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DESIRING A BETTER LIFE: HETERONORMATIVITY, MOBILITY, AND GENERATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS AMONG LATINAS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

SOCIOLOGY
with an emphasis in LATIN AMERICAN AND LATINO STUDIES

by

Michelle Parra

June 2024

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Peter Biehl
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

DESIRING A BETTER LIFE: HETERONORMATIVITY, MOBILITY, AND GENERATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS AMONG LATINAS

by

MICHELLE PARRA

Desiring a Better Life: Heteronormativity, Mobility, and Generational Negotiations Among Latinas examines how heteronormativity (normative gender and sexuality) and undergoing a mobility experience of either migration or higher education shapes Latinas' gender and sexual subjectivities as well as generational conversations of sex, pleasure, and dating among mother-daughter dyads. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 53 college-going daughters and 11 of their migrant mothers, digital and in person ethnographic observations with 7 daughters, and a discourse analysis of 78 Tik-Tok videos utilizing the hashtag "#hotcheetogirl," I offer heteronormativity matrix of domination, a framework rooted in intersectionality, Black feminist thought, and transnational feminist theory, for examining how multiple, historical, context-specific formations intersect to shape the social construction of heteronormativity. As such, my first chapter examines how national U.S. and regional power relations in Los Angeles produce the gender and sexual pathologization of low-income Latinas. The second chapter employs this framework to analyze how these relations rely on and. reproduce several discourses of heteronormativity, including the "hyperfertile" Latina immigrant, "disposable"

immigrant, “chola,” and "hot cheeto girl,” and delineates the implications it has on daughters’ mobility trajectories.

This project also encourages mobility scholars to consider how migratory and educational experience shapes generational gender and sexual formations. I do this in Chapter 3 by utilizing a heteronormativity matrix of domination to delineate how the sexual politic of *uno nunca sabe* (you never know what bad thing(s) can happen) that migrant mothers draw on to teach their daughters about sex reflects how mothers’ migratory journeys and first-hand experiences with heteronormativity and other structural inequalities in Latin America and the U.S., shape Latina daughters’ college-going experiences and subjectivities. In Chapter 4, I employ my theoretical framework to examine how daughters’ new desires and pleasures as a result of going to college provide further insights into the various axes of power shaping heteronormativity. Similar to their mothers, daughters’ mobility experience and discourses of heteronormativity inform the ways in which they talk to their mothers about sex. Many daughters encourage their mothers to explore new desires and sexual pleasures. Overall, this project contributes to Sociology, Sexualities, Gender Studies, and Feminist Studies as it reveals that gender and sexuality are critical sites for resisting and reproducing intersecting inequalities, such as poverty, racism, and nation-making projects like settler-colonialism and imperialism.

For my mami and sister. For niñas pobres, "cholas," "ghetto," "hood," and "hot cheeto girls" around the world and across lifetimes. May we continue to desire and create a better life for ourselves and each other.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people and institutional resources have helped me navigate applying to and finishing graduate school. Among these resources is the McNair Scholars Program at my alma mater, The University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). Thanks to this program, I had the opportunity to learn about and conduct my own research. As a first-generation Latina student, the concept of research or graduate school was unheard of to me. The McNair Scholars Program exposed me to academia and provided me with institutional support to apply to graduate school. During my undergraduate studies, I benefitted greatly from the mentorship of Beth Schneider, who supported my passion for doing sexualities research and worked endlessly to support all of the McNair Scholars in her role as program Director. Many thanks to the additional McNair Scholar staff, including Holly Rose, Monique Limon, and Elen Broidy, who also helped me apply to graduate school. Thank you to my McNair Scholar mentor, Leila J. Rupp, who oversaw several of my undergraduate research projects, exposed me to feminist research, and assigned the most interesting readings in her undergraduate courses. While it has been a decade, I still have and refer back to Leila's course reader when selecting readings to teach in my own courses.

Through the McNair Scholars Program, I learned about and applied to the Summer Research Opportunities Program at the University of Illinois at Chicago. That summer, I received a lot of support from Director Allen Bryson, my graduate mentor Ramona, and my cohort of peers. I have also particularly benefited from the

decade-long friendship of Jasmine Vargas-Patron, who I met through SROP. Cheers to witnessing each other through various stages of our academic careers.

The summer of 2014 also blessed me with the mentorship of Lorena Garcia. Meeting Lorena and encountering her work changed my life in many ways. Reading *Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself* was one of the first times I saw myself reflected in academic writing. I can recall the excitement in my 21-year-old body when I received the news that I had been admitted to work with Lorena at SROP. That summer, Lorena exposed me to the world of Latinx Sexualities—and took me under her wing since then. By writing letters of recommendation, networking me, providing me guidance on all components of my dissertation, and assisting me during the job market process, Lorena has been instrumental in shaping the kind of intellectual scholar and mentor that I am. People who encounter my work for the first time often note that my research reminds them of Lorena's work—perhaps the best academic compliment I have ever received.

Before enrolling at The University of California, Santa Cruz, I was lucky to complete a Master's in the Department of Sociology and Sexuality Studies at San Francisco State University (SFSU). Here, I met Jessica Fields, another core feminist mentor who taught me how to take risks in my writing, exposed me to feminist and queer methods, and pushed me to believe in my voice and writing. I also learned how to engage in collaborative research and the importance of active learning by witnessing Jessica Fields interact with students in and outside the classroom. Her students are so lucky to have her as a teacher!

A huge thank you to Belinda Reyes, who also shaped my research, and welcomed me into the Ethnic Studies College when I struggled to find community. Marla Ramirez, Andreana Clay, Clare Sears, Alexis Martinez, Amy Suoeshi, and Darius Bost were all SFSU faculty who believed in my work and provided me with guidance as I transitioned to my doctoral program. While at SFSU, I benefited from the CSU Sally Casanova Pre-doctoral Fellowship, which provided me with economic support to apply to doctoral programs. Before starting my doctoral studies, I also received feminist mentorship from Ranita Ray, who, to this day, continues to support my academic trajectory.

My time at The University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) was divinely guided and protected. I met everyone that I needed to craft and conduct my dream project, including my PhD homegirls. Roxanna Villalobos and I instantly connected on admit day, and since then, we have supported each other during each step of graduate school. From spending hours helping each other complete our statistics homework, traveling together to conferences, workshopping papers, talking for hours about research on gender, drawing parallels between our girlhoods in urban and rural contexts, and debriefing on data collection, all the intellectual support and love I have received from Roxanna has motivated me to complete this study. Theresa Hice-Fromille has provided me with so much intellectual stimulation and pedological advice these past seven years. Her love for space/place, girlhood studies, and Black feminist thought continuously inspired me to think about my own research. A huge thank you to Karla Reyes for gifting me an abundant amount of emotional support,

often picking up my spirit when I could not seem to get it off the ground. Additionally, many thanks to Karina Ruiz for her support and advice on multiple aspects of graduate school throughout the past years.

Many other graduate students at UCSC (some of who are now Doctors!) also provided me with friendship, supported my research, and cheered me on as I navigated my doctoral studies. Among these kind souls are Rafael Franco, Dennis Browe, Christine Rosales, Alycia Ellington, Ankit Sharma, Randy Villegas, Anthony Bencomo, Katherine Quinteros, Erica Zurawaski, Andrew Takimoto, Sarah Mason, Kaylee-Allyssa Roberts Larson, Valeria J. Alonso Blanco, and Bree Booth.

Women of color spaces served as sacred spaces for me to form intimate friendships that sustained my spirit during my doctoral studies. *Mil gracias* to Brenda Gutierrez, Paulette Garcia, and Azucena Lucatero for creating the Women of Color Community Group. Here, I also made many good memories with Lizzet Gonzalez, Anny Mongollón, Arcelia Hermozillo Ruis, Mikayla Wilson, and Melanie Prieto. I am incredibly thankful for The Colibri Circle that Betania Santos created, which helped me confront and work through my insecurities about writing.

Several faculty and staff at UCSC also supported me in different capacities. A huge thank you to Rebecca London, James Doucet-Battle, and Juan Pedroza for supporting my dissertation work and professional development. Also, many thanks to Jessica Lawrence and Colleen Stone for all the logistical help coordinating events and processing my paperwork. Lorato Anderson's presence and equity work have significantly impacted UCSC grads, including myself. Thank you to Lorato for

supporting our Women of Color Graduate Group. Also, I extend deep gratitude to the Latin American and Latino Studies Department for being my second departmental home at UCSC.

Sylvanna Falcón's feminist mentorship, especially her intellectual training on women of color feminisms, pushed me to produce theorization that I did not know I was capable of advancing. From introducing me to the work of Chandra Mohanty, providing me with substantial feedback on my qualifying exams, and advising me on multiple professional development topics, Sylvanna always ensured that I felt supported as a junior scholar of color.

The universe also blessed me with Jessica Taft's mentorship. Jessica stood by me rejection after rejection, reminding me not to give up—gently supporting and pushing me to advance my work. Her theoretical and methodological training on critical girlhood studies, feminist methodology, and gender shaped me into the feminist scholar I am. She also spent countless hours writing me letters of recommendation, meticulously reviewing all of my work, and processing my feelings when things (often) went array. Additionally, thank you to Jessica for all her work to advance equity at UCSC—always finding ways to improve the professional development of marginalized graduate students. Jessica is a true gem and gift at UCSC, and I am so lucky to have been her student. Being part of and extending her feminist lineage is a privilege.

Academics often describe Julie Bettie as a pioneer in feminist sociology for turning class theory on its head. As her student, Julie taught me to do the same, to

trace theoretical lineages and debates in order to unsituate the known. I am thankful for her intellectual training as well as emotional support over the past years. I am also extremely grateful for her support in navigating the job market. She often reminded me of the importance and novelty of my sexualities research during moments of doubt. It was a true pleasure to have been her student and to extend her intellectual brilliance.

People often describe the job market process as traumatizing and humiliating. I was lucky to enter this career stage in a job market group, with four brilliant scholars of color—all hood babies doing novel work on youth and/or women of color. At every step of the job market process, Katherine Maldonado Fabela, Jonathan Ibarra, Uriel Serrano, and Brian Cabral held space for me, tending and uplifting my spirit. I'm so thankful for having gained four life-long colleagues through this process. I can't wait to see how they each transform the world.

I am fortunate to have the mentorship of other feminist sociologists as I navigated the job market. Angela Jones, Ghassan Moussawi, LaToya Council, and Pallavi Banerjee always reminded me of the importance of my research and made themselves available for professional advice.

Many students also assisted and shaped this research study. Among these brilliant students are Izzy Zazueta, Saúl Ordaz, Lizeth Calderon, Daniela Obeso, Leslie Marquez, Nina Franz, Sharis Hsu, Vishnnu Rajaram, Reina Juarez, Alexus Lee, Stella Sun, and Kimberly Roa. Thanks so much to these students for their meticulous help in data collection and analysis.

Thank you to my little dog, Rava, who has been by my side these past seven years. Often reminding me to take breaks, enjoy basking in the sun, and that life really is better when you stop to smell the flowers. Without the support of Nate, I could not have completed my doctoral training. His endless home-cooked meals and kind soul comforted me at every stage of my doctoral program. Nate's support is forever imprinted in me.

One of my first memories in this lifetime is of me, laying in between my *mami* and sister as they consoled me after falling down a flight of stairs, leading me to scrape half of my face. It was one of the first moments I felt tender care and love in its purest forms. Both have taught me many feminist values, including how to support and value connections with girls and women, to reject oppression, and to envision a better life for myself. They have been my biggest supporters in all stages of my mobility trajectory—even when it meant moving to a different geographical location from them. They are my first feminist teachers, and their feminist critiques of inequality are reflected in this research.

Lastly, I am forever grateful to the daughters and mothers in this study—who trusted me with intimate details of their lives. Each of them is resilient in shared and unique ways. Learning about the ways in which daughters and mothers resisted heteronormativity has been a healing journey for me; not only validating my lived experiences, but also allowing me to view my mother from a new and more nuanced vantage point. Bearing witness to the ways in which Latina daughters and migrant mothers claimed desire and pleasure across "ghettos" in Los Angeles also prompted

me to confront memories and parts of my past that I had buried. Now, thanks to the brave daughters and mothers in this study, I enter the next stage of my academic career proud of my roots and prepared to create a better life for *niñas pobres*, “cholas,” “ghetto,” “hood,” and “hot cheeto girls.”

INTRODUCTION

Theorizing Heteronormativity Intergenerationally From The Flesh

Perhaps the first time I was impacted by discourses of heteronormativity (or normative gender and sexuality) occurred before I was even born, when I was in my Mexican immigrant mother's womb in a nation that deemed me, a soon to be U.S. citizen, an "anchor baby."[1] While I have no recollection of how my mother's flesh and body was impacted by these discourses during her pregnancy, I learned through other experiences that my mother was deemed nonheteronormative. Much of these instances consisted of 8-15 year old me accompanying my mother to welfare appointments in Los Angeles where I served as a translator. For several years, I bore witness to the ways in which such state institution treated her as a "welfare queen." [2] From having to be fingerprinted to answering various questions about her sexual life, these instances made me conscious that society criminalized the reproductive capabilities of low-income women.

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[1] "Anchor baby" is a derogatory term circulates amongst U.S. politicians, the media, and the general public used to refer to U.S. citizen children who are born to undocumented parents. Under the guise of this discourses undocumented immigrants are thought of conceiving children as way of obtaining citizenship and obtaining public services—which they will exploit. This narrative depicts immigrant women of color as hypersexual through their hyperfertility (Escobar 2016; Parra 2023).

[2] The "welfare queen" narrative originally pathologized low-income African American women who were single mothers and utilized social services to raise their children by depicting them as "bad mothers" who exploit the welfare system. The "welfare mother's" excessive sexuality is evident in her inability to refrain from having children she cannot afford to raise. As demographical shifts occurred in the U.S. and an increasing amount of Latina immigrants began to use social services as well, the discourse of the "welfare queen" also included low-income women from other racial backgrounds (Foster 2017; Hill Collins 2004).

A few years later, as a teenager, who attended public schools in several "ghettos" within Central Los Angeles, I became aware of the ways in which institutions and actors assumed that I was part of the urban underclass, understood as people of color living in low-income urban areas who possess deviant values, like a lack of motivation for school, have uncontrollable sexual urges, and are allegedly prone to engaging in criminal activities (Mingione 2008). I dressed like a chola up until middle school when a white male staff accused me of stripping simply for standing on a bleacher to remove my oversized (size XL) white hoodie. Without even explaining what he was accusing me of or having an opportunity to speak my truth, he gave me a week of detention. As a low-income girl who understood college as my sole opportunity out of poverty, a way to achieve the economic independence needed to leave an abusive relationship, and the only way I could avoid the hardships that come from being a low-income parent, I began to modify my behaviors; leaving behind chola aesthetics to secure access to higher education.

After gaining access to The University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), partly due to my modification of aesthetics, I returned to publicly celebrating my roots: dressing in "chola," or what could also be considered "hot cheeto girl" fashion in this moment. Attending UCSB opened up other forms of sexual agency for me as well. Through courses and social networks, I gained access to a plethora of knowledge about gender and sexuality—and for the first time I saw myself worthy of having sexual desires.

Eagerly, I would return home to Los Angeles, to share this new information with my mother—as I desperately yearned for my mother to explore new desires and pleasures. While my mother was receptive to some information, she did not engage with other topics, leaving me confused as I always understood her to have feminist values, including her advocacy of girls and women to be self-reliant to ensure they never become trapped in a patriarchal relationships like was for several years. "How could my mother not be open to these views?" I thought to myself. It wasn't until I read the work of the canonical Gloria González-López (2003), which examined how migratory experiences inform parents' sexual politics and the ways in which they teach their daughters about sex, that a lightbulb went off in my head. My mother's mobility trajectory, of migrating, alongside discourses of heteronormativity, like being marked as a "welfare queen," shaped her sexual politics and how she raised me. Similarly, my own mobility experience of going to college and how I contended with pathologizing depictions of Latinas' sexualities shaped my subjectivity and how I attempted to talk to her about sex and pleasure. It is by placing the experiences of my Mexican immigrant mother in conversation with my own life as an upwardly mobile college-going daughter that this project was empirically and theoretically conceived.

In sharing how this project came to fruition, I have begun alluding to the three theoretical aims of this project. The first includes moving beyond Eurocentric definitions of heteronormativity that utilize sexual orientation as the only basis for understanding sexual oppression. Under such definitions the sexual oppression that my mother, I, and the Latina daughter-mother dyads in this study underwent would be

rendered unintelligible. As I will show in this book, intersecting structures of power, like race/ethnicity, class, citizenship, and empire produce discourses of heteronormativity. The second goal of this book is to document how heteronormativity is a co-constitutive element of mobility experiences of migration and higher education. In this project, co-constitutive refers to the ways in which discourses of heteronormativity shape desire for, access to, and how someone experiences going to college and migrating. It also refers to the ways in which undergoing a mobility experience can embed subjects in power relations shaping whether they are socially constructed as nonheteronormative and the ways in which they challenge or reproduce heteronormativity as a result of their mobility trajectories. Lastly, this study captures how mobility experiences and discourses of heteronormativity inform how subjects negotiate their own gender and sexual subjectivities and have generational conversations of sex and pleasure.

What you have in your hands is a story of mediated desire. A study capturing how heteronormativity, along with other structural conditions, shape access to and what Latina mothers and daughters desire for themselves and each other. It is a story that places their desires of living a life free of poverty, having access to (sex) education, possessing bodily autonomy, living in a society where Latinas are not reduced to hypersexual or desexual objects of labor, and of dressing as one pleases without institutions and actors making assumptions about their sexualities and intellectual capabilities, as entry points into understanding what intersecting systems of oppression shape the formation of heteronormativity. In simple sociological terms,

it is a story about structure and agency—one that I have chosen to tell from a feminist of color standpoint.

Heteronormativity Matrix of Domination: A Project of Epistemological Disobedience

Sociologists, queer theorists, and sexuality scholars often use the concept of heteronormativity to theorize sexual oppression. Michael Warner first defined heteronormativity as "a hegemonic system of norms, discourses, and practices that construct heterosexuality as natural and superior to all other expressions of sexuality" (Warner 1993: 1). Similarly, sociologist Karin Martin conceptualized heteronormativity as "the mundane, everyday ways that heterosexuality is privileged and taken for granted as normal and natural. Heteronormativity includes the institutions, practices, and norms that support heterosexuality (especially a particular form of heterosexuality—monogamous and reproductive) and subjugate other forms of sexuality, especially homosexuality" (2009: 190). Although these definitions of heteronormativity account for the ways in which queer subjects face institutionalized oppression based on their sexual orientation, they fail to capture how other axes of power have historically shaped U.S. gender and sexual hierarchies.

This is in part due to the ways in which queer theorists rely on, even when critiquing, Eurocentric feminist approaches to gender and sexual inequality. For instance, Warner and Martin build on Judith Butler's "heterosexual matrix," defined as a

> grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, gender, and desires are naturalized…a hegemonic discursive/epistemological model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is appositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality (1990: 151).

While this framework makes important theoretical contributions—drawing attention to the ways in which a sex-gender-sexual orientation system normalizes heterosexuality, it fails to capture how nation-building projects have shaped this matrix and other social forces that make bodies unintelligible.

Accounting for the role of settler-colonialism, women of color feminisms provide an alternate, intersectional understanding of the ways in which race/ethnicity, class, citizenship and other social forces shape gender and sexual hierarchies in the U.S. Building on intersectional approaches to gender and sexuality, the canonical Patricia Hill Collins, offers Sociologists an analytical framework for understanding how "intersecting oppression originate, develop, and are contained" across time periods and locations through her matrix of domination framework (2000, 228). By analyzing dominant depictions of Black women, such as the "jezebel" and "mammy," which either hypersexual or reduce them to desexual objects for capitalist wealth production, Collins delineates how colonialism and the institution of slavery fused race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and nation to socially construct Black women as nonnormative. Collins also draws attention to contemporary forces and institutions, like the welfare system, housing segregation, media, and U.S. policies, which help uphold pathologizing depictions of Black women's sexuality via the "welfare queen" narrative.

In a similar vein, transnational feminists have critiqued Eurocentric feminism for homogenizing womanhood, often privileging the experiences of white, middle-class, heterosexual, and cisgender women who are citizens living in the Global North. As a result of centering the experiences of a particular group of women, a universal patriarchal system is imagined and utilized to theorize women's gender and sexual oppression (Mohanty 1988). Transnational feminists contend that an analysis of gender and sexuality must always be context specific to the similar and divergent ways that social forces intersect to shape gender and sexual hierarchies (Alexander 2006; Falcon 2001).

Building on various women of color feminisms, queer of color critique scholars have also challenged Eurocentric definitions of heteronormativity. For instance, in her pivotal essay, Cathy Cohen argued that defining heteronormativity based on a heterosexual/queer dichotomy negates to account for the ways in which interlocking systems of oppression have shaped the formation of racialized figures, like that of the "welfare queen," which pathologize low-income, Black women's heterosexuality (Cohen 1997). Echoing Cohen, Roderick Ferguson links the formation of heteronormativity to the capitalist state and nation-building projects—urging Sociologists to consider how economic and racial projects are accomplished through the construction of sexual difference (or the sexual other) (2004). By tracing how the U.S. state has advanced capitalist wealth accumulation via the pathologization of Black sexuality across time periods, Ferguson exhibited that normative sexuality has always been co-constitutive of racial, class, and state

formations. Under a queer of color critique framework, heteronormativity is constitutive of various axes of power, promoting a particular form of heterosexuality; one that upholds whiteness, cis-gendered middle-upper class femininity and masculinity, and U.S. patriotism, which is necessary for reproducing the settler-colonial state. I employ this definition of heteronormativity in this project.

In this project, I build on intersectionality, Black feminist thought, transnational feminism, and queer of color critique to challenge Eurocentric definitions of heteronormativity through the framework that I call heteronormativity matrix of domination. This is a framework for examining how multiple, historical, and specific formations at the national and regional level intersect to shape and maintain the social construction of heteronormativity. At its core, heteronormativity matrix of domination is a project of epistemological disobedience (Mignolo 2009), a way of unsituating the known, in this case being Eurocentric definitions of heteronormativity. It is a framework for naming how context specific formations, especially those related to empire and nation-building, intersect to produce and maintain heteronormativity. The naming of this framework also contributes to the unsettling of Eurocentric epistemologies that have deeply shaped the discipline of Sociology as it intentionally situates itself in woman of color feminist frameworks via Collins' matrix of domination.

My entry point into studying how national and regional forces shape and maintain heteronormativity in the U.S. is through an examinations of Latinas' mobility experiences of migration and higher education. Existing research on these

mobility experiences indicates that gender and sexuality are social forces informing desire for and access to either mobility trajectory. Additionally, both sets of literature reveal that undergoing a mobility experience can result in gender and sexual changes for a person (Acosta 2013; Bogle 2020; Carrillo 2020; Rupp and Taylor 2010). Yet not much is known about how discourses of heteronormativity are shaping desire for and experiences of migration and higher education is similar and divergent ways. I will now review literature on migration and education to explicate how accounting for the role of heteronormativity in these mobility experiences deepens our understanding of this social force and the ways in which it is shaping migratory and college-going experiences, gender and sexual formations, and generational negotiations of sex.

Mobility

In Sociology, mobility often refers to social mobility, understood as movement up or down a socio-economic hierarchy. People often pursue a better socio-economic life by seeking formal education and/or immigrating (Rao 2010). New approaches to mobility studies have increasingly recognized that gender, sexuality, and race are axes of power that intertwine with poverty, fueling a person's motive for seeking migration or higher education. Thus, pursuing mobility can be reflective of a person's desire to obtain a better life for themselves, one free of the gender, sexual, economic, and racial oppressions they undergo. Yet, not much research has examined how normative gender and sexuality, or heteronormativity, is a co-constitutive element of these mobility experiences.

Education and Heteronormativity

Demographical information indicates that there is an increasing number of Latinas in higher education, with the amount of 18-24 year old Latinas enrolled in four-year universities being 42 in 2020 (National Center for Education Statistics 2022). However, obtaining college access may be difficult for Latinas and other low-income girls of color. As scholars note, educational institutions in the US were built by and for white-settler colonial men (Cariaga 2019; Lamb, Roberts, and Plocha 2016). Hence, the ideological architecture underpinning schools constructs the white male body as synonymous with rationality and intellect, framing non-white bodies as uncivilized and deviant via gender and sexualized discourses (Brown 2013; Hyams 2000; Morris 2016).

For instance, girls are disciplined in educational settings when they refuse to uphold heteronormativity through their gender expressions. This is because society and teachers evaluate academic success via white femininity and heterosexuality (Bettie 2000; Jones 2010; López and Chesney-Lind 2014; Morris 2016), which is measured by behavioral characteristics, such as being "warm, nurturing, compassionate, passive, and receptive" (Caraves 2018) and through style of dress. Teachers and staff often view girls who do not uphold white middle-class femininity through their aesthetics as "bad girls," who are unintelligent and hypersexual (Lamb et al. 2016; Ray 2022a). For instance, teachers and administration rely on discourses of "ghetto" or "ratchet," which correlate modes of dress, speech, and comportment

viewed as “too ethnic” and low-class with sexual impropriety, to justify the disciplining of Black girls (Jones 2010; Morris 2016). As Jessica Taft argues, hierarchies to differentiate girls limits their political potential and overall sense of agency as gender subjects (2014).

Building on several fields of scholarship, this book provides an empirical account of the ways in which US state officials, institutions, and people rely on discourses of heteronormativity to correlate styles of dress emerging from the “ghetto,” or a low-income, ethnic, urban community, as visual markers of immoral sexuality, contributing to a “good” and “bad” girl hierarchy. Through an analysis of “ghetto girl,” “chola,” and “hot cheeto girl” discourses, I show how moral panics over the urban underclass and "The Urban Girl" primarily pathologized Black girls’ sexualities and have now come to demarcate the sexualities of urban, low-income non-Black Latina girls as dangerous. I also shed light on Latina daughters' awareness of these discourses and the strategic ways they refute these depictions to gain access to higher education. In doing so, I delineate how heteronormativity is a co-constitutive element of college-going experiences.

Little is known about what occurs to the gender and sexual subjectivities of college-going Latinas once they become upwardly mobile. Much of the research examining how college is shaping sexual formations does so through an investigation of women’s engagement in hookup culture, or casual sexual activity ranging from kissing to intercourse (Armstrong, England, and Fogarty 2012; Bogle 2020; Ronen 2010). Although double standards and homophobia still constrain women’s activities,

within this cultural setting, women have more sexual agency because they can engage in casual sexual activity and explore their same-sex desires (Rupp and Taylor 2013). College coursework can also facilitate new freedoms for women, exposing them to feminist theories that challenge patriarchal norms (Hurtado 2003). Research has also indicated that becoming upwardly mobile shapes heterosexual Latinas' romantic desires as they ideally wish to date someone who is college-educated and of the same racial/ethnic identity (Muro and Martinez 2016). Lastly, Lorena Garcia and I have argued that as a result of going to college, economically marginalized Latinas gain access to sex-positive discourses, causing a shift in their subjectivities (Parra and Garcia 2023). Latinas view themselves as worthy of having sexual pleasures, which is particularly noteworthy since they previously understood their sexualities as dangerous.

While illuminating, this research has not explicitly examined how discourses of heteronormativity shape Latinas' access to or desire to obtain a college degree. It is also unknown whether undergoing such mobility experience informs how Latinas contend with discourses of heteronormativity. Noting this unexplored phenomenon, *Desiring a Better Life* investigates how heteronormativity informs Latinas' college experiences and shifting subjectivities.

Migration and Heteronormativity

Feminist scholars were among the first to challenge traditional approaches in immigration studies, assuming that women's only motivation for moving to a new

national context was for family reunification purposes. Scholars such as Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2000), Sherri Grasmuck and Patricia Pessar (1991), and Cecilia Menjívar (1999) not only showed that gender shapes subjects' desires for and access to migration, but also found that relocating to a new context can reconfigure gender inequality in women's lives.

Acknowledging the gap in immigration research, sexualities scholars have produced scholarship examining how sexuality shapes transnational migration patterns. Among the first to do so was the late Lionel Cantú, via his queer political economy of migration framework. Similarly, Héctor Carrillo's concept of sexual migration shed light on the ways in which sexual desires and inequality shape desire for relocating to a new context (Cantú 2009). Much of the research on sexual migration has primarily focused on understanding the migratory experiences of homosexual men, including how living in a new location embeds men in power hierarchies which often racialize and hypersexualize them (Del Aguila 2013; Epstein and Carrillo 2014; Manalansan IV 2003; Thing 2010). Moreover, as a result of moving to a new context, people can become undocumented, which can subject them to new forms of oppression—including those related to sexuality.

Although there is not much sexual migration research on Latinas, some scholars have examined how living and contending with intersecting inequalities and new social and cultural forces in the United States informs women's subjectivities. For example, U.S. racial hierarchies racialize women from the Global South, framing them as "hypersexual" (Acosta 2013). Moreover, moving to some U.S. urban

locations can facilitate new social networks and increase access to sexual health resources, which can help Latinx immigrants learn new information about sexual health (González-López 2005). Research has also found that spatial distance from family can allow women to engage in transgressive gender and sexual behaviors without worrying about facing familial scrutiny (Castañeda and Zavella 2003). Lastly, as a result of migrating, women also become embedded in new national and regional political economies where they can earn a wage, which they use as leverage in their romantic heterosexual partnerships to create more egalitarian conditions (Hirsch 1999). However, these jobs are often exploitive, often relegating them to do gendered labor, such as that of being a domestic or nanny.

From these existing bodies of work, we glean that perhaps discourses of heteronormativity are informing the sexual experiences of Latinx immigrants since their sexualities become marked as excessive and deviant as a result of being racialized. *Desiring a Better Life* contributes to the growing research examining the intersection of migration, gender, and sexuality by bringing into relevance the role of heteronormativity in Latinas immigrants' negotiations of their sexualities. In doing so, it deepens our understanding of the ways in which gender and sexuality are co-constitutive elements of migratory experiences.

Mobility and Generational Negotiations of Sex

The research on women's sexual migration reveals that undergoing a migratory experience can inform generational negotiations of sex among family

members. Much of this work has examined how a woman's experience of migrating shapes how she raises her children, particularly her daughter(s). For instance, although Latina mothers might have primarily defined sexual danger as engaging in premarital sex, exposure to U.S. sexual politics, and first-hand experiences with oppression, like having to deal with *machista* husbands, being forced to marry due to an unplanned pregnancy, or feeling guilty for engaging in sexual activity, results in mothers' teaching sexual moderation and autonomy to their daughters rather than abstinence (González-López 2005). Mothers also turn to policing their daughter's sexualities as a strategy for ensuring that they focus on their educational studies, which they imagine will ensure they become upwardly mobile, economically independent women. Motherhood, then, becomes an opportunity for women to challenge oppressive systems they contended with as girls and women—and to teach their daughters to desire possibilities and lives that were denied to them.

How daughters teach their mothers to resist oppressive conditions, especially those related to gender and sexuality, mostly remains unexplored. In her study of adolescent Latinas, Jennifer Ayala found that daughters encouraged their divorced mothers to date—even if other societal members perceived this behavior as shameful (Ayala 2020). Aida Hurtado also sheds light on the ways in which going to college exposes Latinas to feminist frameworks that renounce patriarchal conditions. Daughters utilize their new approaches to womanhood and egalitarian heterosexual relationships to help their mothers leave abusive relationships (Hurtado 2003).

From these existing studies, we glean that generational negotiations among daughters and mothers are a bi-directional process and that mobility experiences of migration and higher education inform the conversations they have about sexuality. This study contributes to research on generational negotiations amongst mothers-daughters by taking into consideration how discourses of heteronormativity, such as that of the "hyperfertile Latina," "welfare queen," "ghetto girl," "chola," and "hot cheeto girl," inform the ways in which mothers and daughters talk to each other about sex, dating, womanhood, and pleasure.

Research Questions and Theoretical Contributions

To understand the entanglement of heteronormativity, mobility, and generational negotiations of sex, desire, and pleasure, I asked the following questions in this study: How do national and regional power relations shape the social construction of heteronormativity? How is heteronormativity a co-constitutive element of mobility experiences of migration and higher education? In what ways does heteronormativity impact how Latinas negotiate their own gender and sexual subjectivities as well as generational conversation of sex, desire, and pleasure?

I utilize my framework of heteronormativity matrix of domination to answer these questions and reconceptualize power relations through a context specific and intersectional lens. As such, other researchers can use this framework to examine how national and regional formations in other contexts shape the formation of heteronormativity. By showing that heteronormativity shapes experiences of

education and migration, this study encourages mobility scholars to account for the role of gender and sexuality when examining class formations. Additionally, this project moves beyond Eurocentric narratives of migration and higher education that document the impacts of mobility experiences at the individual level by considering how these experiences shape conversations about sex across generations. Lastly, it disrupts cultural narratives blaming Latinx culture as the primary factor causing gender and sexual oppression within this ethnic community by illustrating that heteronormativity and other intersecting structural forces impact how Latinas negotiate their sexual politics.

Methodology

This project used three methods to produce triangulation, garnering a deeper understanding of the ways in which heteronormativity, mobility experiences, and generational negotiations inform each other. When I first conceived this study, I anticipated conducting two methods: semi-structured interviews with Latina college-going daughters and their mothers, as well as an in-person ethnography of college-going daughters. The COVID-19 pandemic put many academics, including myself, in a furry state regarding in-person data collection. A faculty mentor and graduate student at the time recommended that I look into conducting a digital ethnography, especially since I planned to utilize daughters' gender expressions as cultural practices providing insights into the formation of heteronormativity. Broadly defined, a digital ethnography can entail conducting an ethnography of a digital space or

utilizing digital methods to enhance ethnographic observations of a cultural practice (Born and Haworth 2017). In this study, I used the latter form of digital ethnography to examine the cultural practice of forging aesthetics.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 53 college-going Latinas between December 2021 and February 2023. Initially, the college-going Latinas must have met the following requirements: be first-generation college students who currently attended San Francisco State University (SFSU) or The University of California, Davis (UCD), called Los Angeles home, and had a Latina migrant mother who lived in Los Angeles for at least 10 years. I began recruiting participants from these two universities, SFSU and UCD, since I was living in Northern California at the time, and I anticipated conducting in-person interviews. However, after distributing my flyer to campus organizations and my social networks in Los Angeles for three months, I still experienced difficulty recruiting Latinas who met these requirements. Many of my friends would respond to my email or text with something like, "All the Latinas I know, went to college closer to home." Recognizing my error and assumption that there were many Latinas from Los Angeles across college campuses in California, I took my friends' advice and added a third university closer to Los Angeles, The University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). Within a week, I was flooded with emails from UCSB students who met my requirements. Still wanting to interview Latinas who moved away further from home, I expanded my requirements, opening my study to alumna. Thus, the final criteria college-going daughters must have met included being first-generation college students

who currently or previously enrolled at San Francisco State University (SFSU), The University of California, Davis (UCD), or The University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), called Los Angeles home, and had a Latina migrant mother who lived in Los Angeles for at least 10 years.

Most of the college-going daughters in this study were of Mexican or Salvadorian descent, between the ages of 18-33. Although the college-going Latinas in this study possessed various skin tones, phenotypes, and hair textures, none identified as AfroLatina or Black because they felt that family members could not trace their lineage to a particular person of African descent. The majority identified as Brown Latinas, with two identifying as Indigenous Latinas and three others as white Latinas. Their sexual orientations varied and included: queer, questioning, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, fluid, and heterosexual.

With the daughters' help, I also recruited 11 of their migrant Latina mothers to interview. The recruitment of mothers first consisted of me explaining to daughters that I was interested in examining how migration and college informed generational negotiation of sex among mothers and daughters. Before starting the interview, I shared a flyer in Spanish or English with the daughters, which they shared with their mothers. Most daughters generously agreed to tell their mothers about the study. When a daughter told me that their mother was interested, I would call the mother to arrange an interview, or the daughter would set up a date and location for me to interview her mother. Given my family background, I knew that many mothers would not be tech savvy, and they would most likely rely on daughters to set up

interviews. Half of the interviews with mothers occurred over phone calls, and the other half were in person when I was in Los Angeles. Nine interviews were conducted in Spanish, and the other two in Spanglish. The mothers I had the honor of speaking with were between the ages of 50 and 65, low-income, and primarily of Mexican and Salvadorian descent, having migrated to the United States between the 1980s and 1990s. Some were single mothers, and others were partners with men.

After completing a large portion of interviews with daughters, I selected seven girls to conduct digital ethnographic observations. My use of digital ethnography consisted of giving participants seven to eight prompts, which they answered by taking pictures of their aesthetics. Some questions included, "Tell me about a time you had to compromise your sense of style? What do people in your college town/city typically wear? What do/did you usually wear in your college town/city and what do you think people thought of your outfits?" Participants and I met to discuss their photos over the course of four to nine months. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, I met with four daughters primarily online and with the other three online and in person once COVID restrictions were lifted. Thus, my ethnography eventually became hybrid—as I began to record my interactions with these daughters when we hung out in various parts of California.

