

The *Girl-Mom* Experience:
A Discourse Analysis of Online (R)evolution

by

Leanne Gislason
Bachelor of Social Work, University of Regina, 2007

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

in the Faculty of Human and Social Development

© Leanne Gislason, 2013
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

Supervisory Committee

The *Girl-Mom* Experience:

A Discourse Analysis of Online (R)evolution

by

Leanne Gislason

Bachelor of Social Work, University of Regina, 2007

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Donna Jeffery, School of Social Work
Supervisor

Dr. Teresa Macias, School of Social Work
Departmental Member

Abstract

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Donna Jeffery, School of Social Work
Supervisor

Dr. Teresa Macias, School of Social Work
Departmental Member

This thesis explores the ways in which the young mothers who participated in the online community of Girl-Mom.com were influenced by the dominant website discourses.

Young mothers are positioned as deviant throughout time, with specific consequences related to notions of stratified reproduction. Girl-Mom.com exists within social relations of third wave feminism, and in the social context of cyberspace. Within this background, feminist post-structuralism is employed to read discussion forum posts to note how concepts of discourse, power and knowledge, subjectivity and resistance create discursive effects. The *Girl-Mom* discourse emerges as a major theme. The qualities of the *Girl-Mom* discourse enlist young mothers in their own emancipation and the creation of self-knowledge while invoking processes of normalization, regulation and discipline between members. In the process, motherhood is valued as a biological act in which women are revered for their reproductive capabilities, with different effects for racialized women.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	viii
Acknowledgments	ix
Dedication	x
CHAPTER ONE: Introduction	1
From “Girl” to “Girl-Mom”	1
“To Speak Loudly and Boldly of Our Experiences”	4
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review	8
A Short History of Unfit Motherhood	8
1600s-1700s	9
1800s	9
Early 1900s	10
1960s-1970s	12
1980s	14
1990s	15
Young Mothers in Canada Today	16
Young Mothers in the Literature	17
Young Motherhood as a Social Problem	18
“That Kind of Girl”	20
“The Browning of America”	21
Young Motherhood: A tool to dismantle the welfare state	23
The Monitoring Gaze	25
What About the Young Dads?	27
Resisting Shame, Growing Resiliency	28
The Young Mother Rides the Third Wave of Feminism	29
Resistance is Personal	29
Uploading Resistance	32
Humans and Machines	32
Considering Cyberspace	34
Cyber-feminism(s)	38
DIY R/evolution	40
Conclusion	43
CHAPTER THREE: Conceptual/Methodological Framework for Researching Young Mothers in Cyberspace	45
Girl-Mom.com	46
Site Logistics	47
Member and Community Profile	48
Overview of Forum Posts	50
Concepts	52

Discourse.....	52
Power/Knowledge.....	54
Subjectivity.....	57
Resistance.....	59
Methods.....	60
Coding.....	61
Ethics.....	67
Ethics in Cyberspace.....	68
Human Research Ethics Board.....	76
Intimate Insider Research.....	78
CHAPTER FOUR: Constructing <i>Girl-Mom</i>	85
Interactions.....	85
Reference, Tone, Circulation.....	86
Reference.....	86
Tone.....	87
Circulation.....	88
Discursive Strategies and Techniques.....	90
Resistances.....	91
Effects.....	94
CHAPTER FIVE: Exploring <i>Girl-Mom</i>	99
Who is <i>Girl-Mom</i> ?.....	99
Characteristics.....	100
Resistances.....	101
Introducing Alli.....	104
Being <i>Girl-Mom</i>	105
Essentially, Mothers.....	106
Knowledge Creation and Subject Development.....	107
Regulating Language.....	109
Resistance.....	114
Normalization.....	119
“ <i>Girl-Mom</i> Doesn’t Represent Me”.....	121
Uploading Difference.....	121
Cracking Open the “Safe Space”.....	123
Becoming <i>Girl-Mom</i>	125
Allison Crews.....	128
The Process of “Becoming”.....	130
The Tools of Change.....	131
CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion.....	135
Witnessing My Own Experience.....	135
Study Conclusion.....	137
Reference List.....	138
Appendix A: <i>Girl-Mom</i> Mission Statement and User Agreement.....	151
Appendix B: <i>Girl-Mom</i> Discussion Forums.....	157
Appendix C: Images from the National Campaign to Prevent Teenage Pregnancy.....	161
Appendix D: Sample Research Information Post.....	164
Appendix E: Screenshot of One Step in Data Selection.....	168

Appendix F: Major Themes 169

List of Tables

Table 1: Document B	65
Table 2: Document C	66

List of Figures

Figure 1: CHEAP	161
Figure 2: DIRTY	162
Figure 3: REJECT	163
Figure 4: Screen Shot of Forum	168

Acknowledgments

I extend gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Donna Jeffery, for her thoughtful insights throughout this study. Donna encouraged me to question my own ideas and create knowledge in ways that consistently pushed the boundaries of what I thought I was capable of. This thesis began as a strong feeling that there was “something there” worth studying, and with Donna’s expert knowledge of discourse analysis and feminist post-structuralism shared with me in countless conversations, I was able to conduct research that I can feel proud of.

Thank you to my committee member, Dr. Teresa Macias, for her insights at key moments of thesis completion. Her expertise in discourse analysis and critical race theory shaped this work in crucial ways. Also, thank you to Dr. Susan Boyd, my external examiner, for her ability to bring much needed clarity in the final moments of this study.

I am grateful for the financial support provided by the Anna Isabelle Allen scholarship, and scholarships and provided by the School of Social Work and Faculty of Graduate Studies.

I would not have finished this study if it were not for the support of my writing group, the “secret society” that accepted me as a member at my most vulnerable. Their collective wisdom guided me through long months of research, and their reminders for me to be gentle with myself in the process made this project sustainable.

To my son Noah, thank you for reminding me of the joy in making new discoveries. I don’t know any other kid as insightful as you, and my hope is that the best parts of the grad school experience have rubbed off on you. Stay curious, little scholar.

To my son Avi, thank you for all of the long, meandering conversations and walks. I’m not sure that a rock or stick in Cadboro Bay went unexamined while I wrote this thesis. You reminded me that when I slow down and really take a good look at something, interesting discoveries result.

Lastly, to my partner Dallas, none of this would have been possible without you. I am grateful for your support, both reliable in all of the meal times and kid-wrangling you took on solo while I did research, and passionate in all the conversations in which you convinced me I would complete this work. Love, love, love.

Dedication

“Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen.” (Brené Brown)

This thesis is dedicated to the women of Girl-Mom, my sisters and friends who inspired me to be brave and joyful in a time when I was otherwise told I should be ashamed. I am who I am because of you. Respect, solidarity, and gratitude.

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

From “Girl” to “Girl-Mom”

Girls like me have raised presidents. We’ve raised messiahs and musicians, writers and settlers. Girls like me won’t compromise and we won’t fail. (Allison Crews, founding editor of Girl-Mom.com)¹

The term “young mother” brings to mind the image of a specific kind of woman. She looks different depending on the person imagining her, but we all have an idea of who “that kind of girl” is. I got pregnant just outside of adolescence, with a boy whose last name I didn’t know. I took the pregnancy test at the Planned Parenthood downtown, where Catholic girls from the suburbs, like me, went to talk about sex with nurses and social workers, conversations we couldn’t have with our mothers. Finding out I was pregnant was a shocking reality check. Even more unsettling than learning the consequences of my actions was learning what society had in mind as my penance for becoming “that kind of girl.”

My pregnancy was a lonely time. My peers didn’t know how to connect with me and I felt conspicuous in the doctor’s office and birth classes for not having a partner in the empty chair next to me. My birth experience was scary and overwhelming because the nurse put me through a brutal line of questioning about what drugs I had ingested in my pregnancy. When I insisted on my sobriety, she stated simply that when my baby was born sick from being gestated in a girl like me, everyone would know the mistakes I had made. My first days as a mother were disorienting, mainly because I could hardly believe how much I loved my little baby. I stayed up all night just to watch him sleep. This love

¹ American Typewriter font has been used in this document to signify text that has been taken from Girl-Mom.com.

wasn't enough to deflect the social worker that pulled back the curtain to my bed in the maternity ward and smiled a professional smile at me while asking questions about my support system and infant care knowledge. No other women in my shared room received the same treatment, as though the men sitting next to their beds acted as a shield against unwanted intervention. Adjusting to motherhood was difficult. I rarely slept and was so tired, hungry, and lonely that postpartum depression was inevitable, the fuzzy, sad silence too powerful to overcome. We didn't have enough to eat, my parents still weren't talking to me, and I had to spend hours at social services offices just to get enough help to eke out a living, as long as I didn't try to pay the bills and eat much in the same month. By the time my son celebrated his first birthday, I had a lawyer, a social worker, an income assistance worker, a student loan officer, a health plan worker, and several different accounts to get assistance, none of which came easily. Several professionals kept tabs on me. It felt like everyone was just waiting for me to fail so that when I did, they could all exhale a collective sigh. "We were right. We knew this would happen. Let's roll up our sleeves and clean up this mess of a girl."

A website saved my life. One lonely night, I sat down at my kitchen table and typed the hopeful phrase "cool young moms" into a search engine on my ancient desktop computer. Girl-Mom.com was one of the first results. I read through the "About Us" page, and could hardly believe my eyes. Other young mothers, girls like me, talked about how the pressure on young mothers to fail creates a self-fulfilling prophecy where they do fail because no other choice has been given to them. They promoted advocacy, education, and support for young mothers. In the discussion forums, they talked about attachment parenting, dealing with judgmental people, how to go back to school with a

baby on the hip, and feminist activism at the grassroots level: zines², protests, “girl-cotts” and above all, unconditional respect for other women, young mothers in particular. My life forever changed.

I couldn't get enough of their brave, hopeful, inspiring words. I registered on the forum and introduced myself. Women with whom I am still close welcomed me with open arms. I participated on the forums and became a regular member, slowly going through a feminist awakening so powerful that it wasn't just an online thing anymore. I went to conferences affiliated with the website, informally termed “mama gatherings,” and sat with purple haired, tattooed mothers who breastfed toddlers while discussing recycling, birth control, navigating the welfare system, getting student loans, and dating as a single mom. I never knew such women existed. I created and participated in zine making, website moderating, and community building. I even changed my academic major from nursing to social work in the hopes that I could some day inspire change in others the way that the women on Girl-Mom.com changed me.

I was taught from early childhood that it is love, then marriage, and then the baby carriage. Breaking those rules meant I was an outcast who at best could only hope to redeem herself through mimicking respectable mothers, a group I would never actually be able to belong to. After I became a Girl-Mom, I wanted more, and got it. My identity changed when I saw myself not as trash for being a single mom in poverty, but as strong and resilient for daring to raise a child on my own in a world designed to make me fail. I ended an abusive relationship, obtained my Bachelor of Social Work degree, and carried

² A ‘zine’ is a self-published, usually underground magazine dedicated to promoting the author(s) viewpoints. Several genres of zines exist, including a large number by feminists.

the messages of fiery hope and feminist activism into my social work practice with marginalized populations.

This study is an ode to the process of transformation from being no one to becoming someone. I experienced it firsthand and watched many of my friends experience something similar. It changed us. Through Girl-Mom we learned to “speak loudly and boldly of our experiences” (Crews, A.) as young mothers, to defy the stereotypes that society has about us. We learned how to be strong, how to love ourselves, and each other, and how to survive.

“To Speak Loudly and Boldly of Our Experiences”

This study examines text from the discussion forums of Girl-Mom.com to answer the research question:

How were the subjectivities of young mothers influenced by participation in the online, feminist space of Girl-Mom.com in the early 2000s?

As a small part of feminist history in cyberspace, Girl-Mom.com was highly influential to the hundreds of women involved over the years. Created by and for young mothers, no other space exists in which the young motherhood experience is shaped by feminist activism and the online “safe space.” While obtaining data through interviews would have allowed the women to define for themselves what Girl-Mom.com meant to them, the use of discourse analysis of historical website posts brings deep insight into the ways in which these women produced discourse in an authentic setting.

Through the lens of feminist post-structuralism, I read the website text to examine the major discourses and how those discourses influence the way that young mothers

articulated their identities and the motherhood experience. After compiling a data set out of discussion forum posts made in the early 2000s, I created a list of the major themes evident in the text produced by website members. From those major themes, I uncovered the most dominant, which I have titled *Girl-Mom*.

As a discourse, *Girl-Mom* invokes power relations and influences member subjectivities. The *Girl-Mom* discourse is at times read as a subjectivity members may attain, but only if they meet the reproductive requirement of biological motherhood. This echoes the radical feminist notion that experience with female biology produces women specific knowledge (Saracino, n.d.). However, in the process *Girl-Mom* is associated with traditional motherhood discourses that associate women's experience, knowledge, and worth to their biological capabilities. Thus, to invoke *Girl-Mom* in a space for marginalized women engaged in feminist activism also invokes traditional biologically oriented tropes of motherhood.

Traditional motherhood discourses are known to value the white, middle-class, and heterosexual motherhood experience above all others. As such, I examined the *Girl-Mom* discourse for its relations to stratified reproduction, a notion that is based on the opposing categories of respectable and deviant motherhood. As Reid, Dirks, and Aseltine (2009) suggest, "stratified reproduction posits that certain categories of people in a society are encouraged or coerced to reproduce and parent, but others are not" (p. 812). The respectability granted to some mothers over others is based on social categories related to income, sexual orientation, and especially race. Throughout this study, racialized mothers are interpreted differently than are white mothers, in both dominant discourses on motherhood that are explored in the literature review and in the alternative *Girl-Mom*

discourses in the discussion of findings. Presented as an emancipatory discourse for marginalized young mothers, *Girl-Mom* was not able to influence website members equally.

This study is specific to the timeframe and population explored in the analysis, and should be considered only in this context. It is a close examination of the lives of women, and makes no large-scale conclusions about young motherhood or cyberspace, although these topics are explored to demonstrate the context in which *Girl-Mom.com* exists. In addition, while the phrase “young mother” is used extensively in this thesis, It should be noted that I recognize that young mothers come from diverse backgrounds and there is not one single term that could describe them all. For the sake of simplicity in language, I have used “young mother” to describe a vast category of women while making analytic observations. The intention has not been to deduce the diverse group of website members to one common identity, but rather to examine one aspect of their lives that they all have in common: the young motherhood experience.

In the following chapters, I review of the literature on young motherhood, third wave feminism, and cyberspace. After developing the background to this topic, I provide an overview to the website, outline the conceptual framework used to read the data, describe the methods used to code the data, and demonstrate my approach to ethical research in cyberspace with women that are intimately familiar to me. Then, I examine how *Girl-Mom* is constructed as a discourse. Lastly, I explore the findings of my discourse analysis through the lens of feminist post-structuralism. In a famous passage, bell hooks (1994) states, “I came to theory because I was hurting” (59). To me, this means that theory can be a way to make sense of the world and our place within it. It can be grasped by those of

us used to being “on the ground” rather than behind the academic desk, and used to make insights into small pieces of seemingly mundane life activities to bring new knowledge and insight. This study contributes to the knowledge produced when theory is applied to every day experiences. The kitchen table has changed over the years, as has the kind of computer I type on, but I still live and work by one of the values of the Girl-Mom mission statement: women must “speak loudly and boldly of their experiences so that women in the future may do the same” (Crews, A.). Let us begin.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

In this review of the literature I explore what other researchers have discovered regarding the three main themes of this study: young mothers, third wave feminism, and cyberspace. I consider how young mothers are constructed in specific ways relevant to the era; how the third wave of feminism contributes to grassroots change at the individual level; and how cyberspace influences the way that young feminists take up their own emancipation. This discussion situates the work done on Girl-Mom.com and provides background information to what they are doing and why.

A Short [Western] History of Unfit Motherhood

The interval we insert between ourselves and the past may be much less than we assume (Young, 1995, p. 27).

The social category of young motherhood is understood in different ways at different points in time, depending on the discourses of the era (Pillow, 2004). Teenage pregnancy was only classified as a social problem in need of intervention in the 1970s, but since the colonial era, stratified reproduction has created conditions that support social condemnation of women presumed to be unfit mothers (Cherrington & Breheny, 2005; Luker, 1996). The young motherhood experience looks different for each young mother, depending on her cultural, social, and economic location. It is thus impossible to provide a full history of what unfit motherhood looks like over time, given that the focus of this thesis is on the contemporary, online community of Girl-Mom.com. This brief overview considers the contributions of North American history, including the impact of slavery, residential schools, and moral reform movements to the current social climate.

1600s-1700s

In the time when white settler society was organized into European colonies across North America, white babies born out of wedlock were both an economic burden to colonies and evidence of the sin of “sexual transgression,” or, sex outside of the confines of marriage (Luker, 1996). To deal with this problem, officials used public lashings to shame unwed mothers, interrogated women in labour to force them to disclose the identity of the father, fined the men deemed responsible, or forced unwed mothers to leave the colony. White settler women were thus punished if they reproduced in deviant circumstances that could mar the so-called respectability of white families. This marks the beginning of an era in which public policy was used to discipline and regulate unwed mothers and their children.

1800s

Who is this woman, so pitiable, yet so scorned? It is the mother of the illegitimate child. By forbidden paths she has obtained the grace of maternity, but its glory for her is transfigured into a badge of unutterable shame (Albert Leffingwell, 1890s, quoted in Kunzel, 1993).

In the 19th century, society was categorized into respectable and degenerate classes (Cherrington & Breheny, 2005; Stoler, 1998). As a social category, white settlers depicted degeneracy as a racialized, gendered, class-based phenomenon that defined white, Christian, middle class, settler families as respectable and all others as degenerate. These categories continue to shape present day society and can be identified in social constructions of certain populations as inferior, chaotic, or deviant as compared to those in the dominant, ruling class. As such, usages of “degenerate” and “respectable” in this

thesis refer to processes that reflect specific separations and exclusions due to race, sexuality, and class.

In the 1800s, helping professionals and moral reformers targeted the wretched with interventions designed to minimize the impact of deviance on respectable society. In Canada, residential schools were implemented by the state and the Church to forcibly remove Aboriginal children from their homes (Woods, 2013). The intent was to diminish the impact of Aboriginal families on settler society by attempting to indoctrinate Aboriginal children with white, middle-class, so-called respectable values.

Another intervention in this era was selective breeding through eugenics, or, “separating the fit from the unfit and controlling the population of the unfit” (Kennedy, 2008, p. 24). To protect the purity of motherhood as engaged in by the white, middle class, women that were young, poor, or racialized were stigmatized, subjected to heightened surveillance, and in some cases, forcibly sterilized. Eugenics was “essentially elitist, racist, and misogynist in principle and practice” (Stoler, 1998, p.356). Thus, in the 1800s, the moral threat and financial burden of the unfit mother was solved by extermination of so-called delinquent populations or, when that was not possible, forcible removal of her children.

Early 1900s

The popularity of eugenics continued into the 1900s. The first eugenics organization, the American Breeders’ Association, was founded in 1903. Feeble-mindedness was classified as a condition subjected to state intervention through the use of forced sterilization (Carabine, 2001a; Luker, 1996). Forcible eugenics was justified on the basis

that sterilization was necessary to prevent the scourge of promiscuity and loose morals that supposed feeble-minded individuals were thought to create (Kennedy, 2008).

Alongside the flourish of eugenics was the boom of institutionalization, including homes for unwed mothers and reformatories for youth. Homes for unwed white mothers were built to protect innocent babies from the presumably immoral choices of their mothers, marking the beginning of an era of quiet institutionalization for fallen white women (Luker, 1996; Kunzel, 1993). Women of colour were excluded from these homes, seemingly because they were so degenerate that there was no saving them, or their degeneracy was considered a naturalized part of their identities as racialized people (Luker, 1996, p. 23). Stratified reproduction was thus reinforced by the different choices made around who would be institutionalized for pregnancy, and who would not. Youth reformatories contributed to the construction of adolescence as a time of vulnerability and immature reason. Thus, young people were excluded from adult activities, like work, marriage, and sex. Those who broke the social rules were locked up to minimize their deviant notions on society.

These social changes could not have occurred without the work of the professionals hired to regulate society: the social workers (Kennedy, 2008; Carabine, 2001a; Kunzel, 1993). Social workers in the 1900s wanted to be scientific experts on those considered deviant subjects (Kunzel, 1993). At first, they diagnosed unwed mothers and sexualized adolescent women with feeble-mindedness. When too many middle-class white women turned up in the maternity homes, they changed their diagnoses to sexual delinquency, inspired by Freud and Christianity. Women were thought to have unconscious desires and neuroses that caused reckless sexuality, and thus required professional intervention

(Kunzel, 1993). As the 1950s got underway, unmarried white mothers were diagnosed as pathological, requiring expert intervention (Carabine, 2001a). Unmarried black mothers, on the other hand, were thought to be evidence of loose morals in racialized communities (Kunzel, 1993). As a social context, stratified reproduction and continued colonization thus denotes different outcomes for white and racialized women.

To manage these illegitimate subjects, the Canadian government consolidated systems of financial support provided through social welfare programs (Lessa, 2006). Conditions for receipt of such support included surveillance and moral regulation from social workers. Social welfare was considered unrelated to the universal Family Allowance, developed in 1945 by the Canadian federal Liberal government to supplement the wages of working husbands (Gazso, 2012) and thus intended for the deserving public. Conversely, welfare stigmatized the presumably undeserving poor, including unwed mothers.

1960s-1970s

The second half of the 20th century introduced a specialized classification of illegitimacy: the teenage mother. Prior to this time, age was not a major factor in determining maternal deviance. As the baby boom of the post-war era wound down, the government in Canada and the United States began to worry about public spending for the enlarged population. An easy scapegoat, programs for the so-called undeserving poor were targeted for cuts in public spending. To justify these cuts, policymakers constructed social welfare as a system that exploited hard-working taxpayers and rewarded the indolent poor (Lessa, 2006; Pillow, 2004). A special target, “teenage pregnancy” was

constructed as an epidemic sweeping across North America, leaving governments scrambling to pay for the mistakes of society's bad girls. Even though birthrates to teens were at their lowest in decades, "teenage pregnancy" registered as a social problem on the government agenda (Luker, 1996; Cherrington & Breheny, 2005; Seitz & Apfel, 1999).

While previous eras associated unfit motherhood with immorality and delinquency, the problem of teenage pregnancy in the 1970s was related to economic dependency (Kelly, 1996). Denying the role of society in creating certain outcomes, professionals problematized the psychological make up of sexually active youth (Luker, 1996) and racialized mothers (Spillers, 1987). Indeed racialized families were targeted by policies designed to lesson or eliminate their presence in and impact on settler society. In Canada, this was enacted by the Canadian government through practices that saw Aboriginal children removed from their homes and adopted out to white families throughout North America and Europe. This practice has come to be known as the "Sixties Swoop" and it had a devastating impact on Aboriginal families and communities.³

In the United States, the 1965 Moynihan Report was influential in constructing black single mothers as a burden to the welfare system, weakening men's authority and presence in the home and producing deviant children. Rather than acknowledge the impact of urban poverty, social and legal discrimination, racism, gender discrimination, as well as the legacy of Jim Crow laws and slavery, conservatives challenged the "war on poverty" and sought to construct black single mothers as deviant and a burden on society. Interventions that included surveillance of welfare recipients, contraception for teens, and

³ For further elaboration on the "Sixties Swoop" see Blackstock and Trocme (2005) or Sinclair (2007).

political interference in racialized families were implemented to lessen the impact of sexual and youthful deviance on government spending. Birthrates to teenage women declined, but the stigmatizing of young mothers had only just begun.

1980s

Two events in the 1980s shaped capitalist and family discourses in ways that resonate today. Firstly, Ronald Reagan, recalling the legacy of the Moynihan Report (1965), promoted the use of the term “Welfare Queen” in the United States to assign a racialized identity to public fears of the undeserving poor (Pillow, 2004) and the crack scare in the United States, opening up (again) the construction of black women as deviant mothers producing damaged children (Boyd, 2004). Secondly, abstinence-only sex education was endorsed in schools and public policy (Pillow, 2004; Kelly, 1996; Luker, 1996). Each of these events led to new discourses on youth sexuality and motherhood.

Assumed to be a woman of colour, the “Welfare Queen” became a popular caricature of racialized mothers when used by Ronald Reagan and others to symbolize the maternal welfare recipient (Pillow, 2004). The “Welfare Queen” trope invokes public outrage that poverty is a choice made by lazy, racialized families who reproduce at high rates and infiltrate white society, diluting white purity. An extension of the “Welfare Queen” discourses was the “crack babies” phenomenon, in which George H.W. Bush linked a presumably higher use of crack cocaine in racialized communities with defective babies (Lyons & Rittner, 1998). Fears of racialized people and their reproductive habits combined with fears of taxpayer exploitation to justify the oppression and stigmatization of mothers who are women of colour.

To be a mother who is excluded from the white, middle class, heterosexual norms of respectability is to be deviant (McCormack, 2005). This is evidenced clearly in the trope of the welfare mother. The welfare mother is marked by stereotypes that depict her as “a symbol of the supposed irresponsible, sexually promiscuous, and immoral behavior of the poor” (McCormack, 2005, p. 660). Therefore, the production of the deviant mother by strong discourses of motherhood and respectability functions to elevate the reproductive capabilities of women who are married, well off, and white while shaming mothers who are different.

Social programs were shrunk as the politically conservative Canadian and American governments shifted responsibility from the state to individuals (Pillow, 2004; Luker, 1996). Policies regarding youth emphasized sexual abstinence. Parental control over youth was enhanced through acts such as the requirement for parental consent for contraception. Welfare programs and school supports for young parents were cut as such funding became reframed as undermining parental control over their teenage children (Kelly, 1996), inviting youth promiscuity, and subverting the dominance of the traditional nuclear family.

1990s

In the 1990s, public and policy discourses shifted to reflect neoliberal values. Brown (2005) aptly describes neoliberalism as a political rationality

equated with a radically free market: maximized competition and free trade achieved through economic deregulation, elimination of tariffs, and a range of monetary and social policies favourable to business and indifferent toward poverty, social deracination, cultural decimation, long-term resource depletion, and environmental destruction (p. 38).

In neoliberal Canada during the 1990s, welfare for single mothers was restricted and emphasis was placed on employment (Lessa, 2006). The discourses that constructed young mothers in the 1990s are strikingly evident in advertisements created for the National Campaign to Prevent Teenage Pregnancy, an abstinence-only sexual education campaign (Sember, Kropf, & di Mauro, 2006)⁴. Heralded by Hilary Clinton and funded by a national sexual abstinence program designed to lower welfare rates, this campaign sought to emphasize “family values” and discourage sexual exploration outside of marriage, especially by racialized and poor women. With words such as CHEAP and DIRTY written in large letters across images of racialized, sexualized young people, young parenthood is clearly described in terms of its emotional and physical costs alone. Young mothers in the 1990s were thus dirty, cheap, and economically exploitative to taxpayers in government policies and ad campaigns. In neoliberalism, young mothers are worthless.

Young Mothers in Canada Today

In 2006, the World Health Organization estimated that 10% of all babies worldwide were delivered by women aged 15-19 years (as quoted in Al-Sahab, Heifetz, Tamim, Bohr, & Connolly, 2012, p. 228). In Canada that same year, just 4.1% of all births were delivered by 15-19 year old women (Statistics Canada, 2006, as quoted in Al-Sahab, Heifetz, Tamim, Bohr, & Connolly, 2012, p. 228). The average age of women at the time of first birth is 28.0 years, up from 22.8 in 1971 (Whitley & Kirmayer, 2008, p. 339).

⁴ To view images from this campaign in the 1990s, see Appendix C. To see how this campaign looks in 2013, see www.candiesfoundation.org.

More women give birth when they are between 25 to 34 years old than in any other age range (Statistics Canada 2008).

Geographically, Nunavut has the largest population of young parents in Canada, at 24.0% of 15-19 year old women (Al-Sahab et al., 2012, p. 228). Second highest is Saskatchewan at 10.1% and lowest is Quebec at 2.7%. Geographical variances are present within provinces and cities. For instance, in Saskatchewan there are more young mothers in the North, and in Toronto, there are more in low-income communities than in more affluent regions (Best Start, 2007). Al-Sahab et al. (2012) report that areas with high numbers of First Nations families have high birth rates among young women.

Overall, the national teen birthrate is declining (Manser, 2004). The total number of births to teenaged women decreased by about 50% between 1975 and 1996 and this number continues to fall (The Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006). In general, delayed childbearing is the norm for Canadian women (Whitley & Kirmayer, 2008; National Advisory Committee, 2007). Young motherhood is considered a social problem, and governments increasingly fund teenage pregnancy prevention initiatives (National Advisory Committee, 2007, p. 1) over social welfare for teenage parents (Gazso, 2012, p. 35). In the next section, I explore these concepts in more detail.

Young Mothers in the Literature

The young mother is a well-worn research subject. As I reviewed the literature, I noticed that the way these women were portrayed had certain consequences, depending on the research. Quantitative methodologies magnified negative qualities by reporting on adverse outcomes in pages of incriminating statistics, with no consideration for societal

influences (Acs, 1996; Healy & Peile, 1995). Qualitative research mainly followed a formula in which teen pregnancy is described as a problem, the social and economical costs to society are exposed, and an emphasis is placed on changing and managing teenage girls⁵. Society is mainly left unexamined. When negative language is repeated from article to article without question, the message is that teen mom degeneracy is a fact (Cherrington & Breheny, 2005). I will now briefly review the major themes through which young mothers are described in the qualitative and quantitative academic literature reviewed for this study.

Young Motherhood as a Social Problem

A prominent theme of Western academic literature on young mothers is that they are a problem to be solved. As one researcher states, “almost no one thinks it’s a good idea for unwed teenagers to become parents” (Sawhill, 2000, p. 40). The general idea of young parenthood is that it is the result of stupidity, implying that young parents are of questionable intelligence (Mollborn, 2011). Young people themselves report they would feel embarrassed if they got pregnant. Teenaged parenthood is assigned long-term negative consequences (Luong, 2009; Larson, 2004) that can extend into the next generation (Lee & Guterman, 2010; Oxford, Lee, & Lohr, 2010; Luong, 2009). Consequences include abandonment of education, poverty, and dysfunctional relationships with intimate partners, family, and peers (Whitson, Martinez, Ayala, &

⁵ For an example of a qualitative research report on young mothers, see: Best Start: Ontario’s Maternal, Newborn, and Early Child Development Resource Centre and the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada. (2007). *Update report on teen pregnancy prevention*. Retrieved from http://www.beststart.org/resources/rep_health/pdf/teen_pregnancy.pdf

Kaufman, 2011; Chabot, Shoveller, Johnson, & Prkachin, 2010; Lee & Guterman, 2010; Pillow, 2004).

