Young mothers: Discursive constructions of their lives and identities

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Abstract

The notion that early motherhood is a significant problem for society is widely documented in the academic literature, and there is a complicated history surrounding young pregnant and parenting women in social and educational policy contexts. Less is known about young mothers themselves and how they experience the social and material effects of early motherhood. The purpose of this study was to examine how young mothers, who attended a young parent program in Lake City in Victoria Australia, experienced early motherhood and how they contested the social discourses that framed their lives. Using a poststructural lens and drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, this thesis used narrative inquiry and discourse analysis to examine the complex nature of seven young mothers’ lives. Analysis of the narrative data showed that despite the complexities, early motherhood was a significant turning point as the young mothers drew on resources of resistance and responsibility to transform their lives. An analysis of the social welfare policy practices identified surveillance and regulation measures as responses to alleviate long-term welfare dependency but did not account for the structural and economic barriers that young mothers encountered in their lives. In educational contexts, the young mothers in this study had experienced disrupted education trajectories before moving to an alternative setting. The findings highlight that they were ‘invisible’ in mainstream educational contexts and while ‘learning from the margins’ in the young parent program. This study found that the voice of the young mother was missing in the social and educational policy discourses, and the complexities of early motherhood were not accounted for within the policies. This thesis argues that young mothers' voices need to be included in strategic policy responses to address issues of inequity and reduce the structural and economic barriers faced by young mothers.
Statement of Authorship

Except where explicit reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been relied upon or used without due acknowledgement in the main text and the list of references of the thesis. No editorial assistance has been received in the production of the thesis without due acknowledgement. Except where duly referred to, the thesis does not include material with copyright provisions or requiring copyright approvals.

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Associate Professor Annette Foley

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Statement of Ethics Approval

Ethics approval to conduct research on human participants for this study was received from the Human Research and Ethics Committee (HREC) at the University of Ballarat. Project reference number: A12-011.

Ethics approval to conduct the research in a government school setting was received from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). Project reference number: 2012_001499
Dedication

To all mothers who experience the journey of motherhood in all its joy and complexities.
Acknowledgments

To Associate Professor Annette Foley, my principal supervisor, I greatly appreciate your tireless effort and patience throughout the long doctoral journey. Your knowledge and wisdom helped me find my academic voice, refine my understandings of Foucault, and have the confidence to write.

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To the young mothers who participated in this research. Without you, this study would not exist. I cannot thank you enough for your openness to share your journeys into motherhood. Lynne, Tara, May, Ruby, Cassandra, Elly and Amanda, your voices were loud and clear in the stories you told. Thank you also to Tim and the staff at the Lake City Young Parent Program for providing time and space for the young women to participate.

At the beginning of this doctoral journey, my then principal supervisor, Professor Georgina Tsolidis, introduced me to Foucault. From then on, I saw the world differently and there was no going back. Thank you, Georgina, for beginning the research journey with me.

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A special thank you to Denise M Taylor who, in accordance with the Institute of Professional Editors’ Guidelines for editing research theses, provided a professional editing/proofreading service. Her attention to detail and advice was deeply appreciated.
All journeys have bumps in the road and this one no less so. Vision loss and complex eye surgery almost brought the research journey to a close before it started in earnest, but the modern miracles of surgery meant I could continue the research. Thank you to the team of ophthalmologists’ incredible skills to make it possible.

Close to the end of the research journey in 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic occurred, and the final months of writing and editing this thesis occurred during lockdown at home. Although still teaching and supporting university students learning online, the time and space allowed me to deeply reflect on this research to bring it to a close.

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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHHS</td>
<td>Department of Health and Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FaHCSIA</td>
<td>Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HYPM</td>
<td>Helping Young Parent Measure</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCYPP</td>
<td>Lake City Young Parent Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGA</td>
<td>Local Government Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Post-traumatic stress disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA</td>
<td>Responsible Serving of Alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCAL</td>
<td>Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCE</td>
<td>Victorian Certificate of Education</td>
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Chapter 1 - Introduction

The research that constitutes this doctoral thesis is informed by my first experiences of early motherhood and my commitment to the research area. Early motherhood or young motherhood is understood to be the age of a young woman who becomes pregnant between the ages 15 – 19 and becomes a mother. This understanding is ubiquitous in the academic literature and social policy documents that focused on early motherhood and is used in government statistical data to characterise populations.

I begin the thesis with a personal vignette that occurred in 1981. When I reflected on those early months with a new baby and the stigma and judgement I experienced, I was motivated to examine how young mothers in the 21st century are discursively constructed, and the social and material effects of those constructions. The introduction to the thesis is structured in two sections. The first section sets the scene with my personal vignette representing an exchange in a hospital setting in 1981. This vignette illustrates my positioning as a young mother in the prevailing discourses of early motherhood and perceived inadequacy of young mothers in the early 1980s. It is these discourses about young mothers that still appear to circulate in social and political contexts in the 21st century framing the context of the research. Following the discussion of how the research topic took shape, I introduce how the thesis is framed through the use of a ‘quilt’ metaphor. The second section of the introduction establishes the context of the research, the research questions, the theoretical framing, methodology and method chosen to undertake the study.

Before I present the first vignette, I provide a brief contextual biography. I had a stable childhood with two parents and an older sister present in my life. I completed secondary school and commenced a teaching diploma the following year at the age of 17. I married at 19 and my first pregnancy was confirmed ten months later. At the time, I was
considered by family and acquaintances as quite young, not only to be married, but also to be pregnant. With a background in piano, I had set up a business teaching music to children and adults while also completing my tertiary qualification. I had planned to be a primary school teacher, but this plan was put on hold when it was confirmed I was expecting a baby. During this time, my husband and I also moved from Melbourne to a regional city in Victoria where we settled and raised our son. My life context was quite different to the young mothers who were participants in this research project. Nevertheless, I include two vignettes of early motherhood experiences as throughout the pregnancy and the first years as a young mother, I was verbally critiqued for my parenting and part-time employment, shunned by other mothers in community groups, and considered unable to mother appropriately by health professionals.

**Setting the scene**

*Through the glass barrier, a young woman could be seen holding a bundle close to her body. There was a smell of disinfectant in the air and quiet murmurings in the distance with the occasional beep and buzz from various machines. If one listened closely, the soft pad of footsteps could be heard as people moved quietly about their business. The matron, with her brisk clicking heels audible on the linoleum, moved towards the main desk in the children’s ward, her head moving swiftly from side to side as she surveyed the scene.*

*“Who is that holding that baby?” she demanded brusquely to no-one in particular as she continued to move through the administration area. As she entered the Isolation ward the matron directed her next question to the young woman.*

*“Who gave you permission to enter this room and hold this baby?” demanded the matron.*
The young woman turned slowly, still holding the precious bundle, now clearly in view, and nervously replied, “I am his mother”. The matron moved to the chart and flicked through the clinical notes.

“You are far too young to have a baby...no wonder he is having feeding problems...you have no idea what to do!”

The young woman’s mouth dropped open and she cuddled the baby closer, frightened and aghast by the accusation.

It is 1981.

Situating the Researcher: A personal story

A brief account of my experience as a first-time young mother opened this chapter and was a catalyst for this research journey. I was admitted with my seven-week-old son into the Isolation Unit situated in the children’s ward of the Lake City Regional Hospital1. I slept in a side room at the hospital for several days and was woken by the nurses every two hours during the night to breastfeed the baby. During our stay, Matron questioned my right to be at my baby’s side, caring for him as I worked with the health professional team to resolve his feeding issues. I was positioned, by Matron, as a young mother with inadequate mothering skills. She stated publicly, and quite emphatically, that it was my fault the baby was experiencing feeding problems, and that I had no knowledge of parenting or child development. The Isolation Unit was clearly visible to the nurses at their station and it was only on reflection, after the encounter with Matron, that I sensed I was under surveillance. I was unable to establish that I was a capable and knowledgeable new mother. Instead, I was categorised as incapable by one

1 Lake City Regional Hospital is pseudonym for the hospital located in a regional city in Victoria, Australia.
'authoritative' health professional, and the hospital staff had not taken the time to enquire about my background. My confidence as a new mother diminished, and I could not trust that my voice would be heard in the hospital context. Although this scenario had a positive ending with dramatic changes in attitude by the matron and other nursing staff, this only came about through intervention by the father of the child. He had allied health professional qualifications, had worked in his field for several years, and was immediately listened to by hospital staff. He commanded respect as he politely made demands to instigate changes in the way staff could support me as a new mother and his baby son. He wielded the 'power' that I could not exercise as a young woman, new to the demands of motherhood and worried about the baby. Once Matron's negative views regarding my ability to care appropriately for my newborn son were challenged, nursing staff took time to speak with me and acknowledge my background, knowledge and skills. Following this experience, I was in a better position to negotiate the complex world of motherhood.

Three decades later, my early motherhood memories were rekindled. Prior to commencing the research project, I volunteered to work with a group of young mothers and their toddlers and pre-schoolers at the Lake City Young Parents Program (LCYPP) in regional Victoria. It was during this time I gained some unexpected insights. While I engaged the young children in a range of play activities, their mothers would show keen interest in what was happening and became engaged in conversations about parenting. Through informal conversations, some of the young mothers shared their aspirations for

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2 As defined by the Department of Health (Australian), the term 'allied health professional' was coined in the 1990s and is used under the National Registration and Accreditation (NRAS) scheme as a term to group together a range of professionals in various health disciplines. Allied health professionals provide services in a range of settings including hospitals, community health, in-home care and private practice. The term is used in service delivery and at policy level. For further information see http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications.publisher.nsf/Content/work-review-australian-government-health-workforce-programs-loc--chapter-6-developing-dental-allied-health-workforce--chapter-8-allied-health-workforce

3 Lake City Young Parent's Program (LCYPP) is a pseudonym and is used throughout the thesis.
the future, for themselves and their children. They expressed a sense that the wider community constantly judged them, their lives, and their parenting skills, and at times did not acknowledge them as mothers. They talked about some of the complexities they faced with housing and relationships. Some of the young mothers were anxious about asking for advice from health professionals in case they were deemed to be ‘unfit mothers’ and there were many barriers to negotiate. One young woman told me of an incident in a local shopping centre, where her two-year-old had been particularly difficult to pacify and was lying on the ground screaming loudly. As other members of the community walked by, they voiced their disapproval loudly with unhelpful comments while glaring at the young family, making the situation even more difficult. Another young mother spoke of the vitriolic language she encountered at her secondary school when other students discovered she was pregnant. Derogatory words hurled at her included ‘slut’, ‘bitch’ and ‘prostitute’, and she was asked on several occasions, ‘How many times have you opened your legs?’ She left school and did not complete Year 12. Against this backdrop emerged the research questions that sought to examine how young mothers are discursively constructed in social and political contexts. As an aside, none of the young mothers and children that I met while undertaking voluntary work at the setting still attended the LCYPP when I began this study. It was some years later, after receiving ethical approval through the Ethics Committee at Federation University and the Department of Education and Training (DET, formerly DEECD), that I sought permission from Tim, the LCYPP coordinator, to return to the program to carry out interviews with the group of young mothers who participated in this research. This thesis is their story.

The idea of using a metaphor emerged part way through the research journey when I was enmeshed in the young mother data. As I began to piece their stories together while reflecting on my own experiences (and my love of quilt-making), the ideas coalesced. The following discussion provides the reasoning for why I am using the ‘quilt’ as a framing device in this research.
Quilt as metaphor

Figure 1

Judy Mathieson, Quilt, ‘Bristol Stars’, 1999, 83” x 83”

Note. This quilt design was chosen to illustrate the research project and doctoral journey. The digital image was provided by the quilt designer, Judy Mathieson, who specialises in the Mariner’s Compass designs. Copyright 1999 by Judy Mathieson. Reprinted with permission (See Appendix D).

The quilt is used as a metaphor for this research project, which has its beginning in an extract from my own narrative in the Introduction: “she cuddles the baby closer, frightened and aghast”. I sought metaphorical comfort as I cuddled my baby son close to me.

A quilt brings comfort and warmth; it is both a text and a narrative. A quilt design is decorative and symbolic, creating meaning for the creator and viewer of the quilt.
Although this research project focuses on young mothers and how they are discursively positioned in the social world, it also reflects my own journey as a young mother. The brief narrative extract provides an insight of my journey into motherhood. My more recent and overarching quest to develop my skills as a fledgling researcher is also captured throughout the project as I piece together each important part of the thesis, connecting fragments of fabric to create the quilt as I develop my skills in research and writing to present my findings, my analysis of the data, and argument.

Other researchers have also used a quilt metaphor to frame aspects of their research. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest, “metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish – a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language” (p. 3). The quilt metaphor is used by Bamford (2005) to create a narrative to tell the stories of accomplished art teachers. When data involves several participants, Koelsch (2012) suggests that the quilt metaphor is useful, as each participant’s story can be captured by one part of the quilt. Similarly, Saukko (2000) wrote up individual women's stories about their experiences with anorexia using the metaphor of a patchwork quilt as the framework to acknowledge multiple voices. Also, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) use a tapestry, weaving, and quilt metaphor to describe what a portraitist, as a researcher, does to construct narratives, describing this as “the process of creating a whole often feels like weaving a tapestry or piecing together a quilt” (p. 12). A patchwork quilt metaphor also emerged from data gathered by Logsdon et al. (2005) of how adolescent mothers could “piece together” (p. 606) the support they required from others who provided varied and often unreliable provision of care. Each of these ideas went some way towards affirming the construction of the quilt metaphor that frames this research project and I take Denzin and Lincoln’s (2005) suggestion that a qualitative researcher is “a maker of quilts” (p. 4).
Additionally, the metaphor of ‘quest’ is drawn from McCulloch (2013) who seeks alternative descriptions of doctoral education. This fits with my understandings of the doctoral journey and connects to the concept of the mariner’s compass. A compass shows the direction one is facing and options available to choose which direction to follow, and there are many decisions that I have made to undertake and write up the research. The mariner’s compass is the intricate pattern used to construct the top layer of the quilt as illustrated in Figure 1. A discussion of the development of the quilt metaphor follows and introduces how the intricate pattern of mariner’s compass is used to create the framing of this research.

Quilts have three layers: a backing, the batting, and the top of the quilt. The sides are then bound to finish the quilt. For the purposes of this project, the backing is considered as the background to the project. This provides a space to begin, to set the scene, to frame the context, and articulate the question. It is here that the macrosociological discourses are explored through the literature review, focusing on academic literature, government policies and discursive practices. The batting is the next layer, inserted to provide warmth. In this work, the batting contains the theoretical perspectives, methodology and method, providing depth and reasons for the chosen theoretical lens, methodology and method. This layer seeks to be the connecting fabric between the bottom and top layers. It might be invisible in the final construction of a quilt, but it plays an important role in drawing the threads through and holding the layers of the quilt together.

The top layer of the quilt comprises fragments of fabric that are joined together to create intricate patterns. In this case, the pattern known as the mariner’s compass is used as a metaphor for the complex and intricate lives of the young mothers’ stories that are represented here. In their text, *Doing Narrative Research*, Andrews et al. (2013) highlight that “narrative research is a multilevel, interdisciplinary, field” (p. 13) and liken the
development of the text to “a compass for navigating the seas of narrative research” (p. 13). Narrative inquiry, as a methodology in this work, seeks to capture the microsociological discourses of the young mothers themselves, their subjugated voices, and the way they set new directions after the birth of their first child.

A specific quilt top design chosen for this work incorporates the complex mariner’s compass pattern called “Bristol Stars” by Judith Mathieson (1999). The mariner’s compass represents my quest to bring to the fore both visible and invisible knowledge associated with how young mothers are constituted through motherhood. This pattern is set on overlapping layers of fabric, depicting the multiple complexities of young mothers’ lives. Each circle positioned between the inner and outer circles represents the seven young mothers, and the complexity of their lives is reflected in the circular shapes. Each small circle represents the child/children of the mother. Circularity is also reflected in the inner and outer circles as the triangular shapes depict continual movement, and further fluidity is evident in the positioning of the background checkerboard. The four circular shapes positioned outside the large circle represent the macrosociological discourses that discursively construct young mothers, and represent the forces acting upon young mothers, and more broadly, their discursive construction in the social world. Each layer is overlaid, and the bottom and top layers connect by quilting stitches drawn through all layers of fabric.

I position myself in two places: in the eighth circle as a young mother constructed by the dominant discourses of the time (early 1980s), and as the researcher, at the centre of the quilt because I am central to constructing the research project as I draw the threads up through the layers of the quilt to strengthen and hold the quilt together. Those threads radiate out from the centre to the edges towards the binding in line with the traditional process of quilting from the centre outwards. The stitching also draws together the
subjugated voices of the young mothers to metaphorically strengthen understandings of how they live their lives.

The binding of a quilt finishes the edges and completes the project. I draw on the binding step in the quilt construction as I make connections across the data, bringing the young mothers’ stories into play with the macrosociological discourses of governmental policy and academic literature. It draws together the conclusions and reflects on the quest I have undertaken.

A doctoral thesis is a particular form of writing that illustrates the research project and acts as an evidentiary document of the directions the research has taken. Once the examination and review processes are completed, the thesis document itself is bound, using specific book binding techniques, just as the quilt is bound and finished using appropriate finishing techniques. It is acknowledged that qualitative research projects might not have a definitive end, as other perspectives, other young mother stories, and other lenses can be applied to analyse the data or incorporate new data. However, the binding, in this case, will be considered as the conclusion of this work, for now.

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Context of the study

This study has a contextual basis in successive government policies created to tackle social exclusion and reduce unemployment. Policy responses, from the mid-1990s, saw a move towards the introduction of welfare to work programs. In line with global trends, labour market transformations emerged, as skills training and requirements were built into social welfare policy programs in countries such as the United Kingdom (U.K.), United States (U.S.) and Australia. In particular, adolescent pregnancy was an underlying concern for governments. To reduce pregnancy rates in teenagers, key
elements of social welfare programs in the U.S. introduced programs that encouraged abstinence from sexual activity and the prevention of pregnancy through the use of contraception. The U.K. implemented multifaceted approaches to supporting young families and providing sex education in schools. Australian social policy responses related to disadvantaged and marginalised groups came about in 2011 with the introduction of targeted measures to break the welfare dependency cycle. Young mothers became the focus of the measures with education, training and/or employment pathways, and compliance frameworks embedded in the policy measure. Through the implementation of these measures the young mother as a problematic subject emerged as a constitutive element of the political field.

Discursive constructions of early motherhood are predominant in academic literature and social policy responses (Arai, 2003; Breheny & Stephens, 2007a). Key discourses invariably detail negative outcomes of early motherhood including welfare dependency, low educational attainment, poor parenting skills (Keegan & Corliss, 2008), and health issues (Cherrington & Breheny, 2005). Young mothers are constructed as lacking responsibility with non-existent aspirational goals (Fergusson & Woodward, 2000). Stigmatised and marginalised, young mothers’ stories are often invisible within the broader contexts of society. Despite declining birth rates in recent decades (Wilson & Huntington, 2006), young mothers are framed as a social problem and a range of ‘tough love’ policies have been introduced to reduce welfare dependency and increase employability through participation in education and training. In contrast, alternative discourses suggest that early motherhood can be an affirming life course (SmithBattle, 2000a) and transformative as young mothers see value in completing their education (Hosie, 2007) and taking up employment opportunities.
Research questions

This research is underpinned by the understanding that taken for granted discourses about young mothers position them in particular ways. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the discursive constructions of young mothers and the social and material effects of those constructions within institutional and local contexts. It considers young mothers’ often invisible subjugated narratives and juxtaposes this with the deficit framing evident in the macrosociological discourses.

Two research questions frame this study:

How are young mothers discursively constructed in institutional and local contexts?

What are the social and material effects of those constructions?

Theoretical perspective

The thesis uses a poststructuralist theoretical framework to acknowledge the multiple subjectivities and complex lives of young mothers. I draw on Foucault’s understandings of subjectivity, discourse and power/knowledge to examine how the young mother as subject is constituted in the social world, and how she constitutes herself. In particular, the study seeks to examine how ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 131) in macrosociological discourses constitute and position young mothers as deficit, while other discursive framings of young mothers are subjugated or invisible. The notion of governmentality is used to examine how political power operates and how young mothers become problematised through policy discourses and governmental practices.
Methodology

A qualitative research design, with dual methodological approaches – narrative inquiry and discourse analysis – are used to examine how young mothers were discursively constructed in the social world. Narrative inquiry was chosen as a means of making visible the storied accounts of young mothers’ complex lives to identify how they subscribed to or pushed back from the discursive constructions of young motherhood in a localised context. Complexities and tensions within their accounts provided a window into ways they took up alternative and visible subject positions. Discourse analysis was chosen to examine how young mothers were problematised in policy texts and became problematic subjects enmeshed in broader contexts of institutions and government.

Methods

To enable the subjugated voices of young mothers to be heard, research interviews were undertaken with seven participants from a young parent program. Each participant was invited to take part in two interviews, held several weeks apart. Four of the seven participants took part in a second interview to confirm accuracy of the content from the first interview and additional questions were asked to extend the storied accounts of their lives.

To examine policy texts, I drew on Bacchi’s (2009) poststructural method of policy analysis, known as “What's the problem represented to be? (WPR)” (p. xii). A range of policy documents relating to the Helping Young Parent Measure (HYPM) were examined to identify how young mothers were problematised in the policy measure introduced in 2011, and how the shift in focus specifically included young mothers.
Discursive research spaces

Two research spaces were chosen to examine how young mothers are discursively constructed in the social world. The first research space was a field site and focused on young women who attended the Lake City Young Parents' Program (LCYPP) located in a regional city in Victoria, Australia. Some of the young mothers lived in a socioeconomically disadvantaged community with limited public transport options, while others lived further afield and could drive to the location. The program created a space for young mothers to advance their schooling and qualifications through a range of courses and provided a pathway to further study or employment. Parenting skills and other vocational skills were embedded into the program and young mothers could access childcare at the same location. This site was chosen to examine how one particular group of young mothers shaped their lives and drew on resources of resilience and responsibility to counter the negative discourses that circulated in the public domain. Chapters 5 and 6 provide a full discussion of the findings.

The second discursive research space analysed social and educational policy texts to examine the mechanisms at work that constituted young mothers as particular types of subjects and thus problematised. Drawing on one social policy example, the HYPM, introduced as part of the Australian Government budget release in 2011, the study sought to examine how the new welfare measures became part of the broader social policies aimed at reducing welfare dependency. Education policy texts were examined to identify whether young mothers, as a subset of the students in educational settings, were visible within the policy texts. Chapter 7 discusses the social policy measures related to young mothers in Australia, while Chapter 8 includes a discussion of how young mothers are positioned in educational policies.
Significance of the research

This research draws attention to the discursive construction of young mothers in the social and educational field. The importance of this work is the nexus between the discursive constructions that reproduce young mothers in a deficit light as long-term welfare recipients, and their own journeys into motherhood that are transformative and, in many ways, resistant to the deficit view. Therefore, this research seeks to acknowledge other ways of envisioning how young mothers construct their lives giving them a voice to contrast the ‘taken for granted’ stigma and marginalisation. The analysis of their narratives provides an insight into the complex ways early motherhood is negotiated, and how the prevailing notion of ‘good’ mothering practices can overshadow the parenting practices used by young mothers. The findings contribute to the understandings of the social and material effects of the dominant and subjugated discourses about young mothers.

This research also contributes to the understandings of how alternative education programs for young mothers have a positive impact on young mothers’ lives through social support and the reconnection to educational possibilities. Paradoxically, though, alternative education contexts can also reduce the possibility of access to comprehensive programs and resources in mainstream educational contexts. Young mothers can be ‘invisible’ as policies and practices do not always coalesce to support their educational pathways. This research offers key insights into how both social and educational policy need to be enacted differently to address disparities in access to social and educational resources.
Terminology used in this thesis

A range of terms have been used to identify young mothers in academic literature, government documents and media texts. The terms teenage mother, teen mum, adolescent mother, and schoolgirl mother, have all been used in academic studies that examine young mothers and their lives. When this study commenced, the term ‘teenage mother’ (or its plural form) with single quotation marks was used to emphasise the positioning of this group within dominant discourses. As the study progressed, the academic literature highlighted the complex and multiple identifications of the ‘teenage mother’. The term ‘teenage mother’ encompassed all ‘teenage mothers’, whether they were older or younger, married or unmarried, welfare dependent or self-supporting (Wilson & Huntington, 2006). The term was used in media and government policy responses without specific definition or recognition of the subgroups within the group, ‘teenage mother’. Multiple identity categories of ‘young mother’ were evidenced through the range of keyword searches undertaken in the Factiva database to identify relevant articles in the Australian media following the introduction of the HYPM. The following terms were all used as labels for young mothers: sole mother; sole mum; sole parent; lone mother; lone mum; lone parent; single mother; single mum; single parent; teenage mother; teenage mum; and teenage parent.

In 2012, the Teenage Parent Measure was implemented as part of a broader package of social welfare policies by the federal government. The measure was put into effect in ten disadvantaged areas in Australia and is introduced in Chapter 2 and examined in depth in Chapter 7. Lake City, the location where this study takes place, was not one of the ten disadvantaged areas where the new measure was established. Several young parents, who were clients of the new program, provided feedback to the federal employment minister at the time, Bill Shorten, that the title ‘teenage mum’ was offensive and not inclusive. The government responded by stating that the phrase would no longer be used
in public documents when referring to young parents or mothers (Shorten rebadges ‘teenage mums’, The Australian, 6 January 2012). The measure was renamed the Helping Young Parents Measure (HYPM) and was also referred to as the Helping Young Parents trial. A more recent iteration renamed the measure to ParentsNext. This study focuses on young mothers aged between 15 and 19 and the term ‘young mother’ will be adopted throughout this study, except when other terms are used in cited texts.

**Thesis structure**

This thesis consists of nine chapters.

**Chapter 1 - Context and research orientation: Setting the scene**

The introductory chapter is presented in two sections. The first section begins with a personal vignette and commentary and then introduces the ‘Quilt as metaphor’ notion that I draw on to frame the thesis. The second section establishes the context of the research and outlines the theoretical framing, methodology and methods employed to carry out the research.

**Chapter 2 - Young mother: The landscape of policy and discourses of motherhood**

In this chapter, I review a range of literature that is relevant to the study. The chapter begins by reviewing the social and educational policy terrain and, in particular, policies that impact on young mothers. Secondly, the chapter presents a commentary drawing on the academic literature that focuses on the discursive positioning of young mothers. A brief discussion about the historical constructions of young motherhood as a deviant population and more recent constructions, which still problematise young motherhood as a moral and social issue, are presented. To frame the discussion, three key discourses linked to health and psychosocial determinants, welfare dependency, and low
educational attainments are briefly examined. A review of alternative education programs for young mothers is also undertaken in this section.

Chapter 3 - Theorising the study

This chapter begins by defining theory, and maps the theoretical terrain used in the study. I discuss the poststructuralist framework used in the thesis and theorise my understandings of discourse and the discursive construction of the subject, in this case, the young mother. I introduce key Foucauldian concepts of subjectivity, power/knowledge, and governmentality to examine how young mothers are problematised in social and education policy contexts.

Chapter 4 - Mapping the methodology and method

This chapter presents dual methodological approaches chosen to examine the data. Firstly, narrative inquiry was chosen to explore the young mothers’ storied accounts of their lives. Secondly, discourse analysis was selected to examine the key social and education policies that discursively constructed young mothers. The second section of this chapter outlines the data collection and discourse analytic methods. Research interviews were chosen to elicit the participants’ voices, and narrative accounts were created in order to draw out the themes. The ‘What’s the problem represented to be (WPR)?’ approach (Bacchi, 2009) was used as a tool to examine social and education policy texts. The chapter ends with a discussion that situates my reflexive self.

Chapter 5 - Stories from the field

This chapter presents the storied accounts of seven young mothers as they experienced early motherhood and other complex and problematic events in their lives. Five themes were identified and used to connect the individual and collective narratives together and
are as follows: Unravelling at the seams; Layers of doubt; Stitching life together; Intricate complexities; Reading the compass: New directions.

Chapter 6 - Young mother identities and discursive practices

This chapter examines the young mothers’ storied accounts presented in the previous chapter to understand how young mothers negotiate motherhood and move from problematic lives to a more affirming identity of young mother. Discursive resources of responsibility and resilience were identified, and young motherhood was considered transformative and a significant turning point in their lives.

Chapter 7 - The politics of young mother: Social policy

Young mothers face social and political inequalities, and this chapter examines how young mothers are discursively constructed by social policy. It draws on one recent example of Australian social policy – the HYPM, that was formalised as a measure in 2012 – drawing attention to the young mother as subject, as part of the broader neoliberal notions of social welfare policy.

Chapter 8 – The politics of young mothers: Alternative educational contexts and education policy

This chapter examines how young mothers as students are constructed in the Australian education system. The first section in this chapter makes the case that the young mothers in this study benefited from attendance at a young parent program, which created a safe space, support systems and educational opportunities as they came together to experience motherhood. The second section argues that young mothers’ precarious identities in the Australian education system are shrouded in a ‘cloak of invisibility’, with disrupted school trajectories, and located on the periphery of schooling without access to comprehensive curriculum.
Chapter 9: *Conclusion: Closing the loop*

The concluding chapter draws together and acknowledges the discursive patterns in the complexities in the young mothers' lives. It provides a summary of the previous chapters, the major arguments of the research and implications. This chapter considers that solutions in social and education policy require wide-ranging responses to support young mothers who are living in, and learning from, the margins.

*Final remarks*

This section closes the thesis with a second vignette presenting how I experienced judgement while visiting a child maternal health centre as a young mother of a seven-month-old baby and provides a brief commentary to draw the thesis to a close.
Chapter 2 - Young mother: The landscape of policy and the discourses of motherhood

To provide the context for the study, this chapter reviews the academic literature and related social and education policy commentary that focuses on the discursive positioning of young mothers in institutional and local contexts, and the social and material effects of that positioning. This chapter begins by presenting a snapshot of the social welfare and education policy reforms related to teenage pregnancy. I present this snapshot as a way of setting the scene or laying some ground in the literature review that sheds some light on the policy terrain associated with young people and, in particular, policies that have impacted on young parents. For the purposes of this research, the focus begins from the mid-1990s, drawing on social welfare policies from the U.K. and the U.S., two countries that have served to influence and inform the Australian policy landscape (Castles, 1996; Saunders, 2000). The U.K. welfare reform also drew on Australia’s model of means-benefit tests (Jordan, 2000). Changes to Australian social policy associated with adolescent pregnancy and parenting appeared later in the 2000s with the introduction of the HYPM in 2011. The second section of the chapter presents an overview of the academic literature that examines the discursive constructions of young motherhood, juxtaposing discourses of risk and discourses of new directions.

Social welfare policies related to adolescent pregnancy

As the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries moved towards the globalisation of markets since the 1980s, countries in Continental Europe and Scandinavia sought to offset rising unemployment data by increasing social
insurance contributions (Jordan, 2000). In contrast, in the 1990s, countries such as the U.K. and U.S. with Conservative governments, and Australia with a Labor government, instigated means-tested benefits as part of the social welfare systems with work-related obligations (Jordan, 2001). In the U.K., this led to the instigation of the Third Way program by the prime minister of the new Labour government, Tony Blair, and his advisor Tony Giddens. The Third Way focused on social welfare reform and was considered “a specifically British solution to a set of issues which - in one form or another - confront all welfare states” (Jordan, 2000, p. 2). According to Bullen et al. (2000), the Third Way was a strategy to move “beyond the outdated political binaries of the Left and Right…towards national renewal” (p. 441). To increase means-tested benefits (Jordan, 2000), the Third Way concept of tax-benefit reform drew on the Australian system of work-related obligation. In addition, the Australian and New Zealand systems at the time both incorporated “minimum levels of social protection to those who meet certain conditions” (Castles, 1996, p. 88), hence a means-tested model was developed. Across the three countries, the welfare reform changes focused on different groups in the population, but in particular, in the U.K. and U.S., aspects of social policy focused on adolescent pregnancy and strategies to prevent high pregnancy rates. In Australia, changes in social welfare policy focused on single parents more generally. The following section maps policy responses in the three countries from the mid-1990s to illustrate how social policy priorities changed focus as adolescent pregnancy and parenting became a greater concern.

**Social policy in the United Kingdom**

One of the priorities of the U.K. Labour Government that came to power in 1997 was to “modernize the U.K. economy and welfare state…end child poverty and…tackle social exclusion” (Walker & Wiseman, 2003, p. 3). The 1997 Pre-Budget Report (HM Treasury, 1997, 4) outlined how the Government was seeking to modernise the welfare state in the
new labour market, society and the global economy. A new approach for the 21\textsuperscript{st} century was flagged in the Pre-Budget Report to provide stability in the labour market, including macroeconomic stability and growth; a flexible and adaptable workforce; welfare to work programs; and an investment in skills (HM Treasury, 1997, 4.14). Particular groups were highlighted in the Pre-Budget Report, including the 20\% of lone parent families on income support at the time. One aspect of the broader sweep of strategies influenced by global trends was the changes to the welfare to work policy domain. At the time, unemployment rates of 7.1\%, including at least one million people under the age of 25, were considered too high (HM Treasury, 1997, 4). Strategies to encourage recipients on welfare to broaden their education, including basic skills in literacy and numeracy, and finding employment, were deemed essential elements of the new government priorities (HM Treasury, 1997, 4).

In 1998, a workfare program called the New Deal was introduced, targeting unemployed 18–24-year-olds with training, subsidised employment, and voluntary work as designated elements of the program. Participation was mandatory and sanctions were imposed on those who were not willing to engage in one of the options. Once the program was introduced other groups were also targeted including lone parents with school age children. At the time, young pregnant women or mothers were not specifically targeted as a group requiring support under the New Deal program, and the lone parent benefits did not support childcare and education (Social Exclusion Unit, SEU, 1999). The increase in young single mothers and the rate of teenage conception, were high, leading to calls for action by the newly elected Labour government (Ingham, 2005). In 1999, to tackle the issue of high pregnancy rates, the U.K. prime minister, Tony Blair, introduced a 10-year strategy intended to halve teenage pregnancy rates. Known as the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, it was the first endeavour by any government in the U.K to reduce teenage pregnancy rates (Hadley et al., 2016). When introducing the strategy, Blair stated:
Too many teenage mothers – and fathers – simply fail to understand the price they, their children and society, will pay...Our failure to tackle this problem has cost the teenagers, their children and the country dear...the consequences of doing this can be seen all around us in shattered lives and blighted futures. (SEU, 1999, p. 4)

The strategy was developed using a multi-faceted approach with four target areas. These areas included: access to effective contraception; sex and relationship education; improved communications with young people and their families; and coordinated support for young parents. The support program sought to lower the risk of teenage pregnancies by preventing further unplanned pregnancies and addressing the intergenerational cycle of welfare dependency. As part of its focus the SEU also sought to reduce social exclusion for young parents and their families. Implementation of the program occurred at national, regional and local levels with funding committed to the duration of the strategy. Statistics indicated that the strategy was successful in reducing the number of conceptions in women aged 15 to 17. From the original baseline in 1998 of 46.6 conceptions per 1000 women aged 15 to 17, the under-18 pregnancy rates were halved, at 22.9 conceptions per thousand women by 2014 (Office for National Statistics, 2014). Despite the decrease in the U.K. conception rates, Arai (2009) argues that particular representations of early motherhood in social policy responses can add to the “pathologisation of young parenthood” (p. 181). Teenage pregnancy and parenting are constructed as a social problem without taking account of the possibility that early motherhood can enhance a young woman’s life (Arai, 2009).

**Social policy in the United States**

As in the U.K. in the last decades of the 20th century, teenage childbearing emerged as a problem in the U.S. (Furstenberg, 2007). Rates of pregnancy were very high in the early 1960s but decreased in the late 1960s and early 1970s (www.census.gov). In 1979, the
Carter administration placed adolescent pregnancy high on the agenda and proposed $148 million in addition to the Adolescent Health, Services and Pregnancy Act of 1978 (S.2910 — 95th Congress, 1977-1978) where $60 million had been allocated. The purpose of the Act was to prevent unwanted and repeat adolescent pregnancies, and ensure pregnant teenagers received appropriate care. Priority was given to those who were aged 17 and under, and the Act clearly stipulated that using funds for abortions was prohibited. There were several debates related to the Act, but many members of the 95th Congress believed adolescent pregnancy was a growing problem and it was vital that the bill passed (Vinovskis, 1988). Further to this, Vinovskis (1981) observed that the urgency to pass the bill focused on high adolescent pregnancy rates, yet “many Senators and Representatives privately admitted [that the bill] was hastily conceived and poorly drafted” (p. 207). In essence, adolescent pregnancy and early motherhood was constructed as a social problem that required urgent resolution.

Moving forward, President Clinton signed ‘The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996’. This act was designed to assist families to become self-sufficient and reduce reliance on welfare. Provision of assistance became the responsibility of the state, and strict work requirements were imposed (Adair, 2008). For example, single parents were expected to work 20 hours per week in the first year while two-parent families were expected to work 35 hours per week. As part of the act, there was an increase in childcare funding to the value of $14 billion over the following six years to enable more mothers to gain employment. It outlined that women receiving welfare would continue to receive health benefits as they transitioned from welfare dependency to work. Under the new laws, families who had already received assistance for five years would no longer receive aid. Individual states and territories in the U.S. were tasked with developing individual personal responsibility plans, and connections to education, training and employment services, which would assist the move from welfare dependency to the workforce. Importantly, provisions for teen parents
were made under the new laws. To receive assistance, all unmarried minors⁴ were required to live with a responsible adult and participate in education and training. Further to this, $50 million a year was appropriated to pregnancy prevention programs.

In 1996, under PRWORA, the Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) was developed to ensure assistance was provided to families that required financial assistance and other support services. The basic premise of the measure was personal responsibility, and that assistance was not to be considered a handout. Instead, welfare recipients were required to engage in full-time activities classified as work activities and this did not include engagement in higher education. To qualify for assistance, the recipient was either pregnant or caring for a child under 19 years-of-age, had a low income, or was unemployed or about to become unemployed. The program sought to end dependency on government funds by promoting job preparation and work, creating caps in relation to the amount of benefit received and the time recipients could remain on benefit. Marriage and two-parent families were encouraged. Each U.S. state or territory established specific criteria that applicants were required to meet. As at 2020, the TANF program remains in existence and over the life of the measure, various sanctions including work requirements and time limits to receiving assistance have continued. As Christopher (2004) notes, the TANF program was “very successful in moving lone mothers and their families off cash assistance” (p.146), but this did not necessarily take into account, socioeconomic and employment status of those who no longer received welfare.

Although teen pregnancy continued to demand the attention of the U.S. government, statistical analysis indicated a decline in the birth rate for teenagers from the 1950s, apart from a sharp rise in rates in the late 1980s to 1991 (Ventura et al., 2001). While

⁴ From 1995, a ‘minor’ is considered to be under the age of 18, although in some US states and contexts such as alcohol consumption and gambling, the age is 21. In relation to the ‘age of consent’, it varies between 16 and 18 depending on the US state. (The ‘age of consent’ relates to the legal age a young person can competently consent to engaging in sexual acts with another person).
many young women remained unmarried at the birth of their first child, fewer teenagers were becoming first time mothers in the 15 to 19-year-old age bracket (Ventura, et al., 2001). The key platform outlined by President George Bush in 2004 focused on reducing teenage pregnancy by implementing sex education programs based on abstinence until marriage, costing $176 million annually. Information about contraception methods to prevent pregnancy and the avoidance of sexually transmitted diseases were not provided in the programs. In contrast, when President Barack Obama came to office, he announced a budget of $178 million for the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative. This initiative sought to implement multifaceted models with the aim of reducing teen pregnancy and births in communities with high rates of birth. In 2010, the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) set up the Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) program to fund the implementation, development and evaluation of innovative approaches to teenage pregnancy prevention. The focus was adolescent populations aged between 10 and 19 years.

The ‘welfare queen’ dilemma

The term ‘welfare queen’ became synonymous with unmarried women, particularly during the 1996 reforms, and framed women who received welfare assistance in derogatory ways. As Sparks (2003) noted:

Commentators regularly invoked...gender-biased images of ‘welfare queens’ out to cheat taxpayers and of irresponsible teenage girls bearing children out of wedlock as the quintessential justification for punitive welfare reform. The only seemingly positive public role for recipients during this debate was as a ‘welfare to work’ success story. (p. 172)

Mothers who sought better lives for themselves and their children by engaging in ‘welfare to work activities’ were considered compliant and upright citizens, whereas those who did not comply were deemed recalcitrant (Sparks, 2003). In her book titled The Politics of
Disgust: The public identity of the welfare queen, Hancock (2004) provided further evidence of how particular narratives shaped the political rhetoric that perpetuated the stereotype of welfare recipients in the U.S. Hancock (2004) argues that welfare recipients were discursively constructed as “mostly single mothers who are poor and African American” (p. 6). Similarly, Pillow (2004), investigated how in both social and education policy, teen mothers were constructed in various ways. In one framing, teen mothers were “good girls who made a mistake” (Pillow, 2004, p. 3) while other framings portrayed teen mothers as “welfare queens” (Pillow, 2004, p. 3). The term, ‘welfare queen’ was particularly prevalent for “black unwed teen mothers” (Pillow, 2004, p. 217) highlighting the racial profiling of particular groups. According to Hancock (2004), the concept of the welfare queen “is grounded in two discursive themes about Black women traceable to slavery: their laziness and their fecundity” (p. 6). As target populations, some groups find it difficult to contest their public identity, and stereotypes are “immune to contradictory information” (Hancock, 2004, p. 8) that could frame groups in other ways. An analysis of Congress and media data sets by Hancock (2004) highlighted overlapping constructs of teen mother identity, including “overly fertile, illegitimacy, single-parent family [and a] culture of poverty, cross-generation dependency” (p. 95). The ‘welfare queen’ construct was repeated throughout the 1996 congressional debates about welfare reform (Hancock, 2004) and “the Congressional Record data set featured no significant inclusion of welfare recipient’s voices in the final debate” (p. 115). As Champlin (2016) argues, the ‘welfare queen’ stereotype remains pervasive as U.S. policies constrain impoverished single mothers to a lifetime cycle of poverty by minimising access to social welfare assistance.

Social policy in Australia

In ways similar to the U.K. and U.S. policy contexts, the Australian social policy reform, known as the principle of Mutual Obligation, emerged as a concept in 1997 where
welfare benefits were provided to those who were of working age but unemployed. There was an expectation that recipients of the benefit would take up responsibilities of seeking work, improving their skills in a competitive labour market, and giving back to the community. A range of participation activities were listed, and one of the main features of the mutual obligation principle was the Work for the Dole government-funded program. Work experience opportunities in local communities were designed to assist unemployed people to re-engage with the job market. The program was expanded in 1999 to include Year 12 school leavers who had been unemployed for more than three months. Expansion of the program and additional Work for the Dole projects continued up to 2004 (Media Release – Work for the Dole, Working for the Nation) with other reforms introduced in the following years.

The Coalition government, led by Prime Minister John Howard, introduced the First Child Tax Offset in 2001, and the maternity allowance (commonly referred to as the Baby Bonus) was introduced in 2004 to support new parents with the expenses associated with having a child. The purpose of the scheme was to increase the fertility rate and offset the effects of an aging population but was also part of the “Coalition’s philosophical commitment to families with children” (Tapper, et al., 2014, p. 113). The scheme initially granted $2500 in tax cuts for parents with newborns. In 2004, the scheme was amended so new parents received a lump sum of $3000. Media commentary suggested that the payment would tempt young mothers to fall pregnant in order to receive the payment (Grattan & Nguyen, 2004, 27 May). When the Baby Bonus was set to rise to $5000 from 1 July 2008, a plethora of criticism focused on young parents who were considered as not being able to use the bonus wisely (Risse, 2010). Predictions that the bonus would be spent on plasma televisions and other luxury items, rather than the necessities for a baby, were rife in the media, and not only focused on young mothers but other family groups as well. A commentary by Staley (2008) indicated that the Rudd government would make fortnightly payments to young mothers and would “withhold payment from
‘irresponsible’ mothers…deemed unfit" (p. 6) and who did not make appropriate use of the payment. The use of vouchers was also considered as a way to prevent misuse of the bonus.

The Welfare to Work (2006) reforms introduced by the Howard government focused on increasing workforce participation and incentives to work, thereby reducing dependency on welfare, but the reforms did not specifically target young parents. Supporting economic growth and reducing welfare expenditure were part of an ongoing move towards active labour market policies (Thomas & Daniels, 2010). In May 2011, the Building Australia’s Future Workforce Budget was released. The budget focused on breaking the cycle of welfare dependency for disadvantaged and marginalised groups.

The 2011-12 budget paper, Building Australia’s Future workforce: Trained up and ready for work (Budget Paper 2) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011) introduced measures targeting participation plans and requirements for young people, single parents and other vulnerable recipients of income support. Young parents were specifically mentioned in the budget and media releases by government ministers. The Teenage Parent Measure (later renamed the HYPM) outlined the expectations for young parents in receipt of welfare payments (Evans & Ellis, 2011). The new measures required young parents (young mothers) to plan a return to school or a training activity by the time their child was 12 months old. They were required to attend meetings with the central agency, Centrelink - the Australian government agency responsible for the delivery of social, health and child support services and payments. If the young parents did not attend or sign an Employment Pathways Plan (without reasonable excuse) they had their parenting payment suspended. It was expected that plans would include activities such as completing Year 12 or an equivalent qualification, and young parents were obliged to seek advice to ensure beneficial early health and education outcomes for their children.
Ten regions (Local Government Areas)⁵ throughout Australia were designated by the government as the first areas to trial the new rules from January 2012. The budget release outlined that 47.1 million dollars would be invested over 3.5 years to assist in participation plans and childcare costs (Budget Paper 2, 2011) for 4000 young parents. The regions, identified as regional areas based on the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) classification (Department of Health, 2011), included Hume and Shepparton (Victoria); Bankstown, Wyong and Shellharbour (New South Wales); Rockhampton and Logan (Queensland); Playford (South Australia); Burnie (Tasmania); and Kwinana (Western Australia). These communities recorded high rates of jobless families, youth unemployment, and long-term welfare dependency, as well as teenage birth rates that were up to eight times higher than less disadvantaged communities.

The Helping Young Parents and Supporting Jobless Families trials, of which the HYPM was one part, was introduced in 2011 and enacted in 2012 and concluded in 2016. A new initiative, known as the Supporting Parents to Plan and Prepare for Employment initiative was introduced in the 2015 – 2016 Federal budget and then renamed ParentsNext in 2020 (Services Australia, 2020). The objectives of this initiative built on the 2012 trials. The plan continued to target early assistance to parents at risk of long-term welfare dependency, provide support to create education and employment goals, and connect parents to services. Two streams were established, and participants were allocated the Intensive or Targeted stream according to a set of criteria. Eligibility to participate in the program was undertaken by Services Australia. All eligible participants resided in one of the ten identified local government areas (the same areas as the previous trial), had a child under six years of age and did not have recent paid work.

