Latina adolescents and sexuality (Ayala, 2006; Garcia, 2009; Lundström, 2006; O’Sullivan & Meyer-Bahlburg, 2003). Many popular and academic discourses
surrounding Latina girls and sexuality focuses on sexual crises, unplanned pregnancies, and non-consensual situations with deficit orientations. This chapter will look at a continuum of sexual experiences (including crises) and will specifically emphasize how the girls make meaning from those experiences (by learning from emotional artifacts and integrators that accompany those experiences), regulate their own and other Latina girls’ performances of sexuality and sexual acts, resist the regulation of their sexuality in the MMS community, and resiliently develop critical sexual subjectivities. Unfortunately, I will represent a number of girls’ sexual experiences that reflect shades of non-consent, deceit, manipulation and coercion. Fortunately, I end this chapter with a discussion of how the development of a critical consciousness and sexual subjectivities enables girls to critique such misogynistic and violent patterns in their relationships and social worlds.

This chapter strives to reframe the phenomenon that staff were so concerned about by explaining, “what is going on” with Latina girls in terms of their emotions, identity development, and social identification. I will argue that when educators have to get involved with, discipline, or regulate girls’ sexuality, they also need to prioritize and focus on supporting girls in emotionally processing their experiences, nurturing healthy sexualities, and cultivating a critical consciousness and critical subjectivities so that girls can have more nuanced beliefs about sexuality and make agentic decisions in their personal and romantic relationships. Throughout the chapter, I also examine the multiple ways that the girls resist and regulate characterizations of Latina girls as hypersexual and how girls’ resist patriarchal practices in sexual interactions as they develop critical, sexual subjectivities, informed by their emerging critical consciousness. The first part of this chapter will look at how girls participate in and learn from one of the most meaningful and intimate moments in their sexual education: their first sexual experiences.
I. A Sexual Education

I asked how old he was and Lucía, a seventh grader, said “17 or something”. I asked how they met and she said that he (Ian) was in 8th grade at MMS when she was in 5th grade and that she had a huge crush on him, but that they did not start dating until November of last year when he saw her in her neighborhood. She said that when he saw her for the first time, in the neighborhood, her called “chula” (pretty) and they started talking. He told her that she had pretty lips and asked if he could kiss her. She said yes and they kissed, hugged and he “grabbed [her] ass”. Then, because Lucía’s parents were not home from work yet, they went into her back yard and “made out for a while”. A neighbor (a Latina friend of Lucía’s mother) saw them from her back window, came to Lucía’s backyard, and told Ian that he had to leave. The neighbor told Lucía that she would not tell Lucía’s mother about the incident, but, later, the neighbor did tell her mother.

Months later, Lucía confessed to me that she had had a “pregnancy scare”. She said that she thought “it” (the conception) happened at a party. She said her 15-year-old cousin threw a party and someone brought drinks. Lucía said that she was drunk and that when she woke up in the morning she did not know what happened the night before. She asked her cousin if Ian had been at the party and the cousin said yes. Then her cousin started crying and told Lucía that she had found her, naked, in the morning in her room. Lucía concluded that she and Ian must have had sex. One of Lucía’s friends told Mr. Drake, the MMS counselor, part of this story and Mr. Drake reported this to Lucía’s mom.
Lucía lamented that this event negatively affected her relationship with her mom. Lucía’s mom found texts on Lucía’s phone from Ian asking if he could “take her virginity card”. Lucía said her mom did not like Ian because he had tattoos and was Puerto Rican. Lucía said that if she had not been drunk, she would not have had sex and, now, she wants to wait until she is older, “like 18”, to have sex in the future.

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Last week, Carla and Miranda, two 8th graders and best friends, group messaged me on Facebook to say that Carla had lost her virginity. In the group message, Miranda said that she thought Carla was “dumb” for having sex. Carla replied that she “felt dumb” and I told her not to feel dumb, but that we should talk about it because it is a big step in life.

When we met in person, Carla told me that she had sex with a high school boy named Nicolás. It started because they had been flirting on Facebook and then they decided to “become friends with benefits”. They met after school and were supposed to “just make out” but ended up having sex. I asked if they used protection and she said no. She said that she asked him to use protection, but he said that “sex does not feel as good with a condom”. She said that he pulled out of her before he finished. She said that she felt very ashamed, that she has only told a couple of people that she lost her virginity, and that her mom would “kill her” if she knew. She said that they had sex in his backyard, in her cousin’s room, in an ally by a Mexican store, and in an old deserted factory in back of a Mexican store. She said that they were probably going to meet to have sex again today.
Using the Girls’ Group as a Space to Discover and Process Sexuality

Lucía and Carla’s stories represent learning about sex and sexuality: not through formal sex education in a classroom (García, 2009) or consejos from a mother (Ayala, 2006), but through first intimate experiences. In this section, I will explore how the safety of the girls’ group space nurtures these conversations and how emotions facilitate learning about sexuality, a sexual experience, and the self.

The girls’ group, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, was a safe, reciprocally respectful, mutually trusting, homeplace (hooks, 1990; Hyams, 2003; Pastor et al., 2007) for the Latina participants. In this homeplace, we talked about sexuality frequently, especially compared to girls’ classrooms and home environments, where sexuality was talked about very little (the girls reported). As I observed the girls over the course of four years, I documented how they collectively, and individually, gradually learned about sexuality as a social-relational phenomenon, and their own sexuality, through experiences, the group, and each other. Sometimes a girl would pull me to the side to whisper to me about a recent experience that she had, while other times, experiences would come up with the whole group and we would talk about a girl’s sexual experience that she had already shared with others about. I was always impressed with girls’ abilities to be vulnerable and emotionally honest in the group space, even if they did not yet know other group members very well.

Each semester, girls requested that we have at least one meeting where we talked about sexuality. I often had the girls write down questions about sexuality and romantic relationships on index cards and we would pull each anonymous question out of a bag and discuss what we thought the answer was. When I first did this activity with a group of 6th grade girls, questions on index cards ranged from: “How can you get pregnant? And when sperm travels does air kill eat?” to; “How are they-boys so mean and tall?”, to; “have you ever had sex?”. Girls also asked questions about their own bodies, such as, “Why do girls have their period in a young age?” and
“Does goo come out?” These questions reflect a lack of knowledge about a range of topics and a curiosity to learn about their bodies, sex, and sexuality, which is a key ingredient for the development of sexual subjectivity (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2005; Schalet, 2010).

These questions often brought up personal stories and pointed to local phenomena that were related to MMS staff concerns. For example, one question from the bag read “forcing to have sex?”. Similarly, when one girl in this 6th grade group asked, “what to do if you have a boyfriend but want a new one at the same time?”, Maite and Josefina responded advising her to cheat on him and providing her with personal stories of times that they cheated on their boyfriend. Clara (who is 11) jumped in and began telling a story related to how she met her boyfriend: her uncle is 30 and introduced Clara to her boyfriend (who is 14) because they play on the same soccer team. These questions (related to dating older boys, non-consensual sexual experiences, and greater rates of participation in messy sexual-romantic activities than other groups of girls) were indicators that MMS educators’ concerns about Latina girls were not totally out of touch with girls’ actual experiences. Although not all girls embody or enact the concerns of MMS educators, the girls were aware of and voiced that they had similar questions about the actions of other girls in their peer group and that they were hungry for a space in which they could dissect these issues and experiences that they observed in their peer group.

**Silence Surrounding Sexuality in School and Family Spaces**

As I noticed that the girls had a hungry desire for talking about their own sexual experiences, observations of the experiences of others (usually in the form of gossip and rumors), and thoughts about sexuality and society, I began to wonder why they wanted to talk about these issues in the girls’ group space, with me, an adult that they did not know very well. I found that the girls often did not feel like they could talk about sexuality in their homes/ with their families
or in other school spaces. Because I openly listened to all topics they breached, I think they felt comfortable talking about sexuality.

The girls I worked with often discussed how strict parental regulations around dating and sexuality shaped their experiences and I hypothesize that these ideologies and regulations made them feel less comfortable talking about or asking about sexuality with their families. For instance, I once asked Emily what she thought was the hardest part about being a girl and she replied, “Like, uh, your mom or your dad is not going to like that you have a boyfriend”. Of course, this in part reflects Emily’s frustration with perhaps wanting a boyfriend and feeling like her choices are limited, but it also reflects that these types of attitudes and restrictions are stringent enough that they make her feel like they are one of the worst parts of being a girl.

Additionally, the girls I have worked with have reported that their and Mexican families in general have very strict consequences if they engage in sexual and romantic relationships, which often result in shame for them (Denner & Dunbar, 2004; Lam, McHale, & Updegraff, 2012; Zavella, 2003). For instance, Carla’s comments in the vignette at the beginning of this section express that she is ashamed and afraid of her mother finding out that she had sex, because her mother would “kill her”. Similarly, Lucía explains that when her mom found out that she had had sex, it affected their relationship negatively. During a social gathering at a restaurant, Maria and Gabriela made comments that corroborated this pattern. They said that “it is horrible to get pregnant as a Mexican girl, because your parents will disown you and act like you are a whore”. They added that boys don’t “give a fuck” if you’re pregnant and “will not support you”. They cited this with multiple examples of friends and cousins that they had seen this happen to and argued that girls should not let boys pressure them and acknowledge that despite what a boy says, they will not support the baby.

Vania has struggled to talk to her family about sex. In eleventh grade, after dating her boyfriend Aaron for a year, Vania decided to have sex. Vania thought about this decision from
many angles, talked to Aaron about it for many months, and finally decided that she wanted to have sex and start taking birth control. Vania lives with her Aunt (who she calls her mom), Aunt’s husband, and her grandmother. Her dad lives near by. Vania said that she did not feel like she could talk to her Aunt about it, but she did feel like she could talk to her father because she interprets his reactions as typically, more understanding. Straying from the stereotype of Mexican fatherhood, her father took her to Planned Parenthood and helped her to get a prescription for birth control. When Vania’s grandmother and Aunt found out that Vania was having sex, Vania’s grandmother, who is very traditional, said, “Oh, well, now you’re a ho like all Hispanic girls” (implying that Vania was fitting into a stereotype). Vania added that whenever she feels ill, her grandmother assumes that it is because she is pregnant and will make comments like, “now that your pregnant, you should learn to cook”. This is a clear example of how circulating stereotypes about Latina girls as sexually promiscuous in Marshall, can shape how one’s family interprets one’s actions, and how an indirect social injury (knowledge of hurtful, circulating stereotypes) can translate into a personal, and direct social injury.

These types of occurrences within family spaces make girls feel like they can not talk about sex, sexuality, or their romantic experiences with their families and they often associate sexual experiences with looming disciplinary consequences and shame. Unfortunately, school does not offer girls the space to explore their sexuality and desires either. In MMS, sexual education is fairly surface level and is not designed in a constructivist, student centered matter. Although the school technically teaches comprehensive sex education, the ESL coordinator for the district once told me that the superintendent prefers abstinence only education and that I should be careful about what I discuss in the girls’ group, with regards to sexuality. In school, the only consistent opportunity that girls have to learn and talk about sexuality and sexual norms is through peer group gossip and rumors, which often function to shame the target of the narratives and to reinforce associations between sexuality and shame. Besides exploring sexuality in the
girls’ group, other opportunities for learning about sex included, learning through intimate experiences with boys, talking with their friends, and examining sexuality in the media. However, these informal experiences did not nurture girls’ critical awareness of sexuality and intersections of sex and power. As I will show, later in this chapter, the girls’ sexual lives are regulated and/or silenced in a variety of ways and in a variety of spaces: with the girls’ group, the girls’ created a space where they could resist that regulation and silence, and feel free to dissect and explore their experiences.

**Emotions as Conductors of Sexual Learning**

As I discuss above, learning about sexuality from the silence surrounding it in the home and school, often teaches girls to associate sex with shame, and that if one engages in a sexual act, one is “bad”. Besides these lessons and sexual norms, which circulate throughout the peer group, girls’ learn about sex and themselves through their first sexual experiences and the emotions that accompany them. Lucía and Carla’s cases at the beginning of this section illustrate how first sexual experiences often create emotional artifacts and the emotions which accompany the sexual acts function as integrators.

For both Lucía and Carla, the emotional artifacts of their sexual experiences (including the experience of being regulated by one’s friends, family, and school staff) included shame, a sense of “feeling dumb” for or wishing they had not had sex, and distress related to upsetting friends and family members with their behavior. I argue that not only the intimate act of sex, and the emotions that are produced via the act, teaches girls about themselves, but the emotional and disciplinary responses of others in response to finding out that a girl had sex, produces emotional artifacts and integrators that are educational. For example, in one girls’ group meeting, Bri, another girls’ group member, brought a catalog of quinceañera dresses and was paging through the catalog. Lucía, sadly, looked down at the floor and said that she wanted “quince”, but that her
mom would not let her have one because she had been “doing adult things”. Her mom’s anger and disappointment with Lucia’s engagement in sexual activities, lead her mom to disallow her from having a quince, one of the most revered celebrations of girlhood. Not being able to participate in this type of celebration, again, reinforces a sense of shame and teaches Lucia that she is no longer a girl worthy of being celebrated. Experiencing those types of emotions encourages the girls to make sense of their experiences and themselves and particular ways: the shame that Lucia feels allows her to learn that she wants to wait to have sex; feeling “dumb” or shameful seemingly leads to a more negative self-concept for Carla, which perhaps causes her to engage in continuous, dangerous behaviors (valuing Nicolás’s perspectives more than her own and agreeing to have unprotected sex). Later in this chapter, I will show how girls resist these messages of shame and push back against the regulation of their sexual lives. In the conclusion of this dissertation, I will imagine how critical consciousness can mediate coping practices, in situations that represent complex sexual and personal/romantic relationship issues, in order to promote the development of resilience, healing after an unfortunate sexual experience, and the ability to make more self-determined sexual decisions in the future.

II. Sexual Predicaments and Emotions

I began working with Emma when she was in seventh grade. She was giggly, funny, and clever, yet she often became deeply emotional and sad regarding situations with her on-again-off-again boyfriend, Lucas. Aware of her own emotionality, she frequently referred to herself as “my emotional self”. Once in 8th grade, Emma Facebook messaged me to tell me that she felt sad, “not like herself”, and like she was “losing herself”. I asked her to meet with me for lunch to discuss this further and she told me that she had been feeling that way because she told Lucas “goodbye forever” and then immediately regretted it. She said she...
was very upset but then she talked to Lucas and told him that she did not mean it and “they are ok now”. She said that his girlfriend, Victoria, gets very jealous of Emma and does not want to see them together. I asked why Lucas still goes out with Victoria, if he is obviously still interested in talking to and hanging out with Emma and she said that “he has his reasons”. I asked if those reasons made sense to her and she said, “I don’t know . . . Kinda”.

A couple of weeks later, I saw Emma at school for lunch and she told me that she “wanted to die” and was “terrified”. I asked her what happened and she put her head down and said that she did something bad with Lucas. I asked if she had “S-E-X” and she said yes. She and Lucas had sex two weeks ago on a Friday when they did not have school. I asked her why she was terrified and she said that they used a condom but it did not feel good for “them” and so they took it off. I asked if it did not feel good for him or for her and she said “both”. Emma reported that Lucas “finished” but they did not know where “it” (semen) went. As Emma told me this, tears were streaming down her face. She said that she always dreamed of having a family with Lucas, and they even talked about it in the past, but now that it was a potential reality, it was very scary. She said that Lucas said that she should not worry because he would take care of her.

The following Monday, I brought in Aitana, Planned Parenthood’s Latino Community Liaison, to the girls’ group meeting to meet with Emma. Aitana had come into the girls’ group and MMS health classes before and the school was familiar with her. In the meeting, Emma told Aitana and I that she finally told her older sister about the pregnancy scare: at first her sister was mad, and then she
started crying. Her sister was supportive and told her that if her parents
“disowned her: and kicked her out because she was pregnant, that she (Emma’s
sister) would help her (Emma) and get an apartment with her. Emma said that
she was so afraid to tell her parents because she was “like, [her] parents’ golden
child”: she was the one who was still in school and getting good grades and she
did not want to “ruin that for them”.

Emma told Aitana that she had been throwing up and Aitana confirmed that even
if Emma was pregnant, it was too soon for pregnancy to be causing her nausea,
which made Emma feel better. Aitana looked at her calendar and asked Emma
questions to figure out when she could take a reliable pregnancy test. By asking
these questions, Aitana figured out that Emma had actually had a period after the
first time she had unprotected sex. Aitana said that she could still take a test
though to make her feel better. Aitana pulled out the tests and explained how to
use them and said that Emma should pee in a cup and then dip the strip in. Emma
said her parents would “kill her” if they found her taking a pregnancy test at
home, and she asked if she could do it right then, at school. Before I could even
process this request, Aitana said yes and Emma appeared frightened and
relieved, all at once.

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Emma came back and said that the test result was negative. You could see the
relief on her face and in her smile. Aitana continued to explain safe sex practices.
She explained why Emma’s first time did not feel good and encouraged
lubrication. She even gave her a couple of packs of condoms. As we went over
how to use condoms and lubrication, Emma giggled and looked at the floor,
nervously. She was very timid about touching the condoms that Aitana brought for her to practice with. Aitana offered that Emma could take some condoms with her and Emma said that she is good at hiding things and took the condoms and lubricant. At this point it was 4:15 PM and we went down to catch the after-school bus.

As Emma’s vignette demonstrates, romantic and sexual relationships and crises can produce intense emotional artifacts and integrators, which teach girls about themselves and their social worlds. In this section of the chapter, I want to emphasize that educators and researchers often miss a critical piece of the puzzle when examining adolescent sexuality and helping adolescents to persevere through challenge’s like Emma’s: by only focusing on the sexual event and the potential biological/ medical consequences, we miss out on understanding a critical, developmental piece of sexual experiences. It is important to focus on how youth process these events emotionally, in order to better understand why they engage in certain activities, how sexual experiences shape their sense of self and future trajectories, and how we can support youth in navigating through current and future challenging situations. In this section of the chapter, I will use Emma’s story to examine the emotionality associated with adolescent romantic and sexual relationships, early sexual decision making, and sexual predicaments including the fear of pregnancy.

**Sexual Predicaments and the Production of Emotional Artifacts**

In adolescence, the experience of a sexual predicament produces intense emotional artifacts. For Emma, she reports feeling “terrified” and “wanting to die” when she is concerned that she may be pregnant. She explains that these feelings are related to knowing that she disappointed her family and that she may have altered the future that she had imagined for herself.
Ainara, Emma’s friend, experienced similar, intense emotional artifacts after her first sexual experience in 8th grade, and these artifacts manifested into physical and mental health symptoms. Ainara and her boyfriend, Diego, had sex at Diego’s father’s house, when they were home alone. I asked Ainara if she had wanted to have sex and she said no, but that she did it because she felt very pressured by Diego. He would say things to her like, “I love you so much, we need to do it”. She said that they used a condom, but she still thought that she might be pregnant. She explained that she “kind of wanted to break up” with him because he pressured her to have sex and broke her trust. Shortly after this event, Ainara stopped eating regularly. Her mother observed this change and turned to the school for help. Her mother was also worried because Ainara did not get her period for a couple of months and confided in school staff that she was worried that Ainara was pregnant. As Ainara retold this story, she sadly reported that her and her mom fought a lot because of this conflict. Towards the end of the school year, Ainara’s mother became so worried about Ainara’s eating that she checked her into an in-patient, county, mental health hospital. I did not see Ainara, once she left for in-patient care, because this occurred at the end of the school year, but I was told that Ainara was in the hospital from her counselor, Mr. Drake. Ainara’s story emphasizes the intensity of emotional artifacts that are (at least in part) produced by sexual predicaments and their social ramifications. It also suggests, that if the educators and Ainara’s mother would have focused on Ainara’s emotionality and mental wellness, rather than solely biological/medical concerns, Ainara may have been able to work through some of the damaging emotional residue that she was struggling to manage, in productive ways.

It is important to note that the emotional artifacts that sexual predicaments produce are social, and they travel throughout peer group networks. For example, when Lucia (who we met at the beginning of this chapter) had sex with Ian for the first time, Lucia is not the only one to experience intense emotional artifacts: her cousin, who is scared for her and can empathize with
her, starts crying. Additionally, when Carla (who we also met at the beginning of this chapter) has sex, Miranda says that she is upset and very disappointed in Carla: this demonstrates that although the event shapes the girls’ emotional residue in different ways, it does produce social-relational emotional artifacts. Finally, when Emma first told me that she had sex with Lucas, we were sitting with Emma’s best friend, Amanda. As Emma told me the story and her fears, Amanda’s eyes watered as she tried her best to console Emma with hugs and soft touches on her arm or shoulder. It is important to recognize this social-relational character of the emotional artifacts produced by sexual events. Adolescent girls, especially, are consumed with their relationships in middle school (Birchnell, 1997; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; McLean Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). Knowing these two things, it is critical that we provide safe, relational spaces for girls to examine and dissect their (and their peers’) experiences and the emotions that are produced by them.

**Sexual Predicaments and Emotional Integrators**

It is also important to examine how emotional artifacts function as integrators, allowing the girls to learn about themselves, sexuality, relationships, and their social worlds in particular ways. For example, the shame and fear associated with her first sexual experience force Emma to examine herself and sex in new ways: she conceptualizes sex as “bad”, she distinguishes future ideations of having a family with Lucas from the reality what that might look like now, and she learns that she needs to protect herself sexually (she does take the condoms for the future). Additionally, when Emma was experiencing relational “drama” with Lucas, she messaged me, referred to herself as “my emotional self”, and claimed that she was losing herself. Emma identifies herself as very emotional and in touch with her feelings: she has built this self-conceptualization by learning from her emotional reactions to various situations throughout her life. I argue that she claims that she is “losing herself”, though, because the emotional-relational
drama with Lucas has reached a precipice that allows Emma to consider herself, how she usually feels and navigates emotional situations, and identify that this situation is “too much” and making her act in ways that do not fit with her self-concept. Additionally, the fear and shame that Emma experiences are caused by the threatening possibility that she may have to reconsider her future if she were pregnant. Emma and her sister cry about the possibility of Emma’s family disowning and kicking Emma out of the house if she were to be pregnant. The fear, shame, and sadness that she experiences force her to reconsider her self-concept and what her future life might look like (107).

