

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: LATINX MOTHERHOOD REASSESSED: HOW SECOND AND LATER-GENERATION LATINA MOTHERS REDEFINE MOTHERHOOD, LATINIDAD, AND PURSUE INTERGENERATIONAL HEALING

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This dissertation examines how social location, experience with racialization, and generation since immigration influence the parenting practices and mothering ideologies of second- and later-generation upwardly mobile Latina mothers. Through 62 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Latina mothers across the United States, I explore four sets of questions. First, how do second and later-generation Latinx mothers approach parenting amidst multiple cultural scripts of motherhood? Second, how does social location, experience with racialization, and immigrant generation inform the motherhood ideologies and parenting practices of second and later-generation Latinx mothers? Third, how do Latinx mothers approach ethnoracial socialization and transmission of cultural knowledge with their children? And lastly, how do second and later-generation Latinx mothers' experiences and practices highlight the incorporation strategies and challenges of later-generation Latinx people? My findings show that upwardly mobile second and later-generation Latinx mothers intentionally deviate from the mothering strategies used by earlier family matriarchs and also do not replicate those of white American mothers. Instead, they adopt what I call a *culturally transformative mothering* approach that involves 1) intentionally selecting and integrating valued aspects of their cultural background into their parenting practices while also 2) identifying and altering practices they

deem harmful and remnants of structural inequalities. Overall, my findings demonstrate that middle-class Latina mothering is distinct from both mothers' ethnic communities of origin and white American middle-class motherhood. It is instead informed by cultural expectations and traditions but adapted to fit their current social, cultural, and economic needs of mothering in the United States.

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INTERGENERATIONAL HEALING

by

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Chapter One: Introduction: Latinx Motherhood Reassessed

The first time I heard my grandfather speak Spanish was in the parking lot of an IGA, the local grocery store next to our family home. I sat in awe as I watched him converse with and then help a man jump his car entirely in a language I had never heard nor understood. I later learned that my grandfather—who was one of 23 children and whose parents left their ranch in Mexico to come to the U.S.—suffered severe discrimination and violence at the meat plant he worked at for 30 years. His coworkers didn't like when he and the other Mexican men spoke Spanish to each other. So eventually, he stopped. I am now a sociologist, who's spent much of my life feeling like I "wasn't Mexican enough." My family didn't speak Spanish, we didn't listen to Spanish music, we didn't go to bailes. My parents listened to musicians like Stevie Ray Vaughn and Janis Joplin. But we were raised Catholic, ate Mexican food, had brown skin and curly dark hair. My father instilled a great sense of racial awareness and pride in us, yet people still believed the Reyna sisters were "whitewashed."

This experience is not unique and actually quite common among later-generation Latinas/os in the United States. Not only is it common but something that Latinx people and communities are beginning to deal and grapple with. The Los Angeles Times recently published a piece titled, "How second- and third-generation Latinos are reclaiming the Spanish language." In this piece, the author details how not being Spanish proficient hinders connection to culture and community for Latinas/os. The author includes stories of families who have lost their language due to language suppression and the preceding generations deliberately choosing not to pass it on to younger generations. Now, second and later-generation Latinas/os are reclaiming their language and this aspect of their cultural identity. In Chapter 2, I explore how second and

later-generation Latina mothers, who have similar familial experiences, are attempting to reclaim the Spanish language, pass it on to their children, and the challenges they face in doing so.

In this dissertation, I explore how upwardly mobile second and later-generation Latinx mothers navigate the complex terrains of Spanish language, Latinx ethnoracial identity development, adopt a new culture shifting parenting style, and the consequences of both these processes and their pursuit of upward mobility. Through three empirical chapters I show how U.S. born upwardly mobile Latina mothers use their gendered and racialized experiences in the U.S. to shape the lens through which they choose what to prioritize in their mothering. My participants describe how they struggle to navigate raising Latinx children who have a strong sense of ethnic identity, have the appropriate markers to claim an uncontested ethnic identity, while also preparing children to navigate white society. Also drawing from their childhood experiences in Catholic houses and traditional Latinx¹ families, mothers choose to adopt what is known as gentle parenting, a parenting style that is often received by family members as a white way to parent. Through these analyses and my participants' stories, I show how upwardly mobile Latina mothers challenge much of what it means to be a Latinx mother and how Latinx families operate, thus reshaping and redefining what has come to be foundational understandings of Latinidad.

...

When I came to graduate school, everyone told me I needed to find community; that is how I would survive. I made a few graduate school friends who were nothing short of fantastic,

¹ Latinx and Latine are both gender neutral terms to describe people of Latin American descent. I use these terms throughout this manuscript to acknowledge the gender diversity represented among this group. While the terms Latina/o are not masculine-centered, they still reflect a gender binary. Latinx is more inclusive of all possible gender and sexual identities. When referring to my respondents, I use the term Latina because all of my respondents said they identified in this manner.

but they were not mothers. I knew I needed to make mom friends outside of graduate school but it was hard. The mothers on my daughter's soccer team were married and in an entirely different tax bracket so our lives were structured very differently. I made a friend in my neighborhood, who I met through attending Library events with my daughter, but sometimes our daughters didn't always get along so the play dates subsided. I was trying my best to create a community of mothers, ones that had nothing to do with graduate school. I sought out women that could commiserate with me, that could give me advice, or help me learn more about the community in which we lived. Through all this invisible labor, I did make one friend. She was an older woman from El Salvador, had no grandchildren, and happened to be my next-door neighbor. She would bring my daughters treats and keep an eye on the comings and goings of our home, "for an extra set of eyes," she said. I was very fond of her and appreciated her caring gestures but she was significantly older than I was and more of an older tia than a girlfriend.

If I would have been successful in building a mother community, when the pandemic hit, I might have had an easier time. I was in the third year of my graduate program when the covid-19 pandemic hit. I lived in Maryland alone with my three daughters. I was more than 2,000 miles away from any family. For three years, I had been navigating pick ups, drop offs, extracurriculars, paying far more than I could afford for in-home care so that I could attend my late afternoon and evening grad seminars, all while managing the intense workload of graduate school. I left Maryland in July 2020. Enough was enough. I had taken my children across the country so that I could attend graduate school. We stuck it out long enough. Had the pandemic not happened, we likely would have lasted the length of my program. But in those early months of the pandemic, I realized how isolated my children and I were. I eventually decided we were moving home.

In Chapter 4, I describe two sets of consequences my participants face on account of their pursuit of upward mobility. My participants are primarily upwardly mobile and have moved away from their family and community of origin for educational or career pursuits. In their new communities, my participants face significant challenges in establishing new mothering communities, which leads to a deep sense of maternal isolation and loneliness. Specifically, I find that mothers experience maternal isolation through one or more of the following four pathways: mismatch in parenting styles, mismatch in life stage, mismatch in social group, and geographic separation from their families and communities of origin. I also discuss how the middle-class white spaces they now inhabit are culturally mismatched to support their maternal aspiration and they relate to family and work.

As someone who researches how mothers use the internet and frequents blog sites and other women-centered spaces on the internet, I noticed the term “gentle parenting” and “conscious parenting” surface on TikTok during the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic. Over time, I have seen the terms popularize on Instagram with dedicated pages and mommy influencers endorsing the parenting style. Given my background and research interests, I came across and followed a very popular Instagram page: LatinxParenting. As of September 2023, this page had 182,000 followers. They aim to “shift the paradigm of raising children towards creating a trauma-informed, healing centered, nonviolent, and culturally sustaining approach where Latinx families can nurture connection in their homes....” Their hashtag on their bio and website is “#EndChanclaCulture”, which is in reference to the popular stereotype that Latinx parents but particularly matriarchs carry a chancla, or sandal, and will hit people, but specifically children with it when they are not obeying. LatinxParenting is not only an Instagram page that shares information on parenting techniques. They are also an organization that offers workshops and

series such as “Decolonized Nonviolent Parenting”, “Healing the Madre Wound” and “Reparenting Yourself for Healing and Restoration.”

As I detail more in Chapter 3, almost all of my participants describe adopting a version of gentle or conscious parenting. However, although gentle parenting takes many forms, my participants overwhelmingly refer to a specific internet source as their go-to resource: LatinxParenting on Instagram. In this Chapter I describe how mothers interpret and adopt this parenting style, but also their motivations behind this style, and how they navigate this parenting style within their extended families.

My experiences in many ways map onto the experiences of the second and later-generation mothers I interview and that I present in this dissertation. I share these experiences to point out that had I not had similar experiences as my participants, I might not have known to ask about their parents’ and grandparents’ relationships with Spanish. When participants described their friends, I might not have thought to ask if they too were mothers or if they lived in their same locale. If I was not also experiencing maternal isolation—due to complicated decisions in pursuit of upward mobility that removed me from my family and community of origin—the nuances my participants described might have gone unnoticed or seemed inconsequential. Moreover, had I not been familiar with online parenting discourse surrounding gentle parenting, the different ways it manifests, and how mothers of color were discussing it online, I might not have asked my participants detailed questions about where they sought out information and why. I might have assumed the version of gentle parenting my participants adopted and their reasons for doing so were in alignment with white American mothers.

While it may be easy to assume that my lived experiences have altered my analysis of my data, I assert that instead this dissertation is an analysis and framing of a longstanding group of

mothers in the United States as seen through the lens of an “outsider within” (Collins 1987). An outsider within is someone who “trusts their own personal and cultural biographies as significant sources of knowledge” (p. s29). Moreover, feminist standpoint theory (Hartsock 1983; Smith 1987) argues that those who occupy marginalized or oppressed positions in society have a different, potentially more insightful, understanding of the world than those in privileged positions. Building upon this framework, in this dissertation, rather than always aiming to be “objective”, I have relied upon and privileged my own personal and cultural knowledge as a lens through which to view and understand my participants’ experiences. I am confident that my lived experiences and similar struggle have allowed me to view my participants through a light that not many in the academy up until this point have.

Dominant Constructions of Latinx Families, Women, and Mothers

Much of the existing scholarship on the Latinx parenting practices has mixed findings, focuses primarily on Mexican American families, and presents families in stereotypical ways (Mirandé 1977; González-López 2005). Through culture deficit and assimilationist perspectives Mexican American women were often blamed for their family’s socioeconomic positions in society. Through a lens of white supremacy, wherein white middle-class families are the standard, Latinx families were seen as traditional, overly patriarchal, and Spanish and Catholicism were perceived to be hindrances to their social, political, and economic progress (Huntington 2004; Hurtado 1995). Research specifically on Latina mothers, often examines their labor force participation practices (Ybarra 1982, Segura, Vesely et al 2019), mothers’ engagement in children’s education (Buriel 1993; Terriquez 2012), and sex education (O’Sullivan et al 2001; Villar and Concha 2012; Meneses et al 2016). However, it’s important to note that oftentimes the framing of these research questions and the underlying assumptions of

the research itself are influenced by stereotypical depictions of Latina mothers and assimilationist goals. Many of these inquiries operate under the assumption that Latina mothers are not passing on the "correct" traits and may reinforce negative behaviors, thereby perpetuating stereotypes about Latinas, particularly Latina mothers, who are unfairly subjected to scrutiny regarding their sexual encounters, fertility and general morality (González-López 2005; Chavez 2013).

In the 1970s and 1980s scholarship from Women's Studies and Chicana/o Studies contextualized research on Latinx families regarding gender, work, and the nature of familism (Mirandé 1977; Ybarra 1982; Zinn 1982; Zinn 1990). However, mixed and sometimes contradictory research findings persist. For example, more contemporary studies characterize Latinx parenting as authoritarian and controlling (Cardona, Nicholson, and Fox, 2000; Parke et al., 2004; Rodriguez and Olswang 2003; Varela et al. 2004), while others characterize it as authoritative and responsive (Calzada et al 2012; Domenech Rodriguez, Donovanick, and Crowley 2009; Gamble, Ramakumar, and Diaz 2007). Earlier research as well as more contemporary research on Latinx families is often concerned with how permissive or authoritarian Latinx parents are, how cultural factors shape their parenting styles, and how parenting styles may reveal the level of acculturation to U.S. norms among traditional immigrant families.

Consistent with the large body of scholarship produced after the post-1965 immigration waves that renewed social science's interest in understanding how the "new second generation" would fare, U.S.-based research on Latinx families in the last decade primarily focuses on immigrants and their children (Van Hook and Glick 2020). This research principally focused on immigrant incorporation, assimilation, and ethnic identity but has neglected a thorough analysis of parenting and ethnoracial socialization practices. Much of this research was also specifically

focused on Mexicans residing in California (see Bean, Brown, and Bachmeier 2015; Jiménez 2010; Telles and Ortiz 2002; and Vasquez 2011). While these tangential bodies of research are important and reveal how and why immigrant and second-generation mothers experience motherhood in the context of multiple cultures, countries, and experiences with immigration, the story is incomplete.

Due to the limited scope and the predominant emphasis on how parenting practices relate to acculturation or assimilation, Latinx families are often portrayed as forever foreigners (Jiménez 2010; Vasquez 2011). Latinx families are either depicted as holding onto un-American family cultural values or as abandoning their cultural background to conform to white, mainstream family norms. However, an entire generation has passed since this research was conducted and the grandchildren of post-1965 immigrants are now either coming of age or in adulthood. What scholars know less about is how the “new second generation” and later generations approach parenting once their families are established in the United States, no longer consider themselves immigrant families or personally identify with an immigrant experience, and are raising children in the current sociopolitical context. Echoing calls from other scholars (Jimenez, Park, and Pedroza 2018), this dissertation seeks to understand how social, economic, and political processes are experienced by later-generation Latinx people, in this case, mothers, and how these processes inform their motherwork, motherhood ideologies, and experience leading their families in the United States.

Latina Motherwork in the Current Sociopolitical Climate

Latinx people are often depicted by controlling images (Collins 1990) that anthropologist Leo Chavez (2013) refers to as the “Latino Threat Narrative” that portrays Latinx people as a threat to the United States. The Latino threat narrative and its “invasion” rhetoric is in part fueled

by scholar's projections of demographic shifts in the United States in which the country will soon become majority minority with the largest non-white group being Latinx people. While public discourse will portray immigration as the main factor for growth in the Latinx population, Latinx immigration to the United States has been on the decline in recent years (Stepler and Lopez 2016) and two-thirds of Latinxs are native born (Krogstad and Lopez 2014). Controlling images contribute to commonplace understandings of all Latinx people regardless of national origin, race, class status, or generation which proliferate through time and space via media, public discourse, policy, and everyday interactions.

This dissertation is especially timely given the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States. While the U.S. has rarely, if ever, ideologically welcomed immigrant groups of color, the country's anti-immigrant sentiment rose with the presidential campaign and eventual election of Donald Trump. Even though Trump opened his campaign targeting Mexican immigrants, his rhetoric increased the salience of panethnic Latinx identity across national origin and generation (Gutierrez et al 2019). In recent years, scholars have shown that perceptions about one's race and immigration status—derived from controlling images and racial scripts—impact patterns of discrimination (Garcia 2017), health outcomes (Brown 2018; Lopez et al. 2017), and feelings of exclusion among Latinx people (Garcia 2017; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Canizales and Vallejo 2020). In today's anti-immigrant climate, the stigma associated with “illegality”, or what some scholars refer to as “social illegality” (Flores and Schachter 2018), is now being extended across legal status and generation to affect even those who are U.S. citizens (Garcia 2017; Menjivar 2021). Hence, some scholars point to the “Trump effect” as causing many Latinx people to develop a reactive ethnicity, or one in which their ethnoracial identity was made more salient due to Trump's racist rhetoric and the increase in experiences of

discrimination and violence in everyday life (Canizales and Vallejo 2020). This dissertation examines how stereotypical depictions of Latinx families relate to Latina mothers' motivations for and strategies of ethnoracial socialization with their children. I specifically examine how Latina mothers perceive and respond to the controlling images about their family, particularly in light of the acute political shift following the 2016 presidential election.

Bridging three bodies of scholarship on motherhood, immigration, and ethnoracial socialization, this study moves beyond treating Latinx people as permanent immigrants. I specifically center upwardly mobile second and later-generation mothers and analyze their experiences to understand how generations of U.S. based racialization may define, structure, and constrain their motherhood and their roles as leaders of their families. In this dissertation, I answer four sets of questions. First, how do second and later-generation Latinx mothers approach parenting amidst multiple cultural scripts of motherhood? Second, how does social location, experience with racialization, and immigrant generation inform the motherhood ideologies and parenting practices of second and later-generation Latinx mothers? Third, how do Latinx mothers approach ethnoracial socialization and transmission of cultural knowledge with their children? And lastly, how do second and later-generation Latinx mothers' experiences and practices highlight the incorporation strategies and challenges of later-generation Latinx people?

I argue that perspectives on U.S. mothering ideologies (Hays 1999; Blair-Loy; Segura 1994), ethnoracial identity formation, and incorporation trajectories (Jimenez 2010; Vasquez 2011) do not fully account for the mothering ideologies or practices of second and later-generation Latinx mothers who are raising their children in the 21st century sociopolitical context. Using 62 interviews with upwardly mobile second- and later-generation Latina mothers across the United States, I expand upon existing family and incorporation scholarship to show

that whereas legacies of migration often constrain and define immigrant women's motherhood, later-generation Latina mothers' ideologies and practices are informed by their race and class identities but also their relation to both their family's ethnic community of origin and the U.S. white mainstream. My findings show that upwardly mobile second and later-generation Latinx mothers intentionally deviate from the mothering strategies used by earlier family matriarchs and also do not replicate those of white American mothers. I deploy two concepts to explain my participants' approach to mothering in the United States: *culturally transformative mothering* and *Latina/e/x motherwork*.²

I use the term *culturally transformative mothering* to describe the deliberate process mothers engage in when determining which aspects of culture and identity to pass onto their children and which parenting styles to adopt. Mothers intentionally select and integrate valued aspects of their cultural background into their parenting practices. Simultaneously, they identify and alter or remove practices they deem harmful and remnants of structural inequalities. For my participants, this dual process empowers mothers to both challenge essentialist values they feel do not intrinsically align with Latinx culture while reinforcing those they consider central to Latinx identity and community. In Figure 1. I highlight the components of culturally transformative mothering. While I apply this concept to the mothering practices of the upwardly mobile second and later-generation Latina mothers I interview, it can be applied to other racial and cultural groups that are navigating and negotiating cultural fluidity and transformation.

Feminists of color argue that Latina motherhood plays a pivotal role in the ongoing intergenerational struggle for gender, racial, economic, and social equality (Delgado Bernal,

² The use of Latina, Latine, and Latinx is evolving. In an effort to respect and accommodate the diverse self-identifications of mothers of Latin American descent, I incorporate all three terms. This concept can be tailored to match the identification of the mother in question.

Elenes, Godinez, and Villenas 2006; Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981). Latina mothers are continually in flux, reshaping, and renegotiating the practice of motherhood by embracing collective mothering while simultaneously challenging prevailing ideologies (Glenn 1994). Collins (1994) identifies three key factors that form the foundation of motherhood for women of color, a concept she terms motherwork: the critical role in ensuring the physical well-being of children and the community, how power dynamics shape maternal practices, and the importance of self-definition in shaping both individual and collective racial identity. Contrary to mothering frameworks that focus on the nuclear family, motherwork is conducted not only on behalf of one's own children but also those of other mothers (McDonald 1997) and the larger social groups they are a part of (Stack and Burton 1994).

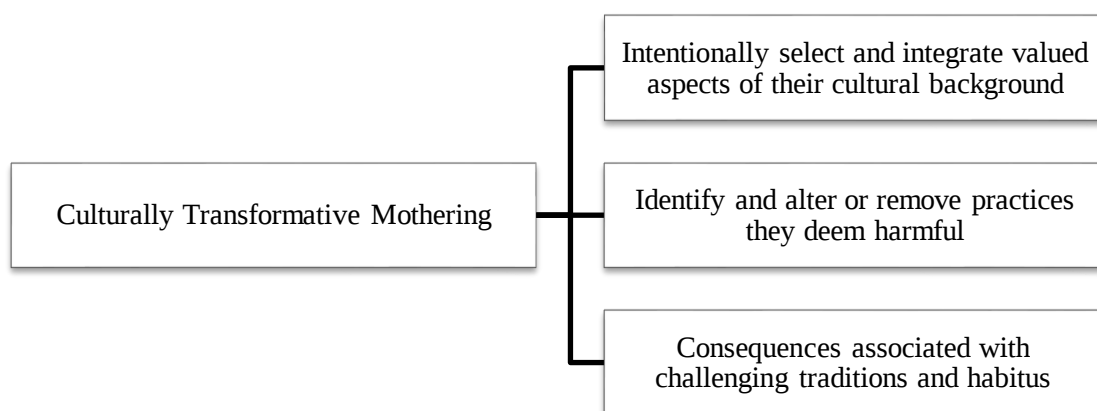


Figure 1. Culturally Transformative Mothering

Through research and *testimonios*, Latina and Chicana feminists have demonstrated that Latinas consistently engage in activities that benefit their families and communities through active community participation (Pardo 1998; Ochoa 2011) and efforts to reshape the discourse surrounding their families (Maldonado 2019) in the name of expanding access to opportunities in the U.S. (Marrun 2016). Expanding upon Collins' (1994) concept of motherwork and incorporating Anzaldúa's (1987) Borderlands framework, "Chicana motherwork" (Téllez 2011)

recognizes culture as a dynamic preservation tool, praxis, and form of resistance within contemporary U.S. society. Because Chicana motherwork necessitates a willingness to adapt cultural practices and tools, it also means reinterpreting motherhood. It also acknowledges that mothering labor involves ongoing negotiations within families and communities. Moreover, departing from traditional notions and expectations of women's role and duty to family, Chicana motherwork challenges the conventional belief that motherhood is an all-encompassing, selfless endeavor, proposing instead that motherhood can also prioritize the self (Téllez 2011).

Through a lens of *culturally transformative mothering*, I expand the concept of Chicana motherwork to include mothers who are not descendants of Mexico and do not identify as Chicana. I expand this concept not to diminish the diversity of Latina mothers but to highlight the qualities, values, and struggles that define Latinx motherhood in the United States, irrespective of dissimilarities, on account of panethnic racialization in the United States. Drawing on Collins' framework of motherwork and placing emphasis on survival, power, and identity, I put forth the concept of *Latina/e/x motherwork*. Latina/e/x motherwork necessitates that Latina mothers engage in both negotiations with family and community members but also white society about the ways in which Latina mothers lead their homes and families. As Latina and Chicana feminist scholars and writers have demonstrated, Latina mothers are constantly negotiating power struggles in their families and communities regardless of which nation they reside in. Migration, recent or historic, does not change this fact. Instead, it adds an additional dimension of power and struggle to their mothering. Latina/e/x motherwork also necessitates that mothers prepare their children for survival and navigation of U.S. specific racialized spaces and that this may vary for different family configurations, phenotype, name, geographic region, and by other markers of difference. These complex and varied terrains that Latinx people navigate necessitate

that mothers help their children develop ethnoracial toolkits that allows them to seamlessly navigate the borderlands of their ethnic communities, broader Latinx communities, and white society. Each of these work together for the individual and collective survival in white society, amidst attempted cultural erasure, but also to overcome trauma stemming from legacies of inequalities such as poverty, systemic racism, and migration.

This process, coupled with structural incorporation, results in the transmission and creation of a Latinx ethnoracial toolkit and identity that is informed by U.S. contextualized racialization, class, gender dynamics, and sociopolitical realities that are distinct from both earlier coethnic generations and white Americans alike. Ann Swidler (1987) conceives of culture as “a repertoire, like that of a musician, or a dancer.” She argues that looking at culture through a tool kit model allows us to understand how one performs a culture repertoire, and what skills, habits, and orientations one has. We are then able to ask how and why certain repertoires are deployed, when, and for what purpose. Through this lens, we are able to see that material and nonmaterial forms of culture, and their meanings, are transmitted and stored (Lacy 2007). Just as Pattillo (2013) finds that Black people in Chicago possess a Black cultural toolkit that draws upon church rituals, and Lacy (2007) finds that middle-class Black suburbanites possess a cultural toolkit reflective of the Black middle-class experience, I argue that the Latina mothers in my sample also possess, refine, and pass on a Latinx specific cultural toolkit to their children, which I call an *ethnoracial toolkit*. This toolkit serves a dual purpose: first, it enables their children to navigate predominantly white spaces where they are seen as American insiders, and second, it facilitates ethnoracial identity development and group belonging within the Latinx community.

Considering that my sample is diverse in terms of generation, family ethnic origin, and

geographic region, one would expect that my findings would highlight a number of differences between mothers parenting approaches and motivations. However, my participants have a range of shared experiences. While I found cultural differences in terms of food, holidays celebrated, and sometimes religious affiliation, the broader racialized experiences growing up and mothering in the United States were similar across ethnic groups. Even though mothers were able to distinguish themselves from different Latinx ethnic groups and could see differences by generation, out-group members often could or did not. Therefore, their and their children's racial experiences in the U.S. do not vary based on ethnic group or generation but instead by fixed characteristics such as race, phenotype, and name. These were especially pronounced among mothers who lived in predominately white areas or neighborhoods. These mothers openly discussed their concerns for their children in navigating those spaces. Differences did arise among mothers who lived in non-diverse or predominantly white areas and in terms of generational relationships to Spanish. Each of these will be discussed further in the following chapters. Generational differences did not arise in approaches or motivations for parenting style or ethnoracial socialization strategies.

These findings show that while later-generation Latinx mothers are influenced by family matriarchs and U.S. mothering ideologies, their parenting approaches, ideologies, and the toolkit they pass onto their children are ultimately informed by their own gendered and racialized experiences in the United States. Ultimately, through these efforts, mothers redefine their roles as Latinx mothers, reshape family dynamics, and perceptions and embodiments of Latinx identity.

Theoretical Framing

Theorizing and Rethinking Motherhood

Sociological scholarship that focuses on mothering, and the associated practices and

expectations of mothers, is dominated by two ideologies: intensive mothering and concerted cultivation. Intensive mothering is the notion that good mothers should invest significant amounts of time, money, and emotional labor into their mothering (Hays 1996). It is based on three tenets: mothers are inherently better parents, mothering should be wholly child-centered, and that children should be considered fulfilling to parents. Intensive mothering is well documented (Blair-Loy 2003; Blum 1999; Bobel 2002; Garey 1999; Stone, 2007) and requires that mothers constantly concern themselves with their children's developmental growth, supervise every aspect of their day to day lives, and provide consistent intellectual stimulation. In essence, motherhood became professionalized. And although intensive mothering is coded as white and middle class (Hays 1996; Roberts 1997), research suggests that all mothers, regardless of racial, ethnic or class background are aware of and feel pressure to conform to intensive mothering ideals (Blair-Loy 2003; Hays 1996; McCormack 2005; Elliot, Powell, and Brenton 2015). While widely practiced, intensive mothering has also been found to be associated with poor mental health, increased stress and guilt, and an overall decreased satisfaction with life (Elliot, Powell, and Brenton 2015).

A second dominant framework used to describe the practices and expectations of mothers is concerted cultivation. In *Unequal Childhoods*, Lareau (2003) argues that social class plays a pivotal role in shaping parental approaches to child-rearing. She posits that middle-class parents adhere to distinct cultural norms compared to their working-class and poor counterparts. Furthermore, her framework suggests that, irrespective of racial backgrounds, parents tend to share common parenting ideologies, aspirations for their children, and methods for reproducing their social status. Both of these parenting frameworks downplay how race and other social identities that parents have inform their parenting ideologies, strategies parents use to cultivate

their children's racial and gender identities, how they reproduce or advance their class or social status, and challenges faced in the process.

Nevertheless, in recent years scholars have begun to challenge the applicability of these mothering ideologies to mothers other than white-middle class. In *Mothering While Black*, Dow (2019) demonstrates that mothering ideologies and practices are not only shaped by class, but also racially and gendered situated identities, ideologies, and cultural orientations. The middle- and upper-middle class African American mothers in Dow's (2016) study practiced a different orientation to mothering: integrated mothering. Integrated mothering assumes that childcare is mother centered but supported by extended family and community; working outside the home is a duty of motherhood and therefore not a source of internal conflict for mothers; and that mothers routinely consider racial, gendered, and classed identities when making parenting decisions. Dow also finds that middle class African American mothers place significant amounts of time and energy into creating racial comfort for their children, fostering their racial self-esteem, and crafting specific orientations to African American identity among their children. Building on this perspective, I explore the social forces influencing the mothering ideologies and practices of Latina mothers, examining the roles of race, gender, class, and cultural expectations in shaping these processes.

Latina Mothering Ideologies and Practices

Mothering ideologies that assume mothers will be the primary and sole caretaker of children are not restricted to white, middle-class mothers. Aspects of these ideologies show up in versions of idealized Latinx motherhood via Latinx cultural prescriptions of what motherhood entails. For example, Catholicism often paints employment in opposition to motherhood and

cultural images such as the Virgen de Guadalupe, *La Llorona*, and *La Malinche*³ serve as respective positive and negative blueprints that Mexican and Chicana's motherhood is measured against. These images of motherhood are consistent with the idea that mothering is a selfless labor-intensive endeavor, which is present in both concerted cultivation and intensive mothering ideologies.

Much of the literature on Mexican families relies on stereotypical cultural explanations that portray them as overly patriarchal and pushing idealized versions of motherhood onto women. This body of literature also often fails to 1) distinguish between foreign and U.S. born women and 2) relies on ideas of linear and stepped acculturation. Under this guise, one would assume that Mexican immigrant women would hold more "traditional" family values and participate in the paid labor force less than their U.S. born counterparts as they have grown up and been socialized in the "more modern" or "gender egalitarian" United States. However, in her examination of motherhood and employment ideologies, Segura (1994) finds a stark contrast in how Chicanas (U.S.-born Mexican women) and Mexicanas (foreign-born Mexican women) conceptualize motherhood and its compatibility with motherhood. She finds that Chicana mothers embraced conventional U.S.-informed intensive mothering ideals, resulting in inner conflict when they engaged in work outside the home. Conversely, Mexican immigrant mothers adopted a Mexican-informed mothering ideology that emphasized the value of maternal employment, leading to internal conflict when they assumed the role of stay-at-home mothers.

³ The Virgen de Guadalupe is an indigenous virgin who presented herself to a young man, is widely used in Catholic symbolism across Mexico, and provides an exemplary model of maternalism. *La Llorona* is a legendary ghostlike figure that murdered her children by drowning them and has been condemned to eternal suffering for failing as a mother. *La Malinche* is an Aztec woman who was given to Hernan Cortes as a slave and later served as his translator. Since she had a child with Cortes, she is often referred to as the "mother of all mestizos". She is a controversial figure because she is seen as a traitor to her country for collaborating with Spanish conquerors and for her so-called sexual promiscuity. *La Llorona* and *La Malinche* are both versions of negative and detested forms of maternalism and femininity.

Segura posits that these divergent mothering orientations are shaped by distinct cultural contexts between Mexico and the U.S. but also selective immigration, in which Mexican mothers immigrated with the specific intention of improving their family's economic standing. She argues that since Chicana's grew up in the U.S. where men are seen as the primary breadwinner and women are mothers first and wage earners second, they adopted (and assimilated) into the U.S. based mothering ideology.

Even if mothers' reasons for migrating did impact their mothering orientation, immigration is a sociohistorical process where push and pull factors vary depending on the social, political, and economic conditions of both the country of origin and the receiving country. The time of migration, country of origin, and immigration status upon migration (among other factors) may all influence not only which women migrate but their family's social and economic progress once in the United States (Bean, Brown, and Bachmeier 2015). Nevertheless, the first women to migrate are likely to set a precedent and influence the decisions of their children, who are the future generations of Latinas/os in the United States. My research challenges and expands upon Segura's findings by proposing a more nuanced perspective on mothering ideologies, suggesting that they, along with other aspects of culture and personal identity, operate independently of structural incorporation measures. Moreover, my research questions the notion that U.S.-born Latina mothers automatically assimilate into U.S.-based mothering practices due to exposure to U.S. culture and distance from their family's country of origin.

