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**THE POLITICISATION OF MOTHERHOOD:
SILENCING SOLE MOTHERS**

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ABSTRACT

In most OECD countries adolescent child-bearing and child-rearing is regarded as the forerunner of social, economic, employment and educational disadvantage particularly for young sole mothers receiving State-provided benefits. The National-led government has argued that the cost of social welfare benefits, an estimated \$7.6 billion in 2008/2009, is no longer sustainable. Towards the end of 2012 following recommendations from a government-appointed Welfare Working Party, the social welfare system was restructured to 'encourage' recipients to search for paid employment by restricting their opportunities for support if they did not. This study explored how young sole mothers experienced mothering, and made sense of the processes and consequences of the National-led government's reforms, in a socio-political environment that overtly prioritises paid work. Using thematic analysis of narratives obtained from unstructured interviews with 10 adolescent sole mothers attending a teen parent education unit in the greater Wellington area, the study also sought to understand the ways in which sole mothers are silenced on political issues affecting their futures. The research is based on feminist principles of empowerment of women and social justice and is situated within Michel Foucault's postulations that Governments, their institutions and their representatives, structure actions and use language to discipline and silence individuals and groups to maintain normative power and control. Themes from participants' narratives included an unambiguous preference for hands-on/ full-time mothering with support as needed; intractable difficulties in coping with inadequate DPB benefits with social isolation as a consequence; an acceptance of the need to obtain paid work, but only when their child is settled and ready; a determination to obtain further qualifications in order to achieve a better life for their child and themselves coupled with a largely unrecognised resilience.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction:

Considerable publicity and research has focused on the problems attributed to adolescence, with attention centred on the risks and future disadvantages associated with teenage sexuality and too-early motherhood (see for example, Breheny, 2006; Yardley, 2008). Adolescents are seen as immature and too irresponsible to parent; normatively it remains the preserve of adults. Teen mothers are consequently positioned into an homogenous group that does not take account of their diversity. They are regarded as personally responsible for their situation and for being stigmatised as deviant; they are therefore undeserving of inclusion in 'normal' society (Furstenberg, 2007; Goffman, 1963; Yardley, 2008). Governments and policymakers do not account for the social, economic and environmental factors that contribute to sole mothers' circumstances; instead adolescent sole mothers in particular are individually problematised.

While in recent years both National and Labour-led governments have actively 'encouraged' all welfare beneficiaries to enter paid employment, the emphasis has been on sole mothers who comprise 87 to 89 percent of more than 100,000 Domestic Purposes Beneficiaries. The political discourse of conservatives and neo-liberals has stressed independence, individualism, citizenship obligations and reciprocity; anyone wanting State welfare support now must earn it by entering at least part-time paid employment.

This project seeks to understand adolescent sole mothers' experiences from their perspective using a narrative approach. The first chapter outlines the specific aims of the current study and backgrounds the socio-political events that provided the impetus for it. Included are the meanings ascribed to motherhood and mothering, an exploration of Western constructions of adolescence and associated behaviours and I attend to recent neurological/developmental research on the aetiology of teenage risk-taking. Stereotyping of young mothers and identity development are explored, as are strategies by which people can be silenced. The limitations of narrative studies and caveats that apply to qualitative research are précised and the genesis and development of my interest in the project outlined.

1.1 Study Aims:

The primary aims of this study were to understand the ways in which teenage sole mothers experience and make sense of mothering in a socio-political environment that has clearly prioritised paid employment over mothering care. I was also interested in how identities might change in relation to socio-political change. Further, in exploring why sole mothers, the women most affected by the National-led government's policy, have remained politically silent, or have been silenced, I considered whether their apparent political inaction could be interpreted as a strategy of resistance. Given that research on individual responses to politically-imposed change is, to date, sparse (Patterson, 2004), another goal of this project was to contribute to understanding how personal experience is shaped by political change.

A further aim, was to extend, challenge and even change, society's knowledge and understanding of the complexities and social perceptions young sole mothers live with and must negotiate daily, through thematic analysis of individual case narratives.

1.1.1 Research framework:

As a qualitative study drawing on case stories, my research involved interviewing teenage sole mothers receiving financial support from the State. The central question concerned how young sole mothers experienced and made sense of mothering in a political environment that now overtly prioritises paid employment. The question also involved exploring the meanings ascribed to mothering; the day-to-day rewards and disadvantages; the support available; the perceptions participants held of the case workers/managers who have the power to grant or refuse welfare entitlements; their responses to stereotyping and the strategies employed to establish their individual identities as mothers. It is in the 'the landscape of being' as Oliver Sacks (1991) so poetically put it, that within the realities of day-to-day living, sole mothers can construct and transform individual identities to understand themselves, others, and the world they inhabit. The study draws on social constructionism as articulated by Berger and Luckmann (1971), Gergen (1985) and others, and relies on the practices of narrative as explained by Catherine Riessman (2008). It is also guided by egalitarian feminist principles contained in participatory research practices including the empowerment of women and the freedom of choice implied in social justice ideology. As well, it is situated within feminist interpretations of Michel Foucault's theorisations that Governments, their institutions and representatives, structure actions and use language to discipline and silence individuals and groups so as to maintain normative power and control. The project draws on elements from studies by Kingfisher (1996, 2002) in the United States, Croghan and Miell (1998) in Britain, as well as Rouch (2003), Patterson (2004) and Breheny (2006) in New Zealand, all of whom have used narrative approaches to the study of young parents and/or sole mothers. Using thematic analysis of participants' accounts, I focused on the content of their stories, that is, 'what' was

being said rather than ‘how’ or ‘why’ it was said. As expressed in the aims, I was also interested in how the young sole mothers’ identities might alter as a consequence of socio-political change and the ‘Who am I?’ aspects of identity construction and if change would emerge from the stories ‘told’ rather than the style of the ‘telling’ (Mishler, 1999; Riessman, 2008, p. 54).

1.2 Sociopolitical background:

In mid 2008, the National Party informed prospective voters that its policy was to maintain an “unrelenting focus on getting [welfare] beneficiaries into employment”. As explained by Prime Minister John Key, long-term welfare dependency “locked people into a lifetime of limited income and limited choices” (Key, 2008; NZ Herald, 2008. p.1). A Working Welfare Group (WWG) set up through the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) in 2010 made recommendations for totally re-structuring the social welfare system in 2011. At an estimated cost of \$1.76 billion a year, welfare was considered no longer economically affordable.

Sole mothers, who comprised 89 percent of 97,000 Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) recipients in 2010, came under widespread scrutiny. The Prime Minister made this clear when he claimed change was necessary because some sole mothers were “breeding for a business” (Key, quoted in Trevett, 2008).

Headlines in the British press also suggested that single mothers were “enjoying state benefits” as a “lifestyle choice” (Coventry Evening Telegraph, February 2010. p. 1). However the article read rather differently; single mothers preferred state benefits for providing more security than relying on funding from an absent/former male partner. In other words, sole mothers could not rely on their child’s father for financial support.

In the same year (2010) 176,500 Aotearoa/New Zealand parents had “shirked their financial responsibilities for their children” (“Rob”, 2010, p. 1) by owing the state more than \$560 million in unpaid child support and \$1.6 billion in late payment penalties and interest. According to the Minister of Revenue, Peter Dunne, 90 percent of payments by absent fathers were eventually made, but the problem to be addressed was in the imposition of penalties and accrued interest. (“Rob”, July 9, 2010). This suggests that such payments were neither timely nor reliable.

The justifications for the structural changes for DPB recipients implemented in October 2012 were in direct contrast to those of the early 1970s when the DPB was introduced; then its expressed purpose was to support sole mothers as stay-at-home parents. At the time, both political parties agreed that enabling sole mothers to care for their children at home was a necessary investment in the future wellbeing of the nation.

A decade ago, in 2002 the Labour-led government had signalled its intention through the Ministry of Social Development (MSD, cited in Kahu & Morgan, 2007) to implement its *Towards an Action Plan for New Zealand Women* in which recipients of state-provided welfare would be required to work. It too, was founded on the notion of reciprocal contracts – if you require state welfare support, the government will require you to earn it. According to Kahu and Morgan’s (2007) discourse analysis, the plan drew on “feminist principles for its vision” but was “driven by capitalist goals of increased productivity and economic growth rather than needs of women” (p. 134). The plan was actioned in 2004 under the auspices of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MWA). In the same year Labour’s ‘*Working for Families*’ tax package made no provision for sole parents and their children; it seems they were construed as neither families nor workers. Now, in the second decade of the 21st century, rather than being a social welfare state New Zealand constitutes an enterprise state with responsibility for

one's fate increasingly divested to corporate businesses and selected individuals (Kingfisher, 2002, 2004). Mutual obligations between welfare recipients and the state continue to be emphasised in political discourse and highlighted in the media. With some exceptions, the clear implication is that all beneficiaries are to be disciplined into self-sufficiency, independence and individual responsibility with government-imposed sanctions acting to coerce recipients into compliance. Refusal to fulfil work opportunities and/or job training requirements risks a 50 percent reduction or cancellation of benefit payments.

1.3 Motherhood and Mothering:

Motherhood rarely bestows high status on women. Along with unpaid work, it has little or no economic value. Two decades ago, former MP Marilyn Waring (1988) pointed out that caring for others in the private, that is the unpaid sphere, 'counted for nothing' (Waring, 1988). Sole parents, especially mothers receiving government-provided financial support, have been positioned in most developed countries as 'the undeserving poor' (Gans, 1995) and New Zealand government's restructuring of the social welfare system has closely followed that of the USA, Australia, Canada and Great Britain. In the view of the New Zealand Prime Minister, to continue supporting sole parents risked the establishment of an intergenerational and dependent underclass (Key, 2010).

In market economies, the social contribution made by the bearing and raising of children is not valued. People not in paid employment, particularly women, do not contribute to the 'tax take'. Early child-bearing among adolescent mothers is a costly, difficult and inconvenient problem for governments (Kingfisher, 2002).

While motherhood is seen by some as an essential attribute of being female, and mothering as an instinctual characteristic of womanhood, both notions have been contested (see for example, Badinter (1980); Donzelot (1980); Goldberg & Kremen (1990); Thurer (1996)). However McMahon (1995) found, in her research project with 59 Toronto women, that motherhood continued to be an “important source of identity for women” (p. 6), but warned that no inferences could be made from that study to suggest that women’s motherhood experiences and practices were to be considered normative.

Arai (2009), among others, has suggested that many research projects on mothering contained a ‘middle-class’ assumption that the ‘best’ mothers are adult, that is over 20, and thus experienced enough for bearing and nurturing offspring (see also in Badinter, 1980; Furstenberg, 2007; Lawson & Rhodes, 1993; Luker, 1996).

In contrast and by implication, adolescents are constructed as too irresponsible, too immature and too inexperienced to undertake the responsibilities of parenthood. Many young mothers, but only one mother in this study, have acknowledged that having a baby so early in their lives was a ‘mistake’ (Luker, 1996). The background regarding *why* it happened is outside the purview of this study, which focuses on how teenage mothers cope, adjust, adapt, and see themselves in an environment of politically imposed change.

1.4 Western adolescence and risk-taking:

In the 1960s, Erik Erikson considered that adolescence was the time in which young people discovered and reflected on who they are. In the late 1960s and early 1970s during a time of widespread research into the cultural construction of personhood, and

in an era of significant social upheaval, it was adolescent sexuality that came under close scrutiny.¹ Social and biological research made it known that females were experiencing puberty/menarche before their teenage years. As Murcott put it: “Biologically a child becomes an adult earlier and earlier, socially a child becomes an adult later and later” (Murcott, quoted in Cunningham, 1984, p. 13). Developmental psychologist Laurence Steinberg (2012) noted that at 16-17 years of age adolescents are at peak fecundity – “about the same age they are at the peak of risktaking” (p. 72).

Early pregnancy, that is pregnancy during the adolescent years, is problematised and incorporated into a cluster of risk-taking behaviours ascribed to adolescents – unsafe driving practices, drug taking, binge drinking and careless sex. Also argued is that adolescent risk-taking behaviour is the consequence of ignorance, impulsivity, irrationality, and delusions about their own invulnerability. Teenagers, it has been said, live in “the bubble of the present” (Flynn, RadioNZ. 13 August 2012). Flynn was referring to their apparent reluctance to actively engage with the classics of Western literature, but his observation reflects a widely-held view that many adolescent activities and behaviours demonstrate an aptitude for ‘living in the moment’ concomitant with incidence of high risk behaviours (Amsel & Smetana, 2011; Arai, 2009; Furstenberg, 2011; Lawson & Rhodes, 1993; Steinberg, 2011). Impulsivity, inexperience and immaturity may be contributing factors, but do not provide a complete explanation for teenage risk-taking (Furstenberg, 2011). Single parenthood may have become a viable option for adult women, but it invokes normative social sanctions for the adolescents

¹. Developmental research now regards adolescence as including 10 and 20 year olds with some adolescent behaviour extending into the next decade (Steinberg, 2011).

raising a child outside marriage because of its association with developmentally explained 'risk-taking'.

For over half a century of actively examining possible causes of adolescent high-risk behaviour (see, for example, Amsel & Smetana, 2011; Furstenberg, 2011; Minnick & Shandler, 2011; Thorne & Shapiro, 2011;), the emphasis has largely been on developing pre-emptive strategies such as education, easier access to contraception and the use of attitudinal-change slogans, for example USA's 'Just Say No' campaign. However, few if any of these solutions have been wholly successful at reducing teenage pregnancy, and the rate of such pregnancies, at least in OECD countries, has remained fairly stable (Furstenberg, 2007). Deanna Kuhn and Amanda Holman (2011) found that, though young people tend to identify single causes to explain their risk-taking, single solutions such as the abovementioned will not ameliorate the problem, and other recent approaches have focused on multiple causes, which suggest the need for broader understandings to foster multi-faceted responses.

New clues from neurological (fMRI) investigations may provide different answers to reducing the incidence of 'anti-social' behaviours in young people. If heightened risk-taking and recklessness are typically found in adolescent behavioural patterns, then it is axiomatic that a major risk of unprotected sexual activity is teen pregnancy and adolescent motherhood. Recent neurological research suggests that adolescent risk-taking behaviour stems in part from what Steinberg (2011) terms a neurological dual-systems model in which "rapid and dramatic" (p. 45) increases in dopamine levels in the socio-emotional system precede the maturing of the cognitive control system. Based on these findings it is hypothesised that the temporal gap between socio-emotional arousal involving increased dopamine levels, and the later development of the cognitive control system, contributes to a "period of heightened vulnerability to risk" (Steinberg, 2011, p

45). During mid-teenage years, the obtaining of immediate rewards outweighs considerations of personal and social costs and consequences, placing adolescents at particular risk. Steinberg (2011) also suggests that the first five years of adolescence - 10 to 15 years of age - is a period of heightened vulnerability, which tapers off towards the end of the teenage years and into the early 20s. He further states that the high-risk behaviours of teenagers constitute the greatest threats to the health and development of individuals, as they are behaviours that are frequently repeated in adulthood. Whether Thorne and Shapiro's (2011) findings regarding adolescents' hypothetical thinking abilities, will meld with Steinberg's (2011) neurological dual systems theory in which the emergence of hypothetical thinking in teenagers lags behind emotional development, is yet to be considered in research. To date neither set of findings has had a significant impact on policymakers. But as teenagers face the multiple emotional, biological, and relationship transformations, new research findings, under the existing conditions of governmental welfare reform, are unlikely to ameliorate adolescent uncertainty and anxiety.

1.5 Teenage pregnancy/parenting:

While not specifically targeted in the rhetoric and discourses leading up to the New Zealand Government's 2012 introduction of structural changes to the social welfare system, teenage pregnancy and parenthood have remained a source of social unease. Reporting to the Welfare Working Group, the Ministry of Social Development (June, 2010) stated that among developed countries, New Zealand had the second highest rate of teenage births at 29.6 per 1,000. Two thirds of 4,670 births to under 20 year old mothers in 2009, were to 18 and 19 year olds; only 29 were to women under 15 years of

age. Young sole mothers receiving a state provided benefit are likely to be dependent on it for longer than older age parents (MSD, 2010).

Early parenthood, according to a Ministry of Social Development (MSD) report of July 2010, has been a marker of problems experienced in childhood including, and resulting in, disengagement from school, and early economic disadvantage. While most sole parent families fare well, there is a high proportion that experience disadvantage in absolute terms when compared with two-parent families (MSD, 2010). Many researchers consider that comparisons in early child-rearing between sole-parent families and two-parent families are inappropriate (see for example, Lawson & Rhode, 1993) and few New Zealand studies have examined the prior risk factors for early pregnancy (MSD, 2010) that might be related to disadvantage. However a Christchurch longitudinal study compared adolescents who had not become mothers before age 21 with those who had before age 18. It found that the adolescent motherhood group was more likely to have been physically and/or sexually abused, and were more likely to have experienced parental criminal offending and/or parental substance abuse (Boden, Fergusson & Horwood, 2008). Comparisons made on the aftermath of adolescent pregnancy, found that sole mothers in the older age group (20 to 25 years) experienced similar disadvantaged outcomes as those faced by teenage mothers (Furstenberg, 2007).

Teenage parenthood has generated considerable debate and interest among policymakers, commentators and social researchers, as a significant problem and the basis for consequent disadvantage. In most OECD countries teenage pregnancy is considered to be a poor life choice that consigns the mother to “interrupted education, reduced earning potential, reduced career prospects; and more generally, simply being emotionally and socially unprepared for child rearing” (Boddington, Khawaja & Didham, 2003, p. 1). Steinberg (2011) suggests that where teenagers are regarded as too

immature and too inexperienced to assume the responsibilities of both child-bearing and child-rearing (Arai, 2009; Furstenberg, 2007; Lawson, 1993; Luker, 1996), it is associated with an irrational generalised fear of adolescents, (*ephebeophobia*). Society's attitudes towards teenagers, especially in matters sexual, are ambivalent. The aforementioned researchers, however, agree that adolescence is a transitional stage for achieving social and sexual maturity leading to the assumption of the responsibilities of adulthood, and a time of increased self-awareness and self-discovery.

1.6 Identity seeking:

Change, actual or proposed, is likely to “provoke concerns about identity” (Jenkins, 2004, p. 26). Changes in the formation of families, increasing unemployment especially among adolescents, widening income disparities, the relaxing of gender-prescribed boundaries, developmental adjustments and biological transformations contribute to a complex and confusing matrix which adolescents are expected to navigate. Add to the ‘mix’ governmentally-imposed structural changes that restrict freedom of choice by mandating how people should live, and an already marginalised group is entitled to question their own subjectivity and ask ‘Who am I?’. In combining employment obligations with caring for a family, employed mothers have access to the two significant identities defined by their role as mother and paid worker. A young sole mother must negotiate those identity ‘options’ against a background of entrenched and negative ideological beliefs about young sole-mothering, the ignominy of stigma, state-imposed diktats and the economic disadvantages inherent in receiving state-provided welfare payments. Furthermore, she must parent successfully and alone; failure to do so brings attendant blame (Arai, 2009). Each day a young sole mother navigates her way through family, educational and societal challenges, opposing viewpoints on the causes

and effects of early pregnancy², moral judgements and ideologies that blame her for mothering, and the prospect of being held wholly responsible for her own current and future disadvantages as well as those of her child. It is no small wonder that the incidence of age-related depression among young mothers is noteworthy (Breheny & Stephens, 2007a).

Sixty years ago, Erik Erikson (1950) considered adolescence as the prime era for identity exploration through “socially distributed processes”. However, according to Avril Thorne and Lauren Shapiro (2011), those processes have remained elusive. Even so, in their study, which explored how adolescents evaluated memorable experiences, the researchers regarded hypothetical thinking as a process significantly contributing to the construction and reconstruction of [a mature] identity. Developmental psychologist, Laurence Steinberg’s (2011) taxonomy is somewhat different. Rather than accounting for socially distributed processes, he examined aspects of hypothetical thinking from individual and neurological perspectives to align it with executive/cognitive functioning.

In earlier research studies, by Erikson (1968) and more recently by Kroger (2007, cited in Thorne & Shapiro, 2011), identity was defined by a lack of uncertainty regarding who one is, what one wants and what one values. Parallel to the question “Who am I?” is the query “Who are you?” These are not new questions; Jenkins, (2008) is mindful that for many decades, women in developed countries have been “striving to establish more equal and self-determined ways of being women” (p. 9).

² For an example of the diversity of opposing viewpoints on causes and effects, *Teenage Pregnancy*, edited by Auriana Ojeda (2003), includes perspectives from teenagers, church representatives, journalists, media commentators, researchers and support organisations.

By striving, Jenkins (2008) suggests, we 'do' identity in our verbal and non-verbal behaviour; it is not something we 'have'. Identity can serve to classify us as belonging, or not belonging, to particular groups. Such positioning by others can be resisted through behaviours and beliefs to indicate that we do not belong within a specific group. Notably he says, "The only reality that we should attribute to a group derives from people thinking that it exists and that they belong to it" (2008, p. 9). Croghan and Miell's (1998) study of women who, positioned as 'bad' mothers by welfare workers and organisations, resisted the categorisation by acknowledging that while 'bad' mothers did exist, the participants believed their own behaviour differentiated them from the 'others'. The designation 'bad' mother did not fit with a personal determination of who they were. How they saw themselves depended on distinguishing and articulating individual differences, while still complying with the dominant/master narrative (Coombes & Morgan, 2004). Jenkins (2008) argues that identity does not depend on difference: Similarity and difference are intertwined. Differences between individuals and groups do not justify treating others in particular ways. In isolation, neither can account for who 'we' are nor who 'they' are. Neither similarity nor difference should be privileged and both can be resisted.

Jenkins analysis is supported by Deanna Kuhn (2009) and is equally applicable to young sole mothers whose adolescent identities are developing and changing. In exploring the social psychology of self, Kuhn (2009) writes that motherhood needs to be understood in social, situational and political contexts particularly when structural/political changes for women in relation to work are introduced. In order to reconstruct individual and social identities, transformative changes entail necessary shifts in self-perceptions so that people can make sense of their own and other people's lives.

1.6.1 Identity and stereotyping:

As defined by Reber and Reber (2001), a stereotype is "a set of relatively fixed, simplistic overgeneralizations about a group or class of people" (p. 710), usually other than their own. Stereotyping ignores behavioural responses that do not fit the stereotyped perception. Rather it is based on misinformed irrational beliefs as in: 'All sole mothers are bludgers/sluts/stupid, she is a sole mother, therefore she is a bludger/slut/stupid'.

This study's research question is premised on the recognition that social changes provoke anxieties and create threats to identity, especially when individuals are positioned in a group that is stereotyped as socially deviant. Recent government requirements that sole mothers are now to make themselves available for paid work and/or training when their child reaches the age of five, represents a significant social change for sole mothers. No longer is the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) regarded as an entitlement enabling parents to stay at home while caring for their children, as was the case in the early 1970s. Politically and practically the restructuring of the welfare system constitutes an ideological volte-face. The discourse emphasises that sole parents are to become paid workers first and childcarers after, predictive of a shift in how sole parents see themselves and are seen by others, and affirming that politics are deeply influential in matters of identity (Jenkins, 2008).

While identity is not a complete explanation for the causes of behaviour, it matters considerably for it involves the human capacity to know "who is who" and concomitantly "what is what" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 5). When individuals are positioned into a group they are often categorised as "other", a common consequence of negative stereotyping. They may call upon several strategies of resistance.

1.7 Silence and resistance:

Speaking out and taking political action have long been considered essential transformative elements in feminist praxis. Each constitutes evidence of 'agency' and 'voice' (Ryan-Flood & Gill, 2010). That said, in a hegemonic socially marginalising environment, speaking out may be an unsafe option and recourse to silence a protective strategy (Gordon, 1980; Jack & Ali, 2010; Stanko, 1985; O'Farrell, 2005).

Carol Gilligan (1982) asserts that women's views, ideals and concerns are less valued than the masculine attributes of individuality and rationality. Moreover when girls and women are encultured into a system that disapproves of 'feisty' women and discourages them from expressing anger or annoyance, women may self-censor because that is what they are 'programmed' to do (Brizendine, 2006). According to Celia Shiffer (2009), mothers world-wide have remained 'strangely silent' (p. 211). She suggests a possible explanation; the only vocabulary readily available is from institutions, experts and patriarchy.

Sole mothers appear to have been politically inactive in New Zealand. While submissions were made to the Working Welfare Group (WWG) by organisations concerned about increasing poverty among single parent families, there was no direct representation from sole mothers, young or older. My formal inquiry under the Freedom of Information Act brought an emailed response outlining organisations that had mentioned sole parents in their broad submissions, and I was advised that the Ministry of Social Development was not aware of "any of the organisations which we contract services to of having recently made representations to or reports specifically on sole parents" (Howlett, 2012, p. 2. See Appendix 1). This suggests that only government service contractors could be expected to respond with feedback on the Working Welfare

Group's proposed options and no-one had submitted papers specifically focusing on sole parents. Even as major stakeholders in the re-structuring processes and outcomes, sole mothers (and fathers) had no opportunity to be heard. They were silent, and had been silenced.

Where Governments and their representatives exclude debate and input from stakeholders, they are, as Foucault contends, exercising power to regulate and control and to discipline people into conformity (Gordon, 1980; O'Farrell, 2005). Silence therefore cannot be construed as signifying apathy or weakness, but in contexts where state-imposed directives are bringing about social change and identity transformation, silence can be an important form of resistance for oppressed individuals (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004; O'Grady, 2005). Stanko (1985) put it directly: Silence is a way "for the powerless to cope with very real situations. Silence is a declaration" (p. 19). It is also a form of personal resistance.

1.8 The new social welfare policy:

In restructuring the welfare system, successive governments have assumed that economic imperatives will ensure better outcomes for individuals, but to date have given minimal consideration to the social effects on families, mothers and mothering. Research on the psychological impact of imposed social change is sparse, and no more so than in relation to sole mothers (Patterson, 2004). Moreover, in designing policies for improvement, governments pay little attention to systemic failures that impact on the wellbeing of mothers and children (Barrett, 2006; Furstenberg, 2007; Lawson & Rhode, 1993). Also rarely considered are the psychosocial factors surrounding stereotyping, stigmatising and marginalisation. Rather, sole mothers are scapegoated, marginalised and stereotyped as lazy, immoral bludgers with only themselves to blame (Piven &

Cloward, 1972; Yardley, 2008). Now all state welfare beneficiaries are situated as a cost - a too-expensive drain on New Zealand's diminishing economic resources (Rebstock, 2010; St John & Craig, 2004). Policymakers rarely consider the impact of contributing environmental factors such as poverty, inadequate housing, insufficient educational opportunities, or the unavailability of work, (Arai, 2009). Psychosocial factors such as stereotyping, stigmatising and marginalisation are also rarely considered. The problem is instead personalised: If you've failed, it's your fault, and concomitantly, if you want state welfare, you must work for it.

After the 2008 election, the implementation of National-led government's welfare-to-work policy changes was postponed because of a world-wide economic downturn. By 2010, the National-led government had restored the reform agenda and set up a Working Welfare Group (WWG) to recommend changes. Headed by former Commerce Commissioner, Paula Rebstock, the group was tasked with providing to government options for restructuring the whole welfare system which, it was argued, at a cost of \$6.476 billion in 2008/09, was no longer affordable, socially, fiscally or economically (Rebstock, 2010).

In recent decades successive governments have considered that paid work was a significant solution for many of Aotearoa-New Zealand's economic ills. Paid employment is currently held to be the duty of all citizens (Rebstock, 2010) and welfare beneficiaries were neglecting that duty. Sole mothers receiving state welfare support were also positioned as having made the 'wrong' choices (Rebstock, 2010); the 'right' choices required them to undertake job training, and/or paid for work for at least 15 hours a week when their youngest child reaches the age of five years.

Also known as 'workfare', welfare-to-work proposals are not new. Before the election of a National-led government in 2008, the Labour government considered and then introduced, a welfare/work programme in 2004, but its implementation was not emphasised in practice. While the rhetoric used by Labour was less forceful than that of the National-led government, Kahu and Morgan's (2007) discursive examination of the *Action Plan for New Zealand Women* concluded that the plan privileged "certain life paths over others and in doing so, rather than freeing women, it simply changes the nature of their constraints" (p. 136). As such, the government was acting dictatorially to remove choice. In September 2012, the National-led government actioned the first of three stages of reform, with further stages to be introduced in 2013. Eligibility criteria remain the same: DPB recipients must be over 18 years of age with dependent child (ren) and not in a partnered relationship. However, those not complying with the paid work and/or job training obligations, risk benefit cuts of at least 50 percent³. Sole parents participating in full-time study are exempt as are those parenting special-needs children (DPB Fact Sheet, March 2010).

