ResearchOnline@JCU

JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY
AUSTRALIA

This file is part of the following work:

Hamley, Jemma (2022) ***Beyond teenage motherhood: navigating life stages and issues of identity into adulthood.*** **PhD Thesis, James Cook University.**

Access to this file is available from:

https://doi.org/10.25903/pt5e%2D7t21

Copyright © 2022 Jemma Hamley.

The author has certified to JCU that they have made a reasonable effort to gain permission and acknowledge the owners of any third party copyright material included in this document. If you believe that this is not the case, please email researchonline@jcu.edu.au

Beyond Teenage Motherhood: Navigating Life Stages and Issues of Identity into Adulthood

Jemma Hamley

BSW, James Cook University

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

College of Arts, Society and Education

James Cook University

November, 2022

Abstract

Teenage motherhood is a widely studied topic. Life beyond adolescence and into former teenage mothers' lifespan has received far less academic attention. In this study, guided by feminist standpoint theory and constructivist grounded theory, the lived experiences of 22 former teenage mothers and their mothering journeys beyond adolescent motherhood were explored. Results of this study indicate that understanding former teenage mothers' lived experiences across their lifespan entails an appreciation of the disadvantage, stigma, and oppression that many participants needed to navigate. Key emergent themes related to contrasts between dominant social constructs of deficit teenage mothering, and participants' subjective identities of predominately positive mothering identities and outcomes. Patterns of adversity including a prevalence of gender-based violence, and ongoing scrutiny including a pervasive social stigma, could follow participants across their lives. While social stigma could be experienced as an ongoing and multigenerational source of tension, even up to the point of midlife, impacts of stigma were felt heavily in participants' adolescent and emerging adult years. Many participants had felt the need to conform to dominant social values to offset judgment or gain social approval in ways that subsequently constrained former teenage mothers' lives and opportunities. Unique areas of life-stage phenomena identified in this study included ways in which a sense of autonomy within early adulthood could be contingent upon a range of factors. These factors included conforming to or resisting dominant values and negative social stigma related to teenage motherhood, and whether, as teenage mothers, they were able to participate in age-related activities and educational or career opportunities if they sought to do so. Other key findings included lengthier periods of time that children were within the family home due to extended childbearing years, and a sense of social surprise linked to a young grandmothering identity. Participants' perspectives and recommendations about ways to promote better long-term

outcomes for former teenage mothers were explored. Implications for social policy, social work practice and future research are identified.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to the women who participated in this study. I feel so honoured that you entrusted me with your stories.

To my supervisors, Dr Susan Gair, and Dr Debra Miles, thank you both for taking the time out of your busy schedules to supervise me. I have learned so much from you and will forever appreciate your guidance.

To my husband, Mark, thank you for hanging in there with me throughout this journey. You are my rock.

To my daughter, Ruby, and my granddaughters Alice and Isabella you are my inspiration.

Finally, to my nana, Beryl Jean Hamley, as I wrote this thesis, I felt your presence beside me. Thank you for helping the stars to align. I know that you would be proud.

Statement of Access

I, the undersigned author of this work, understand that James Cook University will make this thesis available for use within the university library and, via the Australian Digital Theses network, for use elsewhere.

I understand that, as an unpublished work, a thesis has significant protection under the Copyright Act, and I do not wish to place any further restriction on access to this work.

Signature

Jemma Hamley Date 20 November 2022

Statement of Sources

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given. Every reasonable effort has been made to gain permission from and to acknowledge the owners of copyright material. I would be pleased to hear from any copyright owner who has been omitted or incorrectly acknowledged.

Signature

Jemma Hamley Date 20 November 2022

Statement of the Contribution of Others

Supervisor team: Dr Susan Gair and Dr Debra Miles.

Financial support: This research was supported by a Post Graduate Research Stipend Scholarship and JCU Minimum Resources Funding.

Graphic design assistance and proofreading: Dr Eileen Siddins.

The research was conducted in compliance with the National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines and procedures outlined in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). Ethics clearance for this research was received from the Human Research Ethics Committee at James Cook University (approval number H7874).

Table of Contents

Abstract 2

Acknowledgements 4

Statement of Access 5

Statement of Sources 6

Statement of the Contribution of Others 7

Table of Contents 8

List of Figures 19

Chapter 1. Introduction 1

1.1 Chapter Overview 1

1.2 Background 1

1.3 Significance of This Study 7

1.4 Research Design and Analysis 8

1.5 Origins of This Study 10

1.6 Definition of Key Terms 12

1.6.1 Social Adjustment 12

1.6.2 Resilience 12

1.7 Thesis Outline 13

1.8 Chapter Summary 16

Chapter 2. Literature Review 17

2.1 Chapter Overview 17

2.2 The Sociopolitical Climate Surrounding Teenage Motherhood 17

2.2.1 The Problematisation of Teenage Motherhood 17

2.2.2 Teenage Motherhood as a Tarnished Social Identity 20

2.3 Adversity Within Childhood and Adolescence 21

2.3.1 Childhood Abuse and Neglect Associated With Adolescent Pregnancy 21

2.3.2 Economic and Social Exclusion.. 22

2.3.3 Increased Risks of Domestic Violence.. 24

2.3.4 Mental Health and Teenage Mothers 25

2.4 Advancing Beyond Adolescence to Later Life Stages 25

2.4.1 Existing Research Into Experiences Beyond Adolescent Motherhood 25

2.4.2 Conceptualising Ripple Effects of Adversity 32

2.4.3 Conceptualising Challenges in the Maternal Journey: Mothers and Their Children 33

2.4.4 Intergenerational Links of Child Protection Involvement........................ 34

2.5 Theoretical Perspectives on Human Development... 35

2.5.1 Erikson's Life-Stage Theory of Psychosocial Development.................... 35

2.5.2 Conceptualising Life Stages from Infancy to Later Life.......................... 37

2.5.3 Life-Stage Understandings Related to Childhood 38

2.5.4 Life-Stage Understandings Relating to Adolescence............................... 39

2.5.5 Life-Stage Understandings Relating to Early Adulthood......................... 41

2.5.6 Life-Stage Understandings Relating to Middle Age................................ 42

2.5.7 Life-Stage Understandings Relating to Later Life 45

2.5.8 Life-Stage Model Critiques 45

2.6 Chapter Summary 48

Chapter 3. Methodology.. 50

3.1 Chapter Overview 50

3.2 Theoretical Framework 50

3.2.1 Feminist Standpoint Theory 50

3.2.2 Epistemological Considerations Inherent in a Feminist Standpoint Theory Approach 52

3.2.3 Constructivist Grounded Theory... 54

3.2.4 Integration of Constructivist Grounded Theory With a Feminist Approach 56

3.3 A Qualitative Research Methodology 57

3.3.1 Orienting This Study Within a Qualitative Framework 57

3.4 Researcher Biography 60

3.5 Aims of the Research 60

3.6 Ethical Issues and Participant Welfare.. 61

3.6.1 Issues of Autonomy and Access to Counselling and Support Services 61

3.6.2 Public Health Considerations in the Undertaking of the Data Collection in 2020.. 62

3.6.3 Participant Anonymity 62

3.6.4 Feminist Ethics... 63

3.6.5 Australian Association of Social Workers Ethical Conduct in Research 63
3.7 The Sample 63
3.7.1 Sampling Method 63
3.7.2 Participant Details 64
3.7.3 Recruitment Methods 66
3.7.4 The Use of Facebook for Data Collection 67
3.8 Method of Data Collection 67
3.8.1 Semi-Structured Interviews 67
3.8.2 Development of a Semi-Structured Interview Schedule 68
3.8.3 Interview Locations 69
3.8.4 Data Transcription 69
3.9 Operationalising a Feminist Approach 70
3.9.1 Critical Self-Reflection 70
3.9.2 Navigating an Insider Positioning 71
3.9.3 A Reduction of Hierarchy in Interview Processes 73
3.9.4 Research as an Empowering Process 73
3.10 Data Analysis 75
3.10.1 A Grounded Theory Approach 75
3.11 Coding the Data 76
3.11.1 Sorting and Categorising the Data 76
3.11.2 Coding the Data 76

3.11.3 Initial Coding 77

3.11.4 Focused Coding 77

3.11.5 Theoretical Coding 78

3.11.6 Coding Modalities 79

3.12 Towards the Generation of Theory 80

3.12.1 Constant Comparative Methods 80

3.12.2 Theoretical Sensitivity 80

3.12.3 Memoing 81

3.12.4 Considerations of Emergent Theory in Qualitative Data Theory Building 82

3.12.5 Treatment of the Literature 83

3.12.6 Conceptualisation of Knowledge as a Co-Construction 84

3.12.7 Considerations of Data Saturation 85

3.13 Quality and Rigour 85

3.13.1 Quality Criteria Within Constructivist Grounded Theory 85

3.13.2 Credibility 86

3.13.3 Originality 89

3.13.4 Resonance 89

3.13.5 Usefulness 89

3.14 Limitations of This Study 90

3.14.1 Retrospective Research Approach 90

3.14.2 Limitations Related to the Research Sample 90

3.15 Chapter Summary 91

Chapter 4. Introducing the Participants 93

4.1 Chapter Overview 93

4.1.1 Participant 1: Tinsley 94

4.1.2 Participant 2: Bethenny 95

4.1.3 Participant 3: Dorinda 96

4.1.4 Participant 4: Erika 98

4.1.5 Participant 5: Kyle 99

4.1.6 Participant 6: Gretchen 100

4.1.7 Participant 7: Sonja 102

4.1.8 Participant 8: Leah 103

4.1.9 Participant 9: Luanne 105

4.1.10 Participant 10: Bronwyn 106

4.1.11 Participant 11: Theresa 107

4.1.12 Participant 12: Melissa 109

4.1.13 Participant 13: Carrol 110

4.1.14 Participant 14: Camille 111

4.1.15 Participant 15: Brandi 113

4.1.16 Participant 16: Adrienne 114

4.1.17 Participant 17: Yolanda 115

4.1.18 Participant 18: Vicki 116

4.1.19 Participant 19: Kameron 117

4.1.20 Participant 20: Denise 119

4.1.21 Participant 21: Shannon.. 119

4.1.22 Participant 22: Kelly... 121

4.2 Chapter Summary 122

Chapter 5. Patterns of Adversity, Scrutiny, and Resilience Across the Lifespan................. 123

5.1 Chapter Overview 123

5.2 Experiencing Adversity.. 126

5.2.1 'Experiencing Adversity' as a Category of Analysis 126

5.2.2 An Overview of Patterns of Adversity Within the Data 127

5.2.3 Childhood Disadvantage, Abuse, and Violence Within a Family Environment 127

5.2.4 Abuse Within Intimate Relationships Entered During Adolescence 130

5.2.5 Abuse and Control Within Intimate Relationships Entered During Various Stages of Adulthood 132

5.2.5.1 Impacts of Domestic Violence on Children.................................... 134

5.3 A Climate of Social Scrutiny... 136

5.3.1 'A Climate of Social Scrutiny' as a Category of Analysis...................... 136

5.3.2 An Overview of Patterns of Social Scrutiny Within the Data................. 136

5.3.3 An Onset of Social Scrutiny During Adolescence.................................. 137

5.3.4 Experiences of Othering in Emerging Adulthood and Into Midlife 142

5.4 Resilient Behaviours or Actions... 147

5.4.1 'Resilient Behaviours or Actions' as a Category of Analysis 147

5.4.2 Resilience as an Overall Pattern Within the Data 147

5.4.3 Resilient Behaviours or Actions Between Childhood and Adolescence 148

5.4.4 Support From Adolescence Through to Adulthood 150

5.5 Acknowledging Variation Within the Data 156

5.5.1 Accounting for Difference 156

5.6 Chapter Summary 158

Chapter 6. Interrelations Between Social Scrutiny and Various Aspects of Participants' Lives 159

6.1 Chapter Overview 159

6.2 'Corrosive Impacts of Scrutiny on Resilience' 160

6.2.1 Corrosive Implications as a Theoretical Category 160

6.2.2 Erosion of Informal Support Systems 161

6.2.3 Avoidance of Formal Support Systems 165

6.2.4 Loss of Confidence or Distress 167

6.3 Conforming to Dominant Social Values 170

6.3.1 Conforming to Dominant Social Values as a Theoretical Category 170

6.3.2 Conforming Through Domestic Image or Occupational Patterns 172

6.3.3 Conforming Through Relationship Patterns 176

6.4 Chapter Summary 182

Chapter 7. Navigating Life Stages, Mothering Milestones, and Life-Stage Constraints 183

7.1 Chapter Overview 183

7.2 Navigating Early Adulthood to Midlife 184

7.2.1 Contrasting Maternal Responsibility with Individual Freedom within Early Adulthood 184

7.2.2 Conceptualising Autonomy Within the Context of Adversity 189

7.2.3 Conceptualising Autonomy Within the Context of Social Scrutiny 195

7.3 Mothering Milestones Associated With Empty Nesting and Grandmotherhood 197

7.3.1 Relatively Large Family Sizes Amongst Many Participants 197

7.3.2 Navigating Social Responses Towards a Younger Grandmother Identity 202

7.3.3 Contextual Factors that May Shape the Grandmothering Journey 204

7.4 Chapter Summary 208

Chapter 8. Knowledge from the Margins 210

8.1 Chapter Overview 210

8.2 Access, Education, Information, Support, and Being Treated Like Worthy Mothers 210

8.3 Improved Opportunities to Access Education 211

8.4 Opportunities to Obtain a Licence 213

8.5 Targeted Support Services 214

8.6 Access to Information 216

8.7 Freedom of Choice Regarding Sexual Health Options 217

8.8 Responsive Service Delivery 219

8.9 Addressing Stigma and Affirming Positive Young Mother Identities 220

8.10 Recognition Regarding Issues of Confidence 222

8.11 Holistic Understandings and Early Intervention Approaches 224

8.12 Informal Support Networks 225

8.13 Life Skills 227

8.14 Chapter Summary 229

Chapter 9. Discussion 231

9.1 Chapter Overview 231

9.2 Contrasts Between Participants' Subjective Identities and Dominant Social Constructs 232

9.3 A Prevalence of Men's Violence Against Women 235

9.4 Pervasive Social Stigma and Scrutiny Which can Follow Participants Across Their Lifespan 240

9.5 Stigma Impacting Resilience 245

9.6 Processes of Conforming to Dominant Social Values 248

9.7 Autonomy Within Early Adulthood as Contingent Upon a Range of Contextual Factors 252

9.8 Lengthy Periods of Children Within the Nest 257

9.9 A Sense of Social Surprise Linked to a Young Grandmothering Identity 260

9.10 Participant Recommendations: Underscoring a Need for Additional Support Within Early or Emerging Adulthood 261

9.11 Chapter Summary 266

Chapter 10. Recommendations and Conclusion 268

10.1 Chapter Overview 268

10.2 Consolidating Research Findings With the Overarching Question and Aims of This Study 268

10.3 Contributions of This Study Towards Current Understandings 270

10.4 Recommendations for Social Work Practice and Social Policy 274

10.5 Recommendations for Social Work Education 277

10.6 Recommendations for Future Research 277

10.7 My Journey as a PhD Student and Reflections as an Insider Researcher 278

10.8 Chapter Summary 279

References 281

Appendix A Research Information Sheet 315

Appendix B Informed Consent Form for Interview 316

List of Figures

Figure 3.1 Participants Categorised by Their Age at the Time of First Birth 65

Figure 5.1 Example of Coding and Categorising the Data.. 125

Figure 6.1 Codes Relating to Resilience and Scrutiny.. 170

Figure 6.2 Conceptual Framework for Understanding Influences of Dominant Stereotypes on Conforming to Dominant Social Values 181

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Chapter Overview

In the study reported in this thesis, I set out to explore lifespan issues associated with teenage motherhood. In this introductory chapter, I present the research background as it relates to academic understandings around the long-term trajectories of this group of women. Gaps in qualitative understandings are identified, thereby contextualising the research question and aims. The significance of this study for social work practice and social policy is discussed, and the methodology is summarised. The origins of this study are discussed, including my own experiences of life-stage transitions as a former teenage mother. An outline of subsequent chapters in the thesis is also presented.

1.2 Background

Teenage motherhood is associated with social disadvantage in western industrialised countries such as Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2018a; Lee et al., 2016). Teenage mothers are reportedly more at risk of experiencing economic inequality (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2017), social exclusion (Ellis-Sloan & Tamplin, 2019), domestic violence (Mann et al., 2020), and developing mental health problems than their same age counterparts (Australian Institute of Family Studies [AIFS], 2014]. The social climate presents additional challenges, with literature suggesting that there is a pervasive social stigma surrounding teenage motherhood that can affect the confidence and self-esteem of young mothers (AHRC, 2017; Ellis-Sloan, 2014; Jones et al., 2019).

Adversity surrounding adolescent motherhood is far-reaching (Gunes, 2016; Lee et al., 2016; Mann et al., 2020). According to Mann, Bateson, and Black (2020), long-term socioeconomic and health disparities exist for teenage mothers. Specifically, women who

become mothers during adolescence can experience ongoing inequalities related to educational attainment, employment, and mental health outcomes in comparison to women who delay childbearing into adulthood. It is noted, however, that such disparities may not be related to the age of conception per se (Furstenburg, 2016; Mollborn, 2017; SmithBattle & Leonard, 2012).

Furstenburg (2016) revealed that early studies of teenage motherhood greatly overstated the social consequences of adolescent childbearing. Teenage mothers were previously considered to be destined to lives of disadvantage by virtue of their age upon conception. More recently, research contests notions that adolescent motherhood causes social disadvantage. As highlighted by Mollborn (2017, p. 65), teenage mothers "tend to come from more disadvantaged segments of the population in terms of social class, race, and ethnicity." Various authors have argued that teenage motherhood is therefore symptomatic of social inequality, and that associated poorer outcomes can be largely attributed to prior economic and social positioning (Gunes, 2016; Furstenburg, 2016; Mollborn, 2017; SmithBattle & Leonard, 2012).

Such assertions are supported by a United States study into the effects of adolescent childbearing on long-term health outcomes. Gunes (2016) sought to address gaps in understanding around links between adolescent pregnancy and health inequalities. They analysed data relating to the socioeconomic and health outcomes of a sample of 67 sets of twins aged between 25 and 74. Sample criteria included that one sibling had given birth as a teenager and the other had given birth after the age of 20. Within family, comparisons were undertaken to account for background factors that may otherwise bias outcomes. Gunes (2016) revealed that within the context of life cycle and background considerations, long-term disadvantage associated with adolescent motherhood may be minimal.

Specifically, Gunes (2016) found that areas of health and economic disadvantage were most pronounced in the teenage mother's early life cycle. Beyond the age of 34, however, disadvantage began to gradually level out. By the age of 46, the teenage mothers in the study had largely caught up with their sibling groups in terms of a range health and economic indicators. Gunes (2016) thus proposed that disadvantage associated with teenage motherhood may diminish over time. Background characteristics of the sample were noted to be particularly important in projecting long-term outcomes, with members of minority and disadvantaged groups experiencing greater adverse outcomes. As such, Gunes (2016, p. 917) concluded that the effects of teenage childbearing were "mostly insignificant and small in magnitude after controlling for family fixed effects."

Despite providing valuable insight into background characteristics and patterns within long-term trajectories, a limitation of Gunes (2016) study was that due to its quantitative design, the in depth lived experiences of this group of women as they transitioned across the life cycle was not explored. For example, a levelling out of health and socioeconomic positioning by midlife may suggest strengths in overcoming social and economic obstacles. However, a review of literature indicates that there are significant gaps in qualitative understandings around ways in which such women access opportunities, or experience barriers to self-determination across the course of their lives (Ellis-Sloan, 2019).

Likewise, a review of available literature has identified a lack of qualitative understanding around life-stage transitions that may be unique for former teenage mothers. For example, Furstenburg (2016) noted that early adulthood is a life stage during which independence and autonomy are emphasised as dominant societal values. They proposed that early childrearing is at odds with these constructs and pointed to gaps in understanding around ways in which such incongruence may be experienced. Gaps in understanding regarding mothering milestones also were apparent. Specifically, 'empty nesting' as children

move out of home can present challenges for some women (Robinson, 2015). It may be presumed that due to maternal responsibilities commencing at an earlier point in the lifespan, empty nesting may occur at a relatively young ages for former teenage mothers. Literature around variations in qualitative experiences that such phenomena may present was not located during the literature review for this study.

Gaps in qualitative understandings extend to whether stigma as a social issue surrounding teenage motherhood persists across their lifespan. According to Jones, Whitfield, Seymour, and Hayter (2019, p. 761), "there is a growing body of research to suggest that teenage pregnancy and parenting has a number of social consequences linked to bias and stigma, vulnerability to negative attitudes and exclusion." A novel area of research into early grandmotherhood conducted by Spencer (2016) identified that young grandmothers may encounter a sense of rebounding social disapproval where intergenerational teenage pregnancy occurs. Such findings indicate that stigma may be an enduring phenomenon for some teenage mothers. A review of literature indicated that information pertaining to ways in which dominant societal values and assumptions are experienced by teenage mothers across their lives is particularly limited.

Finally, gaps in qualitative research relating to the lives of former teenage mothers render the voices of women who have experienced this phenomenon silent. There is a tendency within academic literature and popular media to view adolescent motherhood through a deficit lens, with adolescent mothers being widely problematised as unsuitable mothers within dominant understandings (Dhunna et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2019; Slater, 2018).

Underlying causes of the problematisation of adolescent motherhood are complex and have their roots in young mothers' marginalised position within the sociopolitical order (Ellis-Sloan, 2014; Luker, 1997). In her seminal book, *Of Woman Borne,* Rich (1995)

discussed the concept of ‘the institution of motherhood.’ Rich (1995) deconstructed discourses of the ‘good’ or ‘natural’ mother, who is typically produced as white, heterosexual, married and upper class (Rich, 1995; Rock, 2007). Similarly, Arnup (1982) asserted that the good mother is a socially constructed ideal reflecting conservative traditional family values to serve the patriarchal state.

Binary constructs result in women being labelled as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ mothers based on their adherence to dominant social values, leading to women who fall short of social ideals, inclusive of lesbian mothers, adoptive mothers, and older mothers being marginalised and denied the status of good motherhood (Baden, 2016; Trub et al., 2017; Ylänne, 2016). Teenage mothers are problematised by virtue of falling short of the status of ‘good’ motherhood due to their age, social status, and social class (Ellis-Sloan, 2014; Luker, 1997).

The problematisation of young motherhood may not resonate with young mothers themselves. For example, Jones, Whitfield, Seymour, and Hayter (2019) conducted qualitative research with 40 adolescent mothers, with an aim to examine their own discourses around teenage pregnancy. They found that participants appeared eager to present a positive self-image by emphasising favourable aspects of their mothering identities. Further qualitative research has identified that there may be some positive aspects associated with early childbearing, which include transitions to motherhood representing a renewed sense of purpose, or a turning point that is positive in the lives of some young mothers’ lives (Brand et al., 2014; Dhunna et al., 2021; Zito, 2018). Such accounts have received less empirical attention (Zito, 2018), yet research that is representative of the opinions of teenage mothers may be beginning to gain traction, with an increased body of literature that captures young mothers’ views and insights on this topic emerging over the past decade (Brand et al., 2014).

However, a review of available literature indicates a scarcity of research extending beyond adolescence or emerging adulthood, into the retrospective accounts of former teenage

mothers at later points in their lifespan. Ellis-Sloan (2019) critiques the absence of former young mothers' voices in existing research, arguing that current understandings of young mothers across the life course measure women's lives in ways that impose pre-determined notions of success. Ellis-Sloan (2022, p. 100) argued that without considering the perspectives of former teenage mothers themselves, an "imposition of measure and outcomes can add a moral dimension which reinforces the idea that the life paths of young mothers are deviant."

Consequently, this study set out to explore gaps in qualitative understandings of former teenage mothers' experiences through an exploration of the following research question:

What themes can be identified about former teenage mothers' lives as they transition across their lifespan from adolescence to middle age?

The primary aim of this study was to identify themes relating to the ways in which former teenage mothers navigated various phases of their lives. Secondary aims for this study were to:

- Explore barriers to self-determination for former teenage mothers at various points in their lifespan.
- Explore ways in which dominant societal values around early motherhood and early grandmotherhood are experienced by former teenage mothers, including any implications for personal and social identity.
- Build upon theoretical understandings of life-stage phenomena experienced by former teenage mothers.
- Contribute to research where women who have experienced teenage motherhood are consulted regarding their own needs, interests, identities, and perspectives relating to existing social policy and welfare supports available.

1.3 Significance of This Study

Disadvantage associated with adolescent motherhood is a significant human rights issue (AHRC, 2017). Poverty and abuse as factors preceding and perpetuating inequalities experienced by teenage mothers can have a range of implications on young mothers' lives and the lives of their children (ACOSS, 2017; AHRC, 2017). Educational and vocational inequalities place teenage mothers at risk of economic disadvantage across their lifespan in ways that are in opposition to women's rights to have equal access to education and employment (AHRC, 2018; AIHW, 2018a; Global Fund for Women, 2018). High rates of intimate partner violence experienced by teenage mothers are a violation of human rights for women (Mann et al., 2020; World Health Organisation, 2022). Experiences of stigma are further problematic. Stigma is an insidious and often invisible phenomena that can lead to systematic discrimination and an erosion of social rights (United Nations, 2012).

The social work profession, by virtue of a concern with disadvantaged, marginalised, and vulnerable groups, holds a particular stake in addressing areas of social injustice (AASW, 2020a). As articulated by Burke and Harrison (2002, p. 131), "the complex nature of oppression is witnessed in the lives of people who are marginalised in this society. As social work practitioners, we have a moral, ethical and legal responsibility to challenge inequality and disadvantage."

One of the central roles of social work is to mitigate inequality and disadvantage through a range of interventions at micro, meso, and macro levels (AASW, 2015, 2020a; Dworak-Peck, 2022; Maschi, 2015; Mauldin, 2020). In doing so, the social work profession relies on social research to ensure that interventions are informed and subsequently effective (AASW, 2003; Brenner, 2016). A strong evidence base for practice requires that social workers understand the root causes of social issues, as well as the circumstances, preferences, and values of the populations that they serve (Mauldin, 2020). In this sense, it is considered

that a range of blind spots regarding qualitative understandings of former teenage mothers' lived experiences may hinder responsive social work interventions and policy development. It is my hope for this study that the information generated may be applied to promoting more positive long-term outcomes for this group of women.

1.4 Research Design and Analysis

Research concerned with individuals across their lives can be either longitudinal or synchronic (Robinson, 2013). Due to time and resource constraints, this study employed a synchronic design, which entailed gathering data at one point in time (Robinson, 2013). A biographical approach was selected, which consisted of gathering retrospective accounts of participants' lives, and was facilitated via the use of a semi-structured interview schedule (Robinson, 2013; Tracy, 2019). A qualitative approach was selected, through which it was possible to capture participants' subjective lived experiences of teenage motherhood, and the meanings that they placed on central themes within their lives (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Moser and Korstjens, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). In total, 22 women took part in this study.

The selection of an overarching theoretical framework for this study entailed significant reflection. At the inception of this study, I had been interested in pursuing a lifespan approach that utilised existing models of psychosocial development to inform a thematic analysis. However, as I became more familiar with the origins, implications, and epistemological assumptions embedded within such an approach, I realised that this was not compatible with my own values and world views.

For example, as discussed in Chapter Three, feminist scholars have argued that existing lifespan theories and frameworks have historically served to marginalise the voices and the experiences of women and oppressed social groups in ways that can perpetuate inequalities (Schmidt, 2020; Intermann, 2016). As a feminist researcher, I was concerned

about reproducing understandings that contribute to the marginalisation and voicelessness of this social group. I therefore chose to study this topic through a strong commitment to feminist principles via the integration of feminist standpoint theory.

Feminist standpoint theorists seek to raise the voices of women in context with their social positioning, and they are averse to research that silences women's experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2012). It follows that this study was concerned with the 'voicelessness' of women in this social group within current understandings, as well as ways in which societal constructs surrounding what is deemed to be 'appropriate' motherhood can result in women who do not meet certain social norms becoming stigmatised (Baden, 2016; Ellis-Sloan, 2014; Trub et al., 2017; Ylänne, 2016).

Additionally, the theoretical framework guiding this study incorporated a constructivist grounded theory approach. Grounded theory entails an inductive approach to theory development, in the sense that theory is grounded within the data as opposed to being influenced by *priori* assumptions (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Chun Tie, Birks, and Francis (2019) proposed that grounded theory can be a particularly useful approach to theory development where understandings on a given topic are sparse. In this sense, grounded theory was particularly suited to my aims of building upon theoretical understandings within the context of wide gaps in current understandings.

While a range of philosophical perspectives have influenced developments in grounded theory, I was particularly influenced by constructivist grounded theory, which holds that rather than there being one objective truth, multiple meanings are possible (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Leavy & Harris, 2019). This perspective conceptualises research findings as being a co-production of reality between researchers and participants (Leavy & Harris, 2019; Mills et al., 2006). As further discussed within the methodology section of this thesis, constructivist grounded theory was selected due to its congruency with my own world views,

as well as its compatibility with feminist approaches (Charmaz, 2017; Plummer & Young, 2010).

Underpinned by a constructivist grounded theory process, qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews. Data was analysed via stages of initial, focused and theoretical coding towards theory development (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1978). After immersing myself in the data in a committed way to bring to light the themes, patterns, relationships, and complexities evident in the participants' stories, prominent categories were identified through a process of focused coding. Through focused coding, interrelations between codes were hypothesised, which informed the development of two theoretical frameworks.

1.5 Origins of This Study

My interest in exploring life course issues associated with young motherhood originates from my own social positioning as a former teenage mother. I am a 39-year-old woman who became a mother at the age of 15. During my time as an adolescent mother, I experienced issues of stigma and discrimination. Borne from such experiences was a deep appreciation of social justice and human rights issues associated with mothering outside of 'normative' bounds. I subsequently went on to study issues of stigma associated with teenage motherhood for the research requirement of a Bachelor of Social Work Honours degree, conferred in 2011.

My interest in this topic has continued to grow and evolve across the course of my life. Over the past several years, I have developed awareness of how my own life course experiences of motherhood are not necessarily represented in dominant life-stage understandings. For example, when my daughter moved out of home at 18, I was just 32. Empty nesting was a transitional period that was accompanied by a sense of internal crisis. I

turned to the internet in the hopes of finding information that may shed light on and normalise my experiences, yet I was unable to find sources that resonated with me.

Specifically, I found that most information on empty nesting related to dealing with a sense of grief or loss around the sense of absence that reduced maternal responsibilities may bring. Advice tended to revolve around finding new hobbies or interests to fill such a void. My experience, on the other hand, related less to feelings of absence, and more to being at a complete crossroads in my life. I was at a stage in my life where sociocultural norms for my age bracket included ideals such as marriage and family formation. I was torn between such ideals and a conflicting desire to 'catch up' on experiences of leisure and freedom that I sensed I had missed out on in my earlier years due to an early onset of family responsibility.

More recently, at the age of 35, I became a first-time grandmother, and now have two small grandchildren aged two and four. As a young grandmother, I sometimes encounter a sense of othering. For example, when people become aware of my grandparenting status within social situations, this can lead to intrusive questions about my age and personal circumstances. Such encounters can feel awkward at best and stigmatising at worst. They also serve as a reminder that adolescent motherhood remains a part of my mothering identity, and correspondingly my grandmothering identity, with age continuing to serve as a marker of difference. A sense of my experiences being marginalised both within formal understandings and in social interactions has elicited a motivation to contribute as an insider researcher (Berger, 2015) to understandings of more nuanced and varied experiences of mothering.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

1.6.1 Social Adjustment

The term social adjustment is interwoven in my analysis of this topic and is therefore pertinent to define at the outset of this thesis. Social adjustment can be understood as relating to the interrelations between an individual's subjective sense of self, and connection to their social environment (Erikson, 1950, 1968; McLeod, 2019; Robinson, 2013). The American Psychological Association (APA, 2022) defined social adjustment as "accommodation to the demands, restrictions, and mores of society, including the ability to live and work with others harmoniously and to engage in satisfying interactions and relationships." Runjun (2020, p. 202) proposed that such accommodation is a dynamic process, with life being "a continuous series of change and challenges for survival or growth." Individuals may attempt to find harmonious and satisfying interactions within their environment by altering their behaviours in accordance with social, cultural, or family standards and values to secure acceptance (Al Abiky, 2021; Runjun, 2020; Sasikumar, 2018). The importance of finding a harmonious balance between a person and their environment can be understood in the context of positive social adjustment being linked to happiness, positive self-concept, and emotional wellbeing (Dong et al., 2020; Runjun, 2020). Conversely, the inability to adjust to one's environment can result in a range of detrimental emotions, which can present risks to poorer outcomes, such as challenges within interpersonal or vocational outcomes (Runjun, 2020; Schulte et al., 2018).

1.6.2 Resilience

Resilience is discussed within this thesis as an emergent category of analysis. Resilience relates to ways in which harmful impacts of adverse life experiences are mitigated (Van Breda, 2018). Resilient processes can be conceptualised as relating to individual

intrinsic characteristics, or as being holistic in terms of interrelations between a person and their environment, which may promote better outcomes (Van Breda, 2018).

1.7 Thesis Outline

This study is presented across 10 chapters. Within this introductory chapter, I have provided an overview of the research topic; contextualised the research question and aims within a backdrop of knowledge gaps; discussed the significance of this study, provided a summary of the research methodology; and introduced my positioning as an insider researcher.

In Chapter Two, I present a review of available literature in which teenage motherhood is placed within a sociopolitical context. Literature pertaining to the experiences of teenage mothers between childhood and adolescence is also discussed, and knowledge regarding gaps in women's lived experiences with post-adolescent motherhood is highlighted. Further, theoretical perspectives that can facilitate understanding of experiences across the lifespan are considered.

In Chapter Three, the research methodology is presented in greater detail. The underpinning theoretical framework guiding this study is outlined, including considerations inherent in combining feminist standpoint theory with constructivist grounded theory; biographical research methods; and ways in which such approaches were operationalised. The significance of a qualitative methodology in generating in-depth understandings is discussed, and considerations relating to ethical issues and participant welfare are made apparent. Considerations of quality, rigour, and limitations of the study are all points of discussion.

In Chapter Four, the women who took part in this study are introduced through short autobiographical descriptions of their lives. Each description includes basic demographic information such as age, age upon the birth of their eldest child, relationship status, and

employment status. The Feminist Standpoint orientation of this study gave rise to my interest in capturing participants' own socially situated reflections and vantage points relating to their lives and mothering identities (Intermann, 2016). Subsequently, verbatim quotes pertaining to the women's reflections are integrated throughout.

Chapter Five outlines my grounded theory process of focused coding, in which themes of 'experiencing adversity,' 'a climate of social scrutiny,' and 'resilient behaviours or actions' were identified as key categories across the data. It is suggested that the prominence of such categories may indicate that understanding the lived realities of women from within this social group entails an appreciation of areas of social disadvantage and oppression that must be navigated across the lifespan.

Chapter Six outlines my grounded theory process of theoretical coding, and how interrelations between key categories are theorised and integrated into two theoretical frameworks. The frameworks represent ways in which social stigma could impact resiliency or processes in which participants felt that they needed to conform to dominant social or familial values to offset judgment or gain approval. It is suggested that these frameworks indicate that experiences of stigma may have tangible ripple effects in young mothers' lives.

In Chapter Seven, findings around ways in which phenomena associated with early adulthood, empty nesting, and young grandmotherhood were experienced by participants, are presented. Focused and theoretical codes identified within previous chapters are revisited once more and are discussed as being central to understanding participants' access to autonomy within early adulthood. Limitations in comprehensively exploring empty nesting are noted in that most participants had not yet reached this milestone, while variations between participants who had experienced empty nesting and grandmotherhood are discussed.

Chapter Eight presents participants' perspectives relating to the needs and interests of women from within this social group. Participants made numerous recommendations relating to the support required for promoting positive identities and long-term outcomes for women from within this social group. The chapter discusses how, from a feminist standpoint perspective, such recommendations may offer particularly meaningful and relevant insights by virtue of being located within participants' lived experiences (Intermann, 2016; Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019).

In Chapter Nine, I discuss the research findings within the context of existing literature, highlighting ways in which this study builds upon current understandings by addressing various knowledge gaps. Eight key findings are presented, relating to significant contrasts between participants' subjective identities and dominant social constructs surrounding teenage motherhood; a prevalence of gender-based violence; a pervasive social stigma which could follow participants into their lives; resiliency which could be impacted by stigma; processes of conforming to dominant social values to offset judgment and gain approval; a sense of autonomy within early adulthood as contingent upon a range of contextual factors; lengthy periods of children within the nest amongst some; and a sense of social surprise linked to a young grandmothering identity.

In Chapter Ten, a summary of the research is provided, detailing how the overarching research question and aims were met. Identified recommendations demonstrate how the findings can challenge lifelong stigma, highlight positive teenage mother identities, and complement and inform social work practice with women from within this social group. Social policy directions are suggested, and directions for future research are proposed. Specifically, directions for further research are mentioned, including further exploration of empty nesting amongst former teenage mothers; research that considers paternal demographics; research that considers contributions that exposure to violence may have on

understanding social disparities experienced by young mothers and their children; and research which further explores resilience in the face of adversity and stigma.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter identified qualitative knowledge gaps relating to teenage mothers' experiences as they navigate their lifespans. To address such gaps, this study explored the retrospective accounts of former teenage mothers about their journeys across various phases of their lives. This chapter introduced the feminist standpoint and constructivist grounded theory frameworks underpinning the research. The genesis of this study was discussed as it relates to my own lived experiences as an insider researcher, and a corresponding motivation to contribute to more varied understandings of motherhood. Findings demonstrate that young mothers can and do experience a range of inequalities that can extend into adulthood. It is hoped that information generated from this study may help to inform social work practice and policy towards promoting positive long-term outcomes for former teenage mothers. Finally, an outline of this thesis was presented as it relates to the content and flow of subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I discuss the sociopolitical climate surrounding teenage motherhood, by outlining changes in family constructs over recent decades, and social factors which have contributed towards a widespread problematisation of early childbearing. Research relating to childhood and adolescent experiences amongst teenage mothers is discussed, with a particular acknowledgement of social adversity areas that may have ripple effects into subsequent life stages. This chapter revisits knowledge gaps regarding young mothers' post-adolescent motherhood, and discusses research capturing aspects of life-stage experiences that may be unique to former teenage mothers. Understanding experiences across the lifespan can be facilitated by a range of theoretical perspectives. Therefore, various theories pertaining to life-stage models of development are considered.

2.2 The Sociopolitical Climate Surrounding Teenage Motherhood

2.2.1 The Problematisation of Teenage Motherhood

Teenage motherhood deviates from dominant life-stage trends, in that the stage of adolescence is accompanied by family responsibilities that, in contemporary western society are typically reserved for later stages of adulthood (Spencer, 2016). Adolescent norms are noted, however, to have varied considerably across time (Hendry & Kloep 2007; Robinson, 2013). In past centuries, adolescents were often married by the age of 18 (Robinson, 2013), and early family formation was not considered to be problematic (SmithBattle, 2020). From the 1970s, however, public opinions changed dramatically, and teenage mothers began to face considerable scrutiny and stigma in western industrialised countries such as Australia (SmithBattle, 2020; Summers, 1994). SmithBattle (2020) argued that a shift in social attitudes was influenced by politicians and healthcare experts proposing that early

childbearing was responsible for family breakdown, poverty, and crime. Media coverage correspondingly reflected such assertions, fuelling public anxieties (SmithBattle, 2020). Young mothers began to be referred to as ‘children having children’ within popular public discourse, yet as argued by SmithBattle (2020, p. 323), “no one questioned why teen mothers of a few decades earlier had escaped this demeaning label.”

Factors pertaining to social status and social class have arguably underpinned the construction of teenage motherhood as socially problematic (Ellis-Sloan, 2014; Luker, 1997; SmithBattle, 2020). For example, Summers (1994) and others have suggested that the emergence of stigma surrounding teenage motherhood was originally linked to the status of single motherhood. Pre-marital sex for single mothers historically was concealed through shotgun marriages or forced adoptions (Higgins et al., 2014; SmithBattle, 2020; Summers, 1994). Stigmatising attitudes towards young mothers emerged in the context of a social decline in patterns of marriage (SmithBattle, 2020; Summers, 1994). Teenagers who became pregnant outside of wedlock represented broader societal digression from normative Christian values of marriage that were prevalent within the mid-twentieth century, which had long catered to patriarchal family ideologies (Scerri, 2020; Summers, 1994). Further, young mothers were more likely to be members of socially devalued income and racial groups (Moore et al., 2021), and some authors have suggested that their marginalised social positioning heightened public scrutiny (Ellis-Sloan, 2014; Nayak & Kehily, 2014; SmithBattle, 2020).

Young motherhood remains a problematised social identity to the present time (Arshadh, & Muda, 2020; Naidoo et al., 2021; Punsuwun, 2020). Various authors have argued that one way in which early family formation has been constructed as a social problem relates to a widespread linking of early childbearing to a range of social ills within popular discourses (Breheny & Stephens, 2010; Slater, 2018; SmithBattle, 2020; Wilson &

Huntington, 2006). For example, young mothers and their children face considerable disparities in relation to social outcomes (AHRC, 2017; Gunes, 2016; Lee et al., 2016; Mann et al., 2020). Some researchers have proposed that poorer outcomes were caused by age at conception, yet this notion has been widely contested (Furstenburg, 2016; Gunes, 2016; Mollborn, 2017; SmithBattle, 2020; SmithBattle & Leonard, 2012). As articulated by SmithBattle (2020, p. 323):

> A wealth of evidence now suggests that poor maternal–child outcomes are largely predicted by the social disadvantage, minority status, and childhood adversities that precede teen pregnancy; these social inequities predispose youth to engage in unprotected sex and contribute to poor outcomes.

The problematisation of young motherhood also is reinforced within discourses undermining the suitability, capability, and economic scruples of young mothers themselves (Breheny & Stephens, 2010; Ellis-Sloan, 2014; Luker, 1997; Slater, 2018; Wilson & Huntington, 2006). Various authors have critiqued the representation of adolescent mothers within formal understandings over past decades (Breheny & Stephens, 2010; Luker, 1997; SmithBattle, 2013). For example, Breheny and Stephens (2010) conducted a discursive analysis to uncover ways in which teenage mothers are produced as 'unsuitable' mothers within academic journals. Findings revealed that adolescent mothers were stigmatised within public health discourses, which insinuates that young parents are incapable. Findings also revealed economic discourses that position adolescent mothers as "a financial drain on society" (Breheny & Stephens, 2010, p. 307).

Ellis-Sloan (2014) further highlighted that teenage mothers are depicted as becoming pregnant to secure welfare payments within popular media, in ways which insinuate that young mothers symbolise economic and moral decay (Ellis-Sloan, 2014). More recently,

Slater (2018) conducted a media discourse analysis pertaining to stereotypes around lone parenthood within the United Kingdom. Stigmatising discourses were apparent relating to teenage mothers, who were often labelled as being financially motivated to fall pregnant for welfare-related benefits (Slater, 2018). Findings also revealed that intersecting stigmas pertaining to age and single motherhood are perpetuated within popular media. Specifically, teenage motherhood and single motherhood are inextricably linked within media representations, with notions that single motherhood equals teenage motherhood reflected within dominant discourses.

2.2.2 Teenage Motherhood as a Tarnished Social Identity

Qualitative research has uncovered ways in which young mothers are exposed to negative social attitudes, or can experience stigma and discrimination (AHRC, 2017; Breheny & Stephens, 2010; Ellis-Sloan, 2014; Hoffmann et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2019; Mass Alliance on Teen Pregnancy, 2017; Neill-Weston & Morgan, 2017; SmithBattle, 2013; Wood & Barter, 2015). For example, in a project investigating the needs and rights of young parents and their children in Australia, the AHRC (2017) consulted adolescent mothers who described feeling stared at in public and being subjected to comments of disapproval about their status as teenage mothers (AHRC, 2017). These mothers felt judged at shopping centres, Centrelink, on public transport, in medical contexts, or within their own families (AHRC, 2017). Some of the young mothers in the study reported that stigma had resulted in self-doubt, which affected their confidence as a parent and their self-esteem (AHRC, 2017).

Similarly, Jones et al. (2019) undertook a qualitative study with 40 mothers aged between 16 and 19 in England to explore teenage mothers' perceptions of how they are socially portrayed. Findings indicated that some teenage mothers had an acute awareness of moral judgement regarding their social status and would attempt to engage in strategies to distance themselves from perceived negativity. Experiences of anticipated stigma may be

particularly problematic for rates of social participation, with literature suggesting that stigma leads to social withdrawal, and subsequently impairs opportunities for teenage mothers to socialise or access support services (AHRC, 2017; Dion et al., 2021; Ellis-Sloan, 2014; SmithBattle, 2013, 2020). A range of authors have proposed that stigma is a factor which has the potential to further compound the inequitable distribution of life chances faced by teenage mothers and their children (AHRC, 2017; Dion et al., 2021; Ellis-Sloan, 2014; SmithBattle, 2013).

Ellis-Sloan (2014) discussed contemporary processes behind the stigmatisation of teenage mothers through Erving Goffman's (1963) seminal literature pertaining to stigma. Goffman (1963) theorised that individuals could be stigmatised through three kinds of discrediting attributes. According to Goffman (1963), the first kind of sigma relates to physical stigmas on the body, the second to perceptions of character, and the third to race or religion. Ellis-Sloan (2014) argued that it is this second kind of stigma, relating to personal deviancy, which is particularly pertinent in common perceptions of teenage mothers. Ellis-Sloan (2014) highlighted ways in which stereotypes undermining the moral character of teenage mothers are embedded within popular discourses, which undermine the moral and economic scruples of young mothers.

2.3 Adversity Within Childhood and Adolescence

2.3.1 Childhood Abuse and Neglect Associated With Adolescent Pregnancy

As outlined below, literature suggests that adolescent mothers can experience adversity across childhood and adolescence (AHRC, 2017; Gunes, 2016; Luker, 1997; Mann et al., 2020). From a lifespan perspective, early experiences of adversity can have ongoing psychological and social effects into the lifespan and are therefore an important consideration in understanding outcomes amongst members of disadvantaged groups (McLeod, 2017; New

South Wales Department of Family and Community Services, 2021; Robinson, 2013; Schaffer, 2006; Shirvanian & Michael, 2017).

Experiences of child abuse and neglect are correlated with higher rates of adolescent pregnancy (Garwood et al., 2015; Gray et al., 2016; Mann et al., 2020; Martínez et al., 2017; Noll et al., 2018; Zhan et al., 2017). For example, a United States quantitative study in Missouri carried out by Garwood et al., (2015) explored rates of pregnancy in adolescence amongst children who had no child protection involvement, with a comparison group of children who had experienced child protection involvement. The study compared data relating to 321 females for several years up to the age of 18 between 1993 and 2009. Data included records from child protective services, medical services, and juvenile courts. Results indicated that teenage mothers were nearly twice as likely to have been abused or neglected in their childhoods than the comparison group.

A limitation of that study, as identified by Garwood et al. (2015), was that it did not differentiate between different types of abuse and risk of pregnancy. Research conducted by Noll et al. (2018) which examined data from a meta-analysis of 21 English studies to explore the relationship between child abuse and teenage pregnancy discovered that sexual abuse increased chances of adolescent pregnancy significantly. Even after alternative explanatory variables such as such as sociodemographic, family characteristics, and other forms of abuse were considered, adolescents who had experienced sexual abuse were 2.45 times more predisposed to falling pregnant within their teenage years than adolescents who have not been sexually abused (Noll et al., 2018).

2.3.2 Economic and Social Exclusion

Socioeconomic disadvantage also is associated with teenage pregnancy (AIHW, 2018b; Aslam et al., 2017; Cook & Cameron, 2017; Moore et al., 2021). In research conducted by the AIHW (2018b), national perinatal data were collected to explore the

demographics of teenage mothers and their babies. The study compared the data of teenagers who had given birth under the age of 20 with women aged between 20 and 24. Findings indicated that teenage pregnancy rates were nine times higher amongst 15- to 19-year-olds who are from the lowest socioeconomic status areas compared to those from the highest socioeconomic areas. Economic disadvantage was found to be particularly high for Indigenous teenage mothers (AIHW, 2018b). Similarly, literature from the United Kingdom and the United States has consistently linked social and economic disadvantage in childhood to higher teenage pregnancy rates, with most teenage mothers being from minority groups and disadvantaged locations (Chambers & Erausquin, 2018; Cook & Cameron, 2017; Maness et al., 2016; Sedgh et al., 2015).

Effects of poverty include reduced access to basic nutrition, medical services, and other vital services (ACOSS, 2017). Education may be one pathway to breaking the cycle of poverty, yet not all schools have implemented an educational policy to support pregnant and parenting students (AHRC, 2017). Furthermore, teenage mothers face competing priorities related to parenting and continuing education, making it harder for them to fit into a mainstream education environment (AHRC, 2017). Subsequently, young women's opportunities for education may be disrupted by early motherhood (Mann et al., 2020).

In addition to social exclusion arising from educational barriers, teenage mothers can become isolated from their peer networks (Ellis-Sloan & Tamplin, 2019). Ellis-Sloan and Tamplin (2019) argued that the role of friendship tends to be overlooked in initiatives for supporting teenage mothers, yet breakdowns in peer relations may be particularly problematic during the stage of adolescence, as socialising with friends and a sense of belonging with peers is central to young people's understandings of wellbeing (Ellis-Sloan & Tamplin, 2019; Wyn, 2009).

2.3.3 Increased Risks of Domestic Violence

Adolescent mothers are at increased risk of being subjected to intimate partner violence than their non-parenting counterparts (Bekaert & SmithBattle, 2016; Dhunna et al., 2021; Langley, 2017; Lindhorst & Oxford, 2008; Mann et al., 2020). Bekaert and SmithBattle, (2016) conducted a qualitative metasynthesis to explore teenage mothers' experiences with intimate partner violence. Findings highlighted ways in which exposure to violence during childhood can contribute to risks of intimate partner violence, as violence can be normalised for some young mothers within their early years (Bekaert & SmithBattle, 2016). Such findings are consistent with literature pertaining to risks of violence for women within the broader population, with exposure to abuse or violence during their childhood being an established risk factor for revictimisation over the life course (Bjørnholt, 2019; Papalia et al., 2021).

There is a wide body of literature on domestic violence in a general sense, yet comparatively limited literature exists about ways in which young people specifically experience this phenomenon (Brown et al., 2011; Wood & Barter, 2015). Existing literature indicates that there may be some particularly unique aspects of domestic violence experiences among young mothers (Brown et al., 2011; Wood & Barter, 2015). For example, Brown, Brady, and Letherby (2011) undertook qualitative research with a group of young mothers experiencing domestic violence to explore the nature and impacts of violence. Findings indicated that social stigma is an important contextual factor, as the focus of service providers is typically young mothers perceived problematic maternal status in ways that detract from addressing other aspects of their lives (Brown et al., 2011).

From a broader societal perspective, there is increasing awareness that domestic violence is not about separate incidents of violence but can rather be conceptualised as part of an overall pattern of coercive and controlling behaviours used to dominate and control

victims over a period of time (Katz et al., 2020). This pattern of power and control has been critiqued as linked to gendered inequalities around political and economic status, which can render women particularly susceptible to abuse (Coercive Control Collective, 2018; Eaton Noori et al., 2020).

2.3.4 Mental Health and Teenage Mothers

Teenage mothers as a group are at heightened risk of experiencing mental health problems, including depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (AIFS, 2014; Dahmen et al., 2019; Hodgkinson et al., 2014; Wong et al., 2020). These experiences may be influenced in part by themes of trauma in childhood (AIFS, 2014). Children who have experienced trauma are at risk of higher rates of mental health problems which often emerge in adolescence (AIFS, 2014). As noted above, experiences of stigma can also impact adolescent mothers' confidence and social participation, and therefore may have some bearing on poorer emotional and social wellbeing (AHRC, 2017; Dion et al., 2021; Ellis-Sloan & Tamplin, 2019; Wyn, 2009).

2.4 Advancing Beyond Adolescence to Later Life Stages

2.4.1 Existing Research Into Experiences Beyond Adolescent Motherhood

Teenage motherhood is a widely studied topic, yet far less academic interest exists beyond the stage of adolescence and into subsequent life stages (Ellis-Sloan, 2019, 2022; Furstenburg, 2016; SmithBattle, 2018; Spencer, 2016). As argued by Ellis-Sloan (2022, p. 4), "much of the qualitative research with young mothers occurs within the first few years of childbirth." In this sense, the focus on young mothers' lives and mothering journeys may be critiqued as being particularly narrow. An overall lack of qualitative, retrospective studies has arguably silenced the voices and life journeys of this group of women (Ellis-Sloan, 2019, 2022).

A small body of existing research reveals a variety of experiences and perspectives among former teenage mothers. Hirst, Formby, and Owen (2006) undertook a qualitative, biographical study into the experiences of young mothers and fathers who became teenage parents within the context of intergenerational teenage parenthood in South Yorkshire. Their study sought to explore the perspectives of teenage and former teenage parents, as well as significant life transitions, and access to support systems. Three generations of teenage and former teenage parents were interviewed. A segment of the sample, which is of relevance to this study, was six 'first generation' adolescent mothers, aged between 56 and 68, and three second-generation adolescent mothers, aged between 26 and 49.

Findings revealed that some of the former teenage mothers expressed benefits to early family formation, such as close generational gaps resulting in unique yet positive relationship dynamics with their adult children. However, societal attitudes were noted to have complicated some of the women's experiences. Specifically, elements of societal judgment were evident in some of the former teenage mothers' accounts, such as the account of one woman who felt judged within her children's school into her thirties. Further, Hirst, Formby, and Owen (2006) noted that some participants described feeling hesitant to disclose their status as former teenage mothers at work due to concerns of judgment. Ongoing psychological implications of stigma were noted by some of the women, who discussed negative responses to their pregnancies to have been linked to depression, for which some had later gone on to access support services (Hirst et al., 2006).

Further research conducted by Bowman (2013) captured the experiences of young mothers. In this small retrospective study, Bowman (2013) examined the experiences of seven women who became pregnant under the age of 20. The women's children were aged at least five at the time of their interview. Findings indicated that the women's lives and perspectives of young motherhood were expressed as predominately positive in ways that ran

counter to general perceptions of young parenthood as being problematic. Further, having a solid personal support system was expressed by the women as vital for experiencing positive outcomes (Bowman, 2013).

Ways in which teenage mothers access opportunities across their lives have long been an under-explored area of research (Ellis-Sloan, 2019, 2022). Ellis-Sloan (2022) sought to address gaps within qualitative understandings of young mothers' educational trajectories by drawing upon qualitative research within the United Kingdom, which explored the retrospective experiences of 30 former teenage mothers who had completed further education. Some of the women in the study's educational pathways were uninterrupted by early motherhood due to access to childcare and familial support (Ellis-Sloan, 2022). Most of the women's educational trajectories had not however followed a linear pathway, yet education had become more viable as their children aged (Ellis-Sloan, 2022).

Ellis-Sloan (2022, p. 1) argued that young mothers tend to be socially assessed by "pre-determined markers of success" which equate variations in educational trajectories amongst teenage mothers with failure. They argued, however, that divergence from normative educational pathways was not associated with negative meanings within the participants' personal accounts. Specifically, the women placed a high level of subjective value and meaning upon their mothering roles. Subsequently, Ellis-Sloan, (2022, p. 9) concluded:

> We need to expand our understanding of what constitutes a marker of success by considering participants' own values and moments of pride rather than simply measuring predefined markers of success such as entrance to higher education.

Benitez (2017) also explored educational attainment amongst former teenage mothers. Their study employed a qualitative, phenomenological approach to uncover factors that

influenced decisions to pursue higher education amongst a group of 15 former teenage mothers in California. Each of the women had achieved a master's level of education or higher. Benitez (2017) identified four areas of commonalities among those studied, which related to personal determination, significant life events, support systems, and perseverance. Specifically, personal determination was noted in terms of the women describing a strong personal drive throughout their pursuit of higher education. A significant life event was shared by each of the participants, which had influenced their desire to accomplish or overcome barriers. Such events included exposure to assumptions that they were unable to achieve positive outcomes due to their status as young mothers, which could influence a subsequent desire to resist stereotypes. Personal relationships consisted of family members or other key figures within the women's lives who had believed in them, encouraged them, and provided emotional or practical support. Perseverance also was evident in that all participants persevered despite adversity, or feelings of fear and doubt in their abilities to balance mothering, employment, and education (Benitez, 2017).

While Ellis-Sloan (2022) and Benitez's (2017) research provides valuable insight into factors associated with positive vocational outcomes, sampling criteria within both studies required that participants had completed higher education. Such sampling presents limitations, in that the studies did not explore barriers to self-determination that some young mothers who have not accessed educational opportunities may face. Such limitations may be significant in the context that educational and vocational inequalities have been noted to disproportionately impact young mothers as a group (Gunnes, 2016; Mann et al., 2020).