Although Emma did not frame her predicament in a discourse of virginity, I argue that there are many links between conceptions and evaluations of virginity, emotions functioning as integrators, and conceptions of the self. I argue that sexual actions (or rumor of sexual actions), social identification, and emotional responses are connected, cyclically, for girls, and virginity provides a good example for examining this cycle. For example, one day a group of eighth grade girls and I were talking about virginity and sex. Gabriela said that “if people found out you are not a virgin in this school, then they look down on you”. Bianca said, “ya, they think you’re a slut”. Vania said that if boys know that you are not a virgin then they “try to hit that”. During this discussion, Bianca became very emotional and said that she wished she could “have [her] virginity back”. She said that sometimes she does not eat and when I asked her if she liked her body, she said that she does like it, except for “the thing that I lost” (her virginity), and she pointed to her vagina. An uncle sexually abused Bianca when she was younger and her mother knows about the abuse. Bianca said that sometimes she asks her mom if she can “get it back” and her mom says “no, it is never coming back”. This story demonstrates multiple things. First, it demonstrates the high value of virginity to these girls and the negative character evaluations that are made in their peer group when one is “outed” as a non-virgin. This story also demonstrates that emotional artifacts are often produced by participation (even if violently forced) in a sexual
act and the acknowledgement that the social identification of that act is evaluated negatively, in a variety of ways. Knowing that one will be socially identified as a “slut”, or as someone who is no longer a virgin, contributes to girls as feeling “less than” or not liking a part of the self. The violence that Bianca experienced is an extreme example of that cycle, but a realistic example because many of the girls have experienced non-consensual sexual interactions that are part of this emotional cycle.

Although I will explore this further in the conclusion of this dissertation, I do want to explore the roles that coping mechanisms, resilience, and critical consciousness could play in these types of situations. Emma, Carla, and Lucía, and Bianca’s stories are marked by exploitative (and for Lucía and Bianca, violent) sexual relationships and a gendered disparity in the reciprocity of care between the girls and their sexual partners. Their actions and discussion of their experiences lacks a critical consciousness. The presence of a critical consciousness might allow girls in similar situations to do a couple of things:

- Recognize the power dynamics related to gender and sexuality that shape their intimate relationships, the values and standards for women and girls (like the value of virginity), and the ways that they are socially identified.

- Critique the exploitative requests or actions that their partners made or took, and instead of attributing the negative experience and residual sadness to the self, recognize the roles that their partner and broadly circulating, gendered standards for behavior in intimate relationships played in producing situation.

Being able to critically, critique and avoid such relationships would function as resilience-promoting coping mechanisms, allowing them to avoid and persevere through the adversity posed by their partners, who try to involve them in negative and sometimes dangerous situations.

Activities that support girls in managing the intense emotional residue that often accompanies these types of predicaments and that promote the development of a critical consciousness (that can mediate coping strategies in complex intimate moments) and the recognition of unfair gender and sexual dynamics in relationships is absent from most sex education programs. In order to
equip girls with these key skills, I will use the conclusion to imagine what educational spaces (specifically, girls’ groups) may look like if they included nurturing a critical consciousness that could be exercised in intimate situations in their learning goals and priorities.

**Adolescence, Emotional Ambivalence, and Sexual Learning**

Learning from sexual experiences is difficult and complex in adolescence, and often, adolescents do not “get” the lessons that we think they should receive from certain sexual predicaments. Emma’s story offers a good example of the ambivalence that is often involved in sexual predicaments and emotional learning. Although Emma is clearly in distress, the fear and shame associated with the experience did not totally convince her to stop having sex. She takes the condoms (which is positive) because she wants to engage in future romantic and sexual acts with Lucas, because she likes the attention he gives to her and the way that he makes her feel (in love, like he would take care of her, etc.). Similarly, Carla, who was introduced earlier in this chapter, feels badly about herself after having sex for the first time, but still decides to have sex and seek affection from Nicolás. As an adult ally, it is frustrating to observe Carla continuing relations with Nicolás, since she obviously feels badly about herself due to having sex with him, and since Nicolás is prioritizing his own needs and endangering hers (e.g., not using a condom because it does not feel good for him). However, Carla’s case represents the ambivalence present in adolescent romantic and sexual decision making and emotional learning: despite thinking that having sex with Nicolás is “bad”, Carla continues to want to “hook up” with him, perhaps for affection, the experience of feeling desired, or a fleeting emotional connection.

The limited opportunities that girls have to talk about sex (especially in school and with their families) often make it challenging for girls to process these emotional artifacts of early sexual decision making and to act in less ambivalent, and more self-protective and -determined ways. For instance, eighth girls and I were once doing an activity that prompted them to agree or
disagree with popular sentiments and myths about sexuality and romantic relationships. One prompt was: “You should never talk to your parents about boyfriends or sex”. All six girls who were present at the meeting said that they agreed with that prompt. Gabriela said that she agreed “because they will tell someone else . . . they’ll snitch”. I asked who they would snitch to and she said “to someone else in your family”. Gabriela said that when she got her period her mom “was like . . . oh my God, I can’t believe you got your period, now I have to tell your aunt”. All the girls were laughing and nodding their heads in agreement. Similarly, Lucía, who we met at the beginning of the chapter, was often frustrated that her neighbor, her mother, and her guidance counselor had talked about her sexual activities and disciplined her, but they did not talk with her. When I asked if Lucía wanted to continue to meet with me, one-on-one during lunches (after I found out about the her sexual experience and was concerned), Lucía said “yes” and that she really likes “talking to me because [you’re] like a teen and you listen [during meetings]”. These data demonstrate that girls feel like they have limited opportunities to talk about and explore their sexual experiences and the emotions that accompany them and that they are hungry for a space that might listen to them as the authority on their experiences. As I will demonstrate in the next section, feeling like they cannot talk about or explore their sexual experiences in many spaces is exacerbated by peer group regulation of sexual promiscuity.

III. Regulating Sexuality

*Marshall Middle School (MMS) Latino Community Liaison:* “Many Latina girls date much older boys, which leads them to negative behaviors and holds them back from academic success”.

*MMS 8th Grade Latina Girl:* “Everybody thinks that Latina girls are sluts. But that is not the truth, I’m still a virgin!”. 

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MMS Administrator: “Mexican girls assimilate too quickly, which causes them to initiate sexual activity at earlier ages”.

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Ms. Smith and Mr. Drake, the 5-6th and 7-8th grade (respectively) counselors at Marshall Middle School, have been very concerned with a Latina student named Sara over the past four years. Since her start at MMS, Sara has been getting into trouble: in her 5th grade year, she was disciplined for skipping school to engage in sexual activities with an eighth grade boy, in 6th grade she sent a naked picture of her breasts to a seventh grade boy, which was later posted to Facebook, and she frequently curses at teachers and threatens to fight many Latina girls who used to be her friends. School staff have tried to reach Sara in multiple ways. In her 5th grade year, Ms. Smith requested that I meet weekly with Sara to talk about the consequences of her actions and to counsel her on how to handle her emotions and aggression. In addition to meeting with me, Ms. Smith and two ESL teachers closely monitored and worked with Sara across her 5th and 6th grade years, telling her that they care about her and encouraging her to journal about her emotions in a journal that they have provided her with. Because the ESL teachers have broader contact with the Latino population, they have also talked to Sara and peers about trying to support each other to avoid the drama involved with “bad boys” and bad situations.
Because of these incidents, Sara has become a popular subject of rumors and drama in MMS. The peer circles in MMS are fairly racially segregated, and so when rumors are spread about a Latina girl the entire Latina peer network knows about it (and often, these narratives will circulate amongst Latino adults in the community), increasing the emotional impact on the subject of the rumors.

After Sara skipped school in 5th grade with the eighth grade boy, a boyfriend of another Latina girl in the girls’ group (Mia), many older girls started spreading rumors about how Sara was a “slut,” had STDs, and was a bad friend. These types of rumors made Sara feel isolated from the peer group and sad because everyone spread rumors about her. After this incident, I spoke to many girls in the peer network who said that they did not want to be like Sara and would not do such things in the future because they are not “slutty girls, like her” and do not want to have to face the consequences of such rumors. Although Sara felt shamed in private, she acted outwardly aggressive to the girls in her peer group, threatening to fight them, which only intensified the rumors, her bad reputation, and her isolation. When the girls were in 8th grade, I asked some of the current group members why Sara wasn’t in the group anymore. The girls replied, “she hangs out with the morenas now because no one [Latinas] else will hang out with her”. I asked the girls if they felt bad for Sara, and although Ivanna admitted to being friends with her since kindergarten, she said, “It’s not my fault she’s a little ho”.

In this section, I will use Sara’s experiences as a case to examine how educators and peers try to regulate girls like Sara, and their race-class performances of femininity and sexuality (Bettie, 2003) and perceived sexual promiscuity in school, social and social media spaces.
Sexuality is understood, talked about, and positioned in a variety of ways in different social worlds (family, school, the community, etc.). I understand school, and specifically, MMS, as a social site, where a variety of social scripts are relevant in understanding and policing sexuality and performances of femininity. In the upcoming section, I use the case of Sara (across her four years in MMS) in order to analyze: 1) how the characterization of Latina girls’ as “sluts” can function as indirect and direct social injuries; 2) how the sexual lives of Latina girls are regulated at school and contribute to their social identification; 3) how Latina girls participate in the regulation of girls’ sexual lives and why, and; 4) how girls strive to resist and regulate certain circulating narratives and other social actors, related to the sexual lives of Latina girls.

**Exploring the Moral Panic Surrounding Latina Sexuality in MMS**

Before Sara arrived at MMS in 2011, staff had already become concerned about Latinas’ romantic entanglements and sexual activities. When Sara was in fourth grade, an MMS administrator told my advisor, Stanton Wortham, that Latina students dated older boys, engaged in sexual activities and suffered sexual abuse at younger ages than girls from other ethnic groups. As a result, the administrator claimed, Latina girls became less academically engaged during middle school, and he and his colleagues were specifically worried about the transition, for Latina girls, between 6th and 7th grades. He acknowledged that school staff was struggling to support these students.

As a result of these concerns, Wortham and MMS leadership arranged for me to facilitate a girls’ group for Latina students. Before doing so, I explored MMS staff member perspectives about Latina girls’ sexual practices and academic achievement. In many formal and informal meetings at MMS, I documented the following staff hypotheses about Latina girls (Compiled from multiple fieldnotes and interviews that took place between December 2011 and May 2012):

**Mr. Gonzalez, Administrator:**
Mexican families are out of touch with U.S. culture, customs, and laws, and because of this, they allow their daughters to date much older men.

Mexican girls assimilate too quickly, which causes them to initiate sexual activity at earlier ages.

Mr. Folger, ESL teacher:

Mexican family parties cause problems because they allow older men to interact with younger girls and there is a lack of supervision.

Crowded living conditions lead to girls’ interactions with older men and can be causes of sexual abuse.

Ms. Chavez, Latino community liaison:

Early sexual activity and pregnancy are modeled in Mexican families by mothers, aunts, and other female family figures who have had babies at young ages.

Many families are uneducated and do not value education as much as families who have experienced success through education.

Ms. Smith, counselor:

Families lack knowledge of contraception and/or do not believe in it because of religious reasons.

Mexican adults often engage in physical fights, and thus Mexican girls think it is acceptable to resolve conflict with physical fights.

These comments and folk theories present negative characterizations of Latina girls and their families. Staff supported their accounts with examples of students who had been dating older boys, having sex, dealing with a pregnancy scare, or surviving an act of sexual abuse. Educators connected these cases with widely circulating stereotypes about Latinas and built models of identity that were then available for socially identifying Sara. As described in my literature review, the social identification of Latinos in New Latino Diaspora communities is often more flexible than it is in longstanding Latino communities, and Wortham and colleagues
(e.g., Wortham, Mortimer & Allard, 2009) have shown this to be the case in Marshall. While stereotypes of Latina youth as sexually promiscuous had not robustly taken hold in the larger Marshall community in 2011, they had become established among educators at MMS and in the larger school district.

Other researchers have documented similar stereotypes of Latinas, which position them as making poor choices, dropping out of school, becoming teenage mothers, engaging in romantic relationships with gang members, and being hypersexual and exotic (Denner & Guzman, 2006a; Lundström, 2006; Rolon-Dow, 2004). Collins (1991) describes how intersecting stereotypes involving race, class, gender and sexuality have yielded these images of women of color. These objectify women of color as “other” and are often “constructed in contrast to white women and values associated with white women, like piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” (Collins 1991, p. 76). As I clarified previously, such stereotypes were not uniformly espoused in Marshall or the local schools, but they did circulate densely in the middle schools. In some spaces in Marshall, sexualized media images of Latina women often shape perceptions and interactions within schools (Lundström, 2006; Rolon-Dow, 2004). For instance, in the quotes above Ms. Chavez and Ms. Smith both employ common, gendered, sexualized stereotypes about Latinas. They claim that a lack of knowledge about contraception, models of early sexuality, and a lack of appreciation for education cause Latinas to make bad choices. Mr. Gonzalez describes Latino cultural practices, positioning Mexican migrant families as out of touch with appropriate behavior in the U.S. context. In his attempt to explain Latina girls’ “early” sexual activity, Mr. Gonzalez echoes an anxiety that many Latino immigrant parents have: assimilation to American cultural practices leads to an increase in Latina girls’ promiscuity (Cammarota, 2004; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2002). Latino parents often strictly monitor their daughters in the US to ensure that they are not adopting “American promiscuity.” Note how the educators and the parents
locate the source of this alleged behavior differently—with educators locating it in working class Mexican culture and parents locating it in mainstream American culture.

MMS educators do not describe all Latina girls as sexually promiscuous. Academically successful Latinas and many who are not regularly disciplined are not identified in this way. But staff nonetheless experience moral panic about Latina girls’ sexuality. Stevenson (2012) describes how low-income girls of color’s bodies, thoughts and actions are often understood “through the lenses of moral panic, poverty, protection, and sexual risk,” and they are “policed by national and local political narratives, public policies, and individual interactions with peers, family, and public schools” (p. 4). Stevenson argues that public concern over black and Latina girls’ sexuality is motivated by a “societal state of frenzied being, where national, local, and/or group norms are disrupted by an episode, person, or group of persons that are identified as threats to one’s lived experience,” or to society’s agreed-on “respectable behavior and civilized ways of being” (p. 12). The moral panic at MMS affects how staff members understand and interact with Latina students. They shape the way in which Sara was understood once she arrived at MMS.

At MMS, staff’s primary concern is academic. Staff are not generally concerned with students’ sexuality or moral development, but instead with making sure that sexual activities do not detract from academic success. Academically successful girls are often not identified as sexually promiscuous, regardless of their behavior. But girls who are perceived as sexually active are seen as academically unsuccessful. Panic about lack of academic success influences how girls like Sara are understood at MMS. In order to promote Latina girls’ academic success, staff often regulate Latina girls’ sexuality by promoting the idea that they should have no sexuality: they should not enact specific race-class performances of femininity that are read as sexual and they should not engage in any sexual activities. However, that message and that form of
regulation leaves little room for the development of healthy, positive sexualities and sex education that allows girls to make informed, self-determined decisions.

**Why and How MMS Staff Regulate Sexuality**

As the introductory vignette described, staff at MMS became involved with regulating Sara’s sexual behaviors when she decided to skip an entire day of school in her 5th grade year, with an 8th grade boy, Bruno. Sara was able to skip school because of her parents’ taxing work schedules and because she did not live with extended family as she would have in Mexico. Sara’s mother found out that Sara skipped school with Bruno because one of their neighbors saw Sara walking with him in the neighborhood during school hours and told her mother. Her mother turned to MMS for help. The following emails (copied to administrators, Sara’s counselor, teachers and Clonan-Roy) reflect staff perspectives on Sara skipping school to be with Jose:

March 1, 2011

Good Afternoon,

Late yesterday, Sara’s mother and stepfather came in to share some concerns. Specifically, her dating an older boy (an eighth grader) and the potential decisions she may be making with him. This relationship has caused Sara to miss a day of school, and on several occasions she has sneaked out of the home. I spoke to Mrs. Chavez and Mrs. Smith this morning, who indicated they have been in contact with parents on some of these concerns.

Here is what I was able to offer the family;

1) I will meet with the young man to discourage his advances towards Sara
2) I informed Sara that she is to ride her identified bus (it seems on occasion she has gone on to other buses)
3) I would communicate this to those that work with, teach or interact with Sara (hence this email)—I can provide more information about last night’s conversation if you would like to see me.
In our conversation last night, Sara communicated that she does want to be successful and is interested in being promoted to the next grade.

Rob Gonzalez
Vice-Principal

-----Email response to Mr. Gonzalez’s email-----

March 2, 2011

Good afternoon all,

From my perspective, Sara likes to give adults a bit of “shock value.” She seems to enjoy that kind of attention. I’ve only briefly spoken with her mother on a few occasions, but I know that relationship is strained.

She’s a very smart girl, but she’s using her intelligence against herself right now. Her choices are putting her in pretty dangerous situations that will eventually have gravely serious consequences that I (and I think the rest of you will agree) don’t believe she’s anywhere close to ready for. We’ve got to find a more constructive outlet for her.

I’m going to approach her with a journaling idea (one I discussed with her at the beginning of the year) and we’ll see where she goes from there.

Adam Folger
ESL Teacher

These emails were crucial to MMS educators’ identifications of Sara and motivation to regulate or help her regulate her own her behaviors. Although some educators knew that Sara enjoyed male attention and had a strained relationship with her mother, this is the first time that staff identified Sara as potentially sexually promiscuous and willing to risk academic success for male attention. The moral panic about sexual activities of low-income Latina girls and their academic failure—partly drawn from widely circulating stereotypes and partly specific to MMS—allowed the educators to frame Sara’s choices as sexual, dangerous, and likely to undermine academic success. The panic was reinforced by Sara’s family’s anxiety about her sexuality. Although Sara told her mom that she and Bruno “only made out,” Sara’s mother told
MMS administrators that Sara and Bruno had sex. Many Mexican parents have strict rules and high anxiety about their daughters’ sexuality (Cammarota, 2004; García, 2009; Suárez-Orozco, Baolian Qin, & Fruja Amthor, 2008). Sara’s mother may have reported the event as sex because her parental anxiety surrounding Sara’s sexual promiscuity led her to believe that Sara was lying and actually did have sex.

School and family circumstances also led Sara’s mother to turn to MMS for help, and this choice directly affected Sara’s social identification as sexually promiscuous in school. The Marshall School District has worked to reach the Latino community, hiring Latino community liaisons, partnering with Latino non-profit organizations, and providing interpreters to encourage parental participation. These efforts may have made Sara’s mother feel more comfortable turning to the school for help. While these efforts produce myriad positive effects for Latino parents and children and MMS educators, they also allow MMS staff to participate in regulating Latina students’ social, emotional, and sexual lives, which does not happen as frequently with students from other racial/ethnic backgrounds.

The email exchanges also reveal a tension between her mother’s and educators’ concerns for Sara. Sara’s mother focused on her moral development, turning to the school because she was concerned that her daughter was dishonest and engaged in inappropriate sexual activity. This probably reflected a Mexican cultural value of educación, one that encompasses “additional, nonacademic dimensions, such as learning the difference between right and wrong, respect for parents and others, and correct behavior, which parents view as the base upon which all other learning lies” (Reese et al., 1995, p. 66). This widespread model of moral personhood sees moral upbringing as a precursor to academic success. However, Mr. Gonzalez and Mr. Folger’s emails seem more focused on academic success, without focusing on moral concerns. In the U.S., academic success is not necessarily tied to moral personhood. Staff members expressed their concern that Sara missed a day of school and was using her intelligence against herself, and they
discussed how to help her be academically successful and advance to the next grade. The school responded to Sara’s mother’s concerns in so far as it felt that Sara’s academic success was at risk. Both Sara’s mother and the school addressed Sara skipping school to be with a boy, and both wanted to help Sara, but they had different agendas and Sara’s skipping school meant different things to each party. While Sara’s mother and school staff had different reasons for addressing Sara’s behavior, they were able to find common ground in defining her behavior as negative.

Sara had great difficulty contesting these social identifications.

Strategies of Regulation

MMS educators often approach these issues by providing advice and informal counseling to Latina girls, policing girls in school and making sure that they are not socializing with certain boys, talking to older boys about staying away from specific younger girls, or referring girls to “Central” (a county services agency) for counseling. As reflected in the emails that were circulated amongst Sara’s teachers, MMS staff, like in their every-day practice as middle-school teachers, often work together in teams to regulate, and in their eyes, support, girls who are in similar situations to Sara’s. Girls are often aware that “teams” of teachers are attempting to regulate/support them, and they often, unfortunately, perceive this as negative and as “being all up in their business”.