While considerable policy and public attention has been focused on sole parents receiving state welfare, and young sole mothers blamed for jeopardising future opportunities for education and employment, little consideration has been given to socio-environmental contexts. Neo-liberal/conservative ideologies continue to contribute to the marginalisation of sole mothers who are held responsible, jointly and severally, for 'not measuring up' to the requirements of citizenship and for under achieving when assessed against the expectations set by the middle classes (Furstenberg, 2007; Yardley, 2008). Furthermore, if overseas experience is anything to

³ Teen mothers under the age of 18 years when their child was born may receive an Emergency Maintenance Allowance (EMA), which is included in the Domestic Purposes Benefit Statistics.

go by, welfare beneficiaries are unlikely to be better off under the proposed welfare-to-work scheme.

Welfare-to-work programmes have been introduced in Australia (Gardiner, 1999; Walter, 2002), United States (Kingfisher, 2002, Quaid, 2002), Canada (Quaid, 2002), Norway (Espen, 2003), and Britain (Dostal, 2008). They too were programmes founded on the notion of reciprocal contracts; if you want state welfare support, you will have to earn it - a version of 'user pays'. The phrase 'mutual obligations' is often located in government policy papers; the implication being that all beneficiaries are to be disciplined into self-sufficiency, independence and individual responsibility⁴. Taken for granted is that mothers in paid work will continue with mothering and household duties, clearly indicating that democratic theories and principles of equity and social justice are gendered and are not applied to the care of families (Okin, 1989). In the USA, the now-defunct Mothers Movement Online (MMO) alerted Americans to the dangers of "raising families in a nation where protecting corporate interests takes priority over the well-being of workers and children" (Tucker, 2008, p. 1). Tucker suggested that such policies typified neo-liberal distaste for social spending.

Walter (2002) who after examining 30 years of Australian governmental ideology on the purpose of welfare assistance, and the shift in the construction of sole mothers as paid workers rather than mothers, found that labour market solutions appeared to "merely replace inadequate monies from income support with an inadequate market income" (p.378). In the United States, more than half the sole mothers participating in transition-to-work programmes soon returned to welfare support (Harris, 1996, cited in Walter,

⁴. Republican voters in America tended to agree that it is best if mothers stay at home to parent their children, but they must work to achieve the privilege (Tucker, 2008).

2002, p. 364). Similar outcomes were reported in Australia, Britain, Norway and Canada (Dostal, 2008; Espen, 2003; Gardiner, 1999; Kingfisher, 2002; Quaid, 2002; Walter, 2002).

1.9 Locating the researcher/author:

This study emerged from an informal discussion with a small group of mature women students attending Massey University in 2009. Curious to know what impressions had been gained by sole mothers when dealing with Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ), I related my daughter's experience of meetings with WINZ 'frontline' staff. She had frequently felt patronised, scarcely tolerated and an inconvenient problem. Many members of the group related similar experiences: They too had been variously ignored, patronised, kept waiting, made to feel unwelcome, stupid, greedy and, occasionally, directly insulted. As a feminist who had worked towards positive social change for more than five decades, I was disturbed that the principles of equity and social justice had achieved so little tenure. That discussion provided the motivation to look further, especially having read that a National-led government would re-structure the welfare system, and was focusing attention on all welfare beneficiaries, particularly sole mothers. The subsequent rhetoric in media reports of party political speeches suggested that as a major cost in the welfare budget vote, sole mothers were the most serious 'offenders' - the scapegoats. At the end of December 2009 when sole mothers comprised 89 percent of Domestic Purposes Beneficiaries, around 44 percent of those were young mothers who, when their youngest child reached school age, would be 'work-tested'. Some 70,000 children would be affected by the changes to their mother's status. Teenage mothers were a particular concern. At the end of 2009 there were 4,169 adolescents aged between 16 and 19 years, receiving the DPB. The same document,

prepared by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) for the Working Welfare Group (WWG), acknowledged that economic downturn had reduced the availability of part-time and full-time work (MSD, April 2010). This raised a question for me: In an environment of increasingly high unemployment, what advantages were there in obliging welfare beneficiaries to be 'work-tested'? Other questions arose: What would the changes mean for sole mothers? What was their life like now? How would they see themselves in future? The present study is the result. By attending to young mothers' own experiences, it aimed to increase an understanding of the everyday stresses and strains of adolescent motherhood and to extend, modify and even alter the existing body of knowledge that categorises young sole mothers as non-contributing citizens.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction:

Chapter One provided an overview of the political events leading to the construction of this study's research framework with particular reference to teenage pregnancy, teen parenting and risk-taking behaviours. I also introduced identity construction, stereotyping, silence and resistance as influences on the ways sole mothers experience and make sense of mothering in a socio-political environment now overtly prioritising paid employment. I outlined the Government's new social welfare policy as a version of 'workfare' programmes elsewhere and raised questions about their influence on young mothers' experience and identity.

Chapter Two reviews the literature to provide a brief overview of the history surrounding diverse constructions of motherhood, mothering and mothers, and identifies factors characterising young sole mothers as deviant. I include the feminist movement's contribution to positive change, examine narrative inquiry, the genderising of poverty, power influences and strategies of silencing, and the rhetoric used to justify the recent government interventions for restructuring state welfare. I then consider research on welfare-to-work programmes implemented by several nearby OECD countries, and outline some issues and problems emerging from the available literature.

2.2 Motherhood, mothering and mothers:

The literature examining motherhood (the institution), mothering (the socially-constructed practices) and mothers (the actors), has established how meanings and actions change over time according to social, ideological and economic determinants (for some historical examples see Shari Thurer, 1996). Through the centuries, the dominant discourses and rhetoric on parenting have emphasised the essentiality of mothering as a ‘natural’ and universal experience for women (Thurer, 1996). Caring, caretaking and nurturing of dependents have remained a primary role of women.

Motherhood and mothering continue to characterise women-as-selves, and as Kittay and Feder (2002) noted, are a “substantial part of *adult* identity” (p.89. Italics added). Until the second wave of feminism in the 1970s, research on the subjective experience of mothering-in-practice was largely absent; as if ‘telling it like [sic] it is’ was tantamount to confessing to be a ‘bad’ mother. Many new mothers were considered to be, and felt, failures when they did not know, instinctively, how to respond to a baby’s needs.

Women’s fulfilment equated with nurturing, caring for and understanding husbands/partners, parents, siblings and children rather than themselves (Oakley, 1986).

Motherhood, mothering and mothers seem to be the most susceptible to changing societal rules, institutional dictates, expectations, conventions, and ideologies which mandate how things ‘should be’. In their collection of essays O’Reilly and Bizzini (2009) propose an inclusive perspective that accepts difference – “lesbian, adoptive, lone, working class, and enslaved, among others” (p. 27) in order to emphasise the diversity of maternal contexts and to show how the “autobiographical tale” (p. 27) connects the political meanings of mothering to private experience. However

inadvertent the omission, early child-bearing is absent from O'Reilly and Bizzini's (2009) list indicating that teenage mothering remains proscribed.

Adrienne Rich (1976) contended that mothering patterns have always been subjected to patriarchal manipulation and control. In examining the discourses, the rhetoric and her own everyday experiences, she distinguished between the socio-political institution of mothering with its attendant ideologies, and the multi-faceted practices of mothering, and argued that the institution of mothering is critical to the control of women by men and essential to all patriarchal systems. Rich (1976) also pointed out that such systems commonly contained contradictions. On the one hand women are nourishing, pure and sacred and on the other the source of physical and moral contamination. Such binaries joined forces to define motherhood, block choices and reshape language and behaviours. Thus, women as mothers are both valorised and devalued especially in systems where only those in the paid workforce are considered productive. Good or bad; powerful or powerless; sacred or profane; pure or polluted, rational or emotional; independent or dependent, mothers are positioned within binaries providing either/or choices with the first term frequently prioritised and privileged. Rarely are they both/and propositions.

2.3 Feminist concerns:

During the second wave of feminism, Angela McBride (1972), Adrienne Rich (1976), and later Ann Oakley (1986), wrote of their emotionally ambivalent feelings about their own children, motherhood and childcare. Each author looked beyond the social scorecards that marked as failures those mothers who had neither an intuitive understanding of their child's needs nor a never-ending devotion to their child. Each asserted that the day-to-day lived experiences of bearing and caring for children were

very different from the commonly held beliefs seen and heard in texts and discourses. Their consensus? Mothering was not instinctive, intuitive, natural or pre-determined⁵. In documenting their experiences McBride (1973), Rich (1976), Oakley (1986), and later Thurer (1996) made more readily available to mothers the view that maternal instinct/intuition was a product of mythology. They argued that the romance surrounding motherhood should be seen for what it was, an oftentimes cruel fiction, largely driven by the hegemony of patriarchy. Furthermore the images commonly presented in popular literature and in visual media, constituted nothing more than “sanctimonious whitewashing” (Oakley, 1986, p. 6) and were as damaging for women as the belief that to be a ‘complete’ woman one must become a mother. It continues to be the contention of natalists that bearing and rearing children is a ‘natural’ and fundamental requirement for being female. The natalists argue that motherhood is essential to womanhood and represents the ultimate fulfilment of a female’s biological destiny (Thurer, 1996). The ‘obligation’ for women to breed also included a doctrinaire notion that ‘good’ mothers were self-sacrificing, always available and always content with their children who brought “nothing but joy” (Oakley, 1986, p. 6). Eyer (1992) too cast doubt on biologically based claims regarding maternal instinct/intuition arguing that it was a belief conservatives continued to reify as a way of protecting old sex-based power relations. McBride (1973), Rich (1976) and Oakley (1996) emphasised that mothering was learned through experience, social interactions with other mothers and/or advisers, observation and often, guess work. Perfect mothers and fathers were mythological characters in storybooks, magazines and on advertising billboards. In telling the stories of their lived experiences, the three writers won over many millions of

⁵ Thurer (1996) noted that some 800 books on mothering were published in the last decades of the 20th century, indicating that motherhood continued to be a highly sanctioned and prescribed activity.

mothers whose experiences matched those of the authors. Feminists and socio-linguists were also attracted to qualitative studies and in particular, narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008) which along with inductive rather than deductive techniques could improve research praxis and outcomes by attending to the diversity of women's mothering experiences.

2.4 Narrative inquiry:

The increasing awareness of the social function of language, brought story-telling into focus as a more appropriate and sensitive way of representing human experience. Sarbin (1986) described it as a 'root metaphor' for psychology researchers. Story-telling helps to construct and make sense of living, and studies involving narrative inquiry, according to Riessman (2008) are more often favoured as a way for participants to relate that an event or occurrence was sufficiently important to justify recalling and telling to the researcher as listener/audience. It is this aspect of story-telling as meaning-making, as well as the story content that most interests narrative researchers.

While narratives are co-constructed in situ between the interviewer and the interviewee, and later interpreted from transcripts, Riessman (2008) proposes two contrasting theories underpinning the re-presentation of stories: The first is 'constitutive' and centres on how the speaker wants her /his autobiographical self to be known. The second is 'reflective', based on the belief that the self pre-exists and therefore is less dependent on social interaction(s). Riessman's question 'Is the self co-constructed or reflected?' leaves the researcher pondering. On reflection, my solution was to acknowledge the possibility of both, that is, the self may well be co-constructed and reflected. To eliminate one or the other seemed restrictive, limiting access to contextual influences and risking a positivistic 'tunnel vision'.

Just as importantly however, in the knowledge that the normative biography of the participants had been “ruptured” (Riessman, 2008, p. 27) or at least disturbed on many fronts by the political restructuring of the welfare system, it seemed to me that as this was a narrative study, addressing where I was ‘coming from’ necessitated a reflexive appraisal. I needed to be consciously aware that the basis on which the participants’ life stories were to be heard and then re-presented would be strongly influenced by my own beliefs, feelings and attitudes. They were feminist-based, and included anger that in hegemonic ideologies paid work was now overtly more valued than mothering, particularly for adolescent women; dismay that freedom of choice was being further eroded; that sole mothers continued to be perceived and described in pejorative terms; bewildered by the arrogance implied in statements suggesting that young sole mothers (and all state welfare recipients) were failing in their citizenship duties by not earning taxable money; and perturbed by the rhetoric doubly-blaming adolescent mothers first for having sex and then for having a baby. All this was underscored by a concern that there appeared to have been no consideration for, and application of, the principles of social justice and freedom of speech. Given a feminist resistance to the limitations imposed in the enforcement of binary choices, I chose to acknowledge that interpreting and re-presenting participants’ experiences would contain both consciously available inputs and unconscious ones.

2.5 Adolescent mothering:

In 2001, UNICEF noted that the incidence of teenage motherhood was higher where there are greater income disparities and lower school participation. In June 2010, the Ministry of Social Development reported that among developed countries, New Zealand had the second highest rate of teenage births at 29.6 per thousand. In the 1950s, nearly

50 percent of all teenage marriages in the USA were as a consequence of pregnancy. The arrival of more effective contraceptive methods and increasing access to legalised abortion from the 1980s onward appeared to have little effect on the incidence of teenage births. Historically however, according to Furstenberg (2007), the availability of resources such as cheap land and plentiful work have been directly linked to child-bearing and marriage patterns.

Today, marriage is seen as a 'high risk' choice for young parents, they are often unstable relationships that are exacerbated by problems of poverty, an uncompleted education and financial difficulties (Furstenberg et al., 1987, cited in Steinberg, 2011). Such marriages are more likely to fail and most often it is the young mother who is left to cope, and yet individually and as a 'group' teen mothers are seen as epitomising irresponsible and impulsive, even 'stupid' behaviours.

While motherhood, mothering and mothers have long been idealised as a natural attribute of being female, child-bearing in adolescence is problematised in most industrialised countries (Collins 2010; Furstenberg, 2007; Offer, Ostrov, Howard & Atkinson 1988; Rouch, 2003, 2005). The concern appears to be based on moral considerations surrounding early sexuality and a perceived lack of preparation, maturity and readiness for parenthood. Not only had teenagers been engaging too early in sexual behaviours normatively defined as reserved for adults, but by becoming pregnant they were also sexually irresponsible. It was 'children having children' (Pearce, 1993), 'kids having kids', 'babies having babies'.

Early child-bearing is as old as time itself (Lawson & Rhode, 1993). Different cultural mores apply, with many cultures considering adolescents to be autonomous and responsible, while others perceive them as vulnerable, dependent children needing care

and protection (Wool & Scott, 2009, cited in Steinberg, 2009). Changing attitudes to teenage sexuality tend to occur when adolescents are unlikely to achieve adequate financial independence. Drawing on results from their cross-national studies of some 6,000 teenagers, Orloff, Ostrov, Howard and Atkinson (1988) considered that when a measure of financial, psychological and social independence from parents is obtained, adulthood was achieved. In some countries, the first pay packet signposts adulthood (Rouch, 2003)⁶.

Lawson and Rhode (1993) remind us that teenage sexual behaviour has been a particular focus of attention since the late 1960s and early 1970s, a time of contemporaneous social upheaval when teenagers began to be seen as irresponsible, immature and unreliable. Adolescent pregnancy became a symptom of what was seen to be one of myriad minority group problems largely confined to lower socio-economic sectors (Furstenberg, 2007). By expanding their research into hitherto unexamined areas contributing to early child-bearing, Furstenberg (2007), Lawson and Rhode (1993) among others, found that while there were variations, adolescent births in England and the United States were not confined to one social class or ethnic group, had remained relatively stable over time and were attributable to multiple aetiologies. In locating teen parenthood within historical, economic and social contexts, an apparent upsurge in numbers in the late 20th century was seen also to coincide with a diminishing attractiveness of marriage, as evidenced in fewer 'shotgun' marriages.

In Aotearoa-New Zealand, the introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) in the early 1970s provided a government-sanctioned payment for sole mothers to assist

⁶. In Aotearoa-New Zealand the teenage years carry with them contiguous age-specific legal and social edicts, for example the recent introduction of a youth rate of pay, which further positions adolescents as different from adults and children and making it more difficult for beginning work to serve as a marker of adulthood.

them in staying at home to parent full-time. It was regarded as a necessary investment in the country's social and economic wellbeing. Today, parenting full-time at home is an option available to mothers in partnered, more affluent relationships. Sole mothers do not have the same choice.

Apart from examining the 'problems' clustered around the purported consequential disadvantages of early child-bearing and rearing, little has been published on the realities of day-to-day life for young women as sole parents, in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Exceptions include research by Lesley Patterson (2004, 2009), Barbara Collins (2005) and Angela Crabtree (2008), - and it is always possible there are others I have not found. In his studies, Gareth Rouch (2003, 2005) noted that nationally and internationally even less research exists on teenage fathers.

2.5.1 Adolescent risk-taking:

As introduced in Chapter One, in the USA, Australia, Canada, Britain and New Zealand, adolescence is characterised by high risk-taking behaviour, for example, drugs and alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking, hazardous driving, promiscuous sexual activity, all of which position them as socially and emotionally too immature for parenthood. Motherhood is considered the preserve of adults; teenage mothers are seen as creating problems, which neo-liberals propose to 'solve' by getting them into paid employment, participating in training and education, thus moulding them into the normative 'shapes' that are approved by researchers, commentators, policy makers/politicians, social workers and bureaucrats (Lawson & Rhode, 1993). The effect of morally constructed terminology and positioning, Pearce (1993) contended, was to infantilise teenage mothers while at the same time, disempowering them. Most recently, research on adolescence risk-taking has included physiological, neurological and

biological perspectives (Steinberg, 2009). With the advent of functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) scans, for example, researchers have been able to take investigations into adolescent behaviour beyond the disciplines of behavioural, social, developmental and abnormal psychology. Current knowledge emerging from a decade of investigations is that the human brain is not fully mature until individuals reach early adulthood (Steinberg, 2009). This he notes is attributable to temporal disparities between the earlier development of an easily aroused reward/emotional system and the later maturing of the cognitive/ self-regulatory system (Steinberg, 2009). As previously mentioned, he also found that the age of peak fecundity, around 16 to 17 years, coincides with a higher incidence of risktaking.

After 35 years studying adolescence, and following his recent participation in biological examinations of the developmental construction of the brain, Steinberg is encouraging discussion between social science investigators, medical science researchers and policymakers vis a vis adolescence (Steinberg, 2012). He argues that like the behavioural sciences, neuroscience can “usefully inform policy discussions” (p. 739) but cautions that special care should be taken when presenting the evidence to non-experts as there was a risk that medical science information might take precedence over social science findings. One tradition he argues should inform and stimulate efforts in the other. Both disciplines could usefully enlighten the policy developers involved in designing interventions for reducing adolescent recklessness. In subsequent articles Steinberg (2009, 2012) goes further by arguing that the immaturity of the adolescent brain suggests increasing protections for young people.

It is worth noting, however, that in detail, neurobiological investigators hypothesise that “risky behavior in adolescence is the product of the interaction between changes in two distinct neurobiological systems: a “socioemotional” system which is localised in limbic

and paralimbic areas of the brain, including the amygdala, ventral stratum, orbitofrontal cortex, medial prefrontal cortex, and superior temporal sulcus; and a “cognitive control” system which is mainly composed of the lateral prefrontal and parietal cortices and those parts of the anterior cingulate cortex to which they are connected” (Steinberg, 2011, p. 45). This is to say that the socially normative view that adolescents are risk-takers is assumed at the level of the hypothesis, not tested by it. The irony between the application of social sanctions imposed on teenage sexuality and the biological findings noted by Steinberg (2012) is inescapable. Through assuming that adolescents are risk-takers, neurological researchers do challenge the discourses that disempower young mothers.

2.6 The feminisation of poverty:

Young mothers are also disempowered by poverty. A substantial amount of literature in recent decades has recorded the feminisation of poverty (see, for example, Cowley & Blair, 2007; Donzelot, 1980; Funicello, 1993; Gans, 1995; Goldberg & Kremen, 1990; Kingfisher, 1996, 2002, 2004; Larner, 2002; Lefkowitz & Withorn, 1986; Okin, 1986; Phillips, 1991; Rhode, 1997; Stallard, Ehrenreich & Sklar, 1983; St John & Rankin, 2002, 2004; St John, 2005; Steinberg, 2008; Thurer, 1996). The afore-mentioned texts are presented solely to illustrate the extensive awareness that poverty is gendered and that the poorest of the poor are mothers: Welfare mothers, sole mothers, widowed mothers, single mothers, immigrant mothers, indigenous mothers, low-paid mothers, teenage mothers - and their children (Larner, 2002). In families headed by sole mothers, it is axiomatic that where the mothers are poor, their children are poor (Funicello, 1993).

In her critique of state welfare policies Susan Okin (1989) pointed out that where democratic theories and principles of justice were not applied to gender relations, the continuation of welfare inequalities was assured. More recently Kingfisher (1996, 2002, 2004) and Quaid (2002) made similar assertions of gender bias in reference to sole mothers facing barriers to remunerative employment further marginalising sole mothers and forcing them into a pathology of dependence (Kingfisher, 1996). The policies proposed by successive governments, and those actioned by the National-led government in 2010, have restricted income payments and limited financial opportunities for many teenage mothers, for example those under 16 who must either live at home with minimal or no state assistance, or live separately with inadequate financial allowances. Because many adolescent mothers are categorised as minors, it is her parents - the newborn's grandparents - who are expected to provide first⁷. Often the baby's father opts out; if the baby's father is not named, the Domestic Purposes Benefit is reduced. If the baby's father does contribute, payments are often irregular.

Today the consensus in the Western world is that early child-bearing remains a significant social problem. To date sole mothers of all ages are characterised as deficient, either socially, personally or both. They are problematised, marginalised, scapegoated and stereotypically 'branded' or, as Gans (1995) suggested, positioned as the 'undeserving poor'. In New Zealand, a free market economy, they are regarded as an expensive drain on the country's diminishing economic resources (Rebstock, 2010; St John, 2004). Furthermore, they are to blame for their own failures and inadequacies, therefore they can expect to relinquish the rights allowed to those who conform to normative standards and who do not live in poverty.

⁷ If under 18 years of age, teenage mothers, may be entitled to an Emergency Maintenance Allowance (EMA) providing some financial assistance while they remain at home.

It seems that pregnant adolescents and sole mothers are clustered into negative stereotypes to be characterised by dominant narratives as an intergenerational 'underclass' (Key, 2008). Poverty, financial dependence, drug-taking, unemployment, cigarette smoking, inability to find work, alcohol consumption, dropping out of high school, and female-headed households typify the underclass (Pearce, 1993), which are ideologically placed as expensive and unaffordable inconveniences. If it's bad, it's underclass. These ideological assumptions could be said to conflate distinct analytical and empirical aspects to contribute to "a lack of precision about the nature of the perceived problem of adolescent pregnancy" (Macintyre, 1993, p. 61). Even so teen parents continue to face considerable opprobrium with adolescent mothers a central concern (Rouch, 2003).

Lisa Baraitser (2009) called on policymakers, and society, to seriously consider the real-life actualities for every mother, regardless of age, who must cope with the necessary needs of a child, day-in and day-out. Like McBride (1972) and Rich (1979), Baraitser (2009) also drew on her own experience as a mother. She contended that mothers can be allowed to make mistakes and thus be able to "right herself" (p. 68) innumerable times in order to adjust to the knowledge that mothering is ongoing work which may never be completed. The challenges of mothering, at any age, are complex and recurring and they cannot be simply addressed by insisting women work to alleviate their apparently self-imposed poverty.

2.7 Identity construction:

Problematizing risk-taking behaviours and locating them within a specific group such as adolescence, paves the way for increased stereotyping, based on the assumption that certain behaviours are characteristic of a particular class or group of individuals. When

individuals are defined by an ostensible membership of a particular category or group, they are likely to be considerably influenced by such positioning and to ponder the complexities of their own subjectivity. As Steinberg (2011) notes adolescents are “far more self-conscious” (pp. 246-247) about biological, physical and individual social changes and will “feel them much more acutely” (p. 247).

Baraitser (2009) suggested that maternity provided women with a unique opportunity for the construction of a new subjectivity in relation to another. Women who become mothers have to rethink who they are in relation to partners/husbands/siblings. Ergo, coming to terms with who one is, includes questioning and rethinking societal impositions (McBride, 1973). Mothers must surrender their own needs in order to meet the demands of ‘significant others’ including those of the dependent child for whom she has ultimate responsibility. And where a male parent is absent, a sole mother must meet the needs of her social environment and her child alone. Sole mothers on the DPB now obliged to enter remunerative work are also open to rethinking who they are in relation to paid employment, their school obligations, new social relationships and their childcare duties plus home maintenance.

Where dominant discourses presume to know what people should and should not be doing, it is not surprising that where sole mothers are positioned as different and therefore deviant, they will experience doubts about their place in the world, their identity, their competence and even their own sanity (Rich, 1979; Stoppard & McMullen, 2003). In this study, the major aim was to locate in the storying of daily experiences, the areas in which young sole mothers might shape an identity. In other words, in the face of institutionally-imposed structural change, how would they see themselves now and in the future? Harre and Moghaddam (2003) suggested that we have two inter-related identities - the personal/individual and the social/collective, with

the latter taking psychological precedence. How people see themselves and construct an identity is interactive and influenced largely by how they are seen (Gergen 1985), and positioned by others (Harre & van Langenhove, 2003). By comparing ourselves to others and by thinking “what kind of a person would I like to be?” we seek to establish secure, constant and consistent identities and stereotyping influences beliefs about one’s self. Though stereotyping ‘styles’ may change over time they act like external motivating forces to influence behaviour, and are thus akin to self-fulfilling prophecies.

Occasionally stereotypes can provide useful heuristics, but are more often negative, hurtful, prejudicial and even ‘malignant’ (Sabat, 2003) when used against individuals positioned as deviating from the norm. Stereotyping influences the construction of what one believes about one’s self and “when the external world does not provide safety, reliability and a climate of trust”, coping mechanisms emerge (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 153). Often individuals positioned as ‘failures’ will try harder in order to disprove the stereotype, or in situations over which they believe they have little or no control, they may accept the status quo as immutable and feel helpless and hopeless (Dweck, 2002, cited in Steinberg, 2011, p. 378). Stereotypes stigmatise and marginalise especially among those whose presence may be highly visible on the basis of appearance, for example obesity, skin colour, clothing style or membership of a socially-disapproved of group. Less obvious is the stigma and powerlessness often attached to situations of poverty. Amsel and Smetana (2011) suggest the combination of stereotyping, stigmatising and marginalising may lead to sequential events and experiences that extend well beyond adolescence. Girls, they suggest, are likely to be particularly disadvantaged especially if they are members of a stigmatised group and positioned as powerless.

2.8 Power and social control:

Throughout history, because of power disparities, women's roles including motherhood, have been revised and reformed to compulsorily aid economic development, while at the same time women continued with primary responsibility for producing and nurturing children. Adrienne Rich (1976) contends that "The language of patriarchal power insists on a dichotomy: for one person to have power, others - or another - must be powerless" (p. 67).

Rich (1976) also suggests, the power relations existing in patriarchal societies are often mirrored in those between mother and child. Just as hegemony can dictate what is good for society, so too can a mother convey to her children what they must do, because she knows what is good for them. However, Rich (1976) proposed that power is exercised in all transactions and that those with greater power, perceived or real, are more likely to be males.

Using a somewhat different theory of power, Helen O'Grady (2005) draws on Michel Foucault's panoptical power analogy in her book *Women's Relationship with Herself*, to debate the effect of women's self-surveillance as a form of social control. Top-down systems respond to increasing numbers of welfare dependents as threats to opportunities for increasing profit levels. They are systems that also exert 'bio-power' by regulating biological processes such as fertility. A recent example directly illustrates Foucault's bio-power surveillance by governments in its expressed intention to control the sexuality and fertility of sole mothers: Should a DPB recipient have another child while receiving state support, she will be required to enter paid work when that child reaches one year old (Bennett, 2012). By internalising this government edict, sole mothers become self-policing and stigmatised as people not allowed to have children - again a

pathologising of difference (O'Grady, 2005). It means that "when a person fails to conform to accepted identity modes, aspects or even the whole, of their sense of self can be experienced as "wrong" (O'Grady, 2005, p. 19). This sense of being 'wrong' would be supported by chair-person of the Working Welfare Group, Paula Rebstock's assertion that welfare beneficiaries and particularly sole mothers have made 'wrong' choices: The 'right' life choices involve participation in paid employment outside the home (Rebstock, 2010).

