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“Doing Your Life”: Narrative Intervention with Young Mothers as Storytellers

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The familiar story about young pregnant and parenting Latinas relies on commonsense logic about the timing of reproductive lives. We explore young mothers’ own sense making, captured in local vernacular through participants’ digital story depictions, our fieldnotes of digital storytelling workshop talk, and participants’ follow-up interview reflections about enduring judgment and doing their lives. In this article, we introduce the Hear Our Stories project and present key digital stories and related ethnographic material that serve as local exemplars of “doing your life.” Findings reveal ways participants negotiate value making about their reproductive lives. As a narrative intervention, digital storytelling helps to gain a firmer grasp on social worlds and to better understand inequality, while also engaging participants in a process that affords them the opportunity to shift from being a judged teen mom to co-creators of knowledge and change as strategic storytellers.

Key words: digital storytelling, Puerto Rican young women, teen pregnancy and parenting, value and ways

Introduction

Dominant discourses on teen mothers serve as a barometer of national and local values on family making, belonging, and progress through the life course. Teen motherhood is depicted as a single story (Adichie 2009). This familiar story, which pivots on shame, is largely predicated on commonsense logic of the life course. It tells of potentially promising lives being stolen even before they have really begun and of a doomed and largely uncontrollable future that is deserved by the teen mother because she has actively made a “bad choice” to have unprotected sex, get pregnant, and keep the baby. The story holds a rigid notion about the right age to have a child and the “fitness” of young mothers: once a teenage girl gets pregnant, and even more so has a baby, she hits the proverbial wall. She will bear a cost

to the taxpayer. She is selfish. She will perpetuate the cycle by raising problem children. Though often well intentioned, prevention campaigns aiming to raise public awareness about teen pregnancy often reinforce this logic. The United Way of Milwaukee’s 2015 campaign serves as a recent example. The ad positions young people of color as passive objects with little chance of a future should they get pregnant and have a baby (Gubrium and Krause 2015). In one ad, a young man’s head appears on the body of a duck on wheels, his expression bemused as a young child wearing a diaper pulls the toy by a string. In another ad, a young African-American woman’s head is affixed to a hand puppet, which a young African-American baby wears. At the top of both ads a message in all caps warns: “Have a baby too young and it’ll control your life.” Below the message, the campaign web address is listed: BabyCanWait.com.

Culturally tinged versions of the single story specifically aimed at Latinas have focused on values of *familismo* and *respeto*, which respectively emphasize the importance of family as a form of social support and identity and refer to the maintenance of a hierarchy of respectful relationships within the family (Smith-Morris et al. 2013; Villaruel 1998). Presumed to be universally shared, these values have a fraught positive and negative valence. On the one hand, familismo and respeto are associated with strong and tight-knit families. Those who assert these as positive characteristics situate the family as a key element of social support and identity construction and emphasize a hierarchy of respectful relationships within the family (Smith-Morris et al. 2013; Villaruel 1998). On the other hand, these labels stir up negative associations extending back to the amoral familism of the postwar modernization era in which strong

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families were seen as inward focused, backward, and insufficiently engaged in civil society (Banfield 1958; Schneider and Schneider 1991). More recently, scholars have critiqued such characterizations as essentializing and over-determined in their logic (Mann 2016; Mann, Cardona, and Gomez 2015). In either case, Latino cultural values inform sexual and reproductive practices and produce motherhood as key to identity construction for women, young and old (Raffaelli and Ontai 2001), stigmatized or not.

Bundled into dominant narratives and messages specific to Latinas “at risk” for teen pregnancy, these values infuse hyperbolic images of sexuality and reproduction (Asencio 2010; García 2012), with young Latinas labeled as hypersexual and, thus, as hyperfertile (Briggs 2002; Chavez 2004). A double standard largely colors the design of teen pregnancy prevention programs, such that young Latinas seen as inherently “at risk” for teen pregnancy and motherhood given cultural expectations are prioritized as objects for the promotion of long-acting, reversible contraception to prevent pregnancy, while they are denied subjectivity and agency in conceptualizing and making good on their own desires (García 2012; González-López 2010; Hurtado 2003; Zavella 2003).

Recent social science literature moves beyond the single story including the culturally tinged version pointing to the intersectional effects of racism and sexism, everyday violence, economic and housing insecurity, disenfranchisement in the educational and social services sector, and social isolation on the lives of young mothers (Erdmans and Black 2015; Furstenberg 2007; Geronimus 2003; Kearney and Levine 2015; Lawlor and Shaw 2002; Mann 2013; Silver 2015; Singh, Darroch, and Frost 2001; SmithBattle 2007). This literature pushes back on the shaming discourse of pathology that has surrounded teen pregnancy and parenting to uncover social inequality and the social injustice and structural violence that young mothers experience.

A burgeoning social movement literature extends this work to focus on the subjectivities of teen mothers themselves as they contend with the single story (#noteenshame.com; Barcelos 2013; Barcelos and Gubrium 2014; Cadena et al. 2016; Cashdollar 2017; Gubrium, Krause and Jernigan 2014; Mann 2016; Mann, Cardona, and Gomez 2015; Ronan 2015; Vinson 2011; Vinson and Stevens 2014). This literature reveals the often-silenced identity constructions of young mothers, illuminating how structures create stigma that informs local logic about sexual and reproductive health practices. Social scientists have taken seriously locally articulated meanings of pregnancy and parenting. Young mothers speak of children as making their lives better (Anwar and Stanistreet 2014) and mothering-while-young as a resource for resilience in facing adversity as they pursue education and obtain economic independence (Mantovani and Thomas 2015). They experience social isolation (Hanna 2001) and contend with stigma resulting from policy interventions that contrast with local value systems (Yardley 2008).