As a social problem, young motherhood can be broken down into micro-level issues for researchers to understand and find solutions for. The most common issues that are repeated in the literature relate to mental instability, substance misuse, heightened maternal vulnerability, and poor outcomes for children of teens. Mental instability presents in the literature mainly as depression due to post-partum changes and the stress of parenting outside of respectable circumstances (Easterbrooks et al., 2011; Whitson et al., 2011; Lee & Guterman, 2010; Chaudhuri et al., 2009; Love, Suarez, & Love, 2008; Eshbaugh, 2007; Mayers, 2005). Substance misuse is linked to the presumably questionable decision making skills of young people (Chablani & Spinney, 2011; Morrison, Lohr, Beadnell, Gillmore, Lewis, & Gilchrist, 2010). Vulnerability is related to heightened incidences of intimate partner violence (Chablani & Spinney, 2011; Chalfin, Burke, & Tonelli, 2011; Lee & Guterman, 2010; Love et al., 2008) and conception due not to either statutory rape (Cocca, 2002) or promiscuity caused by childhood sexual assault (Erdmans & Black, 2008). Lastly, young mothers are thought to be unstable caregivers, authoritative and harsh with their children because they lack parenting knowledge (Easterbrooks et al., 2011; Whitson et al., 2011; Lee & Guterman, 2010). As a result, children suffer poor health (Al-Sahab et al., 2012; Easterbrooks et al., 2011; Chaudhuri et al., 2009; Dryburgh, n.d.) and emotional, cognitive, and behavioural difficulties (Chabot et al., 2010; Chaudhuri et al., 2009). These difficulties are thought to lead to gang involvement, unemployment, teenage pregnancy, learned violence, low educational aspirations, and inability to regulate their feelings (Lewin, Mitchell, Burrell,

Beers, & Duggan, 2011; Whitson et al., 2011; Love et al., 2008; National Advisory Committee, 2007; Sawhill, 2000; Seitz & Apfel, 1999). Thus, early pregnancy and parenting are associated with a multitude of social problems thought to likely extend and influence multiple generations.

“That Kind of Girl”

The construction of teenage pregnancy as an epidemic of promiscuity is an oft-repeated theme (Kirkman, Harrison, Hillier, & Pyett, 2001). A woman who gets pregnant while young is depicted as unable to control her own sexuality (Kelly, 1996). Her innate rebellion renders her unable to participate in appropriate female sexuality or family structure (Rains, Davies, McKinnon, 2004; Seitz & Apfel, 1999). Pillow (2004) points out that the sexuality of young people mimics the sexuality of adults. There is nothing unique about teenagers having sex, other than it happens within the discourses of adolescence, which position youth sexual exploration as problematic and deviant behaviour.

Pillow (2004) uses the phrase “erotic welfare logic” (p. 176) to describe how abstinence discourses depict young mothers as dirty, promiscuous, risk-takers whose depravity is demonstrated by their swollen bellies and lactating breasts. This is evident in the National Campaign to Prevent Teenage Pregnancy ads⁶ in which young parents are represented as sexual deviants, with tousled hair and smeared make up (Pillow, 2004, p. 185). Tying a woman’s agency to her body denies her full personhood because a person

⁶ See Appendix C.

at the whim of their chaotic, deviant, sexualized body certainly cannot be trusted to make reasonable decisions (Rúdólfsdóttir, 2000, p. 339).

“The Browning of America”

Literature on present day society shows that across North America, racialized young women become mothers more often than other women. In Canada, First Nations women are almost four times as likely as other women to get pregnant during adolescence (Al-Sahab et al., 2012; National Advisory Committee, 2007). This higher rate is considered the influence of an indigenous perspective on pregnancy as a positive life event, no matter the circumstances. In the United States, Hispanic young women have the highest rates of pregnancy (Harris & Franklin, 2003). Larson (2004) notes that even if they are accepted in their own communities, racialized mothers are outcasts in mainstream society that values economic success and individual achievements. Pillow (2004) refers to the social exclusion and condemnation of racialized women as due to fear of the “browning of America” (p. 217). In white supremacist societies⁷ such as North America, ethnic-minority groups face racist oppression based on the notion that their difference will erode what is considered common (white) respectability.

Racialized motherhood is symbolized by the “Welfare Queen” (McCormack, 2005). As mentioned previously, “Welfare Queen” discourses gained momentum in the 1980s,

⁷ My use of the term “white supremacy” is borrowed from bell hooks who defines her use of the term in a provocative video found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQUuHFKP-9s>

In one transcribed excerpt from that video, bell hooks states: “To me an important breakthrough, I felt, in my work and that of others was the call to use the term white supremacy over racism because racism in and of itself did not really allow for a discourse of colonization and decolonization, the recognition of the internalized racism within people of colour, and it was always in a sense keeping things at the level at which whiteness and white people remained at the centre of the discussion... white supremacy doesn’t just evoke white people, it evokes a political world that we can all frame ourselves in relationship to...”

when politicians promoted family values and reduced social welfare (Pillow, 2004). The “Welfare Queen” continues to invoke an image of the morally irresponsible, sexually promiscuous, deviant woman of colour who exploits taxpayers, presumed to be white. While more single parent families do live in poverty (Al-Sahab et al., 2012; Cooksey, 1997), the “Welfare Queen” is a mythical subject. Women of colour have not been found to utilize social programs more than white women, and do not have multiple children to increase welfare payments (Acs, 1996).

Despite the fictitious nature of the “Welfare Queen,” there are very real consequences for people of colour who are excluded in her name. In today’s world, “welfare has become a code word for race” (Roberts, 1996, p. 1563). The persistent stereotype of the “Welfare Queen” as a racialized woman marginalizes women of colour (Mollborn, 2011; Kulkarni, 2007). Black teenage pregnancy is depicted as a sign of ethnic inferiority, while white teenage pregnancy is a sign that pregnancy prevention programs are needed (Pillows, 2004, p. 28). This reinforces the notions of stratified reproduction by depicting racialized reproduction as undesirable.

Welfare is racialized through associations with supposed unruly ethnic families with hands outstretched (McCormack, 2005). Fear is generated in white society through discourses that describe poor people of colour as illegitimate, pathological, and as a threat to so-called respectable communities (Pillow, 2004, p. 41). Racist discourses undercut the decency of racialized families by implying that their views on young parents represent their inability to make decisions that align with so-called civilized (white) society (Cherrington & Breheny, 2005, p. 95). While racialized young mothers report that they enjoy their babies and receive loving support from their communities (Al-Sahab et al.,

2012, p. 232; Whitley & Kirmayer, 2008, p. 344), dominant discourses on respectability and family reframe these women as unable to adapt to proper (white) culture (Cherrington & Breheny, 2005, p. 101). Racism thus pathologizes the lives and families of people of colour and supports notions of stratified reproduction that devalue racialized reproduction.

Young Motherhood: A tool to dismantle the welfare state

Pregnant and parenting teens defy the dominance of the ‘American dream’ (Luker, 1996, p. 107). Present day neoliberal discourses emphasize individual accountability and so those who cannot financially provide for themselves are recast as exploitative to taxpayers (Al-Sahab et al., 2012; Cassiman, 2008; Kohler-Hausmann, 2007; Cherrington & Breheny, 2005; Carabine, 2001a; Little, 1994). Right wing, conservative governments portray young parents as wayward youth who feel entitled to public funds and who thus must be monitored lest their chaotic choices disrupt society (Pillow, 2004, p. 49; Luker, 1996, p. 176). Left wing governments depict young moms as lost souls in need of guidance, leading to investments in initiatives to ‘help teens make better choices’ (Luker, 1996, p. 180). Both approaches target individuals for change rather than the social factors that contribute to higher rates of teenage pregnancy, such as living in poverty, attending a low-quality school, or experiencing dysfunction in the home (Luker, 1996, p. 180). Teenage pregnancy is depicted in both instances as a problematic event resulting from troublesome circumstances.

When users of the public purse are re-cast as “Welfare Queens,” it is easy for politicians to justify the dismantling of the welfare state (Cassiman, 2008). Politicians use

dramatic story-telling of the smug “Welfare Queen,” driving her welfare-paid Cadillac (Cassiman, 2008, p. 1692) to garner support for reduced social spending (Cocca, 2002, p. 57; Acs, 1996, p. 899). Problematizing the actions of women on welfare naturalizes interference in their lives (Cocca, 2008, p. 57).

When individuals take the blame for social problems, those who presumably would not require public aid if they simply made better choices become the undeserving poor (Gazso, 2012; Gazso & McDaniel, 2010; Manser, 2004; Roberts, 1996). Young mothers are in this category because their pregnancies are constructed as mistakes due to supposed immature recklessness that those with better self control have to pay for (Luker, 1996, p. 176). Single mother and anti-poverty activist, Josephine Grey, describes the result of welfare surveillance on recipients: “When you live on social assistance, you live in Stalinist-Russia – your neighbor, your [social] worker, even your friend might report you. You live with all kinds of terrorist fears” (as quoted in Little, 1994, p. 294). In neoliberal North America, young mothers are viewed with suspicion at best and invasive regulation and surveillance at worst.

While teen pregnancy is thought to be one of the main reasons for poverty, in most cases young parents were poor to begin with (Mollborn, 2011; National Advisory Committee, 2007; Maticka-Tyndale, 2001; Kelly, 1999, 1996; Luker, 1996). Welfare payments do not entice women to get pregnant, and women who access social assistance would likely require that assistance at some point in their lives with or without children (Kelly, 1999, p. 58; Kelly, 1996, p. 425). The poor stay poor in neoliberal society no matter what their reproductive habits (Best Start, 2007).

The Monitoring Gaze

Motherhood as an institution comes with expectations for white women to be fertile, heterosexual, and nurturing (Gazso, 2012). “Good mothers” are those who most closely follow the cultural motherhood script, such as only reproducing when married and financially stable (McCormack, 2005, p. 661). Women in other situations thus become immoral deviants, symbolic of fissures in societal morals (Mollborn, 2011). A moral panic is produced when the “others” are perceived as a threat to social functioning, so interventions into the intimate lives of women are justified on the basis of upholding social morality. This happens most intensely for white women, charged with maintaining racial purity of white people. Luker (2004) states, “what’s toxic about teenage pregnancy is that it combines a threat to the public purse with a threat to morality” (p. 43). Young mothers are treated differently because they can never achieve respectability within patriarchal institutions of motherhood.

The discursive constructions of the young mother justify interventions in her life (Cherrington & Breheny, 2005; Pillow, 2004; Rúdólfsdóttir, 2000; Luker, 1996). Labels such as “welfare mom,” “teen mom,” or “unwed mother” define these women as abnormal (Manser, 2004) and thus justify the “helping” of professionals (Luker, 1996). The category of adolescence means that young parents are assumed to need protection from their own immaturity (Sisson, 2012; Manser, 2004; Maticka-Tyndale, 2001), which means that interventions are justified even for those young people can manage ‘adult’ responsibilities such as caregiving or running a household.

Gone are the institutionalized “homes for unwed mothers,” but young mothers are still segregated from society and kept under surveillance (Rains et al., 2004, p.18). On the

macro level, government researchers inspect and examine young mothers each year through data collected and analyzed by Statistics Canada and other researchers (Al-Sahab et al., 2012). On the micro level, families, teachers, social workers, and society at large fix the young mother within the ‘monitoring gaze,’ a tool of power intended to help keep these women in line (Cherrington & Breheny, 2005, p. 102; Rudolfsdottir, 2000, p. 339). This monitoring gaze can strip a young mother of confidence and leave her living in fear that she will be punished through added regulation and surveillance or that she will lose her baby to the system of people who presume to know better than she does (Manser, 2004, p. 8).

It is unlikely that a young woman could get pregnant in the Western world and not feel some trepidation about her circumstances (Baker, 2009, p. 283; Kirkman et al., 2001, p. 283). Shame, stigma, and social and legal discrimination of young mothers is prevalent and young women know exactly what that looks and feels like (Whitley & Kirmayer, 2008, p. 340). As Manser (2004) states, “The societal stigma against young moms is overriding and reaches them and their children at all levels of their lives” (p. 2). Being relegated to the margins of society as an “other” and being designated as a “bad mother” in the process is damaging to any young mother’s self-concept (Croghan & Miell, 1998, p. 445). The effects of dominant discourses regarding young mothers is important because discourses shape reality, construct subjects, constitute truths, and invoke power relations (Lessa, 2006). Thus, young mothers deal not only with the stressors of caring for a child, but with the social stigmatization and exclusion due to their position in society.

What About the Young Dads?

The most glaring omission in the literature about young mothers pertains to young fathers. In the context of young pregnancy, women are usually depicted as promiscuous while men receive little scrutiny in the research on young families (Sisson, 2012, p. 61; Wilkes, Mannix, & Jackson, 2011, p. 180; Tuffin, Rouch, & Frewin, 2010, p.485; Bunting & McAuley, 2004, p. 295; Luker, 1996, p.2). If young men do appear in the literature, they are often presented as delinquents or abandoners, and very seldom in terms of their potentially nurturing love for either mother or baby. Young fathers can more easily deny their parenting responsibilities, but they cannot escape the stigma that follows young parenthood. This stigma creates them as sexualized predators who prey on vulnerable (virginal) young women, as hyper-masculine men incapable of taking interest in the pregnancy, birth, or raising of their child, and as selfish, immature man-children unable to clean up whatever mess they have made in someone else's life (Weber, 2012).

Researchers who consider young men and masculinities state that the absence of consideration for the contributions of young fathers underestimates the efforts of these men (McKinnon, Davies, & Rains, 2001). However, it seems there is a fine line between research that acknowledges young fathers and research that emphasizes male dominance in the patriarchal family. Certainly, women still do the majority of the parenting and domestic labour within the home, and research that considers the efforts and experiences of women can help to bring attention to long-standing gendered inequalities in families. However, to exclude fathers from the literature is to exclude consideration for men that are highly influential to the lives of young mothers and their children, whether those men are absent, abusive, or affectionate. Whatever the construction may be, one thing that

young fathers have in common with young mothers is that they are the wrong kind of men (Weber, 2012). They have failed simultaneously at adolescence, parenthood, and masculinity. While the literature over-emphasizes the plight of young mothers, the absence of consideration for young fathers is not without consequence.

Resisting Shame, Growing Resiliency

Researchers have identified blind spots in academic literature on the strength and resiliency of young mothers (Best Start, 2007; Lessa, 2006; Manser, 2004; Pillow, 2004). While it was infrequently discovered in this literature review, at times young mothers were described as agentic and strong, able to achieve long-term goals and stability (Easterbrooks et al., 2011; Turney, Conway, Plummer, Adkins, Hudson, McLeod, & Zafaroni, 2011; Eshbaugh, 2007; Herrman, 2006; Kennedy, 2005). Getting pregnant as a young woman is sometimes reported as a turning point for women to get their lives in order (Al-Sahab et al., 2012; King, Ross, Bruno, & Erickson, 2009, p. 147; Manser, 2004, p. 2; Rúdólfsdóttir, 2000, p. 347). After taking on the challenges of motherhood, many receive respect from their families and communities (Manser, 2004, p. 14; Acs, 1996, p. 899) and have an easier time adapting to the demands of parenting thanks to the energy of youth (Kirkman et al., 2001, p. 291). Despite all of the problems they are said to face, young mothers report to some researchers that they have no regrets in choosing this life path (Baker, 2009, p. 284; Kirkman et al., 2001, p. 286; Kelly, 1996, p. 441).

Some researchers argue that young mothers deserve support and respect. In fact, Kelly (1996) boldly states that if we undermine the reproductive rights of adolescent women, we undermine reproductive freedom for all women (p. 60). Pillow (2004) asks “what

would it mean to build a community of parents, of mothers, instead of relying upon individualistic notions of responsibility and the instability of heterosexual nuclear family?" (p. 209). To treat adolescent mothers as adults allows them to take responsibility for their choices (Kaufman, 1999, p. 32; Kelly, 1996, p. 63). Indeed, support for young parents has been shown to reduce barriers and increase positive outcomes (Al-Sahab et al., 2012, p. 232; Sisson, 2012, p. 66; Best Start, 2007, p. 18; Herrman, 2006, p. 245). In the next section, I consider how young women are influenced by another strong social force of the present day: third wave feminism.

The Young Mother Rides the Third Wave of Feminism

Girl-Mom.com took an explicitly feminist stance to provide support to young mothers and respond to societal shame and degradation. This feminist stance was grown out of the qualities of the third wave of feminism, embedded within the social context of the early 2000s. I will briefly introduce some elements of the third wave to position the politics and approach of the website members that will be explored in later chapters.

Resistance is Personal

The third wave of the feminist movement builds on the efforts of the second-wave while adding an element that considers how feminism changes individual women (Riordan, 2005, p. 289). The third wave reverses the old second wave saying: *the personal is political*. Now, the political is personal. Third wave feminism is characterized by many small acts of revolution, occurring constantly, from an endless and complex

array of women who resist through political self-expression (Budgeon, 2001, p. 14; Garrison, 2000, p. 146).

Third wave resistance is as distinct as young feminists, whose identities are considered by some to be more representative of diversity than perhaps earlier generations of feminism (Harris, 2008, p. 7). This population of young feminists uses discussions of personal issues as a tool to demonstrate how feminism helps them to resist sexist oppression in their daily lives (Moore & Roberts, 2009, p. 285). Kathleen Hanna, the lead singer of the band Bikini Kill and founding member of Riot Grrrl⁸ describes resistance in the third wave:

Resistance is everywhere, it always has been and always will be. Just because someone is not resisting in the same way you are does not mean they are not resisting. Being told you are a worthless piece of shit and not believing it is a form of resistance (as quoted in Garrison, 2000, p. 146).

Third wave resistance thus emerges at the grassroots level by individuals speaking out about the position of women in the neoliberal patriarchy.

It has been said that second wave feminism was a movement that focused on the needs of white, middle class, educated women (Riordan, 2001, p. 280), and there was a surge of backlash to this construction of women's liberation, led by Black, Latina, and Aboriginal feminists (Orr, 1997). In response, the third wave has attempted to be inclusive of social

⁸ The Riot Grrrl subculture is one example of how an underground DIY feminist movement eventually leads to widespread political and social resistance (Brown, 2011, p. 112; Rosenberg & Garofalo, 1998, p. 809). Riot Grrrl began in the 1990s in the United States as a movement to get women and girls more involved in the punk scene. This movement grew exponentially over the first few years, showing up in Riot Grrrl chapters across North America, in all-female punk bands singing explicitly about the experience of being a woman, and in hundreds of other individuals and groups producing their own media about their experiences and other 'girl politics' (Riordan, 2005, p. 285; Rosenberg & Garofalo, 1998, p. 810). Riot Grrrls took on many mainstream forms of political activism, including hosting workshops and conferences, teaching each other how to participate in the movement, and learning how to question and resist. Defying the perception that politics should be boring and women should be tamed, Riot Grrrls are loud, straightforward, and proud. As Rosenberg and Garofalo (1998) state, "at a time in their lives when girls are taught to be silent, Riot Grrrl demands that they scream" (p. 810).

difference. Garrison (2000) states that difference is a “core component of Third Wave consciousness,” (p. 145). In this context, the word difference is used to describe those who are not part of the mainstream, dominant societal groups and who are thus different due to race, class, education, sexual orientation, and other minority statuses. Third wave feminism attempts to hear all those who speak.

Garrison (2000) notes that in the acts of resistance initiated at the micro level by diverse feminists, these women question their “experiences of race, sexuality, class and other forms of [embodiment]” (p. 157). However, despite the emphasis on difference, the third wave is criticized for excluding some women, in effect replicating the problems of the second wave. Brown (2011) describes young third wave feminists in the Riot Grrrl movement as “young women who were largely daughters of feminists, white, often university educated, and frequently self identified as queer. Girls of colour and with (dis)abilities were largely absent” (p. 112). Rosenberg & Garofalo (1998) state that the white-washing of the third wave movement means many women of colour distance themselves from it and ongoing discussions of race have not created much change within the movement (p. 811). Thus while the potential for resistance and revolution at the site of individuals is promoted in the third wave, the movement does not provide that same experience for all individuals.

The feminist movement still does not listen to or include all women (Budgeon, 2001, p. 11), and in the third wave this includes women of colour, queer women, disabled women, and older feminists who may feel excluded by the emphasis on youthful forms of expression and politics (Garrison, 2000, p. 145). It is also taken for granted by young women who have grown up with rights and freedoms that previous generations had to

fight for (Rúðólfsdóttir & Jolliffe, 2008, p. 269; Rich, 2005, p. 496). The emphasis placed on individual women speaking out is thought to make little real change in society because the overemphasis on individual injustice means that systemic injustices persist (Riordan, 2001, p. 282). ‘Empowerment’ in particular has become a dirty word, once used to describe the process of opening up and being heard, but now commodified and overused to the point that even razor blades and dish soap promise empowerment (Riordan, 2001, p. 283). Even used politically, empowerment is thought to only change things for the individual, hinting that it is a selfish pursuit that does nothing for the feminist movement (Rúðólfsdóttir & Jolliffe, 2008, p. 270; Rich, 2005, p. 501) and is unlikely for women to achieve even personal change in a world that devalues them and commodifies the girl power experience (Gonick, 2006, p. 17). This discussion now shifts to consider cyberspace as the medium through which third wave feminism is communicated, and the social context for Girl-Mom.com.

Uploading Resistance

Cyberspace is a fairly new but vast field of research. This section explores only a small part of the immense discussion on the way that the digital and physical worlds collide. I consider how humans and machines interact, situate cyber-feminism as a movement online, explore how cyberspace contributes to feminism through the ‘DIY’ revolution, and identify the limitations of the Internet.

Humans and Machines

Some of the literature on cyberspace reads like a science fiction novel about a future society connected through wires and machines. Three women are at the forefront of thought on cyberspace: Donna Haraway, Sadie Plant, and Sherry Turkle. Donna Haraway (1991) comments on the influence of computers on humans:

...basically machines were not self-moving, self-designing, autonomous. They could not achieve man's dream, only mock it. They were not man, an author to himself, but only a caricature of that masculinist reproductive dream. To think they were otherwise was paranoid. Now, we are not so sure.

In this quote, Haraway argues that over time computers have become so intuitive to human behaviour, they could be assigned human qualities. We engage with computers to share ideas, make connections with other people, and keep track of our daily lives.

Certainly, websites such as Girl-Mom.com are indicative of the influence that machines can have on humans. As we become consumed by the influence of computers on our daily lives, it becomes less of a static machine used to compute ideas, and more of an interactive, intuitive, persuasive device that we find ourselves unable to step away from.

Sadie Plant (2001) considers the Internet an essentially female construct (Sundén, 2001). Plant invokes cyborg imagery to talk about how humans interact with machines, but with a distinctly feminine, sexual element. "With an openly sensuous, erotic vocabulary, she [Plant] expresses the scene where women's bodies almost melt, fuse together with the technology at hand in an ongoing rhythmic, pulsating interaction" (Sundén, 2001, p. 220). The Internet is not just the medium for connecting subjects, it also influences how those connections begin and progress. The imagery that arises from this theory depicts women on websites such as Girl-Mom.com interacting in intense ways not just with one another, but also with the machines and devices they use to go online.

Through technology, ideas and bodies fuse in ways previously unheard of in the history of human connections.

Sherry Turkle (2011), a pioneer of research in this field, began her work with an idealistic view of what computers could do for community and identity. A decade or so later, when computers were used in vastly different ways than they were at first, she warns,

Now we know that once computers connected us to each other, once we became tethered to the network, we really didn't need to keep computers busy. They keep us busy... The ties we form through the Internet are not, in the end, the ties that bind. But they are the ties that preoccupy. We text each other at family dinners, while we jog, while we drive, as we push our children on swings in the park. We don't want to intrude on each other, so instead we constantly intrude on each other, but not in 'real time' (Turkle, 2011, p. 279-280).

Building on Haraway's (1991) notion that humans and machines have become quite similar, and Plant's (2001) idea that the female body interacts with technology in "pulsating interactions," Turkle depicts computers as overtaking human life. It is interesting that these women presented their theories ten years apart from one another, yet they all predicted that computers as machines would shape human life. The women who went online to engage with others through the discussion forums of Girl-Mom.com were part of a vast network of people connecting with others and with machines in very similar ways. A full review of the influence of machines on human life and society is out of scope for this thesis, but in the next section, I will briefly review the key contributions and limitations.

Considering Cyberspace

Some researchers conceptualize the Internet as a utopia for connection and activism. The use of the Internet allows individuals to shift political discourses through self-expression and community connections (Garrison, 2000, p. 163; Warf & Grimes, 1997, p. 260). The sheer volume of knowledge created and shared online has shifted society around the world in impressive ways (Carty & Onyett, 2006, p. 230; D'Amelio, 2005, p. 15; Warf & Grimes, 1997, p. 260). People can be connected simply by ideas. Online knowledge creation comes from decentralized sources, and is distributed according to interests and voices not typically heard, which "...seems to breed critical thinking, activism, democracy, and equality..." (Mark Poster, 1995, p. 28 as quoted in Carty & Onyett, 2006, p. 231). The ease at which those with Internet access can participate in social movements has shifted whose voice is heard, who contributes to social change, and even who considers themselves as someone who has something to say.

Online activity is a form of knowledge production (Madge & O'Connor, 2006, p. 208, Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005, p. 924). What appears first as chit-chat grows to become unofficial ways of talking about certain subjects, and website members gain power from creating knowledge. When women do this, they rewrite narratives about what it means to be a woman in this society, defying the hegemonic script that limits them to only a few, passive, vulnerable roles (Hammond, 2010, p. 79; Tucker, 2008, p. 201; Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005, p. 924). Expressing oneself through text and reading the words of others can create increased self-understanding and strengthen relationships between women, as they recognize differences and feel heard by one another (Hammond, 2010, p. 82).

Conversely, critics of online activism worry that it will replace involvement in real life community, social and political events (Carty & Onyett, 2008, p. 239; Koerber, 2001, p. 231). Some suggest that what happens on the Internet stays on the Internet, limiting the emancipatory potential of cyber-activism (Tucker, 2008, p. 209). As McTavish (2006) writes, “when communications technologies paradoxically enable being everywhere at the same time but nowhere at all, they mark the loss of the site, city, and nation in a way that is at odds with democracy” (p. 124). Users connect instantly online, but the lack of place and position in cyberspace is thought to erode the meaning of the messages because the ideas and movements have no physical location. In this same line of thought, Slater (2002) comments on the disembodiedness of Internet relationships as the “unreliability of the ethical other: how can one invest emotionally, socially, or ‘materially’... with an other who might vanish, untraceably, at any moment, and whose identity claims are unverifiable?” (p. 233). The validity of online relationships is questioned by many. Drentea and Moren-Cross (2005) ask how Internet communication could stand in for the love and care of friends and family, noting that without nonverbal cues it is an incomplete form of communication and is time consuming to boot (p. 939).

The phrase “digital divide” describes the division between the technologically privileged and others (Carty & Onyett, 2008, p. 239; Leggon, 2006, p. 98; Warf & Grimes, 1997, p. 262). The digital divide occurs mainly in terms of access to a computer, Internet connection, some understanding of how to use the technology, and at least some ability to communicate through text (Carty & Onyett, 2008, p. 239; Poster, 2002, p. 231; Sundén, 2001, p. 224). Since those with a higher income, younger age and more education (Steyaert & Gould, 2009, p. 744), have more access to the Internet, online

spaces are infused with an overabundance of their ideas and representations (Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005, p. 923). This limits the subversive potential of counter-discourses created online and socially excludes those who do not have the right access (Steyaert & Gould, 2009, p. 742; Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005, p. 923).

The digital divide can also be seen as a racialized divide. Globally, it is more likely that those in the so-called developed nations will own computers and have Internet access than those in developing nations (Daniels, 2009, p. 105). As Steyaert & Gould (2009) succinctly describe,

On a global level... only 1.5 billion people have access... 22 per cent of the world's population of 6.6 billion. Industrialized countries, with only 15 per cent of the world's population, are home to 88 per cent of all Internet users... These are not new discrepancies... 50% of the world's population has never made or received a phone call (p. 743).

The Internet may have emancipated individuals in industrialized countries, but has deepened global differences. Within cyberspace, the digital divide means racialized subjects are the minority online as well as in the physical world (Daniels, 2009, p. 116). Within the physical world, it means that the technologies that liberate women in some countries are produced by the devalued labour of women in other countries (Daniels, 2009, p. 105). Online conversations that deconstruct whiteness and oppression happen on devices produced by women in the developing world, which troubles the notion of cyberspace as an emancipatory setting.

The emancipatory potential of the Internet is tenuous because those who use it upload the same oppressive discourses that shape material societies (Daniels, 2009, p. 116; Magnet, 2007, p. 589; Madge & O'Connor, 2006, p. 200, McTavish, 2006, p. 123; Pitts, 2004, p. 35; Warf & Grimes, 1997, p. 262). Virtual experiences are grounded in the real

life bodies of users, meaning that words and ideas that are shared in cyberspace are infused with the power relations that shape physical society (Slater, 2002, p. 242; Kolko, Nakamura, & Rodman, 2000, p. 4). Jodi O'Brien (1998) writes,

Current research, science fiction, and wishful thinking suggest that cyberspace will be a realm in which physical markers such as sex, race, age, body type and size will eventually lose salience as a basis for the evaluative categorization of self/other... floating free of corporeal existence, the mind will generate new forms for rendering self and other and for organizing personal communication. I am not convinced" (p. 77).

Thus, even online, where physicality is not visible, user differences are contrasted the user considered as the baseline to what is normal, neutral, and assumed, i.e. being white, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class, Christian, and so on (Magnet, 2007, p. 589; Bryson, MacIntosh, Jordan, & Lin, 2006, p. 794; Travers, 2003, p. 292).

Researchers question the emancipatory potential of cyberspace. Because of the many ways online activity is inconspicuously tracked and recorded, the Internet functions as a tool of panoptic control, whereby no one is ever assured privacy and no secret is ever safe (Magnet, 2007, p. 587; Thomas, 2007, p. 22). In addition, some online users experience abuse, exploitation, and bullying (Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009, p. 111; Magnet, 2007, p. 586), particularly users who are women and children (Harrison, 2006, p. 365).

Cyber-feminism(s)

Feminist organizing online has been referred to as cyber-feminism, sometimes written in the plural to acknowledge the vast numbers of feminists, debates, agendas and ideas uploaded online (Daniels, 2009, p. 102; McTavish, 2006, p. 123; Travers, 2003, p. 232; Plant, 2000, p. 325; Driscoll, 1999, p. 183). Plant (2000) sees feminism as encouraging women to make connections and undermine the dominance of patriarchy. She describes

the emancipatory potential of the Internet as “women... access the circuits on which they were once exchanged” (Plant, 2000, p. 325). Driscoll (1999) refers to this as “a kind of computer guerrilla warfare” (p.183). Online feminist organizing and knowledge production, in some cases, has led to global changes through large-scale marches, protests, and collectives in the offline world (Puente, 2011, p. 335; Daniels, 2009, p. 108; Everett, 2004, p. 1284). Through promoting subversive feminist thought, women use the Internet to unsettle patriarchy (McTavish, 2006, p. 124) and forge connections with others through “open participation and horizontal communication” (quote in Puente, 2011, p. 335; Everett, 2004, p. 1281). Feminists have greatly benefited by the use of the Internet as a gathering place (Riordan, 2001, p. 289; Garrison, 2000, p. 153).

The rise of Internet technology has shaped the movements of third wave feminism (Garrison, 2000, p. 162). Access to the Internet means access to various methods of creative expression and the ability to create relationships with individuals not available in the immediate area. Using technology, women become agentic subjects who produce their own forms of cultural and political expression (Garrison, 2000, p. 156).

Young feminists have produced hundreds of websites (Riordan, 2001, p. 289). The Internet allows feminist groups to “call out their issues, locate themselves, make feminism work for them, and conclude by opening up the conversation to others, taking what they need and passing it on” (Garrison, 2000, p. 160). While critics claim that resistance formed in subcultures rarely impacts larger society, many young feminists report that learning how to be a political person in a supportive space means learning tools to question authority and overtly resist in greater ways outside of the subculture space (Schilt, 2003, p. 83). It leads to a political awakening of sorts.

The idea of the Internet as a safe space for women is a common thread in much of the literature (Daniels, 2009, p. 118; Travers, 2003, p. 231). A ‘safe space’ is said to allow women to “enable them to transform their embodied selves, not escape embodiment” (Daniels, 2009, p. 118). It creates the possibility of collectives where people understand and empathize with one another, which can lead to emancipation. Despite these promising claims, many researchers question the reliability of the ‘safe space’. Their critiques are taken up in a later section of this thesis.

