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# High Educational Aspirations Among Pregnant Adolescents Are Related to Pregnancy Unwantedness and Subsequent Parenting Stress and Inadequacy

*On the basis of theories of maternal identity development, role conflict, and childbearing motivation, the authors tested whether high educational aspirations among pregnant adolescents are related to the unwantedness of the pregnancy and whether pregnancy unwantedness leads to subsequent parenting stress and inadequacy. Longitudinal data from 100 first-time-pregnant, unmarried Latina adolescents (M age = 17.3 years) were analyzed. Results from structural equation path modeling confirmed these associations, with strong educational ambitions related to greater unwantedness of the pregnancy, which led to feeling trapped by parenting at 6 months postpartum, which in turn was related to unaffectionate parenting and feeling inadequate in mothering at 1 year postpartum. The potential long-term*

*negative consequences of high educational aspirations for pregnant adolescents' adjustment to parenting are discussed.*

The transition to motherhood is a major life event that involves a reorganization of goals, priorities, and self-perceptions in efforts to successfully incorporate the new role of mother into one's self-identity and "life space" (Rubin, 1984). Such preparatory and self-definitional role shifts are known to have important implications for the acceptance of the pregnancy, the emotional attachment to the child, and mothers' postpartum mental health (Deutsch, Ruble, Fleming, Brooks-Gunn, & Stangor, 1988; Peacock et al., 2001). When pregnancy occurs among adolescents, the developmental tasks of adolescence—such as completing or pursuing one's education—run counter to the demands and responsibilities of parenting. Indeed, continuing the pregnancy and choosing to parent her child often necessitate that the adolescent abandon her goals to graduate high school or go to college (Raley, Kim, & Daniels, 2012). Those who have strong achievement aspirations might then have a tendency to resent the pregnancy and subsequently feel trapped in the parenting role. Such feelings are significant

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given that they might manifest themselves as mothers' punitiveness or uninvolvedness toward her child, which can have long-term detrimental effects for both the child's adjustment and the mother-child relationship (Barber, Axinn, & Thornton, 1999; Hummer, Hack, & Raley, 2004).

The association between pregnant adolescents' strong desire to continue their education and their pregnancy wantedness has not, to our knowledge, been previously studied. This inattention is likely due to research demonstrating that low educational aspirations often precede early childbearing (Manlove, 1998) and that early childbearing is highly disruptive for future educational attainment (Fergusson & Woodward, 2000). Thus, the possibilities that pregnant adolescents have strong achievement aspirations and that this might undermine their adjustment to parenting has tended to be overlooked. In fact, though, not all pregnant adolescents have modest educational goals, with several studies documenting strong aspirations and definite expectations to attend college among pregnant and parenting adolescents (Barr & Simons, 2012; SmithBattle, 2007). Thus, given the likelihood that at least some pregnant adolescents want to further their education, it seems important to address whether strong educational ambitions hinder girls' acceptance of the pregnancy and thereby thwart their subsequent adaptation to parenting. Theories related to maternal identity development, role conflict, and childbearing motivation are particularly relevant and are discussed below.

#### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Rubin's (1984) theory of maternal identity development describes a series of cognitive-developmental stages that begin at pregnancy discovery, evolve throughout the prenatal period, and end with fully incorporating a maternal identity into one's self-system and self-concept. Rubin importantly described grief as a critical phase in establishing a healthy maternal identity, given that roles or parts of one's life that are incompatible with motherhood are relinquished. According to this theory, if such roles are not adequately relinquished from one's self-definition, a healthy maternal identity is not achieved, the prenatal attachment to the unborn child is compromised, and the mother's adaptation to parenthood (i.e., her

ability to competently interact and care for her child) is jeopardized. Studies addressing Rubin's theory have shown that women who do not engage in sufficient self-definitional modification processes during pregnancy have more difficult postpartum adjustments and report less satisfaction and adequacy in parenting (Mercer, 2004; Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Gallant, 2000). Extrapolating this theory to adolescents suggests that pregnant young women who have strong educational ambitions would have particular difficulty adopting the maternal role and thus would be in need of greater support and counseling in their adjustment to parenthood than young women who are less educationally motivated.