Segura's (1994) findings are consistent with more recent studies on differences in foreign- and native-born Latinas. When new mothers were asked about their outlook on motherhood and their overall satisfaction, foreign-born Latinas were more likely than U.S. born Latinas to express negative feelings. Foreign-born Latinas often reported that they felt pressure

to conform to sociocultural expectations of motherhood, i.e., being the primary caretaker of their children with little help from their partner, while maintaining paid employment outside the home (Aiken and Trussell 2017). In direct contrast to intensive mothering ideologies, immigrant mothers in the U.S. are expected to prioritize employment (Chang 1994; Segura 1994; Boris 1994). And sometimes, immigrant mothers will resort to transnational childcare strategies in which their children will stay in their home country under the care of extended family members while they work in the United States (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). Even in more recent studies, paid employment was central to migrant women's identities. At the same time, though, too much time spent in paid employment (at the expense of caregiving) was associated with bad mothering (Straut-Eppsteiner 2021). These findings highlight the complex expectations Latina immigrants face related to motherhood and paid employment, as they strive to maintain their preferred roles in their family while contending with U.S. societal norms and perceptions of their caregiving abilities. These differing ideologies and expectations of mothering for immigrant and once immigrant groups showcase how motherhood is influenced not only by U.S. cultural norms but also by the cultural expectations of mothers' family's country of origin. These highlight the complex intersection of motherhood, employment, cultural backgrounds, and gender expectations among Latinas.

Research on Latina mothers has consistently suggested that their mothering practices change either as they migrate from their country of origin to the United States (Vesely et al 2019) or over generations (Segura 1994; Buriel 1993). Scholars posit that these changes are informed by both immigrant women's experiences in their country of origin but also their social location in the U.S. and by being exposed to U.S. parenting ideologies and expectations. Research finds that parenting in the U.S. versus participants' country of origin prompted shifts in

both gender roles within the home and also modes of child care. Specifically, when women participated in the labor force they maintained or gained more gender egalitarian homes as compared to women who did not work outside the home (Vesely et al 2019).

Research that examines how parenting practices after migration may change finds that socialization practices differ by generation (Buriel 1993). Buriel finds that parents who were born in Mexico had a “responsibility-oriented” style of parenting that was characterized by early self-reliance and adherence to family rules. Buriel suggests that because immigrant parents are removed from their communities of origin that they encourage their kids to be more independent and that this may wane over time as future generations acculturate into the U.S. Conversely, U.S.-born Mexican parents had a “concern-oriented” style of parenting that was characterized by emotional support while also encouraging children to adhere to school rules. Buriel suggests that as US born women, who are socialized in the US, become parents they are more aware of their children’s social position and their encouragement of rule adherence may be to offset potential negative treatment on account of their ethnic and racial identities. However, they also posit that this may reflect a shift toward white American parenting styles. Given that much of the research on Latinx families arrives at similar conclusions, suggesting that Latinx families, particularly mothers, are departing from their cultural norms and values in favor of adopting or moving towards U.S. or Euro-centric parenting styles and values, it becomes crucial to reevaluate this group of mothers from a fresh perspective.

Beyond Permanent Immigrants

The predominant framework for understanding ethnic families, specifically Latinx families, has been through assimilation models. Generally, assimilation is defined as acquiring the language, value, and behaviors of the dominant group. Thus, scholarship about Latinx

families has consistently used these measures to guide researchers' frameworks, questions, analyses, and interpretations of Latinx families and family life. As I will show in this section, Latinx families present an assimilation paradox, in that they do not neatly fit any model of assimilation that scholars put forth, laying the foundation for an alternative lens to studying Latinx people, families, and mothers.

Classic assimilation theory assumes that over time immigrants will become more similar to those from their host nation through seven stepped dimensions of assimilation (cultural, behavioral, structural, identificational, attitudinal, behavioral, and civic) (Gordon 1964). Considering that Latinas/os come to the United States with various social, cultural, economic, and historical backgrounds, this formula is too simplistic. Portes and Zhou (1993) introduced segmented assimilation theory which posits that assimilation is a segmented process that allows certain groups to assimilate into various segments of U.S. society and accounts for the possibility of downward assimilation or incorporation into a marginalized or stigmatized group (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Which segment a group assimilates into is dependent on their levels of human capital, the social capital of their ethnic community, the context of their reception, and government policy. This theory emphasizes a three-part path: assimilation into the white middle-class for those with human capital advantages; disadvantage for select immigrants due to racialization and poverty which will be accompanied by assimilation into the underclass; and a deliberate preservation of ethnicity for others (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993). Segmented assimilation also posits that the outcome of the second generation depends strongly on which path the first generation takes, and that the presence of immigration sours the social context for the second generation (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Mexican Americans, in particular, have been presented as an exemplary case of segmented assimilation. However, depending on the axis of measurement, scholars do not always agree on the overall social status and levels of social mobility for this group. For instance, later-generation Mexican Americans have made considerable economic, political, and social progress (Telles and Ortiz 2008; Jimenez 2010), have consistently high levels of workforce participation (Waldinger and Feliciano 2004; Waldinger, Lim, and Cort 2007), and high rates of intermarriage (Macias 2006; Feliciano 2001). Conversely though, a long history of colonization, subsequent immigration, and discrimination has solidified a hostile context in which Mexican immigrants and later generations settle. This hostile environment, often low levels of parental social capital, and a (perceived) “oppositional” orientation toward the US mainstream lead the second (and later) generation on a downward structural trajectory (Lopez and Statnton-Salazar 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). In their landmark longitudinal study, Telles and Ortiz (2008) conclude that while Mexican Americans have attained some markers of economic and social mobility, they are missing the most impactful one: education. They conclude that by the fourth generation Mexicans’ daily lives are still structured by their race and ethnicity, which raises questions about which measurements social scientists prioritize when assessing assimilation, why, and through which lens we view assimilation, incorporation, and even acculturation.

More recent scholarship that specifically studies later-generation Latinx people, although again only Mexican Americans, offers revisions of these perspectives. First, Jimenez (2010) argues that later-generation Mexican Americans have structurally assimilated too much to be perceived as an aggrieved minority group but also that “ethnicity remains far too important in their lives to regard them as an assimilating ethnic group” (p. 254). Jimenez’ central argument is that the continual influx of Mexican immigration makes the Mexican-origin population in the

U.S. a permanent immigrant group that continually “struggles” with assimilation. However, Jimenez makes the case that race is important in the lives of Mexican-origin folks not for the same reasons earlier scholars assume. Instead, race is important in their lives because it is seen as and conflated with immigration. Jimenez posits that continual Mexican immigration is responsible for the strong sense of ethnic identity that this groups holds on account of the “ethnic raw materials” they continue to supply and pass on to later-generations. He also argues that continual immigration is largely responsible for the continued racialization—or the process of ascribing ethnic or racial identities to a group for the purpose of domination and social exclusion (Omi and Winant 1986)—of Mexican people in the United States.

Second, through interviews with three generations of Mexican-origin families in California, Vasquez (2011) extends bumpy-line assimilation (Gans 1992a, 1992b) by arguing that her later-generation Mexican-origin participants experience racialization and institutional discrimination despite improving levels of structural assimilation. While she agrees with Jimenez (2010) that the Mexican-origin population occupies a social status as permanent immigrants, she argues that phenotype, gender, name, and marriage patterns, particularly at the second generation, influence the speed and direction in which later-generations assimilate and form their racial identity. She finds that her later-generation participants’ connection to their Mexican origin culture existed on a spectrum from “thinned attachment” to “cultural maintenance.” Those she categorizes as thinly attached had what she deemed loose commitments to their Mexican heritage, increased attachment to American culture, and inconsistently attempted to preserve and pass on Mexican identity to their children. Vasquez notes that a high percentage of families she categorized as thinned attachment had second-generation members that married white Americans. On the other end of the spectrum, she argues that the same factors that influence

thinned attachment, when configured differently, can produce a cultural maintenance trajectory. This occurs when the second generation marries other Latinos, continues to be Catholic, and practices traditional or transitional gender ideologies. Ultimately, Vasquez argues that in the second generation there exists “key points at which assimilation advances, reverses, stalls, or changes directions.”

In sum, two competing perspectives of assimilation and incorporation are routinely applied to Latinx immigrant groups, particularly Mexican-origin people. The first paints Mexican Americans as an aggrieved minority group that experiences persistent discrimination and is therefore blocked from entering the U.S. mainstream (Acuña 2000; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Ochoa 2004; Telles and Ortiz 2008). The other perceives Mexican Americans as a slowly assimilating group, primarily based on their levels of structural incorporation such as education, intermarriage, primary language, and ethnic identity patterns (Alba 2006; Alba and Nee 2003; Vasquez 2011). The primary emphasis of these studies lies in analyzing identity patterns and the degree of structural incorporation. There is comparatively less focus on exploring the mechanisms through which mothers transmit culture and ethnic or racial identity to the succeeding generation and the specific strategies employed by mothers in this process.

In this dissertation, I challenge the very assumptions that previous scholars put forth regarding the assimilation and incorporation trajectories of Latinx people. As scholars have documented and debated, the assimilation trajectories of Latinx people presents a paradox. With each generation, there is a general trend of continual and increased structural incorporation, measured by socioeconomic status, spatial concentration, English dominance, and intermarriage (with white Americans) (Waters and Jiménez 2005). However, when qualitative research takes a subject-centered approach, it consistently finds that Latinx people continue to face routine

discrimination in daily life, feel generally othered in the United States, and identify with their family's ethnic groups of origin. In light of this, it becomes inappropriate to categorize my participants as "assimilated" or to interpret their stories as such. Thus, relying on normative assimilation measures that do not take into account the actual experiences of Latinx people (and other immigrant groups) in the United States is misleading (Li and Nicholson 2021; Lee and Sheng 2023). In this project, I challenge assimilation frameworks that assume with each successive generation mothers will increasingly aspire to a family model that mirrors that of white Americans. I instead center the lived experiences of Latina mothers, allowing their narratives to illuminate how and the reasons behind their approach to mothering their children and leading their families.

What remains notably underexplored in contemporary literature on Latinx families is the impact of racialization and perpetual exclusion on the mothering ideologies, practices, and experiences of Latina mothers as they guide their families and raise Latinx children. Their lives remain distinctly influenced and shaped by their roles as women and Latinx mothers, raising children who oftentimes share this racial identity. Rather than attempting to emulate the parenting practices of white families, my participants actively engage in the construction of a Latinx family identity rooted in the U.S. context. Rather than viewing Latinx individuals as having a tenuous connection or deliberately distancing themselves from Latinx culture, we can more accurately interpret this as Latinx individuals crafting an identity that blends elements of their family's ethnic background with the cultural, racial, economic, and political realities of the United States. Mothers then use various strategies to pass their acquired ethnoracial toolkit onto their children. Considering the consensus that Latinas/os experience persistent racialization, rather than assessing degrees of structural incorporation, I examine the lived experiences of

Latina mothers and how they approach raising their children *despite* their socioeconomic status, educational achievement, or marital patterns.

Ethnoracial Socialization

Family ethnoracial socialization is the process that families engage in that socialized youth regarding the values, traditions, and practices associated with their ethnic or racial group. It also includes the practices that families engage in to teach their children about and how to cope with or navigate potential discrimination, threat, or harm they may encounter on account of their (perceived or actual) ethnic or racial identity (Hughes et al 2006). Ethnoracial socialization plays a significant role in diminishing the negative effects of ethnic and racial inequalities by socializing youth to better understand their ethnic/racial group and thus building a strong ethnoracial identity (Huguley et al 2019). While a key responsibility of parents is to “help children learn values and behaviors that allow children to adapt to environments in which they live” (Umaña-Taylor and Guimond 2010: 637), little is known about how non-immigrant Latinx mothers engage in this behavior and how their and their children’s own experiences with racialization influence these actions. These messages are often a reflection of the racial category’s parents belong to, parents’ class, gender, exposure to racism, and the racial socialization they themselves received in addition to their children’s social characteristics (Hughes and Chen 1999; Thomas and Speight 1999).

Relatedly but distinct, ethnic socialization refers to how children acquire the behaviors, perceptions, values, and attitudes of an ethnic group and the process in which they come to see themselves as members of an ethnic group (Rotheram and Phinney 1987). Exposing children directly to what some scholars refer to as “ethnic raw materials” (Jimenez 2010) such as food, language, and objects from their country of origin or indirectly through books and conversations

about culture are all examples of ethnic socialization practices. Research on ethnic socialization often looks at the experiences of Latinx, Asian, and Caribbean groups. This research has focused largely on the transmission of culture from parent to child, identity, and in-group affiliation under pressure to assimilate into dominant culture and society (Phinney and Chavira 1995; Umaña-Taylor et al. 2009; Quintana and Vera 1999).

Much of this research comes from the field of psychology and examines the types of socialization parents engage in as it relates to positive youth outcomes such as racial identity and self-esteem (Hughes et al 2006; Umaña-Taylor and Guimond 2010; Umaña-Taylor and Hill 2020). In the past decade though, there has been an emerging focus on the precursors and motivations for racial and ethnic socialization practices of families but motivations and precursors have not been differentiated by type of socialization (Umaña-Taylor and Hill 2020).

Although there are four dominant types of ethnoracial socialization found in the literature, two types have been studied the most: cultural socialization and preparation for bias (Umaña-Taylor and Hill 2020). Among Latinx families this largely examines ethnic or cultural practices or the transmission of identity and culture from one generation to the next (Vasquez 2011). Some scholarship has, however, begun to examine the Latinx second generation as parents rather than as coming-of-age or young adult children of immigrants and specifically how they pass on language (Garcia 2018). Experiencing racism has also been found to influence Latinx parents' parenting practices and is associated with their engagement in various kinds of ethnic and racial socialization. For instance, experiencing interpersonal racism was associated with Latinx parents communicating cultural socialization messages. In contrast, experience with institutional racism was associated with Latinx parents communicating preparation for bias messages so that their children may navigate those systems (Hagelskamp and Hughes 2014).

Experiencing race-related phenomena resulted in parents communicating both cultural socialization and preparation for bias messages with children aged 10-17 (Hughes 2003). Number of coethnics in their neighborhood was also shown to be associated with racial and ethnic socialization practices. That is, Latinx parents engage in more ethnic-racial socialization when they live in areas where fewer coethnics reside (White et al 2018).

Recent scholarship has also pointed to immigration policies as creating additional emotional hardships for Latinx families and influencing their parenting practices (Leidy, Guerra, and Toro 2010; Ayón et al 2012; Ayón and Becerra 2013). When Mexican immigrant parents experienced workplace discrimination, they interacted less warmly with their children (Gassman-Pines 2015) and when Latinx immigrant parents who report experiencing higher levels of discrimination was associated with lower parental monitoring and less consistent and harsher disciplining compared to those who experiences less discrimination (Ayón and García 2019). Although this study does not engage directly with immigrant mothers, scholarship has shown that hostile immigration contexts affect Latinas/os across generations and legal status (Garcia 2017; Menjivar 2021).

Methods

To investigate how Latinx mothers experience motherhood and to disentangle how their motherhood ideologies and practices are informed and vary by social location, experience with racialization, and immigrant generation, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 62 Latina mothers across the United States. As Table 1 details, my sample is comprised of mostly upwardly mobile Latinas with college degrees holding white-collar professions. Roughly two thirds of the sample is second-generation and 77% of mothers are married or in a domestic partnership.

This project takes a constructivist grounded theory approach. Constructivist grounded theory differs from classic grounded theory in that it requires researchers to identify their preconceptions with the data whereas classic grounded theory does not. An emergent method such as constructivist grounded theory is the recommended methodological approach when knowledge of a certain phenomenon is unknown or fragmented, as is the case with mothering ideologies and practices of U.S.-born Latinx mothers (Charmaz, 2008). Constructivist grounded theory has four strategies that I incorporate through the research process: theoretical sampling, memo writing, coding, and theoretical saturation. Further details on data analysis can be found in the Methodological Appendix.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Age Range	24-48
Generation	
Second	74.2%
Third	16.1%
Fourth+	9.7%
Education	
Advanced	51.6%
College	25.8%
Some College	11.3%
High School	6.5%
Marital Status	
Married/Domestic Partner	77.4%
Single	12.9%
Divorced/Widowed	9.7%
Household Income	
0-50k	17.7%
50-99k	24.2%
100-149k	40.3%
150-200k	6.5%
200-250k	6.5%
250k+	4.8%

In-depth semi-structured interviews

I chose to conduct in-depth interviews to better understand if and how theories of mothering ideologies and immigrant incorporation explain the lived experiences of U.S. born Latina mothers. Interviews with Latina mothers took a life course perspective in which I asked mothers about their experiences in childhood, coming of age, journey into motherhood, and finally their experiences within the family they created. First, I asked participants to describe their childhood including neighborhood and school contexts. I also asked about their own mother and how they perceive her mothering values and practices. The second section of the interview focused on the participant as a mother and comprises the bulk of the interview. I asked participants to describe their own journey into motherhood including how, when, and if motherhood was intentional. In this section, I also asked about day-to-day family management including but not limited to child and family care, neighborhood and school choice, extracurricular activities, community involvement and civic engagement, and aspirations they have for their children. This section also focused on how they see motherhood in harmony or conflict with other domains of their personhood such as employment and personal or social life. Throughout this section I asked participants their primary concerns regarding each of the topics and probed for how their and their children's social location, gender, and ethnoracial identities inform those concerns. Prior to each interview, participants were also asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire that gathers information about them, their spouses or live-in partners, their children, and their parents. This questionnaire asked about self-identified race and ethnicity, income, occupation, marital status, family size, age, gender, level of education, immigrant generation, and their ancestors' country of origin.

Recruitment

Data collection for this project took place between Fall 2019 and Spring 2023 and was disrupted in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants were limited to Latinx mothers who were born in and currently reside in the United States and were raising children under the age of 18 at the time of our interview. I recruited participants through several strategies. First, I advertised my study through paper, email, and online advertisements at professional Latinx organizations, Latinx cultural organizations, educational organizations, as well as through civic, community, and parenting networks and organizations. However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, and once research was able to resume again, I faced recruitment challenges which was not surprising considering that I was recruiting mothers. Hansen (2019) found not only that recruiting mothers of young children to be especially challenging but that traditional recruitment methods yielded few leads because this strategy was impersonal and did not draw upon her insider status. She also notes that while mothers are easy to locate (due to mothering often occurring in public spaces), mothers are often time-poor. Thus, for research purposes, mothers may be a hard to reach and/or a hidden population. Hence, as a researcher would with any other hidden population, my insider status as a Latina mother proved to be useful in my other recruitment strategies. To remedy my recruitment challenges, I also recruited through informal contacts, acquaintances, and online mothering and parenting networks that I am a member of or participate in. Finally, I used snowball sampling to connect with additional participants by asking study participants to refer additional people who they feel would be interested in participating and whom they believe meet the study criteria.

Since I was conducting interviews in person but also via video or telephone, (whichever was preferred by the participant) and was able to open participation to a wide range of Latinx

mothers that may have different experiences and ideologies based on their geographic location (i.e., established Latinx community, new immigrant destination, predominantly white community), I did not limit the geographic location of my sample. However, I did aim to have participants from each of the four census-designated regions: Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. Latinx mothers will also fall into a variety of racial categories. I attempted to recruit a diverse sample of mothers by self-identified race. I tracked how many participants self-identify as white, Black, Asian, multiracial, or solely as Hispanic/Latinx and adjust recruitment methods as needed in an attempt to gather a diverse sample of Latinx mothers. As data collection proceeded, I tracked how many respondents from each region have been recruited and adjusted recruitment efforts as needed. I also tracked and adjusted recruitment methods to ensure that my sample was diverse in terms of higher education attainment, partnered status, racial identity, and sexual orientation. Even with my various recruitment strategies and changes, the end sample is largely upwardly mobile and middle class. Thus, the findings in this dissertation capture the parenting practices and strategies of economically privileged Latina mothers whose parenting styles, practices, and strategies may differ from lower income or working-class mothers on account of differential access to resources.

In the next section, I provide a summary road map of my dissertation and how ethnic and racial identities, gender, culture, class, and generation since immigration inform the mothering approaches and parenting styles of second and later-generation Latinx mothers in the United States.

The Road Map

In Chapter 2, “Negotiating Latinx Authenticity”, I examine how mothers approach ethnoracial socialization and transmission of cultural knowledge to their children. I find that

primary motivations for and practices of ethnoracial socialization are intricately shaped by a combination of factors including racial background, phenotype, Spanish language proficiency, and cultural habitus, and the perception of how they and their children are perceived as regarded as Latinx by both the wider Latinx community and dominant society. These practices serve multifaceted roles: safeguarding the safety of children perceived as Latinx by broader society, nurturing a sense of identity and belonging within the Latinx community, and reclamation of their Latinx identity in the face of potential challenges from the broader community.

In Chapter 3, “Redefining Latinx Parenting Practices”, I examine how participants challenge traditional and stereotypical depictions of Latina motherhood by adopting gentle parenting as both a parenting practice and a means of intergenerational healing for themselves and their children. Although mothers often anticipate family resistance to this parenting style because it is perceived to not align with traditional Latinx child-rearing norms, my participants firmly challenge the notion that authoritarian parenting styles are intrinsic to Latinx families. In doing so, they redefine the role of a Latinx mother within a Latinx family. However, their embrace of gentle parenting invites critiques from family members and often results in strained relationships with family matriarchs. These dynamics underscore the intricate process of reconciling their parents' past challenges and circumstances, conscious efforts to depart from past generational practices, and the often-accepted consequences that come with making these transformative choices for their family.

In Chapter 4, “The Cost of Upward Mobility”, I delve into the consequences mothers face on account of their pursuit of upward mobility and a new parenting style. As mothers find themselves lacking structural support and feeling disconnected from their communities and families, they report feeling a profound sense of maternal isolation and loneliness. This sense of

isolation arises from differences in parenting styles, the timing of motherhood, social or ideological backgrounds, and geographic distance from their family and community of origin.

In Chapter 5, I conclude by summarizing the previous chapters and illustrate how upwardly mobile second and later-generation mothers are redefining what it means to be a Latinx mother and a member of a Latinx family in the context of the United States. I describe this transformative process as *culturally transformative mothering*. Culturally transformative mothering involves a two-part process wherein first mothers carefully select elements of Latinx culture and parenting they consider intrinsic to the Latinx community and Latinx identity. Second, they examine practices they deem harmful and essentialized onto the community, and remove or alter them. These practices are often seen as byproducts of enduring poverty, confronting systemic racism, or residing as immigrants and people of color in a xenophobic white supremacist nation. Rather than viewing mothers' alternative practices as adopting American ways of parenting, Americanized identities, or American cultural habitus, I argue that my participants are forging a Latinx racial and cultural identity that is informed by the racial, cultural, economic, and political realities of the United States, rather than those of their family's country of origin. This redefinition challenges conventional notions of Latinx motherhood, family dynamics, identity, and assumptions about assimilation and incorporation trajectories.

Chapter Two: Negotiating Latinx Authenticity and Ethnoracial Socialization

I interviewed Vanessa over facetime. Vanessa is married, has three children, and lives in a small town in Oregon that is largely made up of what she calls “Americans” and Latinos who once migrated there to work in various forms of agriculture. She and her husband are second generation and her children are third. Spanish comes up in our discussion multiple times in response to different topics. As a child, she always spoke Spanish at home. Vanessa tells me that when she first entered motherhood, she had the following vision: “My kids are going to know their Spanish. They’re going to look brown and they’re going to have their Mexican last name, and they’re going to Speak Spanish.” Vanessa then follows up with, “That was my thing. And I failed. But I am working on it.” She goes on to tell me that “they’re [her kids] the no sabo kids and I don’t know how that happened.” I ask her directly if having Spanish fluency is connected to her family’s identity as Latinos. She responded affirmatively with “Yes. It is. Yes” Even though Vanessa says she “failed” in passing on Spanish to her children, Spanish language transmission is one of the most important aspects of ethnoracial socialization in their home.

Vanessa highlights the most important aspects of the Latinx ethnoracial toolkit—a toolkit model that is adopted from Swidler’s (1987) concept of a cultural toolkit. Among my participants, this toolkit is believed to be essential for both positive identity development and acceptance as an authentic Latinx community member. Participants describe how their children’s racial background, phenotype, Spanish language proficiency, cultural habitus, geographic community context, all combine to create unique perceptions of how they and their children will be embraced as “authentic” by the larger Latinx community. Among these, Spanish proficiency is the most salient and contentious.

Vanessa references “No Sabo Kids”. “No sabo” is the incorrect Spanish-English translation of “I don’t know” which correctly would be “*no se*.” It is a common slur used against people who don’t know Spanish or are accused of “acting Latinx” when they are “whitewashed.” It is often used in the Latinx community as a boundary and way to distinguish between who is and is not “authentically Latinx.” As the use of Spanish language continues to decline, specifically among U.S. born Latinas/os, slurs like this are increasing and causing tension among many second and later-generation Latinx folks. According to Pew Research, the share of Latinas/os who speak Spanish at home declined from 78% in 2000 to 68% in 2021. But specifically, among second and later generations, this has decreased from 66% to 55% (Krogstad et al 2023). However, as profiled in the L.A. Times recently, Spanish continues to be a complicated topic with second and later generation Latinas/os trying to reclaim the language but also facing shame and ostracization from the broader Latino community for not being fluent in Spanish (Garcia 2023).

Raising Latinx children, and specifically those that are card carrying members of the Latinx community, requires that children are able to display certain markers of Latinx identity. This chapter investigates the ways second and later-generation Latina mothers approach ethnoracial socialization, the motivations behind different approaches, what identities and mannerisms mothers want their children to have in their cultural toolkit, and what challenges mothers face in this process. I first investigate the significance of language socialization and how language loss is perceived, navigated, and negotiated by second and later-generation Latina mothers. I also explore how mothers navigate identity development and group belonging when a key factor is historically contentious. I then explore the additional ways mothers engage in

ethnoracial socialization in attempts to bolster their children's ethnoracial identity, self-esteem, ties to Latinx communities, and to help them navigate and cope with racism.

Spanish Language and Latinx Ethnoracial Identity

Spanish language use among Latinas/os is a controversial topic in popular discourse but also within Latinx communities. Scholarship that examines Spanish language—specifically the loss of it—among Latinas/os has largely been concerned with measuring assimilation and incorporation of Latinx groups into “mainstream U.S. society” (Waters and Jiménez 2005). To a lesser extent, scholars have examined how the loss of one’s native tongue creates boundaries among coethnics, how such a loss shapes ethnic and racial identity and belonging, and how narratives about authenticity are constructed around those who are racialized and/or identity as Latinx but have lost this significant cultural artifact.

The English-only movement, which started in the early 20th century, represents one facet of broader efforts to suppress the use of Spanish by Latinas/os in the United States. This is part of a broader pattern of forced linguistic and cultural assimilation that has affected various communities throughout U.S. history. For example, in the early 20th century, there were policies and practices in some areas of the United States that discouraged the use of languages other than English in schools and public spaces. There have since been deliberate attempts to suppress the use of Spanish, both in schools but also workplaces through English-only policies or practices. Despite this historical backdrop, much of the scholarly community still assesses and frames English dominance as a marker of successful group assimilation. To fully understand the consequences and long-term effects of Spanish to English dominance within just one or two generations, we must approach the topic beyond the realm of assimilation. Instead, we should examine English dominance not as a natural outcome of assimilation but rather a consequence of

structural factors such as colonization, white supremacy, and forced assimilation which leads to the erosion of cultural identity and racial trauma for those affected. Considering the proliferation of dual language and immersion schools in the 21st century, and the state of Spanish language use among later-generation Latinas/os, this phenomenon can also be seen as a form of cultural theft and appropriation.

The four standard primary benchmarks for assessing immigrant group assimilation patterns are: socioeconomic status, residential concentration or segregation, intermarriage and language assimilation (Waters and Jiménez 2005). Hence, Spanish language use—and specifically the loss of it and shift toward English dominance—has mainly been accessed as one of these measures of assimilation into the U.S. mainstream (Alba and Nee 2003; Rumbaut, Massey, and Bean 2006; Telles and Ortiz 2008). Scholar's find that a three-generational model of language assimilation appears to hold for most immigrant groups. This model suggests that first generation folks may learn some English but largely remain dominant in their native language, the second generation is bilingual, and the third generation speaks only English. Alba et al. (2002) finds that even among third generation Mexicans and Cubans, two thirds to three quarters, respectively, do not speak any Spanish.

This literature also finds that by the second-generation, Mexican Americans have higher markers of “assimilation” in labor market and education than first-generation coethnics. By the third generation though, these trends start to change direction, but language is still lost (Bean et al. 2016). Thus, later generation Latinx people are losing a key aspect of their cultural background while also not achieving middle class status or other markers of “assimilation and incorporation.” According to Pew Research, only 26% of third and later generations report being encouraged to speak Spanish by their parents (Lopez, Barrera, and López 2017), which for many

years was a specific model of assimilation. This chapter investigates this phenomenon as a key boundary in Latinx communities and site of contention among later-generation Latinx people and within Latinx families.

While much literature focuses on language assimilation, some scholarship focuses on the benefits and processes of bilingualism instead (Linton and Jimenez 2009; Tran 2010). Scholars who are critical of the assimilation-based approach to explaining language usage among Latinxs shift attention to how language holds meaning and how it can be shaped by context, power dynamics, and colonial historical experiences (Aparicio 1998; Bailey 2007; Pease-Alvarez 2002; Rosa 2014). These scholars find that in adults, Spanish is sometimes reinvigorated and may be a circular process (Vasquez 2011; Silva-Corvalán 1994). Some Latinxs have made efforts to reconnect with language or learn Spanish as adults through friends and coworkers (Jimenez 2010). As the Latinx population grows and communities are further removed from days of forced language assimilation in institutional contexts, this reconnection with Spanish language may be growing.

Latinas/os understandings of the relationship between Spanish and ethnoracial identities suggest they “do” Latinx through language and social interactions (Flores-Gonzalez, Aranda, and Vaquera 2014; West and Zimmerman 1987). Scholarship has found that there are ingroup conflicts and politics surrounding Spanish language use. Latinx people who cannot communicate through the Spanish language—a distinct cultural marker—are deemed inauthentic and are excluded (Torres 2010; Jimenéz 2010). Mexican-Americans who cannot speak Spanish are sometimes perceived to be ashamed of their race and even a disgrace to *la raza* by coethnics (Nieman, Romero, Arredondo 1999). Non-Spanish speaking Mexicans also report feeling uneasy in and disconnected from Spanish dominant or bilingual spaces (Jimenéz 2010). At the same

time, early generation Mexican origin people report that later-generation Mexican Americans do not have an understanding for those who cannot speak English and often treat them worse than white Americans (Nieman, Romero, Arredondo 1999; Jiménez 2010). Aside from the language itself, differences arise in “how” Spanish is spoken which can be a factor in creating Latinx panethnicity (Potowski 2015; Zentella 1990). Further, middle-class upwardly mobile Latinx parents consider Spanish a form of linguistic capital relevant to claiming a Latinx identity (Garcia 2018). This language ideology may be passed down intergenerationally in addition to being communicated through community social interactions.

Ethnoracial Socialization and Negotiating Latinx Authenticity

Family ethnoracial socialization refers to the strategies and approaches that families use to transmit information, values, traditions, and practices associated with their racial or ethnic group. It also includes families’ efforts to teach children about potential racial or ethnic discrimination and how to navigate and cope with these experiences. Within this broader framework, there are four dominant types of socialization: cultural socialization (i.e., transmission of cultural values, customs, traditions, history, and pride), preparation for bias (i.e., preparing children for discrimination and how to cope with it), promotion of mistrust (i.e., communicating the need for distrust of other ethnic or racial groups without offering advice for coping), and egalitarianism (i.e., emphasizing equality among ethnic or racial groups). Although multiple metaanalyses identify these as the most common (Hughes et al 2006; Umaña-Taylor and Hill 2023), a number of other ethnoracial socialization types have been identified (Underhill 2019; Atkin et al 2021; Reyna 2022; Vezaldenos, Jacobs, and Rivas-Drake 2023). While some researchers distinguish racial and ethnic socialization, there is considerable overlap in how they are used. In this chapter I refer to ethnic or cultural socialization as those practices that teach

children about their values, customs, and traditions associated with their racial or ethnic group. I refer to practices and strategies that specifically educate and prepare children for discrimination, racism, or other negative experiences on account of their actual or perceived racial or ethnic group as racial socialization. Collectively, I refer to these practices as ethnoracial socialization.

