

The Policing of Young Motherhood

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Abstract

Within a public consciousness informed by mythological beliefs in meritocracy, postracialism, and postfeminism, youth pregnancy continues to be socially recognized as a tragedy, a mistake, and a ‘wrong’ choice resulting from ‘careless’ behaviour, consequently influencing young mothers by shaping and constraining their behaviour, actions, and lifestyle choices (Baker, 2009; Cense & Ganzevoort, 2018; Kelly, 1998, 2000; Luttrell, 2003; SmithBattle, 2007). While today’s postfeminist and neoliberal ethos trivializes and denies the relevance of gender, class, and race, existing literature on young motherhood demonstrates how systems of inequality continue to influence and govern the lives of young mothers. Utilizing a Foucauldian and poststructural feminist lens, this research aims to uncover these inequalities by examining how, where, and why young mothers experience forms of policing. Through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with 11 young mothers, this research illustrates how existing discourses of ‘good’ motherhood and neoliberal citizenship contribute to young mothers’ lack of resources while also informing existing programs attempting to provide this population with support. Participants conceptualized ‘good’ motherhood through two qualities – ‘being there’ and ‘taking care of herself too.’ This research shows how these qualities both reproduce and resist hegemonic discourses related to normative mothering within contemporary neoliberalism. Findings also reveal how both real and perceived instances of negative and positive judgement resulted in young mothers’ policing and/or self-policing, influencing their behaviours, choices, and self-beliefs. Despite experiences of negative judgement rooted in discourses of youth, mothering, and young motherhood, the participants recognized their parenting as rewarding, consequently resisting the hegemonic narrative of young motherhood as a mistake.

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Chapter One: Introduction

My interest in the topic of the policing of young motherhood developed through various stages across my undergraduate academic career. My initial interest began through a focus on the policing of pregnancy, an idea that was introduced to me through a sociology course called “Deviance and Normality.” As I learned about the ways in which norms shape all arenas of everyday life, from the public seating available at bus stops, to the physical positioning of models in advertisements, I was exposed to the surveillance and regulation that pregnant women experience, where pregnant women who inevitably fail to follow the plethora of existing medical knowledges, health suggestions, and public advice on ‘good’ pregnancy are problematized, and “[open] themselves up to potential criticism of their irresponsibility towards the ‘foetal person’” (Fox, Heffernan, & Nicolson, 2009, p. 558).

This focus was solidified in my fourth and final year through several other sociology courses. “Policing and Security” enabled me to recognize how policing has become lateralized and now includes a range of individuals, both in and outside of the law, and all within a public consciousness informed by neoliberal beliefs of responsabilization, individualism, and free choice (Hermer, Kempa, Shearing, Stenning, & Wood, 2012). This neoliberalist ethos, paired with lateralized policing, further informed my understanding of the policing of pregnancy. With this, I began to notice how the surveillance and discipline pregnant women receive often works to create ‘good’ and ‘bad’ pregnancy, women, and, eventually, mothers. Indeed, this policing did not seem to end after pregnancy; the way in which a mother parents her child is often under just as much scrutiny as a women’s pregnancy, and I witnessed this localized judgement occur across various spaces over the duration of my undergraduate degree. Instances that stand out in particular are those that occurred at the Tim Hortons I was working at before and throughout my

undergraduate experience. Located in a small town, both the employees and customers of this Tim Hortons would make comments on ‘good’ and (primarily) ‘bad’ mothering when the opportunity arose: mothers could have been judged for the drinks or food that people assumed they were feeding to their children; they could have been judged for smoking around their children; they could have been judged for raising their voice while attempting to discipline their children. Regardless of the situation, these instances of judgement seemed to be inexhaustible – and they took a more cruel and moralistic twist when the target was a young mother. While these young mothers were assumed to be permissive, welfare dependent, and lazy, my “Youth and Society” course allowed me to recognize how discourses of youth have featured in the construction and maintenance of these beliefs about young mothers, and consequent judgement.

Purpose of study and research questions

Today, young mothers are recognized within various and, more often than not, adverse understandings which frequently position young motherhood as a mistake, a tragedy, and a ‘wrong’ choice resulting from ‘careless’ behaviour. Various ‘experts,’ from policy and law makers, to school administrators, to child care professionals, seek the ‘meaning’ of youth pregnancy and motherhood and, consequently, attempt to predict the consequences of this ‘phenomenon.’ Deirdre M. Kelly (2000) highlights how discourses on youth pregnancy and motherhood have resulted in a “stigma contest.” Bureaucratic experts, for example, utilize the “wrong-girl” frame which recognizes young mothers in pathological terms and attempts to understand the ‘motivation’ behind a young woman’s pregnancy and early motherhood (2000). “[A]s girls from flawed backgrounds who are making tragic mistakes” (p. 75), young mothers who are understood through this frame become normatively recognized through knowledges which present them as victims of dysfunction and they are consequently associated with

discourses that construct young mothers as “the girl nobody loved” (2000). Conservatives and “reprivatization groups” view youth pregnancy and young motherhood through the “wrong-family” frame, and understand youth pregnancy as the breakdown of the traditional family (heterosexual, nuclear family with an adult working father and an adult stay-at-home mother), high school education, and ‘proper’ childrearing (2000). A focus on such assumed motivations and meanings around youth pregnancy and young motherhood may also lead to other discourses which position young mothers as “welfare moms” who quickly become social problems linked to (if not presented as the cause of) poverty (Cense & Ganzevoort, 2018; Kelly, 2000).

With such discourses circulating, it is no surprise that young motherhood is understood as “an unequivocal social, health, and economic problem” (Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014, p. 466) and “an epidemic in need of urgent intervention” (Kirkman, Harrison, Hillier, & Pyett, 2001, p. 279). While (mis)informing a public consciousness on the presumed meaning and consequences of young motherhood, such discourses also work to regulate young mothers through the policing that is carried out by family, friends, and strangers around them, and through self-policing (Luttrell, 2003).

Within this context, my research utilizes a Foucauldian and poststructural feminist lens to examine the narratives of 11 young mothers to address the following questions: 1) how, if at all, do young mothers experience forms of policing; 2) where do these forms of policing take place when they do; and 3) why do these forms of policing take place when they do?

Chapter Two of this thesis will discuss the theoretical perspective I use to address my research questions and reflect on my data. I apply Foucauldian theorizing and a poststructural feminist perspective to understand how the various, shifting, and often overlapping discourses surrounding young mothers in today’s Western society perform a regulatory function. I argue

that these discourses of young motherhood – which are influenced and informed by hegemonic understandings of youth, women, and motherhood within a neoliberal and postfeminist consciousness – work as a form of surveillance, where young mothers experience discipline and regulation through their assimilation and resistance to discourse. These understandings of surveillance, discipline, and regulation inform my definitions of policing and self-policing, discussed further below, and I argue that discourses of young motherhood lead to their policing by the family, friends, and public around them, as well as their own self-policing. Poststructural feminist thinking will also enable me to recognize the production and consequences of socially constructed knowledges, and encourage me to recognize where discourse is resisted through moments of rupture (Harris & Dobson, 2015).

In Chapter Three, I review some of the literature that has allowed me to understand some of the intersections involved in a young mother's social positioning as a mother as well as a youth, student, woman, and 'problem' in contemporary society. This literature review is divided into four sections. The first section focuses on today's ambiguous understanding of youth, one that is informed by conflicting assumptions of 'adulthood' independence and 'childhood' dependence; responsibility and dependency; capability and irresponsibility (Arnett, 2006; Raby, 2012; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011; Tyyskä, 2014). The second section considers women's nuanced social positioning and understanding in today's neoliberal and postfeminist era. New postfeminist knowledges construct today's womanhood as liberated, powerful, and, through an emerging feminist backlash, overwhelming, while ongoing and insidious forms of sexism continue to position 'good' and 'bad' womanhood through a woman's 'morality' and ability to make 'good' choices (Kelly, 1998, 2000; Lesko, 1995; Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2006; Pomerantz, Raby, & Stefanik, 2013; Ringrose, 2006). The nuances and masked inequalities directed towards

young women and young mothers will be analyzed before moving onto the third section, which critically examines how neoliberal, middle-class understandings of young motherhood reproduce the ‘welfare moms’ discourse and construct young mothers as ‘bad’ neoliberal citizens (Kelly, 1998). The fourth and final section analyzes existing research informed by the narratives of young mothers across the West. While these narratives are nuanced and various, many young mothers voice similar experiences of discrimination, judgement, and a lack of supports (SmithBattle, 2006, 2007; Watson & Vogel, 2017).

In Chapter Four, I outline my research methodology, and address how my methods and analysis align with my theoretical perspective, and take the literature discussed above into consideration. Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with a small sample of young mothers across three separate time points in 2018 demanded considerations of reflexivity and ethics, and these are reviewed through a careful reflection informed by feminist researchers. Following this reflection, I outline how I analyzed my interview data using critical discourse analysis in order to address my research questions in a critical and meaningful way.

I outline my research findings in Chapter Five. Like my literature review, this chapter is divided into four sections. First, I provide some context to the young mothers’ lives. I describe how existing discourses of young motherhood contribute to their lack of resources, but also work to inform programs attempting to provide young mothers with support and resources. I then outline three areas in which my participants – and potentially other young mothers across the West – experience a lack of support. In the second section, I discuss how the participants conceptualized ‘good’ motherhood through two patterns which they identified as qualities belonging to a ‘good’ mother: the mother ‘being there’ for her child and ‘taking care of herself too.’ With this, I outline how these two qualities both reproduce and resist discourses relating to

normative mothering within today's ideology of intensive mothering and a neoliberal ethos promoting the responsabilization of its citizens (Baker, 2009; Elliott, Powell, & Brenton, 2015; Hays, 1996; Hermer et al., 2012). In the third section, I analyze the young mothers' experiences of judgement and praise, recognizing how these instances of negative and positive judgement are rooted in discourses that position older, middle-class motherhood as 'normal' and 'ideal' and, consequently, 'good.' Both real and perceived judgement from friends, family, and strangers alike influenced the behaviours, actions, and lifestyle choices of young mothers. In the fourth section, I highlight a final pattern found across the participants' interview data, where these young mothers recognized their parenting as rewarding. This narrative resists the hegemonic understanding of young motherhood as a mistake and demonstrates how the rewards following parenting influence areas of the women's lives outside the realm of parenting.

The concluding chapter will outline the limitations and strengths of this research and indicate its contributions to previous research on young motherhood and the governance and regulation of young women. I end this chapter by considering this research's implications for theory and scholarship.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Perspective

In order to critically and meaningfully examine the disciplinary discourses of young motherhood, I will draw on Michel Foucault's (1977/1995, 1978) theory of discourse. I will also refer to his notion of disciplinary power to inform my definition of policing. Together, this Foucauldian theorizing will work to demonstrate how normative discourses possess productive and regulatory functions which shape and constrain the behaviours, actions, subjectivities, and lifestyle choices of young mothers. Complementing this Foucauldian perspective, I will also utilize a poststructural feminist lens. This theoretical perspective benefits my research through its simultaneous focus on women, where feminist research fundamentally works "to promote justice and the well-being of all women" (DeVault & Gross, 2012, p. 207), and its ability, through poststructuralist thought, to question, critique, and challenge the norms and commonsensical knowledges that have historically been shrugged off as "the way it is" (St. Pierre, 2000). As stated by Elizabeth St. Pierre (2000), "[p]oststructuralism does not allow us to place the blame elsewhere, outside our own daily activities, but demands that we examine our own complicity in the maintenance of social injustice" (p. 484). The action-based qualities of feminism and poststructuralism joined together are not only beneficial but necessary for my research as I strive to make waves not only in academic thought but in the everyday as well.

Neoliberalism and postfeminism

Before discussing my theoretical perspective, it is necessary that I describe today's political climate in the West, which has actively fuelled and maintained the flows of power and knowledge that uphold contemporary systemic and institutional inequalities. Wendy Brown (2006), drawing on Foucault, states that neoliberalism is a political rationality, or "a specific form of normative political reason organizing the political sphere, governance practices, and

citizenship... [it] governs the sayable, the intelligible, and the truth criteria of these domains” (p. 693). With this, I follow that neoliberalism is a discourse that has successfully informed Western consciousness on what is considered successful, productive, and meaningful citizenship.

Neoliberalism involves a shift in responsibility from governments to individuals, where governments have withdrawn financial support for systems and assets that were once accessible to people from all socioeconomic backgrounds, consequently altering the position of these once public resources into the domain of privatized businesses (Brock, Raby, & Thomas, 2012; Côté, 2014). Within this neoliberal shift, Clare Daniel (2014) highlights that today’s social safety net has largely been eroded as the onus of social and personal well-being is placed on individual citizens and their ‘earned’ resources, rather than achieved or maintained with the support of public services. Today’s neoliberal ethos promotes success through the responsibility, virtue, and discipline of the individual – values that are built on characteristics of individualism and the freedom of choice, privatization, meritocracy, and assumed equal opportunity (Daniel, 2014; Kelly, 1998).

Daniel (2014) further posits that contemporary neoliberalism implies “a logic of personal responsibility” (p. 974), which has enabled the depoliticization of structural inequalities, consequently fueling discourses of post-racialism and postfeminism (Brown, 2006; Kelly, 1998; Pomerantz et al., 2013). Moreover, the success of neoliberalism relies on its ability to promulgate its ethos in market terms and convince people that that they are “rational economic actors in every sphere of life” (Brown, 2006, p. 694). Neoliberal citizenship, as Brown (2006) highlights, is nothing more than an individual’s capacity as an autonomous “entrepreneur” for “self-care” in terms of “their ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions, whether as welfare recipients, medical patients, consumers of pharmaceuticals, university students, or

workers in ephemeral occupations” (p. 694). With such a narrow focus on individual autonomy and potential, neoliberalism simultaneously propagates the idea that society offers equal and open opportunities to all, and that these opportunities are available through citizens’ unencumbered choices, while dismissing the inequalities that result from the problematic economic structure active today (Brown, 2006; Daniel, 2014; Kelly, 1998; Pomerantz et al., 2013). In sum, neoliberalism successfully works “to present individual behaviors as the causes of class inequality, ignoring economic structure, racial and gender discrimination, and other factors while rendering market forces stable and neutral” (Daniel, 2014, p. 979).

Following this understanding of neoliberalism, Shauna Pomerantz, Rebecca Raby, and Andrea Stefanik (2013) state that this hegemonic form of citizenship implies that society has reached a postfeminist state. Now that misfortunes, setbacks, and obstacles are understood as a symptom of an individual’s defective character rather than the result of structural inequalities, gender, class, and race are shallowly accepted as social positions that no longer negatively alter an individual’s life course. Thus, “[p]ostfeminism can be viewed as a component of neoliberal strategy that enables girls and women to internalize the narrative of the self-determined subject who does not require support, for example, within education, government, and social services” (Pomerantz et al., 2013, p. 186). This discourse asserts the idea that women can do, and have, anything so long as they work hard for it – a notion that clearly echoes the fundamentals of neoliberalism (Brown, 2006; Pomerantz et al., 2013).

What Jessica Ringrose (2006) calls an anxious backlash to feminism and its influence in today’s shifting gender order, postfeminism posits that women “have it all” regardless of their age, class, sexuality, migration status, religion, or dis/ability (Genz, 2010; Pomerantz et al., 2013). This backlash has had such an effect that it has resulted in the pathologizing of women,

shifting women from positions of “vulnerability” to “meanness” as they harness some of the possibilities feminism has granted them (Ringrose, 2006). Consequently, there is a growing understanding that the scales are now unevenly balanced in favour of women and their interests. Stéphanie Genz (2010) states that this adopted assumption of postfeminism has resulted in a precarious female/feminine identity that is both “a source of confident autonomy and of disempowerment in its unstable oscillations” (p. 98). As feminism faces social evanescence through its wide acceptance as an obsolete movement, where its political goals are understood as excessive in a supposedly equal society, women as a monolithic entity are expected to bask in their equality and liberation despite ongoing symptoms of sexism and gender discrimination.

Power and discourse

In the section above, I stated that neoliberalism is a discourse that informs today’s Western consciousness. For this notion to be meaningful in my research, it demands a definition of the Foucauldian concept of “discourse.” However, before I can offer this definition, I must first outline how Foucault understood and conceptualized power.

Power, according to Foucault (1977/1995), is constantly exercised through social relationships. It is not a binaric concept reflecting dominance and submission, with the former wielding power alone (Raby, 2005). Thus, power is not a thing that an individual does or does not possess; it is not a privilege, tool, or commodity that one can ‘have’ in a stable and consistent manner (Foucault 1977/1995). Rather, power is embodied and exercised by everyone, every day, through our interactions. Through these social relations, power is multidirectional, relational, and always circulating (“Contemporary social theories,” 2018; Foucault, 1977/1995). Consequently, “[t]here is no pure place outside of power” (Butler, 1995, p. 139).

Power’s omnipresence across individuals and society is also strategic (Foucault, 1978).

Power establishes knowledge, and this knowledge, which holds the ability to become discourse depending on its circulation across a web of relations, works to maintain the relations of power in which it was created (1978). Thus, “power and knowledge directly imply one another... there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 27). Power is both productive and strategic, constructing *what* we know and *how* we know it (Foucault, 1977/1995, 1978).

Consequently, discourse is a vehicle of power, behaving in boundless and strategic ways. A discourse, according to Stuart Hall (1996), “is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e. a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic” (p. 201). Thus, discourse is productive as it constructs knowledge, moving outside the realm of language alone, and making it possible or impossible to “articulate objects and subjects in their intelligibility” (Butler, 1995, p. 138). Here, I return to the discourse of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism influences our day-to-day living, goals, and motivations. For example, many youth today enter post-secondary institutions passionless and guideless as they work to obtain a degree in addition to their high school diploma, as this degree is seen as a necessary ticket towards personal success which is often perceived as financial success through innovation or job security outside of a minimum wage job (Côté, 2014). Without mention, this goal implies the avoidance of dependence as the neoliberal subject fulfills their meritocratic obligations. While leading a seminar on contemporary social theories, I asked my students if they could imagine any way of living outside of neoliberalism. As we all struggled to think of an answer, the success of this discourse became apparent: while rendering one form of social organization possible, discourse has made any other possibility unimaginable, unsayable, and unfeasible (Pomerantz,

2008). With this example, one can also recognize how discourse has real consequences through its ability to influence social practices (Hall, 1996).

Foucault (1978) notes how power, knowledge, and discourse are relational as power/knowledge is circulated and produced through discourse. His theory of discourse involves an analysis which works “to uncover the particular regimes of power and knowledge at work in a society and their part in the overall production and maintenance of existing power relations” (Weedon, 1987, p. 107-108). Discourse creates, informs, and organizes our everyday knowledge through its “authority to solidify socially constructed categories, granting them authorizing power that forms commonsense ways of thinking about others, the social world, and ourselves” (Pomerantz, 2008, p. 13). Thus, what we consider ‘normal’ is a consequence of discourse.

Discourses are not natural, nor are they innate knowledges. Rather, they are promoted as legitimate knowledges by agents who tend to be constructed as neutral and unbiased professionals who specialize in different arenas of society (Barcelos, 2014; Foucault, 1991). Discourse structures thought through creating and assigning meaning to the events, people, relations, and places in our lives. Consequently, “discourse speaks us into subjecthood – naming and classifying us as particular kinds of people who lead particular kinds of (sanctioned, disparaged, privileged, oppressed) lives” (Pomerantz, 2008, p. 13). Thus, how we understand our subjectivities, relationships, thoughts, feelings, and bodies is rooted in discourse (Weedon, 1987).

Discourses organized by and sustained through sociocultural forces and institutional bases – the law, education, medicine, religion, social welfare, media, and academic research, for example – become the most authoritative and influential in a society, shaping and promoting “a preferred form of subjectivity” (Weedon, 1987, p. 109) through their “power to delimit ‘right’

and ‘wrong,’ ‘normal’ and abnormal, ‘beauty’ and ‘abjection’” (Pomerantz, 2008, p. 13).

Consequently, discourse is also disciplinary. Through its ability to inform society’s notions of legality, goodness, morality, and possibility, discourse becomes the rule which we are expected to follow, consciously or not. Thus, discourse informs, directs, and determines our behaviour and thought, leading us to police both others and the self.

Disciplinary power and policing

Throughout this thesis, I will use the term *policing* to encapsulate a range of activities that have normatively been assigned to ‘the police,’ such as “control of access and movement, use and threat of physical force, [and] surveillance” (Hermer et al., 2012). This term will be informed by Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power to underscore the regulatory and controlling qualities the act of policing entails, whether this policing is performed by outside forces or through self-policing.

Drawing on the work of Joe Hermer, Michael Kempa, Clifford Shearing, Philip Stenning, and Jennifer Wood (2012), who highlight how it is fruitless “to think of ‘policing’ as just what ‘the police’ do” (p. 23), I utilize their definition of policing “to mean *any activity that is expressly designed and intended to establish and maintain (or enforce) a defined order within a community*” (p. 23). Through explicit and implicit norms that are posed formally (i.e. laws) and informally through customs and traditions, individuals are both regulated and regulate each other in an attempt to preserve a society’s defined order, one which works to produce and uphold specific objectives that serve particular interests (2012). This policing becomes more effective in maintaining a community’s “defined order” through an individual’s self-policing, which involves one’s internalization of their society’s normative values and ideals, and their consequential discipline and regulation. The links between policing, self-policing, and disciplinary power are

necessary in order to understand the policing of young motherhood, and will be discussed as I outline Foucault's concept of disciplinary power below.

Disciplinary power, according to Foucault (1991), was established in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through the management of individuals through attentive surveillance and control "within the mundane practices of social institutions" (Fairclough, 1993, p. 139). In schools, prisons, manufactories, hospitals, and armies, segmented populations experience forms of control that differ in their rigidity, resulting in particular behaviours, actions, expressions, and positions. Within these social institutions, disciplinary power is at first relentlessly enforced. Across time, however, the disciplining of specific actions and behaviours become mundane as they develop a sense of normalcy after going unquestioned, unchallenged, and without critique (Bartky, 1988; Fairclough, 1993). Consequently, without exerting an overt influence, disciplinary power renders the individual a docile body (Foucault, 1977/1995).

Sandra Lee Bartky (1988) critiques Foucault's localized assignment of disciplinary power, stating that this specific assigning "is to overlook the extent to which discipline can be institutionally *unbound* as well as institutionally bound" (p. 75). We no longer need to look at the classroom teacher, the sergeant major, or the parent to recognize discipline, for disciplinary power "is everywhere and it is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular" (p. 74). As a result, the consequences of disciplinary power are limitless, shaping, constraining, and guiding our behaviours, habits, and actions. This form of power is so effective because it does not "require coercion, but relies on the willingness, or desire, of individuals to submit to it: a desire that is invariably unwitting because of its taken-for-granted nature" (Ussher, 2006, p. 4). Much like discourse, disciplinary power has an influential yet unrecognizable effect on the behaviours, actions, and choices of an individual and this will be demonstrated through

the metaphor of Bentham's panopticon.

The panopticon, a model prison designed by Jeremy Bentham, captures the essence of disciplinary power and its consequential self-discipline, or what I will conceptualize as self-policing, as the modes of behaviour I am working to recognize and understand as those actions, behaviours, and choices done by an individual to maintain (or resist) a "defined order." A circular structure holding two-windowed cells among its periphery, the panopticon offered its prisoners an unsettling feeling of constant surveillance as its inner opening held a structure from which the guard stood (Bartky, 1988). With one window opening towards the guard and the other prisoners' windows and the other opening up to the outside "an effect of backlighting... [made] any figure visible within the cell" (p. 63). The ultimate goal of the panopticon, according to Foucault (1977/1995), was "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (p. 201). This automatic functioning of disciplinary power becomes self-discipline, or self-policing. The internalization of disciplinary power – from constant surveillance, repetitive actions, and rigid schedules and expectations – results in self-policing, where an individual begins to participate in self-surveillance that alters and restricts their own actions and decisions.

Noticing and analyzing the forms of policing directed towards young mothers will reveal those objectives which benefit from the marginalization of women, youth, and young mothers specifically. Further, analyzing the forms of self-policing that young mothers participate in may reveal how they resist and reproduce discourses of 'good' motherhood and 'good' neoliberal citizenship through actions that do or do not maintain a "defined order" (Hermer et al., 2012). Compared to self-policing, the laws and social norms promoted and reproduced through the state, schools and agencies, and the family and media create more visible forms of governance

that young mothers may feel pressured to follow (Barcelos, 2014). While self-policing is done on the individual level, it is influenced by the structures and sociocultural forces surrounding the individual, leaving people pressured to conform to specific identities that may be restricting or contradictory (Ussher, 2006). The disciplinary power fueling this form of policing is “connected with morality” (Foucault, 1991, p. 91), leaving individuals with feelings of shame – depending on their access to counter-discourses – when they do not comply with the hegemonic discourses applied to them (Bartky, 1988). These feelings of shame may intensify for young mothers due to discourses on youth, women, and female sexuality, which position these women as ‘immoral’ for their youthfulness and related ‘irresponsible’ sexuality (Kelly, 2000; Lesko, 1995). Further, the influence of obvious governance mentioned above (Barcelos, 2014) may also draw on morality to further police young mothers. Indeed, “[i]n an age of ‘intensive parenting,’ rules are not enshrined in law but in moral obligation, with ‘expert’ advice turning parents into ‘paranoid risk managers’ (Furedi 2001)” (Fox et al., 2009, p. 559). With the normalization of the ideology of intensive motherhood, which will be discussed in my data analysis below, those young mothers who do not conform to the intense and paranoid characteristics of today’s ‘proper’ mother may be further understood as ‘bad’ mothers (Elliott et al., 2015; Hays, 1996).

This shame or need to comply strengthens within today’s neoliberalism. Hermer et al.’s (2012) research demonstrates how policing has evolved with the development of a neoliberal consciousness, altering both the agents who carry out this policing and the forms of this policing. Indeed, as neoliberalism shifts responsibilities from governments to individuals, there “has come an increased reliance on local knowledge and an emphasis on the value of more direct forms of citizen participation in carrying out the business of governance” (p. 38) resulting in the “responsibilization” of citizenship (2012). However, this reliance on local ‘knowledge’ is very

much informed by the hegemonic discourses existing at a particular time and place, as highlighted above. The link between discourse, disciplinary power, policing, self-policing and morality is evident: as discourse shapes today's available knowledges, constructing some as 'good' or 'bad,' 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate,' discipline carried out by discourse-informed "responsibilized" citizens may result in one's policing or self-policing, which works to reproduce and maintain those same discourses across time and space.