Similar lines of research have been conducted within the work and family literature, wherein establishing a balance among one's various social roles (i.e., worker, spouse, parent) has been linked to measures of parental well-being (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Marshall & Tracy, 2009). Much of this work is rooted in *role conflict theory* (Biddle, 1979), which states that conflict originates from the simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of role expectations, such that compliance with one role makes compliance with the other more difficult. Given such conflictual pressures, role ambiguity develops, followed by role dissatisfaction, poor performance, and, ultimately, psychological distress (King & King, 1990). Studies that have examined role conflict in terms of disproportionate work-parenting commitments have found that role-related conflict is related to adults' poor mental health and lower quality parenting (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1993; Perry-Jenkins, Goldberg, Pierce, & Sayer, 2007). In the case of teenagers, when a pregnancy is superimposed on the normative tasks of adolescence, role conflict can result as looming parenting responsibilities conflict with planned school commitments and career development. For young women who are strongly attached to their role of student or future professional, conflict deriving from discrepant role expectations might lead to feelings of resentment toward the pregnancy and subsequent difficulties in parenting.

Similarly, Miller's (1994; Miller, Barber, & Gatny, 2013) childbearing motivation theory, originally applied to explain fertility-related behavior, has recently been used to understand how pre-conception motivational factors affect the emotional response to a pregnancy and the

subsequent attachment with one's child (Miller, Sable, & Beckmeyer, 2009). A central component of Miller's theory is that personal values and motivations that are less compatible with having children, such as a strong commitment to work and career, dilute one's childbearing desire. In the event that a pregnancy does occur, low childbearing desire is thought to weaken the mother's attachment to her unborn child and cause the parenting experience to be highly stressful. As a result, the mother becomes uninvolved and detached from her child (Miller et al., 2009). This mediational sequence has been confirmed using three independent samples of pregnant adult women (Ispa, Sable, Porter, & Csizmadia, 2007; Miller, 1994; Miller et al., 2009), and it seems especially applicable to adolescents, given the challenging developmental tasks they face. Specifically, inasmuch as high achievement motivations represent a trait at cross-purposes with full-time, hands-on parenting, one would expect that pregnant adolescents who have strong educational aspirations would be at greater risk of not wanting the pregnancy and, consequently, experiencing postpartum parenting stress and feelings of maternal inadequacy.

The issue of high educational aspirations possibly being associated with pregnancy unwantedness is important considering that unwanted pregnancies carried to term are known to be associated with maternal postpartum depression and anxiety (East, Chien, & Barber, 2012; Najman, Morrison, Williams, Andersen, & Keeping, 1991), children's behavioral and socioemotional difficulties (Barber & East, 2011), and long-term problematic mother-child relationships (Barber et al., 1999). These issues are also of concern given that the large majority of teenage pregnancies are described as unintended or unwanted (Mosher, Jones, & Abma, 2012) and that the percentage of unwanted births among women age 20 years or younger nearly doubled from 1995 to 2002 (Kissin, Anderson, Kraft, Warner, & Jamieson, 2008).

#### THE CURRENT STUDY

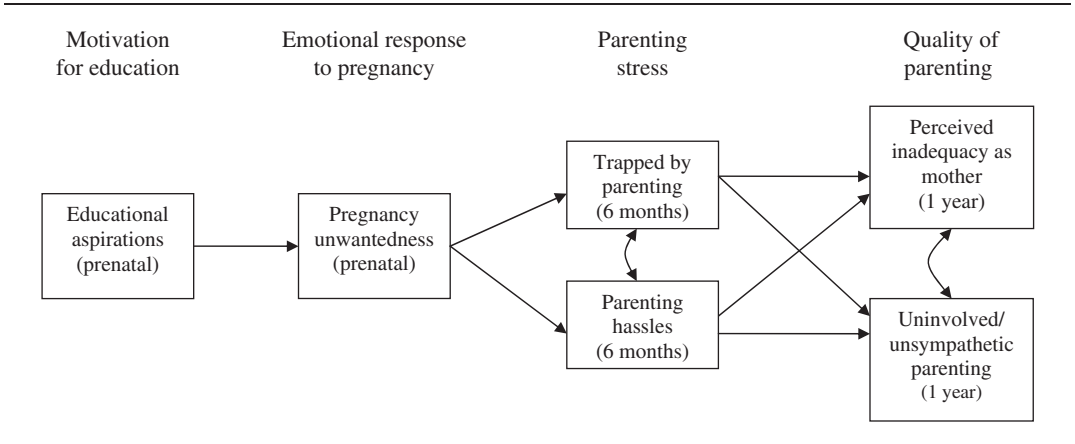
In the current study, we focused on the consequences of high educational aspirations for pregnant adolescents' adjustment to parenting. Using structural equation path modeling and longitudinal data, we examined the links among pregnant adolescents' educational motivations and the wantedness of their pregnancy (at Time