My data show that primary motivations for and practices of ethnoracial socialization vary depending on a combination of acquired and fixed traits such as Spanish proficiency, cultural habitus, both mothers and children's race, phenotype, gender, name, geographic community in which they reside, and their overall perception of how they and their children are perceived as Latinx by coethnics but also dominant society. Through mothers' assessments of which types of knowledge and skills needed in their children's ethnoracial toolkit, mothers demonstrate how the lines of demarcation surrounding Latinx identity differs by in- and outgroup members.

For interactions among ingroup members, the primary objective of ethnoracial socialization is to be recognized as authentic members of the Latinx community. In this context, acquired traits such as proficiency in Spanish and cultural habitus are most salient, often irrespective of fixed traits such as phenotype, race, or gender. Almost all of the mothers in my sample engage in what scholars refer to as cultural socialization. Cultural socialization refers to practices that teach children about their ethnic background and history, encourage racial or ethnic pride, or encourages cultural customs, traditions, and using their family's native language (Hughes 2006). Cultural markers such as language, and specifically the threat of or actual loss of one's native tongue, name, cultural habitus, phenotype, and racial identity are all forms of Latinx specific cultural capital. Habitus refers to a learned set of preferences and dispositions that guide people's orientation to the social world that shapes people's actions and overall behavioral repertoire within various contexts (Bourdieu 1984). In this context, cultural habitus refers to the

learned dispositions and behavioral repertoires that Latinx people acquire typically from Latinx communities. Taken together these allow Latinx people to perform (or “do”) seemingly authentic forms of Latinx habitus and claim a Latinx identity unchallenged.

In addition to traditional forms of cultural socialization, I find that Spanish proficiency, specifically, is so strongly tied to Latinx identity acceptance that participants use a number of strategies to pass the Spanish language on to their children. Participants engage in language socialization by making Spanish a priority in their children’s lives through childcare choices, bilingual schools, & even extracurricular activities.

Some scholars who study immigrant groups and their racial/ethnic identity patterns argue that immigrant replenishment and proximity to coethnics helps to ensure that ethnic identity remains salient by providing later-generation Latinas/os with a steady supply of ethnically linked symbols and practices—one of which being the Spanish language. Specifically considering later-generation Latinas/os, the replenishment perspective argues Spanish is an ethnically linked practice that replenishes and maintains identity across generations and that continuous immigration is the primary mechanism responsible for patterns of integration and identity. Conversely, those who do not have access to ethnically linked practices or symbols—such as Spanish—will develop an “optional ethnicity” (Jimenez 2010, Waters 1990). However, contrary to scholars’ assumptions, the absence of Spanish does not always lead to an optional ethnicity but rather a contested ethnic identity. In an attempt to avert and/or rectify this contested identity, mothers engage in other types of ethnoracial socialization, namely cultural socialization, to bolster their children’s ethnic identities and validate Latinx group membership.

In contrast, for interactions among outgroup members, the primary objective of ethnoracial socialization shifts towards safety and the ability to navigate encounters with racism,

regardless of Spanish proficiency or cultural habitus. In this context, fixed traits such as race, phenotype, gender, and even name become more salient as they are often the first markers that influence how children are perceived and treated. Mothers who have children with conventional phenotypic traits associated with Latinx people such as brown skin, dark hair, and even Spanish surnames engage in explicit racial socialization while other mothers engage in preparation for bias messages reactively, occurring intentionally after their children or family experience a racist encounter. Figure 2. outlines the various acquired and fixed traits mothers take into account when deciding how to engage in ethnoracial socialization and construct their children's ethnoracial toolkit.

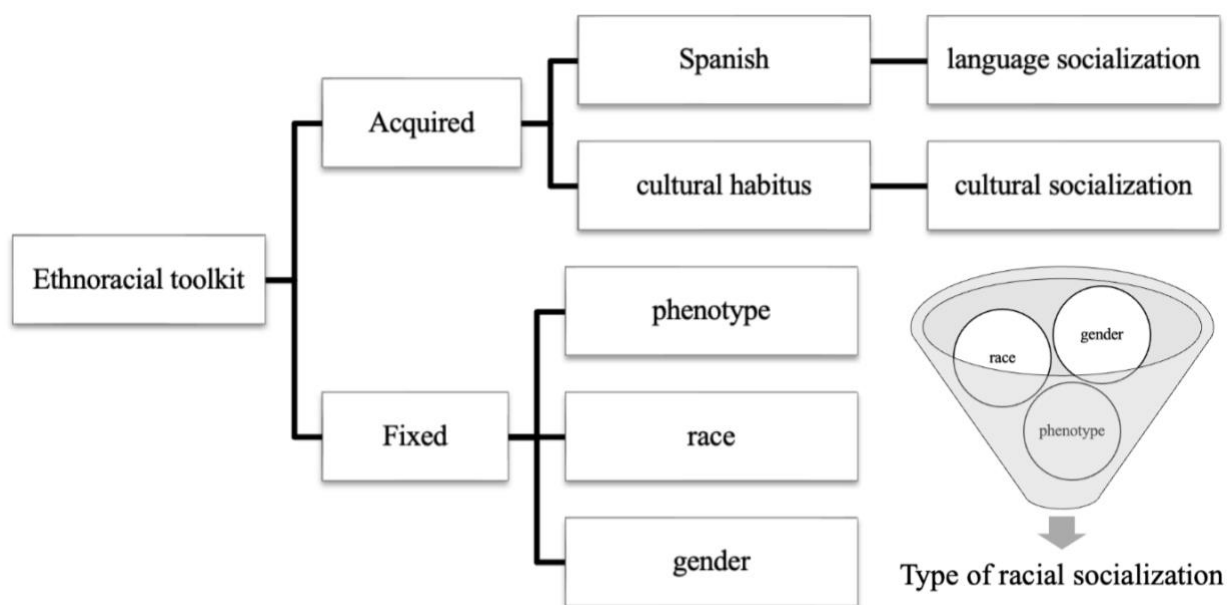


Figure 2. Ethnoracial Toolkit

Participants employ various strategies in their ethnoracial socialization practices, focusing on the distinct boundaries present in their children's lives. By doing so, they equip their children with the tools and knowledge necessary to navigate the complex landscape of Latinx identity, ensuring their recognition as authentic ingroup members while also preparing children to address the challenges and safety concerns that may arise when interacting with the broader

society. For my participants, ethnoracial socialization practices are simultaneously a means of ensuring that children perceived as Latinx by outsiders are safe but also a means of ensuring their children develop a sense of identity and connection to the Latinx community while averting Latinx identity challenges by the larger community.

In addition to race, class, and gender, Latinx people in the U.S. experience subordination along lines of immigration status, sexuality, culture, language, phenotype, accent, and surname (Arriola 1997; Stefancic 1998; Montoya 1994; Johnson 1999). Mothers in my sample recount how these markers of difference are not only boundaries for outgroup members but ingroup coethnics as well. Thus, when discerning how to socialize their children and which aspects are most salient, my participants make socialization decisions based on their and their children's unique identities and contexts. However, the same markers that allow my participants and their children to maintain ethnic group ties (Spanish language use, phenotype, cultural habitus) can bring potential harm to their children. My participants negotiate how to balance ethnic group membership and acceptance with navigating white marked spaces at the intersection of forced assimilation, racial trauma, ethnic consciousness, and social psychological comparison.

Language Socialization and “No Sabo Kids”

Spanish continues to be one of the strongest claims to authentic Latinx identity (Garcia 2023). As my participants describe through their accounts of concerns for their children, their approaches to ethnoracial socialization, and even their own identity concerns, Spanish language remains the foremost concern and the most salient marker of Latinx identity and group membership acceptance. Thus, for many of the mothers in my sample, ensuring the Spanish language is a part of their children's ethnoracial toolkit a top priority, with many directly naming that without this skill their children will be faced with ridicule from the community and possibly

an identity crisis. While Spanish may be the quickest and easiest way to be accepted as a Latinx community member, other markers such as phenotype, surname, and cultural knowledge and habitus mediate the salience of Spanish language ability to both claiming and being accepted as a card-carrying member of the Latinx community.

Considering the generational differences in Spanish proficiency nationwide, it could be expected that there are significant generational differences in participants' motivations for and strategies of passing on Spanish to the next generation. Generational differences did arise in terms of their family's relationship to and proficiency of the Spanish language. Second generation mothers often grew up in Spanish-dominant homes and they are or at one point were Spanish proficient. Third and later-generation mothers may have had family members or grandparents speak Spanish in their presence but overwhelmingly grew up in English-dominant homes. Therefore, they may have some knowledge of Spanish but were often not proficient as children or as adults, which is typical for Latinas/os across the U.S. Third and later-generation mothers also discuss their families complicated relationship to Spanish as their families lived in the U.S. during English-only movements and before bilingualism was considered a critical 21st century skill for navigating a diverse workplace and society. Even though mothers and their families have different relationships to Spanish, strategies for passing on and maintaining Spanish were similar across generations with differences arising instead based on proximity to others who speak Spanish such as family, care providers, husband/partner, or school environments.

When able to, mothers make Spanish a priority in their children's lives by strategically selecting bilingual caretakers, enrolling their children in bilingual schools, and even in extracurricular activities, sometimes moving or even creating these spaces themselves. When

mothers do not live near kin, have access to bilingual environments for their children, and/or are not able to engage in the additional labor of teaching Spanish fluency, mothers across generations often express guilt and regret that they did not or could not create conditions that allowed for their children to become fluent in Spanish.

Many mothers also recognize and name that they are the children or grandchildren of Latinos who were shamed for speaking Spanish, were forbidden from speaking Spanish, and who may have complicated relationships with the language. So, while Spanish is important for identity development and solidifying their membership in a Latinx community, mothers also recognize that Spanish is a contentious and significant aspect of both cultural knowledge and the United States' participation in colonial, white supremacist violence.

Alejandra, who is a fourth-generation married Mexican mother of a 12-year-old son, highlights how the legacy of English-only laws and sentiments affects language, culture, and identity dynamics in families and communities.

My parents grew up in the 1950s and '60s in El Paso where Spanish was not allowed at schools. My parents were reprimanded for speaking Spanish. And so what my parents raised us, even though culturally we exhibited what every, I think what most Mexicano or Latino families characteristics and cultural practices have, there was also this part of them that really wanted to Americanize their family and themselves because of the corporal punishment that they went through as children, where they used to get beaten for speaking Spanish.

Alejandra's experience reflects the complexity of language and ethnoracial identity within Latinx families in the United States. Her parents intentionally chose not to teach her and her siblings Spanish during their childhood, a decision she couldn't fully comprehend at the time. It wasn't until college, as she delved into the Chicano movement and its historical context, that she began to grasp the reasons behind her parents' approach to the Spanish language. Alejandra's parents grew up in a generation where they could be physically punished for speaking Spanish in

schools. Therefore, refraining from passing on the language to their children was a racial socialization strategy to shield their children from racism in schools and broader society.

Linda's family's story and relationship with Spanish is in some ways similar to Alejandra's, with the exception that Linda's godmother taught her Spanish as a child. Linda is a later-generation biracial Mexican woman who has a white mother and Mexican father and who is now married to a white man. She grew up in the Los Angeles area, moved around a bit as an adult, and is now living back in Los Angeles. I ask Linda about Spanish, her own comfortability with the language, and if or how she approaches the language with her son. Her response highlights what many later-generation Latinx people experience: a complicated relationship with the language. She says,

So, it was really inconsistent over time. I spoke Spanish up until I went to school basically, so about five. My godmother, my Nina, who is one of my dad's sisters, she lived with us for a period of time when I was a toddler and she spoke exclusively in Spanish with me. There was a lot of shame, I think, about Spanish in my family. I'm the only one in my generation of kids who learned to speak Spanish. So, none of my cousins or my sister learned how, and like I said, going to elementary school in the early '90s when there were the battles over bilingual education. So, we weren't really supposed to speak Spanish in school, it was all about training it out of us. So, I've had a difficult relationship to the Spanish language.

I think there's also class-based shame around the language as well because the part of Mexico that my family's from is fairly rural in the borderlands area, and I know my dad and his siblings were made to feel as though their Spanish was uneducated or just a little bit too rough of a dialect. My dad would be corrected by people who felt like they spoke better Spanish when he was in business settings, and so I think that reinforced the idea that he and his siblings didn't want to be teaching us Spanish at home.

Linda grew up in a context where two social forces contributed to her being the only cousin in her generation learning Spanish: political bilingual education battles and class-based shame around her family's Spanish dialect. The resistance to speaking Spanish because of dialect and

the political nature of the time surrounding language highlights how Latinx people navigate contested terrain among in- and outgroup members. While Linda details how the elders in her family felt shamed by other Latinx people for not speaking proper Spanish, other mothers disclose that their families chose not to teach them Spanish as children because they felt they could be seen as lower class among white Americans.

Given this history, I ask Linda if and how Spanish shows up in her immediate and extended family now that she is a mother herself. She says her family, specifically the women, are actively trying to reclaim and pass Spanish onto the younger generations. When speaking of her family's acceptance of her white husband, she says,

But I think by and large my extended family has been pretty accepting of him and is really happy that for example, we're going to be raising our child in a bi-cultural setting and that we want him to speak Spanish because I think there's a lot of regret over the loss of the language generationally. So that was something that we were getting asked while we were still pregnant, was what languages is he going to speak?

Linda and Alejandra's family's story illustrates the complicated relationships different cohorts and generations have with the Spanish language, assimilation, and cultural identities and connections. As Linda and other mothers point out, there is also class-based shame around the type of Spanish someone does speak. On one hand, not speaking a certain dialect of Spanish brings criticisms from coethnics but there is also a sense that speaking Spanish at all, or even having an accent, is associated with not being intelligent among Americans. For example, Dulce tells me that her father was heavily concerned with her speaking perfect English and with no accent. When I ask her why she thinks her father placed importance on speaking English "perfect" and without an accent, she says,

I feel that his concerns stem more from an educational standpoint. He was concerned about how I was going to be seen in school, by the way I spoke, because I'm a female. Since my son is a male, I'm a little bit more concerned about police encounters with him.

Dulce and Linda's comment about their parents' relationship with and perceptions of Spanish language use highlight the complicated and changing relationship different generations have to the Spanish on account of the dominant ideologies and associated stigma of languages other than English, including Spanish, and bilingualism at that time.

Like many later-generation mothers, Alejandra, Linda, and Dulce all come from families who lived in the United States when Spanish was often not allowed in schools and elders experienced racism and violence for speaking Spanish in public. Consequently, even though their family members were fluent in Spanish, they often discouraged subsequent generations from learning or speaking the language to protect them from such discrimination. Now, Alejandra, Linda, and Dulce are raising their children in an era where Spanish and bilingualism are viewed as valuable assets for navigating a multicultural world. The rise of Spanish bilingual and dual immersion schools creates a different linguistic environment for this generation of Latinx parents. While mothers in my sample discuss various ways to pass on Spanish to younger generations, an earlier generation of Latinx parents engaged in racial socialization by intentionally withholding the language. Therefore, different cohorts of Latinx parents have distinct experiences and relationships with Spanish. This current cohort of later-generation mothers is actively combating the historical shame associated with the language and striving to reclaim Spanish as a vital aspect of their cultural identity. These changing and complex factors inform how Latinx families navigate language transmission, reclamation, and ethnoracial identities.

Social science researchers show that Spanish proficiency is typically lost by the third generation. Even mothers who were raised by first generation parents and were required to speak Spanish at home, discuss similar constraints in passing on the language. Karina shows how an

earlier generation mother, who is herself fluent in Spanish, struggles passing on Spanish in a community where English is dominant. I interviewed Karina over Zoom. Karina is the oldest daughter of Mexican immigrants who came to the U.S. as children, making her second generation (or 2.5). She grew up in a small-town farm community on a reservation that was comprised of mostly Mexicans and Native Americans. She grew up in what she refers to as a traditional Mexican household where gender roles were practiced by her parents, Spanish was required in the home, and education was a top priority. After high school she moved to the area she currently lives in for college and has since built a life for her family there. Karina is now married to a Puerto Rican man, has two children, and lives in Arizona. Karina discusses the struggles that she has in teaching her children Spanish, getting them to use what they do know, and fostering a sense of ethnic identity and pride. She also discusses how her proximity to family and coethnics facilitate and hinder this process. She says,

And at that time [when her children were young], we couldn't afford to fly out there. Now, we go at least every other year, sometimes more. But in the beginning, I was a teacher, we didn't have money. That wasn't going to happen. So that worried me a lot. And then even with my family being four hours away, they weren't growing up with all of their cousins. We tried really hard to speak Spanish. We spoke Spanish to Mateo exclusively, then he started school...And then without having family here to speak Spanish to, it went away pretty quickly once he started school. So that still to this day is a struggle of mine that my children don't speak Spanish.

Karina points out a pattern many mothers experience. They teach their children Spanish in the home, but when they start school, their children become English dominant. She also underscores the significant obstacle many mothers face of limited access to extended family members, who could provide opportunities for their children to converse in Spanish outside of school. She later discloses that her children feel othered by their coethnic peers. When discussing another child in her family she says,

And Jason is at welding school right now and there's a lot of Mexicanos in the welding school. And they're like, "Prove to us you're Mexicano." He's like, "How do I prove it to you? I'm going to get my mom on the phone and have her speak Spanish to you? Is it not enough that my name is Jason Martinez-Mora?"

Here Karina highlights that perceived Latinx authenticity is heavily reliant upon Spanish proficiency. Having a Spanish surname, even one that is hyphenated is not enough to sway naysayers. This weight understandably explains why many mothers go to such lengths in attempts to ensure their children are fluently bilingual. Many mothers use Spanish speaking family members as caretakers when children are young, if available, or seek out other bilingual caretakers and if available, opt for bilingual daycares, preschools, and immersion elementary schools. Christina, who is a second-generation Mexican woman, married to a second-generation Mexican man, and has one adoptive Latinx son, says that she and her husband both speak to her son in Spanish. But she also wants her son to go to a bilingual school but there is not a bilingual school in her current city, but there are in neighboring cities. She says,

"There's no bilingual school here." And I was like, "So if we want Leo to go to a bilingual school, we're going to have to move to Nampa before he hits that age or borrow an address." So, I was thinking about that. And so, I think, I mean, he'll be two. So, we have three-ish years before he goes to elementary. But I think it's definitely something that we're thinking about because I feel like it would be beneficial for him to go to a bilingual school just to want to keep practicing. But also, I would hope that a bilingual school would be more inclusive and more equitable than a normal public school.

Christina is a homeowner, yet she is contemplating selling her house and moving to a new city so that her son can attend a bilingual school and potentially have a more inclusive and equitable education experience. The city that Christina is considering moving to is 25% Hispanic/Latinx whereas the one she currently lives in is only 8% Hispanic/Latinx. The school her son could attend is even more diverse. Christina's willingness to consider selling her home and relocating to a city with bilingual schools underscores the significance she places on her son learning

Spanish and thus preserving a key piece of their cultural identity. It also demonstrates that she places a high value on her son interacting with peers from similar cultural backgrounds and the potential racial buffer a more diverse space could provide.

Alma shares a similar disposition to Christina regarding the potential advantages and disadvantages of schools. While certain schools can offer numerous advantages particularly by complementing and reinforcing language learning at home, they can also be sites of harm for their children. Mothers weigh these potential outcomes when choosing schools for their children. Alma is a fourth-generation Chicana who lives in Denver, Colorado, has two teenage sons, and is married to a Mexican-American man. Both Alma and her husband have careers in education. Even though she did not grow up proficient in Spanish, she was a bilingual education teacher for years. Although she only spoke Spanish with her great grandmother, Alma knew Spanish was important. She says,

I knew everybody would stop speaking Spanish. They only spoke Spanish when they were with her. So, I knew when she died when I was 17, that the language would die with her. So, then I was like, "Oh, no. This can't happen. I need to become more proficient." That's why I became more proficient. I became a bilingual teacher. I've only ever worked in Mexican immigrant communities. Even before my boys, when at my first teaching jobs. And my student teaching was all in immigrant communities. I named them Jose and Vicente because I wanted them to be bilingual. I had all these hopes and aspirations, and I feel like I've failed.

Alma expresses similar struggles and weight as other mothers who are trying to teach their children Spanish. But Alma went to great lengths in an attempt to bring to light the vision she had for her family. Her Spanish is largely self-taught or learned through school. She and her husband both participated in bilingual education college programs, and she even taught bilingual education for years. When we begin to discuss her children entering school, she shares that her father and brothers have all experienced institutional racism in various ways. In retrospect, she

identifies the school system as the initial point where this racism began. Because of her family's history with education systems, Alma views schools as a site for her sons' advancement or as a potential source of harm. She says,

When they were little, I was terrified to send them to school, and they were getting to an age where I could start to see identity formation happening, and I knew it was a critical time. So, I quit school. I mean, I quit teaching public school and I opened a school in my house and it was an immersion. This is what I do. This self-educating thing, I went to all these bougie-ass freaking preschools all over Denver in these ritzy neighborhoods that people pay two, three grand, and I pretended to be a prospective parent and did the parent tours. Guess what? Our kids don't have access to schools like that. Only rich kids whose parents can afford schools that are based on emergent curriculum and connecting with the natural world. It was beautiful. I would go and I'd pretend I was interested in sending my kids, and I would just take all these notes. Well, I decided to create that within my own home in the basement and my backyard. I went and got flyers and recruited people. So, I had a little school at home for them and did some Spanish immersion to the best that I could. There were times where I needed to be in English so everybody understood me because most of the kids were Chicanos or white from the neighborhood.

Alma discusses at length both the importance of language to identity formation in the Chicano community in Denver. She bought a house that was in a predominantly white area and over time had less access to other Chicanos and opportunities to speak Spanish in everyday life outside of the home. She says, "So, English is my dominant language, I guess. It's my dominant language. That's what came out naturally when really trying to child-rear, to raise them. And then there's no other place for them to practice. So, it [Spanish proficiency] just was an unfulfilled dream and promise." This unfulfilled dream weighs heavy on her and in our zoom interview, I can see that recounting her story to me is painful. She says to me, "There's this heartache, Chandra, that the Chicano identity is disappearing. I'm not sure if I raised them with it strong enough for them to sustain it."

Carmen, who is a second-generation married mother to two biracial Black Mexican sons, has a different view on the transmission of Spanish than many other participants. Carmen says

that her family speaks Spanglish and estimates that their casual conversation is 70-30 Spanish-English. Even though her family speaks a lot of Spanish and she grew up in Los Angeles where Spanish is very common, she says some people may still consider her *a pocha*, a term for a Mexican descent person who is not fluent in Spanish and/or may not be familiar with Mexican culture. When I ask Carmen if she speaks Spanish with her children, she tells me that she has tried, they are not really receptive to the language, and that they are removed from her family so they don't have many opportunities to speak the language considering that her husband is also not fluent. However, while other mothers have very similar struggles and are hard on themselves about the realities of passing on the language, Carmen feels differently. She says,

I feel like we fetishize Spanish, like you need to know it to have close ties to your community, and I think for my children, it's going to look different. Their community is different and unfortunately, they know that they don't have their great grandparents to talk to anymore. They've passed away so... And maybe they'll get there and we can foster that later, but it's not the end all be all to me.

Like other mothers, Carmen acknowledges that Spanish fluency is often necessary to foster close ties to community. But Carmen's sons are Mexican and Black, which she discusses at length in our interview. The self-esteem issues and racist treatment her oldest son has experienced she attributes to his Blackness and not on account of him being perceived as a Mexican boy. Thus, and as I will describe further in a later section of this chapter, Carmen tries to connect her son to other Black boys and young men to foster this part of his identity as that is what is most salient in his life at this time, a strategy that has been found to lead to positive identity development and increased identification with Blackness among Afro-Latinx youth (Salas Pujols 2020). Ultimately, Carmen does not view Spanish as the ultimate factor for connecting her sons to their heritage. The community she is concerned with connecting her sons to, given their current

geographic location and experiences, is their local Black community, where Spanish is not a qualifier for entry or acceptance.

Cultural Socialization as a Means of Ensuring Authenticity

In addition to the Spanish language, another aspect that mothers prioritize in their children's ethnoracial toolkit is "the culture." Mothers discuss how they pass on Latinx culture and habitus through sharing cultural food, music, art, books and educational materials; participating in Catholic traditions; hosting and attending large family gatherings; and seeking out Latinx or diverse extracurricular activities and spaces. Many of these practices are reliant upon a community to practice with and learn from. Therefore, cultural socialization practices and messages are often mediated and constrained by mothers' access to Latinx communities. How mothers find themselves without Latinx communities and how they go about meeting their needs in the absence of kin is further discussed in Chapter 4.

Karina discusses the struggles that she has in teaching her children about their culture, fostering a sense of ethnic identity and pride, but also teaching her children about potential racism they may face. She says she started this messaging when her children were young and it has changed over time. She says,

"Well, I think I started off with just books. It was the easiest way for me to give them access to culture when I wasn't around people who could help me with that. So, from very early, we read bilingual books and even still. My daughter was a reader, stopped being a reader and became a reader during COVID again when we were stuck at home. And the first thing I did was bought her books written all by Latina writers that had Latino characters in them that told a story around our culture. And she loved them. And she struggles with her identity. We are light-skinned, right? We are very fair. And she struggles because she's half Puerto Rican, half Mexicana and she doesn't speak Spanish and she's not as Mexican as she would like to be culturally. And she has been called out on it and I hate that."

Mothers using books and other forms of media to bolster their children's ethnoracial self-esteem, specifically among their daughters, is supported by existing research (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2014; Dow 2019; Reyna 2022). Mothers in this sample also discuss how they use books and other forms of media with their sons and daughters to teach their children about the cultural background, bring Spanish language into the home, and also provide a range of diverse stories for their children, all with the aim of fostering their ethnoracial self-esteem.

Karina's family's experience and struggles with ethnic identity and cultural habitus are reminiscent of many second and later generation mothers' stories. For Karina, who lives a few hours away from her family, books and stories were a way to teach her children about their culture and cultural traditions in the absence of a community that she could regularly practice with. She also points out that this cultural knowledge and habitus is just one of the factors that affect her daughters' ethnic identity and connection to other Latinos. Throughout our conversation, Karina shares that her daughters' closest friends are also Latinas of different ethnic origin groups. Because her daughter does not speak Spanish and does not have as much experience in Latinx families and communities, she sometimes feels like an outsider.

Similar to Karina, many mothers use books, media, and other educational materials to teach their children about their cultural background, cultural traditions, but also to normalize diversity in stories and life in general. Christina also discusses books and media in our interview. When I ask about how racial and ethnic identity, she says,

"I feel like it's part of our life. So, a lot of our traditions or foods, everything, it's related to our cultural identity. So, I think that piece is happening as he's growing up. But I know we're also conscious of it. So, for example, I try to buy him books that are bilingual, that represent our culture, books that represent other identities and cultures, I would say. Now that I'm thinking about it, I'm like, I don't know if he has any books with white kids on it. For the most part they're stories of Latinx stories or Black stories written by Latinx or Black authors.

Similar to Karina and Christina, Esmeralda, who is a second-generation Mexican American woman and has a young son, says that passing on the culture to her son is one of the most salient aspects in her son's identity development. In addition to books and language, she discusses cultural events and art forms. She says,

I think the culture. Just being Latino, not forgetting that and the roots component, going back to where he comes from kind of thing... I'd say the big part of the culture and appreciating his culture, which I think he'll probably struggle with that, just because we do live in a predominantly white location. I would say the culture would be the most important identity that we'd like to instill in him. We're very big on attending cultural events, and so making sure those particular components are a part of our identity. Here, there's the Hispanic Cultural Center. There is different art. Even in books, so he has a ton of Spanish books. We read to him in Spanish, so that's another way to instill that identity. Hopefully, having him do folklórico, mariachi, those types of things that really appreciate the culture.

In this passage, Esmeralda points to a number of ways that she tries to develop her sons' ethnoracial identity by participating in cultural events and traditions. But she also highlights that her son may struggle with his ethnic identity because they live in a predominantly white community. In our extended conversation Esmeralda explains that because her family lives in a predominantly white area, she has had to seek out Latinx community groups and experiences for her son in neighboring towns. For example, she takes her son to a children's bilingual nature group. Through this group, her son is not only able to practice his Spanish but he is also able to meet and play with other Latinx children. She is able to connect with other Latinx parents that may not live in her immediate community.

Like Esmeralda, others' mothers intentionally seek out either Latinx specific or diverse spaces for their children to be in. This includes schools, extracurricular activities, care providers, but also medical offices and other people of authority in their children's lives. For example,

Karla, who is a fourth-generation married mother of two and lives in Pennsylvania, said the following about looking for a dance studio for her daughter.

I started looking for dance studios because she wants to take a ballet class. And my sister-in-law was like, oh, go to this one. And I looked at it and there was not one person of color in any of the photos. And so, I looked at their past alums and there was only one little Black girl. And I was like, no, I'm not sending my child here. Because I have to—with a last name like ours and her being half White, I need to make sure that she is around people that look like her and that she feels she can look up to. So, I make sure our doctors are someone of color... so I try as much as I can to make very intentional choices of making sure that my kids are around people of color. And so, I wanted to make sure that people of color were teachers and lead teachers...But I just wanted to make sure people of importance in their life were not just White people.

Karla's decision to avoid a dance studio with limited diversity in its photos and alums underscores her commitment to ensuring that her daughter has diverse role models and peers. As the mother of biracial children with a white Jewish husband, Karla places great importance on ensuring that her children have meaningful connections to their various cultural backgrounds. Throughout our interview she discussed how it is important that her children have touch points on their various cultural backgrounds. Her primary concern is that her children are surrounded by diverse communities and role models to nurture their self-esteem and understanding of the world's diversity as they grow. Karla, like other mothers, also uses books, media, and religious traditions as tools to teach her children about their cultural backgrounds.

Mari is a second-generation Mexican woman who, like Karla, is married to a white man and has a biracial son. Like others, she uses language, art, food, and books to teach her son about his culture and identity. When I ask about her son's identity and how she tries to cultivate it with him she says:

“Yeah, I mean, I feel bad because when he was a little baby, I would talk to him in Spanish more, but it's really hard to keep that track going in my brain. I definitely want to

make sure he learns how to speak Spanish. He knows he's Mexican. We were going to go to Mexico, but with COVID that's all been pushed to the side. But he knows. He knows that he has a part of him that is Mexican because we visit my family for Christmas every year. So, we do the pinata and then my mom has everything decked out with decorations and stuff, and that's when he tries a lot of different foods, traditional foods. So, he knows that he is Mexican, but I don't think yet he's loud and proud about it. I don't know. I don't think we're going to really make him say, because now I think there's way more mixed or biracial kids around, so I think he's going to be kind of similar to a lot of people so he's not going to be too different.”

Mari highlights her efforts to instill a sense of Mexican culture and identity in her biracial son. She uses various tools like language, food, and cultural traditions to teach him about his Mexican heritage. However, Mari acknowledges the challenges she faces in maintaining Spanish proficiency for her son, given her husband's lack of knowledge of the language, her distance from her own family, and the predominantly white community they live in. Unlike some mothers who worry about their children's potential identity crises due to not knowing Spanish, Mari expresses confidence in her son's ability to find community and identity even as a biracial individual. Other mothers who have multiethnic/racial children express similar constraints and aims as Mari and Karla. Because their partners do not speak Spanish or have family members who speak Spanish, the onus to pass on the language rests on their shoulders. To make up for the potential loss of language, they rely more heavily on cultural socialization strategies to develop their children's ethnoracial identity. These mothers' perspectives shed light on the complexities of cultural transmission and identity formation in a multicultural and multilingual context. Mari and Carmen's attention to but difference in concern of their children being proficient in Spanish, supports existing research on community belonging and perspectives about racial authenticity among mothers with multiracial and Afro-Latinx children (Dow 2019; Salas Pujols 2020).