Further knowledge gaps exist in conceptualising life-stage phenomena post-adolescent motherhood. As discussed, there is limited evidence within academic literature regarding the ways in which psychosocial concepts may vary for women from within this social group. As will be further elaborated upon within this chapter, a trigger for crisis in the

stage of early adulthood can relate to feelings of commitment versus independence (Robinson, 2015). Such phenomenon appears to be largely unexplored for former teenage mothers, whose level of familial responsibility commenced at relatively early periods in their lifespan, during an era in which independence and autonomy are dominant societal values (Furstenburg, 2016; Robinson, 2015).

It is noted, however, that while limited research exists regarding issues of identity into adulthood, research conducted by Dayandan (2015) has explored identity achievement amongst young mothers who are within the stage of adolescence. Dayandan (2015) employed a quantitative approach to compare surveyed data between 42 teenage mothers and 53 mothers over the age of 24. A statistical analysis was undertaken to compare variables between the groups—one of which related to Marcia's (1993) identity status paradigm. As will be further elaborated upon within this chapter, Marcia's (1993) paradigm proposed that dimensions of identity exploration and identity commitment influence identity status during adolescence. Findings of Dayandan's (2015) research indicated that commitment to a mothering identity could facilitate positive identity achievement for young mothers, whereas teenage mothers who sought to explore their own personal identity could struggle to mediate their relationship between age and motherhood.

It has further been discussed that concepts associated with midlife, such as empty nest syndrome amongst former teenage mothers, appear to be similarly neglected. However, a small body of literature does capture phenomena associated with grandparenting amongst former teenage mothers. Literature suggests that teenage motherhood may be an intergenerational phenomenon (Brown, 2016; Liu et al., 2018). In a United States study, Meade et al. (2008) examined data from a national longitudinal survey of 1,430 adolescent girls. Findings indicated that teenage mothers' daughters were 66% more likely to become

mothers in their teenage years. As such, young grandmotherhood may not be uncommon amongst former teenage mothers.

The transition to grandparenthood in general brings with it changes in status, roles, and identity and is one of the most significant social transitions across the lifespan (Noy & Taubman-Ben-Ari, 2016). Spencer (2016) critiqued knowledge gaps relating to the experiences of young grandmothers, and subsequently set out to explore unique aspects of this transition. Their study consisted of an interpretive phenomenological analysis, which captured the experiences of 10 young maternal grandmothers between the ages of 35 and 42 in the United Kingdom. Analysis uncovered two essential experiences related to acceptance (or lack thereof) regarding their daughters' pregnancies, and acceptance (or lack thereof) regarding becoming grandmothers. Acceptance was highly influenced by whether participants had felt that their daughters exhibited a readiness for motherhood, or whether they themselves had felt ready to undertake transitions to grandmotherhood (Spencer, 2016).

Spencer's (2016) study further identified factors that could complicate grandmothering experiences pertaining to fear of judgement. Because teenage mothers are portrayed as deviant, some participants worried that they themselves would be further stigmatised, or that their children would experience the condemnation that they had incurred (Spencer 2016). Findings further revealed that adaptation to early grandmotherhood may be facilitated by rejecting dominant social constructs of grandmotherhood as an older social identity through methods such as choosing an alternate grandparenting name and asserting one's sense of youthfulness. Many participants indicated positive experiences and subjective meanings placed upon their young grandmothering roles (Spencer, 2016).

Yet literature suggests that there may be particular challenges for young grandparents who are caught in a cycle of intergenerational poverty (Hughes & Emmel, 2011). Hughes and Emmel (2011) conducted research into the intergenerational exchange between grandparents

and their grandchildren in the context of socioeconomic disadvantage. The study employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. In-depth interviews were conducted with midlife grandparents, aged between 35 and 55 years, who were living in poor areas. Census and other demographic data also were analysed (Huges & Emmel, 2001). Findings indicated that young grandmothers in low-income areas often were called upon to provide financial assistance for adult children grandchildren, placing women within this group at increased levels of economic strain (Hughes & Emmel, 2011). Where child safety concerns were involved, the young grandmothers in the study sometimes faced conflicting and stressful situations and were called upon to care for their grandchildren (Hughes & Emmel, 2011). Despite their invaluable role, young grandmother participants indicated that they typically felt overlooked and undervalued by service providers, and that the financial contribution they made towards their grandchildren was not recognised or compensated for by social services (Hughes & Emmel, 2011).

Such findings are consistent with literature which suggests that many grandparents who may need to adopt caretaking roles for their grandchildren in general may feel marginalised (Gottzen & Sandberg, 2017; Preez et al., 2015; Tarrant et al., 2017). Gottzen and Sandberg (2017) argued that grandparenting literature tends to focus on 'normal' everyday issues yet has tended to overlook intergenerational relationships within families characterised by trauma and disadvantage. Gaps in service delivery also may reflect this tendency (Preez et al., 2015). In a review of studies evaluating support for grandparents in Australia, Preez et al. (2015) identified community and financial support as lacking in policy and service frameworks for grandparents who were caring for their grandchildren. These researchers argued that sustained impacts of a caring role under trying circumstances could have potential negative impacts on grandparents' overall wellbeing (Preez et al., 2015).

2.4.2 Conceptualising Ripple Effects of Adversity

In considering the lived experiences of young mothers into the lifespan, appreciation of pre-existing adversity may be particularly relevant. As discussed, teenage mothers are more likely than their same-aged counterparts to have experienced childhood social and economic disadvantage, which may compromise long-term outcomes for some mothers (Furstenburg, 2016; Gunes, 2016; Lee et al., 2016; Mann et al., 2020; Mollborn, 2017; SmithBattle & Leonard, 2012). For instance, pre-existing issues of poverty have been discussed to contribute to ongoing economic disadvantage for this group of women (Gunnes, 2016) in ways that are in opposition to women's rights to have equal access to education and employment (AHRC, 2018; Global Fund for Women, 2018).

As discussed, research conducted by Gunnes (2016) suggests that former teenage mothers tend to catch up to the earnings of their sibling groups by midlife. However, access to superannuation later in life due to prolonged periods of unpaid childrearing may hypothetically be a point of concern for some women. Reduced access to superannuation as a whole can result in women being more reliant on the Age Pension than men (AHRC, 2018). Therefore, educational and vocational inequalities during adolescence and early adulthood may have repercussions at later points in the lifespan.

Economic inequalities can in turn impact long-term health outcomes (Kim et al., 2018). Access to resources for general health can result in exposure to stressful living situations, which can influence poorer health (Kim et al., 2018). Issues of pre-existing trauma may also be important to consider. As discussed, young mothers as a group experience high rates of abuse within their childhood backgrounds (Mann et al., 2020). Experiences of trauma have been noted to increase risk of revictimization at later points in the lifespan (Bjørnholt, 2019; Papalia et al., 2021). Experiences of trauma can also have long-term health ramifications (Kim et al., 2018; Nusslock & Miller, 2016). For instance, Nusslock and Miller

(2016), argued that childhood adversity amplifies crosstalk between neural processes related to threat and reward, resulting in chronic low-grade inflammation. Nusslock and Miller (2016) noted that this inflammation contributes to pre-disease states, inclusive of insulin resistance. Nusslock and Miller (2016) further identified that trauma impacts the brain in a way that creates a predisposition to self-medicating behaviours such as substance misuse and poor diet across the lifespan.

2.4.3 Conceptualising Challenges in the Maternal Journey: Mothers and Their Children

Cognitive and behavioural issues have been documented regarding the long-term outcomes of children born to teenage mothers (AIHW, 2018a), which may in theory present as particular challenges in the maternal journey (Neece et al., 2012). As discussed, adolescent mothers as a group are overrepresented in areas of social inequality. It is important to acknowledge that children born to teenage mothers are also vulnerable to adversity (AIHW, 2018a; Goossens et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2016). Goossens et al. (2015) undertook a systematic review of online journal articles from between 1989 and 2015 relating to the social and health outcomes of children born to teenage mothers in developed countries. Results indicated that babies born to teenage mothers risk physical health issues associated with preterm delivery and low birth rates, particularly amongst children born to mothers under the age of 16. Findings also indicated that children born to teenagers are at increased likelihood of living in homes with minimal financial resources and are susceptible to poorer educational outcomes than children born to older mothers (Goossens et al., 2015).

Further, children born to teenage mothers may be at risk of long-term cognitive and behavioural problems (AIHW, 2018a). Results from a study (Shaw et al., 2006) of children who had received antenatal care at the Mater Hospital in Brisbane, Australia, concluded that by the age of 14, children born to teenage mothers were at increased risk of demonstrating disturbed psychological behaviour. These children were more likely to have had involvement

in the criminal justice system than their counterparts born to older mothers (Shaw et al., 2006). More recently, Lee et al. (2016) studied variations in behavioural developmental outcomes amongst adolescents born to teenage mothers. Lee et al. (2016) identified an increased likelihood of challenging behaviours among children born to teenage mothers. Lee et al. (2016) argued that the impacts of cumulative poverty could have a significant bearing on explaining adverse outcomes.

Literature suggests that it may be a minority rather than the majority of such children who have adverse outcomes (Lee et al., 2016; Shaw et al., 2006). Yet where children do develop problems, this outcome has potential to cause parental stress and pressures on family relationships (Neece et al., 2012). There are associations between child development issues and parental stress, with behavioural and cognitive issues among children posing complex challenges for parents in general (Clauser et al, 2021; Neece et al., 2012). Literature suggests that parents faced with children's challenging behaviours can experience high parenting pressure which can have a profound impact on intrafamilial relationships (Clauser et al., 2021; Neece et al., 2012). A strong association has been identified between high parenting stress and depression, marital conflict, poorer physical health, and tensions in the relationship between parent and child (Neece et al., 2012). Robinson (2015) proposed that from a lifespan perspective, stressors related to family relationships are the main trigger for crisis for women across adulthood. Therefore, where behavioural and cognitive issues develop, this may have ramifications for adjustment amongst some former teenage mothers at various points in adulthood.

2.4.4 Intergenerational Links of Child Protection Involvement

As discussed, teenage mothers as a group are more likely to have experienced child protection involvement during their childhoods than their same-age counterparts (Garwood et al., 2015). The children of teenage mothers are in turn particularly vulnerable to child

protection involvement (AHRC, 2017). Links of intergenerational child protection involvement can be influenced by unresolved childhood experiences of trauma, creating patterns that are repeated into the next generation (Menger Leeman, 2018).

Wall-Wieler, Bronwell, Singal, Nickel, and Roos (2018) undertook research to determine risks for removal of a first-born child amongst a cohort of parents. The objective was to determine associated risks of having their first child taken into the care of child protection services. This was a retrospective cohort study of women in Canada. The study found that teenage mothers in general were significantly more likely to have their babies removed (Wall-Wieler et al., 2018). The study found that there was a distinct cycle of child protective service involvement within adolescent mothers who had themselves experienced child protection involvement. Adolescents who were children in protection services were 11 times more likely to have their children removed (Wall-Wieler et a., 2018).

Child protection intervention can in itself be traumatic for parents (AIFS 2018; Braithwaite, 2021; Schaffer, 2006). Research indicates that parents who are subject to child protective intervention can be placed in a position in which they are marginalised, powerless, or feel that they are treated without compassion (Braithwaite, 2021; AIFS, 2018). Where intervention results in interruption to parent-child relationships, parents can face grief and loss issues (AIFS, 2018). Impacts on children also are noted to be highly detrimental (Masten, 2018).

2.5 Theoretical Perspectives on Human Development

2.5.1 Erikson's Life-Stage Theory of Psychosocial Development

Erikson's life-stage theory of development (Erikson, 1950, 1968) is a model of understanding which encompasses a biopsychosocial appreciation (Robinson, 2013). This model was pioneered by Erikson in the 1950s as a way of conceptualising stages of human

development and corresponding social and developmental needs across the lifespan (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Robinson, 2013). Erikson conceptualised human development through a holistic lens, proposing that biological, psychological, and social factors must be considered interdependently (Robinson, 2013). Erikson considered the relationship between individuals and their environment to be defined by 'mutuality,' in that "a person shapes their social context while the social context in turn shapes them and their development" (Robinson, 2013 p. 129).

In development of the model, Erikson drew inspiration from other prominent psychoanalysts of the time (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Robinson, 2015). Of particular influence was the work of Sigmund Freud, who posited that an intricate balance of childhood experiences shape an individual's transition throughout their lifespan, and the work of Carl Jung, who theorised that transitions throughout the lifespan are characterised by tensions of opposing needs, with personal growth being achieved by consistently mediating and balancing these needs (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Freud, 1905; Jung, 1947; Robinson, 2015).

A principal concept in Erikson's work is the notion that ego is central to human experience (Robinson, 2013). Erikson defined the ego as the essence of one's subjective identity. The ego's function is proposed "to integrate drives, thoughts, emotions, fantasies, personality, moral standards and social relations into an 'identity'—a sense of being a unique, integrated and authentic person" (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Robinson, 2013, p. 129). Erikson considered the ego to be constantly evolving over time (Robinson, 2013). As Erikson explained, when a person's social circumstances or sense of identity are confronted, this can pose challenges to the ego and can influence a state of crisis (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Robinson, 2013). Conversely, harmony within circumstances and ego can influence a state of psychosocial adjustment-a concept that relates to psychological wellbeing as dependent on adaptation to social circumstances (Bernstein et al., 2013; Robinson, 2013). It is noted that

Erikson considered personal identity to be interlinked with concepts of social identity discussed earlier within this chapter, as personal identity development is influenced by an individual's connection to their communities and families (McLeod, 2019).

As discussed within Chapter One, concepts pertaining to adjustment between an individual and their environment have more recently been discussed by various sources. For example, the American Psychological Association (APA, 2022), describe social adjustment as relating to accommodation to social demands, constraints, and customs of society. Such accommodation can be understood as a dynamic process, in which individuals may alter their behaviours towards securing a sense of social, familial, or cultural acceptance (Runjun, 2020). The inability to harmoniously adjust to one's environment can result in a range of detrimental outcomes, inclusive of emotional challenges, challenges within interpersonal relationships, and impaired vocational opportunities (Runjun, 2020; Schulte et al., 2018).

2.5.2 Conceptualising Life Stages from Infancy to Later Life

Erikson's life-stage model of human development consists of eight stages of development, spanning infancy to old age (Erikson 1950,1968; Maree, 2021; Polan & Taylor, 2019; Robinson, 2015). A dialectical pair of opposing forces are represented in each of the life stages, with each stage representing conflicting tensions for personal growth (Maree, 2021; Robinson, 2013). Extreme imbalances in developmental dialect can be a catalyst for developmental crisis (Maree, 2021; Robinson, 2015). Conflicting developmental tensions are proposed to peak during their allocated life stage, yet the core concerns of each life stage are apparent to a certain degree across the adult lifespan (Robinson, 2013).

Each of the life stages referred to in Erikson's life-stage model of human development are outlined below. Theoretical contributions of a range of theorists are interwoven. As noted by Robinson (2013), Erikson's model "provided a starting point for researchers and theorists who have since emulated his focus on the whole person's journey through definable life

stages, and crisis and formative transitions" (Robinson, 2013, p. 131). Contributions of Marcia (1993), Arnett (2000), and Levinson (1978) in building upon life-stage understandings are discussed below regarding their relevance for understanding the life stages of adolescence, early adulthood, and midlife.

2.5.3 Life-Stage Understandings Related to Childhood

Erikson (1950,1968) described four stages which span across childhood. The first of such stages relates to the first two years of an infant's life, which are conceived to be characterised by competing developmental tensions of 'trust versus mistrust' (Robinson, 2013). During this stage, if infants' needs are not consistently met by those around them, they may begin to feel fearful and distrustful of others (Maree, 2021; Polan & Taylor, 2019). The second stage relates to ages two to four, which are conceived to be characterised by tensions around 'autonomy versus shame and doubt' (Maree, 2021; Robinson, 2013). During this stage, infants "learn to exercise their will, to make choices and to control themselves—or they become uncertain and doubt that they can do things by themselves" (Bernstein et al., 2013, p. 498). The third stage relates to the ages between four to five, during which time children are presented with developmental tasks related to 'initiative versus Guilt' (Maree, 2021; Robinson, 2013). Positive adjustment during this stage is dependent on children learning to initiate activities on their own (Bernstein et al., 2013). Where a child is exposed to excessive invalidating statements and actions, they can develop a pervasive sense of guilt and begin to question, "is it okay to be me?" (Bernstein et al., 2013, p. 498). The fourth stage relates to 'industry versus inferiority,' which is a particular developmental challenge between the ages of five and puberty (Maree, 2021). During this stage, children develop increasing competency in their endeavours (Maree, 2021). Where they receive recognition for their developing sense of interests, they can develop initiative to achieve their goals (Bernstein et al., 2013). Excessive criticism during this stage can result in children feeling a sense of

inferiority and a loss of motivation (Bernstein et al., 2013; Erikson, 1950; Polan & Taylor, 2019).

2.5.4 Life-Stage Understandings Relating to Adolescence

Erikson proposed that 'identity versus role confusion' is the main developmental challenge for adolescents (Crocetti, 2017; Erikson, 1950; Maree, 2021; Robinson, 2013). The stage of adolescence spans the period of puberty to the age of 18 (Bernstein et al., 2013; Robinson, 2015). During this time, young people experience a heightened need for acceptance and belonging (Dahl et al., 2018). Young people tend to undertake a quest for identity, as biological, psychological, and social changes occurring in adolescence "stimulate young people to think about themselves, reflect on the kind of people they want to become, and find their place in society" (Crocetti, 2017, p. 145). Learning about oneself is by no means a straightforward task for young people, who must simultaneously adapt to the increasing social complexities associated with adult society (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017; Dahl et al., 2018; Marcia, 1993).

Where an adolescent experiences freedom to explore their own sense of identity in a way that is safe and uplifting this can encourage and facilitate a positive sense of identity. On the contrary, where adolescents feel pushed to conform to roles that they do not identify with, or experience a lack of love and acceptance, they can begin to feel lost and confused (Bernstein et al., 2013; Erikson, 1950; Polan & Taylor, 2019). A state of confusion can lead to a young person "failing to choose their own commitments and to hold meaningful identifications that provide them with a sense of direction" (Crocetti, 2017, p. 145).

Various theorists have elaborated upon Erikson's work in conceptualising adolescent identity (Crocetti, 2017; McDermott et al., 2022; Robinson, 2013). Crocetti (2017) notes that a particularly influential expansion is Marcia's Identity Status Paradigm. Marcia built upon concepts of identity versus role confusion, proposing that two dimensions, namely

‘exploration’ and ‘commitment,’ influence identity status during adolescence (Crocetti, 2017; Marcia, 1993, 1993; McDermott et Al., 2022; Robinson, 2013). As explained by Crocetti (2017, p. 145), identity exploration relates to “actively questioning and weighing various identity alternatives before deciding which values, beliefs, and goals to pursue,” and commitment relates to “making identity choices and engaging in activities to implement them.” Identity exploration is influenced by internal and external processes (Marcia, 1993). Specifically, identity can be conferred in the sense that it is “given by one’s childhood caretakers,” or constructed in the sense that it is “built by oneself out of conferred elements” (Marcia, 1993, p. 8).

Various combinations of processes related to identity exploration and commitment in adolescence are conceived to influence four possible identity statuses, known as identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement (Crocetti, 2017; Kocer, 2020; Robinson, 2013). Identity diffusion refers to circumstances in which commitment to a specific identity has not been made, and identity exploration has not been attempted (Crocetti, 2017; Kocer, 2020; Robinson, 2013). Foreclosure refers to identity that is committed upon without identity exploration (McDermott et al., 2022; Robinson, 2013). As articulated by McDermott et al. (2022, p. 212), “foreclosed individuals have, in theory, committed to an identity without critically thinking about it.” This identity status can be conferred in the sense that life goals and priorities can be driven by dominant ideologies or prescribed by authority figures such as parents (Marcia, 1993; McDermott et al., 2022). Marcia (1993, p. 8) notes that the self-esteem of adolescents with a foreclosure identity status can be “contingent upon the extent to which they ‘fulfill’ the tasks given to them,” and that they can subsequently find themselves trying to live up to the expectations of others. Moratorium refers to the identity status whereby “an adolescent is engaged in active exploration of alternative aspects of themselves, but is yet to commit to a clear identity”

(Kocer, 2020; Robinson, 2013, p. 134). Conversely, identity achievement refers to an identity status whereby "exploration has been successfully engaged in and an autonomous identity adopted" (Robinson, 2013, p. 134). Identity achievement is considered to be a particularly desirable identity status, that is related to effective decision making, independent thinking, and positive interpersonal relationships (McDermott et al., 2022; Robinson, 2013).

2.5.5 Life-Stage Understandings Relating to Early Adulthood

Early adulthood is described as a period when bonds, such as intimate relationships, are of key developmental significance (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Polan & Taylor, 2019; Robinson, 2013). Erikson proposed that developmental tensions within this period are characterised by 'intimacy versus isolation' (Robinson, 2013). During the peak development of the model in the 1950s and 1960s, marriage and first conception tended to occur in an individual's early twenties. It was considered socially problematic if one were to hold off on getting married, because they risked experiencing a sense of missing out (Robinson, 2015). Therefore, crisis within this stage was initially considered to related to feelings of isolation where intimate relationships were not formed (Robinson, 2015). However, evolving relationship patterns relating to norms regarding marriage, divorce, cohabitation, and family structures have led to considerable changes in crisis episodes during this stage (Robinson, 2015).

In his seminal work on the theory of emerging adulthood, Arnett (2000) proposed that recent decades have seen the emergence of two distinct stages to early adulthood. The first stage, termed emerging adulthood, occurs between the ages of 18 and 25 and is typically characterised by a flux of instability between being an adolescent and adult (Arnett, 2000; Robinson, 2015). During this stage, identity exploration features as being a particularly prominent focus, and young adults may explore various options relating to relationships, employment, and world views before committing to enduring choices (Arnett, 2000, 2015a;

Arnett & Mitra, 2020; Robinson, 2015). A stage of exploration is suggested to be foundational in the development of a stable sense of self. As articulated by Arnett and Mitra (2020, p. 413), through trying out various possibilities, “emerging adults develop a more definite identity, that is, an understanding of who they are, what their capabilities and limitations are, what their beliefs and values are, and how they fit into the society around them.” The second stage, termed early adulthood, occurs between ages 25 and 35 and tends to be more settled (Arnett, 2000; Robinson, 2015).

Considering noted changes in social norms relating to early adulthood since the introduction of Erikson’s (1950, 1968) model, Robinson, (2015) argued that the model’s original dialect of ‘intimacy versus isolation’ may no longer capture developmental tensions in early adulthood. In contemporary western society, people tend to value independence, which has become a norm within itself (Robinson, 2015). Robinson (2015) argued that an increasing level of choice in recent times tends to be the catalyst for crisis during early adulthood, particularly as it relates to intimate relationships. People in committed relationships can experience crisis related to feeling locked into commitment, whereas those who are single may experience crisis relating to feeling unable to enter, and subsequently locked out of intimacy (Robinson, 2015). Robinson (2015) suggested that ‘commitment versus independence’ may therefore be a more suitable for conceptualising crisis within this stage than the model’s original dialect.

2.5.6 Life-Stage Understandings Relating to Middle Age

Midlife is conceived to be a period during which “fulfilling life goals that involve concern for future generations” are of particular developmental significance (Erikson, 1982; Robinson, 2013, p. 130). Definitions of the midlife period have varied across time periods and increasing life expectancy has meant that the middle life period has consistently risen (Robinson, 2015). The term midlife often is used to describe the period commencing from the

age of 40 to the age of 60, yet qualitative literature around subjective experiences of ageing suggest that perceived meanings of midlife generally extend to around age 69 (Robinson, 2015; Shinan-Altman & Werner, 2019).

Erikson described developmental tensions within midlife as relating to 'generativity versus stagnation' (Robinson, 2013). Erikson proposed that during midlife, a strong desire for generativity may develop, in that people may want to contribute back to society (Bernstein et al., 2013; Erikson & Erikson, 1982; Polan & Taylor, 2019). Feeling able to achieve generativity as a goal can result in a sense of fulfillment, whereas feeling unable to attain a sense of purpose can result in detrimental emotions such as pessimism or stagnation (Bernstein et al., 2013; Erikson & Erikson, 1982; Polan & Taylor, 2019; Robinson, 2013).

A range of theorists have sought to expand on theoretical understandings of the midlife period. Levinson (1977) introduced the theory of life structure which was particularly influential in conceptualising midlife transitions (Robinson, 2013; Schmidt, 2020). Levinson's theory of the life structure is not limited to conceptualising midlife yet gives major emphasis to the midlife transitional period (Nicic, 2019; Robinson, 2013). Levinson's theory of life structure relates to balance between inner and outer aspects of development (Levinson, 1977; Robinson, 2013). Integration between inner and outer life structure is considered key to finding a sense of wholeness and balance (Robinson, 2013). According to Levinson (1977), changes in the transition to midlife can present challenges to such integration. Midlife transitions can prompt individuals to reflect on their accomplishments, early dreams, aspirations, and values (Levinson, 1977). Such review may contrast with outer aspects of their lives, such as the nature of their personal relationships or other features of their lives (Levinson, 1977). Levinson (1977, p. 107) proposed that such incongruence can be experienced as a state of crisis characterised by emotional turmoil; despair; a sense of

conflict; confusion about what direction to take; and a need to explore a range of relationship, occupation, or lifestyle options (Levinson, 1977).

An overall sense of challenges within the midlife period may be particularly common (Gaydosh Hummer et al., 2019). For example, findings from a retrospective study into the types and outcomes of crisis in the lifespan suggests that between the ages of 40 and 49, up to 59% of women and 46% of men report experiencing a period of crisis (Robinson & Wright, 2013). Crises may be triggered by a range of circumstances inclusive of issues within family relationships, financial problems and the impacts of ageing on identity (Robinson & Wright, 2013).

‘Empty nesting is a crisis experienced by some women during midlife (Bougea et al., 2019). The concept of empty nesting was initially introduced by writer Dorothy Canfield in 1914 (Han, 2018). According to Han (2018, p. 29):

> … the concept of ‘empty nest syndrome’ was subsequently clinically identified and popularized in the 1970s as a group of symptoms including depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem, found among mothers whose last child had recently moved out of the family home.

Empty nesting is a transitional stage in which some parents can experience feelings of grief and loss, challenges in adjusting to their new identity, and lifestyle separate to a care-taking role, or changes within parent-child relationships (Bougea et al., 2019; Robinson, 2015). Yet challenges related to empty nesting are not universal (Robinson, 2015). As argued by Dare (2011, p. 113) in past decades, the prevalence of challenges linked to empty nesting was overstated, and “theories of psychological development often constructed depression in midlife women as a response to an empty nest.” However, many women welcome empty nesting to represent an opportunity for personal growth in which they can reconnect with

personal interests and identity and can find the transitional phase where their children leave home to be unproblematic (Dare, 2011; Mansoor & Hasan, 2019, Robinson, 2015).

Within academic literature, empty nesting appears to be generally referred to as a phenomenon which occurs within the midlife period alongside biological changes associated with ageing, such as menopause (Bougea et al., 2019; Lee & Lee, 2021; Mansoor & Hasa, 2019). It may be presumed however, that due to family formation occurring relatively early point within the lifespan of teenage mothers, empty nesting may occur within early adulthood for some women. As noted however, such phenomena appear to be unexplored.

2.5.7 Life-Stage Understandings Relating to Later Life

Erikson described late adulthood as a period whereby reflection over one's life becomes a central focus (Bernstein et al., 2013; Erikson & Erikson, 1982). Developmental tasks associated with later life are considered to relate to 'ego integrity vs despair' (Robinson, 2013). Those who feel that their lives have been positive and that they have made a meaningful contribution experience a sense of integrity, whereas those who feel that their lives have been wasted may experience despair (Bernstein et al., 2013; Erikson & Erikson, 1982; Polan & Taylor, 2019).

2.5.8 Life-Stage Model Critiques

Life-stage models have been critiqued from a feminist perspective as failing to equally represent women or value women's roles within the life cycle (Slote, 2016). Until the 1980s, there was a taken-for-granted assumption within the academic community that the life cycle model was representative of all humans (Gilligan, 1993, 2018; Slote, 2016). In her landmark work, *In a different voice*, Gilligan (1993) discussed observations that psychologists would study men and then make sweeping generalisations about the population as a whole (Gilligan, 1993, 2018; Slote, 2016). Gilligan (1993) argued that by leaving out

female participants in research, the life cycle model was biased towards male patterns of understanding. Furthermore, women's progress through such a model would, by default, be considered inferior to men's progress if their progress differed from the model (Gilligan, 1993).

Examples of misrepresenting women within life-stage understandings extend to Levinson's concepts of midlife (Schmidt, 2020). Levinson conducted research based on the lives of men; women were excluded from initial samples, and thus the evolution of his concepts around midlife (Schmidt, 2020). Levinson's research described midlife as a season of change, characterised by men reinventing themselves. For example, Levinson drew heavily on a case study of a participant who had engaged in a pattern of infidelity, divorced his wife, and remarried a younger woman before reinventing his career path (Schmidt, 2020). Such transitions were considered to be a hallmark of personal growth, whereby men distanced themselves from their wives in ways that allowed them to master midlife bodily and sexual changes (Schmidt, 2020). Misogyny was evident in such conceptualisations, in that women were conceived merely as extensions of men, without their own importance or growth (Schmidt, 2020).

Various authors, including Sorell and Montgomery (2001), have also critiqued the applicability of life-stage theories to women. These authors argued that Erikson's life-stage model has a focus on the development of an independent, separate identity, particularly during early adulthood, which is not necessarily representative of women who may place more value on connection with others. Slote (2016) argued that the original work on life-stage theory also reflected patriarchal assumptions of what is natural life-stage development for women and men.

Despite flaws within original life cycle theorising, Slote (2016) and Sorell and Montgomery (2001) argued life-stage models are not devoid of value. Specifically, Sorell and Montgomery (2001, p. 122) stressed that:

> Many—not all, but many—postmodern and feminist standpoint theorists and researchers, especially those concerned with human development, have implicitly or explicitly adopted analytical strategies congruent with the life-span biopsychosocial framework, even as they reject other aspects of Erikson's theory.

Slote (2016) asserted that for the model to be applied in a way that is not sexist, it is important to value how women choose to balance their lives between family and career. Women's decisions regarding balancing family and career are however undermined within a neo-liberal climate. Clarke and Newman (2012) discuss austerity within social and political responses to women's decisions to mother outside the bounds of economic security. Economically disadvantaged women, particularly those who are single, are commonly portrayed to be a threat to capitalist structures (Clarke & Newman, 2012; Jensen, 2013). As articulated by Jensen (2013, p. 60), "the social problems of poverty, social immobility, economic inequalities and disadvantage are magically transformed into problems of 'welfare dependence', 'cultures of entitlement' and 'irresponsibility.'" Correspondingly, state provisions for women who choose not to work while parenting reflect a punitive mentality, in which access to welfare payments is conditional, insufficient, and perpetuates poverty (Clarke & Newman, 2012; Jensen, 2013). In this sense, ways in which women choose to balance their lives between family and career are restricted by way of oppressive societal structures (Clarke & Newman, 2012; Jensen, 2013).

A further important consideration in appreciating variances in psychosocial development, is that of cultural relativism (Keller, 2019; Marcus & Fischer, 1999). A

homogenization towards western frameworks of understanding has been apparent in dominant psychological theory (Marcus & Fischer, 1999; Keller, 2019). Yet, while humans may be predisposed to universal development similarities, beliefs, values, and practices vary considerably between cultures (Keller, 2019). Cultural variations exist relating to phenomena such as age upon entering marriage. For example, in many countries, young women transition quickly from childhood to adulthood due to early marriage and subsequently may not experience phenomena within life-stage theory around adolescence or emerging adulthood (Hendry & Kloep, 2007). Furthermore, values around autonomy and interdependence can differ in meaning depending on culture (Keller, 2019). Within western culture, there tends to be an orientation towards psychological autonomy whereas in other cultures, there may be more orientation towards collectivism (Keller, 2019). An appreciation of cultural differences and influences are therefore important in avoiding top-down imposition of dominant western norms and values (Keller, 2019; Marcus & Fischer, 1999; Slote, 2016).

Considerations of class may be equally important to consider (Hendry & Kloep, 2007; Robinson, 2013). Hendry and Kloep (2007) provided a critiqued Arnett's (2000) theory of emerging adulthood from various angles, including inherent assumptions around culture and class. Many life-stage theories are based on middle-class samples in western countries (Hendry & Kloep, 2007; Robinson, 2013). They argued that concepts of emerging adulthood may therefore only be a reality for affluent, middle-class members of western society, who have the luxury to spend longer period of time exploring prior to making commitments around factors such as education (Hendry & Kloep, 2007; Robinson, 2013).

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed literature pertaining to the sociopolitical context surrounding teenage motherhood, inclusive of social norms and values, which have arguably influenced heightened scrutiny towards teenage mothers. Childhood and adolescent adversity may be

disproportionately experienced by young mothers. This adversity may include childhood abuse, economic and social exclusion, increased risks of domestic violence, and development of mental health problems. The chapter revisited gaps in research literature relating to the lives of young mothers beyond adolescence, and presented a small body of research relating to the experiences and perspectives of former teenage mothers. It was suggested that, due to adversity preceding early motherhood, conceptualising ripple effects of adversity into the teenage mothers' lifespan may be pertinent to consider the ongoing impacts of trauma and potential challenges within the maternal journey. Finally, this chapter introduced a range of theories pertaining to human development, while acknowledging how such models are not necessarily representative of all women, cultural, or economic groups.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Chapter Overview

In this study, feminist standpoint theory was combined with constructivist grounded theory in the exploration of themes in former teenage mothers' experiences across their lifespan. In this chapter, I present the theoretical underpinnings inherent in such an approach, inclusive of epistemological assumptions and areas of compatibility between both perspectives. The selection of a qualitative methodology and aims of the research are also outlined. I then turn my attention to considerations of ethical issues and participant welfare, followed by research methods including sampling, data collection, and the operationalisation of feminist principles during interviewing. Finally, data analysis and considerations of quality and rigour within the parameters of a constructivist grounded theory approach are discussed, and limitations of the research are acknowledged.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

3.2.1 Feminist Standpoint Theory

When I initially began to consider the issues that may be associated with adolescent motherhood over a lifetime, I was struck by the way in which voices of women who have experienced these phenomena were glaringly absent from available literature. Ellis-Sloan (2019, p.100) critiqued the lack of qualitative studies dedicated to exploring the long-term outcomes of adolescent mothers and highlighted a tendency within existing literature to impose parameters "from a middle-class perspective which define what is and isn't 'normative,'" subsequently equating and labelling difference in deficit terms. The labelling of women's lives in ways which do not offer recourse to women themselves in defining their own sense of identity, needs, and interests, was something that did not sit comfortably with

me. Subsequently, I was drawn to a feminist approach due to its ability to position the voices of women at the centre of this inquiry (Hesse-Biber, 2012).

Wigginton and Lafrance (2019, p. 2) identified that a "broad and diverse terrain of feminist scholarship" exists. It is acknowledged that this study was influenced by standpoint feminism. Standpoint feminism places particular value on the socially situated knowledge of oppressed groups. According to Intermann (2016, p. 261) "standpoint feminism originated in the 1970s among Marxist feminists, who were interested in understanding how hierarchical structures, such as capitalism and patriarchy shape and limit our knowledge practices."

Early feminist standpoint theorists critiqued the production of dominant knowledge as belonging to elites, and catering to the vested interests of the powerful in maintaining an unjust social order (Intermann, 2016). Further, these theorists recognised androcentric biases in knowledge production and tendencies within fields such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology to generate knowledge under a guise of impartiality that marginalised women's experiences (Intermann, 2016; Smith, 1991; Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). For example, Dorothy Smith, a foundational scholar in developing feminist standpoint theory, critiqued a disconnection between her own lived experiences and academic literature, noting:

> Sociology claims to speak of the same lived world I inhabited with my children and yet somehow I could not find the world I knew at home with my children in the texts of sociological discourse. The sociologies and psychologies I had learned were not capable of speaking of what I knew as a matter of my life (Smith 1991, p. 157).

In this sense, it was argued that knowledge production can exclude the lived realities and vantage points of some groups, including some groups of mothers (Harding, 1991; Intermann, 2016; Smith, 1991). Feminist standpoint theorists proposed that incorporating

women’s experiences could contribute to more balanced and complete ways of knowing. As scholar and central feminist standpoint theorist, Sandra Harding articulated:

> Women’s different lives have been erroneously devalued and neglected as starting points for scientific research and as the generators of evidence for or against knowledge claims … Using women’s lives as grounds to criticise the dominant knowledge claims, which have been based primarily in the lives of men in the dominant races, classes and cultures, can decrease the partialities and distortions in the picture of nature and social life provided by the natural and social sciences (Harding, 1991, p. 121).

Standpoint theorists aimed to address the marginalisation of women’s experiences, seeking to understand “how their realities are organized, and the ways in which social relations and societal structures inform their experiences” (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019, p. 4). It was considered that by virtue of lived experiences of gender oppression within a patriarchal capitalist society, knowledge produced from the standpoint of women may be a resource for identifying areas of oppression (Intermann, 2016). As articulated by Intermann (2016, p. 262), knowledge generated from oppressed groups was considered to aid in “identifying problematic assumptions in the theories and frameworks widely held by those in power, who were likely to benefit from justifying existing social inequalities.” In this sense, feminist standpoint theorists sought to generate “knowledge created by women for women” for the purpose of emancipation (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019, p. 4).

3.2.2 Epistemological Considerations Inherent in a Feminist Standpoint Theory Approach

Adopting a feminist standpoint perspective involved deviating significantly from positivist notions of researcher neutrality. As argued by Hesse-Biber (2012), positivists believe that through objective pursuits towards knowledge, universal truths can be uncovered.

The epistemological perspective of standpoint feminism runs counter to concepts of objectivity within empiricism, proposing that attempts of neutrality cannot completely eliminate researchers' social values and interests (Harding, 1995, 1992; Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). Rather, as Harding (1995, p. 340) argued, culture-wide assumptions such as Eurocentric and androcentric undertones remain embedded because "when a scientific community shares assumptions, there is little chance that more careful application of existing scientific methods will detect them." Unacknowledged and undetected assumptions can systematically distort results, biasing knowledge production towards the dominant status quo (Harding, 1995, 1992; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019).

It follows from an inherent rejection of positivist notions of neutrality, that the subjective processes of researchers are accounted for within a feminist standpoint approach. Wigginton and Lafrance (2019, p. 8) argued that "objectivity has been fundamentally reconceptualized within feminist standpoint epistemology." They noted that "strong objectivity requires locating and interrogating the researchers' subjectivity, so that researchers do not speak as invisible 'god-like' authorities, but instead as historically-placed subjects, with their own desires and interests" (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019, p. 8).

Adopting a feminist standpoint perspective also entails honouring the situated knowledge of participants (Steckle, 2018; Wigginton and Lafrance, 2019). The term 'situated knowledge' was coined by feminist philosopher Donna Haraway to refer to the epistemological perspective that all knowledge is limited and enabled by one's social location. As argued by Haraway (1988, p. 590), "situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals. The only way to find a larger vision, is to be somewhere in particular." In this sense, feminist standpoint theorists argue that the power within standpoint epistemology "lies in the epistemic privilege or authority gained through particular socially situated perspectives" (Wigginton and Lafrance, 2019, p. 8).

From a feminist standpoint perspective, the situational knowledge of marginalised groups is distinctly valuable (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Intermann, 2016; Wigginton and Lafrance, 2019). Intermann (2016) notes that standpoint theorists view direct experiences of oppression as affording insights that may otherwise be obscured from view. Such insights are not laden with the "problematic assumptions in the theories and frameworks widely held by those in power" that can be used to justify the perpetuation of social inequality (Intermann, 2016, p. 262).

3.2.3 Constructivist Grounded Theory

I sought to build upon theoretical understandings of lifespan issues associated with young motherhood by applying a grounded theory approach. According to Corbin and Strauss (2015, p. 3), the purpose of grounded theory "is to construct theory grounded in data." Chun Tie, Birks, and Francis (2019, pp. 1–2) propose that grounded theory "is appropriate when little is known about a phenomenon; with the aim being to produce or construct an explanatory theory that uncovers a process inherent to the substantive area of enquiry." In this sense, I felt that grounded theory fitted closely with my intention to build on theoretical understandings about phenomena related to life after adolescent motherhood, within a climate of significant gaps in current understandings.

Grounded theory was founded by Barney Glaser and Anslem Strauss, whose seminal book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (1967), challenged the traditional research methods of deductive testing. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 3) questioned deductive approaches whereby theory is "generated by logical deduction from *a priori* assumptions." Their position held that theory should be meaningfully related to, and hence, grounded in the data under study through an inductive approach (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory has continued to evolve since its inception, with a range of philosophical perspectives that have influenced methodological development

(Chun Tie et al., 2019). One such extension is Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory perspective, which has particularly influenced my approach in exploring former teenage mothers' social adjustment across the various life phases.

According to Mills, Bonner, and Francis (2006), Charmaz had been a student under Glaser and Strauss who emerged to become a highly influential figure in constructivist grounded theory. Charmaz (2006) highlighted ways in which the assumption of an external reality, through characteristics such as analytic questions and hypothesis that were implicit in original grounded theory applications, have positivist implications, in that they "assume the existence of an external reality" (Mills et al., 2006, p. 6).

Constructivist grounded theory is influenced by social constructivism, defined by Leavy and Harris (2019, p. 28) as "the idea that knowledge and even perception and identity are all formed in relation to others, to the society as a group" (Leavy & Harris, 2019 p. 28). This perspective holds that rather than one objective truth, multiple meanings are possible (Mills et al., 2006). In this sense, constructivist grounded theory has an inherent acknowledgement of a co-production of reality between researcher and participant within the knowledge-building process (Mills et al., 2006). As was argued by Charmaz (2006, p. 10):

> Neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices … any theoretical rendering offers an interpretive portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it. Research participants' implicit meanings, experiential views—and researchers' finished grounded theories—are constructions of reality.

3.2.4 Integration of Constructivist Grounded Theory With a Feminist Approach

My selection of a constructivist grounded theory approach was influenced by constructivism being congruent with my own world views, particularly around a rejection of objectivity or universal truths. The importance of a comfortable fit between researchers and their chosen theoretical framework is argued by Mills, Bonner, and Francis (2006, p. 2), who advised that "to ensure a strong research design, researchers must choose a research paradigm that is congruent with their beliefs about the nature of reality." This selection also was influenced by a sense of what Plummer and Young (2010, p. 305) refer to as an "epistemological affinity" between feminist and constructed grounded theory approaches. For example, as has been noted, feminist standpoint scholars and scholars working from frameworks of social constructivism both share a rejection of empirical positivist notions of objectivity (Charmaz, 2006; Plummer & Young, 2010; Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019).

In addition, both perspectives place a strong emphasis on the importance of critical reflexivity due to recognition of ways in which researchers own contextual elements invariably influence knowledge production (Plumer & Young, 2010). Similar to critical reflexivity in feminist research, engagement in constructivist grounded theory involves a process of critical reflection, referred to by Charmaz (2017) as methodological self-consciousness. Methodological self-consciousness involves operating from a stance of deep reflexivity, "which leads researchers to scrutinize their data, actions, and nascent analyses" (Charmaz, 2017, p. 35). This process calls for researchers to reflect on preconceptions, and "requires scrutinizing our positions, privileges, and priorities and assessing how they affect our steps during the research process and our relationships with research participants" (Charmaz, 2017, p. 35).

Plummer and Young (2010) argued that in addition to epistemological compatibilities, these positions are complementary in the pursuit of social justice. Plummer and Young (2010,

p. 305) proposed that when combined, feminist and constructivist grounded theory approaches loosen "the androcentric moorings of the empirical processes underpinning grounded theory, enabling the researchers to design inquiry with greater potential to reveal issues particular to the lives and experiences of marginalized women."

The suitability between constructivist grounded theory and critical inquiry is outlined by Charmaz (2017, p. 35), who argued that constructivist grounded theory is compatible with studies that seek to "expose, oppose, and redress forms of oppression, inequality, and injustice." Specific mechanisms within constructivist grounded theory include furthering the interests of social justice and its ability to create knowledge from the vantage points of oppressed people. As argued by Charmaz (2019):

> Constructivist grounded theory emphasizes studying processes and thus fosters making connections between events and situations, meanings and actions, and individuals and social structures that otherwise may remain invisible. This version of grounded theory provides tools enabling researchers to go deep into studied life and see it from varied vantage points. Through conceptualizing what we learn, constructivist grounded theorists can offer new understandings (Charmaz, 2019 p. 167).

3.3 A Qualitative Research Methodology

3.3.1 Orienting This Study Within a Qualitative Framework

In reflecting on epistemological commitments inherent within feminist standpoint theory and constructivist grounded theory, it became apparent that a qualitative methodology was best suited for my study. According to Yates and Leggett (2016, p. 225), "quantitative studies are appropriate for examining relationships between and among variables, describing trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population, as well as for testing the effects of a treatment

or intervention on an outcome" (Yates & Leggett, 2016, p. 225). Wigginton and Lafrance (2019, p. 10) argued that there are inherent assumptions within such measures, including notions of empirical objectivity within research processes, and notions of there being "an internal quality of individuals that can be measured independent of context." Such assumptions are not compatible with feminist standpoint theory or constructivist grounded theory, with a rejection of notions of objectivity inherent in both perspectives (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019).

Further, it was recognised that a qualitative research design was compatible with the aims inherent in feminist standpoint theory, of giving voice to women who have been less heard or rendered less visible. As has been discussed, feminist standpoint theorists have argued that mainstream research has failed to adequately represent women's experiences, which have been interpreted by conceptual categories decided by those in positions of power. Wigginton and Lafrance (2019, p. 7) argued that "rather than starting from the *a priori* categories and assumptions of empiricist science, then, standpoint theorists begin inquiry with the experiences of individuals who are not members of dominant groups with the goal of opening up different ways of understanding by foregrounding marginalised voices."

It was envisaged that a qualitative approach could enable possibilities for in depth understandings around oppressive features of the sociopolitical order (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Yates & Leggett, 2016). As outlined by Moser and Korstjens (2018, p. 12), qualitative research "seeks to describe the meanings of central themes in the life world of the participants" through listening and attempting to understand the underlying meanings communicated by participants. A qualitative approach afforded opportunities to explore participants' subjective experiences by building in-depth understandings (Rutberg, & Bouikidis, 2018). Further, it allowed me to capture the nuances and subtly of concepts within participants' stories, and the overall essence of life-stage phenomena in a way that would not

have been possible using a quantitative research approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Such understandings included those related to issues of social justice. Rubin and Rubin (2005) argued that qualitative research has scope to examine survival under circumstances of adversity (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). For example, a qualitative researcher can attain in-depth information which may contribute to explanations of how one participant obtained a particular outcome when another did not (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As articulated by Yates and Leggett (2016, p. 225), qualitative researchers find "the how and why of the story."

As identified in previous chapters, available literature identifies that teenage mothers are a group of women who are at risk of experiencing a range of inequalities (ACOSS, 2017; AHRC, 2017; Gunes, 2016). I found a qualitative approach guided by feminist principles useful to understand social justice issues faced by this group of women, while providing opportunities for participants to assert their own needs and interests. In this sense, a qualitative feminist approach was particularly suited to the exploratory and emancipatory aims of my research.

In operationalising the primary and secondary aims, which focus on exploring teenage mothers' transitions across phases of their lifespan, this study utilised a biographical approach. Biographical research is a qualitative approach that "seeks to investigate individual's daily life experiences and their past and future perspectives, using a variety of materials and interpretive approaches" (Roberts, 2002, p. 1). A biographical approach entailed collecting data on retrospective accounts of participants' lives (Robinson, 2013). Such an approach "assumes that a person's written or spoken story about their past can illuminate the ups and downs of development and the life cycle" (Robinson, 2013, p. 32). According to Robinson (2013, p. 32), biographical research can be used in a variety of ways, including to develop theory about how life is experienced, to understand the kinds of life

stories that are related to positive outcomes, to explore how early experiences are associated with outcomes in adulthood, and "to give participants a chance to tell their own life story."

3.4 Researcher Biography

As identified in Chapter One, my interest in this topic emerges from my own lived experiences. I became a mother at the age of 15, and as such, I am an insider researcher in relation to this topic. During my time as an adolescent mother, I experienced issues of stigma and discrimination. These experiences have resulted in a deep appreciation of social justice and human rights issues associated with mothering outside of 'normative' bounds.

Further, as discussed, during my own journey across the lifespan, I have become increasingly aware of gaps in current knowledge around lifespan issues associated with adolescent motherhood and subsequent life stages. Several considerations regarding my position as an insider and feminist researcher are revisited in this chapter. Such considerations pertain to discussing my own position as a former teenage mother in this thesis, and with participants during data collection (Hesse Biber, 2012; Rubin and Rubin, 2005), while also highlighting the benefits and challenges associated with insider research (Berger, 2015; Dinçer, 2019; Hayfield & Huxley, 2015).

3.5 Aims of the Research

This study was guided by the following research question:

What themes can be identified about former teenage mothers' lives as they transition across their lifespan from adolescence to middle age?

The primary aim of this study was to identify themes relating to how former teenage mothers navigated various phases of their lives. Secondary aims for this study were to:

- Explore barriers to self-determination for former teenage mothers at various points in their lifespan.

- Explore ways in which dominant societal values around early motherhood and early grandmotherhood are experienced by former teenage mothers, including any implications for personal and social identity.
- Build upon theoretical understandings of life-stage phenomena experienced by former teenage mothers.
- Contribute to research where women who have experienced teenage motherhood are consulted regarding their own needs, interests, identities, and perspectives relating to existing social policy and available welfare supports.

3.6 Ethical Issues and Participant Welfare

3.6.1 Issues of Autonomy and Access to Counselling and Support Services

Throughout the research process, after gaining ethics approval, I adhered to James Cook University guidelines (reflective of the National Health and Medicine Research Council guidelines) regarding ethical research conduct. This conduct included voluntary recruitment, ensuring that I had fully informed participants of the nature of the research, and that they had provided their written consent to participate. All participants were provided with a formal information sheet prior to interviewing (Appendix A). In addition, I carefully read the consent form to participants before commencing the interview, to confirm the voluntary nature of their participation and their rights to stop taking part in the interview at any time without explanation or prejudice (Appendix B). I ensured that participants verbally indicated that they understood risks of emotional distress before proceeding.

I was mindful of ways in which interviews may bring up sensitive topics for participants, which may induce or exacerbate emotional distress (Draucker et al., 2009). One way in which the potential for emotional distress to arise was managed was to provide participants with information on various support services. Information and contact details for

the Lifeline telephone counselling service, Beyond Blue, and Womensline were included in the information sheet for this study. No issues relating to harm or adverse events have been observed over the course of data collection.

3.6.2 Public Health Considerations in the Undertaking of the Data Collection in 2020

Participant welfare relating to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 was of utmost importance. The first nine interviews were conducted before the severity of the pandemic, meaning that increased restrictions were implemented. In the lead up to COVID-19 restrictions, I followed Queensland Government guidelines as they unfolded, relating to social distancing, no physical contact such as shaking hands, sitting an appropriate distance apart from participants, and engaging in regular hand sanitation. By late March 2020, in line with the tightening of social distancing laws in Queensland, I began interviewing participants via telephone. Consent forms were sent to participants via email or posted with a reply-paid envelope if they felt comfortable sharing their address.

3.6.3 Participant Anonymity

Participants' anonymity was respected by de-identifying the data (Stuckey, 2014). In order to de-identify data, participants were given pseudonyms (Stuckey, 2014). Other variables, which may otherwise identify participants, were replaced with more general categories (Stuckey, 2014). For example, the name of participants' specific workplace or towns in which participants and their families lived were replaced with generic words such as 'workplace' or 'town.' Participants' children and grandchildren's names, and other names, were de-identified to protect anonymity (Stuckey, 2014), and pseudonyms or generic categories such as 'son,' 'daughter,' or 'friend' were used (Stuckey, 2014).

3.6.4 Feminist Ethics

Within a feminist paradigm, research ethics extend to upholding feminist values (Leavy & Harris, 2019). Feminist research places particular emphasis on values such as "inclusivity, addressing inequalities and injustices, social betterment," and opposition towards oppressive and discriminatory treatment of marginalised social groups (Leavy & Harris, 2019, p. 102). Ways in which such values were upheld throughout this study will be outlined later in this chapter, including the role of critical self-reflection, a reduction of hierarchy within research processes, and considerations of research as an opportunity for empowerment (Golombisky, 2017; Harvey et al., 2016; Leavy & Harris, 2019).

3.6.5 Australian Association of Social Workers Ethical Conduct in Research

I adhered to guidelines relating to ethical conduct in research for social workers. Many of the ethical considerations outlined above overlap with guidelines for ethical conduct in social work research. For example, social work standards of professional integrity entail adherence to ethical guidelines and regulations pronounced by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW, 2020a). As recommended by AASW (2020a), I also ensured that I maintained appropriate boundaries to minimise the risk of harm and exploitation of participants. I upheld ethical principles of social work practice, such as maintaining respect for persons, and a commitment to social justice and human rights (AASW, 2020a).

3.7 The Sample

3.7.1 Sampling Method

A purposive sample was secured for this study. Palinkas et al. (2015) noted that purposive sampling is widely used to select individual information-rich cases. A variety of purposive sampling techniques exist (Palinkas et al., 2015). This study utilised criterion

sampling specifically, which entailed selecting cases that met explicit criteria (Palinkas et al., 2015). Criteria for participation in this study entailed restricting participation to women who were previously teenage mothers and whose eldest child was above the age of 18 yet below the age of 40. Sampling women who met this criterion ensured that participants had experienced a number of years of life post-teenage motherhood, to enable them to comment on their transition into further life stages. Restricting the age of the eldest child ensured that results were reflective of contemporary issues faced by this population, and out of recognition that the social and political climate surrounding teenage mothers has changed considerably across time (Higgins et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2019; Luker, 1997).

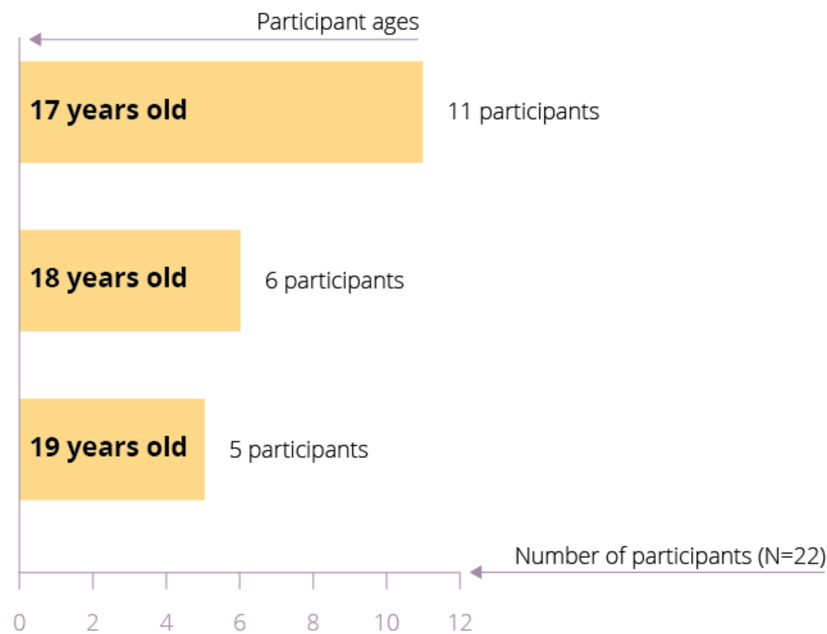
According to Moser and Korstjens (2018), grounded theory generally begins with a purposive sample, yet can often go on to employ theoretical sampling methods. Theoretical sampling can be particularly useful towards final stages of conceptualisation, in order to cater to emergent theory by selecting participants whose circumstances may best contribute to the exploration of particular concepts of theoretical interest (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Timonen et al., 2018). It is noted, however, that I did note feel the pull of theoretical directions that led me in the direction of narrowing my sampling criteria, and hence this study retained a purposive sampling method throughout.

3.7.2 Participant Details

Twenty-two former teenage mothers aged between 36 and 57 took part in this study. All participants were residing in Queensland at the time of interview. Participants had been aged between 17 and 19 at the time of the birth of their first child. As the figure below demonstrates, 11 of the participants were 17, six were 18, and five were 19 at the time of becoming mothers:

Figure 3.1

Participants Categorised by Their Age at the Time of First Birth



Sampling did not attract women who had been 16 years or younger at the time of first birth. This may be due to such women being a statistically less frequent occurrence. A review of available literature failed to locate information related to births amongst adolescent mothers aged 16 and under between the 1980s and early 2000s. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2018b) noted that in 2015, births to adolescent mothers aged 16 accounted for just 6.9% of all adolescent pregnancies. Births to adolescent mothers aged 15 and younger were even rarer at just 3.5 % (AIHW, 2018b).

In terms of participants' socioeconomic backgrounds, nine of the participants self-reported experiencing childhood poverty, whereas 12 of the participants estimated that their childhood family socioeconomic positioning was middle income, and one participant estimated that her socioeconomic positioning during childhood was within a high-income bracket. Regarding the cultural diversity of the sample, two participants in the study

identified as being of Aboriginal Australian heritage. All other participants identified as being Caucasian Australians.

