"My Whole World": Teen Moms Navigating Identity and Social Discourse

by

Laura C. Tanner

A PROJECT

Submitted to

Oregon State University

University Honors College

In partial fulfillment of
The requirements for the
degree of

Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in Women Studies (Honors Associate)

Presented June 3, 2013
Commencement June 2013

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Laura C. Tanner for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in Women Studies
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Abstract approved:

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Susan Shaw

Social discourse presents teenage childbearing as a "serious problem" that results in
significant harm and expense to teenage mothers, their children, and society. Although
the discourse of teenage childbearing has been multiple, overlapping, and contested, it
has resulted in negative stereotyping and stigmatization of teenage mothers. Much of
these stereotypes are based on teenage mothers' "failure" to perform adolescence and
motherhood according to societal norms. I perform an exploratory rhetorical analysis on
seventeen vlogs (video blog entries) of teen moms who describe their experiences of
teenage motherhood. Result: The vloggers in my sample simultaneously (re)produce and
(re)negotiate discourses of adolescence and motherhood in order to navigate their
identities as teenage mothers in the context of the discourse of teenage childbearing.
Additionally, they use Internet communication to share their narratives, together claiming
the authority and strength to define their subjectivity and create a new discourse of
teenage motherhood.

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June 3, 2013.

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon
State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of
my project to any reader upon request.

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Laura C. Tanner

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First, I want to thank the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program; each faculty and staff member has contributed to my success both in this project and my academic career. To Amanda Litke, thank you for introducing me to feminism and for showing me how fun teaching can be. Additionally, you were the first person to suggest that graduate school was within my reach. To Kryn Freehling-Burton, thank you for your constant support and mentorship from my first term to my last; you are my model for the ethic of care in feminist pedagogy. I always felt welcome in your office, and your advice and encouragement went far beyond academics. To Janet Lee, thank you for always telling it like it is, and giving practical and strategic advice about graduate applications and career planning. Your passionate lectures are always enjoyable, and your high standards inspire hard work and preparation. To Patti Duncan, thank you for your encouragement and mentorship when I started this project. It was your suggestion that I pursue this topic beyond the classroom, and the readings assigned in your class, that inspired me to conceive of it in the first place. Thank you also for your support and encouragement for applying to graduate school. When other people told me I wouldn't be accepted straight into a Ph.D. program, you told me I could do it, and you helped me get there. To Susan Shaw, thank you for supporting my graduate school dreams and for stepping in when I needed your guidance and mentoring at the end of this project. You have been encouraging, and helped me to stay disciplined; your faith in me has helped keep the panic at bay, and kept me focused on finishing. I feel incredibly privileged to have studied with all of you.

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Dedication

For Alex Tanner. I couldn't
have done this without you.

"If you have a baby, I'm here. I'm here for you, you can always write me, `here.

If you hurting, I'm going to hurt with you, because I'm hurting."

Rachel, teen mother

Introduction

Anywhere teenage mothers are encountered in popular culture, academic

literature or government policy, examples of the stereotypes and stigma associated with

becoming pregnant and having a baby at a young age can be found. Although teenage

women have always become mothers, the "problem of teenage childbearing" is fairly

recent; it is a socially constructed issue that has only been in the national consciousness

since the 1970s. Additionally, although the rate of teenagers giving birth has been

steadily dropping for decades (falling 8% from 2010-2011 alone), it is billed as a public

health epidemic that requires considerable resources be devoted to prevention ("CDC -

Teen Pregnancy," n.d.). This discursive construction of teenage childbearing as a "serious

social problem" with disastrous consequences is exemplified on the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention (CDC) website where teen pregnancy is described as costing U.S.

taxpayers $11 billion each year while devastating the lives of young mothers and their

children. According to the CDC, teenage childbearing causes young mothers to drop out

of school, experience economic hardship and raise children who are more likely to do

poorly in school, be incarcerated, have health problems, become teenage mothers and

experience unemployment. Even though the certainty of these statistics has been

challenged and remains unclear in the literature, the CDC unequivocally states that this

data applies to "the teen mother and her child even after adjusting for those factors that

increased the teenager's risk for pregnancy, such as growing up in poverty, having

parents with low levels of education, growing up in a single-parent family, and having poor performance in school." They go on to describe preventing teen pregnancy as "one of CDC's top six priorities, a 'winnable battle' in public health, and of paramount importance to health and quality of life for our youth" ("CDC - About Teen Pregnancy," 2012). While national organizations such as the CDC serve to disseminate, and in so doing, shape the "facts" about teenage childbearing, it is research that provides the backbone of the teenage childbearing discourse. According to Cherrington and Breheny, researchers are "authoritative social voices" and their work is used to develop public policy and shape attitudes about teenage childbearing (2005, p. 90). Research has "proven" the negative consequences of teenage childbearing; it combines with social discourses (i.e., adolescence, women's sexuality, race, class, motherhood) to create and reinforce the negative stereotyping of teenage mothers. However, research not only shapes attitudes and understandings, but it reflects those already formed by the researcher based on his or her own social location. The questions asked, research design, and conclusions drawn from the results are culturally mediated and influenced by underlying ideologies and biases (Reinharz, 1992). It is important to remember the impossibility of researcher objectivity when wading through the plethora of research about teenage childbearing.

The social construction of teenage childbearing is not limited to a simple grouping of stereotypes. While the lives of teenage mothers are in reality quite heterogeneous, being a teen mother is often portrayed as a singular, homogeneous identity. Synthesizing the work of several authors (Carabine, 2001; Foucault, 1980; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; I. Parker, 1997), Cherrington and Breheny write of the process through which issues like

teenage childbearing, that have complex origins, take on singular identities through academic research:

> Through psychology and health research into teenage pregnancy, multiple strands of talk, practices and institutional arrangements combine, overlap, compete and collide to produce ongoing re-working of meanings. Meaning in this way is not stable or singular. What can happen, though, is that an illusory idea of a unitary 'thing' often appears to present itself; for example, teenage pregnancy as a problem. Despite meanings being produced through ongoing processes of struggle and contestation, those processes are often elided. Particular socio-cultural constructions of how things are can become naturalized and dominate understanding as the historical antecedents to their development become forgotten, and powerful institutions obtain positions of authority in setting out how things should be understood. (2005, p. 91)

Although narratives about teenage childbearing are multiple, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory, they come together to form a discourse of power that presents the "teen mom" in monolithic fashion (stigmatizing the teen mom as bad mother, not ready, irresponsible, promiscuous, immature, societal burden). This singular identity of "teen mom" appears to the casual observer to have always existed in its present form rather than having been manufactured in the social imagination; its historical and underlying context is obscured. Moreover this application is not accidental or random, it is accomplished through the work of social institutions (particularly education, public health, welfare, and the media) and takes on a life of its own at the structural level. It is significant that the sexual and reproductive behavior of young women has been so

thoroughly framed as a matter of public interest. According to Nathanson (1991), the campaign against teenage pregnancy is first and foremost an attempt to regulate the sexuality and gendered behavior of young women. As such, it should be considered an important area of inquiry for feminist scholars.

Birth of this Project

In a way, this project had its germination when I became a mother at the age of sixteen. That is when I began my own struggle to reconcile myself as a mother in a society that considered me unworthy and yet idealized and idolized motherhood. It has been years since I was officially a "teen mom;" my eldest recently celebrated his 18th birthday. I'd like to say that being a teen mom hasn't defined my life, and in some ways it is true. However, I still feel a vague sense of the embarrassment that comes with being a teenage mother. The fact that these feelings still lurk in my consciousness demonstrates the magnitude of the shaming visited up on teenage mothers like me.

I didn't expect to spend the final year of my undergraduate degree immersed in studying teenage pregnancy. In fact, when my mentor Patti Duncan first suggested I expand a class project on the issue into my thesis topic, I had to think about it long and hard. I didn't particularly want to revisit a time of my life that was painful, and I was skeptical about embarking on a topic that I felt personally invested in. Additionally, I worried that teenage childbearing was too typical a project, not original enough (that was the discourse of teenage childbearing talking, devaluing teenage mothers). However, with my mentor's encouragement, I began to feel excited, to believe I could bring a new voice to the discourse of teenage childbearing.

I began this project with the idea of investigating the way teenage mothers are cast in a singular manner, as a monolithic identity. I wanted to explore the connection between this identity and the way teenage mothers are discounted and treated as naïve. As my project progressed, I narrowed my topic to the way a small group of teenage mothers in the U.S. navigate the discourses of teenage childbearing, adolescence, and motherhood, how they reproduce or challenge these discourses, and how they work together to resist the negative stereotyping and stigma they experience. While teenage childbearing is considered an issue in different ways throughout the world, this project is focused on the discourse and experiences of teenage childbearing, and the identity of "teen mom," in the context of the United States. This paper barely scratches the surface of the work that needs to be done in this area. However, it provides a basis for future research that investigates the experiences of teenage mothers, not from the perspective of pathology and prevention, but with the notion that teenage women deserve the same sexual and reproductive rights as women of any age.

Ethical considerations

As a feminist researcher, I value reflexivity highly because I believe all knowledge, including social science research, is shaped by the subjectivity of the knowledge producer. This research has been strongly influenced by my own experiences as a teenage mother. These experiences informed and shaped this project in valuable ways, giving me insight and empathy for the subjects of my analysis. As a woman who began mothering in my teenage years, I approached this research with the belief that teenage mothers are a structurally marginalized, oppressed group. I also assumed that teenage women have the capacity to provide their children with the loving environment

and care that children need in order to flourish. Finally, I believe that teenage mothers have a perspective, a subjugated knowledge, which is valuable and should be revealed.

Guiding Theory

I have approached this project through feminist postmodernism. Postmodernism arose from the work of French theorists including Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault. According to Mann (2012), Feminist postmodernism is based on the rejection of all core identity characteristics as essentialist; identity is viewed as a fluid construct of language, discourse, and culture. Additionally, language "governs our sense of what is 'real,' 'normal,' or 'natural'; it creates, rather than reflects, reality (p. 216). In other words, identity categories are not only socially constructed, but are continuously socially performed. Whereas organizing based on identity has been considered politically empowering by many feminists (particularly standpoint feminist theorists), postmodernists view static identity categories as silencing difference, reproducing discourse and thereby power and control. This doesn't mean that postmodernists are not interested in the voices of marginalized people. In fact, Foucault advocates for the "resuscitation of discourses that have been silenced," and those that have been "treated as naïve by dominant discourses" (Mann, 2012, p. 220). While I have used strategic essentialism in my discussion of identity categories (teenager, woman, mother, Black, White, Latina), I have sought to explore the navigation and production of discourse from the marginalized perspective of teenage mothers. I focus on three salient discourses in teenage mothers' lives: (a) the discourse of teenage childbearing itself, (b) the discourse of adolescence, which forms the foundation of much of the teenage childbearing discourse, and (c) the discourse of motherhood.

Literature review

Teenage childbearing is well accepted as a serious social problem. However, while childbearing in the teen years is not a new phenomenon, the construction of it as an "epidemic" that must be stopped is relatively recent. Researchers have produced copious amounts of literature on the subject of teenage childbearing. This research has been highly concentrated in the fields of demography, health care, psychology, sociology, public health, and policy. A comprehensive analysis of the literature is out of the scope of this project; therefore, I will introduce a sampling of the research that discusses the social construction of "teenage childbearing," the discourses of adolescence, women's sexuality, race, and motherhood, the risks of teenage childbearing, challenges to those risks, the perspectives and experiences of teenage mothers themselves, and mother's narratives shared through Internet communication.

The social construction of the teenage childbearing "problem"

The discourse of teenage childbearing as social problem has its roots in multiple and long-standing ideologies about women's sexuality, race, class and human development. However, it didn't crystalize until the early 1970s. The fact that teenage childbearing came to be described as an "epidemic" during a time when the rates of births to teenagers had fallen significantly is an indication that the labeling of teenage childbearing as a social problem was born more from the socio-political milieu than from actual consequences from teen births (Luker, 1997; Nathanson, 1991; Vinovskis, 1987). However, there were significant social changes during this time that fostered the perception that teenage childbearing was increasing. First, young White women who would have historically hid their pregnancies through abortion, adoption or immediate

marriage, began to keep their babies without marrying the father (Macleod, 2011). Second, the swell of baby boomers reaching adolescence meant that the numbers of teen pregnancies went up even while the relative rates were falling. Finally, the legalization of abortion meant that statistics on the rate of pregnancies (not just births) to young women became available (Nathanson, 1991). Depending on how they are presented (e.g., total number vs. relative rate, pregnancies vs. births, age of mother), statistics regarding teenage reproduction can tell a wildly different story. Even though teenage childbearing has historically mirrored the trends of childbearing among all women, just at a lower rate, looked at in the right way it can be portrayed as a frightening "epidemic" (Nathanson, 1991, p. 25). In addition to these demographic changes, the stage was set for teenage childbearing as social problem during the 1960s by discourses about the 'sexual revolution,' the rising rates of unwed motherhood, concerns about welfare costs, and the medicalization and politicization of birth control (Nathanson, 1991).