Racial Socialization Concerns Mediated by Phenotype

While mothers engage in a range of language and cultural socialization methods to promote positive ethnoracial self-esteem, foster ethnoracial identity development, and to ward off identity challenges, racial socialization is a third essential component of Latinx children's ethnoracial toolkit and serves a different primary purpose. When interacting with outgroup members, the primary goal of ethnoracial socialization shifts towards ensuring safety and equipping children to navigate encounters with racism. This shift occurs regardless of Spanish proficiency or cultural habitus and factors such as phenotype and name become salient. Some mothers, whose children possess typical phenotypic traits associated with Latinx people, such as brown skin, dark hair, and Spanish surnames, engage in explicit racial socialization while other mothers provide racial socialization reactively, in response to their children or family members experiencing a racist encounter. In this section, I detail how and when mothers engage in three types of racial socialization: proactive, reaction, and relative privilege.

Proactive Racial Socialization

Carmen, who was introduced earlier, is originally from Los Angeles. After college, she and her husband lived in Los Angeles for a short time but eventually they relocated to upstate New York for Carmen's career. Her oldest son was an infant when they relocated and her younger son was born in New York. Like many other mothers, Carmen describes teaching her sons about their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities through food, books, television, and even storytelling. She uses media like *Encanto*, *Miles Morales*, and Quest Love's *Rise Up, Sing Out* show to show her sons characters who look like them and to build their ethnoracial self-esteem. However, Carmen acknowledges that a few years ago, she recognized the need to go beyond educating her children about their various identities. She also became conscious of the

importance of the people they encounter in their daily lives and how those interactions impact their self-esteem. Carmen expressed feeling “immense sadness” and realizing her limitations in protecting them. She emphasizes the significance of her sons acknowledging their Black identity, even when they may not readily identify as such and sometimes describe themselves as “tan.” She does her best to correct them and educate them about the nuances of phenotype and race.

Carmen tells a story about her oldest son who she describes as having brown skin and really long curly hair that if worn out will form an afro. Carmen says that when he would wear his hair out, that kids would throw things in his hair and call him “puffy head” and she could tell it was affecting his self-esteem to the extent that he wanted to cut his hair. For a child that at eight years old had only ever had two haircuts, this was alarming to her. She enrolled him in a summer camp program that she describes as being very similar to Boys and Girls Club. It is much more racially and economically diverse than their neighborhood and school and the camp leader was also a young Black man. Carmen noticed at the end of the summer her son’s self-esteem changed for the better, particularly surrounding his hair. She says, “He’d wear it in different styles from out to braids, and my husband does all the hair stuff, all the braiding, all the conditioning and everyone was like... They just gassed him up about his amazing hair, and so, now he’s just like, ‘I have the best hair ever and I don’t ever want to cut it.’” Carmen also notes that her younger son, who is five and has lighter skin than his brother and a different hair texture, hasn’t had any negative experiences that she would attribute to his race. Both of her sons now attend this program after school in lieu of the in-home daycare Carmen has used the entire time she’s lived in New York because “they are a center that is very affirming of their identities as Black Mexican boys.”

Carmen's decision to remove her children from their longtime in-home daycare, illustrates the significance she placed on providing her children with spaces where they can develop a positive self-image and a strong sense of identity without the burden of racism or discrimination. In our interview Carmen discussed how it was hard to be away from her family, specifically when it came to child care and the day to day raising of her children. Like many of the mothers in my sample, they were raised in environments where mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and other extended family or kin played a pivotal role in child rearing. Since Carmen and her family do not live near any family, an in-home daycare was the next best alternative. Her children loved the daycare so much that they call their provider "Tia Martha." In fact, even though her sons both attend the new after school program, her youngest still goes to Tia Martha's on Friday after school so that they can maintain their relationship. Thus, considering the relationship they have with Tia Martha, Carmen's decision to change childcare providers underscores the weight of her concerns for her sons' self-esteem, racial comfort, and Black and Mexican identity development. This type of specific and intentional consideration of spaces children of color have access to is not an uncommon consideration among mothers of color (Dow 2019, Reyna 2022)

While other participants enrolled their children in dual language schools, in-home daycares run by Latinas, or in culturally relevant arts like Folklórico or Mariachi groups, mothers expressed different motivations for doing so. Most participants used these various groups as a means of passing on language and Latinx culture. Conversely, Carmen explicitly says these are not her main priority. She has enrolled her sons in an after-school program that does not offer the benefits of some of these other activities but it does foster her son's identity and positive self-esteem specifically as Black Mexican boys. Carmen's decisions highlight how race and

phenotype inform mothers' decisions about and motivations for children's activities, childcare centers, how culture is transmitted, and which identities become salient.

Other participants who engage in proactive ethnoracial socialization were primarily concerned with safety and encounters their children would have with police or authority figures when they themselves were not present. Participants recounted how they worry about discussing with their children how they may be perceived by the general public and how to navigate encounters with police, also known as safety socialization (Reyna 2022). Similar to mothers of multiracial children, this type of socialization was almost always reserved for boys and children whose mothers perceived their skin tone to be brown or dark. For example, Isabel, who is a single mother of two boys, lives in Oregon. She lives in a predominantly white city in a middle-class neighborhood. She rents her home but specifically chose this location because her sons would have access to well resources schools. Although middle-class white neighborhoods are generally considered “safe”, she says the following when discussing her son's safety,

We live in a neighborhood that's really close to their school, so they walk sometimes, but I want to make sure they're not walking by themselves. Because even though they're friends who are white get to walk around the neighborhood by themselves, it's different for them. And I feel like it's a scarier thing to have them walk around by themselves. So we take that kind of safety into account. It's going to be a bigger conversation as they get older and as they look older, they're going to be perceived in a way that adultifies them, and that's just a different scary part of parenting that I'm preparing for mentally is how to have conversations with them about what to do if and when they get stopped by officers or if and when they're accused of something. And I'm definitely aware of that and I know that that's going to be part of the price I pay being somewhere like Oregon.

Although her son's live within walking distance to school and there is not a bus since it is so close, Isabel is not comfortable allowing her sons who are 11 and 7 walk to school like the other neighborhood kids. Instead, he walks them to and from school so that she is. Isabel's feelings about the safety of the community for her brown sons echo other research on people of color in

middle class white neighborhoods (Ray 2017, Dow 2019; Hudson et al. 2021; Lee 2021).

Throughout our interview, Isabel attributes the lack of racial diversity in her city and state to some of the obstacles she faces in motherhood. Isabel's perspective sheds light on a broader issue faced by middle-class Latinx people who may not have the same access to middle-class ethnic or racial enclaves as their white counterparts. This requires them to navigate the delicate balance of living in neighborhoods perceived as "safe," choosing between schools that are well-resourced or diverse, and considering the potential impacts of each racial environment on their children and family (Lee 2021). These decisions underscore the disparities and nuanced choices that parents like Isabel must make when striving to provide their children with the best opportunities while addressing concerns related to racial and cultural diversity, safety, and their children's physical and emotional well-being. It highlights the additional challenges Latinx mothers encounter which ultimately influence parenting decisions and identity orientations mothers believe their children need.

Camila, who is a third-generation married mother of three teens who lives in a predominantly white city in Pennsylvania, is also concerned with how her children will be perceived by the general public. But since her children are old enough to drive, she is also concerned about their interactions with police in potential traffic stops. Whereas existing research shows that this is a common worry among mothers with sons, specifically Black sons (Smith-Bynum et al. 2016; Dow 2016, Davis Tribble et al. 2019; Reyna 2022), Camila discusses how her concerns relate to both her daughter and son:

We want to make sure that they're aware of the dangers that exist with how the world is going to view them...But yeah, so one of these things that comes to mind is for our cars, for my daughter, I have one child in a car, my oldest. And so, in her car we have a little box on top of her dash and she just can press the button and inside of that is all her documentation. It has her ID, her license, registration, insurance information. I do believe

that we'll have that for our son, definitely, when he's driving because he is a young, dark-skinned man and that puts him— we're taking that all into account when we're letting him leave the house. The fact that he is a young, dark-skinned man. The other day I came home from work, it was maybe a couple weeks ago and he had Tupac playing loud. I'm like, oh buddy, you know, you need to be mindful of where you are right now. And we live here and my kids have grown up here and they were little adorable children here. But it's still is something that you think about and it's scary and you have to consider it when you are allowing them to, or supporting or not supporting their choices.

Camila's account highlights how she takes proactive measures to protect her children from potentially dangerous situations. The box her daughter has in her car may alleviate issues during encounters with the police. Camila is acutely aware of how her children's race and phenotype, particularly her son as a dark-skinned young man, can impact their interactions in their neighborhood and beyond. Further, Camila's comment about her son playing Tupac loudly and her response for him to be “mindful of where you are right now” indicates the importance of white cultural awareness and supremacy. Despite living in their city for a long time, Camila and her family remain vigilant and concerned about their children's safety, constantly evaluating their children's choices and surroundings, and how they will be perceived by white others. Camila's approach to racially socializing her children illustrates the complex and multifaceted nature of guiding children through the challenges of being people of color in a racist society. Moreover, both Isabel and Camila's accounts highlight how even when families are longtime residents and homeowners, their neighborhoods are not truly theirs and their presence is conditionally accepted.

Although most mothers who worry for their children's safety describe their children as having brown or dark skin, Karina notes how Latinx identification goes beyond phenotype. While some mothers describe specifically making sure their children have ethnic first names or

hyphenating their last names as a marker of Latinx identity, Karina and other mothers highlight the consequences that come with Latinx perceived names. She says,

I tell my 21-year-old, he's got brown hair and he is very light-skinned also. I said, but don't forget what last name you have behind your name, because it makes a difference. And he just got to experience that in an altercation with his roommates. Guess who they believed? Guess who they sided with? Guess who got arrested? It was my kid. My kid who's a super student, only one of the three of them who's in college. Working and going to college.

Karina's comment about the importance of remembering one's last name and the differential treatment experienced by their child compared to the roommate with a criminal record underscores the impact of race, phenotype, and privilege. While her son is light-skinned, his name marks him as Latino which can lead to vastly different outcomes. Karina also highlights that racial socialization is an ongoing process that parents continue to engage in even when their children are adults and no longer in their home, which much literature on the topic does not underscore. Supporting young adults as they navigate a world where their parents are not present much of the time is a crucial aspect of racial socialization. Karina's recount illustrates the complexity of racial or ethnic markers such as phenotype and name and how parents communicate their hierarchy of salience to their children. It also highlights the ongoing dialogue that occurs within families to help children develop a strong sense of self and resilience in the face of inequality.

Reactive Racial Socialization

Proactive racial socialization was not practiced among all participants. While some participants focused on cultural socialization to foster their children's racial or ethnic identity, they did not actively prepare their children to navigate discrimination or racism. Conversely, some mothers adopted a reactive approach to racial socialization, initiating conversations about race and racism after their children encountered negative experiences related to their racial or

ethnic background. In these instances, such discussions were prompted by specific incidents or situations. Vanessa, who was introduced at the beginning of this chapter, is a mother whose racial socialization practices follow this pattern. We discussed at length how she engages in cultural socialization. When I ask her more specifically about discussions about racism, she says,

When Trump was president, they all came back and were talking about how they were being discriminated or it started to show more in school...My older kids are the ones that came back and were saying, "Mom, they started calling us beaners. I think that was a word that they said, beaners. And that there were some teachers even saying, "Oh yeah, we support Trump." And they just started noticing the whole racial thing. We had never talked about it before, and then all of a sudden, we had to talk about it. Our town really wasn't... I couldn't really tell the difference of being Hispanic. I wasn't being treated differently until then. And then afterwards, I did feel like all eyes on us, when we'd go out to dinner or something. And so, in [our city], we are a minority here. It's pretty much a lot of just American folks. And so, I do always also tell them, "Be respectful of where we are because they do look at us because we are different."

Vanessa resides in a predominantly white city but points out that it was the rise in popularity and subsequent presidential election of Donald Trump that significantly shifted the racial dynamics in their small agricultural town in Oregon. Vanessa is not the only mother who noted the 2016 presidential election as a turning point in their lives, families, and the need to have discussions with their children about how to navigate racism.

Earlier in this chapter, Vanessa discussed how she was proud to have Mexican children and how she envisioned they would embody their identities. She also tells me, "'We're Hispanic, but don't try to act any different.'" I don't know. I've always told them, "Be proud of who you are. And so, you're not any better, you're not any worse. We're just equal, just different colors." But she found that her family's racial identity took on greater significance in their predominantly white small town following Trump's election. In light of the "Trump effect," the phenomena of heightened salience of ethnoracial identity among Latinx people in response to Trump's racist

rhetoric and increased discrimination and violence (Canizales and Vallejo 2020), Vanessa's family's experience in her small town takes on added significance. She, like many others, found that her family's racial identity became more pronounced in the wake of the 2016 presidential election, prompting important conversations with her children about how they are perceived and treated in their community.

Similar to Isabel and Camila, Vanessa recognizes that her family's acceptance in their predominantly white town comes with conditions. Mothers living in such environments often feel like outsiders who are constantly under scrutiny. The perception of a seemingly safe neighborhood or city can shift depending on the context, and mothers are keenly aware of this. They strive to protect their children from this reality while also grappling with the delicate balance of determining when and how is the appropriate time to share this information.

Relative Privilege Socialization

Mothers who have children with light skin or believe their children can pass for white, and especially if they have non-Spanish last names, employ a distinct form of racial socialization compared to mothers with children who have features that clearly mark them as children of color. In such cases, mothers describe how they engage in cultural socialization to foster their children's ethnoracial identity. However, when it comes to interactions with outgroup members, their approach shifts to preparing their children for a different kind of engagement – one in which they may need to become proactive advocates for their racial or ethnic group. In some instances, they use socialization methods akin to those used by white progressive parents (Hagerman 2017; Vezaldenos, Jacobs, and Rivas-Drake 2023). Rather than preparing their children for bias, mothers with light-skinned or white-passing children embrace a variety of antiracist socialization practices. However, not all mothers who taught their children to advocate

for their larger peer group, described their children as being light skinned or white passing. Some mothers, and specifically those that were later-generation, viewed their children as being very or relatively privileged compared to some of the Latinx or other children of color peers. Hence, when discussing interaction with out-group members, specifically at school, mothers taught their children how to advocate for themselves and their peers as a dominant form of racial socialization.

For example, when Mari discusses racism, how it shows up in her own life as Latina, and how she teaches her son about it, she primarily discusses teaching her son about the existence of racism externally to their family and not necessarily how it can or may affect their own family. In our discussion, Mari raises issues of race, racism, and the effects it has on Latinx communities. She is an artist whose subject matter is cultural and centers Latinx people and their struggles. Although she discusses challenges she has had as a Mexican woman and mother living in a predominantly white area, which I will discuss more in Chapter 4, she does not express the same types of concerns for her son. However, Mari's son is half white, does not have a Spanish last name, and she believes he can blend in with his white peers. Instead of proactive racial socialization such as preparation for bias, that prepares children for navigating racism, Mari engages in cultural or group consciousness raising. When I ask about her concerns for her son now or in the future, racism, or living in a non-diverse area, these do not come up as a topic of concern. When I probe and ask if the geographic location gives her cause for concern—because she's mentioned how white it is multiple times—she says the following,

Yes, because I just think it cycles all the time like, "Let's ban these books," and "Let's not like these people," and "We don't want these other people here." I feel like my son will know about that stuff, we're not going to shelter him about how people think around, but I guess now that you ask this question, I need to think of how am I going to prepare him. Kind of like how Black moms and parents prepare their kids to confront the world, how

am I going to prepare him to speak up, to be the upstander, or how am I going to help him decide what to believe in and what to trust? So yeah, I'm definitely concerned. I would much rather him be somewhere where there's way more diversity.

Mari's response differs from other mothers. In contrast to other mothers presented earlier, who were concerned that their families would face discrimination in public and in their community, Mari is more focused on how to teach her son to be an upstander. She makes a direct comparison to Black mothers preparing their children to "confront the world" and racism in everyday life. For her family, having a white biracial son with an English last name decreases the perception of racism in their lives and thus less of a need for preparation for bias or similar racial socialization messaging.

Whereas some mothers view their children as having relative privilege primarily on account of their phenotype, some mothers also view their children as having relative privilege in terms of their legal status, socioeconomic status, or other social markers. Alejandra describes her son as having very light skin. But in addition to his phenotype, she also recognizes that her son has other privileges as a fifth generation Mexican American with two highly educated parents. She discusses how she teaches him about and how to use his privileges:

We are ground zero. When it comes to immigration, El Paso is one of the sites that has been on the national news for some time. We are the community where there was the largest mass shooting of Latinos because of that kind of rhetoric. And he goes to a school that is a couple blocks away from the international border where most of the students there are coming across the border every day. And so, he was raised with this idea that I believe it's his responsibility and I hope that he believes that it's his responsibility, that any kind of privilege that he has, whether it be because we give him a more comfortable life from our hard work or because his grandparents sacrificed and worked in the fields and worked hard to give him this life. Whatever it is, whatever privilege that he has, that he uses that to be able to advocate for others. And sometimes I worry that maybe it was like, I don't want him to worry too much about this, but it is his reality every day and that's what we're seeing. And so, I take pride in the fact that he is well informed about stuff that's going on and that he is always trying to be the good guy helping out the underdog.

Alejandra's perspective sheds light on how some mothers perceive their children's relative privilege, and the accompanying responsibilities that come with it. Alejandra's family history plays a significant role in shaping her views. Like many second and later-generation mothers, Alejandra's grandparents migrated to the United States as immigrants and worked in the fields to give their family a better life. Her parents were raised in a time where their language was suppressed and many Latinx people were made to feel ashamed of their identities and cultural backgrounds. On account of this, Alejandra and her siblings were never taught Spanish. She tells me that she feels she "lost a significant piece of her identity" even though she is a dark-skinned Mexican woman who could not pass for anything but. She is now raising a son who, despite her efforts, is also not fluent in Spanish. As expected, her son has faced identity challenges from his peers and feels as though not being fluent in Spanish "has affected his social networks." But still, Alejandra teaches her son about his Mexican background, passes on cultural traditions, and takes pride in not only their racial and ethnic background but teaches her son to always stand up for his peers who are in more precarious positions than he. Overall, Alejandra highlights how mothers understand and contend with the complex nature of the Spanish language to identity development and group belonging. However, she also demonstrates that while mothers know Spanish is a site of contention, their children's identities are ultimately not defined by their proficiency or lack thereof in the language.

Conclusion

The chapter delved into the complexities of ethnoracial socialization practices among second and later-generation Latina mothers as they strive to raise confident Latinx children. A central focus of this chapter is placed on language socialization, highlighting the significance of language preservation to identity development, group belonging, but also the racial trauma

families and mothers contend with in navigating language loss and reclamation. Additionally, this chapter examines the various strategies mothers use in ethnoracial socialization, encompassing language and cultural socialization to promote positive ethnoracial identity and self-esteem. This includes efforts to instill a strong connection to Latinx communities and equip children with the tools to navigate and confront racism. These practices are influenced by various factors such as phenotype, name, Spanish language proficiency, and cultural habitus. This chapter also highlights that even though mothers across generations have different relationships to the Spanish language and varying degrees of Spanish proficiency, they have similar motivations for and challenges in passing on language to subsequent generations.

Through a combination of language, cultural, proactive, reactive, and relative privilege socialization methods, Latinx mothers carefully craft their children's ethnoracial toolkit. This toolkit, if fostered in the way mothers hope and intend, allows Latinx children to develop a strong Latinx identity and foster connections with and be accepted as an authentic member of Latinx communities. Simultaneously, with this toolkit, Latinx children are equipped to recognize and navigate racist encounters and even act as upstanders in the face of unfair treatment or discrimination. These practices reflect the multifaceted nature of raising Latinx children and the complex sociocultural landscape these mothers navigate. Overall, Latina mothers navigate a complex landscape, adapting their approaches based on their children's individual circumstances and the broader sociocultural context. Their efforts reflect a commitment to fostering positive ethnoracial self-esteem and identity development while addressing the realities of racism in their children's lives.

Chapter Three: Redefining Latinx Parenting Practices: Gentle Parenting as a means of Intergenerational Healing

Social science research and popular culture (Molina and Unkrich 2017) paint Latinx parents as cold, emotionally unavailable, and physically abusive to their children. At the beginning of the popular Disney movie, *Coco*, Abuelita (the grandmother and matriarch of the family) is seen finding Miguel (the protagonist) in the village square talking to a man playing a guitar. Abuelita then takes off her sandal, or *chancla*, and hits the man telling him, “You leave my grandson alone!” Abuelita is then seen batting a dog out of her way again with her *chancla* (Molina and Unkrich 2017). The official Disney Movies Youtube channel even has a video that details the decision making behind these scenes. The directors explain that the inclusion of Abuelita’s *chancla*, and specifically the use of it for physical punishment, was a decision to make the movie more realistic because a woman wielding a *chancla* was a common occurrence in Latinx households (Disney Movies 2017).

While much of the scholarly literature on Latinx parenting practices and styles agrees that Latinx families lean toward authoritarian styles (Cardona, Nicholson, and Fox, 2000; Parke et al. 2004; Rodriguez and Olswang 2003; Varela et al. 2004), many of the mothers in my sample describe intentionally parenting their children in ways very different than their own parents and extended family members. Mothers were very open about the fact that their parents were not emotionally available to them, encouraged traditional gender roles among their children, sometimes used scare tactics to get their children to obey, and that religion and the church played a large role in their lives—all of which correspond with dominant discourses in academic literature about Latinx parenting styles and practices.

By contrast, when I asked mothers to describe their parenting style with their own children, many mothers specifically stated that they intentionally parent differently than their own mothers, fathers, and other extended family members. Mothers recount that they prioritize mental health for themselves and their children, open communication between all family members, allow their home to be child-led, do not teach traditional gender roles, and stress that they do not spank their children. Most mothers name that these are in stark contrast to how they were raised by one or more of their parents or caretakers. Specifically, mothers express that they are learning about and adopting “gentle parenting” or “conscious parenting.” However, while gentle parenting may be seen as a trendy parenting style that is being adopted by white millennial mothers, and because my participants have specific motivations behind their adoption of this parenting style, the Latinx mothers in my sample modify gentle parenting to fit their own cultural values and family needs.

Mothers who adopt gentle or conscious parenting anticipate and experience resistance from their families on account that the practice is perceived to not align with traditional Latinx child-rearing norms that prioritize respect and obedience to parents and other adults. Participants discuss how when they were children, they felt like they could not speak their minds in their home or could not have an opinion on matters without feeling like or being told that they were being disrespectful. Mothers also note that openly communicating about one's feelings or acknowledging mental health was not supported in their homes as children and often even as adults within their extended families. Mothers also discuss that as girls they had more responsibilities, stricter rules, and were held to higher academic standards than the boys in their families. Thus, because this parenting style is seen as out of alignment with Latinx child-rearing

norms, the mothers in my sample are often criticized by extended family members for parenting like a white mother.

Despite criticism from family and community, the mothers in my sample engage in *culturally transformative mothering* by challenging the notions that authoritarian parenting styles, dismissal of mental health, traditional gender roles, and corporal punishment are intrinsic to Latinx culture or families. In doing so, they also challenge longstanding stereotypes about Latinx mothers, their parenting practices, and perceptions about how Latinx families operate. However, mothers' socioeconomic status, and specifically the degree to which they relied on their parents and extended family for financial or child care assistance, constrained and informed the decisions they made regarding how to navigate these differing parenting styles with their families and the approaches they take to address critiques and challenges they face in charting their own path.

Gentle parenting is an approach to raising children that focuses on empathy, respect, and understanding. It emphasizes building a strong parent-child relationship based on trust, communication, and positive discipline techniques. Gentle parenting encourages parents to avoid punishments, rewards, and harsh discipline methods, and instead focuses on teaching and guiding children through positive reinforcement, setting clear boundaries, and modeling desired behaviors (Watson 2022). Although gentle parenting has become quite popular on social media sites such as Instagram and TikTok, with parenting experts, pediatricians, neuroscientists, and other professionals and parenting influencers engaging in discussions about the parenting style, it has been credited to Sarah Ockwell-Smith, a British author. Ockwell-Smith wrote *The Gentle Parenting Book: How to Raise Calmer, Happier Children from Birth to Seven* in 2016. Gentle Parenting initially emerged as a response to more “mainstream” parenting approaches that relied

heavily on punishments, strict rules, and authoritarian control. Gentle parenting advocates believe that children thrive when treated with kindness, understanding, and gentle guidance, which helps to foster their emotional well-being, self-esteem, and positive behavior (Watson 2022, Ockwell-Smith n.d.).

The concept of gentle parenting has been around for many years, but it has gained significant attention in online parenting circles in recent years, both from those embracing (Hogenboom 2023) and criticizing the practice (Winter 2022; Niazi 2023). The internet and social media platforms play a crucial role in spreading information about gentle parenting and connecting like-minded parents around the world. Online communities such as blogs, parenting forums, and social media sites like TikTok and Instagram provide a platform for sharing experiences, discussing parenting philosophies, and promoting the principles of gentle parenting. As a result, the approach has gained traction and became increasingly popular among parents seeking alternatives to more traditional and punitive parenting methods.

In this chapter I explore the parenting styles of second and later-generation Latina mothers, their motivations for adopting said practices, their strategies for navigating these styles within their extended families, and the consequences for doing so. I find that through their engagement with gentle parenting, my second and later-generation participants challenge long standing beliefs about what it means to be a Latina mother and how Latinx families operate. For these mothers, gentle parenting acts both as a social justice framework but also a means of intergenerational healing for themselves and their children.

To my participants, the idea of intergenerational healing is deeply rooted in the understanding that although their own parents might have had strict high standards, were occasionally emotional or physically unavailable, and often adhered to traditional gender roles,

they acknowledge that their parents' actions were molded by the circumstances of their times—conditions that differ substantially from the structure of their own adult lives in terms of societal norms, socioeconomic status, and political dynamics. My participants, who are mostly upward mobile Latinas with college degrees and hold white-collar professions, have privileges and access to resources that their families did not (e.g., legal status, paid time off, health insurance, mental health services) that in many ways enable them to adopt a "gentler" approach to parenting.

Challenging Latinx Family Essentialism

Christina, a married mother of one son, describes and specifically names gentle parenting and what it means to her and in her household. When I ask her to describe how she approaches raising her son, she says:

So, I would say my parenting style is like... What's trendy now is what they call gentle parenting or conscious parenting... So, essentially for me, conscious or gentle parenting is really being aware of your child's needs. Not just their sleep, eat needs, but their emotional needs. Just also being child led. So, allowing our son to take the lead or follow what he's doing. Talking a lot about feelings, trying to work on naming the feelings, allowing him to feel his feelings. So, if that means a tantrum and crying and yelling, letting that happen, but also looking at why it's happening instead of just like, "Oh, he's just throwing a tantrum?" And respecting him and no fear tactics of us as his parents.

Christina's description of gentle parenting is very similar to other mothers. She focuses on her child's emotions, wants her parenting to be child-led, help her child to name his feelings and fully feel them, and not use fear tactics. When Christina was a child, she says her parents never used corporal punishment, but there was a threat of it. She recounts respecting her parents because they were fearful of getting into trouble. This is not what she wants for her son, she wants her son to respect her, and folks to respect him without a fear of punishment. She says:

So, I think, at least how I see it, is where for the most part we grew up being scared of my parents. So it was like a scare tactic, right? If you don't do this, you're going to get in

trouble. It was like, if you don't do this before your dad gets home, you're going to get yelled at, or you're going to go to your room. So, we were scared of my dad. I mean, I guess we learned to respect him, I guess, because we were afraid. Or actually both my sister and my sister-in-law, spanking is part of their parenting. And so, they have spanked their kids. And they'll say like, "If you don't do this, then I'm going to spank you." Or, "If you don't stop, I'm going to tell your dad, then you're going to get a spanking," or whatever. And in my partner's family, they were spanked or hit as kids. And then in my family, we weren't, I don't think we were ever hit, but it was always a threat. Like, "If you don't behave, you're going to get spanked," or you're going to get hit. And so, I grew up knowing that was a possibility, but it didn't ever really happen.

Christina goes on to say that respect was very important in their household but only one way—they were to respect their parents but she felt they as children were not respected. This sentiment is at the heart of gentle parenting techniques and reasons for participants describing why they have adopted the practice. Christina and other mothers extend the notion of respect to other aspects of their children's lives as well including the right to say no to physical affection from anyone including family members, being able to cry without being told to stop, and being able to play with toys that may be deemed for another gender. Children's full selves, from emotions to gender expression are to be respected.

For Christina, and many other mothers who have adopted this parenting style, these parenting practices and boundaries do not come without a cost. Participants report that their extended family members, specifically those that are older than them, see gentle parenting techniques as a white way of parenting. This is communicated to them in various ways. For extended family members, who were raised in and ran households where children were obedient and always respectful, this type of open and sometimes negotiable parenting, may seem like it is not part of their culture. This sentiment is something that participants repeatedly report.

For example, because Christina consciously practices a parenting style much different than her mother, mother-in-law, and both her sisters, she feels as though she does not have

anyone to go to for advice on mothering. While the matriarchs in her family will openly give her advice, it is not helpful advice or advice that she would incorporate into her parenting. She gives the example of spanking. If she needs advice on how to handle her son not following rules, she knows her family will tell her to spank him, which is something she never intends to do. While having different parenting styles does not create conflict in Christina's family, that is not the case for all of my participants. I explore these dynamics, and the feeling of isolation mothers experience, in more detail in Chapter 4.

Marianna, a married art teacher with one son, describes similar approaches as Christina. But unlike Christina, she describes how her choice in parenting style can create tension in the family and draws criticisms from her mother. She says,

My mom calls it gringa, raising your son like a gringa. I think it was my husband's idea, because we talk about stuff a lot because we're both educators, but ever since my son was little, we've always been giving him choice, and allowing him to make decisions and feel like he has some say in what's going on. I've always been a little worried that at some point he might feel entitled to that because that wasn't how I was raised. But yeah, we're trying to raise him with being able to make his own choices, his own decisions.

While Marianna does not directly name gentle parenting as the style she adopts, she describes it. Like Christina, she is also concerned with her son having a sense of autonomy and being able to make his own choices, to feel like he has a voice. But she also notes that she is learning where the line is and does not want her son to feel entitled. As children, both Christina and Marianna felt as though they did not have choices. Not following though or challenging what was expected of them was seen as a sign of disrespect and would not be tolerated. Many of my participants describe similar expectations in their household as children and they recount obeying their parents, regardless of how they felt about it. Many scholars may say this sort of blind respect and obedience is a form of familismo. Marianna's mother may also agree. Many of my participants

report their family members, particularly other matriarchs, criticizing their gentle parenting approaches. But more specifically, like Marianna, they are accused of raising their children like a *gringa* or *guera*, both meaning like a “white girl”. From my participants’ family’s perspective, allowing children autonomy in various ways is not the Latinx way to raise children. White children are entitled, white children are allowed to tell their parents no, white children are able to make choices in their lives as children, and Latinx children are not. Because doing so would be disrespectful, which one never aims to be.

Like Marianna, Carmen, a married mother of two biracial sons who lives in New York, says she grew up in a home rooted deeply in faith and dutiful respect for adults. As an adult, she tries to parent very differently than her parents, she says,

I'm trying to raise them as kids who feel confident to be able to speak to me, not like necessarily an equal, but to feel confident to speak with me. And then also, my husband and I were both spanked when we were kids, and probably both fear our parents in some way when we were as kids. That's impacted our relationships as adults, so we were like, "We're not going to do that." ... So, it's ... I don't ... I wouldn't say it's gentle parenting. I wouldn't put any label on it, but I think it's a little bit more in that way... I think my parents had a lot of rules, and you were very strict, and you said *usted* [formal form of ‘you’ when speaking to strangers or those in authority, a sign of respect in Spanish language and Latinx culture], and you spoke a certain way, you acted a certain way, Adults were here [raised hand up near her eyebrows] and children were here [lowers hand to her chest], and I don't think I'm fully there, but I think I'm not ... I feel like I'm more approachable to my children than that. And I just see that with the way that the eight-year-old will tell me if he's unhappy with something. Well, both of them will tell us.

