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Finding Home: A Qualitative Approach to Understanding Adolescent Mothers' Housing Instability

Margaret C. Elliott, Elizabeth A. Shuey, Natalya Zaika, Lauren Mims, and Tama Leventhal

Abstract Many low-income Latina adolescent mothers face instability in their housing circumstances, which has implications for their long-term prospects and that of their children. This study used longitudinal, ethnographic data from *Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three City Study* to explore experiences of low-income, Latina adolescent mothers ($N = 15$) with unstable housing who primarily rely on their families or the families of their significant others for housing support. Results of analysis employing grounded theory and narrative approaches suggested two types of instability: "Horizontal moves" between family homes and "vertical moves" between family homes and independent living. Although family support often was fundamental in allowing for participants' pursuit of independent housing (i.e., vertical moves), it also was associated with greater residential mobility (i.e., horizontal moves), most often in the context of intrafamilial conflict and family instability. These results are discussed with respect to inconsistencies in policies to address this vulnerable population.

Research has shown that adolescent mothers face instability across numerous aspects of their lives, with implications for their long-term prospects and those of their children (e.g., Kane, Morgan, Harris & Guilkey, 2013). One such area is adolescent mothers' living situations, which undergird other important areas such as education and employment, relationships, and parenting (Chen, 2013). However, the ways in which adolescent mothers' living situations contribute to instability in their lives remains largely unexplored. Given rising rates of homelessness among this population at a time of cuts to public assistance programs, this topic demands both research and policy attention (Whitbeck, Lazoritz, Crawford & Hautala, 2016).

In recent years, Latinas were more likely to bear children in adolescence than young women from other racial or ethnic groups (Martin et al., 2013). Although many adolescent mothers choose to stay with their families of origin for housing, financial assistance, and child care to continue their education or secure employment (Logsdon, Birkimer, Ratterman, Cahill & Cahill, 2002), this housing arrangement is especially common among Latina adolescent mothers (e.g., Sarkisian, Gerena & Gerstel, 2006). Scholars such as Calzada, Tamis-LeMonda and Yoshikawa (2013) found that Latina adolescent mothers may face unique challenges establishing an independent home (i.e., a "vertical move"). Cultural norms comprising "familismo," which stresses respect, obligation to family, and interconnectedness, may conflict with such a transition because it disrupts family harmony and closeness. As such, Latina adolescent mothers have been portrayed in literature as particularly vulnerable to residential mobility through "horizontal" moves (i.e., out of their origin families' homes and into homes of others, such as extended family members; Scappaticci & Blay, 2009).

Extant research has not captured the complexity of why some young Latina mothers experience housing instability and how such instability shapes their pursuit of personal goals. This information is critical for informing programmatic and policy efforts to support these vulnerable families. Thus, this study used qualitative methods to explore residential mobility experiences of low-income, Latina adolescent mothers who rely on their origin families for support in attaining housing and other goals.

✉ Margaret C. Elliott
margaret.elliott@tufts.edu

Tufts University, Medford, MA, USA

Policy and Conceptual Background

It is useful to understand the policy context under which adolescent mothers are constrained in their access to government assistance, including housing support. Government assistance programs (e.g., Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF], food stamps, and housing assistance) were established to ease the financial hardships associated with low income. In one policy demonstration, families who received housing assistance, specifically a voucher, were more residentially stable, had lower rates of homelessness or "doubling up" with family members, and a greater likelihood of future homeownership than their low-income counterparts who do not receive assistance (Wood, Turnham & Mills, 2008). Yet, the demand for affordable housing has been greater than the supply of available units (U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015). Finding affordable housing has been particularly difficult for many Latin Americans because they often face housing discrimination or barriers to access related to citizenship status (e.g., Ross & Turner, 2005). Adolescent parents confront additional structural barriers to accessing housing assistance and other forms of support. Specifically, federal stipulations have required applicants to be at least 18 years old to receive housing assistance (unless they are emancipated minors). TANF, the primary cash assistance program for low-income families, has required minors to remain in a household with a supervising adult (Levin-Epstein, 1996). State-specific requirements often have been even stricter than federal guidelines. Thus, public assistance programs intended to support low-income families can make it difficult for adolescent parents to live independently and provide for their children without help, typically from family; these challenges may be magnified among young Latina mothers.