Research and commentary about the "sexual revolution" during the 1960s was largely focused on the changing sexual behavior of college-age, white middle class women. In particular these young women were seen as increasingly permissive and sexually experienced before marriage. Most importantly, this discourse defined their sexuality as a matter of choice, and as a "rebellion of the young." While at this time their sexuality was seen as part of a progression towards legitimate sexuality in marriage, the image of sexual rebelliousness, combined with narratives of adolescence, would later inform the stereotyping of teen moms as promiscuous and irresponsible (Nathanson, 1991, p. 32).

Paralleling this discourse about White, middle class college women, was increasing concern about perceived consequences of unwed motherhood and welfare costs among poor, particularly Black, populations (Nathanson, 1991). During the first half of the twentieth century, progressives like Charles Crittenton and Kate Waller Barrett had led efforts to change the image of the unwed mother from fallen woman to social victim, and provided services (adoption) to young unwed mothers (often whether they wanted them or not). However, their social activism only extended to white women. Black women continued to be construed as highly-fertile, immoral "breeders," and Black babies were considered undesirable for adoption (Pillow, 2004; Solinger, 1993). Although the increase of Black mothers on welfare during the 1960s was actually a result of increased access to welfare services that had been limited to poor whites, it was blamed on the "steady disintegration of the negro family structure" (Moynihan quoted in Nathanson, 1991, p. 34), and the sexual behavior of poor Black women (Nathanson, 1991, p. 79). This is the origin of the controlling image of the Black "welfare queen" described by Patricia Hill Collins (2000). This "welfare queen" was a lazy, often young, unwed Black woman sitting around and passing bad values on to her neglected children, while collecting money from upstanding tax-payers (Collins, 1991, 2009). Aspects of this stereotype were later applied to all young mothers through the construction of the "teen mom."

Nathanson (1991) notes that the development of hormonal birth control, and the birth control advocacy of the largely lay volunteer network of Planned Parenthood, medicalized reproduction in a new way that transformed unplanned pregnancy from morally reprehensible but unavoidable, to a solvable public health problem. Through this

advocacy, public policy makers were convinced that birth control was the answer to "the problems of poverty, illegitimacy, and the rising costs of welfare" (p. 41). Additionally, the availability of a medical solution to unplanned pregnancy made unwed (and latter teenage) motherhood a matter of personal choice and irresponsibility. Over time however, family planning advocates needed new recipients for their services, as older white women brought their fertility under control, and organizing around the family planning of poor Black women became politically problematic due to backlash from eugenic population control tactics such as forced and coerced sterilization of women of color. Teenage childbearing "helped to continue the conversations about controlling women's fertility, while potentially deflecting attention from reproductive injustices" (Vinson, 2012, p. 145). Teenagers made an excellent group around which to organize; they were depicted as middle class and white (i.e., sympathetic), could be seen as requiring contraception but not sterilization. Additionally, organizers needn't worry about being accused of coercion because young childbearing was generally understood as undesirable (Nathanson, 1991, p. 56; Pillow, 2004). Furthermore, teenage women had (and have) very little political power and were (and are) unlikely to raise significant objection. Birth control advocates successfully defined teenage pregnancy as a public health epidemic, but their proposed solution (access to birth control) was less successfully adopted due to counter movements from moral conservatives who focused on vilifying sexual activity among young women and pushed for sexual abstinence education instead (Nathanson, 1991). Even so, the perception that childbearing was a matter of individual choice and that prevention of it could solve social issues like poverty remained.

The politics of the early 1970s that defined teenage childbearing as a serious problem built on the processes described above. In the beginning, teenage mothers were portrayed as the "girl next door," as wholesome white girls who had made a mistake in falling pregnant. These were girls that the public, and policy makers, could feel good about saving, and they were represented in the media through images of young innocent-looking white school-girls. Later on, anxieties about unwed motherhood and welfare costs, which had focused primarily on poor Black women, shifted focus to teenage mothers in part through Reagan's welfare reform. Teenage mothers became the "other" (with teenage mothers of color becoming the marginalized of the marginalized) and took on the imagery and the reputation of women of color: of "welfare queens" (Pillow, 2004). During this time, the distinction between the sexual "revolution" of the white middle class, and the sexual "irresponsibility" of poor Black women was muddied and coalesced into the irresponsible and medically dangerous sexuality of teenage girls (Nathanson, 1991). Additionally, the language of "illegitimacy" and "unwed motherhood" was largely dropped, and "teenage pregnancy" took its place. While this term was significantly more neutral, it carried with it the judgments, shame, and social degeneracy associated with the former; it simply disguised these judgments in the language of public health. Now instead of being overtly blamed for threatening the patriarchal nuclear family, they were blamed for sustaining poverty, generating health costs, and other social degeneracies (Macleod, 2011).

Carolyn E. Cocca discusses another shift in teenage childbearing discourse that occurred in the 1990s and portrayed teenage pregnancy as a problem of statutory rape. She describes the response as a "moral panic" that was officialized in the 1996 passage of

the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). This act not only reformed welfare in significant ways (including limiting the public assistance available to teen moms and placing requirements on their receipt), but it also promoted heteronormative and patriarchal social changes targeted toward teenage mothers (including funding abstinence-only sex education) (Cocca, 2002; Pillow, 2004). The findings of the act begin by stating "Marriage is the foundation of a successful society," and go on to describe the problem of unwed teenage pregnancy in terms of sexual victimization, "An effective strategy to combat teenage pregnancy must address the issue of male responsibility, including statutory rape culpability and prevention . . . . The increase of teenage pregnancies among the youngest girls is particularly severe and is linked to predatory sexual practices by men who are significantly older" (quoted in Cocca, 2002, p. 64). Like previous legislation about teenage pregnancy, PRWORA was based on half-truths and statistical manipulation. For instance, according to Cocca (2002), only 8% of teen mothers had partners who could be prosecuted for statutory rape, far from the figure of 65% of teen mothers with partners over twenty promoted by the Alan Guttmacher Institute. However, the 65% statistic, and the idea of teenage mother as sexual victim, stuck and became part of the teenage childbearing discourse. The teenage mother as "sexual victim" is still portrayed today in anti-teen pregnancy campaigns along with the "irresponsible welfare queen" and the "innocent girl who made a mistake." What they all have in common is that no matter how teenage mothers are framed in these campaigns, teenage pregnancy is always portrayed as a matter of choice.

Adolescence

Most research on teenage childbearing begins with the assumption that teenagers are a valid separate category of human and that this separation is meaningful to sexuality and motherhood. However, like the discourse of teenage childbearing, adolescence as a distinct life stage is a fairly recent (Western) cultural development (exported globally through imperialism). Nancy Lesko (2001) provides a detailed account of the development of adolescence in her book *Act Your Age!* Nancy Lesko (2001) provides a detailed account of the development of adolescence in her book *Act Your Age!* According to Lesko, references to adolescence arose in the mid-late 19th century in the context of industrialization, urbanization, and strong anxieties about race, class, gender and sexuality. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed the replacement of religion with science as the primary source of expert knowledge. A primary component of this expert knowledge was the study of people, particularly in terms of their place in civilization. Social discourses clustered around two binaries: progress/decline and social/individual, with an emphasis on diagnosis and prevention (we see a continued emphasis on diagnosis and prevention when teenage childbearing is considered a matter of import for the CDC). Within this context, conceptions of adolescence were developed in relation to the theory of recapitulation in which individual human development was seen as mirroring that of greater civilization. Recapitulation theory reinforced the already dominant ideologies of the Great Chain of Being that ranked animals and humans on a continuum from savage to civilized, from simple to complex, and featured white, middle class men as the most advanced and closest to God. All persons were understood to follow the same path from simple and savage childhood to the disciplined, moral, civilized adult; however, "inferior persons" (women, non-whites, lower classes) were

said to become stuck in the lower stages (Lesko, 2001). Therefore, recapitulation theory justified colonialism and provided an "absolute biological criterion not only for racial but also for sexual and class ranking (Macleod quoted in Lesko, 2001).

In 1904, Stanley Hall, considered the father of modern adolescence, published a treatise on the psychology of adolescence that defined this age period as having universal psychological characteristics based on biological age. Prior to this notion of adolescence, youth entered adulthood at different times mainly dependent on class status and opportunity; the transition from child to adult was accomplished by the undertaking of adult behaviors and responsibilities rather than attaining a particular age (Macleod, 2011). Under the new adolescence, age was the determining factor of appropriate behavior, and deviating from proper chronology was considered degenerate and a sign of inferiority. Adolescence became known as a time outside of time, a period of constant becoming, where teenage behaviors were essentialized as biologically set apart from both child and adult. Because the borders of adolescence were based in the biological teenage years, sexual maturation and activity was at the heart of adolescence discourse. Hall saw adolescence as a period of transition between child and adult, which he described as turbulent and full of conflict between childish urges and civilized behavior. Precocity, especially sexual precocity, was associated with inferior classes and races. Hall's remedy was a prescription for activities that developed good moral character while staving off adulthood. With the goal of white, middle-class manhood, adolescents were to engage in slow and careful development, engaging in busy-work designed to keep them from growing up too quickly (this corresponds with the progressive era emphasis on group

sports and organizations like the Boy Scouts). The emphasis on adolescence as a discrete life stage on the continuum of civilization created a need for constant surveillance:

> The idea of adolescence as always becoming (and not really existing in the present) fostered a hide-and-seek of knowing, watching, and cataloguing maturing bodies, for *prevention* necessitated unlimited scientific looking.
>
> . . .
>
> Adolescence became a handy and promiscuous social space, that is, a place that people could endlessly worry about, a space that adults everywhere could watch carefully and that could be imagined to have many visible and invisible instabilities. (emphasis in original Lesko, 2001, pp. 89, 113)

The categorizing, mapping, and charting of adolescent bodies was considered essential to the preservation and progress of society; deviance from the accepted rate of development was thought to put the future of the nation at risk (Lesko, 2001).

As mentioned above, adolescence is highly gendered, raced, and classed. Defining adolescent women as inferior and farther down on the civilization scale helped to shape and clarify goals of masculinity for White teenage males. Additionally, the differentiation between males and females of a species was considered a characteristic of more advanced societies (a device that justified gender oppression). White people, as the "superior race" required substantial differences between the sexes (Lesko, 2001). During this time homosexuality and consequently heterosexuality were also being constructed. Sigmund Freud defined homosexuality as an immature stage of development associated with childhood. This interacted with recapitulation to define sexual difference as a sign of

immaturity or inferiority. In fact, according to Gilman, "the concepts of human sexuality and degeneracy are inseparable within nineteenth century thought" (quoted in Lesko, 2001, p. 39). Science had proven that civilization was a result of masculine (white, middle class) virtues. Therefore, sexual deviancy from women (or men), departing from acceptable gender roles, would have serious negative consequences for the future of the nation (Lesko, 2001).

Proper female adolescence and civilized behavior was modeled on prolonged chastity followed by marriage (the life-course followed by elite white women). Victorian ethnographers of the time considered early female sexual experience and promiscuity to be a characteristic of less civilized "lower" races (Macleod, 2011). Proper adolescent women were supposed to be asexual and "perfect strangers to any [sexual or amorous] sensations" (Haller quoted in Nathanson, 1991, p. 80). Sexuality in adolescent women was considered evidence of moral perversity (Nathanson, 1991, p. 80); transgressing the boundaries of proper white female adolescent behavior signified a "threat of degeneration" and racial deterioration. Therefore, from its inception, adolescence has been intimately tied to a specific form of female sexuality based on Whiteness (Lesko, 2001; Macleod, 2011).

Later, this same form of sexuality was reinforced when the progressive era ushered in the juvenile justice system, which policed young women's sexuality. Adolescent women were watched carefully to ensure that they followed proper Victorian standards of sexuality. Any hint of immorality or delinquency (including vile language, masturbation, or lack of demure behavior) was cause for the court to intervene. Lesko (2001) notes that "promiscuous girls called forth all the concerns and prejudices against

racial, ethnic, and lower-class others (given recapitulation theory and adolescence as a cultural switching station)" (p. 82). It was agreed that female adolescent promiscuity would lead to "social degeneration, racial suicide, and imperial decline," again making the connection between Whiteness, norms of female adolescence, and nationalism (Lesko, 2001, p. 87).