Christina describes similar approaches as each of the other mothers introduced but she specifically says she would not describe her parenting style as gentle parenting. In many ways, Carmen’s description of her family mirrors that of other respondents who have immigrant parents—you always went to church, specifically Spanish mass, you did well in school, you respected your parents, put your family first, and boys were allowed more freedom than girls.

Carmen's resistance to labeling her parenting style as gentle parenting highlights the flak that gentle parenting techniques receives both in some online parenting content and, according to respondents, their extended family members. Both of these groups have the same underlying criticism: gentle parenting teaches children to be entitled, disrespectful, and does not incorporate consequences. Christina describes gentle parenting in the ways other participants do but says she would not consider her approaches gentle parenting because her sons are "not necessarily an equal" but that they feel confident to speak to her. She offers more room in her household for conversations and expressions of disapproval from children, but she is still an authority figure in their home. In this way, Carmen demonstrates how the mothers in my study intentionally selected which practices and values to incorporate into their mothering. The mothers in my sample adapt gentle parenting techniques to honor their cultural family values such as respect.

Mothers also reported engaging in gentle parenting techniques by making themselves more emotionally available to their children and by holding less stringent standards for their children in life matters. Marianna discusses both of these. She says,

I guess we pay more attention to him. We're more engaged with him. Not saying that my parents weren't, exactly, but my mom would be like... I remember saying, "Will you play with us? Will you read with us?" She'd be like, "I'm so tired. I have a headache." My mom was doing school when we were really little too, she was doing a program to become a medical technologist, and she would study and do her homework, and we just kind of played around her. She didn't really find things for us to bond around with, really, but she always supported things that I wanted to do, or even my sisters too.

Many of the mothers I spoke with have similar memories of their parents as Marianna. They didn't have a lot of time for quality time with them. All of my participants report having mothers who worked outside of the home, sometimes more than full time, and a few, like Marianna, had mothers who were simultaneously going to school. So now as parents themselves, many of my participants report intentionally making quality time with their children a priority. It's important

to note that almost all of the mothers in my sample had children after graduating college, were in long term committed relationships or married, and had begun their chosen career. This was not the case for their parents. Their mothers were still going to school, working multiple jobs, or trying to launch their careers while also managing a household. As a result, many of the challenges faced by my participants' mothers have been significantly alleviated due to their mothers' hard work and unwavering expectations. When discussing expectations in her household growing up, Marianna reflects on how she will implement these with her son. She says,

I guess the older he gets, I'm probably going to start kind of implementing like, "I have these expectations for you," kind of thing, but I don't want to do it to the point where he feels anxious or stressed out if he's not meeting the expectations. Because I think that's kind of what happened to us in a way, me and my sisters, just that anxiety like, I'm not going to be how I'm supposed to be because I can't do it all.

In this passage, Marianna highlights that as of now, expectations are not something she really discusses with her son outside of manners. Marianna's father is a doctor and her mother is also in the medical field. They always had the same hopes for her – to become a doctor, lawyer, or something similarly prestigious. But Marianna's passion was art. Despite their reservations, her parents eventually supported her, though she had to consistently advocate for her artistic interests from a young age. When college approached, her parents agreed she could attend art school, but they insisted it had to be a top-tier institution, not a state school. She says, "In my dad's opinion, if we just went to state schools, we were losers. We had not met the goal." These are the pressures Marianna alludes to when explaining why she hasn't established similar expectations for her own son – she wants to spare him from unnecessary stress.

Linda, a married mother of one, echoes what the previous mothers describe but also highlights the gendered nature of her childhood home. Linda's father is Mexican and her mother

is white. She is a light skinned woman, a detail she frequently highlights during our interview. She grew up in California and spent most of her childhood living near her father's family in diverse suburbs. Throughout our conversation, Linda emphasizes the stark contrast in parenting styles between her mother and father. Her mother's parenting approach centered around positive reinforcement and being actively involved in her education. She describes their relationship leaning more towards friendship than traditional parental authority, which is very different from other mothers in my sample. Conversely, Linda's father conformed to a pattern that other participants also describe. He subscribed to traditional gender roles, expected Linda to be "subservient" as a young girl, reinforced "chancra culture" as a means of correction, materially providing for the family, and took a hands-off approach in parenthood allowing her mother to assume most duties. Linda's family often characterizes her parenting approach as "how white people do it." When I ask her to elaborate, she says,

I think we're still very much learning and I'm actually learning a lot from Instagram. Certain accounts, like the Latinx Parenting Instagram account is one that like I'm finding very healing and helping me understand a little bit more contextualize I think my dad's parenting style and understand the pain of that and how I can still raise my son with this cultural orientation and with an understanding of where he comes from but that doesn't mean having to pass on certain harmful practices that I think were passed off as culture. Right now, I see myself taking elements of what I'm learning in those spaces and trying to blend it with I think my mom's parenting style which was very much about encouraging curiosity, positive reinforcement. Treating children like tiny humans, tiny people, and not talking down to children and making them feel small.

Linda in many ways echoes what other mothers describe in how she is choosing to raise her son and why, how some of her family members react, but also that she is leaning to the internet for guidance. In this passage Linda refers to "certain harmful practices...were passed off as culture". By this she means the ideas that children are meant to be seen and not heard, have blind obedience, and because she has a son, she calls attention to how masculinity was performed in

her household and in her family at large growing up. When I ask her to explain and how she is trying to combat those ideas in her own parenting she says,

I think a lot about, what does it mean to raise a feminist son and what does that look like? So, I don't necessarily have the answers for them yet, but I feel like I'm developing the questions for what are the values that I want to instill in him? What person do I want him to be? I want him to be a socially aware, empathetic little boy who's connected with his feelings who isn't told that he's not allowed to cry or he is not allowed to feel feelings or he's only allowed to feel anger and things like that, because that was how boys in my family were raised, was with a very rigid sense of masculinity, and I feel like I want to pull down those walls for him a bit more or much more actually.

Like Linda, the general consensus among my participants was that they wanted to teach progressive gender ideals, raise their sons and daughters as equals, and free their sons from the rigidity of masculinity. Many mothers described how they did not assign gendered chores or allow their sons to skip out on household tasks and encouraged their daughters to believe they could do anything a boy could. They often specifically related this to very strict gender roles in their homes growing up. Linda points out how gentle parenting is more than respecting children and adults equally, making space for mental health discussions, and teaching and allowing children to feel and name their feelings. For Latinx children and families, who have too often grown up in environments where scarce resources and time have not allowed for this type of presence with self or self-actualization, these practices represent a profound cultural and intergenerational transformational.

However, while mothers didn't impose traditional gender roles in their households when it came to their children, these ideals weren't consistently reflected in their own daily lives with their partners or coparents. Some mothers, like Esme, specifically stated that she could not parent the way she does without her partners physical and emotion support. Nevertheless, many mothers often found themselves shouldering the majority of caregiving responsibilities,

particularly considering that a significant portion of my participants had jobs that allowed them to work from home during the pandemic, even when their partners were also at home. When it came to making parenting decisions, mothers frequently reported assuming a greater share of the mental load, while their partners or coparents allowed them to take the lead and trusted their judgment. Given that nearly all mothers grew up in households with traditional gender roles and were in relationships with men who had been socialized in similar settings, this outcome is unsurprising but further highlights why socializing their children with gender egalitarian values is so important to them. In the next section, I detail how mothers navigate and negotiate their differing parenting styles with their extended family.

Responding to and Navigating Familial Criticisms

Because common understandings of gentle parenting are perceived to stand in contrast to traditional Latinx child-rearing practices of respect and obedience, mothers who adopt this parenting style expect and receive criticism from their Latinx family members, particularly family matriarchs. However, mothers' economic positions facilitated or constrained the approach they took in addressing and navigating critiques from family members. Specifically, mothers who relied on their parents and extended family for financial or child care assistance, had a harder time setting boundaries around parenting styles with their children than mothers who were not economically reliant on their parents. In the following sections, I describe three approaches that mothers took to navigate this differing parenting style with family and how mothers' economic position facilitated or constrained this process and ultimately, their mothering aspirations.

I find that participants take one of three paths in response to their family's criticism: avoiding confrontation to maintain familial support, setting boundaries to maintain family ties, or cutting

ties. To avoid disrupting vital familial support, some mothers opt to avoid discussing differing parenting approaches with their mothers and refrain from confronting them when they interact with their grandchildren in ways contrary to participants' preferences. Others establish clear boundaries within their families, even if it leads to tension and arguments, in order to maintain their involvement in each other's lives while preserving their own parenting choices. Some mothers find it necessary to either limit their parents' involvement in their children's lives or reduce their own association with their parents, particularly when they don't live in close proximity. Which option mothers choose to take, often hinges on how much they rely on their parents and extended family for financial or childcare support. Neither option is without consequences, some of which are discussed in Chapter 4. Figure 3 details how mothers' economic position facilitated or constrained the boundaries they erected with their family members surrounding parenting styles and practices.

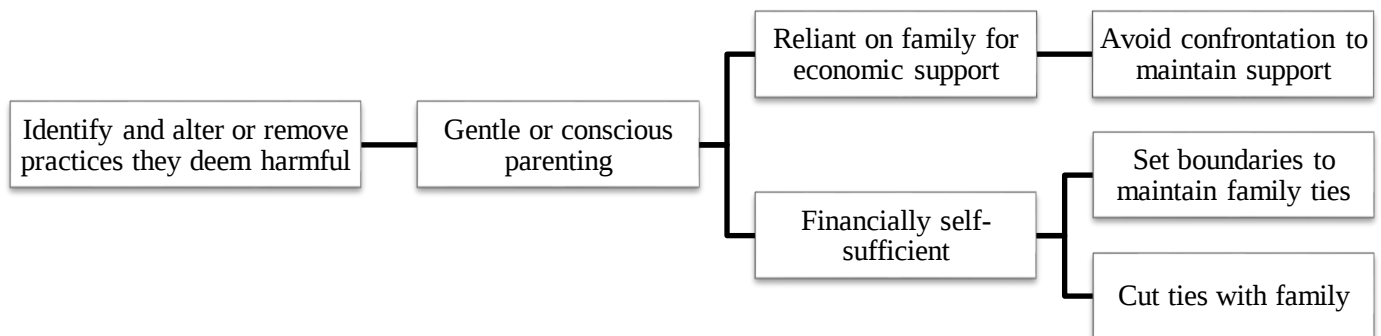


Figure 3. Mothers' Economic Positions and Familial Boundaries

Avoiding Confrontation to Maintain Family Support

Mothers who rely on their family for financial or childcare support often find it challenging to get their parents to implement their preferred parenting strategies. In this section, I delve into the tensions that arise when participants disagree with their family on child rearing practices and the resulting compromises that affect their parenting approaches.

Brenda, a married mother of two daughters, lives in California with her husband, conveniently close to both of their families. She describes her upbringing as defined by survival and assimilation. Raised in a Catholic household, Brenda and her family attended church regularly and the values of hard work and education were important in her home. As a young woman, her parents were particularly focused on ensuring she didn't "become a statistic," with concerns revolving around her sexuality and the possibility of early motherhood

Brenda grew up in a low-income predominantly Latinx area. She remembers her neighborhood having a lot of crime and characterizes it as "sketchy." Her parents wanted her to have a better education than the one she would receive from her home school, so they drove her to an out of district school every day in an affluent predominantly white neighborhood. As a result of this, most of her friends were white and she recalls being bullied by her Latinx peers for being "white washed" throughout much of her childhood and teen years. While they encouraged her to speak Spanish, Brenda also felt a desire for her to assimilate and "blend in as much as possible."

In some ways, Brenda has chosen to incorporate similar values as her parents into her own mothering. Like her parents, she says that she is "hyper focused on academics," her children are involved in many extracurricular activities, and she has hand selected a school for them that is outside of her home district. However, when it comes to how she interacts with her children and how she conveys these values, she differs from her parents quite a lot. She says,

I would describe my general approach as conscientious and thoughtful parenting. I've sort of actively leaned into a parenting style that is opposite of the way in which I grew up. So for example, I don't physically hit my children at all for anything. And I feel like that is in response to trauma that I experienced as a child. So it's like I would never touch my children in those ways, which means that I've had to read a lot of books, which I did when I was pregnant and continue to when I am having difficulty with tantrums or behavioral problems. But so it requires a lot of talking, a lot of patience and yeah, I constantly questioning whether I'm doing the right thing and how they're going to turn

out because I don't know. I mean, I only know the way in which I grew up, but I continue to listen. I listen to podcasts and like I said, I'll pick up a book or read mommy blogs to continue to find new tools and new methodologies for trying to connect and communicate with my kids

As discussed in chapter two, Brenda's family is very involved in their lives. Her children never went to daycare as they were always cared for by women in her family. Now that her children are school age, her mother and mother-in-law still help with school pickup and childcare when needed. Given this high involvement and their differing parenting techniques, I ask how she navigates the differences. Brenda says that she has adopted a "her house, her rules" mentality. Specifically, she says,

Well, with my mom, I would say, especially, where I think she views something as disrespectful and whereas I feel like it's something I'm fine with tolerating. But generally, I take the approach of when the kids are with my mom and she disciplines them... And like I said, she was never the parent who physically disciplined us. It was always my dad. So my mom's disciplining is more verbal, but that when they're with Abuelita, it's what Abuelita says you've got to adhere to. And then when they're with me, it's my rules.

For Brenda, adopting this kind of structure allows her to avoid conflict with her mother, who is typically the most vocal adversary to her parenting techniques, while also allowing her to stay in her children's lives. She also notes that her father was the one in her childhood who used physical punishment and not her mother. She is not concerned that her mother will hit her children, something she is staunchly against. Brenda continues describing how she approaches parenting her children and what gentle parenting looks like in her home. Something that many mothers brought up when discussing gentle or conscious parenting was the role of respect. Almost every participant said that respect in their household growing up was a top value in their home. When discussing their parenting approach, many mothers specifically noted that they do not see gentle or conscious parenting and respect mutually exclusive, something their parents did not always see in the same way. Brenda says, "I let them have more of a voice, within limits.

Obviously, they have to be respectful, but it does mean that I let them communicate their emotions and what their needs are more vocally and freely than I was allowed to.”

Celia is a single mother of one son who lives in Rhode Island near her family. She had her son at 18 years old. When she found out she was pregnant she had just started college. She says that although her parents supported her in caring for her son, there were a lot of conversations among the extended family surrounding her needing to prioritize being a mother. Although Celia was determined and says their doubt fueled her more, she did heed their concerns. In addition to working and going to college, she started an alternative education program that allowed her to get her medical assistant license in six months. She finished this a few weeks before her son was born. While Celia intended on continuing in college, this program was a backup in case her family was right and she would need to drop out. She would at least be able to work in the medical field. Celia’s son is now eight years old; she finished a four-year degree, took a break, and is now enrolled in a Masters of Social Work program.

The relationship Celia was in when she became pregnant with her son did not continue and her son’s father has not been a steady parent in her son’s life. At this point she says that her son’s father is a nonexistent coparent and she is the only parental caretaker of her son. As a result of this, and her determination to pursue a college degree with an infant, Celia has heavily relied on her parents' help. Her mother cared for her son until he was old enough to enter pre-k and has continued to care for him after school since. Celia lived with her parents until she was 22 and is now a homeowner. Her father not only helped her purchase her home but also chose the home she eventually bought. She preferred a different neighborhood where her son, who has autism, would have more services and resources but her father said no because she couldn’t afford it. She says she felt like she had no choice in the matter.

Like other participants, Celia characterizes her childhood and upbringing as one that was defined by Catholic faith, respect for parents, traditional gender roles, and that helping others was always important. When I ask Celia how her own parenting compares to that of her parents, she says,

I definitely, definitely will say that my approach is very, very different than my parents. I try really, really hard to understand him and relate to him and find ways to help him. He does have autism, he's high functioning, but he needs a lot of services. He needs a lot of support throughout the day in school. So, I am just really always available for him. And sometimes I've had to leave work or stop what I'm doing to attend to him and his needs. So yeah, I would say that I am trying really, really hard to not only parent him, but also understand him and give him the voice that we didn't have growing up.

Like other mothers, I ask Celia how she navigates the differing parenting approaches between her and her parents, especially considering that they spend so much time with her parents and that they are heavily involved in their lives. She tells me that she has always had arguments and conflict with her parents over how they help her raise her son. But when he was diagnosed with autism, she had to assert stronger boundaries. She says,

We grew up in a house where mental health was not a thing. If you were sad, depressed, whatever, it was like, no, you're just being lazy. You need to go do the dishes or something to get your mind off of that. So when my son got diagnosed about two years ago, honestly, I was so scared to tell everyone, I was debating whether or not to tell people. And I think primarily what made me tell them was that because my parents were so involved in raising my son, they were trying to raise him the same way that they raised us. And so that did include spanking. And so me being very different mind wise, I was like, no, I need to tell them because there's no way that they're going to continue this knowing that my son has that diagnosis.

Celia goes on to say that her family initially did not understand the diagnosis, thought it was something that he could recover from, but that her parents have slowly come around to understanding her son more. Her brother however did not believe the diagnosis, said that doctors diagnose everything as autism, and still gets upset when her son engages in certain stimming behaviors that he feels she should correct. Regarding general boundaries with her family, Celia

feels her father is the most respectful of her parenting approaches and preferences but that her mother does not recognize her boundaries. She says,

I think my dad is a little bit more respectful in that way. We definitely bump heads a lot because of that. It's been years of just arguments and arguments and arguments because my mom really tries to impose her ways and her thinking on other people, and it's her way or no way. So definitely a lot of arguments. There have been many times where I haven't said anything just to avoid having that conflict with her. But there are definitely a lot of times where it's really upsetting to, I've said something to her and she completely does not acknowledge it, dismisses it or tells me that she would know more than I would because she raised her kids. So it's definitely been hard setting those boundaries. And I feel like with her boundaries are nonexistent. So it's just going with the flow. And obviously if it's something really big and she would never hurt him or anything like that, but if it were something big, then I would definitely say something and take other measures into it. But for the most part, she doesn't really care about boundaries or anything like that.

Like Brenda, Celia will avoid confronting her mother about how she interacts with her son to avoid conflict. Both Brenda and Celia are against physical punishment and have said they will draw a hard boundary around their parents' use of that form of punishment with their children, as Celia chose to do upon her son's autism diagnosis. In addition to having a hard time asserting strict boundaries with their parents in child rearing, both Brenda and Celia have also heavily relied on their parents in their own mothering journey and their parents have taken on a large role in daily child care. While they do not say they do not assert stricter boundaries with their parents because they rely on their help, Yolanda does specifically note her parents significant help with childcare as a reason why she does not push her preferences stronger with her parents. She says,

Yeah, I was just trying to do more gentle parenting and healthier, better nutrition. I really didn't want to introduce him to fast food, but that's what they would get for him. And I would ask them not to, but I felt like I couldn't ask for too much because they were offering to watch him for free or really cheap.

Because Yolanda's parents are offering free or low-cost childcare, she feels she cannot "ask for too much" when it comes to how they interact with her children or what they feed them. In

addition, Yolanda is not the only mother who raises nutrition as a struggle that they have with their parents. Other mothers who have similar perspectives but have alternative care arrangements feel they are able to more freely raise their concerns with their parents.

Some mothers who adopted a similar viewpoint as Brenda—who let their mothers be themselves noticed that this was rubbing off on them, specifically when their mothers were present. For example, Soledad recounts a moment when she felt pressured to resort to physical discipline in front of her mother but later regretted it, realizing that it wasn't her preferred parenting style.

We talked about how my approach of talking out things with my son. I think that's really important, because when I'm doing that in front of my own mother, she tries to convince me to do other stuff. "Sometimes you just need to smack him." Or, "Sometimes they just need to be yelled at." And I tried it, when he was little, I had to slap his hands a few times. Last summer, I remember there was a moment where he was having this complete breakdown, and because my mom was there, I felt like I had to do something more physical, so I smacked him in the butt. And then I reflected, and I was like, "That's not what I should have done." But because I had my mom in my ear and I was like, "I made a decision that was like an action she would've done for me growing up, just smack them in the ass, they'll be fine." That was like a moment to me where I was like, "Okay, we're different moms." When I chose an action with her around, and then I thought about it afterwards. And I was like, "I would never have done that." And it didn't work, nothing worked, nothing came out of it.

Soledad's reflection underscores the influence that mothers can have on their daughter's parenting decisions when they are present, as opposed to when they are not and their daughters can make choices independently. Soledad goes on to stress that her practices of gentle parenting are in progress, that she has not always practiced mothering in this way, and that the journey toward a more gentle and conscious approach with her son is both a growth process for herself as a mother and as a daughter independent of her own mother. While participants are trying to parent in their own way, reparent themselves, and shield their own children from potential physical and emotional harm, they are also contending with Latinx family values of duty and respect. Telling their mothers no and setting clear boundaries, when that was never acceptable

behavior or the way their relationship has been structured can be especially challenging, even as independent adults. However, some mothers have been able to find ways to do this with their families and still maintain strong bonds, particularly those who are not heavily reliant upon their parents' help with childcare or finances.

Setting Boundaries while Maintaining Family Ties

In contrast to mothers who depend on their families for financial or child care support, mothers who are entirely self-reliant tend to feel more empowered to set boundaries when it comes to their family's involvement with their children. In this section I will highlight the conditions that allow mothers to successfully assert boundaries and maintain family ties.

Valentina is a third-generation divorced mother of four who lives in a suburb of Los Angeles. Her parents divorced when she was a child and both remarried. She primarily resided with her mother but spent weekends with her father and maintained a very good relationship with him. She grew up in a middle-class diverse neighborhood and went to private Catholic school from kindergarten through 12th grade. Her mother worked long hours so she was raised with a nanny. Valentina became pregnant with her first child shortly after beginning college. Her family was so excited that she was the first person to attend college that they offered to help her finish in any way they could. Her mother helped her pay for the same nanny to move back into their home and care for Valentina's oldest daughter. She eventually graduated college, moved out of her mother's home, and married her daughter's father. They had three more children and only recently divorced.

Valentina describes her parents' and stepparents' style as strict but "not your traditional, 'You can't do anything,' kind of Latino household." I ask her to elaborate. She says that her mother was pretty flexible and "went with the flow" because she was always busy but that both

her father and stepfather, who was ex-military, had typical rules that had consequences if not followed such as curfews and expectations of performing well in school. Valentina describes her parenting approach as differing from her parents in the fact that she spends a great deal of time discussing her rules, her children's actions, and the natural consequences of breaking them, which is a hallmark of gentle parenting. She says,

I discussed things with them ever since they were babies. I mean, I would discuss things with them. I would talk to them about natural consequences. It was a lot of communication, a lot of talking, and exhaustion, but it was all well worth it. And yeah, so I would say, just very facilitative, as well. I bring them to the table, and I make them aware of what they've done wrong. And I try to, they don't run the show as far as telling me what the consequences is going to be, but I do allow them to tell me, depending on their age, "What do you think your consequence should be? Because I've already explained this to you, the last time I did this, and you didn't do this, or what do you think now?"

Valentina also tells me that she is still very close with her parents and stepparents, particularly her father. But she also says, she never goes to her parents for parenting advice because she knows they will not give her advice that align with her values. When I ask how she navigates their differing approaches while staying so close, she says,

They end up deferring to whatever I say, because it's like, "This is my house, nobody contributes to here." I run a pretty tight ship, where everybody kind of knows, and it's not for any reason, but because of the fact that I want to parent my children this way. I didn't ask for anybody's advice. So any dietary issue, any dietary suggestions or whatnot, I didn't ask you for them. So there's a respectful boundary that I have set with my family, and both my mother, my father. My father's old school. "You can't feed them that much egg, they're going to get high cholesterol." I'm like, "Really? Okay. Eating eggs twice a week is really not going to be a cholesterol problem." I just tell him, "No, no." "Why are you going, letting her go to Magic Mountain? Why are you letting her?" "Because I'm letting her. I feel safe with who she's going with, and that's it. End of conversation." Because they're so old school, my dad in particular. He's the one that I have more conflict with, when it arises. My mom more, no, she already knows. Nope, I'm not asking. Nope, not soliciting any kind of advice, or anything. But my dad's more, because my dad comes to the house more. Of course. He's going to go ahead and try to give his opinion, but I'm like, "Nope, I didn't ask for it."

In contrast to other mothers, Valentina says that she sets clear boundaries with her family and shuts down unsolicited advice freely. She also noticeably states that nobody in her family contributes to her household so she does not feel the need to heed their advice. While years ago, Valentina's mother helped her pay for a nanny, that child is now an adult in college. Her other children, who were born years later all attended an in-home daycare with family not helping out in their care. Her father comes by her house three to four times a week to see them but nobody in the family cares for her children. This separation in care and finances has empowered Valentina to set boundaries with her family and feel comfortable asserting them. However, as someone who was raised in Latinx and military households where respect is priority, she questions whether her boundaries are disrespectful. She says,

But it does, it's some internal stuff that I have to go through, because obviously, I was raised differently. I do want to respect him. Traditionally, it's like, "Oh my God, is this disrespectful?" I have to remind myself, "No. I'm raising my children the way I want to. I want to feed them when I want to."

Valentina raises a point that many mothers allude to but do not always specifically describe: even as adults with their own families, they still feel compelled to obey and respect their parents, even if they feel like their parents are disrespecting their wishes for their own families. Mothers who are more independent from their families and are not reliant on them for financial or child care support are more inclined to stand their ground and assert their wishes. Valentina highlights how financial self-sufficiency releases her from loyalties that other mothers feel they still have to their families of origin, despite the feeling that she may potentially be disrespecting her father when she tells him no.

Cutting Ties with Family

For some mothers, particularly those who did not rely on their parents for help in caring for the children or who did not live in close proximity, the boundaries they enforced with their

parents were rigid. If their parents did not honor their wishes for how they or their children were to be treated, they made it clear they would cease communication. Although this was only done in extreme cases, more than one mother felt they needed to cut ties with their family for their and their children's well-being.

An example of this is Ana, who is a married mother of two who lives in a rural area of the Pacific Northwest. Ana's is the oldest daughter of six whose parents immigrated who came to the United States as teenagers. She describes them as being very assimilated and encouraged them to do the same. In their home education was a priority so that their children would not have to work agriculture jobs. Ana grew up in a farming community and like many other mothers says her childhood was characterized by Catholicism, obedience to her parents, education as a priority, and says that her parents did not accept personal struggles. Ana says that her parents had high expectations for all of their children but did not "build the foundation" for them so it was hard to anticipate and therefore meet their expectations. Ana moved away for college and now lives in a neighboring state in a home she rents from her in-laws.

Ana tells me that she has no contact with her parents now and they have only met her oldest child one time and that during that visit she made up her mind that she would not be visiting again. As I discuss more in Chapter 4, Ana feels a deep sense of isolation in motherhood and she is torn but firm on her decision to remove her parents from her life. Specifically, she says,

But part of that is me wanting to really safeguard my children. And a lot of that comes down to a line that I learned from one of [her husband's] friends who said, "It's important to keep the kids around people who are worthy of emulation." And my parents are unpredictable, judgmental, hypocritical, prone to violent outbursts. And so that's why I cut them out of my life. After I had my kids, I was like, "You are not going to be around them." I don't want them to model any of those behaviors or to think that that's acceptable. And my parents are the gatekeepers to my sisters. So they don't come visit, which is bad

Ana has made a difficult decision not to visit her parents anymore or to reach out to them via telephone. And she says they do not either. She also notes that her five younger sisters, all who live near her parents, do not come to visit her but they do talk on the phone. Ana says that one of the main issues with her parents is that she feels like she cannot have conversations with them as equals, where she is listened to, heard, and where her words will not be held onto or used against her. When I ask her about how she approaches parenting, and how this may differ from her parents, she discusses communication and allowing children to have a voice without fear of punishment, which is also a characteristic of gentle parenting.

I mean, all parents are making it up as they go along. They're doing their best, I hope. And parents get tired when they have to work all day and come home to rambunctious children. That's part of my staying home and being present for them and trying to find time to recharge so I can continue to be present for them and be patient with them. I lose my temper sometimes. Oh my goodness. And there is a little bit of yelling, but I definitely... I don't want to harm them or have them live in fear of me and only do things because they are fearful of my reaction. Differing from my parents, the belt, the sandal, whatever is close. I want my kids to be able to speak and be heard and we can find a solution together on whatever the situation may be.

In this passage Ana, like other mothers, notes that part of why she has chosen to be a stay-at-home mother is so she can be present with her children and have more patience to respond to them in the way she would like—a way that she believes she is more freely able to do because she is not exhausted from a long day of work and commuting outside of the home.

Angela, who is a third-generation married mother of one who lives in Nebraska, had similar issues as Ana with her mother but was able to turn the relationship around after setting strict boundaries. Angela's family was working class. Her Mexican American mother worked as a Certified Nursing Assistant and her white father was a truck driver. She describes her mother as being a disciplinarian, pushing traditional gender roles onto her, but raising her to be independent and practical. Angela describes her parenting style as,

So we are really child led to a great extent. And so, we really just follow his natural cues for things... I think a lot of the stuff and resources that I consume are both are largely from social media and they're largely from either indigenous creators talking about parenting and what I guess American society is calling gentle parenting now and doing a mixture of that and child led and just really attachment based type practices.

I was curious as to the specific label that so many mothers were using to label their parenting style—gentle parenting. I asked Angela how she came to this term. If she had read about it online and decided to adopt it? Or did she already have this style of parenting and then see it labeled online? Essentially, which came first, the chicken or the egg? She told me,

I think the second part came first because I specifically did want to be a different type of mother than what my mom was. And I've spent 11 years in therapy working through my issues with my mom, specifically. That's the biggest thing. And so, I think I just knew I want to love my kid in a way that I wasn't loved and then started searching out for people who looked similar to me or to my husband. So, my husband's Caribbean. And so consuming media from both native and indigenous creators, Mexican creators, and Black creators, and then just following the path that led to bigger conversations and then the label of gentle parenting came down.

I ask Angela what her relationship is like with her mother now that she is a mother herself considering the strain their relationship has experienced. Like Ana, she has had to set rather strict boundaries with her mother but to her benefit, this led to their relationship taking a turn for the better. She says,

My mom and I did have a very, as a Jew, this is always fun for me to say, come to Jesus moment while I was pregnant...And so we just had a really hard phone conversation after my baby shower because she now lives in Phoenix. And I said, I need these things for our relationship to heal. And I also want to recognize that you didn't have a good childhood and you didn't have a good relationship with your mother, and you probably didn't know how to nurture me because you were never nurtured...So that relationship has taken a 180, really. Because she knew that she wanted to be a part of [her son's] life, and she also knows that I'm the type of person that will say no. So, she was like, either I'm going to make this change or I'm not going to have access to my grandson the way that I want to have access to him.

While practicing gentle parenting is contentious in many of my participants' families and relationships with their parents, it has led to a positive change in Angela's relationship with her mother. Angela's journey highlights how her entry to motherhood was the facilitator for

intergenerational healing as she navigated her relationship with her own mother. Angela acknowledged that her mother's parenting style was influenced by her own difficult upbringing and Angela's choices as a mother are influenced by her desire to provide a different and more nurturing experience for her child compared to what she experienced as a child. Through open communication and understanding, Angela and her mother worked to heal their relationship and break the cycle of maternal specific generational trauma.

Conclusion

In this chapter I showed how through their adoption of gentle or conscious parenting, second and later-generation Latinx mothers challenge multiple stereotypical and limiting depictions and understanding of how Latinx mothers and families operate. By adopting this parenting style, the mothers in my sample challenge stereotypes about Latina mothers using corporal punishment with their children, associating respect and obedience with the idea that children are not allowed to have opinions, not prioritizing mental health, and not being overall warm caretakers. Because the principles of gentle parenting are perceived to not align with traditional Latinx child-rearing norms, mothers often anticipate and experience resistance from their families with participants' families often perceiving their parenting style as a "white" way to parent. Nevertheless, my participants firmly challenge the notion that authoritarian parenting styles are intrinsic to Latinx families. Moreover, they adopt principles of gentle parenting to fit their specific cultural needs, specifically as it relates to respect and balancing the ability to have open communication while also maintaining cultural values of respect for parents and elders. Through their unwavering commitment to practicing gentle or conscious parenting, the mothers in my sample are actively pursuing both intergenerational healing and cultural transformation. In doing so, participants redefine the role of a Latinx mother within a Latinx family.