Following Foucault, McNay (1993) also argues that power is exercised in all transactions; those with greater perceived power are more likely to be males using their positions to perpetuate gender roles, and/or to dominate, oppress and censor. Powerlessness implies inability to think, to act, and to choose. Today for the most part, middle class women are able to choose if, when and how they will have children and whether or not they will be stay-at-home mothers and parent full-time. Two parent families can often choose whether either or both partners will enter paid employment. Like other sole mothers, teenage parents receiving the DPB are not able to make those choices. Whether or not women choose reproduction, the bearing and rearing of children will continue to be constitutive of many women's self-concept and will influence the ways they are seen by others (McMahon, 1995). While it is a truism that only women can mother and that caring for children is largely gendered, it is recognised that for many men and boys becoming a parent is personally, practically and relationally transformative (Rouch, 2003, 2005). For women, however, the changes are the most life-changing with roles, identities, duties, expectations and status significantly altered when becoming a mother. With institutionally-imposed transformations, the price paid is often a "virtual annihilation of self" (Kitzinger, 1992, p. 7). Overnight, even in the absence of political interventions, a new mother will be expected to surrender her own

needs in order to meet the demands of her 'significant other' and those of the dependent child for whom she has ultimate responsibility. When a male parent is absent, she faces those challenges alone and where dominant discourses presume to know best what people should and should not do, it is not surprising that sole mothers, positioned as different and/or deviant, will experience doubts about their place in the world, their identity, their competence and even their own sanity (Rich, 1979; Stoppard, 2010).

2.8.1 Silencing sole mothers:

Feminists have always considered that actively speaking out implies an awareness of one's own power; however in the present context sole mothers' silence can be variously explained as a significant form of communication. Almost 50 years ago Watzlawick, Bavelas and Jackson, (1967) stated in "Pragmatics of Human Communication", "*one cannot not communicate*" (p. 51. Italics in original). Silence is both a communication and an action.

Sole parents were not directly represented at a public discussion organised by the Working Welfare Group following the publication of its discussion paper on the options for restructuring the welfare system. It seems that the views of only those with Ministry of Social Development contracts were actively sought. In effect sole mothers were silenced – all 87,000 to 89,000 of them.

Given their dependence on State welfare, it is also possible that the young sole mothers were reluctant to do anything that might be construed as "biting the hand that feeds". In silence there is safety, especially when speaking out risks emotional alienation, verbal and/or physical violence, loss of relationship, hurt (Jack & Ali, 2010), categorisation as a troublemaker, and for sole mothers, the risk of economic deprivation for herself and

her children. Amsel and Smetana (2011) suggest that in a marginalised group, agentic individuals (and the researchers regard adolescents as agentic) “may avoid the pain of stigmatisation by removing oneself from the site in which stigmatization is occurring (for example, the high school) or by reducing the importance or value placed on that site” (Amsel & Smetana, 2011, p. 193). Nevertheless the message contained in neither seeking nor acknowledging input from a significant stakeholder, is that sole mothers are not worth listening to. In doing so, they are further disempowered.

Combine uncertainty, poverty, exclusion, censorship, double responsibility for childcare, finding and attending paid work, efforts to be a good-enough mother, a sense of social injustice and social disapproval, and sole mothers are likely to experience resulting anger-related depression, especially where they are seen as deficient when measured against socially-prescribed expectations of perfectionism (Jack & Ali, 2011).

2.8.2 Anger and depression:

The experience of anger-related depression serves to individualise and pathologise the plight of many, even when it is obvious that social contexts have been significant contributors. Steinberg (2011) states that as many as 25 percent of adolescents will be affected by a stress-related depressive illness by the time they reach adulthood. Female teenagers are more vulnerable than their male peers are, and recent national surveys in the United States reported that twice as many adolescent girls as boys have made attempts at suicide. The single most important contributor to suicide is the "break-up of a romantic relationship" (Steinberg, 2011, p. 432).

Dana Crowley Jack (1993) found in her study, *Silencing the Self*, that the suppression of anger was a significant contributor to women’s depression. The anger was most often

related to the impossibility of being a good wife/mother/woman leading to feelings of inadequacy and failure. Where socialisation processes dictate that women must live up to acculturated images of feminine goodness and passivity expressing anger is outlawed. Women who do express anger are being emotional as opposed to rational, and aggressive rather than passive. Jack (1993) contends that where anger remains unexpressed the self is silenced, annihilated and depression follows. Kitzinger (1992), citing Oakley (1986) suggests that the post-partum 'baby blues' experienced by four out of five new mothers, are readily attributable to the mother's social conditions, and precipitators of stress such as financial insecurity, inadequate housing, community disapproval and social isolation, are rarely taken into account as contributing to depressive and physical illnesses.

Loss of self also conveys and connotes the loss of voice, a self-censoring that arises from feelings of self-doubt and of not being heard. As Jack (1993) explains it, self/identity is threatened when women try "to fit into an image provided by someone else - the husband, parental teachings, the culture" (p. 32). Where doubt exists, women are reluctant to argue and in a society that continues to judge as deviant those who break the rules and are therefore deserving of blame, the judged will tend to see themselves as at fault.

The ideologically-based strategies drawn on by the powerful in public rhetoric includes dismissing, blaming, marginalising and ignoring dissention and disagreement, all of which effectively disempowers others, could readily be described as determined and subtle.

2.9 Positioning young mothers in political debate:

In recent decades, social, economic and demographic shifts have marked the need for policy changes in the nature and purpose of welfare support and since the 1980s media commentators, economists and politicians, in particular adherents to New Right policies, warned that state welfare was no longer financially sustainable (Lunt, O'Brien & Stephens, 2008). Welfare dependency they and others argued (see for example, Key 2008) had become an intergenerational problem; the children brought up in households dependent on state support now expected welfare support to continue, and consequently members of such households were unwilling to seek employment. More than a decade ago Herbert Gans observed a change in the rhetoric employed by neo-liberals and the New Right in the United States, and pointed to the targeting of particular people as the source of the problem in the war against poverty. The war against poverty had become the war against poor individuals (Gans, 1995).

In 2004, Kingfisher reported that in relation to welfare beneficiaries, the dominant discourse in the United States and in New Zealand clearly emphasised individual responsibility rather than collectivist caring. Implicit in that shift was the need to reposition and redefine the people dependent on state welfare benefits.

Party political statements and the discourse of the Welfare Working Group (WWG) position sole mothers as non-contributors to a capitalist economy who have thus failed in their citizenship duty. This being so, they are to be castigated for having made 'wrong choices' individually (Rebstock, 2010) at the same time as their personal choices and identities are positioned within political and economic discourse.

For some individuals and groups, social welfare systems are anathema: a New Zealand Round Table (NZRT) foundation member, Roger Kerr described the welfare state as “one of the seven deadly economic sins of the 20th century” (quoted in Boston, Dalziel & St John, 1999). In a publication commissioned by NZRT, entitled from *Welfare State to Civil Society*, Green (1996) proposed that “human nature at its best is about assuming personal responsibility for both self improvement and making the world a better place for others” (p. vii). He strongly advocated reforming the Domestic Purposes Benefit referring specifically to “girls contemplating pregnancy” (p. 133). In the new millennium rather than continuing its social welfare orientation, New Zealand has confirmed its place as an enterprise state driven by capitalist imperatives, with responsibility for one’s fate increasingly off-loaded onto corporate business and individuals (Kingfisher, 2002, 2004).

Barrett (2006) describes government investment as emphasising social development, rather than social welfare. In the new millennium, a Labour-led government changed the name of the Department of Social Welfare to the Ministry of Social Development, discursively signaling an intention to intervene into people’s lives rather than ameliorate disadvantage. Social historian and feminist Anne Else described New Zealand’s current political focus as indicating: “If people don’t like being so poor, they should get off their backsides and work for a living, like the rest of us” (A. Else, personal communication, March 3 2013). The prevalent discourse, and recent Ministry of Social Development actions, now confirm that people reliant on state financial support, that is those not participating in paid employment, (Rebstock, 2010) or those born wealthy, have been positioned as inadequate citizens who will get what they deserve - retraining and compulsory redeployment or a lifetime of poverty.

Frequently labelled neo-liberal and/or New Right (see, for example, Kingfisher 2002, 2004) such beliefs have become embedded in an individualistic blaming rhetoric that also contends if children are less than perfect, their mothers are at fault (McBride, 1973; Oakley, 1986; Rich, 1979). ‘Good’ mothers raise ‘good’ children; ‘bad’ mothers raise ‘bad’ children (Croghan & Miell 1998). Consequently, mothers are positioned in political discourse as individually responsible for their choices, their poverty, and their children’s futures. Yet research continues to find that policy interventions based on political discourses focusing primarily on individual responsibility have consistently failed to address the problems young mothers’ experiences.

2.10 Other welfare-to-work programmes:

For decades researchers, for example Lefkowitz and Withorn (1986), du Plessis (1992), Kingfisher (1996, 2002, 2004), Sainsbury (1999), and St John and Rankin (2009) have argued vociferously that welfare-to-work strategies are not only hegemonic, patriarchal and sexist, but in not achieving their own stated goals they are also seriously flawed. Considerable evidence exists for their failure: Kingfisher (1996) in her analysis of women recipients and welfare workers in the United States in the 1990s concluded that welfare-to-work programmes continued to trap women in poverty. Studies in Australia have shown that policies promoting part-time work for sole parents serve to “entrench the cycle of dependence they were designed to dismantle” (Gardiner, 1999, p. 43). Sociologist Maggie Walter (2002), after examining results from her study on Australian labour market incomes, writes that considerable doubt exists on the “assumed link between material well-being and paid work for sole mother households” (p. 361) and suggests that working their way out of poverty via paid employment is probably neither accessible nor “a realistic option” (p. 378). In the United States and Canada, Maeve

Quaid's (2002) analysis of the content and outcomes of six workfare programmes in the USA [3] and Canada [3] with one possible exception [Wisconsin] did not achieve their primary goal of moving welfare recipients into 'real' jobs. They merely moved people off welfare lists to reduce caseload numbers (Quaid, 2002). In New Zealand, economist Susan St John along with other spokespeople from the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), have insisted that child poverty will not be solved by obliging the parent carer to undertake training for and into employment (see for example, St John et al., 2004, 2008).

Furthermore the obstacles militating against sole parents gaining paid work have been recognised by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (2008) which has acknowledged that current barriers include lack of available jobs, insufficient access to adequate childcare facilities, poor pay and conditions for part-time work, short-term job insecurities, and the expense of getting to and from work and public transport timetabling. Patterson (2004) adds to the list, unsociable working hours and lone responsibility for parenting. Two years ago, the Ministry of Social Development acknowledged to the Working Welfare Group that the economic recession had reduced the availability of part-time and full-time employment (MSD, April 2010). For young people obtaining paid work has become even more difficult.

2.11 Identifiable issues and shortcomings:

Of the many written texts about motherhood, mothering and mothers surveyed specifically for this study, most if not all, have been premised on an assumption that mothers are, or by implication should be, adults over 21 years of age. Many of the reports held, directly or tacitly, that the proper care of children required an age-delineated maturity, which by definition adolescents lacked. In other words,

chronological age provides the singular criterion for decisions on whether or not individuals are sufficiently mature to bear and raise children. Furthermore, in the light of Steinberg's (2011) assertion that in their mid-teens adolescents are at peak fertility/fecundity, the disparities characterising socio-biological perspectives and developmental psychology's findings alongside the cultural disapproval of early parenthood, implicate irreconcilable theory-based differences. Even as the variations in mothering roles and styles are increasingly recognised to include lesbian relationships, surrogate mothering, in vitro fertilisation, adoptive parenting and blended families, adolescent mothers are either omitted or ignored.

Ideas about mothering are "always in a state of flux" (Kinser, 2010, p. 26) and women in particular are vulnerable to the many changing social, environmental, ideological and economic determinants. Where the dominant discourses contend that welfare recipients per se and sole mothers in particular, have made "wrong choices" (Rebstock, 2011) which require compulsion and coercion for their implementation, by inference the 'right' choices can be said to be significantly influenced by political and power-based ideologies. Adolescent sole mothers have not escaped notice but the existing research, in New Zealand and overseas, tends toward an unquestioned acceptance that early pregnancy and parenting is a far-reaching personal, social and economic catastrophe. The focus on present and future disadvantage problematises teenagers and risks reaffirming and reinforcing the pathological aspects of behaviour said to characterise the socially constructed group of young individuals. Where researchers point out that policymakers and ideologues have failed to account for environmental, social, structural, and other economic determinants (see for example, Barrett, 2006; Furstenberg, 1987, 2007; Yardley, 2008) that contribute to present and future disadvantage for young sole mothers, insufficient research exists on specifics – that is,

the 'how, what, where, when and why' of young mothering. It seems easier to discount the complex issues and rely on a culture that blames individuals - the 'who'.

2.12 Chapter summary:

In Chapter Two, I canvassed the history surrounding diverse constructions of motherhood, mothering and mothers, to identify factors that characterise young sole mothers as deviant or deficient. I briefly summarised the feminist movement's contribution to positive change, including the emergence of narrative inquiry, recognition of the gendering of poverty, and the operations of patriarchal power. The rhetoric 'justifying' recent government interventions for restructuring state welfare was noted and I examined some research on welfare-to-work programmes implemented by several nearby OECD countries. Finally, I commented on some of the issues that emerged from my reading of the available literature on mothers, teen parenting and the present lack of research on a range of 'environmental' influences that affect disadvantaged outcomes for adolescent parents and their children.

In Chapter Three, I consider the methodologies that contributed to formulating the project's research processes and summarise the study's methods.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

3.1 Introduction:

Chapter Two reviewed literature on motherhood and discussed gendered power imbalances, as well as stereotyping, silencing, and identity formation. Also examined were recent neurological research and its contribution to understanding adolescent development and risk-taking. Considerable attention has been paid to the constructions of motherhood, which Andrews (2004) considers one of the most dominant of all cultural narratives. The constructions of motherhood have been illustrated as historically changing. Chapter Three summarises the organising principles underlying my research. I attend first to social constructionism, explain the study's qualitative approach, the use of narrative inquiry and include some of its limitations. In touching on the concept of dominant/master narratives and counter narratives, I discuss the uses of silence and being silenced as resistance strategies and explore feminist contributions to research methodologies including Foucault's concepts of power, all of which provided the personal and political impetus for this study.

The method section explains my reliance on thematic analysis for the representation of participants' stories, and canvasses matters of data saturation to validate the study's small sample. I also address reflexivity matters and positioning vis a vis the considerable age disparity between myself, as interviewer/researcher, and the adolescent participants.

3.2 Social constructionism:

In debating the historically conformist nature of scientific reality, social constructionists eschew traditional notions of the existence of objective certainties that are assumed to exist 'out there' in a singular, stable 'reality'. Instead social constructionism enables a focus on the social, cultural and historical determinants contributing to the ways people "describe, explain or otherwise account for themselves, others and the world (including themselves) in which they live" (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). Social constructionism acknowledges the complexities of living and takes into account personal and group interactions, social mores, cultural influences, individual subjectivities, institutional rules and the multiplicity of everyday experiences. Ways of thinking and acting, and ideas about who we are, are thus socially produced, and available for exploration through research processes. Social constructionism is also a significant component of feminist research following its epistemological criticism of a hitherto taken-for-granted positivist approach to knowledge acquisition. Traditional research methodologies were purportedly objective and value-free; feminists considered them to be sexist, discriminatory, value-ridden and restrictive. As well as contesting the social adequacies of the bulk of quantitative research undertaken to extend scientific knowledge, feminist contributions to the social constructionist paradigm was premised on the grounds that a social constructivist approach provided a more appropriate model for achieving a greater understanding of the human condition.

What we say and what we do may at times be incongruent⁸, but, it was argued, actions and thoughts are constructed as a consequence of social relationships, be they verbal,

⁸ Festinger, Riecken and Schachter, (1956) considered cognitive dissonance occurred when beliefs or behaviours are adjusted so as to lessen anxiety in situations of belief or behavioural conflict

aural, visual or behavioural. Thus in the processes of sense-making, and in interactions with others (including interviews), meanings are socially-constructed, identities can be affirmed or transformed and behaviours modified or reinforced (Riger, 1992).

Political conservatives and neo-liberals emphasise individual responsibility for one's own fate and demonstrate a reluctance to consider environmental, social and economic factors as significant contributors to human lives, interactions and experience. As a framework for understanding how a sense of self is developed, social constructionism's theories and practices, which include qualitative studies, can alert the researcher to the intersecting complexities that occur between - and among - individuals and groups.

3.3 Qualitative research:

Riger (1992) argues that when personal interactions are quantified the "experiences are not fully captured" (p. 5) and the opportunities for contextual and more detailed analyses are lost. Qualitative research accounts for actual-world contexts, real-life complexities, lived ambiguities and the multiple personal truths of everyday living (Mayan 2009; Morse, 2000). Particularly relevant to the present study is Paluck's (2010) contention that qualitative studies are well suited to examining conditions of change, in order to explore the "possible social and political dynamics by which the behaviour is produced" (p. 62).

Qualitative studies aim for depth, richness, texture - more is not necessarily better. Moreover when there is a limited number of 'units' available for study, greater emphasis can be placed on exploring behaviour and meaning-making in real-world situations (Paluck, 2010). The contention is that an individual's understanding of the world is subjectively dependent on social interactions, language use, and accrued knowledge, all

of which are maintained by interactive social processes and often captured in the stories we tell and are told.

3.4 Narrative inquiry:

Realising that language influenced, organised and defined human actions and beliefs, Kenneth and Mary Gergen (1983), Thomas Sarbin and Karl Scheibe (1983), Jerome Bruner (1986) and Catherine Riessman (2008), among others, argued that human existence could be better understood through qualitative studies of story and narrative. It was a stance echoed by feminist researchers seeking to develop different philosophical and epistemological bases that could better account for the multiple diversities implied in being women.

Narrative inquiry is about representing participants' "self-reflexivity, feelings, identities and meanings which are [themselves] representations" (McMahon, 1995, pp. 33-34).

Narrative studies have challenged assumptions about what can be observed or measured. They do not require the quantification of particular content or themes and, as narrative studies are specifically situated, they cannot provide information relating to objective reality.

Citing psychologist Jerome Bruner (1986), sociologist Francesca Polletta (2006) says narrative "is a distinctive way of not just representing reality but also of apprehending it" (p. 11). Language, according to Sarbin (1986) is the organising principle for human action and it is through narrative that we refine and define our individual identity as human beings. Indeed, several researchers, for example Bruner (1986), Stiles (1990), and Riessman (1993, 2008), argue that narrative provides the most precise vehicle for accurately reporting and doing psychosocial research. It is through narrative and

language use that humans organise experience, and in studying narratives/storytelling the researcher aims to explicate and make sense of the meanings individuals have attached to lived experience. Donald Polkinghorne (1993), drawing on his experience as an academic and a psychotherapist, adds that storytelling draws out “the implications... for understanding human existence” (p. 6). But, language use is not self-evident and personal narratives are not simply expressions of the inner experience of the storyteller: They are produced between teller and listener and a correspondence between what the participants communicate to the researcher and their actual experience is not a necessary component of narrative. What is of primary importance is how people see their world; it is the participant’s interpretation of events and interactions that matters. This study sought to explore how sole mothers constructed their understanding of a governmental re-structuring, which will transform their lives when their child reaches age five years. Those transformations may also alter the ways they see themselves.

That knowledge and understanding are accessible from the unmeasurable and unquantifiable sources emanating from narrative inquiry is now well accepted (Mayan, 2009) with several options made available for privileging participant narratives to address research questions. Riessman (1993) suggests those options could include snapshots of past events, persuasive narratives, apologetic, exploratory and/or inquisitorial narratives.

I also sought to hear from participants narratives that might suggest how they saw their lives in the future role as paid workers including rewards and difficulties. The teller’s selection would depend on how each experienced different contextual changes. My task was to identify and interpret the themes emerging from interviews, discussions and conversations, from which meanings might be explicated.

3.4.1 The researcher's task:

My assumption in this was that the structural changes to welfare entitlement recently implemented by government(s), had ruptured, or would rupture, the relationship between sole parents receiving DPB payments, and the taxpaying society resulting in some identifiable changes in a sole parent's self-knowledge and self-concept.

Knowledge, including self-knowledge, Kenneth Gergen (2009) suggests, is performative, something people do together. Thus researcher and participant unite in a performance (Riessman, 1993, 2008) through which stories are created. The interviewer/researcher and interviewee/participant play out roles bounded by tacitly accepted rules; the interviewer/researcher asks questions and listens to the answers, and the interviewee/participant comprehends what is required, and replies within that context. From there Polkinghorne (1995) proposes, the researcher's task in narrative analysis is to configure "the data elements into [a] story that unites and gives meaning to the data as contributors to a goal or purpose" (p. 15). In this way, interviewer and interviewee are actively engaged in a creative process with subjectivity and identities "crafted in a collaborative conversational interaction" (Riessman, 2008, p. 31).

The ways in which the stories are told may not follow the rules of grammar, or conventional story structure of beginning, middle and end, but where the interview structure is sufficiently flexible, stories can be expanded to include expressions of social, political, and historical influences. Primary responsibility rests with the sensibilities and responsiveness of the researcher to comprehend meaning from the narratives as presented. The goal is to appreciate and learn from the participants' experiences and from the meanings ascribed to them, and then to generate ways of understanding the emergent data.

Obtaining situated knowledges relies on eliciting richly textured and detailed narrative case stories (Letherby, 2003). By ‘unpacking’ narratives, it becomes possible to capture how government-imposed decrees change the ways sole mothers might see themselves. By describing what it is like now or exploring what it might be like in future, the participants can try out and “*generate identities*” (Bamberg et al., 2007. p. 6. Italics in original). As identity was a central concern in this project and my current readings consistently referred to and elaborated on plurality of individual identities, something seemed to be missing from my understanding and/or interpretation.

Several decades ago I accepted the orthodoxy, validity, and authority of Erik Erikson’s (1963) framework for the construction of identity, but (silently) questioned its seemingly hierarchical organisation. The theory’s formality did not match my own experience or that of anyone I knew. Identity-shaping seemed to me to be more haphazard and more complex than explained within the ‘rules’ applying to the progressive construction of a singular identity. Don’t we create, draw on and present different personas in different social contexts? Aren’t we influenced by other ideas, beliefs and theories? And doesn’t that imply multiple aspects of identity, even multiple identities? If I relied on Erikson’s theoretical construction, how could I account for the discontinuities, disruptions and disjunctions that constituted lived experiences contributing to identity formation? Further, how could I reconcile the multiplicity of the sole mothers’ experiences with what I had been taught 20-plus years ago - and understood to be still ‘operational’. How could identity be unitary? Something individuals ‘had’? Was it a receptacle that experiences were added to until the container was full and a unitary temporally-stable adult identity established? Was it a conceptual ‘thing’, a reification that consolidated the process of thinking, observing, actioning,

hearing and seeing? And what of social construction? I thought I must have misunderstood or forgotten (or both) some or all of Erikson's rationale.

What made more sense was Mishler's (1999) argument that chance/serendipity/disruption/coincidence all played a part, and self-concepts would be responsive to those experiential variations, but I was still perplexed. Then two literary events coalesced: At the same time as studying Elliot Mishler (1999) I was also reading (for relaxation) Penelope Lively's *Making it Up*, an autobiographical exploration of imagined alternative destinies - what might have happened had the novelist made other choices or travelled different roads.

In the book's preface Lively wrote:

Somehow, choice and contingency have landed you where you are, as the person that you are, and the whole process seems so precarious that you look back at those climactic moments when things might have gone differently, when life might have spun off in some other direction, and wonder at this apparently arbitrary outcome. (p1.)

It was as Mishler (1999) suggested in *Storylines. Craftartists' Narratives of Identity*. Identity was not unitary or something one had. Identity was not an 'it' and was "neither fixed nor progressively developing, but continually being reshaped and reconfigured in response to... changing circumstances" (p. 62). Moreover, Mishler pointed out a multiplicity of identities reflected the interactive haphazardness of experience with greater accuracy. Rather than a "singular totalizing IDENTITY" (Mishler, 1999, p. 8. Uppercase in original), he suggested 'sub-identities' and the phrase 'identity formation', rather than an orderly 'identity development', as epistemologically more appropriate. Between them, Lively and Mishler expanded my understanding of how knowledge and beliefs are sensitive to the exigencies of change - and helped me recognise the variable

ways social science discourses (and literature) shape and change our knowledges and understandings “as beings with certain desires, feelings, habits and dispositions” (O’Grady, 2005, p. 15). Identity was indeed multiple, complex, variable, malleable. That pair of readings also exemplified the serendipitous and oftentimes unpredictability, of experiential learning.

Discovering the nature of day-to-day realities as experienced by adolescent sole mothers, meant identifying the ways teenage sole mothers who are commonly perceived to have flouted significant social norms may have constructed different, and differing, versions of themselves and others. Those constructions of meaning are contained in the sense-making processes embedded in experiences of events and in personal interactions. They ‘create’ who we are.

Bamberg and Andrews (2004) consider that for participants it is imperative that they feel able to present themselves in ways that indicate ‘this is the me I want you to understand’. Therefore, it was important that participants were comfortable knowing that all their responses were valid, valued, interesting, unique and confidential and that whatever was said would be treated with respect at every stage of the research process including the thematic analysis.

3.5 Thematic analysis:

Riessman (1993) states that for individuals, “Meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal” (p. 15), providing researchers with a reminder that interviews are ‘snapshots of the here and now’. Further, in recognising that representations of events may be inconsistent even in similar environmental and social contexts, what I sought through listening, recording, transcribing and then thematically analysing, were

narratives, describing young sole mothers' every-day, ordinary, realities. I was endeavouring to find out what it is like to be an adolescent one day, a young sole mother the next day and a paid worker at some time in the near future. How would the participants make sense of who they were, who they are and who they might become? The inclusion of thematic analyses in qualitative inquiry was seen to be particularly well suited to the "purpose of making diverse women's voices and experiences heard" (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 15). In the present study, my preference was for flexibly structured personal interviews to obtain detailed and variable data. A key aim of the study was to explore the means available to adolescent sole mothers for expressing their lack of conformity to normative expectations of financially dependent motherhood. In her studies of first person accounts of life experience, Riessman (1993) described her thematic analysis as a series of seemingly unconnected narratives but when read together, showed how previously politically-disengaged women had emerged from social isolation to participate in various women's organisations. The 'turning points' were small but cumulative. Riessman (1993) argued: "By studying the sequence of stories in an interview, and the thematic and linguistic connections between them, an investigator can see how individuals tie together significant events and important relationships in their lives" (p. 40). Thematic analyses of transcribed narratives obtained in semi-structured one-on-one interviews, could identify perceived needs and provided a platform from which to facilitate change. It was an approach that seemed particularly salient when the needs of sole mothers, including adolescents, had continued to be absent from current welfare debates. Riessman's example demonstrated the efficacy of an inductive narrative project and its ability to assist in constructing positive social change. By inductively collecting a set of thematic categories, (many of which could be expected to overlap and change over time in response to changing ideological inputs

and individual sense-making strategies in the process of thematic analysis), sense-making frameworks could be identified.

3.6 Limitations and advantages:

Qualitative research, and with it thematic analysis of narratives, does have limitations, which, according to Hollway and Jefferson (2000), are based on several assumptions: The first being that participants can communicate meaningfully in ways that will be understood by the researcher (see also Riger, 1992). Second, the researcher takes it for granted that participants are also looking for a truthful understanding of their situation and can capture that experience in a “single concept” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 11). Third, as Polkinghorne (1988) also pointed out, in order to understand the meanings humans attach to their lived experiences, qualitative researchers will be relying on methods that investigate unobservable human consciousness. There are other factors that might be considered either advantages or limitations. Non-generalisability of findings is not seen as a disadvantage; instead it is sufficient that interpretive results are applicable to those participating in the study (Mayan, 2009), though some findings may have some relevance for others facing similar transformational and politically imposed changes.

Greater homogeneity in the sample often provides a challenge, but young sole mothers are a heterogeneous group. The focus of interest in the present research study however did require setting some boundaries regarding, age, dependence on state welfare and sole responsibility for child care, thus the results from this study cannot be generalised; nor can they be in other similar-sized narrative inquiry studies (Riessman, 1993). That findings are not self-evident or generalisable or amenable to scientific proof is not seen as a disadvantage in narrative studies (Mayan, 2009). One of the hallmarks of

qualitative inquiry is its non-replicability, which according to Janice Morse (2000), is because it was never intended to be replicable.

Qualitative research is not prescriptive; its inclination is towards understanding rather than rule-making (Riger, 1992). Qualitative narrative research is also about researcher and participant “self-reflexivity, feelings, identities and meanings which are representations” (McMahon, 1995, pp. 33-34). The data obtained does not relate to a singular truth, instead it aims for the partial truths that will contribute to a fuller understanding of how humans structure and restructure, create and recreate personal and social meaning. Moreover how often instances occur is not part of the criteria for qualitative inquiry; what is sought is thematic variation rather than quantity. Indeed, in her editorial, Morse urges researchers to ignore the “frequency of occurrence of any specific incident” (Morse, 1995, p. 147)⁹. Like many other narrative studies, the current research project is exploratory rather than definitive and descriptive rather than prescriptive.