Consistent with contemporary neoliberalism, this responsibilized citizenship is a consequence of the growing individualism that is replacing government supports, leaving individuals looking for specific 'truths' or relying on hegemonic, commonsensical knowledges that will guide them, with "[t]he most common guarantees of the 'truth' of discourses... [being] science, God and common sense" (Weedon, 1987, p. 126). The consequences following today's responsibilized society are illustrated in research by Rebekah Fox, Kristin Heffernan, and Paula Nicolson (2009), where they demonstrate how pregnant women are now pressured to conform to "unwritten rules" in relation to their appearance and behaviour by their surrounding population (p. 554). If pregnant women do not comply with these unwritten rules, they may be offered scientific 'advice' from family, friends, and strangers – an act that works as a form of surveillance and discipline – as science is understood as the most legitimate knowledge one can follow (2009). Similarly, these mothers may also be regarded as bad mothers or as irresponsible citizens, as these unwritten rules are bound to ideas of proper morality and commonsensical thinking.

Through this Foucauldian-informed conceptualization of policing, I aim to understand how and when young mothers experience forms of policing, if at all, and why this policing occurs. Existing literature, which will be discussed in depth in the following chapter, exhibits

how youth, women, sexuality, and pregnancy are all targets of policing carried out by responsabilized citizens and the neoliberal, disciplined self, and I aim to illuminate these social locations through the narratives of young mothers.

Poststructuralism, feminism, and the poststructural feminist perspective

Poststructural thinkers are critical of the production, organization, and maintenance of knowledge, and claim that there are no truths or single certainties (Pomerantz, 2008). The impossibility of fixed categories that allow us to have a complete and total understanding of a time, place, or person, is the result of constantly changing knowledges that circulate and “operate in relation to power” (Hall, 1996, p. 205). As power is always changing due to shifting social relationships and cultural practices, any attempt to inform oneself on a phenomenon through generalizations is undesirable (Pomerantz, 2008; Weedon, 1987). With these critical assumptions, poststructuralism similarly counters modernist ideas about objectivity, the agentic self, and grand narratives.

Young mothers are often understood as a homogenous entity and have come to symbolize a plethora of contemporary issues. As a group of women who are too often framed as ‘typical’ irresponsible women who made bad choices, today’s young mothers represent the loss of society’s (or, more precisely, expected female) morality and are deemed an unfair drain on scarce government resources, making them a threat to both the family and the nation as a whole (Barcelos, 2014; Kelly, 2000; Lesko, 1995; Pillow, 2003, 2015). In response to such characterization, a poststructuralist feminist perspective is useful when considering this population. Through its focus on context and the organization of power relations, this theoretical perspective challenges essentialist ideas about women, youth, and young mothers, as well as knowledges that try to find a single, objective meaning for young motherhood (McNay, 1992).

With the critical and deconstructive notions offered by poststructuralism, I believe my research will strengthen and benefit from a feminist edge as I study a group that has experienced pregnancy. Feminism, as “simply put” by bell hooks (2000), “is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (p. 1). This concise yet general definition does not assume any specific individual or group as a perpetrator of sexism, which is valuable for two reasons: first, it suggests that *anyone* can reinforce sexism regardless of their gender, age, race, or class; secondly, it does not reproduce the idea that feminism is “anti-male” (hooks, 2000).

Unfortunately, the necessity of mentioning how feminism is not “anti-male” has become a frequent occurrence in the lives of many feminists due to dominant (mis)understandings of feminism today. The inclusion of a feminist perspective was necessary to the development of this thesis. Andrea Doucet and Natasha S. Mauthner (2006) state that “feminist researchers have long advocated that feminist research should be not just on women, but *for* women and, where possible, with women” (p. 40). Accordingly, I utilize a feminist theoretical perspective to not only benefit my thesis, but to offer my work a political, action-based edge which serves to benefit young mothers through an academic platform and my privileged position as a master’s student.

Poststructural feminism binds the theories of poststructuralism and feminism, capturing the essence of feminism’s radical critique and action-based drive with poststructuralism’s focus on knowledge production and maintenance, and the role power plays in its organization. While some tensions can be found between these theories – for example, poststructuralism’s denial of grand narratives would oppose modernist versions of feminism’s dominant conceptualizations of sexism and patriarchy – both poststructuralism and feminism strive to locate where relations of power reproduce and perpetuate the problematic organization of privilege and inequality today.

Feminist thinking, as stated by Pomerantz (2008), “has pushed poststructuralism in new directions, working to infuse these deconstructive aspects with a critique of gender as it intersects with race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality” (p. 25). Understanding knowledge as socially constructed, poststructural feminism holds that “[t]hose who produce discourse also have the power to *make it true* – i.e. to enforce its validity” (Hall, 1996, p. 205). Therefore, a poststructural feminist perspective can work to reveal how many forms of knowledge circulating today work to maintain the subordination of women (Weedon, 1987). By locating specific power relations with attention to social, cultural, and historical influences, this theoretical perspective will enable me to understand how gendered discourses have developed and transformed across time and space, as well as how and where they are maintained today (McNay, 1992; Weedon, 1987). This acknowledgement and understanding is crucial as structural inequalities continue to be depoliticized and invisibilized as a consequence of neoliberalism and postfeminism.

While poststructural feminism holds a focus on the ways in which knowledge is socially constructed to achieve specific aims for particular benefits, it consequently follows that these forms of knowledge – these discourses – are also capable of rupture. Just as poststructural feminism rejects grand narratives, it similarly rejects the existence of a single form or act of resistance. Feminist poststructural thinking, as stated by Anita Harris and Amy Shields Dobson (2015), “has opened up ways of thinking about resistant agency less as an inherent criticality joined up to a grand narrative” (p. 152) but, rather, as a possibility through moments of rupture and “pockets of resistance” (Bartky, 1988, p. 83) where discourse can be challenged, critiqued, and changed. For instance, research by Nancy Lesko (2001) demonstrates how the discourse of adolescence as “becoming and developing” (Raby, 2005, p. 167) is disrupted through young motherhood. Thus, discourse is not overthrown through great acts of revolution but rather “a

plurality of resistances” (Foucault, 1978, p. 96) that rupture existing relations of power (“Contemporary social theories,” 2018; Foucault, 1978; Raby, 2005). When our “shifting selves” begin to notice and acknowledge the contradictions across discourse, we are able “to locate new ways of thinking and behaving. In such a moment, discourse can be questioned, altered or reinterpreted” (Raby, 2005, p. 167). The idea of resistance is critical for my research, for if I am to successfully learn how young mothers experience forms of policing, I must also learn how they navigate it, and realize what makes this resistance possible for some young mothers over others. Foucault’s theory of discourse complements a poststructural feminist lens as both theories consider power relations and adopt a deconstructive perspective in order to consider who benefits from the maintenance of particular discourses (Hall, 1996; Pomerantz, 2008; Weedon, 1987).

Despite the overlaps in feminist and Foucauldian thinking, there is a “continual contestation” (Sawicki, 1991, p. 66) between these theories. For instance, feminist scholars have noted critical limitations within Foucauldian understandings concerning the effects of power on the body. Foucauldian theorizing has been critiqued as overly generalizing as its focus on individuals as merely bodies produces a uniform understanding of the body and the discipline it undergoes (Bartky, 1988; McNay, 1992). Consequently, intersectional influences and their effects are overlooked and all people “b[are] the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life” (Bartky, 1988, p. 63). Recognizing the tensions resulting from these differences, I believe that poststructural feminism eloquently addresses these feminist critiques of Foucauldian thinking while maintaining the tenets of a Foucauldian-inspired poststructuralist lens.

In my thesis, poststructural feminism and Foucauldian understandings of discourse and

disciplinary power work to reveal how knowledges and their resulting discourses are constructed rather than innate. This combination of perspectives is useful if I am to successfully demonstrate how existing relations of power do or do not insidiously influence, limit, or police the lives of young mothers through disciplinary discourses that construct them as ‘immoral,’ ‘irresponsible,’ and ‘lazy.’

Writing about, for, and with young mothers

Following Pomerantz’s (2008) theorizing in her feminist poststructural ethnography on girls’ style, I write this thesis to nuance contemporary knowledges on young women, specifically those understandings focused on young mothers; “not as a ‘problem’ in need of solving... but as a complex and fascinating social category deserving of attention” (p. 3). Foucault’s theory of discourse, along with his notion of disciplinary power, is necessary for my research as they both will enable me to understand how, where, and why young mothers experience forms of policing, if at all. Narrowing my focus to the discourses linked to young motherhood offers a critical and concentrated perspective that is pivotal for my theoretical understanding, allowing me to consider where harmful discourses of young motherhood circulate, why they are influential, and how they are experienced by young mothers. Given the ubiquity of discourses on young motherhood, this Foucauldian theorizing will invite me to critically consider how young mothers exercise, embody, and navigate power, and in what ways they may conform to or resist forms of policing. With this Foucauldian theorizing, the application of a poststructural feminist perspective invites me to further consider where power relations are located and in which ways they are reproduced and maintained. Moreover, this perspective also offers my research the possibility of revealing active forms of discrimination and bias, which could facilitate the production of meaningful, systemic change. Chris Weedon (1987) states that “it is only by

looking at discourse *in operation*, in a specific historical context, that it is possible to see whose interests it serves at a particular moment” (p. 111) and it is my hope that these particular interests are made visible through my research and the narratives offered by my sample of young mothers so that they can be critiqued and, ultimately, altered, facilitating a necessary change that offers young mothers and contemporary society “alternative meanings” of young motherhood which promote strength, growth, and praise (1987).

Chapter Three: Literature Review

This literature review works to create a foundation to my research, which aims to uncover how systems of inequality continue to influence and govern the lives of young mothers by examining how, where, and why young mothers experience forms of policing. Recognizing the various and nuanced discourses of young motherhood and their effects is crucial for current understandings of young motherhood, especially in a context where many firmly believe that we are in a postfeminist and post-racial age. These understandings trivialize and deny the relevance of gender, class, and race through dominant ideas of individualism, and perpetuate the myth of meritocracy through a complementary neoliberalist ethos, as revealed in the previous chapter. The existing literature on young motherhood demonstrates how systems of inequality continue to influence and govern the lives of young mothers. Through neoliberal and postfeminist discourses, ongoing symptoms of oppression based on a young mother's age, gender, race, and class become difficult to recognize and label due to prevalent assumptions of individual success through hard work on a level playing field (Pomerantz et al., 2013).

Before reviewing existing literature on young mothers, I will examine age and the youth category, and outline the tensions that youth experience as they move between the loaded and opposing states of childhood and adulthood. This section will conclude with a discussion of how the policing of youth has become justified and will introduce two avenues, youth sexuality and female sexuality, where forms of policing are active today. Following this, I will narrow my focus on youth to young women, centring in on a young mother's gender to underscore how structures of sexism and misogyny influence and limit young mothers today. I will end this section by highlighting how outdated gender norms that are assumed to be obsolete work in line with new gender anxieties resulting from recent feminist achievements, creating new forms of

policing that are fuelled by an ongoing and insidious sexism. These two sections will be nuanced with mentions of today's growing neoliberalism and postfeminism, and will tie together in my third section, which examines how the ethos of these phenomena strategically work together to position young mothers as failed citizens who have made 'bad' choices and have therefore earned the mistreatment and inequality they face. I will conclude this review with an introduction of young mothers' perspectives. This final section will discuss literature informed by young mothers and examine how these women understand and navigate the discourses surrounding them, as well as how they understand themselves as good mothers in spite of these harmful discourses.

“Children raising children”: today's youth and bad age chronology

In this section, I focus on the complexities of age by centring in on the youth category as an ambiguous age period that faces tension due to its position between the stages of being a child and being an adult. I examine how contemporary neoliberalism has altered social understandings of who a youth is and what levels of independence are expected of them, and contrast this new youth independence with normative age-based assumptions of youth dependency. These sections will dovetail to demonstrate how the policing of youth is justified today, leading to the final section which considers how young sexuality is policed, where young motherhood simultaneously embodies the idea that the dependent are attempting to become independent too soon and the idea that those who should be moving towards independence have regressed towards dependency.

Neoliberalism and independence Today's understanding of youth is ambiguous, as it does not have a definite age range nor a uniform social status (Tyyskä, 2014). Some people characterize youth as “a period of life in which a person is either partly or fully dependent on

others, usually adults and members of one's family, for material support" (Tyyskä, 2014, p. 5). This economic understanding of youth leads to a problematic conclusion as it creates a shallow criterion for who qualifies as a youth by including a wide range of people who require material support, regardless of their age. For instance, a forty-year-old who is jobless or between jobs, or housebound due to illness or disability, matches the definition of a youth more than a high school student who is working two jobs to support their family. However, we do not characterize this forty-year-old as a youth because an individual's age holds a great amount of social significance: age can determine whether they are (or are expected to be) in middle school, high school, college, or university; whether they can apply for a line of credit or borrow a loan; and whether they can legally drive or drink alcohol. As a result, the tensions in attempting to understand today's notion of youth make themselves apparent as we comprehend youth as both a social status and an age range.

Across Canada, there are various definitions of youth which utilize differing age ranges. For example, "Statistics Canada defines youth between 16-29 years, whereas for Human Resources and Skills Development Canada it is 15-24" (Canada Factsheet, 2014). While acknowledging that there are tensions in the flexible term of youth, I will apply the definition of youth utilized by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada to this research. This definition of youth – which includes individuals ranging in age from 15 to 24 years – captures the age range of my sample of young mothers while maintaining the complexity involved in creating and applying a set definition to a group whose social position is frequently shifting "between areas of dependence and independence" (Raby, 2007, p. 47). These shifts will be discussed further below.

Our current understanding of youth, while ambiguous, can best be understood as the age

period between childhood and adulthood. As the youth category stands between these two binaries, each representing different stages of maturity, knowledge, and responsibilities, “young people are expected, and allowed, to act in particular ways and engage in particular experiences as they move toward adulthood and adult responsibilities” (Prettyman, 2005, p. 155).

Consequently, youth are assumed to have achieved a certain level of maturity, knowledge, and responsibility through their progression through childhood while simultaneously still requiring more development before reaching adulthood. While these age-based milestones were once more obvious through social signifiers – for example, through one’s education or marital status, or through their material possessions – the boundaries once defining their differences have become less distinct.

Research by Maysoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock (2011) highlights how the youth category has expanded “both horizontally, in terms of the range of people and practices it encompasses, and vertically, in terms of the chronological age range to which it is commonly understood to refer” (p. 682-683), making it difficult, if not impossible, to decide who is considered a child or an adult. Moreover, the ambiguity of the youth category has consequently influenced normative understandings of childhood and adulthood. With the extended youth category, certain children, “rather than being seen as vulnerable members of the population in need of welfare state support and protection... can be seen as individually responsible for their own choices and actions, and ready to make their own way in the grown-up world of business” (p. 683). Thus, the extension of the youth category has included children within its classification, pulling them away from childhood protections and assuming an independence they do not yet have (2011). Further, vague notions of who qualifies as a youth in need of support, paired with the neoliberal discourses of independence, meritocracy, and personal responsibility, make it

possible for most social supports to be deemed unnecessary and excessive (Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Raby, 2012; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011).

Incompetent and dependent Despite the neoliberal expectation of independence directed towards youth, existing literature reveals that youth are simultaneously understood as incapable and in need of ‘support’ (in the form of surveillance and control). Liza Tsaliki (2015) states that childhood became pathologized with the nineteenth century’s rise in scientific rationalism, “as psychology had firmly established itself as the principle source of scientific knowledge about the child” (p. 503). With this “expert” advice on childhood – advice that presented childhood as a stage of “incompetence and dependency” (p. 503) – and a new public consciousness on the proper, “natural” paths of development emerged. As mentioned above, childhood has slowly merged into the youth category due to neoliberal pressures, and this has consequently led to discourses of childhood permeating into discourses of youth. For example, it is not only children who have come to be understood as an “at-risk” population, but youth as well, justifying the public assessment and judgement of youth’s behaviour and leisure-based activities (Harlan, 2016; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011; Tsaliki, 2015).

Today’s youth continue to be understood as an at-risk population, and this understanding has not gone without consequence. The normative understandings of youth as dependent, incompetent, and at-risk have led not only to the surveillance of youth, but their silencing as well. The student activism advocating gun control following the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting on February 14, 2018, that resulted in the death of seventeen students and staff members and left seventeen others wounded, was met with an unsettling amount of doubt and cynicism by ‘experts’ such as policy and law makers, child care professionals, school administrators, and teachers due to the activists’ assumed ‘youthfulness’ and thus incompetence,

immaturity, and indifference. While some schools across the U.S. supported their students' participation in coordinated walkouts protesting gun violence following this event, other schools threatened students "with unspecified consequences" and "detention or more serious discipline" (Binkley, 2018). The threats these schools used against their students demonstrate a patronizing form of concern, where instead of taking their students' activism seriously and respectfully, they reacted to this desire for political change as youthful deviance and rebellion without a cause. Despite the large demonstrations of youths' desire for political change regarding gun control, law makers have similarly shown a lack of support, where "Congress has shown little inclination to tighten gun laws despite the recent mass shootings, and Trump backed away from his initial support for raising the minimum age for buying an assault rifle to 21" (Binkley, 2018). Once again, the tensions of youth's assumed independence, paired with the childlike naïveté that is similarly assigned to them, becomes visible: while a young individual can purchase and consequently use an assault rifle, they cannot speak about this weapon and its potential harms, nor be taken seriously by the members of society who can influence related laws. The powerful statements made by the Stoneman Douglas High School students following this event were not recognized or respected by these "professionals" and ultimately demonstrated the reality that youth are "controlled and diminished through discourses of immaturity and irrationality" (Raby, 2012, p. 151).

Relating to this, young adults – also conceptualized as *emerging adults*, which may work to undermine their capabilities and knowledges, and, consequently, their respectability – are understood as immature and ill-prepared for complete adulthood as the youth category has expanded upward into adulthood (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011). However, without childhood supports and protections, these emerging adults are understood as responsible for reaching the

requirements of adulthood through their “competent” and “productive” characters, which implies their conformity to the expectations of our democratic society through their participation in extended schooling, waged work, and normative family responsibilities (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011). This conformity is difficult for many youth to achieve with the price and weight of higher education and a lack of jobs offering a salary above minimum wage. Indeed, through the influence of neoliberalism, “the entry into adulthood has become deinstitutionalized and individualization has increased, meaning that people are required to rely on their own resources and their own sense of agency, for better or worse” (Arnett, 2006, p. 4).

Policing justified To this point, the literature discussed has revealed a recent shift in how youth are perceived, where normative understandings of youth’s incompetence have adjusted according to Western society’s growing neoliberal consciousness (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011). In spite of pressures to be independent, the merging of the youth period and childhood has situated youth in a binary against adulthood, where youth have been assigned negative qualities opposing adulthood’s assumed rationality and stability (Raby, 2007, 2012). Lesko (2001) addresses the obscure and contradictory aspects of the youth category through her term “panoptical time,” which “places individual adolescents into a temporal narrative that demands a moratorium of responsibility yet expects them at the same time to act as if each moment of the present is consequential” (p. 107). Panoptical time as a norm of youth captures the essence of these conflicting forces of independence/dependence and responsibility/immaturity. These opposing understandings of youth have inspired public anxieties, leading to new and ‘justified’ forms of surveillance and control that work to ‘protect’ not only youth themselves, but the social order existing around them. For example, youth are encouraged to develop their independence by achieving part-time waged work, joining after-school academic groups and sports teams, or

volunteering, but are still considered too immature and dependent to successfully live on their own and too ill-prepared to stop attending school for work. They are also understood as having too much to lose to act on their ambitious goals, despite the fact that many youth “do not have to answer to anyone and can essentially do what they want with their lives, before they enter the permanent (or at least enduring) obligations of adult roles” (Arnett, 2006, p. 10). Moreover, with a growing embrace of “the ‘sunny side’ of youth” (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011, p. 675) through a focus on youth’s core competencies, strengths, and potentials, new forms of youth surveillance are created. Through this focus, acts of governance are promoted as necessary steps to ensure today’s youth develop in a “positive” and “healthy” manner (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011). By promoting youth’s competencies, youth are encouraged to act in certain ways that will facilitate those competencies, and any behaviour or action that does not support this development is seen as wasteful, rebellious, or lazy.

In addition to the disciplinary framework that centres on “sunny side” of youth, Tsaliki (2015) states that youth’s leisure activities are targets of regulation, where those activities that do not conform to middle-class norms are seen as “morally debasing” (p. 501) and in need of reform. For instance, youth who spend their weekends drinking alcohol with friends are understood as deviant and problematic not so much for their (possibly) underage or excessive drinking, but rather because this activity is seen as unproductive and thus dangerous for their development. The distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ youth development is also made possible through age norms, which work to determine the behaviours appropriate for certain individuals depending on their age (Raby, 2012). Raby (2012) states that hegemonic “age norms are used by more dominant social groups to maintain power and to attempt the moral regulation of others, establishing, and reinforcing narrow ideas of what is correct or ideal behaviour” (p. 135). Thus,

age-based moral regulation is less about morality than it is about social hierarchies associated with race, class, gender, and sexuality – concepts which continue to inspire anxiety over the assumed loss of ‘morality’ in society (Pillow, 2015; Raby, 2012).

Youth sexuality and young mothers The literature discussed in this section investigates how the policing of youth through surveillance, governance, and discipline has been justified in the past, and demonstrates how this policing is maintained and reinforced today. The nuclear family, heteronormativity, and gender and age norms are some of those normative structures that motivate policing today – especially the policing of young mothers.

Across time and contexts, youth sexuality has inspired public anxiety and attempts at control in the West (Kelly, 1998, 2000; Lesko, 1995, 2001; Luttrell, 2003; Pillow 2006; Prettyman, 2005). While youth were (and continue to be) constructed as incompetent and ill-prepared, they have simultaneously been constructed as overly sexual (Lesko, 2001). Youth’s assumed vulnerability paired with their excessive sexuality has created the discourse existing around and policing their sexuality today, where youth are perceived as possessing a sexuality that is “deviant, reckless, and dangerous” (Daniel, 2014, p. 993). Consequentially, youth sexuality has faced different forms of surveillance and control.

This policing of youth sexuality takes various forms dependent on a youth’s age, gender, race, and sexual orientation, and social research has revealed that female youth sexuality is ultimately positioned as more concerning than male youth sexuality (Lesko, 2001; Valenti, 2010). For instance, a young man’s sexuality has been constructed as natural and healthy while a young woman’s sexuality has come to be understood and communicated as a sign of her immorality (Lesko, 2001). These opposing, gender-based understandings of youth sexuality are visible through media depictions of young men compared to those of young women, and

arguably demonstrate that the ‘problem’ of youth sexuality is localized to young female sexuality. While a young man’s sexuality is celebrated, encouraged, and frequent in the media, a young woman’s sexuality is rarely represented this positively (if at all). For instance, while “a goofy movie about horny teenage boys” (Valenti, 2010, p. 21) is not an uncommon descriptor for several movies that are popular today, a movie focusing on a young woman’s sexuality would hardly been seen as “goofy,” especially if her character was perceived as “horny.” In contrast, this movie and her character would more likely be deemed distasteful, a bad influence, and youth sexuality gone wrong. Related to this, Lesko (2001) states that the control and disciplining of young women’s sexuality in the past was possible and executed through *preventative* measures. Attempts at preventative intervention were made once child care, educational, religious, and political ‘experts’ considered the total repression of young female sexuality an impossibility (2001). Just as a young woman’s sexuality has been policed using preventative measures, her sexuality has been further prevented from discussion, critical thought, and acceptance through its invisibilization in the media.

Jessica Valenti (2010) highlights how the “virginity myth” that is active and accepted today maintains the belief that female sexuality and a woman’s morality are intrinsically linked, “and that their ability to be moral actors is absolutely dependent on their sexuality” (p. 9). By linking female sexuality with female morality, young women are expected to control their own sexuality as well as the sexuality of men – a sexuality that continues to be understood as something that cannot “be reined in” (Lesko, 2001, p. 84) – by not “leading them on” (Lesko, 2001; Luttrell, 2003; Valenti, 2010). Tsaliki (2015) conceptualizes the policing of female youth sexuality through a focus on *protection*: “how not to get pregnant, how not to catch a sexually transmitted disease and how not to be sexually abused or raped” (p. 511). By focusing on a fear

of young women's possible pregnancies and sexual infections, and positioning these women as victims to an unspecified culprit, contemporary sexual education conceals the moral values and systems it works to maintain (Tsaliki, 2015). Further, this focus on a young woman's assumed agency regarding her sexuality works as an introduction to the blame that is solely directed towards young mothers, which will be discussed in depth in the following sections.

Indeed, these various attempts of control, paired with conflicting assumptions regarding youth's responsibility/immaturity, position youth pregnancy and motherhood as "shocking" and "terrible," negatively impacting societal views towards young mothers (Lesko, 2001). This is because these young women, in spite of all of the warnings directed towards them, were sexual and are now facing the consequence of their 'choice' – another idea that will be examined further (Kelly, 2000). Young mothers face age-based moral regulation and judgement through accusations of 'immorality' because they have had children when still young and are expected to 'redeem' themselves by progressing on the more respected, age-appropriate path following their pregnancy (Barcelos, 2014; Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014; Kelly, 2000; Prettyman, 2005). Young motherhood remains constructed as an "out-of-time act" (Lesko, 2001, p. 138) due to hegemonic age and gender norms that continue to guide public consciousness despite ever-changing ideas on responsibility, individuality, progress, and equality, and where many acts are now becoming "out-of-time" as a consequence of credentialism and a lack of stable careers (Raby, 2012; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011).

"Girls gone wild": morality, responsibility, and making 'bad' choices

To adequately capture and understand the complex social position young mothers hold today, Lesko (1995) stresses a multidimensional understanding of these women, one that takes into account "their simultaneous statuses as mother, student, wage earner, family member, young

person with racial identity, and sexual being” (p. 180). I further this literature review by focusing on young mothers’ identities as women and sexual beings, highlighting the influence of contemporary postfeminism and neoliberalism. Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that, while they are all limited, regulated, and judged by these existing systems, the experiences of sexism, misogyny, and gender inequality are not uniform to every young mother across the West. The intersections of race, ethnicity, class, religion, migration status, and sexuality nuance these young women’s realities beyond their gender, age, and status as a mother. Social positioning within various axes of inequality has influenced each woman before her pregnancy, and will continue to shape her life and the opportunities offered to her as she moves beyond her status as a youth. This section of the literature review will briefly review some of these intersections while ultimately focusing on how these young mothers’ gender influences their experiences, representations, and judgements.