Pushing Back against the Single Story: Digital Storytelling as Narrative Intervention

Family life has become ground zero in a political war (Chavez 2004) for struggles over citizenship and belonging in the United States. Discrimination inscribes itself on certain bodies, including those of Latino/as (Chavez 2008; De León 2015; Santa Ana 2002). The “Hear Our Stories” project aimed to better understand the contexts shaping young motherhood and family making in a post-industrial city. We chose to work with young Puerto Rican women, who are historically positioned as hyperfertile and thus in need of sexual and reproductive control or management (Acosta-Belén and Santiago 2006; Asencio and Acosta 2010; Chavez 2008; Lopez 2008; Vargas 2010). Most study participants had moved frequently with their families, back and forth between Puerto Rico (i.e., the island) and the mainland United States in the face of structural violence. Structural violence includes historical colonialism and medical experimentation, as well as intergenerational and current social inequality including high rates of un(der) employment, housing and food insecurity, lack of transportation, intense surveillance meted out in social services and the prison industrial complex, and limited access to affordable health insurance, health care facilities, and high quality care (Brown 2009; De Jesus and Xiao 2014; Kaltman et al. 2016; Lopez 2008). High teen birth rates in the local Puerto Rican community are magnified in local public health efforts, with generations of structural inequality rarely examined. Young Puerto Rican women in the community are concomitantly positioned as being “at risk” for teen pregnancy and targeted with shame-based prevention strategies, ironically reproducing structural violence.

A reproductive justice framework guided Hear Our Stories. We sought to understand the ways that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing dimensions of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Collins 2015). One tenet of the reproductive justice framework is particularly compelling in this light, stating that “every woman has the human right to: decide if and when she will have a baby and the conditions under which she will give birth” (Trust Black Women n.d.) The project aimed to make visible the social and structural conditions that engender differences between the reproduction of socially valued and devalued groups, in this case in terms of value making around teen motherhood (Mann, Cardona, and Gomez 2015; see also Luna and Luker 2013; Price 2010; Silliman et al. 2016).

As a “narrative intervention,” digital storytelling opened up a new way forward, where young mothers contended with judgments and upended them. The aim was to recalibrate narrow conversations about and with young parents to stimulate more supportive policies for themselves and their families. Digital storytelling promotes collective sense making among storytellers (Hull and Katz 2006) by engaging those individuals who are telling their stories in the actual digital story production process. In Hear Our Stories, participants crafted one- to three-minute digital stories within the structure of a

workshop that featured talking and writing prompts, script work, a story circle, script editing, voice-over recording of scripts, storyboarding and image selection, and digital editing and assembling. Participants received feedback each step of the way from peers during group work and from trained workshop facilitators in one-on-one contexts. Their stories evolved as they worked with feedback. Participants sat in a room, one-on-one with a microphone and a facilitator, who coached them in reading their scripts for a voice-over recording. During the story circle, participants shared their stories for the first time with the group (some for the first time with anyone) and were able to choose what to share or not to share and to consider which parts of their story might leave the circle and enter the public domain.

A collaborative approach prioritizes storytellers and the knowledge they are sharing. They decide how to tell a story. They acquire tools and hands-on skills for assembling the digital story. Through the workshop process, participants served as veritable participant observers of their own lives as they confronted and reflected on their lived experiences by creating a story to explain and understand them (Gubrium and Harper 2013). Sense making included storyteller descriptions and fellow workshop group member reflections on their everyday experiences in light of an expected or envisioned life course rooted in a local knowledge system. This was captured in local vernacular through participants' storied depictions, our fieldnotes of workshop talk, and participants' follow-up interview reflections about "doing their lives," as one participant put it.

As a group-based process, digital storytelling also *felt good*. In Hear Our Stories, the workshop served as a mechanism for solidarity building and action for workshop participants. Through the sharing of personal stories, participants recognized their own experiences in others' stories and realized that they had a lot in common. The process encouraged storytellers to make the private public and to challenge stigmatizing and shaming conversations. Participant-produced digital stories were presented by the researchers and storytellers at multiple forums including community-based screenings, social service provider workshops, and academic conferences and through a strategic communications effort that featured a project website (umass.edu/hearourstories) and social media campaign.

We used digital storytelling to render otherwise discounted knowledge as relevant. We set out to prioritize research participants' own identity constructions in the project. However, as we moved through four digital storytelling workshops with research participants—all young mothers—we realized that despite scholarly efforts to push back on shaming, that the young women, themselves, continue to find themselves at a standstill, as a cacophony of judgment continues to resound. As a stigmatizing process, judgment cast on young mothers defines and labels them as "undesirable, unproductive, dysfunctional, and potentially dangerous, and (re)produces" their differential acceptability as mothers (Carabas and Harter 2005:150-151):

The process of labeling [i.e., as a "teen mother"] is a powerful rhetorical lever that can be simultaneously considered a genesis to and outcome of stigmatization. Classic conceptualizations proffer that stigmatization results in the devaluation of individuals and groups in society. More than a mere indicator of certain attributes, stigma should be seen as "a language of relationships" (Goffman 1963:3) that emerges in the day-to-day activities of agents. Shame, embarrassment, and distrust evolve through the process of othering that stigmatization performs, and are embodied in people's life narratives.

In this article, we contend that narrative intervention helps to realize the messiness of subjugated knowledges not considered worthy (after Foucault 1980) and creates a discourse through participant-produced stories. Out of incoherence comes coherence, where a subject is born. Gibson-Graham (2006:23) put forth a compelling question in their efforts to both convey and destabilize "the strengths and staying power of hegemonic formation," asking: "how might the potentiality for becoming arise out of the experience of subjection?" Our argument relates to the "potentiality for becoming" elicited through digital storytelling. The experience of subjection, largely felt through socially stigmatizing value judgments and sensed as shame, which participants articulated frequently over the course of the digital storytelling workshops and follow-up interviews and is well documented in the literature, can concomitantly serve as a site for concretizing alternative subjectivities. Hear Our Stories traversed methodological borders to explore familiar stories with participants. Digital storytelling encouraged us all to imagine new, enchanting ways of seeing, engaging with, and acting upon these stories.

We provide a backdrop to the Hear Our Stories project and then develop our argument by presenting samples from digital stories produced in the project, along with extracts from transcripts of key digital storytelling workshop activities and follow-up interviews, as well as fieldnote reflections. In the two parts—enduring judgment and "doing your life"—we present findings to reveal how participants negotiate the single story on teen motherhood and "unfit" parenting. In our discussion and conclusion, we draw on an insight from Gibson-Graham (2006:24) that subjects "may shift and create new identities for themselves despite the seemingly hegemonic power of dominant discourses..." As storytellers negotiated, reflected, and resisted dominant discourses on value, ways, and young parenting in the United States, digital storytelling encouraged a potentiality for becoming.