Conceptually, we approached this study from a social networks perspective. Scholars (e.g., Granovetter, 1973; Small & Newman, 2001) have defined social networks as connections established among individuals for , among other things, social support. Individuals have different types of social ties. On the one hand are strong ties encompassing close friends and family who provide various forms of social support, including emotional (e.g., someone to talk to about life challenges), instrumental (e.g., help with child care), or financial support (Cohen, 1988). On the other hand, weak ties comprise a broader range of individuals who bridge social circles and provide access to information and other more elusive resources. The poor have relied heavily on strong ties for social support (Stack, 1983), and expectations around social support (e.g., reciprocity, extent of assistance) may be culturally bound (Arnett, 2011). For instance, Latino families have tended to emphasize social support from family members derived from their cultural values around the meaning of family, or "familismo" (Stein et al., 2014). Manifestations of familismo vary across individuals' development, but adolescents often are expected to obey their parents and contribute to household responsibilities such as caregiving and housework. Latino/a adolescents and their parents typically have strong positive relationships, but normative developmental tasks (e.g., need for autonomy) may be at odds with their family-oriented values and cause tension between adolescents and their parents (Stein et al., 2014). Thus, Latina adolescent mothers may not only face challenges beyond the policy context but also have additional resources because of the unique role of their social networks.

Motherhood and Living with Family among Latina Adolescents

Although there is diversity among adolescent mothers (Easterbrooks, Chaudhuri, Bartlett & Copeman, 2011), research has suggested that compared with women who delay childbirth, they are less likely to have financial resources or access to decent housing (Hobcraft & Kiernan, 2001). Adolescence is a period when individuals explore their identities and seek autonomy from parents, rather than focus primarily on the well-being of others (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Thus, balancing the dual responsibilities of completing these normative developmental tasks and caring for a child may be challenging (Pittman & Boswell, 2008). Moreover, parenthood—a time- and resource-intensive job—may complicate adolescents' ability to pursue personal goals related to the transition to adulthood, such as completing education, attaining independent living, or securing employment (Bornstein et al., 2003). Achieving developmental goals, in the face of numerous policy obstacles, may compound adolescent mothers' difficulties in obtaining independent housing. As a result, many young mothers turn to support from social networks—often their origin families—to provide housing, financial, and caregiving assistance (Folk, 1996; Skobba, Bruin & Yust, 2013).

Sarkisian et al. (2006) found doubling up to be been common in Latino households, in part due to norms of expected family support related to familismo. Living in intergenerational and multifamily households was beneficial for some adolescent mothers and their children, notably around help with child care that afforded young mothers time to pursue their educational and employment goals (Calzada et al., 2013). In other respects, living with family served as a risk factor for Latina adolescent mothers' low educational and employment attainment,

socioemotional problems, and housing instability. For instance, Desmond and Turley (2009) noted that strong family orientation hindered educational attainment when schooling was perceived as interfering with family responsibilities. In addition, living with family has fostered interpersonal conflicts, compromising adolescent mothers' mental health (Hernández, Ramírez García & Flynn, 2010). Crowding and chaos in these homes causes some Latina adolescent mothers stress that resulted in the loss of housing (leaving or being asked to leave the home; Skobba et al., 2013).

Latina adolescent mothers may seek out alternative housing supports because of "push" factors (e.g., household conflict), and because of "pull" forces (e.g., financial assistance). These moves out of the origin family home may be in the "horizontal" direction (i.e., to another doubling up situation) or the "vertical" direction (i.e., into independent housing). Motivations for and characteristics of Latina adolescent mothers' moves may have implications for their well-being and that of their children. However, the challenges and benefits of residential mobility among this group are largely overlooked in the literature. Although a modest body of research has examined the consequences of living in multigenerational households and residential instability on adolescent mothers, much less is known about how different types of moves shape Latina adolescent mothers' adjustment, particularly from a qualitative perspective. Latina young mothers comprise the largest share of adolescent parents today (Martin et al., 2013) and identifying strategies to support them and their children requires a narrowing of the research gap.

Present Study

The aim of this study was to use a qualitative approach to explore the unique experiences of low-income Latina adolescent mothers who depended on their families of origin for housing and parenting support and had unstable living conditions (into another doubling up situation—a horizontal move—or into independent housing—a vertical move). Latina adolescent mothers may have unique mobility experiences because of both policy barriers and cultural expectations (i.e., familismo). We sought to understand how this particular set of circumstances contributed to young mothers' instability, served their need for support, and allowed them to accomplish personal goals, including vertical moves into independent living.