Thematic analyses also present issues largely to be accounted for in the researcher’s ability to consider for example, his/her political loyalties; the research paradigm or socio-cultural beliefs. Interpretative variations, that is, what another researcher might extrapolate from the same material; differences between researcher and participant in determining life-experience relevance; and/or using a vocabulary unfamiliar to the participant may also affect the appropriateness of researcher-identified themes.

⁹ For me however, ‘quantity’ was useful as a guideline for suggesting themes-in-common given that the experiences of every individual are unique, there are some elements shared by most, if not all, sole mothers.

3.7 Dominant and counter narratives:

Molly Andrews (2004) notes that “one of the defining features of dominant narratives are [sic] their ability to evade analysis” (p. 8): The same might be said of counter narratives that run in opposition to, or in tandem with, master narratives; they are not always identifiable and imply an easy familiarity with dominant sets of cultural ideals. Bamberg (2004) endorses the view that “countering dominant and hegemonic narratives is the flip-side of being complicit” (p. 151). Dominant narratives and counter narratives are not necessarily “dichotomous entities” (Andrews, 2004, p. 2), however the latter provides a way of presenting different perceptions and interpretations of dominant narratives to indicate how participants might make sense of disruptive and hegemonic change so as to restore a congruent subjectivity/self concept. A paradox presents itself in discussing dominant and counter narratives: If, as Andrews (2004) contends, dominant narratives are difficult to analyse - and often to identify - how then can we know what it is that the counter narrative is modifying or disputing? Bamberg suggests that researchers look towards how narrators position themselves within the story (p. 358), and at situated interactions to see “how the personal and social is intersecting with being complicit and countering” (p. 369).

When described as grand narratives, a novice student/researcher might tend to seek equally grand counter narratives which risks missing the “little stories of those individuals and groups whose knowledges and histories have been marginalised, excluded, subjugated or forgotten in the telling of official narratives” (Lyotard, 1984, quoted in Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren & Peters, 1996, p. 3). This statement provided a

simple heuristic by which I could locate the little and large counter narratives¹⁰ accessed by the young sole mothers to resist powerful dominant narratives positioning them as less than ‘good’.

When those exercising power to ignore, discount or exclude women, or any others treated as a minority with nothing of value to contribute, the views, concerns, activities and experiences of such marginalised groups can be censored, ignored and denied.

Though mute, silence is not necessarily inert, nor does it imply complicity, but may be interpreted as a meaningful counter narrative for expressing resistance.

3.8 Silenced/silencing/silent:

Riessman (1993) suggests that self-silencing and/or being silenced is more likely during difficult life-transition experiences and during, or after, trauma. Though deprived of the opportunity to have direct input into the changes regulated by governments, this study’s participants will, never the less, face imposed structural and institutional change that will radically transform their daily lives.

Silences, especially among marginalised groups and individuals, have continued to be a significant concern to many feminist researchers (see for example, Andrews, 2004; Jack, 1993; Jack & Ali, 2010; Thiesmayer, 2003; Ryan-Flood & Gill, 2010) speaking-out has been significant in presaging active change. People categorised as a minority group are often ignored and, in being unaccounted for, are therefore invisible. Some research suggests that minority groups (including women) may have a more accurate perception of society than majorities (see for example, Riger, 1992) and could provide “a basis for

¹⁰ In some ways this, and similar feminist research studies, also constitute a countering of official hegemonic narratives.

a more accurate understanding of the entire world” (Riger, 1992, p. 734). My focus was less on understanding ‘the entire world’ and more on establishing what contributes to sole mothers apparent political inactivity, and exploring issues surrounding silence. Its rationale may be personal choice, external factors, time constraints, disinterest, and unawareness of available options and so on. Flexibly-structured individual interviews could provide the opportunity for participants to explore the possibility of being silenced via strategies of political oppression. For example, in the deliberations of the Working Welfare Group tasked with recommending options for restructuring the social welfare system, sole mothers individually and as a group, remained unheard. Looking beyond surface explanations, Catherine MacKinnon (1993) suggested that those without power may exercise it by hiding behind state power. Other state beneficiaries, such as unemployed and disabled groups were able to make submissions through the media and representative organisations. Sole mothers were much less prominent¹¹. As could be expected, Green Party and Labour politicians were not silent, being highly critical of Governmental welfare change proposals, as were for example such academics as Kingfisher (1996, 2002, 2004), Gardiner (1999) and Callister (2003).

By drawing on what Riessman (1990) described as “a set of understandings, heightening awareness of devaluing experiences, [to] provide a language for interpreting them as sexual politics” (p. 63), I wanted to establish the ways in which young sole mothers might see their worlds, and also to find out their perceptions of what I considered was an overtly unjust, gendered, politically-driven decision by a powerful current government. As individuals and as a category/group, sole mothers now face

¹¹ Non-government organisations such as the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) have long advocated on behalf of poor children, most of whose parents receive state welfare assistance

institutionally-mandated changes that emphasise publicly-located paid employment over privately-situated mothering.

In presenting its recommendations to the public, and to the National-led government, the Working Welfare Group (WWG) drew on a constellation of ideological beliefs; work was the duty of all citizens, individuals were responsible for their own fate and future; to be dependent in the state was wrong, and therefore welfare in future would involve a reciprocal exchange (Rebstock, 2010). It was a persuasive and powerful discourse involving the imposition of structural decisions that would affect the lives of young sole mothers, and a discourse to which they could not respond. As I perceived it, the social injustices, a long-held concern of feminists, surrounding silence and being silenced, had to be included in my research study in order for the young sole mothers' responses to be added to the body of "knowledge of women's lives" (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 39).

3.9 Feminist contributions:

Concerns about social injustices have strongly influenced my reasons, as a feminist, for engaging in this study. Coercing the young sole mothers receiving a Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) into participating in paid employment seemed to me inequitable and undemocratic at least, and at worst, punitive and retaliatory. Moreover, the Government-imposed structural changes were in stark contrast to the stated intentions of the DPB when it was introduced in the early 1970s. Mothering mattered as a social investment in the future then, and the DPB was to assist sole parents, mostly women, to stay at home while caring for their child(ren). Today, DPB recipients (mothers and fathers) have their choices limited. With few exceptions, such as caring for a special needs child, they must give up full-time parenting. Failure to seek paid employment and/or undertake job

training when their child reaches five years of age, risks reduction or cancellation of taxpayer-provided benefits. Furthermore, a sole mother who has another child while receiving the DPB will be expected to enter paid employment when the baby reaches one year of age.

The consciousness-raising of the 1970s enabled women to take action against perceived injustices and political imbalances, because feminism espoused research that was egalitarian, emancipatory, participative and inclusive (Letherby, 2003). Feminists argued that male researchers had for too long regarded women as less highly evolved than men and that women's perspectives were of less value (Gilligan, 1982), which reinforced the perpetuation of male power by influencing knowledge production (Rhodes, 1990). Moreover when some studies excluded women, but generalised findings to explain women's behaviour, feminists argued that what was needed were changes to improve, even replace traditional research methods. Implicit in the exposure of power imbalances was a feminist commitment to facilitating change, especially where economic and social disadvantages were gender-based, and often denied. Liberating women from inequalities required seeking and speaking a different kind of truth – to be understood and experienced by them. Polkinghorne (1988) along with others (for example, Jerome Bruner, 1986), looked towards psychoanalysts working with narratives and case stories to understand client behaviours and thoughts. Others saw the usefulness of ethnography (Letherby, 2003; Riessman, 2008).

New Zealand studies by Patterson (2004), Kahu (2006), and Breheny (2006) for example, affirm that women who parent alone are positioned as “other” and offered little or no opportunity for expressing what their daily lives are like or what their needs are while dependent on the DPB for their own and their children's wellbeing. The rationale for this study is to enable adolescents, often the least heard in any research, to

be acknowledged as having something important to say. They too are the experts in making sense of their everyday lived experiences.

Reasoning that there is a direct link between epistemology (beliefs about social realities) and methodology (the theoretical underpinnings of social research) feminist researchers tend to favour inductivist methods, with results emerging from the data, rather than quantitative/deductive strategies in which hypotheses are proposed and tested (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Mayan, 2009; Riger, 1992). Contextually-grounded feminist standpoints focus on “the experiential and the private rather than the abstract and the public” (Letherby, 2003, p.42), strengthening a recognition that knowledge and understanding are accessible from unmeasurable and unquantifiable sources (Mayan, 2009). And where there is a limited number of ‘units’ available for study, greater emphasis can be placed on exploring behaviour and meaning-making in real-world situations (Paluck, 2010). While debate surrounding the existence of a distinctive and singular feminist methodology continues unresolved (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002) it is agreed that feminist methodologies have established research methods that more accurately portray experiences of reality, especially when seeking an understanding of individual knowledges and social existences (Mayan, 2009; Riger, 1992). Feminist research is considered political, egalitarian, interactive, relational and co-created - all major considerations in the current study, as are the power-related theories proposed by French philosopher Michel Foucault.

3.10 Foucault:

Power as a framework for control is now well accepted (Mayan, 2009; McNay, 1998; O’Grady, 2005). Foucault pointed out that knowledge and understanding are not necessarily neutral. They can be used to justify the retention of power. Power and

knowledge had/have an ideological function as exemplified in traditional scientific methods that had served to suppress alternative ways of thinking about science.

It is in the relationships within, between and among individuals, groups and institutions, that the exercise of power can be seen. Foucault (1980) regards power as an essential implement for good; without power things would not get done. How power is used, can reinforce what is and dictate what should be – power can be both liberatory and oppressive. It does not reside in individuals or in groups but is manifested in actions and in the expression and enforcement of values and beliefs.

The rhetoric displayed by the National-led government, and in the published deliberations of the Working Welfare Group, clearly demonstrated that young sole mothers have made wrong choices (Rebstock, 2010), are ‘breeding for a business’ (Key, 2008) while in receipt of a benefit, and by not contributing to a taxable economy have failed in their civic duty (Rebstock, 2010). While challenging the widely-held view that early child-bearing is responsible for many of the subsequent social ills, Lawson and Rhode (1993) and Furstenberg (2007), among others, reasoned that much social research tended to see teenage pregnancy and parenthood as the central problem, and their research reinforced that view.

Where young sole mothers are held responsible for their failure to adhere to dominant norms, in order to try to conform, they are likely to feel powerless, guilty, and ashamed and to self-police (O’Grady, 2005). O’Grady suggests that Foucault’s thinking provides a useful framework for challenging structural, institutional and social controls so that individuals are not held responsible for the actions of the powerful. It also explains why Foucault continues to be central to the thinking of many feminist social psychologists.

3.11 Method:

The project aimed at interviewing adolescent sole mothers actively engaged in caring for their children while financially dependent on a state-provided Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB). Recent changes to the social welfare system overtly prioritise paid work in the public domain over full-time mothering at home, and narrative research provided the basis for exploring how those changes are experienced and made sense of by young sole mothers. Often scapegoated, stereotyped and stigmatised, teenage mothers have been widely acknowledged as particularly vulnerable and have been socially marginalised as a deviant group. The political rhetoric is often far from benign: Naming people in derogatory terms often invites particular courses of action (Gergen, 1985). I wanted to find out what courses of action had been 'invited' along with how this and similar positionings affected the young mothers.

3.12 Ethics:

Approval from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) was obtained on October 26 2011 (HEC Southern B Application - 11/50). The school at which the research interviews were conducted required only that the Teen Parent Unit's head-teacher sight approval confirmation from MUHEC. The school's approval to continue was confirmed in an email from the unit's head teacher. After discussions with my project's supervisors and the school unit's head-teacher, social worker and local kaumatua, it was considered that the project entailed little or no risk to the participants or the researcher. However, while endeavouring to arrange an appointment with one participant to check through her transcribed interview I was informed that she was no longer at the school, and had not left a contact telephone number. I was advised by the

head teacher not to approach the participant's place of residence. To do so would put her safety at risk.

Potential participants were reminded verbally and in writing that they could withdraw at any stage, that they were not obliged to answer any questions and that they would have opportunities to amend a transcribed copy of their own interview, which they could also keep. They were assured at the start and end of each interview that all audio recordings, taped or electronic, would remain confidential and, at the completion of the research project, the transcripts would be securely held for five years at Massey University after which they would be destroyed.

The advice, guidance and availability of a local kaumatua was sought and a Māori social worker who was a regular visitor to the unit offered to be available if and when needed. All participants were informed that they were welcome to bring a support person/kaumatua to the interview and/or the transcription review.

Before each interview, my supervisors were informed of my whereabouts. I carried my cell phone. Staff members employed at the teen parent unit were also made aware of each scheduled interview. Again, participants were further assured that their stories were important, that they were the experts of their own experiences and that they could tell them in the ways in which they felt most comfortable.

Confidentiality of the information provided by participants was assured through the use of pseudonyms, which the participants chose themselves. During the whole of the study, interview transcriptions were securely stored at the researcher's home then after the study with the supervisors at Massey University.

3.13 Reflexivity:

Reflexivity implies integrity and examining personal values as well as requiring the researcher to accept responsibility for their own actions and beliefs. It entails acknowledging that no-one has a monopoly on truth(s). Qualitative research in particular requires the researcher to consider their own biases, beliefs and assumptions when interpreting and re-presenting data. Furthermore, researchers are to be aware of perceived power inequalities (for example, the researcher as 'expert', the participant as 'subject') during the study processes. In researching the "texts of many lives", Letherby (2003, p. 122) considered that an essential aspect of feminist research included an egalitarian commitment to "seeing things from the perspective of the respondents" (p. 125). Bamberg and Andrews' (2004) criteria regarding the necessity for participants to be assured that they are being seen as they want to be seen, is also applicable to researcher/interviewers. The positioning of interviewer, Molly Andrews (2004) stated, is important in the interviewing process and in thematic analysis. The processes communicate something about researcher/interviewers. As my research environment was situated within a secondary school's education programme for teen parents, I was aware of the age disparity between researcher (a superannuitant) and participants (adolescents). I was concerned that their perceptions of me, and mine of them, could inhibit easy dialogue. Following a suggestion from Trish Young (Cultural Adviser to Massey University Wellington campus), I decided that as a grandmother/superannuitant my lack of knowledge of 'things modern' could be an advantage and I would be grateful for being brought 'up to speed' on how things are for teenagers in the 21st century. Each participant seemed delighted to help out.

Along with class and socio-economic status, ethnicity was not a primary concern in this study. However, as 52 percent of teen parents were previously identified as Māori, 30 percent as European and 9 percent of Pacific Island origin (MSD, June 2010), it was important to remain sensitive to the personal significance of ethno-cultural influences on participant narratives. As a white Anglo-Saxon protestant, I also needed to remain sensitive to matters surrounding participants' ethnicity and religion. However, as the research project was feminist, egalitarian and inductive I endeavoured during the interview process to open up spaces for the young mothers to raise any matters of interest and/or concern regarding socio-economic status, class, ethnicity and religion.

Riessman (2008) brought to notice the need to reflexively consider and understand that narrative research reports are neither the participants nor the researcher's story, but are co-produced. She further reminded investigators to explicitly address how the textual interpretations were arrived at. Verbatim quotations, both Andrews (2004) and Riessman (2008) argue, if presented without contextual inputs are considerably less persuasive than those that can be located within situational, theoretical and narrative perspectives.

I was reflexively and somewhat forcefully, reminded on at least two occasions of the importance of keeping up with changes in psychological theory and practice. As outlined earlier in this chapter (Method section: 3.4.1 The researcher's task) I had difficulty reconciling what I had learned many decades earlier about Erik Erikson's (1963) theories of identity development as it did not seem congruent with what I thought then and had been reading more recently. Today identity is seen not as a singular entity added to progressively, but as socially constructed, interactional, multiple and therefore considerably more complex. Reading Eliot Mishler (1999) and Penelope Lively provided a significant turning point.

The second reflexive reminder (see Method: Section 3.16) centred on how best to enable the research participants to tell richly textured stories. In other words, how could I communicate that whatever the young sole mothers said, in whatever way they chose to say it, was interesting, valued, and valid and would be accepted no matter what. Again, the literature helped me out and Elliot Mishler (1999) and Jerome Bruner (2002) directed my thinking towards asking questions in more open-ended ways.

3.14 Recruitment:

I was able to make a direct connection with around 30 adolescent mothers attending a purpose-built teen parent unit in an outer Wellington secondary school. The early stages to the recruitment process were facilitated by the head teacher at the unit. After preliminary discussions and achieving her written approval to proceed, I was invited to 'chat' with the unit's students and staff in one of two 'free' periods available each week. This enabled the young mothers to get to know me and allowed me to outline the research project, explain why I was interested in the topic, answer any questions and discuss any concerns the prospective participants may have had.

Information packages were readily accessible so that the participants could take them home. The kits contained an invitation to participate; information sheets outlining the aims of the research; an indication of the processes involved including Massey University Ethics Committee approval (HEC Southern B Application 11/50) and a contact email address: humanethics@massey.ac.nz. Also included was a formal consent form to be signed by the participant, a stamped addressed envelope for returning the filled-in forms to my home address, and a list of participant's rights plus a list of available support groups in the local area. My email address and telephone number, and those of my supervisors, were included. The potential participants were also told of the

estimated time involved in the interviews and the transcript checks. By replying, potential participants/volunteers would be indicating interest, availability and consent. On receiving their replies, I contacted the participants by email, telephone or letter to arrange appointments for the interview. After the interviews, when I had verified the accuracy of the transcribing of each interview each transcript, appointments were made so that participants could, if they wished, delete anything they were concerned about. None of the participants asked for anything to be changed.

The school provided a private room adjacent to the crèche allowing all participants ready access to their child(ren). While teachers and crèche staff were aware that students would be interviewed during class time, the pseudonyms selected by the participants were unknown to staff members.

3.15 The sample:

Where in narrative inquiry, the aim of qualitative sampling is to understand the phenomena of interest (Mayan, 2009) - in this study young sole mothers' perceptions of ideologically based welfare restructuring - it was expected that this project's main strength would be in its purposive sampling. It was also expected that some personal experiences would be or might be very similar, and others very different especially when there was also demographic variability in age, geographic distribution, educational achievement and/or access to social and family/whanau support. Most importantly as DPB recipients and teenage sole mothers, the participants were among the most likely to be significantly affected by the recent re-structuring of Aotearoa-New Zealand's social welfare system.

In recent years, sole mothers were around 87 to 89 percent of an estimated 111,000 DPB recipients, involving a multi-million dollar outlay in benefit payments. As a segment of an already marginalised group that includes the disabled, unemployed, widowed, unwell individuals who receive welfare payments from government, and as young women positioned as deviant by having sex and getting pregnant, my research suggested that their stories had not been heard. The scope of the study, exploring ‘what it is like to be a young sole mother’, also had an interest in why sole mothers are politically inactive. With a small sample, the researcher could focus on the subtleties of detail often not apparent in larger studies.

Between 15 and 20 potential volunteers expressed early interest in participating in the research. The question then was how many would be enough to achieve significant meanings from the thematic analysis. This same question was addressed by Greg Guest, Arwen Bunce and Laura Johnson (2006), Janice Morse (1995), as well as Patrick Dattalo (2008). Guest et al. (2006) suggest that data saturation/adequacy is reached at “the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data” (p. 59). From their analysis of several sets of interviews, they concluded that data saturation could be achieved with a relatively homogeneous sample size of six. After 12 interviews, no new themes emerged. Morse (1995) suggested that in qualitative analysis, data seen as outliers may instead serve to put other themes in perspective, as an “infrequent gem” (p. 148). In qualitative research the interviewer does not need to hear the same ideas repeated several times: Detailed, rich and comprehensive descriptions were more important than quantity; with this in mind, I aimed for 12 participants, but the final number was 10.

3.16 Interviews and data collection:

All interviews were audio-recorded for later replay by the researcher. The interviews were scheduled to fit in with unpredictable infant distress-soothing needs, baby-feeding and available teaching periods. For this reason, the time limit rarely extended past an hour.

The first two participants answered everything asked of them; they were eager to help and their responses were courteous and obliging but constrained. I was aiming for a broadly based exploration of the contours of a young sole mother's everyday life. My initial approach felt mechanical even though I was only occasionally consulting my list of open-ended questions (see Appendix 2), something had to change. I went back to *Making Stories*, by Jerome Bruner (2002) and my attention was alerted to the following:

By their very nature, stories take for granted that their protagonists are free unless *ensnared by circumstances*... It is 'ordinary people doing ordinary things in ordinary places for ordinary reasons'. *A seeming breach in this ordinariness* is required to trigger the rich dynamic of narrative - how to cope with it, to domesticate it, to get things back on a familiar track (Bruner, 2002, p. 89. Italics added).

My problem had been how to better assist the participants to construct the stories surrounding their pregnancy and baby care – an obvious breach of ordinariness. As sole mothers, the participants had certainly been 'ensnared by circumstances'. Some research by Elliot Mishler (1999) included a suggestion that questions about events might provide contexts for experience-based stories. Without doubt, having a baby while still attending school amounted to a very big life-event for each adolescent sole mother. Bruner and Mishler's approaches mandated that I changed my interviewing style. In the next eight interviews, I asked - after preliminary exchanges of informal social

information - versions of “What was having a baby like for you?” What followed was an outpouring of storied descriptive experiences. No longer was there any need for me to shape or carefully guide the interviews; the narratives had become rich, detailed and exploratory. In creating those stories, “the process of speaking or writing, experiences are filtered through language into *verbalized events*” (Slobin, 2001, cited in Bruner, 2002, p. 73. Italics in original). That one question enabled the young mothers to “tell it like it is” and explore, recall, construct, reconstruct, and make sense of their experiences with minimum input from me. The experience was extraordinarily exciting and rewarding and several of the young mothers said they had appreciated being able to talk openly about their lives.

Two interviews were interrupted, briefly, and two lasted almost 80 minutes. Most were completed within an hour. It was noticeable that after 35 to 40 minutes a short break was necessary for several participants. I provided biscuits and fruit juice at the time, all but one took them home to their child(ren).

3.17 Transcription:

All interviews were audio-recorded digitally or on cassette tape. Constrained by rheumatoid arthritis I was unable to transcribe as many as I would have preferred. I transcribed one interview, which happened to be the longest, but realised I could not sustain the effort without considerable pain and muscular fatigue. The remaining nine interviews were transcribed by professional services. All transcribers signed confidentiality agreements. After listening twice to each recording, I couriered the cassette tapes and flash-drives to the professional services to be transcribed verbatim. All audio recordings and transcriptions were returned individually as they were completed, and I immediately checked them for accuracy.

Participants were provided with a hard copy of their own interview. In individual sessions, the young sole mothers were encouraged to correct inaccuracies, delete anything they were uncomfortable with or that might lead to identifying them. No deletions were requested.

When all 10 interviews had been transcribed and double-checked, transcribers were requested to remove the information from their databases.

While early checks for accuracy and participant acceptance enabled increasing familiarity with the interview content, I also made rough notes on possible thematic categories.

3.18 Thematic analysis:

In effect, thematic analysis began after the first interview and continued throughout all subsequent interviews, transcription checks and thesis writing. Detailed analysis provided sub-themes. For example, 'Relationships' began as a broad category and as different dynamics emerged sub-categories were created. Relationships with the young mother's old and new friends were often dissimilar, as were relationships between and among parents, grandparents, the baby's father and his parents. This enabled identifying the subtle and sometimes dramatic shifts in how a network of relationships were perceived and managed by the young women.

There were times of considerable uncertainty but on reading, re-reading and reviewing the transcripts, thematic patterns emerged enabling me to establish other salient categories, such as "money worries", "social support", "societal images/stereotyping", "positioning" (particularly in relation to interactions with WINZ). The process involved constantly comparing one narrative with another and one category with another to

identify similarities and differences. Some experiences seemed at first to be ‘outliers’, but served as sensitisers/catalysts to enable searching for similar experiences contained in other interviews. Several interviews involved emblematic statements. For example, Gigi’s, “We’re not little kids” summarised a constellation of strategies to counter the dominant narrative that adolescent mothers are too young/immature/irresponsible to be parents.

Where there were overlapping stories focusing on broad areas of concern, some of the categories were separated; others were merged on the basis of thematic similarity. Staying true to the content and nature of how participants made sense of government’s prioritisation of paid employment over mothering was a prime concern, followed by exploring why sole mothers appeared to be politically inactive. Both areas of research interest produced individual stories of difference and similarity affirming the construction of multiple realities. The participants’ stories represented their own, and occasionally other s, actions and beliefs; in the processes of sense-making the narratives altered and amplified their comprehension of the worlds they were experiencing.

3.19 Chapter summary:

This chapter summarised my broad engagement with the methodologies and organising principles that provided the academic momentum for this study. In outlining the methods used to interview, transcribe and thematically analyse the data obtained, I documented two personal experiences as examples of the importance of personal reflexivity.

Chapters Four and Five discuss specific themes emerging from the narrative analysis of the participants’ transcribed interviews. Chapter Four relates some of the practical

difficulties young sole mothers experience while depending on State-provided welfare payments and endeavouring to provide adequately for themselves and their child.

Chapter Five focuses on the sole mothers' psycho-social experiences including stereotyping and stigmatising, dominant and counter narratives, and the complex processes of silence.

CHAPTER FOUR:
ADOLESCENT MOTHERS TALK ABOUT
THEIR EXPERIENCES AS DPB RECIPIENTS:
PRACTICAL REALITIES

4.1 Introduction:

Chapter Three outlined the methodological bases for the design and subsequent implementation of research methods for re-presenting the knowledges, stories and experiences of the adolescent mothers who participated in the present study. The following two chapters identify and analyse narrative themes emerging from interviews with participants. Chapter Four focuses on the everyday practical realities, the sometimes-fragmentary “small stories” which Bamberg (2004) considers are “the real stories of our lived lives” (p. 356. *Italics in original*). Emergent themes focused on the actualities of the lives of the teenage participants as mothers, students and adolescents. Chapter Five focuses on psychosocial themes to include stigmatising and stereotyping experiences, dominant narratives, strategies of resistance and decision-making.

Many themes in both chapters were closely interconnected and inter-related. Though it was convenient to consider each as if it were a discrete unit for the purpose of re-presenting them, the structures involved were both artificial and somewhat simplistic. Events and responses were not readily distinguished but often enmeshed and acting together to determine how the participants’ lives were experienced. Several of the socio-situational themes remain amenable to separate and in-depth analysis.

In this and the following chapter, I draw on relevant literature to suggest theoretical frameworks for understanding, constructing and integrating participant knowledge and experience.

Throughout the research process from development to reporting the analyses, my goal has been to explore the ways in which adolescent mothers receiving financial support from the state, experienced, made sense of, and constructed meaning from their experiences with particular reference to the recent reorganisation of Aotearoa-New Zealand's welfare system. As outlined in the introduction, all welfare beneficiaries are expected to find paid employment and/or make themselves 'work-ready' through job training. Though there are some exceptions, such as caring for special needs dependents, the provisions apply to all sole parents when their youngest child reaches age five years. Moreover should a sole mother have another child while receiving welfare support, she will be obliged to actively seek work when that child is one year old (Bennett, 2012). Failure to do so risks a reduction in or cancellation of benefit payments.

A further research question involved ascertaining why sole parents appeared to have little or no involvement in the debates surrounding the restructuring when the impact on them has been and will be highly salient.

4.2 Storytelling and positioning:

Bamberg suggests that narrative allows individuals to present stories, descriptions and explanations that indicate 'this is the me I want you to understand' (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004). Narrators position themselves in interviews and in their role as co-constructors of narrative, researchers position themselves similarly.. They too require

understanding by presenting an interested, listening, appreciative 'me'. In effect, both interviewer and participant are constructing subjective, albeit transitory, identities.

In the interviews recorded rarely were the sole mothers' experiences 'tidily' framed within the traditional, linear, story-telling structure of beginning, middle and end. Their 'delivery' was as varied as their personal circumstances and their experiences. In many of the participants' narratives describing interactions with for example, State representatives (WINZ), there were phrases suggesting, frustration, disbelief and anger:

Gigi: *They absolutely degraded me.*

I was just so angry.

So what the hell am I supposed to do?

Angelina: *It's tough.*

You sort of get targeted in a way.

They still won't help but I'm struggling.

Capri: *It's horrible.*

They think we're stupid.

They make you wait for hours.

Holly: *She made me feel like crap.*

These short, succinct phrases clearly illustrated personal experiences of being patronised, feeling alienated and blamed as well as experiencing structural unfairness and scapegoating.

Truncated sentences also expressed experiences that suggested some tensions inherent in many social and familial relationships. For example, Angelina explained that her parents were her main supporters - they were the only babysitters she trusted.

Angelina: *I've got a lot of support from my parents but they still say it's my fault for ...*

One of Jasmin's social workers was seen as lacking in understanding.

Jasmin: She [social worker] was trying to send me off to these other places, but I didn't want to go cos it was just really weird...'