1, or during the third trimester of pregnancy), their parenting stress at 6 months postpartum (Time 2), and the quality of their parenting at 1 year postpartum (Time 3). Our conceptual model is shown in Figure 1. On the basis of maternal identity development theory, role conflict theory, and Miller's (1994) childbearing motivations theory, we hypothesized that high educational aspirations among pregnant adolescents will be related to strong unwantedness of the pregnancy (*Hypothesis 1*). The positioning of educational aspirations preceding pregnancy unwantedness is based on educational aspirations being considered an enduring traitlike value of the individual (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), whereas pregnancy unwantedness is considered a specific statelike response to a relatively short-term, current situation (Miller, 1994). To this end, educational aspirations were assessed in the current study as the desire and importance placed on achieving educational goals, with the intention to capture broad achievement values and motivations while excluding educational expectations. *Educational aspirations* are distinct from *educational expectations*, with the latter contingent on social circumstance and often tied to such factors as schooling costs, family income, career choice, and perceived barriers to educational success (Hanson, 1994).

Second, on the basis of previous research (Ispa et al., 2007; Miller et al., 2009), we expected that strong unwantedness of the pregnancy will be related to subsequent parenting stress (*Hypothesis 2*). Two aspects of parenting stress were measured: (a) feeling trapped by parenting (i.e., feeling stunted, frustrated, and restricted by one's parenting responsibilities) and (b) feeling hassled in the context of parenting (i.e., being irritated by typical mother-child interactions and challenging child behaviors).

Third, we hypothesized that the two aspects of parenting stress will be related to adolescents' poor quality of parenting, as indexed by two indicators: (a) perceived inadequacy in the mothering role (i.e., low confidence and perceived competence as a mother) and (b) uninvolved and unsympathetic parenting (i.e., adolescents' unaffectionate and unresponsive interactions with their child; *Hypothesis 3*). Examining the distinct aspects of parenting stress and parenting quality allowed us to elucidate by which mechanism and for which outcome high educational aspirations might hinder adolescents' adjustment. For example, a strong

FIGURE 1. CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF HOW STRONG EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS ARE RELATED TO PREGNANCY UNWANTEDNESS, WHICH LEADS TO SUBSEQUENT PARENTING STRESS (AT 6 MONTHS POSTPARTUM) AND POOR QUALITY OF PARENTING (AT 1 YEAR POSTPARTUM).



association between feeling trapped by parenting and perceived inadequacy as a mother would suggest psychological difficulties in assuming the maternal role for those who have strong educational ambitions. In contrast, a strong association between stressful mother–child interactions and subsequent uninvolved and unsympathetic parenting would suggest more interactional deficiencies in parenting for those who have strong educational aspirations.

The current study sample involved only Mexican American Latina adolescents, which was deliberate and is important for several reasons. Latinas currently have the highest teenage birth rate of all racial/ethnic groups (Hamilton, Martin, & Ventura, 2012), and Mexican Americans have the highest teen birth rate of all specific Latina subgroups (Martin et al., 2012). Thus, the focus on Mexican Americans is especially timely and relevant. However, given that the sample was exclusively Latina, some of whom were the first generation to be born in the United States, factors related to the concepts under study and relevant to Latinas need to be considered. For example, lesser acculturation may be a proxy for cultural norms stressing the importance of mothering to one’s self-identity (Dehlendorf, Marchi, Vittinghoff, & Braveman, 2010) and could underlie adolescents’ pregnancy wantedness. Lesser acculturation and being non-U.S. born have also been found to relate to adolescents’ lower educational goals (Roche, Ghazarian, & Fernandez-Esquer, 2012). Given these associations and the potentially

varying degree of acculturation and nativity within the current sample, we first established whether adolescents’ level of acculturation and nativity were related to the study variables and then controlled for these if necessary.

We also considered several additional control variables. For example, the degree of pregnancy wantedness is known to fluctuate throughout pregnancy depending on the mother’s health and pregnancy symptoms (Mikulincer & Florian, 1999; Miller et al., 2009). Thus, although wantedness of the pregnancy was assessed by all adolescents during their third trimester of pregnancy, it might vary within this time frame. Other potential control variables assessed at Time 1 were adolescents’ age, grade in school, academic grades, acculturation level, nativity (born in the United States or Mexico), educational level of the adolescents’ parents, and family income. Potential control variables assessed at Time 2 were difficulty of labor and delivery and baby’s neonatal health problems, gender, and difficult temperament. From these, only adolescents’ academic grades, acculturation level, nativity, and the baby’s difficult temperament were significantly correlated with the study variables (described below) and thus were considered as covariates in the modeling analyses. We also examined whether currently attending school (yes or no: due to either already having dropped out or already graduated) at any of the three study time points was related to the four endogenous model variables. This is important to check given that teens who have

high educational aspirations might have poorer postpartum adjustments simply because they are still in school, as opposed to those who have lower educational aspirations and are not attending school and thus are able to parent full time. School status at any of the three study time points was found not to be related to any of the four postpartum parenting variables and thus was not considered further.