Method

This study used data from the ethnographic portion of *Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three City Study* ("Three City Study"), a longitudinal, mixed methods investigation of children and adolescents' well-being following welfare reform in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio (see Winston et al., 1999 for detailed description). The ethnographic component of the study included a nonrandom sample of low-income (<200% of 1998 poverty line) families living in moderate to high poverty neighborhoods (>20% families in poverty; $N = 256$), recruited in 1999 through formal child care settings (e.g., Head Start), WIC programs, churches, and other public assistance agencies. Families in the ethnography had a focal child age four or younger and were visited once or twice per month for 12–18 months and then every 6 months thereafter through 2003. The goal of these repeated ethnographic interviews was to gain an in-depth understanding of neighborhood effects, employment and parenting experiences, and children's development. Pseudonyms were used in ethnographers' write-ups to protect the confidentiality of all participants. We chose to focus on adolescent participants who depended on other people for housing at some point during the study. We identified 92 participants who met these criteria, and began the analytic process by conducting open coding on a random sample of these cases, "letting the data speak to" us (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). We developed a large number of codes and a detailed codebook with overarching constructs (e.g., access to housing), codes/concepts within those constructs (e.g., cost burden), and notes or illustrative quotes. A subset of participants made frequent, repeated moves between one's family of origin and another home. As it turned out, the vast majority of these participants (15 of 16) identified as Latinas, and we decided to limit our sample to adolescent Latinas to avoid race/ethnicity as a confound. Based on the open coding process and resultant sample, the authors identified our core category: Latina adolescent mothers' decision-making processes around horizontal moves between the home of the participant's family of origin and another home, and vertical moves into independent living.

For each participant, all interviews relevant to housing, parenting, and family dynamics over the 3 years were coded. To ensure reliability, at least two researchers (of four graduate research assistants) independently coded a majority of interviews, compared results, and then came to consensus on final codes by discussing discrepant quotes and passages (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman & Pederson, 2013). Next, axial coding was used to examine how the codes were connected to the core concept and to one another (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Using matrix analysis to visualize the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994), instances of codes overlapping or connecting to one another were noted, with memos written to reflect these connections. Researchers then worked together to pull out themes and identify potential causes, intervening conditions, and consequences of the core concept.

Analytic Plan

To conduct analyses, a coding team of four graduate students used Corbin and Strauss' (2014) grounded theory approach to qualitative inquiry, characterized by open coding, elaborating the analysis, and integration. Our research question was inductive and exploratory, and we sought to understand low-income Latina young mothers' processes of navigating living situations in which they depended on others for housing. Due to the longitudinal nature of the data, we also drew from narrative analysis techniques to explore individual participants' lived experiences and their meaning making of them (Clandanin & Connelly, 2000). We also relied on research demonstrating the utility of combining these approaches (Lal, Suto & Ungar, 2012).

Results

The final sample consisted of 15 Latina adolescent mothers who faced housing instability for at least 1 year during the study period and relied on their origin families and often some other family for housing support. Among the young women, 10 identified as Puerto Rican, 2 as Mexican, and 3 as "other Latina" (see Table 1 for a brief description of each participant). Eight lived in Boston, five lived in Chicago, and two in San Antonio. The housing landscape in each of these cities at the time of the interviews was similar—public housing and vouchers were available, but limited (e.g., Collinson, Ellen & Ludwig, 2015). Each participant took steps toward a high school diploma or GED over the course of the study. All worked at some point, but their employment was tenuous, often as a result of residential instability. All of the young women received some form of public assistance, most commonly WIC ($n = 15$) and food stamps ($n = 11$).

The young mothers in our sample experienced some degree of housing instability, whether by choice, due to factors outside their control, or both. The specific motivations and forces that "pushed" or "pulled" adolescent mothers into horizontal moves varied from case to case, but generally related to relationships with the family of origin or significant other, and the stability of the respective situation. Vertical moves, however, were influenced most by access to structural supports, child care, and personal goals.

Horizontal Moves: Mobility between Family Homes

Many participants in the sample described fluid, recurring mobility between their origin family homes and other family homes. The majority ($n = 10$) depended on the families of their children's fathers, in particular, for housing support. As such, these types of horizontal moves are our primary focus. Most mothers who used this strategy of moving into the home of their children's fathers saw it as normal and not a major inconvenience. For instance, Nina said of her situation: "I always go back and forth from here to there. So I'm not really moving." However, some adolescents initially attempted to live with their babies' fathers' families, but the living arrangement did not last. Two themes emerged around participants' experiences moving between their homes of origin and other family homes (usually the baby's father's family), shedding light on what contributed to this mobility and how it related to their well-being. The first concerned the young mothers' relationships with members of each household, whereas the second related to family instability within each household. We discuss the two themes in turn.