3.7.3 Recruitment Methods

Following ethics approval, participants were recruited via social media from my personal Facebook page and local Facebook community groups within the Maryborough, Hervey Bay and Gympie regions of regional Queensland. After posting my research flyer detailing the study aims and sample criteria, 72 women contacted me via Facebook Messenger requesting further information. After I supplied further information, these women were offered the option of having an information sheet and consent form posted or emailed to them. Once potential participants had this information and indicated they would like to participate in the study, I scheduled an interview time.

Before using social media to advertise my research, I carefully considered whether to use my own Facebook profile, or create a Facebook page specifically for this study. My consideration involved reading about the pros and cons of both options. According to Kosinski, Matz, Gosling, Popov, and Stillwell (2016, p. 74), "there are no clear guidelines on using Facebook or other social media platforms for research. Facebook offers participants a relatively high degree of control over their data, but it is the researcher's responsibility to weigh the costs and benefits of collecting and using personal user information."

I settled on using my own Facebook account rather than creating a page dedicated to the research study. The reason for this was that I believed that my own positioning as an insider on this topic may assist in increasing participant responses. According to Berger (2015), one's status as insider can help with the recruitment of participants, as it may be perceived that, due to shared experiences, the researcher may be more sympathetic to their situation. Many of my Facebook friends know me as a former teenage mother and young

grandmother. In this sense, I felt that using my own Facebook page was a personable approach that may provide reassurance to potential participants.

3.7.4 The Use of Facebook for Data Collection

According to Fileborn (2016), where researchers use their own Facebook profile as a recruitment tool, planning ahead in preparation for issues that may arise is the key to successful, ethical recruitment. Fileborn (2016) reflected on two dilemmas to prepare and plan for using this method. One relates to identity management online. When social media is used to recruit participants, there is little separation between researchers' personal and private identities. Fileborn (2016) recognised the ramifications for individuals having unprofessional or inappropriate content on social media accounts in professional contexts. I was careful to keep an appropriate image on social media to allay any anxiety that may be otherwise caused by a sense of concern over the professionality of this study.

Another dilemma outlined by Fileborn (2016) relates to how researchers respond to comments made by others on the research advertisement. Fileborn (2016) noted that there are no clear guidelines or established etiquette on this issue, yet it may seem intrusive for researchers to reply to the potential participants' comments on the advertisement. With this in mind, I decided not to engage in comments between others on my research advertisement in order to avoid the potential for participants to feel monitored; choosing instead to engage in comments directed towards me only (Fileborn, 2016).

3.8 Method of Data Collection

3.8.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Each participant was formally interviewed once. Interviews were between one and three hours long, and were recorded with each participant's consent. Interviews can vary in the level of structure imposed, ranging from unstructured to highly structured (Leavy, 2017).

I chose a semi-structured approach. Semi-structured interviews are particularly suitable for biographical research approaches, due to being adaptable to the flow of each participant's stories (Robinson, 2013). This approach afforded a sense of direction while being flexible enough to allow opportunities to follow new leads and directions where new insights emerged (Tracy, 2019). Such an approach entailed entering the interviews with questions and a range of probes that are "meant to stimulate discussion rather than dictate it" (Tracey, 2019, p. 158). Tracey (2019, p. 158) argued that such an approach allows room for emergent understandings to arise and be explored, and "for the interviewees' complex viewpoints to be heard without the constraints of scripted questions."

3.8.2 Development of a Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

In developing an interview schedule, I was mindful of the overarching aim of the study: to explore the social adjustment experienced by former teenage mothers across various phases of their lifespan. I considered that attaining such information would entail capturing retrospective accounts of participants' lives. An interview schedule was developed that would assist participants' descriptions of perceived life chapters (Robinson, 2013). Further, the interview was designed to be inclusive of participants' adolescent, early adult, adult, and midlife periods alongside their discussion of mothering milestones such as birth, empty nesting and grandmotherhood.

Interviews included asking participants about their opinions and perspectives on these topics. As discussed, feminist standpoint theory places particular value on epistemic privilege, a concept that is defined by Sweet (2020, p. 925) as "the idea that more accurate knowledge is likely to be generated from marginal social positions." The interview schedule included asking participants whether they had experienced particular challenges related to becoming mothers early in the life cycle, inclusive of challenges related to broader structural issues. Participants were asked their opinions about how any identified barriers to self-

determination or social justice may be addressed on a broader scale. In this sense, interviews attempted to honour the situational knowledge of participants, which then may be harnessed for social justice purposes (Intermann, 2016; Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019).

3.8.3 Interview Locations

The first nine interviews were face-to-face and took place in a private setting selected by participants, including a local coffee shop, a park, and the participants' homes. These interviews were conducted across South East Queensland. The remaining interviews took place via telephone, due to social distancing considerations influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. All participants were residing in Queensland at the time of the interview.

3.8.4 Data Transcription

The interpretation of qualitative data, particularly as it relates to the use of grounded theory, is a creative process. Maher, Hadfield, Hutchings, and De Eyto (2018, p. 1) noted that "constant interaction with the data" as "a source of empirical information and inspiration to trigger imaginative insights" is integral to this process. I immersed myself in the data while transcribing my interviews verbatim (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Verbatim transcription is described by Halcomb and Davidson (2006, p. 38) as the "word-for-word reproduction of verbal data, where the written words are an exact replication of the audio recorded words." Ensuring the quality of my transcripts included checking for accuracy while transcribing and including nonverbal data (Moser & Korstjens, 2018), such as laughter, tears, or tones of sarcasm.

3.9 Operationalising a Feminist Approach

3.9.1 Critical Self-Reflection

Flowing from an inherent rejection of positivist notions of researcher neutrality was an acknowledgement that my own values and interests as a researcher could not be eliminated from the research process (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). A feminist standpoint approach called for transparency in my own positioning as researcher, which may otherwise unconsciously influence my interaction with this topic (Leavy & Harris, 2019). Sweet (2020, p. 924) argues that "reflexivity asks us to approach our work with epistemological unease because we are always at risk of reproducing categories that reify power." Reflecting on my own positioning therefore included acknowledging and reflecting on issues of power.

As a member of the dominant culture, I am mindful of ways in which my own understandings may skew the generation of knowledge production towards western frameworks of understanding, and that I may not be able to fully grasp or identify areas of cultural oppression that Indigenous participants have experienced. Further, as a heterosexual woman, I cannot claim to understand some of the in-depth experiences that two of my participants, who identify as lesbian women, may have encountered across their mothering journeys while experiencing intersecting marginalised identities. One process of interrogating my subjectivity involved acknowledging my situated knowledge, its limited location, and being answerable for my own perspectives (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019).

Critical self-reflection also entailed mindfulness of my own personal values and opinions, which may otherwise unconsciously influence my understanding (Dinçer, 2019; Golombisky, 2017). For example, something that is of personal value to me is the prospect of building a career path. Throughout the research process, it began to dawn on me that this personal value was unconsciously influencing my perspectives on this topic. For example, where participants discussed educational or vocational achievements, I tended to conclude, in

the back of my mind, that participants had 'done well' in their lives. In this sense, I was viewing participants' journeys through a particular lens, influenced by the importance that I place on education and career in my own life. Yet, some participants who I interviewed discussed not having any aspirations outside of motherhood. Critical self-reflection of ways in which my biases may influence my understandings around this resulted in a deeper appreciation of elements of difference—specifically that some women may place intrinsic value on the mothering role in ways that define 'success' independently from monetary or societal standards. Developing a critical self-awareness around ways in which my own values may filter my understanding, created a greater sense of openness in capturing the perspectives of women whose lives varied from mine.

One strategy that I have utilised to immerse myself in a critically reflective process, has involved putting time aside prior to interviewing to mentally prepare for topics that may arise in which I require particular personal awareness around (Dowling, 2006). Following interviewing and throughout data analysis, self-reflection through journaling facilitated my opportunity to critically reflect and prevent the imposition of my own experiences and beliefs (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015).

3.9.2 Navigating an Insider Positioning

As identified in Chapter One and noted above, my interest in this topic emerges from my lived experiences as a teenage mother; therefore, I am an insider researcher. Feminist researchers reject hierarchical power relations (Dinçer, 2019; Hesse Biber, 2012; Thwaites, 2017). In this sense, interviews were "not a one-way process where the interviewer elicits and receives, but does not give information" (Hesse Biber 2012, p. 30). Rather, a process of self-disclosure included discussing my own positioning (Hesse-Biber, 2012) as a former teenage mother.

I found that self-disclosure could facilitate a communication exchange in exploring particular concepts. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005, p. 26),

> … feminist researchers argue that the interviewer and interviewee should try to build a relationship in which they share responsibility for finding the words and concepts in which ideas can be expressed and lives described, and by doing so emphasize the importance of issues in which women are deeply engaged.

In this regard, self-disclosure elicited an opportunity for participants to provide their own opinions and perspectives of my experiences as a former teenage mother, in ways that were a point of reflection for me and assisted in a process of co-constructing knowledge.

Being an insider researcher can bring both benefits and challenges to the research process (Berger, 2015; Dinçer, 2019; Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). On a positive note, I found that experiences as an insider in this study facilitated a particular sensitivity to this topic, and opportunities to build a level of trust and rapport (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). Furthermore, Dinçer (2019) noted that holding an insider position is advantageous in having an authentic understanding of the area of study, and in asking meaningfully relevant questions.

Yet, as an insider researcher I was mindful of how I may be prone to biases towards my own understandings and experiences of life-stage transitions (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). Dinçer (2019, p. 3735) notes that "being an insider may blur boundaries, where the researcher might project their own values, beliefs, perceptions which can cause biases." They further caution, that "potential inherent biases might stop researchers to raise challenging questions and participants might be willing to withhold information, based on an assumption on the researchers and researched shared identities." My insider positioning therefore made critical self-reflection throughout this study all the more imperative, so that this process was guided

by participants' experiences rather than my own understandings (Dinçer, 2019; Hayfield & Huxley, 2015).

3.9.3 A Reduction of Hierarchy in Interview Processes

Feminist research is mindful of power imbalances that exist between researchers and participants (Golombisky, 2017; Harvey et al., 2016; Turner & Maschi, 2015). I was aware that, as researcher, I was in a position of power within the research process. For example, I had the power to choose the interview questions and research design. While it is not possible to completely eliminate inequitable power dynamics (Harvey et al., 2016), I attempted to moderate power issues by building relational intimacy and collaboration with participants. Building a sense of relational intimacy included a process of self-disclosure and openness to telling my story (Harvey et al., 2016), including my position as an insider researcher.

A process of feminist collaboration (Harvey et al., 2016) was another way in which I attempted to moderate power imbalances. Hesse-Biber (2012) argued that whereas positivist approaches to research entail studying participants as passive subjects, operating from a feminist approach entails building a sense of partnership in knowledge building with participants. As discussed, an interest in participants' opinions and perspectives was incorporated into the interview schedule. Throughout interviewing, I also listened for opportunities to explore participants' vantage points as they arose in discussion organically. I was committed to learning from participants and reflecting participants' opinions and perspectives within the research findings.

3.9.4 Research as an Empowering Process

Feminist research is inherently political and primarily concerned with gender inequality and the social, cultural, and political practices that perpetuate oppression (Golombisky, 2017; Intermann, 2016; Leavy & Harris, 2019). This study is therefore

intrinsically concerned with the often-disempowered position of former teenage mothers within the sociopolitical order, where dominant societal values and assumptions around early motherhood could be experienced as oppressive by participants.

Standpoint feminist research approaches can afford opportunities for women whose identities have been socially depreciated or marginalised to "critique these representations and embrace their identities with pride" (Wigginton and Lafrance, 2019, p. 8). In this sense, feminist research has the potential to be liberating (Harvey et al., 2016). I found that, during the interview process, encouraging participants to discuss their own opinions and perspectives on this topic resulted in opportunities for them to 'correct' ways in which they felt that they had been labelled, and to assert their own realities. For example, some participants were told that their lives were over upon becoming adolescent mothers, or that they could not be 'good mothers.' The interview process gave participants opportunities to openly discuss and critique representations of adolescent motherhood in light of the inherent value they placed on their mothering role. Further, participants could reject perceived social assumptions that their lives or parenting had been substandard.

Some participants felt hopeful that the generation of knowledge from their particular standpoints could help counter some of the negative social messaging faced by teenage mothers. For example, one participant expressed that at the time of pregnancy, she had searched the internet for information about what happens to teenage mothers later in life because she had been told by a family friend that she was destined to a life of welfare dependency. This participant had been unable to find any information about the subject, and felt that sharing her story may give hope to teenage mothers that it is possible to build a positive future, despite exposure to such negative messages. Another participant felt that sharing the message that young mothers can be good mothers was important. In this sense, interviews not only provided an opportunity for participants to assert their own identity and

worth as mothers, but also to generate knowledge for adolescent mothers that may be equally empowering.

It is envisioned that broader change may be possible by amplifying the stories of participants (Harvey et al., 2016). Information generated about areas of oppression faced by women from within this social group may be distributed, for example, through social work education and training, academic journals, and more publicly available sources. Such knowledge distribution can influence greater understanding and challenge oppressive features of the sociopolitical order. Recommendations for social change are revisited later in the thesis.

3.10 Data Analysis

3.10.1 A Grounded Theory Approach

As has been discussed, there are various approaches to grounded theory. According to Tarozzi (2020, p. 4), there are a range of methods which "vary greatly according to the school of thought and its associated authors." However, Mills, Bonner, and Francis (2006) proposed that there are common characteristics among all forms of grounded theory, which include coding, constant comparative methods, theoretical sensitivity, and memoing (Mills et al., 2006). This section outlines ways in which I incorporated such characteristics into my approach, alongside various other grounded theory considerations such as closeness to the data, treatment of the literature, and data saturation (Conlon et al., 2015; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Timonen et al., 2018). Methodological considerations specific to constructivist grounded theory, such as the conceptualisation of knowledge as a co-construction was a basis for ongoing reflection and epistemological commitment (Charmaz, 2006; Mills et al., 2006). Quality and rigour within a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020) are considered within this chapter.

3.11 Coding the Data

3.11.1 Sorting and Categorising the Data

Because I was interested in life-stage transitions from childhood to middle age, the interviews covered a range of ups and downs in participants' lives. To make sense of the mass of data before me, I found that writing out a summary of participants' life stories chronologically enabled me to capture a timeline of key developmental periods, transitions, and events discussed in each interview. This facilitated an understanding of explanatory linkages across participants' lifespans (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Another way in which I sought to make the data more manageable was to organise the data by grouping information into smaller, more manageable units (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I grouped information around particular life stages, mothering milestones, and other significant life events. I then transferred each of these codes into a Microsoft Word document. With data carefully grouped into sections, I was able to compare incidents across interviews, to identify properties associated with emerging concepts (Charmaz, 2014) while maintaining the coherence of participants' stories

3.11.2 Coding the Data

According to Charmaz (2014) there are a minimum of two phases of coding involved in conducting grounded theory analysis, known as initial and focused coding. The "initial phase of coding involves naming each word, line, or segment of data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113), while focused coding "uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesise, integrate, and organise large amounts of data" (Charmaz, 2014 p. 113). A third phase of coding, often referred to as theoretical coding, may also ensue (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical coding is a sophisticated level of coding (Charmaz, 2014), which was defined by Glaser (1978, p. 72) as relating to "how the substantive codes may relate to each other as a

hypothesis to be integrated into a theory." This study utilised all three layers of coding, which are elaborated on below.

3.11.3 Initial Coding

Glaser (2016) suggested that the initial layer of coding consists of coding all data in each way possible. Hence, I began by coding transcripts line by line (Glaser, 2016) by comparing incidents, searching for similarities, differences, and patterns across the data, and coding what I saw. Chun Tie, Birks, and Francis (2019) advised that in grounded theory, codes relate to psychological processes, social processes, and actions as opposed to themes. I attempted to pay particular attention to these underlying elements.

The initial coding process can result in multiple descriptions and possible concepts (Glaser, 2016) which at times I struggled to find meaning within. In order to facilitate my exploration, I took note of Charmaz (2006) who proposed that asking a range of questions of initial codes in order to facilitate the identification of actions significant processes. Such questions included, "What process(es) is at issue here? How can I define it?," "How does this process develop?," and "How does the research participant(s) act while involved in this process?" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 127).

Glaser (2016) advised that much of what emerges within this first level of coding, may ultimately not fit with emerging theory. In this sense, I was prepared that some of what I was coding may prove to not be core to the final emergent theoretical constructs, yet I appreciated that the level of openness was necessary in identifying provisional codes, in order to open up analytic possibilities (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 2016).

3.11.4 Focused Coding

Focused coding refers to the next, intermediate stage of coding (Chun Tie et al., 2019). During this subsequent layer of coding, coding the data selectively in areas where

patterns emerged was possible (Chametzky, 2016). I began coding around recurrent patterns in order to enrich understandings around the emerging concepts. In this sense I was no longer coding everything I saw, but rather, I narrowed my focus (Chametzky, 2016). Chun Tie, Birks, and Francis (2019) noted that during focused coding, codes are built into more abstract analytical concepts. Categories are reviewed, and an identification of which categories can be collapsed into other categories occurs (Chun Tie et al., 2019).

From a grounded theory approach, it is desirable to identify one core category from common ideas across the categories and their subcategories (Levitt, 2021, p. 91). A core category captures the central idea of analysis and dynamics between clusters of data (Levitt, 2021). Yet, Levitt (2021, p. 91) explains that "although grounded theory analysis typically results in core categories, it may be that you realise in your analysis that a core category does not make sense for your hierarchy." I found that this to be the case for my own analysis, as it proved challenging to identify just one category that captured the entirety of participants' life journeys succinctly. Rather, three major categories which subsumed "common themes and patterns" across the data were identified as being particularly central to understanding participants' lives (Charmaz, 2014, p. 189). Specifically, I found that while participants' life stories were highly varied, codes frequently contained themes and patterns within the data around 'experiencing adversity,' 'a climate of social scrutiny,' and 'resilient behaviours or actions.' Such categories are further defined and outlined in Chapter Five.

3.11.5 Theoretical Coding

Theoretical coding is the final stage of coding (Chun Tie et al., 2019). This stage of coding requires reshaping and remodifying emerging conceptual ideas until emerging ideas become more coherent, and categories and subcategories become more structured (Scott & Medaugh, 2017). According to Chun Tie, Birks, and Francis (2019, p. 6), "the purpose of

theoretical coding is to integrate the substantive theory." This is achieved through integrating and synthesising categories derived throughout the process (Chun Tie et al., 2019).

Categories were integrated and synthesised through an exploration of links between the data which may suggest theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2014). As noted, three major categories established during focused coding related to 'experiencing adversity,' 'a climate of social scrutiny,' and 'resilient behaviours or actions.' Connections between these categories and the data they subsumed were evident, indicating a range of theoretical propositions. For instance, a climate of social scrutiny could deter participants from resilient behaviours or actions. Dominant societal attitudes could also have implications on some participants' relationship trajectories in ways that were linked to adversity. Equally, there was clear evidence of their resilience in adversity. Such phenomena became theoretical categories of interest that are of particular focus in Chapter Six. Theoretical categories also were noted to be of significance in understanding certain aspects of life-stage transitions relating to adjustment to early adulthood, experiences of empty nesting and grandmotherhood, which are discussed in Chapter Seven.

3.11.6 Coding Modalities

A number of tools were selected in the coding process. I selected tools that I felt most comfortable with, in terms of my own preferred learning modality, to facilitate rigorous and productive analysis (Maher et al., 2018). The tools that continued to guide my own constant interaction with the data were mainly traditional tools, including large pieces of poster paper and coloured pens to capture and build upon emerging concepts and themes. I did so by drawing diagrams and maps of the interrelations between concepts (Mills et al., 2006). I chose not to use data analysis software packages, as I am a visual person and creatively using my hands to physically touch and diagram the data helped me to engage with the process in a way that felt natural to me.

3.12 Towards the Generation of Theory

3.12.1 Constant Comparative Methods

Grounded theory utilises a constant comparison method (Birks & Mills, 2015). So central is this process, that Tarozzi (2020, p. 10) noted that the constant comparison method "lies at the very heart" of grounded theory. Working towards generating theory in a way that is facilitated by constant comparisons has included comparing interviews across interviews, and frequently looking over the interviews with fresh eyes where concepts emerge to look for differences and similarities between properties and categories (Cherry, 2000; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Tarozzi, 2020).

Engaging in grounded theory is an iterative process (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Data is collected and analysed simultaneously throughout this process, therefore data was coded, while subsequent interviews continued in a process of constantly comparing new data to data collected (Birks & Mills, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Chametzky (2016) noted that throughout this process one may return to the raw data in order to examine data through fresh eyes, to check if concepts have been overlooked that may now become apparent. This was the case in this process, as I found myself returning to the original transcripts frequently (Chun Tie et al., 2019) and going back and forth rather than engaging in a linear process.

3.12.2 Theoretical Sensitivity

Chun Tie, Birks, and Francis (2019, p. 7) described theoretical sensitivity as the "ability to know when you identify a data segment that is important to your theory." Having insight into extracts of the data that are meaningful and significant "requires a balance between keeping an open mind and the ability to identify elements of theoretical significance during data generation and/or collection and data analysis" (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 7).

Analytical tools that may help to enhance theoretical sensitivity include characteristics of a grounded theory approach such as open coding, and memoing (Chun Tie et al., 2019).

In addition, Charmaz (2006) proposed that coding data around actions rather than being merely descriptive is another way to see analytic possibilities within the data. Further, considering what emerging theoretical categories might suggest in terms of "the core of human experience," such as existing broader concerns around "human nature, selfhood, autonomy and attachment," also can open up possibilities in terms of what findings may mean in the broader scheme of things (Charmaz, 2006, p. 138). In this sense, I approached theory development with a sense of openness and curiosity around a wide range of possibilities of what emerged findings.

3.12.3 Memoing

Throughout grounded theory coding and analysis, researchers document their ideas and thought processes in theoretical memos (Charmaz, 2014; Chun Tie et al., 2019; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Chun Tie, Birks, and Francis (2019, p. 4) propose that "memos are the storehouse of ideas generated and documented through interacting with the data." They note that through memoing, researchers develop records of their thoughts, feelings intuitions, and various decisions. For example, memos capture the reasoning and processes behind decisions made in relation to "sampling, coding, collapsing of codes, making of new codes, separating codes, producing a category and identifying relationships abstracted to a higher level of analysis" (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 4). The process of memoing assists in theoretical reflection, building upon ideas, and analysis; it is considered integral to a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014; Chun Tie et al., 2019). Engaging in memoing entailed my putting time aside to write informal analytic notes throughout coding and analysis. I allowed myself to write freely and without structure about patterns that I saw unfolding in the data (Charmaz, 2006).

3.12.4 Considerations of Emergent Theory in Qualitative Data Theory Building

The central goal of grounded theory is to build upon theory (Glaser, 2016). However, the degree to which theory generation occurs may vary (Tarozzi, 2020; Timonen et al., 2018). For example, Tarozzi, 2020 (pp. 4–5) proposed that the ultimate outcome of grounded theory is to produce a fully elaborated theory that is “a rational, dense, articulated and systematic interpretation that is capable of accounting for the reality being examined.” However, Taraozzi (2020) notes that ‘less ambitiously,’ grounded theory processes often may produce a conceptual framework. Timonen, Foley, and Conlon (2018) proposed that researchers should approach grounded theory with the aspiration of building a comprehensive theory. However, they argued that more commonly grounded theory results in “greater conceptual clarity, or a conceptual framework, which is short of theory in the sense of a comprehensive system of ideas intended to fully explain and predict something” (Timonen et al., 2018, p. 4). In this sense, I approached my grounded theory journey with a target to build theory embedded in the experiences of my participants, and an openness to the degree to which theory may emerge. As discussed, through theoretical coding interrelations between various key categories emerged. Such interrelations are noted above and elaborated upon in Chapter Six by way of introducing conceptual frameworks of understanding (Timonen et al., 2018).

Rubin and Rubin (2012) emphasised the constant nature of data analysis in a grounded theory approach, noting that themes and propositions should emerge until there is a universal solution, or in other words, until there is “a practical certainty that the emerging theory has accounted for all of the cases which have been considered” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 208). Further, “the occurrence of any negative case must lead to either redefinition or reformulation,” with variances and unusual cases influencing the phenomena to be redefined (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 208). In this sense, moving towards theory development involved comprehensively analysing participants’ stories in ways that account for all data collected

towards saturation of the data (Levitt, 2021). Such a process involved acknowledging differences within the data through a cycle of constant comparison, and reflection around meanings that areas of variation may indicate (Levitt, 2021).

3.12.5 Treatment of the Literature

It is noted that "the grounded-theory approach rejects using literature to generate themes, concepts, or relationships between them" to facilitate themes emerging from the data organically, as opposed to being heavily influenced by existing literature (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 208). However, according to Timonen, Foley, and Conlon (2018), grounded theorists vary on their level of engagement with literature. They noted that some classical grounded theorists urge researchers to avoid literature around the area under study entirely, whereas others have argued that the notion that researcher can be a blank slate is unrealistic. For example, some familiarisation with existing literature was necessary in the formulative stage of a research project, in order to justify the focus of the research and research questions (Conlon et al., 2015). Further, it is now routinely required as a standard process to submit a literature review at the commencement of research (Timonen et al., 2018).

It is acknowledged I was not a 'blank slate' in my approach to the literature as I engaged with literature to formulate my initial research proposal. However, I chose not to engage with the literature during the data analysis phase of this study, to remain open to new theoretical insights in line with a grounded theory approach. Once my analysis was better established, the literature was revisited to assess where my research may fit within current understandings. This involved reading widely. As argued by (Charmaz, 2006, p. 183), "a claim to making a scholarly contribution requires a careful study of relevant literatures, including those that go beyond disciplinary boundaries, and a clear positioning of your grounded theory."

3.12.6 Conceptualisation of Knowledge as a Co-Construction

Due to the constructivist influences within the epistemological perspective taken up within this study, interpretations of data were based in an awareness that it was not possible to 'know' in a way that captures the experiences of all women who have experienced this phenomena (Charmaz, 2006; Mills et al., 2006). Rather, findings in the data were acknowledged to be a co-production of reality between researcher and participant (Charmaz, 2006; Mills et al., 2006). As articulated by Charmaz (2017, p. 41),

> … to render our participants' experience we need to dig deep into their meanings and actions. We listen to their stories and view their actions and hope to grasp their meanings. But our way of knowing is always interpretive of a reality, not a reproduction of it.

In the presentation of findings of this study, I sought to honour participants' voices as co-constructors of knowledge by keeping the words that they used throughout interviews intact (Mills et al., 2006). Maintaining the presence of participants throughout the presentation of findings is particularly important, as the visibility of participants' accounts in the text allows the reader to "make the connections between analytical findings and the data from which they were derived" (Mills et al., 2006, p. 7). This demonstrates "the value the researcher places on the participant as a contributor to the reconstruction of the final grounded theory model" (Mills et al., 2006, p. 7).

In presenting the findings, I was mindful that my voice is apparent in the analysis, and I have attempted not to dominate but rather represent the multiple lived realities of participants. Charmaz and Mitchell (1996, p. 299) advised that researchers' voices should not "transcend experience but re-envis[age] it … bring[ing] fragments of fieldwork time, context and mood together in a colloquy of the author's several selves—reflecting, witnessing,

wondering, accepting—all at once" (Charmaz & Mitchell, 1996, p. 299). In this sense, I made attempts for my writing style to be analytical while "evocative of the experiences of the participants" (Mills et al., 2006 p. 7).

3.12.7 Considerations of Data Saturation

In terms of envisaging a sample size, Moser and Korstjens (2018) proposed that when considering a sample size for qualitative grounded theory studies, between 20 and 30 interviews may be a good tentative number, although the initial sample size may be smaller or larger depending on considerations of data saturation. Therefore, rather than being pre-determined, sample size in a grounded theory approach is dependent on emergent theoretical categories and saturation within those theoretical categories (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Vasileiou et al., 2018). Moser and Korstjens (2018) describe data saturation as the collection of data until new analytical information no longer arises. Continuous analysis of the data occurred until no new themes and patterns emerge through a process of theoretical saturation (Aldiabat & Le Navence, 2018; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). At one point during the process, I considered that I may not have recruited sufficiently across the age range proposed and I considered the recruitment of further participants. However, as noted, at the finalisation of the analysis process I felt satisfied that saturation had been reached and the primary aims had been met.

3.13 Quality and Rigour

3.13.1 Quality Criteria Within Constructivist Grounded Theory

According to Charmaz and Thornberg (2020), quality criteria in grounded theory vary depending on which genre of grounded theory is selected. In traditional grounded theory, measures to increase credibility can include those geared towards the generalisability and universality of findings, or the ability to explain causes and predict outcomes (Charmaz &

Thornberg, 2020). However, from a constructivist grounded theory perspective, such terms may be critiqued as having positivist assumptions (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). Charmaz and Thornberg (2020) argued that a constructivist grounded theory approach prioritises interpretation and abstract understandings over explanation. They noted that there are four main criteria to assess the quality of grounded theory studies, relating to "credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness" (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020, p. 11).

3.13.2 Credibility

Charmaz and Thornberg (2020, p. 11) noted that "credibility begins with having sufficient relevant data for asking incisive questions about the data, making systematic comparisons throughout the research process, and developing a thorough analysis." In this sense, throughout data analysis, continued engagement with the data involved reflection on whether I collected enough information to achieve data saturation within categories and concepts. Such reflection included consideration of the following questions proposed by Charmaz (2014, p. 337) for determining the credibility of one's project within a constructivist grounded theory approach:

- Has your research achieved intimate familiarity with the setting or topic?
- Are the data sufficient to merit your claims? Consider the range, number, and depth of observations contained in the data.
- Have you made systematic comparisons between observations and between categories?
- Do the categories cover a wide range of empirical observations?
- Are there strong logical links between the gathered data and your argument and analysis?

- Has your research provided enough evidence for your claims to allow the reader to form an independent assessment and agree with your claims?

Critical reflexivity is another component of credibility within a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020, p. 11). Critical reflexivity has entailed openness and reflection of ways in which my assumptions and beliefs may influence the research process—a term which has been referred to within constructivist grounded theory as 'methodological self-consciousness' (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). A process of methodological self-consciousness inherent in constructivist grounded theory required scrutinising my own assumptions, positioning, privilege, and interests in relation to this topic across the research process (Charmaz, 2017). As discussed, emphasis on critical self-reflection is particularly compatible with a feminist approach and has been consistent across my approach to this study.

In order to gauge the credibility of my data, I was interested in undertaking a process of member checking. While not specific to constructivist grounded theory, Birt et al. (2016, p. 1802) have argued that some methods of member checking can cater to constructivist epistemological perspectives. Member checks involve providing interview data to participants in order to check for accuracy (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Through member checking, participants are afforded the opportunity to "check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences, in turn reducing risk of researcher bias dominating participants voices" (Birt et al., 2016, p. 1802).

Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) argued that reflecting on the purpose of member checking is important. They noted that returning data to participants to confirm accuracy only may reflect assumptions "that there is a truth value in the spoken/written word" and may therefore imply a positivist epistemological stance (Birt et al., 2016, p. 1804). They further argued, however, that returning synthesised data from emerging themes in a way that

invites participants to provide feedback is more in line with a constructivist approach, as this "addresses the co-constructed nature of knowledge by providing participants with the opportunity to engage with, and add to, interview and interpreted data" (Birt et al., 2016, p. 1802).

Member checking therefore involved preparing synthesised analysed data into a document for participants to review in a way that left room for participants' comments. The timing of member checking was a point of consideration. Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) noted that in order to check whether emergent findings resonate with participants' experiences, member checking may take place several months post data collection. In this study, participants were afforded an opportunity to view and provide feedback around synthesised data on core emergent concepts.

Issues of accessibility in member checking were also a point of consideration. Carlson (2010) identified being empathic towards issues such as participants' vocabulary level. I avoided jargon and academic language in my synthesis of analysed data (Carlson, 2010). I also offered a range of options such as for synthesised data to be posted, emailed, or for participants to speak with me directly via telephone. In total, three participants volunteered to provide feedback for member checking, and chose to do so via email. One participant simply affirmed that she felt my interpretation of the findings was correct. Another participant emphasised the importance of teaching young mothers that their lives are not over, as they are often told. The third participant emphasised the importance of young mothers being able to access a driver's licence. Feedback via member checking has been integrated more comprehensively into Chapter Eight, which is centred around participants' opinions and perspectives in line with the feminist standpoint concerns of this study.

3.13.3 Originality

According to Charmaz and Thornberg (2020, p. 12), "originality can take varied forms such as offering new insights, providing a fresh conceptualization of a recognized problem, and establishing the significance of the analysis." As I moved towards theory development, considerations of originality within a constructivist grounded theory approach involved reflection of whether the categories offered new insights or conceptual interpretations, the theoretical significance of the research, and ways in which theory generated extended upon or refined current ideas, practices, and concepts (Charmaz, 2006).

3.13.4 Resonance

Charmaz and Thornberg explain that (2020, p. 12), "resonance demonstrates that the researchers have constructed concepts that not only represent their research participants' experience, but also provide insight to others." In this sense, reflecting on resonance involved considering what my findings suggested of the overall human experience associated with this phenomenon. Considerations of resonance included reflection upon to what extent my categories may portray the fullness of experiences of life-stage phenomena associated with adolescent motherhood, whether linkages were drawn between larger institutions and the lives of individuals, and whether the theory made sense to participants and offered deeper insights into their worlds (Charmaz, 2006).

3.13.5 Usefulness

According to Charmaz and Thornberg 2020 (pp. 12–13), "usefulness includes clarifying research participants' understanding of their everyday lives, forming a foundation for policy and practice applications, contributing to creating new lines of research, as well as revealing pervasive processes and practices." Considerations of usefulness involved reflection of whether my analysis offered interpretations that are useful, whether my research

may influence further research, and the contributions to knowledge that my research generated (Charmaz, 2006).

3.14 Limitations of This Study

3.14.1 Retrospective Research Approach

As previously mentioned in Chapter One, research interested in the development of individuals across their lifespan can be either longitudinal or synchronic (Robinson, 2013). Longitudinal research designs entail gathering data about the same person across various periods of time, whereas synchronic studies gather data at a single point in time (Duncan & Duncan, 2012; Oltmanns et al., 2020; Robinson, 2013). Duncan and Duncan (2012, p. 31) argued that longitudinal research designs offer advantages in terms of "permitting within-individual analysis of change." However, given the size and scope of this PhD study, there were practical constraints in undertaking a longitudinal design, particularly relating to time constraints.

This study therefore had a synchronic approach, which entailed collecting data on retrospective accounts of participants' lives (Robinson, 2013). Limitations of retrospective approaches may include the possibility for results to be affected by memory issues (Greenhoot, 2012). Interviewing participants retrospectively therefore included being mindful that due to lapses in time, there was a chance that areas of the interview may have observations influenced by memory lapses or natural distortions in recalling events (Greenhoot, 2012).

3.14.2 Limitations Related to the Research Sample

This study was also potentially limited by the parameters of the sample. As discussed, this study captured the experiences of two Indigenous women. All other women identified as being of Caucasian Australian descent. Comparatively, one in four teenage mothers in

Australia are Indigenous. In this sense, the sample illustrated within this study does not capture a balanced portrayal of ethnically diverse women in Australia or the kinds of inequalities that they may face (AIHW, 2018b). For example, the AIHW (2018) outlined concerning trends amongst Indigenous teenage mothers, who are more likely to experience poorer antenatal outcomes or to experience socioeconomic disadvantage compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. In this sense, the extent of adversity amongst teenage mothers within Australia may not be captured within this study sample. Further, the participants had been aged 17 years and over at the time of infant births. Births to teenage mothers aged 16 and younger were previously discussed as a statistically less frequent occurrence. Such limitations hamper the ability of this study to consider experiences of women who are aged 16 years or younger age upon transitions to motherhood.

3.15 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, feminist standpoint theory and constructivist grounded theory were placed within their historical and theoretical context with regard to core theories underpinning the methodology. The pairing of these perspectives was discussed in terms of compatibility, and potency in the pursuit of social justice. Epistemological commitments inherent within feminist standpoint theory and constructivist grounded theory were considered influential for the selection of a qualitative research methodology. Research methods and sampling and data collection were detailed, including purposive sampling methods and the use of semi-structured interviewing methods. The utilisation of feminist principles within interviewing included attempts to reduce a sense of hierarchy within interviewing, such as self-disclosure and collaboration. Empowering interview processes included opportunities for participants to openly discuss and critique socially depreciating representations of their identity. This chapter raised ethical and participant welfare considerations, such as autonomy, access to counselling and support services, public health

considerations during 2020, my use of social media for participant recruitment, and participant anonymity. Data analysis strategies included coding, constant comparative methods, considerations of theoretical sensitivity, memoing, closeness to the data, and limited interaction with the literature. Furthermore, data analysis involved epistemological considerations specific to constructivist grounded theory, such as the conceptualisation of knowledge as a co-construction alongside a critically reflective stance. Quality and rigour within a constructivist grounded theory approach were also detailed relating to concepts of credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness.

Chapter 4. Introducing the Participants

4.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I introduce the 22 women who participated in this study. Each participant is represented in a brief overview containing their age, age upon the birth of their eldest child, relationship status, and employment status. This information is presented alongside a brief overview of my interpretations of central aspects of the participants' journeys. In conveying these women's lived experiences, I acknowledge that my understandings are interpretive as opposed to reflecting absolute universal truths, in line with the constructivist orientation of this study (Charmaz, 2006; Leavy & Harris, 2019). In interpreting the qualities and emotions conveyed, and the meanings that these women placed upon their lives, I relied on verbal and non-verbal cues. During the face-to-face interviews, I paid attention to non-verbal communication such as hand gestures, expressions, and postures (Denham, 2013; Laur, 2005). Being attuned to verbal communicational cues was highly important during all interviews, and especially during telephone interviews, as nonverbal information is lost in a lack of physical presence (Novick, 2018). To gather rich data during telephone interviews, I listened intently to voice inflection such as tone, pitch, sighs, and hesitations (Lauer, 2005; Novick, 2018).

Considering the feminist standpoint orientation of this study, I was especially interested in integrating participants' own socially situated reflections and vantage points relating to young motherhood (Intermann, 2016). Participants' lived experiences and perspectives varied considerably. Some former teenage mothers had placed emphasis on personal circumstances or challenges that influenced their mothering experiences, although many challenged negative social constructs of teenage mothers. Specifically, some participants questioned the dominant problematisation of adolescent motherhood, described unique benefits of early family formation, or emphasised young motherhood as being a

valued and meaningful decision within their lives. Further, as will be elaborated upon in Chapter Five, many participants were exposed to messages that their lives were over upon early motherhood. Contrary to such messages, participants mentioned a range of positive life outcomes.

4.1.1 Participant 1: Tinsley

Tinsley and I arranged to meet at a local coffee shop. As she was the first participant for this study, I was initially nervous to meet her. Yet I found myself quickly at ease due to her warm and open demeanour. At the time of the interview, Tinsley was aged 44 and had three children aged between 23 and 27 years. She had given birth to her first-born child at the age of 17. Tinsley exuded motherly pride as she spoke of her children, at times pausing to take out her phone to show me family photographs. She remained in a relationship with the father of her first-born child, to whom she is happily married. Tinsley described a positive childhood, which featured a strong connection to both of her parents. However, she noted that she had been a particularly shy child who did not feel that she fitted in socially during her high school years. She described adapting positively to the mothering role and indicated that she had a strong sense of maternal satisfaction and a solid family and peer support system as a young mother.

Tinsley's educational and career trajectory took a range of twists and turns across her lifespan. She had an early goal of becoming a nurse and attempted to re-engage in school after the birth of her first-born child. Yet she explained: "I ended up dropping out halfway through Grade 11 because I couldn't keep up with my kids as well as my schooling." Tinsley later recommenced her education by completing a tertiary access course in her early twenties. However, a health-related crisis caused her to re-evaluate her goals. Specifically, she developed cervical cancer, and received advice regarding the timing of family planning, disclosing: "the gynaecologist said start having kids now because say 5, 10 years down the

road you’re not gonna have kids, you’re not going to be able to carry a child.” Subsequently, Tinsley put her nursing aspirations on hold once more while she focused on completing her family. She then went on to have a lifesaving hysterectomy to overcome cancer. After regaining her health, Tinsley resumed studying in approximately her mid-thirties, and went on to obtain a qualification that has enabled her to establish a career in a health-related field.

Tinsley’s story appeared to indicate that motherhood was a pause, rather than an end to her aspirations. She described her role as a young mother as a valued decision, stating: “I was very happy with the way my life was, with my family, my kids … I’ve never felt like I’ve missed out on anything.” Further, she indicated the perceived benefits of early family formation included a sense that smaller generational differences can result in a unique connectedness, sharing: “you connect more to the kids. I’ve got a very open relationship with my children.”

4.1.2 Participant 2: Bethenny

I met with Bethenny in a small café in a countryside location. She appeared to be a stylish woman with a confident demeanour. At the time of the interview, Bethenny was aged 37 and had four children aged between 10 and 18. She had given birth to her first-born child at the age of 18. Bethenny described an unproblematic childhood, which featured a close relationship with her mother. School was described as trouble free, and she had enjoyed a large circle of friends in her youth. Bethenny completed Grade 12, yet she had been unsure of what she wanted to do next in her life, and stated: “I didn’t have any direction.” When transitioning to motherhood, she was working in a retail store and had been in a relationship with her now husband for approximately two years. Her partner was somebody whom she had met through friends, and she expressed that this has been a positive relationship.

Bethenny explained that during her time as a young mother, she had an idyllic support network of friends and family. Despite a period of post-natal depression, she enjoyed the

early years of family formation. Bethenny expressed that she does not have any specific occupational goals, yet she experimented with a variety of vocational directions across adulthood, including retail, hospitality, and small business ownership. In recent years, Bethenny has chosen to focus on being a full-time stay-at-home mum, a decision she made to spend more time with her children. Bethenny indicated a sense of contentment within her current circumstances; "we sort of go with the flow, where we're at now is good." She indicated that her decision to be a stay-at-home mother is possible due to her partner's high earning capacity.

Bethenny shared that motherhood has been a meaningful decision in her life in which she has found a strong part of her identity. For instance, when asked about whether there had been a time within her life where she had a chance to explore her own sense of self, she asserted, "I think being a mum is that identity." Bethenny questioned the dominant problematisation of adolescent motherhood. She noted that society assumes that young parents are not good parents, yet she challenged such notions, emphasising, "age has nothing to do with how good a parent you are, or how bad a parent you are either, people just assume it does." She also contended that there are unique benefits of raising children at a relatively young age, including "growing with them," and "the kids will all be grown up while we're still young too."

4.1.3 Participant 3: Dorinda

Dorinda invited me to meet with her at her home. She greeted me warmly and ushered me to sit in her dining room, which had a distinct mid-century charm. She explained that this had been her childhood home, to which she had returned in recent years and now shares with her elderly mother. Dorinda's decision to return home was prompted by empty nesting, which had been accompanied by an uncomfortable sense of silence. Dorinda explained that her

home base had been a source of strength and support at various stages in her life and described, "it's very much a safe place for me, it's my comfort."

Dorinda was 45 at the time of the interview, and had three children aged between 20 and 27. She gave birth to her first-born child at the age of 17. Dorinda was in a relationship at the time of the interview, yet explained that she was in no hurry to move in with her partner. She described a positive childhood, and expressed that she had been a typical adolescent. Dorinda had fallen pregnant with her first-born child while on a Scouts camp. Her parents had been supportive, despite having been disappointed. Shortly after the birth of her baby, she entered a de-facto relationship with her baby's father. However, the relationship fell apart after five years under amicable circumstances. In her early adulthood, Dorinda worked in a café part time, yet she expressed: "in high school I always wanted to be in admin, that was all I ever wanted to do." Subsequently, she attained a Certificate in Business at TAFE when she was in her mid-twenties. After this, Dorinda secured a traineeship within a government department and has since worked in an administration role.

Dorinda reflected that she is satisfied with her decision regarding early family formation, although she could not say the same regarding her relationship choices. Specifically, she expressed: "I wouldn't change my children—I might change their fathers … you know, had that mum and dad and three kids and the dog sort of scenario, but I don't regret having the kids." At the time of the interview, Dorinda was expecting her first-born grandchild, and felt that being a youthful grandmother may have some perks, expressing: "I'm still—I want to say youthful, that I will be able to run around after the grandkids a little bit more." She felt that other unique benefits to early family formation related to reduced parental responsibility at an early age. She explained: "I can compare, because my brothers' got children, and they're little and they've got a stable nuclear family … they're in really good jobs and they were really set up before they had children, whereas I wasn't, financially.

Now, I'm the best I've ever been—compared to my brother, I want to say that I'm better off than he is, cause my children are off my hands, and I'm moving into that grandparent period, where I will have more time, and more money."

4.1.4 Participant 4: Erika

I met with Erika at a local coffee shop. She was an open and engaging woman, who told me her life story in ways that were punctuated by laughter and tears. Erika was aged 49 at the time of the interview. She had three children aged between 12 and 32. She had given birth to her first-born child at the age of 17. Erika grew up in a housing commission home where money was scarce. She explained that she had struggled academically and that did not fit in with her peers at school. She began dating the father of her first-born child when she was aged 16. Their relationship had been brief. Upon finding out about her pregnancy, finances were of particular concern. She told me: "first was fear because, you know, I knew I was going to have to be responsible for this little person … you know, how I was gonna pay for this child." Erika made ends meet by living with her mother and laying turf on a nearby farm. She shared that living with her mother had been tense, as her mother was a devout Catholic who made no secret of her judgement regarding Erika's decision to start a family before marriage.

Erika revealed that when she was in her early twenties, she entered a relationship in which she experienced domestic violence. She secured a restraining order, yet safety remained a concern as she was subjected to stalking behaviours. Erika subsequently put her name down for a housing commission exchange in another town, and marvelled that shortly after, her life took a dramatic turn. She explained: "you wouldn't believe it, it was like four weeks later housing commission rang me and said you've got this house in [City]—I just left, and I was so grateful. Upon moving, Erika secured long-term employment in a retail store, where she was promoted to manager. She explained that despite having no formal training,

she had maintained a retail management level throughout her work trajectory. Erika met her current husband when she was in her thirties, and shared that they are happily married. Since having her youngest child, Erika has chosen to be a stay-at-home mum. Financial stability, including home ownership and an adequate household income, has placed Erika in a position in where she can make such a choice. In listening to Erika's story, it was apparent that she had transformed her life from the financial disadvantage and instability that characterised her younger years.

In reflecting on motherhood, Erika identified social stigma as a particular challenge associated with having children young, explaining: "there were a lot of negatives obviously because you certainly get judged a lot." Erika explained, however, that there are some unique benefits associated with early motherhood, including smaller generational differences resulting in a unique bond with children. She expressed: "I think you get to enjoy them when you're older and they become older—when they're young adults, you're not that much older either. So, I think you get to enjoy them as young adults a lot more then, and relate to them better."

4.1.5 Participant 5: Kyle

I met with Kyle at a local coffee shop. At the time of the interview, she was 38 years old, and had three children aged between 17 and 20. Kyle gave birth to her first-born child at the age of 18. She was in a de facto relationship at the time of the interview but expressed that the relationship was strained. Kyle struck me as a charismatic woman with a witty sense of humour. She described a traumatic childhood, which included family poverty, parental alcoholism, and exposure to family violence. Kyle had met her baby's father at a party when she was 16. The relationship ended when Kyle was in her early twenties due to her partner being unfaithful. Kyle explained that when her children were small, she had provided them with a loving and structured environment and was motivated to give them the positive

childhood that she had missed out on. She expressed: “every minute of the day was filled with them. I wanted them to be more looked after than I was, I think, and have more things that I did.”

Over the years, Kyle has faced setbacks in her educational and career trajectory. She discussed having had behavioural challenges in her adolescence that caused her to drop out of school in Grade 9. Kyle then set her sights on becoming a hairdresser, yet challenges relating to family finances and being in a remote location meant she could not realise this goal. In her early adulthood, Kyle decided to enrol in studies to become an aged-care nurse. She found a sense of enjoyment and promise within her studies, expressing: “I got a job within four days. And I had to study and work full time at the same time, and I loved it, I loved every minute of it.” While establishing herself within the workplace, however, her partner—who had been the main breadwinner within the family—acquired a disability and was no longer able to work. Arbitrary Centrelink policies prevented her from continuing her studies. She explained: “I beat Centrelink—got [partner] his pension, but part of that was I had to become his carer, and that’s when they said you have to quit the job.” In reflecting on her mothering journey, Kyle questioned the widespread problematisation of early motherhood, proposing that negative social opinions are a contemporary construction. She articulated: “I don’t know why people judge teenage mothers, it’s only been this century you know like, last century 16 was the normal age to be married and have a couple of kids, you know, it’s just the way it was.”

4.1.6 Participant 6: Gretchen

I met with Gretchen at her home, on a large block of land nestled amongst nature. At the time of the interview, Gretchen was 54 and had four children aged between 23 and 38. She had given birth to her first-born child at the age of 17. Gretchen was dating at the time of the interview, yet was unsure of her partner’s compatibility. As we sat on her front porch, Gretchen told me her life story over the sounds of birds twittering nearby. Her life had been

characterised by significant disadvantages from an early age. She grew up under impoverished circumstances and recalled witnessing frightening episodes of family violence. She described herself as being picked on in school, and having limited self-esteem since childhood. Gretchen was a dedicated student yet struggled academically due to her exposure to family violence. She explained: "I was a good little girl … I chose to repeat Year 11 myself because I didn't do quite well … it was pretty hard to study and concentrate at school when you have shit going on at home."

The father of Gretchen's first-born child had been a peer who lived nearby. After falling pregnant, they ran away together for fear of how her family may react. Gretchen remained in that relationship for approximately four years, during which time she was subjected to extreme physical abuse. At one point in the interview, she retrieved an old newspaper that she had kept and showed me an article that had been written about a brutal assault on her. She recounted memories of seeing headlights emerge as the police drew near on that occasion. Gretchen remained single for approximately one year after leaving that relationship, yet her next relationship became emotionally abusive. She revealed she had been 40 years old when she was finally able to break free—by which stage she had been exposed to violence across most of her life.

Gretchen worked in commercial fishery for a period in her early adulthood. However, cumulative experiences of trauma have resulted in mental health challenges for which she receives a disability support payment. Despite such challenges, Gretchen hopes to achieve a Community Welfare qualification in the future. Due to many of Gretchen's memories being painful, much of the interview was sombre. However, her face lit up with a visible joy when she spoke of hosting family meals for her children—most of whom were living independently. It was apparent that such connection was meaningful to Gretchen, who

beamed: “that’s become a regular thing now, it started out just them coming over here for dinner all the time, a lot of the time their partners come out and that as well.”

4.1.7 Participant 7: Sonja

I met with Sonja at her local café. She had a warm demeanour, which extended to graciously accepting my apology after taking a wrong turn had caused me to be late. Sonja was a 48-year-old mother of four children aged between 17 and 30. She gave birth to her first-born child at the age of 18. Sonja recalled a difficult childhood in which her mother struggled with depression, and her father had a drinking problem and was often volatile within the home. A sense of walking on eggshells was apparent, as she described: “it was a case of you didn’t know from one day to the next how he was going to be … is he in a good mood, or is he drunk, in a bad mood, you know, that kind of thing.” School life was equally difficult as she experienced bullying relating to her appearance. She explained: “I had braces on my teeth like a head gear that went outside, and I had a back brace for scoliosis … so, it was constant, every day, name calling.”

The father of Sonja’s first-born child had been a friend who lived across the road. Volatility within her home appeared to have been a factor that had influenced her gravitation towards him, as she explained: “I would prefer to be there than at home … there was always tension at home … you know like yelling and screaming at mum or swearing or cursing … nobody wants to go home to that.” Her parents’ response towards the pregnancy further solidified their union, in that her parents insisted that they marry in what Sonja referred to as being a “shotgun wedding.” Sonja remained in the relationship for approximately six years, across which time she felt unappreciated and was subjected to emotional abuse. Sonja went on to meet her current husband shortly after leaving and described her marriage as a positive feature of her life.

It was apparent from speaking with sonja that she was ambitious, career focused, and an avid learner. She told me that it had been important to her to complete high school and had completed her senior years while heavily pregnant, despite feeling self-conscious about her swelling belly. She went on to complete an apprenticeship program, and to attain a Certificate in Business while her first-born child was an infant. Sonja described that she had experienced social scrutiny regarding her ability to establish a career as a young mother. She rejected problematising assumptions by persevering towards her goals, and stated: "I was determined that I was finishing school. And I'm so glad I did, that I didn't drop out. People asked, you know 'what's the point of finishing school? You're not going to get a job, because you've got a baby, you know … I'm like, 'well not really, she's not going to be baby forever.'" At the time of the interview, Sonja was employed in a secretarial role and had recently enrolled in university to study psychology.

4.1.8 Participant 8: Leah

I met with Leah at a local park. She was 54 and had five children aged between 27 and 37. Leah had given birth to her eldest child at the age of 17. She appeared to exude a radiance, which may have been attributable to her expressed passion for yoga and meditation. Leah explained that until recent years, her life had been characterised by a lack of choice and a sense of obligation. She grew up in a poor family. Leah's father had acquired a disability when she was in her early childhood, and she was required to take on a significant level of responsibility to assist her family. She recalled: "I remember being up on the roof, or rounding up the cattle, or doing all these jobs that little kids shouldn't be doing."

Leah explained that she had enjoyed school, yet her parents could not afford to send her to school for her senior years. Subsequently, she was forced to leave school in Grade 10 and began working in a fast-food outlet. Leah met the father of her first-born child at work. They entered a relationship, and she became pregnant shortly after. Leah explained that her

parents had responded to news of her pregnancy by pressuring her to marry the baby's father, and that she had reluctantly gone along with her parent's wishes. Within the marriage, Leah did not feel valued. Her husband was unfaithful and left her shortly after the birth of their second child. Leah recalled a defining moment at the end of the relationship, when her partner accused her of being gay. She described that deep down, she had been repressing her sexuality. However, in that moment, Leah decided to leave her partner and embrace her authentic self. In recent years, Leah has begun living in a same-sex relationship, in which she feels strengthened and supported by her partner.

Leah marvelled at a "synchronicity of events" within her vocational trajectory that have enabled her to obtain hairdressing qualifications and establish her own salon. Establishing herself as a hairdresser was significant for Leah, as hairdressing had been her goal since she was a teenager, which she thought "would never happen." Leah explained that she had initially seen a pamphlet for a hair and beauty course at her children's school. On applying for the course, she received one of the few scholarships available. After completing the course, she received a small inheritance from her grandmother, which was just enough to allow her to start her business. In this sense, despite an initial lack of choice within her early relationship and career trajectory, Leah overcame a range of obstacles to create life on her own terms. Despite multiple barriers across her life, Leah emphasised that early family formation per se had not been the source of challenges. She reflected on her time as a young mother: "I don't think that I had anything negative apart from the men." Leah identified unique benefits of early motherhood, including her transition from parental obligations at an earlier age. She expressed: "if I had kids at home, I still wouldn't have [travelled overseas] for the last seven or eight years—I'd still be in that caring mode … it gives me freedom."

4.1.9 Participant 9: Luanne

I met with Luanne at her home in a serene countryside location. Luanne was 55 years old and had three children aged between 23 and 36. She gave birth to her first-born child at the age of 19. Luanne owned a beautiful home and described her current household income as "comfortable." She also said that she was in a positive relationship, in which she felt valued. Luanne's circumstances at the time of the interview contrasted significantly with her childhood; she had experienced family poverty, and had been subjected to emotional and sexual abuse.

Luanne explained that as a young person, she had lacked the self-belief to think that she had potential, and had subsequently left high school within her senior years. She had then fallen into a self-destructive lifestyle pattern including the misuse of drugs and alcohol. She was single at the time of falling pregnant, and as a young mother, lacked family support and avoided formal support services due to feeling judged. One friend, however, was pivotal in her life. This friend had been an older mother who had taken her under her wing and influenced a sense of belief that a positive future was possible. Luanne expressed: "I think [friend] role modelled … she grew up lower class as well … and here she was, she owned this beautiful home, she had a gorgeous husband—he doted on her … [it] made me just realise that you can be this, it doesn't matter what your upbringing is, you can get out of it."

Inspired by her friend's ability to turn her life around, Luanne took a leap of faith in her early twenties by applying for a housing commission exchange in another town to make a fresh start away from negative influences. Luanne managed to break free from substance misuse and make positive changes in her life. Doors opened for Luanne within her new town, including an opportunity to study childcare. She marvelled that this opportunity had unfolded in certain synchronicity, explaining: "I was walking [son] to school one day, and [he] said to me, 'Mummy why don't you do what I did, in [previous town]?' And I went, 'What did you

do?’ He said, ‘Remember you sent me to that lady, and she’d look after me?’ I went, ‘Family daycare?’ … the lady in front of me stopped, she said ‘Oh hi, I’m [name], I do family daycare … she said look, there’s a scholarship going’ … I got the scholarship, and I did it." Around this time, Luanne also met her husband. After establishing her career as a childcare worker, she moved out of her housing commission home and into a home that she and her husband bought together. In this sense, it appeared that Luanne had achieved the life that she had felt inspired to emulate as a young mother. She emphasised that having her son had been a meaningful decision within her life, which had been a catalyst for positive life changes. Luanne expressed: “the life I was living was going to put my son in the same growing up aspect of what I had, and I didn’t want that for him.”