Ms. Williams, an ESL teacher, has many regulatory conversations with Latina girls. She hypothesized that girls are influenced to participate in sexual activities with older boys because of “their culture” and how it encourages them to enjoy the attention of “older, macho guys”. Ms. Williams said that she would talk to girls and advise them by saying “well, you have to get a job, ya know, you’re going to have to support yourself”. She reported that many girls would respond by saying, “oh, I’ll just let my husband do it”, and she would continuously try to combat that expectation. Similar to the email exchange above regarding Sara, these types of regulatory
moments focus on making sure that girls like Sara can “get back on track academically” and not be distracted by engaging in sexual behaviors with boys.

Regulatory strategies are rarely focused on building emotionally connected relationships with students. MMS staff do not avoid building these types of understanding, emotional relationships: rather, with the emphasis on higher test scores and the pressure of budget cuts and limited time, it is challenging to engage in emotionally connected, long-term counseling relationships. Such emotional connections might allow educators to more deeply understand the emotional artifacts that accompany these sexual experiences and how those artifacts shape girls’ perception of self and future actions.

During my time at MMS I did collect a few examples where staff members reframed concerns about sexuality and promiscuity as concerns about emotional well-being. For example, Ms. Jacobs was one of Sara’s teachers in fifth grade and, after Sara skipped school with Bruno, Ms. Jacobs saw me in the hall, and knowing that I was Sara’s girls’ group leader, asked to talk with me for a moment. Ms. Jacobs told me that she had talked to the boy that Sara had been with and had told him to stay away from Sara because she was so much younger. Ms. Jacobs also said that she had taught the boy’s brother a couple of years ago and that that boy had gotten a younger girl pregnant, so she was worried about the same thing happening to Sara. More than these concerns, she stressed that Sara had recently had “some really down days” and that she was worried about her emotionally, and about her self-esteem. Ms. Jacobs was paying close attention to Sara’s projection of emotions, produced by the emotional artifacts she was experiencing, which is important. Next, I will emphasize that it is important for educators, like Ms. Jacobs to notice, focus on, and nurture girls’ emotions, especially following early sexual experiences that are regulated by school authorities, because such regulation often produces intense shame.

The Production of Shame in Regulatory Situations

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Although MMS staff members typically intend to “help” the individual Latina girl and her family when intervening in and regulating sexual experiences, this intervention and regulation produces the emotional artifact of shame for the girl(s) involved. For example, when I met one-on-one with Sara, she said “I felt embarrassed because [my] mom was saying all of this stuff in front of Mr. Gonzalez”. She explained that her relationship with her mom had been tense for a while, but that these recent events had exacerbated that tension. She said that she hated her mom and called her a “bitch”.

She added that her mom thought that she and Bruno “were fuckin’”, and told Mr. Gonzalez that, who seemed to believe her mom, rather than Sara (who had claimed that they only made out). She also said that since all of this transpired, “people” (mostly her Latina peers) had been spreading rumors about her having sex and that “people”, including people that she thought were her friends, were calling her a “slut, a bitch, a prostitute”. The production of this shame shapes Sara’s relationship with her school and the adults at her school that know about her behaviors, and deeply affects her relationship with her mother. Due to that shame, she becomes angry and seemingly defensive against the negative characterizations that frame her actions.

Over five years of data collection, I noticed that the forms of sexual education that were provided in school spaces and forms of sexual regulation often did not include an attempt to simultaneously foster girls’ critical consciousness. Amidst her shame, for instance, no adults or Latina girls spoke to Sara or to me about gender disparities in how Sara versus Bruno were regulated and characterized in the school space, and how that was related to broader histories of misogyny and gendered, moral expectations for behavior. I also did not observe girls like Sara developing long-lasting, meaningful, relationships with adults, who would guide her in navigating and processing her shame (and other residual emotions) and in talking about and exploring sexuality in healthy, positive ways. In the conclusion of this dissertation, I will stress that the presence of such adult allies who are oriented towards fostering girls’ critical consciousness and
healthy sexualities, are key for girls’ development of critical, sexual subjectivities, and positive relationships. In the next section, I will examine how that sense of shame is exacerbated by Latina girls participating in the regulation of sexuality.

**Latina Girls’ Regulating their Peers’ Sexuality and Sexual Experiences**

**The Circulation of Peer Group Rumors and the Production of Shame**

The shame and embarrassment that Sara experienced grew in the following weeks as rumors begin to circulate among her peers. The week after Sara skipped school, I had lunch with two girls’ group members, Emily and Mia, who spoke about Sara’s actions. The girls’ comments were prompted by my question: “What is difficult about being a girl in middle school?”

**Emily:** Like, uh, your mom or your dad is not going to like that you have a boyfriend.

**Mia:** Dealing with people like best friends and all that.

**Clonan-Roy:** Ya. What happens with best friends?

**Mia:** Um, sometimes they um do things with your boyfriend.

**Clonan-Roy:** Does that happen a lot?

**Mia:** (smiling) Um, maybe it happened to somebody…in our group… Not me.

**Clonan-Roy:** Not you?… Was that the cause of the drama between Sara and Clara?

**Mia:** No, Sara and Maite.

**Clonan-Roy:** Really?

**Emily:** Sara, she like, um, missed school on, on Thursday or Wednesday because she said she um was in bed with Sara’s boyfriend…

**Mia:** No, Maite’s.

**Clonan-Roy:** Oh, Maite’s boyfriend? Wait, did Sara say that or did people say that about Sara?
Mia: Sara said it.

Clonan-Roy: Wait...how...I mean, where would Sara and this guy go? Are their parents not home during the day or something?

Emily: Um...her mom works a lot.

Mia: (mumbles something)

Clonan-Roy: Wait, what was that?

Emily: She’s going to skip school next Thursday to do it again.

Clonan-Roy: To go where though?

Emily: I don’t know.

Clonan-Roy: But you think her mom works a lot and maybe they just go to her house?

Mia: She told me that.

Emily: And her dad...he goes too... Her, her...step dad, um, her step-dad...he goes a lot...to um work...

Clonan-Roy: Would you guys ever skip school to be with a boy?

Emily: No.

Her peer group plays a central role in Sara’s (and girls who have had similar experiences) social identification as sexually promiscuous. Sara and her friends police their peers through gossip, rumors, and evaluative narratives. They also employ emotional tactics like shame, humiliation, and social isolation to discipline girls who violate peer group codes of conduct. These types of evaluations are made based on their value systems, which are influenced by various cultural models: images and evaluations from national media about Latinas, widely-circulating ideologies about girlhood and sexuality, family and cultural ideologies and practices surrounding girlhood, sexuality and age appropriate behavior, and beliefs about schooling and achievement. Regulating girls who violate such value systems with rumors, gossip, and
characterizations of certain girls and actions as “sluts” or “slutty”, creates distinctions between “that girl”, types of girls, and the self.

Emily and Mia draw on these resources when discussing Sara’s alleged actions. They point out norms that Sara has breached, and they judge her. Emily points out that parents do not permit girls to have boyfriends. I argue that these girls learn to evaluate and police their peers, in part, from their mothers and “other mothers” who police their and other girls’ sexual behaviors. Vania’s story appeared earlier in this chapter and demonstrates this pattern: after learning that Vania has had sex, her mother and grandmother comment that she is “now a ho like all Hispanic girls” and when she feels ill, they shame her and suggest that she may be pregnant. Additionally, Mariana, who is currently an eighth grader, once texted her mom to tell her that she was staying after school for the Latina girls’ group and her mom texted back “no sex”. These policing and shame-inducing practices (which often occur in many different types of families and amongst myriad racial/ethnic groups of women) seem to be mimicked by middle school girls, in response to their peers. These shame-inducing practices are complex, however, and rooted in experience: for example, the girls’ mothers probably have unique insights into the exploitative sexual relationships and practices that can be enacted in their communities, and they use these shame-inducing practices to try to protect their daughters from that.

Additionally, with specific regard to Sara’s actions, not having a boyfriend at this age is a peer group norm, one that is shaped by cultural and family practices, school expectations, and peer values. Mia identifies another peer group value—fidelity to friends—and criticizes Sara for betraying her friend Maite. These peer group resources (gossip, rumors, evaluative narratives, peer group value systems) have particular force at Sara and her peers’ developmental stage of early adolescence, in which the peer group functions as a central means for learning about the self and others (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006; Sullivan, 1953).
Later that week, I met with Sara, who reflected on the aftermath of skipping school with Bruno, the rumors that were circulating, and the change in her social position (captured in fieldnotes):

She also said that since the incident she has felt “bad” at school because people have been spreading rumors about her having sex and that people, including people that she thought were her friends, were calling her a “slut,” a “bitch,” and a “prostitute.” I asked how she felt when she was with Bruno, knowing that he had a girlfriend, and she said that she knows it is bad and wrong and that she is going to try to change.

Sara’s actions with Bruno affected her personal relationships, the way she was identified in her school community, and her sense of self. Because she betrayed her close friend Maite, the peer group was very upset with Sara, identifying her as sexually promiscuous, and they spread rumors about her being a “slut” in order to isolate her. The punishment she received from her parents, MMS staff, and her peer group made her start to feel like a “bad girl.” The rumors about the incident between Sara and Bruno did not damage Bruno’s social reputation or his personal relationships. Although Sara claimed that she did not in fact have sex with Bruno, she was unable to change the narrative that circulated about her. Her version could not compete with her peers’ narratives, which were taken up and reaffirmed. These stories also circulated among school staff and Sara’s family. The rumors that circulated about Sara drew on but did not simply instantiate more widely circulating stereotypes. As Sara transitioned to sixth grade, the negative peer evaluation followed her and reinforced her social identification as sexually promiscuous and academically unsuccessful.

Reinforcing Shame and the Social Identification of Sara as a Slut

In Sara’s sixth grade year, she started talking to a seventh grade boy named David. She sent a text message to him with a picture of her naked breasts. David was in the boys locker
room with friends when he received the image. One of the friends, Roman, stole David’s phone and posted the image on Facebook as a “joke.” Before Facebook removed the post for inappropriate content, many of Sara’s peers saw the image. MMS administrators also found out about the post and had disciplinary meetings with Sara, David, and Roman. Sara had to meet with Ms. Smith, her counselor, who tried to engage Sara in a discussion about her motivations for sending the image, why it was inappropriate, and the dangers of sending such pictures.

This incident revived old rumors about Sara and reinforced many staff members’ and students’ perceptions of her as sexually promiscuous. For weeks, students discussed how Sara “was a slut” and “had been exposed.” Although MMS administrators disciplined David and Roman, they did not receive the same peer “slut-shaming” as Sara. The widely circulating, gendered, cultural model of the “slut” often leads girls to be shamed for sexual activities while their male partners are elevated (Dietrich, 1998; García, 2009). As in the situation with Bruno, David’s social reputation remained untarnished, and he went on to date many of the girls who ostracized Sara for her behavior.

These rumors had a lasting influence on Sara’s social position. Later in her sixth grade year she started talking to an eighth grade boy named Ian. Although Sara insisted that she was not having sex with boys, her peers thought that she was. Three 8th grade Latina girls told me the following story about Sara (captured in fieldnotes):

Lucía said that Sara “went to bed” with Lucía’s ex-boyfriend, Ian, and now Sara was pregnant. I asked if that story was going around school and they said “yes.” Miranda said that lots of stories go around about Sara because “she is a sl….” She trailed off and Lucía said, “Just say it.” Miranda said, “Ok, she is a slut.” Carla then added, “and she’s only in sixth grade!”

Sara’s social identification as a “slut” followed her across grades at MMS. As Sara’s peers told and retold stories about her engaging in sexual acts and violating peer norms, they
reinforced her reputation as sexually promiscuous. Sara’s actions with David and Ian were read in light of her skipping school with Bruno in fifth grade and subsequent accounts of that event. Her trajectory of social identification became more rigid and more difficult to escape as similar social identifications were made of her across events and became more solid.

**Rumors, Peer Group Segregation, and Social Punishment**

During Sara’s final year at MMS (8th grade), she only had a few close friends, frequently cursed at teachers, and threatened to fight many of her former friends. Although Sara privately had expressed shame to Clonan-Roy and her counselor, she was outwardly aggressive, and this intensified the circulation of rumors about her, her reputation as sexually promiscuous, and her social isolation. By 8th grade, Sara quit coming to the girls’ group and I did not have much of a relationship with her. I often saw her alone in the hallways and other school, social spaces, and guessed that she must have felt disposed of by many boys and her former friends, and betrayed by certain school staff and her mother.

Many of her former friends now scorn her and circulate stories about her being promiscuous. For instance, a group of 8th grade girls discussed Sara with disdain in 2014 in a conversation with me (Group Interview, 06/25/14):

- **Lara:** Sara didn’t like Kelli, and Sara wanted Ivanna to have problems with Kelli too.

- **Maite:** Nobody here like her. You like her? You like her? (Looking around the room)

- **Ivanna:** I told my mom about what happened with Sara… She said… My mom told me to fuck her up. That’s what she said.

- **Clonan-Roy:** Why? What do people say about her at school?

- **Lara:** She a ho. She think she cute.

- **Clonan-Roy:** Why do you say that?
Martina: Alright, so last year… There’s this kid named David, right? I guess she sent him nudes. And I guess she got exposed.

Ivanna: Yup!

Alexa: Oooooo.

Camila: Because, didn’t they steal his phone? … Someone in the boy’s locker room. And then they posted it on Facebook.

Alexa: Yup!

Lara: (to Alexa, her younger sister) How do you even know this?!

Alexa: Because you told me! You told my mom!

Lara: Oh ya, I did (laughter erupts). And my mom yelled at me. She was like, “I don’t want you to hang out with that girl!”

Clonan-Roy:: Oh, so some parents found out too?

Mia: Ya, like that one lady… I think she’s your tía [aunt].

Clonan-Roy:: So what happened after this Sara thing? Like, how did she act at school?

Lara: She has no friends now. She has like three friends.

Ivanna: They’re all morenas.

Lara: Ya, they’re bl… (trails off)

Mia: (Quietly trying to count and name Sara’s possible friends)

Maite: Ya, but Amaya be fake with her. Cuz she be tellin’ me stuff about her.

This conversation shows how the narratives about Sara spread beyond school to other girls’ parents. They construed Sara for their own purposes, as an example of how not to behave. Lara told her mom about Sara being “exposed” by her peers, and Mia and Ivanna mention adults who have talked about Sara and evaluated her negatively. Sara’s social identification thus moved beyond the school, out into the community. This social injury of Sara being socially identified as a “slut” is complex and multi-layered: with many other social actors perpetrating direct (calling
her a slut to her face, abandoning her as a friend, etc.) and indirect (perpetuating gossip and rumors about her) social injuries, it is difficult for Sara to identify how to resist and attempt to regulate these negative and hurtful characterizations. The complexity of such circulating, social injuries related to sexuality is exacerbated by racial peer group dynamics.

At MMS, Latina girls’ close friend groups are often racially segregated and, although Latina girls have black and white acquaintances, their close friend groups typically include only Latina girls. The seven girls who talk about Sara in the last excerpt, and who were Sara’s close friends in fifth grade, form such a group. These Latina girls often contrast themselves with the “white girls,” whom they characterize as lame, studious, and conservative, and the “morenas” or “black girls,” whom they characterize as dirty, poor, ghetto, and more sexually promiscuous than Latina girls. There is a small population of Afro-Latinas (mostly girls with parents from the Dominican Republic) at MMS, but Afro-Latinas are most often ostracized by the “black girls” for their low-level English fluency. They tend to join Latina peer groups, and other Latina girls do not describe them as morenas.

The girls’ racialized friendship groups are built upon community racial dynamics in Marshall, which are influenced by widely circulating social discourses about whites, blacks and Latinos. The Latina girls position Sara’s behaviors negatively—as more like a “morena” than a “Latina”—tapping into a local model of personhood in Marshall, one that holds that Mexicans are “model minorities” and blacks are inferior to them (Wortham, Mortimer & Allard, 2009). During one girls’ group meeting in 2012, Vania explained that Mexican boys are the ‘ones we usually go out with’ and that Mexican girls ‘don’t really date Black boys,’ often because their parents would not permit them to do so. In middle school, the Latina girls often contrast themselves with the ‘White girls,’ whom they characterized as lame, studious, and conservative, and the ‘morenas’ or ‘Black girls,’ whom they characterized as dirty, poor, ghetto, and more sexually promiscuous than Latinas.
In one girls’ group meeting with 8th grade girls in 2012, the girls were talking about the value of virginity in Mexican families and I asked if they thought that Black and White girls were as concerned with preserving their virginity. Maria replied, ‘isn’t it weird that people think that we’re the ones that lose virginity first? But, I swear to God, man, Black people be losing their virginity first.’ In making these claims, the girls draw on a model of idealized Latina sexual personhood, which allows them to contest, regulate, and resist the stereotype of Latinas as sexually promiscuous, while offering a counternarrative that Black girls are in fact the “sluttiest” group of girls in the school. Unfortunately for Sara, she became an object lesson about how not to be Latina, as girls used her story to reinforce these racial boundaries. In regulating the sexual actions of others in this way, Latina girls create standards for behavior, which function to regulate the self as well: seeing girls like Sara experience such social abandonment and punishment make other Latina girls wary of participating in similar sexual activities and receiving the ensuing punishment. By participating in such regulation, and the resistance of the stereotype of Latina girls as the sluttiest girls in the school community, Latina girls perpetuate social injuries towards girls like Sara and their Black, female peers.

The Production of Emotional Artifacts in Peer Group Regulation

Participating in the regulation of peers and experiencing that regulation are both emotional processes. Obviously, being policed and socially abandoned by your peers produces emotional residue of shame and loneliness. For Sara, her sexual decisions seem to be produced in part by her emotional state and circumstances within her school and family life: because she feels shamed and abandoned, she continues to engage in sexual behaviors with boys in order to feel a sense of affirmation and attention. She responds defensively and with anger to her mother, which works to exacerbate her sense of loneliness and lack of support.
Also, girls who participate in regulating the actions of others often get very excited or angry when spreading gossip and rumors. I have observed that when girls make strong, evaluative statements about a girl, like, “she’s a slut!” or “she needs to close her legs!”, they will receive laughing affirmation in response from their peers. This sense of excitement and angry energy often perpetuates the girls’ desires to continue talking about gossip and dramatic events that take place in the peer group, and to distinguish themselves from the girls who commit sexually promiscuous acts. Often, girls will say that they do not feel bad for the victims of sexual regulation, gossip and rumors “because they decided” to engage in whatever sexual act is being discussed and they are a “slut” (in this way, the girls mobilize very static and permanent conceptions of “slut”, cementing a girl’s identity to the negative evaluation of her action). This emphasizes that girls need safe spaces which explore these gendered, sexual, and racial evaluations, that circulate broadly in society and locally in their schools and peer groups, and that work to regulate individual girls and create harsh sexual double standards for all girls. With adult allies, girls need to explore the emotional artifacts that are produced by such patterns of regulation, with an emphasis on empathy, connection, and sisterhood. One step towards achieving those goals may be working to nurture girls’ critical subjectivities in girls’ group spaces, which I will explore in the next section.

IV. Critical Romantic- Sexual Subjectivities

_I met Maria, Gabriela, and Vania in their 8th grade year and I have followed them through 12th grade. In 2014, we all went out to dinner at a local Mexican restaurant called El Primo. During dinner, Vania told us that she had sex with her boyfriend twice and recently started taking birth control pills. She also encouraged Maria to start taking birth control pills. Vania said that getting access to birth control sparked conflict with her mom. Her mom does not know_
that she has had sex, but she knows she is on birth control. Vania talks to her dad (her parents are separated) more openly about the fact that she is having sex and he reacts in ways that Vania interprets as more understanding. Related to family conflict, Vania said that her grandmother asked Vania what I studied before Vania had left to come to dinner and Vania said “Hispanic girls”. Her grandmother replied, “oh, well, now you’re a ho like all Hispanic girls” (implying that Vania was fitting into a stereotype).

Vania said that the first time she “did it” with her boyfriend, it hurt “really badly” and she started to cry and bled a little bit. She said she felt comfortable telling him to stop. She said she knew that the first time “would be mostly for him”. Maria said that her first time hurt too. Gabriela said it felt fine to her. They all agreed that they do not like listening to music or watching movies while having sex. Maria said that her mom said that if Maria “gets a boyfriend”, she needs to learn to cook and clean. Vania said that her grandmother said, “now that your pregnant, you should learn to cook”, and explained that her grandmother and mother keep referring to her as pregnant any time she feels ill, since they now know that she is sexually active.

I asked the girls, if they thought they were more in control or able to tell their boyfriends to stop during sex and communicate their desires since they were committed and knew each other well. Gabriela said, “yes, you need a base of friendship and trust to have that”. The girls said that there are 20 or so pregnant girls at the high school now and most of them are Mexican. I asked why and Vania said, “because they think condoms don’t exist”. I asked what that meant
and she said that because of time and money, Mexicans don’t use condoms.

Vania said, in retort to that, “if you have time to have sex, you have time to get a condom, nigga”.

On the way home, I told them that I was struggling with the middle school girls to talk to them about sex. Maria and Gabriela had a really critical conversation about how girls should wait to have sex until they are older. They insisted that I bring them in to talk to the girls because they would “tell them like it is”. They said it is horrible to get pregnant as a Mexican girl, because your parents will disown you and act like you are a whore. They said that boys don’t “give a fuck” if you’re pregnant and will not support you. They cited this with multiple examples of friends and cousins that they had seen this happen to. They said that boys should never pressure them to have sex, because they will not support the baby.