Participation requirements were similar to those stated for compulsory participants but

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⁵ In Australia, Local Government Areas, also known as LGAs, are geographical boundaries that cover incorporated areas of states or territories of Australia that local government bodies govern.
were not subject to the compliance framework and payment suspension for non-compliance (Services Australia, 2020). Additional criteria focused on participants who were early school leavers and had been assessed as highly disadvantaged. The program provided support for young parents to plan study or work activities in readiness for employment in the future. The compliance framework, in place for compulsory participants of the program, required attendance at appointments and reporting of activities or risk having their payment being put on hold. An analysis of the policy discourse and rhetoric that accompanied the release of the HYPM, (the predecessor to the ParentsNext program) is undertaken in Chapter 7 to illustrate how marginalised groups such as young mothers are problematised in social welfare policies.

**Childcare in the Australian context**

Childcare became an important element in social policy in the 1970s and a brief timeline of the Australian government funding of childcare is included here. In 1972, through the Childcare Act, the Australian federal government became financially involved in childcare provision funding non-profit organisations to facilitate the operation of long day care facilities for children of working and sick parents. By 1974, the provision of childcare funding was made available to all families and included other forms of childcare including family day care, outside-of-school hours care and playgroups. In 1984, fee relief known as Childcare Assistance was introduced for children in long day care centres and a more specific planning approach to the provision of new childcare places was implemented. Between 1985 and 1987 there was further expansion to the childcare systems and state/territory funding was also allocated. There was a move from funding operational subsidies to income-based fee relief. By 1988, the National Childcare Strategy was introduced allowing a significant increase in childcare places. In 1994, the New Growth Strategy was introduced by the federal government and provided funds to local government and community organisations to increase work-related childcare places. The
Quality Improvement and Accreditation system was also introduced in 1994 to improve the quality and standard of approved childcare in Australia. The Childcare Cash Rebate was also introduced at this time. Successive governments have made numerous changes to the provision of childcare and the funding attached to that provision. In 2012, the National Quality Framework (NQF) was introduced to provide a national approach to regulation, assessment and quality improvement for early childhood education and care across Australia. The major benefits included regulated educator to child ratios, increased skills and qualifications of educators, learning frameworks, and a national register of providers and services (https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/about).

**Young mothers and welfare fraud**

Over many years young single mothers have been portrayed as having “children in order to abuse the welfare system” (Swain & Howe, 1995, p. 3). Welfare fraud in Australia became a contentious issue in the late 90s, targeting women as welfare cheats. They were discursively constructed as “bad women…deceitful, calculated and sexually deviant” (Wilcock, 2014, p. 177). Specific groups within the broader population of welfare recipients, such as single mothers, are categorised according to the risk they pose in relation to welfare fraud (Wilcock, 2014). This in turn shapes the surveillance and compliance requirements embedded in social welfare policy (Wilcock, 2016). Based on convictions in Australia, in 2009-10 women represented over 64% of the prosecutions for welfare fraud (Prenzler, 2012, p. 33). Significantly, taking age into account, there were no prosecutions for welfare fraud by young women under the age of 20 (Prenzler, 2012, p. 33), yet this group remain stigmatised as a group that take advantage of the welfare system.
**Tough love measures**

The phrase ‘tough love’ was used by the U.K., U.S. and Australian governments at different times as they sought to ‘sell’ the new social welfare policies and instigate them during their term in office. The phrase is believed to have originated from a book by the same title written by Milliken and Meredith (1971). The book related Milliken and Borgman’s story of how they worked with African American youth from the east side of Manhattan who experienced low socio-economic living conditions. The Clinton administration used the term ‘tough love’ to describe an approach to a zero tolerance of criminal activity and substance abuse (Jordan, 1998), and it was popularised by legislators, governments and journalists at the time. The U.K. media took up the catchphrase and it appeared in an article by Michael Ignatieff titled “Poverty of desire is our national failing” (1993). Ignatieff wrote, “you can't renew British politics by borrowing American policies off the shelf, a bit of workfare here, a bit of ‘tough love’ there”. Another article in *The Observer* titled “Hard Brits gear up for tough love” provided commentary about government officials in the U.K. seeking social policy information and travelling to the U.S. “to see Bill Clinton’s Tough Love policies in action” (Hugill, 1993) The media commentary in this article provided a definition of ‘tough love’ for its readers:

> Tough love is about making the poor responsible for their actions. It's also about cutting public spending, reducing taxation and pinpointing those deemed responsible for America's chronic economic crisis. Why is unemployment spiralling out of control and the country in the grip of a crime epidemic? Simple - the single mums, their drug-crazed kids and their irresponsible, unemployable lovers are destroying the great American dream.

The phrase was taken up in the U.K. “as a top-down method of implementing targets, standards and initiatives” (Jordan, 2001, p. 531). In 2011, Australia’s prime minister at the time, Julia Gillard, also used the phrase when delivering commentary about the new
measures for young pregnant women and parenting families. A more detailed discussion and analysis of the new Australian measures brought into play in 2012, and the ensuing government, media and public discourse, is taken up in Chapter 7.

Despite the ongoing reduction in teenage birth rates over the last two decades in the U.K., U.S., Australia and OECD member countries (see Figure 2), government social welfare policies in the U.K., U.S. and Australia have continued to highlight a range of ‘tough love’ policy measures to reduce the reliance on welfare. All three countries introduced similar social policies where mutual obligation, requirements for participation, and regular monitoring of employment and education through participation plans were introduced. Minimum levels of social protection were outlined in the social policies for all three countries with additional requirements and expectations that education and training would be taken up. In all three countries, young mothers were framed as a social problem and teenage parent programs were instigated to increase the uptake of contraception and lower the risk of additional pregnancies. The next section of the review outlines the education policies of the U.K., U.S. and Australia that were introduced to support young mothers and their continuation, or return to, school contexts.
Young mothers and education policies

Education policy initiatives relating to young pregnant women and parenting mothers in the U.K., U.S. and Australia are presented in this section. The discussion provides some insight into various policy initiatives in each country that sought to reduce social exclusion, and increase skills, training and future employment to ensure equitable education opportunities. Policies sought to re-engage young mothers and assist them to remain in school contexts.

*Education policy and young mothers in the United Kingdom*

As the U.K. moved towards the 21st century and the Third Way, welfare funding shifted to the concept of “an investment in human capital…rather than the direct provision of economic maintenance” (Giddens, 1998, p. 117), with an emphasis on investment in
education. In the discussion of The Third Way, the then Prime Minister Tony Blair highlighted that one of the four objectives taken up as part of the national renewal was the focus on “a dynamic knowledge-based economy founded on individual empowerment and opportunity” (Blair, 1998, p. 7). He argued that this would assist to reduce exclusion from school and welfare dependency. As Darling (1999), the Secretary of State for Social Security commented “teenage girls doing badly at school are more likely to become teenage mothers than those who are doing well” (p. 36). It was at this time that policies to support young mothers saw the introduction of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy by the SEU (1999). The strategy highlighted the need to encourage teenage parents to continue education and training to reduce their social exclusion and welfare dependency. Prior to the introduction of the Standards Fund Grant (SFG), introduced in 2000, pregnant and parenting young mothers had limited access to educational contexts to continue their education. Local Education Authorities (LEAs) had differing approaches to managing the continuing education of young mothers (Hosie & Selman, 2006). In some areas there was access to specialist units on a full or part-time basis, or home tuition, while other areas offered a mainstream school approach. The SFG assisted the LEAs to improve the attendance of young mothers in education contexts by providing support and identifying the barriers that had prevented a return to school. Assistance available to pregnant and parenting young mothers prior to the introduction of the SFG was varied and many young women had “effectively disengaged themselves from school or were erratic attendees prior to pregnancy” (Hosie & Selman, 2006, p. 76). Although the SEU (1999) found instances of pregnant young women being excluded from school due to health and safety concerns, by 2002, all LEAs were required to ensure all young mothers had access to a mainstream or off-site unit, and pregnancy was not grounds “for exclusion from school” (Dawson, 2006, p. 59). Policy initiatives continued to focus on encouraging young mothers to re-engage with education and reduce further pregnancies.
Education policy and young mothers in the United States

Similarly, in the U.S. context, legislation was implemented in 1972 to ensure pregnancy was not grounds for exclusion with President Nixon signing the Patsy Mink Equal Education Act, commonly known as the Title IX Educational Amendments, as federal law (Patsy Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act, 1972). The Amendments mandated that discrimination on the basis of sex was prohibited in programs and activities that received federal funding, including schools and other training institutions. Excluding pregnant and parenting teenagers from school was prohibited and Title IX mandated that all pregnant and parenting teenagers had the right to receive an education. Detailed specific educational provisions for pregnant teenage mothers were outlined and amendments made during the following decades. For example, teenage mothers could choose to voluntarily attend a separate educational context, but programs offered were to be the equivalent to programs offered to non-pregnant students who attended mainstream educational contexts. Absence from school was to be treated in the same way as other students, with a medical certificate from the doctor required to be excused from school (Marital or Parental Status, 2001a) and opportunities to make up classes or work were to be provided. Other accommodating factors included bathroom breaks as needed, additional time to reach class and appropriate seating. Interestingly, a teen pregnancy was treated as a ‘temporary disability’ and the student was to be treated under the same policies as any other student (Marital or Parental Status, 2001b). In relation to policy construction, Pillow (2015) argues “that the teen mother in the U.S. has been unimaginable as an education subject worth of investment” (p. 57) and “social and educational policy operates through surveillance, regulation, and modification of certain bodies” (p. 60). In these contexts, young mothers experienced difficulties negotiating the requirements in both social and educational policies.
Education policy and young mothers in Australia

The National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools was released in 1987 by the Commonwealth Schools Commission and was the first document to work towards raising awareness of the needs of girls to improve their education opportunities (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987). In 1993, an updated version was released and presented as an action plan. This policy was known as the National Action Plan for the Education of Girls and was released by the Australian Education Council in conjunction with the Curriculum Corporation to span the 1993 – 1997 years (Australian Education Council, 1993). The policy outlined eight priority areas for schools and broader education systems to implement in order to improve educational outcomes for girls. The four objectives of the National Policy included: the importance of raising awareness of the educational needs for girls; equal opportunities to access the curriculum; a supportive school environment; and equitable resource allocation (Australian Education Council, 1993). One priority focused on improving the educational outcomes and specific needs of “girls who were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, girls from non-English speaking backgrounds, girls who have a disability, who live in rural and remote areas, or who live in poverty” (Australian Education Council, 1993, p. 14). Interestingly, within this priority, no mention was made of pregnant or parenting young mothers and their needs. Early pregnancy and motherhood were considered a health and welfare issue and was included under the priority of “addressing the needs of girls at risk” (p. 19), therefore pathologising young mothers as being at risk.

More recently, the Department of Education and Training (DET) has outlined policy expectations to support pregnant and parenting students. They have the right to continue their schooling, and decisions about supportive practices are made by the schools and principals at a local level. The policy advises modification to the curriculum; possible funding to meet individual needs; and flexibility to offer a range of accredited pathway
options to complete school. The current Victorian education policy related to pregnant and parenting students states that they can continue beyond 34 weeks if they are deemed fit by a medical practitioner. Individual schools and principals make decisions about the best way to support students to continue schooling. The curriculum can be modified to consider the workload and out-of-school commitments (https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/pregnancy-and-parenting-students/policy).

Funding was originally provided through the Managed Individual Pathways (MIPS) to ensure programs and resources were personalised to meet individual needs. The program was renamed Career Education Funding in 2019. Its role is to support students in Victorian schools to make informed choices regarding subject selection to plan pathways and career goals. Pregnant and parenting students are provided with options to continue their studies, including distance education, the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), which can be extended over a three-year period, part time apprenticeships, and traineeships.

**Conclusion**

The policy landscape in the U.K., U.S., and Australia from the mid-1990s sought to introduce social policies to tackle social exclusion and transform the labour market in line with global trends. High unemployment rates and government concerns with high levels of welfare saw a move towards welfare to work programs. An investment in skills training was evident in the social policies of all three countries. Young parents and mothers were embedded in particular aspects of social policies at this time and young mothers were constructed as a social problem that needed addressing. Although there were different

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6 The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is an active learning option for students in Years 11 and 12. The VCAL provides practical work-related experience, as well as literacy, numeracy and personal life skills. Like the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), VCAL is an accredited secondary certificate. [http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/vcal/index.aspx](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/vcal/index.aspx)

7 The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) is usually undertaken over a two-year period and is the certificate that many students receive on the completion of their secondary education.
timings for the implementation of policies in each country, similar policies were implemented. Regulation and monitoring were key aspects of the social welfare policies introduced to tackle teenage pregnancy. The U.S. advocated abstinence and prevention programs, while a multifaceted approach to sex education and family support for young parents in the U.K. was considered the best approach. Although welfare-to-work programs were introduced in Australia in the early 2000s, young parents were not specifically singled out until 2011 with the introduction of the HYPM. The political rhetoric that shaped the social policies pathologised young mothers, and terms such as ‘welfare queen’ were used to imply that young mothers deliberately became pregnant to access welfare.

In the U.K. and U.S., education policies related to young mothers were created to reduce social exclusion and facilitate training and skills development. In 1972, legislation was passed in the U.S. to ensure that pregnant or parenting young people were not excluded from education institutions, but at the time only a temporary absence from schooling was allowed and this was monitored by the education authorities. In the U.K., the LEAs were expected to provide appropriate educational contexts that young mothers could access, either through specialist units or in mainstream classrooms. In the early 1990s, in Australia, broader priorities were introduced to enhance the educational outcomes for girls. Young women at risk were considered a health and welfare issue in the 1990s, but specific references to how young mothers would be supported to continue their education was not evident until more recent education policies and the HYPM were introduced in 2011. To further examine the policy landscape that affects young mothers, Chapter 7 presents a detailed discussion of social policy in Australia and the HYPM, and Chapter 8 discusses how young mothers are constructed as students in the Australian education system.
Discourses of early motherhood

This section examines the discursive field of young mothering that can arguably frame and problematise the notion of young motherhood. A brief overview of the term ‘adolescence’ is presented to underpin understandings of the early motherhood experience that is located outside the expected transition from childhood to adulthood. A brief, but important, history of the discursive construction of young mothers is presented.

The chapter then examines the discursive constructions of motherhood to provide some background to mothering and motherhood before focusing on the how young mothers are constructed from a deficit perspective. Three key discourses, identified in the academic literature, frame the problematisation and discursive positioning of young mothers. The first discourse frames young mothers negatively, focusing on health and psychosocial determinants, while the second key discourse frames young mothers as a welfare dependency risk. The third discourse relates to low education attainment and how this can exacerbate welfare dependency.

Defining ‘adolescence’

Adolescence, as with all stages of life development, is defined and constructed by a set of cultural norms, and the term is also embedded in psychological and biological discourses as a transition from childhood to adulthood, which spans a number of years. From a biological perspective, the earlier onset of the menarche and fertility in females between the ages of 12 and 14, affects our understandings of “the evolved mechanisms of time past for appropriate timing of reproductive events” (Lancaster & Hamburg, 2017, p. 33), and earlier sexual maturity. Adolescence is also described in culturally and historically specific ways (Holgate et al., 2006). In Western traditions, the notion of adolescence is a period of time that refers to the educational progress and transition to the workforce. There is some debate about the age adolescence commences and
The United Nation’s (UN) definition of the word ‘adolescent’ is understood as being from the age of 10 to the age of 19 years, while the word ‘youth’ under the UN definition is understood to be between the ages of 15 and 24 (Advisory Committee for the International Youth Year). Analyses by Patel Stevens et al. (2007) and Macleod (2003) suggest that adolescence refers to a group of people that do not fit with the characteristics of a child and have not yet entered the adult world. According to Curtis (2015), “adolescence is a complex multi-system transitional process involving progression from immaturity and social dependency of childhood into adult life” (p.1).

From another perspective, Twenge and Park (2019) suggest that those adolescents who engage in adult activities such as sexual relationships transition to adult life at a faster rate, whereas other adolescents who begin to engage in adult activities in later adolescence transition more slowly to adult life.

The adolescent phase is often viewed as problematic, and those within this group can be perceived as requiring “control, management and containment” (Patel Stevens et al., 2007, p. 108). Humans are typically represented by chronological age and semiotic markers including family, relationships, independence, abilities, and maturity, which are attributed to specific phases and stages (Patel Stevens, et al., 2007). When a semiotic marker is identified outside a phase, it suggests that a person requires intervention (Lesko, 2001). Further to this, Lesko’s historical analysis locates young mothers outside the expected phase for their age and therefore young motherhood could be viewed as problematic. In the following section of the review, I examine the construction of motherhood, followed by an exploration of the historical constructions and positioning of young mothers.
Constructions of motherhood

Motherhood is a discursive field containing competing and contradictory discourses with varying degrees of power to give meaning to and organise social institutions and processes (Woodward, 2003). Discourses about young mothers draw on other discourses of family and mothering with critiques of the ‘good’ mother; morality in terms of behaviours and relationships; and sexuality with positive and negative connotations. In research undertaken by Breheny and Stephens (2007a), health professionals constructed the ‘good mother’ as “White, middle class, married and heterosexual” (p. 119). ‘Good’ mother discourses suggest that the ideal mother is attentive and sensitive to her children’s needs and that the family’s needs are met before the mother’s own needs. The ‘good’ mother provides a stimulating learning environment for her children (Arendell, 1999; Miller, 2005). She follows particular standards and continually critiques herself against those standards; she believes that others also critique her parenting skills (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010). As Goodwin and Huppatz (2010) argue, “the good mother is also recognised as institutionalised in social arrangements and social practices, and hence operating beyond the belief systems or choices of individual women” (p. 2). The ‘good’ mother, constructed through normalising processes, is inscribed into the dominant discourses of motherhood, while other mothers who might be young, single, welfare recipients, living complex lives through disadvantage are represented negatively.

 Mothers identified by government authorities as “problem mothers…find themselves at the intersection of expectations surrounding both professional expertise and normal mothering” (Croghan & Miell, 1998, p. 446). They are under significant pressure to be ‘good’ mothers and are deemed responsible for their children’s development and future, with the social construct of ‘good’ mothering practices used to critique parenting practices (Macleod, 2001). Certain beliefs, values and practices are central to mothering to the detriment of other perspectives (Arendall, 1999). The social construct of
“mothering is ideologically laden, shaped and dictated [and the dominant discourses are] powerful, pervasive, and persistent” (Arendall, 1999, p. 2), therefore constructing some mothers, and in particular, young mothers as ‘the problem’.

**Historical constructions of young mothers**

Historically, unmarried mothers were described and constructed from a moral, medical or psychological frame, and although early motherhood was not specifically highlighted, all unmarried mothers were considered as one collective. The following account is an extract from the Senior Poor Law Commissioner’s Report of 1834 (Checkland & Checkland, 1974), by Edward Tregaskis, Vestry Clerk, of Penryn St. Gluvias, Cornwall, which illustrates how unmarried women were held responsible for becoming pregnant and the male counterpart was induced by the woman to take part in the act and it was through no fault of his own that she became pregnant:

> We know, and are satisfied, from long and serious observation and facts occurring, that continued illicit intercourse has, in almost all cases, originated with the females; many of whom, under our knowledge, in this and neighbouring parishes, do resort to it as a source of support, taking advantage of the kindness of the provisions for the nurture of the offspring from their own known inability to contribute, and thus receive the fixed weekly allowances from the parish officers; and a deliberate repetition of offence gives them in this manner are right to claim the allowances, which, when added together according to the number of their children generally with them, is sufficient in many cases to afford support…it was a matter of general notoriety that such persons receive money from those with whom they may have had intercourse, to induce them not to affiliate upon them, but to swear to some poor man who is frequently paid, and from whom nothing can be recovered. (pp. 169-170)

Children born out of wedlock were referred to as ‘bastards’ in the 1834 Poor Laws and another extract highlighted the debate about payments to unmarried mothers in relation
to the allowances they received. Unmarried women were seen to be rorting the parishes who were responsible for providing allowances and “the sum allowed to the mother of a bastard is generally greater than that given to the mother of a legitimate child; indeed, the whole treatment of the former is a direct encouragement to vice” (Checkland & Checkland, 1974, p. 170). Further evidence provided by one of the Assistant Commissioners engaged to provide evidence from various parishes stated that “the allowance made to the mother for the support of her child, and secured to her by the parish in case of the putative father failing to pay the amount awarded, is an encouragement to the offence” (Checkland & Checkland, 1974, p. 170). The 1834 Poor Laws framed unmarried mothers “as morally corrupt welfare subjects through a negative discourse of sexuality” (Carabine, 2001b, p. 295-296) while the male counterpart was vindicated of his actions.

In the late 1800s, ‘ruined’ girls were expected to take up domestic work; in other words, an unmarried mother was put into service to “work off her sin” (Brumberg, 1984, p. 260). In this period, families preferred not to take the illegitimate into their family as the “unmarried mother and her child were an intolerable reminder of parental failure as well as a dysfunctional form of family membership” (Brumberg, 1984, p. 261). Further to this, Brumberg’s study reported that a prevalent discourse at the time considered that illegitimacy generated “chaos, insecurity and brutality [and was a] damaging form of social deviance for young women and their families” (Brumberg, 1984, p. 261). At the beginning of the 20th century through to the 1940s, Carabine (2001a) found that ‘lone mothers’ were constructed as being mentally deficient and their children were also deemed to lack mental capabilities. Throughout this time, young mothers were perceived as posing a moral threat because they deviated from the norm, with their children accused of replicating deviant behaviour (Vinovskis, 1988). Further analysis of discourses prevalent in the 1950s, highlighted a medical frame, identifying ‘lone mothers’ as lacking in psychological attributes (Carabine, 2001a). The instigation of maternity
homes in the first half of the 20th century saw single mothers giving birth and then
pressured to relinquish the baby to adoptive parents (Higgins, 2011). This was
considered a means of protecting children from their single mothers who were “deemed
to be unfit” (Jones, 2000, p. 60). As Howe and Swain (1993) argue “adoption
was…accepted as the solution to the dilemma of protecting the child and punishing the
mother” (p. 34). In the 1980s and 1990s, the move towards discourses based on moral,
social and economic threats to society was prominent. Drawing on Carabine’s (2001a)
analysis and identification of how young mothers have been described from the early to
mid-1800s to the late-20th century provides a background context to the prevailing
discourses and labels that frame young mothers in the 21st century. Although strong links
to the social and political thought of each period is evident, Cense and Ganzevoort
(2019) argue that young mothers remain a social policy concern in the contemporary
landscape.

Prior to the 1990s, early motherhood research drew on extensive longitudinal studies
using statistical data and analysis. Studies were framed from a psychological and
sociological lens indicating detrimental effects of teenage pregnancy and parenting and
were drawn on to construct social welfare policy (Pillow, 2006). Young mother
perspectives were not included in many research studies (Phoenix et al., 1991), and
hence, the deficit representations of young mothers were discursively constructed
through much of the literature of the time. While this provided one perspective on early
motherhood, it discounted the personal experiences of young mothers and the specific
localised contexts within which they lived. The next two decades indicated a move
towards research studies that sought to include the young mothers' voices, and
accordingly created space to examine alternative young mother positions (Arai, 2003;
Graham & McDermott, 2006; Kirkman et al., 2001; Rolfe, 2008). Despite the creation of a
space to examine alternative discourses of young mothers, the problematisation of
young mothers is prevalent in the literature and I consider this in the following section.
Problematisation of the young mother

Early motherhood manifests as a problem and social concern in the academic literature (Arai, 2003; Breheny & Stephens, 2007a), with much of the literature detailing the negative outcomes faced by young mothers. The literature identifies concerns of poor parenting skills, health issues, welfare dependency, and lower educational attainment, with little opportunity for future employability exacerbating the likelihood of living in poverty (Keegan & Corliss, 2008). Many statistical and qualitative studies identify young mothers as women and girls up to the age of 25; however, for the purposes of this study the young mothers interviewed were aged between 15 and 19 years at the birth of their first child.

Concerns about young mothers increased in the first part of the 21st century despite declining birth rates (Wilson & Huntington, 2006). In Australia, there was a perception that rates were high (Duncan, 2007), as there was a marked increase between 2006 and 2008 in the birth rates for the 15 – 19-year-old mothers and included a very small number of mothers who were younger than 15 when they gave birth. Drawing on data from the ABS, there were 11,005 babies born to young mothers in 2006, but by 2008, there was a 14.9% increase with 12,932 babies born. However, from 2009 onwards the data indicated that rates began to decrease. In 2012, the number of babies born to young mothers had reduced to 11,420, and by 2017 a further reduction in rates was evident with 7,401 babies born to mothers in the 15-to-19-year age group (ABS, 2015), resulting in an overall 42.7% decrease in births. Despite the ABS data indicating a reduction in teen pregnancies, the long-held view “of teenage child rearing as problematic is largely underpinned by changing social and political imperatives regarding the role and responsibilities of women in Western society” (Wilson & Huntington, 2006, p. 59). Young mothers are problematised in government responses to the concerns raised in the analysis of the data.
Although often included in all single mother data, and compared to older mothers, young mothers are not a homogenous group (Hanna, 2001; Wilson & Huntington, 2006). They are situated demographically in wide-ranging locations, from capital and regional cities to small rural towns, with a range of housing and support systems available. Some young mothers live with their family; some live independently; and some live with the father of the child or a current partner. Some young mothers are married, others are single or in a de facto relationship. Emotional and economic support from the extended family is forthcoming for some young mothers, whereas other young mothers experience “ruptured familial relationships” (McLoughlin, 2013, p. 524). Opportunities to remain at, or return to, school or the workforce depends on other support that may be available, including access to childcare. Community support and parenting programs in the local area may not be accessed or accessible, often due to transport issues. Young mothers may face more complex challenges than other older mothers but, regardless of age and background, many mothers face a range of challenges. However, young mothers in particular are subject to more intense public scrutiny (Neill-Weston & Morgan, 2017). As Fessler (2003) concludes in her study, "adolescent mothers face the same challenges as older parents, while trying to achieve their own developmental milestones, finish their education, and navigate the welfare system" (p. 183), yet they "experience tremendous social stigma" (p. 183). An examination of the stigma associated with young mothers enables the identification of the key discourses associated with adverse outcomes related to young motherhood. The key discourses that problematise early motherhood, including health and social disadvantages, welfare dependency and low education attainment, are examined in the next section.

**Key discourse one: Health and psychosocial disadvantage**

A range of adverse outcomes have been linked to health and psychosocial disadvantages associated with early motherhood (Breheny & Stephens, 2007a;
Developmental outcomes for children of young mothers include emotional and behavioural disorders, language delay, learning delays, and difficulties in educational environments (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Moore & Synder, 1991). Infants are more prone to exhibit inferior cognitive development, behaviour problems, lower educational attainment, and difficulties within the school environment with possible early withdrawal from the education system (Hillis et al., 2004). Early family experiences can contribute to early pregnancy, which has also been linked to socio-economic conditions. Coley and Chase-Lansdale (1998) argue that adolescents are not prepared for the complex role of parenting because they are still moving along their own adolescent trajectory, developing psychologically and cognitively, with a focus on self rather than others.

Poverty, disadvantage, and lack of opportunities are all documented as negative outcomes for young mothers and their children (Geronimus, 1991; Graham & McDermott, 2006; MacLeod, 2001; SmithBattle, 2000b). However, pre-existing lower socio-economic environments and adverse childhood experiences that contribute to the negative outcomes previously attributed to early parenthood (Hillis et al., 2004), may actually precede the onset of early parenthood rather than be exacerbated by early pregnancy (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998; Hirst, et al., 2006). A multi-method study titled *Teenage Parenthood and Social Exclusion*, (Wiggins, et al., 2005) found that for most young mothers, the child was wanted, even if not planned, and was a positive event in the young mother’s life. There was little evidence to say that young mothers would have been happier if they had deferred motherhood until they were older (Phoenix et al., 1991; SmithBattle, 2000b). In contrast, other studies suggested that children of young mothers were not planned or wanted (Phoenix, 1993). Irrespective of whether early motherhood was planned or not, early motherhood is framed through a negative lens and parenting practices are identified as a concern.
Young mothers and the fitness to parent

Motherhood discourses are constructed by health professionals and used, along with a developmental view of adolescence, to judge the young mother against the binary of the ‘good/bad’ mother (Breheny & Stephens, 2007b). As Weinberg (2004) suggests “young single mothers…are at the nexus of a number of marginalized categories” (p. 162).

During interviews undertaken by Breheny and Stephens (2007b), the health professionals took up a developmental discourse, which positioned “young mothers as ‘adolescents’ who are naive, distracted, and self-centred, and hence unable to mother correctly” (Breheny & Stephens, 2007b, p. 112). A comparative study carried out by Barratt and Roach (1995) examined the maternal responsiveness and mother-baby interaction of adolescent mothers aged between 15 and 18, and adult single mothers aged 19 to 37 years. Two observations were undertaken during home visits when the infant was four months old and 12 months old. The findings indicated that adolescent mothers had fewer interactions and vocalised less frequently with their infants than the adult group, and this was more notable when the infant was 12 months old. Similarly, a study to identify parenting practices among young mothers (aged 15 to 24) and the relationship between parenting and the cognitive and social development of their children was undertaken by Whiteside-Mansell, et al. (1996). Data gathered through a range of inventory measures of both mother and child indicated that some young mothers were not responsive to their children’s needs. Those with high stress and low coping skills found parenting difficult with links between the cognitive competence of the mother and high stress indicating a decrease in positive parenting. ‘Good’ mothering practices are used to critique the young mother’s parenting practices (Macleod, 2001) and those mothers who do not meet the normative expectations of motherhood “are positioned as the deviant ‘other’ and considered to be unfit to parent” (Wilson & Huntington, 2006, p. 61). Coupled with concerns about fitness to parent, long term welfare dependency is also highlighted as a key discourse.
Key discourse two: Construction of welfare dependency

A welfare dependency discourse discursively constructs young mothers as welfare recipients who are irresponsible and unemployed (Breheny & Stephens, 2009). Young mothers are attributed with a lack of foresight for falling pregnant in the first place and unable to provide for their children due to material circumstances. Dominant discourses construct young mothers as problematic subjects that require management as they are deemed unable to make decisions or have control over their lives (Weinberg, 2004). A paternalistic attitude towards those on welfare “creates the individual as primarily responsible for their own lives” (Bacchi, 2009, p.7) and therefore an individual’s marginalisation is their own fault. Normative assumptions about appropriate ways of living create and make available certain subject positions that question whether young mothers live normal productive lives. Although birth rates to young mothers are significantly lower than in previous decades, early motherhood is still a major concern and much of this relates to welfare dependence and the enormous social and economic impacts (Hanna, 2001). Past ABS data indicates that young mothers represent “less than one per cent of all single mothers in Australia” (Jeon et al., 2008. p. 3), but in relation to Australia’s parenting payment they account for three per cent of recipients (Morehead & Soriano, 2005). As the discussion earlier in this chapter illustrated, social welfare policies constructed young mothers as welfare dependent. This is in part, due to extended periods of time on welfare, there is a higher expenditure which in turn raises public concern around welfare funding. Reduced education attainment and disengagement from school limits opportunities for employment.

Key discourse three: Education attainment and young mothers

Narratives about young mothers and education are part of the broader landscape of discourses about young mothers, situated as a problematic group at risk of failure
Risk factors for young mothers include lower educational attainment, narrow prospects for future education, and limited employment opportunities, thereby extending welfare dependency (Woodward, et al., 2001). Underachieving girls with conduct and attentional problems are more likely to transition to early motherhood (Woodward, et al., 2001) while lower aspirations and motivation to complete school also increase the likelihood of early pregnancy (Fergusson & Woodward, 2000). But as Arai (2003) argues, motivation to stay within the education system may not have been strong before early motherhood. Environmental and other social factors may have also impacted on early school leaving (Ermisch & Pevalin, 2003; Seamark & Lings, 2004; Bradbury, 2006; Webbink, et al., 2011) and young mothers might have experienced pressure to leave a mainstream school context due to pregnancy and early motherhood. Young mothers might also be disadvantaged young people with limited family support, so caring for a child can narrow prospects creating a stronger possibility of reliance on welfare.

In relation to education, Pillow (2006) attests that “teen pregnancy compounds issues of female sexuality and mothering…female sexuality and schooling share a troubled history” (p. 65). Pillow’s work (2004, 2006) examines how pregnant young mothers in education might be viewed through particular “discourses of contamination and responsibility, and discourses of pregnancy as a cold or disease” (Pillow, 2006, p. 67). These discourses draw attention to young mothers in educational contexts, framing both education policy responses and possible negative outcomes by constructing young mothers as a problem that needs to be resolved. In a discourse of contamination, it is recommended that pregnant mothers are removed to a separate school lest they “contaminate the student body” (Pillow, 2006, p. 68) by encouraging inappropriate sexual behaviour, whereas in the discourse of responsibility, it is the responsibility of young mothers to improve their own lives to reduce societal burden (Pillow, 2006). The discourse of ‘pregnancy as a cold’ relates to the finite nature of pregnancy, the situation
is only temporary, therefore the student will be treated in the same way as other students. Contrary to this, in the discourse of disease, the young mother is constructed “as having special needs” (Pillow, 2006, p. 76), and for her safety, separation from the main student body is deemed appropriate. Attending school in a separate location that provides young mothers with parenting and other vocational courses (Duncan, 2007; Pillow, 2004) may impact on academic opportunities. A discussion of young parent programs is taken up in the next section and a fuller discussion of the implications of attending a young parent program in an alternative setting is presented in Chapter 8.

**Young parent programs**

Globally, numerous young parent programs have a range of aims and offerings for young parents including access to counsellors, contraception advice, parenting classes, breastfeeding support, financial advice, and a range of vocational and skill building activities such as readiness for the workforce. Access to playgroups, provision of resources, and in many cases, childcare and home visits are reported as playing an important role in supporting young pregnant women and mothers in young parent programs. Some young parent programs are conducted over several weeks or months.

A systematic review of young parent programs carried out by Furey (2004) suggests that parenting programs can support a range of positive health outcomes, but her findings also highlight that there are questions about what “the goals of such programmes should be…and who should deliver them to teenagers” (Furey, 2004, p. 262). Similarly, a meta-analysis carried out by Coren et al. (2003) indicated that there were some effective elements in teenage parent programs that focused on a range of outcomes including “maternal sensitivity, identity, self-confidence and the infants’ responsiveness to their parents” (p. 98). However, questions were raised about the success of other elements of programs, with a call to further research to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of delivery. Other important considerations from Furey’s (2004) research included how to
engage young people deemed at risk, and the longer-term outcomes for the children of young parents in relation to educational attainment. For the purposes of this discussion, I provide a brief glimpse into young parent programs in the U.K. and U.S., and a more detailed focus on Australian contexts that have included the opportunity to complete a secondary school education.

**Young parent programs in the United Kingdom**

In the U.K. there are numerous programs in place to assist pregnant and parenting teens to complete schooling. The Department for Education (DfE) states that pupils should not be excluded due to pregnancy or parenting, but that it is up to individual schools and local councils to choose how they provide support for students. Specialist Pupil Referral Units (PRU) cater for students with specific needs, and pupils, including pregnant and parenting pupils, can be referred to the units to continue their education. An example is the Rowan Centre (https://therowancentre.wixsite.com/rowancentre/policies-c1blg) in South Yorkshire which provides opportunities for young parents to develop parenting skills and prepare for independent living while receiving individual tuition with a tutor and studying in smaller classes. Similarly, the Moat House (http://www.moathouse.stockport.sch.uk/sen/) at Stockport caters for pregnant school-age girls and school age mothers. The attendees have access to specialist midwives and health visitors, housing and benefits advice, and a program worker. An on-site nursery provides parenting advice and parenting programs are available. The Gloucestershire Hospital Education Service (GHES) (https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/education-and-learning/hospital-education/gloucestershire-hospital-education-service-ghes/) is a registered PRU that supports students who are not able to attend school for medical reasons. Young students who are pregnant are also referred to the GHES by the Gloucestershire Teenage Pregnancy Midwives where they can access a parenting course taught at the school site during pregnancy. They then receive tuition at home.
during their maternity leave from school and a flexible curriculum is available to facilitate a smooth transition back to school. Similarly, the Wandsworth Hospital and Home Tuition Service (Medical Pupil Referral Unit) (https://thrive.wandsworth.gov.uk/kb5/wandsworth/fsd/service.page?id=8mxFLDcjmr5) supports young mothers to continue their education at home during their pregnancy and while on maternity leave. Access to schools in the local area and alternative education providers is encouraged. Each example illustrates how local government in the U.K. tackle the requirements of pregnant and parenting young women to continue their education.

**Young parent programs in the United States**

One of the earliest models of school-based programs for teen mothers in the U.S. was the Graduation, Reality and Dual-role Skills (GRADS) (http://www.k12.wa.us/CareerTechEd/GRADSProgram.aspx). The program was originally developed in Ohio in the 1980s and is now recognised nationally across the U.S. The program focuses on the continuation of schooling, healthy family practices, parenting skills and child development knowledge, work orientation, goal setting to balance work and family, and health information to reduce subsequent pregnancies. An important aim of the program is to develop financial independence. Another early model of a young parent statewide program implemented between 1989 and 1997 in Ohio was the Learning, Earning and Parenting Program (LEAP). This program was mandatory for all pregnant young women and parents under 20 years of age who were receiving welfare payments and had not completed high school. In this program, pregnant and parenting teenagers received financial incentives to attend school. The main aim of the program, as part of the broader policy agenda, was to reduce teenage parents’ welfare dependency and promote the completion of high school. A range of strategies were implemented to promote attendance at school, including “financial incentives and
penalties, case management, and support services” (Bloom, et al., 1993, p. v). All eligible teens were required to attend an assessment interview and provide evidence of attendance to receive a bonus payment. Poor attendance at school without an approved excuse was sanctioned and the bonus payments removed. Those teenage parents who did continue in school were then able to attend GRADs in readiness for future work.

Through their research into 14 programs that worked to meet the needs of young parent families, Dodkowitz et al. (2018) found that these families were a geographically and socially diverse group that faced a wide range of challenges. Federal funding policies continued to provide a range of services to support families to increase positive outcomes of the population. Recent iterations of young parent programs and services in the U.S. maintained the importance of gaining equivalent high school credentials, employment opportunities and the development of parenting skills. Dodkowitz et al., (2018) also identified a stronger focus on improving the educational outcomes for the children of young mothers.

**Young parent programs in Australia**

In Australia, several young parent programs have been established to support young parents’ educational needs, many of which have been connected to schools. In 1994, a Young Mothers in Education Program was launched at Plumpton High, a school located in Sydney, New South Wales. Its aim was to support pregnant and parenting teenagers to continue their education and integrate with the wider school community. The program offered comprehensive advice on childcare, housing, welfare benefits and antenatal care. It was a model for the development of programs in the U.S. and other programs in Australia (Simic, 2010). As Simic (2010) highlights, the Plumpton High program emerged during a period in which the “Australian and British Labour parties were emphasising a ‘Third Way’ that combined community assistance for the disadvantaged with a neo-liberal emphasis on individualism and self-reliance” (p. 440). By supporting young
women to complete their education, they were less likely to remain welfare dependent and more likely to be in a position to support themselves and their family.

More recent Australian examples of young parent programs include the Canberra College (CC) Cares program (http://www.canberrac.act.edu.au/information/programs/cc_cares) attached to Canberra College in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). This program provides a flexible delivery through personal learning and pathway plans for young pregnant and parenting students as they work towards completing the ACT Year 12 certificate. Certified competency-based training in business administration, hair and beauty, childcare or hospitality is available. Transport is offered to the young parents and their children to attend the program, while on-site childcare is accessible with both indoor and outdoor spaces for children to play and learn. In Victoria, under the Government Student Pregnancy and Parenting Policy, (https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/health/Pages/pregnancy.aspx), schools and principals make decisions in relation to the local context of ways to support pregnant and parenting students to continue their education. For example, in Corio, Victoria, a young parent program known as the Supporting Parents Access to Childcare and Education (SPACE) (http://www.northernbaycollege.vic.edu.au/NBCPlus/plus-space-service) operates out of the Northern Bay College. This program provides holistic support to re-engage young parents in their education by providing access to community services and a safe and supportive environment to continue a range of studies. Similarly, in Gippsland, Victoria, the Kurnai Young Parents Program (KYPP) commenced operation in 2014 and is an annexe of Kurnai College in Gippsland. The college has three campuses (Morwell, Churchill and University) and two annexes including KYPP which is located at the Morwell campus. The program caters for young people under 21 years of age who have a child (one or more) and have not completed their schooling (https://kurnaiyoungparentsprogram.kurnaicollege.vic.edu.au/kurnai-college). Young
mothers can develop skills in literacy and numeracy, complete the Year 12 VCAL together with VET programs. They also have opportunities to take up other certificate options and access a range of support services for their social and economic wellbeing.

The young parent programs operating in the U.K., U.S. and Australia share similarities; the programs all focus on parenting skills, the continuation of schooling and credentialing, access to support services and the provision of childcare. The next section examines how other discursive constructions of early motherhood can have a positive and transformative effect.

**Early motherhood as an affirming life course**

The examination of the literature thus far has presented the varying discourses that focus on young mothers and illustrates how early motherhood is still viewed as problematic in health, social and educational contexts. The complexities of young women’s lives with the addition of a baby to care for can further exacerbate the difficulties young mothers face. Yet, other discursive constructions of young mothers indicate affirming aspects of early motherhood. For example, SmithBattle’s (2000b) longitudinal narrative research with young mothers challenges the assumptions that early motherhood leads to “life-long negative consequences, including poverty” (p. 29). Smithbattle (2000b) asserts that discourses about young mothers “permeates our collective understanding and fundamentally structures programs and social policy responses to adolescent parenting” (p. 29), but these responses do not consider the wide-ranging complexities faced by young mothers. Further to this, O’Reilly (2016b) insists that meanings of motherhood are framed through patriarchal discourses “and as such, it renders illegitimate alternative practices of mothering. As a normative discourse, it polices all women’s mothering and results in the pathologizing of those women who do not or cannot perform normative motherhood” (p. 19). This section presents positive
alternative trajectories that young mothers take up as they negotiate early motherhood to illustrate alternative discourses to early motherhood.

**Positive trajectories in early parenting**

Recent studies have reported positive outcomes for young mothers with links to life course trajectories. Early parenting can be an accepted life course as young mothers find levels of support from immediate family members as they manage their new maternal identity (Hunt et al., 2005). For many young mothers living in disadvantaged communities, childbearing is a “rite of passage to adulthood” (SmithBattle, 2000b, p. 30) and a useful strategy for personal and social development for young mothers growing up in poverty. Positive feelings about self (SmithBattle & Leonard, 1998) and learning about the baby provides opportunities for the young mother to learn about herself and empower her sense of self (SmithBattle, 2000a). In studies undertaken by Kirkman et al. (2001) and Arai (2009), positive aspects of early motherhood were emphasised by young mothers. Rather than narratives of isolation and struggle, findings suggested that where there is extended family support, young mothers brought their families closer, and the young mothers’ opportunities to work or return to school were possible.

In contrast to other reported research that considered the children of young mothers more at risk of cognitive and behaviour difficulties (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Moore & Synder, 1991), national data (Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999) examined by Terry-Humen et al. (2005) found that after controlling for background characteristics such as family structure, socioeconomic status, the mother’s background and marital status, any impaired development of kindergarten children born to young mothers had much less effect or had disappeared in a number of areas.
A different future for young mothers

Transformative aspects of early motherhood have been noted in some academic literature and the findings from three studies are presented to highlight some of the positive future trajectories experienced by some groups of young mothers. In their research, Seamark and Lings (2004) interviewed nine young women, located in the U.K. who had given birth before the age of 20. Although the young mothers had not planned their pregnancies and they faced a range of complexities, the research findings report that they all agreed that early motherhood was a “turning point” (p. 818) in their lives. They were motivated to care and provide for their children as a full-time mother and also believed that planning for their own future was an important aspect in ensuring their children experienced a life that they themselves may not have had. Using results from two datasets in a national sample of U.S. teenagers, Fletcher (2012) examined the effects of teenage motherhood on risky health behaviours to ascertain whether the priorities of young women changed. The conclusions drawn suggested that early motherhood was a protective factor and changed the way young mothers viewed their own lives by reducing or eliminating risky behaviour, including substance abuse and the consumption of alcohol. Similarly, in their research carried out in Perth, Western Australia with 69 young women, Smith et al. (2012) found that those who had never been pregnant considered early motherhood as a “derailment” (p. 183) of their lives, with reduced future opportunities. In contrast to this, those who became young mothers saw pregnancy as a “lifeline” (p. 184) with accounts of moving away from substance abuse and other risky behaviour. Similar findings were reported by Sheeran et al. (2016), who interviewed 14 women, aged 15-19 years from Queensland, Australia. Young mothers in the study reported that changing their life trajectory by moving away from illicit substance and alcohol use and being responsible was important. Early motherhood gave meaning and purpose to the young women as they took up the role of motherhood and parenting.
Early motherhood and educational futures

Contrary to research that argued that early motherhood contributed to difficulties at school or school dropout, Zachry (2005) found that the nine participants in her study reflected on their education experiences and altered their perspectives on education after the birth of their child. Although the young mothers in the study initially left school after the birth, the participants stated that they had a renewed interest in providing a better future for themselves and their child and saw education as increasing employment opportunities while also reducing welfare dependency. Hosie’s (2007) findings from interviews with 93 young women in ten Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in England were similar, and suggested that early motherhood was a catalyst, as the young mothers saw value in completing their education. Similarly, in SmithBattle’s (2007a) longitudinal study, 19 young women were interviewed six times over a year, from the final trimester of the pregnancy onwards, with findings indicating that they sought to reassess their priorities and returning to school took on a new meaning after the birth of their child. Taking up young mothers’ perspectives of schooling could therefore contribute to understanding how they negotiate educational opportunities and navigate restrictive options to create a better future (Chase, 2017).