## METHOD

### *Participants and Study Design*

One hundred unmarried, first-time-pregnant Mexican American adolescents (15–19 years of age) participated in the study. The overall study was designed to examine factors related to adolescents' adjustment to parenting. Pregnant adolescents were recruited from high schools; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program centers; and community clinics throughout southern California from 2003 through 2005. Eligibility criteria were as follows: being primigravida, Latina, and living with one's family of origin (at enrollment) and planning to continue the pregnancy and parent herself (as opposed to adopting out). Ninety-seven percent of those approached to participate and who were eligible agreed to take part in the study. Adolescents participated at three time points: (a) during their third trimester of pregnancy and when their babies were (b) 6 months and (c) 1 year old. Five pregnant teens (of the 100 participants) were unable to participate prenatally but participated at the follow-up assessments. Eighty adolescents participated at 6 months postpartum, and 77 remained in the study at 1 year postpartum (a 23% attrition rate). At enrollment, adolescents were, on average, 17.3 years of age ( $SD = 1.2$ ), 7.5 months pregnant (range: 6–10 months), and in 11th grade ( $SD = 1.1$ ). Also at enrollment, seven teens listed their school status as not currently attending; of these, four listed their school status as dropped out, and three indicated that they had graduated high school. Only one teen was currently enrolled in college. The majority of adolescents were born in the United States (75%); the remainder were born in Mexico. Most participants were economically disadvantaged; their families' average total annual income was \$18,525 for an average household of six persons, and 95% of teens were receiving governmental financial assistance at study enrollment.

Analyses used the full-information maximum-likelihood method of handling missing data, which retains all cases. Nevertheless, it is important to assess whether selective attrition occurred. To do so, we compared adolescents who remained in the study through the final time point with those who had dropped out by that time on all model variables, on various adolescent and baby characteristics (e.g., adolescent age, grade in school, whether the adolescent had dropped out of school, baby gender, baby temperament), and on family background characteristics (e.g., parent educational levels, family income). The only difference to emerge was that adolescents who dropped out of the study were slightly older than those who remained in the study; thus, adolescents' age was included as a covariate in the analyses (discussed further in the Analytic Strategy section).

### *Procedure*

All participants completed a short interview and a self-administered questionnaire at the three study time points. A female researcher, who was Latina and fluent in Spanish, visited adolescents' homes to personally administer the interview and provide instructions for completing the questionnaire. Completion of the interview and questionnaire took about 1 hour. Participants were paid \$20 at each time point and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. This study's procedures were approved by the Human Subjects Protections Program at the University of California, San Diego.

### *Measures*

The study questionnaire had an approximate third-grade reading level (as ascertained by the Flesch–Kincaid readability method). The mean scores, standard deviations, and score ranges of all study variables are shown in Table 1. Adolescents' educational aspirations and pregnancy unwantedness were assessed during their third trimester of pregnancy, their feelings of being trapped by parenting and stressed by parenting were assessed at 6 months postpartum, and their perceived inadequacy in the mothering role and their uninvolved/unsympathetic parenting were assessed at 1 year postpartum.

*Educational aspirations.* Adolescents' educational aspirations were assessed in terms of their

Table 1. Mean Scores and Intercorrelations Among Model Variables (N = 100)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Model variables										
1. Educational aspirations, T1	—									
2. Pregnancy unwantedness, T1	.23*	—								
3. Trapped by parenting, T2	.25*	.30**	—							
4. Parenting hassles, T2	.26**	.32**	.28**	—						
5. Perceived inadequacy as mother, T3	-.06	.04	.44***	.21*	—					
6. Uninvolved/unsympathetic parenting, T3	.11	.09	.38***	.20*	.43***	—				
Control variables										
7. Adolescents' age, T1	-.01	.03	-.08	.05	.06	-.08	—			
8. Academic grades, <sup>a</sup> T1	.29**	-.03	.05	.19	-.06	.07	.03	—		
9. Acculturation, <sup>b</sup> T1	-.01	-.02	-.26*	-.11	-.16	-.09	-.05	-.02	—	
10. Difficult baby temperament, T2	.09	.28*	.27**	.46***	.22*	.10	.15	-.06	-.07	—
<i>M</i>	3.87	2.06	2.40	1.50	1.94	1.48	17.30	5.50	2.88	2.22
<i>SD</i>	0.87	0.60	1.05	0.56	0.63	0.74	1.20	1.55	0.66	0.60
Score range	1-5	1-4	1-5	1-5	1-5	1-5	15-19	1-8	1-5	1-5

Note: T1 = Time 1 or during the third trimester of pregnancy; T2 = Time 2 or at 6 months postpartum; T3 = Time 3 or at 1 year postpartum.