Holly was aware of people in the street scrutinising young sole mothers.

Holly: I think they look at us differently...

While these sentences were incomplete, and invited expansion, they chronicled inexplicable confusion and undeserved treatment. Other experiences needed no interpretation: In a single complete sentence they indicated pain, hurt, frustration, disappointment and loneliness.

Capri: All of my friends just left me when I got pregnant, they didn't wanna know me.

Dahlia: My mum got a new partner when I was eleven, so I left when I was eleven.

Britney: It's just solo, full-time.

Faye: It was hard because you're trying to parent and they're trying to parent you and tell you what's best.

Holly: I hate going in there.

Angelina: I think a lot of them judge you by your appearance.

Gigi: I don't know what National is thinking, by thinking that all these jobs are available because there's absolutely nothing, there's just nothing.

Jasmin: I didn't know how important school was until I left.

Inga: Oh, you should get married, you know.

Stories may be succinct, attenuated, or incomplete fragments that provide clues about difficulties, but are none the less recognisable as reflections of the way things were and are for the storytellers. Even succinct stories reflect social norms, and imply the way things should be (Polletta, 2009). They deliver truths as the tellers see them and are

evaluative of the self, others and society (Hardcastle, 2008). Each story is told in such a way to suggest that the teller is a worthy person.

It is through narrative that we can see ourselves across time and space encompassing events and responses that are unlikely to be experienced or told in the same way twice. Stories make us who we are (Amsel & Smetana, 2011; Bruner, 1986; Hardcastle, 2008).

4.3 The lived practicalities of DPB dependence:

Co-operatively exploring the here-and-now experiences of living as a young sole mother, that is, in listening to Bamberg's "small stories" (2004, p. 356), provided snapshots to illustrate some of the exigencies of life on a state-provided benefit.

Four areas encompassing the practical realities of DPB dependence were suggested in discussions with the young sole mothers, all of which described problems and difficulties. The most significant and readily apparent 'message' from every sole mother was that doing their best for their child was incontrovertibly the top priority. No matter what the circumstances, their baby came first:

Frances: So, what's the most important thing for you?

Angelina: My son's future.

Frances: What do you see for him?

Angelina: I want him to be able to get a good education.

Inga: I think he [her son] is going to stay at the top of my priority list for quite a while and probably for the rest of his life.

Capri: Our babies are our world. Especially my son. He's my loving heart, that one. He's my golden star, pretty much.

No matter what goes on, that's me, I'll be with him, you know if he gets sick I'll just drop everything and just run to him.

Jasmin: The only thing that made me come back to school was my baby because I just want to give her the best future. You know, me getting a good job to support her [in] a lot of things as she's growing up. I think that's awesome so I don't want to see her at home, or like bumming around kind of thing, or just going from course to course and not getting anywhere...

All I'm worried about is the life that I'm giving my baby.

Dahlia: That he [her son] gets the best out of life... better than me anyway... cos I don't really speak to my mum. I haven't spoken to my mum since baby was born.

Frances: Mmm...

Dahlia: So like I want him, I want him not to run away from us like I did with my mum.

Dahlia's comment suggested that running away was an action she remained unhappy about, and did not want her child to experience anything similar. The rules of normative/idealised mothering require a mother to be emotionally, socially, supportively and even physically present for her children. This appeared not to have been the case for Dahlia, and she wanted to ensure that the experiences before she left her childhood home were not repeated in her present family environment. In doing so Dahlia was complying with social norms of mothering – as most of us try to do.

In recounting the everyday realities of living, a cluster of seemingly insoluble difficulties and constraints emerged as the consequence of having insufficient money. While the primary focus for all nine participants might have been on doing their best for their child, for seven of the nine young mothers there was not enough money to do so. Poverty, as *Moll Flanders* found, is “the worst of all snares” (Defoe, 1721).

Two of the five narrative themes covered in this chapter, brought to notice the pecuniary effects of living on the DPB. Never having sufficient money led to an inability to provide adequately for their child and themselves, and is addressed in the first practical

theme. The second theme centred on how lack of funds, prevented them from socialising with friends and/or acquaintances. These two themes indicated deprivation because both necessitated expenses the young sole mothers could not cover. A third theme addresses the young mothers need and desire for sustained support from parents, extended family, the public and peers. The fourth theme documents distressing experiences with Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ) and the final theme in this chapter centres on participants' awareness of the paradoxical situation implicit in urging beneficiaries to find paid work in a time of high unemployment.

4.3.1 Insufficient money for basics:

The first theme emerged in descriptions of the specific difficulties involving daily struggles to provide basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing¹². All but two participants¹³ expressed persistent feelings of anxiety and stress arising from government's inadequate, though regular, DPB payments.

Describing life as a DPB recipient, participants used phrases such as:

Faye: It's really stressful.

Capri: I'm struggling... It's hard.

Angelina: It sucks.

Faye: It's a struggle; it's definitely a big struggle.

I think financially it's really hard because I'm going to school so I can't work obviously [but] it's really, really hard. Yeah, it's just financially it's really stressful and I just try not to think about it.

¹² In April 2011 it was reported that Aotearoa-New Zealand's child poverty rate, at 12.2 percent, was almost equal with the OECD average. The Children's Commissioner, John Angus stated that Kiwi children were four times more likely to be living under the poverty line if raised by a sole parent (Torrie,2011)

¹³ These two young mothers had substantial support at home from their immediate and extended families.

Faye was no longer receiving the DPB as she was living with the baby's father and had some support from her parents, however weekend activities required careful planning, even for an occasional trip to a nearby beach for an ice cream.

Faye: This weekend we can't do what we wanted to because we just don't have enough money. It's hard financially to be renting and to support a child... yeah, it's really hard.

Capri's friends had money to spend: She did not. Having her mother to babysit meant not having to pay her.

Capri: I don't go out much, I like staying at home. There are some days when I might want to go out and that's where Mum steps in.

Angelina had completed Level Two NCEA subjects and gained an Early Childhood certificate. At the time of checking through her interview transcript, she was aged 20 years and was no longer eligible to attend the teen parent unit. She had been looking for part-time work without success. She and her baby were living in her parents' home; she was paying board and had her own room. Angelina regarded her situation as a little different from others at the teen parent unit.

Angelina: A lot of the girls have still got their partners or you know, they get parent money easily. I've got support from my parents but they still say it's my fault... The wage, like the amount they [WINZ] give you to live on that's extremely low, like they expect you to be able to buy food, clothes. It's like 'oh you should be able afford that'. I'm left with \$6.50 each week and that's [after] budgeting. 'Oh, but you should be able to buy clothes'? Nah!...

In a way my parents told me this is what's going to happen, you got pregnant, yeah, they did warn me but I mean I love kids anyway, so it's good I've got mine now, it's just changed. I'm used to it. Like at first it was a bit like oh, my mates they're all going out shopping. I haven't been shopping in eight months'.

Frances: Is that tough going? Do you have to work at it?

Angelina: It's tough... I just think of all the other poorer people in other countries, they have nothing... like oh well, you're better off than them ... It's a bit stressful sometimes, yeah. It sucks... just, like, not being able to go out and do things.

With not enough money, Angelina planned carefully for her baby son and herself.

Angelina: I plan the meals for the night, and there's nothing really different that we don't get every week.

From the \$6.50 left after paying for necessities, she must buy for clothes for herself and child, and pay for visits to the doctor. While attending the teen parent unit WINZ had provided a weekly \$40 petrol allowance for traveling to and from school, but it cost Angelina \$60 every week. She saw unfair treatment when she found out that others in the unit, who lived much closer to school, received more. Like Faye, a 60 cent ice cream for her child was a rare 'treat'.

Angelina: There's probably three or four of us [at the school who were in similar situations] and get really annoyed when a girl goes 'Oh, I'm broke this week, I've only got \$60' and we're like "Ooh \$60! Wow!"

Frances: 'How do you manage? What sort of things do you do?'

Angelina: Mostly what we do is walks to the park or walks down to the river. He likes throwing rocks into the river. [It's] the park and the river, otherwise we can walk around to my cousin's house. Sometimes if we do go out [I] try to get Mum to drop us off somewhere, just to go somewhere different. Otherwise I'm just at home... I don't do much cos I don't have any money.

The ordinary day-to-day costs involved in purchasing basics such as fruit and vegetables, milk and bread, disposable nappies and 'wipes' were expensive and finding

the money for rent and power, doctor's appointments and prescriptions¹⁴, transport, especially at weekends, and car maintenance¹⁵ was difficult.

Faye: That's really hard on us, getting a rego and warrant and having extra money for anything else that happens like doctor's appointments which cost heaps if you're going after-hours. It's incredible how much it costs but of course you have to pay that extra money because you care about your child and you want them to be seen just in case it's something important.

Access to transport was a major problem especially at the weekends when the buses are few, doctor's rooms are not open and there is a need to get medical help. For Capri, who lived several kilometres from the nearest hospital, this was particularly difficult.

Capri: Oh, it's pretty hard, especially because my son gets sick a lot. His asthma plays up and he's got bad hearing so he has to wear two hearing aids... When he was a newborn we had to go in and out of hospital. Yeah, so it was really hard for me, and you got less from the benefit. And they said that I had to try [and] manage with my little amount of money to support my son while he was in and out of hospital, [going] to the doctor's everyday was pretty hard, so yeah, and he's still going in and out of hospital and they still won't help...

It's tough, it's pretty hard especially when you have to go in and out of hospital and see your child lying there in that bed with those needles in him. It's really hard seeing that.

Capri was 16 when her child was born and when she sought financial assistance from WINZ, she was told that because of her age she was not eligible. At the time of the interview, she was studying Level One NCEA subjects at the teen parent unit.

¹⁴ Pharmacy charges increased from \$3 to \$5 per prescribed item on January 1 2013.

¹⁵ For many of the adolescent mothers access to a car was essential. Buses and trains were expensive and not easily accessible (with a pram or baby stroller).

Capri: They [WINZ] still won't help, they still tell me to go get a job even though I'm doing a course.

Frances: How do you feel about that?

Capri: It's hard. It's pretty hard. I'm trying to keep my focus on my son and get my education so that I can do better for both of us. But they won't help and it's pretty hard, pretty much.

Meeting the cost of after-hours medical care when the baby is sick was also difficult and stressful for Inga and Jasmin.

Inga: If it's really an emergency, I'll go to the hospital because you know if it's that severe then obviously you're going to get seen quicker, but if it's something like a cold, then you're going to be sitting in the hospital for something like six hours.

I think it was something like forty dollars for a child after-hours.

In my old doctor's it was costing me eighteen dollars, which I just couldn't afford because he [her son] was getting sick all the time.

Jasmin: Finding baby sick in the weekend is really quite hard and it's also stressful because you want to make sure your baby's you know, safe and okay. It's quite hard, because there's no doctor's open at the weekends only the after-hours [service] but that comes at a cost, it's quite expensive especially if you're on the benefit cos everything's quite tight.

If I have to do it, I'm going to do it, but I mean I can see why so many people go to the hospital with their little kids, cos they just can't afford to go to the doctor's.

Rather than pay to visit the doctor, when her baby is unwell Jasmin will telephone Helpline, or Plunketline. If the situation looks more serious she will go to the doctor.

Financial constraints led to a dependence on parents and extended family members who could be called on to help out. Holly and her baby had early support from her mother whose home is in another town. At the time of the interview, she and her son were living with her grandparents who have been a considerable help.

Holly: They help me out heaps. If I don't have enough money to buy baby's milk and stuff, they'll buy it. Oh yeah. I can't really buy myself clothes and new stuff that I need.

Frances: Yeah.

Holly: I make sure that baby's got all his food and clothes and what he needs – bottles.

Again, the primary focus was on providing first for their child, a theme reiterated by all 10 participants.

4.3.2 Insufficient funds for socialising:

A further effect of having insufficient funds was having to reduce time spent with friends and others and accounts of 'not going out much' were frequent. Without responsibility for a baby, their friends had some disposable income and more spare time to relax with their 'mates'.

Gigi: Every now and then that's fun and of course you need it in a way, cos I'm young and you do need to socialise, but not every weekend. Sometimes it's disappointing because there happens to be something good on tonight,... Of course when I do go out I get really nervous. I get so nervous because I'm leaving her, you know I'm not used to it. I'm leaving her; I don't know what's going to happen.

Britney ended the relationship with her child's father and was living with her daughter's grandparents, and said "It has its moments", but "it sucks being lonely".

Britney: Sometimes it can be frustrating, like having to do everything by yourself. Sometimes it can be a little lonely because there's like no guy to just be with, I guess, also just be like, okay I need a break here, can you just take her? There's no person to pass that on to. It's just sole, full-time. Adds a little more stress to the situation sometimes. I usually go out with my sister- no, I don't go clubbing. I'm too young for that.

Frances: What's the worst bit [about being a sole mother]?

Britney: Not having anyone to help me out I guess.

Adolescent sole mothers in the sample variously reported that social isolation as a result of insufficient money made life difficult, but having primary responsibility for baby care and study commitments meant they did not have sufficient time or sufficient energy to socialise. Their life-changing circumstances had also resulted in a reallocation of interests, and some participants saw a need to sever or at least limit relationships with some peers. While conflict in friendships is often more frequent than in relationships with family members, some studies suggest that a basic component of peer friendship is to provide a reference group to further self-understanding and development (Amsel & Smetana, 2011). By comparing values, ideas, goals, experiences and responses, adolescents can develop a sense of self and their own place in the world. Steinberg (2011) considers that friends are selected on the basis of similarity of interests and socio-economic status, and may change relationships according to changing circumstances. When dominant narratives marginalise others as deviant, retaining the friends who do not have sufficient interests or responsibilities, in common, is likely to be difficult, leaving young sole mothers to question where they belong. The participants interviewed had different ways of affirming place and sense of belonging, as we shall see later. Gigi for example felt more 'connected' to most of her old school friends, Britney considered she was closest to her sister and Dahlia felt she belonged among a new group of friends in the school unit.

For Capri, the birth of her son brought a radical and positive change in the way she was living and thinking.

Capri: I feel proud of myself having my son, cos if I didn't have my son I would be out in the streets...

Frances: Yeah?

Capri: ... drinking and smoking weed, um sleeping underneath the bridge ... When I didn't have my son all I wanted to think is drink, smoke weed, smoke cigarettes, go out there, be stupid, sleep underneath the bridge, that's what I used to do, but when I seen my son and his father, he helped me a lot.

Frances: What did he do?

Capri: Well, he got me to... well, when we first met we started talking and started making up plans for ourselves and we started seeing good things out in the world. Ever since then I stopped smoking weed, I still drink but I don't drink what I used to, like drink every day. I only drink about once a month, most probably every two months on special occasions. When I had my son he made me see everything, everything. I love him so much.

An early pregnancy may have catapulted teenagers into assuming adult roles and responsibilities, but for several of the participants the time spent with friends new or old, was examined through different lenses to recognise that changed realities could bring other, and sometimes, more-accessible options.

Gigi: I go out for about two hours and that's me, I'm done. I'm back home in my pajamas, just because oh I don't know, you don't have the energy. I noticed that because I did go out at the weekend and I went to my friend's [to a party] and here's everybody getting wasted because they're that age. Umm, here I am sitting there at about 10 o'clock yawning my face off cos I'm just, I want to go home and I'm tired and yeah, it wasn't very nice. I didn't enjoy it because you know, after having a kid and you know, being pregnant for nine months, you just don't do that. You don't do that and so it's kind of like, I didn't feel like a party pooper, I just felt like, you know, I'm just tired I just want to go home and it's fine, but I did have my fun, then I get home and it was good and I had a very good sleep and then I woke up and there was [her daughter]... But in the end I'm like hang on, it's just as good to be [at home] in your pajamas, eating chocolate and watching good movies.'

Even though they may be in the process of reducing their dependence on parents and moving more towards friends for emotional support, the participants changed circumstances also brought about a shift in interests and they were less inclined to want to socialise. Thus not only were, for example, Capri and Gigi limited by external circumstances, they were also self-limiting and becoming more selective in choosing social relationships. Gigi's new school colleagues were more like close acquaintances and were seen differently from the friends she had made at her old school, even though she had for a while "cut everybody off". Now, with some provisos having fun with her old school friends remained more important and by sometimes taking her child with her Gigi maintained regular daytime contact with her old friends:

Gigi: I keep in touch with my old school friends really well and that's where, you know, my support comes from.

In contrast Dahlia, who lives with her partner and his parents, no longer associates with her earlier friends.

Dahlia: I don't talk to my friends

Frances: Don't you?

Dahlia: No, I made new friends here. My old friends were just wanting to party and get drunk and...

Frances: Yeah.

Dahlia: And I'm not into that.

Frances: And that's not your thing?

Dahlia: Nah. So I just found new friends here [at the teen parent unit]

Predictably the most regular contact with other adolescents was during weekdays at the teen parent unit and the existence of shared experiences and similar goals allowed Dahlia and her new friends to "gossip" and talk about "all sorts of things".

Dahlia: Like if we're having boy problems we can always talk to each other in a big bunch, cos we're all going through the same thing, so it's good to talk around.

For this study's participants, economic support, along with practical, emotional and social assistance emerged as key needs. Teenage mothers are often seen as requiring excessive assistance. Research has suggested that the support they need is little or no different from that ordinarily given to adult mothers, that is women over 20 years (see for example, Furstenberg, 2007; McBride, 1973; Oakley, 1986; Rich, 1976; Thurer, 1996), including hands-on help, advice and guidance, emotional and social support, and approval of effort.

These aspects supplied the basis for the third emergent theme. My own experience, affirmed the contention that the needs of normatively-defined 'adult' mothers and adolescent mothers are very often similar.

As a first-time 'adult' mother I vividly recall feeling inadequate, overwhelmed and desperate because I had no idea, when for several days on end, my baby daughter cried almost non-stop. Adult mothers, that is 'good' mothers, I had been told in the maternity hospital, would know exactly what their baby needed when signalling distress. Maternal instinct would 'kick in'; such knowledge they said, was intuitive, innate, natural, and I was not to worry. The trouble was I didn't know what to do. And I was worried that, because I didn't know intuitively, I was somehow deficient in something basic that everyone else had. I was an unnatural [read 'bad'] mother: On all fronts a failure. I was without ready access to supportive resources (my own mother was ill and unavailable; my husband was at work during the day as were the neighbours, the Plunket nurse would not be back for a couple of weeks, and the landlady disapproved of babies on the premises). In any case, so deeply entrenched was the 'naturalness' discourse, I believed

I was alone in not coping, and in that case asking for help would invite further opprobrium. The only advice available was in Dr Benjamin Spock's child-rearing 'bible'. It was purported to 'make sense', so the paperback accompanied me day or night, into several warm baths with my very distressed daughter naked on my bare chest. The book became more and more soggy and wetly unreadable until my husband said "Enough. Let's get some medical advice." It seemed that our daughter had 'three month colic' and as she was by then, two and half months old, the end was in sight. More than a decade after my first child was born Adrienne Rich (1976) wrote of maternal instinct as 'mythical nonsense'.

4.3.3 Practical, emotional, social support:

In Western countries where adolescence is a time of transition into, and preparation for, adulthood and beyond (Steinberg, 2011), early child-bearing brings young sole mothers face-to-face with the child-caring duties and responsibilities that are socially-constructed as the province of adults. Family care and paid work are considered to signal gateways out of dependence on parents and towards a self-reliance that will achieve adulthood and autonomy (Steinberg, 2011). Neither of these two aspects of achieving maturity is usually achieved in isolation or without some external input.

Britney had indicated that she felt burdened by the sole responsibility of raising a child and also made a brief reference to not getting along very well with her mother.

Furthermore after he left them, the baby's father had made her life 'hell'. Her own father however was 'okay'. The worst aspect of being a young sole mother, she thought, was loneliness.

Britney: Not having anyone to help me out I guess...It sucks being lonely.

What young sole mothers needed most, Britney suggested, was reassurance that they were 'doing okay' as mothers.

Britney: All of us need support... just being able to talk to each other and stuff ... to talk [to people who can tell you] 'well, my kid was like that but they turned out fine'. So right, sweet, maybe my kid is all right then.

Inga appreciated the support she received from her church, but experienced pressure to get married.

Inga: Yeah, um a lot of the young couples have been getting married lately at church and so there's been a lot of pressure, oh, you know 'Are you going to get married? You should get married you know. We can help you organise it, or you can use the church', or the Pastor will like 'I can marry you'. And sort of like, kind of [I've] just had a baby and I don't really want to think about that [marriage] right now. Maybe in a couple of years or something, but I'm okay being a solo mum right now...I think one day when I can actually afford it without taking out a loan, I think would be the best time, better time to get married than right now whereas I could spend five, ten, twenty grand on a wedding, but I could also spend five, ten, twenty grand on I don't know, a house maybe or you know, groceries or [her son]. There's a lot more important uses for that money at the moment.

Capri said she didn't have much support from her friends when she was pregnant and she found it hard because they didn't want to see her. She particularly missed visits from her best friend.

Capri: That was pretty hard and I got depressed and all that stuff. They didn't wanna know me, um [long pause] I didn't have much support really but all I needed was my mum and my dad and my son's father and his parents and I just kept it at that, and I'm doing pretty good for me and my son.

Her mother most understood what it was like to be a sole mother.

Capri: Yeah. Sometimes I tell her about my struggles and stuff and she'll give me good advice, just keep my head up and see the sun, and just be there for my son and that's good advice for me and just look to the future... So dad and mum they're so good especially towards me and my sister cos me and my sister are the only ones with children at the moment, but yep, you can't live without your parents.

While reading through the transcript of her interview, Capri told me that when dealing with WINZ staff she now takes her father with her although they do not allow him to talk; he is there as her support person. It has had a positive effect on the way she is treated. This speaks of power inequalities and gender bias, where even though he was prevented from speaking, as a male his presence had more power to influence and improve outcomes, than Capri as a young sole mother could achieve on her own.

For Dahlia, who left home at 11 years of age, lives with her partner at his parent's home, the regular visits from her Nana, provided her with much appreciated support. It was Nana, Dahlia said, who knew the difficulties of being a sole parent because she *"deals with their problems all the time"*.

Independence was very important for Gigi, who had experienced what she described as *"huge problems with my parents"*. They were, she explained, *"very protective"* of her and also didn't like the baby's father. Gigi felt that *"making her parents happy"* meant breaking-up with the baby's father and his parents, with whom they had been living. Returning home was a move that placated her parents, but temporarily alienated her partner and his parents all of whom she felt *"didn't give a s**t"* about her at the time of the baby's birth. In recent months she thought that they were accepting her again. For a while most of her support came from her friends.

Gigi: My friends have kind of always been there for me.

Moving back into her family's home increased the support given by Gigi's parents.

There were conflicts but they were not so serious.

As adolescence is recognised as a period of changing family relationships, disagreements with parents are normative (Smetana, 2011), and in times of crisis, are likely to be the most dramatic when parent's authority and the teenager's autonomy are likely to be greatly tested. Often the clashes arise from differences in definition – for example where the issue is debated as one of safety or personal choice. In some families adolescent changes may coincide with parental mid-life crises to create very stressful challenges (Steinberg, 2011).

Though much of the research sourced, focused on academic ability and achievement as correlated with socio-economic status, the evidence suggested that in general the influence of friends was somewhat equivocal, that is for the "better or worse" (Steinberg, 2011, p. 383). However parental influence appeared to be stronger in the long term.

When asked who she felt she had the most support from, Holly, who lives with her baby son in her grandparent's home thought carefully.

Holly: Ummmm, probably my Mum.

Frances: Yeah

Holly: And my Nan.

Frances: Yeah.

Holly: Probably my son's father and his parents. He's just been good [and] they help me out heaps.

It was her Nana who was the support person when Holly was having difficulty at the Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ) office. As with Capri, the presence of an older

person served to counter the dominant narrative that young sole mothers have little or no power to effect a necessary end result.

Friendships and close relationships with family members are often functionally linked with levels of support and both mattered a great deal to the study's participants, with support from family members, be they immediate or extended whanau, the most commonly reported.

4.3.4 Support from Work and Income New Zealand:

During recruiting and information sessions for students and staff at the teen parent unit, participants were asked to consider both good and bad experiences at home, in public, at hospital, at school and at WINZ. Some participants related stories about ongoing difficult and stressful interactions with WINZ staff. For example, on one occasion Capri had arranged an appointment with a WINZ staff member to precede a hospital appointment for her son. This was the experience she earlier summarised as "horrible".

Capri: They make you sit there for three hours. Just waiting for your appointment.... But if you go in there 15 minutes late we're not allowed to see our- we can't go to our appointment.

Frances: So if you're late, too bad, come back another day?

Capri: Yeah. Make another appointment. Too bad. That's it. And when you're there early you're made to sit for another three hours.

Frances: How do you respond to that? How does that make you feel?

Capri: What they're doing is sitting at their desk doing nothing. Doing nothing. And I had my son and... and I missed my son's appointment at the hospital. I told them 'Can you please hurry up because I've got a hospital appointment to go to'. And I still sat there for three hours.

Frances: So what do you do when that happens?

Capri: You have to sit there, because if you up and walk [out] you have to make another appointment and then you have to sit there for another two or three hours... Oh, they growl at you for no reason. They make a lot of mistakes. You know, how you fill out a paper and next minute they lose it and you have to go find another appointment... It's horrible. It's horrible. And you have got some good ones.

Frances: What makes a good one?

Capri: Oh, a good one? They make you feel comfortable and they try to help you out [and tell you] when you can afford it. These horrible ones, they don't want to bother with you, they make you sit there for ages and they give you a lecture and all that stuff. They're horrible.

In wishing that WINZ staff were “just better people” Capri added that would improve their manners.

Capri: Yeah, being nicer and don't be grumpy. It's not our fault that you're [they're] so grumpy. You've got some beneficiaries who can be arseholes. Sorry about that. You do have some arsehole ones, but you don't have to take it out on everybody. Trying to hold their anger in pretty much. When you see bad people coming in, just leave it at that. And when you see another person, just put on a happy face. And don't make people sit in the waiting room for ages.

With neither space for children to play in nor anything for them to play with, Capri found it difficult to keep her son occupied while waiting and saw irony in the amount of space allocated to the WINZ staff.

Capri: They've got heaps of space for their desks though. They don't have spaces for a child. Especially if you've got like, if your child is sick and you have to bring him with you and you've got to go to WINZ or childcare is on holiday and you have to bring them to WINZ, they should have a little play area for them... or a little bit of toys.'

With some amusement Capri recalled letting her son go where ever he wanted to while waiting.

Capri: I just let my son run wild run wild.

Deprived of a space for her son to play in, ignored when reminding the WINZ staff of her son's hospital appointment and after waiting for three hours to be attended to, Capri was denied many of the common courtesies normatively due in social transactions. She chose direct action as one of the options of resistance available to her at the time.

Angelina faced a difficult dilemma when she sought a clothing grant from WINZ to purchase much-needed clothes for herself. She had too little left from her weekly DPB payment to go shopping for clothes.

Angelina: I went in for a clothing grant the other day and I was wearing the clothes that I had got given for my birthday and they say 'you look fine' and I say 'have you seen my other clothes?' No, they just judge you straight away.

Frances: So, what are they presuming? Because you look okay...

Angelina: Because I look okay [But] I'm not going to come in looking like a horror. I still have respect for myself.

She added that maintaining respect for herself was stressful at times but she was not going to 'dress down' in order to get a clothing grant. Had Angelina decided that to obtain a much-needed clothing grant she would have to 'dress down' she risked confirming the 'sole-mother-as-slag/slut' stereotype; similarly by refusing to 'look like a horror' she risked affirming the 'sole-mother-as-bludger' stereotype'. Either way, a sole mother in need is constructed as one of the undeserving poor (Gans, 1995). Moreover in both 'scenarios' Angelina was forced into self-policing and both contexts exemplify the ways in which the power of the Foucauldian gaze continues to pathologise sole mothers as 'other' that is different and therefore unworthy.

Gigi had mixed experiences with WINZ and raised the topic without prompting.

Gigi: I tell you what though going on the WINZ subject, it was not easy for me to get, um a benefit. The DPB was easy because I moved to [a different] branch and I had a lovely, lovely, lovely case manager. Also I had turned 18 and I was eligible for it and I wasn't with [baby's father] and I wasn't living with him. But while I was pregnant and 16 it was the most horrible experience of my life. They absolutely degraded me. It was at the [another branch] and I just, honestly I just felt horrible. They seriously, they just dig you into the ground and it was this one guy and I ended up calling up and complaining about him because I was I was so hurt and disgusted by how he had treated me and mm, you know just, 'You can't get on this, you can't get on that', when there was absolutely something I could have gone on, 'umm the umm. What was it? Oh, there was a benefit'.

Gigi was referring to an Emergency Maintenance Allowance (EMA) payable to pregnant girls under the age of eighteen years and part of the DPB structure. The caseworker had not volunteered information about the EMA¹⁶ until Gigi mentioned it.