Conclusion

Discourses about young motherhood are complex and varied. Current discourses highlight health concerns, welfare dependency, poor parenting, irresponsibility, and deliberate pregnancies to access welfare. As Rolfe (2008) attests, young mothers are often positioned as the problem, rather than broader social structures of unemployment, poverty and inequitable outcomes. Many young mothers become marginalised in their communities and are judged in a negative light (Mkhwanazi, 2010). However, other studies focusing on young motherhood offer a different perspective, with young mothers
demonstrating perseverance and resilience as they return to education and take up or continue employment to create a better future for themselves and their children. The following quote from Reekie (1997) encapsulates how the young mother is discursively constructed in the social world:

The body of the illegitimately pregnant teenager is particularly troublesome, not least because it is replete with contradictions: youthful but physiologically mature; childlike yet maternal; innocent while sexual; the object of both compassion and censure. Bearing the blatant testimony of its capacity to transgress sexual and parental norms the body of the pregnant teenager exposes the limits of what is culturally thinkable about proper sex and motherhood. (p. 77)

The discursive field of early motherhood sits outside the expected trajectory of adolescent girls. As the literature review illustrates, the emergence, circulation, and maintenance of statements about early motherhood can create particular subject positions that pathologise young mothers. Having provided an overview of early motherhood in this chapter, the next chapter introduces the theoretical framing of this study and provides an in-depth discussion of Foucault’s understandings of discourse, power/knowledge, subjectivity, and the notions of governmentality. I draw on these concepts to examine the discursive constructions of young mothers in both social and educational policies, as well as the personal narratives of each participant in the study.
Chapter 3 - Theorising the study

Batting is the middle layer of a quilt that is inserted to provide comfort and warmth.

In this thesis, the batting in the quilt metaphorically explains the theoretical perspectives, methodology and method. This layer of the quilt connects the bottom and top layers. Although invisible in the final construction of a quilt, the middle layer plays an important role as the threads are drawn through it to hold the layers of the quilt together.

This chapter presents the chosen theoretical framework, which played a key role in examining how young mothers are discursively constructed in local and institutional contexts, and the social and material effects of those constructions. To begin this chapter, I provide a definition of theory to highlight the importance of the theoretical framework to the study. For Merriam (1998), a theoretical framework involves “concepts, terms, definitions, models and theories of a particular literature base and disciplinary orientation” (p. 46). Importantly, Merriam (1998) reminds us that “it would be difficult to imagine a study without a theoretical or…conceptual framework” (p. 45), and as Mertens (1998) acknowledges all decisions made in the way the research study is carried out are dependent on the chosen theoretical framework. Anfara and Mertz (2015) agree that theory influences the decisions made in how a study is conceptualised. In this thesis I draw on a range of poststructural concepts as meaning-making mechanisms to situate the research problem, guide the research questions, select appropriate methods to undertake the research and analyse the data.

In this study I am examining the discursive positioning of young mothers and how they negotiate their complex contemporary social worlds as mother and as young woman. Using a poststructural lens, I seek to analyse how young mothers are discursively constructed at the macrosocial level in social and educational contexts, and at the
microsocial level in the narratives of the young mothers themselves as they take up alternative, visible subject positions. To undertake this task, and to understand the complexities of young mothers’ identities, I draw on Foucault’s conceptualisations of subjectivity, power/knowledge, discourse, and the notions of governmentality. I present a discussion of my understanding of those concepts in this chapter. These understandings assist me in examining how power constructs and sustains objects of discourse, and how sets of statements that constitute and position young mothers in particular ways become ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault, 1980, p.131). Other constructions of young mothers are arguably excluded as ‘subjugated knowledges’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 82); in other words, those knowledges are marginalised or invisible, yet young mother identities are constantly emerging; they are multiple, complex, and varied (Mollborn, 2017) and need to be acknowledged. Next, I introduce poststructural theory and how poststructuralist concepts assist me to examine the complex world of young motherhood.

**Poststructuralist Theory: Taking account of Foucault**

To begin this section, I provide a brief discussion about poststructuralist theory and then proceed to show how I engage with poststructuralist constructs to frame the research.

Poststructuralism as defined by Bacchi (2009) is "an intellectual tradition that emphasises fluidity and contestation in social thought and relations, and the politics involved in assigning meaning. There is a focus on how knowledge is produced and on how concepts change meaning over time and place" (p. 277). In this study, a poststructural lens allows me to examine how young mother subjectivities are constructed through a range of discursive practices. Poststructural thinking resists the idea of one truth, instead, in the case of this study, it allows me to examine young mothers’ lives from multiple perspectives. Accordingly, by employing a poststructuralist methodological lens, I do not seek to use a metanarrative to explain the world but rather to understand the world at a local level, taking into account Hughes (2010) contention
that we cannot generalise peoples’ understandings of the world as one truth or as ‘grand narratives’ (Lyotard, 1984). Indeed, as Foucault (1990a) argues it is not possible to have ‘one truth’ that is always fixed and true, at all times, and in all places. As a key strategy, poststructuralism promotes the analysis of texts both at the macrosociological level such as the understandings of neoliberalism in policy texts, and at the microsociological in narratives constructed from interview transcripts (Gannon & Davies, 2014).

Drawing on Foucault, a poststructuralist perspective provides a localised, partial explanation of the intertwining discourses of early motherhood in a complex, fragmented and contradictory social world and fits well for the purposes of this study. A poststructural framework also offers a way to understand how human subjects, in this case young mothers, are positioned within prevailing discourses as outlined in Chapter 2, and how those discursive constructions are made visible. As Weedon (1997) suggests, a poststructuralist lens is “a useful, productive framework for understanding the mechanisms of power in our society and the possibilities of change” (p.10). In this study, I seek to understand the social and political constructions of early motherhood and the mechanisms that young mothers draw on to resist particular constructions of early motherhood. Understanding alternative constructions of the complex lives of young mothers could be a catalyst for change in social and political responses.

A poststructuralist approach follows my own view of the world: that there are multiple realities and multiple truths. As Lather (1991) suggests, “we are seen to live in webs of multiple representations of class, race, gender, language and social relations; meanings vary even within one individual” (p. 118). We cannot generalise how young mothers live their everyday lives, as they take up particular subject positions and practices within discursive constructions available to them. When a subject takes up a position as their own, they “incorporate[s] both a conceptual repertoire and a location” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 46) and view the world through “images, metaphors, storylines and concepts”
connected to the “particular discursive practice in which they are positioned” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 46). A poststructuralist approach therefore provides me with a partial and situated interpretation by examining the meaning and significance of the discourses that constitute the young mother. Meanings are created and replicated through discursive practices “that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 64). In this case, young mother constructions become visible and early motherhood becomes an object of contention. Ball (1993) reminds the researcher to consider that “discourses are about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority” (p.14). As a subject, the young mother is created within a “…. multiplicity of discursive elements” (Foucault, 1990a, p. 100) through material and structural practices and it is the effect of those constructions that are examined in this study. Poststructural theory provides a suitable lens through which I can examine the discursive construction of motherhood and how young mothers take up particular subject positions while working to make sense of their complex worlds. A poststructural lens can also be used to challenge the rationality of social and educational policies and the way policies work to create particular subjects. I now proceed to discuss key Foucauldian concepts in relation to the subjectivities of young mothers, how power and knowledge operate on and through young mothers, and in turn how discourse shapes the discursive field of early motherhood, and finally, how political power operates in the social field.

**The subjectivities of young mother**

The notions of subjectivity and the formation of self and identity, as it is understood through the discourses of motherhood, are central to this study. Subjectivity is constituted in language as it produces identity and meaning; for example, the binary of the good mother/bad mother construct creates particular understandings of motherhood expectations. In the process of using language, we take up positions of speaking and
listening subjects, and the identities that go with them. Language produces meaning and creates social reality and is where our subjectivity is constructed. Through discourses "language plays a major part in constituting social subjects, the subjectivities and identities of persons, their relations and the field in which they exist, but only within a context of institutional practices" (Hunt & Wickham, 1994, p. 7). Foucault's work, therefore, is especially important to my understanding of how young mothers’ subjectivities are constituted because it offers research tools of power/knowledge to undertake a discourse analysis to examine how the subject (the young mother) is constituted and how she constitutes herself.

Discursive fields of knowledge about early motherhood produce meanings and subjectivities about motherhood, and arguably, about young mothers in particular, which are not homogenous. Young mother subject positions do not create coherent identities; instead, contradictions and competing knowledges construct motherhood both for younger and older mothers (Wilson & Huntington, 2006). For all mothers, their lives are lived differently; they each have different histories and draw on different practices. Subjectivities are constituted through material practices that shape bodies and minds and involve relations of power. Some discourses and modes of subjectivity and identity constitute more power than others, raising the question about how texts and practices constitute modes of subjectivity and identity in relation to young mothers.

The discursive formation of the subject leads to the dissemination of certain realities and thinking that construct the subject in particular ways (Foucault, 1972). The subject, in this case the young mother, is produced and positioned within discourses, and becomes the subject matter of the discourse. Weedon (1997) argues that “'subjectivity' is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding in relation to the world” (p. 32). The young mother, as subject, is “constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or
speak” (Weedon, 1997, p. 32). Young mothers’ own life experiences, ideas, values and beliefs are all formed by and through discourses as they make sense of the world. As Weedon (1997) reminds us “subjectivity is produced in a whole range of discursive practices – economic, social and political, the meanings of which are a constant site of struggle over power” and “neither unified or fixed” (p. 21). Subjectivities are fluid and contingent on what happens at a particular time and place as well as in a broader social context. Particular regimes of power inform the discursive fields that define and shape meanings of early motherhood.

To take this further, the concept of the discursive field “is an attempt to understand the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity and power” (Weedon, 1997, p. 34). Discursive fields contain competing contradictory discourses with varying degrees of power to give meaning to organised social institutions and processes. They also offer “a range of modes of subjectivity” (Weedon, 1997, p. 35). Weedon provides an example of the family and how ‘new mothers’ are “inserted in a discourse of motherhood” (p. 33), which comes with specific ways new mothers are expected to think and act. The ‘normalised’ discourse of motherhood does not take into account the complex lives of young mothers, and in this study narrative inquiry, discussed in Chapter 4, draws on the storied accounts of the participants, to explore how young mothers practice motherhood differently.

**Power/Knowledge**

Foucault’s conceptualisation of power/knowledge is useful in this study to understand how power is exercised both at an institutional and local level to constitute young mother subjectivities. Power is constituted through established knowledge, understandings and ‘truth’ and “it is in discourse that power/knowledge are joined together” (Foucault, 1990a, p. 100). Discourses “embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both
subjectivity and power relations” (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013, p. 24). Certain knowledge positions are legitimised and recognised within institutions. But power is also distributed through the social world operating at every level of society and exercised through a diverse range of local practices. If certain views about young mothers are disseminated through the social world, and people are drawn into particular ways of talking about young mothers, then it becomes the truth even if conclusive evidence is not available.

This study seeks to map power relations to examine how power operates on, through, and also importantly, from, young mothers. The conceptualisation of power/knowledge is important in this study, as those who are marginalised, such as young mothers, can experience disadvantage due to reduced social and economic power, and access to resources.

Discourses produce subjects within power relations and “the subject can be both subjected to and yet develop or find the means to resist subjectification” (Jones & Brown, 2001, p. 713) by pushing up against power, rather than being a disempowered object of power. Foucault’s understandings of power are useful here as I examine how power is understood in the social world. In particular, I seek to understand how everyday practices of young mothers, their sense of self, and the ways they view and participate in the world, are constituted through the discourses of power/knowledge, and how they might resist marginalising discourses. Foucault invites the researcher to use his work like a ‘toolbox’ (Foucault, 1979, 'Interview with Roger Pol Droit', cited in Patton 1979, p. 115) and cherry pick the concepts that are most relevant to the analysis the researcher is undertaking. I accept Foucault’s offer and make use of his conceptualisation of power/knowledge as a way of examining the discursive constructions of young motherhood.

Foucault's (1972) conceptualisations of discourse and discursive formations, and how objects of knowledge emerge, allow me to examine and understand the shared reality of
how young mothers live in the social world. The elements within the discursive formation are “subjected [to]...rules of formation” (Foucault, 1972, p. 38). In this study, I take the regularity, made visible in the discourses that construct young mothers/motherhood, as discursive formations. “The rules of formation are conditions of existence” (Foucault, 1972, p. 38) and the concepts of subjugated knowledge and dominant discourses can be examined through the application of Foucault’s understandings of how networks of power are maintained within fields of knowledge about early motherhood.

For Foucault (1995), normalisation is a practice that creates a normal homogenised subject. It is a docile body “that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (p. 136) and has an effect on what is appropriate and allowable. Normalising processes draw attention to particular groups, such as young mothers, who sit outside the expected norms and is one way of deploying power. The concept of adolescent pregnancy is a socially constructed problem, which is in the public “gaze” (Foucault, 1980, p. 155), and sits outside the expected trajectory for adolescent girls. For O’Reilly (2016b) “normalization limits and restricts maternal identity and practice to one specific mode: nuclear family” (p. 65) thereby young pregnant women can be subject to comparisons, differences, hierarchical and exclusionary practices (Foucault, 1995), and marginalising processes as they do not conform to the expected trajectory of adolescence. The understanding of normalising practices assists to examine how young mothers are discursively constructed and the social and material effects of those practices.

Foucault conceptualises power as “something which circulates...employed and exercised through a net-like organisation...individuals circulate between its threads...always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). In relation to this study, young mothers are not simply subject to power relations, but instead, as individuals, they both enact and resist power through the way they live their lives. Drawing on Foucault’s notion of power, MacNaughton (2005),
asserts that “power is a relationship of struggle over how we use truths and build discourses about normality to produce and regulate ourselves, our relationships and our institutions, especially our production of normality” (p. 27). Power operates to produce a discursive formation and a “regime of truth” (Foucault, 1980, p. 131) is produced. Regimes of truth exercise power over people’s thoughts by governing what they see as truth. It is a mechanism that seeps into the production of every statement, and as Foucault contends, power acts as a capillary and “installs itself and produces its real effects” (Foucault, 1980, p. 97). Discourses exercise power through excluding some knowledge about the subject and limiting what is said and counted as knowledge and therefore truth.

Foucault’s work on power does not question the nature of power and where power comes from; instead, his work investigates how the productive effects of power circulate through the daily lives of people, producing “domains of objects and rituals of truth” (Foucault, 1995, p. 194). The conceptualisation of power through Foucault’s theorising focuses on the mechanisms, practices and techniques through which power is exercised and gives it effect (Foucault, 1980). Foucault argues that “power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (1995, p. 194) and “power will be exercised by virtue… of things being known and people being seen in a sort of immediate, collective and anonymous gaze” (Foucault, 1980, p.154). The concept of power is important in this research as I analyse how power is exercised within discourses that construct young mothers as subjects in particular ways. Foucault (1990a) argues that “there is not, on one side discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it” (p. 101). If this were the case, then discourses would only consist of binary constructs; for example, the good mother/bad mother construct.
According to Foucault (1980), the individual is constructed or produced through the formation of knowledge and power structures. Discourses have the power to communicate and shape particular realities of the world, such as the realities of young motherhood examined in this study. Discourses are located at the intersection of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1990a) and “power is exercised within discourses in the ways in which they constitute and govern individual subjects” (Weedon, 1997, p. 110). In order to map power relations, or to show power at work, the researcher must ask how the productive effects of power circulates through the practices of people’s everyday lives, and in this case study, examine how power circulates through the everyday practices of young mothers as they negotiate their everyday world. It is in the micro-physics of power (Foucault, 1995) where the discursive elements come together to produce ‘young mother’.

**Defining discourse**

As discourses are a central point of consideration in this study the concept of discourse requires a clear definition. In general terms, discourse refers to written or spoken communication that focuses on a particular topic or idea. Burr (2015) describes discourse as:

> A set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event, person, or class of persons, a particular way of representing it in a certain light. (p. 74)

The following section elaborates, for the purposes for this study, Foucault’s conceptualisation of discourse. In his early theoretical work, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault examines the notion of discourse through the concepts of power, knowledge and truth. Foucault (1972) defines discourse by focusing on three
aspects. Firstly, he argues that discourses produce effects in the real world “as a general domain of all statements” (p. 80) where discourses contain all meaningful oral and written utterances. Secondly, discourses can be understood “as a group of statements, regulated and structured within particular power relations”, (p. 80) with reference to particular discursive groups. Thirdly, discourses are “a regulated practice [that produce and] account for a certain number of statements” (p. 80). Discourses structure the production of statements and are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p.49), thus speaking into existence the young mother as a problematised subject.

Importantly, Hall (2001) draws our attention to the way Foucault shifts the understanding of discourse to “a system of representation” (p. 72). Discourses are viewed as socially constructed representations of reality and defined “as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation” (Foucault, 1972, p 107). Discourses exist within historical and social contexts and are a system of words, beliefs, actions, rules and institutions that share common attributes. Foucault does not see the examination of discourses as seeking truth or a representation of truth; instead, he is concerned with the mechanisms in society that produce accepted truths. Discourses construct the topic; define and produce objects of knowledge; govern the way the topic is meaningfully talked about; and influence the ideas that are put into practice to regulate the conduct of others. Foucault (1972) argues “the unity of discourse is based not so much on the permanence and uniqueness of an object as on the space in which various objects emerge and are continuously transformed” (p. 32). In this study, I seek to examine the mechanisms that produce particular truths about early motherhood and how those understandings emerge and transform.

The study will examine how some discourses about early motherhood are sustained and extended by the effects of power while excluding other ways of understanding the young
mothers and their lives. Discursive formations gain the status of truth through broader social contexts and as Foucault (1991) argues, nothing has meaning outside discourse as discourses are not closed systems. Truth is produced, deployed and circulated through dominant political and economic apparatuses including the government, education and the media (Foucault, 1994). This study draws on these understandings to examine the political and economic representations of young mothers in social and educational policy and the social and material effects of those constructions.

**Regimes of truth**

Through Foucault’s understanding of discourse, certain knowledges become ‘regimes of truth’ (1980, p. 131) while other lines of thinking about subjects are marginalised. Privileged knowledges, or particular ‘regimes of truth’ are produced in the political, economic and institutional discourses made available to the society. These knowledges are powerful in the way they describe particular truths about groups of people such as young mothers, and also influence how groups are viewed in the social world.

Subjugated knowledges describe knowledge that is unavailable or ignored by the dominant discourses that form our understandings of the social world. Foucault (1980) defined ‘subjugated knowledges’ as knowledge or ways of knowing in the social world that are left out and he considered these knowledges “a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge” (p. 82). Foucault proposed two types of ‘subjugated knowledge’. The first type – subjugated erudite knowledges – are expert qualified knowledges entrenched in the formation of dominant knowledge systems. The second type of subjugated knowledge that is borrowed as a concept for this study, is the alternative ‘subjugated disqualified knowledges’ located at the margins of the dominant discourse. This marginal type of subjugated knowledge is an important tool used to understand young mothers and their discursive construction in the social world. As discussed in Chapter 2, young mothers are positioned in dominant discourses as unable
to parent adequately, lacking responsibility, unable to make decisions about their lives, and dependent on welfare with no aspirations for the future, yet other discourses of early motherhood are less well-known. As Foucault, (1980) argues, subjugated knowledge is located low on the hierarchy and is not recognised by political and institutional regimes; it is a “whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified” (p. 82). It is opposed or ignored by the mainstream discourses and is a localised knowledge. It is here “where criticism performs its work” (Foucault, 1980, p. 82) and I will borrow this notion from Foucault to examine young mothers’ knowledges of their social positioning to unsettle the ‘regimes of truth’ and make visible alternative discourses. Understanding the subjugated knowledges of young mothers and the way they live their lives has the potential to unsettle qualified knowledge and bring to the fore invisible knowledges associated with how young mothers practice motherhood.

Academic knowledge of the social world is privileged and limits the field of knowledge applicable to the local communities where young mothers reside, both in a physical sense and also as individuals who are located outside the academic knowledge arena. Legitimate knowledge can be identified, in many cases, by particular types of evidence reported in academic literature and commissioned government reports that rely on quantitative statistics. Alternative knowledges, located outside institutional knowledges, are devalued, and assumptions about young mothers are reflected in media iterations and welfare measures. Excluding particular knowledge ensembles does not recognise the many ways people know and live in the world. The recognition of subjugated knowledges can unsettle exclusionary practices; for example, the complexities of young mothers’ lives are not taken into account as particular policy measures are instigated, raising the question of how policies are created and for whose benefit. The literature review, presented in Chapter 2, pointed to a small number of studies (Arai, 2009; Graham & McDermott, 2006; Kirkham et al., 2001) that sourced young mother narratives to highlight their view on the world, thus acknowledging the value of local subjugated
knowledges as valuable data sets. Recognising subjugated knowledges can make useful contributions to what young mothers require in terms of support and informs policymakers about how such knowledge can be used to inform social welfare measures to develop effective programs.

The multiple layering of discourses about young mothers is difficult to untangle and an account that takes in the local knowledge and interpretations through the narrative construction of the research participants’ daily lives is important to assist in this untangling. Efforts to respond to young mothers are grounded in the macrosociological accounts that construct early motherhood generalisations about young mothers and their practices. These responses are seen as inherently true through political, media and academic literature. Therefore, this thesis seeks to examine the macrosociological accounts to understand how young mothers come to be discursively constructed in the public discourses. However, the political economic perspective, and the ‘taken for granted truths’ are problematic as certain social groups become subjugated. Young mothers are social agents within their social world, and as participants in this research provide a subjective account of how they perceive their world. As Foucault (1980) theorises, it is the “local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges” (p.83) that need to be examined. Hence, this study seeks to examine the young mothers’ microsociological accounts to acknowledge the particular context and local knowledge they narrate to make the potentially invisible knowledges of early motherhood visible, by drawing out and legitimising an alternative narrative. This discussion is addressed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. Early motherhood is constructed as a problem across social welfare and education policies and the next section takes up a more in-depth discussion of the problematisation of young mothers.
Understanding Problematisation

This study seeks to understand how early motherhood becomes a problem in institutional contexts, such as in the development of social and educational policy measures, and this section theorises how "problematisations are central to governing processes" (Bacchi, 2009, p. xii). For Foucault (1990c):

Problematisation doesn’t mean representation of a pre-existing object, nor the creation by discourse of an object that doesn’t exist. It is the totality of discursive or non-discursive practices that introduces something into the play of true and false and constitutes it as an object for thought. (p. 257)

According to Foucault (1994), how problems are produced and represented in government policies and practices "consists in seeing on what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based" (p. 456). I draw on Foucault’s understandings of problematisations to examine policy responses to early motherhood. According to Dean and Hindess (1998) "problematisations appear in definite social, institutional or professional locales and can be assigned a time and place" (pp. 8-9). This study examines those social and institutional spaces and how particular social policy responses emerge and problematise the young mother. Bacchi, (2009) contends that “the discursive elaborations of problem representations constitute political subjects of particular types…[and] how this occurs has political ramifications - stigmatising some, exonerating others, and keeping change within limits” (p. 42). This understanding is important as I examine how the young mother as subject is discursively constructed in social and educational policy texts. When examining problematisations in policy texts, Bacchi (2009) argues that "a current dominant style of problematisation creates individuals as primarily responsible for their own lives" (p. 7). This notion is examined in government responses where young mothers, as governed subjects, are problematised in policy responses that seek to
reduce welfare dependency. A more detailed analysis and discussion of the elements of social policy that relate to young mothers can be found in Chapter 7 and Chapter 4 outlines Bacchi’s approach to analysing policy problems and how the approach was used in this study to analyse policy texts.

An analysis of the literature suggests that young mothers are problematised in the media, in policy statements, and in everyday life (see detailed discussion in Chapter 2, the literature review). In terms of political texts, “problems” are ‘created’ or ‘given shape’ in the very policy proposals that are offered as ‘responses’ (Bacchi, 2000, p. 48).

Certain knowledge positions are legitimised and recognised within institutions that have the power to construct and instigate policies that may or may not be supportive of the particular group the policy is aimed at. Institutional documents regulate what is said and counted as knowledge, therefore constructing young mothers from a deficit perspective.

By critiquing how young mothers’ identities are constituted in a societal context, ‘taken for granted truths’ about young mothers can be contested. For Foucault, policy is a discursive practice that constructs identity, in this case young mother identities, and reproduces particular truths. By drawing on Foucault, through an analysis of discursive constructions, I seek to examine how, and indeed why, young mothers’ lives have been constructed and problematised through political practices. Examining discursive constructions helps to identify the practices, the political structures and ethical influences that constitute young mothers as a particular subject. There are two important considerations. Firstly, I do not seek one precise way of thinking about young mothers. Instead, this work seeks to examine how young mothers’ lives are “questioned, analysed, classified and regulated” (Deacon, 2000, p. 127) in specific contexts and times. Secondly, using Foucault’s framing of the process of problematisation that questions how and why certain objects and subjects become a problem (Foucault, 1990c) and “how are they shaped as particular objects for thought” (Deacon, 2000, p. 139) offers a way of creating new subject positions that warrant a voice. Both
considerations are important as I seek to capture and give voice to the discourses identified in the young mothers’ narratives and juxtapose this with macrosociological discourses in policy responses to early motherhood.

**Governmentality**

Foucault’s understandings of governmentality are used in this work to frame the examination of how political power operates through the social field, in particular how young mothers become problematised through policy discourses and a range of governmental practices. Bacchi (2009) defines ‘mentality’ in the term, ‘govern-mentality’, as “the rationales for particular styles of governing” (p. 6). The term is used in a general sense to refer to different kinds of thinking associated with particular approaches to governing, for example, neoliberal, social, or authoritarian governing. It is also used in a more specific sense to refer to the form of rule that emerged in the late-18th century, which focused on ‘population’ (Bacchi, 2009, p. 276). Foucault is interested in how governing happens and how it is thought about, and the material practices in the way governing is enacted. In broad terms, the subject is created and controlled through the application and distribution of power. This thesis draws on these understandings to examine how young mothers are governed through social and education policy.

Foucault understands ‘government’ to be the formation of strategies through the development of policy responses that shape the conduct of particular groups, such as young mothers, within the population, but also ‘government “designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed” (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). The ‘art of government’, for Foucault, is interrelated with power and knowledge. Firstly, governmentality is a very particular form of power, and as Rose and Miller (2010) contend, the complexities of political power “govern a multitude of…economic activity, social life and individual conduct” (p. 272). Secondly, governmentality, is an ensemble of
institutional strategies and tactics that allow the exercise of differing forms of power resulting in “a whole series of specific governmental apparatuses [and] development of a whole complex of savoirs” (Foucault, 1991, p. 103). Further to this, Murray Li (2007) contends that we need an “understanding [of] governmental interventions as assemblages” (p. 2) to enable us to move away from seeing the government as a single monolithic entity; instead, acknowledging the diverse agencies involved in controlling the conditions under which people live their lives. In addition, Dean and Hindness (1998) suggest that “government…is not a definite and uniform group of institutions” (p. 8). Rather, it is “an inventive, strategic, technical and artful set of ‘assemblages’ fashioned from diverse elements” (Dean & Hindness, 1998, p.8). Understanding the conceptualisation of governmentality assists me to examine the discursive construction of young mothers in social and educational policy.

A discussion of population further contributes to an overall understanding of governmentality. Statistics relating to the population inform the government of intervention measures that require governmental responses (Foucault, 1991). As Hacking (1991) argues, “the collection of statistics has created…a great bureaucratic machinery…itself part of the technology of power in a modern state” (p. 181). Further to this, Cotoi (2011) contends that the “formation of subjectivities and population politics” (p. 109) are also linked in the understandings of governmentality. Concerns for the population, focusing on the health, welfare and economic productivity through labour, play an important role in contemporary understandings of the ‘art of government’ and the examination of social and education policy in this thesis. As Bacchi (2009) suggests the focus on population statistics makes populations visible and “to govern effectively, the government has to work through the economy to ensure the health and security of the population” (p. 27). To this end the subject, in this case, the young mother, is defined and categorised as part of the broader policy developments. Defining a population through statistical data, and systematically identifying and classifying people into
particular categories, creates subjects that become known and visible for example, reproductive status, mother’s age at first birth, marriage, employment, financial status, education and housing. A detailed resource that focuses on data, Gender Indicators [4125.0] (ABS, 2019), outlines the six domains of data used as key indicators and are labelled as follows: Economic Security; Education; Health; Work and Family Balance; Safety and Justice; and Democracy, Governance and Citizenship. Brief insights and key findings are provided under each domain. Each of these domains create categories of the population and detailed data constructs knowable groups (Hacking, 1991). While this is important for the development of broad responses to community needs, particular population responses are constructed in relation to statistical data and “individuals on their own are considered less important” (Bacchi, 2009, p. 27). This raises questions as to why certain statistics are used in policy responses and how certain groups, such as young mothers, are represented as a problem (Bacchi, 2009).

Government is a diverse assemblage of elements, practices and ways of thinking that can problematise subjects as well as resolve problems. In this study, young mothers, as the target population are problematised through an ensemble of practices operating to produce a subject that can be governed. Approaches to governmentality research suggests that policy discourses have specific objectively constructed meanings and are also reliant upon subjective interpretations. I choose not to confine the analysis of data to the political apparatus and technologies of governing where texts produced by government institutions are the sole data source. Where social and educational policies are being examined it is important to examine texts that are produced outside the governing institution to avoid “a depiction of the production of the subject before power as a fundamentally top-down process of subjection/subordination” (Binkle, 2009, p. 65). This fits with my understandings of focusing on the macro and micro discourses by examining how the apparatus of government has produced and problematised the young
mother while also examining discourses about the complexities of their social world generated from the narrative data from the young mothers participating in this research.

**Conclusion**

This chapter presented the theoretical framework of this study, drawing on poststructural ideas and Foucauldian concepts to examine the discursive construction of young mothers in the social world. I draw on the concepts of subjectivity, discourse, power/knowledge, and governmentality to examine how young mothers are problematised in social policy and education contexts, while also examining the microsociological discourses identified in the young mother narratives. The findings and analysis are presented in later chapters. The next chapter presents a discussion narrative inquiry and discourse analysis chosen as the dual methodological approaches in this thesis. It then proceeds to discuss the methods used to gather and analyse the data, the ethical considerations for this thesis, and the researcher reflexivity.
Chapter 4 - Mapping the Methodology and Methods

The previous chapter (Chapter 3) presented the theoretical framework, drawing on a range of poststructural concepts and taking account of Foucault’s theoretical understandings of discourse, power/knowledge, subjectivity and governmentality. Briefly, discourse assists me to understand how discursive constructions of young mothers are produced and shaped in the social world where power circulates to maintain particular ways young mother subjectivities are thought about and acted upon. The notion of governmentality, interrelated with the power/knowledge construct, is applied in this study to examine how young mothers are problematised through policy discourses and a range of material practices.

Methodological approaches underpin the research design and play an important role in the way data is gathered and analysed. This study seeks to understand the complexities of young mothers’ lives, acknowledging varying experiences and responses. However, before I map the methodologies and methods in this chapter, it is important to state my ontological and epistemological position and present how I approach the world. As Crotty (1998) advises, elements of the research process that require exploration and discussion should be highlighted to enable the research to be logically developed and grounded within a defined context. He suggests that the researcher considers the methodologies and methods that will be employed to answer the research questions and then justify the chosen methodologies and methods to explore, in this case, how young mothers are discursively constructed in the social world. It is here that I deliberate on the assumptions about reality that might be brought to the work, and how these assumptions that inform the theoretical perspective outlined in Chapter 3, connect to my epistemological stand.

As Crotty (1998) argues, “ontological…and epistemological issues tend to emerge together” [as ontology] “embodies a certain way of understanding what is” (p.10). Crotty
(1998) suggests that the researcher considers what kind of knowledge will be attained in the research, the characteristics that the knowledge displays, and why readers of the research value what has been explored and examined. For Blaikie (1993), ontology refers to “the claims and assumptions that a particular approach to social inquiry makes about the nature of social reality – claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other” (p. 6). From an ontological perspective, I see the world as a complex set of multiple realities and I take up Blaikie’s (1993) notion to account for the complexities of young mothers’ lives as they navigate early motherhood. Epistemology considers the origin, nature and limits of knowledge, and the links between the knower and the known; in other words, “what it means to know” (p.10). Each epistemological standpoint can explain how and what is known, and the understandings reached. I position myself within a poststructural epistemology as I seek to capture multiple truths of the competing and contradictory discourses of young mothers’ lives. It is their voices, subjugated and often invisible, that I wish to bring to the fore and juxtapose against dominant constructions of early motherhood.

A qualitative research design was chosen for this thesis as the research seeks to understand the real-world experiences of young mothers in a specific context. Schwandt (2015) asserts that “to call a research activity qualitative inquiry may broadly mean that it aims at understanding the meaning of human action” (p. 256). It offers the opportunity to ask the ‘what’ or ‘how’ questions (Chase, 2005) about the discursive positioning of young mothers in the social world. It is the micro-level discourse in a localised context that I draw upon, in part, to examine the discursive field of motherhood and young mothers. Narrative data provides rich detail into how young mothers understand their social world. Macro-textual data drawn from academic literature, government policy documents, and media iterations provide dominant constructions about how young mothers (as subjects) are constituted and reproduced in the social world.
To explore the question of how young mothers are discursively constructed in the social world, and the effects of those constructions, dual methodological approaches were chosen and will be discussed next. Firstly, narrative inquiry was chosen as a way to explore the microsociological discourses that shape young mothers’ lives. Secondly, discourse analysis was chosen to examine the macrosociological discourses presented in public documents, including social and educational policy texts.

**Narrative inquiry**

Early motherhood is often depicted through negative constructions of young mothers’ lives and does not account for the realities and experiences of young mothers themselves. To this effect, I sought an approach that would capture young mothers’ voices and allow for storied accounts of their lives. Hence, narrative inquiry was chosen as a methodological approach in this study. Only a small number of studies (Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014; Brand et al., 2014; Kirkman et al., 2001; SmithBattle & Leonard, 1998; SmithBattle, 2000a, 2007a, 2007b) outlined in the literature review (Chapter 2) reported on research that used narrative inquiry where young mothers were participants. In the following section, I outline the rationale for using narrative inquiry and the key characteristics of this qualitative methodology.

Narrative inquiry seeks to capture people’s experiences over time and takes account of the relationship between individual experience and the social world (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narratives drawn from conversations and interviews are storied accounts that are co-constructed and negotiated between the researcher and participant and in this study narrative inquiry is used as a way of capturing complex and nuanced understandings of how young mothers experience early motherhood. The stories that the participants share provide subjective meanings and insights into a particular time in the participants’ lives. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest “life - as we come to it and
as it comes to others - is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of
time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of unities and
discontinuities” (p. 17). It is:

A way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and
participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with
milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix...in the midst of living and telling, reliving and
retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual
and social. (p. 20)

In this study, the use of narrative inquiry seeks to provide a counter narrative to the
dominant discourses that discursively construct young mothers. Personal narratives
make visible how young women negotiate early motherhood and the complex social
processes they face, while “narratives also express emotions, thoughts, and
interpretations” (Chase, 2005, p. 656). It is through the use of narratives that I can trace
the discursive constructions of early motherhood by analysing the “different and
sometimes contradictory layers of meaning” (Andrews et al., 2013, p. 2). New analytical
possibilities can be generated (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) where the young mothers’
storied accounts of their lives before and after the birth of their child provide an
alternative view to the pathologising discourses of early motherhood that are present in
the academic literature. Taking up the narrative approach, I look to Tamboukou (2015),
who argues that narratives that focus on the sociological world present “rich insights into
how lives, images and stories are intertwined in multifarious and complex ways” (p. 63).
The narrator, in this case the young mother, takes a leading role in constructing herself,
her “experience and reality” (Chase, 2005, p. 657), providing new insights into her life.

Narratives are not polished products (Ochs & Capps, 2001). Instead, the narrator of the
story may not have fully formed accounts of the aspects of their lives they are describing,
and some events are only partially depicted. As Ochs and Capps point out, a tension
exists for participants, in this case young mothers, as they work to create a "seamless explanatory framework" (p. 4) relating to the complexity of their lives. In the actual experiences of early motherhood, events do not happen in a well organised logical way, as unexpected turns emerge, and are more difficult to narrate. Further to this, Hunter (2010) reminds me that narratives “are dependent on the context of the teller and the listener; and are not intended to represent ‘truth’” (p. 44). Storied accounts of people’s lives provide other possible truths from voices that are often subjugated.

From a poststructuralist stance, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) argue that when the experiences of others, in this case of young mothers, are written up, the researcher moves beyond the experience itself to a “re-presentation [of the experience] to hear the broader social discourses shaping” (p.55) the young mothers’ lives. In this way, the “productive power of stories” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 65) “can bring them into useful dialogue with each other…to understand more about individual and social change” (Andrews et al., 2013, p.2). Similarly, Riessman (2008) argues that the researcher does not find the narratives in the interview data, but instead “participates in their creation” (p.21) by creating written representations of the subject. In the construction of the narrative, Lincoln (1993) contends that “the reader should come away from such texts with a heightened sensitivity to the lives being depicted, and with some flavour of the kinds of events, characters, and social circumstance which circumscribe those lives” (p. 37). Further to this, Lincoln (1993) argues that:

Narratives that are faithful to the lives of those they represent, and persuasive to the various communities which are consumers of such narratives (especially as policy documents), create a convincing environment for those who might otherwise continue to ignore and silence groups. (p. 36)

When constructing the participant narratives, I took account of Blumenreich’s (2004) contention that “the role of the researcher who, however invisibly, actually constructs the
narrative” (p. 78). This thesis sought to examine the discursive nature of the microsociological narratives of the young mother and how they took up alternative, visible subject positions in their early motherhood journey

**Narrative and subjectivity**

The link between the young mother narratives and their subject positions is an important factor in this study. I look to Tamboukou (2015) who asserts that “within the poststructuralist agenda, narrative has a necessary connection to time and to cognition. Narrative is actually a cognitive process by which the subject constructs meaningful realities” (p. 41). Similarly, De Fina and Johnstone (2015) state that “narrative is socially and epistemologically constructive through telling, we make ourselves and our experiential worlds” (p. 161). By examining a range of data, discursive constructions can be examined to understand how the identity work of individuals, and in the case of this study, young mothers, discursively construct ‘selves’ within specific institutions, organisations and local cultural contexts. “Narrative research is therefore about the constitutive power of stories in producing realities and indeed the subject” (Livholts & Tamboukou, 2015, p. 45), and “is concerned with the processes, procedures and apparatuses, whereby truth and knowledge are interrelated in the production of narratives” (Livholts & Tamboukou, 2015, p. 44). In this way, conditions of possibility are created to examine the young mother as a discursively constructed subject. This study takes a Foucauldian approach to narrative and discourse where young mothers’ stories are considered “discursive constructions through which the subject emerges as an effect of power/truth entanglements” (Livholts & Tamboukou, 2015, p. 75). Using this approach, I identified themes in the interview data to create collective narratives, and then proceeded to undertake an analysis of the findings which is presented in Chapter 6.
Discourse analysis

This thesis seeks to identify the relationship between the subjectivity, representation and governance of young mothers through Foucault’s understandings of discourse (Foucault, 1972; Hall, 2001). To undertake this task, I draw on methods that use a Foucauldian framework of discourse analysis. Attention is drawn to macrosociological discourses that circulate and constitute subjects, in this case, young mothers. It is these discourses that are enmeshed in the broader society contexts of institutions and organisations. Foucault’s theory asks us to consider how discourses circulate to create subjects (Foucault, 1972). In this case, young mothers become problematic subjects through the circulation of particular discourses. I draw on Foucault’s understandings of discourse to frame the way the data is thought about and to inform and shape how discourse analysis is used in this study. To undertake this task it is important to map how the subject positions of young mothers are constructed in academic knowledge, social and education policy, and the media iterations related to the specific policy measure introduced in 2011. The choice of data is expanded in the Method section of this chapter.

Using discourse analysis through Foucault’s notion of discourse establishes what statements do, rather than what statements say (Graham, 2011). It moves away from the examination of the textual intricacies of the text; instead, the broader rules of discursive practice in “the ordering of objects” (Foucault, 1972, p. 72) is considered, and this includes the examination of how statements are produced and circulated. As Kvale and Brinkman (2009) argue, “discourse analysts focus on how language and discursive practices construct the social world in which human beings live” (p. 14). Further to this, Hewitt (2009) asserts that drawing on Foucault’s understandings of discourse analysis “opens up ways of understanding policy activity … that seek to uncover the power relations of policy making” (p. 14). How young mothers become problematised in policy and the power relations evident in the HYPM is examined in detail in Chapter 7.
Drawing together narrative inquiry and discourse analysis

The interrelated aspects of narrative inquiry and discourse analysis from Livholts and Tamboukou’s (2015) work are taken up in this study. For Livholts and Tamboukou (2015), narratives are described as “discursive tools through which power operates...[and] are effects of power/knowledge relations but are also sites for the emergence of new discourses” (p. 66). Similarly, Frost and Ouellette (2011) suggest that “narratives are units of analysis that provide inroads into understanding how individuals’ everyday lived experiences shape and are shaped by social policy” (p. 154). Tamboukou (2015) asks the reader to consider the question “What does a narrative do? In this study, narrative inquiry provides a way for the participants’ voices to be heard, thereby contributing to understandings of how they experience early motherhood. Their discourses of early motherhood provide a complex and different story that pushes up against the dominant discourses available in the public domain about their lives. This understanding is applicable in this study as the young mothers’ stories accounts, analysed through narrative inquiry, and the broader macrosociological discourses of social policy coalesce to map the discursive field of how young mothers construct their lives.

The issues between the micro analysis of discourses in localised contexts and the Foucauldian tradition of analysing social macro discourses is highlighted in Keller’s (2005) work. Notions of discourse to analyse social processes, practices, knowledge and meaning, corresponds with Foucault’s conceptualisations of discourse as knowledge making “practices of power/knowledge and meaning production” (Keller, 2005, p. 2). Certain knowledges about young mothers’ needs, disseminated by policy iterations, might not value other knowledges made available by young mothers themselves through a narrative inquiry approach which brings the young mothers’ subjugated voices to the fore. By drawing on the analytic approaches of narrative inquiry and discourse analysis,
taken-for-granted assumptions, and the discursive positioning of young mothers in the social world can be examined and analysed. The second section of this chapter will focus on the methods used to elicit the data for the study and the analytic process undertaken to interpret the narrative data and examine the policy texts.

**The research process**

In keeping with the narrative inquiry approach and use of discourse analysis, this section presents the ethnographic techniques used in this study. Ethnography is the study of culture and social organisation of specific groups of people or communities (Reeves et al., 2008). It seeks to understand how people live their lives to provide a detailed in-depth description of their lives and practices. Ethnographic research fits well with this study to understand how young mothers live their lives, how they are constructed in local and institutional contexts and the social and material effects of those constructions on their lives. Ethnographic fieldwork can also be shaped by personal and professional identity of the researcher who may bring an autobiographical dimension to the research (Hoey, 2014). This study begins and ends with personal vignettes from the doctoral researcher to illustrate an autobiographical dimension to this study and provide a context that surrounds the discourses of early motherhood.

The following section of this chapter discusses the methods that were chosen to gather and analyse the data to inform the research questions which sought to examine the discursive construction of young mothers, and the social and material effects of those constructions within institutional and local contexts. Firstly, a rationale for using research interviews with young mothers who attended a young parent program is described. Secondly, a poststructural method of policy analysis called ‘What’s the problem represented to be? (WPR)’ developed by Bacchi (2009) is discussed.
Research interviews

Young motherhood has been a field of investigation in a wide range of studies using various methodologies and methods to consider how young mothers are discursively constructed in the social world. A literature review about teenage motherhood from the U.K., New Zealand, and the U.S., undertaken by Wilson and Huntington (2006), identified a “move to evidenced-based policy development [which] masked the ideological basis of much policy” (p. 59). The review indicated that early motherhood was deemed as problematic and required a solution. A wide range of quantitative studies using surveys and agency observation have informed policy development (Wilson & Huntington, 2006). However, service provision for young mothers is informed by government policies and may not reflect the reality of what young mothers think and know. As Jewell et al. (2000) contends, there is a noted absence of the young mothers’ own perspectives in policy discourses that focus on early parenting. A small-scale qualitative study, conducted by Arai (2009), using semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 15 young mothers noted positive aspects of early motherhood. Rather than relying on statistical findings that might lead to negative conclusions, Arai (2009) suggests that her “findings highlight how powerful qualitative research can be in describing the lives of young mothers in a meaningful way” (p. 180). Further to this, a synthesis of qualitative research by Graham and McDermott (2006) indicated that qualitative research, which seeks out the young mother’s voice, can contribute to the field of knowledge and policy. One such research study undertaken by Kirkman et al., (2001) sought young mothers’ voices through an autobiographical narrative of their own lives. The analysis indicated that the participants in the study did not subscribe to the negative view of young motherhood but saw themselves as ‘good’ mothers. Another account of early motherhood by Rolfe (2008) used semi-structured group and individual interviews to explore young mothers’ accounts of their lives. This study takes account of the smaller number of qualitative research projects that used interview data to elicit the young
mothers’ subjugated voices. Further to this, the discursive positioning of young mothers warrants the expression of their voices to resist the taken-for-granted meaning about their lives.

To understand one group of young mothers’ lived realities, interviews were chosen as an ethnographic technique. Data collected from the interviews were presented as collective narrative accounts (presented in Chapter 5) and using discourse analysis an examination of those accounts is presented in Chapter 6. Interviewing is a widely used technique that generates data through conversation between individuals or groups. A participant can be passive or active in the interview process depending on the context and process chosen by the researcher to elicit data. According to Holstein and Gubrium (2003), “the individual interview has become a ubiquitous feature of everyday life” (p. 4). As Gubrium, et al. (2012) suggest, qualitative researchers are challenging the idea that the interview is a straightforward process whereby information is extracted from the participants. They argue that the construction of meaning is much more collaborative, and that the interview is viewed as "a form of knowledge production" (p. 3). They question "what it means in communicative practice to be an interviewer or respondent [and] how do time, place, culture, and socio-historical circumstances affect interviews?“ (p. 3). In addition, Rapley (2001) suggests that “interviews are inherently social encounters, dependent on the local interactional contingencies in which the speakers draw from, and co-construct, broader social norms” (p. 303). Similarly, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) assert “there is an openness to qualitative diversity [and] the multiplicity of local meanings” (p. 52). Interviews within the context of this research were an active process whereby knowledge was produced through the interaction between the interviewer and participant in a localised context.

Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2009) book is titled InterViews and this is indicative of the way the authors deconstruct the word ‘inter-view’. They state that the construction of
knowledge occurs through “the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee” and is “an inter-change of views between two persons” (p. 2). Similarly, Schostak (2005) provides his take on the word ‘inter-view’ by adding a hyphen between ‘inter’ and ‘view’. The space between allows a glimpse into the world of the participant where their social world, practices, views and opinions can be drawn out to make available an alternative reading of their lives. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue that “the process of knowing through conversations is intersubjective and social, involving interviewer and interviewee as co-constructors of knowledge” (p. 18). Schostak (2005) takes this further and contends that the inter-view data does not stand alone but is one view in a complex world of discourses.