The social changes in the second half of the 20th century have led to a highly sexualized culture in which adolescent sexuality is generally tolerated as long as it stays hidden (i.e., does not result in pregnancy or infection). However, teenage women experience a double bind in which they are simultaneously seen as not-child in that they are expected to be able to understand and act to prevent the "dangers" of sexual activity, but also not-adult in that they are considered too immature to handle sexual relationships or their potential reproductive consequences. When teenage women engage in sexual activity, they are expected to display mature behaviors of careful contraception and safe-sex (never mind that many adults fail to do so), while simultaneously being labeled as too childlike to handle the mothering of a child. Teenage mothers experience another double bind here, as they are seen as either reckless for having an unplanned pregnancy, or pathologically selfish and immature if they admit to planning their pregnancy (Breheny, 2006). Given these contradictions the only truly "acceptable" option is prolonged chastity followed by heterosexual marriage (Macleod, 2011). Teenage childbearing makes adolescent promiscuity visible, and is therefore the ultimate in deviancy, not only because it makes visible sexual precocity, but also because it violates chronology, the idea that biological age determines social behavior (Lesko, 2001). While still a highly contested space, adolescent sexuality has gained traction as a valid part of adolescent

experimentation. Mothering, on the other hand, is firmly placed in the category of adult behavior. Becoming a mother can be viewed as growing up all at once based on social experience rather than physical age. In this sense teenage childbearing challenges the very foundations of adolescence by making visible the performativity and social construction of the teenage years (Lesko, 2001).

The demarcation of the teenage years as a distinct life stage outside of both childhood and adulthood has other significant implications for young women's sexuality. Today, teenage women are simultaneously seen as not-child in that they are expected to be able to understand and act to prevent the "dangers" of sexual activity, but also not-adult in that they are considered too immature to handle sexual relationships or their potential reproductive consequences. When teenage women engage in sexual activity, they are expected to display adult behaviors of careful contraception and safe sex (never mind that many adults fail to do so), while simultaneously being labeled as too childlike to handle the mothering of a child. These contradictions place young women in a double bind in which the only acceptable option is prolonged chastity followed by heterosexual marriage (Macleod, 2011). These values are explicitly reinforced by abstinence-only sex education, on which the federal government spent over a billion dollars between 2001-2009 (Jayson, 2009).

The discourse of adolescence creates a distinct "wall" between teenage and adult behavior that is seldom breached in social research, particularly in regard to teenage childbearing. Even as they enumerate the costs and risks of teenage childbearing, researchers rarely acknowledge that these costs and risks frequently apply as well to childbearing women of any age (Macleod, 2011). For instance, teenagers are highly

criticized for experiencing unplanned pregnancies and failing to use contraception, while adults in the U.S. often experience the same without incurring censure (Chandra, Martinez, Mosher, Abma, & Jones, 2005; Dailard, 2006). Teenage childbearing is blamed for producing poverty and lack of career attainment later in life, when motherhood is known to delay career development and lead to financial struggle at any age (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Miller, 2011). The "risks" of teenage childbearing are primarily either associated with childbearing at any age, or associated with other social factors (i.e., poverty) with or without childbearing. However, separating out these risks for teenagers and focusing on prevention of teenage childbearing as the solution serves an important purpose; it obscures the stratification of society and its attendant structural inequities (Luker, 1997), and reinforces dominant values through the vilification of the "other." In other words, adolescence, and specifically the struggle to control adolescent female bodies, defines proper sexuality, acceptable development, and what it means to be an adult in a mutually constructive process (Lesko, 2001; Mann, 2012).

As a powerless group in society, young childbearing women are fair game for shaming and derogation in the popular press, anti-teen pregnancy media, and academic research. Due to their status as adolescents, as not-adults, teenage childbearing women are painted with a wide brush as children having children (Breheny & Stephens, 2007; Koffman, 2011; Macleod, 2011). Motherhood for adolescents, while considered an adult activity, does not confer adult status or speed development toward adulthood (Flanagan et al. quoted in Breheny & Stephens, 2007, p. 116). The status of childishness leads to perceptions that teenage mothers are like children playing with dolls, they are supremely selfish and unable to put the needs of their baby above their own desires, they are

unreliable and unable to plan for the future (Breheny & Stephens, 2007). Teenage mothers experience another double bind here, as they are seen as either irresponsible for having an unplanned pregnancy, or pathologically selfish and immature if they actively plan a pregnancy (Breheny, 2006).

Women's Sexuality

Women have historically been objectified, commodified, made invisible, and controlled for the benefit of men. This treatment was, in the past, justified by blatant claims for the biological superiority of men, affirmed by religion, and legitimated by "science" (Shaw & Lee, 2001; Tong, 2008; Wolf, 2002) These arguments of superiority have been pushed underground in contemporary society where they persist in gender roles, gender inequality, and gender stereotypes. While women experience gendered oppression according to their unique social locations, it is reasonable to make the generalization that U.S. history carries a strong legacy of gender oppression built into society at every level. Although expressions of gender oppression have changed over time, contemporary women experience this oppression to varying degrees throughout their lives (Shaw & Lee, 2001). Feminists have identified the control of women's sexuality and reproduction as a primary method of oppressing women (Firestone, 2003). This control is accomplished through a complex web of interconnecting social discourses embodied in institutional policies and norms (Shaw & Lee, 2001). Most applicable to teenage childbearing are the aspects of sexual oppression that relate to the control of when, how, why, and with whom women have sex. To address these aspects, it is first necessary to ask the question, which women? Female sexuality has been split into a binary of the chaste, virtuous wife, and the promiscuous, available whore; this is a double

bind often called the Madonna/Whore dichotomy (Shaw & Lee, 2001). Additionally, through discourses of childhood and adolescence, women are divided between the sexless child, the sexual adolescent who is nonetheless deviant if engaging in sex, and the sexual adult. The meaning of these categories has been constructed differently depending on race and class status. For instance, the sexual stereotypes about, expectations of, and acceptable treatment of a young Native woman living in poverty have historically and contemporaneously been very different from that of, a middle class, married White woman who is a mother (see section on race below for more discussion of radicalized sexualities). Arching over these heterogeneous sexual categories is the "mythical norm" of the middle-upper class, Christian, White, heterosexual woman against which all women are judged, and to which all women are expected to aspire (Lorde, 2007). Since the "sexual revolution" and the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the sexuality of adult women (and increasingly teenage women) has become significantly more acceptable and public. This is seen in the saturation of the media with sexual content (although a case can also be made that this media saturation of women's sexuality is a backlash against the women's movement which objectifies and controls women's sexuality in a new way). The sexuality of teenage women has been hotly contested and lies in the crossfire between the movement for sexual liberation and women's sexual independence, and religiously motivated traditional values. This tug-of-war is expressed in teenage pregnancy prevention efforts that either focus on contraception use and access to abortion, based on an understanding of the "problem" as medical with medical solutions, or focus on abstinence education, based on an understanding of the "problem" as moral, with moral solutions (Nathanson, 1991). Media aimed at young people that

objectify women as over-sexed eye-candy and men's playthings, further confuse the picture. The result is a mixed bag in which teenage childbearing is defined as medical, preventable, and a matter of personal choice, while at the same time morally reprehensible and socially irresponsible.

It is important to understand that the actual behavior of women is frequently different from that which is expressed as the norm. In reality, teenagers are likely more sexually experienced than the "mythical norm," and less experienced than portrayed in the media (Doan & Williams, 2008). However, even sexual discourses that are largely out of touch with women's behavior have significant impact on women's treatment, self-perceptions, and on public policies. This is the case with teenage women and sex. Studies have shown that about 50% of high-school students have had sex, and about 34% are sexually active, and that 30% of all teenagers (50% and 52% for Black and Latina women respectively) become pregnant at least once by the time they reach age 20 ("Teen Birth/Pregnancy Data," n.d.). Regardless, the overall discourse of adolescent sexuality is that teenage women are psychologically unable to handle sexual relationships, and developmentally incapable of responsibly preventing pregnancy or parenting a child they conceive (Macleod, 2011). Furthermore, although the majority of teenagers are engaging in sex, and abstinence education has been shown to be ineffective in lower rates of teenage pregnancy (Kearney & Levine, 2012a; Santelli, Lindberg, Finer, & Singh, 2007), substantial resources continue to be dedicated to convincing young women to not have sex ("SIECUS," n.d.). Of central import to teenage sexuality and abstinence education is the concept of virginity. Doan and Williams (2008) explain:

While cultural outlets openly display adolescent women's sexuality and suggest that young women are fully sexual beings, teen women continue to face a sexual double standard that often undermines their sexual agency. The complex construction of virginity illustrates the tentative nature of young women's sexual agency. … The perception of agency is likely greater than the reality, particularly in a society where significant numbers of young women continue to endure sexual assault and pressure. (p. 6)

Virginity is variably viewed as a gift to give to a special partner (often someone a young woman expects to marry), a stigmatized loss (marking the young woman as promiscuous and sexually available), or a rite of passage into adulthood, (Doan & Williams, 2008, p. 6). The first two are heavily promoted by abstinence education programs, which attempt to guilt and scare young women into keeping their virginity until heterosexual marriage (Doan & Williams, 2008, pp. 113–117). This focus on heterosexual marriage is not limited to abstinence education. While the language of "teenage pregnancy" has largely replaced references to unwed motherhood and illegitimacy, these ideologies remain; heterosexual marriage is promoted as a route to happiness and wealth, and illegitimate birth is considered the cause of a variety of social ills. This attitude is summed up well by the testimony of Heidi H. Stirrup, a member of the Christian Coalition, at a welfare reform hearing in 2003, "[illegitimate pregnancy is] the single most important social problem today largely because it contributes to many other social problems such as crime, drugs, poverty, illiteracy, welfare, and homelessness" (quoted in Doan & Williams, 2008, p. 25). This same message can be found in government-sponsored media campaigns. A 2013 anti-teen pregnancy campaign

ad published by the New York city department of human services proclaims "If you finish high school, get a job, and get married before having children, you have a 98% chance of **not** being in poverty" (emphasis in original "HRA - Teen Pregnancy Prevention," n.d.). Additionally, a publication currently distributed on the National Campaign website states:

> According to research, married people are better off than those who are not married in a number of ways. On average, they are happier, healthier, and wealthier and report greater sexual satisfaction than single, divorced or cohabiting individuals. … Teens lack knowledge of what might be called the "success" sequence: Finish high school, or better still, get a college degree; wait until your twenties to marry; and have children after you marry. Teens who follow this sequence are likely to avoid poverty and to do well economically. (Whitehead & Pearson, 2006)

Each of these examples not only promotes chastity and heterosexual marriage, but constructs teenage childbearing as an individual choice that is 100% avoidable; this obscures any social contexts that may limit access to information, resources, and alternatives, as well as the significant problem of sexual violence, coercion and pressure for teenage women. Additionally, framing teenage pregnancy as a choice between acceptable prevention and unacceptable conception eliminates the possibility of a positive choice for motherhood as a teenage woman. The examples above also demonstrate the overarching promotion of norms associated with White, middle class women. These choices (prolonged chastity, higher education, delayed marriage and childbearing) may not be desirable or accessible to many women, and yet are widely promoted as the norm.

In addition to the internalized effects from this constant bombardment of sex-shaming messages, young women's lives are externally impacted through institutional policy including education, public health, child services, and welfare. For example, the 1996 welfare reform (PRWORA) act put limits on teenage benefits and instituted federal-state matching grants for abstinence education. This act begins with the statement "a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of human sexual activity" (Pillow, 2004). Returning to the question of when, how, why, and with whom young women have sex, the teenage childbearing discourse determines that sexuality is only acceptable past the age of adolescence, and should occur between heterosexual married couples as an expression of love and commitment, and for the purpose of procreation.

The teenage childbearing discourse is first and foremost an attempt to control the sexuality and reproduction of young women. However, because discourses simultaneously construct that which is defined, as well as that which is not defined (Mann, 2012), the construction of teenage childbearing as "bad" automatically constructs "good" sexuality and childbearing for all women. In other words, categorizing teenage childbearing as "bad" *because* young moms are not usually fully prepared to parent in a heterosexual married, educated, financially secure household modeled on the mythical norm, promotes that household model as the only acceptable family structure and place of sexual expression for women of all ages. If teenage mothers are in poverty their whole lives *because* they had children too early (and not because of preexisting social contexts), then women who wait to have children should be able to be economically successful (regardless of social context), and poverty becomes the fault of the individual. If

mothering is difficult for teenagers *because* they are young, then older mothers should be able to mother their children without frustration, struggle, or mistakes. In this way, the discourse of teenage childbearing informs acceptable sexuality and reproduction for all women regardless of age.