Gigi: So we we're going to get this benefit and he goes, 'oh, but you don't have this, [document] you need this'. Okay, so I went home and I called up a person and I said, 'Look WINZ has told me that I need this document, ah, can you help me?' "[The person said] 'Um, no we can't, but maybe this person?'. So they put me onto another person, got another phone number, called them up, 'Um, no sorry I have no idea', [they] gave me another phone number. Honestly four or five times they put me on to other people [and they said] 'Sorry you can't get those anymore, you just can't. No way'. So of course I went back to WINZ and I said 'You know I just cannot believe this. I cannot get this document, so what the hell am I supposed to do'. [He said] 'Oh you can't? Oh, here I'll try'. So this guy, oh my God, honestly, I was just so angry, I was just sitting there. While he was making all these bloody phone calls, which led him nowhere, and he just wouldn't listen to me.

¹⁶ The Emergency Maintenance Allowance is now known as the Young Parent Payment. Eligibility; criteria appear to be unchanged.

When Gigi returned to WINZ sometime later she was informed that the document was no longer required.

Gigi: They had changed their leaflets... and they had taken out the document and it's because of me... But umm, yeah, I had absolutely no financial support apart from [baby's father] while I was pregnant and it was horrible'.

Judith Smetana (2011) suggests that conflict is only one way of maintaining or achieving autonomy and young people who feel they cannot directly express disagreement with peers, parents and others, will find a variety of ways to manage exchanging information. Often their disagreements and actions are based on beliefs about privacy, 'what I do is my business and no-one else's'. Furthermore, they may fear disapproval or punishment. However, conflict provides a way of expanding boundaries and fostering autonomy, independence and personal control.

Not being heard or not being understood for Gigi equated with being treated as a child. She had already made a decision not to have an abortion (*"I actually want to have this child"*), had experienced problems with her parents (*"I didn't talk to them the entire time I was pregnant"*) and difficulties with the baby's father (*"Even though he's the father of the child, actually he's a poor one"*) and his parents (*"They're just absolutely terrible"*). She felt she was mature enough to make appropriate decisions for herself and her baby, and found it a struggle to maintain autonomy and decrease her dependence on her parents and others.

Clearly being able to decide, autonomously and independently, is an important consideration for teenagers, which like identity, Steinberg (2011) points out, is a concern that appears and disappears throughout life: Self-determination, he says, is not only about actions it is also about feelings and thoughts

During a time when adolescent roles and relationships are radically changing, inexperienced young sole mothers require at least some dependence on others. However a tension appears to exist even though, as development progresses and experience increases, adolescents will experiment with making more autonomous decisions and become less dependent on others and the tension will ease. As feminist researchers have long pointed out, apparent dichotomous relationships, say for example between autonomy and dependence, can more readily be understood when different contextual variables are taken account of. For example, in times of disruptive, unprepared-for change the greater need is likely to involve relying on others; in different circumstances however autonomous decisions may be more reliable and appropriate. And/or binaries often serve to exclude real-life social contexts. It also depends on how adolescents see themselves and the situation, and on whether others regard adolescents as 'little kids' or emergent adults. Achieving independence in many social contexts is made more difficult when there is very little money.

Very early in her interview, Gigi expressed her views on the government's changes to the social welfare system and suggested that because adolescents were often treated as older children they were consequently discriminated against and patronised.

Adolescents, Gigi forcefully argued, were 'not little kids'.

Gigi: We're not little kids. We need to learn, ourselves, how to budget or else how are we going to get on with life.

In particular Gigi was referring to the government's decision to provide young DPB recipients with plastic cards that would limit their spending to household essentials.

Dahlia, 17, and her partner were planning on leaving his parents home to start out on their own with their baby. Dahlia's wish to 'get on with life' independently echoed that of Gigi, Angelina and Faye.

Dahlia: We're just leaving because we're getting older now and we need to start adventuring for ourselves and going out there and doing it ourselves instead of having, like, of wanting them to help us all the time. We should do it ourselves.

Not surprisingly the participants felt that the most consistent support came from daily contact with the other young mothers and the staff at the teen parent unit. Advice and guidance were readily available from visiting professionals including social workers, Plunket nurses, kaumatua, and doctors all of whom made regular visits to the school and were on call as needed.

Faye: Here we have support from each other and the teachers and we also do parenting courses so that I was doing health and parenting and I finished that which was helpful... There are so many babies at different stages here, so you get to know where your baby will be in a couple of months and just being able to talk to everyone and there's lots of support here.

A big part of it is being around girls who are in the same situation... it's like it just feels so normal to be around other teen mums, especially now that I've got an older baby and then helping girls who come here who are pregnant, that's good because you know how helpful it was for you, so you just have to pass it on really, yeah.

Like many first-time parents, young sole mothers need support often of a kind that places them in situations of dependence on others, and even though adolescent autonomy is likely on occasions to be confused with rebellion, the processes of individuation do not necessarily impede developing the ability to self-govern.

Consistent throughout the participants' narratives were themes indicating that the young

sole mothers regarded themselves as more capable of coping unsupervised than they were given credit for.

4.3.5 “But, - um, - where are the jobs?”

Three participants found the government’s insistence that all welfare beneficiaries must make themselves ‘work ready’ hard to understand. How could a paid job be achieved in an environment of high unemployment? Where was the work that would improve their day-to-day living?

With no exceptions, all of the study’s participants wanted to get into the paid-work community. It meant they were meeting the societal expectations that mandated contributing to their own and others’ economic and social well-being. It was also part of being a responsible adult. But in a time of high unemployment what was to be gained by making welfare beneficiaries find paid work?

None of the participants liked being dependent on the DPB, especially as governments had insisted that welfare dependence is ‘bad’ and that beneficiaries should do as they are told and find paid work. By implication welfare dependence meant the people receiving it were also bad. At the same time there was a clear recognition of the realities implied in the nation’s rising unemployment figures.

Faye: I just don't understand, like they want us Mums to get out there and work, but really everyone's fighting for a job, so I don't understand how these jobs are coming up. What jobs are coming up... If there were jobs of course we'd be looking. But um, where are the jobs?

Gigi: [after describing how she had gone on the Internet to see what jobs were available and could find none that would fit with her present commitments] I met John Key at [supermarket] one day and I told him that. I said you know, I see what you're trying to do, but I don't approve of what you're doing. I just,

you know, I feel like we need to have our independence. And he was like, oh yeah, that's fine, that's cool... It's putting pressure on me and I'm just not looking forward to it at all.

She also described how under the new welfare system she would be using a government-provided payment card designed to limit choices when shopping at the supermarket.

Gigi: *It's like, I don't know, it just might take all the fun out of it, because the whole fun of flatting is you know, budgeting yourself, and you know knowing what you can and can't afford and things like that. Also it's embarrassing because everybody is going to know that you're on a benefit when you have a payment card, you know.*

On the basis of age, Gigi's ability to make, and follow through on, 'sensible' choices was doubted. In other words her autonomy was threatened.

Some of the participants' narratives indicated considerable awareness of the lack of financial advantage when, and if, paid employment could be found. Having done part-time work before, Capri recognised that a pay rate of a little over \$13 an hour would make no difference to her standard of living. Angelina who, since leaving the school unit, had been job hunting without success, also knew the pay-rate realities and did not want to return to work yet.

Angelina: *Cos I'd be bringing in the same amount anyway, close to what I'm getting on the benefit. It still won't be enough anyway.*

Frances: *Do you think it's fair, having to go back to work?*

Angelina: *In a way it is, in a way it's not. You should be ready. Everyone is different... they should look at everyone's situation differently... [It would] be all right with a part-time job.*

Frances: *What do you think your chances are of getting a part-time job?*

Angelina: Unlikely. [laughs] There aren't any jobs at the moment. They're forcing people who have lost their jobs, forcing them to get jobs and I know someone who's been looking for jobs for ages and still can't get a job. It makes it a lot harder for everyone.

Rather than forcing people into work, Capri saw a need for encouraging better rates of pay and increasing the current level of welfare and social support.

Capri: We just need like more help pretty much [and] not try to get us to go out there and get jobs when there's no jobs out there and go to a course when you've not applied to go to a course, and when your baby's sick and you can't go to work and go to your course and do your baby. That's pretty hard, that's real hard.

While commonly blamed and perceived as 'stupid', 'bludgers', 'lazy' or 'breeding for a business', the young sole mothers who spoke about employment made it clear that the choice of when, where, what and how they could go back to work, should be their own decision and account should be taken of individual circumstances.

Capri actively sought work after the birth of her baby, but had only been able to find casual part-time employment. In doing so she lost access to the DPB and by working she risked jeopardising her son's health.

Capri: From my point of view it's been, my son will get sick. I won't have the days I can get off because there's some days you can't get off because you did all your annual leave, sick leave and all that stuff, because if you have too much days off you're gonna get fired and that's pretty hard, cos I told them [WINZ] that I was doing part-time [work] and they said I still can't have the benefit because I'm still working and I'm getting so much money and I said well I'm only getting thirteen dollars an hour and it's only a part-time job. And what else am I gonna do?

Frances: Presuming that there is a job available, how much difference would that make to you?

Capri: It won't make any difference, you'll still be struggling especially if you are on your own, because you'll still have less money than what you had on the benefit.

As discussed in the literature review chapter, welfare-to-work programmes introduced in OECD countries such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, USA and Denmark over the last decade have so far failed to improve the lives of sole parents and their children. Indeed research evidence suggests that the only 'success' has been to move people off welfare lists thus reducing caseload numbers (Quaid, 2002) leading to an increasing workload for voluntary organisations. Welfare-to-work schemes are consistently regarded overseas (see Walter, 2002) and in Aotearoa-New Zealand (see St John et al., 2004, 2008), as unlikely to alleviate poverty.

At the time of writing, adolescents, in particular in Aotearoa-New Zealand, faced severely reduced opportunities for obtaining paid work. In the three months prior to September 2012, New Zealand's unemployment rate rose to 7.3 percent, up from 6.8 percent in the previous quarter (Statistics NZ, November 2012).

Young sole mothers carry multiple burdens. No matter what they do they are blamed, even within their own families, for flouting normative rules and are placed outside society into the margins; they live with trash-equivalent terms that label and encourage people to treat them as outsiders. They are positioned in a non-existent homogenous group then controlled by the powerful because of age-related misperceptions of social, emotional, discursive and cognitive immaturity, castigated for being dependent on social welfare, for not contributing to fiscal budgets and for failing to carry out their citizenship duties. It is a bleak, even shameful, construction, and yet in spite of inadequate welfare support, the 10 young sole mothers interviewed were proud of their children and proud of their efforts to improve their own situation because in doing so

they sought to improve their child's chances for a better life. They saw themselves as winners, not losers.

4.4 Chapter summary:

In this chapter I explored the participants' stories about the impact of often-ignored economic realities that dictate how people are compelled to live their lives. The areas identified by the young sole mothers as the most problematic, included how lack of money prevented them from providing for the basic needs of their child, and also made socialising difficult if not impossible. The chapter also examined the importance of practical, social and emotional support from friends and family and identified some of the sole mothers' fraught experiences with WINZ staff. Also described were participants' perceived problems in obtaining paid work when unemployment rates in Aotearoa-New Zealand were at such a high level.

Chapter Five extends beyond the everyday effects of imposed poverty to emphasise socio-emotional experiences. For example, the motivations leading the young sole mothers to continue their school studies, attitudes to paid work, their approach to experiences of stereotyping by members of the public and their own views of teenage mothers. I also explore the strategies of resistance drawn upon to counter dominant narratives.

CHAPTER FIVE:

ADOLESCENT SOLE MOTHERS' LIFE EXPERIENCES:

PSYCHO-SOCIAL THEMES

5.1 Introduction:

Chapter Four reported on themes that emerged from the participants' stories of the everyday realities that inhere as a consequence of inadequate material stability. These included financial aspects of day-to-day living as a young sole mother and featured the deprivation experienced while receiving a State-provided Domestic Purposes Benefit. Also explored were experiences of conflict with friends, family and WINZ, the participants' desire for consistent support, and their anxiety over having to find paid work when none is readily available.

Chapter Five discusses the psychosocial themes that emerged during interview discussions, including compliance with norms, stigmatising and stereotyping experiences, dominant narratives and strategies of resistance. Decisions surrounding school studies, paid work, childcare, the future, and the silencing of sole mothers are also covered. Once again, the thematic narratives are characterised by parenthetical comments, hesitations, colloquialisms, pauses and asides. As in Chapter Four, the young sole mothers' narratives were not necessarily comprehensive or consistent but they are none the less compelling.

5.2 Complying with social norms:

In a socially constructed world, individuals learn personal values, societal attitudes and behavioural repertoires (Glasberg & Shannon, 2011; Jenkins, 2008) in processes that contribute to the development of identity. Included are unspoken assumptions about the behaviours society considers acceptable. Often sense-making processes are based on internalised ideologies that specify the way things *should* be. The state, schools and the media, are important contributors as are parents, peers, political institutions and members of the public (Jenkins, 2008). When young sole mothers are depicted for example as ‘sluts’, ‘slags’, ‘bludgers’, and ‘welfare queens’ and these terms and images are repeated sufficiently often, these representations tend to become publicly-accepted realities. Gergen (2009) writes that these realities “inform public policies, educational practices, police actions and so on” (p. 51). Ehrenreich and Piven (1984) noted that bureaucracies that have degraded and humiliated their clients over decades tend to reiterate systemic practices of scapegoating welfare beneficiaries, women in particular, and it seems little has changed since then. In effect, dominant narratives enable powerful institutions to give welfare assistance with one hand and denigrate the recipients with the other. In searching for recognition and acceptance into adulthood, teenagers explore and expand their knowledge of societal norms and will make significant efforts to find where they fit socially and to come to terms with the consequences of not doing so (Crosnoe, 2011). The norms, which inform us directly and indirectly about what thoughts, words and deeds are socially permissible, are mediated by moral standards, cultural and religious traditions, as well as political ideologies and community mores (Gergen, 2009). Adapting to society’s normative requirements necessitates relying on social exchanges with others and oftentimes self-censoring to modify one’s discursive processes and actions (Jenkins, 2008). We all make efforts to

comply with normative standards; they represent the rules our society expects us to live by. By attending the teen parent unit to continue their high school education, the participants were improving their chances of better employment opportunities to advance their own and their children's futures and they were complying with a norm that in most societies, constructs education as socially and economically valuable. However, a young sole mother who opts to care for her child herself is complying with a 'hands-on' mothering norm but at the same time flouting it, since child-bearing and caring is normatively reserved for mature/adult partnered women. It is a prescriptive edict that allows for both culpability and commendation and the participants' narratives told of experiencing more blame than praise. What also became apparent was a tacit acceptance that their efforts would be insufficient to dilute the rhetoric positioning them as deviant.

Inga: There's always got to be someone who makes the silly comments or someone who makes you feel uncomfortable.

Angelina: You get sort of targeted in a way.

Capri: When I walk past they think we're stupid.

Faye: I think we are quite stereotyped.

5.3 Stereotyping and stigmatising:

Stereotypes provide one-dimensional, usually derogatory overgeneralisations about others, and are frequently directed towards those with visible characteristics different from their own (Pickering, 2001). It is not too long ago that pregnant teens were expelled from school in case their visibly different shape 'contaminated' others (Luker, 1996).

The consequence of stereotyping individuals and/or groups is to stigmatise and blame them (Goffman, 1963; Pickering, 2001; Spicker, 1984; Yardley, 2008). The research evidence is plentiful and also documents a continuing culture of blame: Furstenberg (2007) noted that in 1995, teenage pregnancy was held to be a significant contributor to family breakdown. Fifteen years later Arai (2009) commented that pregnancies among young girls continued to be perceived by policymakers as a “significant public health and social problem” (p. 3). Fed by political ideologies of individual responsibility, legislative and policy discourse has been able to justify treating young sole mothers differently.

Holly: It's like they laugh at us. It doesn't really matter how old you are.

Capri: Yeah, every time I walk past with my son you hear like other people behind your talking behind your back. There was a couple of old ladies just looking at me and they're going 'Oh look at this stupid young mum getting pregnant and having children they shouldn't have'.

The prevailing normative standards have not shifted to accept adolescent pregnancy and child-rearing as anything other than a serious social problem requiring an urgent solution. Many of the participants experienced negative assessments and disapproval from people they did not know but as we shall see, they had recourse to a broad repertoire of resistance strategies involving considerable discursive and emotional effort. For example, after having difficulty in obtaining a needed clothing grant from WINZ because of the nice clothes she was wearing, Angelina talked of having to convince herself that she was an okay person, which she found stressful (see Chapter Four).

5.4 Dominant narratives:

Gergen (2009) considers that dominant narratives claim rightness, correctness, authority and power. As documented in Chapter Four the participants' stories of having to deprive their children and themselves of many of life's basics, make it hard to escape the view that their plight is a direct consequence of a constellation of derogating dominant narratives which fulfil all of Gergen's aforementioned criteria, and serve to legitimate continued conditions of disadvantage and deprivation.

Almost thirty years ago Spicker (1984), and more recently others (see for example, Funicello, 1993; Furstenberg, 2007; Kingfisher, 2004) contended that being poor is seen as 'wrong', receiving social welfare is 'wrong', and being an adolescent sole mother is also 'wrong', all of which contribute to degradation, embarrassment and/or humiliation which are all related to the kind of 'othering' that Said (2003) identified in relation to the West's representation of the 'East'.

Pickering (2001) writes that the belief, that dominant narratives based on stereotyping could be rectified by the provision of more accurate and realistic information, is little more than "wishful liberal thinking" (p. 12). Along with Tajfel (1981), in his classic research, Pickering regards dominant narratives and stereotypes as operating within rigid ideologies that resist the provision of information. None-the less, Faye was hopeful that with increased awareness of what the students at the teen parent unit were doing, the public's negative and often dominant views of teenage motherhood could be modified, even changed. By returning to school, the study's participants were agentic in actively exploring change through continuing their education and concomitantly gaining normatively approved-of mothering skills.

5.5 Norms of mothering:

Many normative standards are imbued with inconsistencies. For example, policy-makers currently expect a young sole mother to be independent in an environment that approves of age-related dependence for an adolescent under the age of sixteen. As well, independent and dependent young mothers are expected to be knowledgeable and experienced in situations that have often failed to provide adequate social and economic support and they are required to successfully raise a child on their own in a socio-political milieu that continues to normatively valorise nuclear two-parent families.

Aware of the pressure to mother well, with the parenting skills component in the school unit's syllabus speaking of normative forces, the "spectre of the bad mother hovers over a woman all the more oppressively if she has internalised the ideal of the good mother" (Badinter, 2011, p. 141). Like the participants in Croghan and Miell's (1998) study, Gigi, Faye and Angelina recognised that while there might be 'bad' mothers, neither they nor those attending the teen parent unit could be included in that category. As was pointed out, the women studied had accommodated and resisted the negative positioning "to construct a positive maternal identity whilst negotiating for effective help from welfare agencies" (Croghan & Miell, 1998, p. 445).

Stories and testimony of child-caring competence were common narratives for countering the positioning of adolescent mothers as immature and inadequate. Recourse to a self-belief that young sole mothers could adequately and appropriately look after a baby was reflected in many stories. Jasmin was pleased with the routine she had organised to include regular quality time at home with her daughter.

Jasmin: She is in quite a good routine like I'm quite surprised. I think it's the way I've brought her up. She knows her routine.

Participants frequently adopted a narrative with the message, 'I-know-more-than -you-realise-about-babies', to resist the dominant perception of age-related incompetence. Having spent three years at the teen parent unit, Faye felt she had learned a lot from the crèche supervisors, the teaching staff and the other young mothers and their babies. Dahlia too felt well prepared for a new baby, as she had looked after a younger brother and sister. She thought that both she and the baby's father were mature enough to cope with a baby of their own.

Dahlia: We were ready for a baby, very mature.

Holly was in no doubt about her own baby-caring capabilities.

Holly: I know that I can look after my own baby.

When Inga worried about what to do, she sought advice from several sources - Plunket, the doctor or Helpline.

Inga: You've got to speak to someone else just to find out or get advice, but in the end I think you can decide for yourself, out of the options, which one is better:

While it is tempting to 'write off' teenagers' views of their own child-raising capabilities as immature wishful thinking, Rich (1976), Luker (1996), Yardley (2008) and others, have pointed out that 'perfect', 'normal', 'average' mothers do not exist and that many of the standards set for child-rearing in developed countries belong within a cluster of middle-class assumptions and expectations. Furthermore, children of teen mothers do better than society was willing to acknowledge. After three decades of studying teenage pregnancy in the USA, Furstenberg (2007) found considerable disparities between the aspirations of young sole mothers and later outcomes, nevertheless significant numbers had "defied the stereotype" (p. 31). They had continued with

their education, found good employment and no longer required welfare assistance.

Collins (2010), in a report to the Ministry of Social Development proposing a different policy approach to sole parenting, stated that in “absolute terms” (p. 4) when compared to two-parent family structures, the proportion of sole parent families in Aotearoa-New Zealand experiencing disadvantage remained high.

The ubiquitousness of dominant and normative narratives is hard to escape, as is the interplay of resistant/counter narratives. The narratives outlined by the participants, however, indicated that they were well capable of challenging and resisting the pejoratives implied in being positioned as ‘other’. They were also aware of the gender bias implied in many of their experiences with people in authority

5.6 Narratives relating to gender bias:

While sole parenting in OECD countries (Kingfisher, 1999) has in recent years been directly associated with higher unemployment and continuing dependence on welfare, teenage pregnancy and sole parent mothering is also seen as inextricably linked to a range of adverse outcomes (Jaffee, 2002). Adolescent mothers in most developed countries have continued to be held personally responsible for too-early sexual activity and concomitantly for too-early pregnancies both of which offend against the normative rules of society (Amsel & Smetana, 2011; Furstenberg, 2007; Goffman, 1963; Yardley, 2008). However narratives continue to normatively applaud young men’s experimentation with sex, while disapproving of young women’s sexual explorations. Offensive name calling also has a gender base: In a parenthetical aside after her interview, Angelina told me she had overheard a group of young men calling a young mother “*the town bike*”, but could not recall any derogatory terms being applied to sexually-active young men.

Parents of adolescents may or may not condone a son's sexual activity, but a daughter's sexual involvement can be much less tolerated, particularly if the consequence is a baby. Gigi's parents had difficulty adjusting to their new status as grandparents and she noted that it was some time before her mother could introduce the new baby as her grandchild. Her father too, was "*highly embarrassed*" and remained unwilling to introduce her to his friends or work colleagues.

Gigi: It's a very special thing going to Dad's work and all my [siblings] have been to his work and I have not because I have [daughter] and he won't unless I leave [daughter] with Mum and it's really unfair. I actually cried, I cried because I did go to his work one time and umm I had to stay [out of sight] cos of [daughter] and it was really horrible.

As Capri found, gender-based rules made many young mothers feel guilty:

Capri: And when you see other [young] mums out there, they feel guilty for themselves, for having children and all that stuff. It's not their fault; it takes two to mingle.

In her comment, "*it takes two to mingle*", Capri suggests that blameworthiness and guilt are apportioned differently according to gender. For her, sexual activity was/is consensual, but young women continue to be regarded as more blameworthy than young men.

On almost any front, age is a significant determinant of responsibility. A young sole mother's competence is in doubt for parental responsibilities normatively assigned to adults. Young sole fathers too are less likely to help when this country's adolescent unemployment rate remains high. Many of the new welfare policies restrict young mothers' freedoms and, as can be seen in the resistance narratives outlined by the participants, appear to be reluctant to consider individual needs and competencies.

5.7 Resistance strategies and counter narratives:

Resistance against the dominant narratives positioning sole mothers as ‘lazy’ ‘stupid’ girls who ‘slack-off’ by relying on the public purse for continuing support, was readily identifiable in the participants’ narratives. What may be a dominant narrative, in one socio-cultural context, may be resistant in another. A refusal to accept the stereotype marks the beginning of a discourse of resistance and identity activism (Gergen, 2009). Embedded socially mandated directives about what young sole mothers should be doing has however labelled them as blameworthy bludgers. Resisting such blame requires drawing on strategies and defences to construct counter narratives, which Lyotard (1984, cited in Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren & Peters, 1996, p. 2) explained were contained in “the little stories of those individuals and groups whose knowledges and histories have been marginalised, subjugated or forgotten in the telling of official narratives”. The resistance strategies and counter narratives accessed by the young mothers included protest actions, deflection, repudiation, distancing and silence and indicated an ability to adapt their responses to situational contexts. Taken together, these narratives exemplify not only the lengths to which adolescent sole mothers will go to, to discursively repudiate their positioning as deviant young women, but also the resilience they display in their choice of responses to the varying stressful relationships they encountered. Gigi for example considered but rejected getting a job as another way of resisting feelings of being pushed around by the politically powerful.

Gigi: I'm feeling a bit pressurised [sic] I guess it's because it's almost like I feel instead of having them, you know, rule my money, I almost want to go out and get a job myself, which I know is absolutely impossible, to kind of you know, prove them wrong.

When she experienced difficulty with a WINZ staff member who made her feel “degraded”, Gigi acted and formally complained about him.

Gigi: I ended up calling up and complaining about him because I was so hurt and disgusted by how he treated me.

Capri, (see Chapter Four) while waiting three hours to see a WINZ staff member, felt that as the office staff had plenty of space for their desks, some “*little spaces for a child*” might have been provided. When it wasn’t she let her son “*run wild*”.

Both Angelina and Gigi found difficulty in understanding how politicians who had gained from the previous welfare system could institute changes that would disadvantage others.¹⁷

Gigi: He [John Key] is thinking about those people who are bludging the system but then there are people... ...like, some of these girls and they're actually, they're getting an education and they're trying hard to you know, do well and he's making all these tough rules and it's just sad. You know it's sad but obviously he's going to be very stubborn about it and won't listen to anybody. And you know what I find incredible is ummm, one of his colleagues was a teen mum as well.

Angelina asked why and how an MP who as a sole mother had received welfare payments, could restructure the Training Incentive Allowance, that had once assisted her and other sole mothers to further their education.

¹⁷The Prime Minister, John Key, has frequently talked of being brought up in a State house by his widowed mother; and the Minister of Social Development, Paula Bennett, is understood to have participated in tertiary education while a DPB recipient.

5.7.1 Learning norm-based skills:

Most normatively accepted skills and behaviours are learned inside and outside the family, through observation, socialisation processes and hands-on experience. In the only narrative examining the effect of a government proposal to provide a payment card for young sole mothers, Gigi suggested that it would deprive many young mothers of the opportunity to learn about balancing the family budget. The payment card would prohibit the purchase of alcohol and tobacco, and limit the amount that could be spent overall.

Gigi: Some of their intentions are good for you know, no smoking, no alcohol, but you know it's not like we're little kids. We need to have [the opportunities] we need to learn ourselves how to budget, or else how are we going to get on in life.

By assuming adolescent immaturity, the payment card proposal served to re-affirm and deny sole mothers an important and normative opportunity to learn:

Here again, Gigi was rejecting the dominant narrative that young sole mothers are to be treated as “*little kids*” to be kept under control, and accepting that ‘good’ mothers are independent and mature. Gigi maintained that independence and maturity are achieved by individual learning and doing, and the government had deprived some mothers of a learning opportunity solely because of their young age.

In the current climate of economic restraint, a neo-conservative might suggest that we all have to learn to live within budget limitations: Young sole mothers receiving the DPB have more stringent limits than others.

All of the young mothers felt that what they were doing was good for their baby, their families, themselves and society.

Faye: Look at what we are doing, we are studying, and we are putting our babies first by getting a better education, and getting out of bed every morning with our babies, and getting ready and going to school every day, so I don't think they should be judging us or thinking low about us, because I think what we are doing is really great.

The sole mothers active involvement in education and mothering provided what Faye hoped would be persuasive evidence that all sole mothers should not be stigmatised or condemned.

According to McNay (1992), Foucault suggests that “freedom from the normalizing forms of individuality consists of an exploration of the limits of subjectivity,” (p. 89) which would open up new types of subjective experiences in a lifetime of uncovering and re-inventing oneself, which by returning to school, the sole mothers were endeavouring to do.

Those experiences were available as sole mothers’ narratives when public discussions on the options for restructuring the welfare system were held. However, even though around 113,000 sole parents constituted a major stakeholder and sole mothers comprised an estimated 87 to 89 percent of DPB recipients (MSD Quick Facts, 2011), they were not consulted.