This explanation of inter-view is adopted in this research, as the interviews undertaken with the young mothers seek to make visible an alternative reading of their lives by drawing on their ‘subjugated knowledges’. This study used research interviews to elicit the young mothers’ voices to acknowledge other ways of envisioning how young mothers construct their lives, by taking up, subscribing to, or pushing back from the social discursive constructions of young motherhood. For the purpose of this study, the data elicited through the interviews with the young mothers provides a basis on which the narratives are constructed. Young mother accounts can illuminate the complexities of their lives and are a “source of knowledge about social life” (Carson et al., 2017, p. 816) as they narrate their experiences of early motherhood. I draw upon the Foucauldian concept of subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 1980, p. 82) to validate and make visible those knowledges, heard through the young mothers’ voices. However, as Livholts and Tamboukou (2015) remind me, to undertake a critical analysis of power relations, it is important to see research participants, in this case, young mothers, as political subjects. Therefore, through interview and the construction of narratives, I examined the young mothers’ discursive practices of resistance to the macrosociological discourses.
In the field: Young mothers at the Lake City Young Parent Program

The young parents program described in this study was located in a community in Lake City, an inland regional city of Victoria, Australia. It has a rich history as a boom town in the mid-1800s and much of the architecture has been preserved. Lake City is surrounded by farmland suitable for agricultural and livestock industries. Economic sectors include service, manufacturing, Information Technology (IT) and renewable energies, all of which contribute to employment opportunities in the city. Statistical data related to school completion indicates that in 2016, 45.3% of people over the age of 15 completed Year 12 (or equivalent) schooling and the unemployment rate for persons aged over 15 years was 7.1% (ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2011 and 2016). The unemployment rate, similar to other regional cities in Victoria, can be difficult to determine as it may not take into account work and study arrangements that engage young people. This is an important point noted in relation to the young mother narratives presented in Chapter 5, as some young mothers did take up employment opportunities prior to, and after, the birth of their babies while also attending the LCYPP.

The LCYPP was founded in 2006 and underwent a number of changes during the following decade as a more formalised approach with links to schools and the Department of Education and Training (DET) was established. At the time of the interviews, the LCYPP was located in a local community house, annexed to the Lake City Secondary College. The community house facility was established specifically for the young mothers to have a safe and accessible educational space and was located several kilometres away from the Lake City Secondary School main campus. Staff supporting the program were trained teachers and childcare workers employed by DET. Childcare was provided daily on site so the young mothers could pursue their studies in a small supportive environment while their children were engaged with a range of play activities. This setting was chosen as the field site for research because it had been
established for over a decade, was situated in a regional area of Victoria, and combined childcare, support services and educational opportunities for the young mothers. The community house was not located close to public transport and the young mothers and their children travelled from different suburbs in the regional city. Some young mothers had access to a car, so they drove to the setting or were driven there by a partner/family member, while others walked. Support staff from other organisations such as Cradle to Kinder also provided transport.

The program consisted of a range of opportunities including access to work experience; resume writing; a gym program; and driving lessons. Support services focusing on health and wellbeing included: dental health; access to a nurse; counselling; and access to other local area organisations could also be organised. Parenting support and woodwork classes were also available during the program. Young mothers could undertake certificated courses in Business Management (Certificate 3), employability programs, and other short courses in First Aid, Safe Food Handling and Responsible Serving of Alcohol (RSA). More extensive education opportunities included the opportunity to study VCAL; Certificate for General Education for Adults (CGEA); Literacy and Numeracy Skills Units, Personal Development Skills (PDS) and Work-Related Skills (WRS) Units.

**Access to the participants**

Young mothers could be considered a ‘hard to reach’ population and as Abrams (2010) suggests “building connections with gatekeepers who provide access to a given population of interest” (p. 542) is important. Past informal connections with the program and the program coordinator facilitated initial discussions of the research idea. With

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8 The Cradle to Kinder program staff work with vulnerable young mothers before and after the birth of their baby, providing advice about parenting and support networks in the community.
Ethics approval, the program coordinator of LCYPP (Tim) granted formal permission to enter the research site and make contact with the participants.

**Participant sample**

Participants were invited to participate in the research study using a homogenous purposeful sampling approach (Patton, 2015; Creswell, 2014). This approach was chosen to take into account that the young mothers were located in a particular geographical area of Victoria, had similar experiences, and had attended a specific young parent program. Participants were young mothers aged between 14 and 19 when their first pregnancy was confirmed, and between 15 and 19 years of age at the time of giving birth. The age range was chosen in line with the ABS statistical data label of ‘Births and Age-specific fertility rates 15 – 19 years’ category (ABS, 2015). All participants attended the LCYPP while pregnant as new mothers of babies, or mothers with one or more toddlers. They attended the program for varying lengths of time up to the age of 21. Participants who no longer attended the program regularly, stayed in touch and visited on occasions to update the staff on their news.

I visited the Lake City program on two occasions and provided information about the research through an invitation to participate and a Plain Language Information Statement (PLIS) (See Appendix B). Possible participants were invited to ask questions about the research and their involvement. Seven young mothers agreed to participate in the interviews. As I would be undertaking the interviews at the site, it was important to coordinate times with the program coordinator that would not disrupt the young mothers’ studies, other staff and other program activities. I met with Tim, the program coordinator, to map out how the interviews would be conducted. One morning each week was nominated as the best time to meet with each participant to ensure studies were not interrupted. Interviews took place in a quiet and private office space located in the educational setting. It was important that participants felt comfortable in an environment
that they were familiar with and already attending each day. A small staff consisting of teachers, early childhood educators and assistants provided support and cared for the babies and children while the young mothers participated in the interviews. If the baby or child required the mother’s attention, this was facilitated immediately to meet the needs of the child and mitigate any distress.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of mother</th>
<th>Name of child/children</th>
<th>Age as first-time mother</th>
<th>Partner status and living arrangements at time of first interview</th>
<th>School completion status when pregnancy confirmed</th>
<th>Employment at time of first interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lynne</td>
<td>Mason</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Living with partner (not father of the child)</td>
<td>Completed Year 11</td>
<td>Not employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>Alyssa</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Single and living independently with child</td>
<td>Completed Year 9 and left school during Year 10.</td>
<td>Employed (part-time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Living with partner (father of the child)</td>
<td>Disrupted education trajectory after Year 8.</td>
<td>Not employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td>Keegan</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Single and living in family home.</td>
<td>Completed Year 11 and most of Year 12.</td>
<td>Employed (part-time) and involved in voluntary work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassandra</td>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Single and living in family home.</td>
<td>Completed year 10 and left school during Year 11.</td>
<td>Employed (part-time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elly</td>
<td>Hayden (first born) and three other children</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Living with partner (not father of the child) and three other children</td>
<td>Disrupted education trajectory after Year 7.</td>
<td>Not employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Toby</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Single and living in the family home.</td>
<td>Completed VCAL.</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. This table presents brief biographical data of each participant interviewed in the research. Data was extracted from the initial interview questions and other information provided by the participants during the interviews. All names are pseudonyms and were individually chosen by the participants.
Protecting identities

Identity protection was an important consideration in this research as the young mothers lived in a regional area and their stories contained sensitive data. At the beginning of the first interview with each participant I presented the aims of the research and addressed ethical considerations of confidentiality. I invited the participants to ask questions and sign the PLIS if they wished to continue as a participant in the research. The young mothers were invited to choose pseudonyms to protect themselves, their child/children and extended families. Interestingly, the participants provided rationales for their choice of pseudonyms and this contributed to the comfortable atmosphere I had sought to create during the interview process. The co-construction of their stories gave the young mothers some agency in the process by providing them with an opportunity of having their experiences heard and validated. The specific location of the program was also not identified in the discussion of the data to further protect the young mothers and their families.

Interview procedure and techniques

Research interviews were conducted with seven participants in June 2016 of between 25- and 40-minutes duration. The follow up interviews with four of the seven participants were carried out in November and were between 20 to 25 minutes duration. I did not enter the interview context with preconceived notions nor was I seeking specific designated responses. I took the respondents’ lead in the conversation and the young mothers played an active role “in authoring their experiences” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 14). Rich, detailed responses and an open-ended process allowed the interview to be more conversational in style. Power is exercised by both the interviewer and the participant (Nunkoosing, 2005), and in this case, as the interview proceeded, I checked with the participants regularly throughout the interview process to ascertain they were
comfortable and willing to continue with the interview. The participants themselves could also decide aspects of their lives they would disclose and aspects that would remain private.

**Research interview questions**

One of the important considerations in the way I elicited the data was related to the construction of the questions. Although an interview schedule was prepared (See Appendix C), the individual interviews were not constrained by a standard list of interview questions that each participant would be asked. Initial questions were related to the age of the participant (at the point of interview), age when pregnant with first child, living arrangements, name of child/children, relationship with father of the child, and contact details (mobile phone number). For anonymity, these aspects were recorded in field notes and were not included in the audio recording. The questions that were posed in the second interview provided the opportunity for the participants to add, delete or clarify their transcripts from the first interview.

I sought open-ended conversations with the participants and once the initial questions had been asked, I invited the participants to begin where they felt comfortable but suggested that they could begin with the pregnancy confirmation. For some participants, this appeared to be the opening they needed. The young mothers related their motherhood journey to me through what Riessman (2008) describes as a conversation, each taking turns and negotiating openings for extended turns. This was evident in the transcription data. Amanda, for example, did not pause for 15 minutes while she narrated her story of the pregnancy and the abusive relationship with her partner during and after the birth of her son. For some young mothers, the opportunity to talk about life-changing events allowed them to develop long narrative accounts. The young mothers could choose to recount their story in full, eliminate parts of their story or remain silent.
(Liamputtong, 2020). In this way, there was a shift in power relations (Riessman, 2008) between researcher and the participant.

**Transcription of data**

Prior to having the digital recordings professionally transcribed verbatim, initial checking of the audio file was undertaken. Each audio file was edited and clipped using Audacity – an audio editing program.⁹ The beginning of the audio recording included initial introductions, a volume check, a brief outline of the research and explanation of the PLIS, consent forms, and an invitation for the participant to choose a pseudonym to protect confidentiality. This section was edited out before the audio file was sent to the transcriptionist. The end of the recording was also clipped, as the interview came to a conclusion. I continually monitored the interview event and remained sensitive to the participants needs and this is illustrated in the following example. During an interview with one young mother, her toddler required comforting. The early childhood educator came in with the child and I immediately paused the interview recording for a short time. The mother was asked if she wanted to end the interview, but she chose to continue once her child had a cuddle and was ready to return to the activities in the other room. During the second interview with another participant, the recording was paused so she could take an important phone call regarding the connection to services in her new rental property. In this case, the two sections of the interview were then spliced together for ease of transcription.

The transcriptionist was asked to keep all language, including expletives, in the transcript, and the transcripts were prepared in the standard Intelligent Verbatim style for

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⁹Audacity® is a free open source, cross platform, multi-track audio editing program, available for download from https://www.audacityteam.org/
ease of analysis and read quality. Transcripts were time stamped for synchronised use with NVivo 12 data analysis software. Once the transcription was complete, the synchronous function in NVivo 12 was used to attach the transcription to the audio file. Each recording was checked with the transcription document. Overall, very few corrections were required and only some location and organisation names were incorrectly interpreted and spelt. Using the synchronous function, I was able to return to the audio recording, check the interpretation and make corrections. Another advantage of using the NVivo software was the opportunity to listen to the young mothers’ voices while coding the audio data, and note the emphasis, emotion, pauses and repetitions, not fully reflected in the transcriptions of the dialogue.

Prior to returning to the field for the second interviews I created an individual narrative for each participant, based on the transcription data and possible follow-up questions as prompts. The purpose of the second interview was to clarify and verify accounts from the first interviews. Each participant had the opportunity to clarify, add to, or delete sections of her narrative that she did not want to include. All participants were provided with the opportunity to comment on the narrative I had constructed; none of the participants asked to have any sections deleted. All verified that their stories had been portrayed accurately. I negotiated an appropriate time with Tim to return to the site. Four of the seven participants were available for a second interview and three participants chose not to participate in a second interview. One young mother had moved away, and two other young mothers were in full-time work and not available.

**Participant language**

The use of expletives was evident in the dialogue of some participants and the use of particular words were considered from a contextual basis and therefore not censored or
removed from the transcripts. Although certain words had a “strong emotional loading” (Kapoor, 2016, p. 260) and could have been considered offensive, the participant language was preserved in the narrative where direct quotes were included. May, in particular, frequently punctuated her story with expletives such as ‘fuck’ to emphasise how she felt, or when describing an event prior to the confirmation of the pregnancy. Certain words appeared part of May’s everyday language but rather than being ‘abusive’ swearing, Kapoor (2016) would consider such words as ‘casual’ swearing. Some participants made reference to substance abuse by using ‘street names’ for the drugs they had consumed or knew about. For example, May referred to a substance abuse event as being on an “acid bender for fourteen days”. Ruby used the term “slutting around” in reference to how she perceived the community judged her. The usage of this term is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. During the second interview, Lynne referred herself as “a psycho” in relation to the mental health issues she was experiencing, but then she changed this to “no, I'm mentally ill”, moving from a denigration of herself to an acknowledgement of a health issue.

The young mother accounts were not ‘sanitised’, despite the fact that some of the personal experiences the young mothers spoke about were confronting. The accounts were indicative of the complex lives the participants had led. Preserving the authentic nature of the young mothers’ stories was important in order to destabilise my position as the researcher and use the young mothers’ words to represent their own experiences.

**Analysis of interview data**

Qualitative data analysis involves “making sense…of raw data…identifying significant patterns and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal” (Patton, 2015, p. 521). The analysis of the interview data was an iterative process that commenced during the data collection phase and continued through to the final write up phase. This section discusses the steps taken to become familiar with the
data and commence the coding process. Before presenting the steps taken to manage
the data, it is critical to discuss the idea of coding from a poststructuralist view. MacLure
(2013) critiques the process of coding as problematic, stating, “researchers code; others
get coded” (p. 168) and “it positions the analyst at arm’s length from ‘her’ data” (p. 167). I
value this point of view in terms of this research, as it could be argued that the coding I
have undertaken, reduces the young mothers’ complex lives to categorised sets of
coded data. Taking this point into consideration, I suggest that by constructing narratives
from the interview data prior to coding either the narrative or transcript, a holistic
presentation of each young mother’s story builds knowledge of the experiences each
described. Further to MacLure’s critique, she does not suggest “that coding should be
abandoned [but instead acknowledges that] coding demands immersion in, and
entanglement with, the minutiae of ‘the data’” (p.174). It is from this standpoint that I
describe how I have engaged with the data, being mindful that the coding practices I
undertook allowed me to draw together the young mothers’ stories and construct a
collective narrative of the young mothers’ experiences to identify and discuss the
discourses in Chapter 6, where I present an analysis of the findings.

While the data from both the first and second interviews were transcribed by an external
company, preliminary work commenced with the audio interview data. This involved
listening to each participant’s audio recording several times to construct an introductory
narrative, before undertaking initial coding of the narratives with NVivo qualitative data
software. Once the transcriptions were returned, I reviewed each transcript with the
original audio data to ensure accuracy of the transcription and to note other
discrepancies. I then proceeded to use the initial codes to organise that data. In NVivo,
codes are stored as nodes to facilitate the retrieval of coded sections (Bazeley &
Jackson, 2014). Nodes were not predetermined, but decisions about what to name the
nodes came from the initial interview recordings (See Appendix G for a full list of the
NVivo coding nodes and explanations created for this study). By coding both the
transcript and narrative data, I was able to check my initial coding decisions, add further nodes, and then organise the data into larger meaningful units that would enable me to report the findings and undertake an analysis of the findings. Although I drew on NVivo software to undertake this task, decisions about how to present the shifting and complex storied accounts from the young mothers were required. As I threaded together individual transcript data into narrative accounts, I made a note of “quotable quotes” (Hunter, 2010, p. 49) that could illustrate particular events. The whole process considered Riessman’s (2008) reminder of the interplay between interview data and transcription data and in this study, both data sources played an important role. Hunter’s (2010) assertion that “analysis and writing up are interwoven processes” (p. 50) was also important as early immersion in the data involved noting first impressions and asking questions of the data in preparation for analysis.

I drew on the discourse analytic method as a way to group the language themes that emerged from the young mothers’ interview data. Such an approach takes up the understanding that people use language to construct their version of the social world and draw on “discourses and interpretative repertoires…to make sense of their world” (Burck, 2005, p. 248). According to Wetherell and Potter (1988) interpretative repertoires, as a basic analytical unit “can be seen as the building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena” (p. 172). For the purposes of this study, the understanding of the interpretative repertoire was used to draw out the themes in the interview data. As Burr (2015) reminds me:

A multitude of alternative versions of events are potentially available through language, this means that, surrounding any one object, event, person, etc. there may be a variety of different discourses, each with a different story to tell about the object in question, a different way of representing it to the world. (p. 74).
This was an important point as I sought to identify the varying discourses in the data to draw together the young mothers’ accounts of their lives. Further to this, Talja (1999) states “interviews are not interpreted as stories having a clear and distinguishable message and meaning: instead, all the accounts produced by the participants are taken into consideration and analyzed to identify significant patterns of consistence and variation” (p. 466). The analysis of repertoires is like “putting together a jigsaw” (Talja, 1999, p. 466) or drawing on the quilt metaphor in this thesis, sewing together pieces of a patchwork quilt. To this end, the naming of interpretative repertoires occurred through the identification of similar concepts in each of the young mothers’ storied accounts. But it must also be acknowledged that “multiple and potentially inconsistent subject positions” (Wetherell & Potter, 1998, p. 400) would emerge as the young mothers worked to narrate events in their complex worlds. Therefore, it was important to iteratively work with the data as I identified commonalities and differences in the participants’ lives. To undertake this step, I identified patterns in “fragments of text” (Burck, 2005, p. 249) and verbatim quotes in the interview data and coded these to the nodes chosen to represent the language themes. Patterns within the interpretative repertoires were noted and drawn together to create collective interpretative repertoires outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1 illustrates how the nodes created in the NVivo Coding book (See Appendix G for list and description) were applied to facilitate the examination of the research interview data. The nodes (in Column 1) were connected to the narrative threads which then provided the storyline framework to narrate the young mothers’ accounts of their lives prior to and during their pregnancies, and after the birth of the child. The young mother narratives are presented in Chapter 5. To undertake the analysis of the storied accounts, the subject positions were identified and then mapped to the discourses in column 5, creating a framework to discuss the analysis of the data presented in Chapter 6.
Five themes, identified from the narrative threads in the data, drew the narratives together. The themes combined similar events that occurred in the young mothers’ lives and were constructed in keeping with the quilt metaphor to create the storyline that is presented in Chapter 5. The stories from the field begin with the heading, *Unravelling at the seams*, which focuses on the problematic lives that the young mothers experienced prior to the pregnancies, with risk and risk-taking behaviour accounts and each pregnancy confirmation. *Layers of doubt* explores the doubts that the young mothers had when deciding about becoming a mother. The next narrative thread, *Stitching life together*, revealed their experiences of attending the LCYPP and the support that was provided. Next, *Navigating intricate complexities* considers how community judgement, stigma and being visible to government agencies, was concerning for some young mothers. The final narrative thread titled *Reading the compass: New directions* illustrates how becoming a mother was transformative for the young women in this study and presents the positive aspects of the young mothers’ journeys and their aspirations for the future.

Table 2

*Mapping the Narrative Threads for Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nodes from NVivo Code Book</th>
<th>Main narrative thread</th>
<th>Sub narrative thread</th>
<th>Mapping subject positions</th>
<th>Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

• Abortion
• Criminal activity
• Drug reference (personal)
• Early pregnancy
• Ex-partner
• Family issues
• Father of child
• Friendship group (neg)
• IPV
• Living arrangements (neg)
• Mental health
• PND
• School troubles (before pregnancy)
• School troubles (after pregnancy confirmation)
• Self-harm
• Sexual relations prior to pregnancy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At risk</th>
<th>Risk taking behaviour</th>
<th>Marginalised young mother</th>
<th>Discourse of Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Fractured families Leaving home early Education | • Adverse living conditions.
• Experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV).
• Reduced opportunities to complete education. | | |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>• Child in care</th>
<th>• Community judgement</th>
<th>• DHHS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Early sexual encounters and unprotected sex.</td>
<td>• Experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV).</td>
<td>• Reduced opportunities to complete education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Substance abuse.</td>
<td>• Maternal deficit.</td>
<td>• Negative judgements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-harm and suicidal thoughts.</td>
<td>• Othering.</td>
<td>• Surveillance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>• Father of child</th>
<th>• Protective strategies</th>
<th>• Responsible young mother</th>
<th>Discourse of Stigma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Gatekeeping</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stigmatised young mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>• Family</th>
<th>• Financial concerns</th>
<th>• Friends</th>
<th>• Living arrangements (positive)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Parenting</td>
<td>• Resisting negativity</td>
<td>• Responsibility</td>
<td>• Transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supporting other young mothers</td>
<td>• Volunteering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>• Strategic actions</th>
<th>• Supportive environments.</th>
<th>• Social value.</th>
<th>Strategic young mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>• Employment</th>
<th>• Future without baby</th>
<th>• Future plans</th>
<th>• LCYPP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Life changing</td>
<td>• Lightbulb moment</td>
<td>• Moving forward</td>
<td>• Returning to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School completion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>• Transformative</th>
<th>• Taking up education.</th>
<th>• Planning for the future</th>
<th>Aspirational young mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Ethical considerations**

This study had ethical considerations for the participants, and for myself as the researcher. Ethical approvals were granted by the Higher Education Research
Committee (HREC) at Federation University and also from the Department of Education and Training (DET, formerly DEECD). As a vulnerable group of young mothers, who at times disclosed sensitive material about their complex lives, ethical considerations and decisions remained uppermost during the interviews and afterwards when working with the interview data. An “ethics of care” (Lessard et al., 2018, p. 201) approach was important while engaging with the young mothers during the interviews. I monitored the interview process and took account of the participants’ emotions by attending to each young woman’s response to questions throughout the interview and composing my replies with care. Taking the moral and ethical considerations of research with vulnerable groups into account, Paradis (2000) contends that the researcher “must begin with the consideration of the personal, interpersonal, community, and political ramifications of their research” (p. 854). The concept of “ethically important moments” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 262) draws attention to how ethical considerations and reflexivity are connected. This was highlighted in the interviews and disclosures by the participants were “given in confidence” (Atkins & Wallace, 2016, p. 39). These disclosures included drug references, age at first intercourse and intimate partner violence. From an ethical sense, this created a quandary for me as the researcher, as to how I would compose the narratives to preserve the young mothers’ accounts whilst ensuring the participants could not be identified. Writing up the narratives ethically and responsibly required making sure the representation and interpretation of the data satisfied the “meaning making” (Josselson, 2007, p. 549) process while protecting the identities of the participants, the locality and the young parent program.

The participants sought for this study were aged between 15 and 19 when they gave birth to their first child. When submitting the Ethics application, it was deemed possible that some of the participants in the young parent program might have been under the age of 18 and therefore questions of consent to participate were addressed in the original application. The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research
(National Health Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, Universities Australia, 2007, updated 2018) qualifies this important consideration in the following statement “d) young people who are mature enough to understand and consent and are not vulnerable through immaturity in ways that warrant additional consent from a parent or guardian” (p. 65). Some of the young mothers were already living independently, away from immediate family, and were in a parenting role with one or more children and managing their own lives and finances. Therefore, they were deemed mature enough to understand the implications of giving consent to participate in this research. Contributing to research “can inform society, individuals, policy and practice” (Hill, 2005, p. 81), but it is important to balance the research intentions and the possible vulnerabilities of the participants. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child indicates the importance of enabling children and young people to express their opinions on important matters and decisions that affect themselves and the UN Article 12 (2009) states:

> Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

At the time of the interviews, all participants who chose to participate in the study were aged over 18 and therefore were deemed able to give consent for themselves and their children, therefore alleviating concerns about participants younger than 18. The participants made the informed choice of agreeing to take part in the research and were provided opportunities to opt out of the research process at any time before the aggregation of data. A copy of the PLIS, indicated privacy and confidentiality would be maintained under the legalities of law, and the PLIS was reviewed at both the first and second interview. As Atkins and Wallace (2016) remind me, there are tensions in relation to the perceived vulnerability of participants and the provision of consent. I recognised the importance of ensuring that matters of ethics remained uppermost in my mind throughout the study to ensure that any difficulties could be considered “in a
situated and reflexive manner” (Atkins & Wallace, 2016, p. 31). Having provided a rationale for the use of research interviews to capture young mothers storied accounts of their lives, and the ethical considerations for this study, I now proceed to discuss how the examination of policy texts was undertaken.

**The discursive space of policy texts**

Government policies shape our world and govern most aspects of how we live our lives in a broad range of areas including crime, education, foreign policy, health and social welfare. Many people within the government bureaucratic agencies and community are drawn into policy-making processes through their political alliances, expert knowledge, and interest in specific issues. Media commentary, corporation influence, non-government agencies and community groups all contribute to decision-making processes in policy development. Public policy attempts to address issues by introducing laws, regulations, or a plan of action to respond to perceived problems. As such, policies are authoritative documents that outline the government’s intentions, generating an ordered implementation while upholding political priorities (Bridgman and Davis, 2004). To address the question of how young mothers are discursively constructed in policy texts, the poststructural approach and discourse analysis is best suited for this study to undertake an examination of how policy discursively constructs young mothers. The relationship between young mothers’ subject positions and social welfare measures is pivotal to this study as I seek to examine the microsociological and macrosociological discourses that are enabled and constrained through discursive practices.

As identified earlier in chapter 2, the Australian federal government introduced new welfare measures in 2011, known as the HYPM, as part of the changes to the broader social policies to reduce young parents’ dependency on welfare. Specific incremental changes in the Australian federal budget of 2011 to 2012 were linked to the broader economic, political and social contexts outlined in the Welfare to Work Budget Release
(May, 2005) and Building Australia’s Future Workforce Budget Release (May, 2011). Chapter 7 examines the specific measure which was embedded in Australian social policy in 2012 to identify the social and material effects of such measures on specific groups such as young mothers.

Aside from the academic literature used to locate the specific study within a broader existing body of knowledge about early motherhood, other secondary sources of data, such as government policies and reports were also scrutinized to locate the study in the broader macrosociological discourses of early motherhood. In sourcing data for the discourse analysis, I identified over 30 publicly available texts that related to the introduction of the HYPM in 2011 and amendments and changes to the original measure that took place in the years following the HYPM introduction. (See Appendix F for a summary of data sources examined to undertake the social policy analysis).

Each text was identified as a possible source of data and included policy texts, discussion papers, parliamentary debates, speeches, media commentary and responses from other agencies. Earlier social policies of 2005 and 2006 were also included to illustrate that prior to 2011, young parents and young mothers in particular were not singled out as a problematic group. Welfare measures focused on single parents more generally and did not delineate specific age groups. In 2011 young mothers were highlighted as a ‘problem’ in the policy measure. Media texts related to the policy measure iterations were retrieved from the Factiva database\(^\text{10}\) in October 2013. Key word searches were used to identify the specific media texts related to the HYPM. (See Appendix E)

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\(^{10}\) The Factiva database, owned by Dow Jones and Company is a business information and research tool that aggregates content from a wide range of licenced and free sources globally, including newspapers, newswires, journals and other media. [https://www.dowjones.com/products/factiva/](https://www.dowjones.com/products/factiva/). Access to the database was made available through the National Library of Australia library eResource collection.
Analysis of social policy data (texts)

To examine policy developments that focused on young mothers, I sought a poststructuralist approach that moved beyond the political decision-making process.

Data was examined in two ways. Firstly, I applied the ‘What’s the problem represented to be (WPR)’ approach developed by Bacchi in 1999 and discussed in depth in 2009 in her text, Analysing Policy: What’s the problem represented to be. Secondly, I used NVivo and applied codes to describe categories and concepts identified in the social policy and related texts. The following section discusses why I chose, and how I applied, the WPR approach to the range of identified policy texts that related to the HYPM.

Applying the WPR policy analysis approach where policy becomes the "subject for interrogation" (Bacchi, 2009, p. ix), six questions are posed to identify how ‘problems’ are represented in policies. Bacchi invites readers of her work to “apply this list of questions to [their] own problem representations” (p. 19). A range of theoretical perspectives are drawn on in Bacchi’s methodology, including poststructuralism, Foucauldian discourse analysis, social constructionism and feminist body theory. By investigating the meaning making that is part of the policy formulation process, this form of poststructural analysis is crucial to understanding how policy works and how we are governed (Bacchi, 2009).

When deciding on the use of WPR as the strategy to analyse the policy data it was important to seek out possible critiques of the approach. Although, a wide-ranging search for a possible critique of the approach was carried out, an in-depth critique did not emerge, therefore the WPR approach is adopted in this study to analyse the specific measure introduced by the federal government in 2011. Problem representations require work to be done on their “origins, purposes and effects” (Bacchi, 2009, p. 19) and I drew on Bacchi’s questions as the initial step to interrogate how the HYPM constructed young mothers as a problematic group. The findings from the examination of the HYPM are discussed in Chapter 7.
As a basis for my examination of the social policy texts related to the HYPM I reworded the questions outlined by Bacchi (2009, p. 2) for my purposes as follows:

1. What is the 'problem' represented to be in the specific policy measure known at the HYPM?
2. What pre-suppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem' of early motherhood?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' of early motherhood come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation of early motherhood? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' of early motherhood be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the perceived 'problem' of early motherhood?
6. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' of early motherhood been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

The WPR approach considers a number of stakeholders in the analysis, and the government is one of several players, including doctors, allied health workers, welfare organisations, lobby groups and researchers, who contribute "and influence the shape of governing knowledges" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 26). However, rather than focusing on the direct influence of each key player, the focus is on the influence brought to bear by each key player "on and through these knowledges" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 26). Drawing on Foucault’s understanding of power, “the focus is on the practices and relations that produce ‘problems’, ‘subjects’, ‘objects’ and ‘places’” (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 29). By mapping discursive practices through the WPR approach, “the identification of the mechanisms at work in the production of ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’” (p. 37) in the HYPM can be examined. In this case, the WPR approach was applicable to the question of how
young mothers became problematised subjects in the policy measures that were introduced in 2011 and commenced in 2012.

Further to this, Bacchi (2009) argues that the WPR approach “recommends a critical interrogation of assumed ‘problems’ (p. 31) through the examination of “practical texts” (Foucault 1990b, p. 12). Foucault defines ‘practical texts’ as those:

Written for the purpose of offering rules, opinions and advice on how to behave as one should: ‘practical texts’, which are themselves objects of a ‘practice’ in that they were designed to be read, learned, reflected upon, and tested out, and they were intended to constitute the eventual framework of everyday conduct. (p. 12)

I draw on Foucault’s understanding of ‘practical texts’ to examine the problematisation of young mothers in government documents and the discursive practices that shape how these problematisations are formed.

**Undertaking the coding of the policy texts**

The key data in relation to the HYPM required management as there were numerous sources of information. Details about each document were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and included information about the type of document, title, date of publication, author, and any other pertinent notes. The search function to organise data by date and type could then be used to begin the analysis process. The spreadsheet was then imported into the qualitative software package, NVivo, so that coding could be undertaken. Decisions about coding nodes were made as I engaged with the data, searching for key words, phrases and quotations to build understandings that could then be connected to other data. Bazely (2013) reminds me that “coding is not an end in itself, but a purposeful step to somewhere. It provides a means of access to evidence; it is a tool for querying data, for testing assumptions and conclusions” (p. 125). I then wrote analytical memos to remind myself why a code was important and how it might connect
to the theoretical framework and poststructural discourse analysis of the HYPM presented in Chapter 7. This section focused on how I undertook the analysis of the policy texts and the next section discusses how I situate my reflexive self.

**Situating the reflexive self**

Reflexivity is used in qualitative research to critique research practices and representations of the data. Mauthner and Doucet (1998) contend that an important part of reflexivity is “reflecting upon and understanding our own personal, political and intellectual autobiographies as researchers and making explicit where we are located in relation to our research respondents” (p. 121). As Lincoln et al. (2018) state, “it is a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent...as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research” (p. 143). It is also an “exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and world” (Macbeth, 2001, p. 35). I am reminded that while I am reflexive both from within on a personal level and outside as the researcher in this study, I am in constant motion with the participant experiences during the interviews.

From a poststructural perspective, reflexivity “demands that we interrogate each of ourselves regarding the ways in which research efforts are shaped and staged around the binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that form our own lives” (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 247). It is a methodological tool that requires close attention in the way it “intersects with debates and questions surrounding representation and legitimization in qualitative research” (Pillow, 2003, p. 176). While reflecting and making visible the ways I have undertaken to represent the texts as narratives is important, I also acknowledge that text construction and analysis requires iterative thinking and questioning.

As Pillow (2003) states, “reflexivity becomes important to demonstrate one’s awareness of the research problematics and is often used to potentially validate and legitimize the
research precisely by raising questions about the research process” (p. 179). As such, I am reminded that the research I am undertaking involves a vulnerable and marginalised population. How I go about honouring and representing the young mothers’ voices while considering my subjectivity and multiple identities within the research process needed careful planning and consideration. I also take up Manyard’s (1994) important point that although the research undertaken by the researcher cannot change the circumstances of the participants, the findings “can contribute to legislation, policy or the behaviour of agencies in ways which later enhance the experiences of others” (p. 17) by bringing to the fore, the voice of the participants in this study.

Acknowledging the importance of reflexivity in this study helps to mediate the risks involved in undertaking the research. In practice I take up Guillemin and Gillam’s (2004) account of reflexivity where they argue it is “a continuous process of critical scrutiny and interpretation, not just in relation to the research methods and the data but also to the researcher, participants, and the research context” (p. 275). During the interviews and analysis, I continually questioned my positionality and understanding of the young mothers’ complex lives. Although we did not necessarily share the same experiences in terms of couch surfing, drug references and interpersonal violence, I had experienced young motherhood. Despite a different trajectory, I was familiar with the perceived stigma and dominant construction of young mothers as irresponsible and not ready for motherhood. The two vignettes provided in the Introduction and at the end of this study attest to some of the problems I encountered as a young mother.

**Conclusion**

This chapter presented the chosen methodologies and methods used to gather and analyse data to examine storied accounts of young mothers’ complex lives, and the discursive construction and problematisation of young mothers in social policy.
documents. I take up Wetherell’s (2001) argument that “the process of analysis is always interpretive, always contingent, always a version or a reading from some theoretical, epistemological or ethical standpoint” (p. 384) and subsequently I have carefully considered the possible ethical dilemmas while interviewing each participant. I am reminded by King et al. (2019) that “researchers and the methods they use are entangled in the politics and practices of the social world…that doing social research is an active and interactive process engaged in by individual subjects, with emotions and theoretical and political commitments” (p. 174). The next chapter presents the storied accounts of a group of young mothers from a localised context, their motherhood journey, and the complexities they faced as they navigated life as a young mother, while negotiating education and training through a young parent program.
Chapter 5 - Stories from the Field

The top layer of a quilt comprises fragments of fabric that are joined to create intricate patterns. The pattern known as the Mariner’s Compass is used as a metaphor to embody the complex and intricate lives of seven young mothers from a young parent program and their journey into early motherhood and beyond.

Young motherhood is problematised in political and social welfare contexts, discursively framing young mothers through discourses of risk and welfare dependency. Adverse outcomes of early motherhood, including lower levels of education and reduced opportunities for employment are documented in the literature, and are discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2). This study sought to examine the discursive positioning of young mothers in institutional and local contexts and the social and material effects of those constructions.

The previous chapter (Chapter 4) presented the methodology and method for this study and outlined dual methodological approaches to examine the discursive field of young motherhood. Narrative inquiry was chosen to examine the lived experiences of young mothers at the microsociological level, and discourse analysis was chosen to analyse the institutional practices of government at the macrosociological level. Young mothers’ narratives, often invisible in broader societal contexts, are complex and difficult to untangle. Their accounts are shaped and constrained by the prevailing dominant discourses about early motherhood. Narrative inquiry and discourse analytic methods assist to identify and understand the discursive practices that constitute young mothers’ identities.

In this chapter, narrative inquiry enables the lives of the young mothers to be revealed, as they share their experiences of early motherhood and reflect on their past. The
narratives for this study were collected through the research interview process, where participants individually told their story. Dimensions of temporality (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) were interwoven into the young mothers’ stories as they spoke of past and present events and reflected on their journey into early motherhood. Stories or narratives can be considered as spoken discourse and the discursive constructions of early motherhood are presented as a way of understanding how young mothers navigated motherhood in a localised context. In particular, the narratives reveal everyday practices of the young mothers and their sense of self. Drawing on Foucault’s (1972) conceptualisation of discursive formations allows me to identify and draw together the shared reality of the young mothers by identifying patterns of similarity in the stories told. As Chase (2005) states “narrative researchers treat narrative – whether oral or written – as a distinct form of discourse” (p. 656), hence fitting well with discourse analytic methods used in the thesis.

Stories from the Field brings to the fore the voices of the young mothers themselves and the way they set new directions after the birth of their child. The participants in this study were between 15 and 19 years of age when they gave birth to their first child. The children of the seven participants ranged in age from birth to eight years. Ruby was due to give birth to her son a few weeks after the first interview, while Lynne and May had already delivered their babies. Cassandra and Tara had toddlers and Amanda’s son was already at school; Elly had four children, two at school, a toddler and a baby. The chapter begins with a brief synopsis of each young mother in order to set the scene and provide background. The chapter then goes on to present the narratives or stories of each young mother. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key issues and events that were identified in the discursive narratives of the young women as they recalled and told their stories. These key issues and events are developed further in the analysis chapter (Chapter 6).
Introducing the young mothers

Lynne, and her son Mason

Lynne was 20 when her son, Mason, was born, and at the time of the first interview he was three months old. Lynne had only been attending LCYPP for three weeks and was still settling into the program when I first met her. Lynne appeared quite nervous and reticent and I sought reassurance during both interviews that she wished to continue with the interview. Lynne confided that she was quiet and “didn’t really talk to many people”. When I asked her whether she had difficulty relating her experiences she replied she was “shocked”, but as the interview progressed I asked her again if she felt comfortable to continue and she replied, “I’m good”.

Lynne grew up without her mother in her life and did not have a good relationship with her father. She said she grew up with her father, “but he was not really there”. She hated not having a mother and said, “I had so many problems”, but she did not elaborate on this. Despite being part of a family of seven siblings, Lynne mentioned that the family was spread out and mostly she only saw her brother and occasionally her older sister. When she told the family she was having a baby, her “brother was okay with it” and her “sister was rapt”. “Yeah, my parents weren’t really happy and he’s still not happy” (referring to her father). It was at this point that Lynne clarified that her mother was still living but had no contact with the family. Lynne did not mention early schooling but alluded to completing Year 11. She experienced mental health issues at the beginning of Year 12 and was admitted to a Mental Health Unit. Lynne discharged herself from care and moved to another regional town. It was at this time she began to use illicit substances. When she fell pregnant, she did not have a long-term relationship with Mason’s father. Contact with him ceased when she moved back to her original
hometown. Lynne’s current partner had taken on sharing the care and parenting responsibilities for Mason.

**Tara, and her daughter Alyssa**

When I met Tara, her daughter Alyssa, was two years old. Tara was 16 when her pregnancy was confirmed. She had been in a relationship with her daughter’s father for about six months. Tara was not currently living with him as he has mental health issues and was seeking assistance and support to meet his goal of eventually living with Tara and their daughter.

At the time of the first interview Tara was living by herself but had other support around her, including her mother, father and grandparents. When she first found out she was pregnant, Tara’s mother voiced her disappointment with Tara. Tara’s father said that there was nothing he could really do other than being there for her. Her grandparents were “kind of on the no teen pregnancy spectrum but they’re fine now I think”. As Tara suggested, “there is more support there” because “they keep saying that Alyssa is what’s kept them alive for longer so that makes me feel awesome”. Interestingly, once a week Tara visited her 82-year-old grandmother to assist with shopping and provide company. It also meant Alyssa had time with her great grandmother, who also babysat Alyssa on occasions.

Prior to becoming pregnant Tara was completing Year 10 at a local secondary school. But she left school at 30 weeks into the pregnancy because she could not walk up the stairs anymore. Tara cared for her baby during the first weeks and when Alyssa was three months old, Tara began attending LCYP, focusing on a range of areas including literacy, numeracy, personal development and work-related skills, woodwork, and Business Certificate II. Also, Food Handling, First Aid and Responsible Serving of Alcohol (RSA) courses were undertaken.
May, and her daughter Nicole

May began her story by revealing she had been “on a 14-day acid bender”\textsuperscript{11} when she found out she was pregnant with her daughter, Nicole. She had only known the father of the baby for a short time. She was very upset when she found out she was pregnant: “I did a lot of screaming - a lot of yelling”. May’s mother was very supportive when she found out May was pregnant. Despite May having recently stolen money from her mother for drugs, her mother still responded to the 3am plea from May for help. May relates the event: “So my Mum was like, what the fuck do you want? Seriously. So, then Mum came over and I told her - well actually, I just chucked her the pregnancy test”. Her mother’s boyfriend was considered a grandfather figure to May’s daughter.

In terms of schooling, May had only completed Year 8. May related the difficulties she had, as she was expelled from “too many schools”. Accounts of self-harm behaviour, fights with other students, uncontrollable emotional behaviour and truancy all played a part in May’s removal from different schools in the area where she lived. After a horrific self-harm incident where May set herself on fire, leaving her with serious burns that required a six month stay in hospital, May tried to return to school, but the new school expelled her for driving to school as an unlicensed driver.

May indicated she could read but could not spell. She laughed as she said she hated English and reiterated, “I can't do it”. She mentioned that in Year 6 of primary school she was doing Year 9 maths work because she was “just excelling in it”. But when May went to high school, she indicated that she did not engage with the maths lessons she attended.

\textsuperscript{11} ‘Acid’ is the street name for LSD (Lysergic acid diethylamide) a synthetic hallucinogenic drug that is made in a laboratory. https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/lsd/
Ruby, and her son Keagan

I met Ruby, aged 18, when she was seven-months pregnant. Ruby’s pregnancy was a complete surprise to her, and the father of the baby was not on the scene at the time of the first interview. Ruby first met the father of the baby while she was completing Year 12. There was only four weeks left of school and Ruby stated that it was at this time she was suicidal, self-harming, and in a difficult place, so took a week off school to visit her sister in another town to settle down. Ruby did not consume illicit drugs, but the baby’s father was a heavy user at the time of the pregnancy. When the baby was born, Ruby would only allow him to see the baby if he agreed to drug tests. At this point, the baby’s father had another partner and eight-month-old daughter, but as he had not controlled his drug habit, he was also prevented from seeing the other child.

Ruby had moved back home at the time of the interview. She believed that it was important to be in the family home so that her mother could support her, and as she said, “Mum’s excited. Mum’s helping out a lot, as much as she can”. Ruby indicated that she looked forward to eventually living in her own home because the bedroom at the family home that she would share with her newborn son was very small.

Ruby volunteered at the Soup Bus\textsuperscript{12} in the regional city where she lived for four years while she was still at school. She would accompany her grandmother to collect food from bakeries and other shops before heading to the Soup Bus to set out the food for the homeless. Ruby’s first job at the age of 15 was at a local takeaway food shop and she had continued to be employed there. She also mentioned that she had gained a second employment opportunity to pay the rent and save for a car.

\textsuperscript{12} Soup Bus – an evening meal service for homeless and less fortunate people run by a group of volunteers. Donations of food come from various businesses in Lake City.
Cassandra, and her daughter Rose

Cassandra had a 25-month-old daughter when I met her at LCYPP. The pregnancy was not planned, and Cassandra indicated she was scared and frightened as she did not know what to expect. Cassandra had no contact with her own biological father and did not have a good relationship with her mother as she had moved out of home. Although at first Cassandra was reticent to tell her mother that she was pregnant, when she finally did so, she related that her mother “was a bit freaked out and didn’t know what to do” about the pregnancy.

Cassandra was not with her partner anymore as he was also scared about the pregnancy and becoming a father, although he did visit his daughter occasionally. At the time of the first interview, Cassandra had moved back home and was living with her mother, stepdad and siblings. Her two sisters helped with Rose. As Cassandra was working as a sales assistant on a casual basis for a large department store, one of her sisters cared for Rose on a regular basis. Having a driving licence was important to Cassandra so she could shop, take her daughter out and be independent.

Elly, and her son Hayden

Elly commenced at the LCYPP when she was 15. When I met Elly, she was 24, and no longer attended the program, but remained in contact with Tim – the coordinator of the program. Elly gave birth during her time at LCYPP, and the father of the child was 14. She had been living with his family as she “couldn’t really see eye to eye” with her mother. Elly left school at Year 7 and stated, “I was a really troubled”. Elly spoke of illicit drug taking and talked extensively about the abusive relationship with the father of her first child. At the time she had not told her mother and recounted:
At this stage I still hadn't told my mum I was pregnant, and I only lived down the road from her. I was only about seven houses away. She had no idea about anything that was happening there. I was a very secret - and still quite a very secretive person.

Elly had no contact with her two sisters but mentioned she has good relations with her stepbrother and stepsister. Her stepbrother was in the army and her eldest son, Hayden, who recently joined the Scouts, looked up to him and stated he wanted to join the army as well. Her main support when she was first pregnant came from her dad, grandmother and grandfather. The extended family on her mother’s side had been very supportive and adored the children.

Elly did not finish school but was able to complete elements of the LCYPP program. Over the ensuing years she had three more children and life was busy with her partner, who was the father of the three younger children. More recently, there had been financial difficulties when her partner lost his job. Elly also suffered a miscarriage just before she came to the interview.

**Amanda, and her son Toby**

Amanda was 16 when her son, Toby, was born. He was five and was in his first year at school at the time of the interview. Amanda no longer attended LCYPP and was employed on a regular basis. At the beginning of the interview, Amanda spoke for fifteen minutes about her relationship with Toby's father, her risk-taking behaviour and his abusive behaviour towards her. Amanda was not living with her family and had moved in with her partner at the time who was a regular drug user. It was at this time that Amanda also began taking drugs. Within months Amanda was pregnant and her living arrangements were not conducive to caring for a baby, so she moved back with her parents. Jake, her partner, came with her and at first, Amanda’s parents welcomed him into the family home.
Amanda became increasingly concerned by her partner’s abusive behaviour towards her, but she did not confide this to her parents until several violent events occurred. Once Amanda told her parents, they provided full support and care for Amanda and her partner was asked to leave.

After Toby was born Amanda wanted to finish school, but childcare was difficult to organise, and she did not trust her partner to care for the baby. Further abusive behaviour, which involved police and the implementation of restraining orders, left Amanda with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression. Amanda stated that she was so traumatised by the violent events that she cannot remember much of the first two years of Toby’s life. When Amanda heard about LCYPP, she made the decision to attend each day, knowing she could safely take Toby with her. Amanda completed English and maths studies, learnt to write a resume, and was given the opportunity to complete work experience.