DIY R/evolution

Resistance generated at the grassroots level is known as the “do-it-yourself” or DIY revolution (Harris, 2008). In DIY feminist activism, women create feminist knowledge through writing, music, art, fashion, and various forms of protest (Riordan, 2005, p. 286). In effect, they build a “low-tech, amateur, hybrid, alternative subcultural feminist network that register[s] below the mainstream” (Garrison, 2000, p. 151). Kathy Bail describes DIY feminists as:

...riot grrrls, guerilla girls, net chicks, cyber chix, geekgirls, tank girls, supergirls, action girls, deep girls – this is the era of DIY feminism. For young women, rather than one feminism, there are a plethora of feminisms going under new and more exciting tags... This change is allied with a do-it-yourself style and philosophy characteristic of youth culture (as quoted in Driscoll, 1999, p. 183).

DIY feminism means young women can produce their own counter-discourses to mainstream society. In effect, they resist the notion that young women do not care about politics or feminism (Garrison, 2000, p. 143). DIY feminism encourages young feminists

to participate in the third wave, to make noise, to disrupt dominant discourses on girlhood, and to engage in the movement even without access to feminism in academia or physical location (Madge & O'Connor, 2006, p. 199; Armstrong, 2004, p. 92; Koerber, 2001, p. 219; Sundén, 2001, p. 222; Takayoshi, Huot & Huot, 1999, p. 96; Orr, 1997, p. 39). One phrase of grrrl-resistance is “a keyboard is a greater equalizer than a Glock .45” (as quoted in Gilbert & Kile, 1996, p. 5). By reclaiming their right to be heard, girls in the DIY movement resist.

Koerber (2001) describes online feminist politics as inherently postmodern due to the emphasis on the shape-shifting, diverse subject as a form of political resistance. This disrupts the modern notion of political action as an expression of a stable subject who remains the same before and after that expression (p. 219). Subjectivity is constantly negotiated as women interact and share information (p. 223). In spaces of their own, these ‘grrrls’ explore feminism, engaging in “‘subaltern counterpublics’, that is, discursive spaces ‘where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs’” (Fraser, 1993, p. 528 as quoted by Armstrong, 2004, p. 92).

Armstrong (2004) identifies three characteristics of online communication in grrrl-oriented websites: autobiography, networking, and use of various textual tools to express oneself (p. 93). Autobiography includes ‘grrrls’ deconstructing their lives in the public, online space, with an emphasis on feeling heard, although the question of whether people should have to listen is not quite addressed here. Networking connects women and ideas through a general culture of sharing and support. As Gilbert & Kile (1996), two pioneering Internet feminists state, “the flip side of ‘divide and conquer’ is, of course,

‘network and resist with every resource available to you’” (p. 5). Textual tactics are those taken to make the message easier to understand or more fun to read, such as playing with definitions and words through mimesis (for example: grrrl instead of girl), creating parodies of women’s place in the world, or irony in lyrics and zine manifestos (Attwood, 2007, p. 237; Armstrong, 2004, p. 95; Takayoshi et al., 1999, p. 97). Sundén (2001) describes the politics of parody online:

...the mixture of putting up active resistance, having a lot of fun and doing it all their own way. They are the bad girls, smart and proud of having tech skills, guiding other women onto the Net to express and empower themselves (p. 222).

If young women feel unheard in mainstream, patriarchal society, the energy and enthusiasm generated by speaking out online creates opportunities for a political awakening (Sundén, 2001, p. 222; Takayoshi et al., 1999, p. 100).

There is a limited amount of research about Hip-Mama and Girl-Mom and the impact that they have had on mothers (Tucker, 2008, p. 203; Brown, 2002, p. 159; Hoffman, 2002, p. 21). Ariel Gore and Bee Lavender are credited with creating two websites, Hip-Mama for alternative mothers everywhere, and Girl-Mom specifically for young moms. The websites aim to “create a sense of community among marginalized mothers and mamas who self-identify as non-conformists” (Tucker, 2008, p. 203; Koerber, 2001, p. 226). These two websites, like other feminist mother websites, question the patronizing and consumerist content of mainstream parenting sources, normalize the idea that mothers deeply think and care about political and social issues, and encourage mothers to share their stories as activism that defies the dominant social order (Calixte & Johnson, 2009, p. 75; Tucker, 2008, p. 204; Brown, 2002, p. 159; Hoffman, 2002, p. 21). Koerber (2001) writes that such websites,

enact resistance by exploiting the inconsistencies inherent in mainstream discourses of motherhood and feminism, thereby producing new meanings that incorporate elements of these discourses but, at the same time, refuse to obey them. In doing so, I argue that [these communities] make noise...” (p. 218).

This ‘noise’ talks over dominant discourses that oppress mothers with ideal mother subjectivities not actually obtainable by anyone (Koerber, 2001, p. 225). In talking back, women exploit the inconsistencies in dominant motherhood discourses and begin to develop their own alternative visions. This is feminist activism on the web, taken up by women who would otherwise stay silent and isolated (p. 232).

Conclusion

In this review of the literature, I have explored three main themes relevant to the *Girl-Mom* experience: young mothers, feminism, and cyberspace. Four centuries of maternal deviancy discourses shaped by powerful ideas of degeneracy and respectability firmly entrench ideas about unfit mothers as shameful into the collective conscious to endorse families that reflect patriarchal, nuclear, white middle class families and shame all others (Stoler, 1998; Luker, 1996). Because they are the wrong kind of girl and the wrong kind of mother, young mothers are constructed as deviant, although deviancy looks different depending on race. This construction outlines the social relations that women on Girl-Mom.com are situated within. The third wave of feminism provides the context to the website policies that will be demonstrated as highly influential in the lives of members, and the DIY philosophy as influential in engaging women in their own emancipation. Lastly, cyberspace as the medium to the above messages influences what the Girl-Mom.com movement looks like, who participates, and what that means to their lives. The qualities of interactions through cyberspace allow participants to experiment with forms

of creative self-expression. However, the power relations that structure physical society, such as racism and classism, mediate online interactions and thus limit the emancipatory potential of online activism. Cyberspace is a growing phenomenon in some parts of the world, but is not representative of human life because many remain excluded from the versions of self expression and human interaction that occur online.

CHAPTER THREE: Conceptual/Methodological Framework for Researching Young Mothers in Cyberspace

Ideas from feminist post-structuralism created a theoretical framework through which I read and analyzed the postings on Girl-Mom.com to consider how the subjectivities of young mothers were influenced by participation in the online, feminist space of Girl-Mom.com in the early 2000s. As a framework to explore this research topic, feminist post-structuralism “raises useful questions about knowledge, power, truth, difference, and the constitution of the self,” (Strega, 2005, p. 215). Such questions unsettle the notion of an essential self, and position the individual as “both the site for a range of possible forms of subjectivity and, at any particular moment of thought or speech, a subject, subjected to the regime of meaning of a particular discourse and enabled to act accordingly” (Weedon, 1987, p. 34). This study uses feminist post-structuralism to analyze how the subjectivities of members are constituted by website discourses, and with what effects. In the first section of this chapter, I introduce Girl-Mom.com and provide an overview of website members and content. Then, I define the concepts of feminist post-structuralism through which I conducted my research, and describe the methods that I used to read and analyze my data. I conclude this chapter with an explanation of the ethical framework that guided my approach to this work.

Girl-Mom.com

I participate in this site because I support its kaupapa (mission, goal) and I value the learning/unlearning opportunities that are provided here... Kia kaha wahine toa (Stay strong brave women). {Amelie}

In 1996, Ariel Gore⁹ created “Girl-Mom” as a column in her revolutionary print ‘zine’ *Hip Mama*, a pro-choice, pro-mother, radical feminist publication (personal communication, January 23, 2013). The author of that column, the original “Girl-Mom,” was a homeless sixteen-year-old mother. A short time later, another young mother named Allison Crews (“Alli”) began writing for the “Girl-Mom” column. In 1999, Ariel Gore invited Bee Lavender to become the editor and producer of Hip-Mama.com. In 2001, Bee registered Girl-Mom.com and she and Ariel invited Alli to join them as the founding editor. Alli wrote the Girl-Mom Mission Statement and User Agreement¹⁰ and was active on the website until her untimely death in 2005.

The main purpose of the website was to reach as many women as possible and extend the pro-choice, pro-mother message of *Hip-Mama* to an audience unreachable by the print magazine (personal communication, January 23, 2013). Girl-Mom.com was created in the spirit of 1990s feminism, a time of grassroots, ‘do-it-yourself’ style r/evolution. It became a platform for women who were otherwise unheard, even within grassroots, feminist media, and was profoundly influential for those involved.

⁹ See arielgore.com to read Ariel’s complete biography and find links to her literary works.

¹⁰ See Appendix A to read the Girl-Mom.com Mission Statement and User Agreement in full.

Site Logistics

In the early 2000s, the website was divided into discussion forums¹¹ and “front page” articles that were submitted by website members. There were nineteen forums altogether, on topics ranging from “Your Stories” to “Bringing Up Baby.”¹² There were also private forums for long term, well known members, but all other forums posts were publicly accessible, something community members were well aware of. The website changed servers¹³ in 2004, so the discussions that occurred from the time of the site launching in 2001 until 2004 are no longer available for viewing.

There were hundreds of members registered on Girl-Mom.com. Members ranged from ‘lurkers,’ or those who read but rarely or never posted, and members with hundreds or even thousands of posts. To join the website, an individual simply registered with a username and password that was verified through email. To post on the discussion forums, members needed only to click “reply” or “new topic” to respond to a discussion or create a new one.

Website members were (presumably) all women, mainly in their teens or early 20s, and most of those women were mothers. There were some women without children, termed “kidless allies,” who appreciated the feminist politics of the space and were allowed to join the website to act as allies to young mothers. There were also women selected by other members to act as website leaders in the “Mod Squad,” a group charged with regulating the discussion forums to ensure members were compliant with website

¹¹ A discussion forum, or message board, is a website where individuals can post messages to one another.

¹² See Appendix B for a list of all Girl-Mom.com forums and the accompanying forum description, as it is written on the website.

¹³ A server is basically the software that hosts a website.

policy. To become a website moderator, members were required to have a strong grasp of website policy, the ability to be eloquent and assertive in textual debates, and had to be mothers themselves, preferably in their teens.

In the mid-2000s, Girl-Mom.com was “attacked” by members of a popular website for “hackers.”¹⁴ The attack was initiated because members of the other forum were angry that Girl-Mom.com was a feminist space for women only, and they disagreed with some of the strong views towards abortion and women’s rights. The attack consisted of hundreds of their members registering and then posting to the forums, causing the server that hosted Girl-Mom.com to crash. They circumvented the security system of the discussion forums and were able to post under the usernames of longer-term members. The privacy and data of the website was completely compromised, and the forums were filled with posts by this other group, some of which contained graphic images of animal cruelty and rape. Girl-Mom.com was completely shut down for years while the website owner decided whether and how to re-launch. The website is online at the time of this writing, but the forums are very quiet.

Member and Community Profile

This section introduces a general description of the members who posted to the forums in 2004-2005, the time period of data collection. The information was gathered from member survey threads¹⁵ and from a general overview of the most popular discussion topics. Clearly, if members did not reply to the threads collected for the data set, their

¹⁴ A ‘hacker’ is an individual who knows how to bypass website security systems, giving them the ability to manipulate the website as they see fit.

¹⁵ A thread is a topic started on a discussion forum. Individual members create threads on Girl-Mom.com by clicking “new topic,” entering a descriptive title, and then creating an entry about that topic. Other members respond to the thread and replies are nestled beneath the original post.

information is not represented in this study. The purpose of this section is to simply introduce the reader to the women on the website.

To construct the member profile, I simply reviewed my data set to see how the members talked about themselves, and identified the key member characteristics based on the frequency and enthusiasm in which certain ideas came up. Unlike positivist studies, I have not attempted to use quantitative data to make truth claims about these women. Rather, numbers are simply the easiest way to identify prominent themes in a large data set. This member profile is intended to provide an overview to who was posting on the website in the timeframe of the study, and what they were talking about.

Just over half of website members became pregnant while still in high school, with the remainder in their late teens or early twenties. Only 22% of them planned their pregnancies, with the remainder stating it was a completely unplanned pregnancy and they were using birth control (48%) or it was unplanned but they were not using any measures to prevent conception (30%). Their reactions to finding out they were pregnant included shock, tears, fear, denial, shame, and excitement.

Most of the members were in a relationship when they got pregnant (80%). The responses of the male figures included anger, abandonment, crying, fear, denial that it is “his,” and excitement over becoming a father. The majority of mothers were single parents at the time of posting.

Members described the first year of motherhood as a joyful time in which they cherished time with their babies. Challenges ranged from not knowing how to care for an infant to post-partum depression. Many described societal shame as a major factor in the development of low self-confidence. When asked what they would change about being a

mother, many replied that they would choose a different partner, or have a stronger relationship with their current partner. Some commented on the birth experience, stating that they would prefer fewer birth interventions. Others stated they would strengthen their support systems, gather more resources on baby care, and find information on how to cope with motherhood. Other members stated they wouldn't change a thing about their experience because everything happens for a reason.

The members identified themselves as being mainly from North America. There were Australian and English members, as well as some Canadians. The remaining members were American.

The “check in” threads, where members updated each other about their lives, were very popular. Members “checked in” most often to update on being a student in high school or college, or being an employee. They frequently posted about their relationship status as heterosexual, single, and queer mothers. Several mentions were made of how much members loved the website philosophy and community. In talking about what they were up to, members discussed moving, feminism, relationships, pregnancy, and finances.

Overview of Forum Posts

Members loved to talk about their kids. The most popular threads included baby names, starting solid foods, recent funny moments, co-sleeping, what kind of music their children liked to listen to, vaccination (or not), parenting children with special needs, the tenets of attachment parenting, spanking, Barbie, ear piercing, circumcision, and how many children they want to have. Specifically regarding infant feeding choices, members

talked at length about how they chose to breastfeed or not, where to find support for breastfeeding, how to nurse a baby in public, and the evils of formula companies. When it came to pregnancy, the members discussed whether or not their pregnancies were planned, what to do with an unexpected pregnancy, due date lists of currently pregnant members, birth stories, trying to conceive while still in foster care, and their histories of being pregnant, including different outcomes (abortion, miscarriage, adoption, child-raising).

Members also considered life outside of the daily tasks of motherhood. When they talked about themselves, topics included beauty regimes such as shaving pubic hair (or not), piercings and tattoos, beauty products, and one topic about beauty that turned into a political discussion, the idea of whether or not it is ok for white girls to put dreadlocks in their hair. They also talked about running a household with very little money, career aspirations, how to keep the house clean, and meal planning. On personal matters, members talked about marijuana use, alcohol, and favourite sex positions. Playful word games were also popular on some forums.

The politicized nature of the website was reiterated in several different threads in almost all forums. The website policies were clearly described and discussed in different threads, including ones on language policy, member guidelines, and rules for behaviour. Members created two economic initiatives to raise funds for low-income women who needed money for either abortions or to ease the pressure of poverty. Feminism was a constant theme, and discussed in terms of the feminist response to sexual assault, raising feminist kids, and being pro-choice.

Members were open about their life stories in several different threads. Topics that many people spoke candidly about included mental illness, the path they took to motherhood, daily struggles and life events, and venting about societal barriers and judgments. They also talked about their relationships with one another, such as grieving the loss of Allison Crews, talking about how to fit in on the website, and revealing their “Girl-Mom crush.” Relationships with others were discussed and deconstructed too, especially in terms of their child’s biological father and his family, their own support system, and the troubles they had with creating new relationships on an intimate partner and platonic friendship level.

Threads created for members to weigh in on complex social justice cases were very popular. Heated discussions included discussions on the negative portrayal of young mothers in a magazine for young women; how quality of life is influenced by class, race, global location, and gender; the way that some members are privileged in terms of relationship and/or race, and what that means to the community; and the ability of young and single mothers to be good mothers. I now briefly clarify how the key aspects of feminist post-structuralism informed this study by situating my understanding and use of discourse, power/knowledge, subjectivity, and resistance.

Concepts

Discourse

In this study, discourse is understood as a “way of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations” (Weedon, 1987, p. 108) that create a “system of representation” (Hall, 2001, p. 72). The text in the

discussion forums is read as discourses that are produced by individual members in ways that constitute, reconstitute and influence member subjectivities. The post-structural perspective appreciates “the rich complexity of life lived through multiple and contradictory discourses” (Davies, 2000, p. 134). Discourse is not static nor is it something that individuals or collectives can possess but rather it becomes real and identifiable when it is performed or enacted while passing through individuals and environments (Butler, 1993). The language used on the website is understood as “the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested... where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is *constructed*” (Weedon, 1987, p. 21, italics in original). Website text is the location in which young mothers create discourses that allow them to perform subjectivities. Thus, this research considers the text on the Girl-Mom discussion forums to be embedded with discourse and meaning that will affect member subjectivity.

Discourses emerge from language (Carabine, 2001 text, p. 268) and create “systems of thought” (Chambon, 1999, p. 57). Weedon (1987) describes language as the site where our sense of ourselves is constructed (p. 21). For instance, the statements that are made about young mothers cohere to produce the objectified teenage mother, and from those discourses, some young mothers may “choose” to act out deviancy. Through the study of language, discourse can be analyzed to reveal how it subjugates or emancipates women (Weedon, 1987, p. 40).

This type of analysis attempts to “create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” (Foucault, 1982, p. 208). Discourses do not

simply describe, they constitute knowledge and meaning, subjectivities and social relations (Wetherell, 2001, p. 16; Weedon, 1987, p. 108).

Subjectivities are developed as discourses adhere through common logic, circulate, and are embedded in the historical context (Mills, 2004, p. 56; Chambon, 1999, p. 57). Thus, website text is understood as either confirming traditional motherhood discourses that depict certain standardized motherhood experiences; or creating new discourses from which alternative subjectivities are created and circulated by members in ways that change their motherhood experience.

Power/Knowledge

Discourses are laden with power and its effects. As Carabine (2001b) states, “if our study is to be more than a study of language, it must look also at the social context and social relations within which power and knowledge occur and are distributed” (p. 275). In this feminist post-structural study, power is considered as circulatory, relational, and productive (Strega, 2005, p. 225; Sawicki, 1991, p. 21; Weedon, 1987, p. 113). Power “...needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression” (Foucault, 1980, p. 119). Power effects infiltrate micro level actions, behaviours, and desires (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). In this study, I acknowledge that power creates and sustains knowledge, and vice versa. As such, the forums posts are steeped in power relations and are productive of knowledge while being created out of discourses specific to the time and space of the website.

Women are not simply acted upon by discourse; they have choices and can express agency (Davies, 2000, p. 66). Website members are agentic subjects that access and circulate power that is not overly available to them in the mainstream. While much of the research on young mothers positions them as repressed, through a feminist post-structuralist lens, I seek to reposition website members as agentic subjects who access power in specific ways with particular outcomes that influence subjectivities.

Discourses act “as sets of socially and historically constructed rules designating ‘what is’ and ‘what is not’” (Carabine, 2001, p. 275), thus “imposing a view upon reality” (Chambon, 1999, p. 57). Website discourses construct a reality that is alternative to traditional depictions of the motherhood experience. Discourses use power to gain authority and salience within the social context (Carabine, 2001, p. 269). Statements are grouped together according to similarity, and if they are sanctioned by the social context, those discourses gain force and become authoritative over that of which they speak (Mills, 2004, p. 55). In effect, power produces knowledge that “is contextual, historical, and penultimately, produced by rather than reflected in language” (Strega, 2005, p. 212). Members produce specific knowledge that is influenced by the social context and relations of the website.

Because of their position in society, the knowledge created by young mothers is subjugated knowledge, or “a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges” (Foucault, 1980, p. 82). Website knowledge is that which is “present but disguised” (Foucault, 1980, p. 82) within popular discourses on motherhood and youth sexuality, deemed subordinate to discourses produced by powerful institutions. However, the website as a space for

subjugated knowledge to flourish suggests the possibility of resistance through endorsement of alternative truths about young motherhood. To redefine oneself is to create new opportunities. This knowledge creation has the potential to dismantle hegemonic discourses (Strega, 2005, p. 220). If website members resist the tropes of teen mom degeneracy in favour of their own definitions, those tropes are destabilized and their dominance questioned.

Power is deployed through normalization in the identification of appropriate behaviour, the regulation of subjects, and the resultant affirmation or penalization in relation to the norm (Carabine, 2001, p. 278). Through comparison and differentiation, normalization creates dividing practices, or the creation of “polarities between self and other, good and bad, normal and pathological. They create classes of features and categories of people” (Chambon, 1999, p. 67). Normalization also identifies the standard for all to work toward and shapes desired behaviour (Carabine, 2001, p. 278; Chambon, 1999, p. 66). Not a straightforward or homogenous process, individuals continually reassess and negotiate their position in relation to the norm. In this study, norms are considered for how website members consider themselves in relation to both dominant motherhood norms and dominant website norms. These two different kind of norms influence members in different ways through techniques of regulation and discipline that appear, at times, quite similar.

From a post-structural perspective, discipline is understood as a type of power that infiltrates and shapes the subject through the use of simple techniques (Chambon, 1999, p. 68; Moffatt, 1999, p. 221; Foucault, 1995, p. 216). On the website, women use discipline to regulate one another and to regulate themselves internally to align with

idealized website subjectivities. The self-discipline required to do so is created and sustained through certain activities, specifically confession, diary writing, and creating an alternative community (Foucault, 1997). These activities make up the bulk of what happens on the website. In this process, new skills and capacities are gained, an experience that can be life-changing (Heyes, 2007, p. 67). Power is thus not just a force that represses, but a force that creates.

Subjectivity

Post-structuralism considers the subject as never fully formed, but constantly “spoken and respoken” (Davies, 2000, p. 137) according to available discourses (Strega, 2005, p. 217; Davies, 2000, p. 55; Foucault, 1994, p. 291). Subjectivities are fluid, multiple, and constituted by discourse (Allen & Cloyes, 2005, p. 103; Weedon, 1987, p. 21). They represent the “conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (Weedon, 1987, p. 32). It is through this lens that subjectivities are understood in this study.

Exploring the self can be done in a group setting through consciousness-raising or in an individual setting through confessional diary-writing (McLaren, 2002, p. 145). When a woman develops critical self-awareness, she may experience greater understanding to how she may have been pigeonholed into certain identities over others, and how she may break free (Strega, 2005, p. 222; Davies, 2000, p. 56). Previous low self worth is articulated not as a product of psychological inferiority, but rather as due to external stigmatization, such as that which accompanies mainstream notions of young motherhood. In this process, individuals may come to understand previous choices as

forced choices, or those that did not align with who they knew themselves to be, but seemed to be the only option (Davies, 2000, p. 60). For instance, young mothers who stay with abusive partners or drop out of school may have made such choices because they were sold the message that such life circumstances were now their only choices due to conceiving at a young age, in effect prescribing a lifetime of consequences due to social and systemic conditions of inequality. Exploring the self thus cracks open the ambiguities of dominating discourses and, in those new spaces, creates opportunities for new subjectivities to grow.

Individuals in collectives use the discourses of the group to structure their subjectivities (Davies, 2000, p. 66), because that is the language available to them. Thus, the women on the website construct subjectivities out of prominent discourses. This process invokes a type of agency that Davies (2000) terms “*authority*” (p. 66, emphasis in original), or, the ability to define and describe one’s own life. Such agency brings freedom through awareness that the whole of an individual cannot be captured by any one discourse or subjectivity. A young mother is not ‘just’ a rebellious youth or unfit mother. Rather she constitutes her subjectivity according to the discourses she has available to her.

Subjectivity is cultivated through techniques of the self, such as confession to others and to the self through diary writing (McLaren, 2002, p. 145). These acts illuminate the self and can lead to social transformation through building awareness of the social context and relations within which women exist (McLaren, 2002, p. 159; Weedon, 1987, 33). Such awareness can lead to dramatic changes as subjects reframe their lives outside of the confines of the dominance and towards identities that better represent who they are

or want to become (Strega, 2005, p. 223; Weedon, 1987, p. 33). This process is analyzed in this study for how website discourses influence women to construct and perform certain dominant subjectivities.

Resistance

The young women that join the website may be rendered deviant according to the dominant motherhood discourses, but they engage in fierce and feisty activism within the feminist space of the website. When folks typically represented as non-agentic engage in social justice, they shatter the conception that marginalization leads to hopelessness. Certainly, as Foucault (1990) states, “where there is power, there is resistance” (p. 95), illustrating the fragility of the present and the potential of alternative ways of understanding (Strega, 2005, p. 219; Parton, 1999, p. 103). While website members do not fully emancipate themselves from the power relations of neoliberal patriarchy, they do present multiple resistances, thereby increasing their social power and capacity (Weedon, 1987, p. 111).

The concepts of discourse, power and knowledge, subjectivity and resistance constitute the lens through which the discussion forums were read and the analytic points were made. Website text is understood as discourse through which social context and relations are constructed and subjectivities are created and circulated. Power relations are woven throughout the website discourses and influence the creation of website specific knowledge that emerges out of those discourses. Subjectivity is thus shaped in the process as it emerges out of the available discourses and regulated by power and knowledge. A key quality of the website discourses, use of power and knowledge, and

resultant subjectivities is the way that resistance is used to buffer the discursive effects of dominant motherhood discourses on the website community. Through this lens, the data set was created, coded, and analyzed.

Methods

As I read the text on Girl-Mom.com through the lens of feminist post-structuralism, I looked specifically at how website members talked about themselves and motherhood. This study is not an encyclopedic account of young motherhood or even of Girl-Mom.com, but rather considers the website discourses as “fragments” (Cherrington & Breheny, 2005, p. 92) manifested through text to demonstrate patterns of understanding. The scope of this study is thus limited.

I selected the forums as the site for data collection because they contained conversational text written by young mothers engaged in feminist activism. While members were aware that the forums were a public space, their language was mainly unaffected by audience. There are few other sources to access such data. Atkinson & DePalma (2008) describe discussion forum data as candid narratives that depict the various ways individuals create and recreate themselves in text (p. 184). Thus, there is much to learn about subjectivity in such spaces. The other option would have been to interview website members. As a former member still in touch with many women from the website, it would have been quite simple to conduct interviews on how they feel the website influenced their identity over the years. However, the interviews would have been based only on recollections and influenced by the desire to appear a certain way in the research and to me as their friend and researcher. The authenticity of the original

experience would have been lost. Thus, I chose historical data from the discussion forums to align as closely as possible with genuine moments. The ethical implications of collecting this type of data are discussed in the last section of this chapter.

In the timeframe being studied, there were nineteen discussion forums on the website. Three were excluded from the data set because they were information-only forums: “Our Space,” a forum for website suggestions and technical support, “If You Need Help Now,” a resource list for mothers in crisis, and “Organize/Local Resource Listings,” information on offline help. A list of the sixteen forums included in the data set, with website descriptions, is in Appendix B. To note, the forum posts analyzed in this study are publicly accessible, but in this study, member names have been changed.

Coding

The following processes of data coding were largely inspired by Pamela Moss (2011) and her research that maps the representation of women in the music of Bruce Springsteen. I selected her work as my main inspiration because I find her thorough, systematic approach to data analysis to be an efficient method to provide a detailed response to the research question. While Moss is clear about her methodological process, it is not intended as a stringent guide to discourse analysis and was not implemented as such. The following sections describe the process of data coding used in this study to reveal the major website discourse that influenced the subjectivities of young mothers on the website.

Data selection. The discussion forums contain hundreds of threads. To organize this vast amount of information, I selected and refined the data through four actions to

produce my final data set. First, I organized each of the sixteen forums so that the forum topics would be listed from most to least number of replies. This has been demonstrated in Appendix E. Second, I selected the ten threads with the most responses that had the last response posted before or during 2005, to fit the timeframe of my study. Third, I organized the data into a format for coding and analysis. I copied the entirety of each thread and pasted the contents into a Word document titled and saved under the name of the original thread. I included a link to the original thread in each Word document. The documents were organized into folders that I titled the same as the discussion forums. I backed up all of this data using Dropbox software.

While I originally hoped to collect data from the period of 2000-2005, my data set is comprised only of threads starting in late 2004 and 2005. This is because the website changed servers in late 2004, and all of the threads created prior to that were lost in the move, an important detail I neglected to consider when designing this study. Therefore, my data set is limited to the time period of 2004-2005.

I joined Girl-Mom.com in 2002. I became a member of the “Mod Squad” shortly afterwards. I was active on the website until approximately 2005. Thus, a small number of my posts were present in the threads that were selected as part of my data set.

Initial codes. Once my final data set was selected and organized, I conducted a close reading of each thread to identify themes, using recent theory on thematic analyses to structure this process. For instance, Howry and Wood (2001) used three criteria from Owen (1984) to identify themes in an analysis of a young feminist anthology. The criteria include recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (p. 325). In her analysis of young feminist zines, Schilt (2003) followed a similar process. She identified the most popular themes

and then determined which were represented most often, repeated by several different zine authors, and stated emphatically. In their discourse analysis of literature on teenage pregnancy, Cherrington and Breheny (2005) also identified dominant themes as well as what they term “enunciative strategies” to determine salience of themes (p. 93). As I made my way through my data set, I noted which statements were repeated often, the language used to describe main themes, and how emphasis, such as bolding text or capital letters, was used to make a point more forcefully. I will now describe the process through which I developed my initial codes.

I began with a close reading of the original threads saved in Word documents. Each theme was labeled with an initial code applied directly to the data with Track Changes, a tool in Microsoft Word software. The initial codes simply described my interpretation of what was being said, such as “young mother unsupported by partner” or “member regulating other members” or “member educating others on anti-racism.” After coding the data set, I was left with 3232 pieces of data that were coded, although many initial codes were repeated across the data set.

In the process, I identified and omitted from my data set those threads that I determined to be “chit chat.” In their research on a different website for mothers, Drentea and Moren-Cross (2005) only analyzed threads that contained moments of support, debate, challenges, and so on (p. 926), omitting chit chat threads due to a lack of depth in meanings. I followed this example and omitted threads that involved members checking in with short updates on their lives and threads that were surveys about member demographics or opinions. These “chit chat” threads were compiled into the Girl-Mom Member profile, included in the introduction to this thesis.

When I designed the study, I predicted that I would be able to identify distinct subjectivities based on how the members talked to one another. I thought it would be straightforward to read the forum posts and be able to identify what kind of mother each member was representing, creating, or endorsing in their forum post. From there, I thought I could identify how member subjectivities were influenced by participation on the website by identifying the most prominent subjectivities and describing their influence. The study did not quite work out this way. In practice, this proved too fussy with too much room for error, and constructed subjectivity as a fixed thing that could be extracted from words. Much of the text did not directly reference subjectivity, and several interpretations could have been made in many cases. Replacing subjectivity codes with initial codes at this stage in the process helped me to ensure that I substantiated later descriptions of the major themes, which would be explored for how they influenced subjectivity, instead of how they constructed it.

Major themes. I identified a set of major themes based on the initial codes. First, I went through the original Word document for each thread and wrote the initial codes on pieces of coloured paper, grouping similar codes together. This process helped to efficiently identify themes as they emerged from the initial codes, a useful process considering the size of my data set. Second, I reviewed each sheet of paper to verify that the initial codes were all similar and belonged together. Some were transferred to more suitable areas; others that were quite large were broken into smaller themes. Third, I generated an inductive title for each theme based on the initial codes and on the type of mother I thought was being represented in that bit of text. This step identified sixteen major themes. Lastly, I created Document A in which I listed the title I gave to each

major theme, and then included the initial codes as bullet points beneath each title.