Part of what is tricky about studying upwardly mobile people is that their socioeconomic mobility trajectories are often accompanied by spatial mobility or internal migration. For instance, while all daughters called Los Angeles home, some had not returned to this urban metropolis after graduating. Two girls, one an SFSU

alumna and another a UCD alumna, were working professionals in San Francisco. Another girl stayed in Santa Barbara as a working professional and would visit home a few times a year. Two daughters were also working professionals and had returned home after earning their college degrees. Only one daughter who partook in the ethnography was currently in college, living in a UCSB dorm. Most of the in-person observations I conducted were with 3 participants: the two who lived in San Francisco as I was residing in this location during data collection and another daughter in Los Angeles when I returned for breaks.

From the emerging ethnographic data, I began to notice that racialized, urban, working-class femininity and masculinity that I anticipated daughters to perform since they were from Los Angeles were almost absent in how Latinas dressed. They overwhelmingly reported dressing masculine, basic, androgynous, plain, or preppy. Regardless of their style, it became apparent that the modes of dress I anticipated them to perform were missing. I began to grow weary as I had expected documenting how urban Latinas challenged heteronormativity through these gender performances. As I started ethnographic observations with younger millennials and Generation Z girls, I soon learned that the lack of these aesthetics also provided insights as to how heteronormativity was impacting their mobility trajectories. These girls noted that they avoided these aesthetics because they did not want teachers and school staff to perceive them as a "hot cheeto girl" or "chola." Having not heard the term "hot cheeto girl" before, a participant recommended that I look at TikTok videos to learn more information. Following Natalie's recommendation, I opened my TikTok

account and searched for “hot cheeto girl” videos. I quickly realized that these were exactly the aesthetics I sought to document since I understood from personal experiences that these modes of dress are conflated with hypersexuality and unintelligence. Thus, the emergence of this figure led me to conduct a discourse analysis of 78 TikTok videos using the hashtag #hot cheeto girl or “hot cheeto girl” in the video description. These videos were collected between June 2022-October 2023.

I transcribed most interview and ethnographic data in software systems like Otter.ai and GoTranscript to help reduce transcription time. Most TikTok videos were collected by me or various research assistants I supervised through research programs. These students also assisted me with transcribing these videos by using Otter.ai. Lastly, this project utilized a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006). As such, when applicable, research assistants and I would each write weekly analytical memos to identify emerging themes from the data sets, which we then discussed in research meetings. When I did not have research assistants, I wrote weekly memos on my own to develop ongoing codes. Once codes were developed and indicators were assigned to each code, Dedoose was used to code transcriptions.

A feminist approach to research acknowledges that an academic’s positionality shapes all components of a study, ranging anywhere from the selection of theoretical frameworks to how the researcher interacts with research subjects and vice versa (Naples 1996). Feminist scholarship also invites researchers to consider how they are both an insider/outsider in their respective studies (Zavella 2018). In sharing that this project was born from the lived experiences of my mother and me, I

have begun alluding to the ways in which I inhabit an insider and outsider status. For instance, like the college-going daughters, I, too, know first-hand what it means to be born and raised in ghettos within Los Angeles, to be a first-generation Latina college student, and to have a migrant mother. Despite these differences, there were ways in which I was an outsider with some college-going participants. For example, nationality, gender expression, family formation, sexual orientation, skin color, hair texture, phenotype, and generation (being a millennial and not generation Z) created differences between the daughters and myself. Mothers often greeted me with kindness, and I suspect that they saw me as a daughter, as they often called me "*mija*" (my daughter), and expressed how proud they were of me. Having grown up low-income in Los Angeles and having a migrant mother was a way in which I shared familiarity and some insider status with mothers. Yet I recognized that my privileges, like being a U.S. citizen, having high levels of education, and speaking fluent English, made me an outsider in my fieldwork with mothers. Additionally, I did not grow up a low-income girl in the Global South, have not endured the violence that they did when migrating, or the marginalization they contended with as migrants in the U.S. It is from this vantage point of acknowledging my privileges and shared marginalization with daughters and mothers, that I undertook this project.

Overview of *Desiring a Better Life*

Chapter 1 employs heteronormativity matrix of domination as a framework for investigating what national set of intersecting oppressions have historically

constructed the genders and sexualities of immigrant, low-income women of color as pathological and excessive. Much of the research I review here delineates how via immigration, welfare, and national security legislation, the U.S. state has reproduced discourses of heteronormativity, such as that of "hyperfertile" immigrant, "welfare queen," "anchor babies," "illegal anchor babies," and "terror babies." The second half of this chapter employs my framework to investigate how regional power relations in Los Angeles, particularly the political economy, neighborhood segregation, policing, and public education system, help uphold the discourses of heteronormativity participants identified—like that of the "hyperfertile" Latina immigrant, "desexual" Latina, "ghetto girl," "chola," and "hot cheeto girl."

Drawing on interviews with mothers, daughters, and TikTok data, Chapter 2 utilizes heteronormativity matrix of domination to show how national and regional power relations in Los Angeles produce two competing discourses of heteronormativity, that of the "hyperfertile" Latina immigrant breeder and the "disposable" Latina immigrant, a desexual object for capitalist production. While these narratives may seem like polar opposites, they both frame Latina immigrants as nonheteronormative objects without sexual agency. Here, I also use my framework to shed light on the ways in which regional and national social forces produce discursive constructions of the "ghetto girl," "chola," and "hot cheeto girl," framing aesthetics rooted in the cultural practices of urban, low-income, ethnic communities as concrete evidence of the urban underclass. This chapter also reveals how Latina daughters engage in respectability politics to challenge these narratives and pursue their desire

to attend university. I end by bringing into relevance how mothers refute and uphold discourses of heteronormativity by encouraging their daughters to perform white middle-class femininity so that daughters can secure entry into college and a better life.

Chapter 3 utilizes my framework to examine how intersecting structures of power produce discourses of heteronormativity in Latin America, the U.S-Mexico border, and in the U.S., ultimately shaping how mothers forge and articulate the sexual politic of *uno nunca sabe* (you never know what bad thing(s) can happen). I also bring into consideration how additional structural conditions, like lack of access to sexual education and the precarity of being a low-income mother, inform the articulation of this sexual politic. Next, I juxtapose mothers' intention when employing this discourse to raise their children with how daughters interpret this narrative. While daughters and depictions of third world women may reduce this sexual politic to religious values or a cultural deficit value, *uno nunca sabe* is a form of agency; it foregrounds mothers' desire and attempt to shield their daughter(s) from the material repercussions of heteronormativity, the precarity of navigating the racialized and feminized political economy, and the vulnerability they confronted as low-income mothers. In showing how mothers' experiences in their native countries, the process of migrating to the U.S., and living in a new country shaped generational negotiations, I show how mobility experience and discourses of heteronormativity inform generational conversations of sex.

Similarly, Chapter 4 discusses how daughters' mobility experience of attending university in conjunction with discourses of heteronormativity informed daughters' subjectivities and the conversations they had with their mothers about sex and pleasure. I utilize my framework of heteronormativity matrix of domination to examine how daughters' new desires and pleasures as a result of going to college provide further insights into the various axes of power shaping heteronormativity. I also describe how going to college results in daughters challenging and reproducing heteronormativity through their styles of dress and sexual agency. Similar to their mothers, daughters' mobility experience and discourses of heteronormativity inform the ways in which they talk to their mothers about sex. Many daughters encourage their mothers to explore new sexual pleasures and to understand gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation outside of a sex/gender/sexual matrix. Their desire for their mothers to have more sexual agency and to create a world free of binaries is one way in which daughters challenge heteronormativity.

Desiring a Better Life concludes with a discussion of the implications of this research, including increasing access to sex education for Latinx populations. Here, I also note the limitations of this study and future research directions. It is my hope that this study sparks future intersectional work on heteronormativity, aesthetics, mobility, and generational negotiations of sex.

CHAPTER 1: THE REPRODUCTION OF HETERONORMATIVITY IN THE U.S. AND LOS ANGELES

The United States: A Meritocrat, Democratic, and Sexually Progressive Nation

Although the United States prides itself for being a liberated nation that values gender and sexual equality, racialized groups, such as people of Latinx descent, are routinely pathologized and subjected to institutional forms of marginalization within this national context. In the first section of this chapter, I employ heteronormativity matrix of domination as a theoretical framework for investigating what national set of intersecting oppressions have historically constructed the genders and sexualities of immigrant, low-income women of color as pathological and excessive. I particularly focus on immigration, welfare, and national security legislation since these institutions rely on inequalities of race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual, and nationality to reproduce discourses of heteronormativity, such as that of “hyperfertile” immigrant, “welfare queen,” “anchor babies,” “illegal anchor babies,” and “terror babies.” I contend that these figures are not just racialized and gendered narratives, but are discourses of heteronormativity in that they discursively construct low-income women's sexuality as deviant, threatening to the nation, and inferior to white, citizen, middle-upper class women's (hetero)sexuality. While additional U.S. legislation has constructed the gender and sexualities of other groups of people as deviant, I focus on legislation that targets immigrant women since states typically control women's sexuality as a strategy for addressing nationwide moral panics over economic, racial, and state formations (Alexander 2006; Briggs 2002; Cruz 2012; Roberts 1997).

Additionally, the reproductive capabilities of girls and women of color are particularly threatening to the U.S. nation because they do not reproduce family formations that help uphold the regime of heteronormativity (Roberts 1999; Briggs 2002).

Immigration and Welfare Legislation

U.S. immigration legislation has historically constructed low-income racialized (hetero)sexuality as a social problem that the state needs to contain to preserve the formation of the white middle-upper-class heterosexual nuclear family. For instance, the first law to limit immigration into the U.S. was the Page Act of 1875, which prohibited Chinese women from legally entering the state (Lee 2010). A moral panic over immigrants and the potential impacts of their racialized (hetero)sexualities on family, cultural, and state formations justified the passing of the Page Act. In this historical juncture, U.S. state officials and dominant society believed that all Chinese women were sexually lewd prostitutes whose sexual morals could lead to the demise of the white, nuclear U.S. family—an institution needed to preserve the settler colonial state.

U.S. officials relied on economic, social, and cultural factors as alleged evidence of Chinese immigrant women's prostitution status, including the formation of bachelor societies, neighborhoods segregated along racial and gender lines, consisting of low-income Chinese immigrant men whom the state had previously welcomed as a source of cheap labor for building railroads and gold mining (Lee

2010). Dominant U.S. society interpreted Chinese men's non-nuclear family living arrangement as concrete evidence of their lack of American family values. Under this discursive guise, immigrant Chinese men relied on Chinese women prostitutes to fulfill their presumed heterosexual desires—and cultural practices, such as feet binding, were automatically constructed as evidence of Chinese women's alleged "prostitute" status (Luibhéid 2002). Global dominant discourses framing prostitutes as the prime carriers of venereal diseases (Briggs 2002) heightened the U.S.'s moral panic over Chinese women's alleged immoral sexuality that would cause the deterioration of the country through the spreading of sexually promiscuous beliefs and venereal diseases. In sum, the first U.S. immigration law relied on discourses of heteronormativity, in this case, framing this particular ethnic group of women as having deviant sexualities, to deny them legal entry into the country as a strategy for maintaining whiteness.

The fear of Chinese immigrants' presence and sexuality, particularly their sexual values and reproductive capabilities, also resulted in the passing of The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prevented Chinese laborers from entering the U.S. and obtaining naturalized citizenship; only Chinese professionals could immigrate legally (Lee 2002). While immigration scholars have argued that the Chinese Exclusion Act was the first U.S. law explicitly restricting immigration based on a subject's racial and class identity, I suggest that this legislation was also sexualized as discursive justifications for this law included reducing the reproduction of Chinese families who would allegedly spread their deviant sexual beliefs and

cultural practices to American society (Luibhéid 2002). Such discursive justification for passing early immigration legislation reveals how the U.S. state has historically viewed the (hetero)sexuality and reproduction of racialized, low-income immigrant women as deviant and inferior to that of the white, middle-upper-class, heterosexual citizen women.

More recent examples of immigration policies and debates reveal that the U.S. government, media, and dominant society continue to rely on discourses of heteronormativity to discipline and control the influx of immigrants, including those from Latin America and the Caribbean. For example, as the government saw an influx of Latinx immigrants, primarily from Mexico in the 1970s, and later from Mexican and Central America during the 1980-1990s, a moral panic over the increasing non-white population and its potential impacts on economic, cultural, and racial formations ensued. Citizens and politicians viewed undocumented immigrants as criminals since they committed the "crime" of crossing the border illegally (Escobar 2016; Gutiérrez 2008), and they worried that immigrants would deplete the nation of wealth by stealing resources and jobs from Americans.

In response to this moral panic, the state blamed and disciplined low-income immigrant Latina women's sexualities through population control and immigration policies rooted in eugenics logic. In her timely study, feminist sociologist Elena Gutiérrez found that although the government incentivized every institution to prioritize zero population control during this historical juncture, not everyone was discouraged from reproducing; race/ethnicity, class, and nationality influenced who

state institutions viewed as worthy of having children (2008). Gutiérrez noted that state officials, doctors, and dominant society perceived immigrant Latinas as having “anchor babies,” U.S. citizen children for the sole purposes of obtaining public welfare resources and a pathway to citizenship. As in other historical moments, like in the 1950-1960s when U.S. officials funded birth control measures to reduce the amount of reproduction amongst Puerto Rican women (Briggs 2002), the government paid for the forced sterilization of approximately 100,00-150,000 women of color, with the majority being low-income immigrant Latinas in California. By examining discursive constructions of the "hyperfertile" immigrant Latina giving birth to "anchor babies," Gutiérrez shed light on the ways in which these women’s alleged excessive fertility, or discourses of heteronormativity, are used by state officials to pass anti-immigrant policies and inflict violence on third world women.

Alongside population control policies, immigration legislation, such as the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), has historically constructed Latina immigrant women's supposedly excessive (hetero)sexualities as a threat to the nation. For instance, IRCA now and then mandates that immigrants utilizing federal services, such as Medicaid, food stamps, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), cannot apply for citizenship because they are likely to become a "public charge," or become financially dependent on the state (Escobar 2016). Interestingly, when introduced, this policy targeted undocumented low-income immigrant women who would obtain access to social services through their pregnancy or children since these resources were denied to undocumented people at

the time. Consequently, IRCA places poor immigrant women who are mothers (or desire to be) in a predicament: either they choose to use public services to support themselves and their children, and in doing so, risk their pathway to citizenship—or they refrain from utilizing public assistance to help support their families so that they can secure a potential path to citizenship. In the first "option," women continue to lack citizenship and, thus, lack legal protections in the U.S. While the second "option" may affect their reproductive lives; by taking away access to social services, economically marginalized women may not have the necessary means to reproduce children and sustain them—even if they wanted to (Ross 2006). Hence, IRCA is another national legislation that constructs these women as having unruly sexualities that need regulating through policy.

Under Eurocentric conceptualizations of heteronormativity, society and institutions would reward Latinas for having children. Yet, a vast amount of research reveals that Latinas and other low-income women of color are punished and criminalized for having children. I contend that narratives of the "hyperfertile" Latina immigrant and "anchor babies" are discourses of heteronormativity as they articulate immigrant women's alleged excessive and deviant sexuality through their inability to refrain from having children. Moreover, narratives of "anchor babies" reduce immigrant women to the status of a breeder, stripping away the possibility of their desire for and access to motherhood. Lastly, these discourses highlight how national legislation, such as zero population control and IRCA, rely on and, in turn, reproduce

discourses of heteronormativity to justify state intervention and violence in these women's lives.

As I mentioned in the introduction, border states are sites where the U.S. manifests anxieties over the growing Latinx population. California's Proposition 187 (Save our State) reveals how discourses of heteronormativity have impacted Latina immigrants' gendered sexual experiences in this geographical context. Initiated by the governor at the time, Pete Wilson, Proposition 187 denied social services, public education, and health care services such as prenatal care and non-emergency medical services to undocumented women (Gutiérrez 2008). While scholars tend to reduce the motives for this proposition to xenophobia and racism only, Gutiérrez's intersectional examination revealed that discourses of the "hyperfertile" Latina immigrant "stealing" social services from U.S. citizens were used to gather support for this legislation. Though Proposition 187 was passed in 1994 and later ruled unconstitutional, this bill continues to impact discursive constructions of Latina immigrants in California, subsequently impacting their day-to-day experiences. For instance, in their study of Latina immigrants in San Francisco, Tanya Broder and Clara Luz Navarro quoted Irma, who described how Prop 187 impacted her and other Latinas (1996).

> There are a lot of women who go out with several children, some of their own and others that they are taking care of. On the street, strangers count their children. For example, a friend of mine has two children and two she takes care of. An American woman began to count them, "1-2-3-4," and stare at her, and I said to her, "No, she has five children; I am the fifth." I knew that she was thinking that my friend was collecting welfare for those children, but I knew that she was working, taking care of the other children. The same thing happens to me when I take care of other peoples' children. According to them, because we are Latinas, we are receiving welfare and they

> look down on us. They call us "welfaros," and this really bothers me because I have a conscience and I am not receiving anything, not even Medi-Cal.

Irma's narrative reveals that discourses of heteronormativity, in this case that of the “hyperfertile” immigrant Latina, have historically shaped women's daily lives in a particular way: people suspect Latina mothers, or those presumed to be, as having children for the sole purpose of stealing welfare resources. Thus, Irma and other Latina immigrants face admonishments and discrimination in California rather than being rewarded for having children.

The nation further utilized discourses of heteronormativity to gain national support for the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act PROWA, which drastically reduced welfare spending by replacing Aids to Families with Children (AFDC), a federal assistance program that provided low-income families with children financial assistance, with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Under TANF, recipients must have a job within the first two years of receiving aid and have a five-year lifetime limit for obtaining these services. Feminist research suggests that several discourses of heteronormativity, such as that of "hyperfertile" Latina immigrant, "anchor babies," and "welfare queen," helped justify the passing of such legislation (Alexander 2005; Gutiérrez 2008). For instance, the "welfare queen" discourse typically refers to a Black, "lazy" woman who is a single mother and "abuses" public assistance (Collins 2000). This narrative reflects the ongoing fear of Black women's reproduction since it has historically threatened the nation's white racial purity (Roberts 1997; Collins 2000). A contextual analysis of

PROWA reveals how this discourse is mapped onto other non-white women, such as Irma and the immigrant mothers in this study, who threaten white racial purity during this historical juncture. As I explained, the increasing Latinx immigrant population during the 1970-1990s triggered a moral panic in America. In response, the state constructed non-Black Latina immigrants as "welfare queens," poor mothers who move to the U.S. and have citizen children to exploit public assistance (Foster 2017). Thus, PROWA was fueled by, and in turn, reproduced discourses of heteronormativity that constructed low-income women of color's sexuality as deviant.

In sum, feminist research examining how immigration and welfare legislation are co-constitutive of gender and sexual inequalities reveals that several state policies frame the (hetero)sexualities of low-income immigrant women as pathological. Discourses of hypersexuality, “hyperfertility,” “overpopulation,” “anchor babies,” and “welfare queens” frame low-income racialized women’s (hetero)sexualities as uncontrollable and, therefore, responsible for the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, decline in family values, and the nation’s overpopulation which causes the economic deterioration of the country. I build on their findings to argue that these narratives are discourses of heteronormativity since they all construct low-income immigrant women’s gendered sexualities as deviant. Such an analytical shift allows researchers to understand how immigration and welfare legislation have worked together to reproduce heteronormativity within the national context of the U.S. In the next section, I examine how national security in the 20th century has become part of the interconnected power relations upholding heteronormativity.

National Security Legislation

While anti-Latinx sentiment that constructs this particular racial/ethnic group as "criminals" who steal resources from citizens and drain the state of wealth has permeated U.S. society for many decades (Gutiérrez 2008), the "War on Terror" has intensified these sentiments via The USA Patriot Act: Preserving Life and Liberty (The Patriot Act) of 2001. This legislation was shortly enacted after 9/11—expanding what constitutes terrorism, now understood as acts that are dangerous to human life and violate U.S. criminal laws (Alexander 2006; Fernandes 2013). The Patriot Act ultimately constructs Muslim, Arab, and Latinx immigrants as terrorist threats as they are thought of as having already committed a criminal offense by immigrating to the U.S. "illegally." Moreover, politicians use migrants' "illegal" entrance into the country to frame them as "unruly" people who will continue enacting dangerous crimes that threaten the nation's safety and democratic values (Alexander 2006; Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo 2014; Puar 2007).

Gender and sexuality impact how Latinx immigrants are criminalized and disciplined under the state's "War on Terror" regime. For example, politicians continue relying on narratives of the "hyperfertile" Latina immigrant producing "anchor babies" to justify the passing of The USA Patriot Act and the increased militarization of the border. In *Captivity Beyond Prisons,* Martha D. Escobar critically analyzes how discursive constructions of racialized gender and sexuality fuel the militarization of the border. She writes,

> Beyond its physical and formal presence, the border ideologically serves to construct and assign meaning to bodies. It participates in fashioning the United as a white nation while assigning foreignness to non-white, mainly

> brown bodies. This foreignness is further complicated as notions of 'appropriate' national femininity and sexuality are contested in this space...For (im)migrant women, the entrance into the borderlands, which begins upon their initial arrival and remains with them throughout their travels, transforms them individually and with respect to their relationship to global society...At this vital instant, the border and what it represents—geopolitical sovereignty and racial, cultural, ethnic, heteronormative, and classed boundaries—marks (im)migrant women's bodies. From that moment on, (im)migrant women's violability is cemented through their assumed violation of the nation-state, constructing them as a public enemy who needs to be disciplined and, in some cases, killed (2016, 97).

As an analytical category, motherhood, particularly who has access to it and what meanings society attaches to women's reproductive capabilities, reveals that Latina immigrants are seen as the ideal neoliberal worker, but never as the ideal mother. In fact, under the discursive guises of the "hyperfertile" Latina immigrant and "anchor babies," motherhood is precisely what makes these women unfit citizens who would deplete the nation of resources rather than produce wealth for the country.

New articulations of "anchor baby" discourses during the "War on Terror" reveal how the profound fear of Latina immigrants' reproduction fuels national security legislation that further pathologizes their sexualities via institutionalized measures. For instance, republican politicians and news outlets have begun referring to Latina immigrants as "illegal aliens" who "drop illegal anchor babies" (Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo 2014). Framing U.S.-born children as "illegal" further demonstrates that U.S. society perceives Latina immigrants and their children as a threat to the nation. Texas politicians, U.S. Congressmen Louis Gohmert and State Representative Debbie Riddle, use of "terror babies" to describe the children of immigrant Latinas and Arab women further sheds light on the nation's ongoing fear

of immigrant women's reproduction. According to the discourse of "terror babies," immigrant women who are believed to be part of terrorist organizations birth U.S. citizen children who will return to their mothers' native countries to become trained terrorists and enact dangerous crimes in the U.S. (Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo 2014). Although this discourse mostly circulates among politicians, it highlights that some U.S. government officials view Latina and Arab women's reproduction as a social problem. Moreover, this discourse criminalizes immigrant mothers and their children from birth to justify state involvement in immigrant families' lives.

I understand these articulations of "anchor baby" narratives as discourses of heteronormativity since they frame immigrant women as having criminal sexualities and values that will spread and lead to the nation's demise. These discourses also pathologize the U.S.-born daughters of Latina immigrants since cultural deficit models have historically framed mothers of color as responsible for transmitting pathological values to their children (Espiritu 2001; González-López and Vidal-Ortiz 2008; Roberts 1997). Lastly, since low-income girls' and women's reproduction are often pinpointed as causes for the economic turmoil of the U.S. nation (Briggs 2002), these discourses may facilitate the state intervention and disciplining of the sexualities of *both* immigrant mothers and their so-called "illegal anchor babies."

The consequences of these discourses on the U.S.-born children of Latina immigrants are unknown; the majority of research has understandably focused on its impacts on immigrant Latinas (Gutiérrez 2008; Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo 2014; Escobar 2016; Foster 2017). Most recent studies reveal a growing number of

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrests and women detained by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) under the Obama and Trump administrations. I suggest that heteronormativity continues to fuel the justification for ICE facilities and the violence it inflicts on women. For example, Andrea Gomez Cervantes and colleagues found that the immigration industrial complex affects Latinas who are pregnant and migrate with children in a distinct manner (2017) as they are held in Alternate to Detention (ATD) facilities where they face a particular set of gendered and racialized oppressions "intended to reshape Latina immigrants into docile bodies" (Gómez Cervantes, Menjívar, and Staples 2017:274). These facilities employ punitive tactics used in prisons, such as regulating all activities, managing detainees' time, controlling all space use, and subjecting women to sexual and physical violence. These dehumanizing activities undermine immigrant women's autonomy, and deter them from devoting time to their mothering responsibilities. And yet, politicians overemphasize these women's "mother" identities when talking about ATD detainees. While Eurocentric definitions of heteronormativity mask how race/ethnicity, citizenship, and class inform the meanings settler-states articulate to gendered categories such as motherhood, I argue that spotlighting these women's identities as mothers contributes to negative discursive constructions of Latina immigrants as "hyperfertile" women who continue to migrate to the U.S. to birth "anchor babies."

Whistle-blower Dawn Wooten, a Georgia ICE detention center nurse, further exposed how the U.S. continues viewing racialized immigrants' reproduction and presence as a social problem. According to Wooten and previous detainees, Black and

Latina women underwent forced sterilizations and aggressive medical treatment, including invasive gynecological procedures, like hysterectomies, surgery intervention on reproductive organs when unnecessary, and/or undergoing vaginal examinations in cases with no gynecological complaints (Dickerson, Seth Freed Wessler, and Miriam Jordan 2020). Women's accounts also reveal a lack of consent for these medical treatments; detainees either received medical forms in English, which they could not read, or could not communicate appropriately with English-speaking medical staff.

These horrific events are not a new social phenomenon; the U.S. has inflicted violence on non-white women since the colonization of the Americas—proving that race/ethnicity as a structure of power has historically and to this day shaped normative gender and sexuality. As feminists' analysis of the "War on Terror" reveals, national politicians continue depending on narratives of heteronormativity, such as that of "anchor babies" and the "hyperfertile" Latina, to fuel the passing of such policies. Hence, it is clear that the state, Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) are institutions relying on and, in turn, reproducing heteronormativity to pathologize low-income Latinas' sexualities.

The set of national power relations I have described ultimately contributes to the reproduction of heteronormativity across the nation. In the following section, I utilize heteronormativity matrix of domination as a framework for investigating the

regional social conditions in Los Angeles that pathologized low-income Latinas' gender and sexualities.

Los Angeles: The Land of Fame?

"I hopped off the plane at LAX [Los Angeles International Airport]
With a dream and my cardigan
Welcome to the land of fame excess (Woah)
Am I gonna fit in?
Jumped in the cab, here I am for the first time
Look to my right, and I see the Hollywood sign
This is all so crazy
Everybody seems so famous"
-Lyrics from Pop Star Miley Cyrus' "Party in the USA"

"Well, I feel like they [teachers] don't really expect much from us. I feel like, especially now that I'm a little bit more in the educational field, I realize how biased some of these teachers were [in Los Angeles]."
-Denise, Mexican daughter, S.F. State Alumna

"They're just gonna get pregnant, and they're just gonna like skyrocket the, you know, birth rate… I think like in Southgate, like in the hood, I think Latinas are known as like cholas; the hoops, lip liner, hoops, like yeah, the Angeleno accent too."
-Emilia, Mexican daughter, UCSB Alumna

Los Angeles, California, is often imagined as a city of opportunity. People from other parts of the world and country, like pop star Miley Cyrus, migrate to this metropolitan area to pursue their desires. Whether it is to realize their desire to become a music artist, Hollywood movie star, social media influencer, fashionista, or to live a sexually free life, L.A. is the imagined location to actualize these desires. It is also depicted as a progressive city where ethnic diversity is celebrated rather than denounced. And yet, when the media or politicians speak about Latinas in this city, the narrative about the quality of life and the city's status quo changes, as Denise and Emilia, among other participants in this study, noted. Often depicted as living in

"ghettos" and engaging in various "risky" activities—like premarital sex leading to unplanned pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases, criminal or gang activity making the city unsafe, or dropping out of high school— a deficit approach shapes how urban low-income Latinas' lives are framed. These "at risk" narratives also depict Latinas as responsible for any economic turmoil in Los Angeles, which may contaminate other parts of the nation.

If we think critically about the "at risk" discourses shaping how Denise, Emilia, and other low-income urban Latinas' lives are imagined, it is evident that economically marginalized Latinas in cities are thought of as engaging in deviant economic, gender, and sexual behaviors. Narratives framing low-income urban Latinas as inherently uninterested in school, engaging in unprotected premarital sex that "skyrockets" birthrates, or in "chola" (also read as criminal) activity, highlight the deviancy associated with these low-income Latinas, including their gender and sexual subjectivities. These narratives, which I, myself, contended with as a low-income Latina girl who came of age in L.A., provide insights into the ways in which national and regional power relations in Los Angeles reproduce heteronormativity and impact the daily lives of Latina in this context.

In this section, I employ heteronormativity matrix of domination as a framework to investigate what intersecting set of oppressions within Los Angeles construct low-income Latinas' genders and sexualities as nonheteronormative. In particular, I synthesize research on Los Angeles' political economy, neighborhood segregation, policing, and the public education system to shed light on the ways in

which these social conditions produce racialized and classed gender and sexual inequalities through discourses of heteronormativity such as that of the "hyperfertile" Latina immigrant, "desexual" Latina, "ghetto" girl, or "hot cheeto girl." Although many empirical studies examine Latinx people's experiences in Los Angeles, these studies tend to homogenize this ethnic group by privileging Latino boys' and men's experiences. Facing a dearth of literature on Latina girls and women in Los Angeles, I draw on feminist research documenting the experiences of low-income girls or women of color in other geographical contexts to examine— in the following chapter— how these social conditions reproduce particular discourses of heteronormativity about Los Angeles Latinas—subsequently impacting their experiences in this urban metropolis and their mobility experiences with migration and higher education.

Los Angeles: The Land of Fame and Sweatshop Capital

The Restructuring of the Political Economy

The majority of migrant mothers in this study arrived in Los Angeles in the 1980s-1990s, a time when the regional economy had undergone a significant transformation. Before the 1980s, Los Angeles was known to be the second-largest tire manufacturing industry. As union jobs across the nation came to be under attack under a neoliberal agenda, most tire and automobile jobs were relocated elsewhere (Zentgraf 2001). The city's economy was significantly altered with such a change in place. Kristine Zentgraf described this change as, "Job expansion occur[ing] at two

levels: relatively well paid engineers, scientists, and technical specialists in high-technology industries and relatively low paid janitor jobs, busboys, food service, garment workers, and assembly workers in the service sector, electronics, and aerospace-related industries" (2001, 53). These new economic industries further polarized the wealth disparities in Los Angeles by facilitating economic opportunities for middle/upper-class working professionals and their families while simultaneously creating a niche of low-paying, precarious jobs in this urban region. Latina immigrants, including the mothers in this study, play a vital role in industries that employ low-wage workers in Los Angeles as they often work in manufacturing jobs producing garments/apparel, domestic work, janitorial services, or within the informal economy. Here, I review research about Latina immigrants' experiences in these industries.

The Garment/Apparel Industry

Los Angeles is the "sweatshop capital of the United States" (Bonacich and Applebaum 2000, 19), as it has the most manufacturing jobs in the nation. Although these jobs consist of garment/apparel, textile products, aircraft products, electronic equipment, aircraft and parts, as well as fabricated metal products (Bonacich and Richard Appelbaum 2000), the apparel industry is the largest manufacturer in Los Angeles. Evidence indicates that most garment factories in Los Angeles are sweatshops that fail to compensate workers fairly and/or subject workers to hazardous conditions that could lead to death or serious injury. For example, the Department of

Labor found that approximately 61% of locations do not compensate workers fairly and that 54% of manufacturing companies have dangerous work conditions (Bonacich and Applebaum 2000). A more recent study found that wage theft continues to be rampant among garment workers in Los Angeles—with them earning an average hourly wage of $5.85 in 2020 when the legal minimum wage was $15.00 (Garment Worker Center 2020).

Most workers employed in sweatshops are women, especially undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Central America, followed by a smaller number of women of Asian descent (Bonacich and Richard Appelbaum 2000; Su and Chanchanit Martorell 2001). Since these capitalist corporations build their wealth on worker exploitation, they employ workers who they believe to be less conscious of exploitation and willing to challenge oppressive conditions. Inequalities of gender, race, nation, and legality fuse together to construct immigrant women as the ideal worker in this industry as "third world women" are often viewed as "submissive" and "naïve," and therefore, less likely to resist exploitation (Bonacich and Applebaum 2000).

The mistreatment of migrant women in these industries is not unique to Los Angeles; sweatshops exist in other urban locations in the U.S., Mexico, and Asia. This is in part reflective of the deindustrialization of the U.S., defunding of the welfare state, and the rise of a capitalist free-trade state that exports labor to third world nations to increase profit. As feminist scholars note, The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) passed in 1993 between the United States, Canada, and

Mexico has significantly impacted low-income women in Mexico and Central America via the expansion of the maquiladora industry along the U.S.-Mexico border (Arriola 2006; Fussell 2000). Many U.S.-based companies, such as Panasonic and General Electric, have moved production companies to the Mexico border to cut production costs at the expense of third world women's livelihoods. These companies pay women exploitive wages, such as 35 dollars a week, expose women to hazardous work conditions, and cause environmental pollution in Mexico (Livingston 2004; Wright 2001). Lured by corporations' promise of employment opportunities, poor women from Central America and other parts of Mexico migrate to border cities such as Ciudad Juarez, Tijuana, and Reynosa. Feminist scholars have also written about the exportation of U.S. sweatshops to Asian third world countries such as India, China, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Bangladesh (Mezzadri 2016), where factories mostly employ women and girls and subject them to exploitative conditions and wage theft.

Although NAFTA has facilitated the outsourcing of manufacturing jobs to third world nations, some are strategically maintained within the U.S. Such is the case of garment factories in Los Angeles; they are kept close enough to transportation and design centers fueling last-minute requests for Los Angeles' women's fashion industry and Hollywood film industry. An imported good from a Mexican maquiladora could take up to six weeks to arrive on a Hollywood set or a fashion business' doorstep, while having the product made in L.A. cuts the production and shipping time to two weeks (Bonacich and Applebaum 2000). Regardless of where

the clothing product is made, the garment industry and the U.S. state gain capitalist wealth at the expense of third world women and girls.

The research on Latina immigrants working in the maquiladoras in Los Angeles has not sufficiently paid attention to the ways in which both gender *and* sexuality are co-constitutive forces that shape women's experiences. Therefore, I draw on feminist research examining how the political economy along the US-Mexico border shapes the experiences of low-income women who work in these sweatshops. Guadalupe Taylor contends that, "In the maquiladora industry, female subjects ceased to be human beings so as to become objects of consumption whose value is related to what they produce" (2010, 351). Gender, physical appearance, skin color, class, and sexuality are intersecting social forces shaping how these women are relegated to the status of object rather than human. Firstly, since maquiladora jobs are low-skilled, a diminished value is placed on these women. Secondly, because many maquiladora workers are young migrants, they are viewed as living alone and, therefore, vulnerable and expandable. Women's physical appearance and skin color also shape how they come to be constructed as objects as factories and management, primarily men, perceive maquiladora workers with mostly indigenous features as non-human pieces of machinery because of their physical appearances.

Being relegated as objects for capitalist production ultimately frames these women as worthless and makes them vulnerable to sexual violence. This is evident in the research examining femicides along the US-Mexico border. Feminist scholars note that many women who have been raped and murdered—or remain missing to

this day, are low-income girls or women maquila workers (Alba and Georgina Guzmán 2010; Livingston 2004; Taylor 2010; Wright 2001). When these women go missing, police officials and even some Mexican locals living in border towns frame these girls and women as responsible for their own disappearances. The police and locals pinpoint women's social behaviors, such as going out to bars at night, and gender performances, like wearing short clothing and makeup, as evidence of their alleged hypersexuality. In fact, workers' feminine clothing and aesthetics are used to accuse them of living a double life, being a maquiladora worker during the day and a prostitute at night (Livingston 2004). Although there is nothing deviant about sex work as a source of employment, these accusations highlight how these women's socio-economic position and ethnicity, being of indigenous descent, socially constructs them as hypersexual and incapable of being sexually assaulted.