Amanda still lived with her parents during this time, but she expressed a desire to live independently with Toby. However, Amanda disclosed that the PTSD, combined with the flashbacks to earlier events, heightened her concerns about trusting other people and managing independently.

**Piecing the story fragments together**

When constructing the narratives, I was aware that a linear, chronological story might reduce the young mothers’ stories to an ordered recount of their lives and not reflect the complexity recounted through the mostly fragmented conversations I had with each young mother. There was tension as to how I would draw the narratives together thematically. In order to counter a potential linear presentation of the young women’s lives, I made use of narrative storying, which allowed me, in the interview process, to give permission to the participants to recount their experiences as they came to mind.
and as they looked forward and back while presenting their impressions and interpretations of their life events in concert with their beliefs, values and desires (Bruner, 1991).

Through an analysis of the interview data of the participants’ experiences, five themes were identified to create collective narratives. The method of identification of the themes is detailed in Chapter 4. The themes are used as headings to draw the narratives together: *Unravelling at the seams; Layers of doubt; Stitching life together; Navigating intricate complexities; Reading the compass: New directions.*

**Narrative one: Unravelling at the seams**

Arguably, each young mother’s life had already begun to ‘unravel at the seams’ before their pregnancies were confirmed. They had left home for a range of reasons: a difficult relationship with family, an unsafe environment, and in most cases, because they engaged in a range of risk-taking behaviours including the regular consumption of illicit substances.

**Consuming illicit substances**

Maternal consumption of illicit substances was reported by some young mothers in the study, which was a regular occurrence prior to, or during, the early stages of pregnancy. Elly related that:

> There were lots of times I was offered drugs and sometimes - well before I was pregnant I did, yeah sure why not. I was on speed. I'd never put a needle near me or anything like that. It was weed and stuff like - alcohol quite a lot.
May “smoked weed” but “never touched ice”\(^\text{13}\); she “did everything else - MD, everything”\(^\text{14}\) and described herself as “pretty much a drug addict”. Lynne stated she was “on the drugs pretty bad” and had used “ice” when she fell pregnant. Amanda had not taken drugs until she met the father of her child and then she recounted that she took drugs “like marijuana, like pills, MDMA, all that stuff”. While Ruby did not take drugs, her partner at the time was a drug user, and Ruby had supported him in his efforts to overcome his addiction. However, with the confirmation of Ruby’s pregnancy, her partner was very angry and began to consume illicit substances again. Tara stated she did not consume drugs as she had to “be 100 per cent in control” and “the only addiction” she “had then was cigarettes really”. Cassandra made no mention in relation to the consumption of illicit substances in either interview.

**Confirmation of the pregnancy**

All young mothers were surprised about their pregnancy confirmation and although they were having sexual relations, none of the young mothers had planned their pregnancies. Each young mother experienced a range of emotions when the pregnancy was confirmed and all faced questions about their future with or without the baby. Tara had been with her daughter’s father for about six months when she found out she was pregnant and knew it would be a significant decision to go ahead with the pregnancy. As she reflected, “when I found out I was pregnant it was kind of - I had to sit down and think about huge decisions. Like it wasn't ever getting rid of her. We would never do that”. Elly had also been with her first child’s father for six months before finding out she was pregnant and stated, “yeah went to the doctor and found out I was going to be a mum”.

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\(^{13}\) ‘Ice’ is the street name for Crystal methamphetamine, a crystallised form of methamphetamine that is highly addictive and damaging to the central nervous system. [https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/ice/](https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/ice/)

\(^{14}\) ‘MD’ or ‘MDMA’ (methylenedioxymethamphetamine) is often found in Ecstasy – a central nervous system stimulant and hallucinogenic often taken in tablet form. [https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/ecstasy/](https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/ecstasy/)
Cassandra indicated that she was scared when the pregnancy was confirmed. She did not know what to expect or what to do, as she was no longer with Rose’s father. Despite working in childcare previously, Cassandra stated she did not know how to raise a child. Pregnancy complications worried Cassandra as she was quite ill throughout the whole pregnancy due to severe morning sickness. Rose (her daughter) was very small and not growing at the expected rate and this added to the stress of the pregnancy. Ongoing monitoring occurred three times a week throughout the pregnancy. Prior to her pregnancy, Lynne was experiencing mental health issues, had been using ice, and had unsafe sex with “one of the fellas”. Her pregnancy was confirmed a few weeks later. She indicated she did not feel any emotion when the pregnancy was first confirmed, but as the months went by, she felt “happy”.

May was upset and depressed when she found out she was pregnant and had assumed she was feeling ill because she had taken illicit drugs over an extended number of days. After the pregnancy was confirmed, May recounted that she “sat at home and did absolutely nothing, dwelled on the whole situation, cried every day… it was like, this is the stupidest thing in the world”. May also indicated she was very worried about the pregnancy and any damage she might have done to the baby. Amanda, who was 16 at the time of the pregnancy confirmation, had been living with Toby’s father for several months. Her only words were “oh, I’m pregnant, crap!” Amanda was worried about her family’s reaction to the news.

**Accounts of Interpersonal Violence**

Accounts of abusive behaviour by other members of complex family groups and intimate partner violence (IPV) by the father of the child were recounted by three of the young mothers. These recounts are included because they illustrate the complexity of the young mothers’ lives and the difficulties they faced during the pregnancy, and as new mothers.
Ruby reported that the father of her child threatened to have her assaulted and wanted her to have an abortion. She related that he thought that “my pregnancy was going to make him lose his daughter (from a previous relationship), so he hated me for that” but Ruby was determined to make the best of the situation and raise her child.

Elly was frightened to tell her partner about her pregnancy. Her partner’s stepdad became aggressive towards both Elly and her partner when she disclosed that she was three months pregnant. She and her partner had constant arguments and his aggressive actions resulted in Elly being admitted to hospital with bleeding related to the pregnancy. It was at this point that Elly contacted her mother.

I would have been five months when I told mum and she instantly packed my bags up there, took everything back to her place. If it wasn’t for her coming to pull us - pull me out into - obviously the unborn baby out of it, we wouldn’t be here, and I guarantee we wouldn’t - we probably wouldn’t be here. So, it got really bad, really, really bad.

Ensuing events with police led to the father of the child placed into the custody of his grandmother. With further physical threats and the involvement of the police, court orders and intervention orders\(^\text{15}\) were put in place. Elly was removed from the situation and taken interstate by her uncle. On her return, three weeks later, Elly discovered that her mother’s home had been destroyed and her mother had been abused as well. It did not end there for Elly. Her fears of safety were highlighted in the following excerpt: “I couldn’t go downtown. I couldn't leave the front of the house. I couldn't even go and check the letterbox. I was frightened, completely frightened”. Her mother would drive to the shops and Elly would “go in the car and sit in the car and lock all the doors and pretty

\(^{15}\) Intervention order: In the state of Victoria (Australia), an intervention order is an order made by a Magistrate under the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 or the Personal Safety Intervention Orders Act 2010. There are two types of orders. The first intervention order helps to protect a person from a family member who is violent, and the second order helps to protect a person from someone, other than a family member, who makes them feel unsafe. (https://www.magistratescourt.vic.gov.au/jurisdictions/intervention-orders)
much creep down behind the seats because I was petrified. Any male that come near me I broke down”. With support from her mother and a new partner, a protective shield around Elly helped her to focus on the pregnancy and forthcoming birth of Hayden.

Amanda also described the violence she experienced by her son’s father and suffered flashbacks and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after he left. Amanda recounted that she was so traumatised by the violent events that she has blocked out much of the first two years of her son’s life:

I don’t remember a lot of - like, the end of my pregnancy or a lot of Toby’s, probably, first two years, because that's when all the bad memories were. I'd tried to block everything out. So even the good things. Toby's first words and stuff.

During the pregnancy, and after the birth of Toby, her partner became abusive both physically and verbally. He did not allow Amanda to socialise or have family time with her siblings. Amanda believed her parents were not aware of the abusive behaviour and she hid physical signs of the abuse as the pregnancy progressed. After the birth of Toby, Amanda did not trust her partner to care for Toby and she stated that this added to the pressure of parenting and postnatal depression. Further abuse resulted in her partner being arrested and an intervention order was taken out. Amanda became caught up in another situation with her now ex-partner after he was no longer welcome at the family home and it escalated as he became extremely violent towards her. Despite being injured, Amanda escaped the scene and drove home. Again, police were called, and the case went to court with another intervention order and fine against her ex-partner. Amanda recounts having difficulty coming to terms with the way she was treated and only over the last four years the PTSD had reduced in severity. But Amanda still experienced difficulties and flashbacks:
I get a lot of anxiety shopping. Like it was my dad's birthday the other week and I went in to go to the shopping centre to go get him stuff, and I sat in the car for 20 minutes because I was too worried to go in because I saw someone.

Risk-taking behaviours and IPV created complex situations for the young mothers, compounded with the pregnancy confirmation and unsuitable living conditions. Indeed, the young mothers’ lives had begun to ‘unravel at the seams’ as they were confronted with difficult, life-threatening events. The adverse situations in which some of the young mothers found themselves were “far from ideal” (Vincent & Thomson, 2013, p. 6), and highlighted the broader social effects of risk-taking behaviour. The young mothers were faced with difficult decisions about their pregnancy and forthcoming motherhood.

**Narrative two: Layers of doubt**

Each young mother talked about the decision-making processes they worked through once the pregnancy had been confirmed. They also reflected on the advice they were given by health professionals such as having an abortion, the support they received from family, giving birth and future parenthood. Their recollections are included here as part of their journey to motherhood, and in the early stages of pregnancy they worried about the decisions they needed to make.

*Making decisions: Keeping the baby*

Each young mother was asked how they felt when their pregnancy was confirmed. At first, Ruby considered not keeping the baby because she grew up not knowing her father, and she thought perhaps it would be best to wait to have a child when she was in a relationship. But, when Ruby sought advice about the actual procedure for an abortion, she decided she could not go through with the abortion and decided to keep the baby. Lynne was emotionally neutral and stated, “did not really feel anything”, while Tara used the phrase, ‘huge decisions’. Cassandra indicated that she was “scared and frightened. I
wasn’t too sure what to expect”. Elly also found the idea of a pregnancy “pretty scary”. May recounted her conversation with her mother. “Mum, I don’t know what I’m going to do. I don’t have money; he doesn’t have money. I don’t know what I’m going to do”.

May’s 86-year-old grandmother told May that she would not be able to look after the child and told her “to abort the child. She was just, no, you can't bring up a child. I was just like, where’s your faith, mate?” Having a supportive partner, May continued with the pregnancy. Amanda had her pregnancy confirmed at a clinic and recounted that the health professionals immediately suggested abortion:

> When I first found out - I found out at about - it was five weeks and three days when I went and got the ultrasound because I had pains. I hadn't had my period, and so went in and just got the ultrasound. I had taken three pregnancy tests, and they were positive. But I went in and got the ultrasound. Five weeks and three days, they said it was…I'd gone in there and straightaway they had mentioned abortion, straightaway, and I was so upset, because I hadn't even thought of that. I don't think - I was like - it was like - oh, I'm pregnant, crap.

Elly recounted distressing incidents at the hospital when she was pregnant. She stated that she had refused to continue with appointments because the social workers made comments such as “well you shouldn't be doing this. You got yourself into that. You're 15, this is what happens. There are easy ways out of this Elly. You could have just given him away or something”. One social worker distressed Elly because she advised her to abort the baby. But Elly said it was “a big, big thing” coming from a Christian background. Her grandpa was a minister and he told Elly that she needed to deal with the situation and the family did not condone abortions.

**The pregnancy and giving birth**

Elly had a difficult labour and faced the possibility of losing Hayden, her firstborn, but her new partner (not the father of the child) remained by her side throughout the birth of
Hayden. Cassandra had a difficult pregnancy and severe morning sickness. Due to her ill-health, Cassandra decided not to continue attending the local high school. She was closely monitored by a maternal child health nurse and midwife three times a week as the baby was not gaining weight. The obstetrician recommended that Cassandra be induced, but the labour commenced prior to the induction and the baby was quite small at just over two kilograms.

After Nicole was born, May suffered from postnatal depression because she realised that she could not go back to the life she was living. May went into a ‘mum and bubs unit’ for a week to work on building connections with her daughter. She learnt how to care for Nicole, and while in the unit May did not feel depressed, but once home became depressed again. With support from her mother and partner, she gradually settled into the role of motherhood.

As Ruby had not yet given birth, she talked about her plans to breastfeed and had attended a breastfeeding and birthing class at the local hospital. Ruby had planned a natural birth without drugs, despite being told by the medical professionals that she was having a big baby. With back problems during the pregnancy, the doctor had suggested she might need an epidural for the pain, but she stated she wanted to be able to walk around and keep her mind off the birth. Ruby stated she had read all the information provided by the hospital and commented, “I’ve done research”. The second interview with Ruby took place after her son Keagan was born. She recounted the difficult birth she endured before having an emergency caesarean. She was still experiencing some ongoing issues with the surgery due to complications with the birth. Despite this, she

16 The Mother and Family Unit (MaFU) is a free service in Lake City, where the participant resides. The unit provides specialist emotional and psychological support and treatment for families experiencing difficulties during the perinatal period – during the pregnancy and the first year of the child’s life. The length of stay varies, according to individual circumstances, and parents and their babies stay during the week and then go home for the weekend.
returned to the program five days after giving birth to continue her schooling and stated that she rarely missed a day.

Advice from health professionals and family members raised ‘layers of doubt’ in the young mothers’ minds about continuing with the pregnancy. Three young mothers in this study were quite distressed when they received health professional recommendations to have an abortion. Ralph, et al. (2014) suggest that young women perceive pressure from their mothers, male partners, other family members or ‘everybody’ to have an abortion. For May, it was her grandmother who advised this option. Similarly, Spear (2004) noted that the young mothers in her research “opposed abortion as an option for resolution of pregnancy” (p. 344). In Spear’s (2004) study and in this study, all young mothers decided to proceed with their pregnancies and began to make changes in their lives to accommodate the forthcoming baby.

**Narrative three: Stitching life together**

All the young mothers who were interviewed in this research project had attended the LCYPP for varying lengths of time. When asked why they came to the program, their reasons invariably centred on finishing schooling and receiving support. Five young mothers, Lynne, Tara, May, Ruby and Cassandra, who had not reached the age of 21 by the end of the year, were still attending the program while Elly and Amanda had left the program.

*Attending the Lake City Young Parents Program*

Lynne talked about the LCYPP in a positive light, although she had only been attending the program for three weeks. She reiterated she liked school and maths, and that she was good at English as well and studied most evenings. She had done quite well in Year 11, completing the year successfully before she began consuming illicit substances and
falling pregnant. Lynne stated that having day care at the program was helpful so she could continue her education. When asked why education was important to her, Lynne replied, “I just wanted to get my education and found out there was this program”. When I first entered the field to establish the research project with Tim, the gatekeeper, I met Lynne as she worked on numeracy tasks. When I mentioned this during the first interview, she replied, “Yeah, I like my schoolwork”. She also believed that education settings like the LCYPP were “very beneficial”.

Tara was completing Year 10 at a local secondary school until she was about 30 weeks pregnant when she could no longer walk up the stairs. When Alyssa was three months old, Tara started attending the LCYPP with Alyssa and continued with the program for just over two years. Attending the program was hard at first because Tara did not think she would manage the schoolwork, but she realised that it was an opportunity to “make Alyssa’s life better and I have not doubted it ever since”. Tara talked about the challenges of the space and number of girls in the LCYPP with three teachers, but that they all worked together, and with more support it was very different to attending a mainstream classroom. Tara was asked what her future might have been like if she had not started with the LCYPP: “I wouldn’t have a clue. Honestly, I wouldn’t have a clue. Probably nothing. I’d probably still be sitting at home doing nothing by myself trying to raise Alyssa”.

For May, attending LCYPP changed her attitude to English. She began to write stories and received positive feedback from the teachers. But May reflected, “it’s not as what I think would be good. It's okay, but I want it to be great”. May asked questions about reading while studying as the recount below shows:

Yeah. I read, but I read and then I'll be like to [the teacher], what does this say?

What does this mean? But now I have a dictionary app on my phone and I just type it in, and it will tell me what’s going on. But yeah, and then I use Thesaurus
sometimes, so I can put a different word in there, so it actually makes sense to me. Yeah, I'm literally trying everything. I never read - I thought that reading was for retards pretty much. That's what I used to say when I was younger. So, I didn't really want to read.

May commented that she had believed that reading was for “retards” or “idiots” and when asked for clarification used the term “nerds”. “It's like you're an idiot for being a nerd and reading”. May said her view changed once she had Nicole:

When I see people reading on trains and stuff, I look at them and I'm just like, oh my goodness, look at you. You're reading, that's so cool. I don't know, because I want Nicole to read and do things like that. I would be very proud of her if she could read. If she read the books and stuff.

Ruby heard about the LCYPP while volunteering for the Soup Bus for homeless people. The person who managed the Soup Bus knew Tim and suggested Ruby join the program. Ruby has been able to continue her schooling through VCAL and was happy to have finished the numeracy study and begin the literacy study. Ruby also indicated that she would continue to attend the program until she was 21 years old as she was completing a business course, which would assist her to find employment.

Early in her pregnancy, Cassandra's counsellor introduced her to the LCYPP. Cassandra had left school at Year 11 when other students found out she was pregnant. Peers at her school suggested she was faking the pregnancy, and this distressed Cassandra. At the time of the interviews, Cassandra had been attending the program for over two years so that Rose could socialise with the other children, learn to share, and have a routine. When Cassandra was pregnant it had helped to talk with the other girls; there was no judgement, and everyone provided helpful suggestions. The environment was quite different to the mainstream school experiences.
After giving birth to Hayden, Elly met Tim and he helped her to finish most of her schooling and enrol in a hospitality course while she attended the program. Elly recounted her troubled secondary education and had been asked to leave school in Year 7 because “I was quite a bully”. She then attended another educational setting, which is where she met Hayden’s father, but she did not continue her education in that learning space. Moving forward from the abusive relationship experienced in the early days of her pregnancy and birth of her son, Amanda found the LCYPP and Tim helped Amanda complete work experience, write a resume, and complete her English and maths studies.

**The benefits of the parenting program**

The LCYPP provided parenting programs and access to staff who could answer questions when the young mothers sought advice to develop their mothering skills when caring for their babies. Even though Lynne had only been attending the LCYPP for three weeks when we first met, she indicated that she had learnt parenting skills such as how to talk to Mason and the importance of holding him more frequently. She had not been used to talking to a little person.

Attending the program four days a week helped Tara learn more about mothering, cooking, cleaning and where to go for extra support; however, she qualified the need for extra support by stating, ‘not that we do need it because the support is awesome here’. Aspects such as understanding how to create a routine around sleep time, dinner and bathing were all important to Tara and she then helped other new young mothers with their routines by providing advice.

The parenting course helped May with a range of ideas, including understanding that Nicole needed time to run and play after being at the shopping centre so that she would be more settled once back in the car.

Cassandra spent time with her daughter and stated:
I can read to her no worries. I read books to her at night sometimes. She does a lot of puzzles. She's gotten into a lot of puzzles now that she can do. So now we're just doing each step as it comes with her puzzles.

When asked the question about what she would do in the shopping centre if Rose had a tantrum, she replied: “I usually tell her we're going home. Yeah, I drop everything and just go”. Cassandra also related that when she was doing the shopping, she could distract Rose because certain supermarkets had free fruit for kids, and “it helps because Rose loves bananas. So, I give her a banana while I do some shopping and that distracts her quite a bit”. Finding ways to settle their child contributed to the young mothers’ growing knowledge of the parenting process.

As the seven young mothers continued to gather at the LCYPP, they could access educational opportunities, support, and advice about parenting. Sisterhood was one of the major themes reported in similar research by Spear (2002) and it was evident in the LCYPP context that the young mothers supported each other. They began to ‘stitch life together’ as they re-engaged in opportunities to continue their education. For some young mothers, experiencing academic success was highlighted as important and a way into employment or further study. But it was clear that there were other complexities related to working with social welfare agencies, and judgement by the wider community remained difficult for some of the young mothers to manage.

**Narrative four: Navigating intricate complexities**

Some young mothers shared problematic events in their lives related to communicating with government agencies and dealing with community judgement and perceived stigma. Concerns about having their baby taken away created stress for two of the young mothers in this study.
The second interview with Lynne was quite short as I sensed a growing discomfort as Lynne recounted events over recent months. Lynne had experienced further mental health issues between the first and second interview, and she was unable to manage the care of her son. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) organised to have Mason cared for by his grandmother during this time. Lynne experienced mixed emotions and was quite distraught about this arrangement as she missed out on Mason’s development but also acknowledged that she was having difficulties. Her only consolation was that her grandmother sent video clips of Mason’s progress during the three-month period.

As Lynne was experiencing some complex issues, the DHHS social workers recommended that she work with a range of health and community services in Lake City. Lynne received support from mental health, drug and alcohol workers, who were specifically trained to work with young people experiencing difficulties in these areas. Staff from the Cradle to Kinder program encouraged Lynne after the birth of her baby and provided advice about parenting and support networks in the community. This was an important program for Lynne as she adapted to motherhood. An equine therapist also assisted Lynne to work with horses to help identify and make changes to her emotions and behaviours. After three months, Lynne was able to take over Mason’s care on the proviso that she asked for help if she was experiencing difficulties and continue to attend LCYPP every day. Attending the program was not an issue for Lynne as she was willing to continue her VCAL studies. Lynne indicated that her grandmother reported regularly to DHHS and was positive about Lynne’s mothering abilities to care for Mason.

Elly shared her experience of the DHHS and how she was very worried when they arrived at her mother’s home when she was still pregnant. Being 15, Elly had hidden her pregnancy from her wider social circle, so when DHHS staff arrived for a home visit she panicked and was frightened by what might happen:
I was like oh my gosh I've heard of these people. I know what these people can do. I have to get out. That was my first warning of if I don't get out my mum's going to lose me. I am going to be in a world of trouble because I've put myself into this environment. I didn't listen to my mum and I just said to them I'm not anything to do with this family. I was just staying for the night and I went next door… hid my pregnancy from everyone being 15. I was scared of what was going to happen next, if they would come and take my baby obviously. I never heard good things about them. It was always bad things.

Elly found it difficult to believe that the DHHS was there to help, and she found it difficult to trust their actions after Hayden was born. Elly also believed that the complaint against her was made by the biological father’s family, but there was no evidence:

They come in, they looked at what he had, where he sleeps mainly, what he eats, where he eats, how tidy the house was especially, where he bathed, and they left, and I've never seen them since. They had nothing to put against me, nothing at all.

Having emotional and financial support from her mother helped Elly to focus on caring for Hayden and begin to move forward.

Some of the young mothers in this study provided accounts of judgement by other members of the community. Tara perceived that older people did not give young mothers “the time of day”. They just “snub you off. I obviously haven't had much of it but one of the other girls has been spat on by a worker walking up the main street”. Tara also stated that at times real estate agents did not look favourably at young mothers as prospective tenants and mentioned a few problems:

I've had a few rentals that have not been very good, and I haven't been treated fairly because I am at a young age. I'm young and they think that they can rip me off but really like [laughs] they can't and that's...I know the rules and I can get support from the LCYPP. One of my old landlords trying to get them to pay a $600 water bill
because there was a water leak at the property. So, he's [Tim] been awesome. She doesn't ring him back though.

May was quite vocal about community judgement. When asked how she thought the broader community perceived her as a mother, she replied:

> Oh, not great. They never really look at you. I don't know - I guess I feel if I was just that little bit older - I do get really bad looks and that, but I know I don't really look that young anymore… I have to look nice if I'm going out of the house with her too, because or else there's a judgement on that too. I never used to wear shoes for crying out loud. Me and my partner used to walk down the street with no shoes on. Now we have to wear bloody shoes.

May believed that she was judged by others and therefore needed to present herself and her baby in what would be deemed an appropriate way to reduce the judgement by other people.

In relation to the community where she lived, Cassandra stated, "you still get judged no matter where you go. It's how you raise your child that really counts". She said she knew people were judging by “the look they give you. It's easy to tell”. Ruby had a similar view and commented that people in the community did stare and make judgments because she was a young girl and pregnant. Elly shared what she believed other people, especially other mothers and families, felt about her. “Yeah and I've copped it from young mums as well. I am a much older mum now and they look at me. I sometimes look at them and think is there a reason why you're doing this?” Elly talked about her family, who would pass remarks about an increase in the baby bonus because she was having another baby. Elly described herself in the following way: “I'm not a perfect mum. I'm not a bad mum. I'm an average mum” and then defined herself further on in the conversation as a “good mother”. Elly defined what these labels meant to her. She concluded that
despite difficulties and health issues with the children at birth, or in the first years of their lives, they were all well and thriving.

Navigating government agencies such as the DHHS was problematic for both Lynne and Elly as they were emotionally distressed and worried about the outcomes of DHHS visits. This added an ‘intricate complexity’ to their early motherhood experiences. Other young mothers related how they found it difficult to respond to instances of judgement while in the community. In particular, some young mothers negotiating access to rental properties for safer, secure housing was problematic. Research by Whitley and Kirmayer (2008) indicates that young mothers are aware of the specific expectations of motherhood, and that they were constantly surveilled when out in public. Although the young mothers in this study reported instances of judgement, they indicated that they ignored negative responses and comments, and focused on caring and providing for their children, and planning how they could improve their lives.

**Narrative five: Reading the compass - New directions**

**Becoming a mother: Changing lives**

Despite the complexities that the young mothers faced as they reconciled past events, continued their education, and for some, employment, becoming a mother was a transformative aspect of their lives. It provided the impetus to change direction and consider future options.

Each participant was asked about how having a baby changed their lives. Elly referred to it as the “lightbulb moment” when she realised that she could not put her baby through the abuse and drug taking:

> I said enough is enough. I can’t do this. I can’t put my baby through this… It was just a lightbulb that clicked. I just sat there and I - I sat there and looked - I could pretty
much see my future if I was still here. I wouldn't have - I can guarantee that they would have come in and taken the baby away - absolutely guarantee because they already had DHHS involved.

Lynne recounted that having Mason changed what she did:

Well, I knew I couldn't do drugs anymore. Like I was still using weed, but I got off the 'ice' and then it took me a while to get off the weed. I stopped the 'ice' pretty much as soon as I found out I was pregnant but the weed it took a few months. I got a drug and alcohol worker.

Lynne intimated that if she had not had Mason, “I would probably still be on drugs… I was getting in trouble with the cops a lot up there, so I'd probably be in jail by now”. Lynne also announced that she has finished her literacy studies and then mentioned, “I've almost finished my numeracy”. Having experienced equine therapy to assist her own mental health issues, Lynne revealed that she loved working with horses and wanted to train as an equine therapist to assist other people.

Tara expressed that she did not know where she would have been now if she had not had her daughter. “I was in a pretty bad state before I fell pregnant. There's been worse but I was not - like mentally wise. I was not good”. She talked about choosing a better lifestyle and thinking about the future, and although still worried about the future, it was less of a concern than before she had Alyssa.

Amanda explained, “I feel like he's [referring to her son, Toby] all I have. I need to try and do what's best for him. Then I found out about this school [referring to LCYPP]”. Elly’s future goal was to train as a motor mechanic and work alongside her partner. She added, “I know what I'm doing with that. I know stuff about that”.
May was vocal in her response:

I would be probably dead in a gutter if it wasn’t for here [referring to the Young Parents Program], I’m not even joking. I was on so many drugs before her it wasn’t funny. So yeah, I would have been literally f***ed up if it wasn’t for Nicole.

May also recounted that her partner stopped taking drugs and found work supporting people with disabilities. Amanda provided a frank response to the question about life without Toby:

Probably be dead or in jail. Honestly. I think with all the drugs I was doing before I had Toby that probably could have got me in a lot of trouble. I was very suicidal before I had Toby.

Having Toby changed Amanda’s life. “He did, he changed my life, he did. I couldn't even imagine life without Toby. I don't even want to imagine it.” Accounts such as these were coupled with the young mothers’ aspirations and plans as they navigated early motherhood.

Aspirations and plans for the future

All young mothers shared their aspirations and plans. May outlined plans to go to university with a career path of social worker or youth worker. But she conceded that she would need to get herself on track first. She felt that she could help other people because she would “kind of know how they feel”. May had some knowledge of a pathway program for university and said, “I get a good score in that I can go into whatever I want”.

Elly mentioned that she did not have her car licence yet for a range of reasons, mainly around the computer test, and she called this a “a work in progress”. She planned to have her licence within a year. As she reflected, if she wanted to be a motor mechanic then she will need to be able to drive. Elly had also considered becoming a midwife, but
when asked what it might entail, she did not know, but suggested that she would like to specialise as a midwife for young mothers and she referred to some midwives who were very supportive and reassuring during her pregnancy.

Ruby did not want her son to go through what she had been through because it had been so hard. A car licence was a high priority for Ruby for transport or an emergency. Working a second job had paid for driving lessons and the licence test. At the time of the first interview, Ruby was not in a financial position to purchase a car, so she walked to the LCYPP every day. At the second interview, Ruby declared that she had recently applied successfully for a loan to purchase a car. After Keegan was born, and with reliable transport options, Ruby moved out of the family home to live with her sister. She talked about routines, independence and having more space. Ruby had completed the literacy and numeracy VCAL while attending the LCYPP and her portfolio of evidence was used as an example of excellence. More recently, Ruby was given the opportunity to sit on a board of directors for a regional banking corporation as part of the bank’s community engagement program, increasing her interest in business administration.

Amanda had expressed an interest in working in the funeral industry and this had been a goal for several years. But she found it difficult to commence work, as the funeral agencies in the area where she lived were mostly family owned. Many funeral agencies did not take on work experience students, so Amanda offered her services voluntarily, but still ran into difficulties regarding training. Access to study for mortuary courses required her to be employed by a funeral agency. Amanda shared that the voluntary work at the funeral organisation heightened her interest in this area as a future career and staff would call her in when they were busy. They showed Amanda “how to order

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17 A portfolio of evidence demonstrates that the learning and assessment tasks completed by the student are their own work. The portfolio demonstrates the successful completion of the learning outcomes as decreed by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA, 2014, www.vcaa.vic.edu.au)
coffins and caskets, how to engrave on the plaques, how to actually deal with the body itself. Like dressing, moving, cleaning, presenting, like if it was a viewing and everything like that”. Amanda applied to be a mortuary technician assistant, but was not successful, and the feedback highlighted her age as the main issue. Amanda took on other fulltime employment once her life had settled and Toby was at school.

The young mothers related how having a baby changed their lives, and they could visualise a different future for themselves and their family. Living independently from family and having a car licence for reliable transport were important aspects for some of the young mothers. New directions and aspirations in employment or further education featured in the stories of all young mothers.

**Conclusion**

Arguably, one of the important aspects in this study was that the young mothers became more visible in their narratives. As I constructed the narratives, I was continually reminded that their lives shifted, sometimes precariously, through complex and problematic events. The stories they shared had contradictory elements, at times portraying that life was better after the birth of their baby, but then circling around and relating the troubling aspects such as broken relationships, abusive partners, and difficulty with housing agencies, which impacted how they lived their lives.

The summary of the young mothers’ stories presented here recap the key themes and issues identified in the data stories. The young mothers’ narratives presented in this chapter are powerful and tell the story of the complex, sometimes harrowing circumstances that the women found themselves in as they negotiated pregnancy. Some of the issues they had to contend with were dysfunction, drug addiction, health issues, relationship difficulties with families and former partners, and the young mothers’ re-engagement in an educational setting. As they shared their stories about how becoming
a mother changed their outlook on life, aspirations for a different future also emerged. In their research, Conn et al. (2018) found that young mothers demonstrated resilience “when confronted with discrimination and systemic barriers” (p. 91) and similarly, the findings in this study suggest that young mothers navigated a range of difficulties to improve not only their lives but also the lives of their children.

The next chapter presents an analysis of the key discourses of risk and stigma that featured strongly in the storied accounts of the young mothers’ lives before and during their pregnancies. The counter discourses of responsibility and resilience become evident as the young mothers’ narratives move from the early complexities they experienced to a more affirming construction of young motherhood.
Chapter 6 - Young mother identities and discursive practices

The previous chapter presented Stories from the Field, capturing the complex stories of seven young mothers from a Victorian young parent program and their journey into and through early motherhood. Key discourses reported in the academic literature about young mothers have linked early childbearing to a range of negative outcomes, including non-completion of secondary education and/or school failure, fractured families, abusive backgrounds, risk-taking behaviour, and poverty (Keegan & Corliss, 2008).

The stories of the seven participants in this study were fragmented and difficult to untangle. Early motherhood itself was not necessarily a consequence of the high levels of disadvantage they experienced, but becoming a mother intensified the complexities of their lives. Beginning their stories before the pregnancy confirmation, some young mothers initially positioned themselves in such a way that they subscribed to the key discourses reported in the academic literature. Such discourses relate to public health and social welfare concerns for both mother and child, economic difficulties, and limited mothering skills (Breheny & Stephens, 2007a). They shared similar problems that they faced before and during the pregnancy: risk-taking behaviour, disrupted schooling, and fractured relationships. For some young mothers, intimate partner violence (IPV) overshadowed their journey into motherhood. This brought to light the difficulties they experienced over and above the everyday parenting responsibilities of raising their child.

This chapter begins by examining the key discourses about young mother identities that are highlighted in their storied accounts of risk and risk-taking behaviour. Stigmatised and judged against the conventional and expected norms of motherhood, the young mothers showed evidence of resistance to those identity constructions. Analysis of this study seeks to make visible how young mothers as social agents negotiate their social
world through discourses of responsibility and resilience. I draw on literature relating to early motherhood and Foucauldian concepts of discourse and subjectivity to examine how the young mothers in this study negotiate motherhood as they move from problematic lives to construct a more affirming identity of young mother. I borrow Foucault's concept of ‘subjugated disqualified knowledges’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 82) to make visible the discursive construction of young mothers, drawing on localised accounts distanced from the key public discourses about young mothers.

**Discourses of Risk**

Adolescence is a complex process whereby young people transition from the physical and social dependency of childhood to adult life (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). The young mother is situated as both child and adult (Macvarish, 2010a), and is constructed in the academic literature as a vulnerable subject. Discourses identify the young mother and her child as ‘at risk’ and this is framed from a health and diminished opportunities perspective (Macvarish, 2010a), rather than from former moral discourses linked to early motherhood. Young mothers are also reported in the literature as engaging in a range of risk-taking behaviours, which contributes to the view that young motherhood is a social threat. The common thread between ‘at risk’ and ‘risk-taking behaviour’ is highlighted in some of the young mother accounts as they told of their adverse childhood experiences in their complex lives prior to the pregnancy, but also the risk-taking behaviours they engaged in before and during the pregnancy. Being at risk, and engaging in risk-taking behaviour, was entangled with fractured families and relationships, adverse living conditions, and the consumption of illicit substances. Such complexities were predominant for some young mothers in varying contexts, but not all were identified in other young mother accounts.
**Leaving home**

As young people transition to adulthood and become increasingly independent, leaving the family home is an accepted part of the life course (van den Berg et al., 2018). Young people leave to continue their education, take up employment in another area or cohabit with other people. However, some young people leave home much earlier than the expected trajectory and for some young mothers in this study moving away from the family home occurred when they were young adolescents. They found themselves in adverse living conditions or ‘couch-surfing’. Dysfunctional families or conflict in the family home can act as a catalyst for young people to leave home earlier than intended (McLoughlin, 2013). Fractured relationships within their family placed some of the young mothers in this study at risk, as they left the family home to live with their partners or partners’ families. Elly was 14 when she left home, and even though Elly’s mother lived only a short distance away, Elly had not told her own mother where she was living. It was only as Elly’s pregnancy progressed that she reported living in dire circumstances as her partner’s mother was an alcoholic and the stepfather suffered from drug- and alcohol-related schizophrenia. Elly described her partner’s family as “a different type of family. They were very drug related - very, very drug related”. As a minor, Elly was in close proximity to a range of illegal drugs and was placed at risk through possible deviant associations with other people and potential criminal contexts.

Other precursors to leaving home early include difficulties at school and peer group associations. Young females are more likely to leave home if predictors such as leaving school early and delinquency are background factors (Tyler & Bersani, 2008). This is consistent with the findings in this study, as Elly and May both left home and school early, and self-reported involvement in a range of delinquent behaviours prior to their pregnancy. Amanda left home without informing her parents of her whereabouts after an
argument she had with her mother. When asked why she left home, Amanda described a difficult relationship with her mother:

I think - I had a lot of troubles at home, but they weren't - I thought they were big issues, being a teenager then. Fighting with mum and stuff. But I wasn't hard done by or anything. I just thought I was. I'd met Tyler's dad, Daniel, and - he seemed really fun.

Police were called to assist in the search for Amanda and she was located living with her partner. Amanda told her parents that she was not coming home. Within months Amanda was pregnant and living in problematic circumstances.

**Adverse living conditions**

Young pregnant mothers are often faced with adverse living conditions when they are not living in the family home. Access to safe and suitable living spaces while pregnant was problematic for some young mothers in this study, and the instability in housing added to the complexity of young mothers’ lives in the first half of the pregnancy. Living out-of-home when her pregnancy was confirmed, Amanda related how the unfavourable living conditions were further compounded when asked to move from temporary accommodation twice before she decided to move home again:

When I found out I was pregnant…the owner had told us that we needed to leave. We were actually sleeping in the shed at that time. We didn't have a room or anything. We were in the shed on the futon. So, we had moved to another one of his friends’ houses, and that was okay for a while. Then they asked us if we could leave there too, and that's when I'd gone back to Mum and Dad's house because they were really worried about me. They really wanted to support the pregnancy and stuff like that, because it would be their first grandchild, and everything.
Ruby, having left home due to sibling conflict with her younger sister, was living with her partner when she fell pregnant. Difficulties in the relationship, and being subjected to verbal abuse by her partner, was a catalyst for Ruby to seek a safer living space. But at 20 weeks into the pregnancy, finding other housing was problematic so Ruby "was couch surfing with friends". Couch surfing refers to young people who may not have family support and “move from one temporary living arrangement to another, without a secure ‘place to be’” (McLoughlin, 2013, p.13). Being pregnant and experiencing some physical health concerns compounded the difficulties for Ruby in the temporary living arrangements. Eventually, towards the end of the pregnancy, Ruby moved back into the family home, and despite limited space and the need to share a bedroom this was the best option and provided some stability to Ruby’s life. Although Amanda did not use the term ‘couch surfing’, in effect she did not have a stable out-of-home living environment. Interestingly though, it appeared that the young mothers recognised the need for more stable housing as their pregnancies progressed, suggesting that they were beginning to take responsibility to mitigate the perceived risks to create a better living environment for themselves and their unborn child.

**Experiencing intimate partner violence**

The portrayal of young mothers understood through a deficit lens of poor life choices, and social, economic and educational disadvantage, (Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014; Cherrington & Breheny, 2005) does not fully acknowledge how they were positioned by others in their social world. This was brought to light when three young mothers in this study disclosed how they lived in a secret and harrowing world of physical and verbal abuse, while also coping with their pregnancy and the everyday parenting responsibilities as a young mother. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a significant issue for women and in particular for young mothers (Bekaert & SmithBattle, 2016; Wood & Barter 2015). The *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: Continuing the national story* (2019)
from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reports that “in 2017, young women aged 15-34 accounted for more than half (53%, or 11000) of all police-recorded female sexual assault victims” (p. 4) and indicates the extent of the problem.

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2012) defines IPV as follows:

- Acts of physical violence, such as slapping, hitting, kicking and beating.
- Sexual violence, including forced sexual intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion.
- Emotional (psychological) abuse, such as insults, belittling, constant humiliation, intimidation (e.g. destroying things), threats of harm, threats to take away children.
- Controlling behaviours, including isolating a person from family and friends; monitoring their movements; and restricting access to financial resources, employment, education or medical care. (WHO/RHR/12.36)

Definitions of IPV vary in some respects in Australia, the U.K. and the U.S., with additional reference to domestic violence. In Australia, the term family violence is also used and considered a broader term to take into account Indigenous peoples’ experiences in marital and kinship relationships (Phillips & Vandenbroek, 2014). This study takes up the WHO definition, as it specifically brings into focus the young mothers’ accounts.

As victims of IPV, young mothers might not confide in trusted others, or seek help for fear of further retribution from their partner or ex-partner or custodial issues regarding their child (Bekaert & SmithBattle, 2016). The participants in this study were not asked
about their experiences of IPV at the interview and the disclosures about IPV were self-reported by those young mothers who experienced traumatic IPV events as part of the broader portrayal of their difficult lives. Amanda’s story of physical violence and emotional abuse in her relationship with Toby’s father highlights the torment she endured, and how she perceived herself as imprisoned in her own home:

When I was about maybe three or four months pregnant, Jake became really abusive. Like verbally abusive, physically abusive. I didn't want to leave the house in case I got in trouble from him. I didn't speak to anyone else because I didn't want him to know. My mum and dad had turned the lounge room, our house, into one big bedroom so we would have a lot of room for the baby and stuff. I was even too scared to - I felt like that room was my house and I didn't want to ever leave to go socialise with my family and have family time. I didn't - he didn't really like my family and would yell at them, especially my mum all the time. I don't think they - my parents, I don't think they really knew what was going on with me and him, all the abuse and stuff. I also had my younger brother and sister there as well…it started off verbally abusive and then he started to nudge or get his fist and just press it against my face, so it'd hurt. Then it started to get - like, kicking or pushing and - or hair-pulling and punching and slapping and all that stuff. Then I think when I was about maybe eight months pregnant, I was in the shower and he came in and he spat on me. He tried to electrocute me with the hair dryer while I was in the shower. Like, he plugged it in and tried to touch me with it.

For two young mothers in this study, the ex-partner (father of the child) in the relationship had difficulty in reconciling the possibility of parenthood and placed pressure on the young mothers to terminate the pregnancy. A refusal by the young mothers to take this course of action consequently appeared to escalate the violent outbursts by the father of the child. Ruby recounts how she was threatened by her partner of the time:
When I found out that I was pregnant he threatened me with his sister that if I told people that I was pregnant that she would bash me. Even though that I was pregnant. I was living with him at the time of this and he sent me a text message - from the bathroom when I was in the bedroom - saying, I want you to kill the kid. He used to try and arrange for people to bash me and stuff because I wouldn’t get an abortion. [He] turned back to drugs and tried to get my kid killed so he could still have his daughter [from another relationship].

Research by Langley (2017) revealed that the young mothers in her study justified the change in their partner’s behaviour by “constructing pregnancy as the catalyst” (p. 105) for the ensuing difficulties. Similarities were identified in this study also, as the storied accounts indicated that once the pregnancy was confirmed, the father of the child became (more) abusive. Interestingly, the young mothers also justified their partners’ violent change in behaviour by suggesting other factors such as substance abuse.

Although three of the young mothers in this study shared the tumultuous experience of IPV with the father of their child, there was no mention of any coercive sexual practices prior to, or in connection with, falling pregnant. Other studies though (Coy et al., 2010; Stark, 2007; Wood & Barter, 2015) have reported that IPV can be exhibited through exerting pressure on young women to have sex. In her research about young mothers, Langley (2017) noted that participants did not refer to individual occurrences of IPV, “instead focusing much more on the instability, conflict, psychological abuse, threats, control, manipulation and surveillance they had experienced in their relationships” (p. 106), thereby “choosing not to tell stories of physical violence in their relationships enabled them to resist being identified as victims” (p. 107). However, Amanda used specific words to label the abuse she had experienced; for example, “Jake became really abusive. Like verbally abusive, physically abusive” and described her experience in detail during the interview.
Although the young mothers were not specifically asked about the decision-making processes as to why they left the relationship after experiencing IPV, they provided some insight into the reasons on their own accord, focusing on the safety of their child as the most important reason. Leadbeater and Way (2001) argue that young mothers might not have the resources to enable them to leave an abusive relationship as they already consider they are judged and stigmatised. Young mothers can be placed in a conflicting position as they are criticised for continuing with an abusive relationship (Semaan et al., 2013) where their child/ren might also be in danger, but they are also judged for leaving the abusive relationship (Chung, 2005). Langley (2017) argues that social structures can create difficulties for young women to leave the relationship, and they “are constructed as being responsible for their relationship and abuse they experience” (p. 103). The young mothers who did disclose their IPV experiences in this study, distanced themselves from the abusive relationships by returning to the familial home and seeking support from others.

**Engaging in risk-taking behaviour**

Several young mothers engaged in risk-taking behaviour including early sexual encounters and unprotected sex, and the consumption of illicit substances. These at-risk behaviours occurred before the pregnancy was confirmed and ceased soon afterwards as young mothers indicated that having a baby encouraged them to reconsider their lives.

**Early sexual encounters and unprotected sex**

Key discourses about early pregnancy construct the young mother as irresponsible and promiscuous (Ellis-Sloan, 2014) as they engage in risk-taking behaviour, including early sexual encounters, substance abuse and self-harm incidents. In Australia, the median age of first intercourse in adolescent females is 17 years of age (Rissel et al., 2014).
Sexual encounters began significantly earlier for some young mothers in this study, which increased the possibility of unplanned pregnancy and early motherhood. Elly was engaging in sexual intercourse at the age of 14 with her partner who was 13, and Tara and Amanda were 16. Although some young mothers did not specifically state they had unprotected sex, their recounts indicated that they did not think about unprotected sex and pregnancy; for example, Lynne, May and Amanda intimated that their pregnancy occurred while using illicit substances. There was no indication in any of the young mothers’ accounts that they had access to effective contraception to prevent pregnancy or indeed, they had considered using contraception. Marino et al. (2016) suggests that contraceptive and condom use can be inconsistent or non-existent, while Brown (2016) suggests that a lack of knowledge about contraception and personal menstrual cycles can contribute to adolescent pregnancies. During the interview, May had identified as a lesbian prior to falling pregnant at 18:

I only knew the person that I fell pregnant to for a month. It was the first boy I ever had sex with. I was a lesbian before that. So, I thought I would try it and then I ended up pregnant with Nicole.

Sexual identity might have influenced the age that May first engaged in heterosexual experiences as she fell pregnant during early sexual encounters with the father of the child.

**Substance abuse**

Accounts of risk-taking behaviour in relation to the use of illicit substances were shared early in the young mothers’ storied accounts as they constructed a picture of their lives before the birth of their baby. Ruby described how her life was affected by “certain people”, and Lynne, May, Elly and Amanda provided detailed accounts of the illicit drugs they had consumed prior to the pregnancy confirmation. They all attributed their
substance abuse to their partners of the time, who were described as being heavily into
drugs. May’s concern about her consumption of drugs is illustrated in the following quote
when she questioned health professionals about the possible damage to her baby:

It’s like when I stopped having drugs - well, because Nicole (the baby) was so far
along. I talked to so many doctors - told them exactly what I had taken in the last 12
weeks - I was just like, what am I meant to do when she’s this young, did I fuck her
up?