Methods

Setting

In the mid-20th century, "Operation Bootstrap" invested millions of dollars into the Puerto Rican economy, with migration from the island to the mainland and female sterilization (*la operación*) seen as key remedies to the tightly coiled "problems" of overpopulation and economic development

(Briggs 2002; Lopez 2008). When Puerto Ricans first arrived in the 1960s to work in the shade tobacco industry in New England, Highmaple (where our research site was located) was already in the throes of post-industrial devastation. Puerto Ricans encountered similar poor living and working conditions to those of previous immigrant communities. Yet, while other groups (e.g., Polish, Irish, and French Canadian) rose through the ranks of the White middle class to escape literally up the hill, Puerto Ricans remained entrenched at the bottom.

Hear Our Stories was conducted at an alternative school, “The Center,” which provides high school equivalency exam preparation for pregnant and parenting teens. The first author had previously researched and developed an arts-based sexuality education curriculum with The Center students (Gubrium and Shafer 2014), organized a digital storytelling workshop and story showcase with Center students at the local historical museum, and conducted extensive ethnographic research there on sexual and reproductive health inequities and related social injustices (Barcelos and Gubrium 2014; Gubrium 2011; Gubrium et al. 2014). The Center serves young women between the ages of sixteen to twenty-one and their children. Over the past five years, Center students have reported a household income at or below 50 percent of the poverty level, and nearly two-thirds have been pushed out of high school by the tenth grade, the majority before becoming pregnant. Poverty and institutional inequities, such as racism and sexism, manifest in statistics on school dropout for young parents (Luker 1996).

Recruitment

We aimed to recruit ten participants for each one of four, four-day digital storytelling workshops ($n=40$). Participants were recruited by the Director of Education at The Center, who presented information about the project to students during classroom visits. Given her prior relationship with The Center, the first author also attended the recruitment sessions to respond to questions and to clarify the project purpose. Recruitment criteria included: (1) self-identification as a Puerto Rican, (2) receipt of services at The Center (and thus, pregnant and/or parenting), and (3) between fifteen to twenty-one years old. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who, as students matriculating through The Center, were classified as legally emancipated minors. The project received careful review and eventual approval through our university’s Institutional Review Board.

Digital Storytelling and Data Collection

Digital storytelling workshops and follow-up interviews took place between August and November 2013. Four Ph.D. and eight master’s level students were trained to assist with data collection and the digital storytelling workshops. The team worked with five project partners, from the local level to Boston; New York; and Berkeley, California, to develop reproductive justice, strategic communications, and advocacy

trainings offered to The Center students, which brought a number of project participants into the realm of community organizing and policy making. Project participants were also invited to present with the research team at a number of academic and professional conferences. One project partner, the StoryCenter, offered a three-day digital storytelling “training” workshop to representatives from each of the project partners, as well as to project team members, with participants all producing their own digital stories. Several of these stories were used in the orientation session of the digital storytelling workshops as introductory examples for study participants.

Our team facilitated workshops at The Center during regular school hours, with activities taking place in select classrooms throughout The Center, which is housed in an old Victorian house located directly across the street from the local history museum. We followed a digital storytelling workshop process innovated by the StoryCenter. The process entails workshop participants each writing and audio-recording a story about an important moment/experience in her life, collecting images and video clips to visually narrate the story, and learning and using basic video editing software to each produce a final digital story. Story prompts encouraged participants to write about one of the following “moments”: when they learned about sex and desire, understood what love is all about, felt like a good mom or a bad mom, realized what home means, felt really strong or really helpless, or felt like they were (or were not) part of a family. We have used similar prompts in previous workshops and found them helpful in guiding storytellers to pinpoint a topic for their stories (Gubrium et al. 2016).

The workshop also includes participation in two group-based storytelling activities. On the first day of the workshop, participants share the stories they are contemplating writing. The conversation happens in a supportive group story circle activity, as they individually receive structured feedback from group members and facilitators on their stories, while collectively analyzing common threads in their lives—political, economic, sociocultural, and historical—and the ways these are woven in daily practice. A story screening occurs on the last day of the workshop. Each participant introduces and screens her final digital story, with facilitators leading a group discussion around the stories.

One workshop co-facilitator, a White woman fluent in Spanish, was hired from StoryCenter. A second facilitator, hired from a local public television affiliate, was raised in the local Puerto Rican community and a fluent Puerto Rican Spanish speaker. Members of the research team were introduced formally to workshop participants during the workshop orientation as we reviewed the study purpose and objectives including our noted aim to shift the stigmatizing conversation and to create more supportive policies for young mothers and their families, and then more informally as we supported participants during the workshop activities. The research team consisted of the two Project Principal Investigators (PIs: co-authors on this article), both of whom identify as middle-aged, middle-class White women, who assisted

with and wrote fieldnotes over the course of the workshop; four research assistants, including a White woman, a Native American woman, a Puerto Rican woman who grew up in the local community, and one self-identified Latinx individual; and three masters' level interns, two women of color and one White woman, who assisted with workshop activities. Each research assistant was assigned to assist with one workshop; write fieldnotes during the workshop focusing on non-verbal activity and social interactions among participants, researchers, and facilitators, and on their own reflections of the storytelling process; conduct a one hour, semi-structured follow-up interview, one to two weeks later, with each participant from that workshop after establishing a level of trust with participants over the course of the digital storytelling workshop; and transcribe verbatim audio-recordings from their assigned digital storytelling workshop (i.e., Story Circle and story screening) and follow-up interviews. Interviews included discussion on: meaningful people in participants' lives; home/housing and place; sexuality/love and safer sex; schooling; parenting and support; and the future. At the end of each interview, the interviewer and participant viewed and further discussed her digital story.