4.1.10 Participant 10: Bronwyn

In the lead up to interviewing Bronwyn, the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that increased social distancing restrictions were being implemented. All remaining interviews were therefore conducted via telephone. I was initially apprehensive about whether participants would feel comfortable opening up to me without face-to-face engagement. However, I found that most participants, including Bronwyn, welcomed the interview process as a distraction from the monotony of lock-down measures.

At the time of the interview, Bronwyn was a married, 57-year-old woman. She has three children aged between 33 and 40, and had given birth to her first child at the age of 17. Bronwyn had worked in a range of roles including hospitality, administration, and retail during her adolescence and adulthood. She has a tertiary qualification in micro business management. At the time of the interview, Bronwyn was not working due to a disability, yet explained that she was in a financially secure position due to her husband’s employment.

Bronwyn was a warm and engaging person. She reflected fondly on what she described as a happy childhood. Bronwyn had entered a relationship with the father of her

first-born child when she was in Grade 10. Shortly after, she decided to leave school, and gain employment in a retail store. Upon news of her pregnancy, Bronwyn and her partner became engaged, and soon after, they married. The early years of their marriage were described as a positive time in her life. Bronwyn enjoyed young motherhood. She had a circle of friends who were also young mothers, and her mother and mother-in-law were described as a strong source of support. Bronwyn found that this strong support network enhanced her adjustment to motherhood. She articulated: “I knew that [baby would] be fine, that I could take care of him really well … and I suppose that comes with knowing you have back up too you know … generations of mums to ask.”

When Bronwyn was 21, she broke up with her first husband under amicable circumstances. She met her current husband when she was in her mid-thirties, and described this marriage as positive. While reflecting on early motherhood, Bronwyn proposed that problematising social attitudes are unnecessary, expressing: “I don’t feel the need for there to be a drama about it.” However, she felt that young mothers who did not have the support of friends and family might struggle because young mothers need “social back up.” She shared: “I think, that was what made the difference for me anyway … strong family support and people around my age going through the same thing.”

4.1.11 Participant 11: Theresa

Theresa is a 48-year-old mother of two children aged 23 and 29. She gave birth to her eldest child at the age of 19. At the time of the interview, Theresa was engaged and shared that her relationship with her fiancé was positive. Theresa had worked in a range of roles including hospitality, cleaning, and beauty therapy across her life. At the time of the interview, she was self-employed in the cosmetic industry. Theresa presented as a caring person who was hopeful that sharing her story would inspire other young mothers to overcome challenges in their lives. Her childhood had been particularly traumatic, as her

mother had mental health issues that impacted her caregiving, and her father had sexually abused her. During her teenage years, Theresa attempted to escape her trauma through excessive alcohol consumption: "the drinking started of course, because I had to block everything out as much as what I could." It was during an episode of binge drinking that Theresa conceived her first-born child to a man whose identity she does not know.

Theresa has suffered from depression for most of her life, and before becoming a mother she had attempted suicide multiple times. Motherhood had given her a sense of purpose to live, and she shared: "I can still get suicidal … but [daughter] has certainly pulled me out of it more than once without even knowing it … I didn't want her to grow up with my mother … I knew how damaging that could be." Theresa has battled with substance misuse for significant portions of her life since it emerged during her adolescence. At one stage, Theresa attended Alcoholics Anonymous for 11 consecutive years. Theresa said she was currently sober and attending therapy to work on past trauma.

As a young, single mother, Theresa felt labelled as welfare dependent, which had spurred her to work harder towards establishing economic security. She explained: "I worked—I worked all the time … I didn't want my kid to grow up in say housing commission or anything like that … I was never going to, that was my big goal, I was already being judged because I was young." She felt that her success in establishing a career and to overcoming obstacles in her life was possible due to a sense of self-belief and perseverance. She expressed: "I didn't have the best upbringing around, but at the same time, you know, [stepfather] for one, taught us very much to be independent … you know don't let anyone put you into that category of the single mother kind of thing—and I was so determined to not do that."

4.1.12 Participant 12: Melissa

Melissa was a 42-year-old mother of seven children aged between 8 and 25 at the time of interview. She gave birth to her first-born child at the age of 17. When our interview took place, Melissa was living with her husband and did not describe any issues. However, when I contacted Melissa for member-checking purposes, she informed me that she had since left her husband, and had come to realise that he was controlling during their time together. Melissa discussed her life in ways that indicated she had repressed many of her personal needs and interests such as a desire to study to please others. It seemed, however, that Melissa was awakening to her own innate value in that she was learning to prioritise her own needs.

Melissa was raised in a family that was "below the poverty line," yet she had been a confident child who came from a loving home. Melissa dropped out of school in Grade 9 to do a hairdressing course, but she disengaged from this course soon after as she did not enjoy it. It was around this time that she entered a relationship with her children's father, who had been a neighbour. Upon finding out about her pregnancy, her parents had been disappointed, yet supportive.

Societal judgments had weighed heavily on Melissa as a young mother. She shared that she had felt stared at and judged to be an inadequate parent. This judgement caused her to feel reluctant to leave her home or to socialise. Melissa described wanting to be a stay-at-home mother to project an image of domestic perfection, in the hopes of obtaining a good mother status. This choice had come at the expense of putting off aspirations to attend university. At the time of the interview, however, Melissa had finally embarked upon her long-time goal of pursuing a tertiary-level qualification, and she was attending university as an on-campus student.

Melissa challenged the problematisation of young motherhood. In reflecting on a university assignment that she had written on the topic of young motherhood, she told me: "I got a great sense of satisfaction out of some of the more recent articles, because it was much more focused on the positives, you know, like I thought 'good,' for a start." For Melissa, motherhood has been a valued and meaningful decision in her life. She articulated: "I define success as being a decent human, liking yourself, and in my case, raising good human beings. That for me is success—everything else is awesome, but I'm not monetarily motivated."

4.1.13 Participant 13: Carrol

At the time of the interview, Carrol was a 49-year-old mother of two children aged 23 and 31. She gave birth to her first-born child at the age of 18, and has worked in many roles across her adult years, including hospitality, retail, and retail management. At the time of the interview, Carrol was running her own farm; a business that she had owned for over a decade. She described being in a positive marriage, and experiencing financial security.

Carrol's younger years were not as stable as her current life. She had grown up in a poor household where she witnessed extreme domestic violence. She recalled how her older sister would sometimes round up the younger children to flee to their neighbour's house for safety, while they awaited police assistance. At school, Carrol had been the target of cruel taunts due to a health condition that affected her appearance, and stated: "that made you have no confidence." Carrol escaped the schoolyard bullying by leaving school and finding work in a pharmacy at the age of 16. However, this workplace was described as "toxic," "cruel," and further detrimental to her self-esteem. Carrol met the father of her first-born child at the age of 16. This became an on and off relationship, during which he was physically violent towards her. In circumstances that paralleled Carrol's early childhood, police assistance was called on various occasions to uphold her safety. After meeting her now husband during her early adulthood, Carrol cut off all ties with her first-born child's father.

Carrol described that developing the confidence to establish her current business had been influenced by a particularly nurturing employer. Specifically, when Carrol was in her thirties, she worked in a retail store. She explained: "[previous employer] put me on as manager after I worked there for about two or three years, she taught me about bookkeeping … that job is what opened my eyes to the world and to what I was capable of, because she told me I was very clever—she gave me confidence … she was self-made too." Her partnership with her husband has also been a source of strength. They had both started out with very little money, yet together they bought land and eventually earned enough equity to pursue their farming goals. She expressed: "I wouldn't of thought of any of that when I was younger … neither of us would have got where we are today if it wasn't for both of us together."

In reflecting on her mothering journey, Carrol described that commencing motherhood at a young age was an extension of her maternal sense of identity, expressing: "I'm a nurturer from way back—I think that's just in my genetics to be a nurturer." She challenged the problematisation of young motherhood, which included notions that young mothers cannot succeed, by asserting her own positive outcome: "what is the difference between when you're young and when your older when you're a mum? Nothing … look at me, I can be retired in another five years." Further, she emphasised young motherhood as a valued decision, articulating: "I loved being a mum, even though I was very young, it was a beautiful experience, and I wouldn't exchange it for anything."

4.1.14 Participant 14: Camille

At the time of the interview, Camille was a 36-year-old mother of four children aged between infancy to 18. She was 18 years old when she gave birth to her eldest child. At the time of the interview, Camille was newly married, in what she described as a positive relationship. Camille expressed a hope that by participating in this study she could contribute

information that life goes on beyond adolescent motherhood. Such hopes had emanated from her experience of being told that her life was over upon pregnancy, and being unable to find information to counter such assumptions at the time. Camille expressed: “when I was pregnant with my son, I couldn’t find anything on the internet. I really wanted to hear about other women who had their kids and still carried on with their lives.”

Camille grew up in a large family. Her mother had left her father due to domestic violence, and she was required to assist her younger siblings in what she indicated to be a quasi-parent role: “[it was] basically just me and her raising all these kids.” Caring for her younger siblings had been a source of restriction, and Camille expressed: “once I got to about 12, 13, I did have a lot of issues with my mum, because she just had a lot of expectations that I would help her with the kids … even just go to the shops with my friends—I never could do that.” Subsequently, Camille chose to move out at an early age, explaining: “I ended up leaving home at 15, just because I was like, no I’m out I’m done with this crap basically.”

Camille was single when she fell pregnant with her eldest child. She had recently left school to begin an apprenticeship to become a chef. Camille faced discrimination because of her pregnancy, explaining: “about four months along, my boss said to me, we can’t have you in the kitchen—cause my belly was massive, and they thought it would be a workplace health and safety risk, so they basically just sacked me.” Despite interruptions to her vocational goals in her younger years, Camille resumed studies to become a chef when she was in her late twenties. She went on to excel with her career, explaining: “by the time I finished my apprenticeship I was working full time, then I actually took over running that kitchen.” In more recent years, Camille has begun working as a manager in a large retail outlet. She described herself and her husband as “middle-income earners,” and exuded pride as she spoke of ways in which she has found happiness and success, despite being told within her younger years that her life would be over. Camille challenged limiting beliefs regarding

young mothers' life opportunities, expressing: "[young mothers] can do anything they want, they can study—they can travel, you either just take your kids with you, or have a really supportive family."

4.1.15 Participant 15: Brandi

Brandi was a 47-year-old mother of one, whose son was aged 30 at the time of the interview. Brandi gave birth to her son at the age of 17. She was single at the time of the interview, and explained that a traumatic upbringing made it difficult for her to establish intimate relationships. Brandi struck me as a resilient person who had overcome significant barriers in her life. She described a harrowing childhood in which she was exposed to family violence and extreme emotional abuse.

Brandi had been working in a retail store at the time of becoming pregnant. The father of her baby was physically violent towards her. She left this partner soon after her baby was born, yet described feeling fearful of him for many years. As a young mother, Brandi lacked parental support. Brandi described her mother as unable to function due to alcoholism, and her father rejected her because she refused to have an abortion. Assistance from formal support services was equally lacking, in that service interactions were characterised by a palpable sense of judgment regarding her age upon becoming a mother.

In her early twenties, Brandi began studying Veterinary Sciences as she had a goal of working with animals. Around that time, however, she experienced extreme control within an intimate relationship, and was forced to give up her studies. After breaking up with this partner, Brandi completed a degree in human services during her late thirties, and now works in a human-service-related role. She expressed, however, that she experiences significant grief regarding her lost opportunity to become a veterinarian.

Brandi described her pregnancy as unplanned, yet her decision to dedicate her life to her son was nonetheless a conscious choice. In reflecting upon her mothering journey, she

expressed: "it was a conscious decision, I negotiated it and said I am giving up who I am as a person to take care of this person, this person being my son, I will trade my life for his life, and you know what? I don't regret that—he, my son, he is an amazing person and he is a caring person, he is a kind person, he's got his shit together."

4.1.16 Participant 16: Adrienne

At the time of the interview, Adrienne was a 43-year-old mother of eight children aged from infancy to 25. She gave birth to her first-born child at the age of 17, and was single at the time of the interview. Adrienne described herself as somebody who drew strength from her love for her family in ways that had enabled her to weather a range of ups and downs within her life. She described a somewhat idyllic childhood, expressing: "I was a really happy child … my parents—they were great parents." However, she lacked confidence as a child, which was a consistent theme across her life.

Adrienne felt that her lack of confidence during adolescence had made her susceptible to the sexual advances of her first boyfriend: "he was constantly pressuring me for sex … I guess it just wore me down … he was so confident, and he was so worldly, and I was so naïve and unconfident." Their relationship was short lived, and finding out that she was pregnant was an emotionally challenging experience for Adrienne, yet her parents were very supportive. She recalled: "[the Doctor] was fantastic, he got mum in and explained to mum that I was pregnant, and mum just cried, and dad just cried, and I just felt like the worst daughter ever—they were really upset but they were fantastic." Adrienne pulled out of school the year that she became pregnant as she felt self-conscious about her pregnancy. Yet, with the support of her parents who babysat for her, she was able to complete a high school equivalent over the following years through a bridging program at TAFE.

Adrienne's relationship trajectory was described as a source of significant disruption across her life. When she was 19, Adrienne entered a relationship that spanned approximately

10 years, during which she felt controlled and trapped. She had been 30 when the relationship ended, yet her reprieve from the dynamics of control was short lived. Her subsequent partner had also masqueraded as being a positive spouse, yet became increasingly controlling. In recent years she had broken free from this relationship. Her parent's support was described to have been pivotal in terms of accessing resources to leave both relationships.

Since becoming single, Adrienne has focused on her career goals. She had previously enrolled in a Bachelor of Nursing in her early thirties, yet chaos induced by domestic violence had caused her to defer her studies. At the time of the interview, she had resumed her degree and was close to completion. In reflecting on motherhood, Adrienne emphasised that young motherhood had been a valued and meaningful decision within her life, expressing: "my son—he was the love of my life … I just loved being a mum, and yea, I loved [my son], he was the best thing that ever happened to me."

4.1.17 Participant 17: Yolanda

At the time of the interview, Yolanda was a 56-year-old mother of three children aged between 29 and 38. She gave birth to her first-born child at the age of 18. Yolanda described a positive childhood, yet had struggled with her body image in high school, and reflected: "I had absolutely zero self-confidence." She explained that in the years prior to the birth of her child, she had an abortion. She felt that her sexual activity as a young person had been linked to obtaining approval, and was an extension of her lack of self-esteem.

The father of Yolanda's first-born child had been a friend who she had met at school. After receiving news of her pregnancy, her parents pressured her to marry the baby's father. Within the marriage, she felt unappreciated in ways that compounded her self-esteem issues. The marriage broke down after several years, and at the time of the interview, Yolanda was in a marriage that she described as positive. Yolanda felt that her vocational trajectory had been impacted by limiting societal beliefs about young mothers. She was pregnant when

completing her senior year of high school, and had not performed particularly well due to a range of distractions. She stated: “nobody ever said, well look how about you go in this way, what if you do this, why don’t you do that, nobody ever said, oh you’re quite intelligent … it was an expectation at that time, that you would probably just … go off and have babies, you’re just gonna go and be a single teenage mum.”

Across most of her adult years, Yolanda worked in retail. She re-evaluated her career in approximately 2016 upon finding information about art therapy. Yolanda initially presented the information to her daughter, yet felt intrinsically drawn to the course herself. She explained: “I kept saying to [daughter], ‘Maybe you should be an art therapist’ … and I looked at her and I went, ‘Oh it’s not you it’s me.’” At the time of interview, she had obtained qualifications in art therapy and was working in a therapeutic role.

Yolanda’s reflections on motherhood largely related to personal challenges that influenced her transition to motherhood. She articulated: “I didn’t have enough confidence … or enough belief in myself to say ‘[I] need to take the pill,’ and you need to take it regularly, or ‘I’m not sure the pill’s working so you need to wear a condom.’” She emphasised that building young mothers’ confidence is important in promoting a sense of reproductive choice—assertions which are further elaborated upon in Chapter Eight.

4.1.18 Participant 18: Vicki

At the time of the interview, Vicki was a 54-year-old mother of three children aged between 18 and 36. She gave birth to her first-born child at the age of 18. She was in a relationship at the time of interview, yet felt used in the relationship and was considering distancing herself. Vicki appeared to be particularly caring and nurturing of those less fortunate, which extended to assisting the homeless. During the interview, Vicki noted ways in which her caring disposition emanated from her own difficult life experiences, which have enhanced her empathy towards others.

Vicki was adopted as an infant, and experienced significant trauma within the care of her adoptive family, inclusive of sexual and emotional abuse. She struggled within a school environment, and would attempt to solve challenges at school by using aggression. Vicki was expelled from school at the age of 14 due to hitting a teacher. Not long after, she ran away from home and experienced periods of homelessness. She entered a relationship with the father of her first-born child when she was 17. Soon after falling pregnant, he became excessively jealous and physically violent towards her. She hid the violence from her family due to shame. She explained that her birth mother had been a young single mother, and that her adoptive parents had used her birth mother's status as a way of shaming her throughout childhood. She recalled: "all I can remember hearing all my life is you're gonna be pregnant, you're going to be a single mother at 17." Shortly after giving birth, Vicki's partner threatened to harm their baby. Out of desperation, she disclosed the abuse to her parents, who assisted her to relocate.

In contrast to the familial shame which had been projected onto Vicki upon her first pregnancy, Vicki exuded pride as she spoke of her role as a mother. She expressed a sense of confidence in her mothering abilities, and stated: "I've got three totally different girls but they're all very kind compassionate complete human beings … I'm happy now. None of them got molested when they were younger which I'm really proud of, cause I was paranoid about that … [it was] tumultuous, very tumultuous, but we get there in the end!"

4.1.19 Participant 19: Kameron

Kameron was a 39-year-old single mother of two children aged 9 and 19 at the time of the interview. She gave birth to her first-born child at the age of 19. Kameron explained that she came from a home in which uncomfortable topics were swept under the rug, yet she had gone on to find her voice and overtly question a family culture of silence. It was apparent from speaking with Kameron that she was a strong-willed and highly courageous person.

Kameron explained that there had been two distinct phases of her childhood: before, and after the onset of her father's depression when she was 12. Before this time, dynamics within her immediate family were described as positive, yet afterwards, there had been a sense of dreariness. She explained: "dad was on antidepressants … his mood was all over the place, trying to get his medication right affected his mood … all of the sudden the house went from warm and exciting and fun … it was dark, and dreary and awful." Around that time, she was sexually abused by a family member, and her perspective of the world changed. She recalled: "there was no one to protect me. I think from then it was—I can't trust men."

As a young person, Kameron had not enjoyed high school due to struggling to find a sense of place amongst her peers. She subsequently left school halfway through Grade 11 and enrolled in TAFE, where she completed qualifications in childcare. She entered a whirlwind romance with the father of her first-born child when she was 19, yet broke up with him when their child was an infant as he was controlling and had an inflated sense of entitlement. Kameron described a defining moment in her twenties, whereby she confronted the perpetrator of her childhood abuse and informed family members that he was unsafe around children. She shared that the catalyst for this was to protect her child from being exposed to this person. She explained that opportunities to speak openly with her parents had been minimal as they avoided any discussion of uncomfortable topics. Kameron worked hard to break this cycle and has established an open communication style with her children.

Despite possessing a tertiary qualification in childcare, Kameron had worked predominately in hospitality and retail across her adult life. Due to circumstances influenced by COVID-19, she was unemployed at the time of the interview, yet expressed that she felt hopeful about future post-pandemic possibilities. She stated that she is a hard worker, and critiqued the dominant problematisation of young motherhood, which she felt included notions that young mothers—particularly young single mothers are "dole bludgers." She

argued: “no way would I think that [young single motherhood] holds us back—if anything, of the single parents I’ve known, it makes you more determined to not be a burden on society, to not be that stereotype.”

4.1.20 Participant 20: Denise

Denise was a 40-year-old mother of three, whose eldest child was 23 at the time of the interview. She gave birth to her first-born child at the age of 17. Denise was a highly articulate person who spoke in a matter-of-fact way about her adolescent motherhood journey by emphasising the normalcy of her life in a straightforward fashion. She indicated that she experienced a positive childhood, in which she was a gifted student who graduated from high school with a high OP.

Upon completing high school, Denise commenced a traineeship to do conveyancing work for a legal firm. At the time of falling pregnant, she had been living in a de-facto relationship with the baby’s father, yet their relationship fell apart during the pregnancy. She was able to continue working after her baby was born and noted that extended family support had been in place to assist in balancing work and mothering. At the age of 24, Denise enrolled in university. She obtained a degree in human services, and now works in a social welfare-related role. Denise described that she is happily married to a man who she has been with since her thirties. Despite being exposed to negative relationships, her experience of young motherhood was described to have been unproblematic. Her life post-young motherhood was equally unproblematic in that she described living a “normal happy life.”

4.1.21 Participant 21: Shannon

At the time of the interview, Shannon was a 37-year-old mother of seven children aged from infancy to 18. She gave birth to her first-born child at the age of 19. She expressed being unapologetic about deviating from popular societal norms in terms of early family

formation, despite being on the receiving end of societal criticism at times. Shannon described a childhood in which she struggled with her self-esteem. Poor self-esteem became a pattern across her life, and she expressed: "I just have never had a very good opinion on myself." At the time of falling pregnant, Shannon was living an unstable lifestyle. She explained: "I was living with a girl who I'd not long met, and I just was having a lot of fun, using drugs and drinking." Upon reflecting on where her life may have taken her had she not fallen pregnant, she indicated that motherhood had saved her, expressing: "I think I would have ended up dead … I was still lost for a damn long time, but I do think it just changed the course of where I was taking myself and my life."

Shannon described that in her life, she has experienced relationships that had initially seemed positive, yet within which she became subjected to mind games, manipulating behaviours, and emotional abuse. However, her current relationship was described as positive: "life actually has become good." Shannon was working as a cleaner at the time of interview. She discussed that money could sometimes be tight, yet she was nonetheless happy. Shannon identified unique benefits of early motherhood including smaller generational differences of "growing with them." Of her eldest son, she expressed: "I actually think it's really cool because we grew up together … he has been with me for my entire adult life, every single thing that I've done as an adult my sons been with me for, and we've grown up together, and I actually think that's really special, I think we have a really special relationship, and a really special connection because of that." She indicated that early motherhood has been a valued and meaningful decision within her life, and is something that she would not change in retrospect. She articulated: "something in me just knew that this baby was the right thing, that he was meant to be here, and that he was going to be someone amazing … and he's been amazing, he is amazing—hardest thing I've ever done but one of the best as well."

4.1.22 Participant 22: Kelly

At the time of the interview, Kelly was a 40-year-old mother of three children aged between 17 and 21. She gave birth to her first-born child at the age of 19. Kelly appeared to have a casual and relaxed tone, and explained that she had fitted our interview into her busy schedule by placing me on speakerphone while on a long-distance drive. Kelly described her childhood home as being unproblematic, and described: "it was your stereotypical normal family." She had faced some challenges in school however, explaining: "I got into a lot of trouble and got into a lot of drugs, I actually was offered to leave school at the end of Year 10, almost to be the safest option to get me out of that environment."

Kelly attended TAFE after leaving school and completed a diploma in childcare. She met her now husband at the age of 16, and described their relationship as positive. At the time of the interview, they had been together for 24 years. Kelly has gone from strength to strength within her career trajectory. She undertook a Certificate in Commercial Cookery in her twenties, and went on to start a cake-making business. She explained: "I love cooking, my first business was a cake decorating business … I went from just doing birthday cakes to being one of the top wedding cake providers in that area." In more recent years, she bought a restaurant which she runs as a small family business.

Kelly explained that becoming a young mother had attracted criticism from many, who had questioned her ability to be a capable parent due to her age. She challenged notions that young mothers are not good mothers, asserting: "I think there's a lot of misconceptions for young mums and a lot of judgement, and you know, there's a lot of young mums out there doing great jobs." Kelly identified unique benefits of early motherhood, including a unique bond stemming from smaller generational differences. She stated: "I think growing up with them really, you know we're not that much separated in generational change that we're very

close.” Kelly further emphasised early motherhood as a valued decision within her life: “I honestly think it’s the best thing we ever did.”

4.2 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced participants by discussing their lives and mothering journeys in ways that incorporated their own socially situated reflections. Participants’ unique experiences and perspectives varied considerably from happy childhoods to difficult family life. Many participants challenged negative social constructs surrounding young motherhood. Some participants questioned the dominant problematisation of adolescent motherhood by asserting positive outcomes within their lives or proposing that such problematisation is unnecessary. Some described unique benefits of early family formation. Such benefits included a sense of closeness induced by small generational gaps, transitioning out of childrearing obligations at a relatively early age, and grandparenting with a youthful vigour. Many participants emphasised young motherhood as a valued and meaningful decision within their lives. These participants mentioned early family formation as something that they would not change in retrospect; their children as a source of pride or joy; their maternal sense of identity; young motherhood experiences that made them stronger; or teenage motherhood as a catalyst for positive life changes.

Chapter 5. Patterns of Adversity, Scrutiny, and Resilience Across the Lifespan

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter defines and explicates categories within the data as they relate to patterns of adversity, scrutiny, and resilience across the lifespan. As outlined in Chapter Three, such categories were identified through the grounded theory approach to data analysis, during which codes were scaled into increasingly broad themes (Charmaz, 2014). This was achieved through a process of constant comparison, during which units of data were compared to identify common meanings and patterns, which were then subsumed under broader, more encompassing categories (Belgrave & Seide, 2019; Charmaz, 2014; Chun Tie et al., 2019; Levitt, 2021).

Engagement in such a process was not without hurdles. I initially began by examining data related to distinct life stages separately, in the hopes of finding unique patterns neatly confined to each of the chronological stages of interest. To my dismay however, I found that reducing the lifespan into distinct sections did not yield strong patterns or theoretical direction. Rather, from close range, the variation across participants' lives appeared overwhelmingly marked, and I began to wonder what themes—if any, my findings may suggest.

Subsequently, I engaged in a period of reflection, immersing myself in the literature around my chosen methodological approach in order to glean new insights and direction. I took heed of the advice of Charmaz (2014), who urged researchers to construct categories with abstract power and general reach. I returned to the data with a renewed openness to the more abstract and general features of participants' lives. This included comparing codes across the data as a whole, as opposed to comparing chronologically specific sections only.

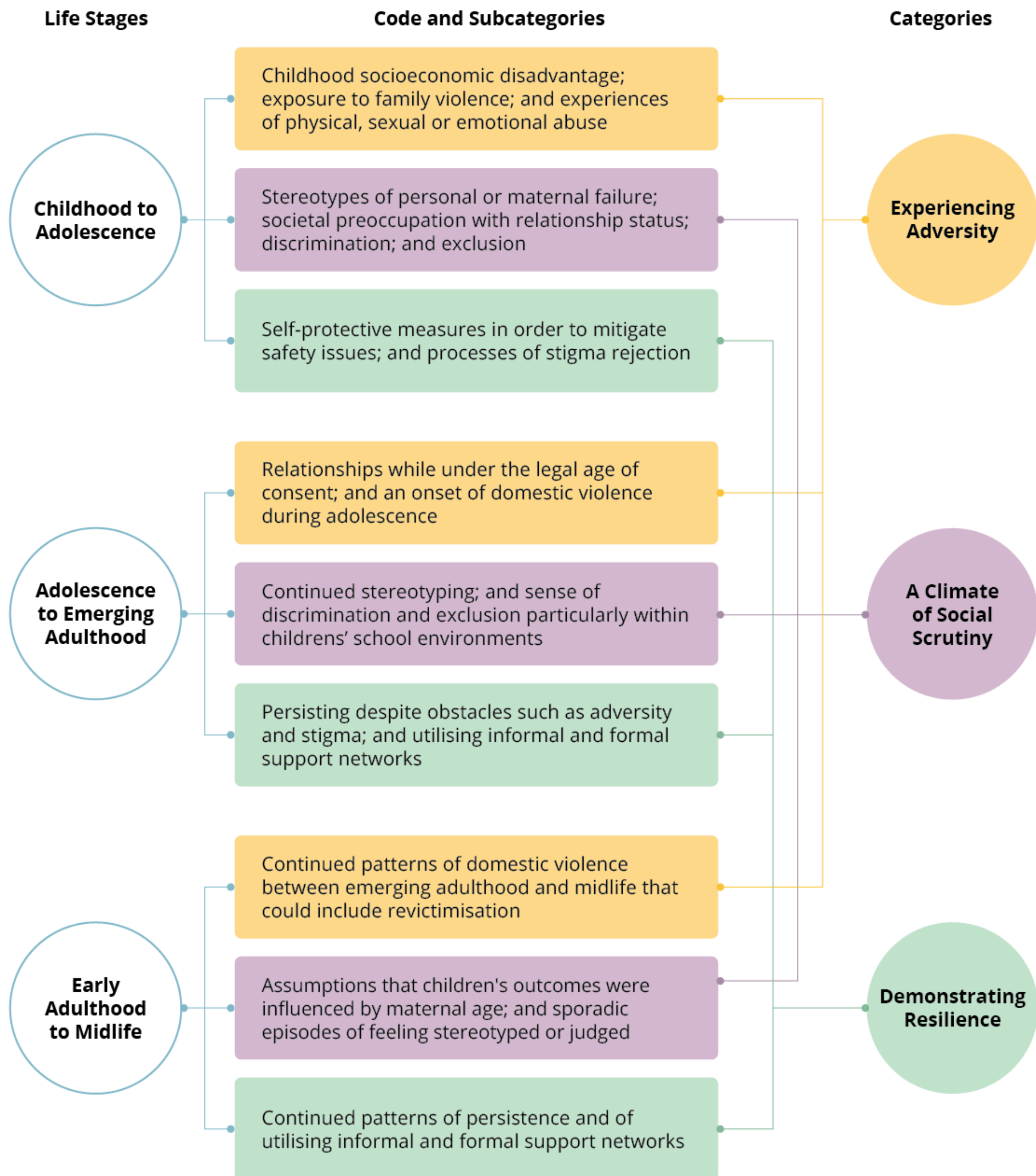
Through this process, common themes and patterns unfolded across numerous codes, which were subsumed under the major theme categories of 'experiencing adversity,' 'a

climate of social scrutiny,' and 'resilient behaviours or actions.' Such categories were particularly prominent within the data as they were identified across the sample, as well as across various tiers of participants' individual lifespans, reflecting commonality across multiple participants' lived experiences (Levitt, 2021). Furthermore, as will be revealed within subsequent chapters, relationships between such categories provided analytic direction regarding a range of substantive processes within the data towards theory development (Charmaz, 2014).

Figure 5.1 sets out an example of ways in which various codes and subcategories were collapsed into categories relating to adversity, scrutiny, and resilience across the lifespan:

Figure 5.1

Example of Coding and Categorising the Data



Collectively, such categories reflect a dominant story within the data in which many participants described backgrounds of childhood hardship or experiences of abuse within intimate relationships between adolescence and adulthood. Experiences of adversity could run parallel to an often unaccommodating social environment in which participants could feel scrutinised or subjected to experiences of stigma. A strong thread of resilience was apparent across participants' journeys, highlighting ways in which understanding the lived realities of women from within this social group may involve consideration of areas of social disadvantage and oppression that must be navigated across their lifespan.

I have divided this chapter into four sections. Each section represents a major theme, with several subthemes. Section 5.2 describes experiences of adversity, Section 5.3 outlines participant accounts existing within a climate of social scrutiny, Section 5.4 focuses on ways participants engaged in resilient processes, and Section 5.5 outlines variation within the data. As discussed in Chapter Three, considering variation is integral in terms of providing a comprehensive analysis in which all participants' stories are considered (Levitt, 2021).

5.2 Experiencing Adversity

5.2.1 'Experiencing Adversity' as a Category of Analysis

Adversity can be defined as relating to circumstances or life events that are associated with difficulty (Vella & Pai, 2019). However, there is a lack of consensus around the kinds of experiences that constitute a threshold for adversity within academic understanding (Vella & Pai, 2019). Some authors have taken a particularly broad view of adversity that includes a range of negative life events and general setbacks (Vella & Pai, 2019). Conversely, adversity can be conceptualised as circumstances or life events that are statistically associated with adjustment issues (Vella & Pai, 2019). This section outlines recurrent codes related to specific phenomena associated with hardship, such as childhood poverty, exposure to family

violence, abuse, and domestic violence (Carret al., 2020; Jiang, 2020; Pepler et al., 2018; Taherifard & Mikaeili, 2019).

5.2.2 An Overview of Patterns of Adversity Within the Data

In total, 20 participants described experiences that fell within codes relating to specific phenomena associated with hardship during at least one point within their lifespan. Some participants described singular experiences of hardship, whereas others described multiple or entrenched layers of disadvantage. Specifically, thirteen participants described childhood socioeconomic disadvantage or abuse within their family environment. Thirteen participants described inequitable power dynamics during adolescent relationships, such as conditions of statutory rape or domestic violence, and 12 participants described abuse within intimate relationships during various stages of adulthood. While it might have been expected that some participants would reveal some stories of adversity, abuse, or assault, the extensive experiences of disadvantage, violence, and sexual assault as reported by a majority of the participants in the interviews emerged as a significant finding.

5.2.3 Childhood Disadvantage, Abuse, and Violence Within a Family Environment

Childhood experiences of abuse were not the specific focus of this study. However, life-stage theories encompass holistic understandings of development in which early experiences are integral in conceptualising one's transition across the lifespan (Robinson, 2013). It therefore felt pertinent to consider childhood adversity in terms of understanding the broader context of former teenage mothers' lives.

As noted, 13 participants described either singular or multiple experiences of adversity within their childhoods. Such experiences could relate to a range of codes consisting of significant poverty, exposure to family violence, or experiences of abuse within a family environment. Specifically, socioeconomic disadvantage as an established risk factor

for adolescent pregnancy (AIHW, 2018a) was present in the stories of eight participants who self-reported growing up within low-income households.

For some, experiences of poverty were particularly abject. For instance, Kyle described harsh living conditions after her father acquired a disability in the military for which he was not compensated:

> They dishonourably discharged him, and now they now realise what caused it … so he was on Centrelink, we grew up out bush in a tin shed. Poor as hell.

Erika described similar financial hardship, having grown up in a single-parent housing commission household. Her family were especially challenged during times when her mother could not access employment:

> She spent a lot of time out of work, cause it was so hard, cause if you had kids, people didn't want to employ you.

Six participants described exposure to serious family violence. For example, Carrol recounted domestic violence perpetrated by her mother's partner:

> I had domestic violence in my childhood, like severe domestic violence, there was guns, and knives and, yea all sorts of things like axes … one night he let off a 22 which went through the wall through our bedroom.

Gretchen similarly referred to family violence, which in her case resulted in child safety intervention:

> I was shit scared … and because I've got [grandmother's] diary, you know it did bring back a lot of stuff, and nana has mentioned in there about Children's Services … I

remember staying with nana a lot, but I didn't remember that I lived with her you know, for weeks, and that she took me into Children's Services and everything too.

Childhood abuse as established risk factors for adolescent pregnancy (Mann et al., 2020; Martínez et al., 2017) was apparent within the stories of a number of participants, three of whom described being subjected to physical abuse. For example, Luanne discussed tangible reminders of being assaulted as a child:

> The other day my husband was dyeing my hair and he went, gee you're really thin on this side—that's where mum ripped it out.

Similarly, Sonja recalled being at the receiving end of her father's rages:

> He hit us kids a lot … if he was throwing stuff around he'd sort of aim at us … I mean I had a telephone thrown at me once … I think the worst thing I remember, is when he tried to set fire to the house … he was screaming at us, where are the matches where are the matches!

Four participants disclosed being sexually abused within a home environment. For some, such abuse was perpetrated by direct family members. For instance, Theresa disclosed being sexually abused by a parent:

> My father sexually abused me and one of my half-sisters as well, and I'm pretty sure the other one, but she doesn't remember it, I managed to block it out most of my life, although there were times that I didn't.

Kameron disclosed being sexually abused by an older cousin:

> My favourite nana died, and then everything changed, I was sexually assaulted, my cousin sexually assaulted me around the same time.

Four participants described experiences that may be indicative of emotional abuse. For instance, Brandi expressed that her emotional needs were not met by either parent:

> I was never told I was loved, I was never told, I was never hugged, I was told I was a filthy bitch, you name it … I should have been a Child Safety case, I should have been taken out and removed.

Vicki described emotional abuse in terms of victim blaming around being sexually abused by workers on her family's farm:

> I was always in trouble, like I was the one that got abused, sexually abused, I was the one that was always in the dark, you know mum would say, "Oh you know, you only got abused cause you should have come in when you were called in," and that sort of thing.

Such reflections capture diverse experiences of childhood adversity, which as discussed, may be an important point of consideration in understanding participants' journeys within the broader context of their lives.

5.2.4 Abuse Within Intimate Relationships Entered During Adolescence

As noted, patterns of adversity during adolescent relationships were apparent in the stories of 13 participants who experienced conditions that appeared to be indicative of statutory rape and/or domestic violence. For example, four participants had experienced relationships with older males while under the age of legal consent. Two of such relationships had subsequently gone on to result in early family formation. For example, Tinsley had been just 12 and her partner aged 16 when they began a long-term relationship. She described a process of family approval despite this age gap:

> Dad knew, he just knew there was something different between [partner] and I, it wasn't like teenage angst, you know … once he got to know [partner] he was fine.

Eleven participants described being subjected to control, physical violence, threats, intimidation, or emotional abuse (Coercive Control Collective, 2018) in relationships entered during adolescence. For instance, Denise described the father of her first-born child as being "controlling, and recalled:

> I'd always have to justify where I was, what I was doing … he actually wouldn't let me catch public transport to and from work, he'd have to drop me off and then he'd be waiting outside for me when I finished work … he would be outside waiting for me when I was on lunch, so I'd have to be in the car with him, and have lunch with him in the car … I look back now, and go yea no, it wasn't okay.

Sonja explained a pattern of emotional abuse:

> He'd call me fat, I mean I was probably about 65 kilos then … I actually thought that I was fat—I bought that I was.

For some, abuse had been physical in nature. For instance, Carrol disclosed being assaulted by the father of her first-born child:

> He's not a very nice person, he actually beat me up, he used to beat me up all the time and I had a lovely black face, lovely broken face and black eyes and all that sort of stuff.

Gretchen had been assaulted by her baby's father, and then held against her will while in need of medical care:

> I had [baby] two-and-a-half months prematurely cause he beat me up … I'm like crawling and he's made me get up and cook him dinner and I'm like—in the end, I begged him at about one in the morning to ring my parents please, ring my parents, and he said I should kick you in the guts for doing this to me, and I'd like, been crawling around on the floor for four days.

Erika had also been held against her will during an incident of violence within her adolescent years:

> He was violent—his mother had a lifetime restraining order against him … I had a restraining order against him half the time—he locked me in a unit for four days.

The above reflections highlight ways in which experiences of exploitation and abuse within intimate relationships entered during adolescence were a significant area of adversity for some participants.

5.2.5 Abuse and Control Within Intimate Relationships Entered During Various Stages of Adulthood

Twelve participants also described entering relationships characterised by control, physical violence, or emotional abuse beyond their adolescent years. For some, such relationships represented a pattern of revictimisation. For instance, Brandi described that the father of her first-born child became violent two months into her first pregnancy. She went on to experience significant control in a subsequent relationship which spanned between emerging and early adulthood:

> It was a different kind of domestic violence; it was a controlling domestic violence … the story that his parents had told him about how to get along in life, was that the

woman was to be seen and not heard, she was in the kitchen, she was to take care of her man, she wasn't to work.

Similarly, Gethin expressed that the father of her first-born child "had been beating me up." She went on to experience emotional abuse within a subsequent relationship during early adulthood:

> The second one, his domestic violence was, the more subtle stuff, the put downs … after years of it, it wore pretty thin, like it's funny once or twice, but then I realised you know like, so many epiphanies.

Kameron described that her relationship with the father of her first-born child consisted of "emotional abuse," and she experienced similar abuse during early adulthood:

> If emotional abuse has a face, it's his … I've blocked a lot of that relationship out because it was just so horrifying.

Adrienne described experiencing a relationship during adolescence that was characterised by "control" and "emotional manipulation" that spanned approximately a decade, after which time she found herself once again in a similar situation:

> He actually ended up going to prison for fraud, yea so I actually divorced him and you know, within 18 months I'd met another man, and he was just the same!

Shannon described being in three abusive relationships, explaining that there was "a huge amount of mental abuse" in the relationship with the father of her first-born child. She noted: "the first two relationships that I had after my eldest son's father, were both violent." Shannon reflected on the cumulative impacts of emotional abuse on her self-esteem:

> My eldest son's father said something to me once that no one would ever love me the way that he did, which of course is just part of the mental abuse, so I guess when I got into another relationship and the same kind of patterns were happening, I just felt that that was just what I deserved.

For some, domestic violence during adulthood had occurred in the absence of prior abuse. For instance, Leah entered an emotionally abusive relationship during emerging adulthood, which lasted for 26 years, thereby spanning into midlife:

> If he drank stout he was really nasty, so we'd make sure we had everything in place, and everyone would be in bed by the time he got home, which would save the children from being abused, but not me … if the sky was blue that day and he wanted it green, like that would be my fault.

For the purposes of highlighting adversity across distinct phases of the lifespan, experiences that may be indicative of domestic violence were spread out across this chapter. It is noted however that combined, accounts of abuse within intimate relationships were described by 15 participants—a number which represented 68% of the sample. By contrast, domestic violence is estimated to have been experienced by approximately 23% of Australian women (AIHW, 2021). In this sense, participant accounts of domestic violence across their lifespan as a whole appeared to be particularly marked.

5.2.5.1 Impacts of Domestic Violence on Children

While outcomes of children are not the focus of this study, I felt it noteworthy to mention that some participants grappled with the impacts that exposure to domestic violence has had on their children.

For example, Adrienne discussed her attempts to help three of her children manage emotional impacts of exposure to abuse:

> … two of my sons are antidepressants and seeing psychologists, and I've got another daughter whose you know wanting to see a psychologist.

Kameron discussed how, after leaving her daughter's father, he attempted to weaponise their child against her. She discussed the emotional impacts that this had, explaining:

> It was decided that I was the devil incarnate … my kid didn't deserve that … [at] home she was a happy girl, she was always smiling, she would you know, go out of her way for anybody, but she'd go to her fathers and come home, and she'd be screaming and just getting out all of her frustration out.

Kameron explained that exposure to family violence has significantly impacted one of her child's behaviour, and expressed:

> I'm finally now—because I have the kids full time, I've actually had [daughter] for the last three years, and she's in counselling … in the last few months she has been increasingly violent.

Leah explained that both of her eldest children struggled with significant disruptions linked to witnessing abuse. She expressed grief regarding this, and reflected:

> [Eldest children] both left home because of the abuse … [eldest son] was 16 I think, and then [eldest daughter] left two weeks later, she was only 14 … I thought, oh my god, where's all the washing, I haven't got enough washing [laughs while tears well in eyes] … but then I thought, oh they're better off out of here, and, then I sort of got

on with that, but then I tried to help them all the time, my daughter never comes home, she went and lived with my mother, and [eldest son] went backwards and forwards, in an out of jail.

5.3 A Climate of Social Scrutiny

5.3.1 'A Climate of Social Scrutiny' as a Category of Analysis

Scrutiny can be defined as being closely examined, particularly in a critical way (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). I felt that such a description was particularly fitting with the data, as codes frequently contained reference to an participants' acute sense of awareness around ways in which they felt critically observed due to their age upon becoming parents. It is noted, however, that such experiences could at times transcend critical examination, with this category also encapsulating codes relating to experiences of ongoing stigma such as stereotyping and negative attitudes (NSW Government, 2020), as well as experiences of direct discrimination such as being treated unfairly based on personal characteristics (APA, 2019).

5.3.2 An Overview of Patterns of Social Scrutiny Within the Data

Twenty-one participants described having felt scrutinised, stigmatised, or discriminated against in ways that were linked to being a teenage mother or former teenage mother during at least one point in their lifespan. Such experiences appeared reflective of social processes of 'othering'—a phenomenon which can be broadly understood as relating to ways in which interpersonal differences cause social exclusion and reinforce power differentials between dominant and target groups (Jauregui et al., 2020).

Twenty of such participants described experiences of othering that occurred during adolescence, while nine participants additionally described varying levels of othering that had been experienced between emerging adulthood and midlife. Experiences of othering during

adolescence may be understood within the context of existing literature which recognises ways in which teenage mothers can be stereotyped and stigmatised within society (AHRC, 2017; Jones et al., 2019). However, my literature review found experiences of ongoing othering beyond adolescence have attracted less academic recognition.

5.3.3 An Onset of Social Scrutiny During Adolescence

As noted, 20 participants described varying accounts of feeling othered during adolescence. One of the prominent patterns of feeling stereotyped that emerged from this study related to societal assumptions of personal failure. Specifically, 13 of the participants had received messages that they would be destined to welfare dependency or that their lives were over by virtue of becoming young parents.

Such messages could emerge upon people finding out about their pregnancies. For Adrienne, messages that her life was over were subtle:

> A lot of people felt sorry for me, there was a lot of like, I didn't have anyone sort of say any nasty things to me, it was just they were like, 'oh no, you poor thing' like, it was like, doom you know, it was like my life was over!

Kameron recalled assumptions that her life and career prospects were over:

> Please remember that I love my parents so, so, much, but what was said to me was, dad was like, "There goes your life," and mum said, "There goes your career" … at the time I'm like, yea I have, I've really fucked up, but yea I'm only just learning now that actually had a big impact on the way I saw myself.

Similarly, Sonja experienced messages that her life and career prospects had come to a halt:

> That stigma, "that's it, you're life's over, you've got kids now"… "you're not gonna have a career, and you're not going to have—you know, you're not going to be the doctor or the lawyer or the scientist, you're not going to go to uni, you're not going to do this, you're not going to do that," so basically once you had a kid that was the end of you.

Vicki reflected on assumptions of limited prospects replacing the celebratory initiation of motherhood reserved for older mothers:

> I used to think, well where's all the excitement? … not "that's the end of your life now, you're a mother, that's it, it's over" … "that's the end of your life, you've got no chance from here on."

Another prominent pattern of feeling stereotyped related to societal assumptions of maternal failure. Specifically, 10 of the participants felt judged and scrutinised through a lens that young mothers were incapable and destined to fail as parents. For instance, Shannon reflected on the kinds of messages that she received upon becoming a mother:

> "You don't know what you're doing, you have no idea how hard it's going to be, and you don't have the capacity to be able to handle it, and you're just going to ruin that baby's life, you've already ruined your own"—that was big for me.

Kelly reflected on assumptions that young mothers cannot be good mothers:

> I felt the main misconception, literally when my children were young, was that you can't be a good mother when you're a teenager.

Erika recalled feeling that her capability to parent adequately was under scrutiny:

I was certainly looked down on … like that I was a bit of an idiot, you know I—you don't know anything, "You're not going to be able to look after this child properly, you're going to be," you know, "not a very good mother cause you're too young."

A further way in which participants indicated feeling judged and scrutinised as young mothers related to there being a societal preoccupation regarding their relationship status. Specifically, 13 participants described that they had felt either assessed through a social stereotype of young mothers as being single mothers, or that being single was particularly compounding factor for stigmatising responses.

For instance, Camille recalled repeatedly being stopped and questioned about her age, her marital status, and her children in public and how that made her feel:

I lost count, like people don't ask so much now I'm older but when I was younger, you know every single week I would do my shopping and people would stop me and, "Oh how old are your kids, how old are you, are you married?" You know, and yea, it was super demeaning, you know, I'd go home and just feel like shit.

Melissa also experienced this social preoccupation with the paternity of children:

My two eldest children look exactly the same, exactly the same, and I used to have people come up to me … I wasn't one of those teenage parents that would get angry and show the anger, I would just keep it classy.

Leah expressed that societal preoccupation with her marital status had at times being covert:

When I was pregnant like so I was 16, 17, I'd notice, that pushing the trolley around, and people, old ladies, ring—would go to your wedding finger, and I felt that all the

> time, even when I wasn't married—well he left, I still wore a ring on my finger because I felt that judgement.

At times preoccupation with relationship status could result in direct experiences of discrimination, with age and relationship status intersecting and compounding stigmatising responses. For instance, Vicki described that she was treated in a way that was hostile and dehumanising while giving birth:

> I can still remember that doctor slapping the forceps on my stomach, like he just slammed them on my stomach, like it was a pain in the ass that he had to deliver my daughter two and a half months premature … I still remember the look on his face, it was almost like this is a waste of time let's drag this kid out of her, you know it felt horrible.

Vicki recounted further aspects of her birth experience, including being left inside an ambulance after giving birth, and felt that marital status may have been a factor that contributed to her treatment:

> I was invisible … if I was a married woman with a husband, they would have—I felt that they would have given me the care, someone would have bothered to remember that I was sitting in the ambulance.

Similarly, Luanne experienced unprofessional medical attention to her physical pain, almost as a punishment for being a teenage mother:

> After I had [baby] they found out I had fibroids, and he took them out in his surgery with no aesthetic no nothing, he started burning them off, and I was screaming, and he's just like "Well you got yourself in this situation!" And it's the same with giving

> birth, they were worried I was too narrow then and he was just like, "Nup, she's brave to get pregnant, she can deliver the baby naturally" … I ended up with 36 stitches.

Luanne also felt that single motherhood may have been a compounding factor in being treated poorly within healthcare:

> Three weeks later I was rushed back to hospital in the ambulance and once again, first everything was nice and lovely and then—'single mum' [indicates a change in service response attitude with change in tone in voice].

Kelly also experienced compromised medical treatment due to her social status. She recalled her health concerns being undermined in that she was told, "you're 18 you're knocked up deal with it" when going to her doctor to express health concerns. Kelly felt that issues related to age and relationship status may have been factors that influenced such treatment:

> This doctor that I had, I think he just had a thing about young unmarried mothers, so he was pretty old school.

Single motherhood also could compound scrutiny in terms of family responses towards pregnancy. For instance, Camille noted a contrast between how her extended family responded to her pregnancy when she was single versus after entering a relationship:

> It was even worse because there was no father in the picture—a lot of people kind of settled down once I met [subsequent partner] and they all kind of said to me, "He's going to go when the baby comes," you know, "that'll be it," and when he didn't, they were like, "Oh, okay," so they kind of settled down a bit, but yea, at first, whoa.

Experiences of othering within various social settings could be experienced. Specifically, three participants expressed not feeling accepted socially as adolescent mothers. For instance, Erika recalled feeling excluded from interactions with other mothers at church:

> Even in the mothers' groups and the creche for the kids you know, just the way the women would look at you and just you know not even want a conversation with you, and they would have their own little clicky groups because they were in their late twenties or whatever, 30 you know and I was 17, 18.

Luanne similarly sensed not feeling accepted during birthing classes:

> The lady you know doing the class was probably you know in her forties or something and looked down her nose at me, and—that's how I felt she did, and I mean she mightn't of really it was just how I felt … I was just like, yea I don't know just felt, yea, degraded, really degraded and I was just like, you know, isolated, like you know, that's a teenage mum let's just shove her over there."

Such accounts highlight participants' experiences of prominent messages that their lives and prospects were over, that they were incapable, or that their social worth was contingent upon their relationship status as adolescent mothers. Some participants also described experiences of discrimination and social exclusion linked to social status.

5.3.4 Experiences of Othering in Emerging Adulthood and Into Midlife

As previously discussed, stigma surrounding adolescent motherhood has been acknowledged in the literature, yet ways such experiences may persist into the lifespan appear to be relatively unexplored. Findings of this study revealed that while less frequent, maternal age could continue as a marker of difference that attracted scrutiny for some

participants. Specifically, nine participants described varying degrees of feeling othered post adolescence.

Five of such participants described feeling judged or excluded socially during early adulthood. Such experiences appeared to be particularly prevalent within their children's school environments.

For instance, Kyle recalled a sense that her capability felt undermined at her children's primary school:

> I was useless … one lady in particular—I used to walk the kids to school, just around the corner, one of my sons had a leaking nose since he was born … I walked past her and every morning without fail she'd come down with a tissue and wipe his nose in front of me like I couldn't do it you know. I had tissues.

She additionally noted feeling excluded socially as a parent of primary school children:

> When they started school all I wanted was some friends you know, I wanted someone who had kids to be friends with you know … but none of em wanted to be friends with me … right through primary school honestly. Was not so bad when they started high school.

Theresa described being treated in a patronising way by her children's teachers:

> One thing I found as well as a single young mum, was not being taken seriously at school, when I'd go to the school for a reason, you know to see them about my child—they'd treat me like I was child.

Like Kyle, Theresa had also felt excluded by other mothers at her children's school:

> The other mothers at the school that had their you know, four-wheel drives and their you know soccer mum cars and the husband and all the rest of it there, they would literally not talk to me, they wouldn't let their children come over to [child] to play with them.

Leah recalled unpleasant treatment at her children's school in terms of how she was treated by one particular teacher:

> Talking about discrimination, I do remember one teacher at school, being very judgmental to me because I was a young mother, very rude at times … this was when my kids were at school … he was a pig … he didn't like that I was a young mother, he often had snide remarks.

For Erika, an awareness of how she may be viewed within general social settings was an enduring concern into emerging adulthood:

> I used to lie about my age, cos I didn't want people to judge [child], so I would always lie about my age, and so people thought I was older so she wouldn't not get invited to the birthday parties and things like that.

She also described that at times she had felt assessed by a stereotype of having limited success:

> I knew sometimes questions they would ask were designed to find out how old I was … questioning ah … my success so to speak as in, "oh do you work" you know what I mean … like you don't have a job you're nothing … things like that, people questioned because they knew I was so young.

Experiences of scrutiny beyond emerging adulthood appeared to be less frequent, yet remnants of social scrutiny and lower expectations were described by six participants. For instance, Camille described social surprise that her son had achieved a positive outcome:

> It filters down to children as well, like, you know people say to me, “Oh what’s your oldest one do?” I’m like, “Well you know, he’s moved out of home, he’s got a really great job and he works you know,” and they’re like, “Oh that’s amazing!” I’m like, “Well it’s not, he’s 18 you know he should be working, he should be starting his life,” but they’re kind of expecting him to be like, somewhere you know smoking drugs.

Similarly, while not counted as a direct experience of scrutiny, Denise also indicated a presence of limiting social assumptions about children born to adolescent mothers:

> My daughter’s about to graduate uni … one of her lecturers actually said in a lecture, that if you were brought up by a teenage mum, basically you’ve got no hope … and she stood there and she went, “Well, I was brought up by a teenage mum I think I’m doing alright,” and they’re like, “Oh yea but you’re the exception not the rule,” it’s like, “Really? Cause mum had a lot of friends who were teenage mums and they’re doing okay too.”

While most participants described positive outcomes for their children, Shannon described that her son had gone through a challenging period, and that she felt a sense of blame that being a young, single mother was the root cause:

> At 16, he left home for a while … smoking a lot of marijuana and dropped out of school … it was almost like, “Oh well if you hadn’t of had him so young and you weren’t so ridiculous and stupid yourself, and if you were set up and you had of been married the right person,” and blah blah blah, “then he probably wouldn’t have ended

> up like this." … I just kind of always feel like everything that has happened with him—not so much the rest of my children, but like I just feel this heavy judgement.

Similarly, Kyle experienced a sense of reemerging stigma when her son had not conformed to social ideals by virtue of having also become a teenage parent:

> Interviewer: Did anyone try judge you as a—
>
> Kyle: [interrupts] Oh yea.
>
> Interviewer: Young nana?
>
> Kyle: Yea, yea. … Just like mother like son, yea.

In addition, some participants expressed an intrusive societal preoccupation regarding their past relationship patterns. For instance, Yolanda reflected on assumptions of prior promiscuity:

> I find that really interesting when people talk about teenage—they think that, I don't know, from what I've copped my whole life it's, you know "Oh you slept around," that's the first thing.

Tinsley similarly recalled derogatory comments directed towards her during a recent workplace encounter as if the terminology was acceptable if directed at past teenage mothers:

> This one 'piece of work' where I work, she goes, "Oh you must've been a bit of a slut back in your day" … I said, "Excuse me?" … I said, "What did you just call me?" She said, "I didn't call you anything," she goes, "I just said you must've been a bit of a slut back in your day." I said, "You're calling me a slut?"

Illustrating this point of reemerging stigma, Dorinda recalled a recent experience that caused her to feel uncomfortable during a discussion at work:

> When I was talking to [colleague] the other day about being a teenage mother, that's when I felt a bit ashamed, and a bit of guilt of being a teenage mother … it was more of a question and his tone, and he can be very judgy … like, it's got nothing to do with you, take your judging elsewhere.

Such accounts indicate that stigma, discrimination, and scrutiny surrounding adolescent motherhood impacted many participants' lives, and their confidence in their own mothering identity. Further, stigma may not be confined to adolescence, and may persist into various points of some former teenage mothers' lifespans. Age as a marker of difference could attract scrutiny within children's school environments during early adulthood. Further, lower expectations of children or remnants of social scrutiny regarding past relationship patterns were experienced by several participants.

5.4 Resilient Behaviours or Actions

5.4.1 'Resilient Behaviours or Actions' as a Category of Analysis

Despite challenges related to adversity and scrutiny across their lifespan, participants' autobiographical descriptions, outlined within Chapter Four, revealed numerous stories of overcoming obstacles and reaching goals. A dominant thread of resiliency was common between such stories. 'Resilient behaviours or actions' as a category of analysis encapsulated codes relating to both intrinsic processes, such as ways in which participants demonstrated unique strengths, or holistic processes such as ways in which participants utilised various informal or formal support systems (Van Breda, 2018).