Race

As indicated in the previous sections, the discourses of teenage childbearing, women's sexuality and adolescence are closely entwined with white supremacy and racialized perceptions of women's sexuality. Like adolescents and women, people of color, have been considered biologically inferior to the standard White, male human (only in the case of the White male adolescent is there an expectation of developing beyond this inferiority). Women of color, at the nexus of racism and sexism, have been subject to multiple controlling images and stereotypes. Sexuality in the U.S. has been racially dichotomous since its colonial roots. During the years of slavery in the U.S., African women were subjected to systematic rape and sexual torture. Their reproduction was used as a means of commercial gain, while at the same time they were denied motherhood of their own children (Davis, 1993; Hooks, 1981). Rather than being seen as victims of White male aggression, Black women were blamed for it and labeled sexually promiscuous, overly fertile, and immoral. Through this process, White women were simultaneously defined as pure and virtuous. The sexual exploitation and devaluation of Black women didn't end with the abolishment of slavery but has continued in various forms to present day (Hooks, 1981). Patricia Hill Collins (1991) points out that even when social conditions change; controlling images often persist because they maintain boundaries of oppression and marginalization. The stereotypes enacted during slavery

eventually formed the basis of the "welfare queen" of the 1980s. These stereotypes, along with Black women's status as "other," help define normality for the dominant group. The single Black mother, or "Welfare Queen," defines a boundary by which any sexual or reproductive behavior outside of the White middle-class norm is dangerous to society (pp. 68, 76–77). Through these processes, "acceptable" sexuality is labeled a White trait, and "unacceptable" sexuality a non-white trait.

Chicana women (and I would argue all Latina women by the extension of stereotyping) have been subject to the controlling image of the overly fertile "breeder," and, as with Black women, much concern has been expressed in U.S. academia and politics about strain placed on governmental services, especially welfare, by Latina mothers (Gutiérrez, 2008). Latina women have also been subject to the controlling image of being "hot tamales," over-sexed and sexually available [See Juarez & Kerl, 2003 for more discussion of Latina sexuality] (Silliman, Fried, Ross, & Gutierrez, 2004). Both of these controlling images are seen in and reinforced by the teen pregnancy discourse. Latina teenage women are viewed as either ignorant, traditional, "breeders," or promiscuous, reckless "sluts." Black and Latina women are not the only women of color who have been stereotyped as sexually deviant. I don't intend to portray them as representing the whole of "women of color," or to exclude the sexual violence against Native women in my references to U.S. history. However, in the context of the discourse of teenage childbearing, the three (admittedly problematic) categories of White, Black, and Latina are the most salient and the most studied.

When young women of color give birth outside of marriage, it reinforces sexual and reproductive stereotypes including Black sexual deviancy or Latina hyper-fertility.

When White teenagers give birth outside of marriage they engage in "degenerate" behaviors, violating the supremacy of Whiteness. However, while White teenage mothers are "othered" in some similar ways to women of color, they are also more likely to be viewed as victims rather than initiators of their "mistakes." Their condition is taken as a measure of their individual poor choices rather than an indicator of their inherent racial inferiority. In other words, White teenagers are starting from a place of privilege and "fall" from getting pregnant; teenagers of color start out at a disadvantage and must maintain sexual norms in order to "rise above" their race. In both cases racism plays a part in stigmatization and stereotyping of teenage mothers.

In present day, making an overt link between unwed motherhood, deviant sexuality, and race has become socially unacceptable. The discourse of adolescence allows these anxieties to be addressed covertly through the focus on chronological age. Even though the public face of teenage childbearing is often White, academic research about teenage childbearing has often focused on populations of poor, urban, young women of color; research in the 1990s especially focused on young Black women [see the work of Furstenburg and Geronimus]. As a result, "teenage childbearing" often stands in as code for the fertility of women of color. In fact, statistics about teenage childbearing from the National Campaign, the U.S. Office of Adolescent Health, and the CDC emphasize the disparities between the birth rates of women of color and White women rather than the overall percentages of births. Each website prominently displays the fact that for women aged 15-17, Black women are almost 3 times, and Hispanic women more than 3.5 times more likely to give birth than White women. In women aged 18-19 (the age group with over 70% of teenage births), Black women are almost 2 times, and

Hispanic women 2 1/3 times more likely to give birth than White women. These statistics are based on the rates of birth per 1000 women in each population bracket. However, looked at as a percentage of all births to teenagers, Black and Hispanic women together only make up 57%. This latest fact is only mentioned once and is not elaborated on ("CDC - About Teen Pregnancy," 2012, "Office of Adolescent Health," n.d., "The National Campaign," n.d.). Additionally, the stereotypes of Black and Latina promiscuity are reinforced by national statistics that separate out the sexual activity of Black and Hispanic teenage women apart from the overall totals; the sexual activity and pregnancy rates of White teenagers are not separated out but are only expressed in the context of the whole ("Teen Birth/Pregnancy Data," n.d.). It is important to try to understand why young women of color are more likely to give birth in their teenage years (a statistic that most likely has more to do with legacies of disadvantage than cultural differences). However, the way the information is disseminated clearly emphasizes the sexuality and fertility of women of color as deviant when compared to Whites (reinforcing Whiteness as the norm by which all people are measured) and obscures the role of White teenagers in producing the costs of teenage childbearing that are focused on so prominently by these organizations. Additionally, the visual rhetoric of anti-teen pregnancy campaigns has clear racial implications, often reinforcing the sexual and reproductive stereotypes of young women of color (Tapia, 2005; Vinson, 2012).

Motherhood.

The discourse of motherhood, particularly since the Victorian Era of the nineteenth century, cements mothering as an essential task – the central achievement – of womanhood. The act of mothering, and mothers' feelings about motherhood, are

expected to be instinctual, granted to every woman through her female biology and the act of giving birth (Chodorow, 1978). Mothers not only reproduce human beings, but, as the main caregivers for children, they reproduce culture, making motherhood a matter of importance to, and subject to discipline from, the state and a variety of social institutions. Motherhood demands and reifies particular characteristics and behaviors in mothers including all-encompassing (never ambivalent) love for their children, self-sacrifice, feeling fulfilled by motherhood, and obedience to mothering "experts." Mothers are held responsible for the physical health and wellbeing, as well as the emotional and psychological health, life successes, and citizenship, of their children (Apple, 2006; Marshall, 1991; Phoenix, Woollett, & Lloyd, 1991; Rich, 1976).

Concomitant with the naturalized "loving mother" as a biological and social imperative is the construction of the "unloving mother" as a monstrosity. This monstrosity, or "bad" mother, may be characterized in this way due to a failure to perform any of the tasks above (from not being nurturing or empathetic to her children, failing to follow expert advice, or neglecting or abusing them, to the extreme of infanticide), but at the heart of the matter is a judgment that mothers who fail in their duties must not love their children properly. Mothers often feel intense guilt and shame when they fail to measure up to the impossible standards of motherhood, especially the dictate to love their children unfailingly. Ambivalence (the mix of love and resentment considered normal in every relationship) is unacceptable in the relationship of a mother to her child (Almond, 2011; Marshall, 1991; R. Parker, 1996; Rich, 1976). Additionally, mothers must navigate a "hierarchy of maternal legitimacy in which not all mothers are equal;" those who don't measure up (poor/welfare mothers, single mothers, mother of

color) inhabit stigmatized spaces in which their subjectivities as mothers are unstable (Patterson, 2009, p. 50). Like the discourses of teenage childbearing and adolescence, the discourse of motherhood is strongly founded in White supremacy and classist values. While each mother's experience of motherhood is unique depending on her social location and history, she is measured by a surprisingly durable and rigid standard that is modeled on the "mythical norm" of the White bourgeois woman, with no flexibility for, or acknowledgment of, varying social contexts (Marshall, 1991; O'Reilly, 2010; R. Parker, 1996).

Mothers often live in fear of being found wanting in their mothering capacity and judged as "bad mothers." For marginalized mothers who are structurally disadvantaged in the motherhood race, the fear of being labeled as "bad" mothers can also be connected to the very real risk of losing their children to the State (R. Parker, 1996; Phoenix & Wollett, 1991). However, "motherhood" is not simply a standard applied to women from external forces; it is reproduced in the discursive spaces of text, speech, and imagery, and through the daily practices of mothers disciplining themselves as well as other mothers (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). This also means that motherhood can be negotiated and contested, especially through the sharing of narratives from one mother to another (See Mother's Narratives and Internet Communication below for more discussion).

"Risks" of Teenage Childbearing

The literature almost universally reinforces teenage childbearing as a serious social problem (most often located in the choices of individual teens rather than in societal structure), and widely proclaims a laundry list of medical, social, economic, and psychological risks to mother, baby and society. In the previous four years (2008-2012)

multiple articles have been published that demonstrate the prevailing attitudes about teenage childbearing. Teen mothers have been found to have economic downward mobility (Hoffman, 2008; Lee, 2010), long term poor health (Patel & Sen, 2012; Taylor, 2009), and poor educational achievement (Basch, 2011). Additionally, the literature concludes that children born to teenage mothers are more likely to become teenage mothers themselves and experience economic difficulty (Francesconi, 2008; Haveman, Peterson, & Wolfe, 2008; Hoffman & Scher, 2008; Wildsmith, Manlove, Jekielek, Moore, & Mincieli, 2012), more likely to have poor health outcomes (Cornelius et al., 2009; Jutte et al., 2010; Wolfe & Rivers, 2008), less likely to have academic success (Cornelius et al., 2009; Jutte et al., 2010; Manlove, Terry-Human, Mincieli, & Moore, 2008), more likely to be incarcerated (Grogger, 2008; Scher & Hoffman, 2008), and more likely to be abused or neglected (Goerge, Harden, & Lee, 2008). The costs of these poor outcomes are borne by society and taxpayers (Hoffman & Maynard, 2008).

The literature appears quite damning on the surface. However, it doesn't tell the whole story. There is a small subset of research that challenges the validity of some of the risk claims, or that suggests alternative ways to address the "problem." Additionally, research into teenage childbearing has been plagued by design flaws from the beginning (Furstenberg, 2003), and recent studies often acknowledge their limitations and are cautious in their conclusions; the causal impact of young motherhood is acknowledged to be much less certain than it was once thought to be (Furstenberg, 2003; Hoffman, 1998).

Challenging the "Risks" of Teenage Childbearing

Much of the early research into the negative consequences of teenage childbearing suffered from design flaws, the most significant being lack of attention to

isolating variables in order to determine causality (Furstenberg, 2003). Therefore, much of the research that calls into question previously held understandings of the consequences of teenage childbearing for both mother and baby is focused on trying to isolate the variable of age from other social factors, factors which may predispose a young women to have a baby in her teens as well as expose her to many of the purported risks of teenage childbearing (e.g., poverty, low educational attainment, poor health). In other words, the main conceptual divide in teenage childbearing is the question of whether young women have babies in their teens because they are already affected by and at risk for social disadvantages, or if young mothers experience social disadvantages because they have babies in their teens.

The most thoroughly addressed risk of childbearing is that being a teen mother causes economic failure. A variety of study designs have shown that being raised in poverty is a more significant indicator of future economic status than age at childbearing; the poverty of many women subsequent to teenage parenting is a result of their previous "low economic trajectory" (Geronimus, 1993; Kearney & Levine, 2012b; Smith Battle, 2007). Recent studies that have identified some negative economic effect state that it is "modest" at best (Ashcraft, Fernández-Val, & Lang, 2013). According to longtime teenage childbearing researcher Frank Furstenberg, "waiting five years to have a child might have improved their life prospects a bit, but it hardly would have changed their chances of making a successful marriage or entering the middle class" (Furstenberg, 2003). Research has also challenged the causality of low educational achievement in teen mothers (Hoffman, 1998; Pillow, 2004), health risks to mothers and babies (Kramer & Lancaster, 2010; Luker, 1997), and the poor parenting skills of teen mothers (Breheny &

Stephens, 2007; Breheny, 2006; McDermott & Graham, 2005; Mollborn & Dennis, 2012; SmithBattle, 2000). Furthermore, the researchers have questioned the causality of the risks to the children of teenage mothers in the cycle of poverty and teen motherhood (Luker, 1997; Smith Battle & Leonard, 2006), low educational attainment (Breheny, 2006; Geronimus, Korenman, & Hillemeier, 1994; Levine, Emery, & Pollack, 2007; Luker, 1997; Mollborn & Dennis, 2012), increased criminal involvement (Furstenberg, 2003), poor health (Geronimus, 1997; Mollborn & Dennis, 2012), and abuse (Geronimus, 1997). Finally, the dependency of teenage mothers and the costs to society from teenage childbearing have been questioned (Geronimus, 1997; Mollborn & Dennis, 2012). However, even the articles that challenge risks and stereotypes of teenage childbearing, or critique current methods of preventing it, continue to treat teenage childbearing as a problem that should be solved. The degree of lifetime disadvantage that teenage childbearing confers on young women and their offspring, the causality of the risks of teenage childbearing, and the best way to prevent it, are all debated at least to some small degree. The inadvisability of teenage childbearing is not. According to the literature, whether it causes poverty or is a result of it, whether it leads to school dropout or is subsequent to it, and whether it is best prevented through contraception promotion or abstinence training, ending teenage childbearing is unequivocally necessary for the betterment of society.