5.8 Political silencing and censoring:

To assume that silence is simply an absence of speech is to elide its multiple meanings. Silencing and censoring are applied in many forms - most often to discourage or suppress dissent (Thiesmeyer, 2003). They also maintain the dominant narratives that reinforce neo-liberal constructions of individual responsibility for who we are and how we are to live (Jenkins, 2008). During research for this project, I enquired under the

Official Information Act whether sole parents had been directly represented at discussion sessions organised in November 2010 by the Working Welfare Group. The emailed reply stated that the Ministry of Social Development was “not aware of any of the organisations which we contract services to, of having recently made representations or reports specifically on sole parents” (Howlett, April 18, 2012. Appendix 1). In other words more than 110,000 sole parents, the men and women most affected by the welfare restructuring were excluded and thus silenced. As Sara Ahmed (2010) said in her foreword to *Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process* (Roisin-Flood & Gill, 2010), those who are “barred from participation in a conversation” (p. xvi) which directly involved them, have been silenced. In the current context, the contribution of sole parents had no value and their voices have remained unheard, a point acknowledged in the Alternative Welfare Working Group’s (AWWG) report of November, 2010:

“Television, radio, magazines and newspapers present material from politicians, academics, policy advisors and social commentators that make all sorts of claims about the circumstances and choices of people receiving benefits, with almost no room for comments by beneficiaries themselves” (p. 5). The AWWG, Caritas and the Beneficiary Advocacy Federation (BAF) had organised a nationwide series of discussions allowing welfare beneficiaries to contribute to the debate. The Federation has since had its government funding cut by 50 percent (Radio New Zealand News. March 5, 2013).

Roisin-Flood and Gill (2010) suggested that the meanings of silence, silencing and being silenced depend on contexts, the nature of relationships and power disparities. Along with secrecy, they asserted, silence matters “ethically, politically and epistemologically” (p. 1), particularly in feminist-based research aimed at foregrounding marginalised voices.

5.9 Self-silencing narratives:

Alongside the externally situated act of being silenced, individuals may silence themselves in order to achieve or maintain social or psychological equilibrium. Gilligan (2010) considered that silencing constituted evidence of the continuation of an overarching framework of patriarchal and gendered societal codes and further suggested that the self-silencing leading to a prevalence of depressive symptoms in women, may have its genesis in adolescence. She writes, “Approaching adolescence girls describe a crisis of relationship as they face pressures from without and within to choose between having a voice and having relationships” (Gilligan, 2010, p. xi). This was exemplified in Gigi’s experience with her parents when returning home to live.

Gigi: [When] Mum says something back, I just have to shut my mouth because you just don’t want to fight with her, cos she’s one of those people that is just right, no matter what, no matter what.

In order to continue a family relationship she obviously valued, Gigi deflected conflict and dissent by ‘shutting her mouth’. Her mother’s ‘voice’ took precedence over her own.

In another social context, Inga self-silenced by choosing to ignore the disparaging looks she received when out with her baby. To respond meant ‘making a scene’, so she kept silent and left. For Inga, saying nothing and physically distancing herself were the most available resistance options.

5.9.1 Censorship and self-policing:

Most commonly censoring connotes with the removal of something others might consider offensive or objectionable. When the personal and the political are enmeshed,

Foucault sees censorship as a coercive mechanism for self-policing (O'Grady, 2005). Neo-liberalism's coercive power in forming welfare recipients identity is considerable, particularly for young women parenting alone and evident throughout the narratives were examples of the effect of the Foucauldian discriminating gaze on the participants. In what Gordon (1980) described as an 'inspecting gaze' or "the internalised gaze of authority" (O'Grady, 2005, p. 24) those looks signified a societal censure which threatened autonomy and fostered self-censoring/self-policing.

Inga, Angelina, Capri, Faye, Holly and Gigi's narratives told of being judged by others' looks and feeling disapproved of as young sole mothers.

***Gigi:** They just totally, totally degrade you and you can tell just by people looking at you... There was one person who gave me the most horrible look... it was like daggers in her eyes... It was the look she gave me.*

***Holly:** I think they look at us differently... I think they look at us like we don't know how to look after babies...*

***Angelina:** They judge you straight away because I look okay... Like I take respect in what I look like, I've got hole-y clothes but they're my home clothes [so] I'm not going to walk into any interview or appointment or anything. Yeah, I think it's that if you walk in with hole-y stuff, if you walk in like that, then it's 'Oh you need a clothing allowance'...*

Being judged by the way she looked, required Angelina to locate a strategy for resisting the discrimination she experienced at WINZ when applying for a clothing grant to replace worn-out garments. In an effort to resist being positioned as a 'benefit bludger' Angelina had conscientiously repaid money she had earlier received from WINZ and felt that while she had treated WINZ responsibly they had judged her by her looks rather than her effort.

Capri deflected the disapproving ‘looks’ from some older women, and disparaging comments from other strangers by constructing her situation differently and drawing on individual choice and an unshakeable affection for her son to signify her maturity.

Capri: It's not their choice, it's our choice. It's not our fault we wanted to keep our babies. Our babies are our world. Especially my son, he's my loving heart that one. He's my golden star pretty much.

As the disapproving gazes silently expressed dominant narratives that pathologise difference, it seems the stigma remains even when strenuously resisted in almost every discursive effort.

5.10 Ethnicity, religion, and abortion:

While ethnicity, religious affiliations and abortion were not specifically within the purview of this research study, their significance to the participants could not be ignored or discounted. Each one of these issues was raised unilaterally by the participants as unforgettably difficult experiences, and exemplified the complexities of conforming to normative standards, while at the same time strenuously resisting social pressure and struggling to maintain a sense of self-worth.

5.10.1 Ethnicity:

Ethnicity issues were raised only once and by Inga who, having identified as Māori, was concerned that her child's Pakeha grandparents might treat her and her child differently.

As she explained:

Inga: I thought that my biggest thing was meeting them, cos I thought they were going to look down on me and be like oh, but they were quite happy when they found out I was pregnant. I was like, what the hell's going on here, like

[this isn't the way] *it's supposed to be, but no, they're really supportive. I don't know, I sometimes think, I don't know maybe I just think wrong things, cos I'm Māori, my ex is Pakeha and so his parents are Pakeha and they might look down on me, cos you know that kind of stuff, but no they don't, they're like real supportive, like they'll take my side.*

Frances: Hmm. It was a real surprise was it?

Inga: Yeah. They're real good, they're like, every birthday or Christmas they always get me something. They're just real cool about that. So yeah.'

Not having been on the receiving end of discriminatory beliefs and practices, many Pakeha may be somewhat taken aback by Inga's fears and concerns, but where a dominant narrative constructs Pakeha as more powerful, Inga and her baby were very likely to be discriminated against. Though she did not expand on what she would, or would not, do if she did experience race-based discrimination, the mere expectation that it would happen and the surprise that it did not, suggests that Inga had given some thought beforehand to constructing counter narratives. To have both her baby and herself accepted for who they were/are constituted a surprise and relief, and Inga felt comfortable turning to her child's paternal grandparents as readily and easily as she could to her own parents for support. Other experiences have been different:

Inga: But there's always, like, a few things that people do who, you know, there's always got to be someone who makes silly comments or someone who makes you feel uncomfortable.

Frances: Yeah? How do you cope with that?

Inga: You don't want to make other people uncomfortable by making a scene or anything like that, cos you kind of try to brush it off, but you know that staying there is making you uncomfortable ... I'll just grab my baby and go.

Frances: Mmmm.

Inga: Whereas you know, outside of school, if you're at the mall and someone calls you a retard, you'd probably just grab your baby and go.

Though Inga anticipated future unpleasant experiences with regard to her ethnic identity and that of her baby, she was agentic in preparing herself for them. It was an approach also evidenced in her decision to delay marriage in spite of encouragement from her church.

5.10.2 Religion:

When Inga's church encouraged her to marry the baby's father she considered it and then rejected it because the money needed for a wedding (she estimated between five and twenty thousand dollars) could be better spent on a house or groceries, or her son. For Inga this was a more mature decision.

Inga: There's a lot more important uses for that money at the moment... I don't want to think about that right now, maybe you know like in a couple of years or something, but I'm okay being a solo mum right now.

While not rejecting outright the possibility of marrying her partner, Inga's decision indicated an awareness of the normative expectations contained in dominant narratives and drew on pragmatic factors to resist an event she and her partner felt they could not afford.

5.10.3 Abortion and resistance:

Three participants, Gigi, Jasmin and Dahlia described the difficult decisions involved in refusing a pregnancy termination, in spite of considerable pressure from immediate family members, extended family and others.

Gigi: They said to me that I was to get an abortion. They didn't ask me and they sent me off to [an out-of-town relative] and they said cos they couldn't handle it, they didn't know what to do and it was a big family secret you know

and 'oh my gosh you know our daughter is pregnant', send her off like they did in the old days.

Gigi decided almost at the last minute, that a termination was not what she wanted.

Gigi: *I was at the hospital and everything with my partner and [an older relative] and then I decided when I was talking to the doctor I said 'Actually you know what, I don't want this. I'm actually I'm not doing this for me, I'm doing this for my family and I want to have this child'. And then yes it all fell apart from there. I got a very abusive call from [another relative] and she's disowned me.*

It was some time before family relationships were restored:

Gigi: *And I kind of did what they wanted me to, which was a very hard thing to do, but I'm proving them wrong. I'm getting on with my life. I'm you know, I can say 'shame' to them now, because they said you're going to become disgusting, you're going to live in [a nearby suburb] for the rest of your life. And umm I proved them wrong and you know I have a beautiful daughter and I've done really well.*

Jasmin had left school and was working long hours and full-time at a café when she 'fell pregnant' and could not cope with the ambient smells of the job.

Jasmin: *It was really disgusting for me, it would make my tummy turn... I still tried to work my hardest, but obviously I couldn't handle it.*

Her boss was supportive allowing her to finish work without having to resign. While at home she "tried to go for an abortion".

Jasmin: *I always remember that day because I was so upset like when I went to the counselling for the first time cos you have to go first before you see the doctor who makes the umm final decision and umm, the like just the way they can put you off, like they're 'oh your baby looks like this, like I didn't expect anything like that... I wanted to know how many weeks I am before I go for my*

abortion and I was fourteen weeks so that was a bit over the three months kind of thing. I tried going to the counselling thing, so it really put me off so I couldn't do that and I just remember that day.

Jasmin's father and a cousin were close by when she broke down crying.

Jasmin: I felt embarrassed cos you know I went back to [indistinct], but I was good cos my Dad was saying 'oh, it's okay, you don't have to do it. You know I'll be there for you' and that kind of stuff. It was quite sad.

For many young mothers, Jasmin thought, having a baby was unplanned and others would say 'Oh I'll just get an abortion'.

Jasmin: But it just doesn't happen like that, it seems quite sad and you think of how many weeks you are and all that kind of stuff.

Jasmin's baby was born prematurely and was hospitalised. Her earlier experience caring for nieces and nephews told her that she was doing everything correctly. At times in the special baby care unit there was no available bed space, but for two days Jasmin never left her baby's side, and remained reluctant to leave.

Jasmin: I would stay with her until twelve o'clock at night, go home and then come back at like six, seven or eight in the morning and just do that every day, which I found really hard.

Jasmin's narrative speaks powerfully of dedicated mothering. Her anxiety, sacrifice, care and concern for her unwell newborn baby parallel the normative expectations epitomised in the idealisation of motherhood. As Jasmin found, living up to those standards was indeed 'hard': Her experience was not so different to that of older mothers caring for sick children.

Dahlia, who was eleven years old when she left home and had not spoken to her mother since her son was born, also volunteered to talk of an earlier abortion when she was thirteen. Four years later she found she was pregnant again, but this time was different.

Dahlia: So I told my mother-in-law and we went for a pregnancy test and I was positive and at the start we were all like shaken up. I cried, my partner was jumping up, he was happy as, and my mother-in-law was a bit confused. But in the end, I was five months and we were all just looking forward to it... This time I just knew it was right.

Frances: Yeah, what made you think it was the right thing to do?

Dahlia: Because the first termination that I had I just knew it wouldn't work, so I knew by now I'd grown up, so yeah... Cos we were ready for a baby, very mature.

Like many participants, Dahlia too rejected the dominant narrative that adolescent mothers were not mature enough to raise children. She saw both herself and her partner as 'ready for a baby'. While attributing her confidence in caring for a baby to earlier experiences of looking after younger children, the young parents felt ready to cope independently. Dahlia and her partner were planning on renting a house through Housing New Zealand but, as they were both under eighteen years of age and could be considered too young, they felt it might not be possible. While afraid of being seen as too young to accept responsibility for obtaining a house, Dahlia was re-assured by her partner's approach.

Dahlia: Yeah, yeah, he's pretty on to it... He's quiet but he knows what he is doing.

In talking of her partner's quiet knowledge and demeanour, Dahlia was asserting both his and her maturity, yet another variant for refuting dominant narratives on age-related immaturity.

Just as Faye, Dahlia, Inga and Holly talked of gaining child-rearing knowledge through hands-on experience with siblings, thus resisting the dominant narrative, so too did Gigi. Having learned the socially approved ways of caring for a baby, she was able to make the 'right', normatively appropriate choices for herself and her daughter.

Gigi: I knew what I was doing and that's kind of what pushed me to the decision to have my daughter.

Confidence in their ability to cope adequately with a baby based on previous experience in caring for children, along with access to support from family and others, constituted strong motivations for the participants who felt they had made the 'right' decisions for themselves.

5.11 Problematised close relationships:

Refusing to have an abortion was not the end, but the beginning of stories of other very difficult experiences with close relationships. Problematised by a social worker's disapproval of her emergency accommodation in her father's house, Dahlia's security and that of her baby was disrupted. For Jasmin the health threats to her baby required a sustained and extra effort, and for Gigi after her daughter was born, an important relationship came to an end.

Gigi: And on top of that, with all that going on, I left my partner. He was a total arsehole anyway... I moved back in with mum and dad.

In order to re-establish the relationship with her parents, Gigi severed her connection with the baby's father, but was working to establish a friendship with him. The return to her parent's home was legitimated in describing her former partner as a "poor father" and an "arsehole anyway". Here again compliance with social norms requiring young mothers to conform to parenting standards set by others, also require young men to

conform, or face the consequences. At home Gigi and her child were likely to feel more secure and safer than continuing to live with her ex-partner and his parents, with whom she had also experienced problems.

Carol Gilligan (2010) describes a series of interviews in which adolescent girls told of internal and external pressures that forced a choice between “having a voice and having relationships” (p. xi). While Gigi gave up one relationship with her child’s father to return home, in disputes with her mother she silenced herself to avoid continuing conflict (as discussed in earlier in this chapter).

A self, Hollway and Jefferson (2006) suggested, develops contingent on psychological security and though Gigi’s decision meant hurting her ex-partner, something she felt “*quite sad*” about; it was none-the-less right for her and thus self-affirming.

Gigi: I felt like I wanted to be with my mum, which ended up being totally right.

The strains of living at home had lessened but Gigi told of ongoing difficulties.

Gigi: I'm back, you know living with them, and but it's still it's very difficult and you can still feel that there is a bit of tension, like they really hurt me, I really hurt them.

Gigi felt her mother “*just sometimes will completely ignore [daughter]*” when she wanted a cuddle, preferring instead to cuddle another sibling. She had tried to remind her mother of her role as a grandmother:

Gigi: Um, I tell Mum, I tell her oh you know, pick up [daughter] as well. She wants to be loved you know.

Though information about her pregnancy had been disseminated only to a selected few, Gigi had experienced the full force of her immediate and extended family's power, shame, disapproval and embarrassment.

Within Foucault's framework that power operates in environments that are "diffuse, heterogenous and changeable" (McNay, 1992, p. 59) in order to achieve autonomy, responses to hegemonic control can be adapted or modified according to individual interpretations of experiences. When for example Angelina talks of wishing to get a good job or a rich husband, and Britney wants to move to another country and get married before her daughter does (discussed in Chapter Four), they are wishing for ways of escaping and complying with accepted social norms about relationships. In saying I-wish-such-and-such-would happen, Angelina and Britney were identifying the consequences of problematic close relationships and acknowledging the loneliness and ignominy implied in being scapegoated, and marginalised.

Britney: It's not that important, but it sucks being lonely.

Britney's frustrated hope for consistent support from the child's father also narrates disappointment and an awareness of the normative expectations. She said the baby's father makes her life "hell".

Britney: Well, he always says 'I'm going to come over and see my daughter' and I say 'Yeah, yeah, sure' and he does it 20 times so I'm constantly waiting. It's frustrating, so I say 'okay, suck it this way, you either come this time or not at all'. So, he says 'oh you can't be all that rough with me, I pay child support and I can see her whenever I want' and I'm just so close to restricting his hours when he sees her because he just, you know those guys see their daughters at the weekends.

What also became apparent was that her former boyfriend believed that as he was providing Britney and her daughter with money, he could control if, when and how he visited them. Although not detailing how her mother *'always picks on'* her parenting skills, Britney felt she had established a regular and 'fun' routine with her daughter, whom she regarded as her best friend. Being a sole mother allowed her to make *"the rules and there's no-one to contradict you"*, on the other hand it *"sucked"* being on her own. The tension between the need for autonomy and the need for support in relationships with significant others is signalled in this narrative. Her plans for the future were unclear. She found getting her daughter ready to take to the school's crèche a *'rush'* and expected that it would be even more hectic and stressful if she obtained work. She almost always felt very tired, and thought her fatigue would be exacerbated when undertaking paid work.

5.12 Paid work narratives:

Paid work by welfare beneficiaries as implemented by the National-led government was proposed as the most appropriate solution for reducing an estimated, and unaffordable, \$1.7 billion spent each year on social welfare (Rebstock, 2010). In developed countries it has been commonly assumed and discursively emphasised, that in paid employment sole mothers and their children would be financially more secure (for a review see Ruth Weston, 1992). This assumption has been strongly disputed in studies in the USA (Kingfisher, 2002; Quaid, 2002), Canada (Quaid, 2002), Norway (Espen, 2003), Britain (Dostal, 2008) and Australia (Gardiner, 1999; Walter, 2002) showing that just as welfare dependence traps sole mothers in poverty so does precarious work. As outlined in Chapter 4, many of the participants believed that the only jobs available to them would be part-time or in unsociable hours, or in casual and short-term work, which

Furstenberg (2007) contended almost guarantees continued poverty. Prospects for more rewarding work were also seen as slim, serving to further foster already existing feelings of insecurity and anxiety (Jenkins, 2008).

Jasmin: I'm always changing what I want to do, like weird, but I want to do something good. You really need to be qualified.

Gigi: Thinking about the future is just scary just because I have no idea what I want to do.

Holly: I [always] knew I wanted to do something in hospitality.

Faye: If there were jobs, of course we'd be looking, but where are the jobs?

Dahlia: I don't like getting made to go back to work when I just want to finish off my school year.

Capri: You'll still be struggling if you're on your own. It'll still be hard because you'll still have less money than what you had on the benefit.

Angelina: Yeah, I want a good job or a rich husband. Yeah, that would be nice.

As discussed earlier all participants placed their baby (or toddler) at the top of their priority list and were concerned that paid employment would mean spending less time with their child.

Faye: Of course I've thought about getting a part-time job, but really it would be really hard because my availability isn't very much and the time that I am available like the weekends I always spend time with [daughter] because I think that's so important especially at the age she is...

I waitressed from 15 to 16 years old and that was fun. I enjoy working, I love working, but it's the fact that I have a family now and of course I put them first, so yeah, if I could get – if a job came to me and it was a perfect job and it suited, it was flexible, I would take it, but obviously I can't.'

Though no longer eligible to attend the Teen Parent Unit, Angelina planned on taking a business course and was not happy about being made to go back to work.

Angelina: Who has the right to make you go back to work? Like yes, we're on the government's money, people's taxes, but I don't feel ready to go back to work yet. I've been at work. I know what it's like, I came home tired and stuff. Like coming home [now] there is just me. It's not like there's anyone else to help, like "oh, come on." It'll probably be extra tiring because of the stress. Just full on, yeah. I don't want to go back to work. I should be ready to work.

Frances: What would make it ready?

Angelina: When my son's settled into school.

Frances: Mhmm.

Angelina: When I know we're in a good routine and I've got something else behind me. Just when I feel good to go back to work. When I know that I'm going to get enough pay and not still be on the benefit and stressing...

Just not being able to see my son, I'll be tired and won't want to put the same time and effort into him. I want to spend time with my son, watch him grow up. Time flies by. I'll miss out on heaps of stuff, but that's all right.

Significant in Angelina's criteria for returning to work were clear priorities - seeing and caring for her son, ensuring that he was comfortable at school, getting too tired to spend time with him and watching him grow up. Her concerns indicate a desire to be a responsible and socially approved mother. If jobs were available, only part-time employment would enable her to look after her son, and do housework and study.

Angelina: There aren't any jobs at the moment. They're forcing people who've lost their jobs, forcing them to get jobs and I know someone who's been looking for jobs for ages and still can't get a job, so it makes it a lot harder for everyone.

Angelina intended continuing with study and had plans to either undertake a business administration course or get a degree in education and then teach at a primary school. As she had built a good relationship with her son, she would wait until he was well settled at kindergarten.

Angelina: It's extremely important to me. I see my son grow up so fast already. Time goes by so fast, what are a few extra years just to see your kid grow up a little bit more. Before you know it, it will be like 'Oh you're so dumb Mum'. I'm cool; they're cool with their friends; at least now they're at that loving stage. If you build a relationship with them then it will be easier in the future. But if you don't build a relationship with them now, then it's going to be way harder.

Angelina would return to work only to ease a strained budget, but wanted to continue taking her parenting responsibilities seriously and her repeated preference was to be a stay-at-home mother. And even though the dominant narrative emphasises paid work as a primary obligation for all beneficiaries, Angelina's preference meant resisting the stereotype commonly directed at sole mothers as State dependent 'bludgers'.

As Capri stated above, getting paid work would make little difference to her standard of living. She too had been job-seeking and had been offered a part-time situation, but a mix-up meant the same position was also offered to another applicant.

Capri: So I just let the other person have the job because he was a sole dad with four kids.

Frances: Right.

Capri: His partner just passed away a couple of weeks ago, so I let him have the job because he will need it.

By giving up a job opportunity to a sole father with four children, Capri strongly demonstrated her care-for-children-first preference. Explaining that she loved spending time with her son, who was often sick and "*in and out of hospital*" Capri felt he needed her full attention. If employed she could not be there for him and reiterated that she would be paid less money than provided by the DPB. Capri added that because of her son's needs she would probably use up more than her sick pay and holiday pay entitlement and therefore would not be a very reliable employee. Her awareness of the

normative narrative requiring employees to be honest, hardworking and dependable also suggests an awareness of how one norm can conflict with another normative requirement – that ‘good’ mothers put their children’s needs first. She too was puzzled about why beneficiaries were being told to get a job in times of high unemployment.

Capri had plotted out a four-year education and training programme for herself including completing Level Three NCEA subjects. The next step involved three years of training to acquire hairdressing skills that would improve her chances of getting a job here or overseas. Capri’s awareness of the high unemployment rate and the need to obtain qualifications contrasts with the stereotyped view of sole mothers as lazy and unmotivated and as such constitutes yet another counter narrative example.

Like Angelina, Dahlia and Gigi, Capri did not like being forced into going back to work. The political edict that all social welfare beneficiaries must make themselves work-ready had opened up feelings of being coerced by the powerful, which threatened their right to make choices.

Capri: Oh, I wouldn't go if I was being made.

Frances: Yeah.

Capri: I don't like being made to go like back to work when I just want to finish off my school year.

While Capri’s focus was on staying at school, when told by WINZ that hairdressing pay rates were better than the DPB could provide, she said she would accept a job so long as it was in the hairdressing industry. This constituted a further example emphasising the young mothers’ autonomy and ability to resist hegemonic control. Gigi found thinking about the future ‘*just scary*’. Not only could she not find work, but she also worried that the government might force people into work.

Gigi: I'm pretty sure it's been mentioned before and it's, they are going to try, you know and force us into the workforce. And, you know that would be very sad if that actually happened this year, well, because I want to finish school and a lot of these girls do want to finish school.

She would like to find part-time employment that could be combined with part-time study.

Gigi: 'There would be the amazing thing of being able to do a course in something which is part-time and then part-time do a job [and] so have that kind of day which could be good, but highly unlikely that it would ever happen, [so] I have no idea about what I want to do... To find a job that you know mixes in with the courses, so honestly I have absolutely no idea... and there's absolutely not a lot for teenagers.

Combining part-time work with study, suggests that Gigi is seeking a way to comply with normative narratives that approve of financial independence and that also commend study to achieve greater independence in future.

Asked what difference going to work would make for her, Holly said she would miss time spent with her son and would worry that while at work she or her son would get sick.

Holly: Yeah, I wouldn't know what to do about that.

Holly continues the consistency of stories and commentary through which the participants' put their children first. Her plans included finishing at the teen parent unit with Level Three NCEA subjects and then enrolling in flight training.

Inga was keen to train as an art teacher, but it was not at the top of her priority list. That place was held by her son.

Inga: I think he's going to stay there probably for quite a while and I think probably for the rest of his life, but it's [teaching that is] one of the things on my "to do list".

She too had chosen mothering as a prescriptive priority and recognised that she could provide a better life for him, and herself, by getting a normatively-approved job.

Jasmin wanted to 'do something good' and vacillated between midwifery or police officer training.

Jasmin: One minute I want to be something like a police officer, like last year I was really keen for it and found out all this information. But the thing was that was kind of stopping me was umm, my baby. Couldn't really fit it around my baby, so then I changed to midwifery which I thought would be easier ... I haven't quite figured out how it goes. I think now you have to do your nursing course and some midwifery course after that. But I'll find that out when the time comes.

Worry about getting time off work to care for her daughter, who had frequently been unwell, meant that Jasmin would stay at home during the school term, and miss out on study, but the health and welfare of her baby came first. Paid work in evening hours would be easier to cope with, as she would have better access to a less-expensive babysitter.

At the time of the interviews, a major focus for participants was on gaining educational qualifications to improve their chances of getting a better job, but the inevitability of employment obligations meant sacrificing time with their child. As mothers first and employees only if necessary, this was a sacrifice the young women were reluctant to make, but would do so if compelled.

Faye: What we are doing is just really good, like good for our children and good for the future, our futures and our education I think that it's a good thing

to go back to work, if you're ready and your child's at a good age, but it really depends where the work is... It's going to be more stressful and I think spending quality time with [daughter] will get cut down and I think that will be really hard.

In addressing what the future holds, success at studying for NCEA levels was emphasised as a way of finding rewarding paid employment that would improve their child's lives, and their own. Being coerced into finding employment before they felt their children were settled into stable routines led to narratives expressing concern about the government's "one-size fits all" attitude, dissatisfaction with its dictatorial approach, and some worry that their lives might not be improved by working outside the home. Uncertainty about finding an enjoyable and satisfying job was also significant, but this was overtaken by doubts about finding any job at all. Access to childcare was not of immediate concern at the time perhaps attributable to the fact that continuing at the school's teen parent unit meant their children would be cared-for during school hours at an on-site crèche.

Jasmin: In my head, I'm just like, no, it's not about the money. All I want to do is just live my life, happy... So yeah I hope that I can finish all my studying and just give my baby the best future and hopefully I'm a good role model for her and she'll follow my step, yeah.

It would be hard to find any mother, regardless of age, who did not hold similar aspirations for her child(ren).

5.13 Agency and subjectivity:

When teenage sole mothers are described as "bludgers", "stupid", "immature", they are problematised and positioned as deviant, and when young women describe their experiences as "degrading" and "horrible" and their daily lives as "tough" and "hard",

something important is being ignored when implementing structural changes through Government policy. Such interventionist social controls have become more than what Ferree (2005, cited in Glasberg & Shannon, 2011, p. 160) described as “soft repression”. A more accurate perception might deem it punishment emanating from a powerful ideology demanding that young sole mothers are to ‘get what they deserve.’

Being targeted, stereotyped and stigmatised places a heavy burden on sole mothers to prove themselves worthwhile as individuals and as group members (Amsel & Smetana, 2011). In this study the participants saw themselves as agentic, that is, able to make their own decisions, bring about change and cope in unpleasant situations. They were also able to distance themselves from the stigmatising stereotypes that dominant narratives attach to teenagers who bear and rear children.