In this final section, I will examine the critical consciousness and sexual (and social/emotional) subjectivities that the girls begin to develop in middle school and through high school. A critical consciousness enables one to think critically about power dynamics in the social world and to orient one’s speech, thoughts, and actions towards social justice (Freire, 2007; Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). Subjectivity, on the other hand, is more centered on the self. Subjectivity refers to the capacity to be aware of one’s feelings, to conceive of oneself as the subject of one’s acts, and to experience a certain amount of control in relationships and actions (Code, 1993; Schalet, 2010; Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000). The terms critical consciousness and sexual subjectivity are often used in very different spaces, but I argue that they are both useful for thinking about adolescent girls’ development and sexual agency: as girls learn to think critically about power
dynamics, they also develop the ability to think critically about the self, their position, and their rights and desires, in a variety of social worlds including intimate relationships. As I will show, emotions often mediate the development of critical consciousness and critical subjectivities: by paying attention to one’s emotional artifacts that send girls the message that something is unjust, unfair, or wrong, they become attuned to different forms of social injustices that shape their and their communities’ lives. As the girls begin to articulate their desires for relationships, ideas about sexuality, and resistance to gendered double standards and family expectations, they begin to develop subjectivities that are critical and that can encourage them to advocate for themselves in romantic and sexual relationships and interactions, like displayed in Maria, Gabriela, and Vania’s agentic discussion and sexual decision-making. I will emphasize that the development of these subjectivities requires emotional work and engaging in listening to one’s emotional responses to romantic and sexual interactions, relationships, and patterns in one’s life. I will emphasize the important work that such subjectivities can do for girls and how girls’ group spaces and peer mentoring hold the potential for offering girls the unique space to nurture such strengths.

**Emerging Sexual Subjectivities**

Throughout my five years of research at MMS and in Marshall, I observed that girls often begin to develop and display critical sexual subjectivities later in middle school and as they transition towards high school. In contrast, during strife in romantic relationships or in sexual predicaments, girls who are in the earlier years of middle school often consider the situation and their role in it with perspectives marked by deficit, low self-esteem and a lack in agency. I have found that as girls develop more sophisticated critical thinking skills, examine widely circulating narratives about women, sexuality and sexual experiences, and have experiences themselves related to sexuality, they begin to develop gendered critiques of these issues and experiences. In this section, I will examine three types of emerging, critical, sexual subjectivities that I
documented, related to three themes: 1) dating practices and romantic relationships; 2) pressure to engage in sexual acts and developing boundaries, and; 3) sexual decision making and planning.

**Emerging, Critical, Romantic-Sexual Subjectivities: Dating Practices and Romantic Relationships**

While I have documented numerous instances of girls accepting or tolerating being treated badly by boys in romantic or sexual relationships and interactions, I have also documented girls (especially in 8th grade and beyond), beginning to develop and deploy critical subjectivities that are aware of their own feelings, conceive of themselves as the subjects of their acts, and seek control in relationships. For instance, Catalina, who is now in 9th grade, experienced low self-esteem and often permitted boys mistreating her in the earlier years of middle school, especially her on-again-off-again boyfriend, Ethan. In eighth grade, however I observed a change in how she was thinking about her relationship with Ethan. During free time in her science class, she told me that Ethan (who left her for another girl) told her that they are going to get back together next year. In response she said, “um, ya right!” To me she said, “Why would I get back with him knowing he might just leave me for another girl again?” This statement marks the emergence of a critical subjectivity with regards to romantic relationships: she is aware of her past feelings of pain and her present desire to not experience pain and she seeks to control her experiences and protect herself.

Similarly, girls will often express critical subjectivities about romantic relationships in social media spaces. For example, in Figure 5, Gabriela exclaims exhaustion with “guys” who are inconsiderate of girls’ feelings (275). She receives 24 “likes” and an “Amen” in
response to this sentiment. The sharing of a critical attitude and engagement with others around this frustration, allows her individual subjective sentiments to evolve into more of a shared, critical consciousness amongst her peers.

I have also documented that girls are critically aware of how they are characterized (as promiscuous) in school and community spaces, and how, as a part of developing critical subjectivities, they analyze social dynamics that influence that characterization. For example, in the following interview with Ivanna, we discuss dating practices amongst Mexican girls:

**Clonan-Roy:** Do you think it’s true that Mexican girls date older boys a lot?

**Ivanna:** Mmm, depends who the type of person they are. Like, I wouldn’t date older people. I find that disgusting.

**Clonan-Roy:** Yeah. What would your mom say about that? Would she let that happen or no?

**Ivanna:** No. What would a person be doing with a twenty year old? That’s like rapist right there.

**Clonan-Roy:** Yeah. I get so confused because I’ve heard from some people that Mexican parents encourage it, say like, “Yeah, you should date this older guy,”

*Figure 5. Gabriela expressing frustration towards young men.*
but I feel like most of the people telling me that are gringos and they don’t really know. Do you think Mexican parents encourage dating older guys?

**Ivanna:** Especially Mexican moms, they’re strict. My mom won’t let that happen. Why would their own mother tell them to go ahead and date them? They can be raped.

**Clonan-Roy:** Yeah. Okay. If you were going to do anything sexual with anyone ever, do you feel like you would feel comfortable telling them when to stop, or being like, “No, I don’t want to do that”? Do you feel like you’d be able to do that?

**Ivanna:** Yeah, what do I look like?

**Clonan-Roy:** You know what I mean? Don’t you feel like there are certain girls who don’t–

**Ivanna:** Because they’re shy. Even if you’re shy, you’re supposed to tell them.

In this interview, Ivanna emphasizes that relationships with older men often imply or involve romantic and sexual pressure. She also critically pushes back against characterizations of Mexican families as encouraging girls’ relationships with older men by emphasizing that Mexican mothers are strict and want to protect their daughters against the threat of potential sexual violence. She stresses that she would definitely tell a boy if she was not comfortable doing something and that shy girls should strive to communicate their feelings and desires with their partners in order to have equal control in relationships. Thinking about what one may resist and how they would communicate their boundaries in hypothetical situations may help girls to resist or communicate their boundaries in real situations in the future. It is important, in the safety of girls’ group spaces, to have these types of conversations, to engage in thinking about how to communicate boundaries and desires, and to nurture critical, sexual subjectivities.

**Emerging, Critical, Romantic-Sexual Subjectivities: Sexual Pressure and the Creation of Boundaries**

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Often, a first step in developing critical subjectivities related to romantic and sexual relationships involves listening to one’s feelings and identifying and extricating oneself from situations that feel “wrong”. For instance, we met Ainara earlier in this chapter. When reflecting upon her sexual predicament and experience with her boyfriend Diego, she explained that she did not want to have sex with Diego and she identifies that he emotionally manipulated her and pressured her into having sex with him by saying things like, “I love you so much, we need to do it”. Ainara explained to me that she had felt uneasy and sad with how her relationship with Diego had evolved: these uneasy feelings allowed her to identify that something was off, and aided her in identifying the sexual pressure that she had experienced. This awareness may allow Ainara to have a greater sense of control in future relationships and interactions.

During her eighth grade year, I interviewed Lara, who critically commented on these forms of pressure:

**Clonan-Roy**: Do you think boys treat girls well at school?

**Lara**: Not always. Sometimes they say, “Oh, you want to hang out?” but what they really want is to, you know... So, usually that’s why they talk to people. You usually don’t hear stuff that’s actually a serious relationship. It’s usually a month. Next person.

**Clonan-Roy**: Yeah, and move on. When do you think boys start doing that type of stuff, like talking to you basically so they can have sex with you? Around eighth grade or earlier?

**Lara**: Yeah, eighth grade. Eh, kind of seventh grade.

**Clonan-Roy**: Yeah. Just start taking advantage of girls, basically?

**Lara**: Mhm... Like, I had a conversation with my mom. She was like, “You know, just wait. All boys want is to have that.” And I’m just like, I know. I know this. Don’t tell me this. It was awkward because I already knew the stuff.

In this interview, Lara demonstrates her critical subjectivity and awareness of romantic-sexual dynamics in her peer group. She highlights that boys just want to have sex with girls, take
advantage of them, and are often not clear about their intentions. Additionally, this transcript
demonstrates that there may be a link between girls’ critical subjectivities and the consejos that
their mothers pass down to them about “how men are”. It is important that Lara recalls this
conversation and supports her discussion of boy’s pressuring behaviors in her age group, with
warnings that her mother has issued.

As a seventh grader, Mariana described how she personally navigated such pressure in

**Clonan-Roy**: Okay. When you touch him in a flirty, racy way like that, do you feel ever like you want to do more?

**Mariana**: No.

**Clonan-Roy**: No? What makes you feel like, okay, this is it?

**Mariana**: Because we’re at school. Also, I never see him, like after school. We don’t really talk after school anymore.

**Clonan-Roy**: So do you think it would be different, like you’d want to do more with him if you were outside of school?

**Mariana**: It would probably be different but I would still have my limits.

**Clonan-Roy**: What do you think? How do you create the limits in for things like that? Where does it come from? Is it stuff your parents say to you?

**Mariana**: Yeah, kind of that. And I know that if we do end up doing that, and I’m still young, there’s a possibility that I could end up pregnant or something. I don't want that to happen because I really want to get somewhere in life. After I’m like ready, like I already have a job and stuff and enough money, I’d probably be ready to have a child. So yeah. . . Yeah, so me and Jared, you know how he touched my thigh? Sometimes he goes a little higher, but I just push him away, because I’m saying, it’s a limit.

In this transcript, Mariana describes how she has limits for the types of romantic and sexual
interactions that she will engage in. She explains that these limits are created by her notion of
what is appropriate for school, values that her family has instilled in her, and evaluations that
consider her aspirations for the future against the potential consequences of having sex. She
seems to be aware that she may desire more in out of school spaces, but she would still negotiate certain limits with Jared that would make her feel in control of the interaction.

Emerging, Critical, Romantic-Sexual Subjectivities: Sexual Decision Making and Planning

As evident in the vignette at the beginning of this section, girls like Maria, Gabriela, and Vania have already begun articulating how they have made sexual decisions, how they are engaging in protecting themselves and planning for their futures, and what their sexual desires are. Sometimes girls will engage in thinking about these topics in private or with their friends, and other times, girls will engage in sexual decision making and planning with their boyfriends or sexual partners. Lara, an 8th grader at the time of the interview, described how she made sexual decisions, with her boyfriend, Manuel.

Clonan-Roy: You said you and Manuel have talked about it. Are you pretty comfortable talking to him about what you think about that type of stuff?

Lara: Yeah. Anything. Because his dad teaches him things, so he teaches this to me. It's like oh, okay, so you can’t do this or you could try this. Stuff like that.

Clonan-Roy: About sex stuff?

Lara: Yeah, or like things that could happen. Like, he’s like, “If we ever have a baby…” he plans it, like, “We’re going to do this.” But sometimes he kids around. Like the other day, he’s like, “If you get pregnant, YOU are going to work. I’m staying in school.” And I’m like, “Shut up. A month ago, you told me you would drop out of school.”

Clonan-Roy: How does that factor into your decision? I remember when I was your age, thinking about sex, and thinking, “I don’t want to get pregnant.” That was the thing that really freaked me out about it.

Lara: Yeah. I feel like that’s the same thing with me. Because I feel like if I get pregnant at this age, I would have an abortion. It doesn’t mess up your life. It just... it stops you from doing certain things. I don’t want to be around carrying a baby, feeding it, when I could be having fun and partying, something like that.

Clonan-Roy: Do you think most boys think this much about sex and what could happen?
**Lara:** No. They just want it for pleasure, I guess.

**Clonan-Roy:** I was thinking about Manuel and that it’s cool he thinks about that stuff.

**Lara:** Some just do it like, “yeah, I’m not a virgin”, and they just do it. That’s not good. They don’t really think about what could happen. They’re not going to want to take care of that baby. They’re like, “We just did it one time.” Well, it only takes one time.

In this transcript, Lara describes how her boyfriend Manuel is sexually informed because he has an open dialogue with his father about these topics. This nurtures sexually open conversations in their relationship and seems to foster Lara’s critical, sexual subjectivity, which includes the following ideas: 1) It is important to plan out sexual decision making and activities and what the consequences of those activities may be; 2) It is important to negotiate how Lara and her partner would navigate the consequences of sexual activities; 3) Pregnancy would hinder Lara from achieving other goals, so she would have an abortion if she needed to, and; 4) Most boys do not think about the consequences of sex, so it is important for girls to protect themselves and be aware of sexual consequences. This transcript also shows that girls’ sexual subjectivities are not formed in a vacuum: they are shaped by many social-relational factors, include the interpersonal romantic relationships that they engage in. This stresses that as much as we need to have safe, educational spaces that nurture girls’ developing critical subjectivities, related to romantic and sexual practices, we need to have similar spaces for young boys, and perhaps gender neutral spaces where boys and girls can engage in discussions about a range of sexualities and sexual practices, because subjectivities and patterns of practice are formed through these types of relational experiences.

**Emotions and Sexual Subjectivities**
As I have stressed throughout this chapter, we need to shift our examination of adolescent sexuality from sexual events and potential medical consequences to the emotional artifacts that are produced by learning about the sexual self and how those artifacts allow girls to make sense of themselves and their social worlds in new ways. Here, I will return to the data above to reflect on how emotional artifacts of sexual events or experiences play a key role in nurturing the development of girls’ critical, sexual subjectivities.

Girls’ often form critical, sexual attitudes and subjectivities by listening to their hearts and bodies and attending to aspects of sexuality that cause them stress. For example, Lara implies that the potential threat of pregnancy and her life path being altered causes her stress, which makes having sex “not worth it”. Stress related to the idea of having sex, and Lara’s ability to tend to her own stress, allows her to gain control of her relationships and actions. Being able to critically, envision the future she wants acknowledge how sex and potential pregnancy would shape that future, allows Lara to regulate her own actions in positive ways, and promote her own resilience. Similarly, Mariana describes how she has “limits”, that are probably constructed from her society’s, school’s, family’s, and own sense of what is promiscuous and what is appropriate. Being able to listen to what feels “wrong” or “off”, and being in-tune to her own “gut”, “intuition”, and “limits”, represent an agentic, critical and subjective awareness of her own values and feelings, and allow her greater control in her actions.

Additionally, listening to their desires for emotional connections, instead of shying away from them, represents critical, sexual subjectivities. Maria, Gabriela, and Vania describe being able to take more control and talk to their partner’s about their sexual preferences when they have a strong emotional foundation that supports their intimate acts. An awareness of this emotional need is important, allows them to have pleasurable sexual experiences, and informs their empowered dispositions that shape how they critique and engage with other arenas of sexual life.
Finally, it seems that anger at or a sense of injustice with gendered and patriarchal
dynamics in relationships and in their social worlds molds critical, romantic-sexual subjectivities.
Gabriela listens to and posts about her own anger on Facebook regarding boys taking advantage
of or “fucking with” girls’ feelings, and in doing so projects a critical subjectivity into her social
world. Additionally, Maria, Gabriela, and Vania, angrily describe gender disparities in Mexican
families’ sexual ideologies: they explain, “boys don’t give a fuck” if they get girls pregnant and
Mexican families will kick out their daughters when they get pregnant. They explain that it is
“horrible” to get pregnant as a Mexican girl, and Vania often explains that that leads her to be
hyper-vigilant of her own sexual activities and sexual health. They are aware of and channel their
anger at these observations into a form of social critique, which informs and is shaped by their
emerging, critical sexual subjectivities. This anger, this outlaw emotion (Jaggar, 1997), points to
something wrong in the social world, allows girls to critically regulate their own sexual lives in
order to allow for self-determined futures, and can, promote their resilience.

V. Conclusions

This chapter has examined data that represent how the girls I have worked with learn about
sexuality, navigate sexual predicaments, process and participate in the regulation of Latina girls’
sexuality, and develop critical, romantic-sexual subjectivities. This chapter has attempted to shift
a narrative: when researchers and practitioners examine adolescent sexuality, we need to shed the
lenses of moral panic and medicalization, and instead focus on how sexual experiences and
social-sexual phenomena in peer groups, schools, and communities are often very significant,
emotional and relational, developmental and educational experiences. Within the nexus of these
experiences, the developmental competencies of regulation, resistance, resilience, and critical
consciousness can greatly shape girls’ personal and academic trajectories:
• **Regulation:** In this chapter, we see that the sexual lives of Latina girls in Marshall are hyper-regulated and policed by MMS educators and parents, and Latina girls participate in this regulation: they regulate their peers’ actions through gossip and rumors, which also function to set standards for their own behavior and in self-regulation. Often, Latina girls’ participation in the regulation of their peers lacks a critical consciousness: they do not acknowledge their participation in patriarchal practices of sexual shaming. However, many girls self-regulate their sexual lives with a critical consciousness: acknowledging how various forms of power dynamics shape sexual practices and misogynistic roles and expectations for girls’ in heterosexual relationships often allows them to enact self-determined sexual practices and trajectories.

• **Resistance:** Girls enact many forms of resistance in their sexual lives. They often resist the policing of their sexuality and the characterization of Latina girls as hypersexual, with both critical/“for liberation” and non-critical/“for survival” methods. In intimate relationships they sometimes critically consider their wants and desires and are able to resist the desires of their partners and advocate for their own boundaries and needs. Other times, girls lack a critical, sexual subjectivity and find themselves in painful, sexual predicaments.

• **Resilience:** This chapter contains many stories of girls navigating through intense adversity related to their intimate relationships and sexual experiences that can jeopardize the development of their resilience. Throughout these stories, we see girls call upon resources, like peers, adult allies, critical consejos from their mothers, etc., to persevere through those moments of adversity. Just because a girl finds herself in a sexual predicament, does not mean that we should characterize her as not resilient. Lucía and Ainara, for instance, persevere through intensely, emotional and nonconsensual sexual experiences by seeking the support of adult allies, therapists, and friends, and it is important to acknowledge that resilience, even if, at the same time, we also acknowledge the risk involved.

• **Critical Consciousness:** Throughout the chapter, I have aimed to show how critical consciousness can mediate regulation, resistance, and resilience and the development and deployment of empowered and informed sexual subjectivities. If nurtured, critical consciousness can encourage girls to regulate, resist, and promote their resilience, in ways that do not harm others or that do not perpetuate racial/ethnic, gender, or sexual social injuries in their communities. If nurtured, these critical attitudes can allow girls to envision the links between their personal experiences and broader patriarchal social and sexual practices and histories in society and to challenge gendered and sexualized norms for behavior which often contribute to non-consensual, deceitful, and manipulative sexual situations for middle school girls.

More than anything, over the past five years I have learned that girls are starving for safe spaces in which they can talk about sexuality, examine their emotions related to sexuality, and voice their critical perspectives. One complex issue in providing these spaces is determining the
roles and positionalities of adult allies who facilitate these spaces. In my practice as a facilitator, I found that once girls felt safe enough to talk about sexuality in the group, they often shared details that I questioned if I should report. Also, in asking girls to be open about their intimate experiences, it seemed unfair to engage in a unidirectional exchange of sharing and openness. For instance, once when I was driving a group of eighth grade girls home, they asked me if I had a vibrator, when I last used it, and what color it was. This same group of girls asked me if I was a virgin and when the last time I had sex was. These questions made me blush and I was incredibly uncomfortable: as a researcher, I was not used to being the subject of the questions and, as a practitioner, I tried to turn my answers to these questions into didactic lessons about sexuality and pleasure instead of providing them with insight into my personal life. However, I felt quite unethical in not constructing more of an open bi-directional exchange, especially because they were sharing such intimate information with me.

Similarly, when Emma experienced a sexual predicament and took a pregnancy test in the school bathroom, I felt incredibly nervous, uncomfortable, and like I was participating in something dangerous and unethical. However, I have always pledged my deepest allegiance to the girls I work with, not their parents or MMS educators, and it seemed like allowing Aitana to give Emma the pregnancy test to assuage her fears was the best and most appropriate act for fulfilling my role as an adult ally that she could trust. In future, methodological work, I plan to examine these roles and boundaries as I imagine what safe, educational spaces for girls should look like and how adult allies can best serve girls in those homespaces.
CHAPTER SIX: EXPRESSING EMOTIONS AND DISTRESS: PEER
GROUP LANDSCAPES OF EMOTIONALITY, SELF-HARM, AND
EMOTIONAL REGULATION

In this chapter, I examine how the girls make sense of, navigate, and regulate their
emotional experiences, and specifically, the emotional experiences that they perceive as
traumatic. Throughout this dissertation, I examine different layers of emotionality that the girls
experience and manage. In chapter four, I examine less traumatic, yet still impactful emotional
events (social injuries) that are related to dynamics in their social worlds and their transcultural
identities. Specifically, I examine how social injuries produce emotional residue or artifacts, and
how that residue allows girls to integrate their experiences and learn about their social worlds
and/ or themselves. In chapter five, I examine one important, and painful social injury that my
participants have processed and engaged with consistently throughout my fieldwork in Marshall:
the characterization of Latina girls as hypersexual in their school and communities. I analyze how
girls understand, resist, and strive to regulate the actions and narratives that contribute to that
social injury, and I examine the girls’ emotional artifacts and integrators in relation to that injury
as well as their own sexual experiences. Those social injuries, and many of the girls’ sexual
experiences, contribute to layers of emotionality and stress for my participants. These stressors
are layered onto the more normative, adolescent emotional experiences and stressors.
In this chapter, I examine more severe and traumatic layers of emotionality. I will argue that the combination or layering of multiple stressors, especially those related to the girls’ and their families’ immigrant status and circumstances, contributes to the girls’ sense of being emotionally overwhelmed and in distress. In this chapter, I will explore relationships between feeling overwhelmed, mental health, and the desire to self-harm and the role that the school plays in those issues and experiences. Finally, I will claim that the girls use social media to construct and participate in a collaboratively constructed emotional landscape, where they create norms for emotional expression and regulation.