5.4.2 Resilience as an Overall Pattern Within the Data

This section outlines recurrent codes relating to a range of resilient processes. Specifically, eight participants described intrinsic self-protective measures between

childhood and adolescence. Six participants described processes of stigma rejection in adolescence, nine participants described utilising friendship as a source of support, 14 participants described utilising family as a source of support, and 10 participants described utilising formal support during various points in their lives.

5.4.3 Resilient Behaviours or Actions Between Childhood and Adolescence

Patterns of resilience included the stories of eight participants' who described gravitation away from home as a self-protective measure between childhood and adolescence. Gravitation away from home could include seeking temporary refuge from circumstances of adversity. For example, Luanne described hiding to avoid physical abuse:

> I really learnt to hide, as soon as she'd start, I'd go and I'd hide, so and not come home till the next day because, I mean I was hiding under the house, but like, I wouldn't come out until I could hear her stop ranting and raving and looking for me.

Similarly, Gretchen reflected on an incident in which she had hidden to escape family violence:

> I ran off, and it was because of [stepfather's] drunken arguments with mum and, I actually spent the night in the house up the hill behind us … and I could hear, while I was up there, I was shit scared.

Some participants made a concerted decision to move out of home in adolescence. For instance, in the context of family violence, Kyle explained:

> He was pissed every day, you know, used to beat the shit out of mum and not so much us, we started fighting back as teenagers and as soon as I was 16 I was out of there.

Similarly, Vicki, who described an unsafe home environment inclusive of experiences of victim blaming regarding sexual abuse chose to distance herself from her family:

> I ran away from home when I was 14 … had got a job and was hitchhiking to that with no lunch or anything, and then I finally got a job at a service station in [town] and got myself a little flat … I still saw my parents, but I wasn't going home.

Other resilient behaviours or actions utilised during adolescence included resisting stigmatising social messages. For instance, Leah indicted resisting messages of personal failure upon her pregnancy, which had included messages that her "life was ruined," and expressed:

> It was one of those things I always thought, no it's not [ruined]. I always had these rebel thoughts of what people were telling me, and I think that has really been a coping strategy.

Erika described attempting to feel productive despite being told that she had limited prospects:

> I thought if this is all I'm going to be then I better do it well, not necessarily to the public, but to [child], for her you know … and so I always tried to show [child] that anything is possible if you want to do it you can do it.

Camille described an ability to argue against negative social messages around her pregnancy:

> I was very—definitely very, argumentative, my mum had a few friends who would come over when I was pregnant and they're like, "Oh," you know, "You're going to

> be on welfare," you know, "This baby's going to ruin your life," so I just kind of went, "Excuse me no, it doesn't define me."

She reflected that her mother's support had been pivotal in learning to challenge stigmatising messages:

> If I hadn't of had that support, I don't know how things would have turned out, because I can remember, like my aunty calling my mum, and my mum screaming at her on the phone about my pregnancy. I think that really kind of gave me the courage to stand up and say, "No, that's not going to be my life, that's not going to be my baby's life."

Such accounts demonstrate an array of ways in which participants demonstrated resilience between childhood and adolescence, including intrinsic self-protective measures in the face of adversity, or rejection of stigmatising messages in response to social scrutiny.

5.4.4 Support From Adolescence Through to Adulthood

Nine participants described drawing upon friendships as an informal source of support during various points of their lives. For some, such support was described as particularly influential in adjusting to new motherhood. Bethenny described feeling judged as a young mother within certain contexts, yet she was able to form positive and meaningful connections within a new mum's group:

> When I had [first-born child] I went to a new mum's group … that group was just really sweet, like there was mums that were older than my mum, but they weren't all judgy or anything like that … I made a few friends that were older than mum.

When asked about the benefits of such friendships at the time, Bethenny noted the mental health benefits of such support, expressing: “[without friendships] I would’ve gone crazy, cos that was my sanity.” Her experience may highlight the value of non-stigmatizing environments.

Friendship could also be a practical source of support. For instance, Vicki described that after leaving her hometown in order to escape domestic violence, she found mutual support and connection with another mother during her emerging adulthood:

> We were supporting each other with our single parenting, you know she’d be bathing the kids and I’d be cooking the dinner … we could support each other through the bullshit, and we were there for each other for babysitting, or we’d take the kids together to do something, and it felt like a team.

Carrol had also left her hometown during emerging adulthood. She described being relatively isolated, yet an older mother established a nurturing friendship with her:

> She was a normal married woman, they had their own house, they worked you know two jobs each, her and her husband, and she took me under her wing … I mean the first time she came around I’m like, “What do you want,” like, “Why are you here, we have nothing in common,” like, “You know you’re a normal housewife,” type thing, like, “What do you want with me?”

It is noted that this friendship was particularly influential in her adjustment to young motherhood, once again highlighting the value of non-stigmatising responses:

> I think she role modelled, she wasn’t so much telling me it was just, looking at her, and you know her life, and what she had … she grew up lower class as well … she might not have had the abuse and all that, but she still had that kind of same

upbringing and here she was, she owned this beautiful home, she had a gorgeous husband, he doted on her … [it] made me just realise that you can be this, doesn't matter what your upbringing is, you can get out of it.

Erika similarly described forming a friendship with an older mother during her emerging adult period. As noted, Erika had previously felt rejected by other mothers due to her age, yet found ongoing support within this friendship, which she referred to as being her "saving grace," and helped her foster resilience:

> We knew each other so well, and like I can ring [friend] and I can just tell from her voice, and she's the same with me, you know, what's going on? What's happened? You know what I mean? I think, if I hadn't of had [friend] to talk to, I don't know how I would've coped cause it was really bad … you know neither of us were qualified, we always tried to give each other the best advice, not just what you want to hear.

Friendship as a source of support was similarly described by Adrienne as a factor that helped her to begin to heal after leaving an abusive relationship during early adulthood:

> [Friend] was someone that just—she knew me, she knew like, she was always supportive, she didn't agree with my choices that I made in my life, but she was always supportive,… we would just talk, and it's just to be able to talk to somebody without any—just with the freedom to know that you're not being judged, and just they're, and they're just a shoulder to cry on.

Family support systems were described as pivotal in some participants' journeys, with 14 participants describing family as a source of support. Some described family support as a factor that could make the emotional transition to early motherhood easier. For example,

Melissa described challenges in terms of processing experiences of stigma as an adolescent mother, yet she reflected on her experience of motherhood as being enhanced by her support network:

> I had family, so there was probably a bit more constant and obvious support, but I think without a group of people that support you, I think it would be God awful.

Family also could provide support with overcoming specific obstacles such as negative relationship experiences. For example, Kameron, who was in an abusive relationship with the father of her first-born child, recalled a particular incident in which her parents offered support:

> We had a big roaring fight one night when I rang mum and dad and said get me out of here … they got straight in the car and came and got me.

Additionally, 10 participants described utilising formal support systems at various points in their lives. For instance, Erika described access to government housing as pivotal in her escaping domestic violence during adolescence:

> I managed to get out and get a restraining order and, that was why I wanted to leave, because I didn't want him finding me—and I was actually at a bus stop one day and he drove past in a skip truck and saw me, pulled up and I was—[hesitates] you wouldn't believe it, it was like four weeks later housing commission rang me and said, "You've got this house."

Luanne utilised an opportunity to relocate with the support of the Department of Housing. She described such support as pivotal in breaking free from a destructive lifestyle which included substance misuse in her emerging adult period:

> [We] packed up we moved … I reinvented myself, into the fact that—not like I didn't make up a story, but like I moved to this town, it was a housing commission exchange type thing, and it was a small country town … it was very hard to do, but the department helped me as well.

Further formal supports described by participants included domestic violence services. For Gretchen, domestic violence support included access to a women's shelter during her emerging adult period:

> [The relationship was] on and off, on and off. I spent probably about five or six months in a women's shelter with two kids.

Camille explained how a domestic violence service provided practical as well as emotional support during early adulthood:

> I had reached out to a domestic violence help place near where I live, and they were amazing, they came out and changed my locks … and this woman sat me down and she went through a questionnaire, and there was like, 12 or 13 questions, and I had 11 questions on their questionnaire … the lady kind of sat me down and said, this is a really bad situation, so yea, they were amazing.

Leah found that attending domestic violence counselling during midlife was particularly impactful in raising her awareness about the abuse she had experienced:

> I went to a psychologist and she said fill out this domestic abuse form, I was like, "I don't need to do that," and then I ticked, she said, "Just do it this is part of the process, you've got to do this" and tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, and she goes, "Oh ok, now you've answered to 85% of these as yes, that means you were verbally

> abused," and I was like, "No I wasn't, no, no, that's just the way it was," and yeah it wasn't probably until that moment I put a name on it.

Some participants who had faced prior adversity in terms of experiences of trauma described utilising therapeutic counselling services as a way of moving forward. For example, Theresa described confronting her past:

> I mentioned seeing a psychologist for a reason, because there's been all these things that I've had to see one about … mum's first husband was violently abusive, my father sexually abused me.

Gretchen sought formal support to do a self-esteem course in her emerging adulthood, which she felt had been impactful in learning about boundaries after prolonged experiences of abuse:

> I had a—a brief period when I was about 32, I actually did a self-esteem course … I mean that carried me for about a year … I was, "No that's not okay," "Yes, you can do that," "No that's not," you know—had great boundaries, I was starting to feel really good, and I think I'm due for a refresher course of that because I'm, my boundaries are a bit blurry now—that was in my thirties.

Such accounts uncover ways in which participants developed and demonstrated resilience by drawing upon friendship, family, and formal support systems during various points of their lives.

5.5 Acknowledging Variation Within the Data

5.5.1 Accounting for Difference

While commonalities relating to overall major themes of adversity, scrutiny, and resilience have been the focus of this chapter, areas of variation within the data need to be noted. As discussed, considerations of variation are paramount in terms of ensuring comprehensive and saturated theory development. Levitt (2021, p. 93) further emphasises the importance of appreciating the multidimensional facets of lived experience, advising, "researchers should not focus only on the commonalities within their findings and flatten out important differences between the varied social realities, social systems, and stressors." Accounting for variation included ensuring that following my identification of categories within the data, I engaged in a cycle of considering further units of data alongside such categories, until all participants' experiences were considered, and the meanings that areas of variation may indicate included within reflective processes (Charmaz, 2014; Levitt, 2021).

Searching the data for variation included considering the lives of two participants whose stories did not reflect patterns of adversity. For instance, Bethenny did not note childhood hardship, and she has remained married to the father of her first-born child, using the word "positive" to describe their union. Further, Bethenny indicated that power dynamics were "never an issue" within their marriage. Similarly, Kelly described a positive childhood experience, noting, "it was your stereotypical normal family." She did not describe any experiences of abuse across her lifespan. Such stories highlight that while experiences of hardship may have been encountered by many former teenage mothers, such experiences are by no means a universal reality in this participant group.

Variation also is noted in relation to experiences of social scrutiny. While most participants described some level of feeling othered as teenage mothers or former teenage mothers, Denise did not describe feeling scrutinised at any time. However, Denise indirectly

felt the sting of general assumptions that children born to teenage mothers were destined to failure, through her daughter's retold example of assumptions evident within a university lecture. Experiences of scrutiny also appeared to be less prominent for Dorinda, who did not note feeling othered within her adolescence or early adult years, yet described a random experience of feeling judged about being a former teenage mother in more recent years.

In reflecting on what such variation may mean, I compared characteristics between these two participants. Both had described consistent employment as young mothers, which as indicated by Dorinda, could possibly serve as a mitigating factor for judgment:

> There's the 'good' single mothers, and there's the 'bad' single mothers, and that's being perceived as being— "Centrelink, you're on Centrelink, you're only having children because you want, don't want to go to work" … then you've got the others that I want to say, were more like me—went to work, working hard.

Another contextual factor that appeared to be associated with variations in experiences of othering related to relationship status. As discussed within this chapter, single motherhood was identified by some participants as being as a particularly compounding stigma factor in terms of direct discrimination within healthcare or heightened social and family scrutiny.

Variations in patterns of resilience also are noted. Limitations within some participants' social systems resulted in barriers in terms of informal social networks. For instance, when asked about what her support network was like as a young mother, Gretchen replied: "what support network" [sarcasm implied]. Barriers to resilient processes may relate to multiple broader societal factors such as experiences of social scrutiny. Several participants, whose stories are of particular focus within the following chapter, described substantive processes around ways in which experiences of scrutiny could undermine

confidence, erode informal support systems, deter participants from utilising services, or influence their career or relationship trajectories.

5.6 Chapter Summary

Through a strong commitment to a grounded theory process of data analysis, the themes of adversity, scrutiny, and resilience were identified as major categories across the data. Such themes reflect a dominant story in which many participants experienced adversity in new motherhood and across multiple tiers of their lifespans. Numerous experiences of othering were captured within participants' stories. Such experiences were particularly prominent during adolescence, yet some participants continued to feel judgement related to their former teenage mother status during later points in their lifespan, indicating a possibility that stigma may be an enduring phenomenon within certain contexts. A dominant thread of resiliency was apparent across participants' stories in terms of ways in which participants navigated areas of disadvantage and oppression across the lifespan. Variation is noted within the data in that experiences of adversity were not universal, and that certain contextual factors appeared to mitigate or compound stigmatising social responses. Further, as will be the focus of the following chapter, resilient behaviours or actions were noted to be impeded by experiences of social scrutiny, which could erode support networks and negatively influence career or relationships trajectories across the lifespan.

Chapter 6. Interrelations Between Social Scrutiny and Various Aspects of Participants' Lives

6.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter describes interrelations between social scrutiny and various aspects of participants' lives that were identified through a grounded theory process of theoretical coding. As discussed in Chapter Three, a grounded theory approach to data analysis involved multiple layers of coding (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Theoretical coding was a layer of coding in which relationships between substantive codes were explored, hypothesised, and integrated into theory (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Glaser, 1978).

In order for the analysis processes to remain congruent with the constructivist grounded theory roots of this study, I was particularly interested in coding relationships that indicated substantive processes within the data (Charmaz, 2014; Chun Tie et al., 2019; Levitt, 2021). As articulated by Charmaz (2014, p. 245), "studying a process fosters your efforts to construct theory because you define and conceptualize relationships between experiences and events." In addition, the feminist standpoint orientation of this study entailed an interest in issues of power, with critical constructivist approaches involving "a related concern with how social power dynamics influence meaning and practices" (Levitt, 2021, p. 93).

Substantive relationships within the data were particularly evident as they related to an interplay between dominant social values and areas of oppression within participants' lives. Specifically, interrelations between social scrutiny and resilience were evident as linked to stigma being a factor that could erode natural support systems or impact emotional wellbeing. Further, feeling scrutinised appeared to influence a state of mind in which some participants felt the need to conform to dominant social values at the time of teenage motherhood and across subsequent life stages. Codes relating to such phenomena were

collapsed into two theoretical categories, which I have labelled 'corrosive implications of scrutiny on resilience' and 'conforming to dominant social values.'

Both theoretical categories are the focus of this chapter and will be presented across two sections. The first section will outline corrosive implications of scrutiny on resilient behaviours or actions. The second section will outline conforming to dominant social values. Details of my own processes of discovery during analysis are interwoven throughout the discussion. As outlined in Chapter Three, theoretical sensitivity is an integral aspect of building grounded theory, which can be enhanced through analytic tools such as memoing and diagramming. Examples of ways I contemplated meanings of the data, followed leads, and built upon ideas are provided, and illustrations representing subsequent frameworks of understanding are presented.

It is noted that the implications of scrutiny on resiliency outlined within this chapter relate largely to impacts of stigma on natural support systems, emotional wellbeing, or decisions within adolescence and early adulthood. As will be elaborated upon within subsequent chapters, impacts of stigma on social adjustment within participants' early lives appeared to have long-term implications for some participants in terms of relationship or career trajectories. Such phenomena may be reflective of adolescence and emerging adulthood being foundational periods within the life course, which impact long-term trajectories (Dahl et al., 2018; Farmer et al., 2013; Kumar, 2020).

6.2 'Corrosive Impacts of Scrutiny on Resilience'

6.2.1 Corrosive Implications as a Theoretical Category

As discussed within Chapter Five, a strong thread of 'resilient behaviours or actions' was apparent across participants' journeys, yet variations in patterns of resilience also were noted. Appreciation of variation within the data was emphasised as being important so as not

to overlook the multidimensional facets of lived experience (Levitt, 2021). Therefore, variations in resilience were explored through constant comparisons, in which I considered and compared multiple units of data (Charmaz, 2014; Levitt, 2021).

Through such a process, I began to uncover various instances in which social scrutiny could impact resilience, particularly between the life stages of adolescence and emerging adulthood. I initially noticed such phenomena in relation to informal support systems, in that while many participants had spoken of the value of belonging, six participants described instances in which experiences of scrutiny had negatively impacted their connections with other mothers. Similarly, while most participants described supportive family dynamics, five participants described instances in which feeling scrutiny from family seemed linked to reduced access to support.

I continued to search the data through a process of constant comparisons to explore further contexts in which experiences of scrutiny could be at odds with resilience. I noticed ways in which scrutiny could impact upon formal support systems, with five participants describing instances in which concerns about being scrutinised had resulted in avoidance of services. Further, five participants described a loss of confidence or distress as a result of living within a climate of pervasive social stigma.

In this sense, it appeared that interrelations between social scrutiny and resilience were apparent across a range of contexts. I labelled such interrelations 'corrosive impacts of scrutiny to resilience,' as I felt that 'corrosive' was a particularly fitting adjective in representing social scrutiny as a destructive element, which appeared to wear away their sense of self-worth and influence participants' lives in ways that could impact resilience.

6.2.2 Erosion of Informal Support Systems

Scrutiny within peer or family networks could impact participants' use of informal support systems in a variety of ways. For six participants, scrutiny within peer networks

negatively impacted their ability to build connections with other mothers. Chapter Five outlines various examples of participants feeling excluded by older mothers during their adolescence and emerging adulthood. It is additionally noted that feeling scrutinised could erode the quality of support within existing networks with older mothers, due to some participants' fear of judgement. For instance, Melissa described social assumptions that young parents are incapable as being a deterrent in asking for advice:

> Support for most teenage mothers, is just so important, and genuine non judgement, genuine non judgement, I mean I never trusted any older people I mean I would never tell an older person, going back to teenagehood, oh I'm not telling those older mothers what I was really struggling with, whether it be the breast feeding or you know the colic or the teething I would never discuss it with them, ever because, even though—they may have given me great advice, I wasn't prepared to take that risk.

Scrutiny within family networks additionally appeared to impair family support for five participants. For instance, Erika recalled being shunned by her brother for a period of time:

> Even my older brother, he had the worst judgement over me, being a teenage mum … he wouldn't even see—come and see [baby] until she was a year old, yea he was so disgusted.

Brandi described parental disapproval as a factor that diminished her level of family support. For instance, she recalled a particularly challenging period when she was required to attend regular meetings with the Department of Child Safety to keep her baby in her care. Brandi described feeling judged in these meetings and experiencing practical barriers to attending appointments, such as a lack of transport:

> I had to walk there in the heat, because you know, I had my baby, he was a February baby, and in Adelaide so if you can imagine the Adelaide heat gets to around you know, 37 degrees in the summer, in the day, so 37-degree days I would be walking up this hill, trying to get to this DOCS appointment.

Brandi faced these challenges alone due to an overall lack of family support, which had been compounded when her father heard about her pregnancy:

> I had no other outside supports, because my father, when I did tell him, he told me to get an abortion, and when I refused, that was it, he refused to acknowledge me, or talk to me or anything like that, so he was not on speaking terms with me anymore.

Family disapproval also impacted Shannon's level of family support. As discussed in Chapter Five, Shannon had experienced a domestically violent relationship with the father of her first-born child. She ended the relationship during pregnancy, and described this as being a challenging time:

> I was very adamant that I deserved better, somewhere in me knew that I deserved better, but it wasn't easy, it was really hard … it was really tough, I went into hiding for a lot of months.

She relied heavily on the support of one of her friend's mothers at that time:

> My friend was a teenage mum and her mum was also a teenage mum so I guess she kind of knew where I was at, so she took me in and then looked after me, for most of my pregnancy.

Shannon explained that a barrier to utilising her own family for support had related to a lack of acceptance:

> My mother was extremely horrified when I fell pregnant so, she was like, oh you've dragged the family name through the mud … so I mean I guess I had some really hard family stuff and not enough acceptance I guess, and so I found that through other people.

Vicki also recalled an erosion of family connection, which she felt was linked to shame:

> It wasn't like nobody would talk to me, but I sort of like I just disappeared out of all the family gatherings and things like that, it was shame—it was a shame thing, I didn't feel ashamed, but they did their best to make me feel ashamed.

As discussed in Chapter Five, Vicki experienced domestic violence in a relationship with the father of her first-born child. She identified shame as being a factor that hindered her ability to tell the truth to family or reach out for family support during the early stages of the abuse:

> One time he detached my retina—"got hit by a cricket ball you know in the eye," yea this barrage of excuses, but you wouldn't use the same one too often, "Oh the same bloody door I hit last time," because you don't want to be a failure as well, I mean being pregnant already, at that age, it's like, oh I failed my parents and my family.

Sonja also described how scrutiny impacted family support. As discussed in Chapter Five, Sonja experienced emotional abuse in a relationship with the father of her first-born child. A level of parental judgment appeared to be reflected in her mother's reluctance to assist with her with such issues:

> I had nowhere to go, I couldn't confide in my parents, because my mother was like, well, that was your bed you made it, you built it.

Such examples highlight a range of corrosive implications that experiences of scrutiny could have on some participants' informal support systems, which ranged from reduced peer connection, reduced family connection, and a diminished sense of being able to turn to family for support regarding various challenges.

6.2.3 Avoidance of Formal Support Systems

Resilient behaviours or actions, such as utilising formal supports, also appeared to be diminished as a result of stigma, with five participants describing avoidance of formal support systems. Such findings appear to reflect literature which suggests that stigma can prevent the delivery and utilisation of services, thereby exacerbating challenges faced by young mothers (Jones et al., 2019).

For example, Luanne indicated that she avoided follow up antenatal care after the birth of her baby due to being made to feel unwelcome:

> I never even had [antenatal follow up], like not really, you went to the baby clinic, but once again I wasn't made to really feel welcome, so I think I went twice and I just didn't go back again. I'd take him to the local pharmacy and just get him weighed there, and that was it.

Tinsley indicated that she had felt discriminated against within a hospital setting, and subsequently avoided follow up antenatal care, recalling, "I avoided antenatal. I didn't want to deal with them anymore."

Gretchen explained that feeling judgement within nursing mothers' groups had been a deterrent from attending. For example, when asked if she had ever felt judged as a teenage mother she replied:

> Oh, hell yea! I remember, I breastfed … the thought of going to nursing mothers, you know I would've liked to of … but nursing mothers were all stuck up women.

Leah indicated a reluctance to open up to her family doctor about feelings of pressure to marry the father of her first-born child. It appeared that such reluctance may have been influenced by her doctor's hostile attitude towards her pregnancy:

> In my typing exam at school I got, I had the most severe migraine that I ever had, I lost use of one side of my body … we went to the doctors, and I remember Dr [name] and she was like, "and what's wrong with you?" And mum said, "Migraines," mum she said, "Oh, she's pregnant," and then, the doctor said, "You stupid little bitch," that's what she said to me! And then when mum left, she said do you really want to get married? And in my head, I was screaming no! I was just screaming no but I wasn't game enough to say, say it.

Feeling unable to ask for help could also stem from concerns of being scrutinised as being an unfit parent. For instance, Sonja recalled feeling watched:

> When I was still living at home with mum I didn't have that worry, but when I first moved out of home … it was then that I felt like, everybody's watching me I have to make sure … I have to make sure she's clean, I have to make sure that nobody, you know—that I don't buy alcohol or whatever.

When asked whether feeling such scrutiny made it difficult to ask for help, Sonja replied: "I always felt like I couldn't ask for help."

Erika expressed a fear that she may have been judged harshly or have had her children removed had she if asked for assistance:

> Even financially you know what I mean if I didn't have enough money for rent or a power bill or something like that, there was no way I would ask for help, like because I didn't want them to think I couldn't afford to have my kids, and take them off me because I couldn't afford maybe to feed them properly or they would judge me on that or yea, so I would never ask for help.

The above examples illuminate ways in which feeling scrutinised could result in avoidance of formal support systems for some participants, such as aversion to antenatal care, avoidance of mother's groups, reluctance to open up to service providers, or an inclination towards being inconspicuous as a barrier to reaching out for support.

6.2.4 Loss of Confidence or Distress

It appeared that existing within a climate of judgement could at times take an emotional toll, with five participants describing ways in which stigma resulted in a loss of confidence or distress. Confidence could be impacted by experiences of scrutiny in a number of ways. For instance, during her first pregnancy, Shannon received personal and social messages that she would be incapable as a parent due to her age. When asked about whether such messages had any impacts on her at that time, she recalled a sense of not being able to trust her own instincts while adjusting to early motherhood:

> Yep, they did, and I did have some pretty bad post-natal depression, and there was quite a long period of time, at the time I didn't realise what it was but for a long period of time I just did not trust my own instincts, I had to always ask someone else … even though, in my head they would often give me the same answer that I'd already thought, I just couldn't trust that what I said was right, or that what I felt was right … now that I'm older and I can look back and I've been a mother quite a few times again now, I can look back and I can, I can sit there and go wow, you know,

> nine times out of 10 you actually really—if you had of just trusted what you thought, your own gut, you would have been fine.

Adrienne reflected on receiving social messages that her life was over upon adolescent pregnancy, which she felt had impacted her confidence and subsequent relationship decisions:

> Oh I believed it, I believed my life was over, and I thought well who's going to want me now? You know? … I think that definitely contributed to my decisions in my next relationship … I really do, like you know, because I felt like I was—I had nothing to offer anybody, you know I had baggage I had a child I had nothing to offer anybody so, yea as soon as the first man showed me any attention it was like, "Oh my gosh he likes me."

Gretchen also indicated that her self-confidence had been impacted by experiences of othering. During the interview, Gretchen described herself as somebody who struggled with self-esteem since childhood. When asked about how feeling judged by other mothers during her adolescence had made her feel she replied:

> It'd just make you feel even less of a person. And even less significant and that you don't really matter.

Experiences of stigma could additionally result in distress for some participants. Melissa described feeling stared at as a young mother, which had been emotionally unsettling:

> It's everyone, everywhere you go, I mean the amount of time I left shopping centres as a teen, crying uncontrollably and trying to keep it together, it's really quite ridiculous.

Subsequently, Melissa developed anxiety around leaving the house which extended into her emerging adulthood:

> There was probably about a four-year period from 95 to about 2000, maybe 99 where I really didn't want to even go to the local store … the looks alone were enough.

Kyle also described emotional impacts of feeling judged in terms of feelings of anxiety when taking her children to school:

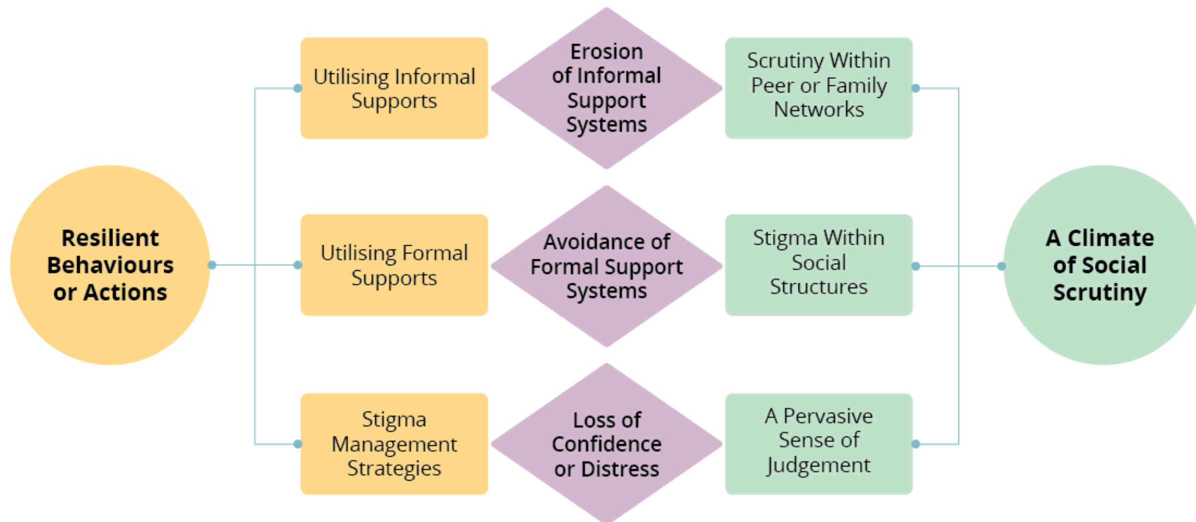
> I'd get really anxious when I went to school, and I'd sit there, and you know how you've gotta sit and wait for them … they'd either be gossiping about me or so I thought they were gossiping about me.

Such examples highlight the toll that stigma could have on some participants' emotional wellbeing, including loss of confidence in one's ability to parent, loss of a sense of value within relationships, or a diminished sense of personal value. Emotional distress or anxiety within social contexts was also described in response to a sense of being othered.

Figure 6.1 demonstrates how resilience and scrutiny codes could be at odds, resulting in a corrosive element between participants and their environments.

Figure 6.1

Codes Relating to Resilience and Scrutiny



6.3 Conforming to Dominant Social Values

6.3.1 Conforming to Dominant Social Values as a Theoretical Category

The prominent patterns of feeling stereotyped, discussed above and previously in Chapter Five, related to societal assumptions of incapability to parent, loss of future prospects, and double stigmas of young single motherhood. During analysis, I noticed ways in which some participants appeared to distance themselves from stereotypes to offset judgement or gain approval. Specifically, five participants discussed a sense of needing to project an image of domestic perfection to offset scrutiny, two participants discussed ways in which feeling scrutinised had influenced occupational decisions, and three participants discussed 'working harder' in response to social assumptions of limited prospects. Further, seven participants described ways in which they had avoided judgement or rejection by entering or remaining in intimate relationships.

I engaged in a process of reflection around such patterns, which included examining inherent generic processes that such phenomena may suggest through a process of constant comparisons (Charmaz, 2014; Levitt, 2021). As articulated by Charmaz (2014, p. 189), “a generic process cuts across different empirical settings and problems; it can be applied to varied substantive areas.” In this sense, I was examining the data for a common thread across the varied contexts. I noticed that some participants had used the word ‘proving’ when describing attempts to distance themselves from negative stereotypes or gain approval. It seemed that some participants attempted to prove their worth as good mothers, or equally, to disprove those who had judged them about their life trajectory. I also noticed a commonality within such accounts which related to decisions or behaviours being influenced by the perceived values of others. I therefore felt that that ‘conforming to dominant social values’ was a label that captured these common elements.

I was additionally interested in the consequences of substantive processes within the data (Charmaz, 2014). I found that conforming to dominant social values appeared to be linked to particularly tangible consequences in terms of ripple effects that conforming related decisions or behaviours could have on participants’ life trajectories. For instance, conforming through relationships appeared to render some participants particularly vulnerable in relationships characterised by abuse. Processes of conforming to social values could also influence educational and career trajectories in ways that could impact on occupational opportunities or lead to a sense of ‘working harder.’

I reflected on what such findings may mean in terms of broader concerns of human experience. As articulated by Charmaz (2014, p. 245), “when you theorise, you reach down to fundamentals, up to abstractions, and probe into experience. The content of theorising cuts to the core of studied life and poses new questions about it.” Participants’ accounts of conforming to dominant social values in order to offset judgment or gain approval appeared

to raise questions around concepts of self-determination, such as ways in which oppressive features of the social environment could overshadow their ability to feel in control of their own behaviours, goals, and interests. Such concerns are revisited in Chapter Seven, which explores a range of lifespan transitions, and acknowledges constraints to autonomy that participants could face.

6.3.2 Conforming Through Domestic Image or Occupational Patterns

A prominent pattern of feeling scrutinised, discussed in Chapter Five, related to societal assumptions that participants were incapable mothers due to being young. Five participants described attempting to offset judgments around their mothering by conforming to perceived social values or ideals within a domestic role. For instance, Kelly, discussed placing a high level of pressure on herself to be perfect, which was ultimately counterproductive:

> I found I did put a lot of pressure on myself to be the perfect mother … the more pressure I put on myself, the worse I got, you know like if I you know put so much pressure on myself to keep the house clean the house just got messier.

When asked about where such pressure had emanated from, Kelly indicated that external expectations of incapability had played a role:

> I wanted to prove the naysayers wrong … I you know, just wanted to do a big "Stuff you all."

For some participants, conforming through domestic image included paying particular attention to their children's presentation. For instance, Sonja recalled attempts to dress her children in ways that she felt would minimise judgement:

I felt that people were, judging me, as I was walking around town thinking, “Oh my God look at that baby she’s got no shoes on,” I always made sure that my kids always looked like they came from healthy happy homes, because of the judgement.

Theresa similarly discussed dressing her baby in ways to offset scrutiny:

If your child’s dirty in any way shape or form you get judged, if you know, that’s why [baby] was always like, crazy immaculate.

For Shannon, offsetting scrutiny included conforming to domestic ideals around breast feeding despite not wanting to:

I absolutely despised breastfeeding … but I just felt this constant judgment from the outside world that just because I was this young mum I probably needed to do it more than anyone because, you know can’t just have a baby and think you can throw it on the bottle, you have to feed him, you’ve gotta do it … so for nearly five months I continued to breastfeed my baby, and I hated every second of it.

Melissa similarly described feeling a high level of pressure around her mothering:

I used to say, but I’m not sure if it’s perhaps over dramatic, but I often would say because it doesn’t really matter what you do but if you are ten times better than all the other mothers, you know, the older mothers, then you might be considered a good mother—not even that you would, but you might.

A sense of needing to be perfect in order to offset judgement was described to have resulted from such dynamics:

It impacted my mothering, I had to be perfect, and you know if I wasn’t, and my children weren’t perfect, it wasn’t because they were children and human beings, it

> was because I was a terrible mother, so [the judgement] definitely had impacts on me, how you see yourself as well.

Melissa was one of two participants who described ways in which stigma had resulted in sacrificing her own occupational goals. At the time of interview, she had recently enrolled in university, yet reflected on ways in which social judgements had deterred her from studying as a young mother:

> I enrolled in [a course] which I never finished … I think what that really was, was I felt like I'm a mother so I can't actually do things for me cause that's somehow not being a good mum … I was young, so I knew that it didn't matter what I did, I wouldn't be considered good … those choices were much more deliberate choices made, for people that might be looking in.

Similarly, Shannon's occupational trajectory appeared to be influenced as a result of feeling judged. Shannon indicated that she felt subjected to a stereotype of welfare dependency. Subsequently She had attempted to offset judgement by working instead of pursuing her academic goals:

> I actually really always wanted to be a nurse … I'm not, not even close to, and probably won't go to uni, but, the reason that I didn't go and do that when my son was a baby like I had initially planned, is because I felt that I had to be with him, and that I—because that was 'the right thing to do,' and I felt that I had to just go and just get an everyday job so that I could put food on the table and that I wasn't living off the government and being like, a sponge like other people thought that I was being.

Patterns of scrutiny discussed within Chapter Five additionally included societal assumptions that participants faced a loss of prospects, including that their lives were over by

virtue of becoming young mothers. Three participants described attempting to offset such assumptions by working harder. For instance, Sonja described working throughout her first pregnancy and into early motherhood as a way of proving herself to be independent and competent:

> I had a good job, I mean like I was the, I was actually in supervisory position with my job … I even worked my way up to [position] to keep progressing and proving myself and proving myself.

When asked about the origins of feeling that she had something to prove, Sonja explained:

> Because I'd been all these years, having people say that you can't do this and you can't do that, and, you know … and that was a lot of the stigma back then when I had her at such a young age, everyone said, "Oh well that's it, that's the end of your life."

Despite some positives of such proving in terms of progressing with her occupation, Sonja described a period when working hard took a toll on her health:

> After I'd had the baby … I applied back at [workplace] and got my job back, so I started back there, and I also did night work at a petrol shop, so I went there during the day and I went to the petrol shop at night … I stopped doing the night work, because it was my health—I couldn't do it, I had to look after a baby during the day, work all night.

Theresa indicated that judgement had been one of a range of considerations underpinning a decision to take on a high level of work as a young mother:

> One of the things I was very big on was I worked, I worked all the time … I didn't want my kid to grow up in say housing commission or anything like that … that was my big goal, I didn't—I was already being judged because was young.

Working harder could become a pattern that continued across participants' adulthood. For instance, when asked about messages that her life was over during adolescence have had any ripple effects into her life, Kameron reflected:

> It definitely made me work harder, so I don't just work, I work my ass off, doesn't matter what I'm doing, and I think I was—I wasn't headed for another break down this year, but I was headed for something, and then COVID hit, so I've had to stop, and I've had to reevaluate my life and I've had to decide what I want in my life, what I don't want in my life … what career do I want? Because up until now, up until two years ago it was just, get the bills paid, get the bills paid, get the bills paid, get the bills paid, that was it, that was my life.

Such examples highlight a range of consequences that proving through a cultivated domestic image or occupational patterns or success could have on participants' lives, such as feelings of pressure to present an ideal domestic image, or to negate judgment by sacrificing occupational goals or working harder.

6.3.3 Conforming Through Relationship Patterns

Another prominent pattern of feeling scrutinised, as discussed in Chapter Five, related to double stigmas of young single motherhood, with some participants having indicated that they had felt assessed through a stereotype of being single, or that being single was particularly compounding factor for stigmatising responses when they were young mothers. Seven participants described that they had subsequently conformed to dominant social values

around relationship status in order to offset judgement or gain approval. For instance, Bethenny described observations that single motherhood and teenage motherhood are inextricably linked in the imaginations of society, noting that single, young mothers can face multiple layers of judgment:

> You do see a young mum and you assume that they are single … there is still a stigma for single mums … I think moreso younger ones.

For Bethenny, concerns regarding such stigma had influenced her decision to marry during emerging adulthood:

> When [child] started kindy … the sign out book you have to write your last name and it wasn't the same as her last name and it just always, always made me feel very judged … the unmarried sort of single young mum sort of thing, [people] just assuming … that was one of our main reasons for getting married.

Bethenny described that this has been a positive marriage, although marrying in a timely way meant sacrificing some of the finer details of her wedding:

> With the courthouse wedding we just had [several guests] … we've gone to friends' houses and their wedding photos on their wall and stuff and [husband's] like, "Don't you feel like you've got a bit ripped, like? We didn't do that?" And I'm like, "I don't really care." … [partner] wants to take us to America cos he went over there for work and loved it, I'm like, "Alright, we'll try and do one of our anniversaries and we'll just go to Vegas and we'll get Elvis and I'll wear a dress and we can have photos."

Brandi reflected on her decision to marry during emerging adulthood. This decision was described to have had been influenced by dominant societal messages, and to have rendered her vulnerable to abuse:

> I did marry, when my son was six, and I married, but the thing was I didn't marry that man because I loved him, I married that man because society told me, I'm a single parent, I'm a young mother, I need to take care of my child … and it was again another domestic violence situation.

Brandi found herself entrenched in this relationship for over a decade. Elements of proving her capability by making the relationship work were evident within her story:

> In my mind the whole time was like, my father had always told me, you're useless and you'll amount to nothing, and the one thing he'd always driven into me is you always give up you never stick out anything, so it was kind of like I had to prove, not only to him but everybody else, that I can do this, I'm okay you know I'm not stupid, I'm capable.

Camille expressed that she had remained in a violent relationship for approximately ten years, in the hopes of giving her children a "unified family until after they had finished school." When asked if internal preferences or external expectations influenced the goals of a unified family, she replied:

> You know what, that absolutely did have an element and because you know, all you ever hear is that young mums, they're single, and like, when I used to go out with my kids, people would ask me if I was married, and at the time I'd just be like yes, of course I'm married you know, but looking back now I think what an odd question to ask a young girl with their kids but, yea, I think they just asked that because they had this thing in their head that, well I just pumped out three kids to three different fathers and we're not married and, just basically society's example of a teenage mum.

Camille additionally emphasised sensing a high magnitude of social scrutiny that being a young single mother could attract at the time, explaining: "I didn't want to be a single mum, ever, honestly, that was the worst thing you could be."

A high level of social scrutiny regarding relationship status also was reflected in Vicki's story. Vicki indicated that experiences of feeling judged as a young single mother culminated, resulting in a decision to adhere to conventional behaviour by entering marriage within adulthood, despite this partner being abusive:

> He was my last ditch at being normal, I was going to be average, I was going to be exactly what my parents and my sister and everyone wanted me to be which was a married woman with a couple of kids and a proper husband … the whole, I don't want to be looked at, like—the stigma had got to me to such a point, that, and—look honestly when I married him I didn't even like him … even though he was sort of abusive to a certain extent I was willing to put up with it … I was swapping my self-esteem and my stuff to have, the 'ideal life.'

For some participants, marriage was a particularly overt parental expectation. For example, Sonja experienced heavy disapproval from her parents about her pregnancy:

> The hardest person to tell was dad… I made my partner come with me to tell them, and, he'll still remember it, it was the scariest experiences of our lives … dad just smashed the table and punched the wall, and we ran.

Marital status was tied to parental approval at that time, resulting in Sonja becoming engaged to a man who, as discussed in Chapter Five, went on to become emotionally abusive:

> We got engaged when I was pregnant … we got engaged to basically keep my parents happy.

Yolanda's parents also strongly encouraged her to marry and leave the family home:

> We started dating, like we never expected it, next minute you know, you're pregnant [laughs] … my mums gone, like, "You have to get married" … and then we had to get married … my first night out of home was the most traumatic, like I had to go and move from my beautiful home with my family into a caravan park, we moved into a caravan, and so we just—it was just horrible, it was absolutely horrible.

Yolanda expressed that despite some good times in her marriage, she felt devalued and was subjected to insults around her physical appearance:

> I didn't feel valued, I felt I wasn't really worth—cause he would take off for days and days at a time or a week and, his mates and everything were more important and I was left with the responsibility … and just all the little comments, you know, and then I started to not like my body.

Leah also described the parental expectation to marry:

> I was made to get married; my father didn't talk to me for six months at all, he told me I was an idiot.

Leah did not describe this relationship as being abusive, however her partner was unfaithful and non-committal, which had implications on her self-esteem, and may have left her particularly vulnerable in future relationships. For example, of entering a subsequent relationship that was characterised by violence she recalled:

> I can't even think of one skerrick of like, I deserve something better … I do remember consciously thinking this—no man will ever look at me because I have two children

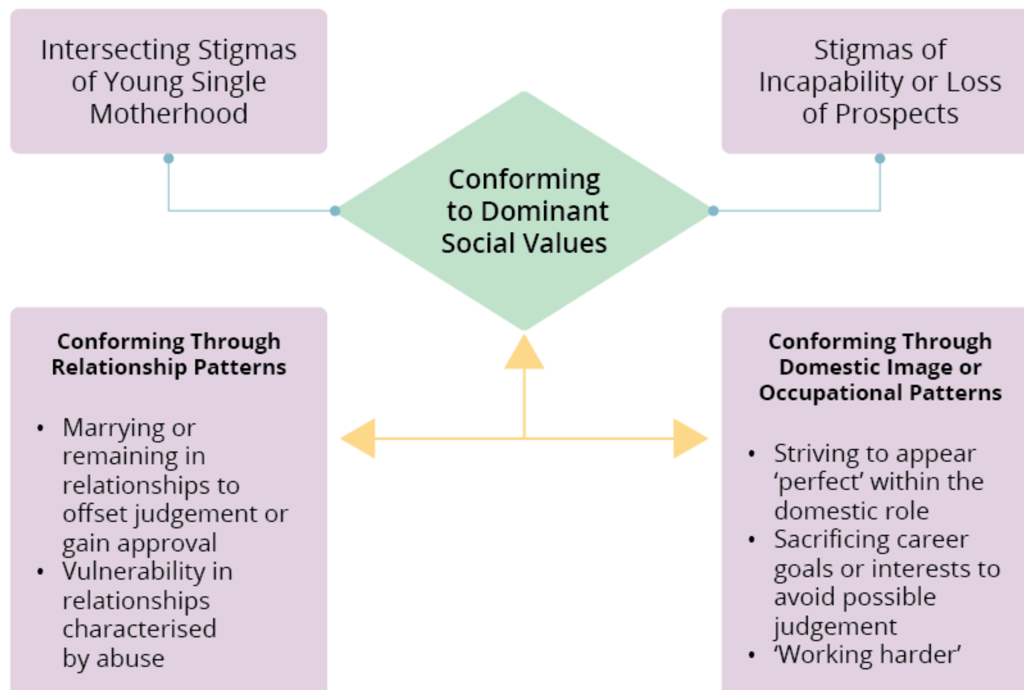
so might as well settle for this … I felt that because you know, I wasn't worth [first husband] sticking around for.

Examples of demonstrating their self-worth through relationship patterns highlight the influence that double stigmas of young single motherhood could have on some participants' relationship trajectories. Attempts to offset judgment or gain approval through relationship patterns could result in some participants entering marriage or remaining in relationships that could sometimes render them vulnerable to abuse or have implications on their self-esteem.

Figure 6.2 provides a conceptual framework that represents dominant stereotypes surrounding young motherhood, subsequent processes of conforming, and the consequences that such dynamics could have on participants' lives.

Figure 6.2

Conceptual Framework for Understanding Influences of Dominant Stereotypes on Conforming to Dominant Social Values



6.4 Chapter Summary

Impacts of social scrutiny on various aspects of participants' ongoing lives were identified through a grounded theory process of theoretical coding in which relationships between substantive codes were explored, identified, and integrated into theoretical propositions. Theoretical categories were particularly prominent in relation to an interplay between dominant social values and areas of oppression within participants' lives. Specifically, 'corrosive implications of scrutiny on resilience' were discussed in terms of ways in which social scrutiny could negatively impact upon connections with other mothers, diminish family support, lead to avoidance of formal support services, or result in loss of confidence or distress. Further, a phenomenon of conforming to dominant values was presented as a framework of understanding various outcomes that could occur in response to stigmas of incapability, loss of prospects, or double stigmas of being young and single in motherhood. Processes of conforming to dominant social values were discussed regarding a number of impacts on participants' lives, inclusive of their occupational and relationship trajectories. It was noted that such outcomes may raise questions around broader concepts such as self-determination. Considerations of self-determination will be revisited in the following chapter, which explores various lifespan transitions, while acknowledging broader social constraints to autonomy within such transitions.

Chapter 7. Navigating Life Stages, Mothering Milestones, and Life-Stage Constraints

7.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I present findings around ways in which participants' navigated life stages and how they experienced mothering milestones, as well as some of the constraints they encountered. Consistent with a grounded theory approach to analysis, I searched for meaningful and systematic patterns across the data (Charmaz, 2014) in my attempts to identify phenomena associated with the women's lives. As noted in Chapter Five, I had initially hoped to find unique patterns neatly confined to each of the chronological stages of interest, yet variation between participants' lives appeared to be overwhelmingly marked at close range. Subsequently, I had turned my attention to categories with abstract power and general reach, which were prominent across the data—namely categories of 'experiencing adversity,' 'a climate of social scrutiny,' and 'resilient behaviours or actions.' Such categories and the interrelations between them have been described within previous chapters as a consistent thread within my analysis and are once again interwoven in the present chapter, complementing a focus here on participants' navigation of their mothering journeys and constraints encountered.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section explores participants' retrospective accounts between emerging adulthood and midlife. Freedom and autonomy as dominant social ideals associated with emerging adulthood are contrasted with participants' experiences of maternal responsibility. Constraints to autonomy within adolescence and emerging adulthood are discussed in relation to focused and theoretical categories pertaining to adversity, scrutiny, and social processes of conforming to dominant social values. In ways that may be reflective of adolescence and emerging adulthood as foundational periods within the life course (Dahl et al., 2018; Farmer et al., 2013; Kumar, 2020), constraints experienced

within adolescence and emerging adulthood are presented as having subsequent impacts into the women's lives. Ripple effects of constraints to autonomy continued into midlife for some former teenage mothers.

The second section of this chapter explores participants' experiences of mothering milestones associated with empty nesting and grandmotherhood. Limitations around comprehensively exploring empty nesting are noted. Experiences of empty nesting varied considerably across participants' stories. Several participants revealed transitions to grandmotherhood at relatively early ages. Social responses towards a young grandmother identity are discussed, and variations across participants' experiences of grandmotherhood are considered alongside various contextual factors.

7.2 Navigating Early Adulthood to Midlife

7.2.1 Contrasting Maternal Responsibility with Individual Freedom within Early Adulthood

As discussed in Chapter One, independence and autonomy are well-described dominant societal values associated with early adulthood. Early childrearing is at odds with such constructs, and there are gaps in understanding how a subsequent incongruence may be experienced (Furstenburg, 2016). Some participants reflected on how freedoms associated with age-graded norms, such as going to parties, drinking, spending time with peers, or travelling, were experienced. Such reflections varied considerably. Contextual factors associated with individual values, and the prevalence of social scrutiny, appeared to influence such variation. For instance, when asked if she had experienced opportunities to explore freedoms within emerging adulthood, Tinsley expressed: "I wasn't one of those to go out and party all the time."

Tinsley further reflected on a high level of satisfaction within her life structure, explaining:

> I was very happy with the way my life was, with my family, my kids … I've never felt like I've missed out on anything.

Bethenny also appeared to minimise the importance of youth-related constructs to her life, expressing:

> I think I was more mature, like I've not done all the teenage stuff but it didn't worry me, it was just all stupid shit … I don't feel like I missed anything.

When asked about whether she has experienced a period in her life in which she has been able to explore her own sense of identity, Bethenny asserted: "I think being a mum is that identity."

Similarly, Denise indicated that activities such as going to parties had not been of particular interest, and that adjustment to such restrictions had been unproblematic:

> I just worked and I had a few friends and just did sort of, did my thing, I didn't really, like—I've never been a big partier or you know was a 'go out and run amuck' type person, so yea, you know my daughter got into dancing and ballet and all that sort of stuff so, yea I just sort of became a mum and that was that.

Dorinda described having some limited opportunities to go out with friends as she shared the care of her children with their father. She reflected on an enjoyed prioritising of her parental obligations:

> Sometimes you were restricted, you felt restricted, but I enjoyed being a mum, and my kids were—and they still are my priority.

Conversely, some participants reflected on having sensed that they were missing out within emerging adulthood. Feelings of deprived freedoms appeared to be linked to personal values and preferences, such as an interest in travelling or engaging in similar activities to peers. For instance, Luanne experienced tensions between parental obligations and a desire to travel. Such tensions were particularly prominent during her early adulthood yet diminished over time:

> I resented my cousin because she was able to travel the world … in saying that she only went to New Zealand, but to me back then that was like, the world … I didn't even realise it until I was like, when I moved over here, I was talking to [her] last year … she said to me, "You never invited me to your wedding" … I said to her, "I think I resented the fact that you know, you had what I wanted, and then you got to travel."

Adrienne detailed experiences of depression that appeared to emanate from incongruence between parental obligations and a desire to travel:

> I hadn't planned on having children, I wanted to travel the world you know I had those dreams and goals and then I was so depressed thinking, I'm never going to you know, I'm never going to be able to pursue my dreams you know.

Adrienne described a process of accommodating such restrictions, which appeared reflective of the previously discussed concept of resilience. Specifically, she utilised family as a source of support to overcome obstacles to travel. She indicated that her feelings of depression resolved after being able to travel, and on the importance of this opportunity:

> It was just like I mean not everyone gets to go overseas for a couple of months and have their parents look after their kids, but I think mum and dad just saw how important it was for me.

Brandi also expressed that she had experienced a sense of missing out during her emerging adulthood, and reflected on a sense of grief that being vicariously exposed to a friend's liberties had resulted in at that time:

> [The friendship] was a double-edged sword really, because on one hand like I was watching her … and you know I was kind of sad for the fact that you know I was missing out … it was like, there was a pane of glass between her world and my world, but I was fortunate enough to step into it a little bit, but I knew that I could only step into it for a few hours at a time and then I had to come back to my life.

Unlike Adrienne's story, Brandi's feelings of missing out did not resolve in time. Rather, Brandi spoke through tears of a sense of crisis associated with loss of youth that had ripple effects across her life. Brandi's experience will be revisited later in this chapter and discussed in the context of crisis associated with empty nesting.

Differences in outcomes related to Adrienne and Brandi's struggles to adjust to loss of freedoms within early adulthood caused me to reflect on contextual differences between their lives. Whereas family support had been integral to Adrienne's adjustment, Brandi had lacked strong family connections. Such differences may suggest that support to engage in age graded norms may be important in the adjustment of some young mothers. It appeared, however, that the social environment could be less than accommodating of some participants' attempts of engaging in youth-related activities, with social scrutiny exacerbating tensions between maternal responsibility and individual freedoms.

For instance, Shannon described a sense of social condemnation related to being a young mother, which extended to scrutiny around her social movements:

> I was already a 'bad' person because I chose to have this baby young … "How dare you want to go out with your friends for a night to the pub" or something, you know, God "You don't do that!"

Similarly, Theresa discussed that her parents would babysit on occasions so that she could have respite, yet noted feeling judged socially when utilising such opportunities:

> I always needed some respite from it you know, cause it's just—oh so much! … you get judged, you get judged if you go out … it's just like if you go anywhere, you get judged.

Kyle also described a sense of judgement, which she expressed had been a barrier to her social movements as a young mother:

> I felt like I couldn't go anywhere then, I felt like I'd be a bad mum if I did go out and leave them at home and all that sort of stuff so I just never did.

Another way in which social scrutiny appeared to exacerbate tensions between maternal responsibility and individual freedoms related to dominant social messages. As discussed in Chapter Five, a number of participants described social messages directed at them which implied that they limited prospects due to young motherhood, that their lives were over or that they were missing out. Such messages could induce a sense of contemplation. For instance, Sonja reflected on being told that she had limited prospects to travel. When asked about the impacts of such messages, she indicated that she had subsequently felt 'stuck,' yet reasoned that she had never actually wanted to travel:

> It did actually feel like, oh well, at that time I did feel like I was locked in, I was stuck … my brother for instance, he travelled overseas, he went here and there and he's gone, "I'm doing all my travelling when I'm young because I can," and that's when

> my parents used to always say to me, "Oh well you missed out … you missed out because you decided to have a baby," and I'm like, "Well, actually that didn't really stop me if I wanted to—I was never really wanting to travel."

Similarly, Leah explained that she has only had thoughts of missing out on experiences when people say that she has missed out:

> People say you missed out on going to nightclubs or whatever and I say, if I don't know—I've never experienced it, I don't know I've missed it do I? Because it's only that people would tell me—I wouldn't sit at home pining, "Oh I wanna go to a night club."

The above accounts indicate that experiencing tensions between autonomy and the responsibilities of motherhood may not be universal, but were experienced by some participants. Variety within participants' experiences appeared to reflect how contextual factors such as an individual's values, beliefs, and family support could influence adjustment. Further, factors related to experiences of social stigma could also influence ways in which restrictions associated with motherhood during emerging adulthood were experienced.

7.2.2 Conceptualising Autonomy Within the Context of Adversity

As previously discussed, emerging adulthood is a stage when young adults may be inclined to explore various options before making significant life decisions (Arnett, 2000; Robinson, 2015). In reflecting upon participants' access to autonomy, I was struck by how many participants had not described motherhood per se as a restriction. Rather, it was adversity that diminished many participants' ability to make significant decisions in their lives.

Some participants described that their vocational choices had been limited due to early experiences of poverty.

For instance, Kyle, who was described to have experienced childhood poverty had an early ambition of becoming a hairdresser. She came close to accessing this goal after leaving school due to a subsidised program being made available:

> I got actually accepted into a what do you call it, like an apprenticeship … it was some sort of subsidised thing—like they do now, but it was a big deal back then.

Yet Kyle expressed that due to financial hardship and related factors, her parents had not been able to assist her to utilise this opportunity, recalling: "they couldn't afford to drive me to [the course] everyday."

Similarly, Leah explained that she had lacked vocational foundations when transitioning to early adulthood, as her family's financial disadvantage had prevented her from completing school:

> My parents told me I couldn't go to Grade 12 because they would have had four children in high school, and they couldn't afford it, so I was already told you're not going to Grade 12, and I loved school, so I think I was pretty devastated.

Both Kyle and Leah have experienced periods of significant economic hardship during their lives, although Leah explained that she had found an opportunity to pursue vocational opportunities within midlife due to access to a scholarship and has been able to break away from circumstances of poverty. She explained, "they gave away I think five scholarships … I graduated top of the class and, within a couple of months I had my own [business]!"

Their accounts demonstrated ways in which prior economic and social positioning could have implications into midlife.

Another way in which themes of adversity appeared to have implications for autonomy related to experiences of domestic violence. Several participants discussed that their social movements or vocational opportunities had been diminished because of experiences of abuse.

For instance, Gretchen who was described to have experienced domestic violence between adolescence and early adulthood, reflected that even her most basic access to autonomy was eroded:

> I was only a baby myself, and I had two babies and a husband that had been beating me up … I'd go to places … then [partner] would always be—there was a typical, "Where have you been? Who have you seen? What have you been doing? Why are you so late?"