<sup>a</sup>Higher scores indicate better grades. <sup>b</sup>Higher scores indicate a stronger Anglo orientation.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

desire to pursue higher education and the perceived importance to them of doing so. Questionnaire items asked how important it was to them to graduate high school and, in a separate item, to continue their education after high school (1 = not very important to 5 = very important). An additional item asked how far they wanted to go in school (1 = want to quit high school before I graduate to 5 = want to go to graduate or professional school after college). All participants answered all questions; teens who had already graduated high school were instructed to answer how important it *had been* for them to graduate high school, to continue their education beyond high school, and how far they wanted to go in school. Of note is that 92% of respondents indicated that they thought it was very important to graduate high school, and 66% to attend college. In addition, 58% wanted to go to college, and 20% wanted to go to graduate or professional school after college. These scores indicate adolescents' high educational aspirations despite being pregnant. We factor analyzed the three items using a principal-components factor analysis with varimax rotation. One factor emerged, with factor loadings ranging between .89 and .76 and accounting for 66.4% of the total variance. The Cronbach's alpha of the three items was .73; thus, the items were averaged to form one score, with high scores indicating a strong desire and perceived importance to pursue education.

*Pregnancy unwantedness.* Adolescents responded to the questions, "How much do you want this pregnancy?" (1 = want very much to 4 = not want at all) and "Do you regret having a child at this time in your life?" (1 = don't regret at all to 4 = regret very much). The Cronbach's alpha of the items was .69; thus, the items were averaged to form one score, with high scores reflecting strong pregnancy unwantedness.

*Trapped by parenting.* We used the Restriction of Role subscale on the Parenting Stress Index (Loyd & Abidin, 1985) to assess adolescents' level of distress resulting from life restrictions due to parenting. The seven-item scale includes such items as "I feel trapped by my parenting responsibilities"; "Since having my baby, I feel that I am never able to do the things that I want to do"; and "I feel that I gave up my life for my child's needs." Response options ranged from 1 (really not true for me) to 5 (very true for me). Loyd and Abidin (1985) reported an internal reliability of .79 for this scale based on 534 parent responses. The Cronbach's alpha using the current sample was .87; thus, we averaged the seven items to form one score (range: 1-5), with high scores indicating strong feelings of being trapped by parenting.

*Parenting hassles.* Stresses specific to parenting were assessed with the Parenting Daily Hassles

Index (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990), which asked how hassled the adolescent felt performing 10 everyday parenting tasks (“continually cleaning [the] baby’s messes”) and by 10 typical baby behaviors (“baby being difficult to manage in public places”). Response options ranged from 1 (*not a hassle at all*) to 5 (*it’s a very big hassle*). The 20 items had good internal reliability ( $\alpha = .94$ ); thus, responses were averaged, with high scores indicating feeling very stressed from parenting.

*Perceived inadequacy as mother.* We used the Preparedness for Mothering Role subscale on the Maternal Self-Report Inventory (Shea & Tronick, 1988) to assess adolescents’ perceived competence in the mothering role. The 11-item scale includes such items as “I feel like I am a failure as a mother” and “I think I am a good mother” (reverse scored). Response options ranged from 1 (*really not true for me*) to 5 (*very true for me*). Shea and Tronick (1988) demonstrated good face, concurrent, construct, internal, and external validity of the scale. The internal reliability of the 11 items using the present sample was .77; thus, scores were averaged (range: 1–5) so that high scores reflect high perceived inadequacy in the mothering role.

*Uninvolved/unsympathetic parenting.* Seven items from the Warmth and Involvement subscale of the Parenting Practices Questionnaire (Robinson, Mandlco, Olsen, & Hart, 1995) were used to assess adolescents’ unaffectionate and unresponsive parenting, for example, “I give comfort and show understanding when my child is upset,” and “I am responsive to my child’s feelings and needs.” Response options ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*often*); scores were reversed so that high scores reflect uninvolved and unsympathetic parenting. Using the current sample, the items had good internal reliability ( $\alpha = .89$ ), and they were averaged to form one score.

*Academic grades.* At the first study time point, adolescents indicated the grades they usually get in school, ranging from 8 (*mostly As*) to 1 (*mostly below D*). The mean score was 5.5, indicating a C+ average, or a 2.75 on a 4-point grade-point average scale.

*Acculturation.* Adolescents completed the 13-item Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics (Marin, Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, &

Perez-Stable, 1987) at the first study time point. Items ask about the adolescent’s integration into the Anglo U.S. culture in their language use, media use, and social network. The possible score range was 1 to 5, with high scores reflecting high acculturation or high integration into Anglo culture ( $\alpha = .95$ ).