Mothers place significant weight on their adoption of this parenting style, not only for their families but also their broader community and lineages. Considering this, coupled with the significant resistance they face in their families, mothers closely consider their approaches in navigating this parenting style with their families. I find that mothers' economic position, and specifically the degree to which they relied on their parents and extended family for financial or child care assistance, constrained and informed the decisions they made regarding how to navigate these differing parenting styles. Those heavily reliant on their parents for financial or childcare support tend to be more flexible with their parenting boundaries or keep their opinions to themselves. While some mothers are able to put distance between their parents and their immediate family if their parents are not respecting their wishes, mothers who are economically reliant on their parents quite literally cannot afford to create the same distance and assert the same boundaries with their parents. On the other hand, mothers who are minimally or not dependent on familial support are more inclined to assert boundaries as their family's economic needs are met. These choices can either strain or heal the parental relationships, making it a high-stakes endeavor to challenge one's parents in pursuit of a healthier environment for themselves and their children.

Adopting a gentle parenting approach not only shields their own children from the adversities they encountered in their upbringing but also effectively adopting this parenting style requires that they engage in a continual process of self-nurturing and reparenting. "Reparenting" refers to the process of consciously and intentionally providing oneself with the emotional support, nurturing, and care that might have been lacking or insufficient during one's upbringing. It involves identifying and addressing the unmet emotional needs from childhood in order to promote self-healing, personal growth, and healthier emotional responses in adulthood. In the

context of parenting, the term can also refer to individuals consciously parenting their own children in a way that contrasts with the methods their own parents used, with the goal of breaking cycles of harmful or unhelpful parenting patterns.

Although mothers describe gentle or conscious parenting as very different from their own upbringing, they also recognize and honor that they are raising children under different social, emotional, economic, and even political circumstances than their parents and grandparents. My participants refrain from chastising or condemning their parents for their parenting methods. Instead, they simultaneously envision a different path for their own mothering journey while also recognizing the challenges their parents encountered in raising them, all within a societal structure that inadequately supports families—especially those from lower-income backgrounds, families of color, and immigrant families who face significant barriers to accessing resources needed to support a healthy family. Participating in this practice, however, often leads to participants receiving criticism from family members, especially matriarchs, and in some cases leads to strained relationships between participants and their mothers and grandmothers, with only a few mothers reporting that their parents and extended family fully support their choices.

In the next chapter, I explore in more depth the complexity of navigating this new parenting approach within the context of my participants' relationships with parents and extended family. I also examine the consequences that adopting this parenting style holds for many of the mothers in my sample.

Chapter Four: The Cost of Upward Mobility: Maternal Isolation, Abandonment, and their Toll on Latina Mothers

According to a recent Cigna report, more than half of U.S. adults report feeling lonely (Cigna 2021). These numbers rose consistently over the years with some pre pandemic numbers estimating more than one fifth of American adults feeling lonely or socially isolated and having fewer meaningful connections to others (DiJulio et al. 2018). People who report feeling lonely have fewer friends they can confide in and more than two thirds say they have little or no family living in close proximity (DiJulio et al. 2018, Cigna 2021).

It is important to recognize that certain demographic groups are more vulnerable to feelings of loneliness and isolation. For instance, 75% of Hispanic and 68% of Black Americans report feeling lonely, which is 10 points higher than their white counterparts. Similarly, two-thirds of people with lower incomes report feeling lonely, also 10 points higher than those with incomes above 50,000 a year. While these studies found that gender does not seem to have much of an effect on general loneliness, parental status does. Single parents, in particular, grapple with loneliness, with a staggering 77% of them reporting feelings of loneliness (Cigna 2021). Mothers, and especially those with young children, are likely to report being lonely (Cigna, Harvard). Depending on the study, between 51 and 69 percent of mothers report feeling lonely (Cigna, Harvard). Thus, it seems as though the intersection of parental status and gender may have an effect on loneliness. These statistics underscore the unique challenges faced by mothers in their pursuit of social connection and highlight the critical importance of understanding and addressing their specific experiences of loneliness and isolation.

A number of social, cultural, and structural factors can lead to mothers being more susceptible to loneliness. First, mothers often bear significant caregiving responsibilities for their

children, especially in the early years of parenthood. These responsibilities can be emotionally and physically demanding, leaving less time for social interactions and self-care. Societal expectations and the shift in identity that often comes with motherhood can also make it challenging to maintain pre-motherhood friendships and social activities, contributing to a sense of disconnection. Time constraints resulting from managing work, household responsibilities, and childcare further reduce opportunities for socializing, exacerbating feelings of loneliness. Furthermore, the lack of adequate support systems, such as family or community assistance, can also intensify feelings of isolation, particularly for mothers who lack physical access to kin networks due to differences in geographic location. For some Latina mothers, cultural factors also play a role, as they must often negotiate competing cultural demands and expectations—those of their family, coethnic peers, and current sociocultural community.

In April 2023, the Surgeon General Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, published a piece in the New York Times declaring loneliness an epidemic and “addressing the crisis of loneliness and isolation is one of our generation’s greatest challenges” (Murthy 2023). While the surgeon general presented a national framework to address loneliness and isolation, scholars and practitioners have been studying and proposing interventions and remedies for some time, particularly during and following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although often used interchangeably, isolation refers to the degree of apartness one has from others while loneliness is the subjective emotion one can feel even when they are physically near others but may feel emotionally distant from others (Parigi and Henson 2014). Among social scientists, isolation has been studied both as a byproduct of modernity and the role of technology as a disruptive force and/or catalyst. Researchers studying isolation have highlighted diminishing social connections and the widespread use of technology. These factors contribute to elevated levels of social

isolation, which in turn can result in deteriorating mental and physical well-being (Parigi and Henson 2014). However, since loneliness is a subjective experience that may or may not be associated with being connected or in close proximity to others, structural measures, recommendations, or interventions to isolation may not be helpful for studying or addressing loneliness.

Loneliness is linked to a wide range of health issues that are concerning considering the rates of reported loneliness, especially among mothers. Loneliness has been linked with premature mortality and a range of significant physical and emotional issues, such as depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disease, substance misuse, and domestic violence (Hawkley and Cacioppo 2010; Holt-Lunstad 2017; Lee, Cadigan, and Rhew 2020). Moreover, loneliness and social isolation have been shown to be just as harmful to one's health as heavy smoking, drinking, and obesity (Holt-Lunstad et al. 2015).

Friendship, Domestic Friends, Mom Friends

Research on isolation, loneliness, and friendship networks agree that the transition to motherhood and the introduction of children is a significant factor in altering social networks for mothers (Cronin 2015). Cronin (2015) argues that motherhood and friendship intersect to create a unique category of companionship, one that she calls “domestic friendship” or what most mothers would call “mom friends.” In contrast to traditional friendships, domestic friendships are built on the initial foundation of children rather than shared interests or personalities. Then, the dynamic of the friendship is oriented around the practical and emotional demands of mothering on one hand, and companionship on the other. However, Cronin stresses that domestic friendships should not be understood as mere units of friendship between two people. Instead, it is a culture of sisterhood that is socially situated and characterized by material resources, social

positioning, and emotional interconnections through practices and bonds of motherhood and domestic friendship. Thus, and as Abetz and Moore (2018) point out, domestic friendships cannot be characterized solely by mothering devoid of any sort of collectivity or interdependence between women. When mothers have intimate relationships with mom friends, they have a stronger sense of self, a sense of belonging, and allow mothers to expand their domestic sphere (Cronin 2015; Ellis-Sloan 2015; Ellis-Sloan and Tamplin 2019). Therefore, not having access to such vital relationships has negative consequences for their well-being and the potential well-being of their children.

In this chapter, I explore the consequences of upward mobility in my participants' lives and the social, cultural, and structural factors behind these consequences. The mothers I interviewed were primarily upwardly mobile which produced two different sets of consequences. First, they experienced maternal isolation and loneliness because they are geographically separated from their families and communities of origin and/or struggled to create mothering networks due to a mismatch in parenting styles, life stage, or social group with other mothers in their extended networks. Second, due to mothers being either physically removed from their families or their parents were still in the workforce, they often lacked access to their ideal child care arrangements. They were also simultaneously navigating middle class white spaces that were less accommodating of children in the public sphere beyond child-centered settings. This dynamic is in conflict with their cultural expectations of mothering.

Pathways To Maternal Isolation and Loneliness

Mothers in my sample commonly experience maternal isolation, leading to a motherhood experience characterized by both physical and ideological loneliness. Many mothers report lacking substantial structural or social support and feel out of step or disconnected from other

mothers and matriarchs in their communities and families. These feelings often stem from the complicated decisions mothers make concerning their place of residence, employment, and education—decisions pivotal to their upward mobility. The sense of isolation my participants grapple with emerged from four distinct pathways that collectively contribute to their lack of substantial social support and feeling out of step and disconnected from other mothers and matriarchs. First, many mothers experience a mismatch in parenting styles, both from matriarchs in their families but sometimes other mothers in their extended networks and immediate communities. Second, the transition to motherhood for many mothers in the sample occurred at a different life stage than both many of their coethnic peers in their community of origin and/or their current social group. Third, mothers also felt socially isolated from other mothers they had access to because they were from different social groups and therefore had different interests, values, or even political leanings. And finally, many of the mothers in my sample felt isolated from their working-class families and friends because they are upwardly mobile and no longer reside in their communities of origin. These mothers either relocated for education or employment, which has often placed them in predominantly white, educated, middle-class communities—communities that do not offer the cultural ties and connections they are looking for. Thus, my participants' pursuits of both upward mobility and a new parenting style have left them isolated from other mothers and the types of women centered networks and communities they grew up in and now crave as mothers themselves. As I will show in this chapter, for many mothers, these social processes compound in my participants' lives to create complex cases of maternal isolation and loneliness highlighting the social, cultural, and structural barriers Latina mothers navigate in their quest to find community.

In attempts to foster maternal connections, participants engaged in a significant amount

of invisible labor by attempting to find and build community through their children's daycares, schools, library and church events, cultural groups, mothers groups, and through existing family and kin networks. These attempts were oftentimes unsuccessful or less fruitful than they would prefer. My participants' experiences highlight the contrast between middle-class white families and middle-class Latinx families. White middle-class families often have their choice of a variety of predominantly white middle-class neighborhoods in which they can live, work, and play. Similar to many middle-class African American mothers (Dow 2019), middle-class Latinx families encounter significant obstacles when seeking access to comparable middle-class social networks and communities. However, whereas social science researchers find that African American mothers find community, other mothers, and social networks for themselves and their children through the church (Patillo 1999; Lacy 2007; Dow 2019), almost all of my participants no longer practice Catholicism and/or do not attend church. Thus, the upwardly mobile Latinas I interviewed find themselves with limited opportunities to engage in the social networks, communities, and lifestyles that characterize middle-class white circles.

Esme is a second-generation mother of one who lives in the Pacific Northwest. A number of factors lead to Esme experiencing maternal social isolation and loneliness within both her residing community and amongst fellow mothers, including much of her own family circle. While some participants experience maternal social isolation or loneliness due to one or a few specific pathways I identified, Esme stands out as one who encounters isolation and loneliness stemming from all four of the identified pathways. Esme and her partner have been together for 10 years and share common upbringings, originating from the same state yet raised in different rural towns with familial ties to farm labor. They met when they attended the same in-state university. After college, they settled into their university town but a few years post-graduation

they relocated to an urban hub that offered more career opportunities. Despite this move, they still reside hours away from their families and do not have relatives or other kin in their vicinity. Esme and her partner both work in education. While Esme holds a position at a flagship state university, her husband teaches at a high school in a neighboring town. Upon their relocation to this area, they intentionally chose a residence located between their two workplaces. However, during our conversation, Esme expresses her discontent with their current residential area, which makes it difficult to establish a sense of community in their new city and the surrounding areas. When I inquire about the specific aspects of the community that she finds displeasing, she responds,

We go to the parks a lot, and then some activities here, but I don't necessarily think I feel what the particular community is, value wise, represents us. It is very conservative compared to our own personal values. But at the same time, we've discussed this actually, I don't know if Boise would be better for us. I feel like, if anything, Caldwell, just because there are more Latinos there...I mean, I think of the whole, it seems like education-wise, it's not valued as much in the area. I can tell you, for example, there're some issues; passing bonds for extra funding for schools, or even with the local community college, there is a high need there, and it kept on getting rejected. Even with looking into the school board, I feel like the masks and COVID is a big thing, but it's just those particular components that I don't necessarily agree with. Housing-wise, that there's a push to keep people out of Nampa, like some growth in certain areas. People push back, but we really need it also. I don't know. I just can't say necessarily why all the time. It just doesn't feel like I'm part of it [the community], if that makes sense.

It is hard for Esme to pinpoint precisely why she doesn't feel connected to the community, but overall, she perceives a disconnect between the values of the community and her own. This disconnect, albeit for different reasons, is also present among her family. Esme has already told me that her family openly criticizes the decisions she makes, especially since becoming a mother. Esme was raised by a single mother who worked a lot. They lived in a multigenerational home with her maternal grandparents. Because her mother worked long hours, Esme spent much of her time with her grandparents and they did much of the childrearing. Given this background,

and that this is common among many Latinx families and among my participants, Esme encountered familial pressure to return home when she was pregnant. Therefore, when they left their college town but opted for another city instead of her hometown, her family was quite upset. Her family primarily raised concerns surrounding childcare and the necessity of having daily familial support.

Like many mothers in my sample, Esme's divergent parenting style and choices lead to familial tension that stem from her deviations from traditional Latinx motherhood expectations. Reflecting on the conflict with her family concerning childcare, Esme says,

"We don't do that. Growing up, you take them to an aunt. You take them to a cousin or those kinds of things. We'd get a lot of people saying things like mistreatment that happens at day cares, that they don't take care of your kids, that they lock them up in rooms sometimes. This gets me emotional, because it is something that I really struggled with, people always telling us those things. People would ask, 'Well, now you're having a baby. Are you moving back home?' and that wasn't an option because this is our home, and being close to family is just not what we want for our career goals. This is the place that we need to be, and so it was really hard when people would tell us that. I would cry about it, because I knew it was what we needed to do and what was capable within our means."

Esme highlights a universal maternal decision that is shaped by cultural expectations: who is going to be the primary caretaker of your child. Esme also underscores that despite her decisions being right for her family, she is conflicted because of her cultural upbringing and the discrepancy between her choice and her family's perception of proper parenting. Esme goes on to give many other examples of how her family vocalizes their disagreement with how she chooses to parent including how she approaches gender socialization, discipline, and childcare choices. Considering this, Esme no longer contacts her mother or grandmother to discuss her experience in motherhood or to ask for mothering advice. Navigating the pressure and criticism from her family is emotionally taxing and leaves her with a sense of maternal isolation due to limited family support. Additionally, in her new city, she has yet to form connections with other

mothers, compounding these feelings.

“No. Definitely not, just because our friends here are not in that particular stage. I guess, I don't have support here. When it comes to parenting and motherhood, I turn to my older sister a lot. She's very respectful of my parenting choices, which is really important to me, for her not to push back on that or be judgmental on how I choose to parent. But in the Valley, I don't know much (sic) people my age who are parents. I don't really interact with other moms, and that's something that I wish I had a little bit more of.”

The only person Esme feels comfortable discussing motherhood with is her sister, who raises her children differently but allows Esme the freedom to be a different mother than herself. Despite having a very supportive partner that carries much of the mental load of parenting, the lack of other mothers to be in community with, the lack of emotional support from her family, and the lack of family in close proximity to help care for her son, leave Esme feeling physically and emotionally isolated in her mothering journey.

In addition to lacking mothers in her immediate community to connect with, like many other mothers in my sample, Esme's education and career aspirations have forced her to choose between living near family or leaving and pursuing upward mobility. Esme, like many other mothers, chooses the latter. Consequently, she does not have access to the same kin networks that her own mother did when she was growing up. These complicated and intricate choices not only alter how Esme and other mothers engage in and experience motherhood, but they also lead to a host of conflicted emotions about fulfilling their duty to their families of origin, maintaining close ties with family, having family nearby to be care providers and help in the raising of children.

When Esme discusses her conflicted emotion surrounding childcare, she is underscoring how familismo impacts her experiences, decision making process, and the associated emotions. Familismo is a Latinx cultural value that emphasizes the importance of family connections and relationships within Latino communities, involves close relationships between family members,

including parents, children, and extended family, and a strong sense of obligation to provide emotional and material support to family members. It also includes a deep respect for elders and authority figures within the family and the belief that maintaining family ties is essential to individual and collective well-being. It is common in Latino families for extended family members, friends, and even neighbors to contribute to a child's socialization through sharing resources and participating in child rearing (Fontes, 2002; Quinones-Mayo & Dempsey, 2005). Many of the mothers in my sample often discussed the importance of their families and their longing to have a supportive women centered network similar to ones they were raised in. As Esme's experience illustrates, many mothers find themselves without this vital social and culturally important support network so they seek other networks of women and mothers to create other kin networks, often unsuccessfully or at least not as robust as they would hope and need. This leaves mothers feeling socially isolated from both their families of origin and other mothers and women which ultimately leads to a motherhood characterized by loneliness.

Physically Removed from Family of Origin

Many of my participants experience isolation because they do not live in their communities of origin. They have moved away for their education or employment opportunities and have not returned to the communities where their mothers and other extended family live. In their new city, they often haven't established a new sense of community, particularly among mothers. Not living close to family makes mothering but also taking care of oneself harder. For example, Yolanda, is a mother of one who lives in the suburbs of Houston with her boyfriend. Her family also lives in Texas but in a different area.

Yeah, I guess people to trust when I need a mental health day or something. But I'm not really connecting with anybody, even my family, or they're too far. I just feel, like I said, we've been here for two years and I haven't been able to find anybody here. I know, if I lived closer to family, I still have a few family members who I would trust them and then

I would be able to be like, "Hey, I really need a day." But right now, I'm really struggling with that, just having people to trust my kid with, or my son with.

Yolanda's partner is not her son's father. Although she says he will help her out at home with her son, she says she feels like she is a single parent, something that multiple mothers in a blended family tell me. Since she also does not have family near her, Yolanda feels like she has no time for herself and when she needs a break or a mental health day, she is without anybody she can trust to watch her son. If she had family, extended, or fictive kin near her, she feels she would be able to take better care of herself.

Dulce has almost the same story as Yolanda. She is also a mother of one, in a blended family, and does not live near family. When I ask if she has people in her community who can offer support to her, she says, "I don't. I feel like I do it alone a lot of the times, just because my mom is not there to help me and my in-laws that do help me do not live in El Paso."

Alma, who is a married mother to two teenage sons, has a somewhat different situation. She grew up in Denver but bought a house in the suburbs when her children were young. Her parents eventually moved to the suburbs as well and are about 10 minutes away from her. However, throughout our interview she describes her parents having a sometimes-unhealthy relationship and their healing journey. She says they are still married and only in her later years of mothering have they been able to show up to support her better. She says, "I think it all comes down to possibly where we decided to buy our house and live. It's just so isolating, I feel. Like, there isn't a community with women, but I think that's so common in the United States. We lived closed off in these houses." Alma talks extensively about the loss of community that she experienced when she moved to the suburbs, even though it took her a long time to realize it. Her parents live close by but her children are now teenagers and she is not in need of childcare and more hands-on help. She is, however, farther away from her brothers who live in the city.

Although her sons know her brothers, they are not that close and her sons are not involved in the Denver Chicano community the way her brothers are. For Alma, where she chose to purchase a home not only limited her access to a mothering and ethnic community, but also that of her sons, which she expressed deep regret and sadness about throughout our interview.

This loss of connection to family and community is something other mothers discuss rather directly. Ana, who is a married mother of two and lives in a semi-rural area in the Pacific Northwest, says the following about her experience mothering away from her family.

I would guess that my sense of isolation stems from, I grew up in a big family and there was always someone there to hang out with, to brainstorm, to talk with. And now we're in this space, the kids get to run around, but I don't really have a neighbor that I can walk to and I don't have roommates unless you count the kids...And so it would be really helpful if we had people we could walk to, or bike to, for a sense of community a couple times a week would be nice.

Ana grew up in a big family and with the cultural value of familismo, wherein time with and devotion to family is a priority. Almost all mothers said that this was a main value that their parents instilled in them, that they were raised with a network of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and fictive kin. Many mothers recount having parties and family gatherings almost every weekend. As young people, their vision of motherhood was very much crafted with the idea of a village in mind. Given this experience and expectation, when my participants find themselves removed from the built-in network that aids in not only cultural and ethnic identity transmission but also companionship and social support, they feel culturally isolated and lonely because they are missing a vital part of their expected cultural experience in motherhood.

Sabrina, a married mother of one, recounts a story of how losing access to her family and support system has impacted her. She lives in Houston but most of her family lives in the Rio Grande Valley and her mother lives in Colorado. Sabrina's family used to travel often to visit, but since the pandemic, and especially since her family is in education and health care, their

travel significantly decreased and hasn't returned to pre-pandemic levels. She says,

So that's just made things more complicated, because it used to be that we would see everybody. I'd see my mom's sisters, my tia and their kids, my cousins and stuff like every other week, we would have something. 'Hey, come over. I'm making food. Hey, come over [we're] having a barbecue. It's so-and-so's birthday.' We were getting together very regularly, like we did when we were kids. But since the pandemic started, I've seen them both maybe two or three times. They've met [her son] once in the whole first year of his life. So, it's been really isolating through all of this. Definitely not what I was used to.

Sabrina highlights something that many of my participants experience. The deep family connections, including those among their extended family members, are not as strong as they were when they were growing up or if they were, as strong as they were prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. For many who lived within driving distance of their family, even if it was a few hours, would still make the journey to be a part of celebrations or even just weekend barbecues, which many mothers say were a central to their family life as children.

Angela expresses similar experiences. Angela is a fourth-generation Mexican woman who is married to a Black man and has one son. Although she has spent her entire life in Nebraska, she followed the path of many participants by relocating for college and not returning to her hometown afterward. Unlike others, she has been able to successfully establish a community in her new town and has one particular friend who has played a crucial role in her motherhood journey and providing essential social support when her husband or mother could not. However, even though she feels she has created a community which she calls her "made family", she still longs for a specific type of Latinx customs that she grew up with: the barbecue.

I think the one thing that I do miss is being in such close proximity to that, my immediate family, because growing up for me, my cousins were my friends, my aunts were my deepest confidants. And that's just something that we don't have. So while I think the made family is probably a little bit more important to me than blood family, I still miss that part of it. And we do very similar things that my family growing up did, but with this made family. So for his first birthday, we're just going to have a barbecue like we always did growing up and invite who we consider as our family to just come and hang out and we'll get the grill going. And that was just a hallmark of how we celebrated everything.

Angela says having a barbecue was the “hallmark of how we celebrated everything” and this sentiment was echoed by many participants, particularly those who did not live near their family. Gathering at a relative’s house, usually the main matriarch, on weekends, for birthdays, anniversaries, or any other celebratory event was a central component in Latinx families. Mothers discuss that these parties were when you were able to connect with extended family that you were not in contact with on a day-to-day basis, you were able to practice your Spanish, you learned about Latinx customs and traditions. These gatherings, though they might appear as mere social events, hold significant importance as they serve as essential sites for transmission of ethnic identity, language, and culture. Additionally, they play a vital role in maintaining strong familial connections and reinforcing the value of familismo.

Mismatch in Parenting Style

Many participants discussed that their family members, particularly their mothers, fathers and grandmothers wanted to offer support and advice, but they often did not seek, heed, or welcome it. As discussed in chapter three, most participants have very different parenting philosophies and practices than their families. Hence, advice or guidance from their families was misaligned with their own values and therefore was unhelpful or critical. Asking for advice, or allowing advice to be given, led participants to feeling worse, stressed out, guilty, and a range of other negative emotions. Participants in this situation seemed to struggle with this dilemma because they yearned for family support and wished they and their families parenting philosophies and practices were aligned, particularly among the family matriarchs.

Olivia is a second-generation married mother of one who lives in Arizona in a multigenerational household. Even though Olivia’s grandmother lives in her home, she still says she feels as though she does not have a support network of women to discuss motherhood and

mothering topics with. She says,

I feel like there are very few moms that I can ask questions to and mostly because I don't always feel like our parenting aligns and I'm totally open to listening to what they have to say but then there's times where I'm like, "I don't think I want to take that approach." A lot of my cousins are like, "Oh, just spank her. It's not a big deal." But to me it is a big deal. I don't want to just spank her. What is that teaching her? With my grandma, when I ask her questions, it's like there's a lot of criticism that comes with when we talk about things. Then my mom is not a support at all. My mom and I have a very rocky relationship and I don't go to her.

Olivia follows an approach to parenting called gentle parenting that is discussed in more detail in chapter three. Unlike some mothers, Olivia lives near her family and has physical access to other women in her family. But she points out that they all give her advice that does not align with her parenting style and the ways she is trying to raise her daughter. She either gets advice that is misaligned with her values or her family criticizes her decisions.

Christina, who is in her late twenties, married, and has one adopted son describes very similar predicaments with mothering communities as Olivia and Esme, who was introduced at the beginning of this chapter. Christina and her husband are from a rural area and have known each other since they were young. They ended up going to the same college where they began dating. They too now live in a different city where there are more career opportunities. She says,

I mean, my mom and my mother-in-law have always been extremely supportive. However, some of my parenting styles are pretty different than theirs, which I think that's where sometimes I have a difficult time because I don't feel like I have people I can go to with my parenting questions or concerns. And so, my sister has three kids and then my partner's sister, so my sister-in-law has two kids and I'm really close to both of them, but I would say they parent more like our parents parented and not how I parent. And so, if anyone, that's who normally I would go to, but I still feel like it's difficult to talk to them."

Unlike Olivia, Christina says she has extremely supportive mothers in her family that she is close to and that she can lean on, if she chooses. But, as discussed in earlier chapters, because they parent differently than her and she is trying to practice gentle or conscious parenting the advice

they would give her would not be helpful. So, while Christina may not be socially isolated among her family, she does feel loneliness when it comes to motherhood and navigating the new style of motherhood she is practicing.

Isabel, who is a single mother of two and lives in Oregon, explains how her parents and family are both active in her and her children's lives as grandparents but for similar reasons as Christina, does not seek advice or support on parenting matters from them.

The answer to both is yes, but they're separate. So, my family is absolutely, so 100% helpful, totally hands-on grandparents, hands-on auntie and uncle. But the parenting styles, they couldn't be any more different. So, the parenting, if I need, "Hey, you think that I handled this okay," or something, I'll go ahead and go to my friends. Or I used to have a therapist, and I'll go ahead and connect with her, and just to make sure, to validate what's going on. But as far as the day-to-day stuff, like, "Hey, I have a doctor's appointment, and I'm not going to be able to pick up?" Parents and family, 100%. But again, not for any advice for parenting

Given that many mothers are not able to seek advice they trust from their family, building social networks, making mom friends, and fostering domestic friendships becomes all the more important. Some participants actively sought out mom groups via Facebook, Meet Up, and other similar networking sites and organizations. In joining these groups, participants were looking to connect with and befriend other mothers with similar values, parenting styles, or were Latina moms themselves. But still, many mothers have difficulty finding compatible mom friends due to a mismatch in parenting styles, difficulty finding mothers in their same social group, or with similar interests outside of their shared role as mothers. Participants meet other mothers through various mother, children, and family spaces and often realize they do not align ideologically in the realm of mothering. For example, I ask Olivia about other potential sources of support outside of her family. She says,

I have joined the mom groups on Facebook. I have yet to find one that aligns with me. I feel like the ones that I have joined that are have said, "Oh yeah, we align." Things come up that I'm like, "Eh, I don't know about that." But okay...I've seen things that I'm like,

that's borderline emotional abuse, but okay.

Similarly, Camila, who is a married, second-generation mother of three who lives in Pennsylvania, describes the troubles she has had in finding mom friends. She says, “I think that parenting style is something that has been a problem, and not only for myself, but with relationships being formed. And so, my inability to have a support group with other parents has to do with their parenting style differing from my parenting style.” Camila goes on to tell me a story about how she became friends with someone she knew from school. They both had children shortly after high school and she thought she would be a good person to befriend. When their kids were a bit older, their two children had an issue over a picture her friend’s son drew for her daughter and the way the little boy reacted to her daughter when she did not “swoon over it.” When she approached her friend about the confrontation, the response she received made her think that the little boy was coached to behave in an unkind way to her child. Camila says this is an example of why she has a hard time making or keeping mom friends. She sees parents either overly disciplining their children or not disciplining their children at all. Camila says being around children who behave in a way that is misaligned with their own values and family rules has negatively impacted her children’s behavior and thus, she has had to end these friendships or keep them at bay.

Mismatch in Timing of Motherhood

Participants also experience a mismatch in their timing of their transition to motherhood which led to increased difficulty in making and sustaining mom friends. In recent decades the age at which women give birth has risen particularly among college educated women (Vital Statistics 2023). In 2021, Latina and Black women’s median age at first birth was 25.5 whereas white, Asian, and Native American women’s age at first birth was 28.1, 31.2, and 23.9,

respectively (CDC). These general social trends lead to mothers in my sample being out of sync with other mothers because they transitioned to motherhood at a different time and are now in a different season of motherhood. Many of the mothers in my sample are college educated and no longer live in their communities of origin or ethnic enclaves. They find themselves in two situations: First, their peers and cousins who may not have attended college and did not delay childbearing, had children earlier than they did. So, when they enter motherhood at a later age, they are in a different stage of motherhood as their peers and cousins and have a hard time furthering their bonds via motherhood. Secondly, the professional middle class friend group they've formed through their and their partners education or work places are either not yet having children or are consciously childfree. Esme and Christina, who we heard from earlier both say their current friends do not yet have children. In Christina's case, some of her friends are consciously choosing to be childfree.

While most of my participants who experienced a mismatch in timing of motherhood because they delayed childbearing, all did not. As mentioned previously, Camila had her first child soon after high school. She describes experiencing being out of sync with her peers as a new mother and still now that she is older and with older children. She says,

As a woman, as a person, it is just so isolating to have to parent. And even though there is support out there, it's just not enough support...I experienced it right away, because when I had my kids, I was in high school. And while all my friends were going to school and leaving and living this life, I went right into motherhood. So, for me, it was definitely challenging. And then I reached this adulthood and it just, again, happened so quickly that now, my kids are growing up and I do not have anything in common with parents that tend to have kids their age. There is a significant age difference. Whereas most people who are my own age are just now talking about having children.

In various stages of Camila's life, because of her social circles, she has been out of step with her peers. In high school, she was the one who entered motherhood early and now as an upwardly mobile adult, she is again the woman who has significantly older children or the only one with

children. Camila's transition into motherhood also occurred at a timing that didn't align with her family of origin. In these instances, my participants' parents were not prepared to assume the role of grandparents in the manner mothers needed. Sometimes their parents were still raising their own children (participants' siblings) or were in the workforce full time. This was also the case for Camila.

I feel like I had more of a support in parenting and in motherhood while my children are older. While my children are young, I felt like it was not. I felt like a lot of people, it was just, even my family, they were young. I had two sisters who were kids. And then my mother at that time, she was not available emotionally or it just wasn't the time for her yet. So, I was primarily alone.

As with many mothers, Camila experiences multiple barriers to creating and sustaining a mothering community. These compounding barriers lead her to being isolated, feeling lonely, or without support. In addition to having difficulty finding mom friends that she connects with, she also felt like her family was not able to support her when she was a new and young mother.

Mismatch in Social Group

Participants also experience maternal isolation and loneliness because they struggle to find and connect with mothers who share a similar social group as themselves. Social groups can be forged around racial/ethnic identity, religious affiliation, class, age or life stage, political or social values, and even shared experiences. Participants tried to forge friendships through their and their partners' educational or professional networks, shared hobbies, family engagements, and even motherhood-oriented groups. Participants described the various challenges they faced in developing deeper maternal connections with other mothers. These challenges range from differences in ethnic and cultural identity, socioeconomic class, values and approaches to motherhood, feelings of competition among other mothers, and a general mismatch in interests.