For some participants, a lack of personal choice in entering relationships seemed evident. As discussed in Chapter Five, entering or remaining in relationships could be a way to offset judgment or gain approval for participants who had experienced social scrutiny. Yet further layers of a loss of autonomy could exist within such relationships, particularly within those characterised by domestic violence.

For instance, as discussed, Camille had remained in an abusive relationship between adolescence and early adulthood. She described her decision to maintain the relationship as having been partly influenced by wanting to avoid the stereotype of a young, single mother. Significant erosion to her autonomy was apparent within the relationship. Reflective of literature which underscores acts of isolation as commonly used tactics of domestic violence perpetrators (Coercive Control Collective, 2018), Camille described being restricted from seeing her family and paying a price for them being permitted to visit.

> Once I had my daughter … he started not to want my family to come over, so every time like my mum would come and stay, I'd have to give him sex or a blow job just to try and keep the peace … all I really kind of had was my mum and my sisters … but yea after [baby] was born, it just kind of—he didn't want my sisters to come.

Camille explained that restrictions to her autonomy persisted post break up. She provided the below example which occurred in her late twenties, and is reflective of literature which suggests that abusers often continue to control their victims even after they leave the relationship (Katz et al., 2020):

> [My parents] looked after the kids for five weeks so I could go, cause I always had a dream of seeing Europe and going to Paris, and my best friend, she bought me my airfare ticket for my birthday … and then he went and got himself a ticket to come on our tour and come to Europe with us, he said it was so I couldn't have sex with other men.

Sonja, who as discussed had become engaged upon pregnancy in order to offset her parents' disapproval, expressed that there was a high degree of control within this relationship, which had eroded her autonomy with regard to engaging with other young people:

> We used to go out in the car … I begged him, can I come with you I just need to get out of the house … and he'd make us sit in the car, so I'd sit in the car with [baby] … I didn't want to be locked away with a baby, I wanted to be part of these young people.

Brandi, who as discussed earlier, had married during emerging adulthood in response dominant societal messages, expressed that conforming to dominant social values had

resulted in multiple restrictions to her autonomy. For example, Brandi has since come out as being gay. She reflected on needing to repress her own sexuality in order to make the marriage work:

> I was having all those negotiations with my partner saying, you know, "Can we have an open relationship?" "No" … I'd already had those conversations with him knowing full well what I was giving up … I negotiated it and said, "I am giving up who I am as a person."

Brandi expressed that she experienced violence in the relationship, and described tactics common to domestic violence perpetrators, such as preventing their partner from getting or keeping a job (Coercive Control Collective, 2018). She recalled being made to give up her chosen vocational goals of studying to become a vet:

> He said you can finish off that certificate that you are doing, but after that there'll be no moving to [city], there will be no career for you.

Brandi appeared to demonstrate considerable resilience in terms of establishing an alternative career for herself after entering midlife, yet continued grief regarding her early loss of autonomy was evident:

> I think to myself like, how did my standards get so low … shouldn't I have these beautiful desires of like what I want to be? I want to be a creative person, I want to be a difference in the world … that goal left me when I couldn't be a vet anymore, because that was my thing, I wanted to be a vet.

Vicki had married an abusive partner as her "last ditch at being normal" after experiencing multiple layers of stigma as a young single mother also reflected on her

autonomy being eroded within this relationship. For example, at the time of meeting this partner, Vicki had begun training to become a nurse, and had secured related employment:

> I must have been getting this air of confidence about me because of course, as soon as you're confident all these narcissists come out of the woodwork … in the nursing home, it went from a 30 bed to a 120 and we were irreplaceable, the people that were working there, cause we'd worked before they changed it, and I ended up being in charge of a whole ward.

After moving in with this partner however, Vicki was made to give up her training and employment:

> I stuck by him cause I was living with him, and yea, gave up my job because he didn't want me to be around other guys.

Vicki explained that she has not been able to rebuild a career due to culminative impacts of trauma to her mental health, and that she was currently on a disability pension. In this sense trauma within Vicki's earlier experiences continue to have ramifications into midlife.

The above accounts suggest that in conceptualising young mothers' access to dominant social values associated with emerging adulthood, such as autonomy to explore one's own interests, goals, and desires, considerations of adversity may be pertinent. Themes of adversity, including experiences of economic disadvantage and domestic violence could diminish participants' ability to make significant decisions within their lives in ways that had immediate and long-term ramifications. For some participants, as highlighted within Chapter Six, a lack of choice in entering relationships was apparent in terms of entering or remaining in relationships in order to offset judgement or gain approval. Further layers of a loss of

autonomy across life stages could be detectable within such relationships, particularly within those that were characterised by domestic violence.

7.2.3 Conceptualising Autonomy Within the Context of Social Scrutiny

In addition to above implications of social scrutiny impacting ongoing relationship patterns, Chapter Six also outlined ways in which social scrutiny could have direct implications on some participants' occupational trajectories. Two participants had sacrificed their goals of going to university within emerging adulthood, with such decisions influenced by a sense of being judged.

Specifically, Shannon had early goals of going to university to become a nurse, yet as discussed earlier, had felt judged in relation to stereotypes of young mothers being welfare dependent. She had subsequently felt as though she needed to work as opposed to attending university so that she wasn't considered to be "a sponge" on society.

However, for Shannon it did not appear that restrictions to her original goal of going to university had resulted in negative implications, as she described that over the years her goals have changed:

> Here I am at nearly 38 and I'll probably never really study but that's okay, I'm okay with it now, I just—it is what it is, I am what I am… I've got quite a large span of children's ages and stuff still as well, and you know whilst my eldest is 18½ nearly, my youngest is only 13 months old … I'm quite okay these days to just be like, yea I'm a mum and that's who I am.

Conversely, Melissa described that a sense of restriction around her early goals culminated in recent years. Melissa had felt judged as being incapable as a young parent. She expressed a sense of needing to be perfect in order to offset such scrutiny. Catering to an

image of maternal perfection included sacrificing her own goals of study to match perceived social ideals of stay-at-home motherhood.

Melissa was in her early forties at the time of interview, and had remained a stay-at-home mother for most her life. She expressed that over the years she has begun to feel resentful regarding sacrifices that she has made:

> I've spent 25 years … 25 years where other people have come before me, and they've come before me quite happily, willingly, and consciously, but you sort of get to a point where it's like hang on, oh my God, I'm going to die soon, and I've spent all this time, you know, not doing things that I want to do … I've noticed a bit of resentment build up, not at anyone in particular but I would describe it as resentment.

These described circumstances may be reflective of literature which emphasises that balance between inner and outer aspects of life structure can be a particular focus towards midlife transitions (Levinson, 1977; Robinson, 2013). Melissa recently restructured her life significantly in order to find balance between her family obligations and career aspirations. This entailed a period of leaving the family home to figure out what she wanted, which was followed by commencing university:

> I said to my husband I'm not moving back for a couple of months … I'm doing my own thing, which happened to just be, figuring out whether I was having a midlife crisis or I wanted to leave you know, and that's when I started doing uni.

While the experiences of Shannon and Melissa varied significantly regarding attempts to negate judgement by sacrificing occupational goals, both stories appeared to highlight ways in which social scrutiny could undermine autonomy regarding major life decisions during emerging adulthood. Long-term implications which appeared to extend into midlife were evident.

7.3 Mothering Milestones Associated With Empty Nesting and Grandmotherhood

7.3.1 Relatively Large Family Sizes Amongst Many Participants

As discussed in Section 1.5, I approached this study with a particular curiosity about knowledge gaps in women's experiences of empty nesting at earlier ages. Such interest was born from my own experiences of empty nesting within my early thirties, and a desire to generate information that may normalise some of the experiences that women such as myself may face. However, a limitation to providing a comprehensive analysis around experiences of empty nesting was encountered during this study, since most participants had not yet reached this milestone.

Specifically, of the 22 participants interviewed, only six had experienced their children leaving home. Further, only four of such women had empty nested prior to the age of 45. One factor appeared to be the extend duration of child rearing amongst participants related to family size, with many of the women still having dependent children within the home. The mean figure of children born to participants was 3.54. This figure will be further discussed within Chapter Nine in terms of trends in family formation amongst young mothers.

Some of the participants who had not yet empty nested described a sense of mounting anxiety regarding this transition. For example, Kyle, expressed:

> I'm not looking forward to having no kids at home … I'm scared of it, I know [partner] isn't, I know he's so looking forward to it you know, he's already talked about selling the house and buying a caravan … but I'm like what about, what if they need us, you know.

Amongst participants who had empty nested, it appeared that their transition experiences varied considerably.

Some participants discussed empty nesting as relatively unproblematic or discussed the highlights of empty nesting. However, empty nesting can present challenges for some women (Robinson, 2015). Several participants described difficulties associated with adjusting to this milestone, and one participant disclosed that empty nesting had triggered a state of crisis.

Participants who described experiences of empty nesting as relatively unproblematic included Luanne, who became an empty nester within her midlife period, at the age of 54. When asked about the nature of her experience, she expressed that it had been 'fine,' and elaborated on some of the ins and outs regarding her youngest child's decision to move out of home:

> Oh fine, yea… so, I mean we were living [in a particular area] then, our son lived two blocks away … we still had [daughter] at home, she's Asperges so it was a big, can we get her to know paying the bills and all that, and yea and then, [daughter] she could move up here with us—and we were going to build her a granny flat, but she opted to move out.

Carrol described having empty nested during midlife, at the age of 46. She indicated that her youngest child leaving home had been somewhat rocky, expressing:

> I think [youngest child] and I had a very different relationship, she at that time she hated me, she was just—she was one of those teenagers that hates their mothers.

Yet a sense of grief and loss which may ensue for some women while adjusting to empty nesting (Robinson, 2015) appeared evident within her story:

> I'd cry all the time cause I missed her so much, I mean that was my baby and you know she's been with me so many years, like oh I miss my baby [laughs].

Relevant literature suggests that empty nesting can be a time to connect with identity and lifestyle separate to a care taking role (Robinson, 2015). Carrol provided such an example when she described how she harnessed interests such as yoga and Pilates:

> I can remember going through a stage where I looked in the mirror and I didn't like what I saw, so I started to say to myself, well why don't I like what is see? Why can't I? You know, I can be anything I choose to be, so you start to build up your self-esteem, you start to—to really build up that inside, and exercise you know, doing yoga, doing Pilates, whatever … I did get into yoga when [daughter] was a baby, but I didn't keep up with it, and I've done a little bit here and there at home, but now I try and practice every day.

Tinsley, who was 44 at the time of the interview, had only recently experienced empty nesting—under what may be considered her midlife period. She described her youngest daughter, who was aged 23, as being in and out of home, and expressed that this transition had been "daunting." She further expressed that she had experienced feelings of depression related to fears of losing her children:

> I actually ended up with depression … just the fear of losing my daughters, cause I don't get to see them all day every day, I don't get to talk to them when I wanted to talk to them, I was constantly on the phone, "What are you doing? How's your day been?" And they were like, "Mum! Leave us alone."

Tinsley explained that she believed her history of child loss was at the root of her fears of losing her children:

> With losing a child you sort of have that really, you have that deep set fear that you're going to lose another child.

Dorinda empty nested at the age of 38. In reflecting on her time as an empty nester she recalled that living alone had not been enjoyable for her, and had prompted a decision to move back in with her own mother:

> I hated it. It was horrible living on my own, hence, I'm living at mums, and mum wasn't always at home, so I've been living back here since 2012 … yes 2012-ish I moved back permanently to mum's.

Dorinda discussed how, over time, she found a silver lining to empty nesting, with opportunities to travel and spend money on herself instead of her children. She emphasised empty nesting as a time to focus on herself:

> So now my life, post children, grown up, moved out is all about me.

Dorinda appeared to relish in her reduced level of responsibilities as an empty nester:

> I don't have children. A lot of my friends have children, my brothers have children that are little, and I'm like ah I don't want to hang out with you people cause you've got children [laughs]. I'll go find someone who doesn't have children—or the responsibilities.

Brandi's adjustment to empty nesting appeared to be especially challenging. Brandi, who as discussed had struggled with a loss of autonomy within her early adulthood, empty nested at the age of 35. Empty nesting was the trigger for a sense of crisis regarding her loss of autonomy within adolescence and emerging adulthood:

> Oh, like I've had some serious breakdowns in my life, and I've had some serious [suicide] attempts in my life … I grieved, and you know what I realised I grieved for the most, was—and this is the most profound thing, that I thought, it still gets me now

> [speaks through tears], I thought that I could pick up my life, as a teenager, and when he left, that I could start it again—you can't, you can't get that time back, I was no longer the teenager, I was no longer able to go out with friends, have parties, go to clubs … I thought that my life was just on pause … I'm never gonna get that back, I lost that.

Brandi described a period of significant despair while adjusting to an empty nest, and had struggled to do anything except read:

> I was catatonic for at least six months, and when I say catatonic, I mean like, I would just sit in a chair … I couldn't go outside, I wasn't eating, I wasn't showering, I wasn't doing anything, I was just sitting in this chair reading.

Nevertheless, Brandi described how she found a sense of escape through reading and how she refined her literacy skills the point that she was able to enter university:

> In saying that, in doing that, that's what led me to be able to go to uni, because prior to that, because if you remember, I didn't have any schooling, I couldn't read and write, so those books taught me to read and write, they taught me how to read and write enough to get into uni, but mind you I got into uni with my point system.

Relevant literature suggests that crisis can be associated with personal transformation and growth (Robinson et al., 2017; Robinson & Wright, 2013). Brandi's crisis appeared to represent a transitional period in her life, which spurred her to pursue a bachelor's degree and subsequently establish a career:

> I had to make a decision right then and there, I'm either going to lay down and die in this moment, like literally die, and give up, or I'm going to try and make something, and that's when I decided I was going to do the [tertiary qualification], now I did the

> [tertiary qualification] knowing, like I said, making a logical choice, going this is going to provide me with some kind of income.

As noted, experiences of empty nesting varied. While some participants discussed empty nesting challenges, others discussed empty nesting as relatively unproblematic or discussed highlights of empty nesting that included an ability to focus on one's own interests and freedoms. One participant discussed how empty nesting had triggered a state of crisis, which appeared related to a lack of autonomy at previous points in her lifespan. This participants' experience may again highlight ways that access to autonomous experiences during early adulthood is important for some young mothers' social adjustment across their lifespan. It is noted that Brandi was the youngest participant to have empty nested. Her experience may indicate unique features to empty nesting for some former teenage mothers, in turn suggesting a need for further research.

7.3.2 Navigating Social Responses Towards a Younger Grandmother Identity

On average, women transition to first-time grandmotherhood between the ages of 49 and 54 (Spencer, 2016). Seven participants became grandmothers at comparatively early ages. These were Tinsley, who became a grandmother at 42; Carrol, who became a grandmother at approximately 40; Theresa, who became a grandmother at 39; Sonja, who became a grandmother at 46; Bronwyn, who became a grandmother at 36; Kyle, who became a grandmother at 35; and Leah, who became a grandmother at 38.

Implications for social identity upon transitioning to grandmotherhood seemed apparent within the story of one participant. Specifically, as noted in Chapter Five, Kyle became a paternal grandmother under circumstances of intergenerational teenage pregnancy. She recalled experiencing a sense of rebounding stigma at the time of her transition to grandmotherhood, which pertained to social attitudes expressed such as "like mother like

son." When asked how it felt to experience such judgment, she replied she was "disappointed," and elaborated that her disappointment related to her son's decision making:

> I taught my boys from a really young age about contraception, I told them all about periods, because I wanted them to know that every woman bleeds and this is when you need to know all this stuff and, and he still got it wrong.

However, Kyle expressed that not all social responses towards young grandmotherhood were negative. She reflected on a sense of social surprise that being a young grandmother could attract within the public arena, and indicated that she found amusement in such conversations:

> I love the look of shock on people's faces sometimes. Especially now I've lost so much weight cause I think I look younger now and I like watch them go—you see it calculate in their head, and then I wait for the questions, you know, not everybody will do it.

Tinsley also reflected on a sense of social surprise when introducing herself as a grandmother, and indicated finding humour within such interactions:

> Day care's a good example. I walk into daycare and if there's a young trainee or something like that in the daycare centre and say I'm here to pick up my grandsons they're looking at me like [pulls surprised face], "Grandsons!?" [laughs] "What grandsons have you got?" … "You're their grandma?!"

Theresa described similar social surprise, which she expressed not minding:

> I actually don't mind it at all, I actually turn round and tell people—we have, between us we have five grandchildren … neither of us look old enough to have grandchildren, and we've got five you know I mean, the eldest one will be double digits next year.

In the above respects, it appeared that social responses to a younger grandmothering identity could vary. While one participant experienced rebounding social scrutiny linked to intergenerational teenage pregnancy, some participants described a sense of social curiosity that did not appear to be negatively received.

7.3.3 Contextual Factors that May Shape the Grandmothering Journey

Participants described a diverse nature of grandmothering experiences, which, in turn, appeared to be influenced by a range of contextual factors such as maternal relationships, and the readiness of one's child to undertake parental responsibilities. For most participants, grandmotherhood could be characterised by a sense of happiness or meaningful bonding experiences. However, some participants expressed that grandmotherhood had symbolised overwhelming responsibility or lack of control. These experiences are detailed below.

Sonja indicated that a close maternal connection with her daughter, and a sense of her daughter being a 'hands-on mum' have positively influenced her experience of grandparenting:

> I love being a grandma because I can just hand them back … I can do the fun stuff, and I can also influence her, and I'm just lucky that I have a relationship—a close enough relationship with my daughter that she allows me to take some, you know initiative in the upbringing of my grandchildren. She allows me to—she offers me to do that without actually putting it on me … you know I've never had it dumped on me, my daughter's always been a hands-on mum.

Bronwyn, also a maternal grandmother, indicated satisfaction within her grandmothering role, expressing: “I love it.” She described her daughter as being a “great mum,” and her overall experience of grandparenting as positive. Bronwyn did, however, express that at the time of transitioning to grandmotherhood, she had some initial apprehensions relating to the age of her daughter who was 16 at that time. Bronwyn further reflected that in the transition to grandmotherhood, she found strength in her own beliefs that young mothers can pursue other goals in later life:

> I was excited, but I was worried, and you know, cause you want the best for your kids and—but, I don’t know I always knew that even if you had kids when you were young you could go for what you wanted in your twenties or your thirties or your forties you know.

Carrol also indicated that her experiences as a young maternal grandmother have been positive, and indicated that intergenerational young motherhood has felt natural within her family:

> [Daughter] had [baby] young as well, so I think we just come from a long line of young, nurturing women.

Carrol emphasised a profound closeness that she felt with her grandchildren:

> [I] love it, absolutely love it, my grandchildren just are beautiful, and because they’re away at the moment I’m missing them like crazy … little [grandchild] she’s got the messenger app on her phone, on her mum’s old phone, so she’s able to talk to me with messenger app, and like some of those little messages, like really cute little ones … she just says with love hearts I love you so much I love you more than you’ll ever know [laughs].

Similarly, Tinsley described her role as a young maternal grandmother in a positive light, and mused that not having responsibility in caring for her grandchildren has been a particular highlight:

> I love every minute of my grandsons, I just relish in it, cause I can give them back [laughs].

Yet, some participants who had been called upon to provide care taking roles described that their transitions to young grandmotherhood had been stressful. For instance, Kyle's adjustment to grandmotherhood as a paternal grandmother was complicated by her grandchild being left with her:

> First two weeks they said they couldn't take her anywhere because [grandchild] hadn't had any needles or anything, and in those two weeks [grandchild's mother] said I'm gonna go down get some stuff and she never came back—rung me from [nearby town], shacked up with some guy up there and came back couple of weeks later and brought scabies into the house. [Grandchild] had suffered badly for about six months because you can't treat them with the scabies stuff before that, it was horrible anyway, she kept giving it back to me all the time cause I held her.

Kyle did not receive financial assistance within such arrangements, and indicated feeling as though she was in a precarious position at that time:

> We never asked her for any money I didn't want to ask her for money in case she just said, "Well I'll take my kid."

Further, a strong attachment to her grandchild was formed, and Kyle described emotionally struggling when relinquishing care back to the infant's mother:

> I did it for 10 months, and then she comes and takes her off me. Now I only see her every couple of months, you know and it sucks … she felt like my baby you know?

Similarly, Leah's experience of paternal grandmotherhood was characterised by being asked to take on a high level of responsibility:

> [It was] stressful because [son] was in a bad place … I said to [son] when you have this baby I'm not babysitting, I've still got things to do … I still had kids at home, and oh that was a hard time. I did take the baby for a while, and then cause I was trying to run [own business], I couldn't get daycare.

Leah described that she went on to develop issues of anxiety associated with being a grandmother:

> I actually had panic attacks looking after my grandchildren when they were little, I just—I don't know why, had no idea but I had panic attacks, even though I'd looked after my kids okay, and I don't know, and then I just thought, I can't do that, I have no clue why.

Leah had a total of 14 grandchildren at the time of the interview. She expressed feeling an overwhelming sense of responsibility for her five adult children, some of whom had made poor life choices resulting in a sense of needing to financially rescue them by giving them large sums of money. Some of her children had had multiple children under adverse circumstances. Leah explained that preserving her own wellbeing had entailed emotionally distancing herself from her grandchildren:

> The oldest [grandchild], like she's 16 now, I've hardly seen her in her life, but I hear of her every now and then. I've seen her from across the store when she was in town or whatever, but I distanced myself very early so I didn't have my heart broken, cause

> all I could see was heartbreak … I get tired, I get really tired of trying to care for everybody, so I distance [myself].

Leah explained that such dynamics have taken an emotional toll:

> I feel really bad—cause I remember going scrap booking one time, and these people were doing their pages for their grandkids and I'm like, oh god, and they looked at me like I had two heads, because I'm like, I can't do that, I just can't do it.

Overall, a range of grandmothering experiences was apparent. Grandmotherhood could be experienced as a profoundly positive and meaningful transaction. However, some participants had adult children who did not appear ready for parenthood, and as grandmothers, they were called upon as caretakers. These caretaking periods were sometimes followed by challenges, anxiety, and emotional adjustment as participants again seemed to experience impacts on their freedom and autonomy.

7.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored ways in which participants experienced phenomena associated with early adulthood, empty nesting, and young grandmotherhood. Barriers to autonomy during emerging and early adulthood were discussed. These barriers related to themes of adversity, scrutiny, and social processes of conforming to dominant social values, which had complicated some participants' early experiences, or had long-term ripple effects into subsequent areas of their lives. The study's limitations in exploring empty nesting were noted. While some participants experienced only mild impacts of empty nesting, one participant's description of crisis may suggest a need for further research into such phenomena. Social responses towards a young grandmother's identity ranged from judgement to surprise and curiosity. Participants' adjustment to grandmotherhood appeared to

be contingent upon contextual factors, such as the nature of their relationships with their adult children, the parental behaviours of their children, or whether participants had been called upon to assume a high level of care and responsibility for their grandchildren.

Chapter 8. Knowledge from the Margins

8.1 Chapter Overview

The aims of this study included a specific aim to give voice to women who have experienced adolescent motherhood so they could assert their own experiences, needs, interests, and identities. In this chapter, I turn my attention to participants' opinions and perspectives relating to those needs and interests of young mothers across the course of their lives. A commitment to capturing the socially situated perspectives of participants was consistent with this study's feminist standpoint epistemology (Intermann, 2016; Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). As identified and critiqued in previous chapters, there are gaps in current literature regarding the voices of women who have experienced this phenomenon. From a feminist standpoint perspective, the socially situated perspectives of marginalised groups offer epistemic privilege in affording a central position to their meaningful and relevant insight, which may be unobscured by dominant frameworks of understanding (Intermann, 2016; Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). In this sense, it is considered that knowledge from the margins, acquired via participants' expressed lived experiences, can enrich and strengthen current understandings.

8.2 Access, Education, Information, Support, and Being Treated Like Worthy Mothers

In order to explore participants' opinions and perspectives, I listened reflectively to their stories during the interviews. Where particular obstacles were identified in their life journey, I asked probing questions about whether there were any kinds of supports or interventions that may have been of assistance at that time. I also asked participants more generally, about their opinions and perspectives of the needs and interests of young mothers and former teenage mothers, in terms of promoting positive long-term outcomes. Participants made recommendations around the kinds of supports that they felt should be available, most

of which were related to early intervention or intervention during the adolescent period. In this sense, a focus on strengthening the foundation at which young mothers begin building their mothering lives appeared to be particularly important.

Participant opinions, perspectives and recommendations highlighted improved opportunities to access education; opportunities to obtain a driver's licence; targeted support services; access to information; freedom of choice regarding sexual health options; responsive service delivery; addressing stigma and affirming positive young mother identities; recognition regarding issues of confidence/self-esteem; holistic understandings and approaches; informal support networks; and life skills.

8.3 Improved Opportunities to Access Education

Some participants identified a need for improved opportunities around education. Adrienne identified a need for educational support that extends beyond a senior education:

> … on the coast, they have a program for teenage mums so they can finish their education and they offer a free service where they pick the teenage mums up and their babies, and they have free childcare, and I think, that ends, once you finish Year 12, that ends—and so what? Where's that support to continue that? Because, you know there's nothing, absolutely nothing and you know you do need that support to help you.

Similarly, Brandi expressed:

> … [there are] schools for teenage mothers that allow them to bring their kids to school just in order to finish off their schooling, but the problem is, okay they finish off their schooling, they get Year 11 and 12, but then what? There's nothing further than that, and the problem is, in this society, you either need a TAFE trade or you need a uni, or

> you need some kind of piece of paper degree if you are going to get a job, so you know, generally speaking a high school Year 11 and 12, generally speaking doesn't cut it, it might cut it until your 20 and then, while you're on lower wages, but as soon as you hit that 20, 21, now you're on full adult wages, then no they want to get their money's worth out of you.

Adrienne suggested that improved access to education goes hand in hand with more affordable childcare, and commented on the cost of childcare facing young mothers who want to continue their education:

> You have to have childcare—childcare is an absolutely massive expense.

Adrienne also suggested that the costs of daycare for young mothers pursuing further education is something that needs to be addressed, and argued that there is a need for special benefits:

> … perhaps special benefits like free childcare … I have to pay childcare to go to university, and I only get $60 a fortnight to help me go to university, so that doesn't cover the cost of childcare … I think it could be, put young girls off doing it, cause it's just all too hard.

Kelly emphasised the importance of educational support that is responsive to individual needs:

> Education … you know whether they're high school girls that are falling pregnant, just helping assist with daycare and things so they can further their education, yea finding out what—I think you really need to take things on a case-by-case basis, and on what each person needs.

For Leah, whose own educational trajectory was positively influenced by discovering pamphlet for a hair and beauty course, greater awareness about educational opportunities was important. She suggested that such awareness could be raised by leaving visible information where women may access it:

> … programs that could be advertised in the schools where you're gonna take your kids … that this is available for you online.

8.4 Opportunities to Obtain a Licence

A number of participants did not get their licence until well into their twenties or beyond.

Tinsley felt that a lack of transportation was a particular challenge facing young mothers:

> … you rely on somebody else to get you there but then something comes up for them well, what am I going to do now? To get to my appointment or whatever, you know?

Melissa, who did not attain her licence until the age of 26, emphasised a need for specific support in attaining a provisional licence:

> … I think … actually making sure they get the provisional … because I mean if they're anything like me, they're going to find reasons why that's not a priority.

During member checking Melissa further emphasised a need for access to opportunities to obtain a licence for young mothers in terms of freedom, explaining:

> "I do really think drivers' licences is really important for teen mums—it's freedom in a sense."

As outlined in Chapter Four, 15 of the 22 participants spoke of experiencing varying degrees of domestic violence at some point in their lifespan. Shannon discussed having a licence as being a protective factor in terms of safety:

> [Obtaining a driver's licence] was huge … and I think it would be for lots of other people too … especially in domestic violence situations, if people feel like they can actually get in the car and escape and get out—because a lot of people stay because they just don't have any other options, and they can't escape, they have no way of escaping.

Additionally, Vicki drew upon her experience of domestic violence as a young mother and ways in which having her own transport had enhanced her safety, reflecting:

> I had my licence … if I hadn't had that, I would have been in all sorts of trouble … it's vital, it is vital … [without a licence] you're more vulnerable, because if they're the only person that can drive, even if there's a car in the driveway, you can't run, you've gotta get down the road, in the quiet, onto a train or something—at least in a car you can lock the doors and drive off.

Vicki additionally reflected on the need for options that may make car repayments viable:

> … [access to] payments where they you know can do it over a long period of time, so it doesn't make it impossible to live their lives, they've gotta have access to the ability to be independent.

8.5 Targeted Support Services

Tinsley described a need for an association for young mothers, explaining:

> I reckon like a Young Mothers Association or something like that with transport even with counselling services or something like that because I know a lot of the young mothers back then didn't have support, and they were struggling emotionally and mentally.

She also acknowledged housing shortages and discrimination in housing, identifying a subsequent need for additional housing assistance specifically for young mothers:

> Another thing that would be good, just for this area sort of thing, would be housing … a lot of young mums are either living with friends, family, they don't have their independence. You know, just that nobody will give you a look in.

Tinsley's concern extended to the risk of child safety involvement where there are barriers to housing:

> If they get kicked out of their friend's house where are they going to go? The streets. Where's their kid gotta go? Into foster care, you know?

Further, Erika drew upon her own experience of accessing housing commission to escape domestic violence and how such access enabled her to establish a positive life:

> … I think access to housing was the main thing for me, because if I hadn't got that housing commission house, I would never have been able to afford to move to [suburb], and I would never of been able to save for my own home either, so without that housing I would've been screwed.

Camille felt that more support options should be offered to young mothers. Reflecting on support gaps in her own experience, she noted:

> I actually think there should be a little bit more support, even if it’s just support groups, or access to counselling would have been massive for me at that time, but, at no point did anyone ever say to me look, here’s some support groups you know, or counselling or anything, it was just, either have the baby or abort it and get on with your life.

8.6 Access to Information

Sonja, who was subjected to control and emotional abuse during a relationship extending across adolescence and early adulthood, reflected that information about healthy relationships may be particularly important:

> Back then, if I had—as a young mum, more information on, relationships, more information on what is okay and what isn’t okay … instead of the stigma of, “Oh you’re a young mum,” you know, “this is how you should do it.”

She drew upon her own life experience, which included exposure to domestic violence in childhood to illustrate ways in which unhealthy relationship dynamics can become normalised for women who have experienced childhood adversity:

> If you’re brought up that way, they think that’s normal … it’s only from my own self-education that I realise that you know—the way I was brought up with my dad being an alcoholic … mum would always say, don’t tell people you know, we’re normal we’re happy.

Leah, who spent 26 years in a psychologically abusive relationship, suggested that information about healthy relationships should be more widely advertised within the community:

> … sometimes you're not aware that you need help—you know how they have those posters about anxiety now in the back of the toilets? Maybe that type of thing … you could be reading it and your other half isn't actually aware that you're reading it sort of thing.

Gaps in information may extend to information about life after adolescent motherhood. Camille, who was also exposed to messages that her "life was over" as an adolescent mother, identified insufficient access to information about the long-term experiences of women who gave birth as teenagers:

> When I was pregnant with my son I couldn't find anything on the internet. I really wanted to hear about other women who had their kids and still carried on with their lives.

Similarly, Dorinda, who had expressed during interviewing that she had felt stereotyped that her prospects were limited as a young mother, provided the following feedback during member checking:

> Any progress in teaching young mothers that their lives are not over and moving in an exciting and different direction, is important.

8.7 Freedom of Choice Regarding Sexual Health Options

Limited choice regarding sexual health options was apparent in the stories of two participants, who experienced direct pressure to not terminate their pregnancy.

Additionally, it is noted that barriers persist in access to abortion. Kyle, who became a grandmother at the age 34 under particularly challenging circumstances, witnessed her daughter-in-law struggle to locate an abortion for a subsequent pregnancy in recent years. She emphasised gatekeeping by local doctors, explaining:

… when [daughter-in-law] fell pregnant the second time, and she didn't want it, she knew that she didn't want it, we seen three different doctors before one would give us a phone number, they don't have to, if it's against their religion—they don't have to … three different doctors before we could even get that phone number!

She expressed a need to address barriers around abortion:

… maybe even some incentive to tell [young women] that abortion is okay, and then maybe a way to make it cheaper or, or socially acceptable.

However, other participants noted that negative social attitudes around teenage pregnancy may also inversely result in pressure *towards* abortion. Shannon recounted ways in which societal stigma influenced her decision to terminate her second pregnancy during adolescence:

I had an abortion when my eldest son was only four months old … I just didn't want to be the young single mother with two children to two fathers … I just physically did not think at that time that I was strong enough … to fight those attitudes and those stigmas, and that's really, really sad.

She spoke of a sense of injustice around the influence of stigma on a sense of choice:

… I think about it and I think about what that—who that baby might have been … what's not okay, is feeling that I had to do it because of society's perspective.

In this sense, despite contrasting experiences between Kyle and Shannon's stories, both suggest the presence of control over women's bodies and choices.

8.8 Responsive Service Delivery

Some participants suggested factors for service providers to be mindful of when catering to the needs of young mothers. Erika reflected on a sense of fear of services that can act as a barrier to service engagement:

> If I didn't have enough money for rent or a power bill or something like that, there was no way I would ask for help, like because I didn't want them to think I couldn't afford to have my kids, and take them off me because I couldn't afford maybe to feed them properly or they would judge me on that or yea, so I would never ask for help or, cause I would think they'd try to take my girls away from me.

She suggested a reassuring approach to service delivery may assist with such anxieties:

> … reassuring them that there's not going to be a repercussion for them, you know maybe you're feeling a bit post-natal depression that day or, a bit down, or a bit upset, or you know like struggling with you know, food or bills or you know and having that safe environment to discuss that. Without feeling threatened.

Erika further suggested that services should be responsive to issues of transport:

> I think too, because a lot of teenage mums don't have their licence it would be a lot easier to go into the home … I just think it makes it more casual not so you know under the spotlight or you know, feel like you're being questioned.

Carrol suggested the importance of being responsive to each individual and reflective of current times, explaining:

You can't treat everybody the same and the way they would have been treated 20 years ago, you have to be in this era.

She felt that this could involve utilising technology:

The way we are now with all this technology, there's so much available to the young girls out there, is maybe they can develop an app for young girls, so that they've got somewhere to go to, or even groups on Facebook or whatever where they can send questions in … I mean non-judgmental you know, protected so that nobody can say anything nasty to them because I think if you go into normal mums' groups … it's not protected enough.

Being responsive may also include being receptive to issues of timing. Kameron reflected on her self-esteem issues, which persisted through adolescence and into adulthood:

… I was really good at seeking out supports for, like talking to therapists and stuff, but I wasn't ready to listen … I just wasn't ready to hear anything.

She highlighted the need for mindfulness of issues relating to timing, interest, and readiness to engage:

… how do you make someone who doesn't want to listen open to listening? … that's only something that I've only learned in the last three months; you actually have to want it for yourself.

8.9 Addressing Stigma and Affirming Positive Young Mother Identities

Some participants discussed stigma as an area that requires social change. Vicki emphasised the potential of stigma to limit the prospects of young mothers, explaining:

> There's studies been done and that, if you expect a child to be a certain way and treat them as if they already are they tend to become what the expectation is … [so] give [young mothers] the idea—not the expectation as in pressure, but the idea that you are going to continue on and have a wonderful career and in the future marry a wonderful man, or woman, and have a wonderful life … instead of, "Oh you ruined your life now, it's all over."

As discussed within Chapter Five, Vicki spoke of the discriminatory treatment she received at the hands of the doctor assisting the birth, and reflected on ways in which non-stigmatising approaches would have changed the experience:

> If I had people around me going "Oh, you're a *supermum*, it's a beautiful baby," and you know, it would have been better, so it is a lot to do with the words people use, and the way they act.

As one of several participants who felt that single motherhood is a particularly compounding stigma factor, Vicki reiterated the need to replace narratives that perpetuate the devaluation of young, single mothers with empowering language in a healthcare setting:

> If a single mother walks into a doctor's office and says look I'm worried about— "Oh look you're a supermum," you know, change, flick it the other way around … put *value* at single mum, its "You're a *supermum*, look at you go!"

For Melissa, addressing stigma includes a non-stigmatising approach to knowledge production, including in this study. In terms of an aversion to engaging in research that perpetuates negative discourses, she noted:

> … for me just as long as [this study is] going to be aimed towards sort of encouraging more positive—I supposed you'd say discourse around teen parents, I wouldn't want

to be participating in something that adds to the stigma—cause for me that's the biggest issue … it's something that does have to change.

Kelly emphasised a need for more uplifting attitudes towards young mothers in general:

> Unfortunately, I do think people still make a lot of judgements on young mums, on the reasonings for conception to their ability, it's so unfair, you know I just think you know, as women we just need to build each other up.

8.10 Recognition Regarding Issues of Confidence

As noted, a number of participants in this study reflected on issues of confidence at various points in their lifespan.

Yolanda, who struggled during adolescence with issues of confidence and body autonomy, felt that confidence issues may be integral in understanding the occurrence of pregnancy:

> … [people need to] stop pulling the wool over your eyes … you know like, if it happens really early … the reason it happens early is that—self-confidence.

She critiqued social assumptions around adolescent pregnancy that may overshadow current understandings:

> … [people assume] you just want babies so that you can you know, not have to work and you can get payments and all this stuff … and you think no, no, none of those things are relevant actually.

Yolanda further proposed that without addressing issues of confidence, sex education by itself is not the answer:

> … they think teaching people about sex education—that's not gonna help … teach young girls their worth—and boys.

Similarly, Adrienne's story reflected themes of lacking confidence and body autonomy in adolescence. She discussed a link between teenage pregnancy and confidence, proposing that confidence can be a direct barrier to accessing contraception:

> … just with the self-confidence thing, for me, like I mean I had a couple of girlfriends who were sexually active before me, but they were confident enough to actually go and get contraception, they didn't care they were happy to talk about sex, but for me, I didn't have the confidence to talk about a subject that was so taboo in my family.

Adrienne also felt that social assumptions might detract from more meaningful understandings:

> … there's a stigma that pregnant girls are you know just loose girls that just sleep with everybody they end up pregnant because they want Centrelink benefits, I've heard that so many times … and look I've seen a lot of girls that got pregnant soon afterwards as well, and I think [confidence is] the reason why we don't perhaps seek help to get contraception or family planning.

Adrienne further reflected that, in retrospect, support with confidence may have been beneficial in terms of her long-term relationship trajectory:

> … I can look back now and I can see everything very clearly you know, but when I was young I wish I had of had that, some support to help boost my confidence and help me I guess, be a little bit more wiser in my relationship decisions if that makes sense.

For Vicki, who struggled with confidence across her lifespan, confidence may be key in facilitating social inclusion in terms of employment for women who were teenage mothers:

> … getting back in the workforce would be easier if they had some self-esteem.

She reflected on the cumulative impacts that circumstances or stigma can have on women's self-esteem:

> … it doesn't even have to be the man or the situation that damages self-esteem, [it can be] society in general.

Vicki also felt that addressing self-esteem from a broader societal level, would include relating to young mothers as worthy members of society. In this sense, challenging stigma and addressing issues of confidence can go hand in hand:

> [Instead of] like, "Ooh she's a single mum" … she was the one that was running around you know, if they could over that—some sort of acknowledgement that they're a worthwhile human being, that actually makes them a *superhuman* being, not a tainted thing that should be swept under the carpet.

8.11 Holistic Understandings and Early Intervention Approaches

For Brandi, whose story captured themes of intergenerational teenage pregnancy that ran parallel with themes of intergenerational trauma, generating holistic understandings around this topic was emphasised as particularly important:

> … there is quite a lot of studies out there … but what's really not understood is where it comes from and how systemic it is and you know, how it all intertwines … you can't just look at one aspect of it.

Adrienne emphasised the importance of offering support to young mothers in order to avoid cycles of disadvantage:

> I've seen plenty of you know mums that didn't have my situation—my support … like their lives are completely different and it's like if you can break that cycle, you're breaking that for generations to come … I think that it's so overlooked.

For Denise, a holistic approach to support begins with promoting positive conditions for children in terms of early intervention:

> … it all comes down to your background as well. If you've come from an environment where mum stays at home and gets treated like shit, to you that's the norm, but that's sort of all you know … its almost from like—an early intervention really.

For Yolanda, who felt that confidence was key in preventing teenage pregnancy, early intervention should include building confidence in children from a primary school level:

> … if you wait till high school, the problems are already there … [I work with] you know girls who are in Grade 6 or Grade 5, who think they're fat, that don't think they're good enough, and trying to dress like either in big baggy clothes because they hate their bodies—or they'll go the other way and learn to be provocative, which is exactly what they're trained to do by society … you just think oh dear, that's not going to end well.

8.12 Informal Support Networks

Informal support networks such as friends, family, and workplaces were referred to frequently throughout interviews as factors that assisted participants in overcoming barriers

and obstacles across their lifespan. It may be hardly surprising then, that some participants' opinions and recommendations highlighted the importance of promoting natural support systems.

For Dorinda, parental support was particularly pivotal in achieving goals across her lifespan:

> … that emotional support person, that backup person, that backup parent. That, that would be the biggest key. Cause there's a lot—I wouldn't have been able to have the life that I've had without my mum and dad.

For Theresa, receiving positive messages from within her family helped her reject social labels:

> … [stepfather] for one, taught us very much to be independent … you know don't let anyone put you into that category of the—the single mother kind of thing and I was so determined to not do that … to not be defined by the fact that I was a single parent, the fact that I was a teenage parent.

Theresa reflected on the value of receiving such encouragement:

> … you can do anything—I think that's really important for me is being told I can do anything I want to.

Bronwyn referred to the importance of a strong social support network of family and friends:

> … social back up, [that] they're not alone you know, the usual things people say, you're not alone and, that's what I think—that was what made the difference for me

> anyway … strong family support and people around my age going through the same thing.

For Erika, friendship has been a particularly valuable source of support across her lifespan. She emphasised the importance of genuine friendships that promote personal growth:

> I think it's important to find that person too that's not just going to tell you what you want to hear all the time, when you are fucking up they're going to go "You're fucking up," you know? And you've gotta be able to accept and hear that as well.

Gretchen also emphasised the importance of friendships. Following social isolation and trauma during adolescence, Gretchen had been introduced to another young mum while living in a domestic violence shelter. This introduction resulted in the development of a meaningful friendship. In contrast to many struggles that she experienced at that time, Gretchen reminisced on a sense of joy this friendship afforded:

> … you've gotta have that [enjoyment] … and you've gotta have friends.

8.13 Life Skills

Some participants indicated that life skills are an area that tends to be overlooked yet may be important for teenage mums. Kyle expressed that gendered assumptions include notions that life skills naturally occur in young women:

> … they reckon it's something that's inbuilt in you—it's not, like, not all women know how to change a nappy or fix the bottle.

Similarly, Erika expressed:

> … life skills! … everybody thinks because you've got a vagina you know how to cook—it doesn't work like that!

Bethenny felt that offering skills for young mothers is especially important in light of gaps within the educational curricula:

> … even, like to learn how to make basic snacks for your kids and stuff like that, there's no one—I don't think, I don't think there's much like that. … even in school there's not life skills.

Erika felt that the delivery of meal preparation skills could provide opportunities for service engagement:

> … I just think that cooking time too is a lot—you don't feel as scrutinised … you can have a conversation around making a meal and having something to eat, is a lot more relaxing than maybe sitting across from, like this with a social worker and you've got a baby you know—you're making a meal together, and showing you how to put a recipe together, is a lot more casual feeling.

Carrol considered that delivering meal preparation skills may result in added mental health benefits:

> … that mental health thing—if they're on a bad diet or they're drinking alcohol would be one thing, but even if they're having sugary drinks, if they're eating takeaway and fast food and not knowing how to cook, that's a huge thing.

She further suggested incorporating self-care skills in promoting mental health:

> … mental health sometimes can come down to what they're eating, and what they're putting into their mind and what they're feeding their mind everyday … if they start

> listening to empowering people, listening to meditations, even if they spend 10 minutes a day in the morning, 10 minutes a day at nighttime.

Kyle suggested offering life skills during pregnancy and felt that providing some practical incentives may break down any apprehension that young mothers may feel about attending:

> I don't know if you ever watch the show, the midwives, it's an old British show anyway … they taught [mothers] about how to wash and bathe and fold nappies, and dress your baby, how to make a bottle how to do all the—all that was done before they were born, I think something like that—not that all the girls would, but if they gave them an incentive to go, to do it, say they get a voucher for money off a cot or something like that I think a lot of them would because it's just teaching them the basics.

In addition, Dorinda reflected that formal assistance with financial literacy would have been helpful for her and may be of benefit to others:

> … I reckon finance support would have been—like, more financial literacy would have been helpful … like when I was asking for housing support … probably then would've been a great time, to provide some financial literacy … you know like, learning how to manage budgets.

8.14 Chapter Summary

In line with the aims and epistemological underpinnings of this study, this chapter turned its attention to the voices of research participants. Participants made recommendations regarding the needs and interests of this social group, many of which related to the need for early intervention or support during the adolescent period. Such emphasis may suggest

particular importance in strengthening the foundation at which young mothers commence their lifespan journey. Specifically, suggestions included a need for improved opportunities around education that extend beyond senior levels of high school, affordable childcare, a responsiveness to mothers' individual needs, and promotion of support to address individual concerns. A need for greater assistance to obtain a driver's licence was discussed, and licencing was suggested as a protective factor regarding domestic violence issues. Recommendations for targeted support services were made, including establishing a Young Mothers Association and access to support services such as housing. A need for improved access to information regarding healthy relationships and life after adolescent motherhood, and the importance of choice regarding sexual health options that are free of overt or covert societal pressures was emphasised. Stigma was identified as an area that requires change, and practical suggestions were made around addressing stigma and affirming positive teenage mother identities. Suggestions of greater recognition regarding issues of confidence that may precede teenage pregnancy, or impact on social participation were also outlined. Holistic understandings and approaches to teenage pregnancy and early intervention were suggested, and the importance of informal support networks such as friends and family were emphasised. Finally, life skills such as meal preparation, self-care, parenting, and financial skills were raised as suggestions.

Chapter 9. Discussion

9.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I present key findings within the context of extant literature, and highlight contributions of this study towards understanding lived experiences of teenage mothers across their lives. As noted, in line with the constructivist orientation of this study, my interpretations are conceptualised as a co-production of reality between myself and participants, rather than the presentation of universal truths (Charmaz, 2006; Leavy & Harris, 2019). Further, a constructivist, feminist approach entailed a critique of taken-for-granted meanings and assumptions embedded within dominant understandings, in ways that allowed for the prioritisation of participants' socially situated perspectives (Charmaz, 2017; Plummer and Young, 2010). A feminist approach influenced my attunement to social power dynamics and areas of social oppression within participants' lives (Levitt, 2021). Therefore, participants' common experiences of gender-based violence and social experiences of stigma were of particular concern, and are brought to the fore within my discussion.

Eight key findings are presented in this chapter. For the sake of clarity, the presentation of these findings primarily reflects the sequence of content presented across findings chapters—although some elements of overlap were necessary in order to integrate various concepts. In the early pages of this chapter, I discuss participants' autobiographical descriptions as outlined in Chapter Four. Contrasts between participants' subjective identities and dominant negative representations of young motherhood (Ellis-Sloan, 2019) are presented as the first key finding. Specifically, participants' descriptions of their lives and mothering roles varied significantly from problematising discourses evident in some literature and social settings (Ellis-Sloan, 2022; Jones et al., 2019; Slater, 2018). Predominately, positive mothering identities and aspirational life plans, struggles, and outcomes were significant emerging findings.

I then revisit patterns of adversity, scrutiny, and resilience, which were the focus of Chapter Five. Broader social issues inherent with such patterns are recognised, from which the second key finding is presented relating to a prevalence of gender-based violence. The third key finding is presented relating to a pervasive social stigma that could follow participants across their lives, and the fourth key finding is presented relating to resiliency which could be impacted by stigma. I revisit interrelations between social scrutiny and participants' lives outlined in Chapter Six. Dominant social values are outlined as a powerful, controlling, and regrettable influence. Processes of conforming to dominant social values are presented as the fifth key finding, and theoretical explanations pertaining to such phenomena are conceptualised. Further, I return to the findings around life stages, mothering milestones, and life constraints outlined in Chapter Seven. This area of my discussion illuminates the impact and ripple effects of adversity and scrutiny themes on the lives of teenage mothers. Three additional findings are presented, relating to a sense of autonomy within early adulthood as contingent upon a range of contextual factors; lengthy periods of children within the nest; and a sense of social surprise linked to a young grandmothering identity. Finally, I locate participant recommendations presented in Chapter Eight within the context of current policy and practice directions.

9.2 Contrasts Between Participants' Subjective Identities and Dominant Social Constructs

Top-down, negative representations of early family formation are embedded within dominant understandings (Ellis-Sloan, 2019). Minimal recourse was supported for women who were teenage mothers, due to the power of the discourse. For example, there were limited qualitative, retrospective studies found that explored the experiences of former teenage mothers. From a feminist standpoint perspective, knowledge production which excludes the lived realities and vantage points of marginalised groups can result in

incomplete, and biased knowledge production which serves the interests of the status quo (Harding, 1991; Intermann, 2016; Smith, 1991).

In this study, operating in ways that were congruent with a feminist standpoint approach entailed honouring participants' personal reflections, which were interwoven throughout their autobiographical descriptions. The nuanced and varied mothering experiences described by participants contrasted significantly with dominant social constructs. Many participants reflected that they had been labelled as being incapable of adequately parenting, or were told that their lives were over during their adolescent pregnancy. Contrary to such assumptions, participants' retrospective reflections included numerous examples of accomplishment within the mothering role, and personal achievements across their lives. Further, many challenged negative social constructs about teenage mothers by questioning the dominant problematisation of adolescent motherhood, describing unique benefits of early family formation, or emphasising young motherhood as a valued and meaningful decision in their lives. Participants' predominately positive mothering identities and life outcomes emerged as a key finding from this study.

The findings are consistent with a limited body of knowledge that has noted discrepancies between social assumptions and the retrospective accounts of former teenage mothers. Specifically, Hirst, Formby, and Owen's (2006) biographical study into intergenerational adolescent parenthood highlighted that some participants perceived benefits to early family formation. These benefits related to a sense of closeness in relationships with children and grandchildren due to smaller age gaps (Hirst et al., 2006). Further, Bowman's (2013) exploration of lived experiences amongst adolescent mothers who had reached their emerging adult years noted that participants described positive mothering experiences and outcomes. Bowman (2013) drew attention to how such findings appeared to be at odds with

dominant conceptualisations of young motherhood as a negative experience. The findings from this study support those earlier findings.

More recently, Ellis-Sloan (2022) reported on research relating to the educational pathways amongst former teenage mothers over the age of 30. All women interviewed in that study had completed higher education and entered employment. Such outcomes were at odds with discourses which imply that teenage motherhood inevitably would lead to educational failure (Ellis-Sloan, 2022). With similarities to the findings presented here, Ellis-Sloan, (2022) noted that the women expressed pride within their mothering roles, and joy associated with their children, which sat alongside their sense of overall achievement in ways that indicate an importance to appreciate young mothers' own values and sense of meaning.

Overall, contributions of my findings join a body of knowledge that has sought to illuminate the voices of former teenage mothers in defining their own lives and mothering identities. The identification of contrasts between participants' identities and dominant social constructions may contribute towards challenging negative discourses, which can undermine young mothers' sense of self, self-confidence, social identities, and social inclusion (Conn et al., 2018; SmithBattle, 2020). Further, insights generated from this study may be a useful source of information for teenage mothers at the commencement of their mothering journeys. As articulated by participants such as Dorinda, "any progress in teaching young mothers that their lives are not over, and moving in an exciting and different direction is important." In this sense, consistent with feminist standpoint intentions, insights generated from this study can serve as "knowledge created by women for women" for emancipatory purposes (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019, p. 4).

Yet, a distinctive feature of these findings is that many participants were profoundly impacted by the stigma of teenage motherhood that for some endured across their lives.

9.3 A Prevalence of Men's Violence Against Women

Categories relating to adversity, scrutiny, and resilience were prominent across the data, as well as across multiple tiers of participants' lifespan. Thus, it appeared that understanding areas of disadvantage and oppression that many participants needed to navigate across the lifespan was central in conceptualising the lived experiences of participants. Adversity as a category of analysis revealed examples of significant disadvantage faced by participants at various stages within their lives. Some of such examples related to childhood adversity, which is widely recognised within the literature, as discussed in Chapter Two to be correlated with adolescent pregnancy (AIHW, 2018a; Mann et al., 2020; Martínez et al., 2017).

Further examples of adversity related to power imbalances in intimate relationships, which appeared to be indicative of a prevalence of men's violence against women. Gender-based violence is a major human rights issue facing women worldwide, which inhibits the ability of women to enjoy their fundamental freedoms (AHRC, 2014). Violence against women has been defined by the United Nations (1993, p. 2) is "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." UNICEF (2022) note that violence against women occurs within the context of "socially ascribed power imbalances between males and females," with women having less power over their decisions, bodies and resources than men in all societies. Examples of violence against women can include domestic violence, sexual violence, and social norms which condone acts of violence or control against women (UNICEF, 2022; World Health Organisation, 2022). For some of these mothers, already discriminated against due to their teenage mother status, the ways in which men's violence against women was apparent within the data related to age imbalances within some

relationships (participants who had been under the age of consent when entering long-term relationships with their babies fathers); limited family support, childhood adversity, a high prevalence of domestic violence in the family of origin; childhood abuse and social norms and expectations regarding young mothers' relationship status which could increase their vulnerability to abuse.

Age imbalances within intimate relationships were apparent in that two participants had been under the age of legal consent when they had commenced long-term relationships with the prospective fathers of their first-born children. While it is typically assumed that teenage motherhood is the result of sexual relationships between same-aged peers, information regarding age ranges of fathers of children born to young mothers is minimal (Brown et al., 2011; Larson et al., 1996; Males & Chew, 1996). I was unable to locate any recent Australian studies pertaining to paternal age ranges with which to compare findings. Older, international research indicates that age discrepancies are not uncommon in teenage mothers. For example, Taylor, Chavez, Adams, Chabra, and Shah (1999) undertook a population-based cohort analysis of 12,317 of school-aged adolescent mothers in California. They compared the ages of mothers with paternal age through the application of multivariate logistic regression. Their study found that adult males had fathered 26.7% of babies born within their study. Further, a report authored by the Department for Children Schools and Families (2007) in Britain, noted that from demographic data available it appeared that only ¼ of fathers born to teenage mothers had been under 20. Challenges to capturing a complete picture of the age profile of fathers was noted in that such details are not always included in birth registrations (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2007).

Findings relating to age discrepancies may give traction to concerns voiced by various authors, such as Brown, Brady, and Letherby (2011) and Males and Chew (1996). These authors have argued that knowledge gaps around the ages fathers of children born to

adolescent mothers may conceal deeper issues regarding power dimensions. Age disparities within adolescent relationships can be problematic due to increased risks of exploitation, victimisation, and abuse (Brown et al., 2011; Wood & Barter, 2015). A particularly obvious form of exploitation that emerged from the data relates to relationships which commenced with older adolescent males while participants were below the age of legal consent. Age consent laws prohibit young people who are under the age of 16 from sexual activities with older individuals (AIFS, 2022a). Such laws are intended to protect children and young people from exploitation and to uphold their rights to healthy sexual development (AIFS, 2022a).

Adolescent mothers may be especially vulnerable to issues of exploitation. For example, Brown, Brady, and Letherby's (2011) qualitative findings research with young mothers which indicated that for some young women, sexual coercion and non-consensual sex were factors that were experienced in the lead up to their pregnancies. Wood and Barter (2015, p. 562) noted that prior experiences of adversity may heighten the risks of sexual exploitation, as "the link between emotional dependence and sexual violence may be particularly accentuated for those from disadvantaged and isolated backgrounds, who can have few other opportunities to gain self-esteem." In addition to vulnerability around sexual exploitation, Brown, Brady, and Letherby (2011) noted that young women who are in relationships with older men are at increased statistical likelihood be victims of domestic violence.

Domestic violence experiences during adolescence were described by 11 participants. These findings appear to be consistent with literature outlining domestic violence as a social issue that is disproportionately experienced by teenage mothers (Dhunna et al., 2021; Langley, 2017; Mann et al., 2020). Twelve participants also described entering relationships characterised by intimate partner violence during various phases of adulthood. For some participants, such relationships represented patterns of revictimisation in that they

experienced intimate partner violence during adolescence. Such findings are substantial and were less expected, as continued risks of violence into the lifespan amongst teenage mothers does not appear to be a phenomenon specifically addressed in the literature.

Overall, accounts of intimate partner violence, such as physical violence, threats, coercion, intimidation, emotional abuse, or isolation were described by 15 of the 22 participants. Combined, such accounts represented 68% of the sample. By contrast, domestic violence is estimated to have been experienced by approximately 23% of Australian women (AIHW, 2021). In this sense, participant accounts of domestic violence across their lifespan appeared to be particularly marked.