*Difficult baby temperament.* Babies’ temperament was assessed at 6 months postpartum by adolescent responses to 12 items on the Infant Characteristics Questionnaire (Bates, Freeland, & Lounsbury, 1979). Items ask how fussy and difficult the baby is, for example, “How often does your baby get fussy or irritable during a typical day?” (1 = *hardly ever* to 5 = *very often*) and “How easy or difficult is it for you to calm or soothe your baby when he/she is upset?” (1 = *very easy* to 5 = *very difficult*). The items had good internal reliability ( $\alpha = .85$ ) and were averaged to form one score (range: 1–5), with high scores indicating difficult baby temperament.

#### Analytic Strategy

We used structural equation modeling within Mplus 6.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2007) to evaluate the hypotheses as illustrated in the model shown in Figure 1. Three model fit indices were used to examine how well the model fit the data: (a) chi-square, which is not significant when model fit is good; (b) the comparative fit index (Bentler, 1990), with values above .90 indicating a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999); and (c) the root-mean-square error of approximation, with values less than .08 indicating adequate fit (Kline, 2011). Analyses retained all cases using the full-information maximum-likelihood method of handling missing data, which fits the model being tested directly onto the nonmissing data for each participant. The maximum-likelihood estimator was used. Mediation was tested using the INDIRECT command and the bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure in Mplus, which uses a product of coefficients test to estimate the degree to which an exogenous variable is related to an endogenous variable by means of an intervening mediator (Muthén & Muthén, 2007). Bootstrapping is a recommended specification when testing multiple mediator models (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), such as the one tested here. We evaluated two sets of indirect effects: (a) the effect of educational

aspirations on the two parenting stress variables as mediated by pregnancy unwantedness and (b) the effect of educational aspirations on the two quality-of-parenting variables as mediated by pregnancy unwantedness and the two parenting stress variables. The two Time 2 parenting stress variables and the two Time 3 quality-of-parenting variables were proposed to be correlated a priori.

On the basis of theoretical considerations and correlational results (described below), statistical controls included adolescents' academic grades, acculturation level, and baby's difficult temperament. Scores for school grades were included as a covariate on educational aspirations, acculturation was included as a covariate on the trapped-by-parenting variable, and difficult baby temperament was included as a covariate on the two parenting stress mediators and on perceived inadequacy as mother. Because attrition was related to adolescents' age, age was also included as a covariate on the two parenting endogenous variables. Nativity (whether born in the United States or Mexico) was found to be significantly correlated with trapped by parenting, but because this relation was redundant to the relation found between acculturation and trapped by parenting, nativity was not included as an additional covariate in the analyses.

## RESULTS

The mean scores and intercorrelations among all study variables are shown in Table 1. Figure 2 shows the path model results, with fit indices and path coefficients noted. Results of the fit indices indicated that model fit was good. Path coefficients showed that adolescents' high educational aspirations during pregnancy were significantly related to strong feelings of pregnancy unwantedness ( $\beta = .23, p < .01$ ), and pregnancy unwantedness was significantly related to the two parenting stress variables at 6 months postpartum (to trapped by parenting,  $\beta = .29, p < .01$ , and to parenting hassles,  $\beta = .31, p < .01$ ). Strong feelings of being trapped by parenting at 6 months postpartum were significantly related to adolescents' perceived inadequacy in mothering ( $\beta = .41, p < .001$ ) and their uninvolved/unsympathetic parenting at 1 year ( $\beta = .35, p < .001$ ). Feeling hassled by parenting at 6 months postpartum was not, however, related to either quality of parenting variable as assessed at 1 year (both  $\beta$ s  $\leq .12, ns$ ).

Results of the indirect tests for the mediated paths are shown in Table 2. These results indicated significant indirect effects from educational aspirations to pregnancy unwantedness to both trapped by parenting and hassled by parenting. Thus, adolescents' educational aspirations during pregnancy were related to both aspects of parenting stress at 6 months postpartum through the unwantedness of the pregnancy. When the full model was considered, the results indicated significant mediation from educational aspirations through pregnancy unwantedness and trapped by parenting to perceived inadequacy as mother, and marginally significant mediation from educational aspirations through pregnancy unwantedness and trapped by parenting to uninvolved/unsympathetic parenting. Thus, girls' educational aspirations during pregnancy were related to their perceived inadequacy as mother at 1 year postpartum via the unwantedness of the pregnancy and feeling trapped by parenting. When parenting hassles were included in the mediation (to either quality-of-parenting variable), the indirect effect was not significant.