It is important to examine these layers of emotional experiences with a feminist, intersectional perspective, that pays specific attention to the ways that gender and girlhood shapes the processing, expression, and regulation of emotions and how power dynamics in the social world shape those processes. In this chapter, I will emphasize that although self-harm is
obviously a negative pattern and dangerous form of regulation, it should be viewed as an agentic attempt (although, not a positive, productive, healthy strategy) to regulate and resist one’s pain and the stressors in one’s life. Finally, I will stress that we need to understand a girls’ resilience as part of a larger trajectory and resist patterns of characterizing girls as either resilient or not. In this chapter, I tell the stories of a number of girls who have turned to self-harm as a form of emotional regulation, and often, eventually, learn to resiliently seek the help of adult allies. As researchers and practitioners, we need to focus on these resilient moments and how those moments build to larger (and often bumpy) trajectories and narratives of resilience, and learn how to nurture the skills and competencies that promote such resilience.

I. Emotions, Trauma, and the Social Context

At the beginning of the summer of 2014, Mia’s parents sent her to visit her grandparents and older brother in Mexico. Mia did not want to go and objected, but on the day of her departure, she obliged and got on the plane. Mia was a constant and consistent social media user, but I lost contact with Mia over the summer because she did not have Internet access at her grandfather’s house.

The 2014-2015 school year began and Mia was not present. A counselor said that he believed
she was still in Mexico. A couple of weeks later, Mia’s cousin, Paula, told me that something “bad” had happened. Mia’s middle-brother, Isaac, was killed in a car accident in Marshall. Mia’s mother was the only other family member in Marshall when it happened and she had to navigate law enforcement and health care systems, figure out how to coordinate a burial in Mexico, and process her own grief.

Isaac’s body was flown to Mexico to be buried. After the funeral, Mia returned to Marshall and to MMS. She resumed posting on social media, but now her posts were mostly related to grieving the loss of her brother. Friends and community members, mostly Latinos, commented on and liked her posts, offering their condolences. Mia was quiet, un-engaged, and dejected in her classrooms. Her science teacher once told me that she tried to connect with Mia and offer support by telling her that her father had died when she was in 8th grade and she could relate to what Mia was experiencing. Mia listened in silence and although she did not say anything in return to her teacher, her teacher noticed her eyes watering.

Months later, Mia and I finally spoke about what happened to her family and Mia gave me an un-emotional, almost numb, account of her brother’s death. She insisted that the police and EMTs did not do everything that they could for her brother: they medi-vaced her brother’s friend who was in the car and took her brother in an ambulance to the hospital. She attributes that police and EMT action to her brother’s death. I asked Mia who she talked to in order to process what she was feeling and she told me, “no one”. She said that her mother
believes in dealing with your feelings privately, and on your own, so they do not
talk about their grief. I told Mia that we could always talk if she needed it, but
she never came to me.

Unfortunately, traumatic stories and experiences of loss are not uncommon among my
participants. In this introductory section of chapter six, I will use Mia’s story to examine the
relationships between the social context of the New Latino Diaspora (and the sense of loss and
separation from Mexico) and the experience of being an immigrant or child of immigrants, the
emotional residue of traumatic events like family separation, deportation, and loss, and the
emotional experiences that are associated with the trajectories of adolescence. The average
adolescent experience is emotional and tumultuous as adolescents struggle to answer, “Who am
I?” For my participants, Latina immigrants or children of immigrants, there are layers of
emotionality, stress and trauma that compound those more normative, adolescent emotional
experiences. The metaphor of an onion is useful for visualizing the layeredness of emotional
experiences that my participants navigate: layers of emotional artifacts from the stresses and
experiences of adolescence, social injuries related to their race/ethnicity, immigrant status,
gender, and sexuality (discussed in chapter four), and traumas associated with the immigrant
experience in Marshall are important layers that comprise girls’ emotional cores.
Like I previously mentioned, traumatic loss is a common experience amongst my Latina girl participants. In a seventh grade girls’ group meeting in 2013, I asked the girls’ what they became most emotional about. Every girl in the meeting reported being the most upset by “family stuff”. Although Mia reported keeping her emotions related to traumatic “family stuff” to herself, many girls often express, navigate, process, and understand those emotions in the social sites of school and social media, with their close Latina friends. Later in the chapter, I will analyze how the girls use social media to express their emotions and create emotional norms for their peer group. For now, I will provide a quick an clear example of the types of loss that my participants experience and the ways that they express and process their emotional responses to that loss. In figure 8, Emilia uses the platform of Facebook to journal about a recent emotional experience:

Emilia woke up to find out that her uncle, her mother’s brother, died. Emilia expresses being sad for her mom and that she herself is grieving the uncle that she never got to meet. In this post, there is a sense of loss and longing: family separation, a loss of connection to Mexico, and a longing for family that Emilia has never met because her parents migrated to the U.S. before she was born.

Figure 8. Emilia’s loss.
It is important to acknowledge that the emotional artifacts of a death in a family are transnational and that girls’ reactions of loss and emotionality are legitimate, and not dramatic teenage reactions. In a later section of this chapter, I will further explore how girls use social media to express sadness and distress to an imagined audience that would feel and empathize with this pain.

Similar to Emilia’s experience of the loss of an uncle in Mexico, Catalina frequently feels distressed when she remembers and thinks about the loss of her uncle, Simón. As an 8th grader, Catalina has come to realize that the winter months are emotionally hard for her, because Simón was killed in December, and she has to surround herself with friends and adult allies who will support her through emotionally stressful winters, as she remembers his death. One day, I interviewed Catalina about her relationship with Simón:

**Clonan-Roy:** So was Simón here in Marshall and then he went back to Mexico?

**Catalina:** He got deported.

**Clonan-Roy:** How did he get deported?

**Catalina:** Because he was fighting. He was a fighter, just like me.

**Clonan-Roy:** Like out in the street or something?

**Catalina:** Yeah, and then the neighbors, I think they called the police on him. I started crying. I was on the window and my older sister, Alejandra, she was carrying me. I was four and she was… I forget how old she was. She’s five years older than me now. I don’t want to count them. I think she was nine.

**Paula:** Nine.

**Catalina:** Yeah, nine. And she was carrying me and I started crying. And since he was the only one I felt cared about me and stuff, I was the one most crying. And Franco [her brother] didn’t really know him because he was only one month old.

**Clonan-Roy:** Yeah. Did you feel closer to him than to your parents?
Catalina: Mhm. . . I felt like he was my only parent, like he was a single parent for me. . . Because my dad and mom, they always worked. And he only worked in the mornings and came back at 12:00 or something. I forget. But he used to be with me most of the time. . .

Clonan-Roy: How did he die, Catalina?

Catalina: Someone shot him in the back while he was riding a bike, because he owed money.

Clonan-Roy: Oh.

Catalina: He was into all that stuff. Bad stuff.

Clonan-Roy: Drugs and stuff?

Catalina: Yeah.

This interview transcript shows that death that occurs in Mexico and traumatic social phenomena and events, like the drug trade and violence in Mexico, deeply touch some of my participants in Marshall, PA. The emotional residue of these events knows no borders. For the Mexican girls I have worked with, their extended families are very important and they are intimately close to their tios, tias, primos, and abuelos. They often live with these extended family members in Marshall, and that experience or interpretation of closeness affects how Catalina processes the violent loss of her uncle, and how Emilia experiences the loss of an uncle that she never met. It is these types of loss and the accompanying emotional residues that are common amongst my participants in Marshall.

Like Catalina’s story revealed, part of the intensity of these traumatic family experiences is having to process violent and gory details about the loss of close family members. Below, is a transcript of my interview with Mia, when she finally opened up to me about her brother’s death, seven months after it occurred:

Mia: After the crash, supposedly he was still alive. He was still speaking, but when he got in the thing, he wasn’t talking no more. They were supposed to take
my brother into the helicopter but they didn’t. They took his friend, because supposedly the story was he was already dying, and his friend was alive. . . . And when they got over there [the hospital], he had all this… he had all the blood. He had all the stuff here, so he couldn’t breathe. So it was all this side of his body. And he passed out… They called my dad. . . . Then my dad came to me. He told me he had a car accident. I thought it was just a car accident. But then my dad started crying because he didn’t want to tell me that he passed away. He passed away around three or six in the morning. He was still alive the whole night. He had two or three heart attacks. Then they let him go. They were still talking, the doctor was talking, the nurse went in, and then they said that he passed away.

As Mia reported this story to me, her eyes did not water and her voice did not waver. She seemed calm, and almost excited (perhaps due to a cathartic release) to report these details to me. Next, Mia explained how her family had to navigate organizing Isaac’s funeral and she talks about how difficult it was to attend the funeral and to emotionally process the death with her family.

Mia: I went with my dad. I didn’t want to sleep with my grandpa. He took me with him. He didn’t want to see me cry. Then we talked with my mom – because my dad was trying to figure out how to get money. To take him [Isaac’s body] over here to Mexico, they had to send money to over here. And then I was on the phone with my mom. My mom was crying. And I didn’t want to talk with her because I didn’t want her to see me cry, you know?

Clonan-Roy: You are strong. I don’t know how you did that without just crying immediately. Were you able to let it out and cry by yourself later?

Mia: When I seen him [Isaac’s body, at the funeral], I couldn’t.

Clonan-Roy: You couldn’t hold it in?

Mia: No. He was like . . . his face was all big and everything. And he was all puffy because they opened him up. But they didn’t take nothing out. My mom and dad didn’t want to take nothing out. And he was like, frozen, like.

Although non-immigrant children often manage family loss, they rarely have to experience the fear associated with navigating law enforcement and health care systems as illegal immigrants or the sense of urgency to collect money to arrange for a funeral in another country. These traumas are unique and they produce distinct and intense emotional artifacts, which complicates the
adolescent experience for these girls. These types of emotional traumas, with transnational reach, often produce emotional artifacts of grief, loss, a sense of feeling overwhelmed, and hopelessness for my participants and the girls often struggle with navigating how to process their emotions and grief, in school and out-of-school spaces. Ms. Hanson, a clinical social worker at MMS, commented on the long lasting effects, or rippling artifacts, of these types of traumas.

**Ms. Hanson:** It's the trauma and there’s the effect that comes with it. It affects them for a long period of time. Sometimes, once you get the services in place or the case management things done, there is this level of emotion that is still an open wound, more than teachers even realize.

This transcript was taken from a longer interview, when Ms. Hanson spent time emphasizing that, as the only clinical social worker for a large middle school, most of her time is spent helping students process the emotional artifacts of trauma, which happened years ago. Students may be in therapy or have a case manager that is monitoring their emotional well-being and mental health, but the “open wound”, the residual emotionality, still effects students in the school space. Ms. Hanson points out that educators often do not realize what emotional residue students are managing as they sit through a class, complete a test, or walk through the halls, and that they should work to increase awareness of the long-lasting impact of these traumas on their students, in and out of school.

As the girls navigate the multiple worlds in which they are located, and the unfamiliar spaces and worlds that their families traverse, they have to figure out how to express and regulate the emotions they are experiencing and when to seek help and support. Relevant to that are gendered and cultural scripts of emotionality and mental health, urban emotional commonsense and emotional habitus (essentially, how to “act” or perform emotionality) (Ramos-Zayas, 2012), and collaboratively constructed emotional landscapes (much of which, I will discuss in later portions of this chapter). I have heard from many girls, Ms. Hanson (who is Columbian), and
Natalia (the Latino Community Liaison from Planned Parenthood in Marshall, who is Mexican), that Latino families often prefer to keep feelings private and to treat mental illness by handling it within the family, and through prayer. Reflective of those Latino family cultural practices, Mia speaks about how her family dealt with grieving the loss of her brother in silence:

**Clonan-Roy:** Did you talk to anybody about how you were feeling? How do you like to deal with stuff like that, that’s hard? Would you rather keep your feelings inside or do you want to talk about it?

**Mia:** Keep it in myself.

**Clonan-Roy:** You do? Why do you like keeping it to yourself?

**Mia:** I don’t know. It just feels better.

**Clonan-Roy:** Is that how your mom and dad are, too? They kind of keep things to themselves?

**Mia:** My mom, she writes in a book or something, I don’t know. She’s got a book.

**Clonan-Roy:** Like a journal?

**Mia:** Yeah. She writes.

**Clonan-Roy:** Yeah. What does your dad do? You don’t know?

**Mia:** I don’t know.

This introductory section of chapter five intended to paint a picture of the types of loss that many Latina girls in Marshall have experienced and persevered through. Throughout these experiences of trauma, Mia, Emilia, and Catalina struggle and communicate, in different ways, that they are experiencing ongoing grief. For Mia, that grief affected her school attendance, engagement, and behaviors towards her peers. However, she, like Emilia and Catalina, often used the comfort of the girls’ group, and their close and trusting relationship with me, to discuss their experiences of loss, or to connect with girls’ group members in other ways. I observed resilient
action each time these girls used the girls group space to process their emotions with others, and even each time the girls were able to put their grief aside, laugh, and engage in light-hearted, but important connections with the other girls in the group.

In this section, I wanted to illuminate some of the issues I will continue to explore throughout the chapter. First, the intensity of these experiences and the sense that they do not have an outlet to express their feelings about these experiences, sometimes leads the girls to self-harm or “cut” themselves, usually on their wrists, legs, or stomachs. Other times, the girls turn to social media as a platform to express their emotions and receive support from close or distant peers in their social network. When educators at school perceive that girls are struggling, they often strive to intervene and provide help for the girls, especially if they have witnessed self-harm and have to report the abuse to county services. The rest of this chapter will explore the relationships between layers of emotionality, including trauma, cutting, emotional expression and regulation, and the role of schooling in providing emotional care and mental health support services.

II. Emotions and Cutting

My first introduction to the serious emotional and mental health realities that my participants were grappling with happened in 2012, in my first year of research, when Maria messaged me on Facebook to tell me that she was “cutting herself”. Maria was in 8th grade and had been struggling emotionally since her brothers were deported from Marshall earlier in middle school. The next school day, I came to see Maria, and as a mandated reporter, unfortunately, I had to report that she had been self-harming to her counselor, Mr. Drake. Maria was disappointed that we had to go see Mr. Drake, but she did not seem surprised. I had warned all of the girls of my mandated reporting responsibilities at the beginning of the year.
First, we talked about her feelings and experiences and Mr. Drake tried to decipher why she felt like she needed to do that. At one point, a nurse came to look at her cuts, which the nurse and Mr. Drake said were superficial. Then, Ms. Chavez, the Latino Community Liaison, came into the meeting to call Maria’s mom, interpret for Mr. Drake, and explain that Maria had been cutting and that Mr. Drake was then going to make a referral to a therapist. Throughout this entire event, Maria was crying silently as she listened to Mr. Drake and answered his questions. Weeks later, Maria was paired with a school clinical social worker who was at MMS on grant funding. She formed a great relationship with him, stopped cutting, and began feeling less depressed.

Maria is now entering 12th grade and her brothers have attempted multiple times to return to the U.S., which, each time, has caused the family much emotional stress. Recently, her brother was murdered in Mexico. From 8th grade to the present, Maria has struggled to manage her...
emotional experiences, related to the complex constellation of immigration traumas and more typical adolescent social, sexual, and academic experiences.

She has often turned to cutting or drug use and continues to ask her mother to find her a therapist and to allow her to take antidepressants. Her family deals with emotions and mental health very privately, often turning to prayer, and her mother, specifically did not want Maria to see a therapist or take antidepressants. I have called and emailed her counselor at the high school and he has been less than helpful: instead of supporting her in finding a therapist he wrote down the number of the county mental health services organization for her to call and navigate herself. Throughout these issues, Maria continues to turn to her friends and to me for emotional support.

Unfortunately, Maria’s story exemplifies why many Latina girls cut and how often, girls’ battles with mental wellness, emotional stressors, and self-harm is long and arduous. In this section of chapter five, I will examine the relationships between girls’ layered emotional experiences (highlighting the role of trauma) and cutting, and the role that school, family, and peers play in those relationships. First, I examine potential explanations for why girls engage in self-harm. Second, I analyze the role that Mexican families and cultural practices and scripts play in motivations to self-harm. Third, I explore how girls learn to cut. And, finally, I argue that a lack of perceived emotional support and relational allies might prompt the continuation or exacerbation of self-harm. Throughout this section, I will claim that cutting is a physical and active artifact of girls’ emotional states. I will also argue that cutting, and the emotions which accompany those acts, function as integrators: those emotions and actions teach girls about themselves, how they can and should manage emotional distress, and often lead them to identify with being “emotional”, “depressed”, or “emo”, which shapes their actions in their peer groups.
and on social media. Finally, cutting is an act of regulation and resistance: it represents an attempt
to regulate one’s pain, and it resists traditional, Mexican models and scripts for emotional silences
and expressions. Girls cut because they are striving to regulate their distress and relieve their
pain: in this way, girls are cutting in order to cope with adversity and persevere through distress.
Although cutting is not a resilient behavior, cutting should be reconceptualized as a coping
mechanism, albeit a dangerous one.

**Why do Latina girls in Marshall cut?**

When I first began work in Marshall, it seemed that MMS staff members were more
concerned with girls engaging in unsafe sexual relationships than having emotional or mental
health challenges. However, each year, I learned of more and more girls that had or were cutting.
In my primary data collection year, 2014-2015, five out of eight, eighth grade girls’ group
members were currently cutting or talked about past experiences of cutting. I recently went
through my girls’ group member records and tried to recall how many of the 70 girls I had
worked with throughout this project had told me that they had experimented with cutting: I
recalled clear episodes of 17 out of the 70 girls reporting that they had cut at some point. I believe
that this number 17/70 or 24%, is probably a low estimate since I lost touch with many girls at
some point in their trajectory in middle school (due to district mobility, changes in girls’ group
membership, etc.) and because some girls may not have divulged their cutting behaviors to me
due to my mandated reporter status. On the other hand, it is important to recognize that 76% of
my participants *did not* cut and, like many adolescent girls of color who navigate myriad
challenging situations, were able to resiliently navigate intense emotional circumstances without
turning to self-harm.
Unfortunately, I was unable to find reliable demographic, national data on the prevalence of cutting. However, there is national data on suicide. Many popular mental health discourses often link cutting with suicide, although that link is not accurate. Cutting is a volitional act to harm one’s own body, with the intention to seek relief and without the intention to end one’s life (Zila & Kiselica, 2001, p. 47). A suicide attempt, obviously, intends to end one’s life, and typically offers no such relief. National data shows that Hispanic/ Latina girls have higher rates of cutting and suicide that other groups of girls, and although we should not confuse the two types of behaviors, these high rates do indicate that this population is managing many emotional stressors and probably not receiving appropriate emotional support. Zayas and colleagues (2005) explain that the 1995 CDC Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance (YRBS) survey showed that a “startling 21% of Hispanic girls between the ages of 14 and 17 years had attempted suicide in the previous 12 months, in comparison with 10.4% of non-Hispanic White and 10.8% of African American girls in the same age group” and that subsequent YRBS data showed little change (p. 276). This national data regarding Latina girls’ mental health and wellness echoes many of the concerns that my data produce.

This prevalence of self-harm (and suicidal ideation/ attempts in the Latino community nationally) shifted my primary focus on sexual issues towards experiences of emotional and mental health issues, and I began to interview girls about cutting and why they thought they or other girls cut. I argue that girls often start to cut due to a sense of being overwhelmed, emotionally, or “wrapped too tight” (Fine & Zane, 2013), typically precipitated by (a) traumatic life event(s). As mentioned previously, in the summer of 2014, I asked my 7th grade girls’ group what girls get most emotionally upset about, they all responded, “family stuff”: including the deportation of family members, family separation, or the death of family members still in Mexico. Additionally, Abril, Danna, and Camila once told me that they get overwhelmed by non-traumatic, but constant stressors at home: they said that they feel “like moms” and always have to
cook, clean, and take care of their younger siblings. Similarly, when Maria was in high school and contemplating drug use and cutting due to a stressful situation related to her brother’s deportation, she commented that she wanted to do drugs in order “to forget everything going on in [her] life”. It seems that the layering of stressors related to adolescence, their family circumstances, social injuries, and traumatic experiences often lead girls to unbearable points of distress, and they use cutting to regulate that distress and relieve their pain. Camila affirmed this by saying, “girls use it [cutting] to relieve their stress, because they think… like, some girls, they keep it all inside and they have no other way to let it out. So they think that causing, by cutting, they’re going to take out all the stress”.

I hypothesize that girls often turn to cutting because they have heard from peers (often on social media) that it is an efficacious way to deal with emotional distress. This may be related to the fact that girls do not have clear and scaffolded outlets for emotional expression, perhaps due to their family’s practices (which may be related to broader cultural practices), and girls turn to cutting to regulate their emotions (often, to feel a release or provide reprieve from numbness). Ms. Hanson, the MMS clinical social worker, who is also Columbian and who operates with a unique level of cultural sensitivity and awareness of bias and assumptions, explained that very few African American and white girls at MMS cut (again this agrees with national data on cutting and suicidal ideation and attempts), and that it is mostly Latina girls who engage in self-harm. In the spring of 2015, she commented that she had seen a rise in the number of Latino boys cutting. She related the rise in boys cutting to Latino cultural values associated with machismo: she explained that one boy who was cutting, said that “his dad told him he should not cry, so bleeding was how he cried”. Ms. Hanson commented that supporting Latino/a students with mental health issues is difficult because mental health is so stigmatized in the Latino community and Latino parents often want to turn to prayer, rather than therapy or medicine, as a solution to these issues.
Although this is not the case with every family, frequently, emotional processing, mental health, and cutting are topics that are silenced in Mexican families, which leads the girls to deal with distress independently and to employ alternatives like cutting, rather than building emotionally communicative relationships within their families or seeking mental health services. On multiple occasions, Maria has vented to me that she is “pissed at” her mom because she will not allow her to see a doctor to get antidepressants, and that her mom did not even want her to see a therapist regularly. The simultaneous stressors of feeling overwhelmed, due to issues going on with one’s family, but not being able to talk about the emotional residue of those issues, may be one reason that girls are persuaded to cut themselves. I have often been confused by the fact that girls so frequently come to me and tell me they are cutting, despite knowing that I am a mandated reporter. I think that this may be one indicator of a desire to express one’s emotions and mental health experiences to adult allies who will listen and to seek help. Next, I will further explore how girls learn to conceive of cutting as a viable option for dealing with their emotions.