Document A can be viewed in Appendix F.

Final result. The scope of this research and the large amount of data with which I was working meant that I focused only on the most prominent website theme to help answer my research question. I decided to focus on the most prominent theme because I anticipated that it would have the most member references, meaning my analysis would represent a larger portion of the community. To determine which of the sixteen major themes were most influential to member subjectivities, I first organized the data according to theme, and second created a spreadsheet to identify the most popular. This process is similar to how Moss (2011) organized the major themes of her research. I will now detail this process.

I created a table to organize the data according to the major themes. I created one table for each forum, and titled them Document B.1 to B.16. I opened the Word document for each thread and copied each piece of coded data into the table. I also kept a running tally of the number of times each theme appeared in the data. To illustrate this process, a replica of one table:

Table 1: Document B

Discourse Code	# of times it appeared in the data	Text copied and pasted from the original threads
Mother Created as "Other"	14	Text excerpt {pseudonym} Text excerpt {pseudonym}

Using the tables, I was able to group similar pieces of text in one area. This made my later analysis more efficient because it meant I could easily identify prominent themes in

my documents. At the point when I copied each piece of coded data into the tables, I also changed the member's pseudonym, to enhance member privacy. There were 376 names changed in total. This is mainly because I completely underestimated how many pieces of data had been coded in the initial coding process. If I conducted this same research in the future, I would simply change pseudonyms for the excerpts actually used in the research write up.

Once the tables in Documents B.1 to B.16 were complete, I created Document C, a spreadsheet, to “show my work” as I identified the most prominent theme on the website. I designed the spreadsheet as follows with forum titles along the left hand column, themes across the top, and the number of occurrences for each theme in each cell. For example:

Table 2: Document C

	Advocate for deviant mothers	Anti-Racism activist	Attachment Parent
Announcements	0	0	0
As They Grow	0	13	39
Bringing Up Baby	1	1	30

Once the information from the tables was entered into the spreadsheet, I simply added up the columns and identified the top result. The theme most prominent on the website is the ideal member, termed here as *Girl-Mom* because she represents website policies and member interests. She was represented in 514 pieces of data coded from the original threads. This result exceeded the next most popular theme, *Girl-Mom Member* by almost two hundred codes, making it a clear favourite.

I began my data selection with 160 threads. These threads were marked with initial codes, with some threads not being included because they were “chit chat.” Of the 160,

only 37 threads actually contained codes related to *Girl-Mom*. This means only approximately 27% of the data that I collected was used in the final analysis. The large data set and exhaustive initial coding process were implemented to limit researcher bias as a former insider. My results were surprising and exciting to me, even though I participated on the forums and felt I knew the community well.

There were ethical issues and methodological limitations of this method of coding data. The ethical issues include coding my own historical writing, and the use of counting in a qualitative, feminist post-structural study. The major methodological limitation of this coding process is whether or not I actually located the most prominent theme. My results are not representative of the group. Some members only participated occasionally while others participated in far higher numbers. This means that my results represent certain opinions over others, since results were determined based on counting the number of times a code appeared. The coding could have perhaps been fine tuned to be more representative of those quieter members if the data set was smaller. I now consider the major ethical issues in this approach to the subject matter.

Ethics

There are two ethical considerations in this study of an online community of which I was once an active member. One consideration involves the ethics of Internet research and the other considers how ethical Internet research is influenced by intimate relationships between researcher and participants. In the first part of this section, I consider the major facets of cyber-research and outline the steps I took to ensure that I conducted this study in an ethical manner. In the second part of this section, I explore how I managed the dual

roles of researcher/insider, the way I approached intimate insider research, and the use of self awareness to guide the feminist, post-structural research process.

Ethics in Cyberspace

Two main ethical concerns shaped my approach to doing research in cyberspace. The first considered how to negotiate the differences between private and public information in an online space. The second looked at how to evaluate the level of privacy granted to publicly available information. In the next few sections I outline my approach to these ethical issues, based on direction I received from recent academic literature on Internet research. I note that my ethical decisions were just one possible approach to conducting this study, and at times, I questioned those decisions. Rather than a list of instructions for conducting ethical online research, this chapter is intended to demonstrate one conversation on this topic in a time when cyber-research is considerably new in its development.

Privacy in a public space. Distinctions between public and private information are made with consideration for material and discursive influences as well as social and cultural expectations (Whiteman, 2012, p. 48; Pittenger, 2003, p. 50; Bakardjieva & Feenberg, 2000, p. 236). People know how to react when others attend to private matters in public spaces, such as by looking away. However, there are no definitive rules about how to avert the online gaze when people engage in private moments within the public space of the Internet. Each situation must be evaluated according to privacy indicators because even though users know the Internet is a public space, the information people reveal is attached to some level of perceived privacy (Whiteman, 2012). Thus, to know

whether or not I was violating privacy by conducting a discourse analysis of a public discussion forum, I consulted current academic literature on the topic.

Evaluating privacy online. Eysenbach & Till (2001) developed seven considerations for evaluating privacy (p. 1105). I used these considerations as a guide to ensure ethical and respectful treatment of the community. The considerations include intrusiveness, perceived privacy, vulnerability, potential harm, informed consent, confidentiality, and intellectual property rights. I will now briefly discuss each consideration in terms of how it shaped this research study.

Intrusiveness. This study conducted discourse analysis on archived posts from approximately eight years ago on Girl-Mom.com. There was no researcher interaction with members on the discussion forums, aside from one informational post, which will be discussed later. Essentially, my only interaction with members was through “lurking” or reading without responding.

Researchers such as Kitchin (2003) and Eysenbach and Till (2001) see lurking as passive observation that involves no interaction with participants. On that basis, Kitchin (2003) depicts lurking as low risk to those being observed. Deciding whether or not I agree with Kitchin (2003) was a key ethical decision in this study, because my data came directly from the discussion forums. After much thought, I chose to agree with Kitchin (2003) and view lurking on Girl-Mom.com as a low risk activity mainly because the participants were well aware that they were posting to public forums and I trust that in the time of posting, members took precautions to protect themselves as necessary. If members wanted to have discussions where outsiders could not intrude, they could have those discussions in the private forums that are only visible to long-term members or

through private messages (Whiteman, 2012). To further protect their own privacy, most users posted under pseudonyms, and all kept identifying information private. As a gesture of respect for their privacy, I changed the member pseudonyms to new pseudonyms, to create another barrier between their words and potential intrusive exposure.

While conducting this research, I returned to this ethical decision frequently. Was I too quick to agree with Kitchin (2003), especially when deeming this study to be low risk worked out in my favour as the researcher? A study that is low risk to participants requires fewer ethical considerations such as informed consent. Was I too hard on myself for feeling like I was taking something from these women, when they posted it online, of their own free will, with full awareness that their words could be used by anyone, anywhere? As a feminist researcher, I intended to protect my participants through respectful use of their words, but was that actually enough to ensure ethical use of those words? These questions remain unanswered. Theory on Internet research functioned as a helpful guide, as did conversations on this matter with my thesis committee and feminist writing group, but area of ethics in Internet research remains underdeveloped in this study and in general.

Perceived privacy. Evaluating perceived privacy means considering what levels of privacy people expect within the context (Pittenger, 2003, p. 48). Discussion forums use different levels of accessibility to view content, and this indicates the level of perceived privacy members anticipate (Whiteman, 2012; Kitchin, 2003; Pittenger, 2003; Eysenbach & Till, 2001). Numerous barriers to reading or participating mean that members expect some level of privacy. On Girl-Mom.com, there is a registration process involved in order to post, but not to read. It is a women-identified and trans-gendered men only space.

While the registration process and member gender requirements indicate there is a level of desired privacy, all public forum posts come up in search results using the major search engines. This indicates the website allows for some level of public exposure.

To protect members who are not keen on public exposure, there are some forums that are private. To gain access to the private forums, members must have 200-250 posts in the community, active participation for at least two months, and agree to a specific, private forum user agreement. These barriers indicate that members expect a degree of privacy in terms of who participates in which discussion forum spaces, but not total or protected privacy. There is at least one post in the “Announcements” forum reminding members that it is a public site and to act accordingly, and several examples of members reminding one another that their words are not private.

As a former insider to the community, I had access to the private forums. Out of respect for the perceived privacy of these women, I created a new username under my first name and only logged in under that username, preventing me from viewing material intended only for long-term website members. I collected data only from publicly visible and accessible forums.

The number of overall users indicates the level of perceived privacy a group has, with small and intimate groups more private than large groups (Eysenbach & Till, 2001). The number of users on Girl-Mom.com is not publicly available, but in my data set of 160 threads, there were approximately 375 different women who participated in those threads. This indicates that the privacy is not at the same level it would be if members were part of a small and intimate group.

While individuals post on forums for the benefit of their own discussion and not necessarily to contribute to research such as this, they are aware that the forums are publicly accessible and their words are in the public realm, although they are not aware of how their words may be used in research such as this. They protect their own privacy through the private forums and pseudonyms (Whiteman, 2012; Bakardjieva & Feenberg, 2000, p. 234). While my study respects their privacy through changing pseudonyms and creating a new account from which to collect data, I did not introduce new measures in order to protect women who did not ask for such protection in the first place (Kitchin, 2003).

Vulnerability. Girl-Mom.com describes itself as a “safe space” for marginalized individuals (Crews, A.). This indicates that there is some level of vulnerability in terms of the content of forum posts and the intentions of members when they participate (Whiteman, 2012; Kitchin, 2003; Bakardjieva & Feenberg, 2000). To respect the privacy and vulnerability of members, I followed the suggestion of Whiteman (2012), Pittenger (2003), and Hardey (2002) and made an informational post to discuss my research intentions, before data collection began (see sample post in Appendix D). This did not reach all members whose posts may have been collected for my data set, simply because many were no longer active. It did let the active members know of my presence and my research methods, allowed for feedback and opting out, and served as a gesture of respect. Additionally, I spoke with Ariel Gore and Bee Lavender, the founders of Girl-Mom.com, to describe my research and intentions. Both women gave their approval and support for this project.

Potential harm. Like other research on publicly available text, this research is very low risk. This study had the intent of putting focus on the wisdom of the community, so findings did not add to the research that shames and blames young mothers. Whiteman (2012) posits that the way that website community members respond to research being done on the community indicates their comfort level with this type of work. I am not the first member to conduct research on the group. Rebecca Trotzky-Sirr represented Girl-Mom.com at the United States Social Forum in 2007 (<http://girl-mom.com/node/147>). Lindsey Campbell created *Girl-Mom*, a play that celebrates young mother voices by crafting the discussion posts into stage readings (<http://web.me.com/mamadweezil/Home/Girl-Mom.html>). The main reaction of the community to these events was happiness at being represented in a positive manner to the public, and interest in the skills of other members in creating these projects. While the website could be said to comprise a vulnerable and sensitive community that could be harmed by research into their online world (Pittenger, 2003; Eysenbach & Till, 2001), the insider knowledge that I have means I know studies done in a respectful manner are not seen as an invasion of privacy (Whiteman, 2012).

Confidentiality and intellectual property rights. Because the data collected is sourced from the public domain, it was not possible to ensure total confidentiality to the original post authors (Eysenbach & Till, 2001). An Internet search could trace the excerpt back to the actual forum post, so I originally intended to keep the original pseudonyms attached to each excerpt from the data, because they are traceable anyways, and it would allow members to retain ownership of their intellectual property (Kitchin, 2003). However, while collecting data, at times it felt like I was taking very personal

information from women who did not anticipate their words being used for any other purpose than just talking with other young mothers. While they were aware of being in the public realm, and while most protected themselves by choosing a pseudonym that was different from their actual name, it felt too personal to include excerpts without altering them somehow for the sake of privacy. In addition, when the forum changed Internet hosts, some of the posts were then matched to the wrong username. For instance, if “Mary” posted that she had a new baby, after the server changed, “Catherine” would have had Mary’s birth announcement attached to her pseudonym and website identity. This meant that the pseudonyms were inaccurate for several posts in the data set. Because my research was on forum post content and not author this did not affect my analysis, but it did change my expectations for how to manage the pseudonyms of members.

Researchers such as Day and Keys (2008) and Pittenger (2003) recommend that Internet researchers change pseudonyms out of respect, and so I changed the names of each member whose words were collected in my data set. This ended up being a time consuming project because there were over 375 members to create names for, but it was a worthwhile activity. I still allow them ownership over their own intellectual property in that I do not take credit for any of their posts, and their original words remain unaltered.

Informed consent. There is no direct answer to whether or not informed consent should be attained in a naturalistic observation study such as discourse analysis (Kitchin, 2003; Bakardjieva & Feenberg, 2000). If informed consent were deemed necessary for this study, I would not have been able to check the validity of any consent provided over the Internet (Pittenger, 2003), my only way of contacting almost all of the women on the website. Kitchin (2003) states that informed consent is an unreasonable expectation of

research that has no involvement with participants, considers publicly available information, and looks at information provided long ago. In addition, the *Tri-Council Policy Statement 2* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERCC), and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), 2010) does not specifically indicate whether or not informed consent is required in Internet research. The question comes down to whether or not online data requires the same protection as human subjects (Kitchin, 2003). I detail my solution to this ethical dilemma in the next section, but in short, I did not seek informed consent because the public nature of the Internet offers what Kitchin (2003) terms “implied consent” (p. 407). The notion of implied consent is problematic in many ways, particularly when participants are vulnerable. My research intentions were based on notions of feminism and social justice, but potentially other researchers with different perspectives could use my work to reach different conclusions. Certainly, as demonstrated in the literature review, there is no shortage of researchers who examine young mothers for their shortcomings. Therefore, the decision to not obtain informed consent represents a limitation of the ethical review process. Based on the theory that I read for this study, informed consent was not technically necessary. However, to then not get informed consent violates my research intention to protect participants and ensure no harm is done to them, because I cannot predict what other researchers or readers will do with this information now that I have exposed it to those outside of the Girl-Mom.com community.

Human Research Ethics Board

The TCPS 2: Tri-Council Policy Statement for Ethical Research Involving Humans

(CIHR, NSERCC, & SSHRC, 2010) details specific situations that absolve the researcher from acquiring informed consent from participants. In Article 3.7 of the policy statement, five items are detailed that, if met by the research study, negate the need to get informed consent. The first, 3.7(a), “the research involves no more than minimal risk to the participants” (p. 37). Because my study considers archived information in a known publicly accessible site with intentions to promote the capabilities of these women, my research involves minimal risk to participants. The second, 3.7(b), “the lack of the participant’s consent is unlikely to adversely affect the welfare of the participant” (p. 37). Many of the women have moved on from the website, indicating little investment in what happens to the discussion posts they left behind in a space they knew was public. The third, 3.7(c), “it is impossible or impracticable to carry out the research and to answer the research question properly, given the research design, if the prior consent of the participant is required” (p. 37). If informed consent was deemed necessary, I would have been unable to do this study. The fourth, 3.7(d),

whenever possible and appropriate, after participation, or at a later time during the study, participants will be debriefed and provided with additional pertinent information in accordance with Articles 3.2 and 3.4, at which point they will have the opportunity to refuse consent in accordance with Article 3.1 (p. 37).

To meet this requirement, I logged in under the research username: “Leanne” and made a post about my research (see Appendix D). I stated my intentions, my methods, and my research goals. I also give members the opportunity to refuse consent, but no one did. The fifth, 3.7(e), “the research does not involve a therapeutic intervention, or other clinical or

diagnostic interventions” (p. 37). The purpose of this study is not to make any therapeutic, clinical, or diagnostic claims and nowhere in any part of my research design do I make intentions towards those claims.

This study meets the five requirements determined by the *TCPS 2* to negate the need for informed consent, and the University of Victoria Ethics Board agreed with me. I was approved for a *Waiver from a Full Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Participants*. Specifically, because my study met the following requirement: “[r]esearch that involves observations that... do not allow for identification of participants... do not involve staging or manipulating the setting or circumstances... is conducted in an open, public setting” (University of Victoria, n.d.). Naturalistic observation, such as a discourse analysis of discussion forum posts, does not identify participants because they are protected by pseudonyms, does not manipulate the setting or even impact it in any way other than the information post, is conducted in a setting that is open to the public, can be discovered using search engines, and has no access barriers to read.

Internet research is an emerging field of research with little in the way of absolute guidelines. Through the discussion above, I have considered the major factors of research online, including the debate between public and private space and my considerations for the data and participants. The decisions I made were guided by academic literature, but remain questionable in terms of standards related to feminist research in vulnerable populations. Certainly, the decisions around how to conduct Internet research in an ethical manner did not come easily. In the next section, I outline how I approached the ethical dilemmas inherent in studying this online community from the perspective of being an intimate insider in that community.

Intimate Insider Research

This study required me to continually bridge the distance between the dual roles of insider and researcher. Kanuha (2000) talks about this dual role as the researcher being “grounded implicitly and situated at all moments in the dual and mutual status of subject-object” (441). Insiderness is not a definitive status, but rather can vary depending on the context (Labaree, 2002). For instance, there were discussion posts included in this study that I had never read before, despite being active on the website at the time those posts were active. Conversely, there were other threads in my data set that impacted me deeply back then, and triggered emotional memories and flashbacks to life in a different time. Thus, insider status is constant but variable, “continuously moving back and forth between the positional boundaries of insiderness and outsidersness” (Labaree, 2002, p. 102).

The positive aspects of insider research relate mainly to the benefit of familiarity with the data (Taylor, 2011, p. 6). Labaree (2002) identifies the key benefits as better interpretations of the data presented, and insider knowledge of what has been left out and why. Certainly, the familiarity I had with website language and relationships helped me to reach some of my conclusions. However, insider research was not straightforward and did not come easily to me. The most pressing concern was whether or not my study was exploitative to the community. I know how juicy some of the secrets are, but was I manipulating my friends by using the knowledge I have of them to create a study that would be part of getting my master’s degree? Were my good intentions and close relationships with website members actually masking “a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation” (Darra, 2008, p. 252)? I wrestled with this thought continually while

conducting the research and certainly it shaped my approach to the data. Even though the official university ethics board approved my approach, deeper ethical issues have remained unsettling.

Another ethical concern that I experienced in this research is in how insider bias can lead to insider blindness. Because I knew so many answers, did I ask the right questions? While I knew the background issues to the major themes that arose in discussion forum data, it was difficult to interpret those themes through the analytic lens. To study something requires at least enough distance to look upon it through that analytic lens, in my case through the theories of feminist post-structuralism. In a study that is not completely autobiographical or autoethnographic, it is not enough to only to see, feel, or remember it intimately through the memories of the heart (Kanuha, 2000, p. 442). While I tried to retain analytic distance, almost all of my data evoked some kind of emotional response within me, and some threads triggered sensitive reactions that I had to process with outside assistance. My response was to back way up and attempt to read my data through a pseudo-scientific lens that was completely at odds with my feminist post-structural methodology, which locates every researcher within every research topic. My analysis became too scientific, too linear, and too black and white. When I noticed that happening, I returned to feminist post-structuralism and tried to remind myself that it is ok to have a research project that is messy and complex, for the theory states that all of life is as such. Clearly, it was a difficult, ongoing process.

Another ethical issue was the risk of assuming too much knowledge about the data (Kanuha, 2000, p. 443). The website members were not a homogenous group and certainly my insider knowledge did not extend to awareness of their private lives or

highly diverse social positions. I had to use caution in thinking I knew what a poster meant in a piece of data, because even if she is a close friend it would be impossible to know her intentions for all posts at all times. I now turn to consideration for how I managed the ethical issues related to doing insider research.

Jodie Taylor (2011) distinguishes insider research within one's own group of friends as "intimate insider research" (p. 9). Intimate insider research is that which is located in a space in which the researcher is highly familiar, engages participants with whom the researcher has personal relationships, and examines information that they helped to produce, requiring some level of self-interpretation in the analysis. She poignantly describes this experience.

Where the researcher-self is part of the Other's narrative, the narrative of the researched and the researcher become entwined. The researcher, then, is forced to look both outward and inward, to be reflexive and self-conscious in terms of positioning, to be both self-aware and researcher-self-aware and to acknowledge the intertextuality that is a part of both the data gathering and writing processes (Taylor, 2011, p. 9).

Since my data was historical, the process of doing this research required me to move not only between the dual roles of researcher/researched, but also from present-day Leanne to 2005 website member. That space that I moved between is difficult to articulate and yet shaped every aspect of this study. For instance, in one post that I made in 2005 while acting as a website administrator, I used website policy to discipline another member in a way that was clearly intended to silence her. In the years since then, I have studied, talked about, and practiced community building in ways that are inclusive and collective rather than dominating and silencing. As a feminist post-structuralist, I believe that no interaction is ever outside of power, but it still made me cringe to see myself treat another woman in such a brutal way. However, I was not conducting this research to do an

exploration of who I am or the ways that I have changed over the years, so I had to work to reframe my present day interpretations of my previous self. Rather than cringing over moments when I demonstrated some rather underdeveloped thoughts on feminist activism, I attempted to read those posts as though a woman in her early 20s wrote them. Rather than reading my earlier words as underdeveloped or even cute in their naivety, I focused on reading them through my conceptual lens instead. I took the judgment out of the process as much as possible. It was difficult because obviously my own posts hit close to home for me, but it was an opportunity to strengthen my ability to read the data through the feminist post-structural lens because I had to continually remind myself to not “take it personally.”

In every research moment, I constantly considered the relationships I have with the women whose forum posts I analyzed. We were co-creators of an online community, but our shared experiences also include: face-to-face meet-ups at conferences, including sharing hotel rooms, hot tubs, and occasional romantic encounters; celebrating each other’s pregnancy and birth experiences by sending gifts for baby and mama; contributing to each other’s zine projects; telephone calls late into the night; exchanging photos of ourselves and our children online; exploring our lives and our secrets in an online blog community; and certain dramatic events that led to some friendships ending. I appreciate what Taylor (2011) says about this kind of contact with those being studied: “Knowing your informants in all or some of these very personal ways undoubtedly affects the manner in which you relate to them professionally” (p. 10). My interpretations of the data in this study were undoubtedly influenced by these relationships. My solution to this ethical issue was to design the study in such a way that if another person went

through the data collection process, they would likely end up with similar results. I used a very detailed and highly structured process to collect and analyze data, which at times felt like it was unnecessarily detailed for the scope of a master's thesis. However, it created empirical distance between my participants and me, distance necessary in order to make research observations.

The approach I took to resolve the ethical issues of doing intimate insider research on the Girl-Mom community was to use self-awareness to ensure that my ethical research study included maintenance of ethical friendships. This notion comes again from Taylor (2011) who states that ethical friendship involves mutual trust, not betraying things told in confidence, and being open with your friends about how you are researching them. My research would have included different findings if I betrayed the trust my friends had in me when telling me, non-researcher Leanne, certain things. Certainly, those secrets shaped the research design even if they were not included in the findings: you cannot unknow information. However, I focused my analysis only on information that was visible to the public and provided no backstory on website members other than Allison Crews, an incredible woman who will be described in more details in later sections of this thesis. In the case of Alli, the details of her life and death are publicly accessible on many websites, and her backstory was provided in the Findings chapter only to demonstrate her influence and legacy. Because she was not active on the website in the timeframe that data was selected from, this information did not emerge in the data set but still shaped how website members spoke and related to one another.

Being open and honest is a key factor of ethical intimate insider research (Taylor, 2011, p. 14). As I will detail in the Method section, I did all of my researched logged in

under my researcher username: “Leanne” instead of my regular username, which would have given me access to the private forums and to my personal messages, both spaces where people divulged information they wanted to keep private. I created an informational post in the community stating my intentions, including how I would create my data set and the feminist post-structural lens through which I would read my data. I also described my research and intents to my friends who no longer read that website regularly and would not have seen the informational post.

Yet even with these precautions, I struggled with making analytic observations about people with whom I am very close. Taylor (2011) notes the difficulty in questioning the familiar (p. 15). While talking with others about my research, such as my supervisor, my partner, or my writing group, I found I often had to explain things to them that seemed obvious to me. Managing these blind spots in my analysis sometimes felt like trying to patch holes in a sinking boat. One solution is to nurture the growth of self-awareness (Taylor, 2011, p. 16). Considering my analysis from an insider perspective instead of trying to force objectivity where it could not exist meant I could enhance my analysis with what I know about the community instead of trying to study what I know. I situated myself in the research process, allowing myself room to grow and change without judgment. This was easier in some moments than others, but acknowledging that doing intimate insider research would change me somehow meant I had no need for faking objectivity that was not going to be possible for me. Without a guidebook or even much academic literature on managing intimate insider research, I had to invoke my “strength of character, goodwill, our gut instincts, and emotional intelligence” (Taylor, 2011, p. 18) while using research skills I gained in formal settings. Invoking the self is not an

unchallenged process, however (van Heugten, 2004, p. 208). The insider knowledge that I possess shaped this study but was also challenged and questioned as appropriate.

Post-structural research methodologies are compatible with doing ethical research as an insider (van Heugten, 2004; Roets & Goedgeluck, 2007). With no emphasis on seeking essentialist truths, researcher bias is just an element of the story, rather than one that disrupts the findings. Representations of those being researched and of myself as the researcher are allowed to be multiple and varying depending on context, because post-structural subjectivity is not absolute. Like subjectivity, knowledge is relational so the focus shifts not from essentialist truths but to how the context and the process contribute to findings. Acknowledging the importance of context and voice in this study aligns with research from the margins, in which those who are typically excluded from research have the opportunity to tell their stories (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 64). Grounding my study in lived experiences and interpretations of women's voices was an attempt to describe how life is for young mothers on the margins. Locating myself as an intimate insider in this research was an ongoing and sometimes intense process, but positioned ethics at the forefront of my study and my research relationships. The discussion now moves to consider how the *Girl-Mom* discourse was constructed.

CHAPTER FOUR: Constructing *Girl-Mom*

This section describes the top website theme, *Girl-Mom* to explore how *Girl-Mom* functioned as a major influence on website members. Five analytic points recommended by Carabine (2001b, p. 281) structure this process, written here in the context of this study: A) the ways that *Girl-Mom* interacts with other website themes; B) the methods through which *Girl-Mom* is circulated, referred to, and through what tone; C) the discursive strategies and techniques employed by *Girl-Mom* to gain popularity; D) moments of resistance to *Girl-Mom*; and, E) the effects of *Girl-Mom* in how members talk about themselves, their choices, and their mothering experience. I briefly discuss each analytic point to provide a comprehensive analysis of how *Girl-Mom* influenced young mothers on the website.

Interactions

To determine how *Girl-Mom* interacted with the sixteen other major themes, I returned to the original threads. The interactions occurred in three kinds of moments. These moments include promoting respect for young mothers, exploring feminist motherhood, and building community. When promoting respect for young mothers, *Girl-Mom* interacted with themes such as *Advocate for Deviant Mothers*, *Mother Created as "Other,"* and *Non-Judgmental Mother*, in discussions on support for marginalized mothers, resistance to the dominance of mainstream motherhood discourses, and endorsement of the website as a safe space.

Regarding feminist motherhood, *Girl-Mom* interacted with *Anti-Racist Advocate*, *Human Rights Advocate*, *Moderator of Privilege in a Safe Space*, *Political Mama*, *Sex Worker/Sex Worker Ally*, *Body Image Advocate*, *Critical Feminist*, and *Pro-Choice Mama* to explore power relations, being an ally, and resistance to the patriarchy. To build community, *Girl-Mom* interacted with *Definer of Girl-Mom*, *Discussion Moderator (official and unofficial)*, *Gatekeeper of the Safe Space*, *Girl-Mom Devotee*, and *Girl-Mom Member* in moments when members expressed support to each other and the website mission. The interactions with the other major themes demonstrate how other themes reinforced the main characteristics of *Girl-Mom* and maintained it as the one that is most influential themes on the website.

Reference, Tone, Circulation

I now consider the ways that *Girl-Mom* is circulated and referred to by members, and identify the tone that is taken. This provides evidence to the elevated status of this theme and explores how members use language. Language is the site of change on the website and this section demonstrates how the use of language increased the salience of themes.

Reference

Girl-Mom is referred to in three main ways: as a policy, an identity, and as embodying resistance, each of which is briefly discussed here. First, *Girl-Mom* characteristics are referenced officially in website policy, and unofficially in forum posts. These references position *Girl-Mom* as a non-negotiable part of the website, demonstrating reverence for her qualities. Second, *Girl-Mom* is referred to as an identity that any young mother would

be proud to have. Such references include threads when members are honest about their experiences, when they refute societal shame, and when they joyfully describe motherhood as the best thing that ever happened to them. Perhaps the most notable reference to *Girl-Mom* as a revered identity is in the thread announcing the death of Allison Crews, “Alli,” a member who embodied many *Girl-Mom* characteristics. In her life, Alli educated and encouraged countless young mothers on gaining empowerment and autonomy to live free from degeneracy. After her death, several members recalled memories of when she taught them to own their lives and choices, in effect to create and recreate their own identities, instead of letting stereotypes of “teen mothers” do that for them. In life and in death, Alli was positioned as an example of what *Girl-Mom* would look like, as she owned her truth, talked back to society, and courageously told her story. A heavy burden for anyone to bear, the effects this had on Alli are out of the scope of this research. For the sake of this discussion, Alli is noted as an embodiment of the *Girl-Mom* identity.

Lastly, *Girl-Mom* is referred to as a subjectivity that can be embodied by members in moments of resistance. In threads about societal oppression, *Girl-Mom* is referenced as an identity that members can access to provide support to one another and to act assertively in their personal lives. Her qualities create her as a resistant subject, and in effect, provide qualities for members to reference when gaining courage to resist.

Tone

Members use forceful, strong language to talk about *Girl-Mom*. Phrases from the website include “diligently fight,” “speak loudly and boldly,” “fuck them!” and “check

yourself.” The *Girl-Mom* characteristic of unwavering support for young mothers is identifiable in posts where members talk to one another in loving ways and provide support to each other. When members embody *Girl-Mom* by identifying themselves with or promoting her characteristics, others describe them as “passionate,” “brave,” and “joyful.” The forcefulness of the words used to describe *Girl-Mom* indicates that this theme is meaningful to members.

Circulation

Discourses are circulated with internal and external mechanisms (Mills, 1997, p. 60). These mechanisms include commentary, determining what counts as truth, and rarefaction. I will demonstrate how each of these circulatory mechanisms situate *Girl-Mom* as the most prominent theme on the website.

Mills (1997) describes commentary as “those discourses which are commented upon by others” in ways that imply validity (p. 60). Because her characteristics are woven throughout the website policies, *Girl-Mom* is often commented on. Being invoked through policy adds legitimacy to this theme because the authority of the policy grants authority to the associating subject. For instance, members achieve credibility and authority when they embody *Girl-Mom* characteristics, because in effect they embody policy. Thus, *Girl-Mom* can be invoked to circulate power. Because website policies are taken as truth, *Girl-Mom* becomes a subject whose dominance is free from debate. Members who use the language of *Girl-Mom* become associated with her qualities. In effect, they become representative of the discourse.

Discourses are also circulated through “a larger-order discursive grouping which determines what can be said and regarded as factual or true within a given domain” (Mills, 1997, p. 62). Because she is associated with the website policies which are taken as truth claims, *Girl-Mom* is associated with notions that are uncontested. In that way, she can be invoked to settle arguments or lend credibility to statements. For instance, some members wanted the website to take a strong stance on support for breastfeeding, while others saw this as shaming members who chose to formula feed. The conversations about this topic repeated in more than one thread, went on for several pages, and usually became quite heated. When members disagreed on the stance the website should take, the disagreements were mediated by the notion that all women must be unconditionally supported, a key *Girl-Mom* characteristic. The decision for how the website would support breastfeeding was shaped by that truth claim.