A correlation between methamphetamine use, recent sexual activity, and adolescent
pregnancy is noted in a study by Zapata et al., (2008). Some of the young mothers in this
study had consumed a range of illicit substances including methamphetamine prior to
falling pregnant. Reducing or eliminating the consumption of illicit drugs was an
important step for four young mothers and this occurred after the pregnancy was
confirmed or during the following months. Two mothers indicated that they required
counselling and support through the process.

Contrary to the discourses of risk outlined above, three young mothers did not consume
illicit substances. Although peer pressure might have been strong for Tara, who was
captured up in an environment of illicit substance use, she was able to draw on internal
resources to resist:

I met Alex (Alyssa's dad) when I was 15 and he was using drugs that I’d never heard
of before. I think - it wasn't ever dangerous or anything, but I witnessed one of his
friends OD and that was probably where - I don't know how to explain that. Like it
was pretty bad. I was never using drugs ever, but I was with people that did because
I felt like I fit in there.

It is strength of those internal resources that appeared in the young mother narratives as
they took new directions of responsibility and resilience after the birth of their child and
these discourses are discussed later in the chapter.
**Self-harm and suicidal thoughts**

Self-harm is defined as "intentional self-poisoning or self-injury, irrespective of type of motive or the extent of suicidal intent" (Hawton et al., 2012, p. 2373). Self-harm is also associated with mental illness (Stänicke et al., 2019) and self-harming incidents were revealed in accounts by three participants in the study at different times.

Amanda spoke of self-cutting and suicidal thoughts before she fell pregnant:

> I was very suicidal before I had Toby. I think when Mum and Dad first knew about Jake they wouldn't let me go see him because they didn't know him. I'd cut everywhere. Like - and I'd cut up my stomach, and I'd cut up my legs. I just wanted to die.

After the birth of Toby, Amanda developed PTSD and depression. Understandably she found it difficult to come to terms with the violent IPV events that had occurred:

> I have a lot of trust issues. I went through PTSD. I went through depression. I went through binging. I went through trying to starve myself. I went through - I wanted to try drugs again so I could just forget about everything. I had flashbacks. I went through so much stuff. I just thought it was unfair that he could do this to me while I was struggling enough, and even now, like today.

Self-harm behaviours continued to reappear over the next five years. Amanda told how she wanted to return to the consumption of illicit substances to escape the nightmare flashbacks but stopped short of this action as Toby meant everything to her. During the interview she indicated that she had moved forward, was working, and had plans for the next stage in her life.

May recounted two self-harm events that occurred during her disrupted trajectory through school:
I lit myself on fire while I was in my mum’s back yard while I was at one of the schools. So then I missed loads of school, and I was in there for six months - I was in the...hospital for six months - of my life.

Sometime later, May also recounted that she “slit her wrists” and did not return to an educational setting for an extended period of time. According to Stänicke et al. (2019), “self-harm may contain important emotional and relational ‘messages’” such as the need “to obtain release...control difficult feelings [and] represent unaccepted feelings” (p. 3). For both Amanda and May, the reported self-harm incidents may have been a strategy used for processing the complexities in their lives.

Amanda indicated it was difficult to share past events with her parents and, in particular, with her mother:

Mum gets a bit upset sometimes because she knows that I have some things going on. But I don't want to talk about it because I don't want to upset her as well. I think it was two nights ago she said that she knows stuff's going on and she wishes that I would just tell her, and she never knows the full story because I'm too afraid to talk about some things. I don't want her to know what I've been through because I don't want her to get upset.

In their findings Stänicke et al. (2019) also noted that adolescent girls did not want to concern their mothers and suggested that self-harm was a way to become “self-sufficient” (p. 21). Their study identified that adolescent girls who self-harmed varied in their ability to acknowledge problems and emotions and sought to end their self-harm in their own ways. In this study, the cessation of self-harm behaviours occurred before May became pregnant but continued for Amanda for some years after the birth of her son.
Discourse of Stigma

Arguably, young mothers are subjected to bias and stigma, and judged against conventional identity scripts of motherhood. Certainly, the previous section focused on entanglements of risk and risk-taking behaviour that occurred in the young mothers’ complex lives. These accounts illustrated how initially young mothers in this study did subscribe to some of the key discourses, that taken on their own, without considering the nuanced accounts of their lives, constructed them from a deficit view. Stigma arises as young mothers, “cast as pathologised other” (Romagnoli & Wall, 2012, p. 277), are constructed as a social problem when compared with older mothers. Following this argument, the young women in this study engaged in sexual encounters that resulted in a pregnancy and are therefore marginalised as they do not fit the ‘more acceptable’ trend towards later childbearing. As Sharpe (2015) notes “a shift in normative beliefs regarding responsible and rational patterns of reproduction; namely that young women should prioritize education and career over motherhood, at least temporarily” (p. 3). This contributes to the negative connotations of young motherhood. For SmithBattle (2013), negative stereotypes associated with adolescent pregnancy link young mothers’ mothering/parenting as deficit with possible risks to the child. In addition, Macvarish (2010b) argues that many mothers, regardless of age, might “…feel stigmatised or assume a defensive stance about their parenting choices” (p. 2), but a young mother is already stigmatised as maternally deficient. A detailed discussion of the negative depictions of young mothers was outlined in Chapter 2.

Several studies have identified that young mothers experience stigma from the general community and through professional and health services (Hanna, 2001; Kirkman et al., 2001; Graham & McDermott, 2006; Seamark & Lings, 2004). Some young mothers in this study perceived that they were viewed negatively when engaging with health professionals and were fearful of disclosing any information. Soon after her pregnancy
was confirmed, Amanda was uncomfortable when consulting with health professionals and believed that they were not prepared to listen to her. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

When they mentioned abortion, I was like, there’s so many options. I’ve got to do what’s best… I said that’s not even an option. They kept on bringing it up and bringing it up and saying, you’re so young, blah blah blah. What’s this going to do to your life?

Unequal power relationships between young mothers and welfare professionals can be a source or worry as young mothers negotiate motherhood. As Virokannas (2011) suggests, involvement with welfare agencies constructs mothers as problematic mothers. Elly was fearful when social workers visited her place of residence several times during the first few months of her pregnancy. She believed they would take her away so she would hide each time so the pregnancy was not revealed. Soon after Elly’s son was born, social workers visited her at home to follow up a complaint they had received. Elly believed that social workers had come to take Hayden away:

When Hayden was first born, we had DHHS arrive at our place. So that was like…oh my gosh, I’ve just been through this and now it’s really going to happen. I shut the door back in their face. Had a cry behind the door, called out for Mum. I grabbed Hayden and sat in the room with him thinking this is going to be my last hug, they only come in here to take your baby away. They were great. They sat down with me and spoke about why they were there - what complaint they had had.

After the social workers checked the baby’s eating, sleeping and bathing arrangements they left, and Elly confirmed that “they had nothing to put against me, nothing at all”. At the time it left her uneasy that there might be further visitations, but she stated that she never saw them again. As Waterhouse and McGhee (2015) argue, when welfare professionals are investigating possible issues that a baby of child might be at risk, mothers need to account for, and justify, their parenting practices, yet the complexities in
mothers' lives might not be recognised. For Elly, despite there being no issues raised by
the social workers, she remained wary and the perceived negativity of the visit most
likely caused anxiety and Elly would doubt her “self-identity as a ‘good mother’” (Sykes,
2011, p. 448), increasing feelings of judgement and stigma that she was a ‘bad’ and
neglectful mother.

While experiencing difficulties with her mental health, Lynne also had contact with the
DHHS in relation to her son, Mason. She confided that she had experienced mental
health issues and it was recommended that her son was cared for by his grandmother
for a period of time, until Lynne was in a position to care for him. Lynne expressed her
unhappiness at the arrangement and said, “I haven't really been looking after him. He
got taken out of my care”. She expressed disappointment and sadness that she missed
some of his developmental milestones. At the time of the second interview, Lynne had
taken up her mothering role again, but was required to provide regular reports, seek
assistance if required and continue to attend the LCYPP every day.

Young mothers in this study experienced a range of negativity from other people; they
linked their perception to their age. Ruby perceived that she was judged by the way other
people would stare at her while in shopping centres. She suggested that they stared
because:
The fact that I'm a young mum - a young girl and pregnant. It doesn't bother me. I see it and I just - I'm used to it, but I don't - I just keep walking. It doesn't - I don't let it affect me. It irritates Mum, because Mum always says something, what's their problem. They don't know what's happened. They just see things and judge...because they - it's something against young girls being pregnant...the fact that we can now be lazy because we don't have to work, or we're just sluttling around - don't know how to use protection.

Although the young mothers in this study did not express specific concerns about their reputation and the possible impact on themselves or their children, more general connotations were shared. For example, Ruby reflected how she believed the broader community sexually stereotyped her as a young mother by her reference to the idea of “slutting around”. The historical basis of this reference is illustrated in one example from Tanenbaum (2000), who states:

For girls who came of age in the 1950s, the fear of being called a slut ruled their lives. In that decade, ‘good’ girls strained to give the appearance that they were dodging sex until marriage. ‘Bad’ girls—who failed to be discreet, whose dates bragged, who couldn’t get their dates to stop—were dismissed as trashy ‘sluts’. Even after she had graduated from high school, a young woman knew that submitting to sexual passion meant facing the risk of unwed pregnancy, which would bar her entree to the social respectability of college-educated middle class. (p. 19)

As Attwood (2007) argues “historically women have often been seen in terms of their sexual relations to men” (p. 235) and as noted in chapter 2, often blamed for encouraging sexual relations with men. Early motherhood has also attracted a range of derogatory terms used by other young people “as a means of branding and exclusion” (Attwood, 2007, p. 235). Variations of this discourse of promiscuity continue to construct negative connotations of young mothers and invariably circulate in the social world. Ruby believed that the media added to the judgement and stigma surrounding young mothers
when she commented, “you don’t see us getting praised for being pregnant, you just see us getting put down for being pregnant”. Cassandra sensed that “you still get judged no matter where you go”, and she perceived people were judging her by the look they gave as they walked past. Tara found other people would ignore her and not engage in conversation, and one of her pregnant friends from LCYPP was spat on in public. When out in the community with her son, Amanda recounted how a member of the public made a hurtful comment: “you shouldn’t have had children so young. There’s a thing called abortion. Should have been more careful”. Young women in Ellis-Sloan’s (2014) study also reported the negative public gaze they perceived in relation to the care of their child or the age of the mother, although as Ellis-Sloan points out, “‘looks’ may have been unrelated to the women’s status as teenage mothers” (p. 5) and could have been attributed to other factors.

At times, real estate agents did not look favourably at young mothers as prospective tenants. Although Tara experienced some positive rental accommodation arrangements, she also encountered issues, and provided an example where a landlord insisted she pay a $600 water bill in relation to a water leak on the property. She commented, “I haven’t been treated fairly because I am at a young age. I’m young and they think that they can rip me off but really like [laughs] they can’t”, reiterating that she knew the rules and the responsibility for the water leak lay elsewhere.

Housing insecurity and negative interactions with housing agencies creates a barrier for young mothers who wish to access suitable accommodation for their family. In particular, young single mothers might be constructed as a “problem family” (Flanagan, 2018, p. 684) who cannot meet rental payments and maintain the property. Age discrimination adds to the stigma that young mothers might not be suitable tenants and thus perpetuates the difficulties they face with housing, creating a situation where they are unable to access a safe living space.
The young mothers in this study were aware that constructions of young motherhood categorised them as “bad, irresponsible mothers” (Gregson, 2009, p. 137). But resisting particular discursive formations and taking up the discourse of ‘good mother’ was indicated in the way the young mothers cared for their children. May shared how prior to having a child she and her partner would walk down the street without shoes but that changed with the arrival of the baby. May considered it was important to present the baby in public in a particular way, thus constructing herself as a ‘good mother’ and perceiving this as one way to mitigate judgement and stigma. Elly indicated that a ‘good mother’ discourse related to how her children were raised and that she considered herself a good mother. When asked to define what ‘good’ meant to her, Elly said, “Good is right in the middle and that’s where I want to be”. Similarly, Cassandra commented that “it’s how you raise your child that really counts”. Autobiographical narratives documented in Australian research by Kirkman et al. (2001) also found that young mothers represented themselves as good mothers who worked to develop their parenting skills.

**Discourse of Responsible Motherhood**

Young mothers draw on a range of protective strategies to reject negative connotations of early motherhood (Clarke, 2015). As discussed earlier in the chapter, the young mothers in this study moved away from risk and risk-taking behaviour, and a discourse of responsibility became evident. In their storied accounts, the young mothers alluded to key decisions they made to protect and nurture their child.

**Young mother as gatekeeper**

A surprising finding in the narratives was how some young mothers constructed themselves as the protector of their child by taking on the role of ‘gatekeeper’ (Nixon & Hadfield, 2018, p. 1). Maternal gatekeeping is “a set of complex behavioral interactions
between parents, where mothers influence father involvement through their use of controlling, restrictive, and facilitative behaviors, directed at father’s childrearing and interaction with children on a regular and consistent basis” (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013, p. 177). In her research, which focused on postdivorce families, Trinder (2008) identified approaches to gatekeeping that included “proactive and contingent gate opening, passive gatekeeping, and justifiable and proactive gate closing” (p. 1307). Although none of the young mothers in this study had been married or divorced, the types of gatekeeping noted in Tinder’s study could also be identified in the young mothers’ storied accounts.

Drawing on a range of gatekeeping discursive strategies, the young mothers in this study provided reasons for gatekeeping, which included mental health issues experienced by the child’s father, the continuation of risk-taking behaviour such as substance abuse, intimate partner violence, or violent outbursts by other members of the birth father’s family. Ruby did not want to deny the biological father of the opportunity to build a relationship with their baby (Keegan) completely but placed boundaries around contact. She drew on a “contingent gate opening” (Trinder, 2008, p. 1309) strategy that would only allow her partner to see Keegan if he agreed to drug tests to prove he was no longer taking drugs. She commented: “now I think he’s trying to - he wants to be a part of my son’s life, so I think he’s trying to fix what he’s done - his mistakes. But the drugs is just the main problem”. Similarly, Tara also perceived the need for an additional element to protect her child and stipulated how visitations with the biological father would or would not occur. At the time of the interview, they were taking a break in their relationship while he worked through his mental health issues.

May combined a “proactive [and] contingent gate opening role” (Trinder, 2008, p. 1307/1309) once her pregnancy was confirmed. Although May remained with her child’s father, she was adamant that he would need to stop drug dealing and taking drugs. May
recounted that “he sold drugs at the time and he thought that, oh okay, we’re having a baby so I can still drug deal and we’ll get loads of money. I was like, no mate”. May also issued her partner an ultimatum that she would leave and move away if he did not stop:

Because my mum was leaving to go to Darwin two months after I found out I was pregnant. I told him that if he didn’t stop taking drugs and if he didn’t stop selling them, then I would leave him and move to Darwin with my mum. Then he stopped, and that was awesome. But there were a few times when I was pregnant, he took it because it was a friend’s party. But he never sold it while I was pregnant. But he probably did it three times in the whole time I was pregnant.

May also stipulated that he would not be able to continue smoking weed once the baby arrived:

He smoked weed every day while I was pregnant. But I just told him, once this baby comes it's not allowed. I can't do it right now, so why do you think it's okay for you to do it? He’s like, she’s not inside me. It's like, that's not the point [laughs]. It wasn't the point.

May also added:

But now he's the best dad. He would do anything for her and anything for me, and now he's got a job. So while I was pregnant, he tried to get a job, and now he works with people with disabilities. So, he earns money, which is good.

Both Elly and Amanda drew on a “justifiable and proactive gate closing” (Trinder, 2008, p. 1311) strategy with the biological father of their first child and there were no visitation rights or contact. “Adaptive distancing” is a useful term used by Clarke (2015, p. 477) to describe how the young mothers strategically moved away from difficult situations that did not support how they wanted to live their lives. As the young mothers talked of future plans for themselves and their children, it was evident that they were beginning to
manage their complex lives by moving away from problematic situations and drawing on internal resources of resistance and resilience to transform their lives.

**Discourse of Resistance**

To counter deficit constructions of young motherhood, the young mothers in this study drew on strategic motherhood practices to construct ‘good’ mother identities. As highlighted in the previous section, protective strategies of gatekeeping and motherhood practices were used to take up a legitimate maternal identity of responsibility. Drawing on Darisi’s (2007) notion that “resistance can be understood as a strategy of resilience” (p. 38), this section discusses how young mothers take up resilience and resistance strategies to rewrite their life narratives by drawing on positive coping mechanisms.

Resilience, as defined by Luthar et al. (2000) is “a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (p. 543). Understanding these mechanisms against the backdrop of stigma and judgement is important for the health and wellbeing of young mothers and their children. Resistance strategies are considered through the concept of value (Skeggs, 2011), whereby the valuing of supportive environments and friendships, employment, economic positioning and parenting skills worked to construct valid maternal identities.

**Supportive environments**

Young motherhood has been linked to “relational exclusion” (Kidger, 2004, p. 297) whereby social support and relationships disappear, and young mothers become socially isolated. Supportive environments and friendships are important to reduce isolation and loneliness that young mothers experience after the birth of their baby (Ellis-Sloan & Tamplin, 2019). In her ethnographic study, Skeggs (2011) identified how young women “developed localised spaces of protection” (p. 504) and worked to nurture their family despite limited circumstances. Similar findings were identified in this study where the
young women attached value to building support networks at the LCYPP and with other young mothers in the community.

Tara provided a protective space in a two-bedroom unit for another young mother who had left a violent situation. Tara also provided transport from school for her and the two young mothers shared the caring responsibilities for the children, managed their financial arrangements together, and provided a network of support. Sometime later, Tara opened her home again, providing advice and support for another young mother with a newborn and the three young women lived together as a family unit for several months. Resisting social exclusion and building relationships with other young mothers were important for Tara as she was confident that she was in a position to play a support role for other young mothers.

**Valuing the opportunity to work**

In research carried out by Conn et al. (2018) with young parents who had their first child prior to 19 years of age, participant responses noted perceived judgment disseminated through “negative messaging…across multiple contexts” (p. 94). Such messages included that the young parents lacked the motivation to work, but this contrasted with the participants’ own accounts of their preparedness to work to be able to support their family. Similarly, young mothers in this study demonstrated resistance to the perception that young mothers lack the motivation to take up employment as they were either employed part or full time while also attending the LCYPP program and caring for their child. Cassandra had casual employment as a sales assistant in a department store and indicated that she was seeking ongoing work and qualifications when she finished at the LCYPP and her daughter was older. Ruby had worked in a takeaway food shop while at high school and attended the LCYPP while working. She had also recently taken up further employment and juggled work, school and motherhood. Ruby valued her local community by volunteering for a service that provided meals to the homeless. She had
already made decisions about a future career in business and expressed her desire that “in the long run …doing the business course really intrigues me - when I'm doing the theory work…I really want to follow that career path”.

A developing maturity was evident in the way the young mothers juggled multiple roles as adolescent, young mother, student, and employee. Working part or full time while studying and caring for their child required good management and organisation, characteristics not always linked to how young mothers are discursively framed in and through policy and academic literature.

**Resisting negative assumptions of parenting**

Young mothers in this study resisted negative assumptions of parenting by highlighting interactions with their children. Lynne believed she knew how to look after Mason as she had “grown up around kids” and remarked that she identified his physical and cognitive needs including “tummy time” and reading to him. Lynne told of her joy when Mason demonstrated new skills: “when he learns new stuff it’s really cool watching him. He’s so smart”. There was a sense of pride and achievement in the Mason’s progress and development. May’s recognition of Nicole’s physical and language development is highlighted in the following explanation:

Nicole was eight months old and had been crawling for about six weeks, was standing by herself, babbling and saying a few words. Mum-Mum-Mum, Dad-Dad-Dad, Nan-Nan-Nan, Hey. Yeah, that's about it. She says a lot of words. She's been able to say hey for - I don't know - three months, she was just hey. Hey was her first word, then it was Dad, then it was Mum, then it was Nan. It's all pretty cool.

May described story book sessions and Nicole’s response by pointing to the words and images on the page:
Yeah, the best thing about is - you know Hairy Maclary books? Have you seen the ones where they've got nothing on one side apart from words, and on the other side it's pictures? So, I'll point at the words as I'm saying it to her, and then lean down and give her a look at the book. She'll start pointing at the words. She's not even interested in the picture anymore because I've sat there and been like, da-da-da. She'll just be like, ses, res [baby talk]. I think it's really interesting because I'll be like, look at the dog. Because have you seen the one with the different textures…of the dog? Well, that's the one we'll have and I'm like, feel this Nicole.

A study by Burgess (2005) that focused on home learning environments of young children suggested that young mothers provided fewer language and literacy opportunities and interactions than older mothers. While the participant group in this study was small, the young mothers shared interactions and were responsive to their children’s interest in books. Although May had shared her difficulties with English in the early years of secondary school, it was clear she had acknowledged the importance of positive early literacy interactions with her daughter and stated that “I want Nicole to read and do things like that…I would be very proud of her if she could read. If she read the books and stuff. I read to her a lot…lovely books that she can look at”. Cassandra considered it was important to provide activities to build cognitive development. In particular, she noted Rose’s interest and skills in completing puzzles and commented that she took a stepped approach to allow Rose the opportunity to complete the puzzle. These examples indicate that the young mothers wanted to provide opportunities for their children to learn.

**Social value through marketplace consumption**

Young mothers “positioned outside the boundaries of normative mothering…with limited financial resources” (Ponsford, 2011, p. 541) see the value in the consumption of a range of goods related to parenting and childhood. As a discursive practice to resist
judgement experienced in the public eye, comments about their economic self-sufficiency and the consumption of material goods were evident in some of the young mothers' narratives. As Skeggs and Loveday (2012) suggested, this was a “public performance of oneself as a ‘subject of value’” (p. 475). Further to this, the consumption of material goods for a child “is related to the notion of being ‘a good mother’ – a caregiver and provider” (Ponsford, 2011, p. 542) and such discursive practices work to reduce perceived stigma and judgement of young mothers.

May demonstrated resistance to public judgement and indicated what she saw as responsible and socially appropriate mothering by referring to the purchase of products such as “a pram that’s really nice” and Nicole’s appearance dressed in clean clothing was important. May indicated that financially she and her partner could meet Nicole’s needs. She disclosed her partner’s wage during the interview, emphasising what she perceived as a ‘good mother’ identity:

But I guess - when I go out with Nicole, she's never got dirt on her clothes, we have a pram that's really nice…when we go out, we… make sure we look like we can, he gets - he's on $1000 a week and I get Centrelink, so we can support her.

Ruby saw the importance of having a car for transport and emergencies if her baby was sick and negotiated the purchase of a car using a financial loan via the bank, demonstrating responsibility and ability to negotiate for her requirements.

Young mothers responded to the challenges of early motherhood by drawing on a range of strategies to resist a deficit view of their ability to parent. They resisted the assumption that young mothers were not capable of providing for their children and defended their position. This is highlighted in Amanda’s comments below:
Just because you're a young mother and you've had a child young doesn't mean that you can't go do things for yourself as well, like working, or getting a house, or getting a car, getting your licence, doing all that stuff.

Similarly, for May she suggested “they think that we can't do this, and we can't do that”. A longitudinal ethnographic study carried out by Skeggs in 1997, identified that a group of young women recognised the ways they were potentially positioned and considered to lack value by a “middle class gaze” (Skeggs, 2011, p. 503). To counter this positioning and “attach value to themselves”, comments such as “just getting on as best we can” and “treating other people as we’d want to be treated” (p. 503) were used to defend their position. These sentiments were echoed by the young mothers in this study who also defended their position refusing to acknowledge the deficit constructions of early motherhood, and instead, in Amanda's case she listed the attributes that would be deemed advantageous and linked to aspirational notions such as employment and material goods.

**Discourse of Transformation**

Early motherhood was a significant turning point for the young mothers in this study. As previous sections outlined, some had experienced adversity including complex living conditions, IPV, and conduct issues in school or in the community. All young mothers in this study had left school early. Moving forward they challenged the problematic identity of early motherhood through a range of discursive strategies of resilience and responsibility. The young mothers’ storied accounts provided insights into how they worked to move away from troubled pasts and created a future that included aspirations for education, employment and what they perceived as a good life for their children.

The young mothers in this study developed reflective capacities as they shared aspirations for a better life for themselves and their children. Reflective functioning can
be defined “as the capacity to understand one’s own and others’ behavior in terms of underlying mental states and intentions, and more broadly as a crucial human capacity that is intrinsic to affect regulation and productive social relationships” (Slade, 2005, p. 269). It is considered an important protective factor in parent-child relationships where the mother’s sensitivity assists her to understand “her own and baby’s behaviors in light of mental states thoughts, feelings, and intentions” (Sadler et al., 2016, p. 220). Transformative processes were clearly evident as the young mothers in this study moved forward with their lives.

Lifestyle choices were evident in the comments made by some of the mothers. Elly referred to the “lightbulb moment” when she realised she needed to make changes to her life to ensure a better life for herself and her son. Both May and Amanda suggested that their trajectory would have been vastly different if they had not had their babies, intimating that they might have been incarcerated or died due to substance abuse. Lynne also suggested that she could have been incarcerated as she had been in trouble with the police on several occasions.

Transformative aspects of early motherhood were evident in the young mother narratives. For some, immediate changes were instigated when their child was born, such as the discussion in the previous section that focused on adaptive strategies such as gatekeeping. Adjusting to motherhood and taking up a maternal identity of mother were important aspects for the young mothers as they worked on positive parenting roles. May talked of being exhausted but wanted to do what was best for the child. She did not want anyone else to take care of Nicole; however, at one stage, May was so exhausted and overwhelmed with the new baby that she acknowledged the need for some rest. She said, “it’s a lot of responsibility [laughs]. I’ve never committed myself to anything in my life”. When asked to explain her commitment to Nicole, May replied,
“yeah and I think I committed it too much. I did not think that it was okay to leave her”. It was clear that May had taken up the challenge of being a new mother.

Motherhood for Tara created a better lifestyle for her daughter, Alyssa, and herself but Tara worried about how she could manage financially. Tara continued to work and plan what would be the best solution and considered furthering her qualifications.

Recognising the importance of creating a better life and moving away from the past negativity in their own lives is identified in research undertaken by Cherry et al. (2015). This was linked to goal setting involving school completion and career planning. For the young mothers in this study, a discussion of their aspirations to complete school can be found in Chapter 8.

An important point is raised by Leadbeater and Way (2001), who suggest that “having a baby as a teenager can be a critical transforming event, but this event alone neither erases the tape of past experiences nor determines future ones” (p. 4). For the young mothers in this study, previous unstable life experiences were problematic, but becoming a young mother was a significant turning point as they focused on managing the demands and responsibilities of motherhood.

The challenges and demands of early motherhood required the young mothers in this study to plan and enact different futures for themselves and their children. Contrary to findings that early motherhood is detrimental, Seamark and Lings (2004) concluded in their study of teenage motherhood that rather than “the end of her education and aspirations for the future, the experiences of these young women were positive and adaptive” (p. 818). Seibold’s (2004) findings also concluded that early motherhood contributed to an “ongoing positive sense of identity” (p. 179) and the young mothers in this study all attributed becoming a mother as a positive event in their lives. They saw “parenthood as a ‘catalyst’ or motivator for significant positive change” (Conn et al. 2018, p. 96). As Duncan (2007) argues, young motherhood can contribute to feelings of
strength, ability to parent, and responsibility, combined with aspirations and maturity as the young mothers navigated a new trajectory, creating new identity stories for early motherhood.

**Conclusion**

Although the young mothers related that their pregnancy and early motherhood was challenging, they all drew on discursive resources to create a better future for themselves and their child/ren. Early in the recollection of their lives before their babies were born, some young mothers constructed themselves negatively by acknowledging rebellious behaviour. Some of the young mothers described their lives as being with iniquitous people, with no thought of what the future would hold. Despite facing a range of complexities, including “material disadvantage and social censure” (Graham & McDermott, 2006, p. 34), they took an active role in constructing their lives as young mothers who could identify and mitigate risks. In all cases, at the time of the interviews, the young mothers had moved beyond the broken relationships, abusive partners, and risk-taking behaviour. They were able to draw on their internal resources of resilience and determination to negotiate their worlds and live their lives differently. The young mothers made decisions about how to protect themselves and stay safe, highlighting what was important for themselves and their child/ren. They drew on facilitative (gate-opening) or inhibitory (gate-closing) processes in relation to the biological father of the child. Early motherhood was a significant turning point in their lives. Indeed, the futures they mapped out were aspirational and already underway.

A cautionary note by McDermott and Graham (2005) provides the context for the next two chapters:
Despite the young mothers reflexively constructing their own life narratives, they do this within the confines of very real structural inequalities and discursive limitations. Thus, there are constraints on the choices young...mothers can make about identities, relationships and mothering practices. In these resource-poor spaces, human action may result from a more embedded reflexivity. (p. 76)

Presenting only the transformative aspects of young motherhood draws attention away from the social and political inequalities that young mothers face in the social world. To mitigate this disquiet, the next chapter examines how social policy contributes to the deficit construction of young mothers by drawing on the HYPM measure, introduced in 2011. It serves as an example of how the discursive framing of young mothers takes place as part of broader neoliberal notions of welfare policy. The LCYPP also played an important role in the young mothers’ lives as they took up motherhood roles. Chapter 8 provides a full discussion of the LCYPP as an alternative education space and the benefits it afforded the young mothers in this study. The second section of the chapter presents an argument that alternative settings such as the LCYPP can, through a range of exclusionary practices, limit educational opportunities.
Chapter 7 - The politics of young mother: Social policy

“Yes, there’s compulsion, there’s responsibility but there’s opportunity at the centre of this measure” (Gillard, J. Interview, 17839, 2011)

The previous chapter examined how the young mothers in this study expressed their maternal subjectivity through practices that worked to mitigate some of the complexities in their lives. This chapter builds on Chapter 2, the literature review chapter which provided a detailed overview of how young mothers were constructed in social welfare policies in the U.K., U.S., and Australia. It is the first of two chapters that examine how policies discursively construct young mothers and argues that young mothers’ complex lives are not reflected in social and educational policy responses. This chapter focuses on social policy and how it problematises marginalised and disadvantaged groups such as young mothers through a range of policy practices that include surveillance and regulation measures. Drawing on Foucault and his understandings of governmentality, this chapter examines how social policies have both social and material effects for young mothers. By undertaking a discourse analysis of a recent Australian social policy measure known as the HYPM, this chapter illustrates how social and political inequities contribute to deficit discourses about young mothers. As Denzin and Lincoln (2018), argue, it is important to examine “institutional sites where troubles are turned into public issues and public issues [are] transformed into social policy…[to push] back against the structures of neoliberalism” (p. 12). I take up Bacchi and Goodwin’s (2016) “poststructural understanding of politics as strategic relations and practices” (p. 13) using the WPR approach (presented in Chapter 4) as a tool to examine how the problem of ‘young mother’ is constructed and produced as subject and object in the HYPM. An analysis of the policy that underpinned the HYPM is situated in this chapter to provide the space for a broader examination of the discursive positioning of young mothers in the social world and the social and material effects of that positioning.
Recent iterations of social policy in Australia have emphasised an obligation to community and good citizenship by targeting particular groups to alleviate long-term welfare dependency as part of broader neoliberal notions of welfare policy. Neoliberalism is defined here “as a mode of political economic rationality characterized by privatization, deregulation and a rolling back and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision” (Gill & Scharff, 2013, p. 5). The move towards labour market activation policies, mutual obligation and “paternalistic welfare in Australia” (Spies-Butcher, 2014, p.195) from the 1990s set the government’s agenda for increased targeting of particular groups in relation to welfare provision. Also, as Hartman (2005) argues “language used in the welfare dependency discourse helps to construct particular subjectivities such as the ‘welfare mother’” (p. 63). It is within this context that marginalised and disadvantaged groups, such as young mothers, are identified and categorised as welfare dependent and requiring management of their lives thus contributing to the deficit discourse about young mothers.

**Young mothers in the Australian political landscape**

This chapter draws on Foucault’s understandings of the key concepts of discourse and governmentality to examine the political rationalities that shaped the social policy measures, which drew public attention to young parents in the 2011 Australian federal budget. It examines how a range of ‘technologies’ were implemented in the HYPM to reduce the welfare dependency of young mothers. As Rose (1999) states governance is used to “refer to any strategy, tactic, process, procedure or programme for controlling, regulating, shaping, mastering or exercising authority over others in a nation, organization or locality” (p.15). Although the young mothers in this study were not located in one of the local government areas (LGAs) that would implement the HYPM in 2012, HYPM is used in this discussion to illustrate how social policies problematise particular groups, such as young mothers who are, in this case, pathologised in
government responses to early motherhood (Ware et al. 2017). As McRobbie (2007) argues, understandings about young motherhood “carries a whole range of vilified meanings associated with failed femininity and with disregard for the wellbeing of the child” (p. 732). As O’Reilly (2016a) adds, those who “do not follow the script of good mothering…are deemed ‘bad’ mothers in need of societal regulation and correction” (p. 14). A policy measure such as the HYPM responds to societal concern that young mothers are “‘failed subjects’, with reduced life chances, but with proper management, guidance and education they can be put ‘back on track’ [and] reformed into ‘good neoliberal subjects’” (Hamilton, et al., 2018, p. 1194). How the HYPM emerges in the Australian political landscape as a response to concerns about young mothers is discussed next.

In this chapter, I draw on Foucault’s (1977) conceptualisation of “entstehung” as “emergence, the moment of arising” (p. 148), to examine how the HYPM emerged as part of a broader development of an Australian social welfare policy in 2011. As Foucault (1977) argues, “developments may appear as a culmination, but they are merely the current episodes in a series of subjugations [and] the emergence is always produced through a particular stage of forces” (p. 148). This was evident in the HYPM as earlier policy directions from the late 1990s indicated a move towards mutual obligation and participation. By 2006, welfare-to-work policies in Australia required single parents with school aged children who were recipients of welfare payments to seek employment, thus the mutual obligation requirements intensified. As Foucault (1977) states, “the isolation of different points of emergence does not conform to the successive configurations of an identical meaning; rather, they result from substitutions, displacements, disguised conquests, and systematic reversals” (p. 151). In the context of this study, I have sought to understand the macrosociological discourses that have emerged at different times to construct young mother subjectivities and to examine how particular social and institutional strategies and practices have shaped those understandings. I take up
Foucault’s understandings of ‘emergence’ in relation to welfare to work policies and concepts such as ‘mutual obligation’ as welfare provision moved “from entitlement to obligation” (Macintyre, 1999, p. 103), where those on welfare support were expected to make an active contribution. Successive Australian governments adapted their policy responses to welfare, but mutual obligation remained part of the Australian neoliberal welfare reform in the 21st century.

Young mothers became visible in the Australian political landscape in the late 1990s. A One Nation press release by Pauline Hanson MP and Member for Oxley indicated the position of the One Nation party in relation to unmarried mothers and the welfare costs to the taxpayers:

My concern is for those who start young with children out of wedlock and then repeat the performance - in many cases with a different man. Everyone makes mistakes and young girls in particular are vulnerable to pressures that may leave them the mother of an unplanned child but we should expect that once having had the experience of a child out of wedlock more care would be taken to ensure the situation is not repeated...We must not do anything to foster the prospect of multiple children out of wedlock - it is not in the real interests of the mothers or the children, especially when the mother is little more than a child herself. The cost to the taxpayer for teenage sole parents alone currently runs to over 120 million dollars a year. Under our policy, assistance to unmarried mothers will not be extended beyond the first child. (16 July 1998)

This release echoed some of the prevailing early motherhood discourses of the time, including young women’s so-called lack of responsibility in contraceptive use, multiple partners fathering children, the young age of the mother, and high welfare costs for the government through the provision of welfare payments for young sole parents. Although fertility rates in the 15-19 age group have declined in Australia over recent years (Wilson & Huntington, 2006), early motherhood is still conceptualised as a major social problem.
The introduction of the HYPM outlined specific requirements and participation plans for young parents to build capacity and contribute to the economy.

**Escaping the trap of welfare dependency**

Prior to the introduction of the HYPM as a trial in 2012 by the Gillard government, preceding governments had flagged the importance of escaping the trap of welfare dependency with a specific focus on self-reliance. In her address to the National Press Club titled ‘The future of welfare in the 21st Century’, Senator Newman, Minister for Family and Community Services stated that policies of the Howard government would focus on a:

- Strong social foundation for family and community life for the next century, while continuing to provide a safety net for those in need - one that encourages self-reliance and supports people to escape the trap of welfare dependency. If you like, one that acts as a springboard to economic security and independence. (29 September 1999)

The major tenets of the address outlined six key principles and focused on incentivising and rewarding work, education and training, capacity building, and contribution to society through increased participation. These principles reflected the Howard government’s welfare reform of mutual obligation where responsibility between the community and individual was shared. At the time, the key principles did not draw attention to particular disadvantaged groups but noted the importance of reducing welfare dependency.

The introduction of a parenting payment known as the ‘Baby Bonus’ in Australia in 2004 sought to provide financial support to families in a bid to increase the population. A brief history of how the parenting payment came into existence is located in the literature review. The introduction of the payment of $3000 (tax-free and not means tested) was controversial as there was a concern about how the payment would be used by families.
There was a perception that some individuals would seek to have a baby to access the payment (Risse, 2010). In particular, there was an increase in first births for young women in the 15–19 age group at this time (Risse, 2010) and young mothers were considered as a collective group who would not use the payment for the benefit of their baby but would instead purchase other non-essential items for personal use. A small number of extreme examples were reported in the media adding to the belief that young mothers were irresponsible (Garrett, et al. 2017). The payment increased to $4000 in 2006 and by 2007 the pervading discourse and heightened concern that emerged in relation to how the payment was being used saw a change to the way the payment was distributed to mothers under 18 years of age. To mitigate the perceived irresponsible spending of the payment, it was mandated that young mothers would receive thirteen fortnightly instalments. The discursive framing of young mothers in relation to the Baby Bonus parenting payment suggests an evolving concern about young mothers that increased over time and fuelled government responses to the purported issue.

A decade on from Senator Newman’s address, the then Labor Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, addressed the National Press Club (July 2010) outlining the government’s economic and financial reform. In reference to building future prosperity, she spoke of an economic patchwork of skilled labour requirements in some areas of Australia, while other regions were experiencing difficulties in attracting skilled labour. Important elements of the economic response included higher workforce participation and productivity growth, with education central to the agenda to develop skills for rewarding and satisfying work. Gillard also stated that lives were shaped through the benefits and dignity of work. Elements of this agenda were reflected in the HYPM, which were introduced in the budget release in the following year and these are identified, analysed and discussed in the next section.
The Helping Young Parent Measure: A ‘tough love’ policy

I began the chapter with a quote from the then Prime Minister, Julie Gillard, whose words encapsulated the essence of the measure. The measure, labelled a ‘tough love’ policy, was touted as a way of providing young people an opportunity to “experience the benefits and dignity of work” (Hudson, 2011) and make a contribution to the Australian economy, which was highlighted in the 2011/2012 budget rationale. The government platform was to return the budget to surplus and thus strengthen the economy by targeting investments in skills and training to increase the workforce. Disadvantaged and marginalised groups were viewed as a priority in the federal budget as some groups, such as young parents, were being ‘left behind’; therefore, measures to increase participation and boost employment for those on the margins were seen as a way forward. There was a shift from unmarried mothers (encompassing all single mothers/lone parents in previous welfare support packages) to specifically focusing on young mothers through the introduction of the HYPM. In terms of government social expenditure, young mothers were viewed as a fiscal burden in the current climate, yet statistics indicated that there were only 11,000 young parents Australia wide at the time the new measures were introduced (ABS, 2010). Of the 8,500 young parents aged under 20 who were receiving parenting payments prior to the introduction of the HYPM, the majority were young mothers (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs [FaHCSIA] 2011, p. 62). The government defended the new measures, stating that it was focused on breaking the welfare dependency cycle for teenage parents.

Although the actual policy measure document used the term ‘young parents’, other labels focusing specifically on young mothers were used in different media broadcasts about the policy, despite the fact that the budget rules also encompassed other groups such as low-income earners, jobless and those on disability pensions. Specific
representations of young mothers were evident in the new policy measure as they were singled out and became highly visible in media releases relating to the budget. For example, the wording of the following media headings, *Prime Minister Julia Gillard orders teen mums back to work with Budget crackdown* (Hudson, 21 May 2011) and *Teen parents targeted in welfare crackdown* (Kirk, 5 May 2011), drew negative attention to young mothers. Specific words such as 'orders', 'targeted', 'crackdown', and phrases such as ‘back to work’ discursively frame young mothers as deficit and highlight that management of their conduct was required and would be managed through compliance. In addition, they were expected to be productive citizens by returning to work.

The implementation of the new measures in 2012 raises questions as to why a specific, small demographic was targeted, and whether it was an economic strategy to manage a particular group of people. As such, Bacchi (2009) would argue that through a range of practices the problem becomes a reality but remains implicit in the response by policy makers. Further to this, Kelly (2000) maintains that young people are problematised in policy discourses and “concerns relate to how young people should be schooled, policed, housed, employed, or prevented from becoming involved in any number of risky (sexual, eating, drug abusing or peer cultural) practices” (p. 301). In particular, young mothers, as a subset of the youth population, became the object of measures and programs that sought to regulate their disposition and conduct. As Henman and Marston (2008) argue, neoliberal welfare rationalities effectively require risk technologies as “the governance of social problems demands a capacity to target and track subpopulations to calculate levels of individual and social risk, and in turn to regulate their behaviour” (p. 200). The HYPM is a risk technology which includes surveillance measures through planning programs to ensure young mothers meet their obligations.

The subject, in this case the young mother, emerges as a constitutive element of the political field and it is here that the HYPM does the work of constructing young mothers
As Deeming (2016) points out, activation policies that focus on particular disadvantaged groups, such as young mothers, do not account for the “important, structural and economic constraints and inequalities” (p. 168) that subsets of the population might face. In many cases, young mothers are already economically and socially disadvantaged and policy measures such as the HYPM construct young mothers “as governed subjects engaged in a power struggle for resources, recognition and respect” (Deeming, 2016, p. 169). Neoliberal beliefs create policy responses that particular groups, such as young mothers, need to be governed as their conduct, namely early pregnancy and motherhood, does not meet the expected adolescent trajectory of completing their education, finding employment and contributing to society. To manage what is deemed a problematic group, a “learning or earning agenda” (Mills, et al., 2013, p. 15) is embedded in the measure through sanctions and conditions that must be met to enable the continuation of welfare support.

**Governing young mothers**

Several governing techniques were evident in the HYPM. Firstly, under the guise of ‘tough love’, the government turned its ‘gaze’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 155) towards young mothers. Their conduct was to be regulated through the establishment of participation plans encompassing education, early childhood learning and development, and parenting activities. Subjecting young mothers to regulatory monitoring or an individualistic gaze is based on the belief that young mothers are unable to care for themselves and their children, and make their own decisions (Wenham, 2016). This reinforces one dominant view about young mothers and in doing so, legitimates government actions and accountability measures while also defining the appropriate and accepted shape of that reform outlined in the budget release. With a specific emphasis on young mothers, the government, in reality, creates a particular impression on what the problem is, and this translates into social and material effects for those affected by
the changes to policy. Early motherhood discourses are predicated on the view that young mothers are welfare dependent and require specific guidance to manage their lives. These truths are then disseminated through the social policy that encompasses the specific measure.

Secondly, to sell the measure to the public, positive aspects of the measure were highlighted in the Budget overview (2011) through words such as ‘opportunities’, producing a particular truth about the benefits recipients would receive by participating in the program while also portraying the government as caring for individuals. However, the inclusion of the word ‘requirements’ counteracted the positive aspects of the policy measure by regulating what was expected from some groups, including young mothers, in order to continue receiving welfare benefits. Therefore, through mutual obligation, the measure could be considered a ‘carrot and stick’ approach where there is an expectation that individuals will be productive and make a contribution to society. Under the measure, compliant young mothers were positioned as productive and disciplined citizens while remaining “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1977, p. 138) who could be transformed through opportunities made available in the measure. Without the measure, young mothers would be deemed to remain undisciplined through inappropriate reproductive activity and welfare dependency, but by taking up the opportunities and meeting the requirements set out by the government, they had the opportunity to transform their lives, and arguably, be forgiven for their previous lapses in what is deemed inappropriate behaviour.

Thirdly, ‘techniques of power’ (Foucault, 1980), designed to observe, scrutinise, shape and regulate the behaviour of individuals, were identified within the HYPM and subjugating young mothers. For example, regulatory requirements stipulated that young mothers would attend Centrelink to plan education and employment pathways when their babies were six months old. Once their children turned one, they were expected to have
returned to education, training or employment. If specified appointments with Centrelink were missed, their welfare payments would cease. It is not clear how positioning a young mother in this way is supportive. However, to comply with this stipulation, attention was drawn away from the importance of mothers caring for their young children and towards making a productive contribution as responsible citizens. The material effects of the requirements such as access to resources for travel to the Centrelink office and childcare while upgrading skills or working could cause financial hardship. Wilson and Huntington, (2006) argue that:

To insist that teen mothers enter the workforce on this basis while their children are young puts them at a double disadvantage as they struggle to make ends meet and at the same time provide a satisfactory home for their families. (p. 69)

In addition, the concept of “dividing practices” (Foucault, 1983, p. 208) was evident within the measure. As noted above, young mothers were expected to have developed a participation plan to meet their obligations by the time their children turned one, yet under the parenting payments for older single mothers and low-income parents, the opportunity to stay at home until the youngest child was six and in school five days a week was available. It was only after this time that older single parents were then mandated to meet their obligations. The disparity in age-related requirements creates a divide where younger women have greater expectations placed on how they conduct their lives. Another concern was that as the HYPM was a trial, only young mothers from one of the ten targeted areas could participate in the program. There was no indication about future participation possibilities for young mothers who lived in similar circumstances in other areas of Australia. In particular, the young mothers who participated in this study did not come from one of the ten LGAs and therefore did not have an opportunity to develop participation plans if this was deemed as an appropriate response to supporting young parents. Interestingly, the measure was not extended to other disadvantaged local government areas after the trial between 2012 and 2016. A
new iteration of the program renamed ParentsNext (2016) continued with very similar requirements, with future planning and preparation for study and employment, but included all parents with children under six who received a parenting payment. The program still focused on targeted LGAs, but the number increased from ten to 31 areas.