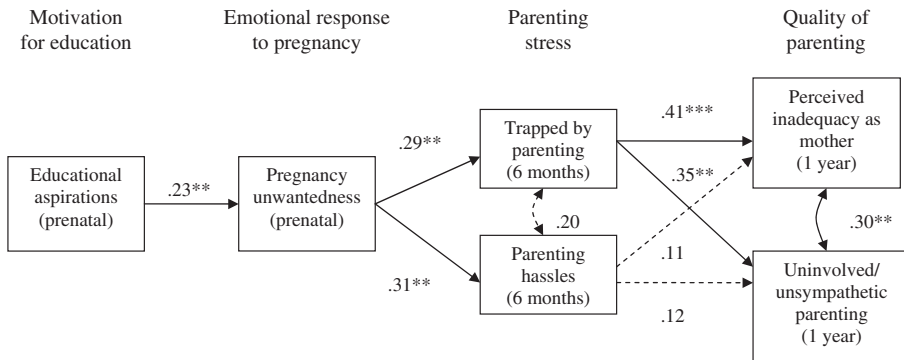
The variance accounted for in the endogenous variables was as follows: feeling trapped by parenting,  $R^2 = .14, p < .05$ ; feeling hassled by parenting,  $R^2 = .23, p < .001$ ; perceived inadequacy as mother,  $R^2 = .22, p < .01$ ; and uninvolved/unsympathetic parenting,  $R^2 = .15, p < .05$ .

## DISCUSSION

As a whole, the results from the present study indicate that strong educational ambitions among pregnant adolescents have the potential to contribute to girls' problematic adaptation to parenting. Specifically and as hypothesized, high educational aspirations among pregnant Latina adolescents were related to greater unwantedness of the pregnancy, which led to subsequently feeling trapped by parenting, which in turn was related to unaffectionate parenting and feeling inadequate in mothering at 1 year postpartum. These findings are consistent with sequences outlined in the theories of maternal identity development, role conflict, and childbearing motivation, such that pregnant adolescents who have strong educational motivations—that is, they possess traits, values, or desires that are incompatible with parenting—are likely to not want the pregnancy and, as a result, subsequently feel stunted and frustrated by their parenting



FIGURE 2. RESULTS OF THE PATH MODEL.



Note:  $N = 100$ . Standardized regression coefficients are shown. Dashed paths were not statistically significant. Covariates are not shown. Model fit indices were as follows:  $\chi^2(23) = 26.53, ns$ ; Comparative Fit Index = .955; Root-Mean-Square Error of Approximation = .039. \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 2. Summary of Indirect Effects

Effect					<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>		
Educational aspirations	→	Pregnancy unwantedness	→	Trapped by parenting	.067**	.034		
Educational aspirations	→	Pregnancy unwantedness	→	Parenting hassles	.073**	.036		
Educational aspirations	→	Pregnancy unwantedness	→	Trapped by parenting	→	Perceived inadequacy as mother	.028**	.014
Educational aspirations	→	Pregnancy unwantedness	→	Trapped by parenting	→	Uninvolved/unsympathetic parenting	.024*	.014
Educational aspirations	→	Pregnancy unwantedness	→	Parenting hassles	→	Perceived inadequacy as mother	.006	.008
Educational aspirations	→	Pregnancy unwantedness	→	Parenting hassles	→	Uninvolved/unsympathetic parenting	.008	.010

Note: Unstandardized coefficients are shown.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ .

responsibilities. As the above theories suggest, such adolescents might not have adequately integrated or accepted the role of mother into their self-concept and consequently are not emotionally equipped to bond with their unborn child or to handle the eventual demands of parenting. As a result, such young women are less involved and engaged with their child and feel less competent in the mothering role. The current study findings corroborate previous reports showing that poor adjustment to parenting is preceded by inadequate maternal identity integration (Deutsch et al., 1988; Mercer, 2004), disproportionate role commitments and resultant role conflict (Greenberger & O’Neil, 1993; Perry-Jenkins et al.,

2007), and insufficient preconception motivation for childbearing (Miller et al., 2009). The present study, though, expands the operationalization of role conflict as evolving from adolescents’ schooling desires and parenting responsibilities and tests these relations among adolescents.

The current findings are important because, although much attention has been directed toward unraveling the link between early childbearing and educational attainment (e.g., Stange, 2011), less is known about how pregnant adolescents’ educational aspirations might hinder their adjustment to parenting. For adolescents who strongly value furthering their education, difficulties are apparent immediately

at pregnancy. For these young women, there is a greater likelihood to not want the pregnancy and to subsequently resent the demands and restrictions imposed by parenting. It is noteworthy that feeling trapped by parenting at 6 months postpartum predicted this study's two indices of parenting quality at 1 year, whereas experiences of typical parenting hassles did not. Thus, it is the subjective feeling of being trapped by the parenting role in particular that leads to subsequent poor parenting. Other researchers have also found that the stress experienced from everyday parenting is unique and different from the distress experienced as a result of feeling that childbearing has stunted one's life options and aspirations, with this latter stress more internalized, chronic, and debilitating (Haskett, Ahern, Ward, & Allaire, 2006; Reitman, Currier, & Stickle, 2002). Feeling trapped and stunted by parenting, then, appears to be a critical psychological factor linking girls' high educational aspirations with subsequent difficulties in parenting, and it warrants further study.