Qualitative perspectives of teen mothers

While the negative nature of teenage childbearing is not generally challenged, even in qualitative research from the standpoint of teenage mothers, a number of studies have used qualitative methods to make visible the perspectives of teenage mothers in

order to create policies that better support their success. Camarena, Minor, Melmer, and Ferrie (1998) spoke with teenage mothers about their aspirations and dreams. They found that support for young mothers' aspirations is not necessarily found in the same social support systems that provides for their other needs. Additionally, mothers reported high levels of discouragement from the professionals in their lives. Brosh, Weigel, and Evans (2007) investigated teenage mothers' perceptions of supports for their educational goals, finding that teen mothers ranked immediate help with childcare rather than support for future plans as the most important to their education goals. Additionally, the mothers ranked help from government agencies as less important than informal support networks, possibly because this type of help is difficult to obtain [and possibly discouraging]. Clemmens (2002) asked teenage mothers about their experiences with post-partum depression. The young mothers in her study experienced feelings of being dramatically changed, and had difficulty dealing with the transition to motherhood. This difficulty was exacerbated by feeling torn between the expectations of adolescence and of motherhood, and also by feeling abandoned by peers and partners. Seamark and Lings (2004) interviewed young women to learn their experiences of motherhood. Overall, the young mothers in their study reported positive feelings about mothering even though they had experienced hardship and sacrifice. They were realistic about their expectations of motherhood, and wanted to give their children a mothering experience superior to their own. McDermott and Graham (2005) investigated the mothering of teenage women, finding that, "young mothers develop resilient mothering practices in response to their poor socio-economic circumstances and their positioning as outside the boundaries of acceptable motherhood" (p. 76). Finally, Kirkman, Harrison, Hillier, and Pyett (2001)

interviewed teenage mothers to learn about their perceptions of canonical narratives of teenage pregnancy versus their own autobiographical narratives. The authors concluded that, instead of accepting the interpretation of teenage motherhood represented by the canonical narrative, teen mothers are "emplotting" their lives to their own benefit (p. 291). Overall, qualitative studies have shown that teenage childbearing is far from unequivocally negative as experienced by teenage mothers; rather it brings with it hardship and sacrifice that is often considered worth it in the end.

Mothers' Narratives and Internet Communication

In her book, *Writing a Woman's Life*, Carolyn G. Heilbrun (1988) says, "Power is the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter." She goes on to describe the sharing of stories among women as essential to their ability to create new narratives, narratives of womanhood in which women matter. According to Heilbrun, it is not each other's lives that serve as models to live by, but the stories shared. She claims, "As long as women are isolated one from the other, not allowed to offer other women the most personal accounts of their lives, they will not be part of any narrative of their own" (pp. 18, 37, 46).

Expressing motherhood narratives through autobiography is a way to construct identity in the process of negotiating the motherhood discourse. Linda Coleman describes mothering autobiographies as a "common strategy for coming to a meaningful understanding of the self and for establishing the needed authority and strength to negotiate or even to subvert external or internalized norms that might silence the self" (Quoted in O'Reilly & Caporale-Bizzini, 2009, p. 19). In this way, women move from private, isolated worlds of mothering to "a political maternal praxis wherein the personal

give rise to a public critique and change on motherhood" (O'Reilly & Caporale-Bizzini, 2009). However, the processes of writing and publishing autobiographies are out of reach for many mothers, particularly the most marginalized.

The introduction of the Internet into daily life in part removes this barrier, creating a space for the unbridled sharing of stories from woman to woman, and the distribution of narratives and autobiographical accounts of mothering. Lisa Hammond (2010) describes the Mommyblog (a blog that focuses on a woman's daily experiences of mothering) as a venue for busting mothering stereotypes and creating more realistic mothering images [although the internet also provides unlimited space for the reproduction of the mothering discourse and its impossible standards (Friedman, 2010a)]. Blogs combine aspects of the personal journal with an incredibly public distribution, creating a unique form of communication. According to Hammond, "Weblogs allow for an immediate experience of community formation" (p. 83). This community formation can be particularly helpful to new moms who may feel especially isolated. McDaniel, Coyne, and Holmes (2012) investigate connections between new mothers' blogging and social networking in relation to depression, concluding that, "blogging may improve new mothers' well-being, as they feel more connected to the world outside their home through the Internet" (2012, p. 1509). While not always, or even usually, stated as such, these blogs are inherently political attempts to rewrite narratives of motherhood (p. 85). May Friedman (2010b) examines the future historical significance of mommyblogging, looking at questions of authenticity and access, concluding that mommyblogs provide a significantly more heterogeneous and variegated picture of mothering in the 21st century, but that these accounts are also mediated through social discourse and ideologies. In other

words, even though Internet blogs offer a new way to distribute women's stories of mothering and present new ways of mothering, these narratives still participate in the production of the mothering discourse.

A more recent entrant into this genre is the mommyvlog (a video segment about mothering experiences posted to the internet). I am unable to find any scholarship specific to mommyvlogging, but it seems reasonable to expect that mommyvlogging shares many characteristics with mommyblogging, particularly in the ability to make connections and create community, and in creating subversive mothering narratives. However, there are some distinct differences. Blogs emerged within the anonymity of the Internet and many mommyblogers continue to post anonymously (Hammond, 2010). Vlogging on the other hand, as a visual medium, provides a direct window into the world of the vlogger without the possibility of anonymity. This means that the vlog requires more blending between public and private than the blog. I suggest that as a generation coming of age in a highly digitized world where Internet access and online social networking is common, today's teenagers are more likely to be comfortable blending their private and public selves by participating in vlogging. This is supported by O'Sullivan (2012), who points out that teens frequently take online risks, such as sharing personal information, and that cyberspace interactions lower inhibitions; being alone in front of a screen (or a video camera) can create a feeling of intimacy that is out of step with the public medium of vlogging. Additionally, vlogging only requires a camera and Internet access. The vlogger need not be particularly skilled at writing, and the vlog may be filmed while the vlogger is doing other things (holding a child on her lap for instance). This makes vlogging particularly well suited to the task of creating community and

sharing alternative narratives about teenage childbearing. For example, a group of

teenage mothers have created a mommyvlog community on youtube.com called the

Young Moms YOUnite project, where they post frequent videos about their lives as

mothers, creating community and a network of support for each other. Arising

organically from the mommyvlogging of several teenage mothers, the project now has a

loose organization and multiple vloggers. Participants each post a video about their

experiences regarding a topic determined by the leaders of the group. Past topics have

included financial support/government assistance, relationships, and advice to non-

pregnant teens. This group also has an active facebook.com fan page with over 950 likes,

where vlogging and non-vlogging teen moms share information and support. These

mothers are using a combination of autobiography/narrative storytelling to create a

network in which they renegotiate their identities as "teen moms," a stigmatized,
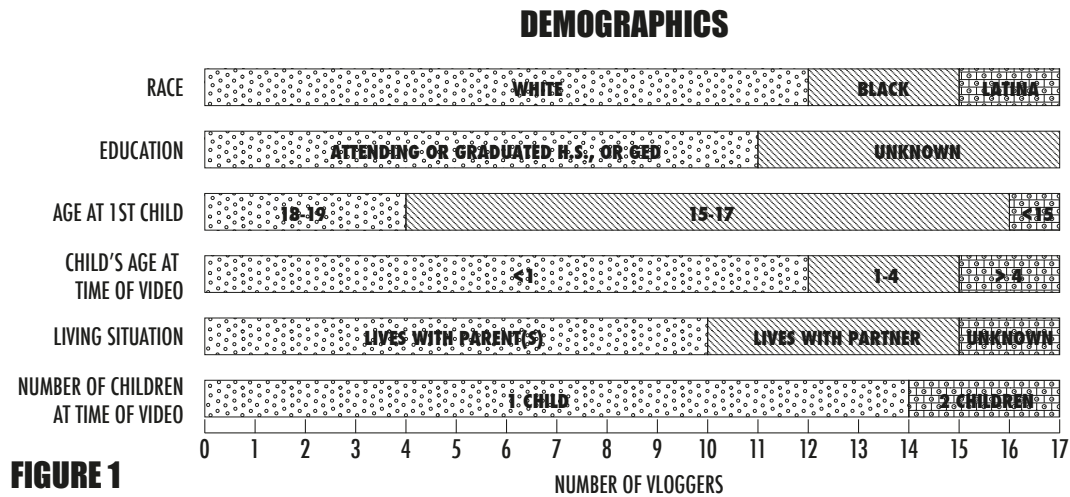
marginalized category of mothers

Methods

Seeking to understand how teenage mothers navigate their identities within the context of teenage childbearing, adolescence, and mothering, I conducted an exploratory rhetorical analysis of mommyvlog segments posted on youtube.com. After an extensive reading of the literature, I approached the vlogs with several guiding questions, but also with an open mind, looking for themes and connections not previously conceived. My initial questions brought a feminist lens to the subject by asking in what ways might the content address, reinforce, or challenge the following: patriarchy, gender norms, mothering norms, what it means to be a teenager, or stereotypes about teenage childbearing. Once major themes were identified among the videos, I focused my analysis on five themes as shown in table 1.

Sample selection

My sample consists of amateur videos uploaded and posted publicly on youtube.com. I performed a search on youtube.com for "being a teen mom" and selected a sample, from unique users, which fit the following selection criteria: (a) uploaded by users from the United States, (b) uploaded since Jan. 1, 2010, (c) the subject of the video self-identifies as a teen mom, (d) she speaks about her own experience and specifically addresses what it is like to be a teen mom, and (e) the video is under 14 minutes long. Using these criteria, every eligible video was selected until the search results lost relevance; this provided an initial sample of thirty videos. Upon closer inspection it was determined that some of these videos were from Canadian users who did not volunteer this information in their profiles. The criteria were also refined to limit the videos to 5-14

minutes long, and to only use videos from vloggers for whom their age at pregnancy, birth, and filming could be determined. This left a final sample of 17 videos.

Sample demographics were determined as follows (see figure 1). Twelve vloggers appeared to be Caucasian, and 5 vloggers appeared to be women of color. At the time the videos were filmed, eleven vloggers were still pursuing secondary education, had graduated high school, or earned their GED, and six had an unknown educational status. Fourteen of the vloggers had one child at the time of filming; three had two children. The average age of the sample at first birth was younger than the national statistics of 70% of teenage births to women aged 18-19. In this sample, four were aged from 18-19, twelve were from 15-17 years old, and one was under age 15. The sample was also heavily populated with new moms. For eleven of the vloggers, their first child was less than 1 year old, for three the child was 1-4 years, and for two their first child was over four years old. Ten of the vloggers appeared to live with a parent, five lived independent from their parents with a partner, and two had indeterminate living situations. Although the vlog segments are published media, and exempt from human subject review, I chose to use pseudonyms for the vloggers in my sample. Although the videos are now public, it is conceivable that the vloggers could choose to remove them from public view at some point in the future. In that eventuality, I feel a commitment to respecting their privacy.

DEMOGRAPHICS

RACE	WHITE · BLACK · LATINA	
EDUCATION	ATTENDING OR GRADUATED H.S., OR GED · UNKNOWN	
AGE AT 1ST CHILD	18-19 · 15-17 · <15	
CHILD'S AGE AT TIME OF VIDEO	<1 · 1-4 · >4	
LIVING SITUATION	LIVES WITH PARENT(S) · LIVES WITH PARTNER · UNKNOWN	
NUMBER OF CHILDREN AT TIME OF VIDEO	1 CHILD · 2 CHILDREN	

FIGURE 1

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

NUMBER OF VLOGGERS

Because these vlog posts consisted of unscripted "snapshots" of the vlogger's thoughts, funneled through the context of the vloggers' intended message (whether discouraging teen pregnancy or supporting teen mothers), the content should not be understood as a complete picture of the vlogger's opinions on teenage childbearing. Therefore, I have restricted my analysis to what was said in the video, not what was left out. In other words, just because a vlogger didn't say it in this video, doesn't mean she wouldn't say it if asked directly. However, the points that these vloggers make when they are free to say anything they choose are relevant and important.

Data Analysis

I watched each vlog segment multiple times taking notes and transcribing significant sections. I listened to, and answered questions about, the way the vloggers phrased and emphasized their message, as well as the language they chose (see Figure 2 for question matrix).

QUESTION MATRIX

Primary Question	Sub-Question
Who is the rhetorician?	
	What demographic information is publicly available in her videos or youtube profile?
	How does she establish credibility?
	What is her intention in speaking?
Who is the audience?	
	How does the intended audience shape the message?
What is the content of the video?	
	What is (are) the main message(s) of the video
	In what ways might the content address, reinforce, or challenge the discourse of teenage childbearing?"
	In what ways might the content address, reinforce, or challenge mothering norms?
	In what ways might the content address, reinforce, or challenge "adolescence?"
What is the form of the video?	
	What kind of style and tone are used?
	What figures of speech are used?
	Does the form complement the content?
	Does it hinder or help the author's intention?