Other practices that created a divide between younger and older mothers were evident when Minister for Families Jenny Macklin (2011) instigated parental leave payments allowing older mothers to spend more time with their children. Yet, in the 2011 Budget release, a dichotomy exists as young mothers from one of the ten LGAs were singled out to undertake a range of activities such as further education or employment and compelled to place their child in care while upskilling at school or working. This meant that they would spend less time with their children because they were young, poor and dependent on welfare support. In this sense, young mothers are constructed as the “pathologised other” (Macleod, 2001, p. 21) as their caring responsibilities are outsourced through a range of childcare arrangements. Further to this, Kidger (2004) argues that young mothers are “faced with an irresolvable dilemma, in which they face judgement either as ‘bad’ mothers who are not there for their children, or as ‘bad’ citizens” (p. 296) who cannot earn social inclusion through work participation.

Access to childcare was one of the tenets in the original HYPM where the government would cover most of the childcare costs for young mothers so they could continue their studies. But it is argued that affordability of childcare and access to childcare services remains a significant issue for young mothers and women more generally who seek employment or study part or full time. For the young mothers in this study, the LCYPP provided on-site childcare allowing them to continue their studies while also having close contact to their child. However, some of the young mothers were also employed and would have faced extra costs if they did not have family support to assist with childcare. Many mothers face barriers in accessing affordable childcare and this can preclude
opportunities for employment and study. Currently, in Australia, the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is received by 931,030 families (1.3 million children) who access a range of childcare services including long day care, family day care, outside school-hours care and some in-home care (Klapdor & Clark., 2019, p. 160). The CCS is paid directly to the childcare provider and all other fees are the responsibility of the parent.

Under neoliberal policies, early childhood education and care has been commodified (Press et al., 2018) and “the market is seen as the primary provider of early childhood services (p. 329). Although there are community-based services for childcare that can be accessed by some families, Press et al. (2018) suggest that when childcare is constructed as a business it can lose sight of the diversity of users who might use the service. This could have implications for young mothers who might perceive exclusionary practices if their identity is not reflected in “the shared identity of the centre community” (Press et al., 2018, p. 335). Having to pay for childcare can widen the social divide and this is compounded by the part-time employment or non-regular hours of employment where childcare can be difficult to source to meet the specific needs of the young mother.

As a social policy measure, the HYPM constructs young mothers as particular subjects in the larger governmental processes. For example, dual expectations were placed on young mothers as ‘worker-citizens’ as they were expected to upgrade their qualifications and/or seek employment, and as ‘parent-citizens’ (Marston & McDonald, 2006, p. 3) as they liaised with child and family services. From an economic point of view, young mothers were constructed as a fiscal burden on the economy if they were not employed, as they did not contribute through a taxable income to the economy, despite their contribution to the economy as ‘consumer-citizens’ (Marston & McDonald, 2006, p. 3) through the purchase of consumer goods for their children and themselves (Marston & McDonald, 2006).
Initial data related to the HYPM indicated that between January 2012 and mid-2013, 1,669 young parents commenced the program. Of this, over 1,000 participants created participation plans focusing on completing their education, early childhood development, and parenting activities. Another 505 participants incurred income support suspensions with most probably experiencing further financial hardship (Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2013). As Romagnoli and Wall (2012) argue, targeting young mothers and their children as an “at risk” (p. 276) group with surveillance through parenting plans may be unsuitable for improving child and maternal wellbeing because it neglects the basic needs of providing nappies, formula, respite and free activities for the children to enjoy. It also does not account for the other complexities in the young women’s lives that might have prevented them from accessing Centrelink and engaging in the development of participation plans.

The rhetoric and language used by Gillard in her speech *The dignity of work* (Gillard, 2011), prior to the announcement of the HYPM already reflected the government’s focus on economic growth and measures that would be put in place. Emphasis was placed on being the “party of work not welfare, the party of opportunity not exclusion, the party of responsibility not idleness” (Gillard, 2011). During the Prime Minister’s speech, comments such as “every Australian should pull his or her weight…inclusion through participation must be our central focus…I am extending this campaign of high expectations to welfare as well” all alluded to the HYPM that would be introduced in the May 2011 budget. Mantras such as “everyone who can work should work” and reference to breaking the cycles of social and economic exclusion dominated Gillard’s speech. As the Prime Minister spoke of the “patchwork economy” and “patchwork pressures” in different parts of Australia, she identified the human face to the economic difficulties faced by people. She drew on one example of “the girl from Woodridge, south of Brisbane, who didn’t fit in at school, now she’s alone with a baby of her own” leading onto statements about reducing long term welfare dependency, education, a participation
agenda, with incentives and opportunities to work as part of the policy reforms. The speech clearly laid out the forthcoming budget changes that would occur in May 2011 and constructed certain groups, including young mothers, from a neoliberal expectation of how a good citizen would contribute as a productive member of society.

Similarly, an address by the deputy prime minister and treasurer at the time, Wayne Swan, to the Per Capita think tank (17 May 2011), highlighted the problems faced by the long-term unemployed who had not completed secondary education or an equivalent qualification, with statistics that indicated that ten per cent of young people aged between 15 and 24 were not studying or in the workforce. Swan emphasised the need for the long-term unemployed to attain basic literacy and numeracy skills so those out of work could “participate more fully in the modern workforce” (Swan, 2011, p. 3). A focus on deep-rooted disadvantage in key LGAs and innovative programs to assist people, such as young parents to “get their lives together, get ready for work, and get their kids ready for school” (p. 3) were emphasised as the way forward to support business growth. However, I argue that assumptions are made within the address that do not address the complexities faced by disadvantaged groups. For example, it is assumed that by ensuring that everyone has basic literacy and numeracy skills, entrenched unemployment issues would be solved. But the question must be raised as to whether there would be employment opportunities and how would barriers to gaining employment be resolved. As Atkins (2013) argues “young people with limited credentials find themselves competing for a constantly diminishing pool of uncertain job ‘opportunities’” (p. 28). This is particularly pertinent to the young mothers in this study, who had experienced complexities in accessing a comprehensive curriculum and completing their schooling. A more detailed discussion about this issue takes place in Chapter 8. Lack of access to school has its own set of difficulties for some young people. As Swan noted in his address, the government had “an ambitious agenda to improve educational
outcomes for...kids" (Swan, 2011, p. 3), but he did not provide details about specific elements of the agenda, or the funding allocated to this aspect of the budget.

As Miller and Rose (2008) argue, “indirect mechanisms...link the conduct of individuals and organizations to political objectives...aligning economic, social and personal conduct with socio-political objectives” (pp. 1-2). The government policy in this case aligns young motherhood with negative conduct that requires redirection through policy measures, so the young mothers contribute to society instead of taking from society through welfare expenditure. As McRobbie (2007) argues, young women are “envisaged as an assemblage of productivity” (p. 732) and as “subjects of economic capacity” (p. 731), and to be successful they need to take control of their fertility, gain meaningful employment and reduce or remove dependency on welfare provision. Conversely, early motherhood will see young mothers “harshly judged for inappropriate reproductive activity” (McRobbie, 2007, p. 732) as their contribution to the economy is limited. Thus, through compulsory participation plans in education, training, or employment, the HYPM takes up the expectation that young mothers will contribute as productive members of society.

One final point is raised in relation to the requirements in the HYPM. As noted, young mothers are expected to plan their return to education, training, or employment within a year of giving birth. Education and training can in many respects be problematic as disengagement from school may have already occurred prior to the pregnancy through both voluntary and involuntary exclusion processes. Some of the participants in this study spoke of the difficulties they had in completing their education in a mainstream setting, while others were employed. Multiple factors come into play in relation to early school leaving, and choices for education and training may be limited for some young women. Although the HYPM indicated that individuals would develop participation plans to address the issues of education, it was not clear how they would be advised as to the best options available to continue their education. Also, possible downturns in the labour
market could create difficulties as employment opportunities are reduced or non-existent in some LGAs where the HYPM or its replacement, Parents Next, was implemented.

Adolescent pregnancy has been a social and political concern for decades. But as Luker (1996) reminds us, "society should worry not about some epidemic of ‘teenage pregnancy’ but about the hopeless discouraged and empty lives that early childbearing denotes. Teenagers and their children desperately need a better future, one that has brighter opportunities and greater rewards" (Luker, 1996, p. 192). The HYPM rhetoric uses the same words of ‘opportunity and rewards’ to position the measure in a positive light, and it seeks to shape the young mother as a “more responsible woman, mother, and citizen” (Pillow, 2004, p. 149). Further to this, the rhetoric of ‘opportunities’ and ‘aspirations’ are clearly identified in the HYPM and as Atkins (2010a) argues such terms “are not defined or problematised” (p. 256) in policy documents. As discussed in this chapter, social policy responses do not necessarily solve the wider social and economic problems that policy measures set out to address.

**Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the political rationalities of the HYPM and how the measure disseminated a welfare dependency discourse that problematised young mothers, representing them as a fiscal burden on the economy. The policy response indicated a need for action and reform while also defining the appropriate shape of such reforms. Although the measure seeks to break the cycle of disadvantage experienced by young mothers in Australia, in particular LGAs throughout Australia, by implementing participation plans, it does not take into account the multiple complexities and material disadvantages already entrenched in varying geographical spaces across the country and outside the main cities. An important point in the argument is that social policy makers do not consult the very people that will be affected by policies; as such, the voices of young mothers are potentially silenced (Breheny & Stephens, 2010; Wilson &
Huntington, 2006). Young mothers' lived experiences could contribute to valuable discussions about the types of support they require to build positive futures for themselves and their children. A broader range of responses that take into account the varying intricacies of young mothers' lives would more readily accommodate the needs of a diverse group (Arai, 2009). Key ideas from this chapter lead into Chapter 8, which considers the positive aspects of alternative educational contexts, such as young parent programs that are structured to provide support for young mothers. However, the chapter also argues that once they leave the mainstream educational context, young mothers relegated to alternative contexts often become invisible. Educational practices do not necessarily provide the specific support required to assist young mothers to return to school and access a comprehensive curriculum.
Chapter 8 - The politics of young mother: Alternative educational contexts and education policy

This thesis has been framed using a quilt metaphor and in this chapter I draw the threads up through the quilt to examine the Lake City Young Parent Program (LCYPP) as an alternative education program site against a backdrop of the ways in which alternative education contexts and government educational policy positions young mothers. Drawing from a poststructural framework, I use Foucault’s understandings of discourse, subjectivity, and power/knowledge to examine how young mothers are constructed as young parents and students in the Australian education system.

The first section of the chapter examines the LCYPP and makes the case that there were beneficial elements of the program as young mothers navigated their way as new mothers. Perceived as a safe space, physically, socially, and materially, the LCYPP had a positive impact on the young mothers’ lives. Support mechanisms, including advice, resources and vocational education opportunities contributed to the young mothers’ wellbeing. In the second section of this chapter, I move beyond a discursive analysis of the findings by drawing on Foucault to argue that young mothers already constructed as at risk (Brand et al., 2015; Chase, 2017) and subjected to exclusionary practices in mainstream education, can be further marginalised in alternative settings such as the LCYPP. I argue that opportunities to access a comprehensive curriculum available to students in mainstream settings is limited or non-existent in alternative settings. It is essential that young mothers have access to a broad range of secondary school options to enhance post-secondary school opportunities.
The benefits of the Lake City Young Parent Program

As outlined in the findings in Chapter 5, the young mothers had attended a young parent program for varying amounts of time and while enrolled as secondary students, worked with teaching staff to create learning pathways to meet their individual circumstances. An increased self-efficacy was evident in the findings as the young women negotiated their needs, enhanced their mothering skills, and developed social networks with other young mothers. Prior to attending the LCYPP, the young mothers indicated that they experienced social isolation as they negotiated the complexities of their lives. Friendships with other young people from mainstream school settings and their social set had disappeared and a sense of loneliness was evident in the findings. The discussion that follows, illustrates that through a safe space with support systems and educational opportunities, the LCYPP became an important part of the young mothers' lives. This section examines how this was enacted in and through the alternative education space they attended each day.

A safe space for young mothers

The LCYPP, located away from the main campus, was described as a safe space by the young mothers where they could continue their schooling and receive support as they navigated early motherhood. A range of support mechanisms including transport to and from the setting, provision of breakfast and lunch, supportive staff and childcare, added to the perception of safety and security for the young mothers. The idea of a safe space and refuge is highlighted in the findings by Nairn and Higgins (2011), whose study focused on four young men directed to an alternative school, who spoke of the alternative setting as “a refuge, a place to retreat from antagonistic relationships at school” (p. 184). The young men’s experiences of mainstream schooling focused on “their sense of alienation” (Nairn & Higgins, 2011, p. 183), and they acknowledged that
the reasons for exclusion were related to behavioural issues. The findings from the Nairn and Higgins (2011) study parallel those of this study, where the young mothers acknowledged the protective elements of the LCYPP. The commonality of experiences as pregnant or young parenting women shared a social connectedness helped decrease their feelings of loneliness.

Both mainstream and alternative educational contexts are constructed similarly, where students are subjects who are acted upon in the educational space; their behaviour is managed, curriculum is imparted, and assessment and reporting processes make it possible for teachers to know their students and build their knowledge and understandings. According to Foucault (1995), schooling spaces:

> Permit an internal, articulated and detailed control - to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them. (p. 172)

Although schools should be safe and welcoming places that support inclusive learning environments, the findings indicated that the young mothers did not consider they were safe in the mainstream setting once their pregnancy was confirmed. An alternative education program, such as the LCYPP, provided the internal space to shelter, while young mothers gathered themselves and engaged with motherhood and parenting. They became visible as staff came to know complex aspects of their lives and identified where intensive support was required; for example, by referring young mothers to local support services such as the Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol service to help reduce and eliminate substance abuse. For those whose living conditions were sub-optimal, staff provided advice and support to identify more appropriate housing. In the LCYPP space,
young mothers were visible and the opportunity of transforming their lives became a reality.

The theorisation of space, with a particular focus on an alternative educational setting prompts me to take up Kraftl’s (2015) consideration of the relationship between social and spatial processes, and the sense that the language of exclusion is both a social and spatial concept. From a social perspective, Gulson and Symes (2007) argue there is a “sense of inclusion and exclusion as individuals and groups move through, in and out of communities. The sense of knowing one’s place has a powerful sociological resonance; stories and narrative mediate the way space is apprehended and comprehended” (p. 99). For the young mothers in this study, their narratives highlighted the inclusive safe space of the LCYPP while also acknowledging the exclusionary practices experienced in other educational settings when their pregnancies were confirmed.

**Value of support systems**

The young mothers linked their perception of the LCYPP as a safe space to the value of the support systems available to them. Belonging to a community and creating a new social network gave a sense of belonging for the young mothers, with the relational aspects of the program emphasised by all participants. Benefits of the program included a more positive outlook on life, which in turn assisted to modify risk-taking behaviours such as substance abuse. In their research, Down et al. (2017) argued that schools needed to be reconfigured to be more responsive to meet the needs and desires of young people who were disengaged from school. Their research indicated that alternative programs were a more “hospitable” (Down et al., 2017, p. 13) place to learn as there was less emphasis on credentials and more focus on the young people within the space. This finding was also evident in this study of the LCYPP as the focus was about working through the complexities the young mothers faced, learning to mother as
well as completing schooling. Similar findings were reported by Smyth et al. (2013), who reported that “alternative educators place importance on rebuilding relational connections with young people who have become disengaged from schooling” (p. 306). Stability, respect and trust were evident in the relationship between the staff and the young mothers at the LCYPP, and the open lines of communication meant the young mothers’ voices were heard and valued. Emotional and social support, specific advice, and a perceived lack of judgement from the staff at LCYPP supported the young mothers in difficult and complex situations in their lives. Unlike advocates for other marginalised groups, such as disability groups (Chase, 2019), young mothers did not have a formal advocate to assist them. But the LCYPP staff, as informal advocates, used the relational connections they had built with the young mothers to advocate on their behalf when complexities of, for example, interpersonal violence, jeopardised their safety and security.

Educational support from the teachers, the opportunity to work in small groups, and individual learning plans, encouraged the young mothers to return to the LCYPP each day, and for some, provided the motivation to study each evening as well. Findings by McGregor and Mills (2012) highlight the importance of “the emotional labour of the teachers and workers that often makes a difference” (p. 858) to young people’s lives. The young mothers perceived that these support systems were not available to them in the mainstream school, impacting on the opportunity to continue their studies, therefore providing the impetus to leave school when their pregnancy was confirmed. Contexts such as the LCYPP are constructed as “a person-centred learning community” (Fielding, 2006, p. 300) and the interpersonal relationship between staff and young mothers was clearly articulated as they worked together in relevant and engaged ways to facilitate learning and parenting.
Educational opportunities

All young mothers expressed a desire to finish their schooling, strongly connecting these aspirations to future employment and/or study opportunities to create a better life for their child. The LCYPP provided a legitimate space for young mothers to gain an educational qualification while continuing a mothering role with their child. The young mothers indicated their recognition of the broader economic opportunities that might be afforded to them in the future, and that the LCYPP was a vehicle for change.

Learning from the margins in alternative settings has been considered as one response to supporting disengaged young people to return to school and complete their education. As Smyth et al. (2013) argue, “in…out-of-school learning centres there seems to be much less talk of ‘youth at risk’ and much more about opening up choices and opportunities for students in education, employment, and community life” (p. 317). Similar findings by Morrissette (2011) drawn from Canadian school students’ experiences in alternative education contexts indicated that “the alternative program engaged learners and provided them with opportunities to become introspective while feeling accepted and valued” (p. 186). The young mothers in this study had educational choices in a positive learning environment where mutual respect and relationships were fostered.

This section sought to understand the positive benefits of the LCYPP from the perspective of the young mothers and how the LCYPP was a catalyst in the transformation of their lives. Through a range of social supports, risk-taking behaviour was modified, and safe housing was secured. The young mothers reconnected with educational possibilities and took up a range of vocational courses while also becoming more socially connected to other young women. In the next section I challenge the notion that alternative programs can provide equal educational outcomes in relation to
mainstream contexts. I take up the argument that young mothers, who already have disrupted school trajectories, are further marginalised through limited access to comprehensive programs of study and hence, subsequent employment opportunities.

**Young mothers’ precarious identities in the education system**

For young mothers on the margins of mainstream school, and at risk of failing to complete the senior secondary years of schooling, alternative education pathways have been considered as one way to reduce the marginalising processes of mainstream settings. Alternative settings such as the LCYPP can offer educational opportunities that reduce marginalisation of the learning experience through targeted programs (te Riele, 2008). The discourse of alternative program assumes however, that out-of-school programs are equal in relation to educational outcomes delivered in the mainstream context. Problematically though, a counter discourse, as noted by te Riele (2008) suggests that alternative programs or schools might be considered as "schools on the margins for students on the margins" (p. 3). Elements of this discursive positioning were identified in the data in this study and indicated that there was a firmly embedded discourse that privileged in-school students and in-school outcomes and resources over those who participated in out-of-school programs. For the young mothers in this study, this occurred through and by the very nature of what I am terming as being shrouded in a ‘cloak of invisibility’. It is important for this study, that I indicate my use of the notion. A ‘cloak of invisibility’ is a fictional object that is often endowed with magical qualities and appears in fairytales, folklore and mythology. However, my use of the notion takes a different form as I reflect on how certain groups, such as young mothers, are shaped by discourses and practices and are often located on the periphery of the social world and therefore hidden away or invisible. The LCYPP itself shrouded and protected the young mothers, but I argue, also hid them away from the mainstream educational setting. As Luttrell (2003) argues the out-of-school education contexts limits the possibilities of
completing a comprehensive education by separating young women’s “student self from pregnant self” (p. 175). Young mothers in this study were students in the Australian education system and their “political storylines” (Pless, 2014, p. 236) were evident in their narratives about the LCYPP as they negotiated new subject positions as young mother and student in the alternative setting. In the next section I present a discussion based on my analysis of the Australian education policies and goals, which foreground, or ‘set the scene’ for the case that I put forward about the discursive positioning of young mothers in the education system and their invisibility in policy reforms and mainstream educational contexts.

**Australian education policies**

The Australian education policy agenda and the national goals of schooling outline broad education goals for schools and education authorities, which in turn have informed investment in schooling over the last twenty years. In this section I examine key documents to identify inclusive and exclusionary practices in relation to pregnant and parenting young women in educational agendas during the last two decades. To begin, I focus on the declarations that have guided Australia’s vision for education beginning with the Adelaide Declaration. The *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (http://www.scseec.edu.au/archive/Publications/Publications-archive/The-Adelaide-Declaration.aspx) developed in 1999, was known as the Adelaide Declaration. There were three main goals outlined in the declaration and Goal 3 stated that:

3.6 Schooling should be socially just so that:

*All students have access to the high quality education necessary to enable the completion of school education to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent and that provides clear and recognised pathways to employment and further education and training.*
This is echoed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2014) and the completion of secondary school to access employment and/or further education is the framework of the agenda in relation to the economy and individual responsibility of citizens to contribute to the country. Further to this, the Adelaide Declaration Goal 3.1 indicated that schools would be free from “negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability; and of differences arising from students’ socio-economic background or geographic location”. In particular, the Sex Discrimination Act (1984) “protects people from unfair treatment on the basis of their sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, intersex status, marital or relationship status, pregnancy and breastfeeding” (https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/legal/legislation#sda). Therefore, it was and still is, a school’s responsibility to ensure that pregnant and parenting students, who are attending school, are not discriminated against and have every opportunity to continue their education with all of the resources available to mainstream students to achieve the standards outlined by the education policy.

The Melbourne declaration was released in 2008 and developed by the Federal Minister of Education and the Minister for Education from each state or territory in Australia. They were released by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA). There were two goals. The first goal highlighted equity and excellence free from discrimination “based on gender, language, sexual orientation, pregnancy, culture, ethnicity, religion, health or disability, socioeconomic background or geographic location” (p. 7). Notably, the specific reference to pregnancy was visible for the first time in relation to equity. The second goal stated that “all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens” (p. 8) with a commitment by all Australian governments to work “with all school sectors to support the senior years of schooling and the provision of high-quality pathways to facilitate effective transitions between further study, training and
employment” (p.12). It is not clear how this goal was to be articulated in alternative settings, such as the LCYPP, and whether detailed guidance was provided by state government education departments to assist schools to facilitate these transitions.

Just prior to the release of the Melbourne declaration, Loxton et al. (2007) made 17 recommendations in their report titled Barriers to Service Delivery for Young Pregnant Women and Mothers, to reduce the barriers for young pregnant and parenting mothers and ensure the continuation of their education. In particular, recommendation 13 stated:

That the feasibility of introducing specialised in-school programs for young pregnant women and mothers into more schools be examined and that child care and support workers be made more readily available to alternative education providers who offer services that are of potential benefit to young pregnant women and mothers. (p. 7)

In addition, this document, identified best practice and service delivery models. However, programs for young mothers, such as the LCYPP, were created under the umbrella of mainstream school contexts but located away from the main campus. Only a small number of schools in Australia had at this time developed integrated programs that were located on the same grounds as the main campus to facilitate access to a broader range of curriculum areas and resources.

Both the Adelaide and Melbourne goals indicated the importance of gaining a Year 12 certificate or equivalent qualification for all students. Completing secondary school education and moving into further education is strongly linked to the notion that social and economic outcomes for young people will be improved. Yet, if young mothers cannot access a comprehensive curriculum to complete their secondary education, their social and economic prospects are reduced, and they remain on the periphery of their community.
In December 2019, the Alice Springs Education (Mparntwe) Declaration (Education Council, 2019)\(^\text{18}\) was launched and Australia’s educational goals and actions for the next decade were established. In consultation with young people, parents, educators and the broader community, this declaration built on past declarations and thereby updated the earlier Melbourne declaration. One key element of the declaration included the importance of being “successful lifelong learners who could continue to improve through formal and informal learning in further education, training or employment” (p. 7). All Australian governments also committed to “support all young Australians at risk of educational disadvantage” (p. 9), and “build partnerships to support young Australians” (p. 10). Senior secondary education is considered a critical transition point for young people and the completion of secondary school is important for future career and employment prospects. It is therefore vital that young people, including young pregnant and parenting women who might be at risk of educational disadvantage, have equity of access to appropriate resources and a comprehensive curriculum so their transition into further education and/or employment is possible.

The release of the *Future Ready: A student focused National Career Education Strategy* in 2019 by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment reflects “nationally agreed objectives for governments, schools and employers to support the provision of high-quality career education for all school students” (p. 3). The school-to-work career strategy outlines the importance of education, training and further study to provide employment opportunities and higher wages. For young people to be prepared for the future, the federal government states it will work with states and territories to connect business, schools and families together, creating a skilled and knowledgeable future.

workforce. The school-to-work career strategy “complements the Australian curriculum;\(^{19}\) the eight learning areas, general capabilities and cross curriculum priorities” (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019, p. 7), all of which are incorporated into mainstream schools. However, with only a small resource base available, alternative settings, such as the LCYPP, are unable to incorporate such a strategy and provide high quality career education. I argue that there is a complete disjuncture in how a school-to-work career strategy that complements the Australian curriculum can be incorporated into an alternative school context such as a young parent program in an alternative setting with minimal resources. Access to the Year 11/12 VCAL option is available, but young pregnant and parenting mothers do not, in many cases, have access to the comprehensive curriculum and staff that a mainstream context would provide, yet over the last twenty years the importance of a comprehensive curriculum has been highlighted as an important aspect of the School to Work Strategy (2019), the Adelaide (1999), Melbourne (2008), and Alice Springs (Mparntwe) goals (2019). To meet the needs of all students, Objective 2 in the School to Work strategy outlines that all stakeholders in education, community and industry have a shared responsibility to “enable possibilities in career education for rural, regional and remote students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disability, cultural and linguistically diverse students, and those from priority cohorts” (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019, p. 17). It is not clear who the priority cohorts are, as this is not defined in the School to Work strategy and no indication is given as to the resources required to enable the implementation of the strategy. It is assumed that young mothers are one group in the priority cohort category, but they are invisible in the school-to-work career strategy. As Atkins (2017) reminds us young people’s decisions about future

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\(^{19}\) The Australian curriculum is a national curriculum developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) for students in Foundation to Year 10. The Victorian government mandates Government and Catholic schools in Victoria to use the Victorian curriculum released in 2015.
careers in a school to work context “are constrained and enabled as they seek to
navigate transitions from school to work” (p. 642) and it is clear in the School to Work
strategy outlined above, that particular groups, such as marginalised young people,
including young mothers might experience difficulties in making those transitions.

An Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Submission to the Senate Select
Committee on the Future of Work and Workers (McDonald et al. 2018) outlined that:

Managing the risk of youth and long term unemployment will need to involve policy
settings that encourage people to acquire the skills that businesses need, that better
courage businesses taking a chance on labour market entrants as well as
ensuring labour market entrants are not priced out of the market. It will also be
critical that young people not only have the skills to enter work, but also to remain in
work, and to adapt to the changing work and workplaces they will encounter across
careers subject to multiple disruptions and continuous change. (p. 15)

Crucially, this extract in the submission highlights the need for young people to
have a broad range of skills to enter the workforce and adapt to the changing
labour markets. An emphasis on the concept of the ‘knowledge economy’, as
discussed in Chapter 7, through the completion of secondary school and
qualifications for further education is deemed important to be competitive in the
labour market. Young women in a program positioned on the margins of
mainstream education settings are systemically denied access to a comprehensive
curriculum that would adequately prepare them for the future labour market.
Instead, as in many alternative settings, the young mothers at the LCYPP
completed vocational courses as part of their studies. Hospitality is one such
vocational course available to young mothers, and it is questioned whether such
courses provide enough educational choices for longer term benefits. As an
example, the hospitality sector employs large numbers of people, but generally
attracts lower wages and casualised employment prospects, which can
disadvantage employees. Lack of job security, no leave entitlements, and exploitative environments are normalised practices in many casualised sectors, and hospitality work is viewed as having discriminatory practices in relation to women and other marginalised groups (Baum, 2019). As Atkins (2013) argues vocational curriculums, such as those accessed by the young mothers in this study, are “closely associated with marginalised learners, and...have very limited exchange value in both the labour and the educational marketplace” (p. 33). It is therefore imperative that young mothers access a comprehensive selection of subjects to enhance their opportunities for further education and employment.

The provision of a wider range of education and training opportunities leads to more choices in future employment options. As Down et al. (2017) argue, “instead of seeing young people as bundles of pathologies or objects to be manipulated [the labour market needs to assess the] structural and institutional arrangements [that] serve to either enable or constrain their ability to find meaningful work” (p.12). All the young mothers in this study indicated future aspirations to be, or remain, employed and/or take up further study to transform their lives and provide a better future for their children, but it is argued that without access to a comprehensive curriculum this is problematic. Some of the participants indicated that their interests were in business, management and social work, which would require more extensive educational learning opportunities to meet their needs.

Alternative education programs also offer a range of skill-based classes that focus on domesticity such as parenting, caring for family, cooking and cleaning. Young mothers are deemed as lacking in skills to mother, which leads, as Macleod (2001) suggests, to the “pedagogisation of mothering” (p. 22). It is argued that a skills-based approach is constructed in such a way that it takes up contemporary ‘good mother’ discourses of attentiveness, sensitivity to the child’s needs, and mother as educator. But as Macleod
(2001) argues, “what remains invisible are the taken-for-granted assumptions concerning the idealised ‘good’ mother which render the teenage mother, as the pathologised other, visible and cognisable” (p. 21). Although skill-based classes might support new mothers, these classes do not contribute to opportunities to further their education to enter the workforce.

The National Report on Schooling in Australia (2018) released by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), reports against the key performance measures for school education in Australia. The 125-page report includes data on “student participation, student achievement in national assessments, and student transitions to further education and work” (p. 4) based on data sets available through the National Report on Schooling data portal https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-data-portal. An examination of the report and the data sets in the portal could not identify any statistics related to the number of pregnant and parenting students in schools, completion of Year 12 or equivalent studies, or any other information specifically related to this particular group. As Pillow (2006) highlighted in her findings of alternative settings in the US, young pregnant and parenting students were absent in the educational discourses in that country; likewise, in the Australian context, where the data shows that young mothers are both absent and silenced. Importantly, student achievement as a measure of educational progress does not take into account the complexities faced by young people, and in particular young mothers who are disengaged from school.

The Australian government provides funding for all young people to complete their education. This is achieved through the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), which is

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20 In Australia, six state and two territory governments are mainly responsible for school education: New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital and Northern Territory.
an estimate of the public funding a school requires to meet the educational needs of the students. For each enrolled secondary student, the base payment for 2019 was $14,254. However, a financial inequity is apparent at the LCYP, as constraints on staffing numbers and subject delivery impact access to a broad range of subject choices. As Angwin and Kamp (2007) contend, “young people who are pregnant or parenting and wish to complete their secondary schooling are invisible within the policies that construct the work of schools” (p. 95). Education policies and practices need to address the complex needs of young mothers and examine whether an alternative education context with small staff ratios have enough resources to be able to tackle the complexities faced by vulnerable young mothers while also ensuring a comprehensive education is provided.

As Foucault (1983) argues, the state, “as a political form of power…is envisioned as a kind of political power which ignores individuals, looking only at the interests of the totality or…a group among the citizens” (p. 213). I draw on this idea in terms of how educational policy focuses on the collective group of students in educational contexts, to meet certain outcome objectives. The argument being made here is that specific groups such as disengaged young people, including young mothers who are directed to alternative programs, do not have the same opportunity, as defined by policy, to access a comprehensive curriculum and resources to achieve school completion. Further to this, Foucault does not see the modern state as an entity that ignores the existence of individuals, rather, it is “a very sophisticated structure, in which individuals can be integrated, under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form, and submitted to a set of very specific patterns” (Foucault, 1983, p. 214). Taking up Foucault’s framing of the modern state, education is delivered to all students under one structure of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. Disengaged young people, including young mothers, do not take up or fit the pattern, often through a range of complexities in their own lives, and are therefore constructed as problems in mainstream education.
contexts. I argue that to ‘solve the issue’, those who do not fit the pattern (in this case, the young mothers in this study) become invisible as they are relegated to alternative educational contexts.

In the academic literature, descriptions of programs that are additional to the mainstream educational programs in schools often use the word ‘alternative’ as an adjective to describe the context, for example, alternative program or alternative school. This includes educational contexts for students who are disengaged from mainstream schools and directed to other school-based programs, including young parent programs. However, a shared understanding of what an alternative education program entails is not clearly defined (te Riele, 2007). In their paper titled *Education alternatives for vulnerable youth: Student needs, program types, and research directions*, Aron and Zweig (2003) argue:

> There is no commonly-accepted, or commonly-understood, definition of what constitutes ‘alternative education’. In part this reflects…the variety of environments and context in which alternative education programming has evolved, and the many sub-groups of vulnerable youth who might benefit from some type of alternative education, broadly defined. (pp. 20-21)

Mills and McGregor (2017) agree that the definition of alternative schooling raises the question “alternative to what?” (p.1). They suggest “that there is an accepted schooling archetype from which to differentiate” (p. 1) but as there is such a variance in alternative school models it is difficult to have an appropriate definition. The Merriam Webster dictionary (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2020) provides definitions for the word ‘alternative’ when used as an adjective. The first entry defines ‘alternative’ as “offering or expressing a choice”. I argue that students who are unable to attend a mainstream school do not have a ‘choice’ about schooling as they are relegated to ‘alternative programs’. The second definition defines ‘alternative’ as “different from
the usual or conventional: such as existing or functioning outside the established
cultural, social, or economic system" (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2020). Drawing
on the second definition and using the word ‘alternative’ as an adjective to describe other
educational contexts, such as a young parent program, immediately positions young
mothers outside the established education system. Interestingly, one of the participants
from this study, May, also used the words ‘alternative setting’ when she described how
she was directed towards another school context when excluded from the mainstream
setting. As Kelly (2003) noted in her study of teachers and administrators in schools with
established teenage parent programs, binary notions of “normal versus alternate” and
“regular versus special” (p. 92) were used to describe the student mothers. I argue that
such notions identify and classify individuals, in this case, the young mothers, into
particular categories, thus creating visible subjects. The language used to define
educational settings as ‘alternative’ and the broader education policy responses that
might seek to be inclusive are, at the core, still exclusionary practices.

**Disrupted school trajectories**

Disrupted or non-completion of secondary schooling is problematic for young mothers
who are discursively constructed from a risk and deficit frame. They are deemed to be
dependent on welfare with low education and limited opportunities for employment.
Responses to school completion are complex, and in particular there is a complicated
history surrounding young mothers and the continuation of their education in mainstream
school settings. Young mothers are faced with ‘learning from the margins’ due to a range
of complexities, including formal or self-exclusion from school, and physical, social and
health barriers that hinder their attendance at school. This section seeks to examine
whether young pregnant and parenting women are adequately served by alternative
education contexts and whether such settings help them achieve the educational desired
outcome through a differentiated delivery of education programs.
In the mainstream schooling context, young pregnant or parenting mothers are ‘hypervisible’, and hence perceived as a disruptive influence on other students (Pillow, 2004). Paradoxically, in an alternative school program located away from a mainstream school campus and specifically designed to meet the needs of young mothers, a ‘cloak of invisibility’ conceals these young women. A more detailed discussion of the notion of invisibility is undertaken in the next section. Being detached from their mainstream school and peers, socially affects young mothers as they are not members of a “homogenous social body” (Foucault, 1995, p. 184). They are out of sight, out of mind, and therefore arguably disadvantaged and marginalised.

There are a range of reasons why young women might be excluded from a mainstream school context. Before becoming a mother, some of the young women in this research had already ‘failed’ the mainstream school system. Both formal or self-exclusion from school was a reality for all young mothers in this study, and their futures were already precariously positioned as they had not completed schooling. For two young mothers, May and Elly, formal exclusion from school prior to their pregnancies was linked to difficult behaviour, truancy and self-harm. May described her move to an alternative setting:

> Because they were a government school, they couldn't expel me as such. They just reassigned me to an alternative setting. So they directed me somewhere else and got me into a different school because they were like, you're too troublesome for here.

May’s statement is of particular interest as she describes the school as a “government school” and uses the words “reassigned me to an alternative setting” to describe her move into a different educational context because she was told “you’re too troublesome here”. May is constructed and classified as a problem, as the expectation is that ‘subjects’ – students in school – will behave in particular ways. The statement functions
to label and constitute the subject in a particular way, contributing to the subjugation of May in the educational setting. The school’s actions do not take into account the complex life, both materially and emotionally, that May had lived. Both May and Elly were moved to another alternative educational context, but this did not end well, and they did not complete school past year eight. As McGregor and Mills (2012) argue, “regardless of the reasons, young people who are suspended or excluded from school due to behavioural issues have a right to an education” (p. 846). The argument being put here is that young mothers require opportunities and access to a comprehensive curriculum, on an equal playing field to students who are in a mainstream setting, to achieve outcomes in line with the education policy definition of outcome.

Osler and Vincent (2003) argue that there are “push-pull factors associated with exclusion” (p. xi). In Ruby’s case, the push-pull effect could be constructed from the school’s perspective, taking into account the teachers’ knowledge of teaching and learning, and the difficulties in studying and completing the Year 12 exams. If it was expected that Ruby would fail, this was recorded in the school data. Based on concern for Ruby, the stress of study for exams in the final weeks could have been considered as detrimental to Ruby during her pregnancy despite the fact she had not provided medical evidence to indicate this was the case. This is taken up in a qualitative longitudinal project with young people where King (2016) draws a link between personal trauma and educational exclusion. Her findings suggest that complex and traumatic events can “precipitate their educational exclusion” (p. 343). Over an extended period of time, May had suffered personal traumatic events including the imprisonment of her father for sexually assaulting the children in her family, and self-harm injuries requiring a six-month stay in hospital. May was already at risk of social exclusion without a network of friends, and without extended support she took up other risky behaviours such as substance abuse. These factors contributed to a disrupted school trajectory.
Self-exclusion from school can occur for a range of reasons, which affects the individual's opportunities to complete an education and enter the labour market. As Osler and Vincent (2003) point out, some girls quietly exclude themselves and thus become invisible and forgotten. Some of the young mothers in this study expressed the notion of perceived pressure to leave. It was the ‘unsaid’, as they sensed they were judged and under surveillance while at school. There is a perception that prior to falling pregnant, young women who leave school early lack the commitment to school and look for an easier path (Kelly, 2000). None of the young mothers indicated that they had purposefully become pregnant and all disclosures indicated that the pregnancies were unexpected. As Osler and Vincent (2003) contend “leaving and staying are only the surface manifestations of a much more complicated story about presence, absence and schooling” (p. x). It is important for schools to recognise this complexity and manage the needs of students by reducing the structural barriers to pregnant and parenting young women and therefore reduce the possibility of leaving school early.

Other young mothers were constrained by material and social barriers that prevented them from continuing in the mainstream setting. Without childcare, attending school was difficult. For others, their disdain for school was increased by the negative responses from staff and derogatory comments from students in the school. The young women were already constructed as a problem and there was little incentive to remain in school. SmithBattle (2007a) argues that young mothers might not continue the educational trajectory they aspire to because the structural support is not available. Similarly, Pillow (2015) argues that “young mothers report and narrate multiple forms of barriers, structural and discursive, that prevent them from attending and completing high school” (p. 63). As discussed earlier, the young mothers in this study face multiple barriers to continuing their education with a comprehensive curriculum in a mainstream setting.
Further to this, Harrison and Shacklock (2007) point out:

Finding ways of keeping pregnant and parenting teens at school is important in addressing the link between educational participation and social exclusion for these young people. Some educational institutions take up this challenge while others are able to conveniently ignore the educational and social issues within the cul-de-sacs of a policy maze that confuses schools and teachers. (p. 133)

I argue that the particular curriculum decisions made for the young mothers who attended the LCYPP and similar out-of-school programs, limit access to a comprehensive curriculum thereby reducing the prospects of completing a secondary education. As the previous chapter (Chapter 7) discussed, the neoliberal policies that underpin social welfare under the broad concepts of mutual obligation and the knowledge economy, education and training were constructed to reduce welfare dependency and increase individual responsibility for self. If young mothers are to participate in the knowledge economy they need access to a comprehensive selection of subjects in school to be able to map a pathway into future employment and thus become financially independent.

**The ‘cloak of invisibility’: On the periphery of schooling**

On the periphery of schooling, young mothers metaphorically wear a ‘cloak of invisibility’. Historically constituted as a problem from the mid-1800s until up to the 1970s, as discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), young women who conceived out of wedlock were sent away to maternity homes until after the birth of the child. Historically, maternity homes had a specific function in Australia. 21 Young women entered maternity homes before the pregnancy was evident, and they remained there until they gave birth.

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21 An in-depth discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis. See Swain and Howe (1995) for an in-depth treatment of this topic.
The child was then usually adopted out to another family. Hidden away, the young mothers were ‘invisible’ until after the ‘problem’ was resolved (Howe & Swain, 1993). After the birth they returned to their families, without their baby, to resume their lives.

From a U.S. perspective, there was a sense of “neglect and invisibility” (Lesko, 1995, p. 189) by many school districts to comply with the legislative requirements to ensure pregnant and parenting students were not excluded (Lesko, 1995). According to Burdell (1998), schools appear to “conceal pregnant students, dominate them, protect them and find ways for them to redeem themselves” (p. 211). Under a ‘cloak of invisibility’, young mothers are relegated to the margins of schooling as they move to an alternative setting or a young parent program. As Pillow (2004) suggests, “if an alternative school setting is available, school personnel can avoid facing decisions about what to do with the teenage parents” (p. 97). Yet, “failing to see a woman who happened to give birth to a child while in her teens in all her complexity risks turning her into the Other, a degraded category” (Kelly, 2000, p. 26). As Pillow (2006) attests, “teen pregnancy compounds issues of female sexuality and mothering within the arena of sexuality and schooling and sexuality and schooling share a troubled history” (p. 65). Young mothers as students do not fit the expected trajectory of “normal sexuality” and are thereby “positioned as a failure” (Chase, 2017, p. 2).

In the mainstream school setting, pregnant and parenting young women are “hypervisible” (Pillow, 2004, p. 5). Discursive frameworks construct young mothers negatively in the “wrong girl” discourse (Luttrell, 2003, p. 27). They are judged and categorised as the ‘wrong girl’ (Kelly, 2000) and are constructed as the problem. But once they are ‘out of sight and out of mind’ they become invisible and are no longer a problem for the mainstream education context. Labelling and categorising the young pregnant and parenting women as ‘bad’ girls further disadvantage them, impacting on future choices of schooling, further education and employment. Further to this, the
argument persists that pregnant students are separated from mainstream settings “for their own safety and the safety of those around them” (Pillow, 2006, p. 69). As Pillow (2006) contends, the “discourse of contamination” (p. 67) is one schooling response to early pregnancy where schools “justify removing the pregnant or mothering student from the school setting based on the fear that sexual immorality will spread to other students” (p. 67). In this study, the LCYPP is constructed as a “social quarantine” (Foucault, 1995, p. 216). It is located several kilometres away from the main campus and sends a particular message about the value of education for the young mothers in the Lake City community. They are segregated and hidden away for their ‘safety’ reducing opportunities to be part of the broader Lake City community. Although some of the young mothers in this study had employment in larger organisations, this was quite separate to ensuring access to a comprehensive secondary school curriculum. As Kelly (2000) emphasises, understanding “the politics of integration and the evolving shape of the programs designed to serve students who are pregnant or parents” (p. 26) affords a clearer picture of both government and school responses to pregnant and parenting young mothers. Although general responses to shape programs and schools can be identified, it is not clear in the Australian government education data, whether or not young mothers complete their education and access further education or meaningful employment if they so desire. I argue that comprehensive data about school completion and future employment that tracks specific groups, such as young mothers, would shape more specific policy responses for those who might be disadvantaged and marginalised.

Young mothers’ identities are complex, and as Pillow (2004) argues, they are positioned as having “dual roles” (p. 149) as student and mother. In this study, the findings indicated that some young mothers juggled multiple roles. As well as the dual role of mothering and studying, some young mothers held down ongoing employment; acted as carers by supporting a more senior member of the extended family; or volunteered for a service that provided meals to the homeless. Juggling roles ran parallel to managing living
conditions alongside the father of the child where gate-keeping practices were in place. As Kelly (2003) argues, the identity of young mother in school is constructed through the question of “who counts as a ‘good’ mother, worker, and citizen within the school and hence, in the end, who counts as a good student” (p. 134). As discussed in Chapter 7, Marston and McDonald (2006) noted that young mothers’ roles comprised dual expectations as ‘worker citizen’ and ‘parent citizen’ (p. 3). An acknowledgement of the multiple roles that construct a young mother's identity in the social world would shift them from the periphery and invisible status, to a more central focus in educational policies.

Pregnancy during adolescence has historically been viewed as a negative event in the trajectory of a young woman’s life. Lesko’s (1995) analysis of school programs for young mothers in the U.S. highlighted the need to address the issue of what she termed ‘the pink-collar ghetto wages’ (p. 196) that young mothers received. The term was used by Lesko used the term to describe how women could only access certain low-paying employment opportunities because they were female. The term ‘ghetto’ described people who were marginalised for social and economic reasons and often lived in impoverished areas. Lesko’s recommendation was to “influence girls’ vocational aspirations away from low-paying fields” (p. 196). Problematically, in Australia more than 20 years later, programs such as the LCYPP deliver a vocational curriculum that sets young mothers up for low-paying employment, thus also limiting their opportunities. Although there is an emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills, young mothers in this study did not have the same educational opportunities to undertake a comprehensive curriculum available to students in the mainstream school located on another site. Opportunities to complete a business administration course provided a steppingstone to a future career in business management, but not all young mothers indicated their interest in this area. As “young parent programs represent an effort to meet the distinct needs of the particular group of students, they inevitably confront the ‘dilemma of difference’” (Kelly, 2000, p. 92). From another perspective, Atkins (2010b) draws on the concept of “second chance” (p. 29)
when discussing inclusive practices and pedagogies in further education colleges. Alternative education programs such as the LCYPP, could also be considered ‘second chance’ opportunities as the young mothers, no longer accessing mainstream education, had the opportunity to attend an alternative setting to complete vocational courses.

From another perspective, te Riele (2008) suggests that “alternative schools…can be perceived not so much as a ‘second chance’ but as ‘second best’: schools on the margins for students on the margins” (p.3). The young mothers in this study did not voice their concerns that the LCYPP was second best to the mainstream setting. Instead, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, the LCYPP was considered a supportive, safe place that provided educational opportunities and new beginnings. However, it could be argued that despite some of the participants commencing senior secondary education in a mainstream setting, their disrupted school trajectories impacted their opportunity to access a comprehensive range of subjects in a supportive and engaging mainstream school context.