The interwoven digital storytelling and data collection process notably involved the co-construction of knowledge, and, in this respect, reflexivity was an essential part of our approach. We, as researchers and co-facilitators, supported participants with script editing and special effects, including consideration of camera angle used in still and moving images, image layering, voice quality, music and/or sound effects, and transitions from scene-to-scene, which inevitably informed the data produced in and around the workshops, as well as our analysis. Each research team member bracketed their perspectives from observations in fieldnote writing during data collection, such that, as much as possible, our interpretations or reflections were kept separate from descriptive material. We held debrief meetings with the research team and co-facilitators at the end of each day of a workshop to discuss our experiences and perspectives in the workshop, with notes typed at the meetings.

Data Analysis

Data sources included transcripts of audio-recorded story circle and story screening activities, the digital stories, and researcher-written fieldnotes from digital storytelling workshop activities and participant interviews. We use an intertextual transcription format to present exemplar digital stories, which allows for a verisimilitude of the visual, chronological, aural and oral, emotional, gestural, and textual components found in the digital story, contributing critical detail to our analysis.

As a team, the PIs and research assistants participated in the data analysis. We used an intertextual transcription method (see Table 1), combining still images from the digital stories along with transcription of the voiceover recording, notes on affect, features of visual objects, text on screen, music,

and special effects to "begin to understand how people make meaning across the different modalities of visual, chronological, aural and oral, emotional, gestural, and textual elements found in a digital story" (Gubrium and Turner 2011:478). Research team members independently reviewed the corpus of data, including the digital stories in whole/video and intertextual transcript format, and took notes on generative themes elicited in the stories, as well as use of imagery, text, and sound. We analyzed themes by storyteller to explore emerging themes within individual cases, and then across the stories, to consider how identified themes played out across the set of stories as a whole. Based on the set of themes identified by each researcher, we composed a list of emerging themes. Of particular interest were the shared values, beliefs, and practices ("cultural paradigms") in the data. The research team then shared their identified themes with each other and reached consensus on the codes and finalized a codebook with detailed description; inclusion and exclusion criteria; and typical, atypical, and close-but-no exemplars for each code to guide data coding (Bernard and Ryan 2010). Collectively, and over multiple iterations, we reviewed the data and tested for intercoder reliability using the codebook to guide further analysis and interpretation. The analytical strategy entailed an examination of narrative content and context (Morse and Field 1995). Our text analysis focused on local cultural paradigms of reproduction and sexuality elicited as key themes in the data, as well as structural contexts (i.e., historical, political, economic) surrounding these themes. One research assistant created a narrative case study portrait for each participant, based on the participant's interview, digital story, and researcher fieldnotes, which also helped guide our analysis.

Results

Part I: Enduring Judgment

Storytellers described experiences of facing and enduring daily "judgment" about themselves as young mothers. Here, judgment is local vernacular for the internalized, enacted, and anticipated stigma and stigma management (i.e., othering) that participants experienced and practiced. Judgment occurred in casual encounters with strangers on the street, with friends and family, as well as in institutional settings. Marie, a participant in the second digital storytelling workshop, made sense of these constant judgments (pseudonyms are used for all participants). Born in Puerto Rico, she was now living in Highmaple and attending The Center. At the time of the workshop, Marie was twenty-one years old and living with her son in a shelter. In her follow-up interview, she discussed her growing-up experiences, describing a well-worn pattern of disadvantage rooted in intergenerational violence (domestic and structural) and dislocation that is said to undergird teen parenting (Furstenberg 2007; Geronimus 2003; Hotz, McElroy, and Sanders 2005). She also spoke of being expected to grow up "like really quick": taking care of her siblings, putting them to bed, feeding them breakfast,

Table 1. Intertextual Transcript: Marie's Digital Story

Image
Time (sec)	31-45
Location Represented	Outdoors, a dog house
Script	But no one ever talked to me about the abuse that could happen. (in Spanish): So now, hold on. You know, like being locked in a room all day? His mom would text me things like, "If you don't take what he does, you're not woman enough."
Emotion Conveyed from Script	Anger
Features of Visual Objects	Close-up of a weathered plywood doghouse. Inside it, we can see some dead leaves and a Styrofoam cup. Words appear in typewriter effect.
Emotion Conveyed from Visual	Twists use of "being in the doghouse," an idiom often used to refer to men who are out of line. Here, Marie is referring to the violence of judgment and physical abuse from her boyfriend and his mother, as if they both should be in the doghouse. The weathered wood and discarded trash gives a feeling of rejection, being cast aside, unworthy, connoting a sense of isolation on Marie's part.
Voice Quality	Rapid
Special Effects	Slow zoom into door of dog house
Text on Screen	English translation; "not woman enough."

getting them to school, and helping with daily household chores. Reflecting on this time in her life, she said, "I didn't have a poor childhood, I didn't even have a childhood." Both Marie and her mother had moved from city to city, state to state, mainland to island and back again, throughout their childhood and as young mothers.

Despite the common hardships, a sense of judgment suffuses Marie's digital story about her pregnancy. Marie begins her story by mimicking the words she heard from her mother:

When I was pregnant, all I heard was all kinds of negativity around me. They all used to say, "You're ruining your life! You think having a baby is easy? You know what that means? No more school, no more parties, no more 'you time'!" You're a baby having a baby. "¡Ay, no sé qué voy a hacer contigo! ¡Cuando se entere tu papá, jum!" [Oh, I don't know what I'm going to do with you when your dad finds out...hmm.] So, I hope he's gonna take care of you and full responsibility and marry you.

The presumed cultural value of tight Latino families does not bear out. Continuing, Marie shifts her digital story

from the cacophony of judgment she faced from her family (Krause, Waldron, and Gubrium 2016) to the physical and emotional abuse she experienced from her boyfriend and his mother while she lived with them during this time and after the birth of her son. An extract from Marie's digital story conveys the visceral sense of anger she feels at the judgment call that she marry her abusive boyfriend, the father of her baby, to establish a respectable family. The memory is juxtaposed with the degrading circumstances of living with him and his mother at the time. Marie recalls, "But no one ever talked to me about the abuse that could happen. '¡Ahora, aguanta!' [So now, hold on.] You know, like being locked in a room all day? His mom would text me things like, 'If you don't take what he does, you're not woman enough.'" Aligned with these words in the video is a still image of a decrepit plywood doghouse sitting outside on patchy lawn. Inside the doghouse, the viewer sees dead leaves and a discarded Styrofoam cup. The image shocks the viewer into feeling the violence of enduring this judgment.