The strategies described by Amsel and Smetana (2011) as available for use by adolescents coping with experiences of marginalisation, included internalising the problem through self-blame; self-medicating through substance abuse; removing oneself from the distress-causing location and diminishing the value of the socially-experienced event. Though Amsel and Smetana’s (2011) research focused on the stigmatising of obese teenagers, these strategies were also available to the young mothers participating in this study. Yet not all of the aforementioned options were apparent in themes addressing efforts by the participants to disengage themselves from problematic perceptions and encounters. Their strategies of resistance and their ability to draw on contextually-driven counter narratives are, I believe, extra-ordinarily impressive. For example, Angelina saw getting pregnant as a mistake but she and her colleagues were agentially active in continuing their education. Faye suggested that people should look at the reality of what her sole mother colleagues were doing, and while acknowledging that some sole mothers sat at home and did nothing, the teenagers attending the parent

unit were working hard. Gigi resisted family pressure to have an abortion, changed schools and ‘proved them wrong’ by having a ‘beautiful daughter’. She also told the Prime Minister that the government’s strategy was misguided. After being treated like ‘crap’ when visiting WINZ Holly took her grandmother along on subsequent appointments; Inga resisted pressure from her church to get married by delaying a wedding until she and her partner could afford it. Jasmin, under pressure ‘*from everyone*’ to have an abortion, decided against it and during her pregnancy attended a computer course until a place became available at the teen parent unit. Because the bus drivers were ‘*quite rude*’ she avoided using bus transport.

While the participants’ strategies of resistance are illustrative examples only, and vary somewhat from (and possibly, add to) the four suggested by Amsel and Smetana (2011), they are consistent with Mishler’s (1999) view that individuals realise identities through the ways in which they “appropriate, adapt and resist culturally-defined definitions of self-hood” (p. 51). Obtaining a secure sense of an autonomous and individual self is made difficult for young sole mothers when they are held individually responsible for their socially disapproved-of situation and also held accountable for the solution. In 1982, Foucault considered that the power of individuation by the state and its institutions, constituted a long-term problem. “We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality, which has been imposed on us for several decades” (Foucault, 1982, quoted in McNay, 1992, p. 86). This appears to still be the case for these young mothers who both resist and comply with normative narratives.

Bureaucracies and policy makers take little account of different contexts and variabilities in individual and family needs (Barrett, 2006). The participants’ narratives made it clear that in the main, they were prepared for life’s future uncertainties.

For example, Angelina's plan to become a teacher included expecting to have to take out a loan to meet the cost of study and transport. Capri was convinced that, if the present state of unemployment continued, improvement would be difficult. She would however go to work eventually.

Dahlia planned to continue at the teen parent unit until she gained Level Three NCEA subjects and aimed to have her son in daycare so that she could undertake hairdressing training. Together with caring for her son, the most important thing in her life was sustaining the courage to continue. For Faye the future looked "*achievable*" but "*hard*". To reach her goals would mean even more careful budgeting.

5.14 The future - school, study, paid work and parenting:

Like teenagers in the USA (Furstenberg, 2007; Steinberg, 2011), the young sole mothers in the present study have participated in casual or part-time work in the past, mostly in the service or hospitality industry, which was not well paid. Since their child's birth the participants' primary concerns were managing their childcare commitments, budgeting scarce financial resources, fulfilling school obligations, and maintaining peer and familial relationships. Their stories also pointed to the community's widespread lack of recognition that young sole mothers were doing something worthwhile. The prospect of having to work while trying to study, *and* looking after a child alone, *and* balancing that with housework might mean "*a big juggle*", but for the young mothers, their efforts would bring improvements to their children's and their own lives. Given the participants' goal-setting plans and the actions taken towards improving their own and their children's lives, it is difficult to understand how society can justify acts and beliefs that stereotype and stigmatise. The young women's narratives clearly signpost their persistent efforts to comply with accepted social norms, and also the capacity to

understand, resist and counter dominant narratives which serve to treat sole mothers unfairly. Clearly not all young sole mothers are the same. Though dominant narratives would have us believe that the unemployed and others receiving State-provided benefits were work-averse ‘bludgers’, the participants’ concerns relating to work centred on a reluctance to be deprived of time mothering their child. Concerns about job insecurity were based on taking time off when the baby was sick and losing the job as a consequence. Not one participant was willing to sacrifice caring for their child when employment availability and work conditions were so precarious.

5.15 Chapter summary:

This chapter extended the thematic analyses beyond everyday practicalities of structurally imposed poverty to emphasise socio-emotional experiences. Included were stereotyping by members of the public, and the strategies of resistance drawn on for countering dominant narratives. Having to undertake paid work caused considerable anxiety and apprehension centreing on sacrificing time away from their children, only to achieve unsuitable, unstable and poorly-paid employment.

In Chapter Six, the final chapter, I further discuss some of the understandings and insights emerging from the research, establishing that the young sole mothers unwavering commitment to their child’s wellbeing, along with an abiding determination to improve their chances of obtaining economically and personally rewarding paid work, has received little recognition politically and publicly.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction:

Chapter Five emphasised the psychosocial themes emerging from the interviews and discussions with 10 adolescent sole mothers attending a teen parent school unit in the Greater Wellington area. Themes included experiences of stigmatising and stereotyping, strategies of resistance to dominant narratives, decisions regarding school studies, paid work, childcare, future prospects and ambitions. I also established that by excluding DPB recipients from public discussions on the options made available by the Working Welfare Group for restructuring the social welfare system, sole parents were silenced.

Chapter Six revisits the aims of the study and discusses the understandings, perceptions, and complexities that emerged during the research processes. I also outline some limitations, review results from research projects on the efficacy of welfare-to-work strategies in several OECD countries, suggest spaces opened up for further study and briefly summarise recent research offering policymakers a more positive approach to young sole motherhood.

6.2 Revisiting the aims:

Through narrative inquiry I aimed to find out answers to the question “What is it like to be a young sole mother dependent on the State for financial support now that the government has overtly emphasised paid work rather than mothering?” Contextually relevant was the recent restructuring of Aotearoa-New Zealand’s welfare system which

mandates that sole parents receiving DPB payments while caring for their child(ren) must undertake job training and/or paid employment when their youngest child reaches age five. I was interested in finding out how the young sole mothers managed to support themselves and their babies on less than \$300 weekly DPB payments. The research journey also involved exploring the experiences of sole mothers encountering widespread attitudes problematising them as 'lazy', 'irresponsible', 'sluts' and/or 'welfare queens', 'bludging off the state' and 'breeding for a business' (Key, 2008). As the participants were adolescent sole mothers marginalised into an 'out-group,' their identity development was likely to involve distinguishing themselves from others in their out-group (Depperman, 2007). A further question involved exploring how, in such a negative socio-political environment, they would develop a healthy identity to encompass not just "who one is but what one wants and values" (Erikson, 1968, quoted in Amsel & Smetana, 2011, p. 118).

By exploring the everyday experiences through narrative - the 'little stories' that constitute real life (Bamberg et al., 2007; Gergen, 2009) for young sole mothers receiving the DPB - the intention was to generate a greater understanding of their realities; materially, socially, emotionally and psychologically. This study focused on how 10 young women mothering alone experienced and made sense of recent political changes.

6.3 The young sole mothers:

All 10 of the participants, each aged between 17 and 20 years at the time of the interviews were studying NCEA subjects at a purpose-built teen parent unit, attached to a secondary school in the greater Wellington region. Each volunteered to take part in the interviews and chose her own pseudonym. Individual transcripts were checked with the

participants and amended to ensure accuracy and anonymity. Transcripts held on databases by the professional transcribers were deleted.

6.4 Emergent themes:

6.4.1 Choosing to mother:

The narratives telling of decisions to not proceed with an abortion, clearly indicated that these participants in particular were making a deliberate choice to mother. As each of the three participants raised the topic unilaterally, that is without prompting from the researcher, it was not possible to discern similar decisions by the other participants. However in all narratives, directly or indirectly, considerable emphasis was placed on intergenerational mothering, that is support from their own mother and immediate and extended family members. Attached to the idealised norms of motherhood and family care are qualities of stability, safety, security, availability and responsibility. In different narratives the young mothers reiterated their appreciation of these normative virtues especially when describing family tensions during their pregnancy and after their baby's birth. The non-availability of a mother constituted a loss, as noted for example in Gigi's return home because she needed her mother, and in Dahlia's determination that her decision to leave home at age eleven would not be repeated in the next generation. In some narratives, assistance from a grandmother or an aunt provided affectionate attention, advice, additional baby equipment, extra food, clothing, toys, and short-term care for the baby. It was clear from all narratives that being a good mother was vitally important to each participant and having children was not a 'second-choice option'. Here the participants' construction of motherhood was in stark contrast to that of government discourses and the Welfare Working Group. Financial security was important for the young mothers but only to provide the good quality of life their

children deserved, and where the participant's privileged mothering over paid work, the government and WWG saw motherhood as a hindrance to obtaining paid employment. Monetary gain, it seems, has become a primary measure of success; to be a good mother means obtaining paid employment. Curiously choice as a fundamental consideration was scarcely mentioned in the WWG's Issues and Options reports, yet critically important to the young mothers in this study.

6.4.2 Positioning adolescent mothers:

The rhetoric of the National-led government constructing teenage mothers in Aotearoa-New Zealand can be explained in direct and plain terms: 'If you are poor, it's your fault. So do your citizenship duty, get a job and get paid. That will solve your problems and ours'. The young mothers in this study clearly discounted the positioning that categorised them as non-contributing citizens and an unaffordable cost to the taxpayer. By raising their own children and planning for a better future, they were making a valuable contribution to society. If they had to go outside the home to work, so be it, but they were perfectly capable of deciding for themselves when and if they were ready. This was in direct contrast to ideologically based beliefs that positioned young mothers as personally responsible and individually blameworthy. The young mothers also refuted the stereotyping labels that led people to believe that all sole mothers are alike. What emerged from the participants' narratives was this: Rather than shirking responsibility for parenting, the young mothers were accepting the day-to-day realities of child-rearing, budgeting and studying, with a determination that enabled them to look forward; often with cogently-planned and normatively-approved of goals to the forefront in their narratives. The present research had much in common with that of Kirkman, Harrison, Hillier and Pyett (2001) in their narrative study of 20 adult

Australians who had been teenage mothers. They too found an awareness of society's stigmatising dominant narratives, and women who, in positioning themselves as "mature and capable parents", took pride in their mothering skills (p. 280).

The 10 young mothers in the present study saw social and personal fulfilment in caring for their children and maintained high expectations of themselves. Most importantly however was a determined unwillingness to sacrifice their own consistent and adequate child caring and rearing for precarious, poorly paid, unreliable work that took time away from mothering.

6.4.3 Gender biases:

Many themes suggested deeply embedded gender biases that placed the participants at a disadvantage in several contexts. Their narratives delineated the following areas of gendered disadvantage; social isolation, feminised poverty, discrimination on the basis of sexuality, derogatory naming and blaming of young women, and limitations on access to paid work.

By deviating from the ideals of motherhood young mothers have long been labelled as 'other' and to experience social isolation as a "homogenous group of immature, irresponsible, single, benefit-dependent, unfit parents" (Yardley, 2008, p. 671), whose successful transition into adulthood was thus jeopardised. Teenage fathers have not been similarly problematised. The social isolation of teenage mothers is further exacerbated by the parsimonious nature of the DPB. Without money the participants were unable to socialise with friends and extended family.

The gendered nature of poverty has received worldwide attention and recognition; women and their children are among the poorest of the poor (Larner, 2002). As

Funiciello (1993) pointed out, in families headed by sole mothers the children are poor because the mothers are poor. Funiciello (1993) further argued that poor women's realities were/are fundamentally different from those of governments, social agencies, researchers and welfare reformers. At a basic \$278.00 per week (WINZ, October 2010) after tax, to feed, clothe and shelter both mother and child, DPB payments made life a difficult and never-ending struggle. Employment options were also limited to precarious part-time or casual work, unsociable hours, poor pay and difficulties in finding adequate childcare especially outside ordinary work periods.

A gendered double standard with regard to teenage sexual experience continues to be prevalent in most OECD countries. Girls who "put out" are labelled promiscuous, those who don't are prudes or 'teasers'; boys having easy access to sex are 'studs'; those without are often encouraged to 'get on with it' (Ojeda, 2003). It was Capri who suggested that girls bore most of the blame for getting pregnant even though it took two to "mingle" and Angelina, in hearing a young sole mother being called "the town bike," could not recall similar pejoratives being applied to young men.

Naming and blaming of young sole mothers has been most common among Neo-conservatives as a significant cause of serious current and future social problems. The scapegoating rhetoric is variously based on adolescents' purported immaturity, their so-called irresponsible sexual behaviour, an assumed lack of mothering experience, and their poverty-stricken state (Furstenberg, 2007). All the young sole mothers in the study experienced stereotyping, stigmatisation and blame; in narrative it was a positioning they strenuously sought to counter and resist. Rather than having limited aspirations, and low expectations, as many policy makers assume, this study's participants were motivated to do better for their baby and themselves.

Choosing to mother meant job options were restricted. Mothers returning to employment for 16 to 20 hours a week were most likely to obtain work in the service industry, working as a waitress, a cleaner, a carer or a shop assistant. This often meant poor pay, inconvenient hours, unsympathetic employers, child-minding problems and job instability. Most of the participants wanted to do something 'good', something 'worthwhile'. Many had career plans, which the teen parent unit was facilitating and encouraging. The young women were also very aware of the high levels of unemployment, particularly for adolescents.

6.4.4 Identities, autonomy and independence:

Narrating experiences with others allows for the construction of identities and enables meaning and sense-making (Thorne & Shapiro, 2011). Equally, identities are also shaped in experiences reflecting dominant narratives that label, stereotype, derogate and/or silence (Gergen, 2009). As outlined in Chapter Five, the young women accessed varying context-dependent strategies for resisting such narratives. Because of their experience looking after siblings and younger relatives, the sole mothers drew on narratives indicating that they were more mature and capable than many people realised. As Gigi put it young sole mothers are too often treated as "little kids". Throughout the interviews participants sustained a firm belief that they were mothering appropriately and well. For the participants, identity as a mother was paramount and paid worker was just one of the responsibilities inherent in mature social participation and personal fulfilment. This suggested that while paid employment was privileged by the politically powerful, for these young women, motherhood and mothering were more important. Furthermore their identity was constructed to incorporate student, mother, daughter, friend, partner, sister, and perhaps later, paid worker, with each dimension foregrounded

according to context. Considerable importance was attached to the autonomy and independence contained in freedom of choice. That is, as they had chosen to assume the responsibilities of mothering, they were also capable of choosing when, where and how they would enter the paid work community. When needed, support and guidance would be helpful and appreciated.

6.4.5 Resistance and counter narratives:

Throughout the interviews, the teenage mothers drew on a wide range of resistant and counter narratives to deflect negative stereotypes and positionings. Their experiences exemplified resourcefulness and resilience in their ability to decide socially appropriate responses. None of the stories suggested the likelihood of confrontational engagement by them with members of the public, rather the young women endeavoured to ignore rude remarks and move away when they were offered insults. Where marginalisation is unlikely to have an impact on those who see difference as 'other', the participants found the experiences hurtful and incomprehensible. They were, however, sufficiently agentic to plan coping strategies should similar situations arise in future.

In their narratives, participants acknowledged that some young sole mothers might not measure up to normative standards of mothering, but excluded themselves from the 'bad' mother category because they had chosen to attend the teen parent unit. In Croghan and Miell's (1998) study, by differentiating themselves from mothers seen as 'bad', the participants had resisted and accommodated the negative categorisation and were able to "to construct a positive maternal identity whilst negotiating for effective help from welfare agencies" (p. 445). A similar construction for countering derogatory language was accessed by the young sole mothers in the present study, in doing so the

participants constructed themselves as the in-group and the people verbally harassing them became the out-group.

6.4.6 Silencing:

Though they were significant stakeholders in the structural change proposals, neither sole mothers nor sole fathers, individually or as a representative group, were allowed input into the 'public' discussions. This was in spite of assurances that the Welfare Working Group had undertaken to engage "with a wide-range of organisations about creating a more sustainable and fair welfare system" (Panui, MWA, 2010, p. 8).

Input from the then 111,000 sole parents, was deemed to be value-less and served to continue the distorted depiction of welfare recipients that is held by many policymakers. Foucault (1980) pointed out that the State and its representatives do not hold a monopoly on the execution of dominant and oppressive powers, and the participants described in their narratives, less powerful citizens, often older women, also contributed to emotionally damaging experiences.

The staff of the teen parent unit suggested other factors to account for the participants' lack of involvement in things political; the student-mothers already had more than enough to cope with. Their daily lives were filled to capacity, and rather than disinterest or apathy (a likely attribution, given the dominant narrative that welfare beneficiaries were/are 'lazy' and 'bludging' 'welfare queens'), it was the everyday demands of study, childcare, negotiating relationships with extended family, studious budgeting and household management that militated against political involvement.

6.5 Study limitations and reflexivity:

That teenagers' behaviour does not always match up with their intentions and a personal value (Kahu, 2006) is axiomatic and suggests that preferences towards mothering and work may change over time particularly if financial constraints continue as the child gets older. As previously noted the interviews with the young sole mothers constituted snapshots, quick glimpses of events and experiences explicated in narratives that at the time represented the truths, responses and realities experienced by the 10 participants interviewed. The sample is small, but adequate for identifying narrative themes (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). These young sole mothers are not typical; by continuing their secondary school education, they may be differently motivated from other teenage sole mothers receiving state welfare. Their experiences and aspirations constitute heterogeneity rather than homogeneity. By gaining a better education, this study's participants were consciously seeking to improve job prospects to enhance their own and their children's lives. Unlike the dominant narratives, their decisions are not primarily driven by economics, but focused on providing at-home and full-time mother-care. Paid work in the public domain is seen as inevitable because it is what they are now obliged to do. Other young sole mothers may not be similarly motivated.

In analysing and re-presenting those narratives I was aware that co-construction processes are influenced by my own biases, knowledges and beliefs. Listening again to the audio-recordings of the interviews it was disturbing to realise that thematic analysis relies on unraveling the fabric of the told narratives, but in the processes of 'unpicking' and separating-out themes, much of the vitality, sensitivity and emotionality is lost. At times the thematic analysis seemed to be one of 'chopping up' and isolating parts of the storied experiences into discrete and disconnected fragments that in the process tore

apart the lived intricacies of the narrative fabric. It is not a new problem, as Coombes and Morgan (2001) pointed out more than a decade ago. Even the most experienced researchers have reported the process as inherently challenging. At times the pauses and silences between sentences seemed as imbued with meaning, albeit inexplicable, as the verbal phrases, expressions and constructions. None-the-less these were the young mothers' experiences, stories and nuanced truths faithfully told and to be re-presented as faithfully as possible.

6.6 Research-gaps and recommendations:

Furstenberg (2007) considers that different research methodologies may account more accurately for the apparent consequences of early child-bearing than inherent differences among mothers. Specifically he suggests that "the impact of early child-bearing has been overestimated by the inability to measure accurately the full set of pre-existing differences between those who become parents in their teens and those who postpone parenthood until they are older" (Furstenberg, 2007, p. 49). Research which takes account of social, situational, economic and political variables for example, would lead to greater understanding of contextual influences.

Rather than comparing young sole mothers with two-parent families (Collins, 2010), more appropriate comparisons might be made by including the experiences of older sole mothers. Throughout this study I found that many of the 'problems' faced by young sole mothers, were anecdotally similar to those experienced by older mothers, particularly in the area of support. Further investigations into the specific nature of the support needed could include what, when, how, where and by whom, support is most helpful for young struggling mothers and could prove enlightening for many service providers.

Attitudinal research exploring how WINZ executives and employees experience day-to-day contact with welfare beneficiaries would add to a greater understanding of their perspectives. A useful discursive comparison might be made by examining the department's mission statement to establish how far the actions of front-line staff correspond with the department's written intentions.

Much is presumed in research outlining the effects of social disadvantage and while we understand that, without improvements in the living conditions of the disadvantaged, the chances of doing well later in life, regardless of age, are slim. Specific knowledge about how these disadvantages can be mitigated is currently insufficient even though there is now recognition that teenage child-bearing is more "a consequence than a cause of economic and social disadvantage" (Furstenberg, 2007, p. 51). Teen mothers may have stumbled by becoming pregnant, but "regain their footing over the longer term" (p. 51). We need to know more about the repertoire of choices that have assisted them in regaining that footing.

Where social, structural and/or economic contexts are either entirely left out of research projects or inadequately accounted for, the omissions in studies comparing mothers over 20 and teenage mothers, led to conclusions that the latter's problems were greater (Lawson & Rhode, 1993). Their situations are not always similar or comparable even though Furstenberg found that single mothers who delay child-bearing fare only slightly better than adolescent mothers.

As Furstenberg states

Teenage parenthood is simply not the disastrous and life compromising event that it has been portrayed to be. And as such our policies which have focused inordinately on reducing teen pregnancy as a strategy for reducing poverty,

increasing social mobility, and enhancing marriage, are likely to have been mistaken or, at least, unable to meet expectations. (2007, p. 161)

Yardley (2008) and Arai (2009) have also concluded that early pregnancy may signal later disadvantage but does not cause it. Clearly we need to know more about the wider social problems signaled by an early pregnancy. More research on the consequences of these problems would be helpful alongside exploring the relationship between poverty and sole mothering.

6.7 Welfare-to-work; success or not

For decades researchers have argued that welfare-to-work strategies are not only hegemonic, patriarchal and sexist, but also seriously flawed (see for example, du Plessis, 1992; Kingfisher, 1996, 2002, 2004; Lefkowitz & Withorn, 1986; Sainsbury, 1999; St John & Rankin, 2009; Walter, 2002). Considerable evidence exists for their failure. Kingfisher (1996), in her analysis of women recipients and welfare workers in the United States in the 1990s, concluded that women on welfare-to-work programmes continued to be trapped in poverty. Studies in Australia have shown that policies promoting part-time work served to “entrench the cycle of dependence they were designed to dismantle” (Gardiner, 1999, p. 43). Maeve Quaid’s (2002) analysis of the content and outcomes of six workfare programmes in Canada [3] and the United States [3] found that with Wisconsin as a possible exception, welfare-to-work/workfare strategies did not achieve their primary goal of moving welfare recipients into ‘real’ jobs. Instead they merely moved people off welfare lists to reduce caseload numbers and increase the burden of addressing poverty on voluntary organisations. In New Zealand the Child Poverty Action group (CPAG) insists that child poverty will not be

solved by obliging parent carers to undertake training for and into employment (see for example, St John et al., 2004, 2008).

Claims that a reduction in the rate of early child-bearing was a panacea for creating social and individual advantage, have been found to be unjustifiable: Lawson and Rhode's (1993) recorded that the vast majority of adolescent participants in the research studies cited, had completed their education, found adequate paid work and avoided continuous welfare. They were seen to have made "selectively rational choices" (p. 7) sometimes complying with dominant narratives and sometimes resisting them.

Commentators frequently fail to acknowledge those efforts.

6.8 Changing perspectives:

Qualitative research on teenage mothers by Barbara Collins (2005, 2010) undertaken specifically for government policy-makers, advisers and decision implementers, shifted emphasis away from problematising and disadvantage to focus on positive outcomes and young mothers' resilience. Contributing factors to resilience included the young women's beliefs, motivations and aspirations, goal-setting, taking responsibility, and a clear understanding of their own identity. None of this research was apparent in any of the Welfare Working Group's documents addressing welfare restructuring issues and options.

6.9 Conclusion:

The participants in the present study considered that the terms "sole mother", "single parent", and "unmarried mother" individually and collectively stigmatised them. While recognising that they have certain characteristics in common - adolescence, females, students, mothers parenting alone and dependent on the state for financial support, they

were first and foremost autonomous individuals who have inaccurately been clustered together in a deviant group.

While each participant recognised that stereotypes existed, they felt hurt and derogated. Such perceptions caused them considerable disquiet because the efforts they were making to be good mothers and the work they were doing to achieve a 'good' education, set them apart from the sole mothers not making similar efforts. The common and dominant narratives had persisted in underestimating, undervaluing and even dismissing the motivation, aspirations, efforts and intelligence of this group of young sole mothers.

The themes emerging from the participants' narratives in this study make it clear that successive governments do not acknowledge the variability of sole mothers' realities. When overseas research has established that welfare-to-work/workfare programmes have done little or nothing to create better outcomes for welfare beneficiaries or significantly reduce government debt, and when policymakers have failed to recognise that sole mothers of any age, are a not a homogeneous group, and when the unemployment rate, especially for adolescents, continues to be high, it becomes increasingly difficult to understand how the strategies put in place for solving a government's fiscal difficulties can be justified. In the context of the present study it is increasingly easy to see the structural changes to the welfare system as disciplinary at best and punitive at worst.

Job-finding for teenage mothers has become even tougher with an estimated 90,000 young people recently categorised as NEET that is not in education, employment or training (Chapman, February 2013). Sole mothers are no longer able to continue prioritising at-home care for their child(ren); instead they are to be paid workers first and full-time childcarers only in special circumstances. The work-first obligation is

frequently couched in terms of doing one's duty as an accountable and responsible citizen (Rebstock, 2010). The teenage mothers in the study may have chosen to mother, but when their child reaches age five that choice will no longer be available to them. Furthermore, if a sole mother has another child while receiving the DPB she will be expected to return to work a year after the baby is born. As such it constitutes a shift in how sole mothers (and fathers) will be identified, by themselves and by others. As Jenkins (2008) points out, identity is not one-sided but the result of the dialectical processes inherent in interactions with others.

Though the rules welfare beneficiaries have 'broken' are not legal ones but socially normative constructs, young sole mothers have been specifically targeted in a population that must 'do as it is told'. In other words people who are poor are governed by ideologies that hold that they are in need of discipline, retraining, reforming and rehabilitation rather than financial support from the State (Kingfisher, 1999).

Gigi summed-up the participant's approach to matters of identity development, counter narrative strategies, struggles for autonomy, negative stereotyping, being positioned as 'stupid' and 'immature' when she said "*We are not little kids*": And indeed they are neither '*little*' nor '*kids*', but young women struggling to construct a better world for their children and themselves, and coping valiantly with a hegemonic bureaucracy that regards them as unworthy citizens whose only value is, not as mothers raising children, but as workers who must contribute to the tax coffers.

Teenage pregnancy and child-rearing continue to be problematised in political discourses and in public perceptions. For the mothers in the present study, life *is* tough. They live with insufficient money to support themselves and their child; they experience institutionalised disrespect, social marginalisation and frequent media stereotyping and

yet continue to be hopeful, motivated and resilient. Their perspectives deserve recognition, positive acknowledgement and active support.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Email from Tanya Howlett, Ministry of Social Development

From: [Tanya Howlett](#)
Sent: Wednesday, April 18, 2012 4:32 PM
To: 'franceszw@xtra.co.nz'
Subject: Response to your request for information

Dear Ms Weston

Thank you for your email of 25 March 2012 requesting information on organised or informal groups which have recently made representations or reports on the needs and views of sole mothers.

As part of the review of New Zealand's welfare system, in November 2010 the Welfare Working Group published a paper entitled *Reducing Long-Term Benefit Dependency: The Options*.

Throughout this paper a range of questions were presented for public discussion. Specifically, chapter three of the paper is in regards to sole parents on a benefit.

In response to this paper a range of groups and individuals presented submissions and general feedback, including the Salvation Army, Families Commission and the Child Poverty Action Group. Many submissions included feedback on the question of whether there should be more of a focus on paid work for sole parents. This paper and the submissions received are available on the Welfare Working Group's website at <http://ips.ac.nz/WelfareWorkingGroup/Index.html>

Apart from these submissions I have been advised that the Ministry is not aware of any of the organisations which we contract services to of having recently made representations or reports specifically on sole parents.

Public submissions on the Social Security (Youth Support and Work Focus) Amendment Bill have recently closed. One of the areas this bill addresses is the work expectations for sole parents. These submissions were made to the Social Services Committee which intends to report back to the House in May 2012. As with all submissions on proposed legislation, all submission on the Bill will be available on Parliament's website at www.parliament.nz once they have been considered by the Committee.

The Ministry's service lines Family and Community Services, Child, Youth and Family and Work and Income fund a range of services and programmes that support parents and their families, including solo parents. Further information on the services and support they provide can be found on the websites of the service lines at:

- www.familyservices.govt.nz
- www.cyf.govt.nz
- www.workandincome.govt.nz

The Ministry's Centre for Social Research and Evaluation produced a number of research reports on sole parenting in New Zealand which are available on our website at www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/sole-parenting/index.html.

You may also wish to look at some of the Ministry's publications which are also available online, such as our Statement of Intent and Statistical Report.

Yours sincerely

Tanya Howlett

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Appendix 2: Sample Interview Questions (In No Particular Order)

THE POLITICISATION OF MOTHERHOOD: Silencing sole mothers.

- What is life like for you at present as a sole mother?
- What is your typical day like (at home and at school)?
- How do you think society 'sees' sole mothers?
- How will going to work change your life?
- How do you feel about being made to find paid work?
- What problems can you see in trying to find paid work?
- How will paid work be better, or worse than being on the DPB?
- What impact will your working outside the home have on you as a mother?
- How do you see I working outside the home affecting your children?
- What do you feel you can do about being made to work?
- Are there other sole mothers who think as you do? Do you see them often?
- Who seems to understand best what it is like to be a sole mother?
- What do you most want me to say about your situation?