FIGURE 2

Through this process I began to identify themes within the vlog segments. Once I completed the analysis of each video, I considered the group of analyses as a whole, looking for patterns and themes consistent among videos. Per my grounded theory approach, I then compared these themes to current theory and to the overall picture of teenage childbearing found in my literature review. Due to the constraints of this project, I did not pursue all themes identified, but focused on a grouping of five themes that have particular relevance to the vloggers' navigation of adolescence and motherhood discourses. The following table (see figure 3) shows how each theme and subtheme relates to the discourse that it primarily reinforces or challenges. It also provides an example of content from the vlog segments for each theme or subtheme. An additional

graph (see figure 4) shows how many vlog segments demonstrated each theme and subtheme.

THEMES: DESCRIPTION

Primary Discourse	Theme	Subtheme	Example
Adolescence	Teenage freedom vs. motherhood restriction		"We don't get to do the parties, and the going out, and the doing all the fun things we did when we were single kids"
		Teen childbearing as positive change	"But that also keeps me out of trouble. I got into a lot of trouble before I was pregnant and had him."
		Teen motherhood as pathway to adulthood	"I had to grow up; literally I had to grow up. And I had to stop acting like a kid"
Adolescence	Being a teen mom is hard		
		Mothering is hard at any age	"I don't care what age you are it's going to be just as difficult"
		Mothering is harder when you are a teen	"It's really hard raising two kids, when you are still a teenager"
Motherhood	A good mother is devoted to her child		
		I'm a good mother despite my age	"I love him, more than anything in the world, he is my world"
		The rewards of mothering make it all worth it	"It's hard most of the time, but the little things that they do, makes it so rewarding in the end"
Motherhood	Regret		"I don't regret anything, I don't regret having a baby"
Motherhood	Community Building		
		I'm here for you, will you be here for me?	"If you have a baby, I'm here for you … if you hurting, I'm going to hurt with you, because I'm hurting"

FIGURE 3

Limitations

This study is not generalizable to larger populations, nor is it representative of teenage mothers as a group. While it reveals interesting themes about the vloggers' experiences of teenage mothering, it is limited by the design of the study and the method of data collection. Particularly, not having contact with the video subjects themselves, and having little background information about them, limits the depth and significance of the findings. I had hoped to use an intersectional approach in my analysis, taking into account the role of race and class in the discourses of teenage mothering, adolescence, and motherhood as shown in my literature review. However, the lack of detailed

demographic information and inability to follow up with the vloggers in my sample limited my ability to draw any conclusions as to how race and class may have affected the vloggers' perceptions of teenage motherhood. Additionally, the sample is limited to teens that have access to the equipment needed to record and upload their videos to youtube.com. Considering that a large number of teen mothers come from low-income households, and the most disadvantaged teen mothers (i.e., those unsupported by family) may have the least access to Internet technologies, this study may primarily reflect the views of a privileged portion of teenage mothers. However, as an exploratory pilot study, on an as yet unstudied phenomenon (teen mommyvlogs), this project has the potential to provide direction for, and to inform, future studies.

THEMES: NUMBER OF VLOGGERS

FIGURE 4
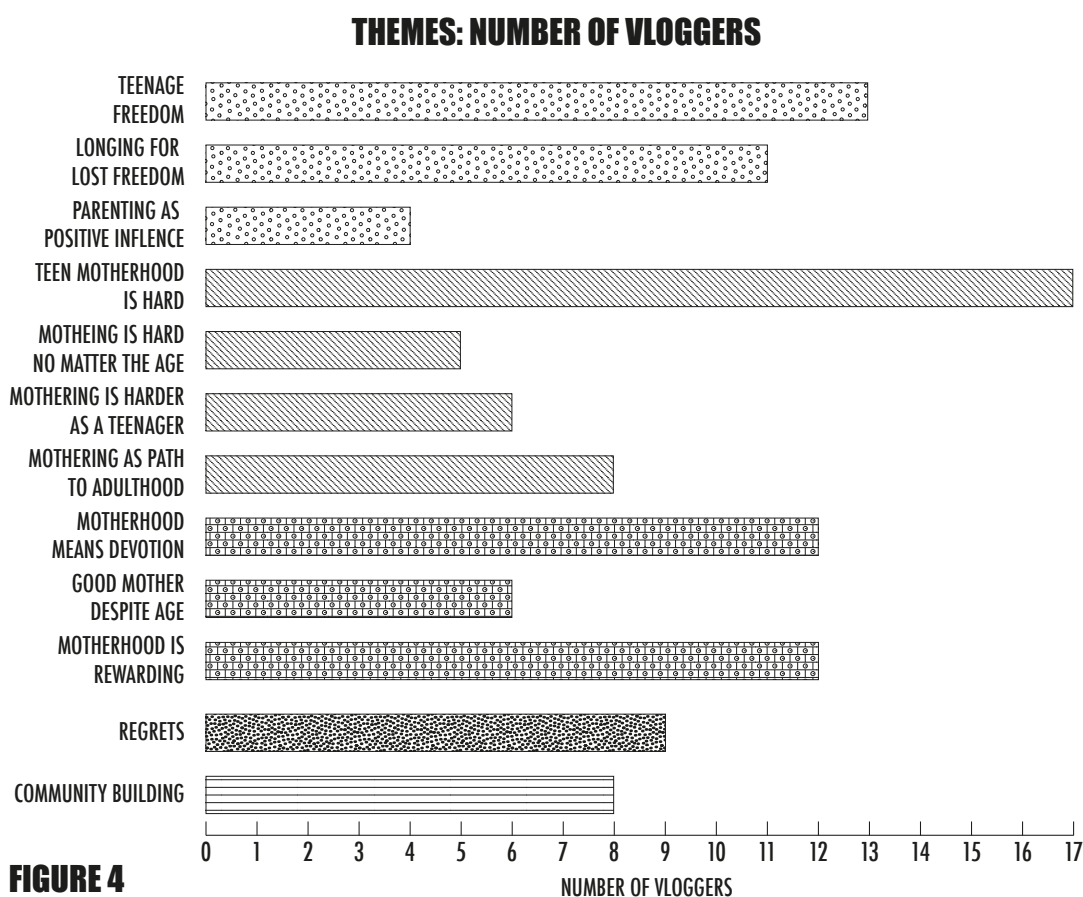
Findings

While describing their experiences of being teen moms, the vloggers fell into two main categories of purpose. Nine of the seventeen vloggers described the purpose of their video as an attempt to convince non-pregnant teenagers to wait to get pregnant. These videos were heavily focused on the difficulties of being a mom, and what they lost when they got pregnant (e.g., freedom, friends, and respect). All of these nine vloggers advised young women not to get pregnant, but only four advised abstaining from sex. The other eight vloggers focused their videos around a message of hope and encouragement for teens already pregnant or mothering. For the most part, these vloggers didn't advise teens either way regarding pregnancy and sex. However, out of the seventeen videos, three of the vloggers fell into both categories, focusing their videos on encouraging moms if they were already pregnant, but advising non-pregnant teens not to get pregnant. Although the vloggers who expressed the purpose of dissuading teens from becoming mothers were more likely to emphasize the hardships of teenage parenting, the five themes described in table 1 span the sample and do not neatly match up with any particular demographic or stated purpose. For instance, vloggers who vehemently argue against teen pregnancy also claim to love motherhood and do not regret their choices; vloggers who focus on encouraging young moms and claiming themselves as happy parents often speak of the difficulties of parenting and how their life might be had they not gotten pregnant. Vloggers in both categories express a desire for community with other online teenage mothers. At first the videos seem to be a mess of contradictory messages and confused thinking. However, these contradictions begin to make sense when viewed through the lens of discourse reproduction and renegotiation.

The overall impression of the vlog segments is that teenage mothering is hard but it can also be positive and rewarding, and that teenage mothers regret the loss of the life they could have lived and the freedom they might have enjoyed, but are devoted to their babies and derive satisfaction from mothering. These results agree with previous qualitative studies from the standpoint of teenage mothers (Clemmens, 2002; Kirkman et al., 2001; McDermott & Graham, 2005; Seamark & Lings, 2004). However, this study goes further, connecting these results to the discourses of adolescence and motherhood, and exploring how the simultaneous reproduction and renegotiation of these discourses can be used as a strategy for creating a positive social identity. Additionally, teenage mothers' use of Internet technology for community creation had not been previously analyzed.

Adolescence

Adolescence in the United States is considered a phase of unstable, irrational, rebellious behavior. Adolescents are expected to behave selfishly, expressing self-centeredness, with a focus on fearless enjoyment of life (Lesko, 2001). Although this phase is characterized as worrisome and frustrating to adults, it is also portrayed as a necessary phase in normal development; teenagers need to fully experience this "period of backwardness" in order to "emerge" as well-adjusted adults (Lesko, 2001, p. 3). Media and consumerism, which rely on these concepts to drive a bourgeoning teenage market, particularly reinforce this image of teenage life. According to Wearing, McDonald, and Wearing (2012), media and advertising create in adolescents a "desire for expressive individualism, norm violations, [and] rebelliousness," (p. 2). These desires are

reflected in the language used by the vloggers in my sample to describe "normal" teen life throughout the first theme in my analysis.

Theme one: Teen freedom vs. motherhood restriction. Thirteen vloggers describe "teen life" as involving partying, drinking, drugs, or staying out late. Each of these activities involves elements of consumerism, individualism, and rebelliousness as described above. Additionally, they all share as their base a feeling of freedom and autonomy from responsibility. These aspects are focused on by eleven vloggers who express grief over their loss of freedom, and a longing for the autonomy of their previous teenage lifestyle. For instance, Elizabeth, a White 18-year-old mother to an infant under three months, who lives with her boyfriend, says of the transition to motherhood, "I went from being by myself all the time, and going partying, and drinking, and smoking weed, and going to parties, to being home Friday nights, going to sleep at 9." Elizabeth uses the phrase "by myself all the time," not to indicate actually being alone, but to describe the individuality and freedom she felt before becoming a mother contrasted with the plurality and restriction she feels as a mother. Adrienne Rich describes this transition from singular woman to mother, "Nothing, to be sure, had prepared me for the intensity of relationship already existing between me and [my baby] … No one mentions the strangeness of attraction – which can be as single-minded and overwhelming as the early days of a love affair – to a being … who is, and yet is not, part of oneself" (p. 36). As a new mother, Elizabeth not only expresses the restriction of always being with her baby and her inability to attend parties, but the reality that she now has another human being (whom she loves) that is dependent in multiple ways on their relationship with her at all times. Regardless of how fulfilling this relationship may be, many mothers feel

overwhelmed by the never-ending connection with their child (Rich, 1976). For example,

Brittany, a White 17-year-old who lives with her parents and baby, also under 3 months,

talks about the change in her lifestyle since becoming a mother, "I do honestly miss being

able to pick up and run to parties with him [boyfriend], and then come home late at night,

and talk on the phone all night … But if you're not in this predicament, and you can wait,

and you can still go out and enjoy your teenage years and party and go out and be able to

be carefree." Brittany also describes her previous lifestyle in terms of the freedom and

autonomy she enjoyed before motherhood. She goes on to refer to teenage motherhood as

a predicament, which implies some feeling of being stuck in a difficult situation. Brittany

has accepted the way her life has changed, but she misses her previous freedom, and

encourages other teens to appreciate the freedom they have before they lose it. Her use of

the word carefree really gets to the heart of this theme: a perception that life before

pregnancy was unhampered by any restrictions and included endless possibilities for the

future. The predicament of mothering narrowed those possibilities, or the vloggers'

perceptions of those possibilities, considerably. This is the classic angst of the road not

taken, except that the discourses of teenage childbearing and adolescence make it very

clear which would have been the better road; they construct teenage motherhood in such

a way that regret is expected.

    Teen mothering as positive influence. It is unclear to what degree these

descriptions of previous freedom reflect the eleven vloggers' actual experience, or

whether they reflect the romanticizing of teenage freedom combined with the shock of

responsibility that comes from motherhood. However, four vloggers describe the loss of

their teenage lifestyle, not with longing, but as an improvement; they see mothering as a

positive influence. For these vloggers, their previous lifestyle seems to have been in line with the more negative aspects of teenage rebellion (getting into trouble, drinking, doing drugs), rather than a romanticized version. For instance, Amber, a White 17-year-old mother of a baby from 3-9 months, who lives with her parents explains, "Yeah, it's hard because I can't just go out with my friends and go party, or whatever, I have to have him my first priority. But that also keeps me out of trouble. I got into a lot of trouble before I was pregnant and had him." Amber uses language that emphasizes the freedom of the teenage lifestyle and the restrictions of motherhood. Prioritizing children above all else is rule number one in the motherhood discourse (Douglas & Michaels, 2004), and accounts for a substantial shift in perspective when young women become mothers. Suddenly, the discourse of adolescence, which has reinforced extreme self-centered, individualistic thinking, is in competition with, and in these cases subsumed by, the motherhood discourse, which requires an equally extreme sense of selflessness. As discussed above, some vloggers view this shift with regret; others, like Amber, view it as a positive outcome.