Whether from older family members or same-age strangers, Hear Our Stories participants endured judgment as young mothers. Judgments were especially felt at the city's mall, a place that draws shoppers from the region. Reyna, another participant, described in her interview the visceral sense of judgment she and other young pregnant Puerto Rican women felt from other (White) young women at the mall:

I I remember one time it got to me...and I was looking at the girl, like, up and down, like, I looked at her up and down, so like, "What are you looking at? You never seen a young chick pregnant, what the fuck?" And, she just kept looking at me, she just kept looking at my belly you can see her eyes looking at my belly, and then looking at myself, like, she was looking at me, like, this young chick being pregnant.

Asked to describe her experience in Highmaple, Gabriela, another participant, likewise spoke of "Hard, just, looks. I, I can tell by looks..." as well as the heard "little whispers and here and there," meant to put her in her place at the mall.

As participants were judged for their station in life as young mothers, a confluence of race/class/gender/sexuality was highlighted. The assumption that they are not simply anomalies in their families but that they come from a long line of objectionable sexual and reproductive practices in the Puerto Rican community was articulated in Jamie's interview:

Um, well, a couple times I used to go to [Nearby City] High in [Nearby City], um, and teachers will look at me, and I'll hear them, like in the corner, and they'll talk about how "Oh she's fifteen and she's pregnant, and she's only in tenth grade." They'll be quick to judge my mom without knowing her because I wasn't raised right, or because like, most teen moms are Puerto Rican a lot of teen moms that I know are Puerto Rican, and they're quick to talk about race. And I heard a few teachers comment on that, and it like, ticked me off kind of, and it made me feel like a bad person.

However, participants were not innocent in casting aspersions, likewise judging other young mothers and themselves. They voiced conflict between judgments faced and their own quest for respectability. While their stories accentuated judgment, they also held overtones of fit parenting, with family making linked to doing a respectable life. As such, participants expressed a politics of respectability, at times by distancing themselves from others whether with other young mothers or their own mothers. This value, introduced by anthropologists Schneider and Schneider (1991) in the context of the demographic transition to small family size in Sicily, is tinged with cultural and economic possibility. Poor married couples with larger families were stigmatized, as dominated by their sexual instincts and thus seen as unrespectable. Though they understood the harm and sense of alienation from being positioned as unfit, this did not stop some participants from describing how they were "not that type of girl," to situate themselves as different than "other(ed)" teen mothers. Using age to strategically situate herself as a different kind of young

mother, in her interview, participant Nicole reflected local cultural norms on teen parenting, which position younger teen mothers like Jamie, in the age range of thirteen to sixteen years old, as problematic (i.e., "they are not ready to be parents," developmentally speaking):

I wasn't like those girls back in high school that got pregnant at fifteen, sixteen. ...So nobody could say anything to me.... Cuz me and my brother's wife, we got pregnant at a older age. So it wasn't that bad. And I look at everybody else that got pregnant before me and I was like, y'all should be ashamed of yourself, cuz I waited 'til I got pregnant at twenty, so.

Building new subjectivities was no easy task. Just as they resisted certain judgments, participants also internalized certain dominant, blame-the-victim norms that contributed to their own self-judgment. Workshop participant Marcela described herself during a story circle as not being "mom material" before she became pregnant. Despite acknowledging experiences with intense structural violence and trauma in her digital story and at points in her follow-up interview, at another point in her interview, Marie internalized the judgment she felt as a young Puerto Rican mother who lived with her son in a shelter. Speaking of herself as a "mirror," she held herself up as an example of *what not to do*, *how not to be*, to her younger siblings:

I tell them, to [my sister] and my younger sister, and my little brother too, look at me. Look at everything I been through. Look where I'm at. Look where I live. Look, I have a child, I'm twenty-one. I'm young. I didn't finish school. Don't go through what I don't do everything that I did.... And just like, do what you guys gotta do so you guys won't end up like I did, you know. Do something in life so you can be in a better place than I am in right now.

Part II: "Doing Your Life"

The reproductive justice literature is replete with references to resistance. In the context of stratified reproduction, there has been resistance to patriarchy, racism, hetero-sexism, coerced sterilization, and multiple industrial complexes (Price 2010; Ross and Solinger 2017; Silliman et al. 2016). It is thus tempting to make an analytical leap, from narratives filled with judgment to resistive (non-judgmental) counter narratives forged through digital storytelling. However, when analyzing participants' narratives, namely in their digital stories and follow-up interviews, the delineation between judgment and resistance was not so clear. In fact, as shown in Marie's case, there was a good bit of internalization of the common sense. In part, participants strategically resisted judgments about themselves as young mothers, while also often accommodating dominant values on what it meant to be a fit mother. We provide a nuanced look at the digital stories and digital storytelling process that shows how the stories could at times perpetuate normative judgments but also provide counter narratives on "doing your life."

This ambivalence was perhaps connected to an all-pervasive sense of surveillance that participants felt as young mothers in a city whose local public health campaigns and state funding structure largely rely on the very visible shaming of teen mothers and their families in the name of pregnancy prevention. One day, we went to meet a state legislator to discuss key findings from the study and to brainstorm possible audiences for the digital stories produced in the project to shape more supportive local policies for young mothers and their families. As we left his office building, beautifully erected in stone and proudly reminiscent of good times gone by in a postindustrial downtown now largely inhabited by a disenfranchised Puerto Rican community, we noticed a banner. It stretched overhead from one side of the street to the other to announce the celebration of Teen Pregnancy Prevention Day and remind young people to “just make proud choices.” Implicit in good faith efforts like this one is the constant messaging about irresponsible teens in Highmaple who have babies and ruin their lives, with young Puerto Rican mothers hailed ideologically in very visible ways through local prevention campaigns. Left silenced is the “gendered racial project” of these prevention efforts, notably the ways that White privilege and race/class/gender/sexual inequalities remain deeply entrenched yet unremarkable (Barcelos 2018).