**Learning to Cut**

Girls have had varying responses when I have asked them how they (or how they think others) have learned to cut. In 2013, MMS counselors said that they suspected that girls learned how to cut by looking at websites and blog posts which instructed individuals on how to cut “safely” (i.e., how to cut one’s wrist without lethally striking a vein). In an interview, I asked Camila the following question:

**Clonan-Roy:** How do you think girls learn about cutting, or learn how to do it, or learn to post stuff like that to get attention?

**Camila:** I think it’s from seeing other people do it.
Although it is unclear if “seeing other people do it” indicates that they learn from others in face-to-face interactions or social media posts, it underscores the social nature of learning how to cut, and the possibility of “social contagion”. In an interview with Vania, we contemplated if girls cut for the first time because they had premeditated the action or if it was impulsive. The following are fieldnotes captured during this interview:

Vania says that girls cut for different reasons. Some are dramatic or do it for show. She said that after her grandmother died, she cut briefly. She was just feeling so overwhelmed and when she cut, it was like a release, like you took the cap off of a lot of pressure inside. She said that she used the end of a broken hanger and cut her arms and that she made this decision impulsively. She was not confused or overwhelmed, she was just seeking relief. She said that some girls cut, because they have no one to talk to and cutting is a way to express their pain.

In the displayed fieldnote, Vania claims that when she cut, she did it because she was overwhelmed, compounded by the death of her grandmother and that, although some girls do it for attention, she did it to find relief from emotional pain. I typically approach the narratives my girls tell with a heuristics of faith (Fine & Sirin, 2007), but I keep a critical edge of suspicion. This is one moment where I was suspicious if Vania’s cutting (and the cutting behaviors of other girls) was completely impulsive. As indicated by Camila, I believe that Latina girls in Marshall have access to templates that guide how they express or manage their emotions through their engagement with their peers and on social media. As I will show in the next section, girls often see, comment on, create, or think about images that value cutting as one viable option for dealing with emotional distress. When girls reach the climax of emotional distress, like Vania did when her grandmother died, they often turn to cutting as a strategy for emotional expression and relief, which has seemingly proved to be efficacious for their peers. Although cutting is a negative behavior, it is important to mark the attempt to regulate one’s circumstances and emotional distress, and cope with adversity. The girls who cut need support to channel that attempt to
regulate their emotions in more productive and positive ways, but it is critical that we do not consider these girls as passive victims, “dramatic”, or “crazy”. Rather, they are striving, agentically, to gain control of their lives and themselves, and need better scaffolding and support in order to figure out how to do so. With such scaffolding and support, girls may develop healthier coping strategies that can foster their resilience.

III. Expressing Emotions and Cutting on Social Media and Emotional Understanding

I met Camila in her 6th grade year. That year, she was very quiet and shy. I followed her on Facebook and Instagram and often noticed that she would “like” depression or cutting-related “pages” but she never posted anything on her own. This made me worry about her, but besides checking in with her constantly, the counselors at MMS advised that I could not really do much else since we did not have specific evidence of self-harm. Once during a girls’ group meeting, Camila told me that she felt like she should tell me something, but she did not know if she should tell me. I reminded her that she could tell me absolutely anything, but if it was about self-harm, someone hurting her, or her hurting someone else then I had to report it to her counselor. She said that she wanted to tell me but she did not want to get in trouble. Danna, another group member, was listening to this conversation and told Camila that “it was ok”, because Camila does not “do it anymore”.

At the end of her 6th grade school year, her counselor, Mrs. Smith, called me to tell me that she had concerns about Camila and that she wanted me to know about them, since I would be seeing Camila during the summer session of girls’
groups. She said that Camila’s boyfriend had come to her and explained that Camila would often cry uncontrollably and on some days, would refuse to eat all day long because she thought she was fat. Mrs. Smith met with Camila about these concerns, and, amongst other recommendations, she recommended that Camila open up to her family members or close friends when she was feeling down. Mrs. Smith said that throughout the conversation, Camila’s eyes watered, and as it concluded, Camila said that she would start opening up to an older cousin. Mrs. Smith talked to Camila’s family, who she said seemed very invested in Camila’s emotional wellness, but still, she wanted me to be an additional adult ally for Camila throughout the summer.

That summer, Camila ended up going to Mexico to visit her grandparents and I was only able to keep in touch with her on social media. Every time we corresponded, she reported that she was doing well. When she returned for her seventh grade year, something seemed to have changed. She was much more talkative and silly. At first, I was not sure if she was actually happier or hiding her sadness with a façade of giggly behavior. Her outward happiness was also coupled with a newfound emotional maturity and literacy.

She explained emotional situations and the perspectives with a great deal of insight and she had a unique perspective on social media use. During one meeting, we were talking about how the girls often met friends on social media, usually Facebook or Instagram. Yartizel said that she often met friends through depression or cutting related pages and that lately she had been helping certain friends manage their depression and stop cutting. Although many other girls had
talked about meeting friends on Facebook and Instagram, she was the first girl to talk about reaching out to others, emotionally. Camila explained that met a girl in Switzerland via a cutting related page and had begun to message her about how “it would get better”. She also met a girl from California on a cutting page. She even exchanged phone numbers with this girl and they ended up talking one night into the early morning because the girl in California was contemplating suicide. Camila listened to her, offered her emotional understanding and empathy, and by messaging that “it would get better”, calmed her friend down and convinced her to get help. Camila is now in 9th grade, and continues to think about the complexity of emotions, cutting, and depression. She continues to reach out to others, in face-to-face and online spaces, to check in on their emotional wellbeing and mental health and to support them through challenging emotional experiences.

In Camila’s cohort of the girls’ group, we have had many discussions about emotions, mental health, and how girls’ use Facebook and Instagram to express their emotions. Camila is a constant and critical voice in these discussions, and she often probes girls to examine their own and other’s social media use in more complex ways. From these discussions in the girls’ group, interviews with individual girls, and observing the girls on social media, I have found possible explanations for why girls use social media to discuss emotions and cutting, that girls’ often use social media to seek or provide emotional support, and that engaging in social media in these ways constructs peer group norms (Lightfoot, 1997) for the expression of emotions and understandings of mental health.

As I discussed in the last section, my data suggests that the girls perceive that they do not have many channels for emotional expression, so the girls often seek help and attention by cutting
and by expressing their emotions or sentiments about mental health and cutting on social media. In the majority of my interviews with eighth grade girls in 2015, the girls said that they did not feel like they could discuss their emotions or mental health with adults at school or in their families, and that only sometimes would they talk with their close friends about their most intimate emotions. Interestingly, the girls I have worked with seem to be surprisingly comfortable expressing their emotions on social media. It seems that the imagined distance and simultaneous safety that social media platforms offer present an ideal opportunity for expressing their emotions. Although many parents and practitioners think that social media is used by adolescents for negative forms of communication and expression, like sexting or bullying, this pattern shows that social media can also be used in positive ways and facilitate girls seeking support or an outlet for expression.

I have observed that girls express emotions in two “types” of social media posts. They either post about a specific situation or artifact that they are processing or experiencing, or, about a more vague emotional state/ artifact or sentiment/ integrator they are grappling with. For

Figure 10. Maria Expressing Grief on Facebook.
instance, in Figure 10, Maria, who you were introduced to earlier in this chapter, expresses sadness related to her family separation, her brother’s death, and the inability to be together during the holidays. She uses the “feeling” capability/option on Facebook and a “sad-face” emoji rather than voicing this sentiment herself, coupled by an explanation of the specific situation she is navigating currently. She receives 16 likes and three comments, which offer her emotional affirmation and support. Beyond garnering that type of virtual-emotional support, her post works to construct and reinforce a common landscape of emotional experiences. As shown earlier in this chapter, many Latina girls post about these types of emotional-family experiences. In Figure 11, Mia, who we met at the beginning of this chapter, posts an emotional confession, reflecting on her grief eight months after her brother’s death. Again, this emotional post, communicated through her words and “crying” emojis and broken hearts, is much more communicative and expressive than Mia usually is in face-to-face spaces, and reaffirms that girls often feel more comfortable expressing intimate emotions on social media spaces.

I hypothesize that these type of posts do two things. First, they co-create a peer group norm that it is acceptable to post such emotional expressions on Facebook, and create the expectation that the peer group will offer support through “likes” on a post. Second, these posts create a common emotional understanding amongst the Latina-dominant peer group, that there

Figure 11. Mia Posting an Emotional Expression.
are others “out there” experiencing the same types of emotional distress, which may offer some comfort, knowing that one is not alone in these types of experiences.

I explained that I have observed two types of emotional posts: one type expresses emotions related to specific situations, and the second are posts which express emotions that are more broad, vague, and less tied to a situation than to an ongoing emotional experience that a girl is navigating. I now turn to examine that second type of post and how girls seek support with those types of posts. In Figure 12, Isidora posts a picture of text and other Instagram users comment below.

Figure 12. Isidora requesting support on Instagram.
In these post itself, Isidora seems to express feeling sad about thinking or being told that she is unattractive and fat. Under the post she comments, “can I wake up to nice comments?”, specifically asking for support from her social media “friends” and using the “sad face” emoji to indicate sadness. She receives 27, affirming “likes” on this post and ten comments which check in to see if she is “ok”, offer her emotional comfort by saying things like, “if people [say] Ur fat they r stupid”, and provide hope that she will learn to regulate emotional stress. She thanks her “friends” for these comforting words and assures them that she is “okay”. This type of post represents emotional artifacts and integrators: they communicate an emotional residue from a specific or more ongoing experience or emotional state and they allow the girls to make sense of themselves in new ways. For Isidora, she makes sense of her feelings by posting and engaging with the comments under her post, learning that the people who are saying that she is fat are “stupid” and that she will learn to regulate her emotional stress.

I argue that these types of emotional expressions or artifacts, not related to specific emotional situations, are also very important in creating emotional-expression norms for the peer group and for co-creating emotional understandings between the Latina-dominant peer groups I have worked with. I have documented three types of emotional posts that are not related to specific events or situations: 1) expressing that one needs to “let their feelings out”; 2) expressing that one is hiding their “real” emotions, and; 3) expressing that one needs someone to care. In Figures 13 and 14, Catalina and Elena...
express to

their virtual worlds that they need to “let their feelings out” and that they really need to “talk to someone about my thoughts and feelings”. Below each of these posts, we can see that “friends” in their virtual worlds, “like” the posts in support, or agreement, and at least one individual offers that they are here for each of the girls.

These types of posts accomplish at least two things: 1) they seek and achieve support from others, and; 2) they create the emotional norm that it is ok to communicate a need to express one’s emotions on social media and that it is common to feel like you can’t talk about your emotions.

In the second strain of posts, those that express that one is hiding their “real” emotions, the girls co-create norms which understand that it is common to feel like one can not express their real “emotions. Below, in Figure 15, Danna and Florencia, post images of themselves and a stock photo with captions that implicate that they are hiding their emotions. Again, girls “like” these posts, which I hypothesize represents agreeing with the posts and a common, emotional understanding. This affirms interview data that I have gathered from many girls, which
suggests that girls cannot talk about their emotions with their families or at school, and so they learn to “keep it inside” or “act dumb” and “smile”, to hide their real emotions. These types of posts, which are taken up throughout the peer group to create emotional norms, may work to prevent girls from examining the social and situational roots of their emotions and how one can seek help.

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Figure 15. Florencia and Danna convey that they are hiding their real feelings.
work to prevent girls from examining the social and situational roots of their emotions and how one can seek help.

Finally, the third strain of these emotional posts, communicate needing someone “to care”. In the Figure 16, Catalina explains that “no one gives a fuck” about her feelings. On this post, she receives 109 “likes” and 11 comments, indicating that her virtual friends care at some level about her emotional state, and do pay attention to her feelings, offering support. This post, along other similar posts, works to co-construct and affirm the emotional norm that it is common to feel like no one cares about your feelings and that it is ok to feel and express sadness related to that lack of care.

Similarly, in Figure 17, Antonella posts an image of a wrist that has been “cut”, saying, “sometimes all you need is that one person to say they care”. She seems to have either found this pre-made stock photo or to have cropped words on top of a photo of an arm with cuts. Eight people “like” this image and one girl affirms the emotional expression by saying “life story”. It is the interaction of the post and the comments that engages in the co-creation of peer group emotional support and norms, which inform how girls learn to process and communicate emotions, according to acceptable peer group standards.
In an interview, I asked Camila why she thinks that girls engage in these types of emotional interactions on social media, and why girls are comfortable expressing emotions to their Latina peers and to people that they have never met in face-to-face spaces and are only friends on Instagram or Facebook.

Clonan-Roy: What about the girl you met on Instagram from Sweden? She was someone who you made feel better, right?

Camila: Oh ya, I don’t talk to her no more.

Clonan-Roy: Does anyone reach out to you on Facebook or Instagram to make you feel better?

Camila: Well, I feel like, some people, it depends on the friends, because, like, if you post things on Instagram then people are going to try to help you but if you don’t post any depressing things, they’re not going to know you’re depressed. And, so, its like, if you have close friends and you feel comfortable talking to them about it and they know what you’re going through, then they will be there for you.

Clonan-Roy: So you think people post things like that on Instagram or Facebook to get people to help them in someway?
Camila: Or to get attention... Like some girls, they will just cut, and then they’ll post the pictures, and they will just say, they have dumb problems, and then cut, for no reason, and its just... its for attention.

Clonan-Roy: How do girls learn to cut or to post these things online?

Camila: I think its from other people.

Clonan-Roy: When you see images of girls cutting or hear about it, do you ever get worried?

Camila: Ya. You just have to talk to the person, and try to help, and not try to ruin them more.

In this interview transcript, Camila explains multiple aspects of girls’ emotional engagement in social media spaces. First, she explains that sometimes girls post about emotions or cutting for support from their friends, and sometimes it is for attention. She explains that these types of expression can be honest requests for help with dealing with an emotional situation, and she implies that not everyone manages these requests on social media. She says that, depending on the friend, and depending on the individual’s level of comfort in talking about their emotions with their friends, they may “be there” for the friend in face-to-face, long-term ways. In this way, girls are using social media to self-regulate: to regulate their own pain and distress and strive to resiliently cope with adversity. Second, she explains that girls learn to express their emotions, needs for care, and hints at depression from seeing others post similar things, affirming that these posts on Facebook create emotional norms for expression and support seeking. Finally, she suggests that when you see posts, like Antonella’s, that show images or words related to cutting, they are concerning and stressful for the viewer. By participating in these social media-emotional- spaces, youth sometimes encounter support and other times, they encounter stress. As Camila explains to me in this interview data, witnessing posts about cutting often makes her worried and makes her feel ethically responsible for talking to and helping the person through whatever situation they are experiencing: for helping them to regulate their distress. In the next
section of this chapter, I will explore that by viewing these types of posts, adolescents, who often do not want to turn to adults with this sensitive information, encounter a massive ethical and stressful responsibility that is complex to navigate.

Many adults in the girls’ social worlds may view these types of social media activities as “dramatic” or as negative behaviors. I analyze these types of social media engagement as signs of self-regulation and attempts to cope with stress and develop resilience. These posts also reflect a degree of emotional self-understanding: the girls who post these types of emotional expressions acknowledge that they have emotional needs and that those needs are not being met, and carve out a space in their world to express their emotions and gain support. I believe that girls’ express that they “need to let their feelings out” or post emotional images and confessions because they are overwhelmed with stressors (ranging from normal adolescent experiences to social injuries to traumatic loss), and do not perceive that they have other outlets for expression or meaningful relationships with people who want to hear about their feelings. In the conclusion of this dissertation, I will emphasize the importance of educators working as adult allies to build long-term, meaningful relationships with youth, that encourage emotional expression and intimacy and that signify that they care about their students’ emotions. In the next section, I stress how the lack of adult support in social media spaces can lead to stressful, ethical situations for girls who attempt to counsel their peers and how we need to figure out how adults can support youth in these situations without making youth feel like their privacy, trust, and independence has been violated.

IV. The Regulation of Emotions in School Spaces

In eighth grade, Catalina and Paula became close friends through the after school girls’ group. Her counselor, Mr. Drake, recommended Paula for the
group that year because he wanted her to work on her self-esteem and assertiveness. Catalina had been in the group since her sixth grade year.

Paula was incredibly quiet and she would not speak during group meetings unless you asked her direct questions. She also was hesitant to smile, usually trying to hide it by turning away if you made her laugh. Paula would often text me telling me that she felt sad or upset, but she often could not pinpoint why. Catalina was also quiet and struggled with managing her emotions and sadness surrounding the murder of her favorite uncle in Mexico. She often posted emotional comments or pictures on Instagram or commented on pages related to cutting or depression. Over Christmas break, I saw that Catalina posted something about cutting and wanting her pain to end on Instagram. I referred her to Ms. Hanson, the new school clinical social worker. I told Catalina that Ms. Hanson was “the coolest” and was great at “thinking and talking about feelings”, like Catalina was. Catalina and I often joked about her being a celebrity therapist when she grew up and making lots of money because she thought about emotions in such complex ways. Catalina went to see Ms. Hanson and began to enjoy her meetings with her and started to trust her (which was rare; many of the girls did not want to go to Ms. Hanson, out of the fear that she would “tell everybody their business”). Ms. Hanson told me that Catalina’s ability to understand her emotions was complex: she knew that winters were hardest for her because that was when her uncle was murdered, and she was making multiple efforts to seek support.
In early January, Paula’s ESL teacher saw cuts on her arms (I had not seen them before) and referred her to Ms. Hanson. Although Paula did not like having to go see Ms. Hanson because it forced her to talk about how she was feeling (which she told me in texts), she must have also come to trust her. In March, a Latina girl who went to a different middle school in Marshall posted an image and comments on Facebook, expressing that she was cutting and wanted to kill herself. Paula texted me, asking what to do. She said that she and Catalina wanted to get the girl help, but they did not want to tell on her and get her into trouble. I urged them to talk to Ms. Hanson about it. The next day, the two girls went to Ms. Hanson to tell her about their friend and to ask for advice. They came up with an agreement: counselors at the other middle school would talk to the girl and offer her support, while making sure that she knew that she was not in trouble and also protecting the identity of Catalina and Paula, so that “telling on her” would not affect their friendship. I texted with Paula after this and I told her to be proud of herself for handling the situation so well. Paula replied that she was glad that she helped the girl, but she still felt badly for “telling on” her friend.

Because emotions are often conceptualized as private and superfluous, we do not always acknowledge the emotional education that youth receive in schools. In this section, I examine how schools serve as sites where youth’s emotions are regulated, so that they are not distracted from schooling and are performing emotional identities, which align with ideals of model neoliberal students. In this section, I examine three forms of emotional regulation: 1) MMS school staff attempting to support the girls by regulating their emotions; 2) Latina girls regulating their own emotions, with social media use, cutting, etc., and; 3) Latina girls regulating their peer’s
emotions, by seeking the support of school staff, or talking with their peers about alternatives to self-harm. I conceptualize these forms of regulation as contributing to my participants’ emotional education and learning about the emotional self and how to process and express emotions.

**School Staff Regulating Girls’ Emotions**

MMS school staff often become involved with emotional regulation, either because they see cutting marks on girls’ arms, girls’ parents turn to them for help, or girls will report that their peers are cutting or engaging in suicidal ideation in order to find help for them. Here, I examine multiple staff members’ perspectives on and issues that arise with engaging in this type of regulation. First, staff members have commented that they feel pressure to help girls’ regulate their own emotions and not engage in cutting, but that they lack the knowledge and skills that would help them to do so, which causes anxiety for certain staff members. When I asked Mr. Gonzalez, the assistant principal at MMS how he perceives his role in supporting students through emotional situations and cutting, he replied:

**Mr. Gonzalez:** What I fear sometimes with kids is that now it's not so much, ‘I'm doing it because emotionally I feel that I need to’. It's kind of like, ‘I want to experiment with it. I want to try it out. I keep hearing about it. I know someone who did it’. I'm a little worried about how our young people are responding to these types of things.

Has it [cutting] escalated? Is it at a crisis place? I don't know. But it is still there. That's a piece of my degree, of my certification, that I have to go back and revisit. Because the psychology of it all, it's a piece that I don't really have.

This transcript reflects Mr. Gonzalez’s awareness of the fact that many Latina girls’ are struggling emotionally and cutting, and his sense of responsibility for supporting youth through those types of issues. This transcript also alludes to the fact that because cutting is often kept private, it is hard to measure if it has become a school wide “crisis” or if it has escalated. This same privacy poses challenges for supporting students and teaching them to regulate their
emotions in targeted and individualized ways. He emphasizes that he, and most other educators, are not experts on supporting students through emotional distress or cutting episodes, and as I will discuss later, often just act as channels for referrals to psychological services.