Relationships and Conflict

Participants' housing instability often was related to their relationships with their own mothers. Four young women in the sample discussed conflictual relationships with their mothers that shaped their motivations for horizontal moves. Arguments seemed to be fairly typical of mother–adolescent relationships, centering on adolescents' rights and responsibilities in the home. The severity of the arguments compounded—and was compounded by—issues specific to adolescent parenthood and the fact that many of these young mothers had alternative parental figures through the families of their significant others.[1] In addition to these "push" factors motivating horizontal moves out of their family of origin, many young mothers felt "pulled" by close relationships with the families of their children's fathers.

Frequent arguments between Inez and her mother, Evelyn, typified ones around household responsibility. Evelyn struggled to make ends meet as a single parent of six children. As the oldest female, Inez was faced with immense responsibility for her siblings' well-being, as well as for her own two children's. Inez felt frustrated and unwelcome in her origin family home, given Evelyn's constant complaints about Inez and her children:

> Sometimes I feel very depressed and with all my worries in my head…And like my things bother her and I said, 'Why should I clean if she complains anyways about my children,' and saying things indirectly and things like that. Sometimes I just stay in my room.

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, the "significant other", "boyfriend", or "husband" refers to the father of the participant's child(ren).

Table 1 Overview of participants' living arrangements

	Residential history	Living with family of origin	Living with other family	Independent living
Inez (Boston) 16 at 1st birth	Lived w/mother, 5 siblings Brief stay at boyfriend's family apartment Back to mother's home Lived elsewhere; children at mother's Back to boyfriend's family home Living independently w/children & boyfriend	At time of 1st birth Family of origin depended on her to help financially due to welfare allotment	Kicked out of family of origin home due to conflict Emotional support from boyfriend's family	Living independently w/children & boyfriend at study end
Julia (Chicago) 15 at 1st birth	Lived w/boyfriend's family during pregnancy Briefly homeless Moved into family of origin home w/boyfriend Living independently w/boyfriend (near his family) until he moved out due to domestic violence Moved to Ohio w/mother & brother Living independently in Chicago	Boyfriend's family evicted Family of origin needed support	Wanted to live w/ boyfriend during pregnancy Moved out of boyfriend's family's building due to conflict w/boyfriend's mother	Stepmother helped her get voucher Boyfriend helped w/ rent until moved out; then father helped
Maria (Chicago) 15 at 1st birth	Lived w mother Moved in w/boyfriend, mom, stepdad, 5 sibs Brief stay w/own mother; kicked out Own apartment w/boyfriend & baby Back to mother's home w/new baby; older child lived w/boyfriend's mother Own apartment w/younger child & boyfriend	At time of 1st birth	Family of origin's house foreclosed; where else to live Financial & transportation support	Wanted own place over study period Structural barrier (not on boyfriend's family's voucher); forced to move out
Nina (Boston) 15 at 1st birth	Moved back & forth between mother's home & boyfriend's family home Living independently in mother's complex; boyfriend sometimes lived there	At time of 1st birth Emotional support	Social support & child care help	Wanted own place over study period, but not in big hurry
Tamara (Chicago) 18 at 1st birth	Lived w/family of origin Living independently w/boyfriend in apartments Back to family of origin's home w/boyfriend Living independently w/boyfriend & child	Affordability issues	Relationship w/boyfriend Family of origin moved & structural barrier (no space for her due to restrictions)	Conflict w/family of origin
Valerie (Chicago) 15 at 1st birth	Lived w/family of origin Boyfriend's (not baby's father's) house 4x/week Boyfriend lived w/her family briefly Lived w/boyfriend & his sister Back to mother's home (w/o boyfriend)	Affordability issues Help w/child care	Conflict w/boyfriend's mother over lack of privacy Affordability issues	N/A, only stated intention to move due to lack of privacy
Vivian (Chicago) 14 at 1st birth	Lived w/family of origin Moved in w/boyfriend's family Living independently w/boyfriend & child; father moved in but not pay expenses	At time of 1st birth	Conflict w/mother over boyfriend staying over Child care from boyfriend's mother	Wanted to independent living w/boyfriend & baby; temporary b/c affordability issues
Yvonne (San Antonio) 18 at 1st birth	Lived w family of origin Moved in w/boyfriend's family home Back to family of origin Temporarily in shelters Lived independently with child, eventually shares place w/friend because of finances	Family of origin during conflict	Conflict w/family of origin about relationship w/boyfriend At time of 1st birth Conflict w/boyfriend's family caused move out	No other viable options