From a litany of judgments, through digital storytelling there was a sense of creating a coherent discourse. Participants shifted from the identity of a judged young mother to being strategically empowered subjects. They revealed profound ways of “doing your life,” a vernacular framing, we suggest, that narratively inventories how young Latina mothers are in fact forging new subjectivities. Having kids marked “doing.” For participants, it contrasted with a middle-class notion that you are doing your life when you have a job or career, such that you do your life *before* you have kids. Participants used their stories to construct themselves as respectable parents, with normal, and nearly universal, parenting concerns, which is compelling in speaking against a dominant narrative about “kids having kids.” During the second digital storytelling workshop, each researcher worked with a small group, which encouraged relationship building. At one point, a participant, Giselle, raised her hand. Krause approached her. Fieldnotes record the moment: “She’s stuck. Looking at blank paper. Feeling pressure. I suggest she close the computer screen. I remind them this is just free writing.” Krause continued, asking Giselle about her ideas. She responded, “I want to write about some shit when my baby was born, how I wasn’t mature before, but it made me mature.” Likewise, another participant, Jade, articulated this transition to “doing your life” as she related a past interaction she had with her younger sister: “And she was like, ‘you know, I feel like crying. You’re gonna get married, you have kids. You’re, like, doing your life, and blah blah.’” Participants talked back to the stock logic on adolescent development. Describing their lives, participants like Marie spoke of not having a “real” childhood while growing up in difficult circumstances. In this context, having children made their lives better, more complete.

Digital stories served as a strategic and intertextual voicing, weaving together common threads of resistance to judgment and accommodation to expectations of fit parenting, as a way to speak back to the dominant shame-on-you refrain they heard as young Puerto Rican mothers. Participant Camila’s story was exemplary in this regard. After presenting a draft of her story to the workshop group in a story circle, another participant told her: “That was, like, the perfect story, cause we all get that judgment” (Research Assistant fieldnotes). Camila grew up in the Southside of Highmaple, a place she called “the ghetto,” moving to a smaller town nearby when she was eight years old. At the time of the project, Camila had moved back to Highmaple and was back where she started from, living with her husband and their daughter in an apartment in the ghetto. Pregnant with a second child during the workshop, Camila spoke of moving “to a better place soon” in her interview, a place where she could respectfully do her life. She and her husband had had a proper courtship: they were neighbors as children and dated for a couple of years before she became pregnant at seventeen. Camila gave birth to their daughter when she was eighteen, beginning her senior year in high school, and was married the next year. She left high school shortly thereafter, though she said she “never gave up” on schooling, spending two years trying to get in to The Center so she could earn her GED. Contrary to stock depictions of Puerto Rican teen mothers lazing at home and leaching off the system, Camila described a carefully laid out career plan in her interview. She would attend the local community college for nursing, move on to the state university to earn an undergraduate degree afterward, practice nursing, and then go back to school for more advanced training.

The title of Camila’s digital story, “A Mom Can Be Anyone,” indicates that she is talking back to stratified norms on fit mothering. Camila begins her story by referencing the single story on young mothers, one that tells them their lives are ruined when they have a baby. In her voiceover, she ventriloquizes the voice of others—family, teachers, society—who have judged her and others like her. As she calls to question the respectable age to have a baby, on screen Camila shows a picture of herself crossing a street, very pregnant, with her head held low, face in the shadows, seemingly doing the walk of shame. She comments: “I feel like teen moms are often judged because being younger than thirty, you’re expected to live with your parents and unable to afford a baby. Some people just make those hurtful comments and expect us not to know anything about life and being a mom, just because we’re young.”

The tenor of the story notably shifts as a new image shows on screen: a photo of Camila, wearing the same dress she had on previously, but this time zoomed in on her hands, which embrace her very pregnant belly. Using a voice suffused with love and affection, Camila talks back to claims of wrecked lives, declaring: “Bringing a baby into this world isn’t about age or money. It’s about love. It’s about being the best mommy.” The backstory lurks just under the surface. Growing up in the ghetto in Highmaple, Puerto Ri-

Table 2. Intertextual Transcript: Camila’s Digital Story

Image
Time (sec)	6-11	11-13	14-28
Soundtrack	[none]	[none]	[none]
Script	Don't hold her legs too high when changing her diaper. You're gonna hurt her back.	Oh my god, hold up her head.	Girls like her at 14 or 13, thinking about having kids when they can't even shower themselves? This is what I heard all the time, when I was just doing my own thing.
Location Represented	Bedroom	Hospital room	Intersection of a residential area
Emotion	Mockingly, disdain	Disdain	Sarcastic, then reflective and confident. Camila's head is low, indicating shame (against narrative of story)
Text on Screen			

can families face tremendous insecurity, with trickle down effects felt by young people in the community. Just down the road, in the “happy valley,” young people can afford to live up to dominant expectations (i.e., live with one’s parents in a well-supported home through young adulthood, earn a college degree, find a well-paid job, get married, in that sequence) which links closely to the ability to “afford” a baby. Nevertheless, Camila and other young mothers like her persist. Camila ends her story displaying a professional photo of herself, her husband, and their child, an “expression of resilience” (Ponsford 2011:541) posted front and center on screen. The words “Family = Love” are emblazoned at the top of the photo. Ponsford (2011) and Lustig (2004) note that aspects of material culture such as family photos hold particular value for teen mothers, who are positioned outside the boundaries of normative mothering and often manage in the face of insecurity. Family photos like Camila’s serve as an oppositional strategy for re-imaging herself as a respectable mother (Ponsford 2011). Through close examination of her story, we see how a potentiality for becoming is enhanced through digital storytelling. Camila chooses still images and words to represent local valences on “doing your life” that disrupt dominant chronologies, and ultimately to substantiate her claim, in the scope of a life publicly examined (Hanna 2001), to respectable motherhood.