Literature suggests that macro factors, including gendered inequalities around political and economic status, can render women particularly susceptible to abuse (Coercive Control Collective, 2018; Eaton Noori et al., 2020). Correspondingly, as discussed within Chapter Six, for some women in this study aspects of the social environment, particularly those which related to intersecting stigmas of young and single motherhood had heightened their vulnerability to violence. Intersecting stigmas- which will be elaborated upon later in this chapter, could influence decisions to marry or to remain within unsafe relationships. Examples provided by participants included covert societal pressure, such as social or familial approval and support being contingent upon relationship status. Overt familial pressures were also described by some participants, who had talked about direct parental pressure to marry after their pregnancies were revealed. Some such participants described how they went on to experience abuse and violence within these relationships.

Observations of intersecting stigmas which heightened risks of domestic violence are consistent with phenomena identified by Wood and Barter (2015). Specifically, Wood and Barter (2015) conducted qualitative interviews with 16 adolescent mothers in the United Kingdom as part of a broader study about intimate partner violence experienced by

disadvantaged young people. They noted the existence of double stigmas around being a teenage mother and a single mother. Subsequently, young mothers could attempt to protect their reputations by staying in relationships characterised by intimate partner violence to avoid labels of promiscuity or to appease social norms (Wood & Barter, 2015).

Brown, Brady, and Letherby (2011) have also critiqued intersecting stigmas of young single motherhood as having the potential to compound issues of violence, as social attitudes may influence an overall systematic lack of response to dynamics of abuse (Brown et al., 2011). As articulated by Brown, Brady and Letherby, (2011, p. 356):

> … experiences of violence take place in a context where being 'young' and pregnant/a 'mother' is considered by some to be socially, politically and morally problematic. Thus, the policy and professional focus in more often than not on their perceived 'problematic' status rather than on the power differentials they experience within their relationships with others.

Correspondingly, a narrow focus on young mothers' problematic social status appears to be reflected within academic literature, which has overlooked cumulative structural components of domestic violence as a potential impetus underpinning poorer outcomes of children born to teenage mothers. As noted, children born to teenage mothers can experience a range of inequalities, inclusive of poorer cognitive and behavioural outcomes (AIHW, 2018a; Lee et al., 2016; Shaw et al., 2006). In conceptualising adverse outcomes, there appears to be a tendency within existing literature to overlook broader social, structural, and systemic discrimination and intersecting stigma, such as widespread inequalities, in favour of individualistic explanations which centre around young mothers themselves (Breheny & Stephens, 2007; Furstenburg, 2016; Sheeran et al., 2018). A review of available literature further reveals that individualistic explanations tend to be highly gendered, focusing on

maternal characteristics such as perceived deficits within young mothers' maturity or mothering skills (Firk et al., 2018; Guttentag et al., 2014; Gyesaw & Ankomah, 2013; Petersen & Crockett, 2017). Cumulative impacts of high rates of domestic violence do not appear to have been specifically considered as a factor in literature, which may perpetuate inequalities of children born to teenage mothers.

This study's participants described the cumulative and intergenerational impacts of domestic violence. As noted in Chapter Five, some women grappled with mental health or behavioural impacts that exposure to domestic violence has had on their children. Participants' observations of their children's exposure to domestic violence are consistent with research which suggests that such exposure can cause harm to children psychologically, emotionally, socially, and physically (Heward-Belle, 2017; Katz et al., 2020; Lloyd, 2018). Trauma experienced due to exposure to family violence can manifest in a variety of ways for children, including disruptive classroom behaviours and barriers to learning (Lloyd, 2018).

9.4 Pervasive Social Stigma and Scrutiny Which can Follow Participants Across Their Lifespan

Findings revealed ways in which 20 participants had felt scrutinised or stigmatised due to their age at becoming mothers during at least one point in their lives; the impacts of which will be revisited later in this chapter. Such experiences were particularly concentrated within adolescence and emerging adulthood. Patterns of social scrutiny included reflections of feeling stereotyped as an incapable parent due to age. This scrutiny included social assumptions that their lives and prospects were over as described by 10 participants, or that they would become welfare dependent, as described by 13 participants. Judgement and discrimination linked to relationship status was also described by 13 participants.

Exposure to negative societal assumptions as expressed by participants within this study have been identified by various authors as a prevalent feature of young mothers' lives

(Mass Alliance on Teen Pregnancy, 2017; Neill-Weston & Morgan, 2017; SmithBattle, 2013; Wood & Barter, 2015). Participants' experiences of feeling stereotyped as incapable parents are consistent with findings from Conn, de Fegueriredo, Sherer, and Mankerian's (2018) qualitative research into experiences of stigma and discrimination experienced by young parents. A range of dominant discourses may perpetuate assumptions that undermine young mothers' parenting abilities. Such discourses are embedded within influential sources such as media and research publications (Breheny & Stephens, 2010; Slater, 2018; Wilson & Huntington, 2006). For example, Breheny and Stephens (2010) applied a critical constructivist approach to explore representations of adolescent mothers in academic literature. They identified several scientific discourses that perpetuate notions of deviancy (Breheny & Stephens 2010). One of such discourses, named a 'naturalist discourse,' appears to be particularly relevant in conceptualising limiting social messages described by participants within this study. Naturalist discourses construct adolescent reproduction and mothering as being deficient in terms of human biology (Breheny & Stephens, 2010). Young mothers are described through language that implies they lack essential age-related components for adequate parenting. Essentially, they are portrayed as "having physical development in excess of their intellectual capacity" (Breheny & Stephens 2010, p. 78).

In addition, participant recollections of being told that their lives and prospects were over upon motherhood, or of feeling stereotyped as welfare dependent are also reflective of Conn, de Fegueriredo, Sherer, and Mankerian's (2018) qualitative research with young mothers. Equally, Breheny and Stephens (2010) argued that reduced social expectations may be understood in terms of the presence of 'economic discourses' which are detectable within academic literature. Such discourses portray early childbearing as a burden on society such as a burden on the welfare system, and a cause of economic decay within society, which comes at an additional personal and financial cost to young mothers themselves. Within such

discourses, social inequalities experienced by young mothers are conceptualised as stemming from early motherhood in ways that overlook broader social issues (Breheny & Stephens 2010). Yet as discussed, notions that adolescent motherhood causes disadvantage are highly contentious, with factors such as pre-existing disadvantage integral in understanding poorer economic outcomes (Conn et al., 2018; Furstenburg, 2016; Gunes, 2016; Mollborn, 2017; SmithBattle & Leonard, 2012).

Participant experiences of judgement and discrimination linked to relationship status appear to reflect literature which suggests that teenage mothers who are also single can face multiple layers of stigma (Brown et al., 2011; SmithBattle, 2020). Intersectionality may be one concept for understanding societal scrutiny regarding teenage mothers' sexual or relationship patterns (Slater, 2018). An intersectionality perspective can be broadly understood as relating to ways in which characteristics that attract discrimination (e.g., race, sexuality, gender, ability, or age) can intersect, resulting in multiplicative sites of oppression (Moradi, 2017; Slater, 2018).

As discussed in Chapter Two, Slater (2018) argued that intersecting layers of identity related to age and marital status are pertinent in understanding how adolescent mothers are socially constructed. In a discourse analysis around the representation of single parents in United Kingdom media, Slater (2018) uncovered ways in which teenage motherhood is constructed as being synonymous with single motherhood in popular media portrayals. Mechanisms through which teenage motherhood has been portrayed to equal single motherhood include repetitive references to youth when discussing single mothers. Further, elements of social vilification are evident in the portrayal of single teenage mothers, with various media articles disparagingly implying that this social group is economically motivated to fall pregnant to meet criteria for welfare payments (Slater, 2018).

While a pervasive social stigma was discussed to have been particularly concentrated in participants' adolescence or emerging adulthood, six participants experienced elements of stigma later in their lives. Such accounts were varied and included sensing exclusion or differential treatment within their children's school environments; lowered social expectations for their adolescent or adult children; a heightened sense of age-related judgment or blame where children had not conformed to social ideals; and uncomfortable social comments or questions when disclosing their former teenage mother status, which could include assumptions of prior promiscuity.

While experiences of social scrutiny within adolescence may be understood within the context of a large body of literature which recognises ways in which teenage mothers can be stereotyped and stigmatised within society (AHRC, 2017; Ellis-Sloan, 2014; Jones et al., 2019; SmithBattle, 2020), experiences of stigma beyond adolescence have gained limited academic recognition. Of existing literature, examples of enduring social stigma experienced by former teenage mothers are consistent with findings reported here. Specifically, it was discussed that in their biographical study into experiences associated with intergenerational adolescent parenthood, Hirst, Formby, and Owen (2006) identified elements of societal judgment in some of the former teenage mothers' accounts, with one of the women having felt ongoing judgement within her children's school environment and others noting reluctance to disclose their status as former teenage mothers at work due to fear of judgment.

My research identified unique aspects of enduring stigma, including ways in which some participants described persistent lower social expectations for their adolescent or adult children, and a heightened sense of maternal blame regarding their children's conduct. Examples of lower social expectations for children provided included Camille's observation that stigma "filters down to children" in terms of there being social surprise that her adult son was functioning well in life rather than being "somewhere on drugs." Examples of heightened

maternal blame included Shannon's account of feeling "heavy judgement" regarding her adolescent son's behaviour, in ways that were linked to her former status as a single, teenage mother.

Labels pertaining to naturalist discourses as described above may have some bearing in understanding accounts of enduring, intersecting, and intergenerational stigma pertaining to children's outcomes. As noted, naturalist discourses embedded within academic literature have implied that young mothers are lacking in physical or intellectual capacities to raise children adequately (Breheny & Stephens 2010). Breheny and Stephens (2010, p. 76) add that such discourses imply adolescent mothers "produce poor quality offspring," with the family unit considered to be an inferior site of reproduction that produces inequality. In this sense, negative assumptions or blame may be an extension of naturalist assumptions that regard children as destined to fail due to poor maternal quality.

Another unique aspect of enduring stigma identified within my research relates to ways in which some participants described a sense of social judgment regarding their past reproductive patterns within certain contexts. Examples provided included that Tinsley recalled that upon recently disclosing her former teenage mother status at work, a colleague had stated, "you must've been a bit of a slut back in your day." A re-emergence of labels relating to promiscuity may underscore how embedded intersecting stigmas of young single motherhood may be within the social imagination.

Goffman's (1963) seminal book, entitled *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, may help to shed light on the influence and damage of social labels in influencing participants' social interactions. Goffman described stigma to relate "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (Goffman, 1963, p. 30). Stigmatised individuals are subsequently viewed through a lens in which stigmatising attributes skew the ways in which they are perceived (Goffman, 1963). Unfavourable perceptions can influence how others interact with

stigmatised persons, thus interrupting personal and social relationships (Goffman, 1963). In such respect, participants' labels as young mothers may thus be understood as a defining feature through which they can be viewed within certain contexts, to the detriment of social interactions.

Enduring stigma is a phenomenon that has been recognised to be experienced by members of various social groups (Ashford et al., 2019; Sheppard & Ricciardelli, 2020; Shi et al., 2022). For example, according to Shi, Silver, and Hickert (2022), social stigma can result in individuals who return from prison wearing 'sticky' labels relating to deviancy or immorality, which can attract unfavourable responses. Ashford, Brown, McDaniel, and Curtis (2019) similarly note that labelling is an issue facing those in recovery from addiction, with labels of addict and substance abuser continuing to elicit stigma within social settings. While those studies are unrelated to the focus of this study, elements of 'sticky' or enduring stigma as described by some participants may be understood within the context of stigma as being a marker of difference, which can continue to attract unfavourable responses well into people's adult lives.

9.5 Stigma Impacting Resilience

Participants were not passive to challenges of adversity or scrutiny within their lives. Rather, patterns of resilience were noted as particularly evident in how many harnessed individual intrinsic strengths, or utilised various informal or formal support systems. Specifically, eight participants described self-protective measures, such as gravitating towards safety or rejecting stigmatising social messages in adolescence. Further, nine participants described that they had utilised friendship as a source of support, 14 participants described that they had utilised family as a source of support; and 10 participants described that they had utilised formal support systems to overcome various challenges within their lives.

Findings related to self-protective measures of stigma rejection during adolescence included some accounts of participants who described questioning the validity of stigmatising social messages, or choosing to not let hurtful societal assumptions that their lives were over deter them from their goals and aspirations. Such findings are reflective of Conn, de Fegueriredo, Sherer, and Mankerian's (2018) qualitative research with young mothers, which identified that young mothers could utilise counterbalancing approaches as a buffer from adverse emotional consequences of social stigma. Counterbalancing approaches included maintaining a positive identity, and expressing pride and gratitude regarding their mothering roles (Conn et al., 2018).

Findings related to ways in which participants utilised informal support systems which included friends and family are consistent with qualitative understandings of circumstances that may be associated with resilience. Specifically, in their qualitative research into the educational pathways of former teenage mothers, Ellis-Sloan (2022) identified ways in which family support could be vital in terms of attaining educational goals. Further, Hirst, Formby, and Owen's (2006) biographical study pertaining to intergenerational young parenthood noted the importance of informal support and friendship. Regarding former teenage mothers in this study, all of the women interviewed identified at least one positive, impactful friendship. Additional supports that were identified by participants within this study related to formal support systems. Some participants identified formal supports related to domestic violence services, housing services, and counselling services as being influential in overcoming obstacles within their lives.

Despite significant strengths demonstrated by participants, resiliency could be impacted by experiences of stigma for some participants. In particular, six participants described that concerns of judgement within peer networks had negatively impacted their abilities to connect with other mothers, five participants indicated ways in which judgment or

rejection within family networks impaired family support, five participants described avoidance of formal support systems in ways that appeared to be linked to stigma and discrimination, and five participants described ways in which experiences of stigma had resulted in a loss of confidence or ongoing distress.

Findings as they pertain to ways in which stigma could negatively impact on social wellbeing are consisted with literature which highlights adverse implications of stigma for young mothers (AHRC, 2017; Ellis-Sloan, 2014; Ellis-Sloan & Tamplin, 2019; Jones et al., 2019; SmithBattle, 2013). Motherhood is a transition with profound social implications (Robinson, 2013). Ways in which mothers feel that they are able to relate and connect to others around their mothering role can have a significant influence on their adjustment to motherhood (Wills & Petrakis, 2019). Experiences of anticipated stigma may be particularly problematic for rates of social participation, with literature suggesting that stigma leads to social withdrawal, and subsequently impairs opportunity for teenage mothers to socialise or access support services (AHRC, 2017; Ellis-Sloan, 2014; Ellis-Sloan & Tamplin, 2019; SmithBattle, 2013). Stigma has further been identified as a phenomenon that can negatively impact the confidence and emotional wellbeing of young mothers (AHRC, 2017; Ellis-Sloan, 2014; Jones et al., 2019; Lucas et al., 2019). Subsequently, stigma may be a factor which has the potential to further compound the inequitable distribution of life chances faced by teenage mothers and their children (AHRC, 2017; SmithBattle, 2013, 2020; Ellis-Sloan, 2014).

In some respects, findings from this study relating to resiliency are consistent with various aspects of current literature as identified above. Findings were additionally noted to add to understandings of the role that formal support services, namely domestic violence services, public housing and therapeutic services in assisting women from within this social group to overcome patterns of adversity. In light of a lack of qualitative understandings around ways in which young mothers overcome obstacles and reach goals across their lives

(Ellis-Sloan, 2019), knowledge which contributes towards understanding the strengths and needs of women from within this social group may be useful in terms of informing interventions which can promote resiliency (Conn et al., 2018).

9.6 Processes of Conforming to Dominant Social Values

A range of patterns and interrelationships within the data were identified through a grounded theory exploration between key categories (Charmaz, 2014). Such interrelationships included ways in which social stigma—especially within adolescence or emerging adulthood—could result in some participants feeling a need to alter their behaviours to offset judgement or gain approval. I created a framework of conforming to dominant social values to conceptualise such patterns, which was presented in Chapter Six (Figure 6.2). This framework outlined the impacts of stigma on participants' domestic presentation, occupational decisions, and relationship patterns.

Evidence of conforming to perceived social ideals or expectations included the experiences of five participants who discussed a sense of needing to project an image of domestic perfection to offset scrutiny. Three participants described working harder to counterbalance societal assumptions that their lives were over; two participants described significant occupational decisions influenced by a sense of needing to offset assumptions of welfare dependency or incapability; and seven participants discussed entering marriage or remaining in long-term relationships to conform to familial or societal ideals.

Decisions and behaviours which stemmed from conforming to dominant social values had a range of ramifications on participants' lives. For example, a sense of needing to project an image of maternal perfection could result in feelings of pressure and stress. Conforming to dominant social values through occupational patterns had altered career trajectories, and marrying or remaining in relationships for approval appeared to influence participants' vulnerability to abuse, where such relationships were characterised by violence. Further, two

participants who entered relationships based on a sense of social or familial ideals have since come out as being gay. One of such participants expressed that repressing her sexuality equated to sacrificing who she was as a person. In this sense, conforming to familial and social standards of parenting status came at significant cost to some participants which included inhibiting exploration of their own interests, autonomy, safety, and identities. I sought to contextualise these findings by exploring what is known about the prevalence of such phenomena, and theoretical understandings as to why dominant social standards may be so impactful within adolescence and emerging adulthood.

A review of available literature identified that several studies have described phenomena that is reflective of conforming to dominant standards. For example, Hirst, Formby, and Owen's (2006) qualitative research found that adolescent mothers within their study could find themselves striving to be good enough in terms of a sense of feeling that they needed to keep their houses tidy and maintain a level of perceived quality of their children's clothing and toys. Young mothers' focus on maternal presentation was considered to be linked to wanting to prove their capabilities to parent (Hirst et al., 2006). Similar attention to presentation has been identified within studies which have found ways in which teenage mothers can focus on image to distance themselves from stereotypes of welfare dependency and poverty (Banister et al., 2016; Hamilton et al., 2018; Nayak & Kehily, 2014; SmithBattle, 2020). Further, research has identified ways in which young mothers can attempt to refute stigma that their lives are ruined by resuming their educations (SmithBattle, 2020), and as noted, some young mothers can remain within abusive relationships to protect their reputations or to conform to social standards (Wood and Barter, 2015). The findings from this study reflect many of those earlier findings. However, the significant impacts on young women, for example living with domestic violence for lengthy periods in order to avoid the stigma of single teenage motherhood; the long-term impacts that such relationships

could have on the women's lives and opportunities; or ways in which stigma could influence vocational decisions in ongoing ways across some participants' life trajectories, is not a feature of previous studies.

SmithBattle (2020) proposed that separation from negative stereotypes is one way in which young mothers demonstrate their moral worth. Such separation may be understood in terms of social adjustment as a dynamic process of coping with the standards and values of society in order to secure acceptance (Sasikumar, 2018; Runjun, 2020). Acceptance and satisfying relationships and social interactions are integral in terms of social and emotional wellbeing (APA, 2022; Dong et al., 2021; Runjun, 2020). While such acceptance is fundamental across the lifespan, establishment of positive social identity has been described to be especially significant during adolescence, as young people attempt to establish their place within society (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017; Crocetti, 2017; Erikson, 1950; Marcia, 1993).

Social needs for acceptance during adolescence coincide with a vulnerable period within young people's lives, in which they are tasked with learning about themselves, while also learning about the complexities of adult society (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017; Dahl et al., 2018; Marcia, 1993). Developmental, social, and personal changes that occur in adolescence are considerable (Dahl et al., 2018). Young people experience increases in cognitive and self-regulatory abilities, which they must apply to increasingly complex social relationships and societal institutions (Dahl et al., 2018). Newly navigating an adult world can be accompanied by a range of trials, errors, failures, and successes as young people learn about who they are, and develop an identity inclusive of their own values and goals (Dahl et al., 2018).

Given the heightened needs for acceptance during adolescence, combined with personal and social instabilities (Dahl et al., 2018), it may be of little wonder that social scrutiny can be highly impactful for young mothers. One theoretical concept which may be of relevance in conceptualising social processes related to conforming to dominant social values

relates to that of identity foreclosure. Developmental theorists have proposed that young people learn about their personal interests, values, and skills through exploration of a variety of interests and activities (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017; Erikson, 1958, 1968; Marcia, 1993). Marcia (1993) considered that young people who forgo such exploration and make commitments about their source of identity in line with familial or social expectations can be considered to have a foreclosed identity status. A foreclosed identity status is one that is prescribed by others, such as family or authority figures, or is constructed by oneself in line with a sense of who they *should* become (Marcia, 1993). Identity foreclosure can secure acceptance and avoid identity crisis at the time, yet inhibits opportunities for personal freedoms and identity growth (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017; Marcia, 1993). Such phenomena may explain participant accounts of adapting their behaviours and decisions to secure acceptance at a cost to their personal freedoms, interests, and identities.

The integration of generic processes of conforming to dominant social values into a framework as outlined within Chapter Six, which considers a range of implications of such phenomena across various contexts is a unique contribution of this study. Further, theoretical interpretations pertaining to linkages between social stigma and identity foreclosure amongst adolescent mothers offer a unique perspective. A review of available literature located knowledge gaps related to identity development within the context of social stigma for adolescent mothers. For example, Dhayanandhan (2015) explored identity development amongst adolescent mothers. Their study considered identity development within the context of factors such as history, economic circumstances, and social support, yet did not specifically consider social stigma. Schmidt and Nilsson (2006) argued however that social stigma can have implications on the identity development of marginalised young people. For instance, stigmatisation has been identified as a factor that can result in turmoil which leads to vocational indecision amongst lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth (Schmidt & Nilsson, 2006).

In this sense, the findings of this study build upon understandings of the impacts of stigma on identity development amongst young people specifically as such impacts relate to adolescent mothers, within a context of knowledge gaps.

Further, adolescence and emerging adulthood are pivotal periods in the life course (Dahl et al., 2018; Farmer et al., 2013; Kumar, 2002). Features of the environment which pose challenges to social adjustment can constrain future outcomes for young people, inclusive of achievement of a positive sense of identity (Arnett, 2018), realisation of goals (Farmer et al., 2013) and optimal social and economic outcomes (Dahl et al., 2018). Correspondingly, as will be elaborated upon within the next section of this chapter, decisions made during some participants' youth, which were designed to gain social or familial approval, could have ripple effects into subsequent life stages.

9.7 Autonomy Within Early Adulthood as Contingent Upon a Range of Contextual Factors

Independence and autonomy are well-described dominant societal values associated with early adulthood in life-stage development literature (Arnett, 2000; Furstenburg, 2016; Robinson, 2015). Early childrearing is at odds with such constructs, yet there are gaps in the literature around how a subsequent incongruence may be experienced (Furstenburg, 2016). Findings of this study revealed that participants' reflections of ways in which freedoms associated with age graded norms, such as going to parties, drinking or travelling, varied considerably. Contextual factors associated with individual values, access to support, impacts of scrutiny, and experiences of adversity appeared to influence such variation.

Erikson (1958, 1968) proposed that social adjustment is highly influenced by how an individual's personal, subjective identity is in line with their social circumstances. Seemingly reflective of such assertions, participants' individual values appeared to significantly influence their adaptation to reduced freedoms associated with motherhood. Specifically,

some participants in this study indicated that their personal values had varied from youth-related social constructs. Such participants emphasised that they had not been particularly interested in engaging in age-related ideals such as going to parties. Their identities as mothers, and the value that that they placed upon their mothering roles were emphasised to have been of primary value to them. Tensions between motherhood and social ideals of youth-related freedoms appeared to be minimal for these participants.

Conversely, two participants reflected on having sensed that they were missing out within adolescence or emerging adulthood. Feelings of deprived freedoms were linked to personal ideals and preferences, such as an interest in travelling or engaging in similar activities to their peers. In ways that may be reflective of literature which suggests that tensions between commitment and independence can be a particular trigger for crisis in the phase of early adulthood (Robinson, 2015), these participants described that a sense of having missed out on age graded constructs had been detrimental to their emotional wellbeing.

Specifically, Adrienne and Brandi explained that they had experienced feelings of depression, which emanated from incongruence between parental obligations and desires for freedom. For Adrienne, feelings of depression resolved after being afforded an opportunity to travel overseas with the assistance of her parents. Brandi did not however have family support and was not afforded opportunities to engage in the kinds of age- graded social activities she had yearned to be a part of. She described experiencing prolonged grief, which as will be revisited in this chapter, culminated in an emotional breakdown during empty nesting. As noted, differences in outcomes between Adrienne and Brandi’s struggles to adjust to loss of freedoms within early adulthood may be understood within the context of differences between their support systems. Family support had been integral to Adrienne’s access to a sense of freedom, whereas Brandi had lacked strong family connections.

Differences between their outcomes may suggest that support to engage in age-graded norms could be important for some young mothers.

Exposure to social scrutiny could also influence ways in which tensions between maternal responsibilities and individual freedoms were experienced. Some participants described a sense of social condemnation around their social movements, in that as young mothers they were considered undeserving of engaging in age-graded norms such as going out at night. For one participant, such judgement had been a deterrent from going out as a young person. In this sense, her access to age-graded norms had been diminished due to social stigma. Another way in which social stigma appeared to exacerbate tensions between maternal responsibilities and individual freedoms related to dominant social messages. Some described that insistence from others that their lives were over or that they were missing out could induce a sense of contemplation about whether they were missing out which had not been emerged organically. Participant accounts of feeling judged if they did embrace personal freedoms yet made to feel that they were missing out if they didn't, appear to indicate the presence of an inescapable societal criticism regarding young mothers' social movements.

As discussed, impacts of scrutiny on participants' access to vocational goals were apparent in some participants' stories. Emerging adulthood has been discussed as a stage during which young adults may be inclined to explore various options before making significant life decisions (Arnett, 2000; Robinson, 2015). In telling their stories, many participants redirected their attention back to experiences of oppression within their adolescent or emerging adult years in ways that were reflective of the pivotal nature of such periods.

This attention included reflections of social processes of conforming to dominant social values, which could have long-term implications across their lives. To elaborate,

Shannon and Melissa described sacrificing their occupational goals to offset a sense of judgement. Specifically, Shannon described not going to university within emerging adulthood, due to a sense of needing to work instead of attending university to avoid stigmas associated to welfare dependency. Conversely, Melissa had chosen to not complete a course that she began in early adulthood, so that she could attempt to offset judgment by being a stay-at-home mother. Shannon has not subsequently taken up university studies, yet explained that her goals have changed, and that study was no longer a priority to her. At the time of interview, Melissa had recently enrolled in university. A decision to commence studies as a mature age student was made within a context of mounting personal resentment regarding past educational sacrifices. Reflective of available literature findings identified that the balance between inner and outer aspects of life structure can be a particular focus towards midlife transitions (Levinson, 1977; Robinson, 2013).

Impacts of scrutiny on participants' relationship trajectories could also indirectly affect goal attainment. For example, Gretchen and Brandi both entered relationships during their early adulthood to gain societal approval. Both described being prevented from being able to continue with their chosen studies due to experiences of coercive control within domestic relationships. It was noted that Gretchen had not re-engaged with education, and that Brandi went on to complete a course of study within midlife yet expressed grief regarding the loss of her original vocational goals. Further, experiences of domestic violence were noted to have diminished some participants' freedom of movements as young women in general.

Adversity in terms of economic disadvantage within early life was described to have significantly diminished some participants' ability to make vocational decisions in ways that had ripple effects into their lives. Specifically, Kyle and Leah explained that family poverty had prevented them from pursuing vocational interests. While Leah had completed an

apprenticeship and had broken break free from a cycle of poverty in recent years, Kyle had not found opportunities to complete her education, and described how she faced current financial disadvantage. Such experiences may be reflective of Hendry and Kloep's (2007) assertion that considerations of social class are important in conceptualising access to autonomy in terms of life choices in early adulthood. Such phenomena may also echo Mollborn's (2017) assertion that economic inequalities experienced by some former teenage mothers into the lifespan can linked to prior economic and social positioning.

These findings have highlighted how young mothers' independence and autonomy are compromised or constrained by aspects of the social environment. Access to autonomy within early adulthood as contingent upon a range of contextual factors. As articulated by Robinson (2013, p. 25), "development is something that occurs on biological, psychological and social levels, and these levels are bound together interdependently; what happens on one level leads to change in the other two, and vice versa, due to reciprocal influences."

The interrelated nature between autonomy and aspects of participants' environments suggests that individual values and support from immediate families influenced an incongruence between dominant societal values and experienced personal freedoms. Linkages between various participants' relationships and their access to freedoms were also apparent. Specifically, dynamics within abusive and controlling relationships made it difficult to respond to demands within their educational institutions, workplaces, or social lives, resulting in a loss of opportunities and reduced freedoms. Cultural and societal structures inclusive of dominant social values (Crawford, 2020), had an overarching influence on such systems, especially in terms of influencing societal stigma, and subsequent social processes of conforming. Therefore, immediate and long-term ramifications of social processes of conforming to dominant social values may raise questions about the impacts of stigma on self-determination amongst this group of women.

Self-determination is a concept which relates to the fundamental human rights of individuals and groups to shape their own lives according to their beliefs and values (AHRC, n.d.; Wehmeyer, 2001, 2020). According to Wehmeyer (2001, p. 30), the realisation of self-determination entails "acting as the primary causal agent in one's life and making choices and decisions regarding one's quality of life free from undue external influence or interference." Compromises made by participants, such as altering their social movements, careers, and relationship trajectories to avoid stigma and discrimination, appear counter to requisites of self-determined action. Barriers to autonomy linked to experiences of early adversity may also represent barriers to self-determination for former teenage mothers at various points in their lifespans.

9.8 Lengthy Periods of Children Within the Nest

As discussed, I approached this study with a particular curiosity around knowledge gaps in women's experiences of empty nesting, which was born from my own experiences of empty nesting in my early thirties. A limitation to providing a comprehensive analysis around experiences of empty nesting was noted, in that many participants had not yet reached this milestone.

Specifically, only six of the 22 women interviewed had experienced their children leaving home. Further, only four of these women had empty nested before the age of 45. Such findings may suggest that empty nesting prior to midlife is a relatively uncommon phenomenon, or they may reflect the profile of this specific study cohort. Family size appeared to extend the duration of participants' child-rearing. According to the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2022b) within the year of 2017, Australian women in 2017 had an average of 1.74 children within their lifetime (AIFS, 2022b). In contrast, the mean figure of children born to participants in this study was noted to have been 3.54. Some participants still had small children within the home, in which sense, prolonging their experiences of

children within the family home. Further, many participants were still of childbearing age, and their reproductive trajectories may not yet be complete.

Such findings are consistent with literature which suggests that relatively large families are common amongst women who experience early family formation. In a longitudinal study, Tomkinson (2019) explored subsequent fertility among adolescent mothers in industrialised countries. They compared fertility patterns between adolescent mothers and older mothers, utilising a sample of 72,000 women from across France, England, and Wales. Findings revealed that adolescent mothers within their study did not follow 'typical' family size trends of two children—which are the most prevalent family size within industrialised countries inclusive of Australia (AIFS, 2022b; Tomkinson, 2019). Rather, most of the women who commenced family formation within adolescence had at least three children across their lives (Tomkinson, 2019).

In addition, Tomkinson (2019) found that subsequent births among women who had their first child during adolescence tended to be more spaced out than those of older mothers. Wider spaces between births, combined with higher-than-average numbers of children, lengthened their overall reproductive trajectories. Tomkinson (2019) hypothesised that differences in spacing between children for adolescent and older mothers may be due to biological considerations. Specifically, family formation when commenced at older ages can be accompanied by a time squeeze. Older mothers may progress to subsequent births more quickly to achieve their desired family size before biological limits on fertility take place, whereas adolescent mothers do not face such time pressures (Tomkinson, 2019).

Further possibilities raised from this study include that some women may simply place a high value on motherhood, and subsequently choose to have fuller and more enduring nests. Such values may be apparent within participants' reproductive trajectories, as well as within their overall reflections of motherhood. For instance, Tinsley a mother of three who

struggled with issues of infertility was noted to have mused, “I would still be pregnant to this day if I could;” and Melissa, a mother of seven, indicated a sense that her children were her legacy, and expressed that her personal definition of success included “raising good human beings.”

Amongst participants who had empty nested, such transitions varied considerably, yet were predominately reflective of general empty nesting understandings. For instance, some participants indicated that empty nesting had been unproblematic; several described a considerable sense of grief around the time of empty nesting, which had passed over time, or of which they were still actively working through; and some had experienced a new or renewed interest in hobbies and interests, such as yoga, Pilates, or travel. Such experiences may be understood within the context of established understandings of empty nesting as a transitional stage that can induce grief amongst some, yet not all mothers (Bougea, 2019; Holland, 2020; Robinson, 2015).

One participant’s experiences varied from literature associated with empty nesting. Brandi empty nested within her mid-thirties. She experienced depression which she linked to a loss of autonomy within earlier stage, and culminated when her son left home. Brandi described feeling suicidal and catatonic for some time. While depression can be a feature of empty nest syndrome (Bougea, 2019), ways in which Brandi’s grief had persisted, and was linked to the loss of freedoms within her younger years, are not reflected within general empty nesting literature. As noted in Chapter Seven, her experience may highlight the importance of access to freedoms to engage in age-graded norms amongst young mothers who place value on such experiences.

In the above respects, while my ability to explore empty nesting was limited due to many participants having relatively large family sizes, this in turn illuminated a phenomenon of lengthy periods of children within the nest for some former teenage mothers. Whereas the

nature of participants' experiences of empty nesting appeared to be reflective of general empty nesting literature, one participant's story may indicate a possibility of complex empty nesting experiences amongst some former teenage mothers.

9.9 A Sense of Social Surprise Linked to a Young Grandmothering Identity

Seven participants in this study were grandmothers. The average age for transitions to first time grandmotherhood reportedly is between the ages 49 and 54 (Spencer, 2016). By contrast, participants within this study had transitioned to first time grandmotherhood at relatively early ages, with the mean age of such transitions occurring at age 39. Participants described a diverse nature of grandmothering experiences. Many of such experiences were reflective of existing understandings from available literature pertaining to grandmotherhood. For example, in line with general grandparenting literature which suggests that grandparenting can be a profoundly meaningful experience in which integrational bonds are strengthened (Schänzel, 2022), some participants emphasised a closeness that they felt with her grandchildren and discussed meaningful bonding experiences. Unique benefits of young grandmotherhood pertaining to a sense of energy to keep up with grandchildren were also noted to have been described by some. Such benefits were similarly reported in Spencer's (2016) qualitative research into the experiences of young maternal grandmothers.

Consistent with findings of Spencer's (2016) research, the study reported here also found that the overall quality of grandmothering experiences appeared to be influenced by a range of contextual factors such as the readiness of one's child to undertake their own parental responsibilities. Specifically, some participants within this study described that grandmotherhood had represented an overwhelming responsibility or lack of control in their lives. Such participants had been called upon to provide caretaking roles in ways that were reported to have been stressful. Examples included being left to care for grandchildren for extended periods, which could result in disruptions to one's own life or ability to work; or

could induce feelings of grief when relinquishing care back to their children. Such experiences appeared to echo Hughes and Emmel's (2011) research into the intergenerational exchange between young grandparents and their grandchildren within the context of disadvantage, regarding elements of economic and emotional strain.

Findings from this study build upon understandings around ways in which entering grandmotherhood at an early age can have implications for women's social identity. Spencer's (2016) study into young maternal grandmotherhood found that young grandmothers can feel re-stigmatised where intergenerational teenage pregnancy occurs. In line with such findings, one of the participants within this study, Kyle experienced a sense of judgment pertaining to social attitudes of "like mother like son" when her son had become a young father. This finding may indicate that social judgments around early grandmotherhood can also extend to young paternal grandmothers.

A unique finding emerging from this study related to ways in which young grandmothers could encounter a sense of social surprise linked to a young grandmothering identity. For example, some described that others could assume that grandchildren were their own children, or could indicate that their physical appearance did not fit with a traditional image of grandmother due to age. Participants did not express being perturbed by social surprise and could even find a sense of humour regarding such exchanges. Findings regarding social surprise related to a young grandmothering identity emerged as a unique finding, which to my knowledge has not been identified within existing studies.

9.10 Participant Recommendations: Underscoring a Need for Additional Support Within Early or Emerging Adulthood

As discussed, significant gaps within the literature are evident in terms of the retrospective accounts of women who have experienced this phenomenon. From a feminist standpoint perspective, a crucial aspect of this study is the socially situated knowledge of

teenage mothers themselves that can afford meaningful and relevant insights, that in turn can enrich and strengthen current understandings (Intermann, 2016; Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). Participants were asked about their opinions and perspectives regarding ways in which teenage and former teenage mothers may be assisted towards positive long-term outcomes. Recommendations related predominately to support at the stage of adolescence or emerging adulthood, which have been descried as being pivotal periods in terms of in influencing future outcomes (Arnett, 2018; Dahl et al., 2018; Farmer et al., 2013; Kumar, 2002). Participant assertions of needs for improved support give traction to concerns voiced by the AHRC (2018), which has argued that more should be done to address long-term inequalities experienced by young mothers and their children.

Participant opinions and recommendations, as outlined in Chapter Eight, related to access, education, information, support, and being treated like worthy mothers. Such themes included improved access to opportunities for education; opportunities to obtain a driving licence; targeted support services; access to information; freedom of choice regarding sexual health options; responsive service delivery; addressing stigma; recognition regarding issues of confidence; holistic understandings and approaches; informal support networks; and life skills.

Participants' recommendations around specific supports are consistent with needs identified by a range of sources, thereby joining the voices of others in underscoring the interests of this social group. For example, participants observations of a need for improved access to opportunities for education noted included Brandi's assertion that there is a need for support young mothers to be supported to continue their education beyond their senior years of high school to facilitate access to tertiary education; and Adrienne's observation of a need for heightened childcare allocations to make further education viable. Such feedback is consistent with findings from a comprehensive investigation into the support needs of young

parents (AHRC, 2017). The AHRC (2017) consulted a wide variety of sources, which included interviews with 77 young parents, surveys of 89 young parents, 69 submissions from agencies and experts, and seven consultations with individual agencies. Specific barriers to completing tertiary education were noted, in that Centrelink policies can serve as barrier in accessing sufficient childcare allocation. The provision of maximum childcare allowance to study lasts for just two years, whereas university degrees tend to take significantly longer to complete (AHRC, 2017). High costs of childcare were also noted as a significant deterrent to educational re-engagement among young mothers within their study (AHRC, 2017).

A need for opportunities to obtain a driver's licence was expressed by participants such as Tinsley, who highlighted the importance of such access to attend appointments. Further, Shannon and Vicki emphasised the ability to drive as important for safety in circumstances of domestic violence. A lack of opportunities to obtain a driver's licence has been critiqued by the (AHRC, 2017). Specifically, initiatives that provide free driving lessons for young people exist within some parts of Australia yet are not widely accessible (AHRC, 2017).

A need for targeted support services was noted to have been discussed by some participants, including Tinsley, who expressed a need for housing opportunities to be targeted specifically towards young mothers; Erika who emphasised that access to housing commission had been pivotal during her time as a young mother to escape domestic violence and to build a positive life; and Camille, who expressed a need for young mothers to be offered more therapeutic support. Young mothers are offered some targeted supports in Australia, such as specific young mothers' programs (AHRC, 2017), yet literature suggests that young parents often have limited access to resources such as long-term safe and affordable housing (AHRC, 2017). As will be discussed in Chapter Ten, participants' recommendations underscore a need for heightened resource allocation.

Access to information as recommended by participants within this study included the Sonja's suggestion that young mothers need to have access to information of what is and what is not okay in relationships; and Leah's suggestion that information about domestic violence needs to be more widely circulated. Participant recommendations regarding promoting greater awareness around issues of domestic violence are pertinent in the context of heightened risks of abuse amongst young mothers (Dhunna et al., 2021; Langley, 2017; Mann et al., 2020). Findings from this study further suggested that domestic violence had ripple effects into many participants' lives and was a barrier to opportunities. Further access to information discussed by participants such as Camille pertained to a need for greater access to information for young mothers that their lives are not over as is often implied.

Freedom of choice regarding sexual health options included the observation of Kyle who as a grandparent supporting their son's partner, had observed barriers to accessing abortion inclusive of gatekeeping by local doctors. Conversely, Shannon spoke out against stigma which had influenced her towards an abortion as a young mother—a decision that she had later regretted. Such observations are consisted with structural barriers which have been acknowledged in the literature. Specifically, research suggests that young mothers can feel unwelcome and judged by staff when accessing sexual health services (AHRC, 2017).

Participants suggestions of responsive service delivery outlined within Chapter Eight included the suggestions of Erika, who explained that she had felt afraid to ask for help as a young mother due to fear that her children may be removed. She correspondingly suggested that a reassuring approach to service delivery may assist with such anxieties. Erika's concerns have been captured within past qualitative studies which have outlined ways in which stigma and fear of judgment can lead to social withdrawal and impact on opportunities for social engagement and access to support services and therefore is a consideration which is essential for human service workers to consider (AHRC, 2017; SmithBattle, 2013; Ellis-Sloan, 2014).

Recommendations of responsivity also included the suggestions of Carrol, who proposed that it is important to be responsive to each individual and suggested the use of communication engagement that is reflective of current times such as computer technology. Carrol's suggestion that engagement with young mothers may be enhanced by the use of technology is supported by a recent trial in Philadelphia which considered the efficacy of social media communication to support pregnant and parenting teens. The trial found that communication technology enhanced the responsivity of young parents (Kang et al., 2020).

Participant recommendations of addressing stigma as discussed in Chapter Eight included the suggestion of Vicki, who expressed that there is a need to replace narratives that perpetuate the devaluation of young, single mothers with empowering language within a healthcare setting. For example, she was noted to have expressed: "put *value* at single mum, it's 'you're a *supermum*, look at you go.'" The importance of operating from a strengths-based perspective appears to remain highly relevant within the current sociopolitical context. The AHRC (2017) identified a culture of blame and stigma embedded within service delivery with young mothers. Further studies have similarly detected tendencies towards deficit approaches (Field et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021; SmithBattle, 2013). Given the impactful nature of stigma on participants' lives as outlined within this study, addressing such issues is needed—to promote more positive, and self-determined outcomes amongst this group of women.

Recognition regarding issues of low confidence and self-esteem was noted by many participants, including Yolanda, who struggled during adolescence with issues of confidence and body autonomy. Yolanda felt that confidence issues might be integral in understanding the occurrence of pregnancy. Such suggestions appear to be particularly applicable to issues facing young mothers as a group, as research suggests that young mothers tend to have lower self-esteem than their non-parenting counterparts (Kim & Manion, 2019).

The importance of holistic understandings and approaches was noted by some participants, including Brandi, whose story captured themes of intergenerational teenage pregnancy that ran parallel with themes of intergenerational trauma. Denise felt that a holistic approach to support begins with promoting positive conditions for children through early intervention. Studies have echoed participants' assertions that holistic approaches to support which are responsive to individual circumstances. For instance, The AIFS (2010) noted that effective engagement entails responsivity to the needs and experiences of young parents and must consider their current and historical circumstances.

Some participants, including Bronwyn, referred to the importance of a strong social support network of family and friends. Participant recommendations to strengthen informal support networks can be understood in terms issues of relational exclusion faced by young mothers as a group, and the importance of connection in terms of wellbeing (Ellis-Sloan & Tamplin, 2019).

Finally, some participants, including Carrol, Dorinda, and Kyle suggested a need to offer young mothers opportunities to learn life skills such as meal preparation, budgeting, or caring for infants. Such suggestions may reflect the universal needs of new parents in adjusting to motherhood. As argued by AIFS (2010),

> … young parents face many of the same challenges as other parents. Thus, the childrearing supports and strategies recommended will often be the same for all; a teething infant, for example, requires the same intervention regardless of the parent's age.

9.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented eight key findings relating to the overarching research question and aims. Positive mothering identities and outcomes were evident, as was resiliency in the

face of adversity; a prevalence of gender-based violence; and a pervasive social stigma that could follow participants across their lives. In turn, resiliency could be impacted by stigma. Processes of conforming to dominant social values were discussed as contingent upon a range of contextual factors. Lengthy periods of children within the nest featured amongst some participants; and a sense of social surprise was linked to some participants' young grandmothering identity. These key findings were discussed as they relate to extant literature, and ways in which this study built upon current understandings were highlighted. Crucially, in line with a feminist research stance, this chapter located participant recommendations within the context of current practice directions; illuminating how participants' opinions and perspectives underscore a need for additional support within the influential adolescence or emerging adulthood as influential periods with the lifespan.

Chapter 10. Recommendations and Conclusion

10.1 Chapter Overview

In this concluding chapter, I provide a brief overview of the research findings as they pertain to the overarching research question and aims of this study. Ways in which the findings contribute to existing understandings and the unique contributions of these findings are reiterated. Finally, how these findings can contribute to informed social work practice and social policy interventions are outlined, and recommendations for further research are proposed.

10.2 Consolidating Research Findings With the Overarching Question and Aims of This Study

To recap, this study set out to explore gaps in qualitative understandings pertaining to the experiences of former teenage mothers through an exploration of the following research question:

What themes can be identified about former teenage mothers' lives as they transition across their lifespan from adolescence to middle age?

The primary aim of this study was to identify themes relating to howformer teenage mothers navigated various phases of their lives.

Secondary aims for this study were to:

- Explore barriers to self-determination for former teenage mothers at various points in their lifespan.
- Explore ways in which dominant societal values around early motherhood and early grandmotherhood are experienced by former teenage mothers, including any implications for personal and social identity.

- Build upon theoretical understandings of life-stage phenomena experienced by former teenage mothers.
- Contribute to research where women who have experienced teenage motherhood are consulted regarding their own needs, interests, identities, and perspectives relating to existing social policy and available welfare supports.

This study's findings indicate that understanding young mothers' lived experiences across their lifespan entails appreciating how participants navigated areas of disadvantage, stigma, and oppression. Specifically, patterns of adversity, including a prevalence of gender-based violence; patterns of scrutiny, including a pervasive social stigma that could follow participants into their lives; and patterns of resiliency were apparent across multiple tiers of participants' lifespans. The identification of such findings contributes to the consolidation of research aims by identifying themes relating to how former teenage mothers navigated various phases of their lives.

Findings revealed that dominant social values relating to early motherhood included assumptions of incapability, loss of prospects, and intersecting stigmas of young single motherhood. Such social values were experienced as a source of tension, particularly within participants' adolescent and emerging adult periods. Experiences of stigma could have implications for social adjustment in various ways, including participants' eroded informal and formal support systems, a loss of confidence, or distress. Further, processes of conforming to dominant social values to offset judgment or gain approval were presented as a theoretical framework. A sense of needing to conform to dominant social values to offset judgment or gain approval, as well as patterns of adversity were described to have had ripple effects into the lives of some participants in ways that constrained their lives and opportunities. Such findings contribute to the consolidation of secondary research aims, to explore themes of former teenage mothers as they navigated their lives; ways in which

dominant societal values around early motherhood are experienced, including implications on personal and social identity; and barriers to self-determination for former teenage mothers at various points in their lives.

Unique areas of life-stage phenomena identified within this study included ways in which a sense of autonomy within early adulthood could be contingent upon a range of contextual factors; lengthy periods of children within the nest amongst some; and a sense of social surprise linked to a young grandmothering identity. The identification of such findings contribute towards the consolidation of research aims pertaining to building upon theoretical understandings of life-stage phenomena experienced by former teenage mothers.

Findings of this study further revealed contrasts between participants' subjective identities and dominant social constructs in terms of predominately positive mothering identities and outcomes. Additionally, participants outlined a range of recommendations pertaining to access, education, information, support, and being treated like worthy mothers. Such findings contribute to the consolidation of secondary research aims to contribute to research where women who have experienced teenage motherhood are consulted regarding their own needs, interests, identities, and perspectives relating to existing social policy and available welfare supports.

10.3 Contributions of This Study Towards Current Understandings

Findings of this study build upon current understandings and address various knowledge gaps identified within the literature. Knowledge gaps discussed in Chapter One included limited understanding of how young mothers may overcome obstacles and reach goals in their lives; the persistence of stigma beyond young motherhood; former teenage mothers' experiences with early adulthood, midlife, and empty nesting; and the voices of former teenage mothers themselves (Ellis-Sloan, 2019; Furstenburg, 2016).

As noted, the importance of informal support networks was referred to frequently throughout interviews as factors that assisted participants in overcoming barriers and obstacles across their lifespans. Some participants' opinions and recommendations highlighted the importance of promoting natural support systems. Findings pertaining to ways participants overcame obstacles across their lives via informal support systems were noted to be reflective of a small body of literature, which has identified resiliency linked to utilising informal supports (Ellis-Sloan, 2022; Hirst et al., 2006). Additional findings presented included the role that formal support, including domestic violence services, access to public housing, and therapeutic services, could have in assisting participants to overcome significant areas of adversity. This study's identification of impactful sources of formal support can contribute to enhancing understanding of the strengths and needs of women from within this social group.

Aspects of enduring stigma beyond teenage motherhood were noted to have been identified within some existing studies. Unique aspects of enduring stigma identified in this study, included ways in which some participants described persistent lower social expectations for their adolescent or adult children; a heightened sense of maternal blame regarding children's conduct; or episodes of rebounding judgement specifically related to past reproductive patterns. Experiences of enduring stigma were reflective of some literature, which suggests that stigma can continue to attract unfavourable responses well into the lives of some marginalised groups (Ashford et al., 2019; Sheppard & Ricciardelli, 2020; Shi et al., 2022).

Findings that captured various experiences of early adulthood shed light on gaps identified within qualitative understandings around ways in which incongruence between dominant societal values relating to autonomy, and parental obligations are experienced. Experiences of such incongruence were largely contingent upon personal values. It was

proposed that such phenomenon may be reflective of Erikson's (1958, 1968) assertions that social adjustment is highly influenced by ways in which an individual's subjective identity is in line with their social circumstances. For some participants, tensions existed between autonomy and parental obligations, and this could result in feelings of depression. It was discussed that such phenomena may be reflective of lifespan understandings, which suggest that tensions between commitment and independence can be a particular trigger for crisis in the phase of early adulthood (Robinson, 2013). Access to autonomy as a dominant social value in early adulthood also was noted to be negatively influenced by experiences of social scrutiny and of adversity. Subsequently, understanding access to autonomy may require an appreciation of complex biopsychosocial interrelations, inclusive of areas of disadvantage and oppression.

Processes of conforming to dominant social values were presented as a framework in Chapter Six (Figure 6.2), which was developed to outline implications of social stigma on participants' behaviours and decisions. Impacts of stigma on various aspects of participants' lives, including vocational and relationship trajectories were outlined. The framework was discussed in terms of notions of identity foreclosure within Marcia's (1993) identity status paradigm. Such theorisation contributes to a fresh interpretation of identity development amongst adolescent mothers.

A limitation to comprehensively exploring empty nesting was noted, in that most participants had not yet reached this milestone. This limitation in turn illuminated relatively large family sizes amongst participants that grew over an extended mothering time frame. This finding was described to be consistent with literature which suggests that relatively large families are not uncommon amongst women who enter motherhood at early ages (Tomkinson, 2019). Such phenomena have been proposed within existing research to be influenced by reduced time pressures on fertility. Findings from this study additionally raised

the possibility that young mothers place a high value on motherhood as reflected within their reproductive trajectories, and overall reflections of their meanings applied on a mothering role.

Amongst participants who had empty nested, such transitions varied considerably, yet were predominately reflective of general empty nesting understandings. One exception was noted however, in that one participant had described significant grief related to loss of autonomy within adolescence and early adulthood. It was suggested that her story may indicate that access to autonomy within early life stages may be important in the adjustment of young mothers who value youth-related social constructs. Further, this participant's story may indicate a possibility of complex empty nesting experiences amongst some former teenage mothers.

Findings related to early grandmotherhood may contribute towards understanding social responses to young grandmotherhood. Existing research suggests that some young, maternal grandmothers may feel judgment where intergenerational teenage pregnancy occurs. Findings of this study further indicate that young paternal grandmothers may face similar judgments. A sense of social surprise linked to a young grandmothering identity also was discussed by some of the women in this study. Findings related to such social exchanges are, to my understanding, unique in that they do not appear to have been identified in existing studies.

The important secondary aim of this study was to contribute to research where women who have experienced teenage motherhood are consulted regarding their own needs, interests, identities, and perspectives. This voice has included shedding light on predominately positive personal outcomes and mothering identities in the participant group. Such findings reflect past research that has sought to illuminate the voices of former teenage mothers in defining their own lives and mothering identities, and to contribute towards

challenging negative representations (Bowman, 2013; Ellis-Sloan, 2022; Hirst et al., 2006). Participants' lived experiences relating to ways which young mothers can achieve positive outcomes was further proposed to be a potential source of information for young mothers starting out on their mothering journeys. The women's opinions and recommendations regarding the needs and interests of this social group underscored the importance of foundational support in adolescence and emerging adulthood, when young mothers commence their mothering journeys.

10.4 Recommendations for Social Work Practice and Social Policy

Social workers strive to assist human functioning through a range of interventions at micro, meso, and macro levels (AASW, 2020b, 2015; Dworak-Peck, 2022; Maschi, 2015; Mauldin, 2020). In doing so, the social work profession relies on social research to ensure that interventions are informed and subsequently effective (AASW, 2003; Brenner, 2016). Knowledge gaps relating to young mothers' lived experiences across their lives have been discussed to highlight potential barriers hindering responsive social work practice or social policy. Findings from this study pertaining to adversity and social stigma may be a particular point of concern for social work practitioners, who have a moral and ethical responsibility to "challenge inequality and disadvantage" (Burke & Harrison, 2002, p. 131).

Findings regarding impacts that oppressive societal beliefs have on young mothers' lives may in turn suggest that social work interventions which challenge social stigma are a crucial way in which to promote improved conditions for teenage mothers, and former teenage mothers. Social stigma, which influenced processes of conforming to dominant social values came at the very personal cost of some participants' autonomy, and their positive age-related exploration of teenage and adult identities. Through awareness raising, negative beliefs and stereotypes, such as those revealed in this study which can render women susceptible to abuse (Coercive Control Collective, 2018; Eaton Noori et al., 2020) can be

challenged. Awareness raising may entail critical analysis of political and social contradictions (Ware, 2017) regarding the problematisation of teenage motherhood. Deconstructing discourses may be undertaken in ways which make it possible to turn early motherhood into a positive and affirming sense of identity (Rodgers, 2003). Interventions/services targeted at individual and structural levels may provide the beneficial support for teenage mothers.

Awareness raising interventions can occur on various levels. On a micro level, engagement that fosters two-way communication about social stigma, and challenges dominant attitudes and beliefs (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.), may assist young mothers to challenge underlying social and familial pressure and build their resilience towards improved individual agency (Ware, 2017). Awareness raising in young mothers' groups may be a particularly potent source of change. Through awareness raising groups, opportunities for social action can arise, thus opening up possibilities for change on a macro level (Dworak-Peck, 2022; Ware, 2017).

Social workers can also identify opportunities to challenge stigma through meso level interventions, such as influencing the institutions in which they work (Dworak-Peck, 2022). Experiences of discrimination, particularly relating to intersecting stigmas of young, single motherhood were described by many participants to have occurred while accessing healthcare. Social workers are in a unique position because they not only work in capacities in frontline practice with young mothers, they also work collaboratively within multidisciplinary teams (AASW, 2020b). Within such contexts, social workers can take available opportunities to challenge oppressive power dynamics within broader service delivery (Burke & Harrison, 2002). Promoting the strengths of teenage mothers may be a further way in which negative discourses can be challenged. As proposed by one participant

in this study, replacing narratives that devalue young mothers with empowering language may be impactful.

A significant barrier to self-esteem, health, and life opportunities as revealed in these findings of relevance to social work practice and social policy was the prevalence and revealed experiences of family violence. Family violence is a professional practice area of expertise for social work (AASW, 2019) and these findings can contribute to this expertise.

Equally, knowledge of society and human behaviours is paramount in understanding, responding to, and challenging political and social processes that influence people's lives (AASW, 2008; Simmons University, 2022). Findings from this study can inform social work practice so practitioners grasp the current and projected complexities that former teenage mothers may experience in adapting to early adulthood, empty nesting and grandmotherhood and take the relevant action.

Importantly, participants' recommendations supported findings related to improved support for young mothers and a need for heightened resource allocation. Areas of adversity and scrutiny identified within research findings, combined with considerations of overall poorer social outcomes experienced by this social group (AIHW, 2018b), point to an ongoing neglected social justice issue in need of targeted advocacy. As discussed in Chapter One, young mothers face various human rights barriers related to health and economic inequalities, and poorer long-term outcomes (AHRC, 2017, 2018; AIHW, 2018b; Global Fund for Women, 2018). According to the AHRC (n.d.), special measures, also known as positive discrimination, can foster equality for groups who face entrenched discrimination, to facilitate similar access to others within the community. Positive discrimination is endorsed by anti-discrimination laws (Human Rights Commission, n.d.). Such measures apply to various social groups who face systematic structural disadvantage (Human Rights Commission, n.d.), as experienced by many of the women within this study. Areas in which

young mothers may benefit from special measures include access to formal supports identified as promoting resilience for women such as those who participated in this study, inclusive of housing, and domestic violence support. Further, special allocation may be considered in various areas of need identified within participants' recommendations, such as improved access to education; affordable childcare; assistance to obtain a driver's licence; and access to improved reproductive choice regarding sexual health options.