Table 1. Continued

	Residential history	Living with family of origin	Living with other family	Independent living
Mara (Boston) 13 at 1st birth	Moved to boyfriend's family home Moved to family of origin after baby born	Support from mother & sister	Because of relationship	Not in a hurry
Victoria (Boston) 18 at 1st birth	Lived w/family of origin Moved in w/boyfriend's family Back to family of origin Moved out to live w/fiancé Lived independently, but own mother moved in	Emotional support Child care	N/A	Wanted to live with fiancé
Lana (Boston) 19 at 1st birth	Lived w/family of origin Following marriage, lived independently w/husband & experienced homelessness Back to family of origin after separation Lived independently Back to family of origin following move for employment and relationship reasons Moved into independent housing w/fiancé & his children	Affordability during transitions	N/A	Relationship changes Financial situation improves
Jessie (Boston) 15 at 1st birth	Lived alternatively w/family of origin and w/significant other and his family	Child care	Lived on and off with significant other's family	N/A
Sonia (Boston) 16 at 1st birth	Lived w/family of origin Moved out to live independently w/boyfriend	Emotional, financial, child care support	N/A	Thinks bothering her mother Finances make her want to move back
Jacinda (Boston) 15 at 1st birth	Ran away from family of origin to be w/boyfriend Living independently w/husband	N/A	Prior to childbirth to be w/boyfriend	Marriage, pregnancy, & received housing assistance
Fiona (San Antonio) 19 at 1st birth	Lived w/family of origin Following eviction, briefly lived in shelter Living independently w/children & boyfriend joins household briefly Management issues led to instability	Financial, emotional, & caregiving support	Boyfriend's family assisted in attaining housing in same building	Wanted to live independently with boyfriend

Sometimes I feel like [I should] get my children and go far away.

Fortunately, Inez found emotional support and a place to stay with her boyfriend's family when she was feeling worried: "I don't talk much with my mother, like about problems and all of that…The person I most seek for communication is my boyfriend's mother." Inez ultimately moved in with her boyfriend's family, where she felt better supported. Yet, her move was short-lived: When Evelyn's husband was released from prison, Inez became concerned that her siblings were being abused by their stepfather and quickly moved back to her family of origin to protect them.

Valerie had a similar experience with her mother, Yvette, although her family circumstances were very different with only two younger siblings plus a consistently present stepfather. Yvette frequently reminded Valerie that she paid for rent and most household expenses as leverage in their arguments. According to the ethnographer,

The downside to having her mother pay bills is that she will throw it in [Valerie's] face when she gets mad…her mother helps her but then complains about it. She says she tries not to ask her mother for too much because she does not 'want to hear her mouth'.

This situation contributed to a rift in the relationship, leaving Valerie feeling as if she could not confide in her mother. Valerie decided to move in with her boyfriend's family (not the father of her child), but viewed living with them as temporary; she often stated her intention to move.

In a similar vein, some of the young women and their mothers had constant disagreements regarding intimate partner relationships. For instance, as the ethnographer

recounts, Vivian's mother did not approve of her boyfriend, Darren, visiting her home:

> [Vivian] told me her mother did not like her to have her baby's father visit. She said he could visit but they could not be in her room or sit too close or be physical in any way. She laughed at this thought and thought that it was "dumb." The implication was that she might have sex and get pregnant again. Perhaps her comeback is that she got pregnant the first time under her nose and that anyway she is a little more prepared this time.

Unable to agree on boundaries for Darren in the family home, her mother finally asked Vivian to move out. Vivian then moved in with Darren's family, which the couple viewed as a temporary arrangement until they could find their own housing. But Vivian missed her mother once she was no longer living with her, and after a few weeks Vivian and her mother resolved their differences—at least enough so that Vivian could move back in with her family of origin.

On the other end of this spectrum, Julia began living with her boyfriend's family during her first pregnancy, because "that is what you do when you love somebody." The family was evicted eventually, and Julia, her children, and her boyfriend, Carlos, moved in with Julia's family of origin. Julia's mother was uncomfortable with this situation because she disapproved of Carlos (he was abusive toward Julia), but Julia would not move in without him. Julia's mother did not want her grandchildren to be homeless and thus allowed Carlos temporarily into her home.

Family Instability

In addition to relationship dynamics, housing instability and changing family compositions were the impetus for several participants' horizontal moves. Maria, who experienced multiple horizontal moves over the course of 2 years, is illustrative of this phenomenon: During her pregnancy, Maria lived with the family of her boyfriend, Estefan, because they had transportation available in case Maria went into labor. After her first child was born, Maria continued to move horizontally between the housing situations, but when her origin family was evicted, Maria was forced to remain with Estefan's family. Not long after, however, Estefan's mother received a voucher for a new apartment that could not accommodate Maria and Estefan. Maria and Estefan broke up shortly after securing their own apartment. Maria moved back into an apartment with her mother, brother, and second child; her first child stayed with Estefan's mother because Maria did not want to expose her toddler to so much instability. In many ways, Maria's mother's instability was a clear challenge for Maria, including the fact that for much of the study Maria was saving money to move to independent living and supporting her mother's household financially.