Lastly, discourses are circulated with rarefaction, “an internal discursive constraint” people place on themselves (Mills, 1997, p. 63). While members could potentially say anything, they typically stuck to socially agreed-upon language and topics. Mills (1997) continues, “discourse is bounded by rituals which limit the number of people who can utter certain types of utterances” (p. 63). For example, only when a certain kind of authority utters marital rights do two people become married. On the website, certain members are thought to embody *Girl-Mom* characteristics more noticeably than others, particularly the moderators (the “Mod Squad”). When such members speak, the authority of their position and their ability to closely replicate *Girl-Mom* means more force is applied to their words and their ideas are taken more seriously. Conversely, when members who don’t have kids speak, their words are granted less authority because they

are less aligned with *Girl-Mom*. The effect of rarefaction is that *Girl-Mom* becomes the author of the website, the figure invoked when defining the community and what can be said there.

Discursive Strategies and Techniques

A discursive strategy is

the way a discourse is deployed. It is the means by which a discourse is given meaning and force, and through which its object is defined. It is a device through which knowledge about the object is developed and the subject is constituted (Carabine, 2001, p. 288).

Discursive strategies were used on the forums to create *Girl-Mom* as a significant theme and can be identified in moments when members refer to “we.” The way that *Girl-Mom* is spoken of by members embellishes specific qualities, which are discussed below.

Girl-Mom is spoken of as strong, empathetic, and resilient. Her existence counters mainstream discourses on young mother degeneracy. For instance, the mission statement is the policy through which she is embodied and this is noticeable in the use of “we” in the following excerpts.

We believe that all teenagers are sexual beings with the ability to love, procreate, and nurture.

We believe that teenagers have the innate ability to parent well, but are socially conditioned to believe that they are irresponsible and reckless. We believe that such social conditioning often creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which teenage parents believe that they cannot parent well and move on to not parent well.

Girl-Mom is spoken of in terms of her unconditional support. For instance, the following excerpts are in response to a young woman who is pregnant and unsure of what to do.

Congratulations on the pregnancy, if you need help in how to tell your parents then there is a thread on the pregnancy and birth board. I really hope they support you and realized its your body and your choice. Remember, if your bloke won't stand by you, you have us, also you don't need someone else to make you a good mom. I really wish you all the luck and don't forget to let us know if we can help in any way. (Elliot)

We will support you in whatever you choose here, that's what makes this site so great. Women are important, YOU are important, taking care of yourself right now is priority. (Fay).

Support is also spoken of as imbued with power relations between members. The following examples demonstrate how power is articulated on the website:

We do NOT want to alienate young women who come here and probably need support and help with bigger issues in their life (like leaving an abusive babydaddy, finding abortion resources, etc.). (Edie)

I do NOT think the harsh in-your-face approach is okay here. Young moms get shit from all directions, they're pushed into making choices they don't really want to. I think here we need to focus on facts, supporting choices that are not mainstream. (Rachel)

Speaking of *Girl-Mom* as a supportive subject is a discursive strategy that emphasizes the necessity of encouragement for young mothers.

Resistances

To consider moments of resistance to *Girl-Mom*, I returned to the original threads and made note of text coded as *Girl-Mom Outlier*, *Mainstream-Influenced Mama*, and *Resistant to Girl-Mom*. Interestingly, moments of resistance strengthened community support for the qualities of the *Girl-Mom* subject. I will demonstrate this by exploring what happened when *Girl-Mom* was resisted first on the basis of language guidelines, and second on the basis of unconditional support and respect for young mothers.

The language guidelines on the website are intended to protect the “safe space,” but they also implicitly protect *Girl-Mom* as a manifestation of the mission statement.

Members regulate language by “calling each other out,” or reminding others of what can and cannot be said. In one example, a member stated a view on abortion that was not allowed to be expressed in the “safe space.”

I couldn't stop a life from being born. That's just too wrong for me and my beliefs. (Abby)

The responses:

We wholeheartedly believe that abortion has nothing to do with life as it is just a bunch of cells... please make sure you understand what girlmom is about so that no further comments are said which could be damaging to women who have made the very valid choice of abortion. (Evelyn).

Girls, PLEASE go read the mission statement. I understand that you all have gone through really rough situations, but this is for many women the ONE safe place they can come without hearing that their abortion 'stopped a life,' you know? Every young woman facing an unexpected pregnancy needs to have a safe place to talk about it. We want that for you, and for all our members. I'm sure none of you mean to hurt any other members, but it does hurt them. So, if you could read the mission statement and be more aware of your words, that would be great. (Adrienne)

These responses demonstrate members regulating language to fit with website policy while referencing *Girl-Mom* by name and in the use of “we.” In another example,

This brings me to another concern I have at the moment. Respectful pregnancy language. I do not agree with the guidelines that have been set forth in the [pregnancy language policy] thread. I have thought long and hard about how to approach this the right way and have spoken to many women who have experienced abortion, miscarriage, birth, and all of the above before deciding how to respond to this. I feel that in an effort to be judicious *Girl-Mom* is overstepping and setting unreasonable restrictions on member's right to express emotions about their own bodies, circumstances, and beliefs... Your idea of PCness is bordering on ridiculous and has actually offended me. (Verna)

Several members responded to Verna to explain the making of language policy and the reasons why it is needed. The conversation went on for many pages, and in effect, further endorsed support for website policy as members defended their policies. When Verna responded that perhaps the other members couldn't see her point because they were younger and more naïve, this set off a wave of responses that had an additional effect of commanding respect for the young motherhood experience. For instance:

We are not impressionable, we all form our own opinions, and we care deeply about each other here. (Leah)

...we are powerful, educated, and willing to do the WORK that is part of making a difference. And we do that with our kids on our hips.. (Maggie)

Just because the women here are young doesn't mean they don't face anything, if anything, the women here face more than they ever could with all their oozing privilege. It seems we ARE more radical [on this website]. Not because we're young, not because we don't have [what other feminist women have], not because we have all this spare time, but because that's what we choose to be. The women here choose to be strong, vocal, radical, and would be regardless of age or privilege. (Eve)

These responses demonstrate moments in which members regulate resistance and define *Girl-Mom* characteristics at the same time, in effect, strengthening support for the idealized characteristics.

Girl-Mom was also resisted for her characteristic of endorsing unconditional support for the young motherhood experience. As one member without children posted:

Just out of curiosity, don't you have any other goals in life besides being a mother?... You really have your whole life ahead of you to have babies, but do you really have your carefree youth for a long time? Oh, no no no no. You need to enjoy it while you have it and live it up to the fullest without children being albatrosses around your neck! (Minerva)

Not surprisingly, members responded to this in droves. In the process, these women aligned themselves with the idealized characteristic of support for young mothers no matter what. For instance:

Last time I checked, becoming a mother was a huge thing to make of myself. (Celeste).

Your path to success is not the only valid one. ALL of us are ‘making something of ourselves’ in our own way, whether that’s graduating high school or college with babies on our hips, pursuing jobs we love, or staying at home with our children. It is out of line for you to judge our relative worth by whether or not we fit your narrow definition of success. Who cares what you think you personally would/would not have been able to do with kids? This isn’t about you. We don’t need some random person coming on here and telling us what we can and cannot achieve with children, thanks. (Jane).

The data set thus did not contain moments of resistance that were strong enough to refute or dilute the potency of *Girl-Mom* and what she means to members. Rather, when her characteristics were questioned, the defensive response by members served to cement her prominence and validity.

Effects

The last stage of the initial analysis of *Girl-Mom* considers what effect this subject position has on how members see themselves, each other, and the young motherhood experience. Initial findings show that *Girl-Mom* affects members by reframing how the young motherhood experience is talked about, supporting the collective, and creating knowledge specific to Girl-Mom.com. The following discussion considers each of these effects in turn.

Girl-Mom affects how members see themselves and each other as outside of the claims of teen mom degeneracy. Her subjectivity influences women to counter popular

discourses and thereby come to value their alternative experiences. The following excerpt demonstrates how exposure to *Girl-Mom* influenced one member:

I've gotten more than I could ever give from this site. I've healed a lot of the pain I carried around about the way I was treated as a single teen mom. I let people make me feel ashamed, and like less of a person for getting pregnant when I did. That shame led me to make a decision to enter a relationship that had some serious red flags to begin with. I didn't listen to the little voice that told me I was making a mistake. Because I thought I was lucky that I found a man who loved me. Because everyone told me I was trash, and that no one would ever love me. Now finally, and thanks to the help I've received on this board, more from being open and learning, reading and unlearning than actually asking (although I've been doing that lately). I've got my life on the right track. And when I see posts that play into the crap that fucked me up in the first place, it's my fucking duty to call it out. It's poison, plain and simple. (Aria).

Aria credits her time on the website, and in effect her exposure to *Girl-Mom*, with results that changed her life. The way she speaks about how young mothers are discursively constructed by mainstream discourses on youth sexuality and motherhood reveals how defeating those discourses can be. The process of liberating herself from external definition is beautifully represented in her words, and indicates that exposure to *Girl-Mom* makes it easier for members to resist degeneracy and develop resiliency. Resistance intertwined in the young mother experience originates at the level of the individual and is deeply personal, refusing outside control.

The high regard for the community and other members creates value and respect for the young motherhood experience. For instance, note how Koda aligns the website and collective with *Girl-Mom* specific transformation.

I'm glad this conversation is happening. The fact that it's 'controversial' in some ways - like people aren't all agreeing - shows me that we're all working really hard to understand and make changes in our understanding. This is what girlmom is about. It is the only place where these kinds of things come up. Nobody,

anywhere else, will tell you that getting pregnant as a teen is anything other than a reflection of poor upbringing or moral/psychological weakness. Nobody, anywhere else, really examines welfare as a concept, and the way that politicians play on racist and classist stereotypes to shuffle funding away from children and families and into (primarily male) big business and military industrial complexes. Girlmom is the only place that really examines these things from a radical, feminist, mother-positive perspective. (Koda).

Also, note how Viola and Rachel promote mutual respect as a tool for empowerment.

Girl-Mom, in itself is not specifically a debate forum. It is a community. A community of women that, for the most part, are marginalized by society for becoming a mom while being too young or too poor or queer or whatever else. But the stress is on community. (Viola)

Basically, it just really bugs me hearing and seeing teen moms put themselves above other teen moms. We should be united, supporting our sisters, not dissing them, even if we don't realize it. (Rachel)

The characteristic of *Girl-Mom* that promotes mutual respect during critical discussions nurtures young mothers by demonstrating what it means and feels like to be a valued, respected individual. The website may be the only place where some of the members experience that feeling. Transformation comes through redefinition.

The effects of *Girl-Mom* include the creation of specific knowledge and learning/unlearning experiences. Gigi comments on the effect this had on her:

I used to think the same thing about abortion. I assumed it was wrong without really researching it. I think it was because (most) of society views it as a 'bad' thing, so I did too. Since coming to Girl-Mom, my views have really changed. (Gigi)

The mother-centric views of the website influence the way that members understand themselves and other women, creating a subjugated knowledge unique to the website. This knowledge is created and circulated through posts that position young mothers as critical thinkers with great empathy.

That's what differentiates this parenting board from others. We share, we discuss choices, we question and deconstruct choices, we don't blindly support people in whatever choices they make regarding themselves or their children, but we also don't attack people for making what we construe as a poor choice, we remain respectful. That's the difference. (Eve)

This knowledge demonstrates critical thinking about being a feminist young mother. This effects how members experience motherhood. For instance, in child-raising:

I have a three year old boy. I also have a lot of pent-up misandrony. I felt like I knew how to raise a feminist woman, how to arm a girl against the world. My son has been the biggest challenge to my feminism I've found, a total curveball, and the biggest joy. My challenge with my son, whom I love and think is the most wonderful human being, able to put himself in other people's shoes and understand that by walking around with white skin and a penis he has a lot of privilege, but I also have to make sure that he's happy, proud of who he is, and isn't squashed by guilt over his privilege. So I revel in his uniqueness as a person, challenge stereotypes, grab teachable moments, and show him that girls can fix stuff and it's OK for boys to cry. I also make sure he knows it's ok for boys to fix stuff and for girls to cry too. (Breanne).

In making feeding choices:

This [discussion about feeding choices] has to be done with a certain degree of sensitivity though, because we are talking about a food source provided by women's bodies, women's breasts... and that means that all the cultural bullshit about our bodies and our identities and all the sexual experiences we've had play heavily into our decisions to breastfeed or not to breastfeed. (Irene)

And in being women in a neoliberal patriarchy:

Children without fathers do have more problems, but I think that is more because of poverty, overworked moms, etc. So, neo-cons who throw these stats around in an effort to encourage marriage are misguided, and more government programs need to be created to combat poverty. (Thelma).

These quotes from the data exhibit the influences that *Girl-Mom* has on the knowledge that members construct about motherhood. Articulating motherhood outside of dominant

discourses creates discursive space for other alternate understandings. As a result, website members can feel validated as mothers even though they do not fit into mainstream notions of what a mother should be.

This chapter has explored the ways in which *Girl-Mom* was constructed as the most significant subject position on the website. This discussion introduces some of the ways that the subjectivities of young mothers were influenced through website participation. These influences are discussed through the feminist post-structural lens in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: Exploring *Girl-Mom*

This section considers how the subjectivities of young mothers were influenced by participation in the online, feminist space of *Girl-Mom.com* through considering the influence of the *Girl-Mom* experience. As previous sections demonstrated, the most potent discourse on the website is *Girl-Mom*, a resistant subjectivity that led many members to experience self-transformation. In this section, I describe who *Girl-Mom* is by analyzing how website policies create her as a resistant subject. Then, I consider what it means to be *Girl-Mom*, including the way that she is created out of website knowledge as a dominant website norm that influences members to regulate and discipline themselves and each other. Being *Girl-Mom* is also examined in terms of how this idealized subjectivity is (or is not) embodied by members with intersecting marginalities, such as race and class differences. Lastly, I explore the process of becoming *Girl-Mom* through a discussion on how self-discipline and technologies of the self lead to transformation.

Who is *Girl-Mom*?

This section describes how the subjectivities of young mothers were influenced by participation in the online, feminist space of *Girl-Mom.com* through exposure to the *Girl-Mom* subject position. After I introduce the *Girl-Mom* characteristics that I have located in website policy, I explore the aspects of mainstream society to which this subject speaks back. The attachment of this idealized subject to website policy identifies the type of woman members may become, who belongs in the group and who is excluded from becoming *Girl-Mom*, and what it is possible to say in this space. *Girl-Mom* is not

explicitly defined by website members in the policy or in their discussions, but she is implicitly described by what they say.

Characteristics

Girl-Mom is not a homogenous subject position, but rather is interacted with and embodied by individuals from different race, class, sexual orientation, education, and political backgrounds. While she is embodied in different ways, *Girl-Mom* has specific characteristics that are described in direct terms in website policy. For instance, she is described in this passage from the mission statement in ways that resemble radical feminist, women-centered discourses:

Teenage girls can be, are, and always have been, both sexual and maternal beings, with the capacity to love, procreate, and nurture.

We love our children fiercely.

We encourage all young women who have chosen to become mothers. We encourage all young mothers to stand up for themselves, to fight for their children, to empower themselves and to defy the notion that being young means that you are unworthy of parenthood.

The girls who frequent this site are intelligent, strong, compassionate, socially aware, politically active, and eternally nurturing. Together, we will change the face of "teen parenthood."

This language depicts *Girl-Mom* as a fierce, maternal activist. In addition, it describes the kind of characteristics that will be nurtured in website members, such as “politically active,” “intelligent” and “eternally nurturing.” Absent from all website policies is the notion that to get pregnant at a young age is a ‘mistake’ or a ‘crisis.’ In what is and is not said, members are told who they can potentially become.

However, as a discourse, *Girl-Mom* does not exist outside of power relations. Thus, she does not only represent who members can potentially become, but also who they are expected to become. By associating *Girl-Mom* discourses with what members can say and do, in effect members can use *Girl-Mom* to regulate themselves and each other in the guise of associating themselves with this idealized subjectivity.

Resistances

In this section, resistance is considered for how website members resist the disciplining of their sexuality and reproduction by dominant discourses on respectability and deviance. In another section of this chapter, I consider how members are in turn disciplined by their own discourses, and what happens if they resist that process. The focus here is on the abundance of academic and public attention that focuses on the troubles that women face if they conceive at a young age. Certainly, some parents do struggle. Yet, a distinct quality of the language used on the website externalizes shame from young parenthood, which returns agency to objectified subjects and makes visible the oppressive power generated in a misogynistic society. For instance,

[Teenagers are] socially conditioned to believe that they are irresponsible and reckless. We believe that such social conditioning often creates a self-fulfilling prophecy in which teenage parents believe that they cannot parent well and move on to not parent well.

This excerpt takes on the powerful stereotype that youth are bad parents, and turns it back onto the societal stereotypes that create it.

It is useful to consider the theory of “forced choices” created by Davies (2000). She defines forced choices as:

The subject's positioning within particular discourses makes the 'chosen' line of action the only possible action, not because there are no other lines of action but because one has been subjectively constituted through one's placement within that discourse to *want* that line of action (p. 60, emphasis in original).

In other words, individuals struggle and live along the margins not because they don't want more for themselves, but because they have been told that is all they can expect out of life. Strega (2005) notes that Davies' (2000) notion of forced choices is "appealing because it allows us to see and understand how and why we are being complicit without pathologizing it or attributing it to an underdeveloped consciousness" (p. 222). Young mothers are not inherently stupid or unaware of how to better their lives. Rather, they are constituted as subjects unable to make anything of themselves. Website policy addresses the impact of forced choices:

Degrading, vilifying, marginalizing, and rejecting teen mothers (as is customary in our society) is counterproductive and illogical.

When a teenage girl finds herself pregnant, it is one of the few times during her life course where she will not only be expected to fail, but socially encouraged to fail.

Teenage pregnancy is not a 'crisis' or 'epidemic' like so many people would like us to believe. The only true epidemic associated with teen pregnancy is the overwhelming and universal lack of support available to young mothers.

The language used in the above policy alludes to how some young parents may be forced to choose degeneracy. For instance, the statements that young mothers are "socially encouraged to fail" and receive an "overwhelming and universal lack of support" demonstrate how maternal deviance is an identity forced onto these women. Indeed, the language used in website policy makes it clear that to resist societal shame is difficult due to how potent stereotypes and biases against young parents can be. However, in deconstructing and opposing societal shame, website members produce another set of

discourses. These alternative discourses, in this case the ones closely aligned with *Girl-Mom*, are not intended to be taken in this analysis as unquestionable truths that are outside the influences of power. Certainly, alternative discourses can be used to discipline and regulate the self and others, just as mainstream discourses are. While members engage in a discursive struggle with larger social discourses about motherhood, they also create and operate in discursive space in which *Girl-Mom* discourses dominate and regulate members.

Indeed, sophisticated societal power relations inflict the forced choice of deviancy onto pregnant and parenting young women. Moffatt (1999) explains “to protect the distribution of wealth and the nature of the system, a hostility must be created that is directed toward those who threaten this system from within” (p. 231). This hostility is directed through state surveillance, which invokes the image of the panopticon (Brown, 2005, p. 78). The panopticon originated within the penal system as a way to place prisoners on constant display while unseen guards had the ability to surveil them at any time, in effect controlling behaviour of prisoners with a mere gaze. This gaze is a metaphor for social control and those who are deviant are subjected to a relentless, judging gaze. Teenagers with protruding bellies, lactating breasts, or children clinging to their hands are marked as deviant in a society that invokes social control on women through rigorous sexual and moral codes¹⁶. Foucault (1995) describes this as “a faceless gaze that transforms the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere” (p. 214). From the data:

¹⁶ Mary Russo’s theory of the female grotesque describes the process by which women are identified by and disciplined for the processes of their bodies. In particular, she has interesting things to say about how this looks for the maternal body. It is out of scope of this research to delve into these juicy insights, but the following is an interesting source on the female grotesque: Russo, M.J. (1995). *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity*. New York: Routledge.

I don't think about the people that stare that much but it does bug me and I wish that I could open up their eyes (even more than they already have them open, looking at me!) and show them that being a teen mom is the same thing as being any other mom. So why should we get stares? Do you see any other moms getting stares around? No, because they're at the age to have kids and are considered fine to have kids. (Kadence)

Kadence identifies the impact of the 'faceless gaze' as one that constantly reminds her that she does not belong. In language that externalizes societal shame and prescribes unconditional support, members who embody the *Girl-Mom* characteristics of standing up for themselves and refusing the burden of degeneracy may experience feelings of resiliency, strength, or hope. Although, the way that members embody *Girl-Mom* characteristics surely operates on a continuum, and different members will experience different outcomes in how emancipating the *Girl-Mom* discourses can be for them.

Introducing Alli

Girl-Mom.com was largely influenced by Allison Crews (Alli), author of the Mission Statement and User Agreement, former website editor, and long-term member. After getting pregnant at 15 and nearly coerced into putting her son up for adoption, she found her voice and her strength and became active in feminist mothering online and communities across the west coast of the United States and into Austin, Texas. As one of the original leaders of the website, she authored both the Mission Statement and the User Agreement, and moderated discussions in the forums for years. Alli is mentioned here because she embodied many of the characteristics of the idealized *Girl-Mom* subject. She was fierce, bold, and radical. She lived and breathed the characteristics of the website that were so influential, and became a pinnacle for what it means to be a *Girl-Mom*.

Alli died unexpectedly in 2005, and her death was a great loss to the website and to the large community of women who called her a friend. In the time following her death, Alli has continued to be referred to in how she embodies *Girl-Mom* traits. In a sense, she has become an icon that reinforces discourses of alternative motherhood. The effect of associating an actual person with a discursive subject is that it epitomizes the *Girl-Mom* qualities in a way that perhaps could not happen without someone to symbolize those qualities, or act out those characteristics.

The language used in website policies and discussion forums creates *Girl-Mom* as a subject position. This subject is constructed out of available discourses and then shaped and reshaped depending on the social context and social relations around her (Strega, 2005, p. 222; Carabine, 2001, p. 293; Weedon, 1987, p. 21). *Girl-Mom* is therefore constructed out of the feminist, mother-centric discourses produced on the website that identify who it is possible to be, what it is possible to say, and how those subjectivities and discourses will be regulated.

Being *Girl-Mom*

We encourage all young mothers to speak loudly and boldly of their experiences and choices, in the hope that young women of future generations will feel more secure in doing the same. (Mission Statement)

In this section, I frame *Girl-Mom* as a discourse that is first and foremost an essentialist construct based on reproductive capability. Then, I explore how members create local knowledge from which subjectivities are formed; describe how the freedom to ‘speak loudly and boldly’ is moderated by processes of discipline and normalization; and

consider how website members enact resistance through reframing their lives from deviance to resilience. This section describes what it means to be *Girl-Mom*.

Essentially, Mothers

The *Girl-Mom* discourses, as evidenced in website policies and discussion forum posts, explicitly support women who are biological mothers over all others who may join the website. This support is based on the notion that young mothers are excluded from nearly every other space, and so Girl-Mom.com is created as a safe space for them. Their knowledge is valued more than the contributions by ‘kidless allies,’ or women who post but do not have children. Men are not permitted in the discussion at all. This creates a situation wherein women are valued for their reproductive capabilities and their status and expertise is related to their biological destiny. Similar thought can be found in expressions of radical feminism from the 1970s, in which femaleness was framed as empowering and women’s power to create new life depicted as the ultimate source of power (Saracino, A., n.d., Radical-Cultural Feminism section). As Weedon (1999) states, the “claim to reproduction... is at the foundation of women’s identity” (p. 49). In this way, motherhood as a uniquely female experience is at the centre of women’s identities and the radical feminist movement. Motherhood is not just a life choice, but where she finds her identity as a woman. The *Girl-Mom* discourses echo this thought when they identify the women on the website as strong, powerful, and above all, mothers. Certainly, other women join in for some discussions, but the website’s intention and mission is to promote young mothers, on the basis of the shared experience of motherhood that the women have between them.

The radical feminist constructions of motherhood are problematic when viewed through the feminist post-structural lens. Theorists such as Davies (2000) depict identity as multiple and fluid, changing depending on circumstances and environment. This directly contradicts the notion that motherhood is an essentialist construct for all women, or for all young mothers. Being a woman or a young mother is not a universal experience (Mandell, 1995, p. 34) and to classify it as such is reductive and ignorant of the diversity in this experience. The website policies on Girl-Mom.com state that they will accommodate and even protect those who are different, including those who have alternative experiences with young mothers. However, the overarching *Girl-Mom* discourses which dominate all website text are predicated on the notion that being a young mother is an essential experience required in order to be a valued contributor and respected member of the website. Thus, to truly be or become *Girl-Mom*, members must above all else meet the requirements based on reproductive participation.

Knowledge Creation and Subject Development

Members are well aware of who they are thought to be in the neoliberal patriarchy and they counter those mainstream notions in the creation and circulation of website knowledges. These local knowledges produce discourses of young motherhood. Foucault (1980) describes this as “subjugated knowledges,” or,

a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated... a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it (p. 82).

O’Brien (1999) further defines subjugated knowledges as “knowledge developed by marginalized communities” (p. 139). Bound by discourses of adolescence, youth are

constituted as unknowing and under-developed. This makes the knowledge they create a subjugated knowledge.

Girl-Mom discourses attempt to call attention to the young motherhood experience. Members combat the shame of silence when they tell their stories and own their experiences. Strega (2005) describes this as “subjugated knowledges and the possibilities of other ‘truths’ that might break the hold of hegemonic discourses” (p. 220). To explore alternative truths means members challenge internalized shame, own their experiences as those that create resiliency and hope, and help others to do the same. To explore website knowledge as subjugated knowledge positions resistance as a movement spurred from within. Rather than compile a history of victimization, the website develops a history of feminist knowledge; it becomes a story of resistance (Sawicki, 1991, p. 26).

The development of subjectivities on the website can be explored through looking at how members articulate their experiences using the discourses available to them (Scott, 1992, p. 38). For instance, in this passage, Petra describes her experiences on the website, and in the process, comments on characteristics of *Girl-Mom*, shown here in bold text:

Truth be told, I’ve seen **better parenting** here than I’ve seen by adults on other boards. I’ve seen much more **thoughtful decisions**. These are **people who should be raising children**, regardless of age. I don’t see women here disappointed that they’ve decided to have children. I see a group **of smart, amazing young women with good hearts** who are obviously **very good parents**. I thought this place was great because I can relate to what you girls are going through. (Petra).

Girl-Mom characteristics include thoughtful parenting and feminist support. Petra demonstrates these characteristics when she talks about her experience on the website and in relationships with others. Referring to these experiences calls attention to the associating characteristics, which can increase their salience and potency on the website.

When individuals go online to talk about their lives, they do more than just ‘chit-chat.’ Discussions establish knowledges that create and circulate particular subject positions (Scott, 1992, p. 37). See the ‘About Us’ section:

The girls who frequent this site are **intelligent, strong, compassionate, socially aware, politically active, and eternally nurturing**. Together, we will change the face of ‘teen parenthood.’

This example promotes *Girl-Mom* as an identity that members can aspire to and are allocated through participation. Characteristics are clearly outlined, showing members what they may wish to become. In the last sentence of the above excerpt, the use of “we” in “we will change the face of ‘teen parenthood’” indicates that this call to action is also a call to become part of a community. In joining in this social mission, members are invited to also become *Girl-Mom*, or, the subject position described and adhered to in website discourses.

Thus, *Girl-Mom* emerges out of multiple and diverse experiences. Scott (1992) situates experience as “not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced” (p. 26). Thus, experiences produce knowledge about motherhood and this knowledge provides evidence to support and develop new ways of understanding.

Regulating Language

Power relations moderate the processes of knowledge creation and subjectivity development. Power relations on the website are most evident in how members use discipline to moderate and regulate their space. Discipline is a type of power, a

technology that changes people (Foucault, 1995, p. 215) and distributes power at the most minute of levels (p. 216). Not simply a power used over others, as it is sometimes articulated, “the chief function of disciplinary power is to train” (Foucault, 1995, p. 170). Discipline works on an individual basis, modifying characteristics and beliefs to create new subjectivities that embody the qualities of the power and knowledge regime. Disciplinary apparatuses are the tools through which discipline is implemented. Several moments of discipline presented in the data; in fact the subjectivity interpreted as “Discussion Moderator: official and unofficial” was the third most frequently coded. The most common disciplinary apparatuses are language guidelines, hierarchical surveillance, and the “safe space.” I consider each apparatus in the following paragraphs.

Discipline can be used to promote and protect local knowledges (Moffatt, 1999, p. 231). Language is regulated to ensure no threats are made to the core beliefs of the community, its members, or *Girl-Mom*. Members discipline one another to ensure standards are maintained. The following three passages demonstrate the diverse ways that discipline through language policy defends website policy:

And yes, elsewhere you do have a ‘right’ to give your opinion but on THIS SITE, your ‘opinion’ and the way you gave it is completely against the way this site is set up in SUPPORT of young, confused, unsure pregnant women. It’s against the mission statement; it offends almost every one of us here. You do not HAVE to be here. You came here on your own free will. If you want to stay, you should probably follow the rules. The MODS here are very protective of what this site is for and won’t stand for it. You chose not to have an abortion and that’s all the information that is necessary. (Cecily, emphasis in original)

Cecily uses discipline to protect the values of the website from being compromised in another woman’s use of anti-abortion language. In her choice of language she creates a paradox between the “young, confused, unsure pregnant women” she describes and the

“intelligent, strong, compassionate, socially aware, politically active, and eternally nurturing” women described in the “About Us” section of the website. One interpretation of her paradoxical word choice is that the tone of her messages is quite disciplinary. She invokes the image of the downtrodden young pregnant woman as a tool to emphasize the necessity of the website regulations and justify her own disciplinary efforts.

I hate that I see women belittled for whatever decision they make in communities that are supposed to be about building mothers up in society. Don't we have enough shit to fight against? Language is extremely powerful... (Viola).

Viola uses discipline to protect the website as a space to value and support women. She invokes the image of the young mother as social justice warrior to call for support to regulate language between members.

As teen and young moms, we often have our mothering skills doubted in many other places, but Girl-Mom shouldn't be one more place where young moms feel inadequate or not good enough. It's... about extending basic respect to our fellow mothers, who often do not get that respect elsewhere. (Jane).

Jane uses discipline to protect the values of mutual respect. She uses images of mutual respect and support to justify disciplining what members can say to one another. These passages demonstrate how discipline through policies support local knowledges. The tone of the language used to discipline others indicates the seriousness to which the policies are taken. Local knowledge is highly valued and defended. The process of disciplining others to protect this local knowledge creates *Girl-Mom* discourses as normative discourses used to regulate the self and others.

Another disciplinary apparatus on the website is the use of hierarchical surveillance. Heyes (2007) describes this type of discipline as “ever-finer measurement and closer surveillance of the subject population” (p. 73). This occurs on the site through two main

categories: Girl-Mom Member, or any person who registers on the website, and Mod Squad, a group of members who are selected by the others to protect and promote website interests by sharing information and enforcing website policy. However, even with a designated group to monitor forums, everyone takes on this task. Since the community is created by and for young mothers, each member has a responsibility to ensure others act in accordance to policy. This task is clearly defined in the User Agreement:

...by posting on Girl-Mom.com and becoming a member of this community, you accept the responsibility of maintaining community standards.