Immoral and irresponsible Existing literature reveals that young motherhood provokes judgement of a young woman’s moral character and her ability to make ‘good’ choices (Gregson, 2009; Kelly, 1998, 2000; Lesko, 1995; Luttrell, 2003, Pillow, 2006). For example, while researching alongside conservative and liberal teachers working with pregnant and mothering youth, Kelly (1998) found that many teachers considered young motherhood a ‘wrong’ choice, regardless of their political standing. While liberal teachers adopted a more empathetic and nurturing attitude towards these students, Kelly states that conservative teachers relied more on observed moral strength: “[a] morally strong person, according to conservatives, should be able to ‘just say no’ to sexual desire” (p. 228). It is crucial to recognize the absence of men in these conversations on choice and saying “yes” or “no,” and as victims of societal moral judgement. The young men who impregnate the women they are having sex with are not

assumed to be ‘welfare kings’ or ‘high school dropouts’ when the women they had sex with become pregnant. They are not told that they should have made the ‘good’ choice by saying “yes” to wearing a condom, nor are they considered ‘the boy who nobody loved,’ ‘permissive,’ or ‘irresponsible.’ These realities demonstrate the underlying inequality and sexism active within conversations and experiences of youth pregnancy and motherhood. Research demonstrates that young women are expected to raise their children with or without the support of their child’s father (Federici, 2012; Fraser, 2016; Kelly, 2000; Luttrell, 2003). This literature also reveals that young mothers are expected to leave (if not pushed out of) school to care for their child while simultaneously pressured to avoid the ‘dropout’ discourse (Kelly, 2000; Pillow, 2006; SmithBattle, 2007) despite the fact that “[t]he pathway to a high school diploma is fragile [as] ... [m]any teen mothers face the daunting challenge of combining school, work, and mothering with unreliable child care and transportation” (SmithBattle, 2006, p. 132).

This hyper focus on a young mother’s ‘choice’ isolates her from the social conditions, attitudes, people, and systems surrounding her (Greyson, Chabot, & Shoveller, 2019; Kelly, 1998; Spear, 2004; Wigginton & Lee, 2013). Neoliberalism exacerbates this focus on the individual rather than the structures surrounding her while inviting other forces, such as postfeminism and the belief of meritocracy, to make blame easier to assign (Côté, 2014; Greyson et al., 2019; Kelly, 1998; Wigginton & Lee, 2013). Britta Wigginton and Christina Lee (2013) contend that the policing of pregnant women is heightened through this hyper focus on choice and personal responsibility. After interviewing 11 women who continued their existing smoking habits during their recent pregnancies, the researchers found that these women felt emotions of embarrassment, guilt, and shame for not adapting to the role of the ‘good’ mother who is self-sacrificing and aware of any and every possible risk that could harm the foetus (2013). Once

again, an individual's choices serve as an indicator of their 'good' or 'bad' character as they "are situated in the neoliberal assumption that all individuals have equal control over their behaviours, regardless of social, cultural and economic factors" (p. 467).

Within today's "risk society" ... characterised by high levels of distrust in social institutions and traditional authorities and increased awareness of the threats of everyday life" (Holland, McCallum, & Walton, 2016, p. 40-41), young mothers are normatively understood as a threat to the family and the health of a nation, and symbolize the loss of society's morality (Barcelos, 2014; Lesko, 1995; Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2006, 2015). However, a close analysis of this assumption reveals the misogyny maintaining it. Young, single mothers are seen as a threat to the heteronormative, nuclear family as they solely raise their children without the presence of a man, as well as a threat to normative life courses and educational systems. Lesko (2001) argues that young motherhood disturbs age norms and educational expectations as it comes to be understood as "all-at-once growing up" (p. 140). As stated by Lesko, young motherhood deviates from normative "assumptions of schooling's role in 'preparation' for adulthood. If school-aged mothers are already adults, at least in one domain, what can school do for them?" (p. 141) While these young women are normatively perceived as 'out of control,' this assumption has little to do with their morality but more so with the normative social structures they are implicitly threatening or, sometimes openly, challenging.

Isolating blame As mentioned, the hegemonic discourses positioning young mothers as 'immoral' and 'irresponsible' fail to recognize the influence of outside social, educational, and political spheres (Spear, 2004; Wigginton & Lee, 2013). The assumption that a young mother is irresponsible for getting pregnant places all blame on her alone, and this isolated blame is revealed through simplified messages against youth's sexual activities which are typically

directed towards women alone through their warning of pregnancy (Barcelos, 2014; Luttrell, 2003). Moreover, preventative messages against youth pregnancy through the promotion of safe sex or no sex at all “takes for granted a host of assumptions about choice, agency, empowerment, and alternatives” (Luttrell, 2003, p. xii).

The expectation that young women should “just say no” (Kelly, 1998, 2000; Lesko, 1995; Luttrell, 2003) assigns young women a certain amount of power and authority that many may not possess against the individual they are saying “no” to. The ability to place all focus, blame, and judgement on the young mother alone is furthered by the reality that she is the only parent carrying the visibility of pregnancy. This visibility influences social understandings of youth pregnancy and motherhood: instead of understanding a young woman’s pregnancy as a sexual relation between her and a man, possibly young like herself, her pregnancy is simplified and truncated by laying blame on her ‘permissiveness’ alone (Kelly, 2000; Lesko, 1995). Kelly (2000) highlights how young mothers are constructed as ‘stupid sluts’ for their supposed irresponsibility towards contraceptives, despite the reality that it is men who typically exercise power over this ‘responsibility,’ where “a significant number of young women find it difficult to insist that male partners use a condom” (Lever, 1995, p. 174, as cited in Kelly, 2000, p. 28).

Wanda S. Pillow (2003, 2004) states that some young mothers come to be perceived as more or less threatening depending on their race and class, consequentially determining which young “mothers are [considered] ‘good girls who made a mistake’” (Pillow, 2004, p. 3) and those who fall into the stereotypes of being immoral, irresponsible, lazy, unloved, or permissive. For instance, research by Valenti (2010) reveals how, compared to white women, racialized women are rarely considered victims of a culture that is oversexualizing women as they are “depicted as having some degree of pathologized sexuality from the get-go, no matter what their

virginity status” (p. 47).

Investigating the ways in which young mothers’ knowledges are constructed as a resource or a site of contestation, Devon Greyson, Heather O’Brien, and Jean Shoveller (2017) similarly reveal how a young mother’s class and ethnicity may influence the valuation of her expertise. Due to their youth and following assumptions of ignorance and social deprivation, young mothers were commonly perceived as “information needy” by older family members, health professionals, and teachers (2017). Young Indigenous mothers, however, were recognized as reliable parenting experts by older members within their communities. This valuation of young Indigenous mothers’ knowledge and expertise can be attributed to “structures of colonization, such as residential schools and child welfare apprehension” (p. 143) which had separated families and hindered, marginalized, and shattered intergenerational parenting practices. Research by Kelly (2000) reports that “[t]raditionally, ‘no child is ever considered illegitimate’ among First Nations peoples” (p. 59) and similarly demonstrates how colonial attacks against Indigenous communities, such as the “sixties scoop,” may have led to increased suspicion towards adoption and, relatedly, greater levels of support and acceptance towards young mothers who choose to raise their children. While some young Indigenous mothers are the first to raise their own children following legacies of colonization and are consequently recognized as knowledgeable experts and provided with acceptance support by their extended families and surrounding Indigenous communities, colonization simultaneously “manufacture[s] ignorance by suppressing and delegitimizing traditional parenting and health practices” (Greyson et al., 2017, p. 146) thus constructing these mothers as naïve to privileged ‘scientific,’ Western knowledges and “dangerous” to their children as a result (Greyson et al., 2017; Kelly, 2000; Salmon, 2007).

Drawing on Marlee Kline (1993), Amy Salmon (2007) further argues how young Indigenous mothers are constructed as ‘bad’ mothers by the Canadian federal government and its policy makers who design specific “prevention” campaigns that target Aboriginal mothers. Through public policies and “public health” and “public education” campaigns (e.g. “specialized services to prevent maternal substance use” (p. 289) designed for Indigenous mothers), these women are recognized as “threats” who are cannot take care of their children’s health and well-being (2007). This understanding compounds through neoliberalist ideals of individualism and responsabilization as young Indigenous mothers face an isolated focus on their “individual behavioural ‘choices’, rather than locating them within the broader contexts and lived experiences of on-going colonial and racialized oppressions of First Nations Peoples” (p. 279). Moreover, the hegemonic expectation of a mother’s self-reliance held by many white, middle-class communities “has led the courts to devalue ‘the participation of extended family members in the care of children in First Nations communities’” (Kline, 1993, p. 331, as cited in Kelly, 2000, p. 59). Despite positive conceptualizations of young motherhood within Indigenous communities, the ‘preventative’ and ‘educational’ policies and campaigns targeting Indigenous mothers outside of their communities maintain problematic knowledges and discourses surrounding this population. Influenced by today’s neoliberal and neocolonial context, these sites of discourse production and maintenance continue to significantly harm the mothering experiences of young Indigenous women, and further marginalize young Indigenous mothers through intensive State and medicalized surveillance that may be largely unfamiliar to other young mothers (Greyson et al., 2017; Salmon, 2007).

Regardless of the social positions she held before her pregnancy, a young mother’s decision to become a mother is often simplified as a ‘bad’ choice – which will be discussed

through today's neoliberal context below – and as a negative consequence of her immoral, irresponsible, and permissive character.

“Welfare moms”: young mothers as bad neoliberal citizens

This section of the literature review will examine the normative economic understandings of young mothers by analyzing the neoliberal and postfeminist discourses that maintain these women as “welfare moms” by choice. By reviewing the discourses that understand and present these women as “economic drains,” we learn that lasting gender inequality continues to go unmarked as neoliberalism and postfeminism leave blame to the young mother alone.

Young motherhood as a ‘bad’ choice Social circumstances such as poverty and inequality, as well as the harsh judgement and mistreatment young mothers face, are overlooked as the blame is focused on these young women and their ‘bad choices’ (Kelly, 1998). Yet as Harris and Dobson (2015) state, “[c]hoice’ has always been a difficult thing to analyse and to use as a measure of agency, because one’s own preferences and decisions can never be disentangled from the social context within which they are arrived at” (p. 143). The values of neoliberalism and postfeminism, and their “strategic deployment” (Pomerantz et al., 2013, p. 188), contradict the idea that choice is socially influenced.

Through her ethnographic study on an integrative school program for pregnant and parenting teens in Canada, Kelly (1998) found that both the politically conservative and liberal teachers working within the initiative followed what she calls “the good choices discourse.” This discourse, like many others applied to young mothers, identifies ‘good’ choices as those that align “with White, middle-class values” (p. 233). Characteristics of neoliberalism were active within the good choices discourse held by the teachers: individualism, the freedom of choice, meritocracy, and the assumed availability of equal and open opportunity (1998). Like

contemporary neoliberalism, the good choices discourse similarly overlooks and ignores structural disadvantages resulting from the sexism, racism, and classism existing today (1998).

With success and failure attributed to specific qualities and behaviours of the individual, freedom of choice becomes a total expression of one's moral character (Côté, 2014). Kelly (1998) furthers this statement by stressing how the teachers in her study, despite their experience teaching and working with pregnant and mothering students, "made little or no mention of the material and cultural conditions that constrict the choices available, for example, the barriers to contraception and abortion services, mixed messages about sexuality, and the pervasiveness of poverty, child abuse, and unequal power relations" (p. 234). Furthering this finding, Maggie Kirkman, Lyn Harrison, Lynne Hillier, and Priscilla Pyett (2001) argue that a young woman's life choices become 'good' or 'bad' depending on how closely they follow "[t]he canonical narrative of womanhood [which] represents the ideal life course for a woman as predicated upon her becoming a mother (preferably in a marriage), naturally, and at the appropriate (adult) time" (p. 286). This hegemonic narrative of womanhood regulates and polices women today, and contributes to discourses on young mothers as unable to "hold down a man" if they are single, and as 'permissive' and 'irresponsible' for getting pregnant in the first place (Kelly, 2000).

Within hegemonic, middle-class ideologies, pregnancy continues to be constructed as something no young woman would ever want. Arline T. Geronimus (2003) examines how, for European Americans, promoting "the social control message that teenage childbearing has disastrous consequences" (p. 882) to their children is an adaptive practice, as these families have access to (and may consequently 'lose') a wide range of supports contributing to their well-being. For African American families, however, these supports are unavailable or not as easily accessible (2003). Kelly (1998) expands her research on the good choices discourse by

highlighting how young motherhood may actually be a good choice for young women under certain economic circumstances and restrictions. Indeed, middle-class pathways to a ‘good’ and ‘successful’ adulthood – attending postsecondary education, gaining relevant work experience, taking part in extracurricular activities, and so on – are not available to all people, let alone all women (Besen-Cassino, 2018; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Geronimus, 2003; Kelly, 1998; SmithBattle, 2006, 2007). Research by Lee SmithBattle (2006, 2007) reveals how young women who are economically disadvantaged and have “little hope of going to college or finding satisfying work – goals that are taken for granted by middle-class teens – have little reason to delay parenting and often view pregnancy as inevitable and positive” (SmithBattle, 2006, p. 131). While middle-class youth may view pregnancy as an event that could compromise future educational or career goals, economically disadvantaged young women who are not offered the same opportunities view motherhood as meaningful, providing them with a sense of competence and satisfaction that their present life circumstances may not have offered them (SmithBattle, 2006, 2007).

Mothers of all ages may experience the struggle of finding accessible and affordable childcare and obtaining a flexible working schedule that allows them to work, mother, and also live a life outside of those two expected roles (Elliott et al., 2015; Federici, 2012; Fraser, 2016; Gregson, 2009; Kelly, 1998). Moreover, within an ethos of intensive mothering today, mothers and non-mothers alike are convinced that a good mother is one who provides her energy, money, emotion, and time to her child/ren before considering her own pursuits (Elliott et al., 2015; Hays, 1996). Yet young mothers and those older women who are expected to become mothers face different forms of judgement for their decisions regarding work and mothering. While an older mother is expected to take time off work to care for her newborn, a young mother is expected to

get “back on track” in order to redeem herself and undo the assumed damage her pregnancy has resulted in (Barcelos, 2014; Elliott et al., 2015; Hays, 1996; Prettyman, 2005).

Kelly (2000) demonstrates how young mothers experienced criticism from their family, friends, and strangers for “[abandoning]’ their children by putting them into day care while they attended classes. Yet to resolve this dilemma by leaving school to provide full-time care for their children... would have relegated them to ‘dropout’ status, no matter how well they did as stay-at-home mothers” (p. 38). Interviews with young mothers by Kirkman et al. (2001) substantiate this research as young mothers described the conflicting societal expectations directed towards them, where they were criticized for being “neglectful mothers” for leaving their child/ren for school or work, as well as for being “lazy bums,” “welfare moms,” and “dropouts” (Kelly, 2000).

Discourses of meritocracy and individualism, paired with hegemonic social expectations of motherhood, nuance the economic position and well-being of the young mother. While she attempts to achieve specific expectations, the young mother’s shortcomings in other areas are too often the focus of the judgement she receives.

Undeserving poor The ‘problem’ of young motherhood is intensified and becomes more consequential in our neoliberal era, where independence and personal responsibility are valued and presented as accessible to all through the availability of waged work (Fraser, 1994; Lantz, 2005; Lesko, 1995). Young mothers who support themselves and their children using financial aid continue to be understood as dependent, as their work in mothering is not recognized as work that should receive a wage (Federici, 2012). Consequentially, a young mother’s assumed dependence is constructed as blameworthy, thus rendering her and her assumed irresponsible and promiscuous sexuality as the source of her own problems of discrimination, poverty, or judgement, as well as a source of her society’s economic problems, as she is deemed an unfair

drain on scarce government resources (Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Kelly, 2000; Lesko, 1995).

To summarize, young mothers are constructed as a population of undeserving poor through neoliberal knowledges which mask structural inequalities and, consequently, shift blame to the individual. According to Sharon Hays (1996) the “ideology of intensive mothering” works in parallel with contemporary neoliberalism. This ideology imparts ultimate responsibility onto the mother as it convinces a Western consciousness that ‘good’ mothers will produce ‘good’ children. The ideology of intensive mothering successfully masks structural inequalities as it “provid[es] a convenient explanation for... difficulties: *mothers* are to blame” (p. 367). The relevance of gender and the inequalities that arise from it, alongside age and other intersecting inequalities, are consistently and purposefully overlooked to maintain the dominant discourses of motherhood that are active today.

Neoliberalism cannot thrive without postfeminism, which similarly depends upon the acceptance that sexism is a problem of the past. Perhaps this is why young mothers today are seen as overly greedy and as “lazy bums” who are trying to take the “easy way out” (Kelly, 2000). With this understanding, any form of inequality or mistreatment young mothers face is seen as earned. In a society that supposedly offered this woman anything she could have wanted, the young mother continues to be seen as someone making a ‘bad choice’ and now she must face the consequences.

Young mothers on young motherhood

Learning how young mothers understand themselves as young mothers, both personally and within the hegemonic attitudes held by others surrounding them, is a necessary step to learn how, where, and why young mothers are policed. Research informed by the narratives and experiences of young mothers demonstrates that these young women are aware of the stereotypes

that inform contemporary Western consciousness (Ellis-Sloan, 2014; Gregson, 2009; Greyson et al., 2019; Kirkman et al., 2001; Luttrell, 2003; Prettyman, 2005; SmithBattle, 2006, 2007; Watson & Vogel, 2017). Discourses of young motherhood inform young mothers' understandings of themselves, as shown by Sandra Spickard Prettyman (2005): "[young mothers'] definitions of self are constructed within and around community and cultural definitions that, more often than not, define them as deviant or delinquent" (p. 156). In other words, how young mothers view themselves as mothers is heavily influenced by the norms fuelling today's idea of the 'good' mother. Today's hegemonic idea of the good mother is very much age based, where she must not be too young, as this would demonstrate that she has not achieved the necessary credentials to become a self-sufficient, independent citizen. While young mothers have not reached the normative age to become a mother, some opportunities of 'redemption' allow these women to demonstrate how they possess the capacity to become the good mothers that many people assume they will not be, and open new avenues for the policing of young mothers (Barcelos, 2014; Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014; Kelly, 2000; Prettyman, 2005).

For example, while researching at an 'alternative' high school for pregnant youth and young mothers, Prettyman (2005) learned that some of the young mothers were invited to speak at a local middle school in order to expose its student body to the dangers of sexual activity in the form of young pregnancy and motherhood. This program, called Postponing Sexual Involvement (PSI), put the young mothers alongside young 'mentors' from other high schools who were considered positive role models by their teachers, ultimately positioning the mothers as the bad examples of the embodiment of youth sexual activity gone wrong (2005). PSI was seen as an opportunity for the selected young mothers "to demonstrate their reform and their acquiescence to school and cultural norms of success" (p. 170). Despite the discomfort these

panels caused some of the mothers, their participation and discussions of “individual transformation” were seen as necessary: “[w]ithout it, the school and society would not believe they were worthy of what little support they did get, and would not only continue to portray them, but treat them, in a negative way” (p. 171). Thus, young mothers are encouraged to participate in activities that allow them to reinforce hegemonic norms surrounding young motherhood. This research demonstrates how young mothers are policed by others as well as themselves, as they must carry themselves in particular ways in order to position themselves in a more favourable manner to those members of society who can adjust the support (or lack thereof) these women receive, whether these behaviours are genuine or not.

Understanding how young mothers view themselves is a crucial step to improve the social, economic, and political spaces these women occupy. While literature on the youth period and young motherhood shows that these two stages in one’s life are temporary – that is, youth and motherhood are states of womanhood that women are expected to move out of – the dominant discourses that shape perceptions and understandings of young mothers can have a large influence on their futures (Greyson et al., 2019; Lesko, 2001; Prettyman, 2005; SmithBattle, 2006, 2007). It is not surprising that only 50% of young mothers graduate from high school when the dominant assumption about this group is that they hold no motivation, will inevitably drop out of high school, and will “go nowhere” (Prettyman, 2005; Watson & Vogel, 2017).

Other studies informed by young mothers demonstrate that the family, friends, and strangers surrounding the participants apply their age-based assumptions to these young mothers. One participant from Kirkman et al.’s (2001) research described an event that took place on a train, where a stranger approached her and her six week old baby: “she turns around and goes,

‘You won’t be able to go to parties, you won’t be able to do your schooling. You’ve ruined your life.’ And I said, ‘Well, I never really went to parties anyway, and my life has just started’” (p. 283). Research exhibits young mothers’ frustration with stereotypes and discourses surrounding their youthfulness, and underscores how these women attempt to navigate others’ harmful assumptions. Some young mothers attempt to do this by providing their children with new clothing, toys, and accessories (Gregson, 2009) and participate in consumer culture to signify ‘respectability’ (Greyson et al., 2019); some push themselves to become better students and “beat the odds against them and graduate” (Watson & Vogel, 2017, p. 7). Similarly, many young mothers reorganize their priorities in anticipation of motherhood and drop bad habits as well as negative influences (SmithBattle, 2006, 2007). Moreover, many young mothers remind themselves that the struggles they face in their parenting are not a consequence of their youth but an experience that any mother can face and learn from (Ellis-Sloan, 2014; Kirkman et al., 2001).

Importantly, the lived realities of young mothers demonstrate the significant impact positive social supports can have on these women’s lives. Schools that provide daycare allow young mothers to attend school as their children are cared for in a safe environment. However, many of these schools have strict age limits regarding which children can enroll in daycare and have been found to lack a rigorous curriculum (SmithBattle, 2006; Watson & Vogel, 2017).

Moving forward

After reviewing research on young mothers’ age, gender, and sexuality within today’s neoliberal- and postfeminist-informed public consciousness, I can begin to understand how these women may experience forms of policing in their lived realities. Analyzing existing research demonstrating how a young mother’s age and gender shape social perceptions of her as a student, young woman, and mother has allowed me to notice where forms of policing take place and

understand who may be executing those forms of power. Reviewing the existing literature on young mothers has allowed me to reach certain conclusions as to why these forms of power occur, whether they are resulting from sexism, expectations of individualism and meritocracy, and/or misguided beliefs linked to today's postfeminist ethos. I plan on using my research to address how the problematization of young motherhood had resulted in young mothers' possible governance, surveillance, and control, which is a direction that has been left out of the literature today. Understanding how young mothers experience forms of policing, if at all, will enable me to learn where and why these forms of policing take place. These knowledges can unveil which hegemonic discourses and social norms are limiting and weakening the social support of young mothers, and can serve as a guide for future research and support programs directed towards this population. Addressing possible forms of policing exercised on this specific population in society will reveal inequalities persisting today in a nuanced fashion, opening up the possibility for necessary and creative discussion as to how these barriers and systems can be addressed and radically altered.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Research paradigm and praxis

As my friend and I were studying for our first major exam in our introductory sociology course, she asked me to clarify the difference between quantitative research and qualitative research. My answer elaborated something like this: quantitative research typically involves numbers and things that you can count, whereas qualitative research usually involves words and the things that you cannot count but must instead describe. For example, I can count how many people I see wearing red jackets as I walk to the gym, but I cannot count the colour red itself; this is something that requires description.

Moreover, the various descriptions of the colour red offer this colour different ways of being known. I could simply say that the colour red is one of the three primary colours and, when mixed with yellow, creates the colour orange. However, qualitative research moves beyond description alone and strives for *meaning* (Hesse-Biber, 2017). I could nuance this description, building on other peoples' understandings of the colour red and make it known in an entirely different way: red is a colour, yes, but it is also blood and wine, and it represents emotions of passion, rage, and love. In short, qualitative research works to reveal "[t]he social meaning people attribute to their experiences, circumstances, and situations, as well as the meanings people embed into texts, images, and other objects" (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 4).

As qualitative research focuses on individuals' lived realities and subjective meanings, much more is at stake than differing representations of the colour red. Qualitative researchers are producing knowledge based on other individuals' experiences, narratives, and understandings through their own framing of the research by asking particular questions and in how they interpret the resulting data; therefore, qualitative research is co-created (Hesse-Biber, 2017).

Thus, researchers are responsible for utilizing a suitable methodology in order to appropriately answer their research question while simultaneously presenting their participants' data in a respectful and informed manner. This is precisely why this research is a qualitative, poststructural feminist project.

Feminist researchers have worked to disarm the “‘dangers’ of the illusion of equality in research relationships... as well as larger epistemological issues involved in attempting to ‘know’ others” (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006, p. 39) by underscoring the necessity of reflexivity in research. Reflexivity involves the researcher’s continual awareness of their social position and resulting personal attitudes and values in order to acknowledge and attempt to address the ways in which their subjectivity may be influencing their data throughout all stages of the research process (DeVault & Gross, 2012; Doucet & Mauthner, 2006; Hesse-Biber, 2017). DeVault and Gross (2012) capture the purpose and act of reflexivity: “[i]f we wish to create knowledge that challenges rather than supports ruling regimes, we must constantly be attentive to histories, experiences, and perspectives that are unnoticed, unfamiliar, or too easily neglected or misrepresented” (p. 217). Thus, the practice of reflexivity aligns with my poststructural feminist perspective as it allows me to notice the ways in which knowledges are constructed, where they are situated in a specific place and time, and how they are developed with particular purposes and goals (Gannon & Davies, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2017). This perspective does not essentialize particular knowledges, consider any form of knowledge objective, nor frame any particular fact as “truth,” but works to “mak[e] strange that which we take for granted” (Gannon & Davies, 2012, p. 81).

Using a poststructural feminist lens, I can approach my research knowing that there are going to be tensions and complexities throughout the construction of my thesis. The fluidity and

“ongoing formation” (Gannon & Davies, 2012) of people – from myself as the researcher, to the participants informing this study, to my supervisory committee reviewing this work – will shift and shape how I understand young mothers, creating a perception that is not fixed, confirmed, or conclusive. Furthermore, there is value in applying this perspective when working with a sample of young mothers, as it does not urge a simplistic and static understanding of these women. Instead, poststructural feminism enables me to understand why each problematic discourse of young motherhood exists at a particular point in time, and recognize how these limited understandings of young mothers are often contradictory and uniquely applied to some mothers and not others. My poststructural feminist perspective acknowledges that young mothers are complicated, fragmented subjects facing particular obstacles, privileges, modes of navigation, and social influences that cannot be assigned a set of stable understandings. Through this deconstructive, social justice-oriented perspective, I can begin to recognize how organized discourses are produced, maintained as “truth” and materialized, and consequentially reveal, question, and work to change those harmful and regulatory discourses (Gannon & Davies, 2012). Moreover, my poststructural feminist research works to recognize the inevitable existence of power relations, which will be examined further below, and continuously acknowledge the act of knowledge making through academic research using reflexivity and “a heightened attention to the structures and organization of language, talk, and discourse” (DeVault & Gross, 2012, p. 184).