10.5 Recommendations for Social Work Education

Informed social work practice is enhanced through social work education that provides a spotlight on the impact of stigma, discrimination, and violence in many people's lives (AASW, 2012). It is clear from these findings that the lives of some teenage mothers and former teenage mothers were severely impacted by stigma, discrimination, adversity, and violence that endured across their lives. Such experiences may provide an evidence based for future intervention. Social work educators are ideally located to inform the next generation of practitioners. Recommendations are made for social work education be informed by the research findings of this study and more broadly, by ongoing emerging research that can contribute to expert professional practice and to improving the lives of women such as those who contributed to this study.

10.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Limitations of this study, as outlined within Chapter Seven, include barriers to comprehensively exploring phenomena associated with empty nesting, as most participants had not yet reached this milestone. A research approach which utilises criterion sampling to select former teenage mothers who have empty nested could provide further scope to explore experiences of empty nesting amongst this social group.

Further, as noted, two participants had entered long-term relationships with their babies' fathers while under the legal age of consent. It was discussed that age of fathers of children born to young mothers may conceal deeper issues of abuse (Brown et al., 2011; Larson et al., 1996; Males & Chew, 1996). Larger, quantitative studies which explore age range of fathers are suggested to greater understand risks of exploitation amongst young mothers.

Further, given ways in which domestic violence is a social issue that may be disproportionately experienced by teenage mothers (Dhunna et al., 2021; Langley, 2017; Mann et al., 2020), research which considers exposure to violence and long-term outcomes may assist in understanding the social disparities experienced by young mothers and their children.

Quantitative research which considers paternal factors may challenge the disproportionate focus on adolescent motherhood as a socially problematic status. Such research could explore problematic issues of gender-controlling behaviours and oppression that may be being overlooked in adolescence and early adulthood and may increase young women's vulnerability to sexual and physical violence (Wood and Barter, 2015). Equally, further exploration of resilience in the face of adversity and stigma, in order to develop positive teenage mother identities may be complementary research.

10.7 My Journey as a PhD Student and Reflections as an Insider Researcher

This research sought to explore former teenage mothers' lived experiences as they transition across their lifespans from adolescence to middle age. As noted in Section 1.5, my interest in this topic emanated from my own experiences of teenage motherhood, and gaps within qualitative understandings of life beyond young motherhood. My engagement with this research has been a transformative experience for me. As discussed, at the commencement of my journey as a PhD student, I had been interested in utilising existing

models of psychosocial development to inform a thematic analysis. However, after reading more about the origins, implications, and epistemological assumptions embedded within such an approach, I felt a strong resistance to recreating research that imposed the dominant, normative standards and assumptions that I felt judged against as a teenage mother. I felt a subsequent pull towards feminist standpoint epistemology, which resulted in a research approach that sought to raise the voices of women in context with their social positioning (Hesse-Biber, 2012). As discussed in Chapter Three, navigating an insider positioning has presented both benefits and challenges (Berger, 2015; Dinçer, 2019; Hayfield & Huxley, 2015), and the feminist underpinnings of this study were described to have challenged me to learn more about myself and my unconscious biases (Dinçer, 2019; Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). Overall, I feel that I have developed as a feminist and a researcher across my PhD journey in ways that I had not anticipated.

10.8 Chapter Summary

This final chapter summarised the research findings in line with the proposed aims and the research question. Understanding teenage mothers' journeys across their lifespan entails an appreciation of many factors including adversity, stigma, disadvantage, oppression, and resilience. This study has contributed to building on current understandings of the lived experience of teenage mothers, and helped bridge gaps in the available literature, in ways that may complement and inform social work practice, social policy directions and social work education. Suggestions for future research include research which has the scope to comprehensively explore experiences of gender-controlling and violent behaviours impacting the life trajectories of teenage mothers; age ranges of fathers; ways in which vulnerability to domestic violence may manifest in terms of influencing long-term inequalities; and experiences of empty nesting and grandparenthood of former teenage mothers. Further exploration of resilience may be complementary in enhancing understandings of young

mothers' long-term outcomes. Finally, this chapter discussed my journey as a PhD student and reflections as an insider researcher.

References

Al Abiky, W. B. (2021). Fighting Pressures: Successful Psychosocial Adjustment of Middle Eastern Students at US Universities. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*(7), 34–42. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.747321

Aldiabat, K. M., & Le Navence, C. L. (2018). Data Saturation: The mysterious step in grounded theory methodology. *The Qualitative report, 23*(1), 245–261 https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.2994

American Psychological Association. (2019). *Discrimination: What it is, and how to cope.* https://www.apa.org/topics/racism-bias-discrimination/types-stress

American Psychological Association. (2022). *APA Dictionary of Psychology.* https://dictionary.apa.org/social-adjustment

Arnett, J. J. (2015). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties* (2nd ed.). University Press.

Arnett, J. J. (2018). *Conceptual foundations of emerging adulthood*. Routledge.

Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, *55*(5), 469–80. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469

Arnett, J. J., & Mitra, D. (2020). Are the features of emerging adulthood developmentally distinctive? A comparison of ages 18–60 in the United States. Emerging Adulthood, *8*(5), 412–419. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696818810073

Arnup, K. (1982). Adrienne Rich: Poet, Mother, Lesbian, Feminist, Visionary. *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice*, *8*(1), 97–110.

Arshadh, N. S. M., & Muda, T. E. A. T. (2020). A review of social acceptance, psychosocial implications and coping mechanisms of teenage mothers. *International Journal of*

Social Science Research, *2*(1), 1–12.
https://myjms.mohe.gov.my/index.php/ijssr/article/view/8284

Ashford, R. D., Brown, A. M., McDaniel, J., & Curtis, B. (2019). Biased labels: An experimental study of language and stigma among individuals. Recovery and health professionals. *National Library of Medicine*, *54*(8), 1376–1384.
http://doi.org/10.1080/10826084.2019.1581221

Aslam, R.W., Hendry, M., Booth, A., Carter, B., Charles, J.M., Craine, N., Edwards, R.T., Noyes, J., Ntambwe, L.I., Pasterfield, D., Rycroft-Malone, J., Williams, N., & Whitaker, R. (2017). Intervention now to eliminate repeat unintended pregnancy in teenagers: A systematic review of intervention effectiveness and cost-effectiveness, and qualitative and realist synthesis of implementation factors and user engagement. *BMC Medicine*, *15*(155), 2–13. http://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-017-0904-7

Australian Association of Social Workers. (2003). *AASW Guidelines for Research.*
https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/179

Australian Association of Social Workers. (2008). *Practice Standards for Mental Health Social Workers*. https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/17

Australian Association of Social Workers. (2012). *Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards*. https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/3137

Australian Association of Social Workers. (2015). *Scope of Social Work Practice: Social Work in Health. Social Work in Health*. https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/8306

Australian Association of Social Workers. (2019). *Scope of Social Work Practice Family Violence*. https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/12226

Australian Association of Social Workers. (2020a). *Code of Ethics.*
https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/13400

Australian Association of Social Workers. (2020b). *Scope of Social Work Practice: Hospitals*. https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/8644

Australian Council of Social Service. (2017). *A future for all children: Addressing child poverty in Australia*. https://www.acoss.org.au/a-future-for-all-children

Australian Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). *Self-determination.* https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/self-determination

Australian Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). *Special Measures.* https://humanrights.gov.au/quick-guide/12099

Australian Human Rights Commission. (2014). *Violence against women.* https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/projects/violence-against-women

Australian Human Rights Commission. (2017). *Children's Rights Report 2017.*

Australian Human Rights Commission. (2018). *Face the facts: Gender Equality 2018.* https://www.humanrights.gov.au/education/face-facts/face-facts-gender-equality-2018

Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2010). *Supporting young parents.* https://bit.ly/3FQW3td

Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2014). *Effects of child abuse and neglect for children and adolescents.* https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/effects-child-abuse-and-neglect-children-and-adolescents

Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2018). *No voice, no opinion, nothing: Parents' experiences when children are removed and placed in care.* https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/2018/03/19/no-voice-no-opinion-nothing-parents-experiences-when-children-are-removed-and-placed-care

Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2022a). *Age of consent laws in Australia.* https://aifs.gov.au/resources/resource-sheets/age-consent-laws-australia

Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2022b). *Births in Australia.* https://aifs.gov.au/facts-and-figures/births-in-australia

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2018a). *Poorer outcomes for babies born to teen mums- often linked to low socioeconomic status.* https://aihw.gov.au/news-media/media-releases/2018/may/poorer-outcomes-for-babies-born-to-teen-mums-often

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2018b). *Teenage mothers in Australia 2015*. https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/6976ff0b-4649-4e3f-918f-849fc29d538f/aihw-per-93.pdf.aspx?inline=true

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2021). *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia, 2018*. https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/family-domestic-sexual-violence-in-australia-2018/summary

Baden, A. L. (2016). 'Do you know your *real* parents' and other adoption microaggressions. *Adoption Quarterly*, *19*(1), 1–25. http://doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2015.1026012

Banister, E. N., Hogg M. K., Budds K., & Dixon M. (2016). Becoming respectable: Low-income young mothers, consumption and the pursuit of value. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *32*(7–8), 652–672. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2015.1117517

Bekaert, S., & SmithBattle, L. (2016). Teen mothers' experience of intimate partner violence. *Advances in Nursing Science*, *39*(3), 272–290. https://doi.org/10.1097/ANS.0000000000000129

Belgrave, L. L., & Seide, K. (2019). Coding for Grounded Theory. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Current Developments in Grounded Theory*.

SAGE Publications. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/jcu/detail.action?docID=5755099

Benitez, T. (2017). *The untold stories of former teen mothers who have achieved a master's degree or higher* [Doctoral thesis, Brandman University]. https://digitalcommons.umassglobal.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1124&context=edd_dissertations

Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, *15*(2), 219–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475

Bernstein, D. A., Pooley, J. A., Cohen, L., Goldthorpe, B., Provost, S., Cranney, J., Penner, L. A., Clarke-Steward, A. & Roy, E. J. (2013). *Psychology: An international Discipline in Context: Australian and New Zealand*. Cengage Learning.

Birks, M., & Mills, J. (2015). *Grounded theory: A practical guide*. Sage Publications.

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member Checking: A Tool to Enhance Trustworthiness or Merely a Nod to Validation? *Qualitative Health Research*, *26*(13), 1802–1811. http://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870

Bjørnholt, M. (2019) The social dynamics of revictimization and intimate partner violence: an embodied, gendered, institutional and life course perspective. *Nordic Journal of Criminology*, *20*(1), 90–110. https://doi.org/10.1080/14043858.2019.1568103

Bougea, A., Despoti, A., & Vasilopoulos, E. (2019). Empty-nest-related psychosocial stress: Conceptual issues, future directions in economic crisis. *Psychiatriki*, *30*(4), 329–338. https://bit.ly/3t1gITL

Braithwaite, V. (2021). Institutional oppression that silences child protection reform. *International journal on child maltreatment: research, policy and practice*, *4*(1), 49–72. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42448-021-00068-8

Brand, G., Morrison, P., & Down, B. (2014). How do health professionals support pregnant and young mothers in the community? A selective review of the research literature. *Women and Birth*, *27*(3), 174–178. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wombi.2014.05.004

Bowman, S. J. (2013). *From Her Perspective: Reflections of Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood.* St. Catherine University. https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers/155

Breheny, M., & Stephens, C. (2010). Youth or disadvantage? The construction of teenage mothers in medical journals. *Culture, health & sexuality*, *12*(3), 307–322. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050903513234

Brenner, M. (2016). *So why is research important to social work?* Ohio State University College of Social Work. https://u.osu.edu/brenner81hseportfolio/2016/10/06/so-why-is-research-important-to-social-work

Brewer, B. W., & Petitpas, A. J. (2017). Athletic identity foreclosure. *Current opinion in psychology*, *16*, 118–122. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.05.004

Brown, S. (2016). *Teenage Pregnancy, Parenting and Intergenerational Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Brown, G., Brady, G. & Letherby, G. (2011). Young mother's experiences of power, control and violence within intimate and familial relationships. *Child Care in Practice*, *17*(4), 359–374. https://doi.org/10.1080/13575279.2011.601285

Burke, B., & Harrison, P. (2002). Anti-Oppressive Practice. In Adams, R., Dominelli, L., & Payne, M (eds.) *Communication, Relationships and Care*: Palgrave MacMillan, 131–138.

Carlson, J. A. (2010). Avoiding Traps in Member Checking. *The Qualitative Report*, *15*(5), 1102–1113. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2010.1332

Carr, A., Duff, H., & Craddock, F. (2020). A systematic review of the outcome of child abuse in long-term care. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, *21*(4), 660–677. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838018789154

Chambers, B. D., & Erausquin, J. T. (2018). Reframing the way we think about teenage motherhood. In S. Choudhurry, J. T. Erausquin & M. Withers (Eds.), G*lobal Perspectives on Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Across the Lifecourse* (pp. 59–71). Springer International Publishing.

Chametzky, B. (2016). Coding in Classic Grounded Theory: I've Done an Interview; Now What? *Sociology Mind*, *6*(4), 163–172. http://doi.org/10.4236/sm.2016.64014

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. SAGE Publications.

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Charmaz, K. (2017). The Power of Constructivist Grounded Theory for Critical Inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *23*(1), 34–45. http://doi.org/10.1177/1077800416657105

Charmaz, K. (2019). 'With Constructivist Grounded Theory You Can't Hide': Social Justice Research and Critical Inquiry in the Public Sphere. *Qualitative Inquiry*. *26*(2), 165–176. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419879081

Charmaz, K., & Mitchell, R. (1996). The myth of silent authorship: Self, substance, and style in ethnographic writing. *Symbolic Interaction*, *19*(4), 285–302. https://doi.org/10.1525/si.1996.19.4.285

Charmaz, K., & Thornberg, R. (2020) The Pursuit of Quality in Grounded Theory. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *18*(3) 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1780357

Cherry, A. L, Jr. (2000). *A Research Primer for the Helping Profession: Methods, Statistics and Writing.* Thomson Learning.

Chun Tie, Y., Birks, M., & Francis, K. (2019). Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers. *SAGE Open Medicine*, *7*, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1177/2050312118822927

Clarke, J., & Newman, J. (2012). The alchemy of austerity. *Critical social policy, 32*(3), 299–319. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018312444405

Clauser, P., Ding, Y., Chen, E. C., Cho, S. J., Wang, C., & Hwang, J. (2021*)*. Parenting styles, parenting stress, and behavioural outcomes in children with autism. *School Psychology International*, *42*(1), 33–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034320971675

Coercive Control Collective. (2018). *The Power and Control Wheel.* https://coercivecontrolcollective.org/news/2018/3/12/the-power-and-control-wheel-1

Conlon, C., Carney, G., Timonen, V., & Scharf, T. (2015). Emergent reconstruction in grounded theory: Learning from team-based interview research. *Qualitative Research*, *15*, 39–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794113495038

Conn, B. M., de Fegueriredo, S., Sherer, S., & Mankerian, M. (2018). "Our lives aren't over": A strengths-based perspective on stigma, discrimination, and coping among young parents. *Journal of Adolescence*. *66*(1), 91–100. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2018.05.005

Cook, S. M. C. & Cameron, S. T. (2017). Social issues of teenage pregnancy. *Obstetrics, Gynaecology & Reproductive Medicine*, *27*(11), 327–332. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ogrm.2015.06.001

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publications.

Crawford, M. (2020). Ecological Systems theory: Exploring the development of the theoretical framework as conceived by Bronfenbrenner. *Journal of Public Health Issues and Practices*, *4*(2), 170. https://doi.org/10.33790/jphip1100170

Crocetti, E. (2017). Identity Formation in Adolescence: The Dynamic of Forming and Consolidating Identity Commitments. *Child Development Perspectives, 11*(2), 145–150. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12226

Dahl, R. E., Allen, N. B., Wilbrecht, L., & Suleiman, A. B. (2018). Importance of investing in adolescence from a developmental science perspective. *Nature*, *554*(7693), 441–450. http://doi.org/10.1038/nature25770

Dahmen, B., Konrad, K., Jahnen, L., Herpertz-Dahlmann, B., & Firk, C. (2019). Mental health of teenage mothers: impact on the next generation. *Der Nervenarzt*, *90*(3), 243–250. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00115-018-0661-7

Dare, J. S. (2011). Transitions in midlife women's lives: Contemporary experiences. *Health care for women international*, *32*(2), 111–133. http://doi.org/10.1080/07399332.2010.500753

Denham, M. A., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2013). Beyond words: Using nonverbal communication data in research to enhance thick description and interpretation. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *12*(1), 670–696. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691301200137

Department for Children Schools and Families. (2007). *Teenage parents next steps: Guidance for local authorities and primary care trusts.* DCSF Publications. https://lx.iriss.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Teenage%20parents%20next%20steps.pdf

Dhunna, Lawton, B., & Cram, F. (2021). An Affront to Her Mana: Young Māori Mothers' Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *36*(13–14), 6191–6226. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518815712

Dhayanandhan, B. (2015). *The relationship between identity development, parenting, quality, and child functioning: testing an expansion of the process model of parenting with a comparative sample of adult and adolescent mothers*. [Doctoral thesis, York University]. https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/handle/10315/32091

Dinçer, P. (2019). Being an Insider and/or Outsider in Feminist Research: Reflexivity as a Bridge Between Academia and Activism. *Manas Social Araştırmalar Dergisi*, *8*(4), 3728–3745. https://doi.org/10.33206/mjss.532325

Dion, A., Klevor, A., Nakajima, A., & Andersson, N. (2021). Evidence-based priorities of under-served pregnant and parenting adolescents: addressing inequities through a participatory approach to contextualizing evidence syntheses. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 20(1), 118–118. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-021-01458-7

Dong, Y., Wang, H., Laun, F., Li, Z., & Cheng, L. (2020). How Children Feel Matters: Teacher–Student Relationship as an Indirect Role Between Interpersonal Trust and Social Adjustment. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *11*, 581235–581235. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.581235

Dowling, M. (2006). Approaches to reflexivity in qualitative research. *Nurse researcher, 13*(3), 7–21. http://doi.org/10.7748/nr2006.04.13.3.7.c5975

Draucker, Martsolf, D. S., & Poole, C. (2009). Developing Distress Protocols for Research on Sensitive Topics. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, *23*(5), 343–350. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnu.2008.10.008

Duncan, S., & Duncan, T. (2012). Accelerated longitudinal designs in developmental research. In B. Laursen, T. D. Little & N. A. Card (Eds.), *Handbook of Developmental Research Methods* (pp. 31–46). Guilford Press.

Dworak-Peck, S. (2022). *Do You Know the Difference Between Micro-, Mezzo- and Macro-Level Social Work?* University or Southern California. https://dworakpeck.usc.edu/news/do-you-know-the-difference-between-micro-mezzo-and-macro-level-social-work

Eaton Noori, S., Bonomi, A., Stephens, D. P., & Gillum, T. L. (2021). Nonconsensual Porn as a Form of Intimate Partner Violence: Using the Power and Control Wheel to Understand Nonconsensual Porn Perpetration in Intimate Relationships. *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse*, *22*(5), 1140–1154. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838020906533

Ellis-Sloan, K. (2014). Teenage Mothers, Stigma and Their 'Presentations of Self.' *Sociological Research Online*, *19*(1), 1–13. http://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3269

Ellis-Sloan, K. (2019). Teenage mothers in later life: Time for a second look. *Journal of Adolescence*, *71*(1), 98–107. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2019.10.007

Ellis-Sloan, K. (2022). Former young mothers' pathways through higher education: a chance to rethink the narrative. *Educational Review*, 1–19. http://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2022.2044288

Ellis-Sloan, K., & Tamplin, A. (2019). Teenage mothers and social isolation: The role of friendship as protection against relational exclusion. *Social Policy and Society*, *18*(2), 203–218. http://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746418000106

Erikson, E. (1950). *Childhood and society.* W.W Norton Company.

Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis.* W.W Norton Company.

Erikson, E. & Erikson, J. (1982). *The life cycle completed.* W.W Norton Company.

European Institute for Gender Equality. (n.d.). *Awareness raising.*

Farmer, Hamm, J. V., Lane, K. L., Lee, D., Sutherland, K. S., Hall, C. M., & Murray, R. A. (2013). Conceptual Foundations and Components of a Contextual Intervention to Promote Student Engagement During Early Adolescence: The Supporting Early Adolescent Learning and Social Success (SEALS) Model. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 23*(2), 115–139. https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2013.785181

Field, S., Abrahams, Z., & Honikman, S. (2020). Adolescent mothers: a qualitative study on barriers and facilitators to mental health in a low-resource setting in Cape Town, South Africa. *African Journal of Primary Health Care & Family Medicine*, *12*(1), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.4102/phcfm.v12i1.2279

Fileborn, B. (2016). Participant recruitment in an online era: A reflection on ethics and identity. *Research Ethics*, *12*(2), 97–115. http://doi.org/10.1177/1747016115604150

Firk Konrad, K., Herpertz-Dahlmann, B., Scharke, W., & Dahmen, B. (2018). Cognitive development in children of adolescent mothers: The impact of socioeconomic risk and maternal sensitivity. *Infant Behavior & Development*, *50*, 238–246. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infbeh.2018.02.002

Freud, S. (1905). *Three essays on the theory of sexuality* (7th ed.). The Hogarth Press.

Furstenburg, F. (2016). Early childbearing in the new era of delayed adulthood. In A. Furlong (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Youth and Young Adulthood*. (2nd ed., pp. 213–219). Routledge.

Garwood, S.K., Gerassi, L., Johnson-Reid, M., Plax, K., & Drake, B. (2015). More than Poverty—Teen Pregnancy Risk and Reports of Child Abuse Reports and Neglect. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *57*(2), 164–168. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2015.05.004

Gaydosh Hummer, R. A., Hargrove, T. W., Halpern, C. T., Hussey, J. M., Whitsel, E. A., Dole, N., & Harris, K. M. (2019). The Depths of Despair Among US Adults Entering Midlife. *American Journal of Public Health*, *109*(5), 774–780. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305002

Gilligan, C. (1993). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development* (2nd ed). Harvard University Press.

Gilligan, C. (2018). Revisiting in a Different Voice. *Learning Landscapes*, *11*(2), 25–30. https://www.learninglandscapes.ca/index.php/learnland/article/view/942

Glaser, B. G. (1978). *Theoretical Sensitivity*. Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. (2016). Open Coding Descriptions. *The Grounded Theory Review*, *15*(2), 108–110. http://groundedtheoryreview.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Open-coding-descriptions-Dec2016.pdf

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967*). The Discovery of Grounded theory: Strategies for Qualitative research.* Aldine Transaction.

Global Fund for Women. (2018). *Women's Human Rights.* https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/womens-human-rights/#.XAJ90vZuKUk

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Penguin Books.

Golombisky, K. (2017). Feminist methodology. In L. Z. Leslie (Ed.) *Communication Research Methods in Postmodern Culture* (2nd ed., pp. 172–195). Routledge.

Goossens, G., Kadji, C., & Delvenne, V. (2015). Teenage pregnancy: a psychopathological risk for mothers and babies*? Psychiatria Danubina*, *27*(1), 499–503. https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/497f/6589d9e6821595fce5b9f486c47e62756df1.pdf

Gottzen, L., & Sandberg, L. (2017). Creating safe atmospheres? Children's experiences of grandparents' affective and spatial responses to domestic violence. *Children's Geographies. 17*(5), 514–526. http://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2017.1406896

Gray, S. C., Holmes, K., & Bradford, D. (2016). Factors Associated with Pregnancy among Incarcerated African American Adolescent Girls. *Journal of Urban Health*, *93*(4), 709–718. http://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-016-0061-x

Greenhoot, A. F. (2012). Retrospective Methods in Developmental Science. In B. Laursen, T. D. Little & N. A. Card (Eds.) *Handbook of Developmental Research Methods*. Guilford Press.

Gunes, P. M. (2016). The effects of teenage childbearing on long-term health in the US: a twin-fixed-effects approach. *Review of Economics of the Household*, *14*(4), 891–920. http://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-016-9326-0

Guttentag, C. L., Landry, S. H., Williams, J. M., Baggett, K. M., Noria, C. W., Borkowski, J. G., Swank, P. R., Farris, J. R., Crawford, A., Lanzi, R. G., Carta, J. J., Warren, S. F., & Ramey, S. L. (2014). "My Baby & Me": Effects of an early, comprehensive parenting intervention on at-risk mothers and their children. *Developmental Psychology*, *50*(5), 1482–1496. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035682

Gyesaw, N. Y. K., & Ankomah, A. (2013). Experiences of pregnancy and motherhood among teenage mothers in a suburb of Accra, Ghana: a qualitative study. *International Journal of Women's Health*, *5*, 773. http://doi.org/10.2147/IJWH.S51528

Halcomb, E. J., & Davidson, P. M. (2006). Is verbatim transcription of interview data always necessary? *Applied Nursing Research*, *19*(1), 38–42. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnr.2005.06.001

Hamilton P., Lawson E., Gaudet C., Chisholm J., Kaur J., & Abercromby, S. (2018). At the intersection of idealized youth and marginalized almost-adulthood: How girls negotiate young motherhood in London, Ontario. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *21*(9), 1182–1197. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2018.1451628

Han, W. (2018). Old Women and 'Empty Nest Syndrome'—An Analysis of Mary Gavell's the Swing from the Perspective of Feminism. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *8*(1), 29–33. http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0801.04

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies, 14*(3), 575–599. http://doi.org/10.2307/3178066

Harding, S. (1991). *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives*. Cornwell University Press.

Harding, S. (1992). 'Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is 'Strong Objectivity'? *Centennial Review*, *36*(3), 437–470. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23739232

Harding, S. (1995). 'Strong Objectivity': A Response to the New Objectivity Question. *Synthese*, *104*(3), 331–349. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20117437

Harvey, R., Brown, K. S., Miller, B., Williams-Reade, J., Tyndall, L., & Murphy, M. (2016). Theory into Research Practice: Reflections and Recommendations on Collaborative Feminist Research, *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, *28*(4), 136–158. http://doi.org/10.1080/08952833.2016.1235410

Hayfield, N., & Huxley, C. (2015). Insider and Outsider Perspectives: Reflections on Researcher Identities in Research with Lesbian and Bisexual Women, *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 12*(2), 96–106. http://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2014.918224

Hendry, L. B., & Kloep, M. (2007). Conceptualizing Emerging Adulthood: Inspecting the Emperor's New Clothes? *Child Development Perspectives*, *1*(2), 74–79. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2007.00017.x

Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2012). *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis* (2nd ed). SAGE Publications.

Heward-Belle, S. (2017). Exploiting the 'good mother' as a tactic of coercive control: Domestically violent men's assaults on women as mothers. *Affilia*. *32*(3), 374–389. http://doi.org/10.1177/0886109917706935

Higgins, D., Kenny, P., Sweid, R., & Ockenden, L. (2014). *Forced adoption support services scoping study: report for the Department of Social Services by the Australian Institute of Family Studies*. https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/09_2014/final_scoping_study_report_including_post_publication_additions_0.pdf

Hirst, J., Formby, E., & Owen, J. (2006). *Pathways into parenthood: Reflections from three generations of teenage mothers and fathers*. Sheffield Hallam University. http://shura.shu.ac.uk/142/1/fulltext.pdf

Hodgkinson, S., Beers, L., Southammakosane, C., & Lewin A. (2014). Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents. *American Academy of Paediatrics, 133*(1), 114–122. http://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2013-0927

Holland, J. (2020). *HappiNest: Finding Fulfillment when Your Kids Leave Home*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Hughes, K., & Emmel, N. (2011). *Intergenerational exchange: grandparents, their grandchildren, and the texture of poverty*. Timescapes: An ESRC Qualitative Longitudinal Study. http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/assets/files/Policy-Conference-2011/paper-6.pdf

Intermann, K. (2016). Feminist standpoint. In L. Disch & M. Hawkesworth (Eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* (pp. 261–282). Oxford University Press.

Jensen, T. (2013). Austerity parenting. *Soundings, (55),* 60–70. https://elibrary.jcu.edu.au/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/austerity-parenting/docview/1470085596/se-2

Jauregui, J., Watsjold, B., Welsh, L., Ilgen, J. S., & Robins, L. (2020). Generational ‘othering’: the myth of the Millennial learner. *Medical Education*, *54*(1), 60–65. https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.13795

Jiang, S. (2020). Psychological well-being and distress in adolescents: An investigation into associations with poverty, peer victimization, and self-esteem. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *111*, 104824. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104824

Jones, C., Whitfield, C., Seymour, J., & Hayter, M. (2019). ‘Other Girls’: A Qualitative Exploration of Teenage Mothers’ Views on Teen Pregnancy. *Sexuality and Culture*, *23*(3), 1–14. http://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-019-09589-4

Jung, C. G. (1947). *On the Nature of the Psyche*. Ark Paperbacks.

Kang, N., Patrick, M., Williams, F., Hemady, K., Aussendorf, M., Greenbacker, L., & Kannam, A. (2020). Using Technology to Support Expectant and Parenting Youth through Case Management: Lessons Learned in the Field. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, *24*(2), 200–206. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-020-02952-0

Katz, E., Nikupeteri, A., & Laitinen, M. (2020). When coercive control continues to harm children: Post-separation fathering, stalking and domestic violence. *Child Abuse Review*, *29*(4), 310–324. https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2611

Keller, H. (2019). Cultural Development. In D. Cohen & S. Kitayama (Eds.), *Handbook of Cultural Psychology*, (2nd ed., pp. 397–401). Guilford Press.

Kim, L. M., & Manion, A. B. (2019). Improving Self-Esteem and Building Self-Confidence in Adolescent Mothers: Implementation of Self-Efficacy-Focused Activity Sessions. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services*, *57*(8), 11–15. http://doi.org/10.3928/02793695-20190528-04

Kim, P., Evans, G. W., Chen, E., Miller, G., & Seeman, T. (2018). How socioeconomic disadvantages gets under the skin and into the brain to influence health development

across the lifespan. In: N. Halfon, C. Forrest & R. Lerner, E. Faustman. (Eds.), *Handbook of Life Course Health development*, 463–497. Springer International Publishing.

Kocer, H. (2020). Comparison of the Ego Identity Statuses of the Adolescents: According to Family Environment Type. *Turkish Studies – Social Sciences*, *15*(6), 2901–2918. https://bit.ly/3gjPODA

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing, *European Journal of General Practice*, *24*(1), 120–124. http://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092

Kosinski, M., Matz, S. C., Gosling, S. D., Popov, V., & Stillwell, D. (2016). Facebook as a research tool: A look at how to recruit participants using Facebook—and the ethical concerns that come with social media research. *American Psychological Association*, *47*(3). https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/03/ce-corner

Kumar, A. (2002). Adolescence and sexuality in the Rajasthani context. In L. Manderson & P. Liamputtong (Eds.), *Coming of Age in South and Southeast Asia* (pp. 58–74). Routledge.

Langley J. (2017). Young Mothers' Experiences of Relationship Abuse: Public Narratives, Personal Stories. In J. Woodiwiss, K. Smith & K. Lockwood (Eds.), *Feminist Narrative Research*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-48568-7_5

Larson N. C., Hussey J. M., Gillmore M. R., & Gilchrist L. D. (1996). What about Dad? Fathers of Children Born to School-Age Mothers. *Families in Society. 77*(5), 279–289. http://doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.916

Lauer. (2005). Interpreting Nonverbal Communication in Interviews. *Performance Improvement*, *44*(1), 39–40. https://www-proquest-

com.elibrary.jcu.edu.au/docview/237233585/fulltextPDF/966A3752AEA745ABPQ/1?accountid=16285

Leavy, P. (2017). *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches*. Guilford Press.

Leavy, P., & Harris, A. (2019). *Contemporary feminist research from theory to practice*. Guilford Publications.

Lee, J. O., Gilchrist, L. D., Beadnell, B. A., Lohr, M. J., Yuan, C., Hartgan, L. A., & Morrison, D. M. (2016). Assessing variations in developmental outcomes among teenage offspring of teen mothers: maternal life course correlates. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *27*(3), 550–565. http://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12293

Lee, K., Lawton, C., & Boateng, A. (2021). Parental experiences for teenage mothers living in poverty: Associations of head start. *Affilia*, *36*(4), 666–683. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109920963032

Lee, P. S., & Lee, C. L. (2021). Prevalence of symptoms and associated factors across menopause status in Taiwanese women. *Menopause: The Journal of the North American Menopause Society*, *28*(2), 182–188. http://doi.org/10.1097/GME.0000000000001662

Levinson, D. J. (1977). The mid-life transition: A period in adult psychosocial development. *Psychiatry*, *40*(2), 99–112. https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1977.11023925

Levitt, H. M. (2021). Essentials of critical-constructivist grounded theory research. *APA PsycNet*. https://doi.org/10.1037/0000231-000

Liu, N., Vigod, S. N., Farrugia, M. M., Urquia, M. L., & Ray, J. G. (2018). Intergenerational teen pregnancy: a population-based cohort study. *International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology*, *125*(13), 1766–1774. https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0528.15297

Lloyd, M. (2018). Domestic violence and education: Examining the impact of domestic violence on young children, children, and young people and the potential role of schools. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *9*(2094), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02094

Lucas, G., Olander, E. K., Ayers, S., & Salmon, D. (2019). No straight lines–young women's perceptions of their mental health and wellbeing during and after pregnancy: a systematic review and meta-ethnography. *BMC Women's Health*, *19*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-019-0848-5

Luker, K. (1997). *Dubious Conceptions: The Politics of Teenage Pregnancy*. Harvard University Press.

Maher, C., Hadfield, M., Hutchings, M., & De Eyto A. (2018). Ensuring Rigor in Qualitative Data Analysis: A Design Research Approach to Coding Combining NVivo With Traditional Material Methods. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *17*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918786362

Males, & Chew, K. S. (1996). The ages of fathers in California adolescent births, 1993. *American Journal of Public Health* (1971), *86*(4), 565–568. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.86.4.565

Maness, S. B., Buhi, E. R., Daley, E. M., Baldwin, J. A., & Kromrey, J. D. (2016). Social Determinants of Health and Adolescent Pregnancy: An Analysis From the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *58*(6), 636–643. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.02.006

Mann, L., Bateson, D., & Black, K. (2020). Teenage Pregnancy. *Australian Journal of General Practice*. *49*(6), 310–315. http://doi.org/10.31128/AJGP-02-20-5224

Mansoor, A., & Hasan, S. S. (2019). Empty nest syndrome and psychological wellbeing among middle aged adults. *Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, *17*(1), 55–60. https://gcu.edu.pk/pages/gcupress/pjscp/volumes/pjscp20191-8.pdf

Marcia, J. E., Waterman, A. S., Matteson, D. R., Archer, S. L., & Orlofsky, J. L. (1993). *Ego Identity: A Handbook for Psychosocial Research*. Springer-Verlag. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/jcu/detail.action?docID=3078241

Marcus, G. & Fischer, M. J. (1999). *Anthropology as a cultural critique: an experiment in human sciences*. University of Chicago Press.

Maree, J. G. (2021). The psychosocial development theory of Erik Erikson: critical overview. *Early Child Development and Care*, *191*(7–8), 1107–1121. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1845163

Martínez, M. R., Numa, L. T., Bernal, D. R., de Galvis, Y. T., & Sierra, G. (2017). Sexual abuse and neglect situations as risk factors for adolescent pregnancy. *Revista Colombiana de Psiquiatria. 46*(2), 74–81. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.rcpeng.2017.05.003

Maschi, T. (2015). *Applying a Human Rights Approach to Social Work Research and Evaluation: A Rights Research Manifesto*. Springer International Publishing. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/jcu/detail.action?docID=4084480.

Mass Alliance on Teen Pregnancy. (2017). *Breaking Down the Stigma Surrounding Teen Pregnancy*. https://medium.com/@mateenpregnancy/breaking-down-the-stigma-surrounding-teen-pregnancy-7b582234679f

Masten, A. S. (2018). Resilience theory and research on children and families: Past, present, and promise. *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, *10*(1), 12–31. https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12255

Mauldin, R. L. (2020). *Foundations of Social Work Research*. Mavs Open Press. Mavs Open Press.

McDermott, R. C., Brasil, K. M., Borgogna, N. C., Barinas, J., & Levant, R. F. (2022). Traditional Masculinity Ideology and Feminist Attitudes: The Role of Identity Foreclosure. *Sex Roles*, *87*(3), 211–222. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-022-01302-4

McLeod, S. (2017). *What is Attachment Theory?* Simply Psychology. https://www.simplypsychology.org/attachment.html

Meade, C. S., Kershaw, T. S., & Ickovics, J. R. (2008). The intergenerational cycle of teenage pregnancy: an ecological approach. *Health Psychology*, *27*(4), 419–29. http://doi.org/10.1037/0278-6133.27.4.419

Menger Leeman, J. M. (2018). *Living our parents' trauma: Effects of child abuse and neglect on the next generation.* [Doctoral thesis, Australian Catholic University]. https://acuresearchbank.acu.edu.au/item/86827/living-our-parents-trauma-effects-of-child-abuse-and-neglect-on-the-next-generation

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Under scrutiny.* Merriam-Webster Dictionary. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/under%20scrutiny

Mills, J., Bonner, A. & Francis, K. (2006). The Development of Constructivist Grounded Theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 5*(1), 25–35. http://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500103

Mollborn, S. (2017). Teenage mothers today: what we know and how it matters. *Child Development Perspectives*, *11*(1), 63–69. http://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12205

Moore, K. A., Simms, M. C., & Betsey, C. L. (2021). *Choice and circumstance: Racial differences in adolescent sexuality and fertility.* Routledge.

Moradi, B. (2017). (Re)focusing intersectionality: From social identities back to systems of oppression and privilege. In K. A. DeBord, A. R. Fischer, K. J. Bieschke & R. M.

Perez (Eds.), *Handbook of sexual orientation and gender diversity in counselling and psychotherapy* (pp. 105–127). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/15959-005

Moser, A., & Korstjens, I. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 3: Sampling, data collection and analysis, *European Journal of General Practice*, *24*(1), 9-18. http://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375091

Nayak, A., & Kehily, M. J. (2014), 'Chavs, chavettes and pramface girls': teenage mothers, marginalised young men and the management of stigma. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17 (10), 1330-1345. http://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2014.920489

Neece, C. L., Green, S. A., & Baker, B. L. (2012). Parenting stress and child behaviour problems: A transactional relationship across time. *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 117*(1), 48–66. https://doi.org/10.1352/1944-7558-117.1.48

Neill-Weston, F & Morgan, M. (2017). Teenage childbearing: young sole mothers challenge the stereotypes, *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, *12*(2), 179–191, http://doi.org/10.1080/1177083X.2017.1358185

New South Wales Government. (2020). *What is stigma?* https://bit.ly/3E5dTHo

Nicic, M., Stojanovic, S., Simic, M., & Ljubisavljevic, M. (2019). Anxiety about aging and quality of life in early and midlife adulthood. *International Thematic Proceedia*, *185*. https://www.psihologijanis.rs/dpp/arhiva/DPPzbornik2019.pdf#page=186

Noll, G. N., Guastaferro, K., Beal, S. J., Schreier, H. M. C., Barnes, J., Reader, J. M., & Font, S. A. (2018). Is sexual abuse a unique predictor of sexual risk behaviours, pregnancy, and motherhood in adolescence? *Journal of Adolescence*. *29*(4), 967–983. http://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12436

Novick, G. (2008). Is there a bias against telephone interviews in qualitative research? *Research in Nursing & Health*, *31*(4), 391–398. https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.20259

Noy, A., & Taubman-Ben-Ari, O. (2016). Becoming a Grandparent - on Transitions and Transformations. In L. Findler & O. T. Ben-Ari (Eds.), *Grandparents of Children with Disabilities: Theoretical Perspectives of Intergenerational Relationships*, 19–37. Springer International Publishing.

Nusslock, R., & Miller, G. E. (2016). Early-Life Adversity and Physical and Emotional Health Across the Lifespan: A Neuroimmune Network Hypothesis. *Biological Psychiatry, 80*(1), 23–32. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.biopsych.2015.05.017

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, *42*(5), 533–544. http://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

Papalia, N., Mann, E., Ogloff, J. R. P. (2021). Child Sexual Abuse and Risk of Revictimization: Impact of Child Demographics, Sexual Abuse Characteristics, and Psychiatric Disorders. *Child Maltreatment*. *26*(1), 74–86. http://doi.org/10.1177/1077559520932665

Pepler, D. J., Catallo, R., & Moore, T. E. (2018). Consider the children: Research informing interventions for children exposed to domestic violence. In R. A. Geffner, P. G. Jaffe & M. Suddermann (Eds.), *Children exposed to domestic violence: Current issues in research, intervention, prevention, and policy development* (pp. 37–57). Routledge.

Petersen, A. C., & Crockett, L. (2017). Pubertal development and its relation to cognitive and psychosocial development in adolescent girls: Implications for parenting. In J. B. Lancaster & B. A. Hamburg (Eds.), *School-Age Pregnancy and Parenthood* (pp. 147–176). Routledge.

Plummer, M., & Young, L. E. (2010). Grounded Theory and Feminist Inquiry: Revitalizing Links to the Past. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, *32*(3), 305–321. http://doi.org/10.1177/0193945909351298

Polan, E., & Taylor, D. (2019). *Journey Across the Life Span: Human Development and Health Promotion* (6th ed.). F. A. Davis Company.

Preez, J. D., Richmond, J., & Marquis, R. (2015). Issues affecting Australian grandparents who are primary caregivers of grandchildren: a review. *Journal of Family Studies, 23*(1), 142–159. http://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2015.1086406

Rich, A. (1995). *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. W. W. Norton & Company.

Roberts, B. (2002). *Biographical research*. Philadelphia.

Robinson, O. C. (2013). *Development through Adulthood: An integrative sourcebook.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Robinson, O. C. (2015). Emerging adulthood, early adulthood and quarter life crisis: updating Erikson for the twenty first century. In R. Z. Ukauskiene (Ed.), *Emerging adulthood in a European context,* (pp. 12–13). Routledge.

Robinson, O. C., Demetre, J. D., & Litman, J. A. (2017). Adult life stage and crisis as predictors of curiosity and authenticity: Testing inferences from Erikson's lifespan theory. *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, *41*(3), 426–431. http://doi.org/10.1177/0165025416645201

Robinson, O. C., & Wright, G. R. T. (2013). The prevalence, types and perceived outcomes of crisis episodes in early adulthood and midlife: A structured retrospective-autobiographical study. *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, *37*(5), 407–416. http://doi.org/10.1177/0165025413492464

Rock, L. (2007). The ‘Good Mother’ vs. the ‘Other’ Mother: The Girl-Mom. *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, *19*(1), 20–28. https://jarm.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jarm/article/view/5132/4328

Rodgers, D. M. (2003). “The Stigmatizers and the Stigmatized”: Enacting the Social Construction of Difference and Discrimination. *Teaching Sociology*, *31*(3), 319–324. https://doi.org/10.2307/3211329

Rubin, H. J. & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative Interviewing (2nd ed.): The Art of Hearing Data*. SAGE Publications.

Rubin, H. J. & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing (3rd ed.): The Art of Hearing Data.* SAGE Publications.

Runjun, S. (2020). Social Adjustment of Adolescent Students and Role of Teacher. *International Journal for Innovative Research in Multidisciplinary Field*, *6*(5). https://www.ijirmf.com/wp-content/uploads/IJIRMF202005038.pdf

Rutberg, S., & Bouikidis, C. D. (2018). Focusing on the fundamentals: A simplistic differentiation between qualitative and quantitative research. *Nephrology Nursing Journal*, *45*(2), 209–212. https://www.proquest.com/openview/af62fd5b0442e59b2729d9fcf7348456/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=45638

Sasikumar, J. (2018). Emotional Intelligence and Social Adjustment Among Adolescent Students. *American Journal of Social Science Research*, *4*(1), 16–21. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329773848_Emotional_Intelligence_and_Social_Adjustment_Among_Adolescent_Students

Scerri, J. (2020). The Power and the Passion: Representation of Single Motherhood in Contemporary Australian Literature. In K. Jones, C. Collins, M. Davies, M. Della Giust & G. James. *International Conference on Gender Research*, 294–299.

Schaffer, R. H. (2006). Attachment and secure base goal behaviour internal working models. In R. H. Schaffer (Eds.), *Key concepts in developmental psychology*. SAGE Publications.

Schänzel, H. (2022). Grandleisure events: Grandparents and grandchildren spending special time together. In T. Fletcher (Ed.), *Family Events Practices, Displays and Intimacies* (pp. 193–205). Routledge.

Schmidt, & Nilsson, J. E. (2006). The Effects of Simultaneous Developmental Processes: Factors Relating to the Career Development of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youth. *The Career Development Quarterly*, *55*(1), 22–37. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.2006.tb00002.x

Schulte, Wurz, A., Russell, K. B., Reynolds, K., Strother, D., & Dewey, D. (2018). Social adjustment and repressive adaptive style in survivors of pediatric cancer. *Journal of Psychosocial Oncology*, *36*(3), 274–286. https://doi.org/10.1080/07347332.2018.1431754

Scott, C., & Medaugh, M. (2017). Axial Coding. *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*. http://doi.org/10.1002/9781118901731.iecrm0012

Sedgh, G., Finer, L.B., Bankole, A., Eilers, M.A., & Singh, S. (2015). Adolescent pregnancy, birth and abortion rates across countries: levels and recent trends. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *56*(2), 223–230. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2014.09.007

Shaw, M., Lawlor, D.A. & Najman, J. M. (2006). Teenage children of teenage mothers: Psychological, behavioural and health outcomes from an Australian prospective longitudinal study. *Social Science and Medicine*, *62*(10), 2526–2539. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2005.10.007

Sheppard, A., & Ricciardelli, R. (2020). Employment after prison: Navigating conditions of precarity and stigma. *European Journal of Probation*, *12*(1), 34–52. https://doi.org/10.1177/2066220320908251

Shi, L., Silver, J. R., & Hickert, A. (2022). Conceptualizing and Measuring Public Stigma Toward People With Prison Records. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *49*(11), 1676–1698. https://doi.org/10.1177/00938548221108932

Shinan-Altman, S., & Werner, P. (2019). Subjective age and its correlates among middle age and older adults. *International Journal of Ageing and Human Development*, *88*(1) 13–21. http://doi.org/10.1177/0091415017752941

Shirvanian, N., & Michael, T. (2017). Implementation of attachment theory into early childhood settings. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *16*(2), 97–115. https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/IEJ/article/view/10978

Simmons University. (2022). *Theories Used in Social Work Practice & Practice Models.* https://online.simmons.edu/blog/theories-used-social-work-practice/

Slater, E. (2018). A Media Discourse Analysis of Lone Parents in the UK: Investigating the Stereotype. In L. Bernardi & D. Mortelmans (Eds.), *Lone Parenthood in the Life Course, Life Course Research and Social Policies* (Vol. 8). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63295-7_3

Slote, M. (2016). *Human Development and Human Life.* Springer International Publishing.

Smith, D. E. (1991). Writing women's experiences into social science. *Feminism & Psychology*, *1*(1), 155–169. http://doi.org/10.1177/0959353591011019

SmithBattle, L. (2013). 'Reducing the Stigmatization of Teen Mothers.' *The American Journal of Maternal Nursing, 38*(4), 235–241. http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/NMC.0b013e3182836bd4

SmithBattle, L. (2018). Teen mothering in the United States: Fertile ground for shifting the paradigm. In A. Kamp & M. McSharry (Eds.), *Re/Assembling the Pregnancy and Parenting Teenager* (pp. 75–104). Peter Lang.

SmithBattle, L. (2020). Walking on eggshells: An update on the stigmatizing of teen mothers. *The American Journal of Maternal/Child Nursing*, *45*(6), 322–327. https://doi.org/10.1097/NMC.0000000000000655

SmithBattle, L., & Leonard, V. (2012). Inequalities compounded: Explaining variations in the transition to adulthood for teen mothers' offspring. *Journal of Family Nursing*, *18*(3), 409–431. http://doi.org/10.1177/1074840712443871

Sorell, G. T., & Montgomery, M. J. (2001). Feminist Perspectives on Erikson 's Theory: Their Relevance for Contemporary Identity Development Research. *Identity*, *1*(2), 97–128. http://doi.org/10.1207/S1532706XID0102_01

Spencer, L. (2016). *Lived experiences of becoming a young maternal grandmother: an interpretive phenomenological analysis*. [Doctoral thesis, University of Northampton: UK]. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319468681_Lived_experiences_of_becoming_and_being_a_young_maternal_grandmother_An_interpretative_phenomenological_analysis

Steckle, M. (2018). *Situating Feminist Standpoint Theory: Toward a Critical Ontology of Knowledge.* [Doctoral thesis, University of Windsor, Canada]. https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/7572

Stuckey, H. L. (2014). The first step in Data Analysis: Transcribing and managing qualitative research data, *Journal of Social Health and Diabetes*, *2*(1), 6–8. http://doi.org/10.4103/2321-0656.120254

Summers, A. (1994). *Damned Whores and Gods Police: the updated edition of the classic study of women in Australian society.* Penguin Books.

Sweet, P. L. (2020). Who Knows? Reflexivity in Feminist Standpoint Theory and Bourdieu. *Gender & Society*, 34 (6), 922–950. http://doi.org/10.1177/0891243220966600

Taherifard, M., & Mikaeili, N. (2019). The effectiveness of cognition-based mindfulness therapy on social anxiety, resilience and emotion regulation in women victims of domestic violence. *Thoughts and Behavior in Clinical Psychology*, *14*(51), 17–26. https://www.sid.ir/paper/172057/en

Tajfel, H., Turner, J. C., Austin, W. G., & Worchel, S. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In M. J. Hatch & M. Schulz (Eds.), *Organizational Identity* (pp. 56–65). Oxford University Press.

Tarozzi, M. (2020). *What is grounded theory?* Bloomsbury academic.

Tarrant, A., Featherstone, B., O'Dell, L., & Fraser, C. (2017). 'You try to keep a brave face on but inside you are in bits': Grandparent experiences of engaging with professionals in Children's Services. *Qualitative Social Work*, *16*(3), 351–366. http://doi.org/10.1177/1473325015615397

Taylor, D. J., Chavez, G. F., Adams, E. J., Chabra, A., & Shah, R. S. (1999). Demographic characteristics in adult paternity for first births to adolescents under 15 years of age. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. *24*(4), 251–258. http://doi.org/10.1016/s1054-139x(98)00122-0

Thwaites, R. (2017). (Re) Examining the Feminist Interview: Rapport, 'Gender Matching', and Emotional Labour. *Frontiers in Sociology*, *2*(18), 1–9. http://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2017.00018

Timonen, V., Foley, G., & Conlon, C. (2018). Challenges When Using Grounded Theory: A Pragmatic Introduction to Doing GT Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *17*, 1–10. http://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918758086

Tomkinson, J. (2019). Age at first birth and subsequent fertility. *Demographic Research*, *40*, 761–798. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26727016

Tracy, S. J. (2019). *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/jcu/detail.action?docID=5847435

Trub, L., Quinlan, E., Starks, T. J., & Rosenthal, L. (2017). Discrimination, internalized homonegativity and attitudes towards children of same sex parents: can secure attachment buffer against stigma internalization? *Family Process, 56*(3), 701–715. http://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12255

Turner, S., & Maschi, T. (2015). Feminist and empowerment theory and social work practice. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, *29*(2), 1–12. http://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2014.941282

UNICEF. (2022). Gender-based violence in emergencies. https://www.unicef.org/protection/gender-based-violence-in-emergencies

United Nations. (1993). Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.21_declaration%20elimination%20vaw.pdf

United Nations. (2012). *General Assembly.* https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session21/A-HRC-21-42_en.pdf

Van Breda, A. D. (2018). A critical review of resilience theory and its relevance for social work. *Social Work*, *54*(1), 1–18. http://dx.doi.org/10.15270/54-1-611

Vasileiou, K., Barnett, J., Thorpe, S., & Young, T. (2018). Characterising and justifying sample size sufficiency in interview-based studies: systematic analysis of qualitative health research over a 15-year period. *BMC Med Res Methodology, 18*(148), 1–18. http://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-018-0594-7

Vella, S. L. C., & Pai, N. B. (2019). A theoretical review of psychological resilience: Defining resilience and resilience research over the decades. *Archives of Medicine and Health Sciences*, *7*(2), 233. https://www.amhsjournal.org/text.asp?2019/7/2/233/273054

Wall-Wieler, E., Bronwell, M., Singal, D., Nickel, N., & Roos, L. L. (2018). The cycle of child protection service involvement: a cohort study of adolescent mothers. *Paediatrics*, *141*(6). http://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-3119

Ware, A. (2017). 'Awareness-Raising as Community Development: Theory, issues and practice in Myanmar.' In R. Phillips, S. Kenny & B. McGrath (Eds.), *Handbook of Community Development.* Routledge.

Wehmeyer, M. L. (2001). Self-determination and mental retardation. In L. Glidden (Ed.), *International Review of Research in Mental Retardation* (pp. 1–48). Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0074-7750(01)80004-5

Wehmeyer, M. L. (2020). The importance of self-determination to the quality of life of people with intellectual disability: A perspective. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *17*(19), 7121. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17197121

Wigginton, B., & Lafrance, M. N. (2019). Learning critical feminist research: A brief introduction to feminist epistemologies and methodologies. *Feminism & Psychology*, 1–17. http://doi.org/10.1177/0959353519866058

Wills, L., & Petrakis, M. (2019). The self in motherhood: a systematised review of relational self-construal and wellbeing in mothers. *Advances in Mental Health, 17*(1), 72–84, http://doi.org/10.1080/18387357.2018.1476066

Wilson, H., & Huntington, A. (2006). Deviant (m)others: The construction of teenage motherhood in contemporary discourse. *Journal of Social Policy*, *35*(1), 59–76. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279405009335

Wong, S. P., Twynstra, J., Gilliland, J. A., Cook, J. L., & Seabrook, J. A. (2020). Risk factors and birth outcomes associated with teenage pregnancy: a Canadian sample. *Journal of Paediatric and Adolescent Gynaecology*, *33*(2), 153–159. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpag.2019.10.006

Wood, M., & Barter, C. (2015). Hopes and fears: teenage mothers' experiences of intimate partner violence. *Children & Society*, *29*(6), 558–568. http://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12100

World Health Organisation. (2022). *Violence against women*. https://www.who.int/health-topics/violence-against-women#tab=tab_1

Wyn, J. (2009). *Youth Health and Welfare: the cultural politics of education and wellbeing.* Oxford University Press.

Yates, J., & Leggett, T. (2016). Qualitative Research: An Introduction. *Radiologic Technology*, *88*(2), 225–231. http://www.radiologictechnology.org/content/88/2/225.extract

Ylänne, V. (2016). Too old to parent? Discursive representations of late parenting in the British press. *Discourse & Communication*, *10*(2), 176–197. http://doi.org/10.1177/1750481315611242

Zhan, W., Smith, S. R., Warner, L. C., North, F., Wilhelm, S., & Nowak, A. (2017). Sexual behaviour and pregnancy among adolescents in foster family homes. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*. https://doi.org/10.1515/ijamh-2016-0155

Zito, R. C. (2018). Children as saviours? A propensity score analysis of the impact of teenage motherhood on personal transformation. *Youth & Society*, *50*(8), 1100–1122. http://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X16653872

Appendix A

Research Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE: **"Social adjustment beyond teenage motherhood: navigating life stages and issues of identity into adulthood"**

Were you a teenage mother? Is your eldest child now grown up, and between the ages of 18-40? If so, you are invited to take part in a research project about what life has been like after teenage motherhood.

This project hopes to identify the strengths, as well as supports that women may benefit from as they transition from teenage motherhood into and across stages of adulthood.

The study is being conducted by Ms Jemma Hamley and will contribute to attainment of Doctorate of Philosophy (Society and Culture) at James Cook University.

If you would like to be involved in the study, you will be invited to take part in a one on one interview. The interview with your consent, will be audio taped, and should take approximately 1-2 hours of your time. The interview will take place at a venue of your convenience, such as a café or a park. Skype may be another option for interviews.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary and you can stop taking part in the study at any time without explanation or prejudice.

It is not anticipated that the research will cause any distress however, there is potential for sensitive topics to arise. Therefore, information on various support services will be available in a handout should you wish to talk to someone afterwards such as Lifeline telephone counselling service 13 11 14, Beyond Blue 1300 224 636 and Womensline 1800 811 811.

If you know of others who might be interested in this study, can you please pass on this information sheet to them so they may contact me to volunteer for the study.

Your responses and contact details will be strictly confidential. The data from the study will be used in research publications and reports such as journal articles, Ms Jemma Hamley's dissertation, and various support services will also be asked whether they would like a copy of the research findings or journal articles generated from the research, however your names or other identifying information will not be shown.

It is hoped that a more in depth understanding of this topic will contribute towards a greater understanding of the support needs of former teenage mothers.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact **Ms Jemma Hamley or her supervisor Dr Susan Gair**

Principal Investigator: Ms Jemma Hamley
James Cook University
Phone:
Email: jemma.hamley@my.jcu.edu.au

Principal supervisor: Dr Susan Gair
James Cook University
Phone:
Email: susan.gair@jcu.edu.au

If you have any concerns regarding the ethical conduct of the study, please contact:
Human Ethics, Research Office
James Cook University, Townsville, Qld, 4811
Phone: (07) 4781 5011 (ethics@jcu.edu.au)

Cairns - Townsville - Brisbane – Singapore
CRICOS Provider Code 00117J

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form for Interview

This administrative form
has been removed