The research investigating low-income maquiladora workers' experiences reveals that the maquiladora industry is co-constitutive of gender and sexual inequalities. In particular, it shows how the Mexican state, police, and maquiladora industries view these women as expandable hypersexual objects for capitalist wealth production rather than human. These discursive constructions impact their economic lives by justifying exploitive working conditions while simultaneously rendering them as hypersexual non-human objects incapable of experiencing sexual violence. Thus, the manufacturing industry in Los Angeles may uphold gender *and* sexual inequalities through the production of heteronormativity by framing low-income immigrant women as non-human hypersexual objects.

Domestic Work

Another common source of work in Los Angeles available to migrant women either via the informal economy or through hiring agencies is domestic work. This line of work can entail being hired to clean homes and care for children or the elderly. In the U.S., middle- and upper-class families hire migrant women to be live-in or live-out domestics. Either of these jobs can be exploitative as they require women to work more than 40 hours a week without proper compensation, and employers can degrade them by requiring them to express subservience and limiting the space they have access to in the household. Moreover, live-in domestics can experience social isolation since this position requires women to be at the employers' homes, restricting opportunities for them to build social networks (Armenta 2009). These jobs also place constraints on the time Latina women can spend with their own children, facilitating guilt for them and leading to women reconceptualizing motherhood (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997).

It is not a unique phenomenon that immigrant women work as domestics. Feminists have noted that Filipina immigrants work as domestic in many parts of the world, including but not limited to Singapore, Denmark, Canada, Spain, Hong Kong, Israel, and Italy; they, too, endure similar working conditions as those in the U.S. (Parreñas 2015). However, in Los Angeles, it is primarily Latina and Asian and Pacific Islander immigrants who do this work. As I previously noted, the economic restructuring of Los Angeles facilitated white-collar jobs in downtown Los Angeles, increasing the amount of middle- and upper-class families living in this county. To

pursue their careers, economically privileged women unburdened themselves from domestic labor by outsourcing it to low-income women, mostly undocumented Mexican and Central American women arriving in this city during this time (Rosales 2001).

As with manufacturing jobs, gender, race/ethnicity, and citizenship now and then shape Latina immigrants' pathways into this line of work. Although reproductive labor is generally relegated to women who society views as inherently nurturing and capable of taking care of children and the elderly, in Los Angeles, the commodification of reproductive labor is relegated to women whose legality status and perhaps lack of English proficiency limits their economic opportunities, making domestic work one of the few options available to them (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007). In addition to these structural factors, negative preconceived notions about "third world women" influence the outsourcing of domestic work. Employers view these immigrant women as "passive" and "submissive"—leading them to believe that even documented domestic workers are less conscious and willing to challenge exploitative working conditions than white women domestics. Some employers take advantage of women's undocumented status by committing wage theft (Chinchilla, Chinchilla, and Hamilton 1996), and a portion even capitalize on women's transnational mother status by purposefully hiring those who have children outside of the U.S. to ensure that domestics' mothering responsibilities do not deter them from work.

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo's study of immigrant Latina women who work as domestics through hiring agencies in Los Angeles indicates that preconceived notions

about the “third world woman’s” sexuality also impact Latinas' experiences in these jobs (2007). For instance, hiring agencies report that some customers prefer to hire indigenous-looking women—who have dark skin, non-European facial features, and are short— because employers believe these physical features demarcate the domestic worker’s subordinate status to the employer’s in public settings. Middle-upper-class women employers also worry about hiring a domestic worker or nanny who is “too sexy” because their husbands might be interested in pursuing sexual relations with the worker. To alleviate their misdirected anxieties, women customers refrain from hiring light-skinned and slender migrant Latinas who they view as “too sexy” and instead hire “desexual” indigenous-looking women. These findings indicate that immigrant women are either viewed as desexual or hypersexual—never as having normative sexualities. In other words, discourses of heteronormativity are co-constitutive of domestic work, which helps frame certain immigrant women as hypersexual and others as desexual.

Janitorial Services

The national hostile political climate towards immigrants in the 1980s, along with Los Angeles’ regional economic restructuring, feminized the field of janitorial services in Los Angeles. For example, when many Latina immigrants arrived in the U.S. in the 1980s, the U.S. was in the midst of passing the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which also introduced legal sanctions for hiring undocumented immigrants. In response to this policy, employers in the janitorial

industry subcontracted to circumvent being legally responsible for hiring documented people (Cranford 2005). Moreover, neoliberal policies decreased pro-union sentiment, causing a decrease in unionized janitorial jobs in Los Angeles. As companies moved towards hiring nonunion janitors, the field switched from predominantly hiring African American men to employing women they viewed as likely to accept lower wages because of their nonbread-winning roles within heterosexual family structures. Additionally, the increased white-collar financial jobs in downtown Los Angeles doubled the number of office spaces, amplifying the need for janitors to clean these work sites.

With the increase of Latina immigrants in Los Angeles, corporations hiring janitorial services saw a potentially expandable labor force at their disposal. Indeed, to this day, most janitorial workers in Los Angeles are Latina immigrants who were fleeing civil unrest from El Salvador, Guatemala, or Nicaragua or economic recession in Mexico (López 2001). Once hired, these women faced a series of exploitive working conditions, including getting paid $4 an hour (less than minimum wage) and being overworked, which cause health issues, including headaches and body aches (Cranford 2005).

Part of these exploitive conditions also entails sexual harassment. In general, one-third of women are sexually harassed while working, but these rates are intensified for women who work in isolated jobs and have male supervisors, such as the case for immigrant women working in janitorial services (Beltran 2020). UC Berkeley's Labor Occupation Health Program found that three out of four women

working in janitorial services in California have experienced sexual assault at work (Chen, Alejandra, and Andrews 2016). Many structural factors contribute to the high rate of sexual violence they undergo. One is that these jobs tend to be non-unionized, leading to a lack of training around sexual harassment and standardized procedures to manage the reporting of these events. Secondly, since the women working in these jobs are typically undocumented, their legal status makes them susceptible to retaliation from the perpetrators, who often tend to be male supervisors. In fact, women have reported being terminated or receiving reduced hours due to reporting sexual harassment.

Sandra Beltran suggests that race/ethnicity, legality, and gender are intersecting social forces contributing to the sexual violence these women face (2020). Not only do perpetrators view immigrant women of color as less likely to report abuse, but they also believe these women are more sexually available and, therefore, less likely to be believed if they report abuse. This is reflected in Leticia Sotos' public letter to the man who raped her while working a nightshift cleaning office in a prestigious downtown Los Angeles skyscraper. Leticia recalled how before violating her, the perpetrator (her supervisor) intimidated her by continuously asking if she "was an illegal" (Soto 2019:150). He then proceeded to state, "nobody here cares about illegals; they're nothing; they're trash," before raping her. Leticia proclaimed that she would call the police, and to this, he responded, "You're the one they'll deport, honey. Nobody is going to believe you" (2019: 152). Leticia's public documentation of this horrific event reveals that documentation status is a salient

social force facilitating and shaping Latina immigrants' experiences with sexual assault. The high rates of sexual assault women such as Leticia endure in their jobs as janitors warrant further investigation into how this industry is co-constitutive of heteronormativity since perpetrators view these women as more sexually available.

In sum, Latina immigrants in Los Angeles typically work in sweatshops producing garments, as domestic workers, or janitors—all precarious and low-paying jobs. Feminist scholars have documented how inequalities of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and citizenship shape Latinas' pathways into these lines of work, which seek a population of expandable "third world women" workers that are allegedly "submissive" and will endure exploitation. There are a few empirical studies that shed light on the ways in which these industries reproduce sexual inequalities, particularly. Up to date, however, there is no in-depth analysis of how these precarious jobs in Los Angeles shape the discursive construction of Latinas' sexuality or vice versa, how the political economy in Los Angeles maintain sexual inequalities. As we will see in the next chapter, interviews with migrant mothers and their daughters reveal that the city's political economy reproduces gender and sexual inequalities by upholding discourses of heteronormativity, primarily constructing Latina immigrants as disposable and non-human, and therefore, genderless and desexual objects.

Racial Neighborhood Segregation, Policing of Racialized Spaces, and the LAPD

Although Los Angeles is a city with much diversity, it is a misconception that it is an integrated city with a high level of interaction and contact between people

from various economic, ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds (Charles 2006). One factor that contributes to the lack of integration in Los Angeles is neighborhood segregation. While some explain segregation as an individual choice rather than a pattern caused by structural inequality, critical scholars examining space/place contend that "Land is in fact a place where economics and ideologies come together, and where an intensely racist past lives on forcefully into our present" (Gibbons 2018:6). In other words, then, neighborhood formations provide us with critical insights about inequality, such as those relating to gender and sexuality.

As Mexican and Central American immigrants arrived in Los Angeles during the 1980s and 1990s, they settled in neighborhoods that were predominantly non-white and low-income, including East Los Angeles and South Central. However, with time, Latinx immigrants moved to adjacent areas occupied mainly by low-income white residents (Charles 2006). As a result, white flight occurred, understood as the process of white residents moving to other geographical areas due to a neighborhood becoming populated by ethnic people of color (Schneider 2008).

As more neighborhoods became increasingly non-white and low-income, society, government officials, and the police viewed them as racialized spaces. Edwardo Portillos and colleagues contend that racialized spaces become criminalized, and in this process, criminality is mapped onto the bodies of all those who live in that neighborhood (Portillos, González, and Peguero 2012). Indeed, research on policing in Los Angeles reveals moral panics over the "browning" of Los Angeles. For instance, when Los Angeles was predominantly white, local politicians portrayed it as

a white metropolitan area or a "white spot" free of crime (Felker-Kantor 2018). As the number of African American migrants from U.S. Southern states and Latinx and Asian immigrants made Los Angeles a predominantly ethnic city, a moral panic over the contamination and deterioration these populations would bring to Los Angeles ensued (Felker-Kantor 2018; Rendon 2019).

Generally speaking, criminality has often been associated with the racial "other" in the U.S. (Portillos, González, Peguero 2012). Whether we look at the ways in which dominant white society framed recently emancipated Black men as "rapists," Chinese immigrant women as "prostitutes" spreading venereal diseases, or the more recent framing of Arab and Latina immigrants as criminals who steal resources via their "illegal anchor babies," it is evident that one manifestation of white supremacy consists of mapping criminality onto non-white people through racialized gender and sexual discourses. Thus, it is no surprise that The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and dominant white society viewed African Americans and the growing population of Latinx immigrants as unruly criminals that would deteriorate the city (Felker-Kantor 2018). As scholars note, U.S. city spaces that are majority non-white and low-income tend to be discursively constructed as "ghettos" hubs for crime (De Graaf 1970; Rendon 2019). However, research examining how Los Angeles came to be discursively constructed as a hub of crime has not examined the role of gender and sexuality (see, for instance, Felker-Kantor 2018; Murch 2015, 2015; Rendon 2019; Vigil 1988). These scholars tend to employ a racial and class analysis when discussing how regional and national events, such as the Watts Riots,

the "War on Drugs," and Rodney King Uprising, have resulted in the hypercriminalization of African American and Latinx communities in Los Angeles.

Max Felker-Kantor argues that the first event contributing to the hypercriminalization of African American and Latinx people in Los Angeles was the 1960s Watts Riots (2018). During this time, Los Angeles was predominantly white, and the majority of people of color were Mexican migrants living in East Los Angeles as well as African Americans who had migrated from hostile Midwest or Southern states in search of socio-economic mobility since Los Angeles' officials portrayed it as a more progressive city. To their dismay, Mexicans and African Americans experienced discrimination in this city—and Black people were particularly subjected to racist policing. Thus, the political climate underpinning the Watts Riots included an awareness of police hostility towards African Americans.

On August 11, 1965, two African American brothers, Marquette Frye and Ronald Frye, were pulled over by California Highway Patrol for reckless and intoxicated driving in Watts, a predominantly low-income African American neighborhood at the time. While the police tried to arrest Marquette, 250-300 onlookers gathered. A scuffle between one of the brothers and an officer ensued. The officers then called for backup and began using force, kicking both Frye brothers. One woman observing the use of force allegedly spat on an officer as a sign of denouncing police brutality, and officers began to charge at the crowd. According to officers, they retreated to reduce tensions, but the Watts community members viewed their withdrawal as a win against police brutality. Inspired by the police's retreat,

people gathered from August 11-16 in Watts, engaging in acts of civil unrest to reject the unjust treatment and policing of Black people in the U.S. To end the Watts civil unrest, LAPD Chief Parker called 934 officers, 719 sheriffs, and 13,900 California National Guardsmen (Felker-Kantor 2018).

The Watts Riots gained national media coverage and attention—shattering the positive image of Los Angeles. In these news coverages, politicians and the media depoliticized The Watts Riots by reducing these events to gang activities, often depicted as composed of African American and Latino boys and men only, according to Felker-Kantor's (2018) and Rendon's studies (2019). The framing of the riots as "lawless" was further supported by appointed commissioner John McCone's widely cited report, which proclaimed the Watts Riots as a "senseless, formless riot" undertaken by "hoodlums" and "criminals" (Felker-Kantor 2018: 35). Depicted as "criminals" and a threat to democracy, the rioters and people living in Watts represented the nation's fear of everything wrong with urban "ghettos." These discursive constructions ultimately helped Chief Brown gather support for his use of militarized police tactics during the Watts Riots, which continue being employed by the LAPD until this day.

Studies indicate that the growing number of Mexican and Central American immigrants settling in Los Angeles County ultimately contributed to the hypercriminalization of Latinx people in this city (Cervantes, Khokha, and Murray 1995; Felker-Kantor 2018). At this time, a moral panic over the increasing Latinx immigrant population resulted in a new category of criminality: "the alien criminal,"

which Los Angeles' local politicians, media, and white residents blamed for the economic turmoil in this region— despite the fact that the economic restructuring of the 1980s was responsible for the exportation of thousands of manufacturing jobs in this city. Thus, Los Angeles came to be viewed as a city harboring a massive amount of "alien criminals" who were draining this region of wealth and spreading crime in this city, including those related to the possession and trafficking of drugs.

Indeed, Latinx immigrants were viewed as one of the two populations in Los Angeles responsible for the increased selling and use of narcotics during the nation's "War on Drugs" during this historical juncture. The other population perceived at fault were African American and Latino male gangs (Felker-Kantor 2018). Although scholars find that the "War on Drugs" policies have led to the hyper-incarceration of boys and men across the nation (Bobo and Thompson 2006; Provine 2011; Rios 2006), there is a particular way this national event shaped the discursive construction of Latinx and Black people living in Los Angeles. This is because politicians and news media outlets constructed Los Angeles as the *epicenter* of the nation's "War on Drugs" and, therefore, in need of increased militarized policing (Murch 2015). Such narrative increased funding for LAPD's militarized police tactics, resulting in the daily militarized policing of Latinx immigrants and youth of color. Secondly, the framing of Los Angeles as an epicenter resulted in the collaboration between Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) and LAPD; undocumented immigrants stopped for any suspected criminal activity, such as those relating to drugs, were handed off to INS, and subsequently deported (Felker-Kantor 2018).

Researchers have neglected to examine how the "War on Drugs" has impacted Latina girls and women in the so-called "epicenter" of the national crisis. Feminist studies provide insights into how this national "crisis" affected Latinas and African American women nationwide. For example, the number of women imprisoned increased from the 1980s to 1990, and most were incarcerated for drug-related crimes, including possession or distribution of products (Bush-Baskette 1998; Díaz-Cotto 2005). Approximately 70% of women incarcerated for drug charges were single low-income mothers responsible for their children at the time of incarceration. Moreover, while African American women were the racial group with the highest percentage of incarcerated women, Juanita Díaz-Cotto found evidence that "War on Drug" policies also led to the hyper-incarceration of Latinas in California. In 1999, at least half of the Latinas in federal prisons were imprisoned due to drug offenses, and California had an even more significant overrepresentation of Latinas within their prisoner population since they composed one-third of prisoners (Díaz-Cotto 2005). This war also impacted Latinas and African American women through Section 115 of PROWA, a provision imposing a lifetime ban on food stamps and cash aid for women convicted of drug offenses. A total of 42 states adopted this provision in full, including California, resulting in the denial of benefits to at least 32,875 women, with 21% of these being Latinas (Allard 2002). In other words, race/ethnicity, class, and gender are all salient forces shaping subjects' criminalization during the "War on Drugs." Still, researchers neglect gender and sexuality as possible axes of power

shaping the hypercriminalization of Latinx people in the nation's alleged epicenter of this "war."

Lastly, the civil unrest known as the Rodney King Riots also shaped how criminality became socially constructed onto Latinx and Black people living now and then in Los Angeles. On April 29, 1992, civil unrest erupted in South Central Los Angeles, later spreading to other neighborhoods, after four police officers were acquitted of their charges of excessive force and assault when arresting Rodney King for a traffic stop resulting in a high-speed freeway pursuit. Local and national media sources widely circulated a civilian's video footage of this violent arrest, showing four officers kicking and beating King with batons for fifteen minutes, resulting in broken bones and teeth, a skull fracture, and permanent brain damage for King. While police brutality against Black people was not a new social phenomenon, people believed that having documentation of the police's excessive force would lead to the prosecution of these officers.

When the trial did not go as anticipated, residents took to the streets of South Central, Hollywood, Koreatown, and the San Fernando Valley to protest the trial's verdict, engaging in protests, looting, and burning. In response, Mayor Bradley declared a state of emergency and called on President George H. W. Bush to fund federal law enforcement to end the civil unrest. About 7,000 National Guardsmen and 3,500 agents from the FBI, SWAT, U.S. Marshals Service, INS, Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and the Bureau of Prisons officers arrived in Los Angeles to arrest 16,291

people, with approximately 36% of them being African American and 50% Latinx (Felker-Kantor 2018).

The Rodney King Riots further hypercriminalized Latinx and Black people in Los Angeles as President Bush and other officials reduced this civil unrest to gang activity. Politicians also blamed the undocumented Latinx population for these uprisings as they were seen as “criminal aliens” spreading crime, poverty, and drugs. In fact, Felker-Kantor contends that dispatching INS during the Rodney King Riots was intentional—reflecting the longstanding anti-immigrant sentiment the police and U.S. settler-state had of Latinx immigrants’ contamination of a once white urban metropolis (2018).

Overall, this research indicates that Latinx people, including Latina adults and youth living in racialized spaces, are subjected to hypercriminalization and policing. Given that state institutions like the police rely on discourses of hypersexuality to justify the institutionalized disciplining of girls and women of color, and that Latinx people in Los Angeles are hypercriminalized in a particular way, it is possible that sexuality is a social force fueling the criminalization of Latinas in this urban region. Little is known about the ways in which gender and sexual inequalities, such as heteronormativity, impact and/or facilitate the policing of Latinas or their sexual experiences. In the following chapters, I reveal how the mapping of the criminal onto urban low-income neighborhoods helps reproduce discourses of heteronormativity—particularly that Latinas are hypersexual, and how this impacts immigrant Latinas mothers’ and daughters’ gendered sexual experiences.

(Urban) Educational Inequalities

The majority of students enrolled in urban public schools are low-income students of color, and it is common for each school in cities to be composed of primarily one ethnic/racial group. Segregated schools tend to be underfunded, making them lack the necessary services to support students' quality of education. These schools also lack qualified teachers as well as teachers and administration reflective of students' backgrounds (Nevarez and Wood 2007).

The quality of public education in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second largest district in the nation, mirrors those in other low-income urban communities. District data reveals that 90% of students attending LAUSD schools are minority students, with the majority identifying as Latinx (73.6%), and over half (59.9%) of students are from low-income backgrounds, participating in the free and reduced-price meal program.[3] LAUSD data also indicates that most high school graduates, do not enroll in a four-year college.

Even though LAUSD is the second largest public school district in the U.S., and there is evidence that students experience microaggressions in these institutions, there is a lack of research documenting the contemporary experiences of Latina in these schools. What is known is that historical events in Los Angeles have shaped the

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[3] This data is based on a U.S. News Report analyzing LAUSD demographical information. The article can be found at https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/california/districts/los-angeles-unified-106440

quality of education for LAUSD students. For instance, Superintendent Jack Crowther, and William Johnston, his successor, framed students' protests, such as the 1968 East Los Angeles blowouts and the strike led by African American students in South Central's Jefferson High School in 1969, as evidence that these youth were "unruly" and in need of disciplining. Like the Watts Uprising and Rodney King Riots, these student-led efforts responded to the inequalities and racial discrimination they faced from teachers and administration. In response, mostly white teachers and school administration lobbied for punitive policies to ensure students followed school rules and provided punitive measures for disruptive students (Felker-Kantor 2018; González and Portillos 2007). What followed was the expansion of LAPD into LAUSD, currently known as the LASPD, composed of "211 sworn police officers, 25 non-sworn school safety officers (SSO), and 32 civilian support staff." [4]

In addition to white teachers and administration, the media portrayed Los Angeles, including LAUSD schools, as "unruly" places where youth gangs committed criminal acts. Such media coverage helped gather L.A. residents' support for police involvement in schools. Surrounded by tall, barbed wire fences, padlocked gates, armed police, and helicopter patrol, schools in racialized spaces became more prison-like after the Watts Uprising. Therefore, in addition to contending with criminalization in their neighborhoods, public schools became institutions supporting the hyper-criminalization of Latinx and African American youth. These conditions

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[4] Likewise, information is based on LAUSD's open data source. For more information, see https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/15609

worsened as a result of the Rodney King Riots as media and local and national politicians framed these youth as "uneducable looting criminals" (Felker-Kantor 2018, 251).

The existing research homogenizes the educational experiences of Latinx Los Angeles youth, failing to account for the ways in which gender and sexuality shape students' criminalization experiences within LAUSD. As with research on policing, the Latino boy or man is privileged in these studies; the photographs or cases researchers use to discuss these events often center the experiences of Latinos, rendering Latina girls and women as untouched by criminalization processes in schools or in the broader L.A. context.

Feminists documenting the educational experiences of Latina and Black girls outside of Los Angeles reveals that schools are colonial apparatuses criminalizing girls of color. For instance, a profuse amount of feminists posit that academic success is evaluated and secured via white femininity and heterosexuality (Bettie 2000; Jones 2010; López and Chesney-Lind 2014; Morris 2016). How society and teachers ascribing to these ideologies assess white femininity and heterosexuality is based on physical and behavioral characteristics, such as being "warm, nurturing, compassionate, passive, and receptive" (Caraves 2018). When girls are read as performing behaviors associated with masculinity, like being independent and assertive, society labels them as aggressive and acting out. Girls dressing in masculine ways or who are non-gender conforming are also viewed as "bad girls" in need of discipline.

Black girlhood scholars have been instrumental in delineating how class, race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality intersect to automatically ascribe the "bad girl" status to low-income Black girls through the heteronormativity discourse of hypersexuality, which has historically framed Black girls and women as having "animal-like" and "uncivilized sexualities" that need to be disciplined by any means necessary. One material consequence of this discourse is that it results in teachers and staff conflating Black girls' behaviors, including their modes of dress, with excessive sexuality (Morris 2016; Ray 2022b). In fact, teachers and staff adhering to colonial logics reprimand Black girls, sometimes even suspending them, for wearing skinny jeans, while white girls have the liberty to wear this item of clothing (Lamb et al. 2016).

To justify the disciplining of Black and Latina girls, teachers and administration also rely on discourses of the "ghetto" or "ratchet" girl—tainted by colonial ideologies of hypersexuality (Jones 2009; Morris 2016). Under the guise of these discourses, modes of dress, speech, and comportment viewed as "too ethnic" correlate stylistic deviancy with sexual impropriety and vice versa. Thus, girls who perform a racialized working-class femininity are deemed "ratchet" or "ghetto," especially in relation to white girls and girls of color adhering to respectability politics.

A few studies document how heteronormative discourses of hypersexuality result in the disciplining of Latina girls in K-12 institutions. For instance, Lorena Garcia finds that educational institutions promote a sexual education curriculum

upholding discourses of the “teen mom,” which frame the sexual desires of low-income girls as excessive, dangerous, and determinantal to securing socio-economic mobility (Garcia 2012). To refute these negative depictions, Latina girls engage in respectability politics by constructing themselves as sexually responsible “good girls” who engage in safe sex to avoid teenage pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) —which they and other institutional actors view as detrimental to securing socio-economic mobility via college.

Similarly, in her study of working-class Mexican-American girls in California, Julie Bettie finds that girls are well aware that society, including teachers, views them as “bad students” because of their economic backgrounds and race/ethnicity (2000). To secure their pathway to college, Latina girls performed middle-class femininity via their clothing, aesthetics, and behaviors in the classroom; teachers perceived those who refused to engage in respectability politics—and adorned their bodies with “ethnic” clothing and makeup as oversexed. Even when Latina and Black girls excel academically, teachers will frame girls’ racialized and classed femininity performances as indicators of unintelligence (Ray 2022b). Thus, any girl who transgresses white middle-upper-class femininity norms by either performing working-class racialized femininity or some form of masculinity is disciplined in school.

In sum, race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality are intersecting social forces that impact what students educational institutions discipline. Given that Latina youth in Los Angeles, especially those living in and attending schools in racially

segregated neighborhoods are hypercriminalized, it is unsettling that scholars have failed to examine how these public schools reproduce racial/ethnic and class inequalities through gender and sexual discourses of Latina girls. Such a gap in the literature warrants a feminist intervention—particularly one that attends to the ways in which gender and sexuality are focal points for manifesting racial anxieties about the growing Latinx community. In the next chapter of this book, I reveal how the public school system, in tandem with racial neighborhood segregation, produces a contemporary discourse of heteronormativity, the “hot cheeto girl,” a hyperfeminine “bad student” whose presumed hypersexuality has ruined her chances of becoming upwardly mobile.

Employing Heteronormativity Matrix of Domination

The national and regional power relations I delineated in this chapter produce state and cultural discourses of heteronormativity that the Latina mothers and daughters in this study identified as impacting their subjectivities. As I will show in the next chapter, state institutions, policies, as well as the political economy in Los Angeles produce competing images of Latina immigrants as either “hyperfertile” breeders birthing “anchor babies” or “disposable” objects of labor, rendering them as desexual and without gender and sexual agency. I also reveal how the experience of migrating exposes mothers to discourses of U.S. heteronormativity and the impacts this has on mothers’ sexual politics and the ways in which they teach their daughters about gender and sexuality. I then describe how urban neighborhood segregation,

racialized neighborhoods, and educational disparities in schools are intersecting forces that produces narratives of the “ghetto” girl, “chola,” and “hot cheeto girl,” which discursively construct girls of color in low-income, urban neighborhoods as part of the urban mythical class, who lack intelligence, motivation for school, and engage in risky behaviors including criminal activity and promiscuous sex. Here, I also discuss how daughters refute these discourses to gain access to college by modifying their aesthetics.

CHAPTER 2: DISCOURSES OF HETERONORMATIVITY

"Supuestamente, las Latinas, son las mujeres prostitutas y los hombres ladrones. Ese es el estereotipo que nos tienen aquí, verdad? [Supposedly, Latinas are women who are prostitutes, and the men are criminals who steal. That is the stereotype they have of us, right?]" stated Anita, a Salvadorian immigrant mother who moved to the United States as a result of civil unrest in her native country, a few minutes before we concluded our phone interview. In sharing her awareness of how society views *all* Latinas, Anita highlights how race/ethnicity is a salient force shaping discursive constructions homogenizing and pathologizing Latinas' sexualities. In this case, the pathologizing of Latinas' sexuality is done by positioning all Latinas as prostitutes, perhaps to signal that Latinas have an excessive amount of sexuality and/or engage in criminal activities such as sex work.

The Latina mothers and daughters in this study identified several discourses they encountered within the US that frame their gender and sexualities as nonheteronormative. These narratives included that of the "hyperfertile" immigrant Latina, "disposable" Latina immigrant, "welfare queen," "teen mom," "ghetto girl," "chola," and "hot cheeto girl." In this chapter, I employ a heteronormativity matrix of domination framework to delineate how national and regional power relations reproduce the formation of these discourses. I posit that collectively, these discourses of heteronormativity show how the US state, and those adhering to these dominant views, perceive low-income Latinas to either be passive desexual objects or to have excessive, aggressive and "animal-like" sexualities—not as having normative

sexualities. To further examine how low-income Latina youth are viewed as having deviant sexualities, I analyze how discourses of the "chola" and "hot cheeto girl" frame certain gender expressions associated with urban low-income people of color as visual markers of immoral sexuality. By bringing into relevance the role of aesthetics, I reveal how the US state, police, public schools, media, and dominant society articulate anxieties over race, class, citizenship, modernity, and global power through discourses of heteronormativity. I also describe how aesthetics are cultural practices through which subjects reproduce or contest heteronormativity. As I discuss, daughters are aware of "chola" and "hot cheeto girl" discourses, framing them as part of the urban underclass, lacking intelligence, motivation for school, and engaging in risky behaviors including criminal activity and promiscuous sex—constitutive elements under the guise of these discourses. To refute these narratives and secure access to college, daughters engaged in respectability politics (Higginbotham 1994), constructing their subjectivities in opposition to "cholas" and "hot cheeto girls" through the modification of behaviors and clothing in middle and high school. I also examine how parents encouraged their daughters to mimic white middle-class femininity by teaching them to be docile and restricting their clothing and accessories. Through an analysis of daughters' modification of aesthetics and behaviors, I analytically demonstrate that heteronormativity is a co-constitutive element of mobility experiences.

Discursive Constructions of the "Third World Woman"

Transnational feminist scholar Chandra Mohanty has written about the ways in which US and Eurocentric societies reinforce a third world woman category, homogenizing the gender subjectivities of these diverse women. “Third World women as a group or category are automatically and necessarily defined as religious (read: not progressive), family-orientated (read: traditional), legally unsophisticated (read: they are still not conscious of their rights), illiterate (read: ignorant), domestic (read: backward), and sometimes revolutionary (read: their country is in a state of war; they must fight!)" (2003: 40). Maria Lugones’ scholarship further helps us understand how European colonization has contributed to the discursive constructions of the “third world woman’s” gender. Under colonial power, gender and race fuse together, constructing a new system of stratification via the colonial/modern gender system in which race and gender are axes of power fueling the dehumanization of non-white people. For instance, European settler states have historically and continue to view all non-white people as “primitive” and more “animal-like” rather than human. When explaining how the colonial/modern gender system impacted gender and racial formations in settler states, Lugones notes, “They [Indigenous and Black people] were understood as animals in the deep sense of ‘without gender,’ sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of femininity. Women racialized as inferior were turned from animals into various modified versions of ‘women’ as it fit the processes of Eurocentered global capitalism” (2008: 13). In other words, people of Indigenous and Black descent are recognized as having female anatomy, but are seen as genderless, and therefore do not have access to the category of “woman.” As a

result of being genderless, they are not afforded characteristics associated with white heterosexual womanhood, including femininity and innocence—and, as I argue, access to sexual agency and motherhood.

In this section, I build on Mohanty's and Lugones' intersectional analysis of gender formations by bringing into relevance how sexuality as an axis of power shapes the figure of the "third world woman." In particular, I contend that in Los Angeles, immigrant Latinas are discursively framed as either "hyperfertile" breeders or as disposable objects for capitalist production that are passive and desexual. Although these depictions might appear as polar opposites, I suggest that these competing constructions are discourses of heteronormativity as they both frame these women as having nonnormative gender and sexual lives.

The "Hyperfertile" or Hypersexual Latina Immigrant

As I described in the previous chapter, the US state utilizes federal policies and institutions to discursively construct Latina immigrants as "hyperfertile" and to link this alleged excessive sexuality to the nation's economic downfall. Like Latinas living in other parts of the country, the mothers in this study recalled learning through interactions with state institutions about their alleged hypersexuality. For example, Anita described her experience while being pregnant and visiting a Medic-Cal health provider:

> Solo me acuerdo que una vez me preguntó una mujer. Y me dijo que ya tendría yo que porque había llegado embarazada, ya yo tenía hijos. Y me dijo que que tenía que haber tenido uno o dos. Me dijo, que estaba muy joven, me dijo para tener tantos hijos. Y eso, así como, como que dije yo era como que si

> es algo personal, no es una decisión personal que no tenía que dicerme nada. Y y eso sí que lo critican a uno cuando uno va a los cheques de embarazo y si ya tiene muchos niños y dicen que 'para qué? Que si está seguro que lo quiere tener.' [I only remember that a woman once asked me. And she told me that I already had, because I had gotten pregnant, I already had children. And she told me that I should have had one or two children. She told me that I was very young, she told me to stop having so many children. And that, is what she told me. It was something personal, it is a personal decision that she did not have to give her opinion about. And yes, they do criticize you when you go for pregnancy checkups, and if you already have many children, and they say 'why? Are sure you want to have it?']

In line with previous feminist scholarship on narratives of the "hyperfertile" Latina immigrant, Anita's account reveals the material consequences of these narratives for immigrant women. In this case, consisting of a medical staff encouraging Anita to have an abortion. By refusing to have an abortion and realizing her desire to have another child, Anita claimed agency in a society that discouraged her reproduction and attempted to deny her access to motherhood.

For the few mothers who migrated very young and attended public schools in Los Angeles, school was also an institution where they learned about their alleged hypersexuality. This was the case with Gabriela, a Salvadorian mother who migrated to the US as a young girl due to the civil unrest there. During our interview on a sunny winter day in Los Angeles, Gabriela recalled how teachers perceived her and the other low-income Latinas in her LAUSD school as susceptible to becoming "teen moms." This discursive construction made her wary of her decision to leave high school and enter the workforce when her mother got sick during the latter half of her high school years; Gabriela feared that people would suspect her as just another "teen mom" dropout. In this occasion, Gabriela enacted agency by ensuring that I and

others in her high school knew that socio-economic constraints were the primary reason for her not graduating. By distancing herself from young mothers, Gabriela refuted discourses that construct Latina immigrants as "hyperfertile" and those of the Latina "teen mom" circulating in schools.

The daughters in this study also spoke about how the US state viewed their mothers and themselves as having an excessive amount of sexuality, but described how being an immigrant woman had specific implications for how others perceived their mother's gender and sexual lives. Take, for instance, Esperanza, a Salvadorian daughter who graduated from SF State and moved back to Los Angeles to live with her mother, who noted, "A belief is that they're [Latina immigrants are] just coming over here to have the kids and unfortunately, like, I think that's a dominant narrative like amongst other things, like, they're trafficking certain things. But I think that's the one that I've heard a lot." Esperanza's answer supports feminist scholarship contending that the US government justified the "war on drugs" and "war on terror" regimes through the criminalization of Latina immigrants (Díaz-Cotto 2005; Escobar 2016). Not only have politicians framed Latinas as drug mules that smuggle in narcotic drugs but as a group of women whose terrorism is enacted via the birthing of citizen children, which will threaten the nation's democratic values and economy.

Indeed, some daughters alluded to the ways in which their mothers were seen as "welfare queens" stealing resources from the nation. Among these was Yanely, a third year at UC Santa Barbara, who said that "a large part [of society] probably just like just [views them as] someone else, just another migrant coming over here, like,

you know, taking their jobs and having kids to like steal state funding, like, welfare, stuff like that." Yanely's interview alludes to the hostile political climate in which immigrant mothers had to forge their gender and sexual subjectivities and raise their daughters. Like Yanely, Rosalinda sheds light on the ways in which the US state relies on discourses of heteronormativity to pathologize Latina immigrants: "I would say as a society, [they view Latina immigrants], probably like freeloaders, freeloaders of the system. I always heard, like, that they are good for popping babies."

Some mothers were also critical of how society perceived them to have children for the purpose of stealing welfare resources. For instance, Reyna, who witnessed the Civil War in El Salvador and migrated to the US to escape this violence, told me:

> Mucha gente que dice oh, 'tú tienes tres hijos o cuatro porque el gobierno te da dinero,' aunque tú no pidas dinero.' Aunque tes contando las moneditas para comprar tu comida, la sociedad piensa que si yo tengo cuatro hijos, es porque yo pido welfare. [A lot of people say, 'you have three or four kids because the government gives you money,' even though you don't ask for money. Even though you are counting your coins to buy food, society thinks that if I have four kids, it's because I ask for welfare.]

In other words, mothers became aware of their alleged hypersexuality through discourses that reduced them to the status of breeding children for the sole purpose of stealing public aid from the government. Like Reyna, some of the other mothers I spoke to explicitly told me they did not rely on welfare even when they had children and struggled economically to raise them. Perhaps this was their way of resisting "welfare queen" and "anchor baby" discourses that pathologized their reproductive capabilities.

Lastly, some daughters blatantly stated that Latina immigrants were seen as hypersexual. This was the case with Liz, a senior at UC Davis, who noted that her mother was "hyper sexualized a lot" in her interview. Similarly, Rosalinda told me that Latina immigrants are "definitely hyper sexualized. Yeah, the terms that like they refer to as exotic or like, sexual, like sexualizing their bodies. I know Latino women are like stereotypically said to have like bigger butts and stuff." Thus, both mothers' and daughters' accounts alluded to the ways in which some discourses of heteronormativity have historically and continue to reduce Latina immigrants to the status of an animal-like breeder, diminishing them to body parts associated with reproductive capabilities and denying them access to the category of mother. Although the "hyperfertile" and "welfare queen" Latina mother were narratives that mothers and daughters identified as pathologizing immigrant Latinas' sexuality, they also described how the narrative of the "disposable" Latina immigrant stripped migrant women of gender and sexual agency. In the next section, I examine how the political economy in Los Angeles helps produce discursive constructions of Latina immigrants' sexuality by relegating them to low-wage jobs.