Recruitment of participants and research procedures

My thesis is informed by community-based research data collected for Young Parents Support Program (YPSP)¹, a local organization that provides schooling and childcare for young

¹ Young Parents Support Program, Family Mentor, and all other names used for organizations, locations, and associated people are pseudonyms.

parents. This research study evaluated YPSP's new mentorship program created in collaboration with Family Mentor, a non-profit organization offering mentoring opportunities, which aims to address the levels of isolation many young parents experience across the summer. As YPSP is closed across the summer, volunteers from Family Mentor, who were older women and raising their own children, were matched with a group of young mothers from YPSP in late February of 2018 in order to establish a bond that would last over the months of July and August, with the hope that these mentor relationships would carry on beyond the summer.

Since December 2017, I have worked as a research assistant alongside Brock's Child and Youth Studies faculty members, Drs. Rebecca Raby and Christine Tardif-Williams, my thesis supervisor and a member of my thesis committee, to assess the impact of this mentorship program. To do this, as well as address my own research questions, Rebecca, Christine, and I conducted semi-structured, one-on-one, qualitative interviews with members of YPSP who were enrolled in this pilot program. Recruitment took place through YPSP, where we forwarded our letter of invitation to the program's teacher and scheduled a date for the first round of interviewing. These interviews were conducted at the program's location and during program hours to ensure that participants' children were cared for during their interviews. Upon our first arrival to YPSP in February 2018, we stood in front of the class to introduce ourselves and the research project, and to circulate the letter of invitation once more before beginning the morning of interviews.

Most participants were interviewed at three separate time points across 2018: once in February before the mentorship program began, again in June before the school term was complete, and finally at the end of summer in September. In February, we had a total of 11 participants. By June, two students had already graduated from the YPSP program. Fortunately,

we only lost one participant due to graduating, however, as one of the graduated students agreed to meet up for another interview, leaving us with 10 second-round interviews. With the same influence of graduation, we were left with eight participants at the time of our final set of interviews in September. Across our participants, all were female student parents, ranging in age from 18 to 24 years. Nine participants were white, and two indicated their Indigenous backgrounds in interviews. Most participants were in heterosexual relationships throughout or in part of the duration of our data collection, with the exception of two participants, where one briefly opened her relationship with her boyfriend and started dating another woman, and another started dating and moved in with her girlfriend (see Table 1).

Table 1: Generalized Participant Chart

Race	Two Indigenous participants; nine white participants
Class	One middle-class participant; ten working-class participants
Relationship status	One was in a relationship with a girlfriend; three were in relationships with boyfriends but became single over the course of the research; seven were in relationships with boyfriends (of these, two were engaged and one briefly opened her relationship and also dated a woman)
Identified mental health struggles	Mental health challenges faced by certain participants included: anxiety; social anxiety; bipolar disorder; borderline personality disorder; bulimia; depression; postpartum depression; obsessive compulsive disorder; posttraumatic stress disorder

Across all three interviews, we used the same set of interview questions (Appendix B) to ensure consistency in collecting the data, with several additional questions added to the second and third interviews in order to ask about the mentorship program. The same interviewer spoke with the same participants across February, June, and September, and the interviews ranged from as short at 17 minutes to as long as one hour and 38 minutes. The length of each participant's

interviews gradually increased as they became more comfortable and familiar with the interviewer and the interview process, and with the inclusion of more interview questions. The interview questions were designed to gain insight into the participants' personal lives, including questions regarding relationships, parenting, well-being, and involvement in healthy and unhealthy activities. Several of the open-ended questions directly addressed participants' ideas about 'good' motherhood and whether they felt praised or judged in terms of how they were mothering, enabling me to understand how and where these mothers may have experienced forms of policing. The mentorship questions added in the second and third set of interviews allowed us to develop an understanding of how the participants were feeling about the program, and whether their participation in this program was associated with changes in how they felt on a wide range of measures including relationships, work, feelings of support, personal well-being, and their sense of themselves as parents. The survey included both open-ended questions and questions that used a rating scale of one to 10. While this research engaged with a qualitative research design, using rating scale questions enabled us to collect quantitative data regarding the mentorship participants' well-being, allowing us to examine how the influence of the mentor relationship may correlate with changing numbers regarding feelings of loneliness, connectedness, self-compassion, and so forth (see Appendix B). This quantitative analysis was required for the research project's final report and demonstrates how numerical, quantitative data is often understood as more legitimate and valued in program evaluations.

With the participants' consent, we audio-recorded each interview. We took independent field notes immediately after each set of interviews, which provided context and depth for future analysis. I transcribed all 26 interviews verbatim which, despite its timely process (of over 15 hours of dialogue to convert to text), proved to be useful as I became extremely familiar with the

participants and their responses.

Reflection and reflexivity: feminist interviewing and ethics

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were the most suitable method of data collection both for the community research project and for my own thesis research, including my theoretical perspective. Before reflecting on how this form of interviewing aligned with my poststructural feminist perspective, it is valuable to recognize which aspects of the project's data collection method did not fit with this framework: the use of rating scales and the use of fixed questions.

First, the use of rating scales assumes that complex answers can be captured through a single number – an assumption associated with positivism, a philosophy which presumes that objective truths are possible and obtainable (“Understanding the sociological imagination,” 2018). Using numbers as the most honest, objective, and unbiased form of data collection, positivism's tenets radically deviate from those of poststructural feminism. Second, the use of fixed questions across all three interviews similarly implies that a desired objectivity is possible through consistency, where fixed questions can produce responses that can be measured against one another, as if these differences can offer a meaningful conclusion without the consideration of the respondent's context, positionality, and life circumstances. The conflict of using such quantitative methods in a largely qualitative project surfaced when we had to produce our final report for YPSP and Family Mentor, as their request for numerical measurements on this document seemed misleading without contextual information to explain participants' fluctuating numbers. While these forms of data collection do not align with my theoretical perspective, they were used to efficiently collect and compare personal attitudes and possible changes resulting from the mentor relationship.

In contrast to these positivist, quantitative methods, feminists have used open-ended interviewing to “br[ing] forward a wealth of previously untold stories – those of marginalized peoples, and also those that the more privileged may have kept hidden, awaiting a receptive audience” (DeVault & Gross, 2012, p. 173). Informed by a poststructural feminist perspective, this method holds that perspectives are always situated, and objectivity is both unwanted and impossible (Gannon & Davies, 2012). Moreover, poststructural feminist interviewers are aware of the “complex and unstable” (Gannon & Davies, 2012, p. 73) power relations that are ever-present and maintained through discourse, understanding and acknowledging how these shifting relations of power influence every part of the interview, from the questions being asked, to the ways in which an interviewee’s transcript is analyzed. With this in mind, it is crucial that I am “reflexive and transparent” (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006) about my experiences as an interviewer. To reflect on my interviewing experiences, I will draw on two cogent pieces that consider the authors’ own participation as interviewers: Ann Oakley’s (1981) influential article discussing her experience interviewing women outside of “proper” interviewing strategies, and Lenore Manderson, Elizabeth Bennett, and Sari Andajani-Sutjahjo’s (2006) research which examines how an interviewer’s age, class, and gender “influence the direction, flow, and contents of interviews, informing how [they] might interpret the information collected in the process” (p. 1317).

Out of the 11 young mothers interviewed, I formally interviewed five of them. Of these five participants, I interviewed three participants in each of the three scheduled interviewing periods across February, June, and September, and two participants twice (in February and June), as they had graduated and left the program by the time of our final interview in September. The interviews ranged in length, and this range was often determined by the participant and her level

of comfort, both in relation to how comfortable she was with the interview process and me as the interviewer. For instance, my first impression of Amber, who was my last interviewee on a cold, February morning of interviews, was that she was shy and a bit awkward: not only did she choose my name as her pseudonym (without realizing, which was obvious based on the shock she displayed as I reminded her that my name was also Amber), her first interview was my shortest interview (just over 17 minutes). However, Amber, just like my other four interviewees, seemed to warm up to me and the interview process by our second and final round of interviews, reminding me that it takes time to develop relationships and to familiarize people with the interviewing process. Their answers during later interviews were more personal, in-depth, and detailed, resulting in longer interviews, with my longest finishing at one hour and 38 minutes in length.

While reflecting on her repeated interviewing with the same sample of pregnant women and new mothers for “some 12 months,” Oakley (1981) observes how “repeated interviewing is not much discussed in the methodological literature: the paradigm is of an interview as a ‘one-off’ affair” (p. 44). She realized that the distanced and often hierarchical interview relationship commonly established in one-time interviews would not allow her to build the rapport necessary to connect and learn from her participants, so, using multiple interviews, she worked to create a non-hierarchical interviewer/interviewee relationship characterized by transparency and intimacy. I feel very fortunate to have had my first experience with interviewing in a situation where I had the opportunity to speak with the same women on three separate occasions. Repeated interviews enabled both the interviewees and I to warm up to each other and the interview process, to remember each others’ names and some details about each other (although I held a lot more knowledge about them than they did about me, an imbalance that I will examine

further below), and consequentially open up more easily, creating a flow that felt more natural rather than structured.

Rapport, as defined by Oakley, is “the acceptance by the interviewee of the interviewer’s research goals and the interviewee’s active search to help the interviewer in providing the relevant information” (p. 35). To begin our first morning of interviews in February, the Brock research team and I introduced ourselves in front of the YPSP classroom in order to introduce the research project and initiate a rapport with the students – our potential research sample. While Rebecca and Christine indicated their shared status as mothers, I lacked this personal connection, and hoped instead to connect based on my youthfulness. While considering how age influenced the relationship between their research’s interviewers and interviewees, Manderson, Bennett, and Andajani-Sutjahjo (2006) describe how their research team’s older interviewers “often drew on life experiences” (p. 1321) compared to their team’s younger interviewers, which created an easy flow across the older interviewers’ interviews through a strengthened common background with their participants. In light of this observation, I am left wondering how my age may have influenced my participants’ responses. Arriving with a team of two other researchers, both mothers and professionals within their fields, I wonder if our sample of young mothers connected better with and held more respect towards my co-researchers. However, my youthfulness and associated knowledges may have served as advantageous, as the young mothers may have deemed me more equal, perhaps holding more understanding towards their social worlds as youth today. This solidarity was demonstrated as one young mother expressed that she wished she was interviewed by me rather than one of the other interviewers after I enthusiastically reminded her of the name of a song from the late 2000’s that she was describing to the research team after her interview. This desire was not based on my quality as an

interviewer, my expertise or experience, or status as a professional, but, most likely, my age, assumed relatability, and coincidental knowledge of popular culture.

Moreover, while my age may have created a sense of comfort and trust for participants, this otherwise “friendly” relationship may problematically mask the power relations existing between the participants and me (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006; Oakley, 1981). While the interviewer and interviewee both hold an essential role in the interview process, where the interviewer selects the questions that are asked, indicates encouragement, and sets the overall tone of the interview, and the interviewee informs of the project, potentially enhancing or sabotaging the data collected about them, “[t]he final shift of power between the researcher and the respondent is balanced in favor of the researcher, for it is she who eventually walks away” (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006, p. 40). Although the three separate interviews took place across seven months, at the end of the final interview, some of the young mothers I interviewed expressed how it felt “weird” that we would not be seeing each other in this setting (and, most likely, outside of it) again. These unexpected emotions, which were felt both on my part and noticed through some off-the-record comments made by my interviewees, indicate how “problematic and ultimately unhelpful” the “conventional interviewing recipe” is (Oakley, 1981). Oakley (1981) states that “the paradigm of the ‘proper’ interview appeals to such values as objectivity, detachment, hierarchy and ‘science’ as an important cultural activity which takes priority over people’s more individualised concerns” (p. 38). Feminist qualitative interviewing, in contrast, attempts to dismantle the barriers established through hierarchical interview relationships. By doing so, feminist interviewing can create a sense of vulnerability, honesty, and transparency across both the interviewee and the interviewer. Now, while I have indeed “walked away,” I do not intend to use the narratives from my sample of young mothers to simply

complete a thesis paper, or earn a master's degree alone; I aim to use this paper to underscore the shortcomings of our neoliberal and postfeminist society while demonstrating the strength and resilience of young mothers working to support their children and themselves today. Talking with some of the young mothers in our sample and reading their transcripts has allowed me to learn about their perseverance, love, and insecurities, and recognize how these complexities are too often masked through the discourses of young motherhood that are active today. As a consequence of these discourses, young mothers – young mothers like the ones that I have had the opportunity to meet and get to know – face discrimination through housing and job opportunities, experience stigma and mental health struggles, and navigate negative emotions of embarrassment, insecurity, and shame. Through the final report for YPSP and Family Mentor, we highlighted the benefits of the mentorship program and the problematic knowledges it may covertly reproduce through stereotypical ideas of young mothers in its mentor training, and I believe that we successfully promoted its more critically-informed future success. Through this thesis, I aim to have a similar impact, where I hope to raise awareness about the inequalities young mothers face that are routinely invisibilized despite an otherwise societal hyper-focus on this population of young women.

Data analysis

I used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze my interview data. The aim of CDA is to systemically examine “opaque” relationships between power/knowledge, ideology, and discourse that are produced and shaped within particular social structures to reveal where inequalities are maintained (Fairclough, 1993; McGregor, 2003). By focusing on discursive conditions and consequences, this method of analysis aims to reveal how dominant, or “elite” (McGregor, 2003), institutions reproduce relations of dominance and power, and unmask how

inequalities “are expressed, represented, legitimated, or reproduced in text and talk” (van Dijk, 1995, p. 24). Moreover, CDA’s focus on context illuminates how wider social, historical, political, and economic realities enable the maintenance of imbalanced hegemonic forms of domination that are active yet unnoticed through their “non-transparency” (Fairclough, 1993; McGregor, 2003; van Dijk, 1995).

Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006) highlight how it is important for qualitative researchers “to be clear about what they are doing and why, and to include the often-omitted ‘how’ they did their analysis in their reports” (p. 79). In order to include ‘how’ I carried out my data analysis, I will describe how my method of analysis shifted from a thematic analysis to a CDA. Before this, it is important to underscore how no method of data analysis is discussed uniformly across researchers, consequently creating a lack of boundaries and clarity when choosing and using a certain form of analysis. While Braun and Clarke say that “there is no clear agreement about what thematic analysis is and how you go about doing it” (p. 79), Teun van Dijk (1995) similarly states: “it is not easy to precisely delimit the special principles, practices, aims, theories or methods of CDA” (p. 17). With this, I highlight some of the complications that can arise when trying to define and apply a single form of data analysis to one’s research.

While I used CDA to analyze the participants’ answers pertaining to my research focus, Rebecca, Christine, and I initially undertook an open coding process, creating and applying 64 codes that helped us to identify themes outlined within each individual interview and across the set of interviews. This method of data analysis aligns with the Braun and Clarke’s understanding of thematic analysis, which “minimally organizes and describes [one’s] data set in (rich) detail” (p. 79). Through thematic analysis, we created codes that directly applied to YPSP and the mentorship program, while some applied to the themes of my research (e.g., good mothering,

stigma, positive/negative re: parenting, judged/praised for parenting, and judging other mothers). These are the codes I honed in on and applied CDA to. Informed by literature on young mothers, young women, motherhood, and discourses of neoliberalism and postfeminism, I thoroughly analyzed my data. Language is socially shaped and socially shaping (Fairclough, 1993) and CDA can be used to understand language's multifunctionality and communicate the productive qualities of discourse. CDA encouraged me to recognize instances of discourse reproduction and resistance through the text of the interview transcripts, the contexts in which these relations of power took place, and the subjects that adopted and/or challenged forms of discourse. This method of analysis aligned with my poststructural feminist perspective as it worked to disclose how particular power relations and forms of inequality are produced and maintained through specific knowledges and discourses. CDA strengthened my activist-based research by urging me "to understand the intricate network of discourses, the sites where they are articulated and the institutionally legitimized forms of knowledge to which they look for their justification" (Weedon, 1987, p. 126).

The application of CDA allowed me to recognize how no active discourse exists in isolation; rather, specific social and cultural forces produce particular mobilities, subjectivities, and possibilities through the prioritization of certain knowledges over other "dismissed" knowledges (McGregor, 2003). Through these discursive conditions, particular understandings – understandings of the self, one's society, and one's potentials and possibilities, for example – are produced, constrained, and disregarded. CDA reminds the researcher that discourse is indeed productive and, consequentially, "[o]ur words are never neutral" (Fiske, 1994, as cited in McGregor, 2003).

CDA worked as the most effective mode of data analysis as it focuses "on (group)

relations of *power, dominance* and *inequality* and the ways these are *reproduced* or *resisted* by social group members through text and talk” (van Dijk, 1995, p. 18). My research aims to reveal the discourses that discipline young mothers and requires a critical examination of the power relations active in the lives of these women, as well as their environments, which may influence these relations. CDA can achieve this as it works to uncover “the sometimes subtle strategies of... discursive dominance” (van Dijk, 1995, p. 21) that are considered legitimate or illegitimate, morally or politically, at a particular time and place, and towards a particular subject. Moreover, this form of data analysis invites me to consider the productive qualities of discourse and understand how certain discourses make certain realities and subjectivities possible. Discourse functions to normalize and instill specific knowledges, thus it also creates subjectivities, including ones that arise through resistance to dominant discourses. The boundless presence of discourse allows the shifting of subjectivities within different locations and as part of diverse power relations; this will be valuable to notice as I examine which subjectivities and consequential possibilities are available to some young mothers, and what conditions have made those subjectivities attainable. Yet, CDA also encourages the researcher to embrace the multiplicity of tension and contradiction, which enables the simultaneous circulation of conflicting discourses (Fairclough, 1993). For example, the young mothers’ understandings of ‘good’ motherhood were informed by various discourses: some that aligned with hegemonic ideals of intensive mothering and some that resisted discourses that frame young motherhood as bad motherhood (discussed further in the following chapter). Once again, CDA proves itself as the most useful form of data analysis for my research as I aim to understand how, where, and why young mothers potentially shift through different and paradoxical discourses of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ young motherhood.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter, which discusses my analysis of the young mothers' interview data, is divided into four sections. First, I will introduce the young mothers' contexts and highlight the areas in which they experience support and, conversely, where they lack it. I will link a lack of support and resources to the hegemonic discourses of youth and motherhood discussed in the literature review. Through these connections, I will illustrate how discourses of youth and motherhood inform both the programs that do not offer resources as well as those programs that do provide support, consequently deciding and defining what 'supports' young mothers need. Second, I introduce the two qualities that emerged across the participants' answers in response to what they believed made someone a 'good' mother: 'being there' and 'taking care of herself too.' 'Being there' and 'taking care of herself too' both align with and reproduce hegemonic discourses, such as the ideology of intensive mothering and individualistic neoliberal values, and these problematic discourses will be analyzed. Following this analysis, I will examine how 'being there' and 'taking care of herself too' also work as sites of resistance to these discourses, frequently allowing the young mothers to succeed and understand themselves as good mothers. Third, I will analyze the young mothers' experiences of judgement and praise for their parenting. I will demonstrate how these instances of judgement and praise are rooted in the discourses mentioned above and examine how the young mothers engaged with or resisted negative judgement. In my fourth and final section, I will consider how the participants resisted the redemption narrative expected from young mothers, where they understood parenting as a rewarding experience rather than a life-devastating mistake. These four sections, focusing on the young mothers' contexts, understandings of 'good' motherhood, experiences of judgement and praise, and resistant narratives, will allow me to address my three research questions: 1) how, if

at all, do young mothers experience forms of policing; 2) where do these forms of policing take place when they do; and 3) why do these forms of policing take place when they do? This analysis will provide overlapping answers and demonstrate the intricacies involved in studying a diverse and marginalized population within their discursive contexts.

Context

This first section will provide some context to the participants' lives regarding their experiences of support and struggle. First, I will outline how discourses relating to youth, mothering, and young mothers influence the lack of supports my sample of young mothers experienced. I argue that these negative discourses reproduce and maintain problematic knowledges about young mothers which consequently limit the availability of the supports they need. These discourses similarly inform the institutions that do provide support, shaping the forms of support young mothers are offered and encouraged to take part in, which also works to define what needs young mothers have (Kelly, 2000; Lesko, 1995). Following this, I will list the beneficial supports the participants did and did not have access to.

Discourses shaping resources

The way in which young mothers are hegemonically represented and understood influences both the accessibility of the resources directed towards them and the aims of these resources. Chris A. Barcelos and Aline C. Gubrium (2014) argue that, "because pregnant and parenting young women are the subjects of numerous policy interventions, it is important to consider how their lives are shaped by the larger social and cultural narratives with which they must contend" (p. 467). With today's neoliberalism, for example, young mothers are recognized as irresponsible for assumedly getting pregnant by accident through a lack of contraceptive use (Kelly, 2000). As discussed throughout the chapters above, the influence of hegemonic middle-

class norms promotes the assumption that no young woman would want to become a mother when there are various educational and careers paths available and easily accessible, especially to young women under the sway of postfeminism (Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Kelly, 1998; Pomerantz et al., 2013; SmithBattle, 2006, 2007). Neoliberal ideals of individual responsibility and control further construct young mothers as unruly and irresponsible, representing these women as “a failure of rational public health and a threat to the neoliberal state, the normative family, and the discipline of public health” (Barcelos, 2014, p. 483). A focus on their deviant youthfulness as mothers similarly informs how young mothers are recognized when establishing the ‘supports’ necessary for their chances of future success. Kelly (2000) highlights the significance of these age-based discourses:

Whether teen mothers are cast as unloved victims or as rebellious threats, by virtue of their age, they are seen as children who must be ‘helped’ by adults. Defining teen mothers as by that very fact ‘immature’ inevitably shapes the programs and policies established to address their needs; thus, supervision, monitoring, and surveillance become the resulting watchwords of such programs. (p. 35)

Influenced by these various discourses, specific forms of ‘support’ are created for young mothers. If young mothers are hegemonically understood as irresponsible, blemished, and in need of control, the ‘supports’ directed towards them will attempt to address these ‘concerns.’ These ‘concerns,’ however, are problematically focused on the individual: for instance, concerns that young mothers lack ambition because they do not have a job (discussed further in a subsection below); that they spend their money irresponsibly; and that they are unable to make the ‘right’ choices for themselves (discussed in the following sections).

While young mothers’ current and future well-being are likely to benefit from a range of supports, including educational and child care supports, flexibility within their work schedules as

well as a living wage, and emotional supports, the limited existing supports “tend to downplay the complex realities of teen mothers’ lives, limit their educational options, and create barriers” (SmithBattle, 2006, p. 132). The influence of contemporary neoliberalism encourages and expects young mothers to become self-reliant with little to no acknowledgement of structural constraints, such as sexism and the stigma against young motherhood (Lesko, 1995). An effect of these problematic discourses is an absence of sufficient supports necessary for young mothers’ well-being. Three supports that were deemed as necessary but not easily available or inaccessible through my data analysis will be discussed below.

How to better support young mothers

Three patterns emerged in my analysis of the participants’ transcripts: a need for mental health support; a need for support in overcoming housing barriers; and a need for childcare. While my analysis of these necessary forms of support understood them as largely inaccessible, it is pivotal to recognize that these needs may only be relevant to some of the participants’ current circumstances. For example, young mothers who are students at the YPSP program have access to childcare, but this childcare is no longer available to those students who have graduated and are pursuing further education and/or careers, so the need for this support may shift across the young mothers’ lives. Some of the young mothers also found an adequate amount of emotional support through large and supportive families and friend groups, making their need for mental health support less crucial than some of the other participants.

Need for mental health support A need for mental health support was identified as many of the young mothers discussed their struggles with mental health. Lee SmithBattle and Patricia Freed (2016) highlight how young women’s transition to motherhood may worsen pre-existing adversities due to “the stress of parenting, economic hardships, intimate partner

violence, and the stigma of early childbearing (Lindhorst & Oxford, 2008; SmithBattle, 2013). Challenges like these predispose mothers to depression (Lindhorst & Oxford) and symptoms of posttraumatic stress” (p. 32). This suggests that the mental health struggles young mothers experience may be a consequence of the hegemonic discourses surrounding young motherhood. This finding underscores the need to reveal the harms that materialize with the existence and circulation of adverse discourses surrounding young motherhood. The mental health struggles identified among the participants included depression and postpartum depression, anxiety and social anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, borderline personality disorder, bipolar disorder, and bulimia. Young mothers may experience a heightened vulnerability to these mental health struggles due to adversities and social disadvantages that preceded their pregnancies and, as mentioned, as a consequence of new adversities and disadvantages introduced with motherhood, especially as a young woman (SmithBattle & Freed, 2016).

While explaining the organization and climate of the YPSP classroom in her first interview, Raven, a 22-year-old student and mother of her three-year-old daughter, Lucy, mentioned how there was tension between her classmates due to “lines that are crossed sometimes” which she related to the prevalence of mental health struggles across the classroom: “[I]ike, we’ve all pretty much been through things and we all pretty much have depression and stuff, so some people don’t think before they speak and they kind of hit people’s triggers. [...] I feel like lines are crossed in that sense, but the teachers fix it pretty quickly.” The support provided by YPSP and their faculty will be discussed further below.