In other cases, participants' families always seemed to have a place for them. For instance, Jessie made multiple moves because of her significant other, as well as for employment. However, when she was experiencing a significant change, she was able to live with her own family until circumstances improved.

Vertical Moves: Mobility between Family Homes and Independent Housing

Although personal relationships and family instability were salient for most participants' horizontal moves, three primary themes shaped opportunities and barriers to vertical moves: access to housing assistance, child care, and individual goals.

Housing Assistance

Financial assistance, whether formal or informal, was critical for some mothers in their pursuit of independent housing situations. As noted, adolescent mothers confronted structural barriers to formal housing assistance and other government programs. For some young women, such as Inez, policies around different forms of government assistance sometimes seemed at odds with one another. Under TANF regulations, Inez was considered a teenager until she turned 20, meaning her mother Evelyn could receive cash benefits for Inez and her children, whereas HUD considered Inez an adult when she turned 18. After Inez moved into her boyfriend's family home, Evelyn removed Inez from the lease of her own unit. When Inez wanted to move back in to Evelyn's home due to her concern for her siblings' safety, the property manager refused her permission because Inez was an adult according to HUD definitions. Returning to the boyfriend's family's home also proved difficult, as it too was a subsidized unit with many more occupants than were permitted by the lease. At this point, Inez formally declared herself homeless, collected letters from family and friends to confirm her lack of residence, and persistently visited the local housing office before she was placed in a temporary shelter, and ultimately received her own housing voucher.

Inez was not alone among participants in struggling to obtain government housing assistance; Julia and Nina both received it, but not through traditional avenues: Julia's stepmother helped her secure a voucher, and Nina's mother transferred her voucher to Nina. Other young mothers were unable to access housing assistance during

the study, but some were in the process of exploring their eligibility. Thus, families of origin (and often, boyfriends' families) remained the primary source of housing assistance for many participants. In a few instances, financial support from families provided participants the opportunity to plan for the future, including vertical moves. Valerie did not contribute to the cost of rent, bills, or household items in her mother's house. She used money from her two jobs to purchase items for herself and her baby and to save for her own apartment. Even when women in situations like Valerie's moved into independent housing, it was typically for a short duration, or they found themselves taking in additional members to assist with housing affordability.

Child Care

Child care support influenced some participants' ability to move vertically into independent living, but for others it inhibited such moves. For example, Nina received child care support from her mother, Rebecca, when they lived in the same household: "My mother helps me out a lot. Like if I wanna go out or if I wanna do something, she's real understanding in letting me go since I'm young." Nina had the opportunity to live independently while continuing to receive child care assistance from her mother and other relatives who lived nearby. Rebecca walked Nina's son to school in the mornings, and her aunt picked him up afterwards, providing Nina flexibility to work long days and fluctuating hours. However, after a period of living independently with her boyfriend, Nina's relationship with her boyfriend dissolved, leading to the loss of support from his family and consequent financial concerns. At the conclusion of the study, she was contemplating moving back to her family of origin, unless she could get a Section 8 voucher to move to another neighborhood or reunite with her boyfriend.

For others, child care was a strong pull factor in continuing to reside with family members (or other families), which occasionally precluded vertical moves. Many participants reported receiving cheap and convenient child care from their own mothers or their boyfriends' mothers, and that living elsewhere would make finding and paying for child care too difficult. The use of nontraditional forms of payment, typically food stamps or WIC, was a standard practice. Valerie acknowledged that without free child care from her mother, "[I] would be struggling. I probably wouldn't be [in school], I probably would be working." However, she also noted that the advantages of having this source of child care curtailed her motivation to live on her own, as she did briefly before her daughter was born:

I moved out, a year before I had my daughter. So I was always living with my daughter's father and his family. And then we lived alone, and then when I got pregnant with my daughter we broke up, and then I came home. So my mom was like, "Okay, you come home, but you got to, like, do it on your own," or work, or whatever. But I kinda like slacked off. I was like, my mom's watching my daughter, I can still go to school. So I didn't think about saving to move out-...I'm starting again to like, really say, yeah, I got to move out because I'm already an adult.