Although our findings indicate problems in parenting for teens who have strong educational motivations, it is important to consider the overall picture of these young women's lives and development. Given the increased labor market importance of a college degree (Katz & Autor, 1999), pregnant adolescents who have strong educational aspirations might be more likely to graduate high school and attend college and even pursue postcollege training, which would add significantly to their long-term earning potential and, ultimately, their ability to provide economically for their child (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, & Morgan, 1987). Thus, our findings should be construed not as implying that positive educational aspirations are undesirable on the whole but instead as indicating that strong schooling ambitions appear to pose risks for adolescents' adjustment to parenting specifically. Additional longitudinal study of such young women further in their life course is needed to understand more fully the chain of events and processes that connect schooling motivations and early parenting to later life situations.

Readers should also recognize that only Latina adolescents were studied, and only those who were in their third trimester of pregnancy and thus had already decided to continue the pregnancy and parent themselves. By excluding young women who had aborted (and thus presumably had very strong feelings of pregnancy

unwantedness), the current sample might have included only those who wanted the pregnancy. However, because of religious and cultural sanctions against abortion for many Mexican Americans (Amaro, Navarro, Conron, & Raj, 2002) as well as the fact that teenagers are less likely to seek abortions than women of other age groups (Pazol et al., 2011), it is possible that some of the study participants continued their pregnancy despite not wanting to do so. Thus, the current sample may be atypical, possibly either more positive or more negative about their pregnancy than would be found in the general population. The sanctions against abortion for many pregnant Latinas and the ramifications this has for educationally motivated Latinas in particular, in terms of their ability to bond with their child and to parent effectively, is an important issue to study further.

#### *Strengths and Limitations*

Study limitations should be considered when interpreting the present findings. Foremost among these was that educational aspirations were assessed during pregnancy, when shifts in desire or importance to further one's education in anticipation for parenting may have already occurred. Educational goals might have shifted downward (Raley et al., 2012) or, as some studies have found, upward as a result of the pregnancy (Barr & Simons, 2012; SmithBattle, 2007). We emphasize, however, that educational aspirations were operationalized as the importance and desire to graduate high school and attend college, which are known to be more stable than actual schooling expectations (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Hanson, 1994). Nevertheless, an assessment of adolescents' educational ambitions prior to pregnancy would have revealed schooling aspirations without the influence of pregnancy and would have been preferable.

As stated above, the current results are based on an exclusively Mexican American sample and thus may not be generalizable to young women of other races or ethnicities. Although our analyses controlled for adolescents' acculturation level, which is often used as a proxy of Latino values and beliefs (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010), it is possible that specific cultural factors influenced the relations found. Moreover, support from the father of the baby as well as from family members is known to influence Latina adolescents'

feelings of parenting stress and parenting efficacy (Umaña-Taylor, Guimond, Updegraff, & Jahromi, 2013) and would be important to consider in future research of this kind.

All data were also provided by the adolescents themselves, and thus there is a potential for shared-method bias. For example, if adolescents who have high educational aspirations also have high standards of parenting, then perhaps they only perceive themselves to be uninvolved parents.

Important strengths of the current study are its use of multiple-wave longitudinal data; the specificity with which parenting stress and quality of parenting were assessed; and the inclusion of multiple covariates in the modeling analyses, which controlled for adolescents' general academic performance, acculturation level, and baby temperament—key characteristics known to be related to the study variables. Thus, one can be confident that the relations that emerged did so while controlling for these factors.

### Conclusion

The current study's results are among the first to elucidate the negative and paradoxical ramifications of strong educational aspirations for pregnant adolescents' acceptance of the pregnancy and their adjustment to parenting. Certainly, becoming pregnant as a teenager is an enormously stressful event. But when a pregnancy is accompanied by strong schooling ambitions, adolescents appear to have particular difficulty in parenting. Professionals who work with pregnant and parenting adolescents would benefit from knowing these risks and the resulting sequelae. The current results suggest that pregnant young women who have strong schooling ambitions would benefit from additional counseling and support both during the pregnancy and throughout the early years of parenting to facilitate as healthy an adaptation to parenthood as possible.

### NOTE

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