Before asking the young mothers about the supports they draw on in addition to YPSP (see Appendix B), we asked: “what kind of struggles do you face?” The participants’ answers

emphasized how they understood their mental health struggles as one of their primary struggles in their day-to-day experiences:

Kikyo: Yeah. And I deal with anxiety and depression too. [...] I have been since my dad passed when I was thirteen. So, quite a few years I've been dealing with it. (first interview)

Raven: Just my mental health and dealing with that every day because I think it's a little much. (first interview)

Monica: I mean, outside of what's already mentioned, I guess just it's just mainly, like, the depression or whatever. (second interview)

Selena: [M]y mental illness [...] cuz my mental illness affects everything else in my life. Like, the struggles that I have (pauses) is because I'm mentally ill. (third interview)

Other questions used to learn about the participants' well-being similarly demonstrated their mental health's negative influence in their lives. In my first interview with April, a 20-year-old mother of two daughters and a step-son, aged three, four, and five, I asked her if she was loving towards herself when feeling emotional pain. She responded:

No. [...] My kids see me cry sometimes and generally [...] I'm just like, 'okay, I have to stop now.' Like. (laughs) Then I'll be emotional later. [I: Emotional later? Like, they're in bed?] Yeah. Then I'll have a mental breakdown when they go to bed and then I'll be okay again. By mental breakdown, I mostly just mean, like, hyperventilating and chain smoking and crying. Then I'm like, 'okay. Get your shit together. You're done.'
(laughs) Yeah. [...] It works (pauses) -ish. (laughs)

Following a question asking how she felt about herself as a student in her first interview, 22-year-old Monica, mother of her three-year-old son, Danny, disclosed how her mental health struggles led her to dropping out of school: "I don't know. I dropped out, like, eight years ago. I had a lot of anxiety and depression. I'd walk into a class and burst out into tears. So I quit

trying.” The participants’ mental health struggles resulted in feelings of guilt, frustration, and isolation, and sometimes led to unhealthy behaviours, such as overeating unhealthy foods or not eating at all, chain smoking cigarettes, and self-harm.

After mentioning their mental health struggles, some participants explained how they attempted to counter its hindrance through efforts at self-care.

Jade: I have anxiety too, right? So I know that as soon as my anxiety goes off, I’ll just be, like, very down and depressed and whatever. So--and mostly end up crying,² that’s what it leads to (laughs) [...] as soon as I start feeling like something might spark, I jump in the bath and grab my book or whatever. Or, like, I’ll go for a walk or take the kids to the park. (third interview)

Selena: I try to go to the gym at least a couple of times a week [...] I just feel like the gym is, like, really good for me [...] you know, uh, healthy body, healthy mind. Because working out is really, you know, beneficial for your mental health. (first interview)

Charlie: It’s just my mental illness. But it’s something that I try to keep on top of. [...] Um, I try and stay positive. [...] I just try and keep my life positive, and I try and keep the negative things out of it. Um, obviously the negative things are going to come up. I try to deal with them in the positive way. (first interview)

These instances of self-care were attempts to handle their mental health struggles alone or without the help or support of those around them, which may be the result of various barriers that hinder young mothers’ efforts to seek support for their mental health issues. These barriers may include cost, a lack of time, childcare, insurance, and transportation, the stigma associated with mental illness and young motherhood, and prioritized demands of parenting, school, and work (SmithBattle & Freed, 2016). Furthermore, their independent forms of self-care may stem from a “fear [of] losing custody of their children if they seek treatment” (SmithBattle & Freed, 2016, p.

² Double dashes (--) are used to indicate an abrupt change in a participant’s thoughts.

33). Moreover, Jade, Selena, and Charlie's self-care efforts (taking a bath, exercising, and staying positive) may also signify the influence of neoliberalism, as it compels these women to become responsabilized citizens through their ability to tackle their own mental health struggles alone and using their individual strength. This responsabilization has had such an influence in this sample of young mothers' lives that it was identified as a quality of 'good' motherhood (i.e., 'taking care of herself too') which will be discussed in the following section.

Monica and Selena both vocalized how counselling would be beneficial for their mental health, as prescription medication did not help them in the past, and talking to the family and friends closest to them was not an option. When talking about supports, Monica stated: "I mean, my mom, kind of. But at the same time, she doesn't want to hear about my stuff because it upsets her, so I try not to say anything." After talking about how it is hard for her to talk to her best friend about her mental health, Selena confessed how her recent fiancé is one of the only people she can talk to about this struggle:

I usually just go to my fiancé to talk to him about it. And, like, sometimes even then [...] I feel really guilty talking about how I feel. [...] I feel like they're not gonna understand. I feel like it's ridiculous for me to even say these things, you know? [...] Or, like, if it's not received the way that I think it will be, I'm like, 'oh my god, that's so stupid. Why did I say that?' (third interview)

With no one in their life to talk to about their mental health, Monica and Selena disclosed their attempts to receive counselling.

Monica: I've tried talking to my doctor and he's just like, 'oh, it's a chemical imbalance in your brain, we can put you back on antidepressants but we're not going to let you talk to anyone because that's not going to help you at this point.' Which is exactly what I want because I know I feel better when I talk to people. (first interview)

Selena, a 22-year-old student and mother of her two-year-old daughter, Agatha, explained how she used to receive counselling, but had to stop due to its distance from her home and financial constraints. Following this discussion, she noted that she was interested in attending group therapy, but its hours conflicted with her schooling, making this form of counselling just as inaccessible because of her need for childcare.

With Selena and Monica's reports on the benefits of counselling, there is much research that supports their claims. In their research on teen mothers' mental health, SmithBattle and Freed (2016) indicate that "a therapeutic presence conveys to the teen that she is worthy of care and respect, that her concerns and experiences are taken seriously, and that even the most disturbing events are approachable" (p. 34). With this, the benefits of counselling may positively influence young mothers' well-being as well as their self-esteem, an issue that many of the young mothers also struggled with. Furthermore, group therapy approaches to counselling may further benefit young mothers through their ability to promote peer support and reduce social isolation (2016). While a lack of mental health support was not mentioned by every participant, the very fact that many of them described YPSP as their primary – and, for some, their only – source of praise and support demonstrates that these young mothers were lacking a support that many of them would have benefitted from.

With restricted access to mental health supports such as counselling, and a lack of friends and family who would understand their mental health struggles, the YPSP program and faculty offered the young mothers a safe space of comfort and support. When asked who she draws on for social support, Katia stated: "Sheryl [the primary teacher at YPSP]. I talk to her. [...] She's kind of almost like a counsellor." When Raven was asked how she manages her mental health, she said: "the classroom really helps. It's just, like, a safe space [...] it makes me feel

comfortable, so I don't get anxiety attacks." In both her second and third interviews, Amber listed the YPSP program as her primary source of praise for her parenting. When asked, "do you ever feel judged positively for your parenting?" Amber responded: "sometimes. (pauses) Here really helps cuz they always--they're just very nice." Several of the young mothers' interviews indicated that YPSP was either their primary or only source of emotional support. Whether this support was offered by their teachers or their classmates, many experiences of support and praise identified by the young mothers was found within the YPSP program. This finding denotes how, through a lack of available supports, the young mothers' primary option or only opportunity for mental health support was through YPSP and its faculty.

Need for support in overcoming housing barriers The young mothers also struggled with institutional barriers, specifically those relating to housing. Whether this was inspired by a need to escape toxic family members and crowded conditions, or to gain independence, many of the young mothers who lived with family members expressed a desire to move out. Some of the young mothers said that their living situation was a primary struggle in their lives, negatively influencing their mental health and creating strain in family relationships. Although "[s]ecuring adequate housing is considered... [a] critical factor in stabilizing a family" (Lesko, 1995, p. 195) – a goal that the young mothers strived for – some of the young mothers related struggles in finding affordable housing, while some mentioned that none of their applications were accepted. For example, in her third interview, Brad mentioned how finding an apartment was her primary struggle:

Not finding an apartment, that's a struggle. That's my number one struggle. [...] I've been looking for one for three years. It's just not working out for me. [...] Yeah. Housing takes forever and there's nothing affordable out there. [...] I keep [submitting applications] and I just tell myself, 'maybe I'll get it.' You never know. [...] I usually

never get it though.

Despite her many efforts, Brad's applications were not accepted. This outcome changed for both Amber and Selena who were able to move out and into new apartments. In their final interviews in September, both Amber and Selena said that they would not have gotten their new apartments if it were not for their Family Mentor. While talking about the relationship between her and her mentor, Selena stated: "[u]m, she's actually the reason why I have an apartment. [...] She called the lady and talked to her for me. [...] She called and set it up so that I could go and fill out an application and stuff. [...] I wouldn't have an apartment if it wasn't for her." Amber shared a similar idea about the mentorship and the mentor she was paired with: "if it wasn't for her, I honestly wouldn't have the place I live in now."

Mentor support enabled two of the young mothers to achieve a necessity that many young mothers struggle to receive through their own efforts (Lesko, 1995). Young mothers' struggle to secure adequate housing is likely due to the stigma associated with young motherhood, where young mothers are understood as "welfare dependent, geographically immobile, poorly educated and with apparently limited vision", making them the "antithesis" (Arai, 2009, p. 181) of today's neoliberal agenda. While these discourses continue to limit young mothers' access to resources such as housing, specific forms of mentor support, such as the support provided by Amber and Selena's mentors, should continue into the future. Furthermore, Lesko (1995) states that "[t]he coordination of services is recommended as cost-efficient and able to meet the diverse and wide-ranging needs of young mothers for financial assistance, drug treatment, housing, [and] family trauma" (p. 192). With this, the coordination of agencies in order to create a greater availability for supports like housing would further address young mothers' need for this specific support. Moving out has the potential to offer young mothers a sense of confidence, well-being, or independence that they may lack while living with family. This is observed through Katia, who

was one of the only parents who was able to move out in the duration of our interviews without any mentor support. She boasted how she was looking forward to exercising a new independence and starting healthy routine for her and her daughter, Celeste: “I’m looking forward to being able to do that on my own for my child.”

Need for childcare Programs created to support young mothers, such as YPSP, offer much needed childcare while they are in school. SmithBattle (2006) states that “[l]ocating day care programs within schools reduces [educational] barriers and improves outcomes for mothers and their children (Williams & Sadler, 2001), but these programs are rare and many exclude very young babies or older children” (p. 132). While these programs ease the stress that comes with finding accessible childcare during their classes, in the case of YPSP, this childcare ended when the young mothers’ school day did. This left the participants in several different predicaments. For instance, Selena and Brad both said that they could not get a job because they did not have consistent childcare available:

Selena: [I: Are you working right now?] No. I go to school full-time. I don’t have child care other than when I’m here [...] I was working before I came to school. But because [...] I don’t have anybody to watch her after school or on the weekend [...] I just didn’t go back. (first interview)

Brad: I’m just with my kid all day, so I don’t really have time to work [...] I don’t have daycare and my grandma won’t watch him, so [...] I don’t really have anybody to watch him. (first interview)

While a lack of childcare made work harder to access for some of the young mothers, other participants confessed how their family’s help with childcare created new stressors. SmithBattle and Freed (2016) describe how support from the mothers of young mothers’, while a primary and reliable source of support for many young mothers, may introduce problems: “[f]or example,

support that is intrusive or laden with criticism contributes to family conflicts, and undermines the teen's mental health... [f]amily conflicts may also ensue when [the young mothers' mothers] resent childcare or financial burdens" (p. 33). Stressors created through a reliance on their mothers' support was found across Monica and Kikyo's interviews. Monica, for example, talked about how her mother's support with childcare was "hard on her [...] [because] she works overnight. Like, one to seven in the morning or whatever. So she's not really getting any sleep, but when I'm at work [...] I can't watch him, obviously." Outside of her mother's support with childcare, Monica mentioned her son's father as a secondary form of support. However, Monica described her son's father as "flakey" when it came to childcare: "[l]ike, he'll say he'll take [our son] for two nights and only end up [taking him for] one because of whatever reason." Kikyo's mother, who was a negative influence in Kikyo's life and a main source of the judgement she received, was one of the only people she could rely on to watch her daughter, Ruby. In her second interview, Kikyo stated that her mother would agree to watch Ruby if she wanted to go out, "but the moment I get home, she just started yelling at me and telling me I need to take care of my kid, that I do nothing, this and that. Yeah, I'm always with my kid. I'm always taking her out."

April often had to postpone necessary tasks that she could not do while watching her three children. In my first interview with April, she told me about how her washing machine recently broke, which resulted in an accumulation of clothes, creating "a mountain in my room. It's disgusting!" Despite wanting to do something about these clothes, April had to wait for the weekend to visit her grandmother and do her laundry there because she could not find someone to watch her children so that she could go to the laundromat. This was just one of the many tasks April told me that she had to do, but a lack of childcare was one of the obstacles that left her

feeling exhausted and stressed: “I have too much to do!”

To summarize, the obstacles that many of the young mothers experienced were the result of a lack of supports necessary for their well-being. A lack of mental health supports left some of the mothers feeling isolated, self-conscious, and anxious. This lack of support pushed many mothers to take matters into their own hands and rely solely on self-care behaviours to manage their negative emotions. Some of the young mothers lived in isolated or toxic environments with family members due to a lack of support in overcoming housing barriers. Our findings show that the support and efforts from the young mothers’ mentors provided housing opportunities that they may have not received without the influence of their mentor. As mentioned above, this finding may also work to reveal how discourses surrounding youth and young mothers influence their opportunities for accessing housing (Arai, 2009; Lesko, 1995). Finally, a need for childcare influenced some of the young mothers’ availability for work. While the young mothers had access to childcare during the school day at YPSP – a form of support that many other young mothers do not have, consequently jeopardizing their chances of completing high school – this childcare ended at the end of each school day (SmithBattle, 2006), leaving the young mothers faced with childcare challenges.

The supports and lack of supports analyzed above are largely shaped by discourses of youth, mothering, and young motherhood, which determined how young mothers could spend their time after school, how they understood their well-being, and what they considered their primary struggles. Throughout the following sections of my data analysis, I will demonstrate the impact of discourse in the everyday lives of the young mothers, shaping what the mothers consider qualities of ‘good’ motherhood as well as the forms of judgement and praise they receive.

Good mom

After asking the participants a number of questions about themselves in order to learn about their attitudes towards their academics, work, intimate relationships, and supports, and listening to their understandings of their personal well-being, we would near the end of our interviews by introducing questions about ‘being a mom.’ Many of the participants demonstrated a deeper interest in this topic than other sections, which was apparent based on their rich responses that were more pensive, introspective, and comprehensive than responses to earlier questions. After asking about their daily interactions with their children, we asked the young mothers: “what do you feel makes someone a good mom?” There were two common ways that most of the participants talked about ‘good’ motherhood: the mother ‘being there’ for her child and ‘taking care of herself too.’

‘Being there’

‘Being there’ as a quality of ‘good’ motherhood was either mentioned in passing, as if it was an obvious quality of good motherhood and did not need any further description, or in detail, where the young mothers elaborated on this quality’s importance in their children’s lives and future well-being. Amber, for example, mentioned the importance of ‘being there’ across all three of my interviews. In her first interview, when asked about what ‘good’ motherhood is, Amber stated, “[u]h, just being there for your kids.” In her second interview, she built on this quality’s description: “[b]eing there for your child, for sure. Being very supportive of them, and putting all your time into them.” With this description, we can begin to notice the intensive quality behind these two words: ‘being there,’ as the young mothers’ quotes will underscore, demands much more than the mother’s presence alone. In her final interview, Amber explained that good motherhood is “being there for your kids [...] not neglecting them, that’s a big one for

me.” When I asked Amber why this aspect of good motherhood was so salient to her, she mentioned how her father disowned her when she was a young teenager while maintaining his parental status with her younger brother. Amber stated that her father’s disowning was especially upsetting “cuz he’s not there for me but he’s there for my brother.” Taking all of Amber’s comments together, from three different points in time, we learn that ‘being there’ is about presence, support, and investing time, all of which are necessary for avoiding the pain of neglect.

When asked what she believes makes someone a ‘good’ mom, Selena also mentioned the quality of ‘being there’ across all three of her interviews. In her second interview, she similarly stated: “you know, just, like, being there. Like, being supportive and, like, interacting with them.” To Selena and Amber, a good mom is supportive and interactive, and dedicates time in her day to spend with her child. In her third interview, Selena continues:

You know, just being there. Just being there and (pauses) having that patience to--to just sit and talk to your child is *really* a big thing. Um, it’s just--it’s just being there [...] um, putting them first is a big thing. Because, like, my parents, they were always, um, caught up in their own issues, you know? And I didn’t feel like they were there enough, and I don’t want my daughter to feel like that.

Here, Selena underscores the intensity behind the quality of ‘being there.’ Not only is the good mother expected to be present, supportive, and interactive, she is also expected to put her child first.

Through her answer on what she believes makes someone a ‘good’ mom, Raven also reflected on her childhood and further develops an understanding of ‘being there,’ but adds the importance of financial support, a component which came up much less frequently in the interviews (which will be discussed further below):

Um, first and foremost, love, and then financially supporting them... [b]ecause I was

just financially supported as a kid. Like, my mom wasn't very affectionate. Never hugged me... it sucked. I had a lot of cool toys but I would've rather her come inside and say I love you. So, first and foremost, love. (second interview)

Importantly, Raven's idiom, where she wishes her mother would have "come inside," further emphasizes how her mom was not there but, rather, somewhere outside of where Raven was as a child, leaving Raven wishful for her mom's time, attention, and love. Within the quality of 'being there,' several other themes were noticed. First, 'being there' allows the mothers to understand themselves as 'good' mothers in comparison to their own parents. Second, 'being there' aligns with the ideology of intensive motherhood and these links will be examined. Third, 'being there' also works as a site of resistance to discourses that position young motherhood as 'bad' motherhood.

Parenting differently than their own parents The participants' narratives mentioned above stress how they wish to parent differently from their own parents. Using their own parents as a point of comparison allows the young mothers to recognize their own qualities of 'good' parenting. Brad similarly insisted how 'good' motherhood is different than the parenting she received as a child. As Brad talked about the instances where her grandmother criticized her for crawling on the floor as she played with her son, Brad said: "[my grandma's] like, 'you're crawling around on the floor with him!' I'm like, 'yeah, that's what moms do. My mom never did this.'" Like, this is my excuse to [...] [have] the childhood I never had." 'Being there' is a quality that thus allows the young mothers to succeed as 'good' parents who do not reproduce the parenting mistakes of their own parents.

'Being there' and intensive mothering 'Being there,' as a quality of 'good' motherhood, also aligns with and reproduces discourses of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996). Before problematizing this quality of 'good' motherhood, it is valuable to acknowledge that

‘being there’ is indeed important for the well-being of children and their mothers. While discussing the importance of play for children, Ginsburg (2007) states that “[c]hildren’s developmental trajectory is critically mediated by appropriate, affective relationships with loving and consistent caregivers” (p. 183). The consistency of a parent ‘being there’ for her child may benefit their child’s social, cognitive, and emotional well-being, as well as the bond they share (2007). Moreover, as the young mothers’ data demonstrates, ‘being there’ enables the mothers to understand themselves as ‘good’ mothers, which may provide them with a sense of confidence and purpose as a result.

The young mothers’ descriptions of ‘being there’ also demonstrate which discourses of appropriate, ideal, and ‘good’ motherhood are active today, and resonate with Hays’ (1996) focus on the ideology of intensive mothering. While Hays’ research concentrates on an ideology rather than a discourse of motherhood, she considers how the ideology of intensive mothering is not natural nor inevitable but, rather, socially constructed, much like discourse. I utilize and apply Hays’ ideology of mothering like discourse as it reveals notions of appropriate and ideal motherhood that have regulatory effects (1996). The ideology of intensive mothering “capture[s] the increasingly common belief that good mothers should first and foremost be caregivers and should invest great swaths of time, money, energy, and emotional labor in intensively raising children” (Elliott et al., 2015, p. 352). Consequently, a ‘good’ mother within this understanding of motherhood is conscientious of her child’s assumed needs and desires, and “must put her child’s needs above her own” (Hays, 1996, p. 8). Consider Selena’s response to what she believes makes someone a ‘good’ mother in her first interview:

I think just, uh, providing that love and support every day. And, um, having that patience for your child, because if you have that patience, they’ll learn to have that patience [...] what you put out to them is how they’re gonna be. So, like, you have to be positive all the

time. I mean, not all the time but, like, the majority of the time because then they'll learn to--they'll learn that behaviour and [...] negative behaviours, that's learnt [...] nobody is just born that way [...] as long as you [...] put your child first, um, then I think that's great, you know? Cuz you always have to put your child first. But yeah, like, I mean, some people are like, 'well I gotta put myself first.' But, like, you know, your child's first [...] and you have to always maintain that good and positive, you know, energy and stuff towards them.

While Selena's description of a 'good' mom centres around the quality of 'being there,' it also introduces the demanding characteristics of this ideal of 'good' motherhood. Contemporary understandings of motherhood, according to Hays, are informed by an "ideology of permissive child rearing" (p. 45). Within today's "permissive era," rigid parenting for children's behavioural training and "proper," uniform development is not just incorrect parenting, but unacceptable parenting. Instead, parents' primary goal should be to "nurtur[e] the child's inherent goodness" (p. 45). With their child's "inherent goodness" as the focus, a mother's responsibilities and tasks as a 'good' mother are intensified. The consequent "emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive" (p. 46) parenting promoted through this ideology is justified, as it is deemed necessary for "the protection and preservation of the child's natural innocence, affection, purity, and goodness" (p. 46). As children are understood to be a product of their mothers' active, informed, and careful participation in their lives, and as the "belief that there is no such thing as a bad child" (p. 7) becomes more prominent, the idea that an intensively child-devoted mother is a 'good' mother has become normalized as a necessary form of mothering.

Katia also reproduced this ideology as she described what she believes makes someone a 'good' mother: "you always have to interact with your child. You can't just let them play on their own [...] you have to sit there and teach them things. Like, sing to them, play with them. [...] I

think it's, um, just always giving them good attention and teaching them right from wrong is being a good parent.” The beliefs following the ideology of intensive mothering are reproduced as Katia illustrates how “every single action of mothering is understood to have potentially damaging consequences” (p. 7). According to Katia, a mother’s ability to effectively ‘be there’ for their children – to treat them in a non-specifically positive manner and to talk to them in general – can have major consequences in terms of their children’s well-being and mental health. Together, with the valorization of motherhood and the rise of children’s “inherent goodness,” mothers are obliged to offer their children the “best,” most intensive and consistent care as they are held responsible for their children’s future behaviours, characters, and life paths.

The problems rooted in ‘being there’ as a quality of ‘good’ motherhood – a consequence of the hegemonic ideology of intensive mothering – are evident when analyzing the Columbine and Newtown school shootings. These two school shootings, which occurred over a decade apart (1999 and 2012), were committed by white men; however, the blame assigned after these events was not exclusively aimed at these men, but also at their mothers. Research by Michael S. Melendez, Bronwen Lichtenstein, and Matthew J. Dolliver (2016) demonstrates how media coverage and public response often blamed the mothers of the shooters for their sons’ wicked characters and, ultimately, for their fatal violence. Relating to Hays (1996), Melendez et al. (2016) underscore the hegemonic belief that while “fathers are quite important for the success or failure of their children, mothers are ultimately responsible for what their children become” (p. 526). In their content analysis of 600 comments left on a video and an article discussing the Columbine and Newtown shootings, these researchers found that most blame was assigned to the mothers of the shooters, and some blame was assigned to the family in general. Importantly, none of the comments referenced the fathers or blamed the fathers for their sons’ characters and

actions (2016). Melendez et al.'s analysis of these fatal events demonstrates how contemporary understandings of 'good' motherhood assume all responsibility is the mother's alone; that is, the blame assigned to mothers overrides the potential influence of social conditions or personal circumstances. In light of this finding, we can begin to recognize how young mothers experience particular scrutiny and judgement about whether they sufficiently fulfill the ideals of intensive mothering. Through interviews with low-income, Black single mothers, Elliott et al. (2015) found that "[t]he mothers engage[d] in intensive mothering using the resources available to them but because the outcomes of their efforts [were] not recognized as forms of child cultivation (Lareau, 2003)... [they] rarely fe[lt] as though they have done enough for their children" (p. 366). This finding can be applied to the circumstances of many young mothers, including the students of YPSP, as they struggle to meet financial and other ideals to succeed as responsible, dedicated, and 'good' mothers.

Selena reflects this ideology of motherhood as she answers the question: "do you feel like a 'good' mom?":

I mean, like, I do feel like a good mom but sometimes when [my daughter], like, acts out and stuff, it makes me feel like maybe I'm not doing what I'm supposed to do [...] she's, ah, got a bit of an attitude. And I'm like, 'is that *me*? Did I do that?' [...] So I'm, like, is it--am I not being attentive enough to her? (third interview)

Monica expressed similar doubts towards her parenting in her first interview while reflecting on her daily interactions with her son: "I'm not as attentive as I should be. I don't--as bad as it sounds, I really don't enjoy spending time with my child anymore because all he does is cry about things and it's stressful to be around." It can be argued that Monica did not recognize how other circumstances in her life, such as her full schedule with schooling and work, as well as her existing mental health struggles, may have been contributing to her high levels of stress.

Focusing all responsibility onto the mother regarding her child and its future abilities, character, and life paths also masks the influence of the mother's life conditions and her everyday situations. For example, a mother informed by this ideology may link her child's assumed advanced intelligence to the nutrient-rich diet she followed while pregnant, or to the task she devoted herself to every day, where she read a book to her child every night for the first three years of their life. She will not recall her class position, where she had the finances and ability to access her healthy foods during pregnancy or collect all the books she read to her child, and where she also afforded the time to devote to reading to her child every night, rather than work, accomplish other necessary tasks, or foster her own interests outside of her child. In this sense, 'being there,' as an idealized quality of 'good' mothering, aligns with today's neoliberal ethos and relates to the second quality of 'good' motherhood identified by the participants, which will be analyzed below.

'Being there' as a site of resistance As discussed above, 'being there' requires much more from a mother than being in her child's presence alone. 'Being there' assumes an idealized form of parenting, where the mother must not only physically be with her child, but provide her attention and positive emotionality as well. While this form of 'good' mothering is demanding, typically assumed of the mother alone, and physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausting, 'being there' also allowed the young mothers to position and understand themselves as good mothers. This positioning is crucial within today's hegemonic understandings of young motherhood, where young mothers are represented as 'problem' mothers who are 'lazy' and 'neglectful,' 'immature' and 'unprepared.' Several themes existed within this quality of 'good' motherhood as a site of resistance. First, the young mothers' dedication to 'being there' for their children was prioritized over providing for their children financially. Second, the participants'

youthfulness enabled them to succeed at ‘being there’ in a more active and playful way. Third, and related to the previous themes, this quality allowed the young mothers to understanding themselves as better than other mothers who were unable to prioritize ‘being there’ for their own children.

‘Being there’ over financial support In her first interview, Raven demonstrated how ‘being there’ enables her to be a good mother to her daughter, Lucy. While answering the question about what she believes makes someone a good mother, Raven says:

Hard question, because I used to think it was to make sure that they had everything and that was it. And now I think it’s--you have to be able to love them and appreciate them. Not just because they’re your child but because [of] them as a person. I know it sounds weird. Lucy definitely has her own personality. She’s definitely her own little person and that’s why I love her. Because she’s Lucy.