The "Disposable" Latina Immigrant

The mothers I had the pleasure of meeting spoke about how US society viewed them as the ideal low-wage workers they could exploit. For instance, Reyna noted during our interview that "La sociedad, a los inmigrantes, nos ven como una arma de de trabajo. Mm, como como alguien que te puede ayudar… La sociedad ve al

inmigrante lo ve muy bajo. [Society, sees us, immigrants, as a weapon of work. Mm, like someone who can help you... Society sees the immigrant very low." Likewise, Anita and Amelia explained how they became aware of their expendability through the exploitation they endured as low-wage domestic and/or garment workers—both experienced wage theft, working long hours without receiving sufficient pay.

Daughters echoed an awareness of immigrant Latinas as the ideal expendable low-wage worker. "Disposable. Replaceable. I guess almost invisible as well. Yeah, submissive," is how UC Davis alumna Melissa understood dominant society's perception of her mother. Disposable was the most common adjective that daughters drew on to describe how society viewed Latina immigrants. When explaining why they believed that US society viewed their mothers as disposable, daughters alluded to the ways in which Los Angeles' political economy socially constructs Latina immigrants as passive objects. For instance, Mayra, a graduate from UC Santa Barbara of Mexican descent, noted that women like her mother are viewed as "workers or the maids and nannies." This description was prominent among other participants, including SF State alumna Luz, who moved back to Los Angeles. "They view Latina immigrants, especially older women, or like moms, as like, maids like the cleaners of society. Like, as if like, they're less than." In referencing how society perceives Latina immigrants as the ideal workers in low-wage industries such as domestic work, participants hinted at the ways in which domestic and janitorial work in Los Angeles since the 1980s is feminized, racialized, and delegated to immigrant women.

Likewise, Aurora, who graduated from SF State alumna and lived in Los Angeles with her mother, explained how domestic work socially constructs immigrant women as disposable:

> I will honestly say that I believe they're seen as disposable. And the reason for that is just seeing the way that the US does not intervene in this situation in Mexico with all the female bodies going missing, or the female bodies being found dead, which is the femicide, right…And then also just here, taking it into a context of the US, you see that they want the women when they need their children taken care for. And I mean this by Anglo families. You know, they want the women to be, you know, there for their kids. But they don't take in mind that by working there with their kids, there's an absence that is being created in their own family, that they're not there for their own children. And that's just one example, of course, you know, the way that this works, but I will definitely say it's just disposable.

In sharing her critical opinion, Aurora described how regional political economies along the US-Mexico border and Los Angeles construct low-income women as disposable and the material implications of this discourse. As I explained in chapter one, by promoting the idea that the women working in maquiladoras are expendable and engage in sex work at night, the Mexican maquiladora industry is complicit in aiding the sexual violence of these women. By constructing these women as both hypersexual and expendable objects solely beneficial for producing capitalist wealth, maquiladora managers, police, and Mexican government officials frame these women as incapable of experiencing sexual assault since they are women with "loose" sexual morals as evidenced by their engagement in sex work. Thus, in this context, the political economy of the US-Mexico border frames Latinas as nonheteronormative by discursively framing low-wage women workers as hypersexual objects. Similarly, I found that the garment industry in Los Angeles upholds heteronormativity by

constructing Latina immigrants as "disposable" objects of labor that are allegedly passive and desexual. As Lugones (2008) and Escobar (2016) discussed, non-white women are subjected to processes of Eurocentered global capitalism, which can construct them anywhere, ranging from non-human animals into various versions of "women" to fit the ideal neoliberal worker. I argue that being turned into an object for capitalist wealth production has repercussions for immigrant women's gender and sexualities.

For instance, Luz explained that Latina immigrants are either viewed as hypersexual or workers for capitalist production only. She states,

> I think Latinas in the US like, we're portrayed either as like overworking. Like, we'll clean anyone's crap. But then on the flip side of it, like there's the other extreme of, like, Latinas are very, like, sexualized. Like, we're like, spicy…I feel like that's how we're seeing like, we're seen as either, like, two extremes of like, the world like we're either like very sexualized or either like, very like desexualized, I guess because we're seeing just like near labor you know or sex.

Luz alluded to the ways in which heteronormativity produces competing depictions of immigrant Latinas' sexuality. On one end of the spectrum, I posit that Latinas are hypersexual objects producing "anchor babies" and stealing welfare resources, and on the other, they are gendered as a desexual, passive, and selfless caretakers beneficial for capitalist production only.

Other daughters like Guadalupe, a UC Davis alumna living in Los Angeles, also described the discursive stretches of heteronormativity. Guadalupe noted that the US sees Latina immigrants as "more of an object than a person. And more of like an object that just produces stuff. Whether it produces children, in the sense of like, oh,

they're just here to take our welfare type of thing, or they produce labor, work. They do not necessarily see them [as] more than that." Similarly, Luna noted that dominant society believes Latina immigrants to be "either disposable or like super sexualized probably. I feel like one or the other. And I say that cuz, like, probably workforce versus like the sexualization and like desire that would be placed on Latinas." Although these two discursive constructions may appear as opposites—they are not; both extremes construct Latina immigrants as objects without gender or sexual agency. For example, the hypersexual or "hyperfertile" Latina immigrant is rendered to the status of the breeder, producing children for reasons other than desiring to become a mother, or sexualized to fulfill someone else's fetishization of this ethnic group. Meanwhile, the "disposable" Latina exists to fulfill the neoliberal state's desire to accumulate wealth, and in the process of being reduced to an object, she is rendered a laboring and desexual body. On either side of the spectrum, Latina immigrants' gender and sexual agency, including their decision to become mothers, is missing.

Some participants alluded to the ways in which this discursive construction of Latina immigrants as "disposable" laboring objects strips Latina immigrants of agency by constructing them as passive women in all aspects of their lives, including in their heterosexual relationships. Of this, Ariana explained, "I think from my knowledge they tend to... view them as like they rely on other people. I feel like more specifically, they would imagine them relying on their husbands... Yeah, I think mostly the husbands, but I don't think they view them much as their own person."

Likewise, Sol told me, “I think passive; I'm thinking like purity comes to mind. Not just like, passive or pure—like naive.” Thus, a repercussion of being turned into a “disposable” laboring object for capitalist labor consists of being denied subjecthood and, therefore, access to gender and sexual agency within romantic partnerships. Latina immigrants, then, are constructed via discourses of heteronormativity as passive in their relationships with heterosexual men.

In sum, national and regional power relations produce discourses of heteronormativity that construct Latina immigrants as having nonheteronormative gender and sexualities. I described how national institutions reproduce discourses of heteronormativity that construct Latinas as hypersexual (having an uncontrollable amount of sexuality), while the political economy of Los Angeles frames these women as passive and desexual laboring objects. By juxtaposing these competing narratives, I delineate how context and historical power relations impact whether discourses of heteronormativity frame Latina immigrants as hypersexual breeding bodies or as laboring desexualized to socially construct them as nonnormative. Next, I examine how national and regional power relations produce discourses of heteronormativity impacting discursive constructions of urban low-income Latina girls’ gender and sexuality.

Urban Latina Girls: *Supuestamente* “Dumb,” “Teen Moms,” “Ghetto Girls,” “Cholas”, and “Hot Cheeto Girls”

The previous chapter described how the contemporary gender and sexual experiences of low-income Latina girls in Los Angeles are rendered invisible, despite

the fact that the US state, local politicians, and white residents perceive low-income urban youth in this regional context as responsible for deteriorating the city—which will subsequently lead to the demise of the modern state. Little is known about how these moral panics shape the discursive constructions of Latina girls' gender and sexualities and how this affects girls' negotiation of their subjectivities. Moreover, researchers have failed to examine whether Latina mothers are aware of these discursive constructions of urban girls and their impacts on generational conversations of girlhood, womanhood, and sex. Here, I examine how discursive constructions of low-income Latina girls in Los Angeles rely on, and in turn reproduce, heteronormativity to justify the marginalization of urban girls of color. The narratives that participants brought up and which I examine include that of "teen mom," "ghetto girl" (sometimes also referred to as "hood" or "ratchet" girl), "chola," and the "hot cheeto girl." I argue that these are all discourses of heteronormativity as they construct Latina girls as having inherently sexually deviant values and behaviors.

"Dumb" and "Teen Moms"

When I asked Melissa how US society viewed Latina girls from Los Angeles like herself, she responded, "From LA, I would say uneducated, reckless, prone to get pregnant. [Takes a long pause]. And probably not having the potential to get far in life." This discursive construction of urban Latina girls as dumb and hypersexual was echoed across interviews, ethnographic, and TikTok data. For example, daughters were critical of how society, teachers, and educational staff often viewed them as

unintelligent and, therefore, with no chance of becoming college bound. Liz explained that teachers viewed girls from LA as "Stupid, I think. Okay, well, yeah. From what I've experienced, like, they don't have a lot of expectations of us." In line with previous educational research, which finds that urban youth of color across gender identities are generally regarded as having inferior intellectual capabilities, interviewees revealed that schools in Los Angeles perceive Latina girls in Los Angeles as part of the urban underclass who lack moral values, are unintelligent, engage in gang-related crimes, and are sexually promiscuous. I reveal how educational institutions reproduce discourses of heteronormativity to justify the framing of girls of color who refused to mimic white middle-class femininity as unintelligent and hypersexual. This ultimately impacted how the Latina daughters in this study negotiated their gender and sexual subjectivities in schools to secure access to college, a point that I will elaborate on toward the end of the chapter.

It is evident that teachers reproduce discourses of heteronormativity, particularly that Latina girls are hypersexual, to frame girls as dumb. For example, a SF State alumna who was getting her master's degree during our interview explained:

> I busted my ass off to not be a stereotype because my middle school teacher was like, 'y'all are gonna end up pregnant with kids by the time you graduate from high school.' And I remember being so fucking pissed. And I was like, 'you're gonna have kids, like, by the time I graduate high school.' So, I was just like, girl, like, you don't know shit about me, you know. But because she was like this older white lady."

Likewise, Liz disclosed that within her school, "it was stereotype like that they [Latina girls from LA] would just eventually get married pretty young, have kids very young or actually have kids first and then get married." Thus, the "teen mom"

discourse constructs Latina girls as intellectually inferior in all regards of life. Not only do Latina girls supposedly lack the intellectual capacity to do well in school, but they also do not have the ability to learn proper sexual values, like not having intercourse until they enter a heterosexual marriage.

The daughters in this study also recalled how interactions in schools provided them with insights into how teachers and dominant society sexualized their bodies. For instance, Gabriela explained that Latina girls from LA "we're like hypersexualized in a way. I would say maybe like hyper sexualized and just like as objects sometimes." Later, she described an interaction with a white male high school teacher, which cemented this teacher's views of her.

> I had an incident where like a teacher. I was talking to like a friend, and he happened to be a guy. And he [the teacher] would just tell me like, 'oh, I don't think your boyfriend would like, if you were talking to other guys.' And I was like, what? I just thought that was really weird. He was a white teacher, so.

Gabriela's experience sheds light on the ways in which K-12 schools are complicit in sexualizing girls of color from an early age as teachers would interpret girls' social interactions with boys as flirting and a sign of their excessive sexualities.

Scholarship examining how girls of color negotiate their subjectivities in relation to the "teen mom" discourse further indicates that this narrative disproportionately impacts low-income urban girls of color. For instance, many of these studies examined the experiences of girls of color in urban places such as Chicago (Garcia 2012), Los Angeles (Hyams 2000), a Northeast city (Ray 2018), and a small deindustrialized city pseudonymized Millerstone (Barcelos 2018). The prominence of these findings among urban girls is no coincidence. In fact, Deborah

Tolman argues that when politicians, the media, and social scientists reference teenage pregnancy as a social problem, they are often discussing the "The Urban Girl," a poor girl of color who was raised by a single mother in an urban context (1996). "The Urban Girl" is thought of as living a risky and immoral life, failing in school, lacking family values, and being sexually promiscuous. However, Tolman does not describe in depth what formations have led to this discursive mapping of girls of color in urban contexts.

So, what national historical events and processes have facilitated "The Urban Girl" to be so dominantly understood as a hypersexual, poor girl of color? Urban, Black Feminist studies, and Girlhood studies provide insights into this question. For example, urban scholars note that as poor rural Blacks moved to Northern cities after emancipation, often understood as The Great Migration, Black urban neighborhoods with concentrated poverty began to form. These neighborhoods were formally known as "ghettos," a term academics used when referring to an African American urban neighborhood *or* to describe the segregation Black populations experienced, leading to the creation of impoverished Black neighborhoods (Haynes and Hutchison 2008; Brown, Vigil, and Taylor 2012). In other words, in the US, the emergence of racialized cities has always been conflated with the formation of poor *and* racialized spaces. This imaginary of urban areas is particularly important given that white settlers view non-white people as "primitive" and the antithesis to modernity under a colonial/modern gender system. Thus, the US settler state has historically and to this

day framed the settlement of low-income people of color in urban spaces as detrimental to the nation's advancement in modernity.

As I previously discussed, gender and sexual discourses are bodies of knowledge the US produces to maintain the settler-state and global power. Thus, when cities became inhabited by poor rural Black people, US politicians, white urban dwellers, and middle-class Black city residents relied on discourses of heteronormativity, particularly that Black girls and women are hypersexual due to their "animal-like" sexualities, to frame Black low-income urban areas as threats to US social order and discourage the settlement of this population in cities (Carby 1992). These social actors argued that poor Black girls' and women's participation in the workforce, engagement in the public sphere, and social nightlife activities were evidence of their alleged sexual degeneracy. However, low-income Black girls' and women's livelihoods or well-being were not the primary point of concern; rather, it was ensuring that these sexual values would not be transmitted to white and Black middle-class urban girls and women.

Protecting economically privileged girls from being sexualized became a focal point of American discourse and continues to be a preoccupation in this contemporary moment. Since middle-class girls are typically imagined as living in suburban areas, Tolman argues that sexual degeneracy is mapped onto urban spaces via the "The Urban Girl." Historically, "The Urban Girl" has been associated with African American girls due to the fact that it was primarily this population moving to cities. However, as demographic shifts caused by transnational migration occurred and cities

became inhabited by low-income Latinx people, “The Urban Girl” is now also imagined as Latina in this contemporary moment.

Overall, the image of “The Urban Girl” is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, it renders the sexual experiences of rural and suburban girls invisible. Secondly, containing the sexual activities of “The Urban Girl” becomes the main target of political debates—ultimately resulting in the hyperscrutinization of urban girls of color. By examining three discourses of heteronormativity, that of “the ghetto girl,” “chola,” and “hot cheeto girl,” I show how “The Urban Girl” in Los Angeles is imagined as a Latina or African American girl whose sexual desires are always signs of sexual degeneracy—never of healthy sexual development. I will also delineate how these three discourses pinpoint styles of dress rooted in the cultural practices of racialized low-income urban communities as concrete evidence of girls’ alleged hypersexuality. To conclude, I describe these discourses' impacts on Latina girls’ subjectivities, mobility trajectories, and how mothers and other parental figures impose regulations on daughters.

“Ghetto Girls” and “Cholas”

“Girl, I did not leave the ghetto to live in the ghetto,” Denise told me while we hung out in San Francisco to discuss one of the ethnographic prompts I assigned to her. Our conversation had veered from the topic of aesthetics to discussing her desire to move in with her long-term partner into a 1-bedroom apartment in San Francisco, one of the most expensive cities in the US. At the time, Denise, a working

professional who shared with me that she was making a middle-class salary, was renting a room in a house near San Francisco State. Upon looking at units advertised online, she expressed concern about whether renting a one-bedroom apartment was realistic or not, given the average $3,000 price for a one-bedroom apartment in The City. In an attempt to be helpful, I suggested that she look at apartments closer to downtown San Francisco since they tend to have lower rent prices. Denise, as well as those with cultural knowledge about the various neighborhoods in San Francisco, knows that apartments with lower rent prices tend to be located around The Tenderloin, a neighborhood with a high rate of homeless people, crime, sex workers, and drug trades, which she and other San Francisco residents defined as a "ghetto."

The "ghetto" that Denise had left was her hometown of South Central, a predominantly Latinx and Black inner-city neighborhood in Los Angeles. Like Denise, the majority of participants were aware that the low-income racialized neighborhoods they lived in, ranging anywhere from South Central, East Los Angeles, Pico-Union, to Huntington Park, were considered "ghettos," subsequently making them "ghetto girls" (sometimes referenced as "hood" or "ratchet" girls). For example, when I asked participants how society viewed Latina girls from LA like themselves, Natalia answered, "I will say Latina girls from LA are sometimes viewed as maybe being quote-unquote "hood" or "ghetto" or from bad neighborhoods. I feel like that is a big perspective that people have."

In line with Nikki Jones' research on urban Black girls in Philadelphia, I find that "ghetto" was a term and status automatically ascribed to low-income Latina girls

from racialized low-income neighborhoods in Los Angeles. Jones contends that ghetto is "a popular slang term that is commonly used to categorize a person or behavior as ignorant, stupid, or otherwise morally deficient" (Jones 2010: 9). Gender shapes how a person experiences being evaluated as "ghetto" as well as the social stigma they undergo. For example, clothing, speech, and comportment failing to uphold middle-class white femininity are used to brand Black girls and women as "ghetto."

Similarly, the Latina daughters in this study reflected on how behaviors, styles of dress, and aesthetics were factors contributing to whether they and other girls were categorized as "ghetto." Take, for instance, Luz, from Huntington Park, who stated, "I feel like they view Latina girls from LA like, as like the hood, like we don't like they don't take crap from no one like we will stand up to people." Throughout our conversation, she explained that white and even people of color who were not from Los Angeles assumed she and other Latina girls from this city to be "loud" and "menacing." Luz, among other participants' responses, revealed that the discursive construction of urban low-income youth as "unruly" also impacted them, as girls are automatically assumed to be aggressive and loud. Likewise, Gabriela explained that Latina girls from Los Angeles are viewed "As intimidating. I think they view [us] as having a very strong character strong personality. I don't think that there's really the greatest, you know, association." Intimidating was another word that participants used to describe other people's perception of them as aggressive, a violent youth that they feared, perhaps.

Latina girls' speech and aesthetics were and continue to be cultural practices people observe to determine whether a girl is "ghetto" and, therefore, morally deficient and aggressive. For instance, Daisy explained, "I think maybe they might group us into like, thinking that we're all like from the ghetto, or that there's certain stereotypes associated with us, the way we look or maybe the way that we would talk." Aurora, like other daughters, elaborated on the modes of dress people associated with "ghetto" urban girls from Los Angeles:

> I guess there's already a prior identity that comes with just being from a certain place. I think people just think like, maybe like back in the day, like the big hoops that like, the more like brown pride kind of kind of girl… So, you know, it just it reflects that people have preconceived conceptions of what it means to be from a ghetto.

Likewise, Lily told me, "I think they view us as like very ghetto or a gangster type of vibe. Like, the thin brows, a dark brown lip liner, or like the very baggy pants." Aurora, Lily, and many other daughters in this study described how aesthetics and clothing choices such as hoop earrings, dark lip liner, thin eyebrows, and baggy clothing are viewed as clothing that "ghetto" girls from Los Angeles wear.

While researchers have documented how urban-based aesthetics and clothing choices as cultural practices that African American urban working-class people perform, and therefore, are always tied to Blackness (Ramos-Zayas 2007), I found that the majority of daughters associated such aesthetics with chola/os *or* with chola and Black communities. My intention is not to dispute that some of the aesthetics deemed "ghetto" are rooted in Black cultural practices; instead, it is to show that context, along with a subject's identities and membership in social groups, informs

how they make meanings out of aesthetics. Ultimately, some of the aesthetics and styles of dress I describe in this chapter are shared by ethnic groups and have traveled across national and international borders, while the origin of others cannot be pinpointed to a particular location or group of people.

Nonetheless, within the context of Los Angeles, Latina girls primarily associated “ghetto” clothing with the aesthetics of chola/os, and described how institutions and people presumed while they were teenagers—and even till this day—that they are cholas due to the neighborhoods they grew up in. For example, Rosa told me, “[When] you're from LA, you know, it's just like, the stereotype is like Cholo, gangster, you know, East LA type thing.” Similarly, Emilia, a working professional alumna from UC Santa Barbara raised in Southgate, explained, “I think like in Southgate, like in the hood, I think Latinas are known as like cholas. I think the hoops, I'm just trying to think of like, you know, lip liner, hoops, like yeah, the Angeleno accent too, like I see that too.” Many of the daughters in this study described how wearing hoop earrings, lip liner, baggy clothing, and heavy makeup would result in them being viewed as having the chola’s moral values. Before further discussing chola aesthetics and how the US state has historically linked them to sexual deviancy, I will provide an analysis of the pachuca style of dress since she is the precursor to the chola and both national discourses construct girls and women who perform pachuca and chola aesthetics as gang-girls with pathological values including those related to sexuality.

The Zoot Suit Riots and Pachucas/os

Figure 1: The Pachuca Aesthetic. Courtesy of Los Angeles Daily News Negatives, Collection 1387, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

Pachucas typically referred to girls and women of Mexican descent in the 1930s-1950s who dressed in Zoot Suits (see Figure 1). Catherine S. Ramírez best explained this style of dress:

> For young Mexican American women in wartime Los Angeles, the zoot look generally consisted of a cardigan or V-neck sweater and a long, broad-shouldered "finger-tip" coat; a knee-length and therefore relatively short pleated skirt; fishnet stockings or bobby socks; and platform heels, saddle shoes, or huarache sandals. Many also wore dark lipstick and used foam inserts called "rats" to lift their hair into a high bouffant. For extra panache, some lightened their hair with peroxide, sported tattoos, or wore the masculine version of the zoot suit. Also known as "drapes" or el tacuche, this outfit

> consisted of the “finger-tip” coat, which sometimes extended to the knee, a pair of billowing “Punjab” pants that tapered at the ankle (2009: xii).

Several political, social, and cultural factors within this period facilitated national state discourses constructing the pachuca dress style as evidence for Mexican women’s criminality and sexual deviancy, including WWII—which heightened the state’s and citizen’s anxieties about global power, patriotism, and heteronormativity. At this time, men and women were expected to exhibit their patriotism in gendered ways. For men, this included participating in the armed forces, while women were expected to work temporarily in the public sphere—eventually returning to their domestic duties of being a stay-at-home wife and mother. For approximately five million women, entering the labor force facilitated new freedoms for them, like having their own source of income, being able to enter the public sphere at their discretion, and having an opportunity to wear pants at work, which they were expected to remove before entering the public sphere. With the entrance of women into the workforce and men deployed to fight this war, the formation of US heteronormativity weakened as marriage rates between white, heterosexual, middle-class American citizens declined.

Secondly, numerous jobs in the agricultural and industrial fields were also vacant during wartime. To fill agricultural jobs, the US initiated the Bracero Program, sponsoring the temporary legal migration of mostly Mexican men through short-term labor contracts, with some of these men deciding to dwell in Los Angeles. African Americans living in the rural South also migrated to Los Angeles to fill vacant industrial jobs. With the increasing presence of Mexican and African Americans in

this city, moral panics about the state's ability to maintain global power during wartime heightened. Politicians, the media, authorities, civic leaders, and white residents in Los Angeles worried that the influx of racialized youth—especially those wearing Zoot Suits, would impact juvenile delinquency during a time when the nation was already politically vulnerable.

Lastly, the war resulted in scarcity of food, fabric, and clothes—resulting in politicians asking Americans to support war efforts by rationalizing their consumption of these products. Anyone who failed to do so was seen as unpatriotic. Thus, those wearing zoot suits, clothing that required a large quantity of fabric, were viewed as unpatriotic for failing to rationalize their fabric consumption.

These sets of power relations formed the historical backdrop for the Sleepy Lagoon Murder case and the Zoot Suit Riots—events in Los Angeles that produced national discourses equating the pachuca style as evidence of gang-related criminal activity and sexual deviancy. The Sleepy Lagoon Murder case and trial refer to the death of José Gallardo Díaz, who was found dead on August 2, 1942, outside Eleanor Delgadillos' home—and the trial of twenty-year-old Henry Leyvas, 24 members of the alleged 38th Street gang (a Mexican-American gang), and three pachucas, Dora Barrios, Lorena Encinas, and Frances Silva, for the murder of Díaz. The trial lasted three months and received national public attention from politicians and news media outlets, which was typically unusual. According to researchers, LAPD, media, and local officials viewed this case as the ideal opportunity for advancing nationwide efforts to criminalize Pachuco/as (Ramírez 2009; Tovares 2002). Ultimately, the

Sleepy Lagoon trial also resulted in a national understanding of Mexican girls and women as gang members, as the media reported these girls engaging in criminal gang activity on the street for the first time.

Approximately a year later, hostile attitudes towards pachuca/os continued to permeate throughout the nation, facilitating the Zoot Suit Riots. Eager to assert their masculinity and fulfill their alleged patriotic duty of disciplining pachucos, US servicemen attacked, beat, and stripped the clothing of primarily pachucos in downtown Los Angeles. Although it was mostly Mexican boys and men affected, African American and Filipino boys and men wearing Zoot Suits were also subjected to these violent measures—and when white service men traveled to East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights (neighborhoods composed of low-income Mexicans), white servicemen harassed anyone, including girls and women, who they perceived to be Mexican.

Though pachucas and pachucos experienced similar discrimination for wearing clothing and aesthetics that transgressed heteronormativity, politicians, the media, white Americans, and even some Mexicans framed the clothing of pachucas as evidence of their alleged deviant sexualities. This is because the Zoot Suit transgressed white middle-class femininity via the marking of ethnic pride, as it differentiated pachucas from white mainstream beauty ideals dictating that girls and women should wear long skirts or dresses, apply moderate makeup only, appear neat, and remain in the private sphere with the exception of working to fulfill their patriotic duty. By wearing trousers, a lot of makeup (which has historically been associated

with prostitutes), having untamed hairstyles, socializing in public, claiming spatial mobility, and their ethnic pride, the pachuca transgressed heteronormativity in this historical juncture. Thus, it is no surprise that Ramírez found academics' description of pachucas as "little tornadoes of sexual stimuli, swishing and flouncing down the streets" (2009: 70).

In sum, the pachuca's desire to transgress heteronormativity contributed to the national framing of this group of girls and women as sexually deviant. Rather than focusing on her patriotic duty to a nation that has historically discriminated against Mexican people and denied women socio-economic and legal opportunities, the pachuca prioritized her pleasure by focusing on her looks and adorning her body with extravagant clothing and makeup. In other words, the pachuca threatened the formation of US heteronormativity, and in turn, society disciplined her, framing her as a criminal with deviant sexual values.

The Urban Chola

Although regional politicians passed a resolution prohibiting the wearing of Zoot Suits in Los Angeles, reminiscences of this style are visible in the aesthetics of the chola, which became popular during the 1970s-1990s and continues to be a style of dress (see Figure 2). Some of the common characteristics of chola aesthetics include winged eyeliner, dark lip liner or lipstick, heavy makeup, lose clothing (especially Dickie pants and Pendleton shirts), tattoos, excessive hairstyles (either in

the form of having long hair worn down or a high bun or ponytail), and acrylic nails.[5] The chola is also known for wearing two particular jewelry pieces: hoop earrings and nameplate or religious gold necklaces (typically of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* or a cross). During this time, the hip hop industry became mainstream, popularizing urban-based aesthetics performed by working-class African Americans, which closely resemble those of cholas. These aesthetics include lip liner, excessive makeup, loose clothing, tattoos, hoop earrings, winged eyeliner, and nameplate necklaces. Again, my attempt is not to make an argument about the origin of these cultural practices—especially since these ethnic populations lived in close proximity to each other during this time period in Los Angeles, possibly fostering the mixing of cultural practices. A more productive point is to detail how girls and women of color who enact these aesthetics, regardless of whether they associate them with cholas or Black women, are deemed "ghetto" and disciplined for doing so.

[5] Academic scholarship has not documented the chola as wearing acrylic nails; this cultural practice is associated with African American girls and women. However, there is evidence from media sources that acrylic nails were part of the chola aesthetic since the 1980-1990s.

Figure 2: The Chola Aesthetic. Picture of girls or women wearing chola aesthetics in downtown Los Angeles bridge. Photo courtesy of public Instagram account @veteranas_and_rucas.

As with the pachuca style, not everyone who did chola aesthetics was gang-affiliated; however, US state politicians, LAPD, schools, and the media viewed and treated girls and women who performed these aesthetics as gang members (Harris 1994). Following in the footsteps of the pachuca, the chola defied heteronormativity on an everyday basis through her aesthetics. Her refusal to reproduce white middle-class femininity was pinpointed as evidence of the mythical urban underclass that would facilitate the downfall of the nation. Once again, the US was engaged in multiple wars during this historical juncture. However, this time, these battles were fought domestically to combat the "war on drugs" and "war on crime," political regimes pinpointing African American and Latinx youth and immigrants in Los Angeles as unruly criminals responsible for crime rates and drug use.

Building on Ramírez's intersectional analysis of the pachuca, I suggest that the figure of the chola came to embody the nation's multiple fears within this particular timeframe. In a nation that perceived low-income urban youth of color as "unruly" criminals, believed that the influx of Latinx migrants engaged in crimes threatening the states' modernity, and understood Latina immigrants' reproduction of "anchor babies" as draining the state's wealth, the chola perhaps is one of the nation's worst nightmares. Firstly, she is a low-income urban youth of color allegedly engaging in criminal activity, including the use and selling of drugs, that will lead to America's demise. Secondly, she is presumably the daughter of Latinx parents, highlighting the reproduction and settlement of this ethnic group. Thirdly, her urban-based aesthetics signaling a proud working-class ethnic identity transgresses heteronormativity as they reject white, patriotic, middle-class femininity. And according to "The Urban Girl" discourse, the chola's sexual degeneracy will spread to middle-class girls and women—teaching them deviant sexual and family values—which will prevent economically privileged women from producing children and family—a key way through which the US state maintains the formation of heteronormativity.

It is clear that US politicians, the police, and society members viewed the chola and any girl or woman of color adhering to this style of dress as a member of the urban underclass as she allegedly possessed pathological sexual values taught to her by her family. For instance, academia and national discourses tend to overemphasize that girls become gang members because of family values passed

down to them; either older male family members introduce girls to this way of life, or girls join gangs because they lack family support (Curry 1998; Vigil 1988; Quinn et al. 2019). Overall, I suggest this emphasis on family as the primary factor for girl gangs reproduces a culture of poverty framework masking the structural conditions that facilitate the formation of gangs.

Much research produced by scholars correlates gang-life with higher rates of engaging in risky sexual behavior, such as having unprotected sex, having multiple and co-current partners, engaging in sex while under the influence, having a high transmission rate of sexually transmitted infections, and unplanned pregnancy. For instance, researchers have tried to understand the phenomenon of being "sexed-in," girls' initiation into a gang by the way of them having sex with male gang members (Quinn et al. 2019). Academics have also examined how mixed-gender gangs reproduce patriarchal hierarchies as cholas are often viewed as sexual objects for cholo's sexual pleasure, requiring them to have sex with male gang members at any time (Harris 1994). Although the underlying motive for this research is to show that gangs reproduce patriarchal hierarchies, this research nonetheless links sexual deviancy with the lifestyle of cholas and those adhering to these sorts of aesthetics. Collectively, such research portrays cholas as girls and women with deviant sexual practices.

Not much research has documented the pleasures of being a chola or the agency these women articulate in performing chola aesthetics. One exception is Norma Mendoza-Denton's study of urban cholas in Northern California, which

describes how Latinas claimed agency by performing chola aesthetics (Mendoza-Denton 2008). Participants in this study used foundation and lipstick to accentuate their ethnic features and winged eyeliner to visibly claim respect for themselves in a nation that polices urban Latinas. Other than this study, much research on cholas has pathologized their behaviors, including their forms of dress, sexual activity, and performance in school.

Similarly, feminist research on chola-like aesthetics has not critically investigated how the figure of the chola is linked to the mythical urban underclass or "The Urban Girl." For instance, Julie Bettie finds that middle-class Mexican-American girls living in rural California performed a chola identity and were disciplined in school for doing so (Bettie 2000). However, Bettie does not elaborate on the ways in which the chola has discursively been linked to urban sexual deviancy. Nonetheless, her findings indicate that urban racialized aesthetics can be performed outside of the urban and that girls adhering to these cultural practices are stigmatized.

Similarly, Jillian Hernandez's study of the "chonga" girl, defined as "low-class, slutty, tough, and crass young woman" in South Florida, acknowledges how this style of dress resembles those of cholas and Bratz Dolls (2009: 64). Hernandez noted the similar ways in which the aesthetics of the chonga and chola are linked to urban bodies that transgress normative gender and sexual norms, yet she does not undertake a historical analysis to delineate what forces have equated sexual deviancy with urban girls' bodies and styles of dress. By employing a heteronormativity matrix of domination, I examine how chola aesthetics are always discursively linked to the

urban and how the US state, schools, media, and police have socially constructed these aesthetics as cultural markers of the urban underclass' sexual deviancy.

To further delineate how The Urban Girl is socially constructed as having a deviant sexuality in this contemporary moment, I examine the "hot cheeto girl," a figure many of the Gen Z and younger millennial daughters invoked to describe negative depictions of Latina girls from Los Angeles. In the next section, I investigate discursive constructions of the "hot cheeto girl." Then, I explain how some of the "hot cheeto girl's" aesthetics are rooted in the cultural practices of the chola and pachuca. To end, I describe how daughters must engage in politics of respectability, forging their subjectivities in opposition to the chola and "hot cheeto girl" to secure access to the category of a "good" student and gain access to college. I also describe the generational implications chola and "hot cheeto girl" discourses have among Latina mothers and daughters by demonstrating that parents' awareness of these narratives results in them encouraging their daughters to engage in respectability politics to safeguard daughters' prospects of socio-economic mobility.

The "Hot Cheeto Girl"

About three months into my ethnographic fieldwork, I noticed that the low-income urban-based aesthetics I anticipated daughters to perform, such as those of the "chola," were almost entirely absent in their gender performances. Most daughters described themselves as dressing masculine, plain, basic, or hybrid during their girlhood years, while in college, and even as working professionals for those who

were alumnae. It wasn't until I interviewed younger participants that I understood how the lack of these urban-based aesthetics provided insights as to how heteronormativity is a co-constitutive element of mobility.

Natalie, a young millennial and alumna from UC Santa Barbara working on her graduate degree, was the first participant to invoke the "hot cheeto girl" figure when explaining negative depictions people had of her. To her surprise, I had never heard of this term, and she recommended I look at TikTok videos to learn about this negative construction. For hours that night, I scrolled through countless TikTok videos on my phone, enraged by the mocking depictions of girls performing this style of dress.

So who is the "hot cheeto girl," and how does she deepen our understanding of heteronormativity? The "hot cheeto girl" refers to a feminine middle or high school-aged Latina or African American girl who is a "bad student." Like the pachuca, chola, and chonga, she has a particular set of aesthetics, including tight and revealing clothing, large hoop earrings, gold nameplate necklaces, fake eyelashes, heavy makeup, winged eyeliner, excessive hairstyles, long acrylic nails, and red fingertips caused by her consumption of hot cheetos (or another spicy chip) for breakfast. Due to the fact that many of these characteristics resemble the chola's style, I situate "hot cheeto girl" aesthetics as a mode of performing an urban, working-class, racialized femininity.

The TikTok videos I examined revealed how heteronormativity continues to impact the educational experiences of girls who perform an urban-based, low-class,

ethnic femininity. For instance, many videos took place in a classroom setting or included some discussion about the “hot cheeto girl’s” outlook on school. By emphasizing how the “hot cheeto girl” is truant, arrives late, is unprepared in class (has no notebook or pencil), needs to copy other’s work, speaks back to teachers, and has an overall “loud” demeanor in class, these videos depict how the “hot cheeto girl” is discursively constructed as someone who lacks intellectual aspirations and capabilities. These videos also spotlight how schools and society perceive the “hot cheeto girl’s” urban femininity as evidence of her lack of academic rigor and why she is a “bad student.”