In contrast, Jessie was motivated to improve her family circumstances by pursuing education and working, but experienced constant stress trying to find child care. At one point during the study, Jessie's mother supplemented the gap in child care arrangements, but had to quit her part-time job to do so, compromising the household's financial well-being. As a result, Jessie had to work to support her family of origin. In general, participants' reliance on their families (usually their mothers) for child care often created barriers to vertical moves when their mothers' assistance with child care precluded their own ability to support their families, but sometimes allowed them to pursue some of their own goals (e.g., education, employment).

Individual Goals

For many participants, immediate housing decisions were driven by their long-term goals of establishing a family home (i.e., making a vertical move). Several participants emphasized their aspirations for mature intimate relationships and self-sufficiency, both often part and parcel of vertical moves into independent homes. Julia wanted to separate herself from her abusive boyfriend, striving for self-reliance through consistent employment, purchasing a car, and getting an independent apartment. In so doing, she sought to provide her children with a stable home life. Julia's aspirations stemmed from her childhood experiences: "She's spent her whole life moving around between her grandma, father and mother. She doesn't like it, and wants to have her own house so her children have a place to grow up."

Similarly, despite the housing-related challenges Inez experienced—including conflicts with her mother, moving repeatedly between family households, and homelessness—she persisted until she was able to extricate herself from the responsibilities at her family of origin's home, break up with her boyfriend (albeit temporarily), and secure an apartment for her and her children. Inez's ethnographer reflected on the obstacles that Inez endured and the

noticeable improvement in her demeanor when she achieved her goal of living independently:

> Now she has her own apartment and [Inez's daughter] has her own bedroom. I have to say that I was so excited to be at [Inez's] house, her own apartment that has furniture, that is so clean and sparkling, and she is independent. We are going over her typical day with her family. It is nice to learn about her social support and activity. It touches my heart and I feel so relieved when I think about her past and her boyfriend not helping her and her getting her headaches. I feel honored to…see this life over such a long time and see these changes. And to see her spirit and how [she] stuck with her plans.

Other young women acknowledged the benefits of living with family, but often were more strategic in using family living situations to obtain personal goals, particularly related to education and employment. The ethnographer's summary of Sonia's experiences is illustrative: "She explained that living at home with her mother and not having to be subjected to the housing market facilitates 'making it.'" In a similar vein, Jessie balanced a job, school, and parenting because of her mother's supportive caregiving. Jessie was able to work more hours and get promoted and to manage an academic workload that led to college enrollment.

Maria, like other young mothers, attempted to use housing support from her family and her boyfriend's family as an opportunity to pursue her education, but her housing instability occasionally interfered with her goals. Maria believed she needed to get an education to help improve her daughter's circumstances. This perspective is illustrated by her assertion that getting an education was important "especially as mothers…[to] further yourself just a little bit more, and try to learn every day as much as you can, because it's always going to be useful, at some point. You should know it, just in case." Unfortunately, Maria had to leave school several times because of her housing instability. Her ethnographer spoke of how her housing situation affected her goals:

> [Maria] says her future plans are to go to college. She wants to work with handicapped children or become a writer, or maybe even both. She says she does not know if she will go straight to college or wait a year—it all depends on her living situation.…She says, "I'm tired of postponing everything, and just forgetting about it." Her success in school (and in life) is currently tied to her housing situation. Without a stable housing situation, she will find school very hard to continue. She may have to work full-time to establish some housing stability (and stability otherwise) for herself.

Despite her instability, Maria remained determined to complete her education and recognized the benefits of receiving housing support, however precarious: "I don't plan to [move into an independent home] 'til I graduate because I don't want to take the chance of not having the opportunity to do it again." In sum, for many of these young women housing support was a mixed blessing when it came to achieving individual goals and housing independence.

Discussion

The 15 young women whose lives were explored in this study provided a rich portrait of Latina young mothers' housing instability and the role of family in both supporting and hindering housing independence. All had unique experiences, yet a preliminary understanding emerged about the process of negotiating moving between one's home of origin, the significant other's family home, and independent housing. In line with research on social networks and on Latino families, findings highlight how for these young Latina mothers, straddling adolescence and adulthood, their personal goals and developmental needs intersected with family circumstances to shape their housing outcomes. In this sample, young Latino mothers' reliance on family and extended networks often was a tradeoff between their obligations to the family unit (consistent with familismo), need for stable housing, and/or pursuit of independence.