The warp and weave of fit parenting with back talk to judgment was a constant in participants’ digital stories. Participant Amarys produced a digital story about giving birth to her second

child. Her digital story voiceover begins: “Three and half years after having my son, I was pregnant again. All I could think was....” She pauses. We wonder whether dominant logic will enter the scene as we assume that Amarys will follow-up with testimony about wasting her life, perhaps confessing to the shameful irresponsibility of being a repeat offender. Instead, she asks: “...[H]ow is my son going to feel? I was scared and worried, thinking he would hate me for letting someone else take his place. How was I going to love them both?” Amarys’ digital story focuses on the efforts she has put forth to prepare her older son to welcome a new baby into the family, ending in new motherly love and the celebration of her daughter’s birth:

When I went into labor, I felt excited for my children to meet. After she was born, I was the happiest woman in the world. My family brought my son to me, for him to meet his new sister. He opened the door, ran up to the bed, and said, ‘That’s my sister, she’s so pretty!’ That’s when my mother’s instinct kicked in. As I held both of my children in my arms, I knew everything was going to be ok.

Juxtaposed with the last lines of her story is a family photo of Amarys sitting with her new baby and her older son, both on her lap and smiling—together they are doing a life. Her story sums up the worries of many a mother about to have a second child—How will she spread the love? How will her older child feel with a new baby around?—while counter-intuitively talking back to dominant assumptions of Puerto Rican teen mothers popping babies willy-nilly, without a care in the world.

Participants also referenced a bootstrapping, “doing-it-on-my-own,” logic to signify doing a life. Often lacking attention is the way that inequality historically frames this logic. With the 1917 Jones Act, Puerto Ricans became United States citizens after the United States assumed control over Puerto Rico in 1898. In the post World War II era, “Operation Bootstrap” was instituted in collaboration with the United States government to relieve the unemployment problem on the island, while also providing tax exemptions to United States companies desiring to invest in its economic development. Puerto Rican migration to the mainland was encouraged, with the idea that individuals would pull themselves up by their bootstraps, get to work, and become economically independent from the state (Black 2009). Ironically, Marie hails a bootstrapping logic of socioeconomic self-sufficiency and independence to resist preconceived judgments about her own fitness as a young Puerto Rican mother. Marie, whose digital story begins by focusing on the judgment she endured while pregnant, speaks back in the second half by telescoping her resilience as a young mother. From her voiceover:

Look, I’m 21 years old. Never had a father to teach me wrong from right or responsibilities. And I have a three-year-old son that I love with all my heart. I go to school and so does he.... But everyday of my life, I wake up and do all I have to do for him. See, being a parent I had to learn overnight. But I’m but it makes me more than just a mother. I am a strong independent woman and in love with my child. Provider for him on my own so I can take so I can take on the role for him all alone. See this teen mother is a father and a mother to her child. I I proved more than one person wrong.

Stories like Marie’s were permeated with reference to strength, survival, and independence, which served as a lynchpin of growing up, adulthood, “doing your life.” Participants yearned and actively worked towards an independence that would validate them as women, mothers, and adults. Yet, assertions of independence were also tethered to webs of the state, made in the face of institutional surveillance and a racist and classist United States system that threatens young mothers of color with child removal and loss (i.e., foster parenting and adoption) (see Briggs 2012). Giselle’s story is remarkable here. Her digital story paints a before-and-after picture, from not “caring about nothing,” and her “mom calling the cops” on her all the time, to establishing independence from her mother, learning to love, becoming a “new girl.” If she had not become a mother, she said in her interview, she would “just be doing me,” intimating that she had been up to no good and suggesting a contrast with the more respectable “doing your life.” Giselle had grown up in the face of motherhood:

I’m doing what I gotta do, and I’m responsible, and I’m a good mom, so I’m not worried [about losing my child]. The one that, it’s that I don’t know how to explain, anyway, but whoever calls like DSS [Department of Social Services] to me or has to have a good reason to call. They can’t call like that, you know, for any little thing. You have to have a good reason and prove that reason.

Working through this fear of institutional threats in tandem with judgment placed participants, as disenfranchised and young Puerto Rican mothers, in precarious positions and informed how they strategized to navigate their tenuous positions in society.

The power to create new meanings and talk back to the single story on teen motherhood was apparent over the course of the project. Hear Our Stories participants voiced daily subjection through judgment faced from others and then internalized. Subjected to constant scrutiny, they talked back. A sense of solidarity was evident as well as a sense of becoming. Dayna was eighteen years old and eight months pregnant when she participated in the project’s first digital storytelling workshop. In her fieldnotes from day one of the workshop, Gubrium wrote that Dayna “kept to herself, sitting alone at a table. She arrived that day with a folder in hand, with a childlike drawing of a boy’s name posted on top [name of her soon-to-be born son]. Her story draft was lodged inside the folder.” Fourth to proceed in the story circle, Dayna began: “I was fifteen, fifteen years old when I started being intimate with a stranger. He’s the father of this baby I’m having. I’m seventeen, now pregnant [inhales]. Me and that stranger were together two years. Those two years were probably the hardest years of my life. I did pretty much anything you can think [gets choked up].... Sorry.” Clearly upset, Dayna began to cry and continued by describing how she dropped out of school to focus entirely on her relationship with her abusive boyfriend. When she was seventeen, she found out she was pregnant. Relating the standard single story on teen pregnancy, she reckoned: “I thought my life was over. There was no way I could afford a baby. I don’t have a job, and I wasn’t going to school [sniffing, sigh]...what was I to do?” As with many of the digital stories, there is a turning point in Dayna’s story from doomed existence to hopeful enthusiasm for what is to come in life. Storytelling about her pregnancy provided Dayna one answer, she continued: “I’ve grown out of my comfort zone, and I’m so glad. I would never tell anyone about my life. I didn’t want any kind of help. I almost gave up again. But I didn’t.” Dayna ended, using the metaphor of storytelling to articulate “doing your life.” “[I]f you ask me where I am now, I’ll answer I’m getting my GED at The Center. I’m planning on enrolling in college and majoring in business management and culinary arts [breathes in and out]. My future is still being written, and I’m excited for what’s to come in my life....”

Without prompting, workshop participants applauded after Dayna told her story. Follow-up responses to her story highlight a sense of solidarity developing during the story circle:

Xaviera: That was amazing...
 Paola: It was great
 Annalisse: Ye=ah...
 Xaviera: [As Dayna continues to sniffle] Oh, it’s fine, girl...
 Allison: Oh, I want to hug her.
 Annalisse: Me too...
 Dayna: [Apologizing for crying] I’m sorry...
 [“Awws”...sniffing sounds...supportive chit chat...]