Raven demonstrates how ‘being there’ allows her to recognize her daughter’s uniqueness and carefully notice her daughter’s characteristics and developments. ‘Being there’ for her daughter has enabled Raven to notice Lucy’s growing curiosity as she answers her many questions and to build “that connection we didn’t have before.” Learning from the flaws in her own mother’s parenting, where her mother was not there for her but left her with “cool toys,” Raven reflects: “I realized in the beginning, part of my issues with Lucy was [...] just how I watched my mom with me and not knowing how to have, like, a proper mother-daughter connection. And now that I--I know everything that was wrong with me and my mom, I can do it the exact opposite.” ‘Being there’ for her daughter is prioritized here, as opposed to leaving her daughter to play with “cool toys,” which allows Raven to understand herself as a good mother despite her youthfulness and financial situation.

‘Being there’ also allows the young mothers to succeed as good mothers despite hegemonic understandings of good motherhood that seemed linked to older and middle-class motherhood. In her second interview, Kikyo responds to what she believes makes somebody a good mom: “[j]ust spending as much time as you can with your kid. Like, you don’t have to spend money on your kid or anything like that, but just be with your kid.” Kikyo, like many of the other young mothers, argue that having enough money to buy your child the nicest and newest toys, gadgets, clothes, and other materialistic things is not necessarily the key to being a good mother. As noted by Raven above, this understanding of good motherhood may even lead to a mother’s absence in her child’s life. Instead, ‘good’ motherhood can be achieved by ‘being there’ for one’s child, which is not only enjoyable for the child, but for the young mother as well, for she can position herself as a good mother – one who is active and engaged in her child’s life.

It is interesting to note what qualities and aspects of parenting the young mothers did not consider when discussing ‘good’ motherhood, such as the ability to independently support their children financially, or buy the ‘right’ stuff for their children. Joanna Gregson’s (2009) research with young mothers found that the participants sought to buy their children new and extravagant gifts, toys, and clothes, even if this resulted in them avoiding buying things for themselves, or maxing out their credit cards. While Gregson’s sample of young mothers practiced ‘good’ motherhood through their ability to “spoil” their children materialistically, the participants from YPSP instead emphasized a mother’s ability to offer their children their own time and physical presence, attention, energy, and playfulness, as demonstrated through Brad below.

Youthful and playful Like Raven, ‘being there’ for her son allowed another participant, Brad, to feel that she was succeeding as a good mother. In her second interview, Brad underscored what she believes makes someone a good mother: “[b]eing around your child and

doing things with them. Like going to the park with them and stuff.” At the same time, Brad resisted discourses of young motherhood as ‘bad’ motherhood. Her youthfulness and energy allow her to connect with her child in a playful way, creating a bond of happiness that she felt was lacking in other, older mothers: “I’m always happy with my kid [...] I see mothers, like, when I’m in Shop-Big [...] not judging them, but I’m like, ‘that mother looks so miserable. She’s rolling her eyes.’ And I’m, like--I’m just laughing with my kid when I chase him down the aisles.” While discourses of young motherhood position young mothers as ‘children raising children,’ Brad challenged this negative discourse, arguing that ‘good’ motherhood is playful and energetic, filled with laughter and activity.

Brad resisted the ‘children raising children’ discourse as she demonstrated the benefits of her youthful motherhood. This finding relates to Kirkman et al.’s (2001) research with young mothers, where their participants similarly shared that young motherhood offered them a youthful energy that would benefit their mothering. Gregson’s (2009) research had a similar finding, where her sample of young mothers felt they had more energy than “mothers who delayed having children until their twenties, thirties, or forties, including their own parents” (p. 85). Like Brad, Kirkman et al.’s (2001) and Gregson’s (2009) research participants similarly considered their youthfulness as an advantage in their childcare, offering them an energy and excitement that would be present across their children’s lives as they “grow old together” rather than merely present in their children’s early years alone.

Parent first, employee second April had the most in-depth response to what she believes makes someone a good mom. For April, ‘being there’ allows a mother to be careful and attentive to her child’s emotions.

I think, um, like, just being there is a big deal and making sure that you are considerate of how they’re feeling is a really--like, I feel like that’s a really big deal because everybody

has bad days and even if you're having a bad day, you can't ignore that they're having a bad day or that they're having a *good* day. Like, as a parent [...] whatever I'm dealing with isn't their problem at all. Ever. So no matter what I'm dealing with, I have to deal with what they're dealing with too, if that makes sense? So, like, being emotionally there is a really big thing for me.

Through April's understanding of 'good' motherhood, we can further notice the emotional work rooted in 'being there.' However, this intensive quality of 'good' motherhood, as described by April, is a one she can succeed at with enough attention and consideration. Like Brad, April also emphasizes how playing with your child is a part of 'being there':

I'm telling you, you will learn more about your child in five minutes of just sitting on the floor and not even talking than you would have, like, 'tell me about yourself.' You know, like, trying to interview them does nothing. Being there is just a big deal. I know so many parents who are just so absent in their child's lives and they don't even realize how much it affects their kids until it's too late.

To the young mothers, 'being there' through one's physical, emotional, and attentive presence is considered so consequential that one's absence may have irreversible effects, as demonstrated through April's statement. Further, 'being there' is a quality that is not present in enough mothers, as stated by April, and demonstrated through the young mothers' narratives above. 'Being there' requires patience, understanding, curiosity, and attention, and these are qualities that many of the young mothers felt they possessed due to the level of childcare they did outside of their schooling, and used this to understand themselves as good mothers. April continues:

You just have to be really, really, really emotionally, physically available all the time. And if you're not, you need to make yourself. It's hard to be available. It's hard, I get it. But you have to do it when you have these little people. If you don't wanna do things like that, don't have little people. Give them to somebody who will. And I know that

sounds harsh, but seriously.

As she relays the intense time-, labour-, and emotional-commitments necessary to be a good mother who is there for her child, April boasts how she is both a good mother and a hard-working mother. As April states, it is not easy to offer these commitments for your children, but it is something any good mother must do. Again, in this way the young mothers understood themselves as better than other mothers who are not able to be so attentive to their children due to their careers, age, or lack of commitment. The young mothers repeatedly demonstrated the hard work and dedication required in one's parenting, and they demonstrated how one's success in 'good' mothering requires a mother's total commitment and child-focused prioritization.

The problems following this hyper focus on a mother's parenting have been discussed above, and were most visible through Monica's mothering experiences. Monica was the only participant who was consistently working across all three of her interviews. Monica worked three to five evening shifts each week, which ran from 3pm to 11pm – her work's closing time – in order to attend school and financially support her son without much initial support from her son's father. Despite the fact that this job made Monica want to “shoot [her]self in the face daily,” she knew she needed the money.

While Monica's school attendance and participation in the work force may position her as a 'good' neoliberal citizen, allowing her to abandon many stereotypes that are assigned to young mothers, such as 'welfare mom' and 'high school dropouts,' Monica did not recognize herself as a good mother. Unlike most of the other participants, who were able to feel like successful mothers through their intensive focus on 'being there' for their children, Monica was unable to commit this much time to her son. Moreover, her shifts at a job she did not particularly enjoy left her physically exhausted and emotionally drained, making her time with her son much more difficult to enjoy. As Monica explained: “I feel like before I started working, like, I was

home with him ‘til he was two and a half and I spent every minute with him pretty much up ‘til that point. And now it’s been, like, next to no time with him and even that little bit of time I do, I--I get annoyed by him almost.” Despite the fact that she was working to financially support her son, Monica was very hard on herself because she similarly believed that being a good mom involved “being there for their child [...] like, interaction, I guess. I don’t have that very much.”

Monica’s story demonstrates the messiness of discourse: while she may conform to certain discourses, where she is expected to go to school and work a consistent job, she consequentially fails at achieving the expectations set by other discourses relating to ‘good’ motherhood and, relatedly, hegemonic discourses of good womanhood. The success of upholding one discourse does not protect Monica from the judgement she receives due to her deviance from another discourse.

In contrast, while many of the other young mothers did talk about wanting to find work, they did not position themselves as ‘bad’ mothers or ‘bad’ neoliberal citizens for not currently working. Rather, their absence from the workforce in order to care for and support their children during the early years of their lives worked as a form of both compliance with intensive mothering and resistance to narratives of young mothers as ‘welfare queens.’ Most of the young mothers shared how they wanted to finish school and care for their children before they look for a job. For instance, Amber, while discussing work, stated: “I just wanted to focus on school first and then I was gonna look for a job [...] just cuz it’s pretty busy now, going to school and taking care of [my daughter], so I just wanna get that out of the way.” In this sense, Amber, and several of the other unemployed participants, understood themselves as good mothers and neoliberal citizens: they are planning their lives so that they can focus on and thrive in particular stages before they move on to another task which they are not yet ready to undertake, consequently

resisting hegemonic discourses which position youth as simultaneously mature yet ill-prepared (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011).

‘Taking care of herself too’

Along with ‘being there,’ many of the young mothers believed that a ‘good’ mother ensures that she is ‘taking care of herself too.’ ‘Taking care of herself too’ interestingly contrasts with the idea of ‘being there’ reviewed above, thus illustrating the intensive, demanding and contradictory characteristics involved in ‘good’ motherhood. After describing the quality of ‘being there’ in her first interview, Raven continues to discuss what she believes makes someone a ‘good’ mom:

And then it’s also to love yourself [...] because if you don’t take care of yourself, you’re not going to be able to take care of them. I learned that really early on because I--I completely gave up on myself when I was pregnant. And right after [my daughter] was born, I wouldn’t do my hair, I wouldn’t get dressed. I was always in ugly PJs. I was always in bed and I always felt gross, and I was always mad at Lucy because I was always angry with myself. I was always upset with myself. So when I started to take care of myself and give myself baths and go out for dinner with my girlfriend--as soon as I did things for myself, I was able to come home and feel good, and be like, ‘I missed you. I love you.’

Raven demonstrates how taking care of oneself as a mother is not only necessary for the mother to be happy, but for the mother to thrive in her role as a parent as well. Raven confessed a resentment she felt towards her daughter after her pregnancy, one that was rooted in a resentment she held towards herself. Raven recognized how self-care can allow her to love every aspect of her life, from her child, to her appearance, to her social life.

Selena also mentioned this quality of ‘good’ motherhood in her second interview. Like

Raven, Selena underscored how beneficial this quality was in one's parenting, where taking care of oneself may also work as a positive and productive form of parenting.

[J]ust being good to yourself to show that, you know, um, like--just to be a good role model for them [...] being good to yourself, loving yourself. Because if you don't love yourself, then they're going to see that and they're going to feel like [...] that's how things are. Like, that's just the norm. [...] Yeah, and taking care of yourself so that they know that they need to take care of themselves too.

Selena emphasizes how this self-care also works as a form of positive parenting, where a parent can showcase positive and healthy habits as one of their child's primary role models. Thus, 'taking care of herself too' relates back to 'being there,' as self-care is also about being a positive role model.

In her first interview, Kikyo also combined 'being there' and 'taking care of herself too' while introducing the nuance of young motherhood as well. When asked what she believes makes someone a 'good' mother, she says, "it's hard to explain. You gotta be there for your kid. You can't just, like, push your kid away to go and do teen things that you wish you could have done." After reflecting on this for a moment, Kikyo continues: "[I]ike, you can still go and hang out with your friends but just, you know, have your [kid]. Or, like, it's okay to go out once in a while without your kid. Like, you need that time for yourself too [...] so you're not so stressed out and stuff like that." Kikyo summarizes the two main themes found across the participants' understandings of 'good' motherhood: 'being there' is crucial for their children's well-being, just as 'taking care of herself too' is for the young mothers', as this quality ensures that she may thrive in her role as a positive, productive, and 'good' mother.

Self-care is indeed important for a mother and her children, just as 'being there' is. Self-care may work as an exercise of self-compassion, where these activities may enable the young

mothers to recognize their value and worth, and these aspects of ‘taking care of herself too’ came up frequently as some of the participants answered questions relating to their well-being and the healthy behaviours. However, some participants who were struggling with their mental health and low self-esteem expressed difficulties in finding the energy and purpose to pursue such self-care activities. As Monica reflected, “I put myself on a backburner usually.” The following two sub-sections discuss how this quality of ‘good’ motherhood reproduces and resists existing discourses surrounding young motherhood and the ‘good’ neoliberal citizen.

‘Taking care of herself too’ and contemporary neoliberalism After considering the intense and time-, labour-, and emotionally-consuming aspects of ‘being there,’ ‘taking care of herself too’ seems to be not only an enjoyable and acceptable form of ‘good’ mothering, but a necessary one as well.

As mothers are expected to radically adjust their lives after their pregnancies, self-care may appear as a selfish act in the mother’s child-centred world. This assumption can be found in Selena’s comment on ‘being there’ mentioned above, where she says mothers should not put themselves first if they are caring for a child. However, Selena was also one of the young mothers who underscored the importance of a ‘good’ mother’s self-care, therefore demonstrating how abstract, unstable, and messy the boundaries between ‘good’ mothering and ‘bad’ mothering are, and where the difference between ‘selfish’ behaviour and ‘productive’ or ‘necessary’ behaviour are unstable and vague. The various discourses on motherhood are constantly influencing and shaping how mothers practice ‘good’ parenting. While a mother’s self-care practices may be considered selfish through norms that position mothering as a ‘natural’ and ‘fulfilling’ role for women and, consequently, a “labour of love” (Federici, 2012), today’s neoliberal ethos nuances this understanding of ‘good’ mothering as it encourages

responsibilization through self-care. Through its values of individualism and personal responsibility, neoliberal ideologies advance the belief that individuals are in complete control of their lives. If the individual is assumed to be in control of their everyday lives, its consequences, and resulting emotions, they are also assumed to hold the ability to be happy, fulfilled, and live out their ‘best’ life. Charlie emphasized happiness in this way when describing what she believes makes someone a ‘good’ mother:

[B]eing a mom is such an interesting concept. It’s something that really can’t be grasped [...] making sure that you are happy in your role and healthy in your role. Cuz if you’re not happy being a mom, then you’re not healthy and taking care of yourself. You can’t take care of your child. (first interview)

According to Charlie, you must be happy and healthy to be a ‘good’ mother, and these are not qualities that come without taking care of yourself as well as your child. Following this logic, a mother who is unhappy with her position as a mother is not taking care of herself. Moreover, the implication of this association is that a mother who is struggling is clearly not taking care of herself. This logic supports today’s neoliberal discourse, which overlooks social inequalities by narrowing all focus to the individual. As self-care is promoted in the most general way, it is almost impossible *not* to participate in these ‘necessary’ activities. In this way, self-care is deemed accessible to all and, therefore, happiness and fulfillment are assumed to be just as achievable. The assumed ‘accessibility’ of self-care is contradicted when considering its consumeristic characteristics, where ‘self-care’ can be purchased through gym memberships, healthy foods, and aesthetic treatments, such as manicures and facials, for example.

Resistance through ‘taking care of herself too’ Despite its failure to recognize the relevance of structural constraints and inequalities, similar to ‘being there,’ the quality of ‘taking care of oneself too’ works to resist discourses that position young motherhood as ‘bad’

motherhood by enabling the participants to succeed as good mothers. Through this quality of good motherhood, the participants can recognize the state of their mental, emotional, and physical health, and take the necessary steps to improve and maintain their positive well-being. Despite discourses that position youth as irresponsible parents due to assumptions that youth want to behave in normatively ‘youthful’ ways (i.e., partying and having a “good time,” as noted by Kelly (2000)), the young mothers successfully positioned their rather contained and affordable attempts at self-care (e.g., taking a bath, dying their hair, “binge watch[ing] movies” with a friend) as a necessary quality to achieve ‘good’ motherhood.

While discussing self-care in her first interview, Selena voiced how important it was for her to start taking care of herself, especially following a falling-out between her and her fiancé:

I was really sad for a long time. And then one day I was just like, ‘you know what? I can’t be this sad anymore [...] I need to, you know, build myself up.’ You know? That’s just what I’ve been doing. I’ve been focusing on being nice to myself, focusing on self-care, self-love, and, like, you know, just trying to do anything, any small thing, that will make myself feel better.

The self-care discussed by Selena differs from meeting the duties of the responsabilized neoliberal citizen, where self-care is more of an obligation to succeed or where self-care is addressed through consumption. Instead, Selena demonstrates self-compassion, where she is offering herself and her well-being genuine attention.

In moments of burnout, Raven similarly shared how taking care of herself is necessary for her well-being: “[s]ometimes I feel like I’ve pushed too hard on myself and then I’m like, ‘I need some self-care.’ So I go do something dumb like take a bath or read a book.” By calling these self-care activities “dumb,” Raven is undermining the necessity behind these actions of self-compassion. In today’s society, where people follow a neoliberal ethic of meritocracy,

responsibilization, and individualism, activities that do not involve furthering oneself, one's abilities, and one's skills are undervalued, often understood as selfish (as demonstrated through intensive mothering above) and viewed as a form of procrastination (Baker, 2009; Elliott et al., 2015; Tsaliki, 2015). Despite the manner in which Raven discussed self-care, she continued to participate in these activities when she needed them most, recognizing that she needs to care for herself as well as her child. 'Taking care of herself too' can both reproduce the problematic intensity behind the discourse of intensive mothering, as demonstrated above, and counter it, offering the young mothers an attainable way to address some of the challenges in their lives. With a demanding schedule that comes with being a mom and a student, Raven later confessed how she felt a sense of disconnect from herself. She mentioned how she was going to address this disconnect:

Just being more aware of, like, myself because I always have this thing where I want to be super self-conscious of, like, what's going on with me and what I'm doing and everything, and I found that over the past couple of years I've kind of lost that [...] so it's been important to me to kind of reconnect with myself.

Through 'taking care of herself too,' the young mothers demonstrate how this quality of 'good' motherhood works as a form of resistance by allowing them to understand themselves as good mothers despite their youth, their financial constraints, and the discourses that surround young motherhood. Moreover, 'taking care of herself too' enables their navigation of the demanding and exhausting ideology of intensive mothering, where they can succeed as good mothers within this discourse without leaving their mental, emotional, and physical well-being behind.

In summary, the two qualities of 'good' motherhood identified by the young mothers – 'being there' and 'taking care of herself too' – work as sites of discourse maintenance and reproduction, as well as strategies of resistance. 'Being there' was found to align with the

ideology of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) while also working as a form of resistance to hegemonic norms surrounding ‘good,’ older, and middle-class motherhood, allowing the young mothers to understand and position themselves as ‘good’ mothers. ‘Taking care of herself too’ similarly reproduced neoliberal ideals of the ‘good’ individualized and responsabilized citizen while enabling the participants to resist discourses which position young motherhood as ‘bad’ motherhood.

Judgement and praise

In addition to asking how they understood ‘good’ motherhood, we asked the participants if they ever felt judged negatively for their parenting. These instances of both real and perceived judgement are rooted in the discourses of youth and normative motherhood discussed in the literature review, and these links will be discussed. Following this analysis, I will examine how the participants engaged with or resisted negative judgement. Following questions focusing on negative judgement, we asked the participants if they ever felt judged positively for their parenting. While praise was ultimately appreciated and embraced by the young mothers, my analysis of these responses demonstrates how praise can also produce particular forms of motherhood which are ‘good’ and consequentially praised and encouraged, while simultaneously creating an understanding of a ‘bad’ motherhood.

Negative judgement

All 11 of the young mothers in our sample experienced negative judgement. The detail in which this judgement was discussed varied, however, my coding of these judgements revealed that they were often rooted in problematic discourses of youth, young women, and young mothers, and hegemonic understandings of ‘good’ motherhood. Kelly (2000) states that judgement towards young mothers is prevalent as these women are one of today’s “catch-all

enemies”: “teen mothers make up one of the most marginalized groups in society. Indeed, it is their marginal status and relative lack of power that makes them such good ‘catch-all enemies’” (p. 27). Through discourses that position young mothers as ‘lazy,’ ‘selfish,’ and ‘irresponsible,’ judgement may come from family, friends, and strangers alike, and take several forms, leaving young mothers feeling much like Kikyō: “I feel like I’m being judged everywhere I go, pretty much.” April elaborates on this point when asked if she ever feels judged negatively for her parenting:

Yes, all the time. I’m 21 years-old with a four year old--a three-, four-, and five-year-old. When I go out in public, I’m judged everywhere I go, *all* the time. When I tell my kids they can’t buy a Kinder Egg because they don’t need it, I’m judged. Like, I’m judged for everything. But I know that everyone’s gonna judge me no matter what and I know that I’m not a bad mom. I know that, like, I’m doing what works for us and, you know, judge me if you want to, kind of thing. Not that it doesn’t suck but it is what it is. [...] Like, every single person you will talk to from YPSP will tell you they are judged every day no matter what they’re doing. They’re walking their baby, taking them for a nice walk before bed, and they’re judged for that because, you know, they’re doing *something* wrong in *somebody’s* eyes. If you’re not doing something everybody else’s way, it’s a problem, basically. And because we’re young, we’re dumb, and we don’t know anything. Of *course*, right? So, you know, there’s all these, like, 40-year-old moms telling me what to do with my baby and it’s really frustrating. (first interview)

As examined in the literature review, norms are used to maintain particular structures of power as they establish certain representations which benefit some while reducing others to negative generalizations and deny the complexity in the lives of individuals who identify with certain social groups (Raby, 2012). Age norms, for example, position adulthood at the centre, where adulthood becomes a position of social advantage due to unmarked assumptions of maturity,

stability, and control (Raby, 2012). In contrast, representations of youth promote an image of youth that is ‘free,’ ‘open,’ and ‘exploratory,’ consequently marking youth as ‘unstable,’ ‘at-risk,’ and in need of control, guidance, and regulation (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011; Tsaliki, 2015). Youth are understood as ‘immature’ and ‘irrational,’ and this understanding worsens for young women who are sexually active and thus perceived as ‘permissive.’ With this understanding, young mothers are further judged through assumptions that they did not take the proper precautions to avoid pregnancy (i.e., insisting that their partners use a condom, taking birth control) and for their assumed inability to maintain a stable romantic relationship (Kelly, 1998, 2000; Lesko, 1995).

Many participants’ discussions of judgement were rooted in negative discourses on youth and young mothers. Young mothers are hegemonically understood as ill-prepared for motherhood as a consequence of normative discourses of youth, and may be perceived as ‘neglectful mothers’ who cannot care for their children (Kelly, 2000; Kirkman et al., 2001). The young mothers frequently mentioned receiving stares from strangers when their children were crying or having a tantrum in public spaces (e.g., grocery stores):

Kikyo: When she’s whiney and I can’t get her to stop or she’s just screaming, people are staring. And then I get stares sometimes because I’m also--like, I’m 22 but I look younger so people think, like, I’m just, like, some teen mom. (second interview)

Monica: And then I feel like in public I--I can’t stand going anywhere in public with him cuz he has constant meltdowns and I feel judged by other people then. If we’re in the middle of the store and he’s screaming and crying-- [I: Right. You feel like people are scrutinizing you?] Mhm. (second interview)

My analysis of these experiences suggests that the judgement and resulting insecurity felt by these young mothers may stem from the negative expectation that young mothers are ‘neglectful

mothers' who cannot care for their children. Due to their youthfulness and assumed naiveté, young mothers are thought to lack control of their children compared to older mothers, who are assumed to have put more time and effort into their childrearing abilities (Kelly, 2000). Through her description of others' judgement, where she believes that strangers assume she is "just [...] some teen mom," Kikyo reveals the effect of discourse, which not only negatively categorizes and simplifies young mothers, but may result in young mothers' internalization of these discourses. Perhaps, although not directly stated, this is why Monica similarly felt insecure in these moments of scrutiny.

Young mothers' assumed lack of control reaches into other areas of their lives as well. Through her ethnographic study in high schools with teen parent programs, Kelly (2000) found that middle-class teachers saw the young mothers' smoking habit as "a metaphor for the purported inability of teen mothers to repress their desires" (p. 42). Teachers commented on the student parents' smoking, claiming that they did not seem to have control over their need to smoke. Kelly explains that "[t]his language evokes the stereotypes of the 'stupid slut' and the welfare claimant unable or unwilling to suppress her sexuality and fertility" (p. 42). An expectation that young mothers will fail as 'good' mothers follows these hegemonic discourses of young motherhood. Young mothers are assumed to have a lack of control that extends to any and every area of their lives, from their sexuality, to their unhealthy habits, to their children's behaviour.

Some participants' experiences of judgement were rooted in broader negative discourses of youth which assume that youth are 'lazy,' 'selfish,' and, more recently, social-media obsessed. When Selena was asked if she ever felt negatively judged for her parenting, she stated that her mother was a main source of judgement:

My mom. [...] If I'm not, like, interacting with [my daughter] the whole time that I'm

home, or if she's, you know, doing something else--if I'm just laying there on the couch, like, trying to decompress, I feel that judgement. [My mom has] never said anything but--oh, she's mentioned me being on my phone and stuff. But, like, um, I just feel that judgement and it makes me feel bad. (second interview)

This instance of judgement also conveys the tensions in a young mother's attempts at self-care. As considered in the section above, self-care, while recognized as a necessary quality for a 'good' mother's well-being, may also be seen as 'self-centred' through discourses of youth (Hays, 1996; Kelly, 2000; Lesko, 2001). With Selena home from work and school, she is expected to be the best mother with each moment she and her daughter have together.

Would this expectation be held towards older mothers? It is possible, due to the ideology of intensive motherhood examined above. However, the judgement that Selena discussed demonstrates the effects of the 'neglectful mothers' discourse for young mothers. Today's youth are hegemonically understood as selfish and irresponsible, lazy and social media-obsessed, and these problematic understandings have been transferred to young mothers (Kelly, 2000; Lesko, 2001). For example, Kelly (2000) claims that discourses of young womanhood influence understandings of young mothers: "[y]oung women are assumed, for example, to be self-absorbed and obsessed with their body image and therefore liable to starve themselves during pregnancy, thus abusing their child in the womb" (p. 39). Such assumptions about youth and young women can directly influence the expectations held towards young mothers: that they are lazy and spoiled, and that they are always on their phones and ignoring their children. In a related example, Amber discussed judgement she felt from her boyfriend's family:

[My boyfriend's] family has always said I've been a horrible mother since birth, basically. [...] They say I don't do anything with her, [my boyfriend] does everything, even though that's not true. [...] It's like, what about that six hours out of the day where

me and her are in school? What am I doing? Sleeping, apparently. (third interview)

Amber's assumed negligence influenced the way in which her boyfriend's family perceived her, where they assumed that her boyfriend did "everything" while she was assumed to always be sleeping. Moreover, this narrative simultaneously masked the efforts Amber made to improve her and her daughter's circumstances, as she was attending school consistently while carefully balancing her roles as her daughter's primary caregiver and a student. It can be argued that the 'neglectful mother' discourse was operating here, and it similarly influenced many of the other young mothers' experiences of judgement.