Take, for example, the video produced by TikTok user @Sassysoundsasmr. The video begins with a slender, light-skinned “hot cheeto girl” sitting in a high school, evidenced by a photo backdrop of small desks and chairs typically found in K-12 classrooms. The “hot cheeto girl” wears excessive makeup, including winged eyeliner, fake eyelashes, lipgloss, and foundation. Her clothing is revealing; she wears a low-cut light green tank top showing her midriff and chest area. She wears a religious gold necklace and medium-length acrylic nails with bright blue French tips and designs. The “hot cheeto girl” chews gum loudly while rummaging through her pink bag to find a light pink lipgloss. As she searches her bag, it appears that someone off-camera might have looked or commented about her making noise; in response, she rolls her eyes and aggressively gestures at them. She then applies her lipgloss while looking directly at the camera, puckering her lips, and tapping the lipgloss loudly with her acrylic nails (see Figure 3 for reference). While gesturing with her

hands and chewing gum, the “hot cheeto girl” whispers to an off-camera teacher: “What, Miss? What you said? I know it’s not beauty class, but how am I supposed to pay attention to math with my lips so crusty?” Next, she glares off-screen, rolls her eyes while inserting and moving the lipgloss applicator loudly, and muttering under her breath: “Focus on yourself.” While glaring off-screen and popping the applicator in and out of the lipgloss tube, she says to an off-camera student to the left of her: “What you keep looking at Marcus, damn, all up in my grill.” She puts her lipgloss away while chewing gum loudly and shifts her focus back to the off-camera teacher. While gesturing with hands, she says: “Huh? I’m paying attention, Miss. I can’t even see the board. You write so small.” She proceeds to roll her eyes several times, then puts on her glasses and mutters under her breath: “Teachers so annoying.” Next, the “hot cheeto girl” takes out a small yellow sticky note pad to take notes and a yellow pencil and says to the teacher: “Yes, I’m writing the notes, Miss.” Shifting her attention back to an off-camera student to the right-hand side of her, she giddily says: “Nick, stop *playing*!” While batting right side playfully and looking at him up and down: “Stop, before I beat you up!” She then looks back towards the front of the room and says, “Miss, I wasn’t done writing down that slide, can you go back please? Thank you.” While continuing to chew gum loudly, she bats her right side again and leans in towards Nick to say: “Stop *playinggg*.” She writes a note to Nick and notices that the teacher is watching her. “Yeah, ma’am, I’m paying attention,” she says and then tosses the note over to Nick.

Figure 3: The “Hot Cheeto Girl” Performed by TikTok User @sassysoundasmr.

It was common for videos to show the “hot cheeto girl” like TikTok user @Sassysoundsasmr did, as a “bad student” being disruptive and aggressive in class, evidenced by her combative body language and disobedience to teachers. These videos deepen our understanding of heteronormativity as they reveal how institutions and people view racialized urban-based aesthetics as evidence of girls’ alleged urban underclass moral values, including their unruliness, lack of motivation for school, and promiscuous sexuality. As @Sassysoundsasmr’s video showed, the “hot cheeto girl” is allegedly a bad student due to her desire to focus on her looks. By putting on lipgloss, body lotion, perfume, or other makeup products (as other videos indicated),

the “hot cheeto girl” allegedly creates a disruption in class, showing her disinvestment in becoming upwardly mobile.

Under the guise of this discourse, the “hot cheeto girl’s” desires to prioritize her body, whether it is through applying makeup, focusing on her clothing, or eating inexpensive hot cheetos, are framed as evidence of her hypersexuality—a primary factor as to why she is a “bad student.” This is evident by the abundant number of videos portraying the “hot cheeto girl” flirting with boys, discussing her relationship with boys, focusing on her looks, or describing their unplanned teen pregnancy. While “the hot cheeto” girl in @Sassysoundsasmr’s video flirted with Nick in class, other videos portray “the hot cheeto girl’s” hypersexuality by spotlighting her sexual availability. This is the case with a video created by @Saulordaz123, a light-skinned Latino who places a towel over his head to perform a “hot cheeto girl” identity. The video commences with the “hot cheeto girl” entering the school classroom late while eating a small bag of hot cheetos (see Figure 4). As she opens the door, she says loudly: *“Hellooo,* ma’am did you miss me or what? I’m sorry I’m late.” She proceeds to eat hot cheetos while dropping some on the floor. Using hands to talk to the off-camera teacher: “Ma’am, I was with the principal.” She turns away from the teacher to look at an off-camera student, who she tells, “Shut up, dude, really! Just kidding, I was smoking weed. Aaaah no ma’am I’m just kidding!” The video transition to the next scene; the “hot cheeto girl” is sitting down and licking her fingers, presumably from eating hot cheetos. She tells an off-camera student, “Ahh dude get me water. *Dame agua guey* [give me water, dude.]” She grabs a white styrofoam cup with her

wrists and drinks water. Then proceeds to stick out her tongue while directly looking at the camera. The last scene consists of the "hot cheeto girl" standing and talking to an off-camera student. While using her hands, she says, "Hey friend, friend, give me the answer to 1, and I'll give you a kiss." She laughs loudly while clapping her hands and sticking out her tongue.

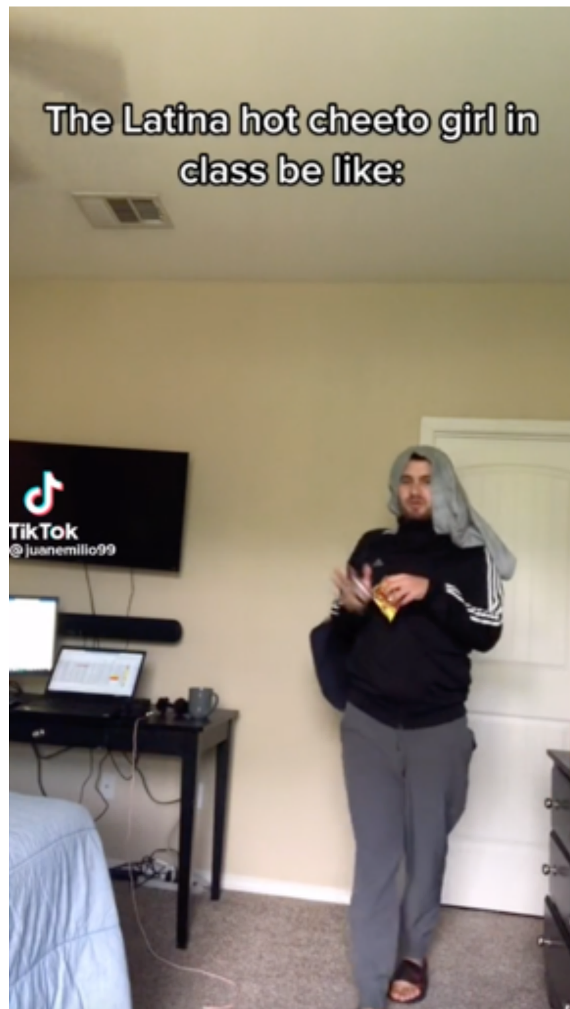

Figure 4: The "Hot Cheeto Girl" Performed by TikTok User @juanemillo99

Such video reveals that the "hot cheeto girl" is not only a "bad" student but she will use her sexuality to cheat her way through school; in this case, made clear by her

offer to kiss someone in exchange for answers to an assignment. A smaller number of videos portrayed the "hot cheeto girl's" excessive sexuality and bad student status through teen pregnancy like @cherry.wonder's video captioned: "Hot cheeto girl gets pregnant again by the same dead beat daddy." Like the urban "chola," the "hot cheeto girl" is framed as a bad student because of her sexual activity, which in this case results in teen pregnancy, often imagined as detrimental to girls' socio-economic mobility.

Although not many, I collected two videos created by white male teachers in schools demonstrating their views of the "hot cheeto girl." Both videos consisted of the teacher enacting a "hot cheeto girl" who shows up to class late while eating a spicy bag of chips, and speaks back to the teacher. For example, history teacher @mr_williamson23 posted a video with the following description: "POV:* Hot Cheeto Girls.*" The video begins with him walking into the room dressed as a "hot cheeto girl." In his hands, he holds a hot cheeto bag, a Starbucks drink, and a white folder tagged up but completely empty inside—signaling the "hot cheeto girl's" unpreparedness for school. His outfit consists of dark shades, a green towel over his head as a way to mock the hairstyle of the "hot cheeto girl" (see figure 5). The next scene consists of him standing in front of the classroom in his teacher role with his hands crossed. He nods his head in disapproval while quoting Taylor Swift's lyrics, "Damn, it's 7 am." In line with girlhood scholars, I argue that this video further sheds light on how teachers and educational institutions perceive girls of color performing

these urban-based aesthetics as “bad” girls and students—and that a material repercussion of this discourse is teachers’ disinvestment in these girls.

Figure 5: The “Hot Cheeto Girl” Performed by TikTok User and History Teacher @mr_williamson23

“I was Never a Hot Cheeto Girl”

The daughters I spoke to were aware of discursive constructions of the “hot cheeto girl” and its material implications for these girls—including their educational and mobility pathways. For instance, many daughters disclosed how they witnessed teachers disciplining girls who were “hot cheeto girls” or “cholas.” “The teachers are

always like, be quiet, or they're treating them [hot cheeto girls] like troublemakers. Like a pest. Not really leveraging their energy," said Melissa while we talked about her lack of urban-based aesthetics. Another daughter, Nicky, told me that "hot cheeto girls" "would get in trouble for having like their phone out and stuff" in school. Luna, a UCSB alumna who first heard of the "hot cheeto girl" discourse as a working professional in LAUSD, said,

> When I saw the hot cheeto girl stuff, I think that's when like, I thought of my students who like for sure get judged because of like, their long nails or like their hoops or because they come in like all makeup and stuff like that. I think by teachers, especially male teachers, they don't get taken seriously. And it's very surprising to them when they perform academically well.

Perhaps, then, we can infer that teachers like @mr_williamson23 exist within the LAUSD school system and that these teachers' anxieties over the mythical urban underclass result in them making negative assumptions about these girls.

As urban low-income girls who desired a better life for themselves and understood college as a possible route for achieving socio-economic, spatial mobility, and gender and sexual exploration, modifying their aesthetics and behaviors while in school was one of the few ways in which they could have some control over their prospects of going to college. To secure access to the category of the "good" student and girl, the majority of participants engaged in politics of respectability by modifying their behaviors in two ways to construct their subjectivities in opposition to the "hot cheeto girl" and the "chola." Firstly, daughters mimicked white middle femininity by being submissive in school. They described themselves as shy or quite—almost never questioning a teacher's authority or voicing their opinion in

classes. Secondly, participants dressed in ways that imitated white middle-class femininity or what they perceived as masculine or androgynous presenting. Regardless of what performances girls resorted to, they explicitly did not perform the racialized and low-class aesthetics of the "chola" or "hot cheeto girl."

For instance, when I asked daughters whether they were a "hot cheeto girl" while growing up, most told me something along the lines of what Liz shared.

> Liz: I was the complete opposite. Okay, again, it goes back to those expectations that I had to meet. Because of what I said when I was young [wanting to become a vet], I stuck to it so much, to the point where, yeah, I did become the complete opposite. And I really tried not to be like that, because I also saw the kind of people that they hung around with. And I didn't want to be associated with that.
>
> Michelle: Okay, who did they [hot cheeto girls] hang out with?
>
> Liz: It's people that did a lot of drugs and drinking and partying, and I just didn't want to do that.

In sharing her response, Liz draws attention to how teachers and schools view girls who defy heteronormativity through their urban-based aesthetics as engaging in risky activities. Secondly, her response provides insights as to how she forged her subjectivity in opposition and superior to "hot cheeto girls" to actualize her desire to attend UC Davis. Likewise, Lily told me,

> I was actually the complete opposite. Very shy in the back corner type of person and I dressed very plain, I was always the good student, like the straight A student. So I kind of did feel like annoyed by the hot cheeto girls at some point because they'd be very loud or obnoxious. I'm like, that's just the complete opposite of who I am. But I don't really relate to them in the sense of how they act in the classroom.

Lily, among other daughters, alluded to the ways in which engaging in politics of respectability required that they modify their behaviors in the classroom by being

submissive girls who dressed “plain” and did not question teachers’ authority. When I asked her to elaborate on what dressing “plain” consisted of, she said, “Well, honestly, I would just dress in like basic skinny jeans and like a zip up hoodie. I was a very plain person. And so, I really kept to myself, I didn’t wear anything very flashy. Or like any statement piece it was just basic, like, black, or like blue. Yeah, dark colors.” Thus, some participants, like Liz, refrained from wearing clothing or accessories that the “hot cheeto girl” would wear to avoid drawing unwanted speculation about their intellectual capabilities and sexual lives. Other daughters alluded to performing white middle-class femininity through their clothing. As was the case with Nicky: “I would just dress very like casual, kind of almost, like, preppy” which for her included wearing a lot of long dresses and skirts. And some daughters like, Luna, described dressing masculine while in middle and high school since they wore men’s or boy’s clothing during this time.

While some participants like Liz and Lily did adopt negative perceptions of the “hot cheeto girl,” other daughters who modified their behaviors to mimic white middle-class femininity were critical of discursive constructions of this narrative—with some even desiring to dress in this style. Of this Ariana noted:

> I remember seeing girls who were in middle school already with the jeans and then their hoops and that personality. I remember looking up to that and thinking, ‘Wow, I want to be that.’ So I remember begging my mom for a specific type of skinny jeans or certain types of shoes. I love the big hoop earrings too at fifth grade.

However, Ariana’s mother did not let her wear large hoop earrings or skinny jeans—and instead encouraged her to dress like her, with more flowy feminine clothing.

Similarly, Natalie desired to own a large pair of hoop earrings and thought that her mother and grandmother were supportive of this decision until they all went together to a jewelry store to buy Natalie her first pair of earrings. "I remember my grandma was like, *no, asi de grandes, no* [no, that big, no]. And I'm like, oh my God, like, how does she know? I'm thinking like they don't want me to be sexualized." Later, Natalie explained that she believed her mother and grandmother learned from the media that in the US, hoop earrings are discursively linked to prostitution.

Thus, daughters' accounts provided insights about how teachers, school, and family members were all factors as to why they engaged in respectability politics. For example, Dora explained, "I was definitely not a hot cheeto girl growing up. You know, like I said, I think it just kind of had like a negative connotation. And I think that growing up, I was always kind of told to, like, be quiet. And not really cause like, stir, too much trouble," later explaining that her parents raised her to "not really stir the pot" with any authority figures, including teachers and police. Likewise, when describing why she was never a "hot cheeto girl," Daisy said:

> I've always been quite shy and introverted. And I feel like I was never allowed per se, like, I would never give my opinion without being asked just because that's I think just that's how I was raised. But also, I didn't want to interrupt teachers or anything like that. And I think that stereotype is definitely not true about like most hot cheeto girls, at least the ones that like that went to my school.

Although Daisy was critical of negative depictions of the "hot cheeto girl," who is not afraid to challenge a teacher's authority or voice her opinion in the classroom, she did not behave in this manner due to the ways in which her family, schools, and dominant society would treat and view her for being an opinionated urban girl. For low-income

urban girls, voicing their opinion in the classroom and/or exploring their desire to dress in ways that signaled a proud working-class ethnic identity was too high of a risk—one that might have cost them their pathway into a four-year college.

Daughters' accounts also revealed how mothers and fathers were aware of the ways in which racialized urban-based femininity is conflated with signs of deviancy within the U.S. Ruby a first-year student at UC Davis living in a triple dorm room said:

> I was never seen as a hot cheeto girl. It's honestly because my parents wanted to kind of remove me from the stereotype. Because it is like a prominent stereotype that all Latinas look the same. You know, we are loud. We all speak with our hands, you know, ready to fight. And I don't want to be categorized in that box. I started speaking proper. I realized, being a hot cheeto girl is pushed into ghetto, so I didn't want to be seen as ghetto.

Ruby and other daughters' accounts suggest that discourses of heteronormativity impacted the rules mothers and fathers placed upon their daughters. To safeguard their pathway to college, perhaps, mothers may have unwittingly encouraged their daughters to engage in politics of respectability, teaching them to be submissive in school and avoid cultural practices that would signify they are "bad" students and girls.

In sum, both mothers and daughters identified several discourses of heteronormativity that framed immigrant women and urban girls as having excessive sexualities or as passive objects. Through a heteronormativity matrix of domination framework, I delineated how several national and regional institutions and forces have facilitated the production of these narratives. For instance, immigration policies, the welfare system, national security legislation, and the political economy in Los

Angeles are key institutions and forces which have historically constructed Latina immigrants as "hyperfertile" "welfare queens" producing "anchor babies" or as desexual, genderless, and passive objects. I have also outlined how the US state, LAPD, public schools, and media sources ranging from news outlets to TikTok, have reproduced discourses of the pachuca, chola, or "the hot cheeto girl," which frame low-income, racialized, urban aesthetics as reflective of urban girls' deviancy. These narratives are ultimately discourses of heteronormativity as they correlate these urban styles of dress with hypersexuality or sexual deviancy. To refute these constructions, economically marginalized daughters construct their subjectivities in opposition to the "hot cheeto girls" and the "chola" while coming of age in educational settings in hopes of securing access to college. Daughters' accounts also indicated that heteronormativity shapes gendered parenting, as mothers and fathers encouraged their daughters to behave and dress in ways that uphold middle-class femininity. In the next chapter, I continue examining how heteronormativity, alongside other structural factors in Latin America and the US, shape mothers' gender and sexual politics as well as how they talk to their daughters about girlhood, womanhood, and sexuality.

CHAPTER 3: "*UNO NUNCA SABE*"

> "Siempre le decía [a mi hija] que como mujer, nosotros tenemos que cuidarnos de los hombres porque uno nunca sabe…Y le dije de mi Amistad en Mexico. Cuando tenía 15 años, salió embarazada. Entonces yo le platicaba que yo vi la diferencia en que ella salió embarazada y sus papás la obligaron casarse con el muchacho. Ella dejó de ir a la escuela. Y ella no la dejaban salir. Y luego después ella sufría violencia doméstica con él." –Catalina (migrant mom)
>
> "I always told [my daughter] that as a woman, we have to be careful with men because *uno nunca sabe*…And I told her about my friend in Mexico. When she was 15 years old, she became pregnant. Then I told her that I saw how getting pregnant affected her. Her parents forced her to marry the boy. She stopped going to school. And they wouldn't let her go out. And then later she suffered domestic violence with him."- Catalina

Catalina was among one of the migrant Latina mothers to invoke their sexual politics through the discourse of *uno nunca sabe*. In this case, Catalina's childhood best friend's experience of dating and having premarital heterosexual sex—resulting in an unplanned pregnancy and forced marriage—informed how Catalina developed her views on sexuality, dating, and mobility. Witnessing the material repercussions of an unplanned pregnancy taught Catalina that pregnancy could deter low-income girls from their educational studies. Ultimately, educational attainment shapes girls' and women's socio-economic status, informing access to resources that people need to leave abusive heterosexual and queer relationships. For Catalina's friend, poverty and patriarchal gender norms facilitated her immobility, keeping her in an abusive heterosexual relationship.

Overall, I found that mothers' lived experiences as economically marginalized girls in Latin America, in conjunction with their experiences as racialized and low-

income migrants in the US, shaped how they articulated the discourse of *uno nunca sabe* to make sense of their own transnational lives and to claim agency. Conversations with mothers and daughters also revealed that mothers drew on this narrative to teach their children about the ways in which class and racial/ethnic inequalities exacerbate gender and sexual marginalization in Latin America and the U.S. As a sexual politic, *uno nunca sabe* visibilizes the violence mothers contended with as low-income girls in the Global South and as migrant mothers by framing heterosexual dating as dangerous and mothering while being low-income as undesirable. It also constructs sexual moderation as a strategy for their daughters to focus on their pursuit of socio-economic mobility, which mothers believe will free daughters of these oppressions. Some of the marginalization this politic sheds light on and tries to shield daughters from included sexual harassment and rape facilitated by discourses of heteronormativity, the experience of being reduced to laboring objects and the consequences this has on one's gender and sexual life, potential power imbalances in heterosexual relationships and the lack of autonomy this created, as well as the hardships of mothering while low-income like securing childcare.

In this chapter, I employ heteronormativity matrix of domination to show how intersecting structures of power produce discourses of heteronormativity in Latin America, the U.S-Mexico border, and in the US, ultimately shaping the ways in which mothers forge and articulate *uno nunca sabe*. While discourses of heteronormativity in these regions impact the formation of this sexual politic, I also describe how other structural conditions, such as lack of access to sexual health

resources and the precarity of being low-income mothers, are factors influencing Latinas' articulation of *uno nunca sabe*. To end, I describe how daughters interpret *uno nunca sabe*, often conflating it with their mother's alleged religious and cultural values. In this section, I also show how this discourse has implications for daughters' sexual subjectivities and mobility trajectories. While some daughters and dominant discourses of third world women may reduce this sexual politic to "traditional" or religious values, I instead argue that this discourse can be read as a form of agency; mothers draw on this narrative to teach their daughters to desire a better life for themselves—one free of the sexual and gender marginalization they underwent, exacerbated by racial/ethnic and class inequalities.

Discourses of Heteronormativity and *Uno Nunca Sabe*

As transnational subjects, who lived in at least two national contexts, the Latina immigrant mothers in this study had to forge their gender and sexual subjectivities in relation to discourses of heteronormativity in their native countries and within the US. Here, I draw primarily from interview data with mothers to show how class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality shape the social construction of heteronormativity in Mexico and El Salvador. Through conversations with mothers about their girlhoods in the Global South, I learned that intersecting structures of power inform who has access to and reaps the benefits of heteronormative sexuality. This is particularly important given that previous research has assumed that heterosexual subjects experience the same sexual privilege within the Global South

(Macías-González and Rubenstein 2012; Corrales and Pecheny 2010). However, interviews indicated that low-income girls of Indigenous and Black descent in Mexico and El Salvador are reduced to hypersexual objects or laboring objects—subjecting them to work exploitation and sexual violence from an early age. Learning about the migratory experiences of mothers who crossed the border without legal documentation also revealed the discourses of heteronormativity that operate within this borderlands region and that heteronormativity helps fuel the sexual violence girls and women face in this context. Here, I also discuss how US discourses of heteronormativity produce sexual violence for Latina immigrants by hypersexualizing them. As a sexual politic, *uno nunca sabe* sheds light on the material repercussions discourses of heteronormativity produce for low-income girls and women of color, such as sexual violence and work exploitation.

Being a Niña Pobre in Latin America

The majority of mothers I spoke to were low-income niñas (girls) who came of age in Mexico or El Salvador and described in depth how their families' economic marginalization impacted their girlhoods in Latin America—including how people viewed them as gendered subjects. For instance, while crying and wiping her tears with a tissue, Rosa Maria explained that in her small rural hometown of Mexico, "hay mucha pobreza en aquel tiempo. Había mucha pobreza. Y me prestaba mi mamá con una persona o con otra, para limpirar por tal de dar los comida. Ya de ahí, desde los ocho años (de edad)" [There is a lot of poverty during that time. There was a lot of

poverty. And my mom would lend me to one person or another to clean [for them] in order to feed us. Since I was about eight years [old].” Like Rosa Maria, many of the mothers in this study learned about the gendered dimensions of poverty from a young age. In this case, Rosa Maria worked as a domestic worker in other people’s homes as a child to help her family meet their basic needs. Likewise, the mothers who grew up in cities in Latin America were also economically marginalized girls who stopped attending school in order to earn an income. Of this, Catalina noted: “Salí de la escuela y trabajé en una tienda…Como a los 15 años. Vendiendo part-time. Primero era en una tienda de helados. [I left school and worked in a store…At about 15 years old. Selling part-time. First, it was in an ice cream shop].”

Through these experiences of having to work at a young age, mothers learned that low-income girls and women were reduced to non-human objects of labor. This is evident as many mothers noted during our interview that government officials and more affluent members of Mexico and El Salvador viewed them as exploitable and disposable objects. For instance, when I asked mothers how the government in their native country viewed low-income girls, most mothers responded something along the lines of:

> En el tiempo que yo me crei, no importabamos allí. Lo que sus padres pudieran hacer por usted es lo que uno tenia, pa darle de comer y ropa. Pero no había ninguna clase de organización. Ninguna clase de institución que dijera ‘pobrecita a las niñas, le vamos a a regalar un par de zapato, para que vayan a la escuela…Los gobiernos estaban en el poder, pero enriqueciéndose ellos y nosotros nomas buenos para trajabar. [At the time I came of age, we didn't matter there. What your parents could do for you is what you had, to give you food and clothing. But there was no kind of organization. No kind of institution that said 'poor low-income girls, we are going to give them a pair of

> shoes so they can go to school...The governments were in power, getting richer, and we were only good workers].

Through conversations with mothers, I learned that mothers became critical of the ways in which class shaped how government institutions neglected economically marginalized girls—often reducing them to laboring bodies from an early age. As I described in the previous chapters, their lack of formal education further exacerbated the precarity they contended with as immigrant women in the US—leaving domestic and garment work as one of the few options of accessible work.

Through their lived experiences of being economically marginalized girls in Latin America, mothers also learned about discourses of heteronormativity in their native countries which either reduced them to laboring bodies *or* hypersexual objects. For example, Amelia, a mother who was born in a small rural town where playing basketball was one of the few social activities available to girls, noted:

> Pero si no tienes, dinero y no estás estudiada, no, te precian así como como mujer. No te aprecian como mujer. Todavía hay muchas mujeres que sufren mal trato. Hay muchas mujeres que todavía los maridos las quieren tener solamente en la casa cuidando a los hijos. Pero hay mujeres que están, que tienen dinero y son profesionales y tienen otra vida, son respetadas, se lo ganan por eso, por el dinero y por lo profesional. Entonces hay hombres que la respetan porque ay, esa sí es estudiada. Entonces esa así. [But if you don't have money and you're not educated, they don't value you as a woman. They don't appreciate you as a woman. There are still many women who suffer abuse. There are many women whose husbands still want them to only be in the house taking care of the children. But there are women who are, who have money and are professionals and have another life, they are respected, they earn it because of money and their profession. So there are men who respect her because she is studied. So it's like that.]

Like Amelia, I found that most mothers understood how being poor impacted their positionality and romantic heterosexual relationships with men. As Amelia described,

men in Mexico respected middle- and upper-class women with formal education while perceiving low-income girls as either fertile or laboring bodies—objects that bred children or did domestic work—indicating that class is a salient force in Mexico shaping the formation of heteronormativity in this national context. Other mothers from Mexico and El Salvador revealed learning that men viewed them as hypersexual objects through their experiences of being sexually harassed in Latin America or being talked about as objects that men could claim for their sexual satisfaction. For instance, Maria, another mother born in a rural town who migrated to a city as a young girl, recalled with much emotion the sexual violence she had undergone as a girl to explain why she imposed strict regulations on her daughters' clothing.

> Te voy a hablar como niña. Yo crecí en una pobre parte de la ciudad. Se veían más las cosas… los hombres abusaban de ti de una manera de otra en las calles. Es una ciudad muy grande. Te subías al autobús para ir a la escuela porque te mandaban sola y los hombres abusaban. O sea, yo me sentía abusada. Mal protegida. [I'm going to talk to you as a girl. I grew up in a poor part of the city where you could see more things... men abused you in one way or another in the streets. It is a very big city. You got on the bus to go to school because they sent you alone and the men were abusive. I felt abused. Unprotected.]

Throughout the interview, Maria noted that she often felt discriminated against, especially by light-skinned people, due to her darker skin complexion and regional accent—indicating her low-income rural background. As such, Maria's experiences shed light on the ways in which class and ethnicity likely inform the social construction of heteronormativity in the Global South as men viewed Indigenous and Black low-income girls as hypersexual objects available for their sexual satisfaction. Overall, I contend that Latina mothers learned during their girlhoods about the ways

in which economic status and ethnicity facilitate or impede access to heteronormative sexuality and that a material repercussion of being seen as hypersexual is sexual violence.

Unlike much literature and popular discourse framing the "third world woman" as naïve and always complacent of patriarchal conditions, the mothers in this study denounced heteronormativity in their native countries and the US. While sitting across her wooden table in her beatifically decorated apartment, Amelia said:

> Es que todas las mujeres somos iguales. Todas las mujeres deben de respetarlas y quererlas porque son mujeres no porque sea estudiada porque sea de buena familia se merece un respeto. [All women, we the same. All women should be respected and cared for because they are women, not because they are well educated or because they are from a good family, they deserve respect.]

In arguing that all women across socio-economic backgrounds deserve respect, Amelia challenges heteronormative ideals that pathologize low-income subjects' gender and sexual lives.

Mothers were also critical of sexism in the Global South. Take, for instance, Rosa Maria, who described how she saw boys slowly become socialized to be *machista* men and made it a point to note that she did not agree with these norms.

> Rosa Maria: O sea ya cuando eran hombres mayores ya eran como machistas, verdad? Pero como los niños, los niños se miraban bien con las niñas [In other words, when they were older men they were already like sexist, right? But like boys got along with girls].
>
> Michelle: Y cómo sabía usted cuando un hombre era machista? Hacía algo el hombre o decía algo? [And how did you know when a man was sexist? Did the man do or say something]?

> Rosa Maria: Pues, porque no dejaban a la mujer vestirse bien o arreglarse o platicar con las otras mujeres o salir. [Well, because they didn't let the woman dress well or fix herself up or talk to other women or go out].

As girls, mothers interpreted their parents' rules, which controlled their spatial movements, social life, and style of dress, as beliefs rooted in patriarchy. Some mothers admitted with joy, often even giggling when recounting how they defied these rules. For instance, Anita gleefully explained,

> Mi cosa favorita era que mi pueblo hacía bailes…Yo me iba de escondida a bailar una hora. (Mientras reyendosa) Yo me le escapaba, me pasaba detrás de ella. Tal vez ya estaba en el lavadero lavando y yo me pasaba ahí tras de ella. [My favorite thing in my town were the dances…I would sneak out to go dance for an hour. (While laughing) I would escape, I would go behind her (my mother). Perhaps she was in the laundry room washing, and I would sneak by behind her].

In sharing her escapades, Anita shatters dominant discourses of third world girls as inherently submissive. By defying rules she interpreted as patriarchal and centering her bodily pleasure—which in this case consisted of attending social events to dance—Anita enacted agency from a young age.

Some mothers even recognized how patriarchal norms negatively policed boys' *and* girls' behaviors. With intense ardor, Irma stated, "Yo he captado qué es lo que le dicen a un hombre, 'tú no, tú eres hombre; y no debes llorar. Y por qué no deben de llorar si tienen sentimientos igual que nosotros [I have noticed what they say to men, 'not you, you are a man; you should not cry.' And why shouldn't they cry if they have the same feelings as us]? Irma continued explaining that her family members, including her parents and brothers, upheld patriarchal dichotomies to assess women's and men's sexual behaviors:

> Mis hermanos pueden acostarse con las mujer que quieran. Nosotros las mujeres no. Porque una vez me dijo mi hermano, el tercero, me dijo 'un hombre, entre más mujeres tiene, más hombre se vuelve. Y una mujer, entre más hombres tiene, más puta.' [My brothers can sleep with the women they want. We women cannot. Because once my brother, the third, told me, 'a man, the more women he has, the more of a man he becomes. And a woman, the more men she has, the more whore she is.']

Irma, then, was not only critical of how patriarchal gender norms restricted boys' ability to express their emotions but also described how these societal expectations hindered women's sexual exploration. Later in our conversation, she noted how her family members shamed her for wanting to engage in casual dating and sexual activity after separating from her long-term abusive partner. Despite living with her disapproving extended family, Irma found ways to explore her sexual desires and date migrant men with egalitarian views as a middle-aged woman.

My conversations with mothers revealed that mothers were critical of discourses of heteronormativity in their native countries that reduced them to laboring or hypersexual bodies as well as patriarchal norms. By sharing how they disagreed with, and at times, outwardly challenged both discourses of heteronormativity and patriarchal social norms, it became apparent to me that the mothers' sexual politic of *uno nunca* sabe was not rooted in these patriarchal gender and sexual norms. Instead, mothers developed this sexual politic to make visible to both themselves and their daughters how multiple systems of domination, including heteronormativity in Mexico or El Salvador, influenced their gendered and sexual lives.

U.S. Discourses of Heteronormativity

In the previous chapters, I showed how various discourses of US heteronormativity, such as that of the "hyperfertile" Latina immigrant, "welfare queen," and "anchor baby," construct the sexualities of Latina immigrants as hypersexual. I also showed how the political economy of Los Angeles helps produce discourses of heteronormativity by reducing immigrant women to laboring objects that are passive and desexual. Thus, in this section, I will describe how discourses of US heteronormativity also facilitate sexual violence for low-income girls and women of Latin American descent.

Through interviews with mothers, I learned that US discourses of heteronormativity existed within the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and subjected girls and women who migrated without legal documentation to sexual violence. For example, Reyna, a mother born in El Salvador who migrated alone, described how women in her family warned her about the possibility of being raped while migrating:

> Y yo recuerdo que cuando yo me venía, me decía la bisabuela de mis hijos, que me poniera una inyección. Porque como allá nos dicen a nosotras, 'en el camino te violan.' Entonces me decía, 'tienes que ponerte la inyección porque uno nunca sabe.' [And I remember when I came, my children's great-grandmother told me to give myself an injection. Because they tell us there, 'they rape you on the way.' So she told me, 'you have to get the injection because uno nunca sabe.']

In line with previous research on the migratory experiences of Central American women asylum seekers, Reyna's experience highlights that women are well aware of the gendered sexual violence that occurs for girls and women en route to the US. Like the women in Schmidt and Buechler study (2017), who took Plan B as a protective strategy for preventing unplanned pregnancies that occur as a result of being raped by

coyotes or other men, women in Reyna's family encouraged her to receive a birth control shot to prevent unplanned pregnancy in case she was raped.

Building on Latina feminist scholarship, which argues that the U.S.-Mexico borderlands is a site inflicting gender and sexual violence onto girls and women by framing them as "illegal aliens" or as criminals who should be punished (Escobar 2016; Falcon 2001), I suggest that US discourses of heteronormativity help fuel the violence low-income girls and women face while crossing the border. This is because US government officials pinpoint the alleged hyperfertility of Latinas as the reason why these women are committing the crime of moving to the US without legal documentation. Moreover, US discourses of heteronormativity like that of the "hyperfertile" Latina immigrant, "anchor baby," and "welfare queen," all frame Latina immigrants as likely to commit an additional second crime: draining the US state of wealth through their use of social services to support their low-income US-born children. In sum, discourses of heteronormativity help fuel the sexual violence girls and women face while migrating—and *uno nunca sabe* reveals how heteronormativity in the Global South, U.S-Mexico borderlands, and the Global North shapes mothers' sexual politics.

Evidence also indicated that discourses of heteronormativity reducing undocumented migrant girls and women to non-human objects facilitated sexual violence for them in other capacities. For instance, Sol shared how her mother was raped by her boyfriend because of her anticipated journey to the US:

> I can't remember how old I was when my mom told me that she had a boyfriend before she left Mexico, and that the boyfriend told her, 'You have to

> have sex with me before you leave.' And he basically forced her. My mom doesn't, doesn't label it as a rape, but I do. Right. But he forced her to have sex with him. Because he said, you know, like, 'you're gonna go through the migration journey, and someone's gonna do it. So, you might as well lose it with me like that. It might as well be the first time with me.'

In this case, the social construction of undocumented immigrant women as illegal, non-human objects facilitated the sexual violence Sol's mother underwent. The experience of Sol's mother revealed that Mexican men become aware that the U.S.-Mexico border frames girls and women as non-human objects, making them vulnerable to rape. Some Mexican men exploit these social conditions by calling into question their alleged right to have sexual access to their partners. Unfortunately, this resulted in nonconsensual sex for Sol's mother, which continued to impact her mother's sexual life. Sol explained that this experience caused tension between her mother and father—as he often resentfully brought up the fact that Sol's mother was not a virgin when they got married. While virginity is socially constructed, the material implications of marrying as a non-virgin—even as a result of being raped—for low-income girls and women can be catastrophic (González-López 2005), ranging from having difficulty in finding a male partner to the facilitation of disrespect and tension within a relationship. It is no surprise, then, that mothers try to shield their daughters from the sexual violence that discourses of heteronormativity facilitate through *uno nunca sabe*.

For instance, some mothers also recalled the sexual harassment they had undergone as migrants in Los Angeles to explain why they policied their daughters' behaviors. Amelia was one of these mothers—who didn't allow her daughter to wear

revealing clothing or to be in the public sphere often. During our interview, she shared:

> Uno nunca sabe, cosas así pasan… A mí me pasaron muchas cosas de joven cuando yo vine aquí…Es cuando estaba por allá, por Sur Centro centro, había un uno que me perseguía mucho. No sé ni cómo se dio cuenta que vas agarraba, en dónde esperaba el vas, en dónde trabajaba. Él supo dónde trabajaba. Yo tuve que moverme de factoría porque me perseguía. [Uno nunca sabe…Many things happened to me when I was young when I came here... When I was there, in South Central, there was a man who followed me a lot. I don't even know how he realized the bus I would take, where I would wait for it, and where I worked. He knew where I worked. I had to move to a different factory because he would stalk me.]