Participants also asked Dayna follow-up questions: Was she still with her “son’s father” (her boyfriend)? Did *she* make the choice to break up with him? Did she still see him around? Collective analysis of shared experience during the digital storytelling process offered insight as to how participants grappled with dominant and internalized societal valuations—such as for Dayna and Marie, the expectation that they might stay with the abusive fathers of their babies—while concomitantly fomenting a desire to contravene the single story of failure and shame for teen mothers by engaging supportively with each other in the process.

The Potentiality for Becoming

In their chapter “Reluctant Subjects: Subjection and Becoming,” Gibson-Graham (2006) convey the dynamics of hegemonic formations in order to destabilize them. In a sense, the co-authors are promoting a strategy that takes advantage of the often-unrecognized characteristics of hegemonic formations that there inevitably exists a “fragility” to such formations (Roseberry 1994). We thus take to heart their compelling question about becoming. Specifically, we ask whether and how experiences of subjection through objectification, such as being constantly subjected to the shame-based single story on teen motherhood, may be strategically marshaled to create alternative subjectivities, which can be both empowering and counterhegemonic.

Goffman (1963) wrote that identities may become spoiled by society. This gives one pause. Is there such a thing as an identity outside the reach of society? Arts-based approaches like digital storytelling allow the participant to create “...a new identity as ‘actor,’” in which they “transform themselves from a negative identity...to a positive identity as an actor. In doing so with others, a social identity emerges, and collectively [participants]...can find a social answer to a social problem through re-defining themselves as artists...” (Torrissen and Stickley 2018:52). Identities, by definition, are socially produced and lived. We challenge the notion that there exists an essential pre-social identity. Where we agree is that our findings illuminate how young parenting women actively make sense of their lived experiences. While they commonly internalize and embody shaming narratives as authoritative knowledge, they are also strategic subjects. We suggest that digital storytelling offers a method of narrative intervention, for shifting value making with and on young mothers. The digital storytelling workshop process, along with the produced digital stories and follow-up strategic communications campaign, upends commonsense logic on valued reproduction and family making. Part and parcel, the project helped us to gain a firmer grasp on social worlds and to better understand inequality, while also engaging research participants as co-creators of knowledge and mobilized agents of action.

Working together on a strategic communications campaign to disseminate Hear Our Stories materials and findings through social media and community forum chan-

nels, participants scoffed at visibly shaming teen pregnancy prevention messages and worked together to develop a response. As they developed a social media campaign in collaboration with one allied partner organization, participants critically commented on the perpetuation of structural violence in prevention campaigns. Marie noted, “...[T]hey spent all of this money on the...campaigns instead of spending it on shelters.” Another participant, Vienna, used local vernacular to theorize on the racist project of teen pregnancy prevention campaigns, which fail to account for stress and weathering as it plays out on the bodies of women of color (see Geronimus 2001): “If I’m young or old, they’re going to look down on me for having a kid. I want to have a kid when young, when I can have fun with my kid. When I’m old, it won’t be fun, I’ll be tired.” As part of a social media blast, participants posted photos of themselves on Twitter holding personally handwritten placards. Annalisse had written: “My kids did not ruin my life because they motivate me to be successful.” Marie’s stated: “Being a teen parent means no harm. In process of getting my degree with a three-year-old.”

During a digital story screening on Harvard University campus, organized late in the project by several workshop participants and the allied partner organization, storytellers took to the stage to screen their digital stories in front of an audience of 150 people, to respond to audience questions, most of which examined the young parents’ lives, and to represent ways of doing their lives, in their own words, on their own terms. Photos celebrating participants’ achievements—graduation, engaging in policymaking forums, parenting—rolled on screen behind them as they talked. Three Hear Our Stories participants, Vienna, Dayna, and Violet, were panelists, along with two other young women from the partnering organization. Krause’s fieldnotes record dynamics from the event: “I recall a ‘shout out’ style intervention. A kind of dramatic beginning to get things going. There was a very brief introduction by the [partner organization] folks. Some of the girls very briefly spoke. There was also the screening of stories. And then there was a panel discussion followed by a Q&A. [One Hear Our Stories research assistant] moderated.” Participants responded to questions about their future. One audience member asked, “What do you need?” Deadpan, Dayna responded, “More art is needed in school,” followed by stating that her son was her future, her motivation in life. They were asked to describe someone or something that has changed their lives. Rather than focusing on her daughter, Vienna spoke of making her digital story and the sense of belonging and care she felt during the workshop (“feeling like a daughter” in the workshop, she said).

We, as researchers and facilitators, remained backstage at the event, as invisible authors. Krause commented on the narrative intervention of digital storytelling in her fieldnotes:

In effect, through the Hear Our Stories project, we had laid groundwork for a “war of position,” in Gramscian terms, to counter the stigma and shame that is usually the focus

of public conversations on teen parenting. I think these women are so brave. They are deeply aware of how much they are stigmatized. I think they are triply stigmatized also because of their class status and their Puerto Rican Latina status. So it's a way that class/race/gender are all articulating to stigmatize them, and so it's powerful how humanizing the event was and how beautiful their stories, via the videos and their own comments, were.

Storytellers' bold responses served as evidence that a new story was being written, and they were forging a way to give voice to it.

Narrative intervention has the potential to create meaningful ways to promote a reproductive justice orientation that values young mothers and their families. Through collaborative means, in digital storytelling, we considered the capability and capacity of storytellers to make sense of and produce grounded knowledge about their own lived experiences. In *Hear Our Stories*, participants shifted from being depicted as shamed teen moms with a single story to empowered storytellers with multiple stories. Many women said they had never told their stories before, thereby making the workshop itself a site for raising consciousness and legitimizing previously disqualified forms of knowledge. Participants became storytellers through various steps along the way as the workshop process, resulting digital stories, and presentation of their stories validated and concretized alternative subjectivities. Juxtaposed with interview and fieldnote material, the digital stories serve as multi-purposed data to provide a rich analysis of valued ways of "doing your life" among young, Puerto Rican mothers.

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