In almost every discussion analyzed in the data, different users posted comments that indicated that they were watching one another. The monitoring gaze of society onto young mothers is, in a sense, replicated in the monitoring gaze of one website member to another. For instance, Katniss responds to a woman who stated that the website needed to take a ‘militant’ stance towards breastfeeding, meaning that mothers who chose to formula feed would be told that their babies were receiving inferior food:

Be as militant as you want, but don’t make women here feel bad about their lives. EVERYTHING else tells us to feel bad. We don’t need it from here as well. (Katniss)

Using surveillance to monitor the forum, Katniss calls the other member out for violating the website policy and local knowledge that mandates support for young mothers. In a discussion about welfare, someone stated that taxpayers should not have to financially provide for people who choose to give birth outside of financially stable circumstances.

Several women responded:

Having sex as a teenager isn’t a crime worthy of punishment by starvation. (Irene)

Victoria continues:

We do what we have to, to get by and to support our families. That assistance is our right to have and if it helps a mama feed her kids or get through school it's not wrong at all. (Victoria)

The forums are constantly monitored for violations to the local knowledges created in that space, and as the above passages show, those who threaten the sanctity of the space are disciplined.

The disciplinary apparatuses of language guidelines and hierarchical surveillance combine to produce the third apparatus, the 'safe space.' The website is described as a safe space for young mothers, women who have had abortions, and those with intersecting marginalities. The safe space is referred to as an uncontested truth, a sort of utopia. For instance:

This is a support community for marginalized moms. Being in a relationship that's accepted by society makes you more privileged and less marginalized so when you say something that hurts a mama, it needs to stop. There are other personal blog sites where you can say whatever you want, but this is a community where even the smallest voice counts. Those who are marginalized most need this space, it's the only place they can openly express how they feel, whereas talking about your relationship is accepted almost anywhere... It is NOT about denying someone's happiness, but the far opposite. We need to educate on this site and 'little mistakes' can have serious repercussions, it may have seemed trivial to some but it can hurt others and those voices need to be heard. (Victoria)

Here, Victoria describes the safe space utopia as a place where 'even the smallest voice counts.'

As K said, the terminology we use on here has also been discussed to death and developed due to member request. This is one of the only safe spots that I know of online where women can talk openly about abortion without encountering anti-choice BS, and that a teen mom and a woman choosing abortion can receive equal amounts of support. (Jane)

In this case, Jane describes the safe space as somewhere that women can talk openly and be supported. A theme in both examples is that the safe space on the website is one of the only spaces of its kind. This grants a reverential quality to the discussions and means that the discipline and regulation that maintains the safe space becomes social justice work, as the women protect one another from outside forces. The reliability of the safe space to truly be safe will be problematized in detail in another section of this chapter, but for now this analysis acknowledges that the reverential quality of the safe space also invokes safe space discourses with power that has some not-so-safe consequences.

Resistance

In the Initial Analysis, I considered moments of resistance from members to the *Girl-Mom* discourses. Certainly, there were many moments in which women on the website resisted both the discourse and the dominance of it. In this section, resistance is considered as that which initiates within young mothers and extends outwards to the rest of society. Resistance efforts initiate at the level of the individual (Weedon, 1987, p. 111) and target multiple points of resistance within the power relations that structure life (Foucault, 1990, p. 95). Their counter-discourses may not be that different than popular ideas (Chambon, 1999, p. 70). For instance,

I love the insinuation that you've 'wasted your life' because you chose to dedicate it to raising a child – like really, how is that WASTING your life? I always thought that folks had children to enrich their lives, to start living life over again... (Emma).

This passage demonstrates that some resistance tactics these women use are not dissimilar to mainstream views on motherhood as a valuable life task for women to engage in. Foucault (1990) states, “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or

rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power... one is always 'inside' power, there is no 'escaping' it..." (p. 95). Members may support popular ideas about motherhood or female sexuality even while they resist degeneracy. Yet this does not diminish their usefulness.

Resistance efforts extend outwards from members like a web. Foucault (1990) describes the multiplicity of resistance as effecting change by "producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them" (p. 96). Thus, resistance sometimes involves directly speaking back to those who shame them:

Does anyone have the address for the editor? I think we should all write a quick letter or email to the editor, and even the advertisement company. They won't get their facts straight unless we speak out. (Eugenia).

In other moments, resistance is enacted through involvement in the collective:

I know that the in-your-face radical Girl-Mom that was here when I first joined the site helped me to really think about the issues facing the world, and made me want to get involved and educate myself, and to help other women out. We have to think critically with each post we make, we are dealing with real people and real life situations, most of which are pretty serious to the people involved. (Edie)

And in other moments, resistance is expressed in terms of being an open-minded critical thinker:

I think that as folks who state that we are progressive, I think that it's important for us to look at what we are buying, what we are wearing, what we are doing and examine the reasons behind it/for it. (Katniss).

Therefore, resistance does not occur in a prescribed manner, but rather begins within individuals and manifests in all connected areas of life.

In the post-structural lens, no discourse contains absolute truth or endless potency. Hekman (1990) indicates, “the gaps, silences, and ambiguities of discourses provide the possibility for resistance, for a questioning of the dominant discourse, its revision and mutation” (p. 189). Members exploit the ambiguities in the objectifying nature of dominant discourses of motherhood when they speak openly about their interactions with those discourses. For instance, in this passage the bolded text indicates how one woman describes young mothers outside of deviance:

We aren't **political and radical and badass** because we 'aren't weighed down' with the responsibilities of adulthood, we are those things and more because **we KNOW what it's like to struggle and feel silenced and feel angry** at how hard life can be, and **we want to change it**. There is a certain sensitivity you get when you have hit rock bottom, you tend to not want others to be in that same place. [In my opinion] THAT is where our drive and ambition comes from. And I don't mean that we are pissed off victims, I mean that **we are powerful, educated, and willing to do the WORK that is a part of making a difference**. And **we do that with our kids on our hips**, because the babysitter just quit and [baby-daddy] ran off so we have no other way to be involved. (Maggie)

Maggie exploits the ambiguities of discourses that portray young mothers as victims of their own poor choices by representing them as powerful, resilient, sensitive, and resourceful. At the same time, she promotes the *Girl-Mom* discourses on young motherhood as an essential condition associated with young mothers, and the call to action in which young mothers take on resistance as an action that presumably other members will agree to join. In this way, Maggie's message becomes a form of normative discourse, prescribing behaviour and subjectivity to others even when framed as a message of resistance. The point is not to question the validity of what Maggie is saying, but rather it is to note that all discourse contains power and even marginalized subjects

taking a stance against dominant society use power over (and with) others to enforce their messages.

The inconsistencies in traditional notions of young motherhood are widened through resistance efforts that suggest alternate ways of understanding. Shapira (2010) comments on women's resistance towards the female grotesque

Might not the image of the 'unruly woman' and her changing, open-ended body subvert, rather than affirm, a norm that preaches discipline and containment? And when women themselves appropriate and reframe such images, can the body's 'disorder' stand not for danger but for an exhilarating challenge to oppressive social boundaries? (p. 53).

To rearticulate the pregnant or maternal body to a body that challenges hegemonic views of women and reproduction is a powerful form of embodied resistance. The following excerpt hints at such resistance:

You know I also think there's something to be said for the fact that this world forces us to be radical... I mean, we are the devil, right? [We are] the teen mothers that are responsible for the downfall of American society and the righteous morals it upholds, RIGHT? Being so socially unacceptable leads one to wanna start some shit, don't you think? (Irene)

This passage shows that the resistance can be taken up in sassy ways. In the acceptance and promotion of alternative ways of understanding young motherhood, new knowledge is created. Yet, in the process, traditional gender roles for women are reinscribed in the articulation of female centered resistance that is reliant on their biological and reproductive capacity. To be a resistant subject that embodies *Girl-Mom*, one must first and foremost be a biological woman with reproductive capability. This leaves dominant motherhood tropes that associate women with their biology unchallenged.

Post-structural notions of power see it as cultivated and expressed within individuals through subjectivities. Wang (1999) suggests "power operates through constructing our

subjectivities, shaping our identities, regulating our views of the world. This can be completed only when we actively assume the subjectivity that is offered through power relations” (p. 192). Thus, subjects resist subject positions assigned to them by dominant discourses when they refuse to identify themselves in the ways prescribed (Wang, 1999, p. 191). This occasionally happens by force, such as in Davies’ (2000) notion of forced choices. The forced choice to accept degeneracy as a naturalized part of the young motherhood experience is resisted on the website. One woman resists being forced to accept the degenerate status of single motherhood:

It’s totally possible to encourage fathers to be involved in their children’s lives without demoralizing the hard work that single mamas are doing. It’s totally possible to discourage young women from wanting to get pregnant (something I’m against anyway, but that’s a whole other rant) without putting down young women who ARE pregnant. I think that getting offended is a TOTALLY justified response to people telling me that the facts ‘prove’ that my child is going to end up a criminal, horrible person, stuck in jail, etc. I think that if people didn’t take offense to things, that nothing would change, you know? Why shouldn’t I get offended when they are using false statistics that undermine all my work at a really fundamental level? I have every right to get as offended as I want to. (Katniss).

Katniss questions the validity of “the facts” and “false statistics” about single parents to make it clear that she does not accept deviancy in her understanding of herself as a single mother. She enacts resistance by refusing to accept negative stereotypes of single mothers as part of her identity or mothering experience.

Allen (2011) states, “deliberate self-transformation is a practice of freedom” (p. 51) and this describes the resistance efforts of members as they analyze, modify and discard the identities traditionally assigned to them and develop subjectivities that will transform their lives. Heyes (2007) describes freedom through self-transformation as “new ways of

relating to others that permit the unspoken to be voiced” (p. 81). Thus, to become *Girl-Mom* means that members describe the young motherhood experience as positive and view other young mothers as capable and determined. The transformation process assists subjects to develop new skills and a heightened sense of self-awareness as the self is reinvented as “something new that is not yet imagined” (Heyes, 2007, p. 82); this process will be explored in more detail later in this chapter. Members do not experience freedom by returning to an essential self that was eliminated upon conception of their children. Rather, they enhance the motherhood experience by embodying resistance.

Normalization

Carabine (2001) describes normalization as “the measure by which all are judged and deemed to conform or not” (p. 278). Due to her popularity and association with website policy, *Girl-Mom* is “the norm towards which all individuals should aim, work towards, seek to achieve, and against which all are measured” (Carabine, 2001, p. 278). Members continually assess and reassess where they are in relation to the norm, at times embodying the subjectivity and at other times rejecting it.

The processes of normalization are not straightforward events (Weedon, 1987, p. 125). Some chose to leave the forums voluntarily because they would not adhere to the website policies, effectively disregarding *Girl-Mom* as a norm to achieve. The community did not deal with moments of resistance quietly, typically “calling out” those who defy website norms and sometimes banning them entirely. Chambon (1999) states, this kind of public shame “serves the purpose of instilling horror and fear in the audience. More than setting an example, and beyond the specifics of the crime, it serves to impress the power of the

authorities and enlist social obedience” (p. 69). To publicly call out those who are resistant reinforces the validity of website policy and validates the non-resistant for their “good” behaviour. The following two excerpts depict how resistance is responded to. One example:

What do infants do? Eat, shit, sleep. The only one of those we have control over is the eating part. Feeding a newborn is 99% of parenting that newborn. Make the wrong choice there and it's pretty hard to feel like a great mom, huh? Nothing has to be 'the standard' at all, except for the choice of the mother. I don't want anyone to feel like a substandard mom, particularly when the rest of society is already telling them they are... Why replicate here a system of who did right and who fell short that is hurtful and discouraging to us in the rest of the world? Master's tools and all. Encouraging breastfeeding is a feminist cause, but so is refusing to create divisions between mothers and finish lines not everyone can cross. (Jacinda).

In this passage, Jacinda is disciplining a member who wanted the website to take a vocal stance about the downfalls of infant formula feeding by calling out that member for replicating mainstream judgments against the choices of young mothers. She positions characteristics of the *Girl-Mom* discourses, such as not judging other mothers, as norms that all members are expected to achieve, or at least not openly violate. While supportive to young mothers, this passage also functions to discipline what members can and cannot say. Another example,

Also may I add that poor people have a right to have children. You don't just breed because you have a spare bucketful of money; you breed because you feel that becoming a mother and having a child will enrich your life (I hope). Children need food, shelter, clothes, support, and love and it is up to each parent to figure out how their children get this and if it is through welfare (which we wouldn't need if the economy wasn't so fucked and the class system so predominant) then there should be no problem with that. (Mae)

Here, Mae uses the characteristic of *Girl-Mom* discourses that promote value for parents in all circumstances as a norm to regulate other members. While she makes interesting comments on parenting in a neoliberal climate, Mae also promotes her stance as truth that others must be disciplined for violating. The strong language used by Jacinda and Mae when “calling out” the website outliers demonstrates the seriousness with which the community takes *Girl-Mom*, and the extent to which she will be protected as the ultimate norm to work to become. Even in this context of promoting feminist resistance by young mothers, there are strong elements of regulation and control between members as they use the *Girl-Mom* discourses as unquestionable norms in interactions with one another.

“*Girl-Mom* Doesn’t Represent Me”

Girl-Mom is not a generic subject position. She is accessed, embodied, and circulated by women from diverse backgrounds who embody the characteristics in unique ways. However, this does not happen on an equal basis. Stratified reproduction structures *Girl-Mom.com* as it does the physical world.

Uploading Difference

Power influences who is heard and what happens when certain subjects speak. As women reinvent themselves, power relations influence which of those women are heard, which are ignored, and what happens next (McLaren, 2002, p. 154). The social context and relations of life impacts the ability or desire of subjects to attain certain subjectivities (Heron, 2005, p. 347). Thus, power relations influence the process of taking on new subjectivities (Weedon, 1987, p. 95). Despite the emancipatory potential and good

intentions of the website, power relations shape that space just as they shape physical societies and this means that some women are excluded. As one woman says:

People aren't so quick to notice, or just don't care, the miniscule amount of POC [people of colour] there actually are on the boards, and how many in the past few years have come to the boards excited to have found a place and left the entire board pretty quickly. This needs to be a safe space. (Eve)

And another continues:

Years ago now, when I first started posting about being a sex worker I envisioned that I would be able to talk about work in a general manner, offload if I had a crappy shift, that kind of thing, everyone else has a freedom to do here. Didn't happen. I tried many times to inform but there gets to be a point where you get sick to death of having to talk sex worker 101.. it keeps me (and the other adult industry workers on GM) in the position of 'other.' (Mary)

One of the points that both Eve and Mary touch upon is the barrier they feel between the middle-class, white, heterosexual members and those who are different. The power relations of the capitalist, patriarchal physical world are thus replicated in the discussion forums despite the best of intentions. The *Girl-Mom* experience is not available to all women because it does not accommodate difference. As Eve notes when talking about the women of colour who leave the boards, and Mary notes in her experience of being created as an 'other,' those who represent difference feel excluded on the website just as they likely do in the physical world. The website thus does not challenge the notions of stratified reproduction that value the reproduction of white women and devalue that of racialized or poor women.

The good intentions described in the mission statement include the website as a safe space for people with intersecting marginalities on the basis of race, sexual orientation, education level, income level, and so on. However, the quotes from Even and Mary

indicate that in practice, the value of inclusivity is not apparent. bell hooks (1992) looks at the way difference is understood in communities. She states

When the dominant culture demands that the Other be offered as a sign that progressive political change is taking place, that the American Dream can indeed be inclusive of difference, it invites a resurgence of essentialist cultural nationalism... This narrative is linked to white western conceptions of the dark Other, not to a radical questioning of those representations (hooks, 1992, p. 26).

While difference is noted in the list of what the website will protect, what Mary and Eve are saying is that “radical questioning” of difference does not happen, even in the “safe space.”

Cracking Open the “Safe Space”

Stengel (2010) says that the notion of the safe space establishes a sense of fear as the norm in a community (p. 525). Fear is what drives the women to establish a separate space where they can presumably feel less trepidation. Yet, her point is that in negotiating the website as a safe space, members are constituted as fearful and become isolated, while those with power are not expected to change in any way (Stengel, 2010, p. 531). In this vein, the safe space reinscribes societal dominance. Stengel makes interesting points, but I hesitate to admonish those who isolate themselves from a society that can feel relentlessly shaming in favour of being with supportive, protective women. The point, rather, is that safe spaces are not the utopias they are sometimes implicitly referred to as.

In order to meet the goals of protection, safe spaces rely on finely-tuned, “ritualized forms of control” (Stengel & Weems, 2010, p. 505). In previous sections, I demonstrated how members used the norms prescribed by *Girl-Mom* discourses to control and regulate themselves and each other. As demonstrated in the excerpts above, members break down

the minutest points of language to identify moments where the safe space was violated.

Pursuing this further,

We really MUST be careful with our words. (Rachel)

And:

You don't have 'freedom of speech' here, no. Not if that means the right to say whatever you feel like saying without regards to how it may make others feel... If you feel we are 'too PC' then maybe you should try another board, because we are not going to change our policies and views to accommodate you. (Jane)

The caution urged by Rachel and the discipline invoked by Jane lends a sense of fear to what might happen if the unspeakable is said. In troubling the notion of the safe space, this caution and fear undermines the articulation of these women as strong, resistant women if words could be so damaging. This understanding of the safe space subverts the notion that it is a space for people who are different to relax and feel free, and rather presents the image of people with difference nervously hiding in a "safe space" to shield themselves from the pain of social exclusion. It diminishes the potency of discourses presented in the forums and website policy by articulating them as in need of protection through the notion of the safe space, as though they are not strong enough to stand on their own. The popularity of messages calling out other members in an effort to protect the safe space troubles the notion that the website members are the fierce, emancipated women they are sometimes described as, for if they were truly so fierce and emancipated, surely so much effort would not need to be made to protect them. In this way, the notion of the safe space is troublesome and the presumed benefits perhaps questionable.

Becoming *Girl-Mom*

I am proud of my kids and fuck anyone who wants to question that or challenge my ability to be a good mom. (Lenora)

The discourses of the website generate new subjectivities, and *Girl-Mom* was the most prominent subject position in the discussion forums. Subject positions are constituted and reconstituted according to the discourses, social context, and social relations of the times (Davies, 2000, p. 57). No essential self exists (p. 66). Thus, the immorality typically assigned as an essential quality of young mothers is rejected as members shake off the burden of degeneracy and come to know themselves differently; a feature of collectives noted by Davies (2000, p. 66).

The discourses of *Girl-Mom* constitute subjectivities. Members take up and interact with these subjectivities in diverse ways, but the overarching social context and relations of online, youthful feminism is highly influential. The *Girl-Mom* discourses are woven into website policy, used between members to discipline and regulate what can and cannot be said in the forums, and identify a specific kind of young mother who is resistant, resilient, hopeful, and loving. The dominant website discourses prescribe *Girl-Mom* as a subjectivity for members who join the forums, and considering that many of these women are allowed to embody only deviant subjectivities in other areas of their lives, *Girl-Mom* discourses likely feel pretty good.

Subjects use agency to explore subjectivities (Davies, 2000, p. 67). When a young mother registers on the website and is moved by the resistance efforts of the collective, she invokes the use of agency to join the movement. This agency allows her to gain authority, or more literally, *authority*, which Davies (2000) articulates as “the capacity to

“speak/write and be heard, to have voice, to articulate meanings from within the collective discourses and beyond them” (p. 68). Certainly, subjects always have the ability to rewrite their own experiences, even those who are marginalized (Weedon, 1987, p. 125). This discussion does not intend to imply that prior to joining the website, these women were mute and incapable. The idea is rather that in exposure to the resistance efforts of the collective and the language of freedom, members can slowly reframe their motherhood experience to a story that more accurately represents who they want to become.

The impact of language on how a woman understands her self can lead to social change. Weedon (1987) describes the emancipatory potential of shifting subjectivities in marginalized groups:

...as we move out of familiar circles... we may be exposed to alternative ways of constituting the meaning of our experience which seem to address our interests more directly... collective discussion of personal problems and conflicts, often previously understood as the result of personal inadequacies and neuroses, leads to a recognition that what have been experienced as personal failings are social produced conflicts and contradictions shared by many women in similar social positions. This process of discovery can lead to a rewriting of personal experience in terms which give it social, changeable causes (p. 33).

The “rewriting of personal experience” (Weedon, 1987, p. 33) by marginalized subjects is a powerful act because the marginalized are typically positioned as objects, or objectified, unable to determine their own fate (Strega, 2005, p. 215). Gigi describes an experience with objectification,

About the article in Seventeen, I hate when they make it seem like teen moms are just losers. So we got pregnant and it wasn't the best thing that could have happened at that particular moment, that doesn't mean we're destined to be failures. (Gigi).

In this passage, Gigi rewrites her personal experience from what a mainstream magazine says that it is to one that might not have been “the best thing that could have happened,” but does not sentence one to lifelong degeneracy. Further,

Being a single mom is hard but its so much easier than trying to scrape and claw your way up with a man AND a kid hanging on your back. (Serena).

Here, Serena rewrites her experience with single motherhood from the notion that it involves suffering to an experience that is actually preferable when compared to taking on mainstream, heterosexual parenting with a partner who will not actually help out. To rewrite experience creates potential for social change, as subjects constitute realities that defy shame and embody empowerment. Redefining young motherhood and single motherhood, as Gigi and Serena have done, opens new possibilities for understanding the world, an emancipatory experience.

Social change follows the “right to speak and be heard” (Davies, 2000, p. 66). The process of a member invoking her right to speak and be heard to respond is visible on the website in a thread in which a woman who did not have any children, a “kidless ally,” posted a statement that there is much more to life than motherhood. People responded in droves to reframe young motherhood in ways that more accurately reflect their own experiences:

You don't have kids and you are older than many of us here were when we got pregnant. It is highly presumptuous of you to come on here to tell others what they should or shouldn't be doing with their reproductive systems, especially when you haven't even been in that position. Your path to success is not the only valid one. ALL of us are 'making something of ourselves,' in our own way, whether that's graduating high school or college with babies on our hips, pursuing jobs we love, or staying at home with our children. It is out of line for you to judge our relative worth by whether or not we fit your narrow definition of success. Who cares what you think you personally

would/would not have been able to do with kids? This isn't about you. We don't need some random person coming on here and telling us what we can and cannot achieve with children, thanks (especially when you do not have kids, so you don't know for sure). (Jane)

In this example, Jane uses her right to speak and be heard to resist objectification by the other member and, instead, tells her own life story. She claims the website as discursive space for young mothers to speak and be heard because it is within that kind of space that marginalized women may feel comfortable in learning and embodying social change. At the same time, Jane reproduces dominant, traditional notions of motherhood that state that only through biological reproduction can women access knowledge about motherhood. This excludes those who do mothering work but not through the involvement of their “reproductive systems” as Jane states. In this way, her message of support to young mothers excludes those who mother children not biologically related to them and positions biological mothering knowledge as superior to all else.

Allison Crews

It's not very often that a mom can find a partner in raunch and rowdiness. Someone to acknowledge that you are more than a boob machine or school shuttle. Someone who is open to discussions about the underbelly of motherhood- because there is an underbelly, and I valued Alli's ability to discuss it openly- lessen the stigma and unnecessary shame... I read her stories with the women I work with. "You are not alone, you will succeed, you are a kick ass mom" This is the message she has left behind to the young mamas who find this site and read her writing. {Fantasia}

At this point in the discussion I bring up Allison Crews, “Alli” again because her life and death speak to the importance of language as a tool of resistance. The transformative potential of language originates at the site of the individual with effects that extend outwards, like a web, to impact the collective as a whole (Scott, 1992, p. 34). Both the

individual and the collective are spoken into existence when the individual speaks (Davies, 2000, p. 62). Refusing to be pitied or silenced, Alli constituted herself as an empowered young mother, and in effect constituted the collective as the same. Resistant language created resistant members and Alli will be forever known for her ability to impact others in this way.

The truth was very important to Alli, both in terms of speaking honestly about the reality of being a young mom and in confronting internalized shame. Her writing in publications and on the website was described as life changing by many who knew her, myself included. She had a way with words that made impact in the heart of the reader. As the writer of the mission statement, Alli was most familiar with the *Girl-Mom* qualities of unconditional support, the need to speak loudly and boldly of the motherhood experience, and feminist resistance. Due to her close affiliation with website policy and her way with words, Alli was often regarded as someone who closely resembled the ideal member. For this, she was greatly revered. However, to be placed on a pedestal is to be isolated from the rest of the group, and puts the revered subject on display, with potentially negative effects. Without speaking for Alli's personal experience with this, I will say as someone who knew her that the community at times asked a lot of her.

When Alli died, the community was deeply shaken. Pages and pages of forum posts revealed a great out-pouring of love and memories of her ability to use language to inspire, to eloquently challenge deviant stereotypes, and to reframe young mothers as capable, loving, and fierce. She represents *Girl-Mom*, and nurtured those characteristics in others. The ability of such characteristics to impact change is evident in the lasting reverence the community has for her life and the grief felt over her death.

The Process of “Becoming”

The process of change requires self-discipline. Articulating oneself differently and going through a process of “awakening” require self-discipline in order to see results. I previously discussed how discipline was used between members; this section describes how members used discipline within themselves to become *Girl-Mom*.

Self-discipline functions through a gaze turned inward (Brown, 2005, p. 77) to monitor the process of gaining new skills and abilities (Heyes, 2007, p. 67). When a woman decides to become like *Girl-Mom*, she uses self-discipline to acquire skills that will allow her to embody the idealized characteristics. In this way, self-discipline leads to skill and personality development (Heyes, 2007, p. 74) and on the website this was demonstrated in learning skills in assertiveness, feminist activism, and parenting. For instance, the following excerpts demonstrate members teaching one another skills that will lead to the acquisition of new characteristics. Josie and Jane discuss assertiveness, which aligns with the *Girl-Mom* quality of being strong and resilient as a mother:

Some doctors seem to ignore you when you're worried about something. Be firm with them. (Josie)

Women should be given all the information about breastfeeding and formula feeding (from nonbiased sources) so that they can make an educated decision about what is best for themselves and their situation, but none of us can make that decision for other mamas. (Jane)

Jacinda discusses the impact of privilege in communities, which aligns with the *Girl-Mom* quality of being mindful of intersecting marginalities in feminist collectives:

If I were to write “Queer and proud!” in my signature line, that would be me standing up against society and being proud of who I am, even though I've been told and it's socially established that I am wrong and bad because of that. But if someone were to put “Straight and

proud!” it would be a lot different, no? It’s not that Girl-Mom is unfair, it’s that society is. If single moms and married moms were equally valued, both signatures would be fine. But since marriage is used as a weapon against young moms, it’s best not to have that weapon showcased here. (Jacinda)

Risa defends the right of women to make their own reproductive choices which aligns with the prochoice stance *Girl-Mom* takes:

The man’s choice ended when he stuck his dick into her without thinking of wearing a condom. Period. (Risa)

Katniss makes a strong statement about the right of welfare recipients to feel respect, which bolsters the *Girl-Mom* characteristic of respecting other mothers from all circumstances, including poverty:

This is not about the ‘government taking care of us’ because we had the audacity to get pregnant before we were financially able to take care of a baby. This is about the role of the government in our lives; about the role of women’s work versus men’s work; about the value placed on our dreams and aspirations. (Katniss)

These examples demonstrate members urging others to transform their actions or perspectives to more closely align with characteristics of *Girl-Mom*. Self-discipline is what is needed to complete such changes, and the results can enhance autonomy as individuals gain new skills and knowledge that can potentially lead to additional transformations, although this process is not guaranteed (Heyes, 2007, p. 77). This is an important outcome for women who are typically shamed for not fitting with traditional notions of either motherhood or young female sexuality.

The Tools of Change

Self-discipline as a means to achieve desired subjectivities is nurtured in certain acts. Foucault’s term ‘technologies of the self’ describes the acts individuals take to work on

who they are (Heyes, 2007, p. 79), which include “care of the self, truth telling (parrhesia), and self-writing” (McLaren, 2002, p. 147; Parton, 1999, p. 112). Such acts relate the self to the process of subjectification, or becoming. Technologies of the self

...permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immorality (Foucault, 1988, p. 18).

When she makes a confession or writes down who she is, the subject connects who she knows herself to be to her desires and thoughts (McLaren, 2002, p. 146).

When individuals engage in self-writing and truth telling, they come to know themselves more intimately (McLaren, 2002, p. 150). In effect, they create self-knowledge, which assists in the process of changing the self (Foote & Frank, 1999, p. 161). Foucault articulates confession as an act that enables autonomy through the ability to observe the self that is created in self-writing, and to influence future choices (Heyes, 2007, p. 85). When this writing is shared with others, Foucault (1997) identifies this as “something more than a training of oneself by means of writing, through the advice and opinions one gives to the other: it also constitutes a certain way of manifesting oneself to oneself and to other” (p. 216).

When individuals tell the truth of who they are through confession, they link personal issues to the political context in which they live (McLaren, 2002, p. 152). As such, “practices of the self aim at transformation. Because our self-understandings and identities always develop in cultural and historical contexts, self-transformation involves a critique of historical, as well as current, social conditions and norms” (McLaren, 2002, p. 151). The versions of motherhood produced by members in their writing counter those in popular culture. Rather than “Welfare Queen,” she is a woman using resources to

provide for her family. Rather than immoral, she is a proud and capable, loving mother. Rather than immature, she is resilient. As members write about their lives online, they come to know themselves differently and implicitly and explicitly make connections between their individual experiences and the social and political climate that influence them. The following quotes are taken from a thread on the realities of young motherhood, and demonstrate how such self-writing links individuals to larger discourses on women and motherhood:

I guess the biggest reality of parenting for me is that I am not the same person I was before I got pregnant. I became softer and more understanding. Most importantly, I learned patience. (Tanis)

I didn't realize that going to a grocery store people stare you down and you can feel the judgment. (Ricky)

Didn't know that 18 years would sound so short. (Marissa)

I never knew that so much of what I did would be judged on a different scale for me being a parent. (Viola)

I didn't think that having a child would totally strip me of my identity, and that I would have to rebuild myself piece by piece. (Emma)

How much I would love my little girls. How hard it would be to spend a day without them. (Shane)

Being able to go out would become a big deal. (Brene)

I never knew how much doubt would run through my mind. I thought that I would automatically fall in love with my son once he was born. However, it was more of a love out of duty than love out of choice. It takes a while to bond with your child. There are a lot of good things about being a mom, but a lot of the times, the bad outweighs the good. It's also one of the most rewarding jobs a person could ever have. (Penny)

Members are changed in the process of speaking their truths to one another. In doing so, they create opportunities for women in the future to do the same.

It takes virtue to reveal parts of life that it would be safer to deny (McLaren, 2002).

When this act is taken in the company of a friend or within a collective, the reflections of others on the self increase self-knowledge. This speaking, hearing, and reflecting is the basis of the discussion forums. Yet, such forums are mediated by the contextual online space (Boyd, 2008, p. 129). Their bodies are not immediately visible to one another, so people have more control over how they are interpreted by others. As women whose identities are closely related to their bodies in the offline world, due to the physical changes that pregnancy, birth, and lactation bring, freedom from physicality can lead to bold expressions of the self and exploration of new identities. Conversely, the notion of speaking the truth in a dis-embodied space is problematic. If the subject can potentially be anyone, there is no limit to the discursive liberties that could be taken while self-writing online. Indeed, one of the threads that came up in the data set was about a long-term member being discovered as a “troll,” or someone imitating a young mother but who likely was neither a mother nor possibly even female. Cyberspace as the medium has both positive and negative consequences.