The sexual violence that Amelia experienced as a low-income girl working in a sweatshop in the garment industry in Los Angeles, a racialized and feminized political economy, eerily mirrors the experiences of Mexican and Central American low-income girls and women working in maquiladoras (or sweatshops) along the US Mexico border. While the political economy of Los Angeles frames Latina immigrants as "disposable" objects of labor that are passive and desexual objects, these girls and women must also contend with national discourses of the "hyperfertile" Latina immigrant that falsely conceive them as hypersexual. In this instance, the sexual violence that Amelia underwent highlights how discourses of US heteronormativity constructing Latina immigrants as hypersexual objects for the sexual satisfaction of others shaped the formation of *uno nunca sabe*.

As transnational subjects, Latina immigrants contended with discourses of heteronormativity in their native countries and in the US. While discourses of heteronormativity in El Salvador, Mexico, and the US, all reduce low-income and ethnic girls and women to either laboring objects or hypersexual objects, citizenship

also informs the formation of US heteronormativity. This is evidenced by the ways in which discourses of the "hyperfertile" Latina immigrant, "anchor babies," and "welfare queens," all frame undocumented immigrants as having excessive reproductive capabilities. An analysis of how citizenship is used to reduce undocumented women to non-human laboring bodies without sexual agency also sheds light on how citizenship is co-constitutive of heteronormativity in the US. Overall, mothers' experiences of having to navigate discourses of heteronormativity shaped how these women formed their views on sex, dating, and mobility. However, this was not the only structural condition shaping the articulation of this discourse. Lack of access to (sexual) education also impacted migrant Latinas' sexual beliefs and how they raised their daughters, as I discuss in the following section.

Sexuality Education and *Uno Nunca Sabe*

Although it was October, it felt like a summer night in Los Angeles, with a high 70 temperature at 7 pm the evening I interviewed Rosa Maria. With the help of Rosa Maria's daughter, a UC Santa Barbara alumna who was now a working professional, I coordinated an interview with Rosa Maria in her home. Despite being close to retirement age, Rosa Maria worked seven days a week from morning until 7 pm in a *fabrica* doing *costura* in the garment industry—making nights the only time available for us to meet.

After parking my car, I called Rosa Maria's daughter, who came outside and greeted me with a hug. As I proceeded to walk into their home, the smell of sweet

guayabas and Rosa Maria's warm 'hola' greeted me. While entering their home, Rosa Maria immediately offered me dinner, bean and cheese tacos with salsa. I politely declined since I had already eaten a small snack before driving over and was too nervous to eat. We chatted about food, Los Angeles traffic, and college while Rosa Maria, her husband, and daughter finished making and eating dinner in their spacious kitchen. After a few minutes, the smell of beans made me hungry, and I finally agreed to eat her delicious homemade tacos since Rosa Maria insisted I eat.

Once we wrapped up dinner, we proceeded to talk about my dissertation study. I began to go over the purpose of the study and consent with Rosa Maria. Encouraging her not to feel shame about her experiences, I noted: "No tenga verguenza, si no sabe algo sobre el sexo [don't be embarrassed if you don't know something about sex]." When I asked Rosa Maria about her knowledge of sexual health during our interview, she said:

> Rosa Maria: Nadie me enseñó [nobody taught me].
>
> Michelle: So, cuando iba, por ejemplo, a los doctors, no le hablaban usted como de condones? [So, for example when you went to the doctors, nobody explained to you about like condoms?]
>
> Rosa Maria: Una vez, pero ya cuando tenía yo a mi hija, la primera vez me dieron condones, pero ajá nunca los suipimos usar. [One time, but I already had my daughter, that is the first time they gave me condoms, but I never knew how to use them].

Like Rosa Maria, it was common for the mothers that I spoke to have little knowledge about sexuality, including condom use, contraception methods, sexual orientation categories, gender and sexual binaries, and consensual sex. As a feminist scholar and

the daughter of a poor Mexican migrant mother, these findings deeply trouble me. Like many daughters in this study, my mother drew on vague discourses like *uno nunca sabe* but did not provide me with elaborate information about sex. In line with the majority of daughters in this research, I assumed that my mother imparted vague messages about sex to me because of religion, which constructs sex as sinful. The interviews I conducted with migrant mothers proved otherwise; they revealed that most of them did not have sexual health knowledge due to their limited formal education and the lack of sexual health resources in the Global South and Global North. In this section, I describe how lack of access to sexual education informed their articulation of *uno nunca sabe*. Since mothers often lacked the proper knowledge to teach their daughters how to prevent unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, they turned to vague messaging like *uno nunca sabe* to prevent their daughters from experiencing these possible repercussions of heterosexual sex.

Access to Sexuality Education in Latin America

Mothers were critical of the lack of access to sexual health education they had in their native countries. Even the few mothers who acquired sex education in their native countries reported that the curriculum primarily focused on human anatomy, neglecting a discussion of sexual intercourse, consent, sexual orientation, gender binaries, and pleasure. Take for example, Catalina's experience in high school: "Te dan ese curso, y te decían cómo venía los bebé vez al mundo. Sí, pero no,

directamente a uno, como relaciones. Nomas como es biológicamente el nacimiento de cualquier criatura. [They give you a course, that told you how babies come into the world. Yes, but it does not directly discuss like relationships. Just like how any creature biologically comes into the world].” Amelia further reflects the experience of learning mainly about the biological components of sex.

> Michelle: Y su mamá, su papa, o alguien le habló con usted sobre el sexo? [And did your mom, dad, or someone else talk to you about sex?]
>
> Amelia: Ah, no, yo lo aprendí un poco en la escuela. En la escuela. Sí, pero tampoco no nos hablaron tanto de que de es lo único que aprendimos era de de de cómo le dicen ah, los aparatos reproductivos. [Ah, no, I learned it a little at school. At school. Yes, but they didn't talk to us much about the only thing we learned was about the reproductive parts].
>
> Michelle: Lo que temenos? [What we have]?
>
> Amelia: La mujer y lo que tiene el hombre. Ajá, y como lo que tenemos que los ovarios y todo eso, pero básicamente nunca nos hablaron, yo que me acuerde, nunca nos hablaron del sexo, de ni lo que sí me acuerdo. No era tanto así del sexo. Simplemente mi lo que decía mi mamá era de que. Ah, cuando uno se enamoraba, se tiene que hasta que te cases. Te vas a ir con ese muchacho, pero nunca nos decían del sexo. [What the woman and the man has. Aha and like what we have, the ovaries and all that, but they basically never talked to us, as far as I remember about sex. As far as I remember, it was not really about sex. Simply what my mom said was, 'Ah when you fall in love, you have to until you get married. You're going to go with that boy—but they never talked to us about sex].

Amelia's educational experiences reveals that there was a lack of institutionalized comprehensive sexual education available to mothers in their native countries when they came of age. With few institutional sources available to them, their own families' views on sex, even if articulated through vague messages, were one of the few forms of sexual knowledge available to them.

Since the mothers in this study came from low-income families, it is no surprise then that their parents did not talk to them about menstruation or sex—most likely because they also lacked knowledge about these topics. Due to their limited resources, mothers often turned to their extended family members and friends to gather information. For example, when I asked Reyna who taught her about menstruation, she laughed at my question—perhaps drawing attention to my naïve assumption of mothers having institutional access to sexual health. After laughing, Reyna's tone quickly became serious as she began to explain:

> Esos temas, en mis tiempos, no se tocaban. Mi mamá no hablaba conmigo de eso. Mi abuela tampoco-- nadien. Entonces, ya lo viví sola con mis primas que hablaba con mis primas, 'o a mí me pasó eso, mira también.' Y nos hacíamos preguntas y la que la que viví esa experiencia primero, esa se guiaba así como como hacerle. [Those topics, in my time, were not touched. My mom didn't talk to me about that. Neither did my grandmother—no one. So, I went through that only with my girl cousins; I would talk to my cousins, 'o this happened to me, me too.' And we asked each other questions and the one who lived that experience first, she was the one who guided us.

As a result of not learning about sexuality in school or at home, Reyna relied on older girl relatives to gather information about these topics. Other mothers described learning through close friends about menstruation and sex. As was the case with Maria, who recalled how the lack of information about menstruation, sex, and pleasure impacted her first sexual experience as a young married woman.

> Cuando eres niña no te explican, tus padres no hablan contigo eso, nunca te tocan ese tema porque para ellos es como pecado o como es falta de respeto, hacer esas preguntas. Entonces tú creces sabiendo y averiguando en las calles o fuera de tu casa, lo que escuchas. Efectivamente el día que llegó, porque yo me casé bien, yo llegué, pues virgen al matrimonio y llegué cerrada completamente sin saber qué hacer. O sea, con miedo con mucho miedo. [When you're a girl, they don't explain it to you, your parents don't talk to you about that, they never bring up that theme because for them it's like a sin

> or a sign of disrespect, to ask those questions. So, you grow up knowing and finding out on the streets or outside your home of what you hear. In fact, the day I married, because I married, I was a virgin and I arrived completely clueless without knowing what to do. In other words, afraid, very afraid.

Feminist scholars often note that there is a "missing discourse of desire" within k-12 sex education curriculum in US public schools (Fine 1988; Fine and McClelland 2006; Allen 2013). One consequence of this curriculum is that it inhibits the development of girls' thick desire, understood as their ability to see themselves as capable of having sexual desires, experiencing sexual pleasure, living outside of sexual and racial violence, and having economic, intellectual, and political freedom (Fine and McClelland 2006). Few studies have examined US immigrant Latinas' experiences with sex education in their native countries and in the US and the implications it has on their thick desire and sexual politics throughout their life course as the majority of research primarily analyzes the impacts of sex education on HIV transmission rates (Flaskerud et al. 1996; Marin and Marin 1992; Romero et al. 1998). For Maria, a lack of sexual knowledge negatively impacted her first sexual experience since she did not know what to expect during her first heterosexual encounter. Other mothers, like Gabriela, admitted that not having access to pleasure-based sex education resulted in several dissatisfying sexual experiences. She articulated her lack of sexual pleasure by telling me that even though she was in her sixties, she had only ever had three orgasms. Given Maria's and Gabriela's experiences, researchers need to analyze how intersecting systems of domination at the global level inform access to thick desire, pleasure, and overall knowledge on

sexuality for transnational subjects and the impacts this has on generational conversations of sex.

I also found that a consequence of having limited access to comprehensive sex education was mothers limited understanding of sexual orientation, including queer identities. For example, when I asked most mothers, “Cual es su orientacion sexual? [What is your sexual orientation?],” most did not understand the concept of sexual orientation. In fact, they did not use heterosexual as a label to describe their sexual identities. Instead, they responded with something along the lines of, “me gustan los hombres [I like men].” Without an institutionalized space to learn about various sexual orientations, mothers gained an understanding of non-heterosexual desires and behaviors by witnessing the discrimination homosexual men and lesbian women contended with in their small rural towns or urban cities. For instance, Emelina explained:

> Los homosexuales los trataban como pues mal, les decían los despreciaban. Les decían que eran colchones, que solo das el trasero. Cosas feas, la verdad. Igual que a lesbiana. ‘No te acerques a esa porque es marimacha,’ así dicen. Es otra cultura. [The homosexuals, were treated well bad, people told them that they despised them. They told them that they were mattresses, that you only give your butt. Ugly things, really. Just like a lesbian. ‘Don’t go near that one because she’s a tomboy,’ that’s what they say. It’s another culture].

While these views did exist, some mothers like Emelina did not necessarily adhere to these homophobic beliefs that pathologize homosexual people through discourses of hypersexuality. Emelina made sure to tell me that “Yo tengo un dicho que mientras no es mi trasero, no me importa lo que haga la gente. Y los respeto. [I have a saying

that as long as it’s not my ass, I don’t care what people do. And I respect them.]”

Similarly, Irma noted,

> Había una lesbiana que sabíamos. Y como homosexuales había dos. Hasta simplemente uno regresó de aquí, los Estados Unidos. Y decía para que sus papás no se sintieran mal, él decía que yo era su novia. O sea, mira yo, para mí, son personas igual que yo. Con diferentes gustos, pero era igual que yo. [There was a lesbian we knew. And homosexuals there were two. Even one returned from here, the United States. And he, so that his parents wouldn't feel bad, he said that I was his girlfriend. I mean, look, for me, they are people just like me. With different tastes, but he was the same as me.]

Here, we see that Irma not only learned about these sexual orientations and desires by witnessing people discriminate against homosexual people, but we also obtain a glimpse of her views on queerness. In an attempt to be helpful and provide allyship, Irma pretended to be the girlfriend of her homosexual friend to shield him from additional discrimination. While some may understand Irma as complacent with compulsory heterosexuality as she did not explicitly challenge people’s homophobia, I suggest this is one way in which she engaged in allyship.

To date, researchers attribute the lack of comprehensive sexual knowledge that Latina girls and women possess about heterosexuality and queerness to religion and cultural values. While the institution of religion may impact the formation of sexuality in Mexico and El Salvador, there are also other social, historical, and cultural factors contributing to Latinas’ sexual politics, including a lack of institutionalized comprehensive sex education and discourses of heteronormativity.

Access to Sex Education in the U.S.

Most mothers relationally defined and understood having greater access to sexual health resources and knowledge as a result of moving to the US. While some mothers expressed having greater access to sexual health resources, I found that their access to knowledge was still limited since they did not understand consent, how to use male and female condoms, various sexual orientation categories, and contraception methods. For example, mothers described an appreciation of having readily available menstruation products.

> Michelle: Cómo aprendió usted cosas así como, ay, cómo se dice en español? Como las pastillas o condones? [How did you learn about those things like, oh, how do you say it in Spanish, like birth control pills or condoms?
>
> Amelia: No, hasta que vine aquí. Yo no sabía de ajá de pastillas ni condones. En mi pueblo ni siquiera conocía yo las las toitas vaginales para nuestro periodo. [Not until I came here. I didn't know about pills or condoms. In my small town, I didn't even know about vaginal products for our period.]
>
> Michelle: Como los Kotex? [Like Kotex?]
>
> Amelia: Nosotros allá usábamos otras cosas. Usábamos trapitos y los lavamos. Sí, me daba pena, pero los lavábamos íbamos al río y decía mi mama, 'siempre lavalos hasta el último cuando ya termines de lavar toda tu ropa.' Los escondidilla, los lavábamos, a veces rápido y ya así. No conocía las toallitas femeninas hasta que ya llegué aquí. Y como yo llegué con con una hermana que yo no conocía, la vine a conocer aquí porque ella se vino cuando yo estaba chiquita. [We used other things there. We used cloths and washed them. Yes, I was embarrassed, but we would wash them, we would go to the river, and my mother would say, 'Always wash them last, once you finish washing all your clothes.' Secretly I washed them, sometimes quickly like that. I didn't know about feminine products until I got here. I arrived with a sister that I didn't know, I came to meet her here because she came when I was little.]

It was common for mothers to lack formal knowledge about menstruation or have access to sanitary products while living in Latin America. Moreover, from Amelia and other mothers' responses, I learned that the general lack of education around

reproductive health in their countries may have facilitated stigma and shame around menstruation, as they often hid being on their periods. Not until Amelia arrived in Los Angeles did her older sister teach her about menstruation products. As with Amelia, other mothers reported having access to menstruation products in Los Angeles as a gender and sexual freedom—since they no longer had to wash and hide their menstruation clothes and could easily buy sanitary products.

While mothers reported having more access to sanitary products, birth control, and reproductive health services in Los Angeles in comparison to Latin America, data indicates that their access to reproductive health and sexual education in the US continued to be limited. For instance, the mothers who identified as knowing about contraception, only described one or two contraception methods, often recommended to them by their doctor, a relative, or a friend. This is evidenced in my conversation with Anita.

> Michelle: Y cuando usted iba, el doctor sí le explicaban así como las pastillas, le explicaron las diferentes formas de la contraception y condones? [And when you went, the doctor did they explain to you about birth control pills, and different forms of contraception, and condoms?]
>
> Anita: Sí me daban condones. Fíjese a mí, no me gustaban. Y me decían también de una cosa, de uno que ponían en el brazo. Yo tenía una amiga que tenía uno por 15 años y fíjese que así salió embarazada. Y entonces por eso yo, como si no le tenía como tanta seguridad. [Yes, they gave me condoms. Look, I didn't like them. And they also told me about something, that they put in the arm. I had a friend who had one for 15 years and she got pregnant. And so that's why I didn't have as much confidence in it.]

Here, we see that the doctor only told Anita about two contraception methods, male condoms and Nexplanon, a contraception implant rod inserted into the patient's arm. Based on her friend's experience of becoming pregnant while using Nexplanon, Anita

refrained from receiving this contraception method. While this is a valid reason for not using this birth control method, what is concerning is that the doctor did not take the time to explain other options, including female condoms. Although medical facilities provided Latina immigrants with male condoms, as was the case with Anita, medical staff and doctors assumed that this population already knew how to use them. Unfortunately, this assumption was incorrect. Like Rosa Maria and Anita, Irma confided in me that she learned to use male condoms while in her 40s.

> Michelle: Y sobre el sexo, o sea, como condones, cómo aprendió usted esas cosas? [And about sex, like condoms, how did you learn those things?]
>
> Irma: Fíjate, fíjate, te voy a decir algo. Fíjate que yo con el papá de mi hija no me habló de eso. Ni con el papá de mi hija. Yo no supe nada de eso. Yo vine a saber de condones y de todo eso, sabía que existían porque sí me daba me dieron cuando yo me al alivio de mi hija. Después fui una cita al doctor y me dieron una bolsa con condones ahí. Los condones terminaron ahí. Regados tirados. Porque la verdad, yo nunca, nunca platiqué con nadie. Yo empecé a despertar de la sexualidad de todo después de los 40 años que yo me separé. [Look, look, I'm going to tell you something. Look, the father of my daughter, didn't talk to me about that. Not even with my daughter's father. I didn't know anything about that. I came to know about condoms and all that, I knew they existed because they gave me some after my daughter was born. Afterwards, I went to a doctor's appointment and they gave me a bag of condoms. The condoms ended there. Thrown everywhere. Because the truth is, I never, never talked with anyone about that. I began to have a sexual awakening, to everything, after being 40 years old when I separated.]
>
> Michelle: Y m cómo aprendio usted ahoracon sobre esa información? [And how did you now learn about that information?]
>
> Irma: Ah, fíjate que muchi yo conocí con una pareja que tuve que dure casi tres años. Yo aprendí más con él. Ah, con él fue con el que aprendí mucho más porque es de esas personas que cuando que plactica y te pregunta y todo es abierto y dice, 'cuando algo te molesta, pues tienesque hablarlo.' Yo aprendido más, más cosas con él porque el aquí estudió. Entonces, tú sabes que aquí en estados unidos es más abierto. [Ah, look I learned a lot with a partner that I had for almost three years. I learned more with him. Ah, with him is who I learned a lot more because he is one of those people who when

> he talks he asks you and everything is open and he says, 'when something bothers you, well you have to talk about it.' I learned more, more things with him because he studied here. So, you know that here in the United States it is more open.

From Irma's lived experiences I learned several things. Firstly, that she and her first partner, a Mexican immigrant man with low levels of education, both did not know how to use male condoms. Thus, when medical staff gave these to Irma after birthing her daughter, they were not used. As Irma explained, she first learned to use male condoms with her more recent partner, a Latino immigrant with formal US education, who facilitated open conversations about sex, condoms, and pleasure. It is not a coincidence that Irma correlates her second partner's willingness to talk about sex with formal education, as research shows that educational attainment can facilitate these conversations amongst people (Weinstein, Walsh, and Ward 2008). In this case, this partner served as a source of sex education for Irma—who had limited access to formal education spaces in her native country and in Los Angeles.

The lack of knowledge surrounding comprehensive sex education facilitated questionable heterosexual sexual encounters between migrant mothers and their male partners. For instance, some mothers explained that they wished to use male condoms with their partners as a way to prevent pregnancies. However, some of their partners outright refused to use them, while others tried to use a condom but could not put it on correctly. Such was the case with Rosa Maria, who told me in a light-hearted manner that a doctor had given her condoms during a check-up appointment after giving birth. Not knowing what they were—some of her sisters, her husband, and herself thought they were balloons. After learning from a family member that they

were condoms, she brought the topic of using condoms to her husband. While they both agreed to use them, something went wrong during this sexual encounter as the condom did not stay on. From then on, he refused to wear a condom during sex—despite Rosa Maria wanting to use them as a pregnancy prevention method. Similarly, Maria told me she never used condoms with her husband based on his preference. "No, porque mi esposo decía, 'condon no, porque cómo me voy a comer una una paleta con el papel?' Y él nuncauso condon. [No, because my husband told me, 'How am I going to eat an ice-cream popsicle that has a wrapper? And he never used a condom.] The sexual experiences of Maria and Rosa Maria, as well as other mothers in this study, revealed that Latinx immigrants possess limited sex educational knowledge due to structural conditions limiting their access to formal education in the Global South and in the US. Ultimately, their lack of knowledge can facilitate sexual behaviors that may be nonconsensual, result in unplanned pregnancy, and produce beliefs rooted in gender and sexual binaries. I found that the lack of access to sexual information not only shaped Latina immigrant mothers' own sexual experiences but also how they talked to their daughters about sex through the discourses of *uno nunca sabe.*

Based on interviews with mothers, I gleaned that mothers' lack of sex education and the power imbalances this caused in heterosexual relationships shaped how they articulated *uno nunca sabe*. For example, Irma drew on this narrative to teach her daughter the importance of limiting her number of sexual partners due to the risk of catching a sexually transmitted infection. Irma noted:

> Pues, es que la verdad yo le decía, si tú vas a tener relaciones, es feo. Si tú vas a tener relaciones sexuales, tratas siempre de llevar condon, o trata de que cada persona con cada vayas a estar use condón. Porque una hay muchas enfermedades, y uno nunca sabe. [Well, the truth is that I told her, if you are going to have relationships, it is ugly. If you are going to have sexual relations, always try to bring a condom, or try to ensure that each person you are going to be with uses a condom. Because there are many diseases, and uno nunca sabe.

I suggest that the power imbalances mothers experienced in part due to their lack of knowledge of condom use shaped the articulation of *uno nunca sabe*. For example, later in our interview, Irma revealed that her first long-term abusive partner had unprotected nonconsensual sexual relations with her. Irma wished condom use was a common practice amongst them so that she would not have to worry about contracting sexually transmitted infections as a result of being raped. Similarly, Gabriela, another mother, shared that she found out about her husband's infidelity through her diagnosis of having a sexually transmitted infection. As with Irma, lack of sexual health knowledge was the primary reason why Gabriela and her partner did not use condoms. Thus, mothers are aware of how potential power imbalances in heterosexual sexual encounters can result in material repercussions for girls and women, including non-consensual sex and sexually transmitted infections. Deploying *uno nunca sabe* is one strategy that mothers turned to warn their daughters about these possible dangers.

The collective experiences of mothers illustrate that the dearth of sexual health information in Latin America and the US contributed to the development of mothers' sexual politics. Unfortunately, the story of how mothers come to equate dating and sexual relations with men as unanimous with danger does not end with

their girlhoods, migratory experiences, or lack of access to sex education. In the next section, I draw on conversations with mothers to illustrate how the precarity they faced as low-income mothers also shaped the formation of *uno nunca sabe*.

Precarity, Mothering, and *Uno Nunca Sabe*

Through interviews, I learned that their experiences of being low-income mothers in Latin America and the US, as well as the many hardships that came with mothering in the margins, informed how women articulated the discourse of *uno nunca sabe*. For instance, mothers had to pause their desires to pursue socio-economic mobility to take care of their children, could not afford basic necessities or childcare, and, at times, had to rely or remain on abusive or unfaithful husbands for economic reasons. To prevent their daughters from experiencing these hardships, mothers encouraged them to delay heterosexual sexual activity and instead focus on securing a pathway to college through the discourse of *uno nunca sabe*. For mothers, formal education would ensure their daughters could have the economic means to leave precarious work and romantic situations if needed.

Some of the migrant women I interviewed were already low-income mothers while living in Latin America, and they explained how becoming parents resulted in them having to leave their jobs. This, of course, had implications for their class subjectivities, but also informed how they mothered. Take, for instance, the experience of Catalina, who, despite not having a high level of formal education, worked in the food and retail industry, earning her own income before becoming a mother. During our interview, she noted:

> Pues no era muy buena económicamente, porque yo ya tenía la niña. Había dejado yo de trabajar y de estudiar. A mi me gustaba estudiar y trabajar. Y había dejado de hacer otras cosas, principalmente trabajar. No más era lo que mi esposo ganaba y económicamente también no estábamos bien. [Well, it wasn't very good economically, because I already had my baby girl. I stopped working and going to school. I liked to study and work. And I stopped doing other things, mainly working. It was only my husband who earned financially, and economically we were not well.]

From our conversation, Catalina noted that she and her husband were both motivated to move to the US, so that they could have and give their daughter a better life. Once in the United States, Catalina became embedded in the racialized and feminized political economy of this city—which further exposed her to precarity. She says, "Y cuando llegué a este país, pues también con esto de venirme y todas esas cosas, este el cambio, no sé, también yo se me fue reduciendo la la leche, mi propia leche. [And when I arrived in this country, well, with coming (migrating) and all those things, the change, I don't know, I also lost my breast milk, my milk.]" The stress of moving to a new country, alongside working long hours in the garment industry, resulted in Catalina's low milk supply.[6] Even when she and her husband were employed, they had difficulty paying for milk and formula for their infant child. Later, in our interview, I learned that Catalina quit her job as she did in her native country so she could stay home and fulfill her gendered responsibility of raising her baby.

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[6] Researchers have found that stress can result in mil reduction for breastfeeding adults. See Lau (2001) for more information. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0031395505702960

While some mothers, like Catalina, ended up quitting their jobs in the public sphere to focus on their mothering responsibilities, others, like Rosa Maria, described how stressful it was to be a low-income working mom:

> Yo creo que es lo más difícil. Porque como yo trabajaba, entonces los dejaba encargados y me iba a trabajar. Y en la tarde que venía, nos recogía y a darles de comer y por que hicieran su tarea y a bañarlos y alistar lonche pa otro día, entonces era pesado. [I think that was the most difficult. Because since I worked, I left them with someone and went to work. And on the afternoons, I would pick them up and feed them and make them do their homework and bathe them and prepare lunch for the next day, so it was hard.]

Unable to outsource childcare duties, like the economically privileged women who hire Latina and Filipina immigrants in Los Angeles to do domestic work, the mothers in this study had to engage in what Arlie Hochschild might call a second shift. While working mothers across racial/ethnic lines and socio-economic classes have reported experiencing a second shift, what is unique about the experiences of the Latina immigrant mothers is that their lack of formal education, race/ethnicity, and undocumented status prevented them from obtaining jobs that might provide them with a living wage or childcare services. Lastly, some mothers intentionally refused to receive social services to refute discourses of heteronormativity framing Latina immigrants as "welfare queens" who birth "anchor babies." I suggest that the lived experience of having to raise children while working precarious jobs and working a second shift informed why mothers encouraged their daughters to delay sex and motherhood until they were women with more socio-economic means to raise children.

Indeed, mothers often correlated heterosexual dating and sexual activity as leading to unplanned pregnancy. Take, for instance, Rosa Maria, who explained why she didn't let her daughters engage in heterosexual dating.

> Quería tener precaución porque uno nunca sabe, pero era más mi miedo, miedo de que ellas fueran a salir embarazadas, porque mi hija desde pequeña siempre ha sido la inteligente. Yo quieria que ella estudiada para salir adelante. [I wanted to be precautious, but it was more my fear, fear that they were going to get pregnant, because my youngest daughter has always been the smart one. I wanted her to study to have a better life.]

While heterosexual sex does not necessarily result in unplanned pregnancy, perhaps mothers lack of sexual health knowledge, such as condom use and various contraception uses, informed why they linked this kind of sex with pregnancy. Similarly, Amelia noted,

> Les he dicho siempre que si se tienen que cuidar porque uno nunca sabe, verdad por una infección o cuando estaban chiquitas de que no las embarazaran porque ya iban a arruinar su vida. Es para ellas, para un futuro mejor. [I have always told my daughters that they have to take care of themselves, right, because of an infection or when they were little, not to get pregnant because it would ruin their life. It is for them, for a better future.]

Like the Latina mothers in Gloria González López's (2005) and Lorena Garcia's (2012) studies, Amelia and the additional mothers I spoke to turned to policing their daughter's sexual behaviors in hopes of safeguarding their socio-economic mobility pathways. While both Rosa Maria and Amelia told their daughters to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, interestingly, neither of them possessed the knowledge to do this for themselves or to teach their daughters. Instead, they turned to vague messages about sexual danger, often articulated through *uno nunca sabe,* to dissuade their daughters from having heterosexual sex.

Emelina, who underwent domestic violence and was a single mother for many years, connected these experiences to how she articulated *uno nunca sabe*. "Le decia (a mi hija) que ella tenía que ser fuerte y valiente y no depender de nadie porque no quería que estuviera dependiente de alguien porque uno nunca sabe. Parece que lo logré. [I told (my daughter) that she had to be strong and brave and not depend on anyone because I didn't want her to be dependent on someone because *uno nunca sabe*. Looks like I achieved it." For Emelina and other mothers, their employment of *uno nunca sabe* as a sexual politic was rooted in their desire to shield their daughters from circumstances that could make them dependent on abusive men. By proudly highlighting that she achieved her desire to raise a college-graduated daughter who is not dependent on men, Amelia sheds light on the pleasure she experienced from helping her daughter toward a better life.

While mothers employed *uno nunca sabe* as a way to attempt to claim agency for their daughters, most of the daughters in this study understood this narrative as evidence of their mother's strict and religious views on sexuality. However, as I have shown, various structural inequalities, including discourses of heteronormativity, lack of access to sex education, and mothering while experiencing financial precarity within neoliberal contexts, inform why mothers associate heterosexual sex with danger and/or do not speak in depth about heterosexual or queer sexual pleasure. In the next section, I show how the inequalities mothers have to contend with have generational consequences on sexuality. Hearing *uno nunca sabe*, for daughters, informs their own sexual behaviors, sexual politics, and mobility trajectories.

The Implications of *Uno Nunca Sabe* for Daughters

Diana, who described herself as dressing in plain clothing in middle and high school, was now a working professional in San Francisco. We had just finished talking about an ethnographic prompt when we went off to explore the Financial District of San Francisco together. On that windy day, in between the city's skyscrapers and amidst the chaotic noise of cars and the Muni, Diana noted, "Growing up, my mom always told me to watch what I wear when I leave the house, because uno nunca sabe," after noticing a man looking at our bodies intensely from head to toe. Without hesitation, I nodded in agreement—as I had often heard my mother reference this saying when describing the possible gender and sexual dangers that low-income girls and women experience in their lives.

Most of the daughters that I interviewed or conducted ethnographic observations reported that their mothers did not talk to them about sex or imparted ominous sex-negative messages to them through *uno nunca sabe*. In this section, I show how the majority of daughters interpret this discourse as a sex-negative message rooted in "traditional" Latinx cultural values. Some daughters did acknowledge that the violence their mothers had undergone most likely shaped the formation of *uno nunca sabe*, and noted that this message wasn't necessarily rooted in cultural values. However, all the daughters who recalled hearing *uno nunca sabe* while growing up reported that this message had negative implications on their sexual subjectivities—often limiting their exploration of heterosexual and queer sexuality. In this section, I

describe how *uno nunca sabe* has consequences for daughters' sexual subjectivities and mobility trajectories.

Often, daughters referenced *uno nunca sabe* as a sexual politic that their mothers drew on to police their behaviors by teaching them to fear dating and having sex with boys and men. Kateleya, a student enrolled at San Francisco State University, who described herself as feminine, but not a "hot cheeto girl," shared that her mother only alluded to sex through the discourse of *uno nunca sabe*:

> She's talked to me about dating, but she's always made sure to say like, 'pero no tienes que dar le.' Like, if he's gonna like you, he's not gonna want to do it with you. So I feel like she's shaped a lot of my ideas because she talks about it like that. Like, if a guy likes you, you're not supposed to [have sex] until you get married porque uno nunca sabe. Like for her, it's always been—it's a sin.

Kateleya was among one of the many daughters to associate the discourse of *uno nunca sabe* with her mother's alleged "traditional" views of sexuality. Throughout our various conversations, Kateleya often highlighted how her mother was religious, assuming religion to be a primary factor in shaping her mother's limited views on queerness and sexual pleasure. While it is possible that religion played a role in the articulation of this discourse, heteronormativity, sexual and domestic violence, and lack of institutional knowledge about comprehensive sexual education were also structural conditions impacting how mothers formed this sexual politic. Kateleya's response also reveals that this narrative shaped her sexual subjectivity as it taught her that boys and men only wanted to take sexual advantage of her. During our ethnographic conversations, Katelaya often associated her inability to have casual heterosexual sex with her upbringing, particularly, with her mother teaching her to be

cautious of men. For Kateleya and other daughters, the sexual politic of *uno nunca sabe* made them wary of dating heterosexual men, which they understood as preventing them from experiencing sexual pleasure.

Uno nunca sabe also shaped the sexual subjectivities of queer daughters. For example, Rosa, who noted that she dressed either very plain or as preppy while growing up and identified as bisexual, said, “She [my mother] instilled so much fear in me when it came about sex. She was always like, ‘It hurts so much; don’t do it.’ Or very much, ‘men are the villain in the story or uno nunca sabe’…I did not have sex until I was 20 because I was just so scared.” From Rosa's experience, we learn that this discourse resulted in her delaying heterosexual sexual activity. Rosa also associated her mother’s limited views on sexual pleasure with religion and traditional values. However, after probing to see if her mother gave her any other dating advice, she alludes to another possible experience shaping her mother’s articulation of *uno nunca sabe*.

> I don’t think she means it as advice for me, but I take it, you know, I think she always kind of resents her situation with my dad growing up, you know, when they were together. My dad was a womanizer. Top tier womanizer, and so, my mom, like I said, she figured that if she gave him her virginity, that he would value her because that’s what she thought had the most value. And so my mom, being this version of a woman, in the sense that she can clean, she can cook, she can take care kids, you know, she could look a certain way, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And she always tells me, she's like, 'en vez de limpiar la casa y cocinar, mejor viera aprendido a cojer. [Instead of cleaning the house and kitchen, I should have learned how to fuck.]’ (Rosa and Michelle laugh).

I suspect that this experience of infidelity contributed to Rosa’s mother’s articulation of *uno nunca sabe*. As Rosa explained, her mother adhered to patriarchal norms surrounding marriage by preserving her virginity for her husband and performing

gendered labor like cooking to ensure that she was a respectable and marriageable woman. Even after following these rules, Rosa's mother had negative experiences in her relationship and was not given the alleged rewards of subscribing to patriarchal gender norms. Additionally, I learned through my interview with Rosa that her mother stayed with her infidel husband due to socio-economic constraints, as she could not afford to live and raise children on her own. By stating that she should have learned how to "fuck" rather than cook and clean, Rosa's mother draws attention to how patriarchal gender norms teach girls and women that they should both exist for the sexual pleasure of boys and men but should also be sexually chaste by preserving their virginity until marriage. Navigating such a double bind as a low-income woman, alongside working a low-income job, facilitated her immobility to leave a relationship in which she no longer wished to be in. The immobility that Rosa's mother experienced informed the articulation of *uno nunca sabe* as a method for teaching their daughters that they should be economically independent before dating and having sex with boys and men to never find themselves in the same situation they were in—having to remain in abusive or unhealthy relationships.

While some daughters did acknowledge that structural conditions and the marginalization mothers underwent might have shaped why their mothers told them *uno nunca sabe*, this discourse still had implications for their gender and sexual subjectivities. For instance, when I asked Luna, who was questioning her sexual orientation at the time of our interview, what her mother told her about sex while growing up, she noted that her mother only referenced vague messages about sex.

> Michelle: While growing up, what did your mom teach you about sex?
>
> Luna: Like, don't have sex, like, don't talk to boys. Like they're only gonna want one thing and uno nunca sabe. Your whole life is gonna get derailed, right? Like, you can get pregnant. Um, don't wanna end up like me type of stuff. And so, it was just like always like negative views on sex that were being communicated and stuff like that…I guess on her part, too, it's like on a level of shame, like the fact that like she was a teen mom and that like she has sex at an early age and stuff like that.

Later in our conversation, Luna discussed how hearing sex-negative messages influenced her sexual exploration.

> Michelle: What has been your funnest or best sexual experience so far?
>
> Luna: I would say probably with myself then. Um, just because I feel like I still have a lot of unpacking to do when it comes to the negative sex talk and stuff. Um, so I think like in terms of like development wise, like it's been easier to like explore my own self pleasure than it has to explore that with someone else also there.
>
> Michelle: Uh, what is the negative sex talk? Does that refer to what your mom told you?
>
> Luna: Yeah.
>
> Michelle: Okay.
>
> Luna: And then, yeah, so I think just like the messaging of like, like, yeah, like sex is always gonna lead to like kids and like to like and it was always made in the sense of like, kids were not seen as like this good thing either, because like they'll impede like your dreams and your hopes and like all this stuff.