Teen mothering as pathway to adulthood. Whether they perceive becoming a mother with regret or gratitude, eight of the vloggers describe the loss of their teenage lifestyle in terms of a pathway to adulthood. The adolescence discourse is biologically-based in the teenage years, and adheres to a chronology that defines precocity, especially becoming a mother, as deviant (Lesko, 2001). The vloggers challenge this discourse by defining adulthood in terms of behavior and responsibility rather than chronological age; they feel that becoming a mother made them mature both in the way they see themselves and/or in how they are treated by others. Kayla, a White 19-year-old married mother of a

toddler from 2-4 years and a second child in infancy, talks about motherhood as an experience that made her grow up: "I didn't get to do anything a normal teenager does, I got pregnant, got married and had a baby, and I had to grow up, I had to take care of that baby." Kayla defines a "normal" teenager as immature and stupid, and as someone who has the freedom to hang out with friends. Growing up meant taking on the weight of responsibilities; it meant, "having" to take care of her baby. Jennifer, a Black 17-year-old who lives with her 3-9 month old baby and her parents, says, "You have to grow up quicker. I had to grow up; literally I had to grow up. And I had to stop acting like a kid." The language of growing up, of adult vs. youth, is another way of expressing the perceived freedom of adolescence compared to the restriction of motherhood. The vloggers describe adulthood in terms of spending money on needs rather than wants, and on prioritizing the needs of others (their babies) over themselves. Adulthood is viewed as the binary opposite of adolescence: restriction vs. freedom, responsible vs. rebellious, struggling vs. carefree. While the vloggers reinforce this binary, and the discourse of adolescence, with their descriptions of motherhood as a pathway to adulthood, they also challenge it by showing the performativity of these categories. In other words, becoming "adults" through their behavior shows the social construction of the adult/youth binary.

By defining the teen years as a magical time of freedom and fun, the vloggers reinforce adolescence as situated between child and adult, a time when enjoyment, rebellion and consumerism are what they "should" be engaging in. Simultaneously, they characterize motherhood, and adulthood, as a time of responsibility, selflessness, and struggle, something teenagers aren't "supposed" to experience. Sarah, a White 21-year-old mother of four and six-year-old children, acknowledges this when she talks of how

her life isn't how it should be, "I don't go out, I don't party, I don't do anything, I worry about PTA, and homework, and what I'm going to make for lunch … I'm 21, I'm not supposed to be doing this right now, I'm supposed to be in college, or doing something like that." Like the other vloggers, Sarah uses language that promotes youth as a time of freedom, and also reinforces the deviance of young motherhood. Additionally, by claiming to not "do anything," when in fact she is a busy mother, she brings in the larger issue of sexism, in which "women's work," particularly motherhood, is devalued.

Throughout this theme, each description of teenage lifestyle emphasizes individual autonomy, whereas descriptions of motherhood emphasize required tasks and lack of choice. This theme helps illustrate how the vloggers make sense of their transition to motherhood through the discourses of adolescence, motherhood, and the convergence of these discourses in teenage mothering. While it is doubtful these vloggers enjoyed unlimited freedom before becoming pregnant, they use this language to denote a time when they felt ultimately accountable only to themselves. Additionally, their main purpose, according to social discourse, was to have fun; their image of themselves matched societal expectations. As teenage mothers on the other hand, regardless of how they present themselves, they are deviating from societal expectation.

Theme two: Being a teen mom is hard. The most common theme across all videos is the description of being a teen mom as "hard," "difficult," or "not easy." Sixteen of the vloggers use these words explicitly to describe their lives, and the last includes this theme implicitly. Across the videos, these words are used 124 times, or an average of once per minute. It seems the vloggers use this language because there isn't language available to them that adequately describes their experience, and because it is

the most common theme in anti-teenage pregnancy propaganda. They use these terms to discuss a variety of situations, including emotional stress and feelings of being overwhelmed, physical exhaustion, economic difficulty, social isolation, and also the stigma attached to teenage parenting. Lauren, a married 22-year-old Latina mother of two, speaks to the difficulty of being a new mom: "After Jayden was born it was hard, I was the only person there, my mom helped me but my mom also worked a 9-5 job, I had never had a baby before, I had never felt so alone, it was such a lonely time in my life." Lauren uses the word "hard" to talk about the lack of emotional support and companionship she had available to her after her son was born. She felt overwhelmed to be caring for her son on her own. She also lacked hands-on help and felt the whole weight of responsibility on her shoulders. Ashley, a White 19-year-old living with her parents and her nearly 1-year-old baby explains that it is impossible to know how hard mothering is until one has experienced it: "I knew in my head it was going be hard, but I did *not* know how hard it was going to be, so my main purpose for the video is … to tell you guys how hard it is and encourage you guys to wait until after you have a college education, a stable job, a stable home, because it is so hard." Ashley goes on to describe the difficulties of teenage parenting in terms of the physical exhaustion of caring for an infant, the economic realities of paying for her baby's needs, and the breakdown of her long-term relationship during her pregnancy. These various difficulties of being a teenage mother are the primary reasons given by the vloggers who advise other teens to avoid pregnancy. The use of these terms mirror anti-teenage pregnancy media campaigns that focus on the unglamorous hard work of parenting, and the edict for adolescent fun-seeking, with messages like, "You're supposed to be changing the world, not changing

diapers," and "you think being in school sucks? You know what sucks more? A baby – almost every 2 hours for feeding time" ("The Candie's Foundation," n.d.). Implicit in the advice to avoid teenage pregnancy is the assumption that mothering is easier as an adult, that chronological age automatically confers ability and ease on adult mothers. The chronology of the adolescence and teenage childbearing discourse suggests that a "proper" adolescence will lead to "successful" adulthood. For instance, a recent anti-teenage pregnancy advertisement from the New York City Department of Social Services states, "If you finish high school, get a job, and get married before having children, you have a 98% chance of not being in poverty" ("HRA - Teen Pregnancy Prevention," n.d.). Ashley picks up on this when she reproduces this idea, saying that teens should wait until they have a "college education, a stable job, [and] a stable home" before becoming pregnant. Ashley implies that adulthood guarantees a stable life for parenting, which is a standard tied into the White, middle-class mythical norm. This is an instance where the discourse of teenage childbearing serves to elide structural inequalities. If the difficulties of teenage parenting come from age alone, then adult parenting should not only be easy, but economically privileged. In reality, many parents do not have a college education, or a stable job and home, no matter their age.

Mothering is hard at any age. Not all vloggers believed that parenting was hard solely because of their age. Five vloggers use their discussion of difficulty to subvert the discourse of adolescence by breaching the wall between adult and adolescent. These moms point out that parenting would be hard no matter their age. Amber claims, "I don't care what age you are it's going to be just as difficult. Because I don't think people realize a lot of 25-year-old, 30-year-olds having babies - they don't have any help. … A

25-year-old first time mom is going to know just as little as a first time 16-year-old mom knows. … So being a teen mom is hard, but being a mom is hard, it's not the being a teenager part." Amber agrees that being a teenage mother is very hard, but frames the difficulties of mothering in terms of the help and support one has. She feels grateful for the help she receives, and feels lucky to be well supported by her family. It is unclear whether Amber is referring to emotional support, or actual physical help. Either way, she sees through the age-based wall between mothers, identifying one of the myths of the motherhood discourse – that proper mothers don't need help. Amber recognizes the struggle of mothers of any age to make the transition to motherhood with their first child. Emily agrees that mothering is hard regardless of age. She says, "I'm not saying to anybody go out and have a baby at 14, I'm just saying that no matter what age you are, … being a parent is difficult, I mean life is hard, let's just face facts, if it was easy, then everybody would just be chillaxin all the time." Emily recognizes the falsity of the promises of the teenage childbearing discourse, which say waiting will make life better. She didn't plan to become pregnant, but doesn't think that starting her family as a teenager made a large impact on her life trajectory or the difficulties of mothering. This is most likely true if Emily is working class or from a low-socioeconomic background (Kearney & Levine, 2012b).

Mothering is harder when you are a teen. Six vloggers describe the opposite experience; they believe mothering is more difficult at a young age. Lauren says, "Having a baby is difficult, it's draining, especially at such a young age when you should be focusing on other things." Here Lauren again reinforces the discourse of adolescence. This relates back to Stanley Hall's description of adolescence as a period of development

in which teenagers must engage in behavior that will bring them from the uncivilized youth to the civilized adult (modeled on White, middle-class accomplishments). She also reiterates the implication that adult women do not experience motherhood as difficult or draining, that they have their lives together and are "ready" to be parents. Sarah also describes teenage motherhood as particularly difficult. She claims, "When you're a teen mom, it's so hard because you're still learning to not be selfish as it is." Sarah is reproducing the assumption that teenagers are self-centered, which is ubiquitous in anti-teenage pregnancy propaganda. For instance, an advertisement from the Candies Foundation features a picture of a baby stroller with the caption, "Not what you had in mind for your first set of wheels, huh? You were probably picturing a hot ride that could take you and your friends anywhere; but you got pregnant and you're stuck pushing a stroller around while your friends are kickin it without you" ("The Candie's Foundation," n.d.). She is also touching on the difficult transition to motherhood discussed in the previous section. It is certainly difficult for a woman to transition from being responsible only for herself to having a baby to care for 24/7. However, it is the teenage childbearing and adolescence discourses that frame this transition as particularly difficult for teenagers – because adolescents are expected to be selfish – as compared to adults.

Throughout this theme, motherhood is described as difficult for a number of reasons: lack of support, economic difficulty, emotional stress, and feeling overwhelmed. Each of these issues could apply equally well to mothers of any age, which some of the vloggers note; however, they are framed as particularly difficult for teenagers due to their age and therefore their lack of "readiness" to parent. The vloggers are split between asserting that motherhood is hard for everyone regardless of age (a position that

challenges both discourses of adolescence and motherhood) and claiming that motherhood is particularly difficult for teenagers (a position that reproduces both discourses).

Motherhood

Teenage childbearing is a quintessential act of deviance that indelibly marks young women. Subject to multiple double binds, there is no place for pregnancy and mothering for teenage women. Once young women become pregnant, adolescence is no longer a welcoming identity; teenage mothers occupy a liminal space, not fully accepted as adult but no longer fitting comfortably into youth. Engaging the discourse of good motherhood to stabilize their social identities is a logical strategy; it allows them to regain a sense of self-worth in their lives and place themselves into an acceptable social category. Although not fully adults, young mothers have the benefit of being able to claim motherhood in its naturalized form; they have given birth, an indisputable claim to the identity "mother." According to the discourse of motherhood, a hallmark of the "good" mother is her love for her children. This love is characterized as natural (automatically acquired from giving birth), all consuming, and never wavering. Douglas and Michaels (2004) call this "intensive mothering," part of the "new momism" in which, "for the best mothers, their kids are the center of the universe. … Their love for their children is boundless, unflagging, flawless, total" (p. 6). The vloggers in my sample generally use two standards to assess motherhood, both of which invoke the intensive mothering of the new momism. First, and most prevalent, they count themselves as good mothers because of their feeling of love for their babies and the devotion that stems from

it. Second, they claim good motherhood based on the physical care they provide for their children. The first standard is the third major theme to emerge from the vlog segments.

Theme three: A good mother is devoted to her child. Claiming to be "good" mothers based on this naturalized love emphasizes essentialized forms of motherhood. This emphasis makes sense because, as teenagers, they are less likely to be able to claim other standards such as providing a middle-class lifestyle. As such, the vloggers in my sample generally reinforce traditional representations of motherhood, forms that have acted to constrain and marginalize women. Twelve vloggers describe their children as their reason for living or as the most important thing in their life (keep in mind that these statements are often prefaced with an assurance that they don't condone teenage childbearing). Sarah says, "You're not living for you anymore; you have another life to take care of when you're a parent," and Jennifer says, "I love my son. He's the reason I get up every morning." Taking care of a child doesn't actually preclude a mother caring for herself. However, Sarah and Jennifer reproduce the motherhood ideal that mothers be "more doting and self-sacrificing than Bambi's mother" (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 11). According to this ideal, once a child is born, its mother can no longer pursue her own hopes and dreams but must subsume herself to the needs, hopes, and dreams of her child (and she should feel fulfilled in doing so). This requirement is reinforced by all media, but especially by anti-teen pregnancy campaigns that attempt to scare young women with the specter of the "end" of their ability to live their lives for themselves. For instance, an anti-teenage pregnancy PSA (promoted in Milwaukee for months as a horror movie trailer, and later revealed as a PSA) asks the question, "What do you do when one life is about to end, and another to begin?" The PSA ends with the statement, "get pregnant as a

teen and the next 18 years may be the hardest of your life" ("2028 movie is actually teen-pregnancy PSA," n.d.). Emily, a White 17-year-old mother of a baby 3-9 months old, who lives with her husband, describes her re-ordering of priorities after the birth of her daughter, "I did not necessarily want to be pregnant, I did not want to have kids for a very long time, but I got pregnant and we handle it, so now I am totally head over heals in love with this little baby right here, she is my world." There's nothing wrong with a mother, regardless of her age, being loving and devoted to her baby, or even being completely focused on that baby when it needs her most. However, when this quality is used to measure the worth of a woman, and anything less is considered monstrous, motherhood becomes oppressive. In attempting to prove themselves "good" mothers, the vloggers in my sample reify these demands, reproducing the motherhood discourse.