Collectively, this pathway highlights the complex interplay of structural and interpersonal factors that contribute to maternal isolation and loneliness, particularly for upwardly mobile Latinas.

Marianna, who is a third-generation married mother of one, describes the struggles she has faced finding compatible maternal connections. Marianna grew up in Florida but went to an elite art school on the west coast. She eventually met her husband, who is a white man, and moved into the home that he grew up in and is still owned by his mother. She is now an art teacher and lives in a predominantly white area on the opposite side of the country from her family. She has lived in her current city for a few years and has been slowly building a community centered around art, specifically among Latinx artists in her area. She is also part of a running group and a women artist collective that communicates actively via the app Marco Polo. Despite these social networks, Marianna does not have mom friends and feels a dearth of support in motherhood for a variety of reasons. She finds it hard to connect with other mothers she does meet, further contributing to her sense of maternal isolation. She says,

I mean, I feel like I've cornered myself because of what I have focused on. My part of the world has just been this little compartmentalized kind of space. Part of it is living here and not really being in one particular place. So yeah, most of it is white women...So at some point, hopefully it'll start developing or more people will come around. But yeah, I guess I don't know how to connect with more Mexicanas because I don't go to church or I don't go... I don't know. I don't really know where I would go meet up with them.

Marianna acknowledges her difficulty in connecting with other Mexican mothers, citing her absence from Catholic church attendance and uncertainty about where to connect with Latina mothers in her area. Marianna's difficulties in forging the specific maternal connections she seeks underscores the intricate challenges that many upwardly mobile people of color encounter when attempting to establish a sense of community within their new social circles. These challenges are particularly pronounced for those who may not engage in conventional cultural traditions or spaces, such as the Catholic church.

While Marianna has a rather extensive network between her various hobbies, her profession, and her husband's family, she discusses at multiple points in our interview the isolation or loneliness she feels that stems from being often times the only Mexican person in her social networks. She believes she is the only Mexican art teacher in her school district, her husband's family is white, she lives in a predominantly white city, and her family lives across the country. She has connected with her local Latinx art community, but many of the other artists are men. In discussing the ways she has tried to find a community of other Latinas, she highlights an issue a few of my participants, and many upwardly mobile people of color, experience: a disconnect with coethnic peers on account of different education and class backgrounds.

Marianna says,

It'd be cool to have more of a network, more of a group of just Mexican moms, that kind of thing. I don't know very many and my brother-in-law is marrying a Mexicana, but she's not very... I don't know. I hate saying that. She's not very educated and she's not very interested in the things that I'm interested in, so it's been hard for me to find ways to hang out with her. She doesn't like kids, she doesn't want kids, she's younger than me, so it's kind of hard to connect with her.

Marianna expresses a desire for a supportive network of fellow Mexican moms. But her brother-in-law's relationship with a Mexican woman doesn't provide the expected connection, as their differing educational pursuits and interests create a disconnect. Her soon to be sister-in-law's disinterest in children and different life stage further hinders their bonding.

Although Marianna lives in close proximity to and is the mother of the sole grandchild in her husband's family, she is also not close with her white mother-in-law and says that she takes a very hands-off approach to grandparenthood. This is a common occurrence in my sample among participants who had white mother-in-law's. These participants expressed a desire to have a deeper relationship with their partners' mothers but they often attribute cultural differences to the differing relationship. She says "She's more of a hands-off approach. And I mean I understand

her, I think it's different when, if they're their daughter as opposed to daughter-in-law. It's not like in my culture and growing up where they're super involved and they've got opinions for days.” Overall, Marianna’s experience with her mother-in-law and her soon to be sister-in-law underscores that my participants are not merely seeking any form of connection with fellow mothers or coethnics. Rather, they are seeking connections with mothers they are compatible with on multiple levels, showcasing how ethnic group, parental status, education, class, and values shape their experiences and lead to different types of maternal isolation and loneliness.

Adriana is a married mother of one who lives in a suburb outside of Los Angeles. Like Marianna, she has tried various avenues to make connections with other moms with little success. She says she “tries to do a double whammy” by attempting to befriend other moms at her daughters’ activities. This approach has overall been unsuccessful for Adriana either because she does not have much in common or is significantly younger than other moms with children her daughter’s age. In contrast to Marianna, Adriana says finding moms who share an ethnic identity with her is not the primary goal or challenge she faces in her search for companionship. Specifically, she says,

So, it's really hard, because my daughter's friends, her two closest friends are both Asian, but I don't think that's the problem, their parents being a particular ethnic group. I think the problem is, the mom identity takes precedence over other identities in that context. And feeling like the under prepared mom, or the, "I'm just winging it" mom, has been the biggest barrier for me, to feel like I belong with a certain group of moms, I guess.

Adriana and I discuss this dynamic at length. Adriana struggles to find common ground with the mothers in her network because they do not participate in motherhood in the same way. Many of the other mothers in Adriana's community are white and Asian, have higher socioeconomic status, and are stay-at-home moms. These mothers have the financial means to remain out of the workforce and appear to embrace classic intensive mothering ideals (Hays 1996). Additionally,

Adriana perceives that their identity as mothers takes precedence over other aspects of their identity. Meanwhile, Adriana balances multiple jobs in addition to pursuing a PhD, and often feels like she is “winging” motherhood.

Before living in the suburbs, Adriana lived in the city and her daughter went to private school. After assessing the cost of her daughter’s education, she and her husband decided it made more sense to live in a more expensive area that had a good public school. So they moved. Despite being married and both she and her husband having masters’ degrees and professional jobs, they rent their apartment and Adriana drives 60 miles one way to go to school a few times a week. In many ways, while Adriana may have markers of middle-class status, she experiences both social and economic mismatches with the other mothers in her network. Not only does Adriana not have much in common personally with the other mothers in her community, they share a different class habitus as well. While Adriana is balancing employment, education, and extracurricular activities with her daughter, her socioeconomic status does not allow her to devote her full-time attention and emotional energy to the task of mothering, nor does she want to. This hypervigilant dedication to mothering does not resonate with Adriana and is another reason why she has a difficult time befriending other mothers long term. She says,

I think in the past, for instance, there was one mom that she really liked to run. And so, we would drop off our kids at their dance class, and then we would go run together. But she was just trying to destroy me or whatever, and outdo me every single turn, not just running, but mommying, if you will. She had to be that mom that packed snacks, and has juice, and stickers, and bubbles, and all these different things. And I just show up as is. So, that has been definitely a barrier for me to relate to other moms.

In addition to being a different age and not having much in common, Adriana also feels like the other mothers are in competition with her and each other to be the best mom. She goes on to say,

And I will also say, because I told this to my husband a million times. I do not care for having conversations with people that are so centered around my kid, because I think, obviously I'm proud of her, and I'm worried, and I think about her, and stuff like that.

But, I very rarely see myself as monitoring her every step or whatever, and comparing, "What is she doing? And what is she thinking?" And, all these different things. And, I cannot stand having these conversations with other moms, when they just want to, "Oh, how does Jesse do this?" Or, whatever. I am so not good with those conversations.

What Adriana describes is a combination of intensive mothering (Hays 1996) and combative mothering (Abetz and Moore 2018). Intensive mothering is one of the dominant mothering ideologies that characterizes "good mothers" as women being their children's primary caregivers; mothering being child centered and both emotionally and labor intensive; and the separation of mothering from paid work (Hays 1996). Combative mothering mandates that mothers be in constant competition with one another to be the best mother, otherwise known as "mommy wars" (Milkie, Pepin, and Denny 2016; Abetz and Moore 2018). The mothers that Adriana describes align with both of these mothering styles. But Adriana simultaneously fails to meet their demands and challenges their ideologies by decentering motherhood as the most fundamental aspect of her femininity. However, she notes that she has recently met one mom and she is hopeful they can develop a deeper friendship over time because "she's not having all control over everything and thought about every single detail and planned everything. She just wings it the way that I do. And, I appreciate that"

Similar to Adriana, Ana in part experiences maternal isolation and loneliness because she feels pressure to be a "put together" or "polished" mother and senses that she may be judged by other mothers who she perceives in this way. Like other mothers in my sample, Ana tries to meet other moms through community events and particularly by taking her kids to library story time. Regarding her ambivalence about interacting with other mothers via this and other outlets she says,

I have been taking [her daughter] to the library story times in [her town] since she was nine months old. And so, you see a lot of familiar faces, but it's hard for me to talk to strange women, especially what I perceive is... So, there's a lot of LDS in [her town] and

they always seem to be very put together and close-knit. And it's hard for me to break into that because I'm a lot more... I throw on whatever I have. My hair is kind of wild and wavy and curly. Sometimes I'm not as polished as the way I perceive other moms. And so, I feel like this little ragamuffin that's coming in to try and talk to them and befriend them.

Ana describes perceiving that she is not measuring up to other mothers in her community. She tells me that often she chooses not to engage because she is not sure how. Part of this she places on her natural tendencies and part on feeling out of place among other mothers. While Ana does not say that mothers have ever explicitly made her feel like she didn't measure up, or that they were in competition with her the way Adriana describes, she still feels the weight of the "mommy wars" as the metaphor, and feelings of inadequacy associated with the metaphor, are culturally dominant.

Structural and Cultural Maternal Abandonment

A second consequence of upward mobility for my participants, and particularly those who have moved away from their parents and communities of origin or whose parents are still in the workforce, is the pervasive lack of structural support for working mothers and children. The absence of robust social policies, such as affordable and accessible childcare, paid parental leave, and flexible work arrangements contributes significantly to the sense of structural abandonment experienced by participants, which I consider a distinct form of isolation. Family friendly social policies are essential for enabling mothers to participate in the workforce while also fulfilling their caregiving responsibilities. Without such support, many mothers find themselves forced to make difficult choices, often sacrificing career advancement, preferred approaches to mothering and childcare, or even personal well-being. In addition, participants express feeling pressured to confine their mothering roles to the private sphere rather than engaging in public caregiving, further emphasizing the collective societal dismissal of caregivers.

Mothers across various class backgrounds are grappling with the childcare crisis that plagues the United States and impacts families across the spectrum. This challenge is felt even more acutely by mothers of color, who may have distinct preferences for the types of childcare they use for their children (Uttal 1999; Dow 2016a; Dow 2016b; Powell et al 2023). In many ways, Latinx family values associated with familismo often create the conditions that serve as informal social safety nets. Many of my participants describe parents, grandmothers, aunts, and other extended family members collectively contributing to their upbringing and often residing in multigenerational homes or very close to kin. Considering that my participants are upwardly mobile second or later-generation Latinas, they often hail from families who are working or middle class. Thus, their parents or grandparents are often still engaged in the workforce due to retirement limitations, and are unable to alleviate the burden of childcare.

Alternatively, many of my participants' careers and educational pursuits have separated them from their family of origin and built in support system. Therefore, they are unable to rely on their families for help in childcare and day to day raising of their children, which is a longstanding traditional Latinx practice. While some mothers initially feel apprehensive about using alternative childcare arrangements, they ultimately accept its necessity for their larger personal and family goals. As my participants' stories highlight, pursuing upward mobility comes with a great cost to mothers as they often have to sacrifice their expected cultural experience and practices in motherhood.

To combat these issues and be able to provide for their families in the absence of both familial or social support, some mothers, and particularly those who solely support their children, feel as though they have to work around the clock to make ends meet. Even mothers with higher education credentials, including graduate and professional degrees, encounter a discrepancy

between their pursuit of education and the financial rewards or access to middle or upper middle-class opportunities. Conversely, some mothers wanted to be in the labor force full-time but the lack and cost of childcare forced them to make the decision not to participate in the workforce in the way they would ultimately prefer.

Isabel describes the tumultuous time she has had in trying to advance her career while also caring for her children as a single mother. In the following quote, Isabel sums up the tension that many mothers experience.

I have felt this kind of cultural, I don't want to call it divide, but there's two very strong cultural forces that have been pulling on my motherhood as a Latina born in the US, which is about how important the family is, how important my contribution to the family is, family first, family before everything, the centrality of family, which I did grow up to adopt as my own value, that's something I also agree that your family comes first. But then the dominant culture in the US, especially for women and growing up in the girl power movement as well, it's like, well no, you should think about your career first. You should think about your own financial self-sufficiency first. You should be a working woman. That should come first. Your own success and your own profession should come first. So there's been these two competing, this should come first, in my experience. And I feel that if I'm being true to myself and what I really believe comes first, it is a family. But the obstacle to me being able to pursue that has been that we live in a country where government and public policy don't actually value or compensate family labor that contributes to or upholds the family. It's all on uncompensated labor. So I think that the big missing piece of the whole picture here is that if we had a different government or economic system that actually valued caregiving labor, parental labor, so many of the issues or challenges with motherhood could have been completely taken away.

Isabel captures the tension between Latinx cultural values that prioritize family and the contemporary societal pressures to prioritize career aspirations. The struggle to reconcile these forces becomes apparent, especially as more later-generation Latinas attain middle class status.

Isabel grew up in a working-class neighborhood in the Bay area with her mother, her mother's husband, and her maternal grandparents. For much of her childhood, she lived with her grandparents with her mother living nearby, sometimes even on the same street. Eventually, her mother moved to Oregon and Isabel stayed in California with her grandparents. She received a

prestigious scholarship to attend a public high school in San Francisco, which was in a different city than where she lived. Although she says she had a very hard time fitting in with her all white and upper middle-class peers (she was the only Latina at the school until her junior year), she says she finally felt academically challenged. She later attended a respected university in Los Angeles and eventually moved to New York City and was a teacher in the South Bronx. In New York, she met her children's father and had her first child but the relationship did not work out. Given her new circumstances, Isabel made the decision to move to Oregon where her mother still lived so that she could raise her children among family, how she was raised.

I was very clear that the way that I was raised as a child growing up, it was a big kind of village contribution. It was just my mom and grandparents, my extended family, it was all hands on deck to help take care of us. And I felt very vulnerable and alone so far away from my family with my baby as a single parent when things didn't work out with his dad. So, I needed to be closer to my family. So that's why I ended up coming to Oregon....And I've been here raising my kids as a single parent of two really close by to my family since 2014.

Unlike many other mothers in my sample, Isabel lives near her mother and other extended family. Since her mother moved to Oregon when Isabel was a child her extended family has begun to migrate to Oregon from surrounding areas. However, like most mothers I spoke with regardless of their marital or partnered status, Isabel still does not feel like she has adequate support in motherhood.

Do I feel like I have an adequate support system in motherhood? I have a support system. To be able to say it's adequate, I think that would need to reflect itself in how my kids and I are thriving, and we're not. And I think we have a support system that is helping us get by, and that's essential, but in order for it to be adequate, it would need to mean that a lot more women and children are thriving than we actually are, and that's just not the case. So it is present and it is a harm reducer, but I wouldn't call it adequate yet. And through no fault of the network. We live in a culture and a society where mothers just aren't taken care of yet and there's so much put on our shoulders and we're nowhere near adequate in terms of how we support mothers yet.

Isabel has access to social support from her family and discusses throughout our interview how

she has learned to cultivate community. But she also names what many other mothers also describe—an overall lack of structural support for mothers and children so that families may thrive. In our discussion Isabel describes how she has struggled to find stable and trustworthy childcare, affordable housing in good neighborhoods, employers who are understanding and flexible with mothering demands, and time to be present with her children in the way that she wants. Isabel’s children are now 12 and 7 and she has decided to work for herself as a consultant and only take on contracts that allow her to both mother in the way she wants and financially provide for her children. Although she has found this is what works for her family, this work arrangement is not what she would prefer.

My preferred arrangement would be something where I could actually be able to make a real family wage and be able to have the kids have fun experiences and trips and activities. And the way I'm doing it now, it does fulfill the need of I don't have to stress or worry about paying for all this childcare, but it basically just allows me to earn a survival wage and we're making ends meet, but we're definitely not thriving. But right now, if I have to choose, and it does feel like I have to choose, I'm choosing my emotional wellbeing and my ability to be present with my kids over financial wealth. And my preference would be to not have to make that choice at all.

Isabel highlights what many mothers experience, a lack of kin supported or “communal” childcare for one reason or another. Isabel’s family is nearby but they themselves are still in the workforce and therefore cannot watch her children full time while she works. Isabel is also a single mother who does not receive regular financial support from her children’s father nor do her children travel often to see him.

In many ways, Isabel feels she has done everything “she was supposed to do” in seeking upward mobility, yet the demands of motherhood, a lack of affordable childcare, financial support, and a social safety net has left her financially stagnant. Isabel’s family always taught her that she needed to be able to take care of herself. She needed to have an education, a career, and to “never rely on a man to take care of her.” She has felt a pressure from her family to seek and

attain middle-class status, but she has faced numerous structural barriers.

It's changed through the years. They're not pressuring me as much anymore. I think it's because they've seen, I literally did everything they told me I was supposed to do. I went to school, I got a scholarship, I went to college, I graduated, I got a good job, I became a nonprofit executive director. I became a professional like they told me I was supposed to. And I still was struggling because childcare was that unaffordable, because I had two kids that had no father around, housing was unaffordable, and my work schedule was very demanding. They could see, oh, I genuinely tried. I genuinely did follow the journey that one is supposed to follow to be able to reach economic stability or success of security. I did all those things.

So I think after they witnessed that, it eased some of their own doubts about whether or not my struggles were because of any kind of character flaw in me. And they thought, oh no, actually she's living in a world where there's so many hoops to jump through, and it seems like there's not... It's not like in their country of origin where taking care of children was a communal, connective expectation. I didn't have that. So I had to fill that for myself. And even with all of that in place, I still wasn't able to easily make ends meet.

Isabel highlights one of the complicated decisions mothers have to make: the balance of paid employment and domestic labor. If Isabel had additional support to care for her children or the financial means to pay for adequate childcare, she would choose to be in the labor force full time doing work she loves. But that is not a luxury she has. Consequently, she has opted to forgo vacations, extracurricular activities, and other outings to prioritize her mental health and the immediate welfare of her children.

In addition to the high cost of childcare, Karla, who is a third-generation married mother of two and currently expecting her third child, highlights the burden a lack of paid family leave has on her and her family. Karla grew up in Los Angeles to two parents of Mexican and Italian descent. She moved to Washington, D.C. for college, met her husband, and never moved back to L.A. She and her family now live in Pennsylvania where she is a teacher. Although Karla is married and has shared financial responsibility for her family with her husband, she expresses similar frustrations and resentments as Isabel about the lack of structural economic and social support for mothers. When I ask her if she feels supported in motherhood she replies,

No, I don't think so. I think mothers, I don't know because why should I be five, six months pregnant, grinding to save every penny that I can so that I can feed my children for six weeks? Why am I doing that? Why am I having to have five jobs over the summer, two to one month before my child is born, just so that I can save enough money for when my kid is here? Why, like why? Why do I have to fear? And I'm also in a place of privilege. Why do I have to fear giving birth at a hospital? Granted, my mortality rates are far lower than a black mother or a trans body. Why do I have to worry that I won't be able to afford formula because of dumbass corporations? No, I'm not supported. Why do I have to pay out of pocket for mental health services when I am dying, when I am so deep in depression during postpartum or even during pregnancy? Why? Yeah. So no, I don't think so. In my own little bubble, yes, I feel supported. I feel very supported by my husband... My daycare is very supportive... So yeah, I don't think so.

Even though Isabel and Karla have different family dynamics, economic situations, and have contrasting levels of access to social support systems (Isabel being single and residing close to her family, while Karla is married and does not), they both share similar experiences of facing substantial challenges in their roles as mothers because they do not have access to economic and social support. While this is particularly pronounced for the mothers in my sample who do not have access to kin to provide childcare and other social support, this is a broader issue that many working- and middle-class families in the United States navigate as the U.S. ranks last in terms of supportive work-family policies among Western industrialized countries (Collins 2020). This lack of supportive social policies combined with my upwardly mobile participants being removed from their family of origin (i.e., their de facto social safety net), make it especially challenging to achieve their desired balance between work and family.

Whereas Isabel and many of the mothers I spoke with preferred to be in the workforce and eagerly reentered after maternity leave, not all mothers did. Yolanda, who was introduced earlier, has one child, and lives in Texas with her partner. Yolanda has had a strained relationship with her mother for much of her life, did not feel like her mother was an active parent, and does not have much of a relationship with her mother now. After being in a long-term relationship and not getting pregnant, she assumed she would never be a mother. Nonetheless, her son is now

seven years old but she is longer with his father. Although Yolanda's son primarily lives with her, his father is an active coparent, pays for their son's health insurance, and pays 50% of all expenses. Even though she has financial support from her son's father and lives with her new partner, she still is unable to mother in the way she'd ideally prefer. Because of the strained and distant relationship she has with her own mother, if Yolanda had the choice and the financial means, she would ideally choose to be a stay-at-home mother.

Again, I never thought I would be a mother, but whenever I did think of what I wanted, it was to maybe be just a stay-at-home mom so I could be always available for him, make sure he was always fed right, and if he needed help with anything. If he needed rides or if I needed to be at the school, I always wanted to be there. So that's what I would've wanted. I would've wanted to raise him. I wouldn't have wanted to ask our moms for help, anything that way. That's what I would've wanted. But it didn't happen that way. So I guess that was the challenge for me. And it was a challenge for me to let that, I guess, dream go, and go back to being a working mom. And that's the struggle. I have to get him to school and get myself to work. And then feeling guilty that I do, even though they do allow it at my job, to ask my boss to have these hours so that I'm able to be with him. I still feel guilty. That's the biggest struggle. And then, even though I'm with my boyfriend now, I still feel like a single mom.

Yolanda's maternal aspirations of being a stay-at-home mother are currently out of reach for her due to finances. Although her context is different, her sentiments resonate with the challenges faced by both Isabel and Karla. Yolanda underscores the common desire of my participants to be actively present for their children and the struggle they experience in achieving a harmonious work-family balance. The mothers in my sample grapple with the tension between their aspirations as mothers and the reality they are able to bring to fruition. Despite their differing family contexts and support systems, the recurring themes of unfulfilled maternal aspirations, challenges, and emotional strain unite their experiences of motherhood.

Participants also expressed feelings of societal inadequacy that go beyond financial matters and highlight a misalignment in cultural expectations regarding mothering in the public sphere. In addition to lacking access to kin-supported or affordable quality childcare, my

participants also expressed their dissatisfaction with middle class white spaces that were not kid-friendly or accommodating to mothers and their families. Numerous mothers in my study voiced difficulties and frustration with the lack of child-friendly spaces, where the presence of children, families, and women assuming the role of mothers is not only tolerated but genuinely embraced. The mothers in my sample are college educated, involved in their communities, and professionals in the workforce. My participants view their children not just as dependents but as integral members of society and young participants deserving of inclusion in public spaces. They resist the notion that private homes, childcare centers, and designated play areas are the only acceptable venues for their children. In their eyes, motherhood should entail a broader, more inclusive experience.

Araceli is a third-generation, 32-year-old mother of three, and is soon expecting her fourth. Araceli knew that she wanted to be a stay-at-home mother, which she was for eight years. But when her husband recently passed, she realized she would have to reenter the workforce. In the months following her husband's death, she and her three children moved into her parents' home so that they could help care for her children. She has also gotten a part time job working remotely and has enrolled in college to pursue a nursing degree. Although her life has turned upside down in a short amount of time, she feels as though the move back to her parents' home is what was best for her family and has been a really great experience. An experience that is not very common among my participants, Araceli says her parents and extended family respect her parenting practices and support her in her parenting decisions. She says the move with her family "just all feels really natural." Araceli, who is a Latter-day Saint, also has a large church community which she receives social support from. However, she feels that outside of her family and church community, she has a hard time carving out space for her and her children.

I don't feel like the society or the world that I live in is just kid friendly. I don't feel like the system that I'm a part of has children or families in mind, just in general. I feel like a lot of the times I'm bullying or making my space for my kids and myself because I want things to work for us and I want my kids to have the things that they need.

Araceli uses the term “bullying” which may seem extreme but other mothers express similar sentiments about their experience with carving out space for their children in the world. Angela expresses similar sentiments. Although she has her “made family”, she expresses frustration with the frequency in which she comes into conflict when she tries to mother outside the home and in public spaces. She explains,

If I have to go to a board meeting for a nonprofit that I sit on the board for, I bring my kid with so that he can see what community engagement and service looks like. I don't silo myself as a mother to only kid-centric activities. He will attend a protest with me as long as it's safe. And all of these, my activist in me, the Jew in me, all of it informs how I view children as active members of our society. And that I want to raise [her son] in a way that he knows that he is an active member in society and that he's not being controlled by these different institutions. And that's like when we talk about support around me, that's where I butt heads with my friends who, particularly women who have actively chosen not to have kids. They're like, if I go to a restaurant or a brewery, even if that brewery serves food and people sit down and eat and it's during the day, she does not want to see children there. That ruins her environment. And I'm like, but aren't children just people too? How are you supposed to expect a kid to be able to sit at a table and engage in conversation if we don't sit down at a table with them and engage in conversation in a public place? They have to be out.

Both Araceli and Angela emphasize the importance of children's inclusion in broader society rather than limiting their experiences to child-specific spaces and the challenges they face in making this a reality. They stress the importance of exposing children to community engagement, activism, and societal experiences as active participants. These mothers advocate for their children's presence in public spaces, even those traditionally considered adult-oriented, as a means of fostering their understanding of and engagement with the world. Ultimately, women who confidently embrace the role of motherhood in public domains beyond child-centric settings often encounter a sense of displacement. However, their vision of motherhood diverges

from the notion that children and mothers (or women actively engaging as a mother) are synonymous with private activities devoid of community engagement. This proactive engagement has the potential to empower mothers by enabling them to foster social networks, be active community participants, continue to participate in the labor force, and more. My participants resist confining women, mothers, and children solely to the private sphere.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored two sets of consequences my primarily upward mobility participants faced as they navigate building their careers, creating mothering networks, and mothering their children in both the private and public spheres. My participants' experiences shed light on the delicate balance between cultural values that emphasize family while also contending with personal aspirations and economic necessity of prioritizing upward mobility, the pursuit of which often removes them from their families and social support systems.

My participants' experiences illustrate the pivotal role of social support networks, familial ties, and community connections in shaping Latina mothers' experiences. Many mothers find themselves making complicated decisions about where to live, work, and go to school that may potentially affect their and their emotional children's well-being. These decisions, while geared towards economic advancement, often pose challenges to their sense of community, social connectedness, and ultimately impact their ability to fulfill their maternal aspirations.

Moreover, while many of my participants seek to break free from conventional gender roles and envision participating in the workforce full time while also caring for their children, there's a clear recognition that these aspirations require support from both their social networks and the broader society in the form of structural changes. My research unveils a yearning for a society that genuinely values caregiving and parental labor, underscoring the limitations imposed

by current governmental and economic systems. My participants' experiences also highlight how white middle-class spaces and communities do not meet the social, cultural, or economic needs of Latina mothers. These findings underscore the significance of understanding how upward mobility and cultural expectations shape the journey of Latina motherhood.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: Culturally Transformative Mothering: Motherwork of a New Generation

In this dissertation I bridge three bodies of scholarship on motherhood, immigration and incorporation, and ethnoracial socialization to examine how the mothering expectations, ideologies, practices, and experiences of upwardly mobile U.S. born Latina mothers are shaped by their cultural and class background in addition to their gendered and racialized experiences in the United States. Specifically, I examined 1) mothers' discernment of how and which cultural and racial knowledge to transmit their children; 2) how mothers' own experiences growing up informed their mothering ideologies and practices; 3) how and why mothers deviate from parenting practices their own parents and caretakers used and the associated consequences; and 4) the pitfalls of upward mobility on mothering communities and systems of support.

My findings demonstrate that both scholarship on motherhood and once immigrant groups have neglected to account for the experiences of U.S. born Latinx mothers, specifically those that are upwardly mobile and middle class. Scholarship on once immigrant groups and later-generation Latinx people assumes that with each successive generation, ties to ethnic identity are weakened unless people marry other Latinxs (Vasquez 2011) or live in proximity to immigrant coethnics (Jiménez 2010) and that mothers born in the U.S. will adopt white American mothering ideologies (Segura 1994). My findings show that upwardly mobile second and later-generation Latinx mothers achieve standard benchmarks of structural assimilation while also maintaining ethnic identification. They also intentionally deviating from the mothering strategies used by earlier family matriarchs without replicating those of white American mothers. I deploy two concepts to explain my participants' approach to mothering in the United States: *culturally transformative mothering* and *Latina/e/x motherwork*.

Culturally transformative mothering is the deliberate process second and later-generation Latina mothers engage in when determining which aspects of culture and identity to pass onto their children and which parenting styles to adopt. Mothers intentionally select and integrate valued aspects of their cultural background into their parenting practices while also identifying and altering or removing practices they deem harmful and remnants of structural inequalities. In this process mothers challenge essentialist values that they do not consider intrinsically aligned with Latinx culture while reinforcing those they consider central to Latinx identity and community. Through this process mothers highlight agency in parenting and the recognition that culture is not static but can be transformed and adapted by present and future generations. While I apply this concept to the mothering practices of the upwardly mobile second and later-generation Latina mothers I interview, it may also be relevant to other racial and cultural groups who are navigating and adapting to cultural fluidity and change.

The mothers in my study engaged in culturally transformative mothering in their pursuit of intergenerational healing in two primary ways: through their efforts in reclaiming Spanish language and simultaneously redefining the boundaries of *Latinidad* and their adoption of gentle parenting. In Chapter 2, I analyze mothers' motivations for and practices of ethnoracial socialization with their children. I find that concerns about racism from white society and ethnic belonging shape the lens through which second and later-generation Latina mothers evaluate their children's racial lives and the tools needed to navigate their various surroundings. Mothers ethnoracial socialization practices vary depending on a variety of factors but specifically children's phenotype, Spanish language proficiency, cultural habitus, name, geographic community in which they reside, and their overall perception of how their children are perceived as Latinx by both coethnics and dominant society. Through a combination of language, cultural,

proactive, reactive, and relative privilege socialization methods, Latinx mothers carefully craft their children's ethnoracial toolkit, focusing on the distinct boundaries present in their children's lives.

This process, coupled with structural incorporation, results in the transmission and creation of a Latinx ethnoracial toolkit and identity that is informed by U.S. contextualized racialization, class, gender dynamics, and sociopolitical realities that are distinct from both earlier coethnic generations and white Americans alike. By doing so, they equip their children with the tools and knowledge necessary to navigate the complex landscape of Latinx identity while also preparing children to address the challenges and safety concerns that may arise when interacting with the broader society. The data in this chapter also challenges assimilation frameworks that assumes with each generation that Latinx people become distanced from their ethnic and cultural background and that parents do not put significant effort into passing on cultural knowledge.

In Chapter 3, I explore a second way mothers engage in culturally transformative mothering through their adoption of gentle parenting, their motivations and consequences of adopting said practices, and their strategies for navigating this parenting within their extended families. I find that through their engagement with gentle parenting, my participants simultaneously challenge long standing stereotypes about Latinx mothers, their parenting practices, and perceptions about how Latinx families operate. For my participants, adopting gentle parenting is a means of intergenerational healing by being present and responsive parents to their children while also reparenting themselves.

Although my participants describe their own parents as having had strict high standards, were occasionally emotional or physically unavailable, and often adhered to traditional gender

roles, they did not disparage them. For my participants, the concept of intergenerational healing is deeply rooted in the understanding that their parents' parenting style was molded by the structural circumstances of their times. My participants acknowledge they are now raising their own children under conditions that differ substantially in terms of societal norms, socioeconomic status, and political dynamics as their parents and grandparents once were. They also acknowledge that their parents and grandparents' hard work, bravery, and sacrifices paved the way for their upward mobility.

This upward mobility and access to resources in many ways allow my participants to ability give their children a softer childhood than they once experienced. However, regardless of my participants' interpretation, mothers who choose the path of gentle parenting often anticipate and face resistance from their families, as it may not align with traditional Latinx child-rearing norms. Nevertheless, my participants firmly challenge the notion that authoritarian parenting styles are intrinsic to Latinx families. In doing so, they redefine the role of a Latinx mother and Latinx family life. The data in this chapter challenges research that assumes U.S. born Latinx mothers adopt white American mothering ideologies and practices. My participants show that their mothering ideologies and practices are significantly informed by their experiences in childhood and that they still maintain Latinx cultural values of family while interacting with their children in a different manner.