Luna described in depth the hardships she witnessed her mother undergo as a result of being a low-income single mother, including having a lack of access to childcare and delaying her educational and career goals of obtaining a GED. While Luna understood how these structural conditions shaped how her mother talked to her about sex, pleasure, motherhood, and education, she still alluded to the implications this

discourse had on her sexual exploration. For Luna, this entailed refraining from exploring heterosexual or queer sexual pleasure with a partner. My intention is not to suggest that sexual activity with a partner (or partners) is the ideal way to experience sexual pleasure; instead, it is to show that for daughters, this discourse limits their sexual exploration through other people.

I also found that some daughters came to understand how violence informed their mother's sexual politic as a result of undergoing similar experiences. Such was the case with Esperanza, who identified as bisexual discussed how she had a difficult time trusting men as romantic partners because of her mother's lived experiences and her own.

> Michelle: While you were growing up, did she tell you anything about sex?
>
> Esperanza: Don't do it. To be honest, there was never like a talk. I think I just remember like, bits and pieces of comments that I would kind of be like, what do you mean, but it was never a conversation. And I think one of them being like, I was young, I was in elementary school, probably. And I was hugging one of my cousins, who happened to be a guy. And I remember just genuinely being like, you're one of my favorite cousins, but I got in trouble. I was like, wait, what [voice begins to crack while speaking due to crying]. And it went back to conversation, uno nunca sabe who may have like an ill intention, no matter who you are.
>
> Michelle: Do you know something like happened to her or maybe to her friend or to a family member?
>
> Esperanza: Her? Multiple times that I know of. Two or three that I know of… I think I asked her about a cut she had on her finger. And there's like a little piece of her finger that's missing on her thumb. And some guys tried to like kidnap and rape her [voice begins to crack as she begins to cry]. This, she was like, fighting her way. She found a glass bottle on the ground. And as soon as she found the glass bottle, it was just like adrenaline, I guess. She was able to like crack the bottle and break it, and when she broke the bottle, she cut her thumb.

Later in our conversation, Esperanza described an instance when a man in a car followed her while she walked in her Los Angeles neighborhood. In this moment, she recalled her mother's advice of *uno nunca sabe*. "I think it made like the fears and the things that my mom would tell me of uno nunca sabe a lot more real… I guess what she [my mother] was trying to say, was like, it doesn't matter if you feel confident, or you feel good, or like you feel pretty, it's like they're not seeing that they're seeing your skin." Esperanza, like other daughters and mothers, intentionally modified their clothing when going into the public sphere—often wearing more masculine clothing—in hopes of avoiding being sexually harassed in public spaces—a material repercussion of being constructed as nonheteronormative.

With little control over structural conditions, in a society that reduces low-income racialized girls and women to either hypersexual bodies or laboring bodies, perceives urban girls of color as unruly and unintelligent, and has few resources for low-income parents to raise their children and pursue socio-economic mobility, mothers turned to policing their daughters' sexual activities in hopes of safeguarding their mobility trajectories. This is evident when looking at what Yesika told me during our interview "My mom always encouraged me to focus on school and go to college, so that I could be independent because uno nunca sabe que puede pasar (you never know what bad things can happen." Perhaps one can argue that mothers were successful in helping their daughters safeguard their pathways into college, as many daughters shared that they delayed their exploration of sexuality—which they also understood as detrimental to becoming upwardly mobile.

While daughters and dominant constructions of Latina immigrants might reduce the narrative of *uno nunca sabe* to cultural values within this ethnic community that uphold sexual silence, my framework of heteronormativity matrix of domination reveals that intersecting systems of domination in the Global South, the U.S.-Mexico border, and the Global North that shape how mothers forge this sexual politic. Amongst these structural inequalities are discourses of heteronormativity—either reducing low-income racialized girls and women to hypersexual bodies or laboring bodies—facilitating sexual violence and work exploitation for them across national contexts. Having little access to sexual health knowledge and the precarity of being low-income working mothers were also structural conditions informing how mothers forged the sexual politic of *uno nunca sabe*. As I discussed, mothers drew on this narrative to shed light on the ways in which intersecting structures of power in various national contexts shaped the marginalization they encountered and resisted. As data revealed, mothers employed *uno nunca sabe* to teach their daughters to desire a better life for themselves—one that is free from the exploitation they have contended with. Thus, I argue that mothers enact agency by deploying *uno nunca sabe* in hopes of achieving their desires to shield their daughters from oppression.

In the next chapter, I examine daughters' mobility experiences of going to college. In particular, I utilize my framework of heteronormativity matrix of domination to delineate how their new-found sense of pleasures and desires further reveals how various axes of power shape US discourses of heteronormativity. I will also show how this mobility trajectory informs generational negotiations as daughters

share new information about gender and sexuality they learned in college with their mothers. Teaching their mothers to claim agency is critical in a society that continuously pathologizes the sexualities of immigrant Latinas or reduces them to non-human objects of labor.

CHAPTER 4: “NO ONE’S FUCKING BUSINESS, THIS IS YOUR BODY”

> It wasn't until college where I realized, and that's why in that first picture, my hoops are really big. And I think that was the first year where I started wearing bigger hoops, like I was already wearing, like basic, like generic, like, small sized hoops, but I feel like when I started going out and started wearing those [large hoop earrings], I felt like I was really like reclaiming myself. And not only that, but my sexuality. I think once I started becoming sexually active, I became liberated. Like, I really became like this, I felt like a woman. I felt like oh my god, I'm a bad ass bitch (laughs). Like I can conquer the world. And it sounds like a simple, you know, simple pair of earrings really did that for me…I think also with the hairstyles, like braiding, I never grew up learning how to braid. So, I think when I was in college, like I found girls, right? That they're very much like ‘Natalie, your hair is so long, let me braid it.’ And just being able to, like, integrate it and like really, like, encompass where I come from, because I think for me, it's like, I'm gonna show you guys like what you're afraid to kind of say, and what you are afraid of. They’re afraid of people that look like me, right? Or people come from my communities, right, you see a Cholo wearing like this, you know, like these shades, like being bald, or having like LA tattoos or being tattooed up, right? Like, they get scared, you know? And it's because they know that in that space, people like that don’t get degrees, you know? So, I feel like for me, I started wearing tube tops. Like, I would never wear a tube top before college. But in college I did. I feel like it was like college, it was like, oh, you know, younger me didn't do that. Best believe I'm gonna start doing that now. Right, it was really more about like, channeling my inner child or my inner teenager.
> -Natalie, UC Santa Barbara alumna

Natalie, of Salvadorian descent and a UC Santa Barbara alumna, was one of the college-going daughters in this project to describe how her mobility experience of going to college continued to be shaped by discourses of heteronormativity. In this instance, attending University facilitated opportunities for Natalie to challenge mythical constructions of The Urban Girl, the urban underclass, and discourses of heteronormativity, particularly that of the “chola” and “hot cheeto girl.” Having secured her pathway of becoming upwardly mobile, Natalie could now explore various ways of dressing and her sexuality at her discretion—without having to worry

about being disciplined by k-12 teachers or her family for doing so. As Natalie explained in this conversation, and many others over nine months, attending college allowed her to engage in various behaviors outside the scrutiny of her family. Equally important, going to college exposed her to social networks and coursework instrumental in her shifting viewpoints of normative gender and sexuality. For Natalie, having power over what she could wear and learning from others that particular racialized and classed aesthetics, like hoop earrings and braids, are not only a way to express pride over her working-class ethnic urban roots but also behaviors that shatters discourses of heteronormativity.

As with Natalie, I found that going to college shaped the pleasures and desires that low-income urban Latinas articulated. Feminist scholars have argued, separately, that desire *and* pleasure are analytical categories providing insights into intersecting inequalities. Among these scholars are Michelle Fine and Sarah McClelland, whose concept of thick desire reveals that race/ethnicity, class, and gender can limit who has access to viewing themselves as worthy and capable of having sexual desires (Fine and McClelland 2006) . Other feminist scholarship has drawn attention to the ways in which a subject's desire for a romantic or sexual partner reveals how racial, economic, and sexual inequalities seep into sexual life (Han 2008; Muro and Martinez 2016; Curington, Lundquist, and Lin 2021). While feminists have taken up the task of investigating how broader formations structure desire, Sociology as a discipline has not done so sufficiently. Indeed, Adam Isaiah Green pivots Sociology towards a Sociology of desire: developing a systemic analysis of desire, to investigate

how and who becomes a desiring subject while placing a person's fantasies at the center of such research (Green 2008). In some of her latest work, feminist sociologist Angela Jones advances the discipline of Sociology by calling for a Sociology of pleasure, crafting a theoretical home where scholars center pleasure as an analytical framework (Jones 2020). "How does pleasure shape the social interactions and experiences we have in various social institutions? Conversely, how do various institutions shape how we understand what is pleasurable? (19)" are two questions that scholars should centralize in their work, notes Jones.

Heeding the call of Jones and other scholars who take pleasure and desire as critical vantage points for examining intersecting systems of domination, I consider how discourses of heteronormativity alongside the mobility experience of going to college informs access to and articulation of desire and pleasure across generations in this chapter. To achieve this theoretical task, I employ my framework of heteronormativity matrix of domination to examine further how multiple axes of power shape and maintain the social construction of heteronormativity through an examination of daughters' newfound sense of pleasure and desires for their own lives as well as for their mothers. Some of the pleasures and daughters articulated for themselves included exploring new styles of dress, including performing the aesthetics or behaviors associated with "hot cheeto girls" and "cholas," as well as exploring other aesthetics. Additionally, going to college exposed daughters to various information related to gender and sexuality, including many definitions of sexual orientations, new sexual health information, and sex positive discourses. This

knowledge informs what daughters desire for themselves and facilitates new forms of pleasure for them, which is critical in a society where discourses of heteronormativity frame their sexualities as always posing a threat to the nation. Such information also has generational implications for Latina daughters and mothers as daughters utilize the new knowledge they gained as a result of becoming upwardly mobile as a drawbridge and invitation for their mothers to desire and obtain a better gender and sexual life. Based on conversations with daughters and mothers, I gleaned that mothers are receptive to some information daughters share—and to others, they are not. Nonetheless, desiring a world in which their mothers can center their bodily pleasures and autonomy is a way in which daughters resist discourses of heteronormativity attempting to strip Latina immigrants of sexual agency and bodily autonomy. Like their mothers, then, discourses of heteronormativity and the mobility experience of going to college shaped how daughters employed generational negotiations of gender and sexuality.

The Pleasure of Exploring Aesthetics

Once in college, the Latina daughters in this study had opportunities to dress and explore various styles of dress. Among these styles of dress included clothing that they described as more comfortable, revealing feminine modes of dress, queer, and ethnic styles (including the aesthetics associated with "cholas" and "hot cheeto girls"). Overall, having more agency over what they could wear without facing significant admonishments from k-12 teachers, family figures, and peers was a

pleasure that daughters articulated and a way in which they saw themselves, even if temporarily, challenging discourses of heteronormativity. Although daughters had more control over what they could wear, there were still moments in college in which they had to engage in politics of respectability—once again resorting to white middle-class expressions of femininity to combat negative perceptions staff, peers, or employers had of low-income urban girls of color.

Shifting Views and Performance of Chola and Hot Cheeto Girl Aesthetics

While most of the daughters in this study either previously understood "chola" and "hot cheeto girl" aesthetics as evidence of hypersexuality, unintelligence, and criminality or, at the very least, were aware that girls who dressed in this manner were disciplined for doing so, going to college facilitated a shift in some daughters' perceptions of these styles of dress. For other daughters, who didn't necessarily adhere to these views, but they still strategically refrained from wearing these modes of dress due to their desire to become upwardly mobile, college provided them the opportunity to dress in this manner. Without having to worry about being disciplined by k-12 teachers for dressing in "hot cheeto girl" or "chola" styles of dress—and ruining their chances of becoming college-bound— or having strict rules imposed on them by their family members— girls wore clothing and accessories at their discretion. Having the ability to dress in ways that signaled a proud working class, ethnic, and urban background was a pleasure that they articulated and a way in which they refuted heteronormativity. As such, this pleasure provides critical insights into

how various axes of power shape heteronormativity, a social force that structures access to and articulation of pleasure.

Take, for instance, the experience of Ruby, who previously noted that she didn't dress like a "hot cheeto girl" while growing up because her parents were aware that this mode of dress would be targeted or interpreted as concrete evidence of unintelligence, criminal activity, and deviant sexuality. When I asked Ruby whether and how her aesthetic had changed since attending UC Davis, she responded:

> Honestly, for the better, I would say because in high school. Again. I was very like, like, I'm like me wearing a crop top like other girls in the school. I would be kind of like, like that's ghetto. Or like, that's ratchet, you know, or wearing big hoops. It would be like, that's, that's ghetto. And coming to Davis, my summer roommates. She was like a hot cheeto girl. So, I remember I saw her, and I was like, how is she a hot cheeto girl. Like, that's funny. She's like, she's my, she's my best friend. And then my other roommate is, Afro Latina. And she had like the big hoops, long braids, tattoos, little tops. And I realized, like, that's not ghetto. Like, that's just how they dress. Like, it's a way that they express themselves. And they express their femininity, and like how they feel. I'm like, I like maybe I'm a hater, because I haven't had that opportunity to express how I feel through my clothing. So, I realized that I had all these like, emotions, I found myself like when I first met them, in a sense, like, judging them a little bit, kind of being like, like, oh, they are hot cheeto girls are like, damn, that is kind of ghetto. Because I realized that, that, like, I had this perception of what I thought was like, formal and like, professional and how we should be dressing. And the more I got to know them, I realized, wait, they're very smart individuals, they're compassionate, and they're kind, and they dress the way they do. They're not ghetto, people get old people, you know, like, I then realized, like, I'm going to dress how I want to dress. I'm gonna wear my crop tops. I'm gonna wear my skinny jeans. I'm gonna wear my hoops, my lip gloss, you know, like how I want to dress.

The experience of Ruby reveals that having friends who performed "hot cheeto girl" aesthetics was one way in which her previously held views of equating low-income urban-based ethnic modes of femininity with aggression, hypersexuality, and lack of educational aspirations were challenged. Perhaps this only occurred because she saw

young women of color who had already proved themselves as “intellectual” through their admittance to a prestigious University dressed in this manner. Influenced by her peers, upwardly mobile Ruby could proudly dress like a “hot cheeto girl” as she pleased without worrying about teachers using her clothing as a form of punishment in educational settings.

Similarly, other girls who desired to dress like a “chola” or “hot cheeto girl” while coming of age, but didn’t want to risk being disciplined for doing so, didn’t wait long to fulfill their desire to dress in this manner once in college. Such was the case with Isabella, who was a first year at UC Santa Barbara during the time of this study. While growing up, Isabella was one of the few daughters whose mother let her wear long acrylic nails only during summer, when school was not in session. Perhaps this was because her mother was trying to protect Isabella from being disciplined in school, as long acrylic nails are conflated with concrete signs of deviant sexuality, lack of educational ambition, and unruliness. Now, in college, without having to subscribe to her mother’s rules, she wore long acrylic nails and revealing clothing. However, soon into her first quarter of college, Isabella once again encountered the material repercussion of being discursively framed as a “hot cheeto girl” due to her clothing choices. During our ethnographic conversations, she noted how one of her favorite crop tops was a cheetah print shirt (see Figure 6). However, she began to see a pattern whenever she wore makeup, her long acrylic nails, and this shirt—or any other crop top—to predominantly white and male classes. Isabella noticed that her peers refrained from selecting her for group work or taking her contributions to class

discussion seriously whenever she performed a low-income, ethnic, and urban mode of femininity. During our conversation, she noted:

> I do find myself changing outfits specifically for this discussion. To wear something more, I guess masculine or like not revealing because I have one thing on before class, but when I specifically go to these sections, like political science, like discussion sections, I tried to wear like the cardigan or like a sweater like that's big like in the picture (see Figure 7), or I tried to just dress in a way where they cannot use my appearance as like a targeting point for their argument… I will take off makeup if I'm wearing it. Because like I have to be like, the most like bare self, most masculine form of myself. Just so I feel like I can be respected in these like academic places. Like I have to lose every ounce of like femininity and womanhood just to be heard and seen.

In an attempt to combat this perception of her, Isabella resorted to wearing what she describes as masculine and loose clothing. While Isabella understood not wearing makeup when wearing a cardigan, loose jeans, and a non-revealing t-shirt as masculine clothing, others might associate this style with white, middle-class femininity since femininity and masculinity are subjective and fluid categories. Nonetheless, what is interesting is that Isabella sometimes modified her appearance so that it did not reflect urban-based, low-income, ethnic femininity *or* masculinity in order to prove her intelligence, just as she did in k-12.

Figure 6: Diana's Favorite Crop Top

Figure 7: Compromising Style

Similarly, Natalie, talked about how wearing large hoop earrings was part of her sexual awakening in college and described a few moments in college where she had to compromise her aesthetics. One instance was in her workplace at UC Santa Barbara.

> It was very much not like corporate, but it was also like an office. And again, they wanted you to wear business casual, like slacks. I think they're also very judgmental, because let's say you have acrylics, and you're like typing on your keyboard and stuff, it could be distracting. I remember reading that in their employee handbook, that nails could be "distracting." I was very worried about what others are thinking. I'm like in my head. That's why I told you like, why I don't want to compromise. And I feel like I don't want to do this. I feel like I've been forced, right for so long to do so. But I feel like in order to succeed in this world, you have to right, so it's kind of like you're telling me I don't want to do this, but I have to do it. Because in order for me to be successful, right, and to continue this upward mobility, I have to, you know, really dilute myself.

Diluting essentially referred to compromising her desire to authentically show up as herself in long acrylic nails, hoop earrings, and tight and revealing clothing to work. During our conversation, Natalie shared that this was one moment in which she compromised her nail length and color to avoid drawing attention to herself. Rather than having long nails, Natalie picked a shorter nail size and shape to have more "natural looking nails." Interestingly, Natalie had already made a similar negotiation in high school, as her mother and grandmother only allowed her to wear small hoop earrings and have short acrylic nails (see Figure 8). As I noted in chapter 2, her family was aware of the ways in which heteronormativity constructs Latinas as hypersexual, and that hoop earrings and long nails are cultural practices conflated with signs of promiscuous sexuality. Thus, in both instances, it is actually discourses of

heteronormativity which force Natalie's compromise of style, but in one instance, her family's awareness facilitates the modification of style.

Figure 8: Natalie's Acrylic Nails

Other participants who began to explore "hot cheeto girl" and "chola" aesthetics echoed how the mobility pathway of higher education allowed them to experience the pleasure of dressing in this manner but that they also still had to engage in respectability politics in school and work settings by modifying their clothing and behaviors. Take, for instance, the account of Guadalupe, a UC Davis alumna who desired to dress in "chola" or "hot cheeto girl" styles while growing up but didn't have the discretion to do so until college:

> Guadalupe: I love wearing hoops. Like, everyone who knows me knows that hoops are my thing now. I have a bunch of Jordans, jeans, and crop tops all of that. I don't wear them out, like, in everyday settings. It's like usually when I'm around, like my friends, and we're gonna go to a specific outing. That's more like edgy vibes, but my day to day that style isn't me.
>
> Michelle: And day to day refers to?
>
> Guadalupe: Work or in school.

As urban girls of color who had already navigated several structural inequalities to achieve a pathway into college, modifying their styles continued to be a strategy they turned to fulfill their desires of safeguarding their socio-economic mobility, and in which they unwittingly upheld heteronormativity.

Their engagement in respectability politics wasn't unwarranted in college. As Isabella shared, how she dressed impacted how peers in her courses treated her. Other girls learned through interactions with peers about the negative perceptions their college mates had of them, often assuming they possessed the characteristics of the urban underclass. Indeed, when daughters revealed they were from low-income, racialized, urban neighborhoods in Los Angeles, most peers outwardly called them "ghetto." Many daughters recalled instances that transpired somewhat as the interaction Aurora recalled having at SF State:

> I don't know how to really explain it to you. But I do know that when you say that, specifically, when you're in a different place, that's not LA, that you're from LA, that automatically means something to people. And it's just crazy... Yeah, I definitely do think that when you say to people, "I'm from LA" and they respond, "What part of LA?" And then that's when it gets a little bit more serious. And you're like, "Oh, well, like, I'm from South Central." So, then it goes like, 'ohhhhh, oookay, you're from there.' Like, that means something, right? So you know, it just reflects that people have preconceived conceptions of what it means to be from a ghetto, from a place that is known to be, you know, known for violence, known for crime, known for poverty, and then

> automatically, I guess it throws people off that you're from there, but you're in a space of that is not meant for us from the "ghetto."

Approximately 350 miles from Aurora, several daughters in UC Santa Barbara also echoed this experience, including Mayra:

> Honestly, I would always introduce myself. "Hi, I'm Mayra, I'm from Los Angeles." And then I'll say specifically, more South Gate. Then they'll be like, 'Oh, that's hood.' And I'm just like, 'yeah, it's hood. But I'm still at the same spot you are, you know.'

The surprise that people express in finding out that smart girls in college come from these low-income neighborhoods further sheds light on the ways in which discourses of heteronormativity shape dominant perceptions of low-income urban girls of color.

In more extreme cases, revealing that they were from "ghettos" or "hoods" resulted in daughters being accused of being criminals who would threaten the safety of other college students. For example, the following was one of Sabrina's first experiences as an incoming first year:

> I remember, I did a summer program before actually enrolling in the University as a freshman. And I vividly remember, one of the persons I was dorming with, she was this white girl from a place I had never visited before. And then when she asked me, I was like, 'I'm from Compton.' And that was the first time that I realized being from Compton like, kind of caused this negative response from people. And I was really actually scared to say it after that. I would just say I was from LA. Because what she did is she asked to be moved. She was like, 'I don't want to like sleep or dorm with her because she's from Compton.' And like, I was like, that's, that's so rude of you, I'm really kind. I'm really kind genuinely kind of person. And so yeah, it caused so much like anger in me.

In our conversation, Sabrina speculated that her roommate requested to be moved because she assumed that Sabrina would engage in criminal activity, ranging from stealing to hurting her. Under the guise of the urban underclass narrative and "chola"

discourses, low-income urban girls of color are assumed to be violent, and thus, when Sabrina and other daughters in this study reveal the neighborhoods they call home, they are deemed to be criminals, unintelligent, and hypersexual. Therefore, it is no surprise that even with more agency over what they could wear, girls still resorted to engaging in respectability politics in an attempt to shield themselves from the various material repercussions of being socially constructed as nonheteronormative.

Exploration of Other Aesthetics

Some participants also found pleasure in exploring other forms of dress, including styles that were feminine (but did not mark them as a "hot cheeto girl" or "chola"), clothing they described as comfortable, and styles they understood as visibly marking them as queer. By observing peers and other people's styles of dress in new geographical locations, daughters learned about new fashion trends. While some daughters dressed in one style, others talked about dressing in multiple types of aesthetics at their discretion, which they found pleasurable and a way in which they understood themselves as challenging heteronormativity.

Several daughters explored feminine styles of dress that didn't necessarily mark them as low-income urban girls of color, but which they saw other people in college performing. Sol, a UCSB alumna, was one daughter who explored her desire to wear more revealing clothing as well as painting her nails—modes of dress that her father prohibited her from doing. During our conversation, she described how her

style of clothing changed from mostly wearing basic and plain clothing in K-12 to the following:

> Yeah, I was in flip flops. I mean we were by the beach [both laugh]. Flip flops and I got to going to get my nails done at a nail salon for the first time. Yeah, I was wearing shorts, I was wearing like tights like spaghetti straps. I remember my friend's sister who was at UCSB, she told me you know, 'it's hot there; you take beach clothing and stuff.' So before I moved, I worked a job and I bought a lot of like tank tops and that sort of stuff like v-necks because like it's gonna be hot. So, my style definitely changed when I moved there.

Sol and other daughters at UCSB understood themselves dressing in ways that reflected what other college women across racial/ethnic lines were wearing on their college campuses but didn't necessarily equate their styles of dress with their desire to mimic whiteness. Intrigued by her social surroundings, Katelya began dressing in styles her SF State peers performed. Kateleya took great pride in her feminine style of dress, which she demarcated as differing from the way in which everyone dressed "back home."

> I feel like here [in San Francisco], everyone's more loose with their clothing. Everyone has like, their own identity. And who cares if you're wearing green pants and the pink shirt? Like, own it. You know? And I feel like that's how the culture is up here. Like, everyone's like own it, you know? In LA, they're are like 'eww what are you wearing? Why are you doing that?' Or at least the people who I'm around here, they've always have this positive energy to like, own it. Own it, whatever you are, own it. As opposed to LA it's more like, like the looks, you know? The 'why are you dressing differently than I am.' You get me? And that's why everyone dresses the same because the moment somebody dresses differently, it's not cute. Or it's, they make you feel at least feel ugly.

At some point during our ethnographic conversations, Kateleya had just arrived in San Francisco from going home for the Winter holidays. She talked about how she wore straight-leg checkered pants and styled her hair in space buns to the mall, which

she believed facilitated negative looks and attention from strangers at the mall. She explained:

> My hair, I did like space buns and I was wearing like, jeans that were a lot more like the jeans that I was wearing in the first picture [referring to loose straight leg jeans]. And I remember we went to the mall in LA, and this was around Christmas time, and you can just feel people looking. That's not what I feel up here [in San Francisco]. Like regardless of what I wear people look at you in San Francisco but it's not like in a in a shady way like in LA.

Kateleya continued describing other moments in which she believed her feminine style, which differed from common femininity back home, resulted in her receiving unwanted attention. Dressed in a long maxi dress, booties with a heel, pantyhose, and a hat, she received comments from family like "te miras diferente [you look different]" or "tu siempre sorpriendendo [you're always surprising] during a family party. Kateleya understood these comments to be negative remarks about her new style. She noted:

> Kateleya: Because I was wearing something that nobody else in my family would wear like the hat, and I think they're called pantyhose in English. Like, my family won't wear that. They'll see someone wearing like, you know, chunky boots or like, a hat that's not a Tejana. And for me, my hair, my space buns like I had never worn my hair like that to a family get together for because I know they're gonna say something.

Michelle: So ,what do they usually wear back home, like the girls and the women?

> Kateleya: The girls my cousin's, they would wear like jeans. Can I send you a pic?
>
> Michelle: Yeah, I'm trying to understand why you stand out in LA, you know.
>
> Kateleya: You could tell like everybody wearing jeans and like dark colors and then over here with like, my checkered pants and dress. Yeah, like you're gonna see it. You're gonna be like, oh. [Kateleya uploads images and I am able to see the outfits she is referring to.]

Upon looking at the image of her with several of her cousins around her age, it became clear to me that the common back home style she was referring to was similar to that of the "hot cheeto girl," as most of the girls in the image were wearing skinny jeans and sneakers. Even in the picture, Kateleya stood out as she was the only one not wearing these two items of clothing. Finding my own fashion practices, which at times can include wearing long maxi dresses and booties, reflected in Kateleya's images and descriptions, I responded:

> Michelle: I love these looks. I'm like looking at them and I got the itch to go shopping. Can I ask, like the checkered pants and like the hat and like the sweater dress, because I dress like that. How did you learn to dress like that? Cuz I dress like that, but I can't remember how I learned to dress like that.
>
> Kateleya: I feel like it has to do with, like, our influences around us. Like what we see. Because when I tried big, chunky boots on, like, for the first time, it was in SF. I was like, oh, I like this. Like they're comfy. And I like how they look, I can incorporate it. And then the loose jeans, I started seeing with my roommate, my first year, like she would wear like, loose jeans and chunky boots…
>
> Michelle: How do you think people back home are viewing us when we dress like that? Do you think they think we are trying to dress like white girls?
>
> Kateleya: I'm not gonna say white girl. But definitely, I feel like they think we're trying to be a different identity than what we are to them. I don't know how to explain it. But I just feel like they think we've changed. Like, how we dress signals we changed the way we are like on the inside. I don't think we're trying to change our identity. I just think that we're more exposed to different fashion.

As a Latina who has achieved upward mobility, the experience of Kateleya and other girls who described learning from peers, including white and wealthier women in college, new fashion practices resonated with me. I also found myself dressing in ways that I didn't encounter back home. While Kateleya, other daughters, and I did

not see ourselves as upholding whiteness by dressing in these particular fashion trends, our stories signal that as a result of going to college, we may have learned additional ways to perform heteronormative, white, middle-class femininity through clothing choices. Although some daughters had to perform white, middle-class femininity while in k-12 as a way to secure access to college, what is different, is that these girls now find performing heteronormative femininity as a pleasurable experience as it demarcated them as different than other urban girls back home.

I gleaned that Kateleya and other daughters also found pleasure in dressing in ways that challenged discursive constructions—shaped by narratives of heteronormativity—of how they should look due to their low-income ethnic and urban backgrounds. For instance, Hazel, an SF State alumna, said:

> Not gonna lie, going to SF really change my style, because I could say I was very basic, you know, did the whole like, partido to the side (parted hair to the side), tie it with the little thing in the bag. You know, the, the rubber bands on the pants, like the side for the clean shoes, like the thin ass backpack [Michelle laughs]. I did it all…I think my style and the way that I dress is very different from that common person even my neighbors could tell you like because I can go from like my hippie clothes to like my Mexican shirt, botas (boots) and my hat. So like right now I look like total chola [laughs]. My hood and like these [points to her oversized blue beaded hoop earrings.] I like to buy a lot of like jewelry.

My conversation with Hazel and with other daughters revealed that girls liked dressing in various styles of dress, including "hippie" clothing, clothing that signaled a proud rural Mexican background, which other scholars might categorize as chusma or rasquache aesthetics, as well as "chola" aesthetics. For Hazel, then, having fluidity to choose between styles was what she articulated as pleasurable.

If we juxtapose these two pleasures, of daughters performing and taking pride in doing "hot cheeto girl" and "chola" aesthetics with them taking pleasure in transgressing these exact modes of dress at their discretion, it becomes clear that multiple axis of power shape heteronormativity, and that discourses of heteronormativity inform what subjects articulate as pleasurable. Ultimately, both sets of girls view themselves as challenging discourses of heteronormativity that subscribe an identity, set of aesthetics, and pathological behaviors to low-income urban girls of color. However, girls that challenge heteronormativity by purposely demarcating themselves as different to "hot cheeto girls" unwittingly uphold the exact systems of domination they are attempting to free themselves of. Perhaps in a world that does not demarcate certain styles as low-class, or treat them as evidence of criminality, unintelligence, or hypersexuality, Kateleya and all urban youth of color could wear clothing without facing repercussions.

Other daughters found pleasure in being able to dress in styles they found comfortable. Among these participants was Luna, who talked about how she either had to dress in masculine or basic clothing, consisting of cardigans, while growing up. No longer worrying about what k-12 teachers thought of her based on her fashion practices, attending UC Santa Barbara gave her the economic means to buy the clothing she desired.

> Luna: I think that's been the biggest thing of just being more comfortable in my clothing. I think in undergrad that helped like a lot just like getting access to buying my own clothing to wear what I want to wear and things like that.
>
> Michelle: What opened that access for you in college?

> Luna: The student loans, I think like, money was like a huge thing…I couldn't control my spending because it had always been limited before. It was like, okay, no one's checking on me.

Thus, the financial aid that daughters received from attending college was another structural factor that allowed them to explore new clothing styles they desired. For Luna, this entailed prioritizing comfort.

Dressing in clothes that signaled comfort was also echoed by other daughters, including Sarai, who shared that her father didn't allow her to enter the public sphere in sweats or anything that might signal laziness. Thus, as soon as she entered college, she prioritized comfort through her clothing:

> My dad totally did not agree with like, sweats or leggings outside of the house. Like he would say, 'you look so crazy and lazy. No way you're walking out of the house like that.' Even like to the market or Target or whatever. It was like that was a big no. And you would never catch my mom going out like that either. Like, even around the house, like my dad would always make comments like, 'oh, like you stayed in that all day? Like, what's wrong with you?' Blah, blah, blah, blah. You know, so that was I grew up very much in that. So, I remember when I went to college, my freshman year my friend would always wear leggings and I didn't have leggings other than to work out. I did not wear yoga pants to go to class or I never owned sweat like that. So, I was like, 'What the heck, like you're going to class like that?' And she's like, 'Yeah, why not?' And I was always wearing jeans to class and like not even a T shirt my freshman year. But then I remember her and two other school roommates, they're like, 'we're gonna take you to like Old Navy.' And then I got like yoga pants. In that way, I changed…Sweatshirts, T shirts, leggings, like, that's all I lived in.

While not very common, a few other daughters reported that at least one family member did not let them dress in comfortable clothing like sweats or leggings. This pattern signals, perhaps, that immigrant parents of color are aware of dominant constructions of them as lazy in the U.S. and that they turn to policing their daughters' behaviors to combat these perceptions of them (Espiritu 2001).

Unwittingly, several social forces may facilitate family members' rules on daughters, which require that they modify their behaviors to appear respectable, often measured by whether a person upholds behaviors rooted in white, Puritan middle-class femininity or masculinity.

Lastly, for some girls that identified as queer, bisexual, pansexual, lesbian, questioning, or fluid, going to college allowed them to explore styles that they understood as visibly marking them as "queer." Mayra was one daughter who had graduated from UCSB and talked about how she shaved the side of her head to make herself look more masculine and "queer" while away from home. However, even as a woman in her late twenties, she would use the rest of her hair to cover her shaved side to avoid unwanted speculation about her sexuality when she visited her family in Los Angeles. Similarly, UC Davis alumna Maya described in detail how the knowledge she accessed in college and the discrepancy over her clothing allowed her to think deeply about her gender identity, particularly how she desired to present to the world physically:

> College is definitely the place where I even like, got to understand what gender could be or not be, you know, and I did a lot of reflecting about, like, what gender meant to me. And for a while, I thought, like, I contemplated basically, like internally like, if I identified with being gender nonconforming. And, ultimately, I think like, through like, the journey that I've had understanding my gender expression, like, I've come to like the point where I've, where I feel very empowered and I love the freedom to be fluid, you know? And, and very much like I'm a femme. And, like, I identify as a woman, you know, but that like that includes that I sometimes dress, boyish, you know? And like, I've never been like Butch. But I have, like, remain true to like those like, roots of like, my younger days where I was tomboyish you know, and for a long time, I felt really uncomfortable, because I think I was trying to be like, a super duper femme. I felt like that was maybe like, what I needed to be to be attractive.

Going to college, then, for queer daughters, allowed them to explore how they desired to dress. For some daughters, this included dressing in ways that were more masculine presenting, and for others, this included having the power to shift between feminine and masculine gender expressions. By performing masculinity, girls also challenged heteronormativity as they refused to perform white middle-class femininity that girls and women are expected to do. In sum, heteronormativity informed how daughters articulate pleasure—whether girls found pleasure in performing “hot cheeto girl” aesthetics, dressing in masculine ways, or performing white middle-class femininity, their pleasure derived from challenging or upholding heteronormativity.

Access to Discourses of Sexual Pleasure

A common theme that emerged from interviews and ethnographic conversations with daughters was their exposure to various sexual pleasures as a result of moving out of Los Angeles to attend University. In this section, I examine how this mobility experience embedded daughters in an institution that facilitated their access to gender and sexual resources. Gaining new information resulted in new forms of agency for daughters, including seeing themselves as worthy of experiencing pleasure. Through the act of claiming sexual pleasure, daughters challenged discourses of heteronormativity that pathologize their sexuality. In the next section, I will also show how the information daughters gained shaped the conversations they had with their mothers about sex.

Several structural and social factors faciliated daughters access to new knowledge of gender and sexuality. Firstly, coursework and reproductive health programming in college exposed some daughters to new ideas about sexual pleasure—which challenged their previously held beliefs of sex always equating to danger. As I discussed in the previous chapters, both discourses of heteronormativity and mothers' sexual politic of uno nunca sabe were structural factors causing daughters to equate sex with danger. Secondly, as a result of living away from home, daughters also had more privacy, facilitating opportunities for them to engage in various types of sexual and gender behaviors. Lastly, the social networks they gained in college were also a resource for learning new sex-related information.

Hazel was one of the daughters who took full advantage of attending college in San Francisco, the gay mecca of the United States. Making the most of attending college included enrolling in sexualities courses where she learned various sexuality-related information.

> I learned a lot, I feel like this San Francisco is a perfect city to explore sexuality and sex. I did, my campus, we had a few. Well, one I did Anthropology so I took a few sexuality classes and I also took like the pornography class at SF state that they offer, so I learned academically, the proper terms and like all the different types of porn that there is out there and being open to watching it because we would sit there in a lecture hall like watching porn with our professor [laughs] and then we sit there and analyze it afterwards, like what the fuck. I remember watching some testicle like anime porn, being so scared of my life, like people watch this to be turned on? Like people be into kinky shit.