I'm a good mother despite my age. As stated above, the motherhood discourse demands from mothers unflagging (never ambivalent) love for their children, self-sacrifice, feeling fulfilled by motherhood, and obedience to mothering "experts." The vloggers are generally obedient to this dictate. As illegitimate, marginalized mothers, teenage mothers can see claiming "good motherhood" for themselves as an act of resistance. The discourse of teenage childbearing provides an unceasing condemnation of teen moms; claiming to be "good" mothers stands in direct opposition to this, even if it calls on a discourse that constrains them in new ways. Six vloggers use their adherence to the definitions of motherhood described above to directly challenge the teenage childbearing discourse. Samantha encourages other young mothers, "I want people to know that it's not bad, … I love my son dearly, and there is nothing wrong with being a teen mom." For Samantha, loving her son makes her teenage status less significant; she

can be a good mother despite her age. Likewise, Amber declares, "I love him, more than anything in the world, he is my world. And I don't think that if I was 25, anything that I've done now with him or for him would change. So I just wanted to point that out that, that whether I am 16 or 25, my ability, my capability to be a good mom is the same." For Amber as well, her love and devotion to her baby makes her a good mother. Furthermore, she believes this love would be the same no matter her age. Reproducing the ideals of motherhood in this way counteracts the stereotypes of teen mothers as neglectful, abusive, or downright murderous, demonstrating that teen mothers can be "good."

The rewards of mothering make it all worth it. As mentioned in the introduction to this section, in addition to all-consuming love, mothers must feel rewarded by the work of motherhood. Part of mothers' proper devotion is finding personal satisfaction in the accomplishments of their children and in the love they share with their child. Twelve of the vloggers claim the love and reward they feel from mothering outweighs the difficulties of teenage parenthood. Amanda, a White 14 year old mother of a baby 3-9 months old, says, "It's like some of the hardest times of your life, it really is, and you have to miss out on a whole bunch, but, I do not regret being a teen mother, and my daughter is my everything." Although Amanda draws on the same statements of devotion as the other vloggers, her declaration does not convince me. While I don't doubt her love for her baby, she says this is a detached, rote manner, as if it is a statement she clings to in an effort to convince herself. Amanda is the youngest mother in my sample, and the only one who gave birth under the age of 15. She has had a difficult life, and it seems likely, based on her story, that her pregnancy was not the result of fully consensual sex. The fact that she is repeating this message of fulfillment makes clear the pressure young

mothers feel to conform to the ideals of the motherhood discourse. It also suggests that

there is pressure for teenage mothers to claim fulfillment, perhaps as a method of

justifying their actions and saving their pride. Megan, a White, 19-year-old mother of a 2-

year-old and an infant, who lives her husband, does convince me. She says, "It's hard

most of the time, but the little things that they do makes it so rewarding in the end. Like

Addison learning to start walking, Jaden learning how to use the potty, him saying

mommy, is the best thing, that can definitely help me, anybody really, just get through all

the hard times." Megan not only reproduces this aspect of mothering, but she shows how

it can help mothers of all ages to handle the difficulties they encounter. Feeling proud of

her child is accompanied by a feeling of pride in her ability to mother that child.

In this theme, the vloggers reinforce the potentially oppressive ideals of the

motherhood discourse: all consuming love and devotion, and the feeling of fulfillment

through that devotion. However, they simultaneously renegotiate the discourse of teenage

childbearing by claiming "good" motherhood as teens and by asserting positive parenting

and satisfaction in the face of stigma, stereotypes, and negativity about teenage mothers.

Theme four: Regret. The teenage motherhood discourse allows for some display

of regret, not that the child exists, but that a mistake (i.e., getting pregnant and losing

adolescent freedom) was made. After all, according to teenage childbearing discourse,

and to a lesser extent motherhood discourse, teenage pregnancy is nothing but regrettable.

However, teenage mothers must not stray too far from the ideals of good motherhood,

lest they fall into that monstrous category of teen mom who doesn't love her baby - the

one that invokes images of newborns left in dumpsters. Although careful to balance their

comments with positivity, nine vloggers express regret over becoming mothers in their

teens. Being careful to frame her regret within her love for her children, Kyla states, "again, don't get me wrong, I love my kids but if I could have waited longer I would have," and Ashley says, "I don't regret anything, I don't regret having a baby, but if I could choose to have the same baby and the same everything, I seriously would have waited until I was at least 21 and had an education and a stable home, and I was married." Kyla and Ashley are attempting to navigate expressing their regret over how their lives have changed and the difficulties the have encountered without tarnishing the messages of undying love and devotion for their children that they have been proclaiming. It is difficult to reconcile feelings of regret with the very real love and joy they find in their babies. Imagining having the same baby at a time when they feel more prepared for motherhood solves this problem, even if it is an impossible solution. Hannah, a White 17-year-old mother to a toddler, has accepted her situation. While she also feels regret, she takes pride in the way she has dealt with her disappointment: "I am not proud to be a teen mom, but I'm proud to be a mother. I love my daughter and I wouldn't trade her for the world. I would have done things differently if I could, but this is the way things are, and this the way my life is. This is *my life* and I'm making the best of it." Hannah also challenges others who judge her for her choices; she is living "her life," and no one else can walk in her shoes. She also implies that mothering is her *whole life*, and thus, regretting it would be pointless. Brittany also points out the uselessness of regret, while making an insightful connection between regret and the motherhood discourse: "I do not regret Karlee at all, you can't regret something that you love more than anything in the world, and she's my everything. But once you have a child I think that's what they become, they're your everything, and they're already there, there's no changing that, so

there's no need to look back and say 'if only' or 'I wish' or 'I regret' cause, I mean then you'd feel like a horrible person, and you'd *look* like a horrible mother" (Emphasis in video). Brittany also claims to be wholly devoted to her daughter who is "her whole world." She explains how a baby is the focus of a mother's love, but also that the baby takes over the mother's life, becomes "her everything." This happens as a result of the daily care required by infants, but also from the pressure of the motherhood discourse that frames a mother as secondary to her child's needs. By saying, "you'd feel like a horrible person, and you'd *look* like a horrible mother," Brittany correctly identifies the source of this pressure as the gaze of others who are ready to judge a mother for her failure to live up to the ideals of motherhood, and also the inner critic who is ready to pounce on even the invisible failures of motherhood (such as not always loving your baby, or occasionally wishing she didn't exist).

As teenagers, the vloggers are already operating on a deficit of credibility as mothers. It then becomes even more important for them to claim love and devotion to their children and hide any regret. This overstatement of their feelings (i.e., my baby is my everything, my whole world) counteracts the teenage childbearing discourse. It also exaggerates and makes visible the demands placed on all mothers. I do not intend to imply that the vloggers' love or devotion to their children is not genuine, nor that they should not feel good about themselves because they give their babies love and good care. However, when constant devotion becomes the definition by which mothers are judged, there is no room for ambivalence and very little room for mothers themselves. Adrienne Rich captures the potent mixture of tenderness and despair mothering can evoke in women: "My children cause me the most exquisite suffering of which I have any

experience. It is the suffering of ambivalence: the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves, and blissful gratification and tenderness. … *I love them*. But it's in the enormity and inevitability of this love that the sufferings lie" (emphasis in original, 1976, pp. 21–22).

Emphasizing the motherhood discourse to renegotiate adolescence could be like jumping from the proverbial pot into the frying pan. Motherhood, with its impossible standards and middle-class values, is a perilous landscape for teenage women. Not only are motherhood's unattainable standards farther from reach for most teenagers' situations, they also limit teenage mothers' ability to openly express unhappiness because being a "good" mother demands constant devotion and no regrets. The demands of mother-love make it difficult to adequately express the feelings of frustration and grief that come with being a new mother, of realizing the level of work and care – both physical and emotional – involved, and of experiencing lost freedom and independence. This is another double bind for teenage mothers: if they fully express regret or grief over their parental status, they risk being seen as selfish and immature, as "bad mothers" according to the motherhood discourse. If they fully express the joy they feel in their children, they risk being viewed as promoting deviant behavior according to the adolescence discourse. Either way they risk creating a partial account that doesn't recognize the depth and nuance of their experience as mothers. This bind applies to mothers of all ages who struggle with the transition to motherhood (especially if the conception was unintended), however, due to the negativity of the teenage childbearing discourse, I suspect this bind is exaggerated for teenage mothers.

Theme five: Community Building. Not all of the vloggers in my sample are members of the Young Moms YOUnite Project; however, it is likely that the presence of the project videos, as well as the vlogs of other teen moms, encouraged the posting of these videos. Additionally, several vloggers mention the MTV shows "16 and Pregnant" and "Teen Moms" in their segments, expressing that the shows don't tell the whole story and that real life is not like what is shown on TV. The vlog segments are framed as a way to set the record straight and provide accurate information for other teenagers and young moms. Both of these factors contribute to the general theme throughout the vlog segments of creating community.

I'm here for you; will you be here for me? Eight vloggers express a desire to share with other teenage mothers emotional support and advice. Taylor, a White mother of a toddler says, "I think it would be awesome to have conversations with you guys, see how each of you raise your children, or if any of you are pregnant as a teenager and wants to come to me for advice or something." Taylor expresses a common theme in the vlogs I analyzed – the open-mindedness and acceptance of other young mothers' parenting practices, and willingness to share their own experiences. For the most part, the vloggers in my sample are careful not to judge other young women's choices (e.g., abortion vs. birth, feeding decisions, working etc.). Their goal is to offer the support they wish they would have received to other young mothers. Emily, a White mother of a baby 3-9 months old, living with her husband, is also looking to share support with other teen mothers: "I would love it if you guys could put a video response down below, other young moms, let's talk, let's talk about being young parents. Because there's a lot of us out there… and it makes it hard to go through the daily life when you're constantly being

told that you can't do it." Emily wants to not only support one another, but also work together to challenge the stereotypes that say teenagers can't be good mothers. Finally, Rachel, a Black mother of a baby 3-9 months old, expresses the power of online networking to create community and provide support: "If you have a baby, I'm here. I'm here for you, you can always write me, message me, follow me on twitter you know, M me on facebook, instagram, I'm here. If you hurting, I'm going to hurt with you because I'm hurting." Rachel is willing to be vulnerable in order to give support to others. While Rachel has previously described mothering with joy, and claims that motherhood doesn't change her dreams or slow her down, at the end of her video she reveals the pain she has felt as a teenage mother. This pain is not surprising considering the negativity and disappointment teenage mothers encounter at all levels of society. However, as these vloggers and the teenage mothers in the Young Moms YOUnite project have discovered, online communities of vloggers and social media can provide a space for coming together to challenge and resist the hurtful stereotypes. In this space, teenage mothers fight back to "write" their own stories; they claim the authority and strength to define themselves, reproducing and renegotiating the discourses of teenage childbearing, adolescence, and motherhood to create a new discourse of teenage mothers.

Conclusion

The discourses of teenage childbearing, adolescence, and motherhood construct teenage motherhood as deviant from the start (Phoenix, 1991). Teenage mothers have violated the proper chronology of adolescence (i.e., grow up, get married, then have children), and of motherhood (i.e., be "ready" to provide all of the trappings of "good" motherhood, including a middle-class lifestyle), and according to the discourse of teenage childbearing they are inattentive, irresponsible, unskilled, unreliable, and unable to provide. This is a heavy burden to labor under when attempting to construct a social identity and self-image as a mother. The vloggers in my sample navigate these burdens by reproducing parts of each discourse while renegotiating others. For the most part, they reproduce both adolescence and motherhood by defining adolescence as a time of freedom and self-centered fun seeking, and defining "good" motherhood in terms of devotion and sacrifice. However, they resist these discourses in key ways, particularly by claiming to be good mothers themselves despite their age, pointing out the difficulties of motherhood regardless of age, and describing motherhood as a path to adulthood. Additionally, they challenge the teenage childbearing discourse by coming together to create a transformative discursive space. In this process they also reach out to other teenage mothers online to form supportive communities that help establish their authority and give them "the strength to negotiate or even to subvert external or internalized norms" that attempt to silence them (Quoted in O'Reilly & Caporale-Bizzini, 2009, p. 19). In other words, the teenage mothers in my sample reject the stereotypes visited on them by the teenage childbearing discourse and use Internet media to reach out to others who feel the same way.

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