In Figure 17, two staff members responded with differing views about their roles in emotional situations and their students’ emotional education. Mr. Gonzalez comments on relying on the counselors to manage emotionally intense situations, and implies that the counselors have the biggest role in emotional regulation. However, Mr. Drake claims that his role in educating for emotional regulation often feels small because he is a liaison and linkage between youth and county services, that, as a mandated reporter, he has to connect.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 2. Two Educators’ Views of their Roles in Emotional Education.</th>
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<td><strong>Mr. Gonzalez, Assistant Principal</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Mr. Gonzalez:</strong> I have to involve myself, because obviously if it involves the academics, and if it creates an unsafe or disruptive environment for us in the school. So I have to be involved. As the Vice Principal, it sometimes becomes black and white... I refer them to my counselors and let them take it from there. My approach is obviously a little bit different because I absolutely adore all 900 of my children, so I'm going to go a little bit further. I'm going to have communication with the families. For me, being the dad of three, having a fifteen-year-old daughter, having a ten-year-old, and an eight-year-old, I have a little bit of life experience that I can bring into it...</td>
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<td><strong>Mr. Drake:</strong> I guess I see my role as limited, compared to some of my colleagues... I give kids the benefit of the doubt as far as being resilient. I think part of that learning how to deal with their emotion has to be developed just by being in the situation. I see myself as someone who is planting seeds, providing guidance, providing support, especially at this age. Seventh and eighth grade. Fifth, sixth, and lower is a little bit different. In high school, seventh and eighth in high school stuff is like a caterpillar in a cocoon. If you cut them out of the cocoon, than the caterpillar dies and never becomes a butterfly. But how do you get that balance? How do you offer? It's a fine line... I have a philosophical argument sometimes the sum of our teachers, who say that they have to...</td>
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I do invest in a little bit more, because I know that my kids are absolutely the most dynamic individuals in the country, and I need everyone to see that. They don't believe it initially, my children, but then as they start to see. "Oh my gosh, I can overcome this situation. I can… I don't have to worry about the fact that she said this on Facebook about me. That I'm such a whatever." So, I do invest a little bit more than that, and I hope that our families understand that, because that's what makes our relationship so much better.

Kids are really resilient. I wish we had more time sometimes, when we sit down and counsel kids, but I don't. You know? It's hard, because on one aspect it's like the amount of time that has to go into actually counseling someone. But then again, I can't close my door. . . . there's always an agency somewhere. . . I see these crises happening all the time.

In Mr. Gonzalez’s transcript, he emphasizes getting involved with emotional situations if it affects academics or compromises the safety of the building or of a student. In this first comment, it seems that Mr. Gonzalez is subscribing to traditional notions of education and his professional role, which do not include conceptions of educating for emotional regulation and wellbeing. In this moment of reform, when budgets are tight and many schools like MMS are under-resourced, many educators do not have the time to build emotionally close relationships with students, where over the course of a school year, they can dissect and collaboratively explore and counsel students on the stressors that they are coping with. However, he goes onto explain that his deep care for his “children”, in part shaped by his experience being a father, encourages
him to invest more than “others” [other staff members] may. He explains that he considers himself responsible for allowing students to see that they can overcome adversity, which may allow them to get through situations without contemplating self-harm. Although Mr. Gonzalez comments that counselors are primarily responsible in managing students’ emotional crises, Mr. Drake, explains that his role is limited due to time restrictions and mandated reporting regulations, which require him to report situations to county services and refer youth to psychological services located in the community, rather than in the school space. Mr. Drake, like Mr. Gonzalez, emphasizes the resilience of youth and the limited nature of educators’ roles in promoting students’ resilience because of a lack of contact time with youth. This comment emphasizes that schools often do not (or can not) prioritize building adult allyships with youth, and do not explicitly allocate time to fostering developmental competencies like critical consciousness, regulation, resistance, and resilience in youth. In the conclusion of this dissertation I will imagine how schools and girls’ groups could work towards nurturing these competencies.

The point when educators make referrals to school counselors, who then make referrals to county services, is an indicator of a girl failing at regulating her own emotions in a safe and productive way (in the eyes of the school). As the school social worker, Ms. Hanson (of Columbian descent), explains below, the referral process is complex and often laden with cultural and power dynamics that make it difficult to advocate for youth.

**Clonan-Roy:** From a variety of people, including my girls, I have heard that their families are not as open or receptive to thinking about mental health or engaging in therapy, therapy relationships, or even psychiatric medicine. Some people have attributed that to them growing up in Mexico, where maybe that's not as common, or maybe just Mexican cultural beliefs and practices surrounding mental health. Do you think that the community is becoming more open to seeking out mental health services here? What is your perspective on all of that?

**Ms. Hanson:** I guess from my own personal experience, I know what it is to definitely have your parents reinforce “Whatever goes on here stays here” and be very closed to any services. But I think being in this country, and having
communities, pockets of communities of Latinos, who probably went through the process already and have seen a positive result. I know for me, for instance, I was bulimic when I was in high school. And not having that support group from my parents, they felt more ashamed to even ask for help for me. They tried to sweep it under the rug until I was in college. And then it was like look, we need to find help for her . . .

. . . To me, I guess with me going through it and seeing the positive result of that, I am so much more open. And now that I work in the field, I am so much more open to the possibility for my children. So I guess personal experience, and going through and seeing that there is help as a positive experience, it definitely has helped. I think there are so many different levels of mental diagnosis. I have seen a large increase in autistic children in the Latino community. That's kind of a different approach, because it's not depression. It's more apparent, when you know that your child needs some kind of help. So the school gets involved and says, "We have assessed your child, we have evaluated. This is what we are going to do." More forceful I guess. But if it's more open, and it's like, "Oh, I think my child is depressed, but I'll just pray on him." I have seen that, where they are very, "No, don't come in here. We've prayed on him and he's fine." It's hard to knock those barriers in. The culture is instilled in us for so many years that prayer works, but maybe he needs help. Maybe he is cutting himself or he is punching a hole in the wall or something.

In the transcript above, Ms. Hanson emphasizes that many Latino families prefer to deal with emotional and mental wellness issues privately, within the family, and through prayer. These attitudes prevent Ms. Hanson, and other practitioners in similar roles, from connecting youth to services or establishing long-term therapeutic relationships for youth. She alludes to the fact that time spent in the U.S. with greater access to and familiarity with psychological services may open certain families’ minds to psychological and psychiatric treatments.

**Latina girls regulating their own emotions**

Many educational practitioners and researchers would analyze Latina girls’ cutting behaviors and posts on social media as hyperemotional, risk behaviors. However, it is important to emphasize that these behaviors also serve regulatory functions and there are seeking reprieve from pain, survival, and resilience. Specifically, with cutting, the girls are often seeking to control the sense of distress they are experiencing. Additionally, by posting emotional images or
comments on social media, they are often reaching out for support, in the attempt to feel better and to regulate their distress. Other girls regulate their emotions with behaviors, practices, and beliefs that are not related to cutting or other behaviors associated with mental illness. For example, Lara verbally reminds herself, internally, that some things are “not a big deal”:

**Lara:** At home, I get frustrated, but don’t get frustrated because my mom told me something once . . . that makes me able to realize that that it’s not a big deal. . . I don’t get really affected by things. . . Being upset is just wasting your time. If you’re just sitting there upset, you could be outside having fun instead of just sitting there thinking negative.

**Clonan-Roy:** Yeah. I agree with you. I don’t really know what to tell girls sometimes when they’re feeling really negative.

**Lara:** Yeah. When I see a friend cry, I’m just like, “What do I say to them?” Sometimes, I just want to laugh because I’m like, “Why are you crying? It’s not a big deal.” I know sometimes it hurts but we don’t need to take it badly.

Similarly, Mia, engages in regulatory behaviors that would probably not be identified as “risky”. Although Mia feels like she does not have many people or adult allies to talk to about her emotions, she posts on social media (as we saw earlier in the chapter) and journals on her cell phone about her brother’s death to express and regulate her emotions.

**Clonan-Roy:** Okay. Who do you feel like you can talk about your emotions with?

**Mia:** Myself.

**Clonan-Roy:** Just yourself?

**Mia:** Yes.

**Clonan-Roy:** Do you just think about them in your head, or do you write them?

**Mia:** I just think them over in my head.

**Clonan-Roy:** What helps you to deal with emotions?

**Mia:** Writing in the notes. [The “Notes” iPhone app.]
Clonan-Roy: Oh, like in the notes on the iPhone? Really? What do you write about, like just how you’re feeling? Do you ever look back at them and read?

Mia: Sometimes, when I feel like it, Miss Katie. You don’t do it, Miss Katie?

Clonan-Roy: I don’t know. Like sometimes, I write on paper. I have a notebook that I carry around.

Mia: What are you going to carry paper? [Rolling her eyes.] Oh, Miss Katie.

In the above conversation, Mia explains using the notes iPhone app to express her feelings, and regulate her distress so that it does not reach overwhelming levels. She describes reading back over her notes, presumably to reflect upon them, and acts surprised, rolls her eyes, and jokingly says “oh, Katie”, when she finds out that I do not participate in such regular cell phone journaling. Thus, although some girls do regulate their emotions with behaviors that we would identify as associated with risk, like cutting, others regulate their emotions in more sustainable and healthy ways.

**Latina girls regulating their peer’s emotions**

In this final sub-section, I will explore how and why Latina girls’ attempt to regulate their peer’s emotions, or emotional acts, by seeking the support of school staff or mimicking counseling relationships, by talking with their peers about the alternatives to self-harm. When girls post about cutting on social media, other girls often feel a responsibility to respond and help the poster regulate their emotions and stop self-harm behaviors. Sometimes, when the stress of supporting a peer through emotional distress becomes too overwhelming, girls will turn to adults at school for help. In doing this, they traverse and have to negotiate many boundaries of trust, which is an emotional process for them. Below, I post an example of this. Paula, an 8th grade girl sent me a text message one evening during the spring of 2015, saying that she was concerned about her friend who was cutting herself. She then, explained:
Paula: On wensday I went to mrs hanson office and I talked to her about something similar to this cause there was 2 girls on Instagram that where talking about how they wanted to kill themselves and that they were going to do it one of these days so me and these girl [Catalina] told mrs hanson and we should [showed] her their conversation and she made me screenshot them and she said she was going to investigate more about the girls their in 6th grade and I have the screenshot she said she would call me up when she needs them and hopeful she helps them.

I told Paula that I was proud of her for going to see Mrs. Hanson about such concerning posts and then I asked how I could help her navigate the current situation with her friend who was cutting.

Paula said:

Paula: She goes to Eisenhower and mrs hanson[‘s] husband works their so can you not tell her cause I don't want my friend finding out that I told on her even doe idk what to do to help her if I talk to mrs hanson do you think she will call her parents cause I don't want her to do that but I need someone to help her

In the displayed text messages that I received from Paula, we see that the stress of supporting a peer through such emotional distress can become too overwhelming and in those situations, youth may turn to adults. Paula had previously told me that she did not like talking to Ms. Hanson, because she told everyone “your business”. However, the emotional stress of seeing these concerning posts must have outweighed those consequences, because she sought her help. These text messages show emotional stress and emotional understanding. First, Paula is able to understand that cutting is a dangerous strategy for emotional regulation and she is concerned for her friend’s wellbeing. Second, Paula grasps that her friend needs help, but that by finding her help, her friend may also feel betrayed. The possibility of betraying her friend caused Paula to experience a lot of anxiety. This emphasizes the point that emotions, emotional acts, and emotional norms for behavior within Paula’s peer group are not private and isolated: they are social and affect more than just the individual who is cutting. Additionally, these data bring up
important issues related to the role of educators and social media. In order to follow up with these students that were posting about cutting on social media, Ms. Hanson asks for snap shots of their posts. Is this an invasion of privacy? Should we be educating students more formally about the realities of social media use in school spaces? These are important questions to consider as youth social media use continues to evolve.

V. Conclusions

At MMS, staff have had to learn quickly about cutting and what depression may look like in middle school, and as staff members like Mr. Gonzalez and Mr. Drake admit, they are still learning how to support students through such issues, connect them to services, and decipher their roles in long term treatment. Networks of care between counselors, nurses, and community liaisons have been formed to manage and navigate through situations that arise that are related to cutting. For instance, when I sat with Maria, who we met earlier in this dissertation, as we reported that she had been cutting to Mr. Drake, the staff involved operated like a well-oiled machine. Mr. Drake calmly called the nurse, who was very sweet as she caringly touched Maria’s wrists and hands, slightly smiling, reassuring everyone that her cuts were superficial. As the nurse left, Ms. Chavez, the Latino Community Liaison walked in, gave Maria a hug and a kiss, and called Maria’s mother. Maria’s mother was hysterical and confused on the phone, and Ms. Chavez used calming, understanding tones, in Spanish, as she reassured Maria’s mom that she had to love her daughter and be there for her, even if she did not understand why Maria would cut herself.

Unfortunately, despite the care that educators provide, the Latina girls that I have worked with are still apprehensive that these networks of care, and so many people knowing about their cutting behavior simultaneously produces the emotional residue of shame and discomfort for students. The entire time I was in the office with Maria, she looked at the floor and quietly cried:
these tears were reflections of her reflecting on her own pain and discomfort with having to air out these intimate realities with educators that she does not know well, and educators, like Ms. Chavez, who she grew up with, and did not want to disappoint. Furthermore, counselors and other adults have to report self-harm, and although girls are not aware of the specifics and directionality of the reporting, they know that once an adult knows, they “get in trouble”, which makes girls distrust these figures and teaches them to not share their emotions with authority figures at school.

Additionally, teachers and parents often struggle to understand and support girls with cutting, which can make the experience of emotional stress all the more intense. In the following interview, Camila explains that adults often devalue what cutting means to the girls and how it shapes their sense of self and interpretation of whatever experience they are struggling through.

**Clonan-Roy:** Yeah. I also wonder, I don’t know. In some ways, I just want to be there for people who have told me that they’ve cut. And it sucks being an adult because usually if someone tells me that, like if they’re currently doing that, then I have to go talk to Ms. Hanson and try to help them and stuff. Which I feel really bad about. Do you think that if your friends ever see pictures of other people cutting [on social media], do they ever tell teachers or their parents? When you see posts like that, does that make you worry a lot about that person?

**Camila:** It depends, I guess, on the person. But sometimes, telling an adult makes it worse. Because I don’t know. I feel like they think it’s just a phase, but we see it differently. And that’s I guess what affects us.

**Clonan-Roy:** How do you guys see it? So it’s not a phase. Do people think they’re going to be depressed for a long, long time?

**Camila:** Adults, some adults, only see it as a phase and they think that over time, they’ll get over it and things will get better. But sometimes, the kids, they see it as like, it’s not going to get better and they just need someone there for them. But sometimes, if a person cuts, and you tell them, and they’re addicted to it, and you tell them to just stop cutting, that’s not going to help them in any way.

Camila’s comments indicate that youth perceive that adults do not take youth’s emotions and emotional responses to situations, like cutting, seriously. Camila also emphasizes that youth need
adult allies to be there for them, beyond just getting them through the “phase”. It may be that youth and adult concerns are more aligned than they appear: MMS staff members lament the lack of time and resources, like education, that would allow them to better counsel youth and serve as longer-term adult allies. The pressure to report and outsource counseling needs to county services, these aims for emotional regulation, the school misses out on important conversations and the ability to do work at the intersections of emotions and education.

In conclusion, many Latina youth that I have worked with are emotionally overwhelmed and distressed, often due to family situations and immigration circumstances, and use cutting to find relief and express their emotions/ pain. The Latina youth I work with seem to find comfort and safety in the distance of social media exchanges and express their emotions (often in very brief/ vague ways) to peers and mentors in the attempt to self-regulate their feelings of distress and seek support. Expressing one’s emotions through public posts establishes peer group emotional norms for how to “share” one’s emotions and seek support. It may also aid in the social contagion of cutting and identifying with feeling depressed or like no one cares about your feelings. While some youth may find support in these spaces, emotionally sharing (especially about self-harm) on social media places ethical responsibility on one’s peers, which can produce emotionally distressful experiences. As educators, we must continue to conceptualize what our role is in guiding youth through their interactions on social media, supporting emotional expression and development, and nurturing mental wellness. It is also important to theorize how we can work with youth to support them in developing healthier strategies of regulation and coping that will support the promotion of resilient trajectories.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has investigated research questions that have both scholarly and practical implications and timely significance. As Latino students become more numerous in U.S. schools, their educational success becomes central to America’s prosperity: research, like this dissertation, which focuses on the intersections of Latino youth’s developmental and educational experiences, needs, and strengths is important in order to understand how best support this rapidly growing demographic group in our nation’s schools. Additionally, in an era of momentous political contention related to race, gender, and sexuality, anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies (globally), and criminalization of women and girls of color, it is critical to consider the needs and strengths of Latina girls, whose life trajectories are shaped by these social phenomena and disputes. Although this research is not directly immersed in these debates and issues, this work does provide nuanced understandings of the lives of Latina, adolescent girls in one particular context and the challenges (related to such contention) that they face, and it imagines how to best support Latina girls to persevere through these challenging circumstances and to create empowered, self-determined trajectories. In this conclusion, I first discuss the practical implications of this work for educational and developmental programming and then I examine it’s scholarly significance.

I. Practical Implications

Re-thinking the Role of Schooling and Adult Allyship

Schools, Teachers and Adult Allies

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In this moment of reform, teachers face immense pressure to meet standards, prevent major disciplinary issues, and raise test scores. Incentives and professional development are catered towards those narrow educational goals. What is lost, in this moment of reform, decreased budgets and privatization, and narrow educational goals, is the emphasis on the role of educators as adult allies who should nurture the positive development of youth. Additionally, being an adult ally to one’s students takes great investment, effort, and emotional energy, none of which are tied to additional compensation or professional reputation. Often, teachers who are excellent adult allies to youth are not considered experts in nurturing their students’ development or rewarded for the specialization of such skills.

Adolescence is an intense period of growth and change. For minority adolescents, like the Latina youth I worked with, that intense period of change is complicated by injurious experiences of marginalization. This dissertation has shown why having adult allies is so critical: for instance, adult allies can help students manage their layers of emotionality, so that they do not turn to solutions like cutting or drugs, like Maria did; adult allies can also scaffold how youth understand their emotional experiences (like being told to “go back to Mexico”), so that they develop a critical consciousness instead of internalizing their experiences or developing prejudiced beliefs (like the middle school girls in this study often did towards their Black peers).

Educators like Mr. Gonzalez emphasize that they want to support youth in this way, but that is hindered by training, resources, and time; again, reflective of this moment of reform. I argue that providing educators with regular professional development training, from community experts (who work with youth) and developmental psychologists, on how they can act as adult allies in global and domain-specific ways is important. Educators should also be able to have a say in the training that they receive: for instance, in Marshall, educators are aware that cutting is an issue that affects their population of Latina girls, but they have not had training on understanding this issue and supporting all students emotionally. Context-specific educator
feedback should direct this type of professional development. Additionally, minority youth rarely see themselves mirrored in the staff at Marshall Middle School. Ongoing efforts to increase the representation of minority teachers, who are more likely to have experience with or knowledge of particular cultural practices, should continue. Higher representation of teachers with similar backgrounds to youth in schools will not only strengthen adult allyships, but will enrich the diversity of perspectives in such professional development sessions.

Paying Attention to Emotions and Emotional Learning in Adolescence

As many scholars emphasize, adolescence is an incredibly emotional period of life, due to changes occurring in the body during puberty, and intense questioning of “who am I?”. For minority youth, these adolescent experiences are complicated by intense emotional stress related to the marginalization of their racial/ethnic, class, gender, etc. identities. These emotional experiences are meaningful, and youth do not just feel them, they learn from them. Intense, emotional experiences can help cement ideologies, like “Black people hate Mexicans”. They can also lead youth to employ unhealthy emotional regulation strategies like cutting, which often reinforce simultaneous messages of control and helplessness to the self. In my interviews with girls, they often expressed that they wished that they had long-term, meaningful relationships with adults, especially in their school spaces. They often perceive that adults at school just assume that their emotional experiences and responses represent adolescent, dramatic “phases”, and that they are more oriented towards disciplining them than providing them with understanding allyship and care.

Most teachers engage in constant, and effective, emotional care work. They care about their students, their experiences, and their well-being. However, teachers are not trained to help students dissect their emotional experiences and what they are learning, about the self and the social world, from them. Teachers are trained to provide care, in order to re-direct students back
towards their academic efforts. I would argue that we need to train teachers to recognize when students need an emotional, adult ally (like when they are navigating racialized social injuries or trauma related to immigration), and how to respond to support students in critically learning from those experiences. Schools should think about how to implement structures, spaces, and practices, which support those relationships and forms of emotional learning, care, and wellness.

As Allison Jaggar (1997) elucidates, students emotions, what she calls “outlaw emotions”, often are rooted in social injustices and can form the basis for important social learning and critique. Educators should learn to pay attention to students’ emotional experiences and to harness them as moments in which they can provide care and scaffold learning and critical thinking. In such moments, educators should provide the space for youth to vent and express their emotions related to the issues that they are navigating, and then ask critical questions to guide youth through examining the social phenomena and power dynamics implicated in those issues. In such interactions, youth will feel like they are being paid attention to, taken seriously, and have an adult ally, and teachers will be able to facilitate higher level thinking about the self and one’s relationship to the social world. These conversations are complex and often uncomfortable. Schools should provide professional development around how to hold these conversations, and offer incentives for adults who do engage in creating spaces and relationships that serve youth in this way. Schools can create small groups where youth and adults work together to explore emotional experiences and emotional learning, in morning advisory spaces or extracurricular time built into the school day. In order to encourage the participation of all youth and to represent emotional learning as something that the school prioritizes and is committed to, this type of programming should be structured into the school day and it should be provided on a regular and consistent basis. In the future, I hope to envision and create a curriculum that educators could use to in specific contexts to support them in engaging in this work.
Improving Regulation in School Spaces: Integrating Critical Consciousness with Regulation  

In some ways, staff at MMS already in the practice of supporting students in reflecting critically upon their actions. One example of this is their use of restorative practices for disciplinary issues. For example, when two students have a physical altercation, instead of simply suspending both students, staff bring the students together and facilitate a reflective, apologetic conversation where they each think about the other person’s perspective and strive towards better relationships. This is a great disciplinary practice, yet encouraging students to reflect on their and others’ perspectives, emotions, and positions in their school community should not only occur in disciplinary moments. Students should be encouraged to think with a critical consciousness about daily moments inside and outside of school, and beyond when they have done something wrong.