Therefore, members use techniques of the self to transform themselves. As a requirement of participation in the online space, self-writing is the process through which women become *Girl-Mom*. As they come to know themselves differently, member subjectivities are influenced by participation in the online space in ways that lead to new skills and self-understandings.

CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

Witnessing My Own Experience

In 2002, Girl-Mom.com changed me. I became someone different after exposure to *Girl-Mom* and her characteristics. In the process of doing this research, Girl-Mom.com has changed me once again. To go from intimate insider, to researcher, and somewhat back again has been a dizzying experience. As an insider trying to work with some analytic distance, at times it felt like standing on a raft moving down a swiftly flowing river. How to anchor myself in a landscape always changing? How to identify myself when the terms of reference are in constant flux? How to get over the need to have things be in black and white, and instead, ease into the flow of the work? Conducting feminist post-structural research as an insider has been an incredibly challenging experience.

One of the biggest motivators for me in this work was adherence to the website mission “to speak loudly and boldly of our experiences so that women in the future may do the same” (Crews, A.). I did not find the process of conducting this research to be easy or straightforward. At times there was no clear path from where I was sitting, surrounded by data and good intentions, to a place of finality. Because feminist post-structural research defies the notion that life is definitive that means there is really no clear finish line in this kind of work, something that at times hindered my motivation. To keep going, I remembered that it was important to me that the *Girl-Mom* experience would have space in the academic literature produced by my university. I had read other research and theses that shamed young parents, or focused only on their deficits, and it left me feeling hollow. I wanted to create something that resisted the dominant stories of young

motherhood as problematic, even if that resistance was confined to the pages in this document.

When I began, I was more influenced by positivist research than I thought I would be after a year of grad school courses that teach post-structuralism. Old habits die hard, I suppose, and it took a lot of work for me to let go of the need to “say the right thing” or do this research perfectly. I am still close with many of the women who shaped my life so long ago. They were in my mind constantly as I did this work. While I did not design the study to have participant contributions, due to scope and design, that did not free me from their presumed expectations. I had constant conversations with them in my head about whether or not I was doing the research “correctly.” With the pressure to meet the expectations of women I care very deeply for, at times I had no idea what to say, or how to say it. With the guidance of my writing group and other mentors, I realized I just needed to let myself be “wrong,” if it came to that. I had to accept that this study represents one very small group of possible interpretations of Girl-Mom.com, third wave feminism, cyberspace, and young motherhood. I created metaphorical walls between us, and from that hiding space, wrote this study. Aside from my findings and all the learning that comes out of conducting any piece of research, I learned a lot about who I am as a woman who will always be a ‘young mother’; about who I am in relation to a community of women with whom I have experienced both love and tension while within the dynamics of a social movement; and what it means to be a feminist post-structural researcher.

Study Conclusion

To explore how the subjectivities of young mothers were influenced by participation on Girl-Mom.com, I read the Girl-Mom.com discussion boards to find out the discourses that website members were most impacted by. *Girl-Mom* was the central finding. I used discourse analytic techniques to analyze *Girl-Mom* first for how it worked as a discourse, and second for how she influenced members. I learned that *Girl-Mom* was a subjectivity that influenced members to engage in feminist activism, work with one another as part of a feminist collective, and change individual members by challenging them to become resistant. At the same time, *Girl-Mom* inscribed dominant discourses that relate women's capabilities to their reproductive capacity and value white, middle class motherhood above other forms. *Girl-Mom* was described as inclusive of all members, but in practice, not all members felt she was an identity available for them, and in that way, *Girl-Mom* replicated mainstream power imbalances implicated in notions of stratified reproduction. This discourse became a norm to which all were expected to adhere, and as a result the discussions were heavily regulated to ensure *Girl-Mom* maintained dominance over members. In their attempts to acquire qualities associated with *Girl-Mom* discourses, members acquired new skills and self-knowledge, which surely contributed to self-actualization and collective emancipation efforts. *Girl-Mom* was a highly influential subject position that changed many women who participated on the website in the early 2000s.

Reference List

- Acs, G. (1996). The impact of welfare on young mothers' subsequent childbearing decisions. *The Journal of Human Resources*, 31(4): 898-915.
- Allen, A. (2011). Foucault and the politics of our selves. *History of the Human Sciences* 24 (43). DOI: 10.1177/0952695111411623
- Allen, D. & Cloyes, K. (2005). The language of 'experience' in nursing research. *Nursing Inquiry*, 12 (2), 98-105.
- Al-Sahab, B., Heifetz, M., Tamim, H., Bohr, Y., & Connolly, J. (2012). Prevalence and characteristics of teen motherhood in Canada. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 16(1): 228-234. DOI: 10.1007/s10995-011-0750-8
- Armstrong, J. (2004). Web Grrrls, Guerrilla Tactics: Young Feminisms on the Web. In Gauntlett, D. & Horsley, R. (Eds.), *Web.Studies*, 2nd Edition. London, Hodder Arnold. pp: 92-102.
- Atkinson, E. & DePalma, R. (2008). Dangerous spaces: Constructing and contesting sexual identities in an online discussion forum. *Gender and Education*, 20 (2): 183–194. DOI: 10.1080/09540250701797192
- Attwood, F. (2007). Sluts and riot grrrls: Female identity and sexual agency. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 16(3): 233–247. DOI: 10.1080/09589230701562921
- Baker, J. (2009). Young mothers in late modernity: sacrifice, respectability and the transformative neo-liberal subject. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 12 (3): 275-288. DOI: 10.1080/13676260902773809
- Best Start: Ontario's Maternal, Newborn, and Early Child Development Resource Centre and the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada. (2007). *Update report on teen pregnancy prevention*. Retrieved September 15, 2012 from http://www.beststart.org/resources/rep_health/pdf/teen_pregnancy.pdf
- Blackstock, C. & Trocme, N. (2005). Community-based child welfare for Aboriginal children: Supporting resilience through structural change. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand* 24: 12-33
- Boyd, D. (2008). Why youth <3 social network sites: The role of networked publics in teenage social life. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press. pp. 119-142.
- Boyd, S.C. (2004). *From Witches to Crack Moms: Women, Drug Law, and Policy*.

Durham: Carolina Academic Press

- Brown, J. (2005). Class and feminine excess: The strange case of Anna Nicole Smith. *Feminist Review*, 81, 74-94. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/3874342>
- Brown, M. (2002). An Interview with Ariel Gore and Bee Lavender of *Hip Mama*. *Serials Review*, 28(2): 159-162. DOI: 10.1016/S0098-7913(02)00174-0
- Brown, M. (2011). The sad, the mad and the bad: Co-existing discourses of girlhood. *Child Youth Care Forum*, 40: 107–120. DOI 10.1007/s10566-010-9115-5
- Brown, W. (2005). *Edgework: Critical essays on knowledge and politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bryson, M., MacIntosh, L., Jordan, S., & Hui-Ling, L. (2006). Virtually queer? Homing devices, mobility, and un/belongings. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 31(4): 791-814.
- Budgeon, S. (2001). Emergent feminist(?) identities: Young women and the practice of micropolitics. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 8(1): 7-28. DOI: 10.1177/135050680100800102
- Bunting, L. & McAuley, C. (2004). Research review: Teenage pregnancy and parenthood: The role of fathers. *Child and Family Social Work*, 9: 295-303.
- Butler, J. (1993). Critically queer. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1: 17-32.
- Calixte, S.L. & Johnson, J. (2009). Marginality in the mamasphere: Queers racializing the family tree. In M. Friedman & S.L. Calixte (Eds.), *Mothering and Blogging: The Radical Act of the Mommyblog*. Toronto: Demeter Press. pp. 74-90.
- Canadian Council on Social Development. (2006). *The progress on Canada's children and youth*. Retrieved on September 15, 2012 from http://www.ccsd.ca/pccy/2006/pdf/pccy_2006.pdf
- Carabine, J. (2001a). Constituting sexuality through social policy: The case of lone motherhood 1834 and today. *Social & Legal Studies*, 10 (3): 291-314. DOI: 10.1177/096466390101000301
- Carabine, J. (2001b). Unmarried motherhood 1830-1990: A genealogical analysis. In Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. & Yates, S.J. (Eds.), *Discourse as Data: A guide for analysis* (pp. 267-310). London: The Open University.
- Carty, V. & Onyett, J. (2006). Protest, cyberactivism and new social movements: The reemergence of the peace movement post 9/11. *Social Movement Studies*, 5(3):

229-249. DOI: 10.1080/14742830600991586

- Cassiman, S.A. (2008). Resisting the neo-liberal poverty discourse: On constructing deadbeat dads and welfare queens. *Sociology Compass*, 2/5: 1690–1700. DOI: 10.1111/j.1751-9020.2008.00159.x
- Chablani, A. & Spinney, E.R. (2011). Engaging high-risk young mothers into effective programming: The importance of relationships and relentlessness. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 14(4): 369-383. DOI: 10.1080/10522158.2011.588544
- Chabot, C., Shoveller, J.A., Johnson, J.L. & Prkachin, K. (2010). Morally problematic: Young mothers' lives as parables about the dangers of sex. *Sex Education*, 10(2): 201-215. DOI: 10.1080/14681811003666283
- Chalfin, S.F., Burke, P., Tonelli, M. (2011). Intimate partner violence and adolescent mothers. *North American Society for Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology*: 1-2. DOI: 10.1016/j.jpap.2011.10.011
- ChallengingMedia. (2006, October 3). *bell hooks: Cultural criticism and transformation* [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQUuHFKP-9s>
- Chambon, A.S. (1999). Foucault's approach: Making the familiar visible. In A.S. Chambon, A. Irving, & L. Epstein (Eds.), *Reading Foucault for social work*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Chaudhuri, J.H., Easterbrooks, M.A., & Davis, C.R. (2009). The relation between emotional availability and parenting style: Cultural and economic factors in a diverse sample of young mothers. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 9: 277-299. DOI: 10.1080/15295190902844613
- Cherrington, J. & Breheny, M. (2005). Politicizing dominant discursive constructions about teenage pregnancy: Re-locating the subject as social. *Health: London*, 9(1): 89-111. DOI: 10.1177/1363459305048100
- Cocca, C.E. (2002). From "Welfare Queen" to "Exploited Teen": Welfare dependency, statutory rape, and moral panic. *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, 14(2): 56-79.
- Cooksey, E.C. (1997). Consequences of young mothers' marital histories for children's cognitive development. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 59(2): 245-261
- Crews, A. (n.d.). Girl-Mom Mission Statement and User Agreement. Retrieved from <http://www.girlmom.com/node/28>
- Croghan, R. & Miell, D. (1998). Strategies of resistance: 'Bad' mothers dispute the

- evidence. *Feminism & Psychology*, 8 (4): 445-465. DOI: 10.1177/0959353598084004
- D'Amelio, L. (2005). Wired for action. *Alternatives Journal*, 31(2).
- Daniels, J. (2009). Rethinking cyberfeminism(s): Race, gender, and embodiment. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 37(1/2): 101-124.
- Davies, B. (2000). The subject of poststructuralism. In *A Body of Writing, 1990-1999*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.
- Drentea, P. & Moren-Cross, J.L. (2005). Social capital and social support on the web: The case of an Internet mother site. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 920-943. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9566.2005.00464.x
- Driscoll, C. (1999). Girl culture, revenge and global capitalism: Cybergirls, Riot Grrls, Spice Girls. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 14(29): 173-193. DOI: 10.1080/0816464993425
- Dryburgh, H. (n.d.). *Teenage pregnancy*. (Catalogue number 82-003). Retrieved September 15, 2012 from Statistics Canada at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/kits-trousses/preg-gross/preg-gross-eng.htm>
- Easterbrooks, M.A., Chaudhuri, J.H., Bartlett, J.D., Copeman, A. (2011). Resilience in parenting among young mothers: Family and ecological risks and opportunities. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33: 42-50. DOI:10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.08.010
- Erdmans, M.P. & Black, T. (2008). What they tell you to forget: From child sexual abuse to adolescent motherhood. *Qualitative Health Research*, 18(77). DOI: 10.1177/1049732307309004
- Eshbaugh, E.M. (2007). Adolescent mothers and depression: Predictors of resilience and risk through the toddler years. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 10(3): 13-29. DOI: 10.1300/J039v10n03_02
- Everett, A. (2004). On cyberfeminism and cyberwomanism: High-tech mediations of feminism's discontents. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(1): 1278-2000.
- Foote, C.E. & Frank, A.W. (1999). Foucault and therapy: The disciplining of grief. In A.S. Chambon, A. Irving, & L. Epstein (Eds.), *Reading Foucault for Social Work*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*. New York: Vintage Books.

- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. In H.L. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow (Eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, M. (1988). Technologies of the self. In L.H. Martin, H. Gutman, & P.H. Hutton (Eds.), *Technologies of the Self*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press: 16–49.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1994). The ethics of the concern of the self as a practice of freedom. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: Ethics and the Subjectivity of Truth*. New York: New York Press. pp. 281-301.
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1997). Ethics: Subjectivity and truth. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *Selections: English*. New York: New Press.
- Garrison, E.K. (2000). U.S. feminism – Grrrl style! Youth (sub)cultures and the technologies of the third wave. *Feminist Studies*, 26(1): 141-170.
- Gazso, A. (2012). Moral codes of mothering and the introduction of welfare-to-work in Ontario. *The Canadian Review of Sociology*, 49(1): 26-49.
- Gazso, A. & McDaniel, S.A. (2010). The risks of being a lone mother on income support in Canada and the USA. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 30 (7): 368 – 386. DOI: 10.1108/01443331011060724
- Gilbert, L. & Kile, C. (1996). *Surfergrrrls: Look Ethel! An Internet Guide for Us*. Seattle: Seal Press.
- Gonick, M. (2006). Between ‘Girl Power’ and ‘Reviving Ophelia’: Constituting the neoliberal girl subject. *National Women’s Studies Association Journal*, 18(2): 1-23.
- Hall, S. (2001). Foucault: Power, knowledge, and discourse. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S.J. Yates, *Discourse Theory and Practice*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Hammond, L. (2010). Mommyblogging IS a radical act: Weblog communities and the construction of maternal identities. In J.F. Stitt & P.R. Powell (Eds.), *Mothers Who Deliver: Feminist Interventions in Public and Interpersonal Discourse*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Haraway, D.J. (1991). *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- Harris, M.B. & Franklin, C.G. (2003). Effects of a cognitive-behavioural, school-based group intervention with Mexican American pregnant and parenting adolescents. *Social Work Research*, 27(2): 71-83.
- Harris, A. (2008). Introduction. In A. Harris (Ed.), *Next Wave Cultures: Feminism, Subcultures, Activism*. New York: Routledge.
- Harrison, C. (2006). Cyberspace and child abuse images: A feminist perspective. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, 21(4): 365-379. DOI: 10.1177/0086109906292313
- Healy, K. & Peile, C. (1995). From silence to activism: Approaches to research and practice with young mothers. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, 10(3): 280-298. DOI: 10.1177/088610999501000305
- Hekman, S.J. (1990). *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Herrman, J.W. (2006). The voices of teen mothers: The experience of repeat pregnancy. *The American Journal of Maternal/Child Nursing*, 31(4): 243-249.
- Heyes, C. (2007). Foucault goes to Weight Watchers (Redux). In C. Heyes, *Self-Transformation: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hoffman, R. (2002). Mothering on the edge. *The Women's Review of Books*, 19(8): 21.
- Howry, A.L. & Wood, J.T. (2001). Something old, something new, something borrowed: Themes in the voices of a new generation of feminists. *Southern Communication Journal*, 66(4): 323-336. DOI: 10.1080/10417940109373211
- Kaufman, M. (1999). Day-to-day ethical issues in the care of young parents and their children. In D. Checkland & J. Wong (Eds.), *Teen Pregnancy and Parenting: Social and Ethical Issues*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Kelly, D.M. (1996). Stigma stories: Four discourses about teen mothers, welfare, and poverty. *Youth Society*, 27(4): 421-449. DOI: 10.1177/0044118X96027004002
- Kelly, D.M. (1999). A critical feminist perspective on teen pregnancy and parenthood. In D. Checkland & J. Wong (Eds.), *Teen Pregnancy and Parenting: Social and Ethical Issues*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Kennedy, A.C. (2008). Eugenics, "degenerate girls," and social workers during the

- Progressive Era. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, 23(1): 22-37. DOI: 10.1177/0886109907310473
- Kirkman, M., Harrison, L., Hillier, L., Pyett, P. (2001). 'I know I'm doing a good job': Canonical and autobiographical narratives of teenage mothers. *Culture, Health, & Sexuality*, 3(3): 279-294. DOI: 10.1080/13691050010026097.
- Koerber, A. (2001). Postmodernism, resistance, and cyberspace: Making rhetorical spaces for feminist mothers on the web. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 24(2): 218-240. DOI:10.1080/07491409.2001.10162435
- Kohler-Hausmann, J. (2007). "The crime of survival": Fraud prosecutions, community surveillance and the original "welfare queen." *Journal of Social History*, 41 (2): 329-354. DOI: 10.1353/jsh.2008.0002
- Kolko, B.E., Nakamura, L., & Rodman, G.B. (2000). Race in cyberspace: An introduction. In B.E. Kolko, L. Nakamura, & G.B. Rodman (Eds.), *Race in Cyberspace*. New York: Routledge, p.1-14.
- Kulkarni, S. (2007). Romance narrative, feminine ideals, and developmental detours for young mothers. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, 22 (1): 9-22. DOI: 10.1177/0886109906295765
- Kunzel, R.G. (1993). *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried mothers and the professionalization of social work, 1890-1945*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Larson, N.C. (2004). Parenting stress among adolescent mothers in the transition to adulthood. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 21(5): 457-476.
- Leggon, C.B. (2006). Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and the Digital Divide. In M.F. Fox, D.G. Johnson, & S.V. Rosser (Eds.), *Women, Gender, and Technology*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, p. 98 – 110.
- Lessa, I. (2006). Discursive struggles within social welfare: Restaging teen motherhood. *British Journal of Social Work*, 36: 283-298. DOI:10.1093/bjsw/bch256
- Lewin, A., Mitchell, S.J., Burrell, L., Beers, L.S.A. & Duggan, A.K. (2011). Patterns and predictors of involvement among fathers of children born to adolescent mothers. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 14(4): 335-353. DOI: 10.1080/10522158.2011.587178
- Little, M.H. (1994). "Manhunts and bingo blabs": The moral regulation of Ontario single mothers. *The Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 19 (2): 233-247.
- Love, S.M., Suarez, A.M., & Love, M.E. (2008). Young mothers and babies wellness

program. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30: 1437-1446. DOI:10.1016/j.childyouth.2008.04.012

- Luker, K. (1996). *Dubious Conceptions: The Politics of Teenage Pregnancy*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Luong, M. (2009). *Life after teenage motherhood*. Retrieved September 15, 2012 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/2008105/article/10577-eng.htm>
- Lyons, P. & Rittner, B. (1998). The construction of the crack babies phenomenon as a social problem. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 68(2): 313-320.
- Madge, C. & O'Connor, H. (2006). Parenting gone wired: Empowerment of new mothers on the internet? *Social & Cultural Geography*, 7(2): 199-220. DOI: 10.1080/14649360600600528
- Magnet, S. (2007). Feminist sexualities, race and the Internet: An investigation of suicidegirls.com. *New Media Society*, 9(4): 577-602. DOI: 10.1177/1461444807080326
- Mandell, N. (1995). *Feminist Issues: Race, Class, and Sexuality*. Ontario: Prentice-Hall.
- Manser, L. (2004). *Broken Fairytales: Teenage Parenting and the Child Welfare System*. Ottawa: National Youth in Care Network.
- Maticka-Tyndale, E. (2001). Sexual health and Canadian youth: How do we measure up? *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 10 (1-2).
- Mayers, H.A. (2005). Treatment of a traumatized adolescent mother and her two-year old son. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 33(4), 419-431. DOI: 10.1007/s10615-005-7035-x
- McCormack, K. (2005). Stratified reproduction and poor women's resistance. *Gender and Society*, 19(5): 660-679. DOI: 10.1177/0891243205278010
- McKinnon, M., Davies, L., & Rains, P. (2001). Taking account of men in the lives of teenage mothers. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, 16(1): 80-99. DOI: 10.1177/08861090122094154
- McLaren, M.A. (2002). *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- McTavish, L. (2006). Virtual activism and the pro-choice movement in Canada. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 25(3/4): 121-126.
- Mills, S. (1997). *Discourse*. London: Routledge.

- Mills, S. (2004). *Discourse*. London: Routledge.
- Mishna, F., McLuckie, A., & Saint, M. (2009). Real-world dangers in an online reality: A qualitative study examining online relationships and cyber abuse. *Social Work Research, 33*(2): 107-118.
- Moffatt, K. (1999). Surveillance and government of the welfare recipient. In A.S. Chambon, A. Irving, & L. Epstein (Eds.), *Reading Foucault for Social Work*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mollborn, S. (2011). "Children" having children. *Context, 10*(1): 32-37. DOI: 10.1177/1536504211399048
- Moore, R. & Roberts, M. (2009). Do-it-yourself mobilization: Punk and social movements. *Mobilization: An International Journal, 14*(3): 273-291.
- Morrison, D.M., Lohr, M.J., Beadnell, B.A., Gillmore, M.R., Lewis, S. & Gilchrist, L. (2010): Young mothers' decisions to use marijuana: A test of an expanded theory of planned behaviour, *Psychology & Health, 25*(5): 569-587. DOI: 10.1080/08870440902777554
- Moss, P. (2011). Handout, January 27, 2011, SPP 550 Seminar [Class handout]. Department of Studies in Policy and Practice. University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.
- National Advisory Committee. (2007). *On the Move: Mobilizing Community, Engaging Youth to Reduce Rates of Teen Pregnancy in Canada*. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada.
- O'Brien, C.A. (1999). Contested territory: Sexualities and social work. In A.S. Chambon, A. Irving, & L. Epstein (Eds.), *Reading Foucault for Social Work*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- O'Brien, J. (1998). Writing in the body: Gender (re)production in online interaction. In M.A. Smith & P. Kollock (Eds.), *Communities in Cyberspace*. New York: Routledge. Retrieved 12 October 2012, from <http://lib.mylibrary.com?ID=11051>
- Orr, C.M. (1997). Charting the currents of the third wave. *Hypatia, 12*(3): 29-45.
- Oxford, M.L., Lee, J.O., & Lohr, M.J. (2010). Predicting markers of adulthood among adolescent mothers. *Social Work, 34*(1): 33-44.
- Parton, N. Reconfiguring child welfare practices: Risk, advanced liberalism, and the government of freedom. In A.S. Chambon, A. Irving, & L. Epstein (Eds.), *Reading Foucault for Social Work*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Pillow, W.S. (2004). *Unfit Subjects: Educational Policy and the Teen Mother*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Pitts, V. (2004). Illness and Internet empowerment: Writing and reading breast cancer in cyberspace. *Health (London)*, 8(33). DOI: 10.1177/1363459304038794
- Plant, S. (2000). Coming across the future. In D. Bell & B.M. Kennedy (Eds.), *The Cybercultures Reader*. London: Routledge: 460-470.
- Poster, J.M. (2002). Trouble, pleasure, and tactics: Anonymity and identity in a lesbian chat room. In M. Consalvo & S. Paasonen (Eds.), *Women & Everyday Uses of the Internet: Agency & Identity*. New York: Peter Lang. pp. 230-252.
- Puente, S.N. (2011). Feminist cyberactivism: Violence against women, Internet politics, and Spanish feminist praxis online. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 25(3): 333-346. DOI: 10.1080/10304312.2011.562964
- Rains, P., Davies, L., & McKinnon, M. (2004). Social services construct the teen mother. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 85(1): 17-26.
- Reid, M., Dirks, D., & Aseltine, E. (2009). Stratified reproduction. In J. O'Brien (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society*. Retrieved from <http://knowledge.sagepub.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/gender/n406.xml>
- Riordan, E. (2001). Commodified agents and empowered girls: Consuming and producing feminism. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 25(3): 279-297. DOI: 10.1177/0196859901025003006
- Roberts, D.E. (1996). Welfare and the problem of Black citizenship. *The Yale Law Journal*, 105 (6): 1563-1602.
- Rosenberg, J. & Garofalo, G. (1998). Riot grrrl: Revolutions from within. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 23(3): 809-841.
- Rúdólfsdóttir, A.G. (2000). 'I am not a patient, and I am not a child': The institutionalization and experience of pregnancy. *Feminism & Psychology*, 10 (3): 337-350. DOI: 10.1177/0959353500010003004
- Rúdólfsdóttir, A.G. & Jolliffe, R. (2008). 'I don't think people really talk about it that much': Young women discuss feminism. *Feminism & Psychology*, 18(2): 268-274. DOI: 10.1177/0959353507083098
- Saracino, A. (n.d.). Radical Feminism. Retrieved from: <http://www.yorku.ca/mlc/sosc3990A/projects/radfem/radfem1.html>

- Sawhill, I.V. (2000). Welfare reform and reducing teen pregnancy. *The Public Interest*, 138: 40-52.
- Sawicki, J. (1991). *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body*. New York: Routledge.
- Schilt, K. (2003). 'I'll resist with every inch and every breath": Girls and zine making as a form of resistance. *Youth Society*, 35(1): 71-97. DOI: 10.1177/0044118X03254566
- Scott, J.W. (1992). 'Experience.' In J. Butler & J. Scott (Eds.), *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York: Routledge.
- Seitz, V. & Apfel, N.H. (1999). Effective interventions for adolescent mothers. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 6(1): 50-66. DOI: 10.1093/clipsy.6.1.50
- Sember, R., Kropf, A., & di Mauro, D. (2006). Images against teen pregnancy. *American Journal of Public Health*, 96(9): 1561. DOI: 10.2105/AJPH.2006.094151
- Shapira, Y. (2010). Hairball speaks: Margaret Atwood and the narrative legacy of the female grotesque. *Narrative*, 18(1): 51-72. DOI: 10.1353/nar.0.0035
- Sinclair, R. (2007). Identity lost and found: Lessons from the sixties scoop. *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 3 (1): 65-82
- Sisson, G. (2012). Finding a way to offer something more: Reframing teen pregnancy prevention. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 9: 57-69. DOI 10.1007/s13178-011-0050-5
- Slater, D. (2002). Making things real: Ethics and order on the Internet. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 19(5/6): 227-245.
- Spillers, H.J. (1987). Mama's baby, papa's maybe: An American grammar book. *Diacritics*, 17(2): 64-81.
- Statistics Canada. (2008). *Pregnancy outcomes by age group. (Total pregnancies)*. Retrieved October 1, 2012, from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/hlth65a-eng.htm>
- Steyaert, J. & Gould, N. (2009). Social work and the changing face of the digital divide. *British Journal of Social Work*, 39: 740-753. DOI: 10.1093/bjsw/bcp022
- Stoler, A.L. (1998). Making empire respectable: The politics of race and sexual morality in twentieth-century colonial cultures. In A. McClintock, A. Mufti, & E. Shohat (Eds.), *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*.

- Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.
- Strega, S. (2005). The view from the poststructural margins: Epistemology and methodology reconsidered. In L. Brown & S. Strega (Eds.), *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous, and Anti-Oppressive Approaches*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press/Women's Press.
- Sundén, J. (2001). What happened to difference in cyberspace? The (re)turn of the she-cyborg. *Feminist Media Studies*, 1(2): 215-232. DOI: 10.1080/14680770120062141
- Takayoshi, P., Huot, E. & Huot, M. (1999). No boys allowed: The world wide web as a clubhouse for girls. *Computers and Composition*, 16, 89-106.
- The Girl-Mom Community (n.d.). *About Girl-Mom*. Retrieved from <http://www.girl-mom.com/node/20597>
- Thomas, A. (2007). *Youth Online: Identity and Literacy in the Digital Age*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Travers, A. (2003). Parallel subaltern feminist counterpublics in cyberspace. *Sociological Perspectives*, 46(2): 223-237.
- Tucker, S. (2008). Mothering in the Digital Age: Navigating the personal and political in the virtual sphere. In A.E. Kinser, *Mothering in the Third Wave*. Toronto: Demeter Press.
- Tuffin, K., Rouch, G., & Frewin, K. (2010). Constructing adolescent fatherhood: Responsibilities and intergenerational repair. *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 12 (5): 485–498. DOI: 10.1080/13691051003629359
- Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other*. New York: Basic Books.
- Turney, H.M., Conway, P., Plummer, P., Adkins, S.E., Hudson, G.C., McLeod, D.A. & Zafaroni, A. (2011): Exploring behavioral intentions among young mothers. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 14(4): 298-310. DOI: 10.1080/10522158.2011.588552
- United States, Department of Labor, Office of Policy, Planning and Research. (1965). *The Negro family: The case for national action*. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office.
- Wang, F.T.Y. (1999). Resistance and old age: The subject behind the American Seniors' Movement. In A.S. Chambon, A. Irving, & L. Epstein (Eds.), *Reading Foucault for Social Work*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Warf, B. & Grimes, J. (1997). Counterhegemonic discourses and the Internet. *Geographical Review*, 87(2): 259-274.
- Weber, J.B. (2012). Becoming teen fathers: Stories of teen pregnancy, responsibility, and masculinity. *Gender & Society*, 26(6): 900-921. DOI: 10.1177/0891243212459074
- Weedon, C. (1987). *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Weedon, C. (1999). *Feminism, Theory, and the Politics of Difference*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.
- Wetherell, M. (2001). Themes in discourse research: The case of Diana. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S.J. Yates, *Discourse Theory and Practice*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Whitley, R. & Kirmayer, L.J. (2008). Perceived stigmatisation of young mothers: An exploratory study of psychological and social experience. *Social Science & Medicine*, 66: 339–348. DOI:10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.09.014
- Whitson, M.L., Martinez, A., Ayala, C. & Kaufman, J.S. (2011). Predictors of parenting and infant outcomes for impoverished adolescent parents. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 14(4): 284-297. DOI: 10.1080/10522158.2011.587173
- Wilkes, L., Mannix, J., & Jackson, D. (2011). ‘I am going to be a dad’: Experiences and expectations of adolescent and young adult expectant fathers. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 21: 180–188. DOI: 10.1111/j.1365-2702.2011.03715.x
- Woods, E.T. (2013). A cultural approach to a Canadian tragedy: The Indian residential schools as a sacred enterprise. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 26(2): 173-187. DOI: 10.1007/s10767-013-9132-0
- Young, R.J.C. (1995). *Colonial desire: Hybridity in theory, culture, and race*. London: Routledge.

Appendix A: Girl-Mom Mission Statement and User Agreement

From: <http://www.girl-mom.com/forums/girlmom-mission-statement-and-user-agreement>

MISSION STATEMENT

GirlMom.com is designed and moderated BY and FOR young mothers.

GirlMom.com is a politically progressive, left-aligned, pro-choice, feminist website. Girlmom.com intends to support young mothers, of all backgrounds, in their struggles for reproductive freedom and social support.

We believe that all teenagers are sexual beings the ability to love, procreate and nurture. We believe that teenagers have the innate ability to parent well, but are socially conditioned to believe that they are irresponsible and reckless. We believe that such social conditioning often creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which teenage parents believe that they cannot parent well and move on to not parent well. We believe that in order to solve the "problems" associated with the "epidemic" of teen pregnancy, we must reassess and change our collective social attitudes towards teenage childbearing. We believe that in order for teen parents to succeed, they must be encouraged to do so and assured that they are capable. Degrading, vilifying, marginalizing, and rejecting teen mothers (as is customary in our society) is counterproductive and illogical. Teen mothers will succeed if allowed the opportunity. When a teenage girl finds herself pregnant it is one of

the few times during her life course where she will not only be expected to fail, but socially encouraged to fail. We believe that encouragement and support beget success.