**Taking account of young mothers’ material and social needs**

In the Introduction to this thesis, I outlined how I used a quilt metaphor to construct each section of the thesis. A patchwork quilt can be pieced together using fabric remnants – the pieces of fabric that are left over from larger meterage or salvaged from other projects. In the following section, the patchwork metaphor is used to consider how the concept of a young parent program develops through a range of social and educational responses that take up local needs. In one example, research by Weatherley et al. (1985) examined ten local area approaches across four states in the U.S., focusing on programs and services for pregnant and parenting adolescents. They reported that rather than a cohesive approach to programs and services, a ‘patchwork’ approach to funding occurred as there was “no single funding source, except for rare, time limited
demonstration project grants” (p. 208). Funding for local comprehensive services were “pieced together and supported from a wide variety of federal, state, and local governmental funds, volunteer efforts, the local United Way, and public and voluntary in-kind and charitable contributions” (p.208). A patchwork approach to funding suggested that young mothers and young parent programs were unintentionally constructed as not important or worthy of a unified approach as funding drew on the remnants that were possibly surplus to other projects.

Similarly, nearly 35 years later, a patchwork approach also emerged with varied responses to the local needs for young mothers in this study. For example, the young parent program described in this research drew on a varied range of resources and services, but it was not clear there was a unified approach to the development of the LCYPP. Full-time teachers were allocated to the program, but volunteers were also used to support the childcare arrangements for the young mothers. The Department of Education and Training (DET) of Victoria provided school-based funding for the ongoing staff and educational resources for the young mothers and their children, but other material resources were donated by the community. One of the major initiatives was the purchase of a building for the LCYPP by a member of the local community, raising the question as to why a community member was funding a building that would then be leased by the main school, located some distance away. Other support was forthcoming through a community bank that provided funding over a five-year timeframe to support the program delivery of business administration subjects, but it is questioned why such subjects were not available through the mainstream school.

I argue that relying on philanthropic sources for funding, such as a building for an alternative education setting as a ‘gift’ from a member of the community, is an abdication of responsibility by the Victorian government and equitable access to the necessary resources for students should be a priority. Similarly, the funding from the community
bank to support the delivery of curriculum, while very welcome, should have been provided from the mainstream school funding to ensure a comprehensive selection of subjects was available. Without access to a comprehensive curriculum, the young mothers in this study remained disadvantaged with limited access to more diverse career and employment options.

Interestingly, on their website, the CC Cares program in the ACT “acknowledges the ongoing assistance it receives from its numerous supporters across the ACT community” http://www.canberrac.act.edu.au/information/programs/cc_cares. Most concerning is the perceived financial and resource inequities faced by alternative programs in relation to the funding available from the mainstream setting. As Luttrell (2003) highlights, a “disparity of services” (p.15) for young mothers leads to under-funding and under-resourced spaces to learn. In addition, Connell (2013) argues that “provided there is a rationing of education resources it is possible to commodify access to institutions, and to particular services within institutions” (p. 105), and some groups will not be able to access the education they need.

Taking account of the conception of space, proposed by Foucault and Miskowiec (1986), the LCYPP is constructed as a heterogeneous space where the possibility to continue some form of education is evident and this might “designate, mirror, or reflect” (p. 24) a mainstream school context, yet in many ways the alternative education contexts sit outside the mainstream educational constructions. Morgan (2000) argues that “spaces are organised to keep a whole range of ‘others’ ‘in their place’ and can be seen as texts that convey to certain groups that they are “out of place” (p. 279). Not only do young mothers perceive that they are out of place, but the broader community see how they are relegated to a particular space and become ‘invisible’ on the sidelines. As Johnson (2006) proposes, “modern heterotopian sites relate more to separating out some form of deviation rather than marking a stage in life” (p. 76), furthering the argument that the
construction of alternative education settings marks a symbolic boundary by excluding and marginalising young people from mainstream contexts. Not only is the LCYPP located in a separate location, the program and curriculum offerings are limited, reinforcing how young mothers are positioned on the margins, which is not consistent with Australian government initiatives. Further to this, McGregor et al. (2015) argue that there is a tendency by some school leaders to “shift the problem elsewhere [and] abrogate their responsibility to young people” (p. 609) and not take into account the “complex material, social and personal needs” (McGregor et al., 2015, p. 609). As already established, many young mothers experience complexities in their lives, therefore targeted responses are needed, and significant gains would be possible if a wider range of resources and broader curriculum access was provided. Fundamentally, alternative educational settings require legislative shifts in education policy and a funding model that takes into account the material and social needs of young people who are learning from the margins.

Conclusion

The benefits of alternative educational contexts for young mothers were explored in the first section of this chapter. Drawing on the experiences of the young mothers’ attendance at the LCYPP, the findings indicated that the young mothers were able to re-engage in education, while developing early motherhood skills and creating a social network in a safe and supportive space. The second section of this chapter challenged the discourse of alternative programs to make the case that young mothers’ precarious identities were not supported in mainstream education settings, and disrupted school trajectories did not afford them opportunities to complete comprehensive secondary schooling. Despite having an opportunity to attend an alternative setting, it was argued that alternative education settings did not provide equal opportunities to access a comprehensive curriculum, thereby limiting the possibilities of completing further study
and entering the labour market in order to become financially independent. Young mothers were learning on the periphery and remained invisible to the main school community. The following chapter is the concluding chapter of the thesis. It presents a summary of the findings drawn from the young mother narratives and the analysis of social and education policy texts. The chapter considers implications of the findings and suggests future research possibilities.
Chapter 9 - Conclusion: Closing the loop

This chapter seeks to close the loop as a way of returning to the quilt metaphor that framed this study. It is in this chapter that I am, metaphorically, constructing the binding and tying off the threads to draw the component parts of the research together to bring this research project to a close for now.

The thesis began with a personal vignette of myself as a young mother with a newborn son and outlined obstacles I experienced in a hospital setting. As I reflected on this vignette three decades later, my attention was drawn to the privileging of certain discourses about motherhood and the discursive construction of young mothers. Young mothers' voices are often invisible in the dominant narratives that are constructed about their lives and do not take into account the complex realities they face while negotiating the social world. Given that their voices are subjugated within the dominant constructions of motherhood, the aim of this study was to bring the young women's voices to the fore and juxtapose their experiences against the competing and contradictory discourses of early motherhood that was identified in academic literature and policy documents.

Research questions

Taking account of the discursive framing of young mothers, two overarching questions framed this study:

How are young mothers discursively constructed in institutional and local contexts?

What are the social and material effects of those constructions?

To answer these questions, I drew on a poststructuralist lens and the work of Foucault to examine how young mothers are discursively constructed in the social world. To this end, Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse (1990a) was invaluable as I sought to
examine the dominant and subjugated knowledges (1980) of early motherhood, and how political and institutional knowledges became ‘regimes of truth’ (1980, p. 131). Further to this, Foucault’s understandings of governmentality (1982, 1991, 1994) drew my attention to the way social and education policy contributed to this discursive construction, and the social and material effects of those policies on young mothers.

Dual methodological approaches were chosen to investigate the political nature of the study as I sought to understand the concept of early motherhood discourse constituted in local and institutional power/knowledge relations. Firstly, the study set out to explore the social and material effects of how young mothers lived their lives, and it was their early motherhood experiences I sought to capture through narrative inquiry. Seven young mothers who gave birth to their first child between the ages of 15 and 19 took part in research interviews. The participants were attendees at a young parent program in Lake City, a regional city, situated in Victoria, Australia. As the study was conducted in a particular context, with a small number of participants, the findings do not speak for all young mothers, locally or globally and are not generalisable. It is also important to acknowledge the partial, contingent, and situated nature of the findings and my interpretation of the data. Secondly, discourse analysis was chosen to examine social and education policies using Bacchi’s (2009) understanding of policy as discourse (p. x) to examine how young mothers were problematised in policy.

Findings

An important part of this study was to make sense of the micro and macro discourses that discursively frame early motherhood. The first section provides a summation of the young mothers’ storied accounts, to add to existing understandings of the experiences of young mothers and contributes to other academic research that draws out the positive and transformative aspects of early motherhood. The second section summarises the findings that consider how young mothers are constructed in educational policy and
schooling contexts, and how social policy, in particular, the HYPM, constructs young mothers as needing redirection and management to reduce welfare dependency.

**Young mothers’ narratives**

Immersed in the complex and discursive dimensions of the narrative data, I proceeded to analyse the participants’ experiences of life before, during and after their pregnancy was confirmed. Drawing on the young mothers’ storied accounts, a narrative inquiry approach focused on the “broader social, cultural and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, pp. 42-43). The temporal nature of the young mothers’ stories varied as individual narratives moved backward and forward through time. As Reekie (1997) reminds me, storied accounts such as those in this study are like “a collage of textual fragments…[that] refuse to be stitched into a smooth, unbroken narrative…[with] edges that fray, colours that clash, patterns that jar, textures that will never blend” (p. 78). While examining the narrative data it was clear that the young mothers’ experiences were complex and diverse and the task of drawing the storied accounts together challenging. But the iterative approach to revisiting the data continuously throughout the analysis allowed me to identify some commonalities in the storied accounts and thus draw the narrative threads together to craft five overarching themes. The themes titled: *Unravelling at the seams, Layers of doubt, Stitching life together, Navigating intricate complexities*, and *Reading the compass: New directions*, provided a framework for Chapter 5 where the participants’ storied accounts are located. A brief summary of the accounts and the findings follows.

For some young mothers their lives were already ‘unravelling at the seams’ prior to falling pregnant. Accounts of disrupted schooling, precarious living arrangements and couch-surfing sourced through social connections were not conducive to stable living conditions. Tenuous relationships with the father of the child created complexities for
some participants as they navigated pregnancy and early motherhood. Accounts of IPV illustrated the complexities that placed some young mothers at risk. Risk-taking behaviours including the consumption of illicit substances were identified in some of the accounts. The participants expressed ‘layers of doubt’ as they made decisions about the pregnancy. Conflicting advice about continuing the pregnancy or undergoing an abortion created pressure for some young mothers, but all of the participants resolved to continue the pregnancy.

Moving forward, the young mothers provided accounts of how they began to ‘stitch their lives together’ by taking up educational opportunities at the LCYPP and upskilling in parenting courses and completing education courses. The alternative education environment provided a safe, supportive space for the young mothers to gather themselves and plan futures for themselves and their children. While the participants acknowledged the positive aspects of early motherhood, some young women shared ‘intricate complexities’ in their accounts. They expressed their apprehension when communicating with government agencies such as the DHHS, as they believed their child could be removed from their care. Participants also recognised community judgement and stigma as unhelpful as they navigated public spaces, rental housing, and utility companies. As the young mothers ‘read the compass’ and moved in new directions, they shared how early motherhood helped to revaluate their lives. The transformative effects of early motherhood with aspirations for the future came into focus.

Core narratives were at play in relation to the construction of young mother identities. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study was that becoming a young mother during adolescence did not necessarily have negative outcomes, but early motherhood led to a more affirming future, and this was borne out in similar qualitative studies undertaken by other researchers (See Sheeran et al., 2016; SmithBattle, 2000b;
The young mothers in this study drew on internal resources of responsibility and resilience to counter deficit constructions of their lives. In one example, some young mothers redrew the boundaries in their personal connections through gatekeeping. Strategies such as ‘adaptive distancing’ (Clarke, 2015, p. 477) were set in motion to purposefully distance themselves from challenging circumstances. They assumed the role of ‘gate keeper’ (Nixon & Hadfield, 2018, p. 1) to manage the biological father’s visitation arrangements, giving a range of reasons including mental health issues, the continued use of illicit substances or violent outbursts by the former partner or his family. While the narratives provided an insight into the personal worlds of the young mothers and considered some of the social and material effects early motherhood had on their lives, macrosociological discourses were evident in social and education policies and these are addressed in the next section.

**Young mothers and social policy**

Over recent decades, Australian social welfare policies have sought to reduce long-term welfare dependency through broader neoliberal notions of welfare policy that focused on mutual obligation and labour market activation. Welfare dependency was, and remains, an economic concern for the government. Prior to the implementation of the HYPM, single mothers were identified as requiring management of their lives and were obligated to take up employment or other options once their child turned six. The HYPM, one element of a broader sweep of changes to Australian social welfare policies as Australia moved into the second decade of the 21st century, specifically targeted young parents in ten LGAs and was introduced as a trial. The rhetoric used by the then Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, and by other government ministers, to ‘sell’ the measure, narrowed the focus to young mothers, outlining that the measure was a ‘tough love’ approach that provided ‘opportunities’ but with those opportunities came ‘obligations’. The measure
sought to reduce welfare dependency and encourage recipients to return to education or employment by the time their child turned one. Participation plans set this in motion.

The ‘tough love’ approach assumed that young mothers had limited aspirations and could not manage their own lives. Hence, arguably, this discursive framing positions young mothers who are not working as ‘other’, or indeed as deficit, citizens who do not contribute to society. Such measures do not recognise other structural and economic barriers faced by disadvantaged and marginalised groups, and therefore might not meet the needs of groups such as young mothers. As Kidger (2004) argues, marginalised groups are often constructed as “passive recipients of social policies determined by more powerful voices” (p. 298). Wilson and Huntington (2006) agree arguing that “service provision and delivery largely reflect policy discourses” (p. 60) and the voice of the recipient of welfare is not heard. Motherhood needs to be valued as a way to contribute to society rather than on economic participation as worker-citizens (Kidger, 2004) and other structural barriers such as schooling completion and policy responses also need to be considered.

**Education policy and schooling**

According to Daiute (2014), the context of narrative is “the system of settings, institutions, physical environments, formal and informal social relations, and events” (p. 34), all of which were reflected in this study. The narratives provided insight into how the participants identified and mitigated complexities in their lives. Also highlighted in the storied accounts was the crucial role played by the LCYPP as an institutional context, where the young women were able to network in a safe supportive environment as they developed a range of personal and vocational skills. As an alternative educational setting, the LCYPP created opportunities for the young women to re-enter the education arena through VCAL studies. However, juxtaposed to the positive aspects of young parent programs such as the LCYPP, Chase (2017) suggests that alternative settings
construct the young mother as ‘other’ as they are relegated to the periphery of society and schools. In addition, pregnant and parenting young women in mainstream educational settings were highly visible in a physical sense with their pregnant bodies (Pillow, 2004), but also invisible in relation to inequitable mechanisms available for them to continue their schooling in the mainstream context.

The young women’s narratives indicated that systemic and institutional barriers disrupted their schooling prior to their pregnancy. For some, exclusionary practices in the mainstream setting after their pregnancy confirmation created circumstances where the young women could not continue their education, and in a sense, they were relegated to ‘learn from the margins’ through an alternative education program. Further to this, processes of exclusion were evident in the way the LCYPP was located away from the main school setting, thereby young mothers were not only cloaked in invisibility and disadvantaged, but they were also unable to access a comprehensive curriculum available to other students at the main school location. Equitable resourcing is vital to ensure that young mothers have the same opportunities as other senior secondary students in mainstream settings. In an analysis of Australian education texts and policies, responses to disadvantaged and marginalised students were evident, but did not resolve the issue of particular groups such as young mothers being relegated to alternative education programs with reduced opportunities that would therefore impact future employment and access to higher education if desired. Although such programs can assist in the re-engagement in education, limited opportunities available to them remains problematic and needs to be addressed.

**Limitations**

One of the limitations of this study was that the research took place in one location in a regional area in Victoria, Australia, with a small number of participants who attended a young parent program. Another limitation was the limited timespan of the data collection
process. Although the young mothers’ storied accounts provided a historical timeline spanning pre-pregnancy events through to early motherhood, the interviews took place at one point in the life cycle of the young family and longitudinal data was not collected as part of this study. Another important factor is that the findings in this study are partial and cannot represent the experiences of all young mothers everywhere. Another concern prior to entering the research space was that access to participants could have been problematic as some people are “hard to reach” (Liampittong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 4) and as Stone (2003) suggests, are vulnerable, and perhaps an invisible population.

Some of participants in this study were particularly vulnerable with troubling histories of illicit substance abuse and intimate partner violence that was hidden from their families, but the participants themselves chose to participate in the study and those participants who shared troubling events were over 18 at the time of the interviews and able to provide consent as an adult. Access to the research space itself was not problematic as negotiations with Tim, the gatekeeper, ensured that there were minimal disruptions to the young mothers who attended the setting to further their studies. But for a range of reasons, such as a sick child, the participants did not always attend the program and their interviews sometimes required rescheduling, which at times complicated the research process. Several young women showed interest in the invitation to participate in the research, but changing circumstances meant they decided not to participate. Although two interviews were planned with each participant, only four of the seven participants were available for the second interview. For two of the other participants, work commitments meant they did not have time to attend, and the other participant had relocated to another region of Victoria. Despite the small number of participant voices, this study provided an insight into early motherhood as experienced by one group of young women at a particular temporal point. To provide a broader understanding of how early motherhood is constructed in the social world, this thesis also draws from extensive
social and educational policy analysis to highlight the problematic framings of young mothers in policy and recommendations are considered in the next section

**A space between**

Before I conclude, I seek to reflect on the ‘space between’, in other words, the juxtaposition between the young mother narratives and the social and educational policies. Although the narratives had similarities to other small-scale studies, and themes were echoed in other studies (Fletcher, 2012; Seamark & Lings, 2004), individual circumstances do not replicate the same outcomes for every young mother and this is where the complexity lies in local and institutional responses to young mothers. There is no ‘one size fits all approach’, instead, varying circumstances indicate that a multi-faceted approach is needed. This study demonstrates that the notion of ‘the space between’ is another possibility where future research contributions can assist to understand the disjuncture of experience with that of policy. Further research is also required into how school programs can better cater for young mothers to ensure they have equitable access to comprehensive curriculum and resources.

Other research aspects are also important in the field of early parenting. Early fatherhood is an area that requires further research with a focus on young fathers in the mother-father dyad and their involvement as young parents in the caregiving process. Several aspects could be examined, including co-parenting options available to foster the relationship between the father and his child; the young father’s understandings of how he is discursively framed by the community; and the supports he needs to contribute effectively to the parenting process. The social and material effects of early fatherhood and the adjustments the young father makes to support the family would also be essential elements of future research. One of the findings in this study indicated that the young mothers had engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse. Future research could examine in a broader context, whether young mothers in Australia have had access to or
attended sex education classes at school and did a disrupted school trajectory impact on the opportunity to attend such classes. Other research could consider other young parents and programs in other city and regional/rural locations in Victoria and other states of Australia to examine best practice and the connection to the broader educational community.

**Future directions for social and education policy**

In 2019, 3.95 million students were enrolled in schools across Australia and 1.6 million were secondary school students (ABS, 2020). However, a percentage of students who should have been in school were not accessing comprehensive educational opportunities due to barriers such as long-term disengagement in education (Hancock & Zubrick, 2015). In this study, young mothers were one group that accessed an alternative education program as they had experienced barriers to completing their schooling in a mainstream setting. The findings in this thesis argue that education policies need to address the complex needs of marginalised young mothers, by addressing funding models to ensure the social and material needs of young people learning from the margins are taken into account. This has become even more urgent with the events of 2020 and the SARS-CoV-2 (more commonly known as the COVID-19) global pandemic. In particular, educational disparities, as noted in this thesis, and marginalising practices in relation to young mothers and schooling were already prevalent in pre-COVID times. With most schools closed for extended periods of time in Victoria, Australia, between March and October 2020, young parent programs in alternative settings were also affected by closures. Access to resources and technology for remote learning were problematic for many families, and young mothers who were completing schooling themselves and/or who had school aged children, might not have had the technological resources available to continue their learning. Prior to 2020, as discussed in Chapter 8, it was already clear that alternative education spaces required
equitable funding and resources to ensure comprehensive education opportunities for participants. In the post COVID-19 era education policies will need to account for the wide-ranging difficulties experienced by learners during the pandemic at all education levels and this will be even more acute for those students who are already marginalised from education contexts. Increased pressures on the education system for all students will also impact how marginalised young people access educational opportunities. There is a very real possibility that some groups will ‘slip through the cracks’ and be forgotten about as the government works to address the complexities of 2020. It will be important that marginalised groups are visible in government education policies. Increased government funding across the whole education sector and individualised programs will be required to support all students and it will be vital that government education policies seek to address these issues to reduce inequities across the sector.

The social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic compounds the effects for marginalised young people. Attention to the wellbeing and engagement of marginalised learners needs to be elevated to address the challenges they have faced and will continue to face into the foreseeable future. High unemployment figures in Victoria, at 6.8% in July 2020 (ABS, 2020) and job losses related to the pandemic already indicate pressures in the job market whereby marginalised groups will find it even more difficult to find employment, thereby further increasing reliance on government welfare. Moving forward, it will be essential that sustainable funding and policy responses ensure that marginalised young people are supported and provided with educational opportunities, so they do not become embedded in a cycle of welfare dependency. Curriculum that has strong post school pathways will also be critical to reduce unemployment for young people. It will be even more important to have mechanisms in place to reduce disengagement from school and the implementation of a wider range of pedagogies, including digital pedagogies to support learners across a range of educational contexts. It is also crucial that young people are consulted about their schooling futures and their
voices are heard in policy responses as this might also assist to reduce disengagement from learning contexts.

**Concluding thoughts**

The young mothers’ storied accounts captured through interviewing offered a window into their complex lives before their pregnancy confirmation and as they moved into early motherhood. What was visible in the centrality of the young mothers’ accounts was that despite the adversity they experienced, the young women drew on inner resources of resilience and responsibility in order to transform their lives and provide a counter-narrative to the motherhood discourses that constructed them as deficit through inappropriate reproductive activity.

It is important to acknowledge that young mother narratives are not separated from a broader range of contexts and discourses, which is why I sought to also examine how young mothers were constructed in social and educational policy texts. The social and education policy analyses drew attention to the structures and barriers that accounted for the social and material effects, which in many instances, disadvantaged and marginalised young mothers.

However, young mothers will remain marginalised and invisible if social and education policies do not implement multi-faceted responses that acknowledge the complexities of early motherhood. It is important to consider possibilities and create new ways to think about young mothers and their individual needs. As Thummapol et al. (2019) note, the voices of some groups of women who are disadvantaged and marginalised are “absent from…policy discourse” (p. 1). Therefore, strategic planning that involves young mothers in decision-making processes could go some way forward in meeting their specific needs. Responses need to address issues of inequity and facilitate pathways to return to education and/or enter the labour market, but at a time that is conducive to both mother
and child. Ultimately, for the young mothers in this study, early motherhood was a significant turning point as they demonstrated they could transform their lives and set new directions. Arguably, though, without in-depth policy responses, not all young mothers and other marginalised young people will have access to equitable opportunities, and this must be addressed in policy responses moving forward.

This thesis began with a personal vignette and my positioning as a new young mother. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, narrative inquiry "characteristically begins with the researcher's autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the research puzzle, called by some the research problem or research question" (p. 41). To draw this study to a close, a second personal vignette is presented as the final remark. It details an interaction with a health centre sister when my son was seven months old to highlight the ongoing challenges I faced as a young mother as I negotiated the social world.
Final remarks: A different time

The introductory chapter of this thesis opened with a new mother narrative that occurred at the Lake City regional hospital in 1981 in Victoria and set the scene for this study. The narrative was a confronting experience and illustrated how I was positioned as a young first-time mother. Seven months later, a second challenging scenario took place at a child maternal health centre in the same regional city, again bringing into question my capabilities as a young mother.

1982

Each visit to the Health Centre Sister (HCS) was filled with trepidation. The young mother was made to feel that she lacked parenting skills, was incapable, and did not know anything about raising a baby. She was criticised for the way she folded the nappies; for the presence of “cradle cap”; the low weight measurements; and that the growth data was located in the lowest percentile. During each visit the HCS asked the same questions in different ways.

The seven-month check-up at the Health Centre was particularly distressing after the initial checks were made. The weight, body measurements including head circumference and length, questions about food, alertness, and physical movement were all carried out in the same way as previous visits. The young mother provided the details she had observed and the notes she had made. At this visit, the anterior fontanelle (positioned on top of the head) was also checked for closure. While this was being checked, the HCS made clicking noises under her breath, sighed heavily and turned slowly towards the young mother.
“I need to tell you that the baby’s head is too large, the fontanelle has not closed and should have closed by now. There is a major problem with the baby, and he is probably ‘retarded’. The baby will need an x-ray to check the skull.

The young mother was quite distressed for a brief time, but also quite puzzled as it did not fit what she had observed about her son and the milestones she had read about.

The HCS then reiterated, “There is something very wrong with this baby”. The young mother was taken aback and at the same time experienced a flash of anger by the words that were used.

“How can you possibly say my son is ‘retarded’? I haven’t noticed anything that seems unusual”. The young mother proceeded to list the things her son could do.

“He is alert; he can sit; he can feed himself using his hands and has made good attempts with a spoon; he is showing signs he is close to crawling by positioning himself on all fours and rocking to and fro; he looks at me when I talk to him; he tracks with his eyes; he smiles, laughs, babbles and shows excitement when his dad arrives home from work; he claps his hand; indicates what toy he wants by pointing; and he likes to have stories read to him – he sits on my lap or his dad’s lap and touches the pictures on each page”.

The HCS laughed, “Well, I really do not think all of the things you have listed are possible at seven months of age. You do not have any experience. I would know if there was a problem, I have been looking after babies for many years and have the

---

The term ‘retarded’ (now deemed offensive but still in use in 1982) was used to describe babies and children that were not meeting the milestones in cognitive, physical or social development.
training to know what I am talking about. I also have two children of my own. You really do not know anything about babies, developmental stages or statistics because you are too young to know these things. I am the expert here. And rocking to and fro is a strong indication there is a problem”.

The young mother was annoyed and responded: “Rocking to and fro is an indication of readiness to crawl. I have read several books about baby and child development and have identified a range of milestones that my son has already met. I have also spoken with other mothers who have babies and children”.

The HCS interrupted and in a sarcastic tone replied, “Really? You can’t learn how to look after a baby from a book. I have had many, many years of experience”.

The young mother was beyond frustration. “Well, the books I have read were on the suggested list of books provided by another HCS here and I see three of the books I have read sitting on the shelf behind you. My teaching degree also covered subjects on early child development.”

HCS: “What teaching degree? You are too young to have any qualification”.

YM responded angrily: “Actually, you know very little about my background because you have never asked. Just because there were some feeding difficulties early on, you have treated me as if I was incompetent and unable to parent. I have come to each appointment and taken on board what you have said and followed your advice. I will take my son to the paediatrician to have the fontanelle checked and I will only consent to an x-ray on his advice. I will also ask his advice about my son’s development and I will take the list of things he can already do”.
HCS: “Well, I am sure the paediatrician will tell you what I have told you. Your son’s head is too big and that is **always** a sign there is a major problem. I have seen it **many** times before. I will send through a letter detailing all of my concerns. Now we need to **make another appointment for next month**.”

The young mother stated she would not be making any further appointments until she had seen the paediatrician.

HSC: “Well, you have to come each month, so I can check your son, especially with the problems he will have”.

YM: “As I said, I won’t be making any further appointments until after I have spoken to the paediatrician”.

The young mother left the health centre quite distressed. She was able to make an urgent appointment with the paediatrician to determine if there were any problems. During the appointment, the paediatrician informed the young mother that fontanelle closure varied in babies, and the ‘soft spot’ at the top of the skull did not close for many months so there was no need for concern. The milestones that the young mother had documented, which the paediatrician tested for, indicated that the baby was developing ________

---

23 It is expected that the anterior fontanelle (commonly known as the ‘soft spot’) would close between 7 and 18 months of age. According to McKinney (2017), “the anterior fontanelle (AF) is the largest fontanelle at birth and typically lasts the longest but has a wide range of normal age of closure: the extremes (highest and lowest fifth percentile) are at 4 and 26 months, with a median closure time of about 13-16 months of age” (p. 816).
within the norms or ahead of schedule. Although there had been early concerns with breast feeding and weight gain in relation to the baby, his weight was increasing, he was consuming solids and was alert, active and happy, and there was no need to worry. The baby did not exhibit any cognitive delay. The paediatrician indicated he would write to the HCS to outline his findings. The young mother did not consult with the particular HCS at the Lake City Health Centre again as she did not trust her advice or judgement. Although it caused substantial friction, the young mother was able to organise appointments with another HCS at the same health centre who was supportive and encouraging.

In both vignettes I was positioned as a young mother who had no idea about mothering. Neither the matron at the hospital in vignette one, nor the health centre sister in vignette two knew my background. Assumptions and judgements were made by two health professionals, deemed to have knowledge and authority, about my abilities as a young mother based solely on my age. So, although in many respects I ‘fitted’ the pattern of “normative middle-class criteria” (SmithBattle, 2000b, p. 31) by completing secondary school and attending a tertiary institution, I had not delayed marriage or childbearing and so I was still framed from a deficit view. It is acknowledged that my combination of a stable childhood with two parents, completion of post-secondary school qualifications, a teaching career, marriage and financial stability at the age of 20, situated me quite differently to the young mothers in this study. Yet as borne out in the two personal vignettes, my background did not protect me from a particular construction of young motherhood prevalent in the early 80s of young mothers as deficit. In both situations, the blame for any health or possible developmental problems (of which there were none) was directed solely at me.

My narratives were included in this study because there were assumptions at the time of my baby’s birth about age appropriateness to become a mother. It was also assumed that young mothers lacked knowledge about child development. Indeed, I was positioned
as being unable to care for my son in both narratives by health professionals who had a
complete disregard of myself as a mother, and who critiqued my ability to care for my
baby without sufficient evidence.

As I come to the end of the doctoral journey, I now return to the description of the quilt
metaphor and quilt design “Bristol Stars” (Matheison, 1999) to draw up and tie off the
threads of the thesis. Seven of the eight large circles that bordered the central mariner’s
compass represented the young mothers and their complex stories, and I was
represented by the eighth circle through the inclusion my vignettes. Each of us across
time and space experienced deficit constructions of early motherhood and critiques of
our abilities as mothers. Regardless of our backgrounds, the prevailing discourses of
previous decades are still prevalent in second decade of the 21st century and it appears
not much has changed. The complexities of the young mothers’ journeys are reflected
throughout the thesis and the ‘patchwork’ effect of varying responses to early
motherhood are reflected in social and educational policies. The mariner’s compass
signifies the journey I have taken, the points of intersection, and the points of contention.
Those points of contention direct my attention to the importance of the systemic change
that is required in social and educational policies to ensure that pregnant and mothering
students are not ‘cloaked in invisibility’ in school contexts or constrained in social welfare
measures but their voices are heard and acted upon to ensure equitable opportunities.
Recommendations for Action

In summary, taking account of the findings and the analysis presented in this thesis the following actions are recommended. Firstly, it is vital that young mothers’ voices are heard by actively engaging them in discussions about their overarching needs from both a social and an educational perspective. Policy makers need to take account of the specific requirements young mothers and their families have and plan accordingly. To do this, young mothers need to be invited to be part of a consultation panel that is made up of a range of stakeholders. Further to this government funding needs to specifically address young mothers’ needs by ensuring there are equitably funded educational resources for all students in all educational contexts. Secondly, young mothers require a socially just curriculum that goes beyond the school curriculum to provide a wider range of pathways to post-school education and other opportunities. In conjunction with this, the focus should be broader than competency-based subject completion and instead, focus on comprehensive curriculum selections that support further education.
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Appendix A: Federation University Australia Ethics Approval

Extension Approval 2
Human Research Ethics Committee

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<tr>
<th>Principal Researcher:</th>
<th>Assoc Prof Annette Foley</th>
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<tr>
<td>Other/Student Researcher(s):</td>
<td>Dr Jane Mummery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karen Felstead</td>
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<tr>
<td>School/Section:</td>
<td>FEA</td>
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<td>Project Number:</td>
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<td>Project Title:</td>
<td>Public and personal discourses: How ‘teenage mothers’ construct their parenting practices with their pre-schoolers.</td>
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<td>Previous Approval Dates:</td>
<td>16/02/2012 to 31/12/2015</td>
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<td>Extension Period:</td>
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Please note: Ethics Approval is contingent upon the submission of a Final Project Report at the completion/discontinuation of the project. Annual Project Reports must also be submitted if the duration of the project exceeds twelve months. It is the responsibility of researchers to take note of the following dates and submit these reports in a timely manner, as reminders may not be sent out. Failure to submit reports will result in your ethics approval lapsing.

REPORTS TO HREC:

An Annual report for this project must be submitted to the Ethics Officer on:
16 February 2016

A Final report for this project must be submitted to the Ethics Officer on:
31 January 2017

These report forms can be found at:

Fiona Koop
Ethics Officer
18 January 2016

Please see attached 'Conditions of Approval'.
Appendix B: Plain Language Information Statement and Consent forms

Dear participant,

I am a doctoral student undertaking a research project for my doctoral thesis in the School of Education and Arts at Federation University Australia. This project has been approved by the Federation University Australia Human Ethics Research Committee.

I am interested in finding out more about your life, your goals and plans for the future, what is important for your child/ren, your thoughts about how the community does or does not support you and how certain government policies might affect you.

I would like to invite you to be a participant in this research. Participation is voluntary and if you decide you do not want to participate after reading this information then you do not need to give any reason. During two, thirty-minute interviews, I will ask you about your life with your child/ren, attendance at the young parent program, your interests and plans for the future. You are free to choose not to answer questions or make comments. Each interview will be recorded and after the first interview the written text will be available for you to read before the second interview takes place. At the second interview, you can add or withdraw comments.

We will meet in a suitable place that provides privacy and if required you will be given a $15 myki card for bus travel.

Real names will not be used to label any materials. All material, including recordings of interviews and transcriptions, will be kept in a locked cupboard at Federation University Australia for five years and only the Principal Researcher, Associate Researcher and Student Researcher can look at the materials. After five years the material will be destroyed.

Your privacy and confidentiality is maintained under the legalities of law. You can choose to withdraw from the project at any time before the data is processed.

The research is part of my doctoral thesis so findings will be written up and a summary of the main findings will be made available to you on request. Findings may also be presented at conferences, in journals and books.

If the research does make you feel uncomfortable or distressed, or you wish to talk about your experience of being involved in the study, you can talk with the Principal Researcher – Professor Annette Foley – whose contact details are at the end of this information sheet. If the research raises other issues beyond the research project then please contact ‘Lifeline’ (131114) where you can talk to a person who is trained help you with issues that may affect you.

If you would like to participate, please sign the attached Consent Form, and return it to the Principal Researcher in the stamped self-addressed envelope provided. I will then contact you to organise the first interview time.

Yours Sincerely,
Karen Felstead
Student Researcher
Participant Consent Form – Please complete the following information:

I, ................................................................. of ........................................

................................................................. ........................................

hereby consent to participate as a subject in the above research study.

The research program in which I am being asked to participate has been explained fully to me, verbally and in writing, and any matters on which I have sought information have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that:

- all information I provide will be treated with the strictest confidence (within the limits of the law) and data will be stored separately from any listing that includes my name and address
- my participation in this research is voluntary
- aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in academic journals and texts, and at conferences
- my participation involves two, digitally recorded individual interviews (up to one hour conducted with the researcher, based on a series of questions
- I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which event, my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from it will not be used
- once information has been processed it is not possible to withdraw consent to participate.

SIGNATURE: ........................................ DATE: ........................................
Consent Form for Coordinator of Program

PROJECT TITLE: Public and personal discourses: How 'teenage mothers' construct their parenting practices with their preschoolers

RESEARCHERS: Associate Professor Annette Foley (Principal Researcher), Dr. Jane Mummery (Researcher), Karen Felstead (Student Researcher)

Consent – Please complete the following information:

[Signature]

hereby consent to Karen Felstead (Student Researcher) accessing the Young Parents Program to seek out potential participants for the research project.

The research project has been explained fully to me, verbally and in writing, and any matters on which I have sought information have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that:

* all information provided by the participants will be treated with the strictest confidence (within the limits of the law) and data will be stored separately from any listing that includes their participants name and contact details;
* participation in this research is voluntary;
* aggregated findings will be used for research purposes and may be reported in academic journals and texts, and at conferences;
* all references to participants will use pseudonyms;
* there will be two recorded individual interviews (up to one hour each in length) conducted with the researcher, asking a range of questions about each young mother’s life;
* the participants are free to withdraw their consent at any time during the study, in which event their participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from it will not be used;
* once information has been processed it is not possible to withdraw consent to participate.

I support the use of a private room at the Young Parents Program site so Karen can conduct interviews with participants in a quiet, comfortable and safe space.

SIGNATURE: [Signature]

DATE: [Date]
Appendix C: Interview Questions

**Background/demographic questions**
You mentioned you have # child/children. Tell me about your child/children?

**Parenting**
Do you live on your own? If not, who do you live with?
What support mechanisms do you have in place to help you?
Are there any aspects of parenting that are difficult for you?
What do you like to do with your children?
What do you think is important for your children to learn?

**Goals and aspirations**
What are your interests?
What are your goals for the future?
How do you plan to achieve your goals?
What support do you require to achieve your own goals?
What goals do you have for your child/children?

**Attendance at the voluntary program**
Why do you attend the Young Parents Program?
Tell me about your experiences at the Young Parents Program.
What aspects of attendance are important to you?
How does attending the Young Parents Program help you?
Your child attends too – what do they do while you are … (insert what participant says they do)?

**Community**
What do you think people in the local community think about young mothers?
How do you know?
How do you feel about this?
Tell me about your experiences in the community.

Possible prompts
The following questions and responses from the researcher could be used to prompt the participant to elaborate her response.

From your own experience…
Can you give me an example of what you mean?
Earlier you mentioned you had a similar experience; can you tell me more about that?
What exactly do you mean by…
I would like to know more about what you think…

Probes
The participant’s own words can be used to generate questions to elicit further responses from the participant.
Appendix D: Permission to use Digital Image

Permission to use digital image in doctoral thesis

I, [signature], give Karen Felstead of Federation University Australia, permission to use the digital image “Bristol Stars, (1999)” in her doctoral thesis. I understand that full citation information and copyright attribution of the digital image will be included in the doctoral thesis and a copy of the thesis would be available in online archives.

Signature: 

Date: [signature]

[Handwritten date: August 19, 2020]
Appendix E: Factiva Database Keyword Search

Table 3

Factiva Database Keyword Search

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## Appendix F: Data Sources for Social Policy Analysis

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<td>Report Barriers to Service Delivery for Young Pregnant Women and Mothers.</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Loxton, Williams &amp; Adamson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Helping Young Parents and Supporting Jobless Families Review/ParentsNext Evaluation</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Unemployed Young People to Take Responsibility for Their Future</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Kemp</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Supporting Young Parents</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Child Family Community Australia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Preparing Young People for the Future of Work</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Torii &amp; O'Connell/Mitchell Institute at Victoria University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Welfare to Work</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Commonwealth of Australia</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Report Mutual Obligation/Work for The Dole</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Yeend, P.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Report Commonwealth Place-Based Service Delivery Initiatives</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Commonwealth of Australia</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Speech Speech to Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) Lunch - Sydney</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Prime Minister Julia Gillard</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
## Appendix G: NVivo Coding Book Data

### Table 5

**NVivo Coding Book: Nodes created to explore the transcription data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of code</th>
<th>Description of code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>Advice or consideration about procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Maternal age at birth of child/children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child in care</td>
<td>Care requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s development</td>
<td>Reference to development of child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community judgement</td>
<td>Accounts of judgement in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Needing to stay in control of situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cradle to Kinder</td>
<td>Connection with organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal activity</td>
<td>Concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current issues</td>
<td>Worries/concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current relationship</td>
<td>With partner (father of child); with partner (not father of child); single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions later in pregnancy</td>
<td>Making decisions about future to support new baby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)</td>
<td>Connection with agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance to LCYPP</td>
<td>Positive/negative concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug reference personal</td>
<td>Personal drug reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early pregnancy</td>
<td>First confirmation of pregnancy; reaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education background</td>
<td>Completed schooling level before pregnancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Current employment status and/or future plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-partner</td>
<td>Contact/no contact with mother/child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Contact; Support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family issues</td>
<td>Difficulties with extended family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father of the child</td>
<td>Contact/no contact with child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial concerns</td>
<td>Accounts of concerns about money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Current friendship group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship group (negative)</td>
<td>Accounts of school friendship group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future plans</td>
<td>Accounts of where to next.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future without baby</td>
<td>Accounts of feelings if baby was not with mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gate keeping</td>
<td>Strategies used to protect child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>Where participants lived/live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving birth</td>
<td>Account of birth experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health in pregnancy</td>
<td>Difficulties experienced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health professional judgement</td>
<td>Positive/negative advice and commentary by health professionals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)</td>
<td>Accounts of IPV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCYPP</td>
<td>Attendance; positive and/or negative aspects; support at young parent program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life changing</td>
<td>Having baby changed life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lightbulb moment</td>
<td>Expression of change as important for mother and child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living arrangements (negative)</td>
<td>Couch surfing/other living conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living arrangements (positive)</td>
<td>Before/during pregnancy and after baby is born. Independent or family; Housing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>Accounts of mental health issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving forward</td>
<td>Plans for the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parents at children's school</td>
<td>Accounts of judgement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>Experiences and accounts of parenting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postnatal Depression (PND)</td>
<td>Experience/difficulties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy confirmation</td>
<td>First notification of pregnancy’ thoughts and feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with partner</td>
<td>Supportive or difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resisting negativity</td>
<td>Protecting oneself from negative comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Concerns for child and future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returning to school</td>
<td>Decisions about continuing education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School completion</td>
<td>Plans to complete school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School troubles (after pregnancy confirmation)</td>
<td>Experiences at school after pregnancy confirmation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School troubles (before pregnancy confirmation)</td>
<td>Early school leaver; difficulties at school before pregnancy confirmation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-harm</td>
<td>Participant accounts of self-harm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual relations prior to pregnancy</td>
<td>Participant account of sexual relations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma</td>
<td>Experience of perceived judgemental situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting other young mothers</td>
<td>Accounts of support to other young mothers at LCYPP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>Driving licence; Access to car; Use of public transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>Involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare support</td>
<td>Participant reference to welfare.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* This table illustrates the description assigned to the name of each code used to code the transcripts.
Appendix H: DEECD Ethics Approval

Dear Mrs Peisstead

Thank you for your application of 29 March 2012 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools and/or early childhood settings titled Public and personal discourses: How ‘teenage mothers’ construct their parenting practices with their preschoolers.

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below:

1. The research is conducted in accordance with the final documentation you provided to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

2. Separate approval for the research needs to be sought from school principals and/or centre directors. This is to be supported by the DEECD approved documentation and, if applicable, the letter of approval from a relevant and formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.

3. The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter and any extensions or variations to your study, including those requested by an ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for its consideration before you proceed.

4. As a matter of courtesy, you advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools or governing body of the early childhood settings that you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director or governing body.

5. You acknowledge the support of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in any publications arising from the research.

6. The Research Agreement conditions, which include the reporting requirements at the conclusion of your study, are upheld. A reminder will be sent for reports not submitted by the study’s indicative completion date.

7. If DEECD has commissioned you to undertake this research, the responsible Branch/Division will need to approve any material you provide for publication on the Department’s Research Register.
I wish you well with your research study. Should you have further enquiries on this matter, please contact Kathleen Nolan, Research Officer, Research and Evaluation Branch, by telephone on (03) 9637 3243 or by email at nolan.kathleen@dpcimg.health.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Dr Elizabeth Hartnell-Young
Director
Research and Evaluation Branch

04/04/2012

end
Appendix I: Final Ethics Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please indicate the type of report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☑ Annual Report (Dmit 3b &amp; 5b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Final Report</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project No.</th>
<th>12-011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Name:</th>
<th>Public and personal discourses: How 'teenage mothers' construct their parenting practices with their pre-schoolers.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Researcher:</td>
<td>Associate Professor Annette Foley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Researchers:</td>
<td>Dr. Jane Mummery</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Original Approval:</th>
<th>16/02/2012</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School / Section:</th>
<th>Education</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phone:</th>
<th>53275167</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Email:</th>
<th><a href="mailto:k.felstead@federation.edu.au">k.felstead@federation.edu.au</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please note: For HDR candidates, this Ethics annual report is a separate requirement, in addition to your HDR Candidature annual report, which is submitted mid-year to research.degrees@federation.edu.au.

1) Please indicate the current status of the project:

1a) Yet to start

1b) Continuing

1c) Data collection completed

1d) Abandoned / Withdrawn:

1e) If the approval was subject to certain conditions, have these conditions been met? (if not, please give details in the comments box below)

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

1f) Data Analysis

☐ Not yet commenced ☐ Proceeding ☑ Complete ☐ None

1g) Have ethical problems been encountered in any of the following areas:

Study Design

☐ Yes ☑ No

Recruitment of Subjects

☐ Yes ☑ No
### 2a) Have amendments been made to the originally approved project?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### 2b) If yes, was HREC approval granted for these changes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- **Provide details:**
  - Yes Application for Amendment to an Existing Project
  - Yes Change of Personnel
  - Yes Extension Request

- **No** If you have made changes, but not had HREC approval, provide details as to why this has not yet occurred.

### 2c) Do you need to submit any amendments now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- **Provide details:**
  - Yes Application for Amendment to an Existing Project
  - Yes Change of Personnel
  - Yes Extension Request

*NB: If 'Yes', [download & submit the appropriate request](#) to the HREC for approval.*

Please note: Extensions will not be granted retrospectively. Apply well prior to the project end date, to ensure continuity of HREC approval.

### 3a) Please indicate where you are storing the data collected during the course of this project: (Australian code for the Responsible conduct of Research Ch 2.2.2, 2.5 – 2.7)

- Interview recordings stored digitally on University system and folder protected with password.
- Hard copy transcription data stored in locked filing cabinet in locked office at the Mt Helen campus of the University. Digital copies of transcription data stored in protected folder on the University system.

### 3b) Final Reports: Advise when & how stored data will be destroyed (Australian code for the Responsible conduct of Research Ch 2.1.1)

Data will be deleted from University systems five years after the project is completed. Hard copy
data will be placed in secure container at the Mt Helen campus for shredding be external company.

4) Have there been any events that might have had an adverse effect on the research participants OR unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project?

☐ No ☐ Yes * NB: If 'yes', please provide details in the comments box below:

Comments:

5a) Please provide a short summary of results of the project so far (no attachments please):

This research drew attention to the discursive construction of young mothers in the social field. The importance of this work was the nexus between the discursive constructions that reproduced young mothers in a deficit light as long-term welfare recipients, and their own journeys into motherhood that were transformative and, in many ways, resistant to the deficit view. This study created a space to envision how young mothers lived their lives, and the resources they drew on to make transformative changes.

5b) Final Report: Provide details about how the aims of the project, as stated in the application for approval, were achieved (or not achieved).
(Australian code for the Responsible conduct of Research 4.4.1)

The aims of the project were achieved. With the approved amendment to the project in 2013, interviews were conducted with seven participants in 2016. The interviews data was analysed and written up to complete a doctoral project.

6) Publications: Provide details of research dissemination outcomes for the previous year resulting from this project: eg: Community seminars; Conference attendance; Government reports and/or research publications


A doctoral thesis was submitted on 18th September 2020.