The participants' youthfulness also attracted the discourse of young mothers as 'children having children' (Kelly, 2000). Twenty-year-old Brad, who was independently raising her year-old son, Clark, often felt judged for being too playful. When talking about the negative judgement she experienced, Brad stated: "I feel like people think I'm, like, his best friend or something. Like, not like a mom to him, I guess? [...] I feel judged. Like a kid raising a kid, I guess. Well, not really a kid. I hate when people call me a kid." She continued:

On the bus one day, I was with Clark and I was just going, 'blah blah!' Like his baby talk. He doesn't know how to say words so he's like (makes baby sounds) doing this.

And I'm doing it back to him and [...] these people were talking and they're like, 'it's like kids raising kids these days' or something. [...] I didn't say anything cuz I just ignore it. I'm like, 'I'm not a kid.'

The judgement Brad experienced directly relates to the 'children raising children' discourse, which perceives young mothers as 'too young' to adequately care for a child because they are immature and childish and, consequently, "incapable of making their own independent decisions" (Kelly, 2000, p. 31). Across all three of her interviews, Brad claimed that she often gets "looked at very, very [...] meanly" while playing with her son in public. She stated that

strangers “judge me hardcore. They’re, like, shaking their heads.” Brad’s playful behaviour with her son was not perceived as ‘good,’ active motherhood, but an outcome of her ‘immature’ youthfulness instead.

Through two experiences, Selena outlined instances where she perceived judgement from others in the form of “side-glances.” In one experience, she discussed how she perceived this form of judgement when buying junk food with her fiancé and daughter: “[w]e get her things that she needs, her clothes, and *then* we go and get food and stuff [...] and we really try hard to get healthy food but sometimes we don’t so, like, that’s where the side-glances come in sometimes. [...] But, uh, you know, whatever! I’m an adult. (laughs)” It can be argued that this perceived judgement overlaps with the ‘neglectful mother’ discourse, where Selena may have been perceived as unwilling to make the ‘right’ and ‘good’ choices for herself and her daughter. Through another experience, she talked about how she felt judgement while shopping alone and being perceived as a *single* young mother. As she and her former fiancé were repairing their estranged relationship, Selena mentioned the looks she would receive while shopping alone with their daughter, which she perceived as judgement for being a young and single mother: “I used to get that [side-glances] when I would go to Shop-Big. [...] When I would go there by myself, you know, I would get side looks, like, ‘oh, where’s the dad?’” The policing of young motherhood is possible when young motherhood is held as the ‘immoral’ and ‘inappropriate’ form of motherhood against normative motherhood, where an adult mother is in a heterosexual marriage, educated, and employed (Kelly, 2000; Kirkman et al., 2001). Moreover, the young mothers’ feelings of self-consciousness and worry following instances of both real and perceived judgement may result in their eventual self-policing as they alter their behaviours, actions, and shopping habits as a result. The following section will examine this further as I analyze how

young mothers engaged with and/or resisted negative judgement.

Young mothers' engagement with and resistance to judgement

In the discussion above, I analyzed the ways in which the participants were policed through judgement stemming from multiple, overlapping discourses of young motherhood. Judgement from strangers and family members alike worked as a form of policing, where the young mothers experienced public surveillance and ridicule in order to regulate them and shape them into more 'acceptable' mothers.

How do young mothers react to, engage with, and resist these experiences of judgement and disciplinary power? First, I will describe how some of the young mothers reacted to judgement by engaging in their own self-policing. Second, I will discuss how the young mothers engaged with judgement by judging other mothers. Third, I will analyze the participants' resistance to judgement, where one participant recognized the unfair judgement she received, and where some participants stressed their perseverance and exercised self-compassion in the face of negative judgement.

Self-policing Judgement and perceived judgement, where participants assumed that negative judgement was present without any overt indication, influenced the behaviours, actions, and lifestyle choices of young mothers. In all three of her interviews, Raven emphasized the consequences of judgement, where she "dealt with" judgement through self-policing and altering her behaviour to avoid further or future judgement:

One time I was in a store--and this was one of the worst things people can do. I was in a store and Lucy was crying and I just--I was just fed up because she had been crying for, like, almost two hours and I was just like, 'shut up.' And then this guy piped up and he's like, 'you shouldn't talk to her like that. That's really ignorant. You shouldn't even have your child.' And I was like, 'I'm sorry.' I wanted to cry because I didn't even do anything

mean. I just wanted her to be quiet. [...] It was one of the worst things people could do- is they attack you for your parenting. [I: How have you dealt with that?] When I'm out in public, I just try to keep my cool better. Especially in public because people are always watching and judging. And then when I'm at home, if I feel overwhelmed, I just walk away from it. I just let her [daughter] do whatever she's doing and then come back to it.

This self-policing, which Raven participated in both when she was in and out of the public eye, reveals the disciplinary role judgement possesses. Here, the relevance of the metaphor of the panopticon becomes apparent: both real and perceived judgement worked to discipline the young mothers regardless of whether they were in a store or at home. The ubiquity of discourses of young motherhood creates a permanent visibility that the young mothers must navigate, where each mother “becomes to [her]self [her] own jailer” (Bartky, 1988, p. 63). While patience through “keep[ing one's] cool better” is certainly a positive trait to possess as a parent, there was a problematic focus on the individual in this situation. As Raven was perceived as problematically impatient with her daughter and was consequently told “[y]ou shouldn't even have your child,” there was a narrow focus on Raven and her character, where Raven's situation and personal circumstances which caused her to ‘lose’ her patience were ignored. It can be argued that Raven's loss of patience was attributed to her character as a ‘bad’ and ‘ignorant’ mother due to ideas about young mothers as ‘too young’ and ‘ill-prepared’ for motherhood. Relatedly, the effects of the panopticon bolster neoliberal and postfeminist discourses, as “the genesis of the celebrated ‘individualism’ and heightened self-consciousness that are hallmarks of modern times” are reinforced within the “inmate” (Bartky, 1988, p. 63).

It is valuable to consider if this instance of public beratement was related to Raven's youthfulness or class. In another example, Raven admitted that she stopped using her daughter's stroller: “our stroller wasn't exactly, like, the nicest looking stroller. It was a second-hand

stroller. So I used to feel like I was getting judged for that.” Raven also stated that she stopped taking public transit when she was using her stroller due to the judgement she would receive while on the bus: “if I need to get groceries or anything, I’ll either walk or I’ll cab it.” This illustrates how young mothers’ assumed poverty may worsen the judgement they receive, and further influence the actions, behaviours, and choices they make due to their self-policing. In addition to “keep[ing] my cool better,” Raven altered her choices and removed herself from certain locations altogether: “usually [I] just leave the store or take deep breaths, count to ten” (first interview); “if she’s really crying and people are really staring [...] I usually just leave” (second interview).

Similar to Raven, Monica’s behaviour was also influenced by the judgement of others. After being asked if she feels judgement outside of the home, Monica confessed that she now avoids others’ judgement by not going out with her son at all:

R: I try not to go anywhere with him because he has tantrums and stuff, and it embarrasses me.

I: Right, right. So it’s like you don’t have problems with other people now because you’re not putting yourself in that situation.

R: Right, pretty much. [...] If I want to go somewhere, I wait until he’s not around so he doesn’t have to go with me. (third interview)

Monica’s solution to avoid judgement through her self-policing is stark, as it contributes to the isolation of her and her son. Further, this isolation may exacerbate Monica’s existing mental health struggles. These mental health struggles, along with Monica’s exhausting schedule of schooling, working, and parenting, contribute to Monica’s understanding of herself as a ‘bad’ mom. Her isolation may also result in a lack of opportunity to engage in activities with her son, furthering this negative self-perception. By looking at Monica’s experience of judgement and

self-policing, it can be argued that young mothers' solutions to avoid judgement may contribute to a negative cycle which compounds their existing struggles (i.e., mental health struggles, low self-esteem). Kikyo also talked about cutting herself off from talking to strangers at all to avoid judgement. These acts of self-policing may result in a negative cycle of isolation, depression, and loneliness, as discussed above. The partial and complete isolation taken on by the young mothers in order to avoid judgement may result in a lack of opportunity to connect with their children and worsen their negative self-perceptions as 'bad' mothers. The metaphor of the panopticon can be applied to these instances of self-policing, as these women have internalized the regulation resulting from the negative judgement they have experienced. Monica and Kikyo's experiences of self-policing reveal how the influence of discourse and disciplinary power "constitutes the very subjectivity of the subject" (Bartky, 1988, p. 80).

Throughout these examples, the judgement informed by hegemonic discourses of young motherhood possessed a disciplinary power, where the young mothers' behaviours and actions were influenced and altered, sometimes making their present realities more isolated, through limited interaction, or onerous, by walking or using money to take a taxi. The participants may have felt pressure to change their lifestyle choices as well. While Selena was purchasing junk food, she described a perceived judgement from strangers through their "side-glances," for example.

Judgement from others also influenced some of the participants' self-beliefs. While discussing parenting struggles in her first interview, Selena acknowledged the stigma towards young mothers active today:

Because of the big stigma with young moms, when people see me and my daughter, especially because I'm a single mom, I feel like that's a big struggle for me too because [...] I know that I'm seen in a certain light, and that's a struggle in itself. [...] Whether

I'm like, 'oh, yeah, yeah. But I'm good. I'm a good mom and I do these things for my daughter' and whatever, you know. I know I'm a good mom but it's still--there's that stigma and [...] it takes a toll sometimes.

Selena confessed that the stigma of being a young mother often undermined her positive self-talk that acknowledged the work and care she put into her parenting. While talking about the stigma and judgement she experienced, Selena emphasized how these forces impacted her self-esteem:

It goes back to me being hard on myself where I'm like, 'I should be doing more. I should be doing more. I should be further in life right now.' Like, I'm gonna be 22 and I'm still trying to finish high school. And that's not a bad thing because I'm still trying to finish but it's--in my opinion on myself, I feel like it's bad because it's taken this long [...] you know, I'm still trying to finish high school. I fricking work at Fast Burger. You know, like, it's just a bunch of those things. And I just feel like I should be doing better.

(second interview)

The pressure for young mothers to 'redeem' themselves through their assimilation to normative life courses (i.e., postsecondary education, full-time work, heterosexual marriage) was discussed in the literature review (Barcelos, 2014; Elliott et al., 2015; Hays, 1996; Luttrell, 2003; Prettyman, 2005). Selena's self-beliefs, where she believes she "should be doing more" and "doing better," relates to this redemption narrative. Despite the fact that she was juggling her roles as a student, employee, and mother, Selena continued to feel emotions of shame for not achieving a normative life course. With her three-year-old daughter, 22-year-old Selena's self-beliefs worked as a form of self-policing, where she pressured herself to achieve a 'normative' identity in spite of her status as a young mother.

Judging other mothers Judging other mothers was another way in which the young mothers engaged with judgement. This effect did not result in their self-policing but, rather, a

justification to continue their current, positively-framed, parenting methods. In other words, some of the young mothers were able to justify themselves as ‘good’ mothers in the face of judgement by turning this judgement towards other mothers. In her first interview, Brad recalled a day where she was playing outside with her son, Clark, and was visible to two older women who were across the street:

They’re just looking at me, shaking their heads [...] they had stern faces and I’m like, ‘what? Is this wrong?’ [...] These mothers are just sitting there, they look like their kids were just, like, five and eight. There’s two of them, two kids playing with each other. And they’re like, ‘mom! Come do this!’ And [the mothers are] like, ‘no.’ [...] I don’t know. I feel like they’re judging me.

Brad defended herself against negative judgement by turning it back to its source: the two older mothers across the road. She navigated judgement by focusing on how she was more engaged with her child than the two mothers across the road, who, according to Brad, were simply ignoring their children.

Eighteen-year-old Topaz, who had her daughter a few months prior to our first interview, also judged other mothers for “always [going] out and leaving the child.” Topaz also judged mothers who “rely on child tax benefits, which is not good,” thus reproducing judgement she may face for being a young mother. By succeeding in areas of motherhood that they suggested were lacking in other mothers, these young mothers successfully challenged negative feelings that some of the other participants faced and did not feel pressured to alter their current behaviours, actions, or choices.

In another example, Kikyo judged her cousin, Tonya, who was also a young mother, for losing custody of her son while working a ‘provocative’ job:

My one cousin, Tonya, she always told me that, ‘you’re never gonna amount to

anything, you're gonna to lose your daughter the moment you have her.' This and that.

But it all flipped around. She became a stripper and lost her son, and I'm back in school and I still have my daughter. [I: Well, what does that make you feel?] Better [...] happy.

While avoiding her cousin's judgement, Kikyo simultaneously reproduced hegemonic discourses surrounding young mothers: that they will be 'bad' mothers and work 'bad' jobs, ultimately losing custody of their children. Despite reproducing these negative discourses of young motherhood and judging another young mother, Kikyo did not recognize herself as one of these hegemonically 'bad' young mothers and felt positively about this. Through this engagement with judgement, some of the participants were able to redirect negative judgement in order to feel like 'good' mothers in comparison. While this act did not result in their own self-policing, the young mothers' judgement towards other moms reproduced certain norms of 'good' motherhood through policing other mothers.

Recognizing and challenging unfair judgement The young mothers also engaged with and resisted judgement by recognizing and challenging its unfair nature. While some participants were indeed affected by judgement, they were simultaneously critical of it. For example, Brad's experience of judgement while playing with her son was recognized and challenged as she asked herself, "[i]s this wrong?" Although her older neighbours were "shaking their heads" with "stern faces," Brad did not accept the judgement directed towards her as justified but questioned and challenged it instead. April similarly recognized the unfair nature of the judgement she received. In her first interview, where I learned that she was raising her two daughters and a step-son, April described the unfair treatment she receives as a young mother:

People are so stereotypical. People think that I drink all the time. People think that I do drugs and that I'm a whore and that, like, all this ridiculous stuff that--I'm a mother. I get it cuz, like, I'm 20 but at the same time [...] there's a lot of people that work their asses

off to be good parents at a young age. And when people get hated--like, I get hated on for being a mom all the time. [...] Not everybody is a bad mom just because they're young. [...] It's--it's fucked up that I'm only 20 years old and I have my shit together more than a lot of, like, 30- and 40-year-old married families. It's crazy! But that [...] 40-year-old mom of four with a working husband, stay-at-home housewife, she will get judged less. She could beat her kids and she would probably be judged less than I would be [...] it's little things like that. Like, they really bother me.

Following this response, I asked April if she felt like she was judged for the same things that could happen to any parent:

Yeah! Like, you're really gonna judge me cuz my kid's crying in Shop-Big? Like, it happens! There's not a lot you can do and when you see another mom with a kid having a meltdown or, like, [...] whatever the situation is, kids go crazy for nothing [...] it happens. And you get judged for the same things that are happening to everybody else. People with kids are judging you. Like, when your kid was four, it didn't happen to you? [...] Let's just get real. Get real!

April resisted self-policing and judging other moms, the forms of engaging with judgement discussed above, by resisting judgement and recognizing the unfair nature of it. She emphasized the hard work that many young mothers put into their parenting while recognizing how older mothers do not experience the same hyper-critical surveillance many young mothers are familiar with. By recognizing how she was judged for circumstances that could happen to any mother, April countered negative judgement and discussed her parenting skills with an apparent confidence and pride. The young mothers' abilities to internalize or challenge judgement were nuanced and often overlapping. For example, while some of the young mothers responded to judgement through self-policing, they were simultaneously critical of this judgement. While Kikyo's statements demonstrate her self-policing following public judgement, they also reveal

her critical attitude towards this judgement. By recognizing how “[p]eople are just gonna talk no matter what,” it can be argued that Kikyo, like April, similarly recognizes how she will experience judgement no matter the situation. Kirkman et al. (2001) shared these findings as one participant, Olivia, similarly noted the constant judgement towards young mothers and “emplotted herself as coping, responsible, and someone who can deflect derogatory comments or impertinent questions with wit” (p. 284).

Some participants resisted negative judgement by recognizing their perseverance and exercising self-compassion. One of these moments of perseverance was quoted above, where Kikyo endured negative judgement from her cousin, Tonya. Despite the negativity she experienced from someone close to her, Kikyo is now able to look back on this moment and feel positively about where she is in her life now. Amber similarly experienced judgement from a member of her family. While disclosing her estranged relationship with her father, she stated: “he always told me I would never make it on my own and here I am. [...] He was like, ‘you wouldn’t last two weeks without living here.’ And I lasted a long time.” By recognizing where she is today, Amber attests her perseverance, something that took her beyond her father’s negative expectations.

Charlie also demonstrated perseverance and self-compassion as she explained how a local newspaper ran a story on a YPSP event. Before being asked if she has ever felt negatively judged for her parenting, Charlie mentioned how a local newspaper perpetuated negative ideas about young mothers:

[E]ven in our own newspaper. [...] They covered our graduation, um, in the newspaper [...] and instead of focusing on these mothers making a big strive, as reaching a goal that 48 percent don’t fucking reach--like, 48 percent of mothers, teenage moms, don’t graduate from high school [...] and they didn’t. Instead of focusing on that statistic and

focusing on the positive, they focused kind of on, 'look at these parents on support that did something.'

When I asked Charlie how she felt about this experience, she expressed self-compassion by stating: “[y]ou take it in stride and realize that you’re better than the way that people depict you.” Instead of engaging with the judgement she experienced from a local newspaper story, Charlie’s statement above demonstrates a resistance, one where she can acknowledge that she is more than what a discourse may present her as.

Selena similarly exercised self-compassion and manifested perseverance against her own self-doubts as she discussed herself as a ‘good’ mother. After being asked: “on a scale of one to 10, where one is never and 10 is always, do you feel like a ‘good’ mom?” Selena first answered with a seven, but then rationalized with herself by recognizing her efforts as a new young mother: “obviously I could do better. Everybody could do better. [...] So maybe change that to an eight [...] cuz thinking about it now, like [...] I’m a good mom. It’s just [...] I’m still learning, you know? Every day, hav[ing] to deal with this child that’s growing in front of my eyes.” Selena’s self-compassion is evident as she recognizes that parenting is not easy. She observes the fluidity involved in parenting (“hav[ing] to deal with this child that’s growing in front of my eyes”) and recognizes that ongoing learning is necessary to become a “better” parent with each day. Rather than criticizing herself for not being a ‘perfect’ mom, Selena’s statements convey that nobody is perfect. These young mothers’ experiences signify their resistance to judgement, where they recognized their efforts and perseverance by exercising a self-compassion that moved beyond self-policing or judging other mothers.

A final form of resistance to judgement was a recurring theme of the young mothers recognizing themselves as “doing a good job.” This finding overlaps with Kirkman et al.’s (2001) research finding which demonstrated how their sample of young mothers were confident

in themselves as good mothers, with one mother similarly stating, “I know I’m doing a good job with [my baby]” (p. 289). The young mothers’ narrative of confidence counters “the canonical narrative of womanhood [which] represents the ideal life course for a woman as predicated upon her becoming a mother (preferably in a marriage), naturally, and at the appropriate (adult) time” (p. 286). While Kirkman et al. state that canonical narratives of teenage mothers perceive “teenage mothers as ‘too young, and too young to be able to look after a baby’” (p. 283), their sample of young mothers held a confidence in themselves that countered these hegemonic assumptions. The young mothers from YPSP similarly held this confidence in themselves:

Amber: Cuz I know I’m doing a good job and I just try not to let them [people who negatively judge her] put me down. (first interview)

Katia: I know that I’m a good mom. Celeste [daughter] is very happy, bubbly, well fed all the time. She’s smart, she talks, and she sings and dances. She’s awesome. Yeah, so I think I’ve done a good job so far. (first interview)

Brad: Well, I feel like I’m doing a good job. (second interview)

The young mothers were not the only ones who believed that they were “doing a good job.” The following section analyzes the participants’ experiences of praise from others for their parenting and discusses how these instances of praise may work as a form of policing that further constructs idealized versions of ‘good’ motherhood.

Praise and positive judgement

Praise, while positive and often embraced by the participants, also worked as a form of policing. Praise reveals socially constructed ideas of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forms of motherhood, where the former is ‘deserving’ of this positive judgement. Praise may also work to produce certain kinds of motherhood that comply with normative discourses of middle-class, older motherhood and further reproduce negative discourses of young motherhood.

Brad, for example, who felt judged publicly for playing with her child too much, stated that her grandmother often praises her for being a ‘fun’ mom. Despite this, she further stated that her grandmother frequently reminds her that “I should be, like, more mommy-like.” This incident of praise demonstrates the abstract and often contradictory expectations held towards mothers: while mothers are expected to be playful and engage with their children, they must not be ‘too’ playful and maintain some of the seriousness that is normatively expected from adults and mothers. Would an older mother receive this sort of comment about needing to be more “mommy-like” if she were actively engaged and playful with her child? A comment like this suggests that youth are not complete mothers – despite contradictory assumptions that essentialize all women as mothers – and must adjust themselves accordingly or work harder to fulfil the normative role of a mother. This incident of praise produced a certain kind of motherhood that was understood as a ‘good’ and ‘acceptable’ form of motherhood. In Brad’s case, ‘good’ motherhood was understood as fun and playful, but only to an extent where one’s status as an adult is not compromised, and where particular expectations of serious conduct are held.

In a later interview, Brad boasted how she is often praised for her son’s quiet disposition while they are on public transit:

When I go on the bus, he doesn’t cry. Like, he doesn’t whine. People are like, ‘oh my god, he’s so good!’ And that makes me feel good when they say that cuz he is a really good kid. He doesn’t cry or freak out. We go onto the bus for over an hour or something, people are surprised that he’s just sitting there.

This experience of praise underscores how a mother’s parenting abilities are often judged based on their child’s behaviour. This focus on the mother – one which shapes her as a key force that can enrich or corrupt her child’s assumed “inherent goodness” – relates back to Hays’ (1996)

ideology of intensive motherhood. Further, this instance of praise may work in reproducing negative discourses of young motherhood, as other people taking the bus with Brad were “surprised” that her son was sitting quietly. These strangers’ reactions of surprise may have been the result of Brad and her son’s behaviour, which went against the negative expectations these strangers held towards Brad as a young mother.

Another form of praise valued by one of the participants was offered by a family doctor. This praise, which focused on her daughter’s physical health, resulted in positive emotions from the young mother, which may denote the power and resulting value medical knowledges and opinions hold in contemporary Western societies. Raven explained how she felt praise from her doctors as she learned that she had a “healthy baby”: “[y]eah, with my doctors. Um, she’s pretty much in the 80th percentile for her weight and height, so she’s great for that. So I’ve just felt [...] happy that I’ve got a healthy baby.” Topaz similarly described how she feels amazing when she sees her 10-month-old daughter, Anna, meet her baby milestones. These experiences of praise demonstrate how motherhood is not only policed publicly by responsabilized citizens but through medical knowledges and professionals as well (Fox et al., 2009). Moreover, with the medicalisation of pregnancy and childrearing, “[m]edical or technological ‘wisdom’ exerts increasing power in a society where it is often viewed as scientific ‘fact’ or ‘truth’, becoming internalized as a specific form of social control to which many willingly submit (Foucault 1973, 1979)” (Fox et al., 2009, p. 557). As Raven recounted this moment of praise and as Topaz expressed her excitement towards the health of her baby, the power authorized to medical professionals and knowledges through discourses, which promote science and medicine as ‘objective,’ ‘neutral,’ and ‘truth,’ became visible. Consequently, the praise offered by doctors and other medical professionals is not as easily acknowledged as a form of judgement.

As mentioned above, the young mothers resisted negative judgement through their ability to recognize themselves as “doing a good job.” However, the young mothers were not the only ones who believed they were “doing a good job.” The participants frequently spoke of instances where the people around them also told them that they were “doing a good job.” For instance, Amber states: “my friends and my mom, my godmother, they tell me a lot, that I’m a good mom and I’m doing a good job. And it’s nice to hear.” Similar comments were made by Selena, Raven, Charlie, and April.

After a quick Google search, I learned that many older, working mothers do not receive this recognition. One article discussed a “mummy blogger’s” Facebook post that was gaining traction across social media which described her recent psychologist appointment (Young, 2018). Without anyone to watch her children that day, she brought her children to the appointment with her and apologized to her psychologist profusely for being late, and for being “a bad mother” who does not have her “shit together” (Young, 2018). In response to these apologies, her psychologist assured her that she was not “a bad mother,” but, rather, one who working hard to successfully balance parenting and her own self-care. Reactions to this post were vast and positive, where many other mothers thanked the blogger for her honesty and others confessed that they “truly needed to read this today” (Young, 2018). Another article told the story of a mother who disciplined her two-year-old daughter in a grocery store. Her “exasperation and embarrassment” following this was returned with a hug from a stranger – a fellow mother around her age – who reminded her that she was “doing a great job” (Allen, 2018), which was the moral and final message of this article. These two articles, and the reactions that followed them, reveal how older mothers’ parenting efforts often go unnoticed. Instead, ‘good’ parenting is expected from them, whether they are running errands or keeping

their “emotions in check” (Young, 2018). Given this context, the recognition of young mothers as “doing a good job,” while valuable affirmation, may also insidiously work to underscore how their mothering is deviant to the norm and is consequentially a target of surveillance, critique, and policing as an ‘inmate’ of the panopticon.

Resisting the narrative of young motherhood as a mistake: parenting as rewarding

This final section of my data analysis discusses another pattern identified across the young mothers’ interview data which demonstrates how the young mothers saw their parenting as rewarding. This narrative resists the hegemonic discourse which positions young mothers as individuals in need of redemption. The redemption discourse ultimately constructs young mothers as having made a mistake that they need to ‘redeem’ themselves from. Drawing on research by Kelly (2000), Chris A. Barcelos (2014) states that “teen mothers are compelled to engage in ‘rites of redemption,’ or confessional techniques in which their personal narratives are used as prevention messages” (p. 484). As “models of what not to do or what not to be” (Kelly, 2000, p. 110), young mothers must downplay the positivity existing in their lives, such as the role of their children, in order to successfully serve as a public “warning label” to the youth surrounding them (Barcelos, 2014; Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014; Kelly, 2000; Prettyman, 2005).