Family networks can provide low-income adolescent mothers with emotional, instrumental, and financial support: Participants in the current study relied on origin families (or, often, those of their significant others) for housing, child care, and monetary assistance. For many, this assistance enabled them to be strategic in pursuit of personal goals such as educational attainment, fulfilling employment, or independent housing that were motivated by their desire to promote their young children's future prospects. Yet, housing support often came at a price; many young women were required to help out around the house, provide child care to siblings or other children in the home, or work to contribute financially to the household, sometimes at the expense of pursuing individual goals. These household responsibilities were sometimes seen as compromising young mothers' independence and autonomy. The tension between the independence the young mothers valued and the respect for authority their mothers or maternal figures demanded often resulted in conflict. Several of the young women in the current study also encountered situations in which the families upon which they were relying themselves had instability challenges, typically through eviction or issues with formal

housing assistance (e.g., more people in the home than their housing voucher allowed). Thus, frequent horizontal moves were part of a strategy to maintain family harmony, to deal with extreme home chaos, and occasionally to bypass structural and policy-related obstacles to finding independent housing. These moves typically had some short-term benefits (e.g., housing, child care, and financial support), but the instability created was often detrimental to participants' obtaining personal goals and meeting their developmental needs. In sum, residential mobility can serve as a tool for young mothers to remove themselves from problematic living arrangements (e.g., conflict with mother or maternal figure; family instability), but it also may hinder their efforts or motivation to work toward achieving personal goals.

This study expands on existing research in a number of ways. First, although studies show that extended family often provides support for young Latina mothers, to our knowledge, no research to date examines how this support network relates to residential mobility. Second, this study highlights how family support provided in the context of family-centered values may contribute to young mothers' residence in or exit from family homes due to personal and parenting goals. It is clear that for some of the young women, the added support from significant others' families came at crucial junctures, although the mobility between homes may have hindered their ability to move into independent living in some cases. Third, this study begins to uncover the processes that underlie adolescent mothers' residential mobility, including conflict and instability among family members, structural barriers to housing assistance, and concerns for their own children's well-being. Finally, this study underscores a major limitation in policies around government assistance: Low-income adolescent mothers who strive to establish independent households and seek support are constrained by minimum age requirements for welfare and housing assistance. On top of long waitlists and confusing guidelines (Edin & Lein, 1997), age-related restrictions further impeded low-income adolescent mothers' ability to support their families without relying on help from others who are often also struggling financially. As such, supportive services for adolescent Latina mothers likely would be enhanced by culturally sensitive housing support services, helping these young women to navigate the confusing policy landscape while balancing their family interests and personal goals.

Despite the contributions of this study, a number of limitations exist. First, as with all interpretive research (Corbin & Strauss, 2014), the findings are not generalizable to the population of low-income Latina adolescent mothers; we can only generalize the relationships between constructs and propositions generated among our sample in the period immediately following welfare reform.

Second, because we could not verify validity with the participants as data were collected more than a decade ago, this study represents the researchers' interpretations of these women's statements and ethnographers' reflections. However, we had the benefit of rich data (multiple detailed interviews with each participant), some negative cases (e.g., Maria's mother sometimes depended on her, rather than vice versa), and comparison to literature on "typical" settings, which are all useful validation tools (i.e., triangulation; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Although we cannot ignore the limitation related to the age of the data, the policy context of welfare has not changed since the data were collected, and these young women's experiences can inform contemporary policy debates. Welfare reform ushered in an era of reduced support for low-income families, and current policy interest in better serving the most disadvantaged families may be informed by the struggles these young mothers faced accessing different pieces of the social safety net.

In sum, this study helps to uncover some of the potential mechanisms underlying low-income Latina adolescent mothers' experiences moving between family homes and independent housing. The findings suggest that the ultimate goal for many of the young mothers was to live independently, and various intervening conditions—financial issues, child care availability, and family dynamics—were seen as helping or hindering their efforts to pursue this goal. Future research should attempt to isolate the unique role of extended family social networks in providing housing support for adolescent mothers. Finally, additional research is needed to more thoroughly explore the extent to which the situations encountered by the young Latina mothers in this study are representative of other adolescent mothers in similar living situations and in the current policy climate. It is crucial that future investigations explicitly take into consideration the issue of adolescent mothers' access to government assistance programs and its role in their ability to establish independent households.

Conflict of Interest

This manuscript has not been published previously in whole or in substantial part and is not currently under consideration for publication elsewhere. Also, the authors do not have any actual or potential conflict of interest

including any financial, personal, or other relationships with other people or organizations that could inappropriately influence, or be perceived to influence, their work. In addition, to the best of our knowledge, the data were collected in accordance with APA ethical guidelines; informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the study, and their anonymity has been maintained in the current study.

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