In order to encourage student critical consciousness, it is imperative that staff are critically conscious thinkers and receive professional development that reflect such modes of thinking and being. This is highly important when there is a great mis-match between the racial, ethnic, and cultural identities of staff and students in the building, like at MMS, where staff is mostly white, and students are mostly Black and Latino. Staff should engage in constant reflection of differences and similarities that stand between and connect them and their students, and how power structures those differences and similarities, and classroom spaces. In Marshall, educators have the opportunity to be facilitators of great social change in the community, if they are committed to supporting youth, especially Black and Latino youth, to build better relationships with one another and anti-racist community spaces.

Latina girls at MMS have experienced multiple moments of emotional and sexual regulation that is devoid of a mediating critical consciousness. Often, when girls are policed for dress code violations, they will exclaim that the policing is racist, and instead of exploring that claim, teachers kick them out of class or issue a detention. Teachers need to be trained to not take offense to these outlaw emotions, but to explore them with students in productive ways. It would
be helpful if in intense disciplinary moments, teachers and administrators took youth comments like, “that’s racist”, seriously and explicitly asked students why they feel that way: educators should take the time to explore those emotions and concerns with youth, to demonstrate that besides trying to discipline them, they are taking their perspectives and emotions seriously.

During professional development sessions, teachers should also be more open about “issues” that they are seeing in their students. For instance, it would have been productive for teachers to discuss their observations and concerns about Latina girls in small groups, and reflect critically on the power dynamics, stereotypes, and value systems which shaped their concerns and Latina girls’ experiences. Using the conclusions that are yielded from such brainstorming, teachers then could imagine how to engage in disciplining, regulating, and supporting girls in ways that take those power dynamics into account. Reflecting upon student issues in such a critical way, can prepare teachers to regulate emotional and sexual situations in more just, critically conscious ways.

Schools Educating for Critical Consciousness

Although I am aware that it is complicated, and in some ways unfair, to burden educators with yet another task in child development and education, I advocate that educators need to conceive of educating for critical consciousness as one of their responsibilities. In the ways that they teach content and respond to disciplinary issues, educators should strive to engage students in critically examining the power dynamics present in social interactions and institutions, and to orient them towards social justice and creating change in their communities. This, of course, is a difficult task. The work of educating for critical consciousness not only involves shaping moldable minds, but it involves navigating resistance towards change and consciousness. This resistance towards critical consciousness is not only ingrained in developing students’ actions and minds: at times, educators embody this resistance, and training them to teach in these ways
involves confronting that resistance, perhaps by providing local examples of how power and privilege deeply affects their own students' lives. This is a radical proposition, but I would argue that one should not permitted to become an educator if they are not willing to become aware of the power dynamics that shape our social world, the role of schools in reproducing social inequalities, and the injustice in the disparities present in certain groups of students' lives.

**Girls’ Group Spaces**

The girls’ group space that I co-created with MMS staff and Latina girls was a safe, trusting space, where girls could explore their experiences and emotions. There were many key practices that I think should be illuminated in order to assist others in creating girls’ group spaces, or, homeplaces, for broader social groups of youth. In this section, I discuss the practical implications of this work specifically related to girls’ group spaces and the characteristics of the group that the girls and I evaluated as positive.

I argue that girls’ group spaces need to be context-specific and participant-centered. Girls’ group spaces should be co-created with girls, the issues that are discussed in those spaces should be determined by the girls, and activities and discussions should follow the girls’ interests and nurture their strengths. I often found it difficult to translate existing curricula to the MMS girls’ group space, often because these curricula were targeting white girls in higher income brackets of society, or schools with more resources and technology. I was essentially operating the group with my personal funding, an easel pad, and markers and was unable to engage in some of the activities that required physical resources. Additionally, Wi-Fi is inaccessible in MMS to non-staff members and Internet access on desktop computers with Ethernet connections is highly secured (many sites are blocked). This posed many challenges for using online resources within the girls’ group space.
As I will discuss further below, I argue that girls’ groups should be focused on the topics and issues that shape girls’ lives and the community dynamics that they are immersed with. For instance, it does not make sense to facilitate an activity centered on “popularity”, if the girls’ peer groups are actually divided racially into “crews” or “squads”. This point about context and participant specificity should be kept in mind as I discuss other key elements of girls’ group spaces that can support marginalized populations of girls.

Finding Mutual Trust, Respect, Solidarity, and Support

As many scholars (Banister & Leadbeater, 2007; Pastor et al., 2007; Rhodes, Davis, Prescott, & Spencer, 2007) have discussed, girls’ groups should function with mutual and reciprocal trust, respect, solidarity, and support, between the girls and the adult allies who facilitate those spaces. Without such trust and respect, girls will not feel safe enough to explore personal issues and social dynamics in front of others, especially adults. This trust, respect, and solidarity can be established in multiple ways. First, at the beginning of each session of girls’ groups, we always had a long discussion about confidentiality, I explained how I functioned as a mandated reporter, and the girls and I each signed a confidentiality agreement that stipulated that what was discussed in the girls’ group space stayed in the girls’ group space (other than what I was required to report). Whenever girls were nervous about confiding in the group, I reminded them about this agreement, and this often prompted them to share and express their thoughts with the group.

As a facilitator, I made sure to thank girls consistently for sharing and to remind them that they could trust me with what they were telling me (beyond issues under the purveyance of mandated reporting). I was also interested in the girls’ lives and asked them follow up questions across the semester to ask them about ongoing issues that they were dealing with. I think that this made them feel like I was invested in their lives, in the long term, and wanted to hear their
perspectives and thoughts. I also positioned the girls as experts and played a very non-authoritative role (besides when we were being too loud in the library, or when girls spilled after-school snacks on the library carpet (which, I was often disciplined for by the administration)). Feeling like they had an adult in their life, who was not interested in disciplining them, but who was interested in hearing their stories, in their casual language, was critical in building that trust.

At the beginning of each session, the girls’ and I co-created group rules, which helped to establish trust amongst the girls in the group. Sometimes girls knew each other before entering the group, and other times they did not. Often, I would witness the girls’ commenting on each other’s facebook walls that they “became friends” in the girls’ group space. During the co-creation of these rules, I tried to amplify each girls’ voice and perspective, by asking individual girls pointed questions about what they thought about specific rules. Creating rules, that we often brought up/ reminded ourselves of throughout the session, I think provided girls with a sense of safety that other girls were not going to shame them for their thoughts or perspectives or not listen to their voices.

I also think that a sense of trust, respect, and solidarity between girls was built because the girls were becoming friends as they engaged in fun activities and because they were all Latina and were bringing common cultural and familial experiences to the group space. I often created activities (again, these were flexible activities and if the girls were not “into them”, I let the girls diverge into discussions about the theme we had for the session) that required girls to work in groups, share their thoughts, or act in silly ways in skits. These types of activities got girls to engage in thinking, collaboratively, about serious issues in fun and engaging ways, and allowed them to work with others and build close friendships as they examined these issues. The girls often asked “why aren’t Black girls allowed in the group”, to which I would ask them “do you want the group to include other groups of girls?” The girls often responded “no” and said that they liked that the group was comprised of only Latina girls because they could talk about certain
issues (especially racial issues) with the safety of knowing that their Latina peers probably thought in similar ways. Although you could argue that an inter-racial group might provide for purposeful consciousness raising, I think that the racial/ethnic segregation of the group at this point in adolescence and in this community, allowed the girls the safety to do the hard work of first examining biases within their own communities, which created a basis from which we could work on developing our critical consciousness through examining our experiences.

**Girls’ Groups as Spaces to Resolve Conflict and Explore Outlaw Emotions**

One important characteristic of girls’ group spaces is that they should be spaces where girls can safely explore their emotions. In school spaces, girls are often disciplined for objecting a policy (even if that policy is racist and misogynistic), speaking up too loudly, or responding harshly to something that they perceive is an injustice. In girls’ group spaces, girls should be given the space to vent those emotions, and then to explore them. As a facilitator, I had to give girls time to talk, to curse, or to cry, and then ask them critical questions that got them to realize the understanding social dynamics of their experience: for example, these questions often got them to realize that a situation (like the dress code) was not just about them (and adults singling them out as individuals), but that it was connected to broader histories of race, gender, schooling, etc. Allowing the girls to recognize that they had common, unfair, emotional experiences also provided that sense of solidarity and allowed the girls to acknowledge that their experiences were not just “about them”, but about broader patterns in society (and that they should attribute the adversity they experienced to society and not internalize it to the self).

The MMS girls’ group space also became a space that allowed us to explore and resolve conflict between girls in the group. As the girls often explained, there was a lot of drama in their peer groups and sometimes, group members would be “beefin’” with each other, often related to a rumor or to a love triangle. As the facilitator, I never forced girls to talk about lingering conflict,
but if it came up, I tried to mediate the conversation and ask girls questions that encouraged empathy and putting themselves in their peers’ shoes. Often, this work would resolve the conflict, and other times, girls would move forward and work it out on their own. Peer groups change and experience conflict across the middle school years, and facilitators have to be prepared to mediate tough conversations and direct youth towards empathy, without forcing youth to have conversations that they are not ready for.

**Girls’ Groups as Cultural Resources**

Later into my dissertation research, I realized that the girls’ group space was a cultural resource. The girls’ bring a variety of cultural resources and funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005) into school spaces, and often these resources and funds are bleached through processes of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999). I was worried that because this Latina girls’ group was led by me, a white woman, I would be aiding in that subtractive process. However, through reflection, I realized that I was able to work across many barriers of difference to co-construct the space as a cultural resource. First, the group was incredibly student-centered: the girls’ directed the conversations and activities, and my role was often to affirm their experiences and perspectives. I never devalued the perspectives the girls brought to the group, even if I could recognize that their statements were influenced by racist or biased ideologies, because I knew that they were rooted in their experiences. Instead, I asked critical questions to understand where they were coming from. I embraced my own naiveté about their contextual and cultural experiences, and asked many questions about their families’ cultural practices to show interest and that I was valuing their cultural resources. Because the group was comprised of only Latina girls, they often explored and affirmed their cultural experiences, identities, and perspectives in ways that I think supported their racial/ ethnic and cultural identity development. In the following section, I will provide recommendations for practices that adult allies can adopt in order to co-create group
spaces as cultural resources and as spaces that nurture Latina girls’ positive youth development (Lerner et al., 2005).

**Adult Allies in Girls’ Group Spaces**

Based on feedback from my participants, I have developed a list of key practices that adult facilitators of girls’ groups should employ:

1. **Position girls as experts.** As an adult facilitator, it is key to position girls as the experts of their experiences. Affirm the claims they make, and when you are confused or skeptical, ask critical questions that require girls to explore their perspectives further, instead of devaluing their perspectives.

2. **Embrace your own ignorance and naïveté.** As adults, we are working, at least, across deep barriers of difference in our work with youth. We are often unfamiliar with their stylistic language choices, technology, etc. These differences are complicated by differences in race, class, sexuality, etc. In addition to positioning girls as experts of their experiences, adult facilitators should embrace their own ignorance and naïveté regarding the experiences of youth, and honestly and sincerely ask questions about youth’s experiences. This will allow adults to gain deeper insights into the youth that they work with, but it will also allow adults to develop more meaningful relationships with youth as youth detect that these adults are truly invested in understanding them and their lives.

3. **Allow girls to use their own language and voices and critically consider authority.** Girls are disciplined and controlled in myriad spaces in their social worlds: they often feel like they have a lack of control in their family, school, and community spaces. The girls’ group space should be a unique space that provides girls with a sense of expertise, agency, and authority. Adult facilitators should be authoritative to the point of ensuring safety and reciprocal respect, but should avoid disciplining girls for more minute issues like cursing, taking too many bathroom breaks, or straying from assigned activities. It is important to allow girls to use their own language in these spaces: whether that is allowing them to translanguate between Spanish and English, use teen slang, or curse. Lucía once complimented me by saying that she liked the girls’ group so much because I was “like a teen” and let them “curse and stuff”. This simple comment affirms that girls enjoy and grow in spaces where they can be themselves, are comfortable, and have a respite from the constant regulation that they experience elsewhere.

4. **Construct the group as a student-centered and directed space.** In order to create groups that are context and participant specific, girls’ groups should be constructed as student-centered and directed spaces. The girls should brainstorm and select the topics that they want to explore and they should be responsible for
creating and maintaining community norms. Within group meetings, facilitators should feel comfortable letting girls diverge and explore other topics (than the one assigned for the day), if girls need to explore an emotional experience or think of a related issue that deeply affects their lives.

5. **Embrace outlaw emotions and resistance.** Facilitators should embrace outlaw emotions (Jaggar, 1997) and girls’ resistance, in response to oppressive social actors or issues in their lives. Tears, heated conversations, and conflict should be embraced and affirmed, and responded to with critical questions that allow girls to explore their experiences. Facilitator responses should be oriented towards promoting girls’ exploration of their strategies of resistance, and if their selected strategies have shaped their optimal development in positive or negative ways.

6. **Recognize qualities of adult allyship and allow that to influence the other adults that you allow to work in the group space.** One issue I often struggled with was finding other adult allies that I felt comfortable allowing into the girls’ group space. I did connect with two, amazing Latino Community Liaisons from the Marshall Planned Parenthood, who would come into the group often to lead workshops on sexual health and who would help out in situations when girls needed information on birth control or were dealing with a pregnancy scare. Adult facilitators not only need to embrace the dispositions discussed above, but they need to be a gatekeeper for the group space, and only collaborate with adults who also possess these qualities of allyship. For instance, I often had requests from students at Penn, health practitioners in nearby suburbs, and clinical social work interns at Marshall to work with the girls in the group space. I did not allow any of these adults to work with the girls because I knew that they “didn’t get it”: in our early conversations I could detect orientations towards “saving” these girls or regulating their “risky” behaviors, rather than providing a space to explore and nurture their strengths. It is key that girls have adult allies in these types of spaces who understand these tenets of adult allyship, girls’ group spaces, and nurturing developmental strengths.

7. **Acknowledge underlying social issues in girls’ experiences and nurture their critical consciousness.** Adult facilitators of girls’ groups should understand their work as nurturing the strengths of youth and youth’s critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is a complex competency to develop, and it is the work of adult facilitators to support girls’ exploration of power differences in society and development of an orientation towards social justice. For example, when a girl explains a situation with her boyfriend that is upsetting, it should be the role of the adult facilitator to tease out any gendered or patriarchal dynamics that are present in that situation and to ask critical questions to the girl about how she could promote change in her current situation, in the future, or with regard to the social issues implicated in that specific situation. Such work will provide girls with a broader and more nuanced awareness of dynamics in their relationships and social worlds and how they can enact change in those worlds. This can provide youth with a sense of agency and resilience in a developmental moment marked by control and regulation.
II. Scholarly Significance

Like I explained at the beginning of this dissertation, the social, emotional, and sexual experiences of adolescent girls in the United States are often framed as superfluous, negative, and distracting from academic activity, rather than as significant learning experiences in girls’ personal, developmental, and academic trajectories. Specifically, these experiences for Latina adolescents living in poverty are commonly characterized as causing them to make poor choices, to drop out of school, or to become teenage mothers or the girlfriends of gang members. However, most Latina girls’ experiences do not match these limiting characterizations and little research has been conducted on the nuanced interactions between these types of experiences, and Latina adolescents’ educational and developmental trajectories in NLD regions. This research fills that gap and reframes social, emotional, and sexual experiences as significant developmental and educational experiences that can shape girls’ academic and personal trajectories.

Perhaps most importantly, this research examines the confluence of social, emotional, and sexual experiences: this confluence greatly influences the personal and academic trajectories of middle school girls, and yet, we do not have many theoretical and empirical accounts that capture the relationships between these experiences. Existing scholarship (Boler, 1999; Rolón-Dow, 2004) typically examines girls’ social, emotional, and sexual experiences in isolation and does not investigate how these experiences converge. This project investigates how social, emotional, and sexual experiences shape adolescent Latina girls’ lives, develops a vocabulary and theoretical framework for discussing this confluence, and demonstrates the complex relationships and interactions between these experiences, education, and developmental learning.

In this dissertation, I innovate new terms: social injuries, emotional artifacts, and emotional integrators. Throughout my discussion of my conceptual framework, I explain the rationale behind creating and using these more accurate terms for my work. With these terms, I
argue that the emotional signals (both artifacts and integrators, often produced through enduring a social injury) that the girls receive, often cue them to regulate or resist, or inform their developing resilience and critical consciousness. These concepts and related understandings of the relationships between social, emotional, sexual, and learning experiences, allow me to work towards broadening how we think about emotional learning (beyond notions of emotional regulation and emotional intelligence). I also connect feminist perspectives on the social implications that “outlaw emotions” (Jaggar, 1997) hold, to processes of emotional learning and possibilities for adult allies to nurture the seeds of youth’s critical consciousness by tending to such “outlaw emotions” or expressed emotional artifacts. These understandings hold the potential for researchers and educators to develop new strategies for supporting middle schools girls (Latina girls in NLD contexts specifically, and girls in diverse contexts broadly) to navigate these experiences, critically examine their social worlds, and embark upon self-determined personal and academic trajectories.

**Merging Siloed Literatures**

This work, as an interdisciplinary study, combines many bodies of literatures in novel ways. This project will make important, new innovations in feminist (Boler, 1999; Jaggar, 1997), educational (Fine, 1988; Valenzuela, 1999), and developmental (Denner & Guzman, 2006b) scholarship on Latina girls’ social, emotional, sexual, and educational experiences by merging literatures that have been traditionally siloed. For example, conceptions of social identification and adolescent identity development are often segregated in existing scholarship. With a gendered lens, I argue that it is critical to consider these interacting processes in tandem, as both psychological development and social identification shape Latina girls’ identities and experiences. Specifically related to my analysis of girls cutting behaviors, I bring together literatures on psychological disorders and mental health and literatures that discuss youth
cultures, to make a contribution to our understandings of the social-relational aspects of youth mental health.

Additionally, besides the work of a small population of scholars (Bettie, 2003; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Fine & Zane, 2013; Gilligan, 1982), education scholarship is often devoid of feminist perspectives and feminist accounts of educational processes. This work strives to add to that important, and burgeoning, body of work to provide a nuanced, feminist case of educational and developmental processes in a specific context, which may hold implications for diverse contexts. One example of the work I have done to merge feminist and K-12 educational scholarship is the way that I connect perspectives on critical consciousness and girls’ group spaces: this work connects literatures on feminist pedagogical spaces and critical consciousness, which, often pertain to university women (Elenes, 1997), with literatures on Latina girls’ adolescent development and girls’ group spaces, to imagine programming that can support positive youth development.

Methodological Significance

Finally, this dissertation presents methodological significance. In new and fluid ways, I use the girls’ group space, as a participatory, ethnographic space, where youth act as co-researchers who aid in directing the research project. This was quite different from youth participatory action research (YPAR), in that my participants were not invested in creating the research questions and designing and implementing the study, but they were invested in supporting me as I conducted research and providing feedback to me on my research methods and interpretations of certain findings related to their lives. This dissertation, thus, provides a template for thinking about how to use girls’ group spaces, or educational homeplaces (Hooks, 1990) in ethnographic work that is father on the participatory end of the ethnographic spectrum.
I also pair traditional ethnography with newer, virtual participant observation in social media spaces (Boellstorff et al., 2012), and my dissertation provides many insights into conducting this type of research and managing ethical dilemmas that can arise when adult researchers observe and interact with youth in these spaces. Social media is a virtual world that is greatly shaping the development of youth today, and researchers need to take that space seriously as a developmental arena. Throughout my dissertation research, using observations from social media provided me with a greater sense of girls’ identities and experiences, how they expressed themselves, and role of social media in cultivating or hindering the development of relationships, and the competencies of resistance, resilience, and critical consciousness. It also allowed me to provide a more nuanced account of how girls participate in regulating themselves, other social actors, or oppressive environments in their worlds. In the future, I plan to work to create a set of methodological best practices to employ when engaging in ethnographic research in virtual worlds, around sensitive topics.

This dissertation began with the story of Andrea, an undocumented girl from Puebla who has experienced poverty, racial/ethnic and gendered marginalization, family trauma, and intense and nonconsensual sexual experiences. Most popular and academic discourses would characterize her as an “at-risk” adolescent and vulnerable to a variety of social-contextual factors. This dissertation, however, has examined her experiences and emphasized her strengths, resistance, and resilience. Amidst these striking challenges, Andrea has used adult allies as resources to help her persevere through emotionally challenging moments, she has worked with peers to resist gendered/sexual and racial marginalization in her school community, and she has led critically conscious discussions about sexuality and culture in the girls’ group space to collaboratively imagine what reciprocal and respectful sexual relationships should look like. She has developed the skills to dissect her social, emotional, and sexual experiences and connect those experiences to broader social issues and power dynamics in the communities that she inhabits, so that she
does not internalize marginalizing experiences, but attributes them to broader social issues. This spring, Andrea will graduate from high school and will go onto a culinary program: in the future she hopes to own her own pastry shop. This dissertation has shown that we need to listen closely to the experiences, needs, and strengths of girls like Andrea, imagine how to support them in achieving their goals, and create educational spaces to nurture their critical consciousness, so that they, like Andrea, operate in the world with an orientation to change it.


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