We encourage all young mothers to speak loudly and boldly of their experiences and choices, in the hope that young women of future generations will feel more secure in doing the same.

We support any reproductive choice a young woman may make, including aborting a pregnancy, placing a child for adoption or becoming a mother.

We encourage fierce, radical parenting. We support political action and encourage our visitors to involve themselves in their communities and to work towards social change.

We reject all ageism, racism, sexism, classism, and other prejudices and stereotypes.

We are actively working towards creating an equal society, in which the right to bear or to delay bearing children is secured for all and all children are allowed to right to excel and thrive.

We support women receiving public assistance, and feel that no woman should have to justify exercising her legal right to do so.

We support lesbian, queer, bi, trans, and poly mamas and feel that no one should ever have to justify or explain their sexual identity and practices.

We support the right of others to choose to not bear children and expect similar support and respect for our choice to become parents.

We believe in the idea of youth liberation, and feel that teen parents should be freed from social restraints which restrict their ability to parent effectively and independently.

We support and encourage natural parenting (i.e., breastfeeding, cloth diapering...) but respect the right of mothers to choose for themselves how to raise their children.

We encourage debate when it is employed in an effort to open our minds and broaden our horizons. We discourage debate when it silences or tramples over the voices of mothers trying to garner support and advice.

We encourage mothers to continue their educations and earn higher degrees. At the same time, we encourage mothers to make choices for themselves and reject the system that exploits them.

We allow mothers the opportunity to express their opinions, experiences, stories and advice in a safe environment.

We encourage mothers to seek independent employment when possible, to purchase independently produced items, and maintain a DIY philosophy, in order to reject the patriarchal system which oppresses us.

---Allison Crews, managing editor and moderator, GirlMom.com For more information on our site, please visit the "About Us" section

USER AGREEMENT

By entering our discussion community, you agree to recognize and respect our standards and values.

The moderators exist to keep GirlMom.com safe for young mamas and those who respect them. If you cannot or do not understand this, then please redirect yourself to a site that better suits your needs. If you choose to ignore these standards, the moderators will, upon your first violation, inform you of the violation and ask you to cease and desist with inappropriate remarks. If you choose to ignore the moderators and continue to violate our user agreement, you will be banned from the site. If you choose to post despite banning, your ISP will be contacted and legal action will ensue.

Additionally, by posting on GirlMom.com and becoming a member of this community, you accept the responsibility of maintaining community standards.

This is YOUR community. If you see remarks that are offensive, please do not ignore them; you may simply remind someone of the user agreement. Do not attempt to aggressively patrol or engage in flaming, but simply remind other users of their agreement. If the problem becomes severe, please notify a moderator, who will then take appropriate action.

You agree, through your use of our community message boards that you will not use GirlMom to post any material which is knowingly false and/or defamatory, inaccurate, abusive, hateful, harassing, threatening, invasive of a person's privacy, or otherwise violative of any law.

GirlMom does NOT erase messages at the request of participants except in rare, extreme circumstances, when the users safety or the safety and reputation of herself and her family are in peril. Moderators and staff will exercise judgment according to the situation. Participants do NOT have the ability to modify or delete their own messages once posted, so reasonable caution and deliberation is suggested.

We at GirlMom also reserve the right to reveal your identity (or whatever information we know about you) in the event of a complaint or legal action arising from any message posted by you. We will cooperate with law enforcement efforts when or legally necessary.

Please note that you are posting messages in a public forum, and exercise considerable caution in choosing your words.

We will not reveal your user information for commercial or statistical purposes.
EVER.

Please note that your "User Name" will be the name revealed when you post messages, and choose a name that you feel comfortable using. The name you choose cannot be changed later in the process, unless you choose to reregister.

By entering our discussion community, you agree to and understand all of the above.

Welcome.

Appendix B: Girl-Mom Discussion Forums

From: <http://www.girl-mom.com/forum>

Announcements

What's GirlMom all about? Read our Mission Statement and other important documents here!

Greetings and Salutations

Welcome to Girl-Mom! Post an introduction and get to know each other here.

Pregnancy and Birth

Share and learn about your pregnancy and newborn experience.

Social Justice

Fight the power! What's getting you down in this world today? Discuss social problems and activism here. This is your world. How are you going to change it?

Bringing Up Baby

General talk about the realities and joys and problems of raising the young ones and the diverse ways in which we choose to parent.

Feed that Baby!

Your lactation station! Everything you need to know about breastfeeding is here. Ask your questions and share your wisdom.

Your Stories

We may be mothers, but we are still women with unique personalities, goals, and stories to tell. Share yours here.

As They Grow

Babies are cute and tiny, but they don't stay that way long. Talk about your growing kids, here. Parenting is a continuing, ever-evolving process, and moms with kids of all ages need support and advice.

Relationships

This is the place to talk about all things related to relationships. Getting serious or splitting up? Learning how to be alone or live with your significant other? Single, dating, or in a long-term partnership? What do relationships or the lack thereof mean in your life? Talk about the joys and obstacles of relationships here.

Mamas and Kids with Special Needs

Struggling with depression? Worried about your child's development? Raising a child with autism? From premies to asthma and everything in between, discuss special-needs issues here.

School and Work

Daycare bill got ya down? Hate your bio teacher's tests? Rocking the semester? Boss wants you to work overtime and the baby sitter just quit? Talk about it here!

Our Bodies and Sexuality

For all those "naughty" questions. Your body is still yours to enjoy...and PROTECT. Talk about it here.

Our Families and Friends

Sing the praises of those who love and support you, or vent about those who aren't acting too friendly.

Domesticities

Face it: Martha Stewart we are NOT. But our kids need to eat, and we want our rooms to look okay. How do you manage your space when you share your bedroom with your kid? How do you get poo stains out of your graduation gown? Talk about the dirty business of managing a household, or contributing to the one you live in here.

Play and Have Fun

The fun and fluffy talk goes here. Seen a funny website? Looking for a pen pal? Have a funny joke? Witty comments on pop culture?

Wielding Words/Book Club

Reading a great book? Writing to live or living to write? Our voices are valuable and strong, and our narratives will rewrite history. Share or publicize your words or discuss books you've read here.

Appendix C: Images from the National Campaign to Prevent Teenage Pregnancy

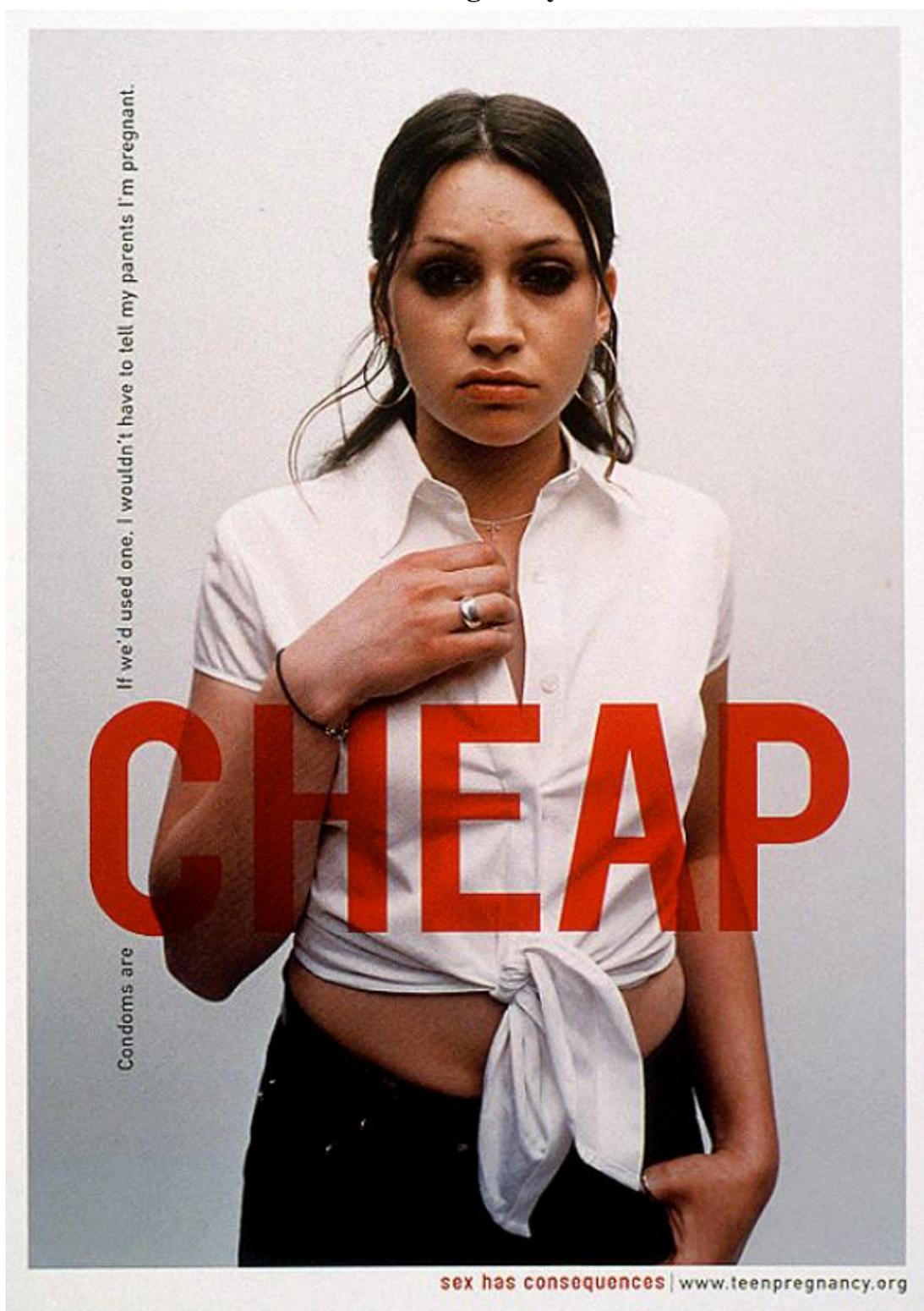


Figure 1: CHEAP

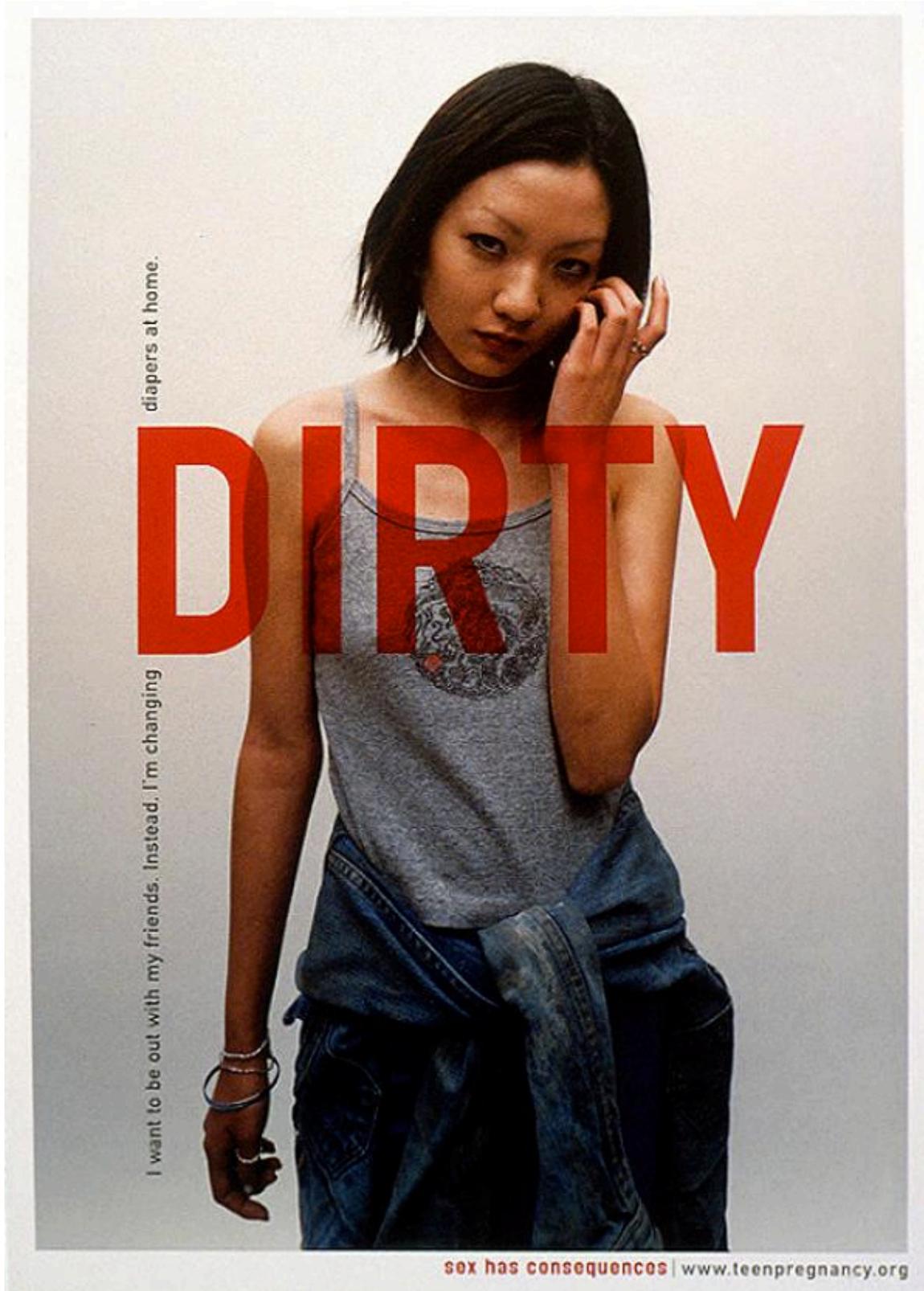


Figure 2: DIRTY



Figure 3: REJECT

Appendix D: Sample Research Information Post

Mamas and Allies,

My name is Leanne and I have been a member on Girl-Mom since my preteen was just a toddler. I credit Girl-Mom for teaching me most of what I know about mothering, activism, and feminism. Meeting you all and participating on the website helped me to get out of some pretty tricky situations and taught me a lot about how truly incredible it is to be part of a group of strong, loving women. I will be eternally grateful to this community for that.

Thanks to Girl-Mom and the support and wisdom I received here, I (finally) got my Bachelor of Social Work degree a few years ago. In my first position, I was a School Counsellor, working in a few different high schools with all kinds of people. It was a really incredible job because I got to work alongside some pretty amazing students. After a couple of years though, I realized there were some things coming up in my practice that I didn't know how to figure out.

I decided to go to grad school to see if I could learn more about power relations, activism, and social change to be more effective as a social worker with marginalized folks. I chose a university with a strong focus on social justice and moved the family across the country to chase my dreams. It's been really hard to be back in school, even though you would think I'm totally used to it after being a student the whole time my oldest son was little. I

finished my coursework last year and have sloooooowly been working on my thesis. That is where you come in.

I want to write my thesis on Girl-Mom. It took forever to articulate what ABOUT Girl-Mom I wanted to focus on. Eventually, I decided I want to look at what we say to each other in these discussion forums, and deconstruct the language to identify the underlying themes that are present and that lead to such intense moments of transformation, group support, and social change. I think we can all agree that who we were when we joined Girl-Mom and who we are now are profoundly different people. I want to study what goes on in that space of transformation, to learn more about how this affects us as women and as people making social change.

This is how I propose to do this research:

- I propose to conduct all research under this username: Leanne. I will not do any research under my other username, meaning I will not give myself access to the private forums that are only meant for long-term members. I will do this so that my research will only be on the discussion forum posts that are available to the public. This is a gesture of respect for the privacy of the website.
- I propose to collect data from threads that originated between 2000-2005.

- I propose to allow a two-week period of time from this date forward to allow any members to opt out, if they wish. I will wait until [insert date here] for people to either respond to this thread or send me a private message on this website to state that they do not wish for any of their posts to be included in my data. If you opt out, I will simply omit anything you write from the data. That includes your original posts, and posts where someone quoted something you said.

My intention in this research is to promote the posts made in this discussion forum for the wisdom, resiliency, and beauty that they contain. I will be using feminist poststructuralism (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-structural_feminism) as the lens through which to read the data. I will be using concepts from Foucault (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michel_Foucault) to read the data for themes on how we used language, subjectivities (or identities), and power to make all the really cool transformations we were involved in making. I hope that my thesis becomes a testament to the really incredible capabilities of young mothers. I hope that as a piece of social work research, it can help to inform the social work practice of people who work with young mothers. I hope to contribute to the research that defies the notion that we are degenerate women.

Again, please note the deadline of {insert date} to opt out of having your posts collected in this research project. I am open to feedback on how I have proposed to do this research. I plan to start collecting data on {insert date}.

Cheers,

Leanne

Appendix E: Screenshot of One Step in Data Selection

The small grey arrow under “Replies” indicates that forum posts have been organized according to the number of responses.

Your Stories

Login to post new content in forum.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
9 ... next > last »

Topic / Topic starter	Replies	Last post
 Sticky: Single Moms: How we got here and how we can help you (Page: 1, 2, 3) by desertmom » Tue, 06/15/2004 - 10:08pm	79	by adcaela Fri, 07/24/2009 - 8:33am
 Sticky: *I've Been Called Out* (Page: 1, 2) by IndigosMama » Wed, 09/14/2005 - 9:20am	48	by KannaChidori Wed, 08/26/2009 - 10:47am
 Sticky: the realities of parenting (Page: 1, 2) by jen » Fri, 01/07/2005 - 7:01am	47	by adcaela Fri, 07/24/2009 - 8:36am
 Sticky: What I love about being a YOUNG mama! by mamamayhem » Sat, 08/18/2007 - 4:33pm	13	by Guest (not verified) Fri, 07/24/2009 - 7:35pm
 Sticky: Why I Love Being A Single Mama by kuntish » Wed, 03/14/2007 - 5:46am	11	by StarlightBlaze Fri, 07/24/2009 - 8:35am
 Sticky: anonymous mama recap by katg » Wed, 01/12/2005 - 5:21am	7	by MamaCaboose Wed, 03/31/2010 - 3:53pm
 Sticky: LOOK! Stories requested for Girl-Mom's features page! by jen » Thu, 12/23/2004 - 7:01am	5	by erika Fri, 07/24/2009 - 8:39am

Figure 4: Screen Shot of Forum

Appendix F: Major Themes

1. Girl-Mom Devotee

- Girl-Mom love

2. Changed by Alli

- loss of influential and well-loved Girl-Mom member Alli

3. GM IRL

- Girl-Mom relationship taken offline
- Girl-Mom relationship
- GM leading to relationship IRL

4. Advocate for “deviant” mother

- calling out for ‘good mother’ myths
- calling out re: single moms are OK too
- calling out for stereotyping a mother’s love as natural
- calling out anti-single mom sentiment
- unpacking nuclear family discourses
- supporting GM in becoming a single mom
- expecting men to raise their kids
- dealing with judgmental attitudes to deviant moms
- value of motherhood

- single moms can do it all
- patriarchal family structure does not reflect the diversity of families
- involved dads get praise, involved moms do not
- single motherhood as subverting dominant family discourses
- advice on how to fight the system
- bad mothers are discursively constructed
- girlmom honours single moms
- GM as supportive space for single moms
- single motherhood and difficulties of dating
- single mom stigmas
- dating as a single mom
- encouragement for single moms

5. Discussion Moderator (unofficial and official capacity)

- calling out for rudeness
- calling out too much calling out
- calling out others for calling out
- misperceptions (calling out)
- insensitivity (calling out)
- calling out for stereotyping other members
- calling out for ganging up on pro-dad member
- calling out for discussion
- calling out for attacking others

- calling out for being aggressive about calling out
- calling out for challenging other mother's choice to spank
- calling out topic choice
- calling out treatment of new member
- banning members
- defining GM discussions
- identifying trolls
- banning trolls/banning members

6. Critical Feminist

- calling out for lack of support for women
- calling out abuse insensitivity
- calling out for use of right wing propaganda to prove point
- calling out for sexist double standards re: parenting
- calling out for making other mother a charity case
- calling out for anti-woman language ("bitch")
- calling out for stereotyping women
- negotiating mainstream parenting and feminism
- reclaiming words
- marriage as oppression
- questioning whether or not women really need men
- research blames individuals and families for structural inequalities
- patriarchy and gender roles diminish capabilities of women

- single mothers threaten the patriarchal social order
- teaching gender identity/diversity to kids
- political mama
- mama's body, mama's choice
- 'good mother' discourses are oppressive
- women/mothers are not supported in society
- men don't get to decide what's ok for mothers to do
- gender and parenting (OK for old guys to be dads but not old moms)

7. Sex Worker Ally

- calling out for sex work stigmas
- talking about sex work in a way that is not oppressive
- kidless ally posting about her sex work to raise awareness
- sex worker ally
- YM sex worker posting in solidarity
- fighting oppression
- YW sex worker posting in solidarity
- sex workers as "others" on GM
- GM has been unsafe for sex workers
- making GM safe for sex workers
- bringing awareness by sharing experiences

8. Human rights activist

- calling out for eugenics mindset
- calling out for stereotyping men
- ageist language
- unpacking language
- discussing unethical business practices of wal-mart
- worker's rights as human rights
- boycott wal-mart
- genetic manipulation
- health care issues
- global issues
- population control
- quality of life
- euthanasia
- death as a part of life
- human rights issue
- activism
- right to dignity in dying
- right to life/death
- technology promotes individual freedom at the expense of societal consequences
- medical ethics

9. Poverty Activist

- calling out for classism

- shopping at wal-mart while living in poverty
- poverty and parenting choices
- class issues
- global north exploits the global south
- politics of food production

10. Girl-Mom Member

- calling out because of feeling judged by another mother
- calling out for judging other mothers
- calling out Girl-Mom disrespect
- women in a community
- women in a collective
- defining GM community
- women in a feminist community
- apologizing
- unlearning
- support for collective
- learning
- difficulty of unlearning
- unlearning is hard
- interpreting community
- shifting attitudes on GM
- learning to unlearn

- wanting to unlearn
- unlearning needs to be respectful
- hierarchy of YMs
- competing marginalities
- value of unlearning
- unlearning: partner privilege to white privilege (all the codes in the calling out thread)
- loud on GM, quiet IRL
- calling out for lack of support for mamas in crisis
- women in a natural parenting community

11. Gatekeeper/Protector of the “Safe Space”

- calling out for threats to safe space
- creating a safe space
- defending safe space
- girlmom as a safe space for sex workers
- protecting GM as a safe space for single moms
- GM posts used out of context and without permission
- anger over manipulation of GM
- safe space for women on welfare
- safe space for queer, trans, poly mamas
- calling out for GM as a safe space for YMs

12. Definers of Girl-Mom

- calling out for idea that GM = man hating
- calling out for GM policy
- calling out for prochoice policy
- calling out for GM discussion policy
- calling out for mission statement
- defining GM stance
- defining ideal GM website
- defining ideal GM member
- defining ideal GM discussion
- ideal GM
- ideal GM policy
- GM as a specifically political community
- respect for choices of other mothers
- feminist mamas
- feminist collective for women-only

13. Moderator of privilege in a space for marginalized folks.

- calling out for partner privilege
- calling out for reluctance to unlearn (white privilege)
- calling out kidless ally for privilege flaunting
- calling out for language: “proper”
- calling out for elitist tone

- calling out for privilege
- calling out kidless ally for overstepping
- calling out use of govt statistics to make an argument
- calling out bad kidless ally behaviour
- unpacking privilege
- understanding privilege
- unpacking partner privilege
- privilege and how it invokes ideas of who is a good mom
- marriage as privilege
- discussing partnerships in a safe space for single moms
- discussing privileges on GM

14. Disability rights activist

- calling out for ableist language
- disability rights

15. Girl-Mom Outlier/Right Wing Politics Supporter

- calling out for attitude against pro-life people
- kidless ally advising against having kids
- support for father's choice
- antichoice poster
- describing sex workers as either exploited or as sex fiends
- poor people should die to reduce strain on resources

- charity prolongs suffering by denying the poor the opportunity to be self-reliant or dead
- pointless to fight large systems that will never change
- businesses have the right to hire only fit workers
- anti-abortion mama
- avoid teen pregnancy
- society should not have to provide welfare to YMs
- shrink govt for individual autonomy

16. *Girl-Mom*

- Girl-Mom member's life changed by Alli
- GM as a safe space for YMs
- GM as a safe space for women who've had abortions
- GM as a safe space for YMs who've had abortions
- respect between YMs as fighting the system
- calling out for ignorance of hardships of parenting when not a legal adult
- calling out anti-YM sentiment
- politics of welfare for YMs
- advice on becoming a YM
- YM advising TTC teen to wait
- YM advising on the realities of young motherhood
- politics of support for YMs
- fighting back

- refuting age-based mother discourses
- refuting degenerate YM discourses
- fighting the system
- refuting teen mama hierarchy
- education, not shame
- support YMs
- unpacking young motherhood
- positives of young motherhood
- support for YMs
- GM as a lifelong identity
- child as a turning point
- supporting YMs/responding to deviant discourses
- YM explaining young motherhood
- advocating for YMs
- awareness of difficulties for YMs
- YMs as good moms
- independent mama
- children deter loser boyfriends
- single moms are still desirable
- being confronted with the realities of motherhood
- reality: kids limit freedom and etc. all the codes in that thread
- trope of degeneracy as a self-fulfilling prophecy that can be prevented through support

- reframing YMs as respectable
- support for parents in difficult circumstances
- sharing coping strategies
- advice on dealing with negative judgments
- supportive mama
- advice on assertiveness
- support for other mamas
- congrats on pregnancy
- empathetic mama
- mama offering suggestions/advice/encouragement
- mamas checking in with troubled mama
- identifying with difference
- support for mental health care
- advice
- support for pregnant woman
- support for other YMs
- support for other mothers
- GM supports YMs
- support for choice
- Alli-inspired activism

17. Queer mama/ally

- calling out for heterosexism

- queer mamas face oppression

18. Anti-racism activist

- calling out for racism
- calling out for white privilege
- calling out for cultural appropriation
- unpacking racism in response to being called out
- unpacking cultural traditions
- unpacking mainstream hunting
- unpacking cultural appropriation
- unpacking language and history of words
- discussing white privilege
- white privilege and intersecting marginalities
- reverse racism is POC responding to systemic racism
- reverse racism does not exist
- discussing racism
- dreads = cultural appropriation
- cultural appropriation is still offensive even if people have good intentions
- white privilege uses its power to justify exploitation
- cultural appropriation hurts POC
- reclaiming culture
- being a white ally of POC
- unlearning white privilege

- racialized women in a community

19. Attachment Parenting Advocate

- calling out for lack of support for breastfeeding
- questioning the mainstream: vaccinations
- against guns in the home
- peaceful parenting
- non-violent parenting
- learning peaceful parenting
- natural parenting
- natural mama
- breastfeeding advocate
- empowerment for breastfeeding mothers/feminist mother support
- nurturing mama
- natural parenting advocate
- AP advocate
- breastfeeding not taught or advocated for
- breast is best
- breastfeeding as a right
- right of baby to breastfeed
- GM as supportive space for breastfeeding

20. Body Image Advocate

- calling out for fat-phobia
- calling out for body-size assumptions
- conflicted about body image
- negotiating self-image
- mama body love
- body love
- feminism and body love

21. Cautious Mama

- awareness of public space
- desire to lock down boards
- mama offering caution
- advice on harm reduction
- advice on safety
- cautioning each other (about pot)
- referring to professional helper for pot use

22. Political Parenting Mama

- unpacking child discipline methods
- should gender roles be role modeled and taught to kids?
- unpacking assumptions of fatherless children
- kids need lots of love, not just a dad
- support for child's choice

- peaceful home as human right
- raising feminist kids
- teaching kids about sex from our mistakes
- raising feminist boys
- raising boys as women-oriented mothers
- respect for child's rights
- natural parenting as political parenting
- political parenting
- political side of mothering
- political side of parenting choices
- informed choice, not forced choice
- formula companies interfere with breastfeeding relationship
- love and care as birthright, not breast milk
- politics and parenting
- mothers and the economy

23. Pro-Choice Mama

- unpacking choice
- unpacking choice – support for abortion but couldn't do it
- support for choice no matter what (pregnancy)
- support for all choices
- support for YMs choice
- prochoice mama (context of keeping pregnancy or not)

- YM emphasizing choice
- support for choice no matter what
- prochoice
- prolife politicians
- GM as prochoice website

24. Non-judgmental of other mothers

- parenting without worrying about the opinions of others
- support for parenting freedoms (to choose what's best for own kid)
- support for choices of other moms (guns in the home)
- non-judgmental mother
- support for unconventional choices
- support for mama making unconventional choices
- support for other's choice (plastic surgery)

25. Mainstream-influenced mama

- teaching societal rules
- conformity to social norms
- emphasis on academia in raising kids (language)
- support for mainstream-parenting choice: piercing baby's ears
- conformity to cultural traditions
- mainstream parenting choice: vaccination
- compliance with social norms: guns in the home

- enjoyment of mainstream norms: guns
- use of spanking/admitting to hard times and spanking
- mainstream parenting: Barbies
- drug abstinence
- anti-pot for moms
- desire for surgery to correct changes brought by motherhood
- desire for cosmetic surgery
- YM happy to be with BD
- breastfeeding should be private
- formula needs to be an option
- both biological parents are necessary for developing a child's sense of self
- dads are important
- formula is best
- birth rights of men
- parenting is prime in certain years
- society over-sexualizes young women which leads to teen pregnancy

26. Unaware of critical race theories

- dreads for white women = OK
- cultural appropriation as an option
- cultural appropriation is just learning about and experiencing other cultures
- watered down cultural appropriation is OK
- respect for individual choice over respect for culture

- white privilege does not exist
- denying extent of white privilege
- reverse racism against whites
- denying racism

27. Resistant to Girl-Mom vision/discourses/policy

- resistant to unlearning
- “attacked” at GM (for formula feeding)
- “silenced” at GM
- aggressive after being called out
- aggression
- judging other mothers
- anti-woman language
- questioning safe space and regulations on language
- questioning other mothers
- defensiveness after being called out
- justifying post after being called out
- GM is too PC
- justifying antichoice language by applying to own choice
- innocence of privilege
- feeling excluded by safe space guidelines
- GM is anti-men
- claims of reverse sexism on GM

- fear of attack

28. Non-traditional mothers

- non-traditional mothering choice – tolerating swears
- non-traditional mothering – smoking pot while pregnant
- prior drug use
- pot smoking mama
- extreme attachment parenting
- mama who can't quit drugs during pregnancy
- mama who wants to do unmotherly things
- anti-establishmentarian
- pot advocacy and education

29. Mother Created As “Other”

- describing degeneracy: abortion
- young mother receiving misinformation
- lack of support as young parent
- survivor of abuse
- dealing with negative judgments and comments
- feeling uncomfortable
- YMs unsupported by family
- YMs unsupported and in need of help
- newly pregnant and in need of support

- YW nervous about abortion
- mama with no support
- mama being judged
- family troubles
- troubles in relationship
- pregnant and scared
- YM angry over being made degenerate
- poem about degeneracy
- how to fight the system?
- pregnant woman hurt by boyfriend abandonment
- pregnant woman living in an abusive situation
- pregnant woman struggling with decision
- loneliness
- stress of being deviant
- degenerate single moms
- justifying ourselves to society: abortion, being a feminist SAHM, partner status, use of welfare
- staying in a bad relationship to avoid the stigma and difficulty of being a single mom
- dominant family discourses are persuasive
- anger over being made degenerate
- social isolation
- difficulty connecting to peers after pregnancy