In my last empirical chapter, I explore the consequences my participants face on account of their parenting style and pursuit of upward mobility. In this chapter I examine the social, cultural, and structural factors that lead second and later-generation Latina mothers to experience maternal isolation and loneliness. The sense of isolation my participants grapple with emerged from four distinct pathways that collectively contribute to their lack of substantial social support

and feeling out of step and disconnected from other mothers and matriarchs. Mothers experience isolation on account of one or more of the following pathways: mismatch in parenting styles, mismatch in life stage, mismatch in social group, and geographic separation from their families and communities of origin. Furthermore, in the absence of family and kin to assist with childcare, mothers face significant obstacles navigating an economic system that does not value caregiving labor or prioritize family well-being, which leads to mothers feeling structurally abandoned. These feelings of isolation often stem from the complicated decisions mothers make concerning their place of residence, employment, and education—decisions pivotal to their upward mobility. These decisions often hinder their sense of community, social connectedness, and ultimately impact their ability to fulfill their maternal aspirations.

Considering the distinct generational differences my participants describe, the intentional approach they take their mothering practices, and the consequences they grapple with, I put forth the concept of *Latina/e/x Motherwork* to better contextualize my participants experiences and motivation of their mothering choices. Drawing on Collins' framework of motherwork, I use the concept Latina/e/x motherwork to place emphasis on survival, power, and identity in motherhood for this group. Latina/e/x motherwork necessitates that Latina mothers engage in power struggles and negotiations with family and community members but also white society about how they lead their homes and families. Latina/e/x motherwork also necessitates that mothers prepare their children for survival and navigation of U.S. specific racialized spaces. And finally, Latina/e/x motherwork necessitates that mothers curate and transmit ethnoracial toolkits that allows their children to seamlessly navigate the borderlands of their ethnic communities, broader Latinx communities, and white society. These processes collectively assure the individual and collective survival of white society and attempted cultural erasure while also addressing collective racial

trauma stemming from legacies of inequalities such as poverty, systemic racism, and migration. Ultimately, through these efforts, mothers redefine their roles as Latinx mothers, reshape family dynamics, and perceptions and embodiments of Latinx identity.

Both the broader concept of culturally transformative mothering and the more specific concept of Latina/e/x motherwork forces social scientist to reconsider what we know about Latina mothers and later-generation Latinx people alike. Both research on once-immigrant groups and the limited research on Latina mothers assumes that with each successive generation mothers will not only adopt practices and values of white mothers but that they will loosen their connections with Latinx communities and coethnics. My data contradicts both of these assumptions. I show that mothers simultaneously achieve structural assimilation, pass on cultural knowledge to their children, make efforts to reclaim the Spanish language, and adopt new parenting approaches that diverge from those of earlier generations or middle-class white mothers.

It is important to note that the findings in this dissertation capture the parenting practices and strategies of economically privileged Latina mothers which may differ from low-income or working-class mothers on account of differential access to resources. Opting to enroll children in bilingual schools outside of their home district, expensive extracurricular activities such as mariachi or ballet folklórico, and selecting bilingual childcare providers are choices that participants make because their class status has afforded them these options. Low-income or working-class mothers may not have the economic means to be able to choose their children's school, enroll in expensive extracurriculars, or be able to afford their ideal childcare provider. Practicing gentle or conscious parenting can in many ways be seen as a privileged parenting practice associated with class status as it requires a significant time commitment, access to

knowledge and resources, and the time and mental capacity to reflect on childhood experiences and their impact. Mothers in my sample discussed seeking out and using mental health resources such as therapy for themselves and their children when needed. Not only does this highlight a shift in mental health acceptance but also that participants' class status affords them access to such services when needed. Low-income and working-class mothers, who may have similar mothering aspirations, may be unable to bring their aspirations to fruition if they do not have the economic resources or conditions that allow for this type of intergenerational healing.

My findings highlight how upwardly mobile second and later-generation Latina mothers engage in mothering that is informed by both their ethnic communities of origin but is adapted to fit their current social, cultural, and economic needs of mothering in the United States. Thus, through these simultaneous processes, my participants redefine and create new Latinx cultural meanings and identity formations. Therefore, rather than asking whether upwardly mobile middle-class Latina mothers and later-generation Latinas/os are assimilating, thinly attached, or on a cultural maintenance trajectory (Vasquez 2011), my findings compel social scientists to recognize and honor that later-generation Latinx people, and mothers in particular, are charting a unique path of their own. This path sets them apart from both earlier coethnics and white society alike. For a more thorough and precise understanding of the experiences, practices, and ideologies of this group, future research should construct projects that avoid the use of assimilation frameworks or deficit-based comparisons to either of the aforementioned groups.

Appendix A: Methodological Appendix

Insider/Outsider Status

Although many researchers debate the benefits and drawbacks to conducting research with communities that someone is themselves a part of, I suspect that the shared identities I had with my participants both allowed me access to this community while also posing certain challenges. Because my participants knew I was a Latina mother, I often had to ask them to explain what they mean so that I was not making assumptions. For example, many mothers discussed traditional Latinx family values. When I asked them how their parents raised them and what were the most important values in their homes growing up, responses would be something like “traditional Latino family, you know.” Although I did feel like I knew, I also knew that I could not make assumptions about what that meant in their families. I would respond with, “I think I do, but can you explain what you mean by that and how it operated in your family?”

In other ways, my perceived insider status sometimes presented complications both in the recruitment process and in interviews, specifically around Spanish. I am a fourth generation Chicana who is not Spanish proficient. I know enough Spanish to make light conversation, check out at the grocery store, and decipher when someone is asking for help. But I cannot maintain a full-fledged conversation in Spanish. Throughout interviews mothers would sometimes speak Spanglish, or when someone switches between English and Spanish either with individual words or sometimes longer phrases. Because I am familiar with this speech pattern, and have basic Spanish skills, sometimes it was not a hindrance to our interviews. Nonetheless, there were a few occasions when I had to tell the interviewee that I did not understand what they just said and if they could repeat it in English. This was always uncomfortable for me, because like many of my participants, I know that not understanding and speaking Spanish is frowned upon. On the few

occasions I had to do this, there was usually a short pause, one that I recognized all too well and interpreted as judgment, and then they would repeat in English. I specifically had to do this with Vanessa, the mother introduced in Chapter 2, who referred to her children as “No sabo kids.” This particular situation was especially uncomfortable because this moment came after she had made that comment. I felt embarrassed. I contemplated not asking her to repeat herself, but I knew that if I did not make it known that I did not fully understand, it would compromise the interview. I had to face the music and put my cards on the table.

On the other hand, there were times I felt that disclosing I was not Spanish proficient put my participants at ease. I sometimes felt a sense of stress in my participants body language or voice when I asked about Spanish. Participants would pause or sigh before answering the question. After I noticed a trend, with this being a site of contention for mothers, I often had to preface or follow up questions about Spanish to let mothers know I was not judging them regardless of their responses. At times, I would disclose my own lack of proficiency in Spanish. This would often lead to mothers letting their guard down and disclosing more about their struggles with passing on, or even themselves learning, the language. While many of my participants and I established rapport over our shared identity as Latinx mothers, it became apparent that the topic of Spanish sometimes played a role in influencing my insider/outsider status during our interviews.

Conducting Participant Research in a Pandemic

I began conducting interviews for this research in 2019 but a bulk of the interviews were conducted after the onset of the covid-19 pandemic. Considering that I was researching Latinx mothers, a group that was significantly impacted by the pandemic, I had to pivot my recruitment techniques and data collection strategies. Data collection was initially paused by my university

and when it did resume, I felt uneasy seeking out mothers to interview. Similar to others conducting qualitative research during the pandemic (Santellano 2022), I had to ask myself how to navigate the data collection process when my population of interest, to which I also belong, was being hit hard by unprecedented times? I could not in good conscience, and while processing the pandemic myself, ask mothers for their time. I did not conduct any interviews after the pandemic started until the beginning of 2021.

Because I knew that mothers were often time-poor, I wanted to make sure that participating in my study was as convenient as possible. Prior to the pandemic, I had already given participants the option to talk to me in person, via videoconference, or phone. I also allowed participants to pick the day, time, and location of the interview and I did my best to rearrange my schedule to fit their needs. Many of my interviews, before and after the pandemic, were conducted in the evenings and on weekends. I conducted interviews in participants' homes, in their offices at their workplace, at local coffee shops where they often worked during the day, and at public libraries. Prior to the pandemic, I only conducted one interview that was not in person. After the onset of the pandemic, all but one interview was conducted via zoom, FaceTime, or phone call.

When I resumed data collection, videoconferencing had essentially gone more mainstream. I used that as an opportunity to expand my research site from only the Washington D.C. metropolitan area to the entire country. Thus, part of this distinct difference is because most of my participants were no longer in my specific region. However, even those that were opted to meet online or by phone. Nevertheless, my data collection process was significantly different at the end of the project than the beginning. For example, for interviews that were conducted over the phone, I was not able to see participants' body language or facial expressions during the

interview. However, conducting interviews over the phone or via videoconference allowed me to reach a wider range of mothers than if I had only conducted in-person interviews. This has without a doubt made my data richer and nuanced.

Despite the qualitative differences between in-person interviews and video or phone interviews, I believe I was able to capture the rapport and some of the broader contextual information that researchers often glean from in-person interviews. For example, I interviewed Marianna in her art studio via zoom. As she described to me that her artwork is culturally centered, I could see a large bright colored canvas behind her that was halfway complete. I interviewed mothers via zoom at their places of work and in their homes while they nursed infants. I spoke to mothers on the phone as they drove their children to Saturday morning soccer games and cooked dinner on speakerphone. In this sense, technology facilitated me access into the homes and lives of mothers across the nation.

Recruitment

I suspect that my identity as a Latina mother proved to be beneficial for recruitment. I initially began recruitment through a series of seemingly typical avenues and did not disclose that I was a Latina mother. I printed flyers and hung them in coffee shops and libraries; asked Parent-Teacher Association leaders to share my study; posted in parent listservs, and parent, neighborhood, community Facebook groups; and even Latinx professional organizations. These all seemed to offer little response.

I realized the population I was looking for may not only have limited time but may also harbor suspicions about researchers. To address this, I explicitly disclosed my identity as a Latina mother on all recruitment materials. I also opted to advertise in my own networks such as Twitter, online parenting and community groups I was a part of, in addition to re-advertising in

the aforementioned arenas. Once I noted my shared identity with potential participants, recruitment noticeably increased.

I adjusted my focus to specifically target recruitment efforts within Latina/x communities. I reached out to Latina/x mother groups and Latina/x family organizations in cities across the nation. Because much of the research of Latinx people and families is focused on Mexicans in California or Texas, I did not reach out to any organizations in these states. I focused recruitment in areas such as the Pacific Northwest, East Coast, New England, Chicago (which does have a large Latinx, specifically Mexican-origin population), and the South.

I also sought assistance from social media pages with a Latina/x mother focus to promote my study, many of which were willing to help. Interestingly, many of my participants named one particular social media page, LatinxParenting on Instagram, as a place where they sought out parenting information and advice from. As to not skew my data, I did not reach out to this organization to share my study. I also did not know any of the participants prior to conducting this research.

The sample in this dissertation is roughly three-fourths second generation and largely upwardly mobile and middle class. When I started this project, I did not set out to conduct a dissertation on middle class Latina motherhood. In fact, I adjusted recruitment efforts at multiple points so that I could try to recruit more working-class mothers, mothers who did not attend college, or mothers who were not married or in domestic partnerships. However, considering that I conducted many of the interviews during the pandemic, I am not surprised that relatively privileged mothers opted into my study. While I did conduct interviews in the evenings and on weekends, I also conducted a great deal of interviews during the day with women who were stay at home mothers, worked from home, or were in between zoom meetings. Prior to the pandemic

I even visited some participants workplaces where they had private offices and the autonomy to meet with me during the traditional workday. Considering that I am studying mothers, and that I did not set out to specifically study low income or economically disadvantaged mothers, I am not surprised at the sample I ultimately ended with. Mothers, particularly in the midst of the pandemic, are often time-poor. Mothers who are not economically advantaged, do not work in/from home, or who do not have high levels of occupation autonomy face additional challenges when it comes to taking part in research interviews lasting one to two hours. Thus, the findings in this dissertation capture the parenting practices and strategies of economically privileged Latina mothers whose parenting styles, practices, and strategies may differ from lower income or working-class mothers on account of differential access to resources.

I had a number of mothers explicitly share that they were interested in the project but decided to participate when they found out I too was a Latina mother. Frequently, before or after our interviews, participants inquired about my project, my educational and career aspirations, my family, and wished me well in my endeavors. This extended beyond mere politeness; they explicitly conveyed their support because they saw me as one of their own and felt a sense of pride in this connection. One can speculate as to the effect this had on my data. I suspect it only makes my findings stronger.

Data Analysis

I began memo writing upon completion of each interview. As in-depth interviews can be conceptualized as a series of case studies (Small 2009), these preliminary memos not only documented my initial reaction to the interview, my rapport with and mood of the participant, and any other relevant information about my interaction with the participant but they also documented how each case helps to answer my research questions and is related to other

concepts or cases. Next, interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim. I used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package, to code the transcripts. To build on existing theory while allowing flexibility for emergent themes, I followed a flexible coding technique introduced by Deterding and Waters (2018). Departing from grounded theory where coding begins with describing small parts of the data such as sentences and words and later connecting the data to previous literature (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006), flexible coding begins indexing the data based on assumptions from literature and insights gained from analytic memos. Specifically, they describe a three-step process consisting of indexing the data, applying analytic codes, and testing and refining theory. Thus, I first built a set of index codes which represented each question in the interview protocol. Next, using insights gained from initial memos, index coding, and existing literature I read through each transcript and applied analytic codes. However, considering that the breadth of academic literature on Latinx motherwork is limited and that I have a rather diverse sample, many analytic codes and themes emerged from the data.

Through this process the framework for culturally transformative mothering and the principles of Latina/e/x motherwork began to take shape. In regards to the strategies mothers use to transmit cultural and racial knowledge to their children, key concepts that emerged included the importance of Spanish language; preference for bilingual schools and care providers; navigating and communicating racial boundary work, legacies and racial trauma from language suppression, the importance and complexities of phenotype, food, media, and art as gaining cultural knowledge, strategies for navigating racism, and teaching children to be upstanders. Mothers accounts about their motivations for and reasons behind which type of socialization they participated in with their children revealed how racial and ethnic background, phenotype, name,

Spanish proficiency and cultural habitus shape mothers' orientations to and primary practices of ethnoracial socialization.

In Chapter 3, I discuss a second aspect of a culturally transformative mothering approach: mothers' adoption of gentle parenting as a deliberate departure from authoritarian parenting styles. As it related to parenting style, key concepts that emerged were the importance of mental health care and judgment free discussions on the topic, open communication among all family members including between children and adults, learning about and adopting gentle or conscious parenting, the refusal to use corporal punishment with children, challenging and setting boundaries with family members, and backstage management of parents' behaviors respondents disagreed with. These concepts collectively became the foundation for my presentation of gentle parenting as a form of intergenerational healing.

In Chapter 4, I examine the reasons behind mothers' experiences and feelings of maternal isolation and loneliness. Key concepts that emerged related to mothers' isolation included limited friendship networks, physical distance from families and communities of origin, consequences of adopting gentle or conscious parenting styles, postponing motherhood, age differences in maternal networks, and misalignment of values

Appendix B: Participant Demographics

Table 2. List of Participants and Demographic Characteristics

Pseudonym	Gen	Age	Education	Occupation	Marital Status	# of kids	Household Income	Respondents Racial/Ethnic Group	Partner Racial/Ethnic Group
Adriana	2	33	Advanced	Consultant/Student	Married	1	\$130,000.00	Guatemalan	Latina/o/x
Alejandra	4+	40	Advanced	Administrator	Married	1	\$178,000.00	Mexican	Latina/o/x
Alma	4+	44	Advanced	Instructor, Higher Education	Married	2	\$127,000.00	White and Mexican	Latina/o/x
Amparo	2	29	Advanced	Director of Programs, Policy & Membership	Married	2	\$200,000.00	Cuban and Honduran	White
Ana	2	36	Bachelor's	SAHM	Married	2	\$54,000.00	Mexican	White
Anabel	2	42	Bachelor's	SAHM	Married	2	\$80,000.00	Mexican	Latina/o/x
Angela	4+	32	Advanced	Nonprofit Development Consultant	Married	1	\$92,000.00	Mexican and White	African American/Black
Araceli	2	32	High School	Analyst	Widowed	3	\$100,000.00	Mexican	Latina/o/x
Beatriz	3	26	Bachelor's	Senior Project Manager	Single	1	\$158,000.00	Puerto Rican	Latina/o/x
Brenda	2	41	Bachelor's	Sr. Director, Engagement Operations for Documentary Films	Married	2	\$216,000.00	Mexican	Ireland and Iran
Camila	3	35	Advanced	Social Worker	Married	3	\$50,000.00	Puerto Rican	Latina/o/x
Carmen	2	41	Advanced	Student Services, Higher Education	Married	2	\$100,000.00	Mexican	African American/Black
Carolina	2	29	Bachelor's	Training & Professional Development Leader	Married	1	\$112,000.00	Mexican	Latina/o/x
Celia	2	27	Advanced	Clinician for Enhanced Outpatient Services	Single	1	\$44,000.00	Guatemalan	NA
Delicia	2	33	Advanced	Social Work Faculty/ Field Education Director	Married	2	\$101,000.00	Honduran and Mexican	Latina/o/x
Dulce	2	25	Some College	Administrative Assistant	Domestic Partnership	2	\$72,000.00	Mexican	White

Pseudonym	Gen	Age	Education	Occupation	Marital Status	# of kids	Household Income	Respondents Racial/Ethnic Group	Partner Racial/Ethnic Group
Elena	2	41	Advanced	Bilingual Speech-Language Therapist	Married	2	\$0.00	Peruvian and Egyptian	Asian/Pacific Islander
Elisa	3	42	Advanced	Community Engagement Officer	Married	2	\$110,000.00	Mexican	Latina/o/x
Erika	3	40	Some College	Patient Service Representative	Divorced	4	\$70,000.00	Mexican	Latina/o/x
Esme	2	27	Advanced	Educator	Domestic Partnership	1	\$94,000.00	Mexican	Latina/o/x
Eva	2	32	Bachelor's	Compliance Specialist	Single	1	\$58,000.00	Mexican and Guatemalan	NA
Fatima	2	38	Vocational Training	Self Employed Artist	Single	2	\$25,000.00	Mexican	NA
Gabriella	2	30	Less than HS	Case Manager	Domestic Partnership	2	\$48,500.00	Guatemalan & Columbian	Latina/o/x
Gianna	2	39	Some College	Marketing Consultant	Married	1	\$106,000.00	Mexican	Asian/Pacific Islander
Gloria	2	20	High School	SAHM	Married	1	\$35,000.00	Salvadoran and Guatemalan	Latina/o/x
Griselda	2	28	Advanced	PhD Candidate	Married	1	\$80,500.00	White and Argentinian	African American/Black
Guadalupe	2	40	Bachelor's	Coordinator	Married	2	\$128,351.18	Costa Rican	Latina/o/x
Hilda	2	30	Advanced	Medical Coding Analyst	Married	2	\$128,000.00	Dominican	Latina/o/x
Isabel	2	36	Bachelor's	Organizational Consultant	Single	2	\$40,000.00	Peruvian	NA
Ivette	2	35	Advanced	Unemployed	Single	2	\$20,000.00	Mexican	NA
Jade	2	32	High School	Customer Service Representative	Divorced	2	\$30,000.00	Honduran and Dominican	NA
Julia	2	34	Advanced	Policy Advisor	Single	2	\$92,500.00	Mexican	NA
Justina	2	33	Vocational Training	Medical Assistant	Married	2	\$42,000.00	Mexican	Did not disclose
Kara	4+	35	Advanced	Speech Language Pathologist	Married	2	\$140,000.00	Mexican and White	White

Pseudonym	Gen	Age	Education	Occupation	Marital Status	# of kids	Household Income	Respondents Racial/Ethnic Group	Partner Racial/Ethnic Group
Karina	2	47	Advanced	Manager	Married	2	\$120,000.00	Mexican	Latina/o/x
Karla	3	34	Advanced	Teacher	Married	2	\$135,000.00	Mexican and Italian	White
Kayla	2	35	Some College	Administrative Assistant	Single	1	\$42,000.00	Puerto Rican	NA
Lara	2	47	Some College	SAHM	Divorced	3	\$100,000.00	Peruvian	Latina/o/x
Lidia	4+	24	High School	Receptionist	Domestic Partnership	1	\$100,000.00	Puerto Rican	Latina/o/x
Lupita	3	33	Advanced	PhD Candidate	Married	1	\$136,000.00	White and Mexican	White
Margarita	2	45	Advanced	Staff Scientist	Married	2	\$214,000.00	Argentinian	Argentinian
Mari	2	34	BS	US Probation Office	Domestic Partnership	3	\$116,000.00	Guatemalan	Latina/o/x
Maria	2	45	Advanced	Attorney/SAHM	Married	2	\$450,000.00	Guatemalan	Latina/o/x
Marianna	2	42	Bachelor's	Visual Artist/Teacher	Married	1	\$88,000.00	Mexican	White
Marisela	2	42	Advanced	District Manager	Married	2	\$255,100.00	Mexican	Latina/o/x
Maya	2	43	Advanced	Corporate Therapist	Divorced	1	\$100,000.00	Mexican	NA
Nadia	2	48	Advanced	Researcher	Married	2	\$259,000.00	Mexican	African American/Black and White
Norma	2	38	Advanced	Community Engagement Director	Married	2	\$200,000.00	Dominican and Italian	Latina/o/x
Olivia	2	29	Advanced	Case Aide	Married	1	\$93,000.00	Mexican	Latina/o/x
Paloma	2	25	Bachelor's	Health Education Specialist	Married	1	\$35,000.00	Mexican	Latina/o/x
Peta	2	35	Bachelor's	SAHM	Married	3	\$100,000.00	Brazilian and Italian	White
Sabrina	3	31	Advanced	Researcher	Married	1	\$125,000.00	Mexican	White
Silvia	3	32	Advanced	Program Director, Higher Education	Married	1	\$152,000.00	Mexican	White

Pseudonym	Gen	Age	Education	Occupation	Marital Status	# of kids	Household Income	Respondents Racial/Ethnic Group	Partner Racial/Ethnic Group
Sofia	2	43	Bachelor's	Freelance journalist	Married	3	\$202,500.00	Columbian, Spanish, Jamaican	Asian/Pacific Islander
Soledad	2	30	Bachelor's	High School Teacher	Married	2	\$110,000.00	Puerto Rican	White
Sonia	2	34	Bachelor's	Teacher	Domestic Partnership	1	\$50,000.00	Mexican and White	Latina/o/x
Tatiana	3	39	Advanced	Associate Professor	Married	3	\$196,000.00	Mexican	Latina/o/x
Tonya	2	33	Advanced	Public Engagement Coordinator	Domestic Partnership	1	\$112,000.00	Columbian and Dominican	African American/Black
Valentina	2	44	Advanced	Administration	Divorced	4	\$107,000.00	Mexican	NA
Vanessa	2	35	Some College	Business and Employment Specialist	Married	3	\$95,000.00	Mexican	Latina/o/x
Yasmin	2	33	Bachelor's	SAHM	Married	1	\$100,000.00	Mexican	Latina/o/x
Yolanda	2	36	Some College	Administrator	Domestic Partnership	1	\$96,000.00	Mexican	Latina/o/x

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Latinx Motherhood Study

Respondent Id Number:	Date and Time:
Interview Length:	Location of Interview:
If applicable, follow up interview date	and length

Childhood and Parental Socialization

1. Can you tell me about the family you grew up in?
 - Did you live with both your parents? Were they married? How many siblings did you have? Did you live with other relatives or non-relatives?
 - Did both your parents work-outside of the home? What did they do for a living?
2. Can you tell me about the neighborhood/s you grew up in?
 - What was the racial or ethnic composition? Class composition?
3. Can you tell me what the schools were like that you attended starting in elementary up until your highest level completed?
 - Were they private, public, parochial?
 - Did you attend a school in your immediate neighborhood? If not, where?
 - What was the racial or ethnic composition of the schools you attended?
 - What was the race and/or ethnicity of your friends?
4. What was your overall experience in school? Positive/Negative?
5. How would you characterize or describe your closest friends in high school?
 - What kinds of activities were they involved in?
 - What were the racial/ethnic backgrounds of your closest friends in high school?
6. What kinds of activities, if any, were you involved in while you were a child?
7. How would you describe the way your parents raised you?
8. What was your parents' approach to discipline?
9. When you were growing up, was your family religious?
 - Did you attend church? How often?
 - Tell me about the church you attended. What type of church? Can you describe congregation?
10. Was there anything that your parents tried to instill in you about your identity?

11. What emphasis did your parents place on your racial/ethnic background when you were growing up?
- Do you feel as though they tried to instill a particular racial or ethnic identity in you? How so?
 - In what ways did your parents teach you about your ancestry/ethnic background and history?

Family History

12. When you were growing up did your family ever discuss family background or family history?
- [If yes:] What kind of things did they talk about?
13. Can you tell me the story of you family coming to the U.S. / Has your family always lived in the United States?
- Where, when, why?
14. As a child, do you recall having any experiences that were negatively or positively influenced by your racial or ethnic background? Can you describe one of those experiences?
- Were you ever made to feel like an outsider or foreigner or outsider?
 - Essentially, do you recall experiencing racism or racial bias as a child?

Motherhood and Children's Socialization

15. Tell me about how you became a mother?
16. Were your pregnancies the result of a conscious decision to become a parent?
- How old were you when your first child was born?
 - What was your marital status when you became a mother/learned you were pregnant?
17. Were you working before you got pregnant? After you had your children, did you return to work?
- [If yes:] How did you make the decision to take the amount of time off that you did?
 - How did you make the decision to return to work?
 - [If no:] How did you make the decision not to return to work? Do you plan to return in the future? If so, when and why then?
18. Does anyone help take care of your children?
- [If yes:] Who? Do you pay them?
 - If working, who is the principal childcare provider?
19. Are your children cared for inside or outside of your home?
- By whom? What kinds of care provider do you use? (family day care, etc.)
 - How did you decide on that/those caregiver(s)?
20. Walk me through a typical day for your children?

- [If probing needed: Who does drop off and pick up?]
- [If probing needed: Who does what during the day?]
- [If probing needed: How are household chores divided?]

21. Are you happy with your current childcare/work arrangement? Is this your preferred arrangement?

Child Socialization

22. How would you describe the way you raise your children?

- How does it compare to how you were raised?

23. What are your main concerns in raising your children?

- How do you go about addressing or navigating these?

[IF RESPONDENT HAS SONS AND DAUGHTERS]

24. Are your approaches or concerns the same for your sons and daughters? How are they the same? How are they different?

25. How do your views compare to how your parents thought about raising sons and daughters?

26. Are there any values that you try to instill in your children? What values and how?

27. Is there anything particular that you try to instill in your children's identity? What and how are you instilling those things?

28. Is race or ethnicity an important factor in raising your children? Why or why not?

- What emphasis do you place on ethnic or racial background with your children?
- How do you teach your children about the racial or ethnic background or family history?
- Differences between children or genders?

29. What language do you use with your children?

- Do your children speak a language other than English?
- How did they learn that/those language(s)?

30. Do you think it's important that your children know a language other than English?

- If so, why?

31. When you need parenting advice, where do you seek out advice?

- Mothers, books, internet, friends?

Neighborhood and Schools - Other Sites of Socialization

32. Tell me about the community/neighborhood in which you live?

- Why did you choose this neighborhood?
- What is the racial and ethnic makeup of your neighbors?

- Do you have family who live nearby? If so, who? Was this important in your decision to live here?
 - How would you compare your community/neighborhood to the one in which you grew up?
33. What factors were most important to you in your housing search?
- [Potential Prompts]
- Were housing costs a factor? How so?
 - Was geographic location a factor? How so?
 - Was the quality of schools a factor? How so?
 - Were there family considerations? What were those considerations?
 - Was proximity to work a factor? How so?
 - Was the race/ethnicity of your neighbors a factor in your decision to live here? How so?
 - Were there any areas or places you would choose *not* to live? If so, what areas are those? Why?
34. Tell me about the schools that your children went to starting in elementary up until their highest level completed.
- What was the overall race and ethnic composition of the schools
 - What is the racial and ethnic makeup of your children's friends.
 - What about the class composition?
 - What has been your family's experience with your children's schools?
 - Is the family involved with the school outside of classes and academics?
35. What kinds of activities, if any, are your children involved in? [Sports, clubs, other school-based groups? Any special programs?]
- How did you decide on those activities? Where do they participate in those activities? Why did you choose that location?
 - What is the racial and ethnic makeup of other children who are involved in these activities? What about the class background?

Sense of Belonging

36. Do you feel part of the local community? If so, why? If not, why not?
37. Is your family religious?
- Do you attend church or other place of worship? How often?
 - Tell me about the church or place of worship you attend. What type of church/place of worship? What is the congregation like? [Languages and racial/ethnic composition, etc.]
38. How would you describe your closest friends now? [*Probe*: Racial/ethnic background? Highest levels of education?] How often do you get to see them? Are the kids with you or is it adult time?
39. Have you or your children had any experiences that have been negatively or positively influenced by your racial or ethnic background? Can you describe one of those experiences?
- Have you or your children ever been made to feel like an outsider or foreigner?

- Essentially, has your child told you about an interaction that you interpreted as discriminatory or racist?
40. How do you think your culture, ethnic background, or race has influenced your motherhood and the way you raise your children?
41. Do you feel like you have an adequate support system in motherhood?
- Isolated, has family/friends help?
 - Who do you get advice from? Internet, family, friends, etc.
42. What has been the biggest challenges you've faced in motherhood?
- Both in parenting your children but also in your experience as a mother.

Kin and Transnational Ties

43. How often do your children see your parents or other extended family? How often do they speak with them?
44. If applicable, do you have close relatives still living in your parents' or your home country? Who?
- [If yes:] Do you communicate with your relatives by phone or by e-mail? Who? How often?
45. Has your family visited your home country/your parents' home country? How often have you visited?
- [If yes:] What was the experience like?
 - [If yes:] Did those visits have any impact on you? How so?
 - [If no:] Why have you never been back? Would you like to go? Why?

Race and Ethnic Identities

1. How do you identify your children? Do you recall how you identified your children when you enrolled him/her for school, daycare, or on the census form?
2. How do your children identify themselves?
 - Has this changed with age?
3. Sometimes people think of themselves differently throughout their lifetime. In your case, have you changed the way you think about your or your children's racial or ethnic identity?
 - [IF YES:] Can you explain how and when it's changed? (*Probe about how they identified in elementary school, junior high, high school, college, work, and with friends.*)
4. You said that you identify yourself as _____. Are there times when you think of yourself or present yourself other than as _____?
 - [If yes:] Can you describe when you think of yourself or describe yourself other than as _____?
 - Does this change depending on who you're with?

5. Do people make assumptions about your or your children's racial or ethnic background based on your last name? Can you recall the last time someone commented on it?
6. Do you think that your last name being _____ affects the way you choose to identify yourself and your children?

For Interracially/Interethnically Partnered Respondents with Children

1. You said that you identified your children as _____, why did you choose to identify your children as _____?
2. Are there times when you think of your children or present them other than as _____?
 - [If yes:] Can you describe when you think of your children or describe them other than as _____?
 - Does this change depending on whom you're with?
3. Have your children ever asked about their identity? [If yes:] What did you tell them?
4. Do you tend to see your children as one part X- and one-part Y or more like a blend?
5. Do people make assumptions about your or your children's racial or ethnic background based on their appearance?

Final Question

Is there anything else that I haven't asked about that you feel is important for me to know about how Latinx mothers approach parenting? Are there any questions I haven't asked that you feel would be important for me to ask? **Thank you very much!**

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