Barcelos and Gubrium (2014), who similarly held in-depth interviews with young mothers attending a community-based educational program, suspected that their participants felt compelled to engage in these “rites of redemption” due to the climate of their interview’s location, which was a program that “promot[ed] the educational and professional outcomes of young mothers” (p. 474). While the students at YPSP were in a similar educational space during our interviews, their interview data does not reveal a significant redemption narrative. Rather, like some of the participants in Barcelos and Gubrium’s study, the YPSP students more often

“referenced the ways having children changed their lives for the better... [and] spoke of the restorative aspects of young mothering” (p. 474). For instance, Selena explained that being a mom is “very rewarding. Sometimes I feel bad and I feel like I’m not doing enough [...] [but] at the end of the day, [my daughter] comes to sit with me [...] she’ll put her head on me and [...] say, ‘I love you, mommy.’ And I’m like, ‘This is why I do this every day!’ [...] It just makes me feel so full.” Kikyo, Topaz and Charlie also explained that becoming a mom had changed their lives for the better. As Charlie said, “[b]eing a mom was the best thing that’s ever happened to me and it’s the hardest thing I’ve ever done. (laughs)” As we can see from these interview excerpts, a number of the participants saw their status as mothers in a positive light. Marianne Cense and R. Ruard Ganzevoort (2018) state that pregnancy is a “turning point” in young mothers’ lives, “as motherhood delivers social status and a new beginning” (p. 580). Pregnancy and eventual motherhood was positioned as a “breakthrough” for the young mothers in several different ways. Below I describe in more detail how motherhood, according to the participants, helped to improve familial relationships; encourage the mothers to reduce and/or end their negative behaviours and toxic friendships, and practice more self-compassion; motivate the mothers to do well academically; and reduce loneliness.

Improve familial relationships

Mirroring findings by Kirkman et al. (2001) and Gregson (2009), some of the participants found that their children brought family together, or repaired weak or broken familial relationships. In my second interview with April, she disclosed how having children allowed her to improve the connection she shared with her family and friends:

I: So, using that same scale, how well connected do you feel with people around you?

(see Appendix B)

M: Like, family? Close friends? [...] Probably, like, seven or eight. I think we’re pretty-

pretty good. [...] It's not bad. I used to be like, 'psh! Four, tops!' (laughs)

I: So what changed, do you think?

M: Um, having kids. It's a lot harder to do everything on your own when you have kids.

[...] Um, yeah. I think it was just having kids. Makes you wanna have someone to talk to because you don't talk to anyone at all.

Answering the same question as April above, Charlie shared a similar view on her daughter's influence in repairing broken familial relationships:

It took a long time but I've built quite a support system [...] it was something that was very important to me when I had my daughter, to have a support system in place. Now for the first time in the last three years, I think that I really have one put together pretty well. [I: Do you think you have your daughter to thank for that?] Oh, definitely. My daughter helps with a lot of relationship boundaries and stuff like that. [...] Yeah, I didn't have the best relationship with my parents, um, up until I had my daughter and she kind of bridged the gap there. (laughs) (first interview)

Indeed, the young mothers' statements above express the benefits of motherhood, not only for the young mothers alone, but for their families as well. Through interviews with 20 young mothers, Kirkman et al.'s (2000) research held a similar finding as their participants also described the influence of their children as positive and beneficial "in drawing the family closer together" (p. 288). Gregson's (2009) research substantiated this finding as well, where some of her participants stressed how motherhood brought them closer to their mothers. Further, as indicated through Charlie's statement, her daughter's influence in her life was also motivational and reparative, where Charlie was encouraged to create a positive support system for herself as a new mother, and where her daughter "bridged the gap" in the negative relationship she once held with her parents.

Reduce negative behaviours and toxic friendships

Motherhood also encouraged the participants to reduce or quit the negative behaviours they were participating in before they became mothers, and to end their friendships with toxic people or bad influences. SmithBattle (2006) similarly found that young mothers “reorganize their lives and priorities around the identity and practices of mothering... [by] reduc[ing] risky or unhealthy practices and limit[ing] their involvement with risky peers or gangs” (p. 131). This was reflected in most of our interviews with our participants. For instance, April claimed that her pregnancy and children “straightened me out”: “I was a pretty big loser before I had my kids. [...] I did a lot of really bad things [...] the first thing I thought about when I woke up was getting high. And I stopped. One day I peed on a stick, there were two lines, and I stopped.” Brad disclosed that she used to party a lot before having her son – “I used to go out all the time. [...] Like, I was a party animal. It was bad but now [...] I’d rather stay home with my kid than go out” – while Topaz stated that her daughter, Anna, “saved her from a bad path.”

After having their daughters, Selena stated that she reduced her smoking habit, going from around a pack a day to five cigarettes a day, while Charlie quit smoking completely. Both Kikyo and Selena revealed how they used to self-harm before having their daughters. Selena, while talking about her past self-harm habits, discussed how her new role as a mother encouraged her to stop this behaviour:

It was terrible. But then [...] I just stopped doing all those things because I was like, ‘you know, if I keep doing these things then I’m going to lose my daughter.’ You know? And that’s not--that’s not what I wanted to do. That’s not the person I wanted to be. [...] I need to be that good, positive role model for my daughter because she’s gonna look up to me for the rest of her life. (first interview)

Similarly, some of the participants noted how they ended friendships with bad influences or toxic

people once they became mothers. Jade and Topaz mentioned how they are now “choosy” with the people they spend their time with, while Kikyo “pretty much dropped everyone that I knew. [...] I realized they weren’t good influences and I didn’t want that around [my daughter].”

Amber also ended many of her toxic friendships: “I don’t really have time for drama like that anymore [...] we don’t have the same outlooks on life anymore cuz, like, they don’t have children. They still want to party and be stupid, and I don’t.” With the influence of their children and their motivation to succeed as ‘good’ mothers, the participants ended friendships with people who they considered irresponsible or bad influences.

Moreover, motherhood also worked to reduce their negative feelings towards themselves. For example, both Amber and Topaz described how their daughters had enabled them to feel less hard on themselves. Field notes from her first interview indicate that Topaz believes that “[t]hings are different now that she has a child, she is less tough on herself.” The pattern of motherhood as life improving demonstrates an interesting challenge to some of the thinking produced through the ideology of intensive mothering, where mothers are more likely to be tough on themselves due to the high expectations towards childrearing today (Hays, 1996; Elliott et al., 2015). After Amber answered “how would you say you feel about yourself on most days?” with a 10 out of 10, I learned that her daughter improved her self-confidence: “having a baby really changed my point of view on a lot of things. [...] I try not to be so, like, sad and stuff all the time.” Amber expanded on this, stating that she tries not to be so hard on herself now that she is a mother because she’s constantly with her daughter “and she feeds off of, you know, your feelings and stuff.” Amber’s daughter, Breanne, encouraged her to not only maintain more positivity for her child, but for herself as well: “and I know it’s not really good to be sad all the time, for my own health.”

As I have shown, motherhood was rewarding to the young mothers in various ways. Some participants felt encouraged to reduce or completely quit their negative behaviours with motherhood. Other mothers ended toxic friendships as they did not want these negative influences in their lives or around their children. Finally, some of the participants practiced more self-compassion towards themselves once they became mothers as they began to recognize how detrimental negative feelings can be, both for their children and themselves.

Motivated to do well academically

Interview data from Topaz and April reveals how they felt motivated to do well academically after having their children. This finding relates to research with teen mothers by SmithBattle (2007), who found that “[r]egardless of their school status prior to pregnancy, the anticipation of motherhood led teens to reevaluate their priorities and motivated them to remain or return to school” (p. 348). Field notes from Topaz’s first interview state that “[s]he wants to prove to others that she can [finish high school]. People in her extended family doubted her. She wants to prove them wrong and also show her child that education is important.” Through her academic efforts, Topaz not only wanted to debunk the negative assumptions held towards her as a young mother, but to also show her child how important an education is in the future.

April held a similar motive as she worked hard to improve her grades and school attendance. After stating that she did not care about school before having children, April boasted that her grades have improved after working hard, and plans to use this to encourage her children to do well academically in the future: “when my kids are 14 or 15 and don’t wanna go to school, they’re going to argue with me and say, ‘you never went to school. You don’t have your diploma.’ No, I do. [...] I went to school with two kids. I worked my butt off and I did what I needed to do. (snaps fingers) Your turn!” With motherhood, some of the young mothers

experienced a new motivation to do well in school and get their high school diploma.

Interestingly, the young mothers did not frame these academic efforts as an advancement that would lead them to better careers or other future successes. Rather, they recognized this new motivation as an effort to prove others wrong and to demonstrate to their children that education is important.

Reduce loneliness

Motherhood also reduced some of the young mothers' feelings of loneliness, which may have correlated with a more positive sense of well-being, and was noticeable after looking at the participants' well-being scales across their interviews. Many of the participants attributed their lack of loneliness to their children when answering the question, "how often do you feel lonely?" Brad, Topaz, and Charlie's responses all echoed Jade's: "I don't really ever feel lonely cuz I have my kids with me all the time." After admitting how her feelings of loneliness "will randomly come and go" in her third interview, Amber stated that she counteracts these feelings by "put[ting] all my focus on [my daughter] so it just gets my mind off of it." Amber's daughter not only reduced Amber's feelings of loneliness, but also enabled her to handle negative emotions in a positive manner. Lisa Arai's (2009) research with 15 young mothers also found that motherhood resulted in less loneliness as their children were a constant presence to keep them company.

This reduced loneliness through parenting relates to 'being there,' a quality of good motherhood discussed by the participants above. 'Being there' not only enables the mothers to succeed and understand themselves as good mothers, but also to reduce their negative feelings of loneliness. Consequently, this positive connection to their children relates to the second quality of 'good' motherhood, 'taking care of herself too.' While some of the young mothers lived with

mental health struggles such as social anxiety and depression, it can be argued that their children may have held an influential role in encouraging these mothers to take action and work to address these struggles. Kikyo, who struggled with anxiety and depression, dropped out of high school due to the bullying she experienced. Her daughter, Ruby, may have had an influential role with inspiring Kikyo to enrol in YPSP, taking on a new classroom and social environment, and work for her diploma. Her daughter's potential influence overlaps with the section above, where Kikyo was motivated to go back to school despite her past, aversive experience in high school.

Motherhood, as a “breakthrough” in the participants’ lives, encouraged them to improve their lives in a variety of ways (Cense & Ganzevoort, 2018). Contrasting with hegemonic discourses of young mothers and their assumed futures, SmithBattle (2007) states that “teen mothers often describe mothering as a gain that contributes to their maturity rather than a loss that jeopardizes their future” (p. 350). For example, motherhood encouraged some of the young mothers to become closer with their families and/or repair broken familial relationships. Motherhood also encouraged the young mothers to reduce their harmful behaviours, end their toxic friendships, and do well academically; and while these two qualities may relate to the responsabilized neoliberal citizen, the young mothers did not frame these beneficial influences of motherhood in this way. None of the young mothers understood their pregnancy and motherhood as events they needed to redeem themselves from, nor did they frame their self-care efforts (ending negative behaviours and friendships; doing well academically) in a meritocratic manner. Rather, these efforts were taken in order to provide the care, attention, love, and support they considered necessary for their children in order to succeed and understand themselves as ‘good’ mothers.

In sum, the participants did not understand their young motherhood as a ‘mistake’ that

they needed to 'redeem' themselves from. Rather, the participants saw their parenting as a rewarding experience which had benefited their lives in numerous ways outside of motherhood. This was established throughout the participants' interview data, which revealed how many of the young mothers reduced or quit harmful behaviours, ended friendships with toxic people and bad influences, and practiced more self-compassion. Their transition into motherhood also enabled the improvement of broken familial relationships and academic motivation, and reduced loneliness. Young motherhood was not positioned as a mistake but, rather, a reward, where their children were a positive influence in the participants' lives.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Through this research, I have looked at the various discourses which contribute to the policing of young motherhood. Using a Foucauldian and poststructural feminist perspective with the application of CDA, I found that this policing is enacted through various discourses relating to a young mother's age, gender, class, working status, and mothering. Moreover, the overlapping of these discourses, along with values of individualism and responsabilization perpetuated by a neoliberal and postfeminist ethos, creates more nuanced forms of inequality and policing, and influence areas outside of a young mother's parenting, such as the supports she does and does not receive, as a result. Through my analysis of 11 young mothers' interview transcripts, I learned how and where policing and self-policing occurred. A close attention to discourse allowed me to build an understanding as to why particular instances of policing transpired. These findings, however, may be specific to this study and its participants, and these particularities will be discussed below.

Limitations and strengths

There were several limitations to this study, particularly relating to the structure of the research, its sample, and its setting. Regarding structure, the research informing this thesis was not primarily focused on my key research questions, which sought to learn about the forms of policing young mothers experience. The participant responses that I drew on throughout this thesis were those responses under the interview section about 'being a mom' (see Appendix B). This was one section of questions that was placed between several other sections which focused primarily on the main research being conducted, where Drs. Raby and Tardif-Williams and I were trying to learn about the impact of a new mentorship program on the young mothers' lives and well-being. Despite the fact that the questions relevant to my research only made up a small

portion of the interviews, many of the young mothers conveyed a deep interest in the ‘being a mom’ section of questions, and shared rich, in-depth responses, as noted in the previous chapter. While these thorough responses were enough to draw on, having more time and questions pertaining to ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood, surveillance, and judgement may have offered more focused data, and, consequentially, more patterns, themes, and powerful quotes relevant to the policing of young motherhood.

A second and pivotal limitation to note is this research’s sample of young mothers. This sample originally comprised of 11 young mothers, though we lost three participants as they had graduated from YPSP by the time our second or third interviews were held. Of these 11 participants, nine were white while two identified as Indigenous. Most of the young mothers were in heterosexual relationships across our interviews, one participant was in a relationship with her girlfriend, while another briefly dated a woman after opening up her relationship with her child’s father. Class positioning was similar across many of the participants as well, where several of the young mothers were supporting themselves and their children with public assistance and, sometimes, minimum wage part-time jobs, consequently living with significant financial constraints. Greyson et al. (2017), who carried out research at a parent support program similar to YPSP, stress “that [their] recruitment methods may not have reached mothers on both the most- and least-disadvantaged ends of the spectrum, as they would be the least likely to be engaged with young parent services” (p. 147). Informed by this research’s limitations, I believe that my research experienced a similar limitation due to recruitment. It is crucial to consider how a young mother’s race, class, migration status, sexuality, and ability, for example, may influence her understanding of ‘good’ motherhood and experiences of policing, judgement, and praise, and a wider sample may have resulted in more nuanced narratives speaking to these differences. As

Kelly (2000) importantly highlights, “[t]he relations of unequal power based on gender, sexuality, class, and race shape who is likely to become a teen parent, how this event will be interpreted by those in positions of power, and with what consequences” (Kelly, 2000, p. 42). Indeed, as discussed in the literature review, young Indigenous mothers’ experiences of policing may be pervasive in a way that is unfamiliar to those populations who have not experienced the historical violence, oppression, and marginalization of colonialism. Young Indigenous mothers, for example, may be considered ‘bad’ mothers due to their Indigeneity alone. These considerations can be examined in future research (discussed further below).

An almost total lack of judgementality was experienced by Katia, an 18-year-old white mother who had a variety of positive supports, from her family and circle of friends, to her three-and-a-half year long relationship with the father of her daughter and large following on social media. Described as a “pretty, young girl,” Katia captured the idealized version of young motherhood: white, middle-class, well supported by her family and, consequently, not reliant on social support. Fox et al. (2009) discuss additional ways in which mothers may experience judgement for being ‘bad’ mothers due to their deviance from normative understandings of ‘good’ motherhood: “popular discourses disempower other mothers who do not conform... and are constructed as ‘bad’ or irresponsible in the public eye, because of their age, race, class, weight, diet, clothing or lifestyle habits” (p. 560). While a significant number of the young mothers indicated struggles with and stressors through their mental health, poverty, weight, and, relatedly, lack of confidence, Katia deviated from this pattern as she described her overall healthy diet and consistent workout routine, and boasted how she was “the only one who doesn’t go out for a cigarette” during the breaks between class. While considering Katia’s largely positive understanding of her experiences of young motherhood, it would be valuable to

investigate further into the differing experiences of young motherhood across a variety of races, classes, genders, and sexualities. White, heterosexual, cisgender, and middle-class mothers who possess a range of positive emotional, physical, and financial supports arguably experience young motherhood in a much more positive light than marginalized mothers who are ‘othered’ due to their problematized social positions.

A further limitation includes the site of the research. Conducting interviews at YPSP, a program created to offer young parents childcare and credit-based courses in order to receive their high school diploma, may have shaped the nature of this sample of young mothers and their comments. These young mothers were offered educational and emotional support that may not be as easily accessible for young mothers who do not have these young parent-centred programs available to them, potentially shaping their experiences of judgement and policing as a result. Moreover, the participants’ responses may have been influenced by the very fact that the interviews were held during their morning class at YPSP. Holding interviews at “the Center,” a program much like YPSP, Barcelos and Gubrium (2014) share a similar limitation by emphasizing the potential influence of institutional discourses perpetuated through programs like YPSP and the Center: “[t]he stories used and promoted by the Center undoubtedly influenced our participant’s responses, in particular the narratives of upward social mobility and the benefits of receiving an education” (p. 470). While there was no significant pattern relating to these institutional discourses, it is valuable to consider how a setting like YPSP may have influenced the participants’ answers, especially those relating to judgement and praise. Within this setting, the young mothers may have also felt obligated to participate in this research as they were recruited through a program that was benefiting them and served as one of their primary forms of support.

Despite its limitations, this research holds several strengths. First, multiple interviews with the same participants across seven months allowed the interviewers to form some connection with their interviewees. With the progression of each interview, we were able to adjust our questions and prompts with attention to the context of the participants' circumstances. Moreover, multiple interviews allowed us to learn about the participants and gather rich, informative data that may not have been collected without a second or third interview to spare. For example, in her second interview, Selena had a doctor's appointment which resulted in a time-conscious interview that was significantly shorter (35 minutes) than her first (one hour and 17 minutes) and third interviews (one hour and 38 minutes). As mentioned in the methodology chapter, multiple interviews also allowed otherwise shy and reserved participants, like Amber, to become more comfortable with the interview process, which consequently resulted in longer, richer interviews later in the research process. Finally, two interviews with Charlie allowed me to understand how beneficial a positive relationship may be in a young mother's life. In her first interview, Charlie talked about how her new relationship with her girlfriend "is probably the most healthy relationship I've been in." In her second interview several months later, Charlie exclaimed how this growing relationship was a solid foundation of support in her life. Charlie's circumstances calls for another interesting area of analysis as she entered a romantic relationship with her same-sex partner: how do young mothers experience their queer romantic relationships? How are these relationships perceived? Does a young mother's queerness invite new forms of judgement, surveillance, and policing?

Contributions and future research

Through the application of a Foucauldian and poststructural feminist perspective, I examined how various and overlapping discourses influenced, shaped, and limited my sample of

young mothers' lives. Through a critical focus on discourse and its regulatory effects, my research worked to reveal the insidious influence normative discourses of youth, women, and young motherhood hold in determining the actions, behaviours, and lifestyle choices of young mothers. Through both real and perceived judgement, and also through instances of praise, findings demonstrated how young mothers were policed, for example, through side-glances and unwarranted comments from strangers. Moreover, judgement and praise resulted in some of the young mothers' self-policing. The idea of young mothers' self-policing would be valuable to take into account while conducting future research on young motherhood, especially while considering how race, class, migration status, and sexuality may influence these actions, behaviours, and choices. Furthermore, future research should also consider how and where the regulatory function of discourse influences other marginalized groups across the West, such as LGBT identifying individuals, Indigenous folks, migrant groups, people of colour, and working-class groups. These 'othered' groups may experience similar forms of policing through particular forms of judgement and praise, and it would be valuable to consider how these forms of negative and positive judgement are produced and maintained, and to analyze their effects.

Implications

After working as a teaching assistant for a qualitative methods course in the first year of my master's degree, I developed a keen interest in how a qualitative researcher's method of data collection influences their resulting data. In her ethnography on teen pregnancy and motherhood and the politics of their interpretation within schools working to integrate teen mothers, Kelly (2000) eloquently outlined the tensions following her critical feminist ethnography. Ethical dilemmas on various and shifting relations of power arose throughout the conduct of her research, and Kelly discusses the nuances involved in these power relations by using the

concepts of studying up, studying down, and studying across (2000). These relations of power do not end after data collection, but continue throughout the writing process. Kelly outlines how these tensions arose in her own research: “[a]s a critical feminist ethnographer, I alternately attempt to speak about, for, and with teen mothers as I analyze and write about discourses, including school policies, about and for – but not necessarily with – teen mothers” (p. 204).

While conducting research on a marginalized and largely vilified group, such as young mothers, it is necessary for the researcher to consider how their language may be positioning and representing their sample of participants. Speaking about, for, and with a group that you do not identify with “enacts a particular social and political relationship that profoundly affects the meanings that will be constructed by listeners [and readers]” (Ellsworth, 1994, p. 105-106, as cited in Kelly, 2000, p. 204). I experienced some tension in my writing as I tried to understand and present my sample of young mothers in a positive light. My supervisor warned me to be careful and not smooth over details within my analysis as I tried to recognize the mothers favourably, and I began to notice the nuances involved in writing, especially while applying a feminist perspective and attempting to produce action-based research. How can a researcher carefully defend their participants while not idealizing them at the same time? These considerations would be valuable to consider in future research informed by the narratives of young mothers.

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Appendix A: Certificate of Ethics Clearance



Brock University
 Research Ethics Office
 Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035
 Email: reb@brocku.ca

Social Science Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

DATE: 2/8/2018
 PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: RABY, Rebecca - Child and Youth Studies
 CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Christine Tardif-Williams (ctardifwilliams@brocku.ca)
 FILE: 17-173 - RABY
 TYPE: Masters Thesis/Project STUDENT: Amber Varadi
 SUPERVISOR: Rebecca Raby
 TITLE: Evaluation of new mentoring program for student parents

ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED

Type of Clearance: NEW Expiry Date: 2/1/2019

The Brock University Social Science Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from 2/8/2018 to 2/1/2019.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 2/1/2019. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Research Ethics web page at <http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/research-forms>.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

- Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
- New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
- Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved:

Ann-Marie DiBiase, Chair
 Social Science Research Ethics Board

Note: Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.

Appendix B: Student Parent Survey

Please tell us a little bit about yourself (used in the February interview)

- What is your date of birth?
- How many children do you have and what are their dates of birth?
- Is there anything that you would like us to know about you right from the start?
- *Ask about what pseudonym they would like...*

How have you been doing? (used in the June and September interviews)

- How have things been since we last interviewed you?
- Is there anything that has happened since your last interview that we should know right from the start?
- Are you (still) involved in the mentorship program? If yes, when did that start and how many times have you met?

School

For the following questions, tell us a bit about how you feel about yourself as a student right now.

- On a scale of 1-10 where 1 is very negative and 10 is very positive, how do you feel you are doing in school in terms of your schoolwork?
- On a scale of 1-10 where 1 is very negative and 10 is very positive, how do you get along with your teachers?
- On a scale of 1-10 where 1 is very negative and 10 is very positive, how do you get along with your peers?

For these questions, is there anything you to discuss or explain?

Relationship

- Are you (still) in a relationship? If yes, for how long?
- How frequently do you see this person?
- If yes, on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is dissatisfied and 10 is satisfied, how do you feel about this relationship?
- If the child/ren's father is in the picture, how is that going?

Work

- Are you working? If yes, for how long?
- What kind of work are you doing?
- What are your hours?
- If yes, on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is dissatisfied and 10 is satisfied, how do you feel about your work?

Well-being

- On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is never and 10 is all the time, how often do you feel lonely?
- On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is never and 10 is all the time, how well connected do you feel with other people around you (e.g., family and friends)?
- On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is never and 10 is all the time, do you tend to be tough on yourself when times are really difficult?
- On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is never and 10 is all the time, are you loving towards yourself when you're feeling emotional pain?
- On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is never and 10 is all the time, when something painful happens, do you try to take a balanced view of the situation?
- On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is very negative and 10 is very positive, how would you say you feel about yourself on most days?

Is there anything that you are doing that you feel is bad for you?

We are now going to ask you about some specific examples. Please remember that you do not have to answer if you do not want to.

- Smoking? If yes, how often?
- Drinking? If yes, how often?
- Drugs? If yes, how often?
- Cutting/self-harm? If yes, how often?
- Hanging out with certain people? If yes, how often?
- Putting yourself in unsafe situations? If yes, how often?
- Unhealthy eating? If yes, how often?
- Other? If yes, how often?

Is there anything that you are doing that you feel is good for you? Eg:

- Exercise? If yes, how often?
- Healthy Eating? If yes, how often?
- Self-care, e.g. bath, nap, calling friends, going for a walk, reading, listening to music? If yes, how often?
- Creative activities, e.g. art, journaling, playing an instrument? If yes, how often?

Supports

- What kinds of struggles do you face? How do you deal with these struggles?

In addition to Supporting Moms (and later, Family Mentor), what do you draw on for social support?

Spiritual/religious. Specify:

Cultural/ethnic. Specify:

Parents/relatives. Specify:

Friends

Intimate relationship. Specify: _____

Other? Specify: _____

- Overall, on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is unsupported and 10 is supported, how well do you feel supported by others?
- Who/where do you most commonly turn to when you need help?

Being a mom

There are challenges to being a mom, and lots of people have opinions about what it means to be a good mom. We are wondering about how you feel about yourself as a mom and some of the challenges that you might face.

- On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is very negative and 10 is very positive, how do you feel about your daily interactions with your child? Explain:
- What do you feel makes someone a good mom?
- On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is never and 10 is always, do you feel like a good mom?
- What kinds of struggles do you face in your parenting? How do you deal with these struggles?
- Do you ever feel judged negatively for your parenting? Explain:
- Do you ever feel judged positively for your parenting? Explain:

Mentor relationship (used in the June and September interviews)

- If still in program, how are you feeling about the mentorship program now? How is it going for you?
- What do you do with your mentor? What is your favourite thing to do with your mentor?
- On a scale of 1-10 where 1 is very uncomfortable and 10 is very comfortable, how comfortable are you talking to your mentor about personal issues?

- On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is very negative and 10 is very positive, how would you evaluate the connection you have with your mentor?
- What are some of the challenges in your relationship with your mentor?
- What are some of the positive things about your relationship with your mentor?
- If not in the program, why is that and how are you feeling about it?

Wrap up (used in the September interviews)

- How have you felt about participating in this research?
- Is there anything that you think we should have done differently?