For Hazel and other daughters, their entrance into college was a way to gain institutional access to information about sex. In this instance, through her courses, Hazel learned proper terminology about genitalia and various sex positions.

Moreover, from her response, we glean that Hazel learned how to be "open" to watching pornography and about the various types of porn that exist. In other words, perhaps Hazel unlearned that watching pornography is a shameful activity.

Similarly, Denise described how college allowed her to gain institutional access to sexuality-related resources.

> I know SF State has a lot of programs where they talk to you about sex—especially sexuality majors. I think it's called PEACHES or something, I think it was. They would always have like, a table. I was always tabling for my student organization, and during this time, I was meeting a lot of people, and I was socializing a lot. So, they would always tell me these things they would always teach me like, I remember the first time I found out about like the dental dam. I remember the first time I found out about dental dam, and it was like they showed it. And also like in the office, they would also talk about sexuality a lot. Like just sexual stuff in general, like and I remember the guys because it was a lot of guys, I would hang out with the first year, they would be like, 'oh, yeah, we just we just went to go hit up PEACHES or we just went to go get like condoms and like a shit ton of these things.' And they're like, 'Oh, I heard the women really liked these the ones with the little bumps on them.'

Enrolling in a college where organizations promoted sex-related information was one way in which daughters learned about comprehensive sex. Denise and many other daughters reported that they did not learn much about sex in school or from their families—with the exception of hearing vague messaging like uno nunca sabe, urging them to refrain from having heterosexual sex. Thus, having access to sex programming that centered pleasure and various contraception methods exposed daughters to knowledge they could leverage to make decisions in their sex lives. Moreover, as Denise alluded, social networks were also an important source to learn about sex. While in college, Denise was able to have in-person conversations with college-going Latinos about sexual pleasure. This social interaction would probably

not occur as easily if she were still living back home since she had less control over her social life while living with family (Parra and Garcia 2023).

The importance of social networks in learning about sex was further echoed in several daughters' accounts including Sol:

> Usually, when we were like, felt comfortable in a space, right, there was people who you were close to, someone's home, maybe you guys are eating or whatever, having drinks, and we just started talking about, like, sexual encounters, or our relationship with our current partners. And we just talked about like, 'Oh, this is something I like. Oh, you get this? Do you have oral sex? Or do you receive? Or do you give?' And that was always something so interesting. And, and I really enjoyed having those conversations, because I never had this conversation with anyone else. And so it was, it was a different, it's like, almost, I learned a whole bunch of different things to like, oh, you can do that. I didn't know that. Or, oh, you can be safe this way. And so I really, I feel like I got a lot of information, from those conversations with my friends that I wouldn't have gotten anywhere else you said.

Based on my conversation with Sol and additional daughters, I learned that peers were instrumental in the development of daughters' sexual knowledge. As Sol described, she learned new information about sexual pleasure and consent from her friends —knowledge she then used to explore what she found pleasurable during sexual encounters.

Ultimately, learning that sex could be a positive experience through coursework, campus programming, and friends resulted in daughters having a new sense of agency over their bodies and sexualities. As was the case with Emelina, who went from fearing sex to finding it empowering:

> I was so afraid of sex. I was afraid to get pregnant. I was worried. In college, I would learn from my sorority sisters, in terms of like, you know sex is not bad. Through conversations with my sisters and fem[inist] classes, I learned sex is not something that we should be shy about. It's a very empowering thing.

Similarly, Gabriela described having a new sense of agency over her body, “I feel like, as a woman, in college, I've learned to like, just do what I want to do. Like, no matter like who's looking or who's watching.” The emerging bodily autonomy daughters saw themselves undergoing as a result of going to college included having control over what they wore, having conversations about sex, and exploring new sexual pleasures. This was the experience of Rosalinda, who also talked about how she now embraced wearing hoop earrings:

> I think going to like Santa Barbara really kind of just like destigmatize, what it means to have sex and just like taking control over like, your sexual, your sex drive, and it's normal to do that. And you don't have to take anyone's bullshit when it comes to that. So, I think in a lot of different aspects, like, I grew because of the community, and then the classes, of course.

In conjunction with learning about sexual pleasure, the discretion they had as a result of moving away to college facilitated opportunities for them to explore their emerging and developing sexual pleasures. For example, when I asked daughters about their exploration of sex and dating while in college, some described learning about masturbation and having the discretion to engage in this activity. During one of our conversations, Kateleya shared:

> I feel like growing up, that [masturbation] was something that was really off limits. One day, I was like, you know what, like, I'm here on my own. Nobody else is gonna go into my room. So like, why not? And so, I decided to go ahead and learn about myself, so that way, whenever I was in a situation, I'm able to tell them what I like. Because we should be able to enjoy it too.

For some daughters, having their own room allowed them to explore sexual pleasure by engaging in various types of sexual activities. In this instance, Kateleya took advantage of having privacy, which she did not have back home due to having to

share a room with her siblings, to explore self-pleasure through masturbation. Structurally, then, college provided several factors that daughters did not have back home—which all contributed to them seeing themselves as worthy of experiencing sexual pleasure and having the resources to explore their desires. These factors included gaining information about comprehensive sex through their coursework and campus resources, having conversations about sex with their social networks, as well as having more privacy to engage in various sexual activities like masturbating.

Exploring and Learning about Queerness

Another common pleasure for daughters was learning about queerness—with some even immersing themselves in queer culture and/or exploring their queer desires. Through coursework and social networks, daughters gained a new understanding of queerness. Many daughters, like Sol, described learning about a variety of sexual orientations through their classes:

> It was like an intro to LGBTQ studies, and so that's when I learned a lot of different terms. And I was like, wait, what [laughs]? I had no idea, a lot of different terms existed. We watched different movies on like Marsha P. Johnson and the riots. I definitely learned a lot of like background information that I don't think I would have gotten anywhere else.

While some daughters like Sol learned in a formal setting about various sexual orientation categories, others learned through conversations with peers. Ruby was among one the daughters to report gaining a new understanding of queerness through social interactions:

> I've definitely met more people here who are like, open with sexuality. I mean, when I grew up like, there's there was obviously like, gay, straight, and like, bisexual. I feel like here in my University, there's like, people who identify as

> like pansexual, or like demisexual or so many different like, subcategories that I wasn't even like, aware that existed.

Before entering college, daughters were often only aware of three nonheterosexual sexual orientations: gay, bisexual, and lesbian. Gaining access to the various sexual orientations that existed was important for both queer and heterosexual daughters as they used this knowledge to make sense of others' sexual experiences as well as their own. For example, nonheterosexual girls often turned to bisexual or lesbian as sexual orientation categories to make sense of their sexualities before entering college, but once in University, they had the knowledge to question whether lesbian or bisexual were labels that accurately captured their sexual desires. This occurred with Jasmine, who described how going to college resulted in a shift in her sexual orientation:

> Before college, I knew three terms. I knew bi, lesbian, and gay, that those are the three terms. So I was just like, I'm bi or whatever. No, I was just like, I refer to myself as straight, first. And then I was just like, I do like men, but I also like females, it's more like, I'm bi you know. But now, because I don't think I like two genders only. I feel like, I'm more like, you have a wonderful heart, you will have a wonderful soul, I love that. It's not like, you have a penis, like, we should date you know. But yeah, it kind of transition into that. So, like, after that I sort of figured out what trans was. It was more like up until like, college when I started being like, okay, might bi, I might be this. I started learning more terms, and I was just like, okay, like, there's a whole other dictionary of you know, different words.

As a result of learning about other sexual orientation categories and trans identities, Jasmine now recognized that she was attracted to people who identified outside of the gender binary (woman/man), and thus, bisexual no longer captured her sexual desires. Instead, she turned to identifying as pansexual, which she learned in college to make sense of her sexual desires. For Jasmine, pansexual reflected her sexual orientation as

she described herself being attracted to a person because of their heart and soul, and not their gender.

In addition to learning about non-heterosexual sexual orientations, daughters also learned about queerness by learning about gender fluidity and trans identities through coursework. This was the case with Yanely, who described learning in class about pronouns. "I learned about they/them pronouns. It never occurred to me that a lot of people would not identify solely with like, just one set of pronouns." Like Yanely, many daughters reported learning about the importance of pronouns and, in doing so, learned that one cannot assume a person's gender based on a person's physical appearance. Additional daughters, like Yanely, also reported learning that a person can use more than one pronoun if they are gender fluid.

Another way that girls learned about queerness was by immersing themselves in queer neighborhoods or events. As was the experience of SF State alumna, Aurora:

> I mean, it was just very interesting to see people just being so sexually free. I had never seen that, you know, like, I was very surprised to see that it was kind of like a new world. I was like, what, this is possible? Like, where am I? You know. So, it was very interesting. And I just felt very good. I felt very happy to be there. I was very, like, curious about everything, like, okay, so why is this here? Like, why do people get to do that here? The best response I got, 'that's just how it is like, that's the city you know, or that's the Castro.' I mean, I'm not gonna lie, like, I think a year after or something like that, I went out to a bar, I used a fake ID. I don't even know if I use an ID actually, I don't know how I got into that place. But I got into a bar. And I know, I was underage. I didn't drink so I was just there to chill. And yeah, I saw guys in like leather outfits, you know, like very small leather outfits on maybe just like underwear, little, you know, a little cop hats or whatever [Michelle laughs]. And like some chokers that like they could pull from I don't know what that was, but it was like some kind of choker. And I had never seen this, you know, like, not even in a movie, I think so I was just like, whoa, like, something's out here. You know, like, what's going on? You see people just, you know, being themselves, enjoying themselves having a good time. You

> know, they just kind of go around the bar and like they're vibing with everyone. Um, and I was open to it, I was like, wow, this is really cool. Like, this is fun, you know, like this is cool. Um, ya know, it was just an amazing experience to be able to see people that were so free that they were so not worried about what other people were going to think as far as them expressing themselves. Whether that be sexually or just, you know, fashion wise, whatever, because I do think that that can be correlated. So, yeah, it was it was very interesting to see that and I was really happy I remember.

Sexualities scholars have examined how queer neighborhoods facilitate the sexual exploration of queer subjects (Carrillo 2020; Kenney 2001). Similarly, I found that the presence of gayborhoods exposed both queer and heterosexual college-going Latinas to various types of sexual behaviors. As Aurora described, entering the Castro, a gay neighborhood in San Francisco, was like being in "a new world," where people could publicly be their authentic sexual selves. Based on her account, I speculate that Aurora was exposed to sexual activities practiced by BDSM and leather communities. Perhaps the pleasure that Aurora articulated to seeing people be their authentic selves, transgressing white middle-class gender and sexual norms through their fashion and sexual practices, provides further insights into her awareness of how not everyone is allowed to dress or express their sexualities in public—including herself. The sexualities of both queer and heterosexual low-income urban girls of color are viewed as threats to the modern nation-state, as neither will reproduce the formation of the white, middle-class, citizen family necessary for upholding the settler-colonial state. Moreover, we get a glimpse of how Aurora questions why sexual liberation is only possible in specific geographical spaces—perhaps alluding to how a public display of sexuality is not allowed in her low-income neighborhood in Los Angeles. Maybe this is because the whiteness underpinning many queer

neighborhoods in the United States facilitates opportunities for people to engage in sexual activities publicly within the spatial bounds of gayborhoods (Greene 2018; Rosenberg 2017).

Another queer event that girls reported attending was Folsom Street Festival, a BDSM, leather, and kink street fair. One daughter to participate in this event was Hazel, who giggled while recalling the first time she found herself at this festival.

> I remember going to my first Folsom Street Fair Festival just like the biggest leather event. My friend, who ended up being my housemate later, she was like 'we have to go, like it's the biggest leather convention.' And I was like okay, I love leather like I have leather Mexican boots [both laugh]. Like no, I felt like, I've never felt like I've had too much clothes on. Like that was the first time I felt like I was wearing too much clothes. And it was, it was hot, I remember when I first went to Folsom, and as I was like, 'what the fuck did you take me to Salma?' We were walking and in front of the old homes with a big ol windows, and this guy is getting head like this. This Black guy is getting head from some white guy. Like, oh my god [laughs], like we keep seeing people like getting head and we see people dressed like dogs you know, like, oh my god. And then my friend said, 'just relax, like, let's smoke some weed.' And I was like, alright, fuck it, I'm not comfortable, but we're gonna make it happen.

Through their social networks, girls learned about queer events like the Folsom Street Festival, which exposed daughters like Hazel to various sexual practices. Hazel learned about puppy play, a form of sexual play where people dress up in dog costumes, as well as other sexual kinks within the BDSM community, like bondage—as there are often various bondage experts who set up stages, publicly tying people. At this event, many people publicly display their kinks and the sexual communities they belong to by dressing up as pups, leather daddies, or as a dominatrix walking their submissive on a leash, for example. Lastly, as Hazel described, some people publicly engage in sexual activity, like oral sex, without being punished for doing so.

Intrigued by her participation at Folsom Street Festival, Hazel attended a BDSM workshop in Santa Cruz:

> It was a little sex shop in Santa Cruz and, they gave us our little goodie bags, they had a CD with music to do like bondage massage, dominatrix stuff, learn how to use like a candle wax to like turn your partner on, blindfold. And we were looking around and I went up, so the ladies teaching the class of course, were some old white, hippie ladies you know. [Laughs]. I was like, 'alright, well, you know, I'm a little shy but like, I like to see like.' 'I have a big ass,' I told her, and I was like and 'they always fantasize about it and I want to be able to get turned on by it. Like I don't get turned on by it like I think because I have a big booty, I always felt like that's the only reason guys talk to me or like want to try to get at me.' I wanted to learn to like love myself and my body for all of it. I like told her a whole little spiel. And then she was like, 'okay, yeah, she was like I'll give you an ass spanking session' and like she gave me like an ass massage like spanking session. Girl, no one to this day has been able to fucking replicate that ass spanking massage and turn me on, turned me on from just like massage and spanking [both laugh a lot].

While Hazel did not identify as queer, going to college exposed her exposure to various sexual practices associated with queer communities. For instance, learning about BDSM allowed her to question whether any of these kinks could help her experience sexual pleasure, as she often felt objectified by men due to her body parts. Thus, as a result of gaining social networks and having discretion about her social life, she attended queer events like Folsom Street Festival and BDSM classes in a sex shop, through which Hazel discovered new bodily pleasures.

Similarly, the discretion they had over their time and social lives allowed some daughters to explore whether they were queer. Caroline, who identified as heterosexual during the study, talked about how she did this by engaging in sexual activity with other college-going girls at parties.

> I mean, in college, you know, I was a little, a little curious, so I did have like, not sex, but more like, you know, it was just like kisses here and there with

> like females. Honestly, it feels like good because you're like, okay, you experience it and then after that you're like, okay, I know what I want. It still feels cool. You know, like to, to have that experience. And if you're curious, why not do it, you know, like, just go for it. And I did.

The exploration of their sexualities was something daughters articulated as pleasurable. Whether they explored their sexual orientations by kissing girls at parties or newly introduced kinks they learned from queer communities, the mobility trajectory of daughters granted them the resources and time to explore their bodily autonomy. Many daughters believed that they probably would not have the opportunity to explore their sexualities if they had not gone to college and left Los Angeles. For example, Daisy shared:

> I think I have more freedom. [laughs] I could probably date a girl that I wanted to… In college I was free from like any pressure to like potentially marry a man or like be with a man. So, I think in college, I was able to question my sexuality more. Like, actually, like stopped to consider whether my attraction to men wasn't actually attraction more like the pressure or the need to feel validation for men. So yeah, I think that's probably the biggest thing there.

During our conversation, Daisy alluded to the ways in which being away from family pressure to date and marry a man, alongside her social networks and new information about queerness, allowed her to reflect on her desires for a partner—rather than her family's expectations for her sexual life. While the presence of family might limit the sexual exploration of Latinas who do not leave home, this is not the only factor shaping access to their sexual exploration. For instance, comprehensive sex education and reproductive health resources are structural conditions that need to be addressed to create a society where urban girls of color can have bodily autonomy.

In sum, as a mobility trajectory, colleges embedded daughters in institutions and social networks through which they learned new knowledge related to gender and sexuality. Some of this information challenged their previously held beliefs of heteronormativity and of sex always equating to danger. By learning about queerness, BDSM, contraception methods, masturbation, and sex positivity, daughters explore various types of pleasures, which ultimately is one way in which they challenge heteronormativity, a social force that pathologizes their sexualities. Overall, the knowledge they gained informed what daughters desired for their own lives as well as their and mothers. In the next section, I review how daughters draw on the knowledge and discourses they learned in college to advocate and teach their mothers about pleasure. By centering the desires that college-going daughters have for their mothers to access and claim pleasure, I further reveal how discourses of heteronormativity inform generational negotiations among Latinas.

"Nobody's Fucking Business, This is Your Body:" Daughters Teach Mothers about Sex

After my interview ended with Rosa Maria, in which she admitted to not knowing how to use condoms, she asked me and her daughter whether using a male condom was difficult. I exchanged looks with her daughter, and we both responded to her something along the lines of "No, it is pretty easy," to which she responded, "Yo quisera enseñar [I would like to learn]—publicly claiming her desire to learn how to utilize this contraception method. A wave of panic hit me as I had not anticipated

that a mother would ask me how to teach her how to use a condom. Without the proper materials to demonstrate how to use this contraception method, I searched on my phone for a YouTube video illustrating how to do this. To my luck, I found a video where a woman explained in Spanish how to put on and dispose of a condom. After watching the video, Rosa Maria's daughter chimed in, reminding her that pinching the tip of the condom was very important to ensure it did not break.

Like Rosa Maria's daughter, several other college-going Latinas shared information related to sexuality and gender with their mothers. The most common topics included information related to contraception and reproductive health, the idea of seeing themselves as worthy of experiencing sexual pleasure, body positivity, and information related to queerness. Overall, I suggest that in sharing this wealth of knowledge, daughters challenge heteronormativity. Firstly, daughters are attempting to create a world where mothers have bodily autonomy rather than being reduced to passive desexual objects for capitalist wealth production or hypersexual breeding objects. Secondly, by teaching their mothers about queerness, they also challenge heteronormativity, that is, white middle-class heterosexuality and gender expressions as normative sexual practices. While I did glean from interviews with mothers and conversations with daughters what knowledge mothers were responsive to, this chapter currently does not describe mothers' responses.

Some of the college-going daughters I spoke to taught their mothers about contraception and additional reproductive health topics. Among these was Denise,

who responded the following when I asked whether college informed the conversations she was having with her mother:

> Yeah, I talked to her about condoms. We've talked about birth control, because I told her that I use birth control. And sometimes when she has questions about birth control, then she'll come and ask me, I know recently, she had a yeast infection, but she doesn't want anyone to know because she's afraid they're gonna think oh, it's an STD or an STI. I get annoyed because I'm just like, that's so stupid.

From her response, we learn that a lot of the information Denise encountered through campus programming and social networks at SF State shaped the knowledge she could now leverage to help her mother achieve bodily autonomy. Moreover, we gain an understanding of how daughters become one of the few sex education sources that mothers now had. In this case, Denise taught her mother about sexually transmitted infections and how to differentiate them between a yeast infection, a conversation Denise believed her mother couldn't have with other family members without being judged. In other words, like their mothers, daughters' mobility trajectory also informed how they employed generational negotiations about sex with their mothers.

Learning that Latinas and women, in general, can have access to sexual pleasure also informed me how daughters talked to their mothers about sex. Daughters cleverly brought up the topic of sexual pleasure by telling their mothers that this was something they learned in classes, which shaped their own sexual practices. Aurora, for instance, noted:

> Yes, I think I've shared a lot of things with her [my mother]. You know, the different things I've learned through the classes I've taken as far as the gender roles, you know, that's something definitely big that I discuss with her. Just because I think in many ways, she and my family do not think that I conform to their ideas of identity, you know, women identity, or women gender. So, it's

> definitely been a subject for us. It's, yeah, it's one of the big ones, I think, definitely sexuality, too. I think I had to, you know, even that's still a struggle sometimes. But I think like, I did share with her that I had multiple partners while I was in college. And, you know, I think she tried her best to be supportive, but she still didn't really understand it. So, I kind of need to give her the insight on why I'm doing these things, right. Like, I don't want to just be the person that says, 'Oh, I'm doing this,' and then they don't understand why. So, I tried to tell her, you know, like, I just feel that I'm, like, my own self, like, I'm my own sexual agent, like I can choose or not choose to do something with someone, and just solely do it for pleasure. You know, like, it doesn't mean that I'm gonna marry this person in 10 years, like, you know, I think sex meant different things for different generations. And I, you know, and just kind of trying to teach her that it doesn't have to mean you're in a relationship or you're committed to someone, it can simply just be sex, you know, whether that's with a friend, whether that's just a stranger [laughs]. You know it happens.

The experience of Aurora was echoed among other daughters who explained to their mothers that there is nothing shameful about casual sex. The purpose of sharing their new viewpoints on sex was twofold. Firstly, daughters taught their mothers sex positivity so that they could understand their new sexual practices. A second motive was to invite their mothers, especially if they were single, to explore pleasure through casual sex. This occurred with Denise, whose mother was dating but faced social stigma from family members.

> She [my mother] knows I don't judge her or make her feel as less for these things. Because I know many family especially now that she's been having different boyfriends and stuff. They literally have told her like, how do you think your daughter's going to view you that you're just being a slut everywhere? That you're just doing this, this and that. And I'm just like, you know what, like, even if you were sleeping with 1,000 people, that's no one's fucking business, this is your body.

In this example, Denise advocated for her mother's sexual agency by insisting that number of sexual partners isn't something shameful. As I described in previous

chapters, both discourses of heteronormativity in Latin America and in the U.S. attempt to strip mothers of bodily autonomy from a young by reducing them to objects of labor or hypersexual objects that existed for the pleasure of others. Through an invitation to engage in casual sex, daughters challenge discourses of heteronormativity that restrict Latina immigrants' sexual agency.

While less common, some daughters did rely on discourses of sex positivity to teach their mothers to wear clothing they found pleasure in wearing, regardless of what society thought of their choices. For instance, Liz's interaction with her mother: "She would like see someone with a really nice outfit, or like with a very revealing outfit, and she would like, 'Oh, I wish I had their confidence.' And I tell her like, 'Mom, you can just, you just gotta do it.' So, it's just a bunch of that." Perhaps some daughters also recognized parallels between the pleasure of wearing clothing styles they desired and their mothers' wish to dress in revealing clothing without facing scrutiny. I suggest that this is another way that daughters challenged discourse of heteronormativity that attempt to strip Latina immigrants of bodily autonomy.

Lastly, many daughters taught their mothers about queerness, especially the difference between biological sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation. These conversations emerged in instances where mothers used incorrect terminology to address someone. This is evident in looking at Vivian's experience:

> For example, they [my mother and father] use like, "Oh, las mariposas [Oh, the butterflies]." Do you know? Like, for men that are into other males? And it's just like, no, not everyone is a butterfly. Like, there's masculine men. I learned a phrase, yesterday, you can't tell sexuality based on the skin. Like, you know, it's, I always tell them with anything that's kind of discriminative

> you can't base that on one person. You know, you can't generalize that community.

Vivian was one daughter to teach her mother about queerness, in this case, explaining to her mother and father that gender expression is not necessarily a reflection of a person's sexual orientation since there are queer and heterosexual feminine and masculine men.

It was also pretty common for daughters to teach their mothers about queerness, especially when it came to advocating for other family members who were queer. As was reflected in Sol's conversations with her mother:

> With my little brother, who came out to us. We definitely, I started talking a little bit more about terms. Like that's, that's what I mean by like, I say certain things sometimes like, 'Mom, my brother, my brother's gay.' And it's hard for her to say stuff like that. Because it's like, 'no, tu hermano no es. Tu hermano nunca me dicho eso.' I do try to inform them, because then they're like, 'oh, no, is he trying to be like, is he transgender? Or this this and that.' I'm like, 'no, he's just fluid in the way he dresses,' and so I'll kind of educate them in that way, when we're talking about my brother. And sometimes even when we're like watching a movie or something, and they're like, you know, confused and like, 'what? I don't get it.' I'll kind of use what I know. Right?

Here, Sol teaches her mother and father that dress style does not necessarily dictate her brother's gender identity and that a person can be gender fluid, dressing feminine one day and in another style the following day. This generational negotiation further shows that lack of access to sex education materializes in mothers not properly knowing how to make sense of their children as well as other people's gender and sexual expressions. College-going daughters recognize that their mothers do not understand U.S. queerness, so they attempt to fill in these gaps in knowledge.

By teaching their mothers, as well as other family members, about queerness, daughters also challenge heteronormativity that ascribes patriotic white middle-class femininity and masculinity as well as heterosexuality as the norm in the U.S. College-going daughters draw on the knowledge they obtain through their mobility trajectory to teach their mothers the difference between biological sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. In sharing this information, daughters hope to normalize nonheteronormative gender expressions and sexualities further. To conclude, like their mothers, daughters' mobility experiences and discourses of heteronormativity inform daughters' sexual politics and the ways in which they engage in generational conversations about sex.

Mobility, Desire, and Pleasure

In this chapter, I have utilized my theoretical framework of heteronormativity matrix of domination to analyze how the newfound desires and pleasures Latina college-going students experience as a result of undergoing a mobility experience further shed light on the ways in which various axis of power maintain heteronormativity. I have also delineated how discourses of heteronormativity shape the desires and pleasures Latina daughters articulated for themselves and their mothers. There are several ways in which going to college shaped Latinas' behaviors which they believe challenged discourses of heteronormativity, including dressing in "chola" and "hot cheeto girl" aesthetics, ways that visibly mark them as queer, comfortable clothing, or other types of feminine clothing that upheld white middle-class femininity. While all daughters

understood themselves as challenging discourses of heteronormativity that prescribed a particular style and set of characteristics (unintelligence, unruliness, and uncontrollable sexuality) to low-income urban girls of color, daughters that challenged these discourses by engaging in politics of respectability, maintained heteronormativity through their clothing choices.

In addition, coursework, campus programming, and social networks exposed college-going daughters to a multitude of knowledge regarding gender and sexuality. Some of the topics that daughters learned included how to engage in safe heterosexual and queer sex, information about various birth control methods, sex positivity, and information about queerness. While daughters learned about queerness through coursework and campus resources, some also garnered more information by immersing themselves in queer events and communities. Their exposure to this new information resulted in them claiming new pleasures through which they challenged discourses of heteronormativity pathologizing their sexualities.

I also found that the information daughters learned informed the generational negotiations they employed in their relationships with their mothers. Some daughters taught their mothers how to use a condom, about sexually transmitted infections, sex and body positivity, and queerness. Daughters also challenged heteronormativity through these generational negotiations. In sharing this information, daughters decentered white, middle-class, heterosexuality, and gender expressions by either attempting to help their mothers access more sexual agency or others who were marginalized. Thus, both discourses of heteronormativity and the mobility experience

of attending university informed how Latina daughters taught their mothers about gender, sex, and pleasure. Shaped by discourses of heteronormativity and their mobility experiences, the new desires daughters have for their mothers to claim bodily autonomy and to understand gender and sexuality as fluid is one way in which they attempt to teach their mothers to desire a better life.

The next section of this book describes this study's theoretical, methodological, and practical implications. It also notes it’s imitations and future research directions. Although this work has limitations, I hope that it sparks interest in utilizing women of color feminisms and queer of color critique to examine how issues related to sexuality and gender are often co-constitutive of economic and racial inequalities as well as nation-making projects like settler-colonialism.

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON DESIRING A BETTER SEXUAL LIFE FOR LATINAS

Gabriela, one of the two mothers who spoke a bit of English, and I had just finished our in-person interview when we continued casually chatting about sex. She was one of the mothers who learned new terminology about queerness through her college-going daughter. In this instance, her daughter taught her about the fluidity of gender, especially since one of Gabriela's children began to transition to another gender identity. During our interview, Gabriela double-checked with me that she was using the correct terminology when talking about queerness. She noted that due to her lack of access to sex education in her native country and the U.S., she didn't know much about sex—including that related to heterosexuality. To prove the gravity of not having sex education, Gabriela emphasized only ever having two orgasms in her life. She wished to experience more orgasms, and I suspect that overhearing her daughter talk about sex stores and toys might have given Gabriela ideas about how she could achieve this desire of hers. Not knowing exactly what a sex store was, Gabriela asked if I had ever gone to one. "I have been to a few," I told her. She smiled at me, and I smiled back, waiting for her to ask a follow-up question as I interpreted her question as evidence of her curiosity to visit a sex store. She asked, "What is it like in there? I have never been to one." "It's really cool. They have a lot of different toys. They usually ask for people's IDs to make sure they are of age, and there is no photography allowed to protect people's confidentiality," I responded. "Oh, that's good. Is it true that you can orgasm quickly with toys?" I giggled at her question since I never

pictured myself having conversations about sex toys and orgasms with a Latina immigrant mother in a public setting. “It’s true. And sometimes all you need is 1 minute—with a toy,” I said. We both erupted in laughter after my response. As we walked towards our cars, she said, “Maybe I will use this gift card to purchase my first toy. I have seen a sex store around here.” I smiled and said, “You should. I think it is a good investment.”

It is my desire that Gabriela used her gift card to buy a sex toy or towards the purchasing of any other commodity or activity to satisfy her desires. While my intention is not to measure sexual pleasure through orgasms, as this is a reductive way to understand bodily autonomy, I share this story as an invitation and provocation to imagine and create a world in which Latinas have sexual agency. This book offers some insights into how we, as researchers, can begin to ask questions and identify the structural conditions we need to dismantle to create this world.

Heteronormativity Matrix of Domination: An Analytical Offering

In this book, I have offered heteronormativity matrix of domination as an analytical lens to identify and name the various social forces and institutions that help uphold discourses of heteronormativity—which ultimately impact and limit the sexual agency of Latinas. In particular, I have shown how race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, citizenship, and nation-making projects help uphold discourses of heteronormativity in the U.S. I have also identified how various actors and institutions are part of the matrix that reproduces heteronormativity. Some of the

nationwide actors and institutions include U.S. state officials, the welfare system, immigration policies, legislation pertaining to national security, and political regimes like the "war on drugs," "war on crime," and "war on terror." I utilized this framework to expose how regional forces and institutions, like the public education system in Los Angeles, K-12 teachers, the political economy, housing segregation, and police help replicate discourses of heteronormativity that Latina daughters and mothers in this study contended with. While the institutions, forces, and policies I have focused on in this study are by no means exhaustive, scholars can apply my framework to investigate what other national and regional institutions, policies, and actors help uphold discourses of heteronormativity. The more knowledge produced about the formation of heteronormativity, the more equipped researchers are to propose solutions to create a world in which marginalized subjects have agency over their bodies.

As such, future research studies should apply this framework to investigate the formation of heteronormativity in other national and regional contexts—especially when studying the sexual politics of immigrant populations. In Chapter 3, I used this framework to investigate how discourses in mothers' native countries, either Mexico or El Salvador, influenced immigrant mothers' sexual politics and how they taught their daughters about sex. As in Los Angeles, the political economy of the U.S.-Mexico border was an economic force helping produce discourses of heteronormativity that either framed low-income girls and women living in Mexico as hypersexual objects or desexual objects for capitalist production. Mothers lived

experiences of contending with these discourses of heteronormativity during their girlhood years ultimately informed their sexual politics and how they raised their children in the Global North. In other words, transnational power relations shape sexual formations. Future work should take a transnational approach to sexual formations. Ultimately, a relational understanding of heteronormativity across national contexts can facilitate a deeper understanding of the work that we need to do in the Global North and in the Global South to dismantle heteronormativity—while shedding light on the ways in which the U.S. empire may aid the production of heteronormativity in third world countries.

Increasing Access to Sex Education

Here, I will return to some of my findings to discuss practical recommendations that can lead to the dismantling of heteronormativity and increased sexual agency of Latinas. As I discussed in Chapter 3, many of the mothers that I spoke to learned that they were nonheteronormative through their lived experiences of being hypersexualized, sexually harassed, raped, or by being reduced to objects of labor during their girlhoods. Their negative experiences of being treated as objects, in conjunction with their lack of access to comprehensive sexual health education, resulted in them having negative perceptions of sex, which they articulated through the discourse of uno nunca sabe. Even when they attended medical appointments, doctors and other medical staff assumed they knew how to use condoms since they were adult women at the time of their visit. Their low levels of sexual education had

various implications for them, including not understanding consent, their inability to differentiate between sexual orientation, gender identity, and biological sex, and their lack of knowledge on safe heterosexual or queer sex. This also informed why they didn't talk to their daughters about or relied on *uno nunca sabe* to try and shield them from the impacts of heteronormativity. For daughters, this generational sexual politics was one factor that contributed to their understanding of sex as dangerous. However, similar to their mothers, discourses of heteronormativity like that of the "ghetto girl," "chola," and "hot cheeto girl," also taught daughters their sexualities were deviant. Lastly, daughters also reported not learning much about sex in their K-12 schools.

As I outlined in Chapter 4, college was an institution that opened up a multitude of knowledge related to gender and sex for daughters. Gaining access to this information resulted in shifts in daughters' behaviors and attitudes, including changing the way they dressed, exploring queer sexual practices, and new pleasures. In other words, it facilitated new forms of sexual agency for them. In that section, I noted that daughters shared this information with their mothers as an attempt to get their mothers to explore new sexual pleasures. Putting Chapter 3 in conversation with Chapter 4 then further sheds light on the ways in which discourses of heteronormativity and access to sex education inform conversations about sex across generations. Comprehensive sex education, especially one that intentionally debunks pathologizing discourses of heteronormativity framing Latinas as hypersexual or passive desexual objects, is one way in which we can begin to dismantle heteronormativity. It is also a resource that can provide information subjects need to

make informed decisions about sex. As my findings indicated, access to sex education produces decade-long impacts.

Recognizing the Potential of "Ghetto Girls," "Chola," and "Hot Cheeto Girls"

Empirically, this study adds to the dearth of research on aesthetics within the discipline of Sociology and encourages scholars to account for the role of aesthetics as they are cultural practices through which institutions and subjects challenge and reproduce inequalities like heteronormativity. It also offers digital ethnography as a method for studying styles of dress. While I also conducted some in-person ethnographic observations on daughters' aesthetical choices, the digital ethnographic observations of this study allowed me to document daughters' dress styles before the study began. As I noted in Chapter 2, many daughters talked about and submitted pictures to show their "plain" or "basic" dress style while growing up.

Building on several sets of literature, Chapter 2 provided an account of the ways in which US state officials, institutions, and people rely on discourses of heteronormativity to correlate styles of dress emerging from the "ghetto," or a low-income, ethnic, urban community, as visual markers of immoral sexuality. Through an examination of "ghetto girl," "chola," and "hot cheeto girl" discourses, I also showed how moral panics over the urban underclass and "The Urban Girl" primarily pathologized Black girls' sexualities and have now come to demarcate the sexualities of urban, low-income non-Black girls as dangerous. Here, I also revealed that K-12 teachers and staff reproduce discourses of heteronormativity, and discipline girls who

dress in these modes of dress since they perceive them as unruly, unintelligent, and hypersexual girls whose sexualities distract them from their studies. Daughters engaged in respectability politics to safeguard their desire to go to college. It is not until they have already proved themselves as intelligent girls and gained access to university that Latinas can begin to explore "hot cheeto girl" fashion practices.

In line with previous feminist scholarship on girlhood studies, these findings provide additional empirical evidence to advocate for the pedological training of k-12 teachers intentionally dismantling narratives equating these modes of dress with concrete signs of hypersexuality, lack of educational ambition, or aggression. While schools are not the only institutions conflating these modes of dress with deviancy, the repercussions students face in schools can have consequences on their socio-economic mobilities. Thus, teachers must view these dress styles for what they truly are—creative cultural and artistic practices.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

There are several limitations of this study. Firstly, I only had the opportunity to interview 11 migrant mothers. Ideally, conducting more interviews with mothers would result in a deeper understanding of mothers' experiences with heteronormativity in their native countries and the U.S. Thus, I hope to talk to additional immigrant Latina mothers from Mexico or El Salvador who have at least one daughter and are in the same age range as the mothers in this study. Secondly, since I did not interview daughters who identified as a "ghetto girl," "chola," or "hot

cheeto girl" while growing up, it is unknown how these girls understand these aesthetics and the repercussions dressing in this manner has had on their economic, gender, and sexual lives. Future studies should examine the experiences of girls who identify in this manner. Thirdly, given that the primary focus in this paper was on feminine expression, an investigation of how aesthetics associated with urban, racialized, and low-income masculinity shapes the sexual experiences of girls performing these styles is also needed to understand the vast impacts of heteronormativity. Lastly, while I included a discussion of how daughters react to the messages mothers impart to them about sex, I did not include an analysis of how mothers respond when their daughters talk to them about pleasure, queerness, or sex. A future draft of this study will add an analysis of mothers' reactions.

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