'Growing up Together'

Exploring personal experiences in relation to socially normative role perceptions of young motherhood, using Hubert Herman's Dialogical Self Theory

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Faculty of Religion, Culture and Society

RUG University of Groningen

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Lobke Houtveen

S5343283

Theis Supervisor: dr. B.E. (Brenda) Bartelink

Second Assessor: dr. K.E. (Kim) Knibbe

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Abstract

This thesis studies the experiences of motherhood of young mothers in the Netherlands. This is done in connection to the cultural context they are part of. And the normative discourses and role perceptions that are inherent to it. Dialogical Self Theory is applied to investigate the relations and interaction between these different personal and social positions whilst integrating social voices as well. It looks at how six young mothers handle motherhood in a position that is often publicly stigmatized. Social discourses are embedded within them, but their exceptional position creates a space to forge their own path. A more empowered mothering, through the relationship with and love for their child is in a conflicting relation with (embedded) social ideas of how to be a 'good' mother.

Keywords: motherhood, maternal studies, young motherhood, religion/secular binaries, Dialogical Self Theory, stigma, empowered mothering

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At last, I want to thank the women that came before me, that fought for our rights. Because of their struggle, I could not only attend university as a woman, but also continue my education during and after my pregnancy. I'm thankful I can be both, a mother, and a student. And I hope this and any further research I get to participate in, will help in any little way to continue to fight for the rights and wellbeing of mothers.

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Introduction

For this study, I interviewed six mothers, whom I feel humbled by. Despite their differences they have in common their strength, persistence, and resilience. This thesis focusses on their experiences and will therefore start with an excerpt from each of their stories. They are the answers to my final question in each interview: "When your child looks back at their childhood, what do you hope will be remembered?"

> *That I was always there. And that they didn't experience the abuse that I experienced.* (Patricia, 41)

> *I hope they realize that I've always done it with love. All the choices I have made, or the things I do for them. […] And I hope that even when they are older and they leave home, they still love to come home [to me]. And I hope that it feels like home. Really that you go 'home'. […] I think that would be the best thing. That your home has been so warm that it still feels like home even though you no longer live there.* (Hanneke, 35)

Judith answered the question: "How would you like to be remembered?"

> *As sweet and caring and that I love them, that I am there for them. […] This is very specifically aimed at the relationship with the children. So not about other things I have done, how many books I have read, where I have been, that is not so interesting in comparison.* (Judith, 65)

> *I especially hope that they had a warm, safe feeling. That they notice that they are loved. It's more that I really hope they liked it [their childhood]. […] And I especially hope they see us as a safe haven. And that they know they always have a place to go. […] Also later in life, if things don't work out, well, just come along. Then we'll see how we can solve it.* (Kimberley, 26)

> *The first thing that comes to mind is just her fun and loving dad. And I hope she sees me in that picture as well. Just a safe home base.* (Fleur, 25)

> *I think more than a specific memory, more a feeling of warmth and love and safety. […] I hope that he'll look back on a beautiful, nice, safe childhood. And that he knows he can always come to us with anything. And also, that he, however life goes, even if we didn't plan it this way, that he knows he can come to us. That we love having him here.* (Jasmijn, 22)

These excerpts convey the experience of motherhood for these mothers and focus on different aspects and profound feelings that are integral to their mothering experience. For me, it is valuable to read this experience first before the introduction of theoretical frameworks.

Problem analysis

'We know more about the air we breathe, the seas we travel, than about the nature and meaning of motherhood.'[1] This iconic quote by Adrienne Rich forms the cornerstone on which maternal studies is built.[2] Rich is the first to place motherhood at the crossroad between private and political, by acknowledging it as both experience and institution. This thesis is built on the discrepancy between these two sides of motherhood. Whereas the above quotes portray the dynamic experience of motherhood this is contradicted in how young mothers are portrayed in the media and academic field. This research tries to give them a voice. With this I respond to the call of Pamela Klassen in her study in the US. She emphasises the importance of researching women's experiences regarding reproductive choice. Specifically in times where religious and secular political actors battle over this in the public domain.[3]

O'Reilly and Thurer are among scholars that build upon Rich's observations, showcasing the binary thinking that forms the basis of contemporary motherhood in the West.[4] The normativity that characterizes this is very limited and excludes a large part of the mothering population. Normative assumptions that characterize publicly perceived 'good mothering' include ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and age. Young mothers are therefore deemed 'bad' mothers by default and are consequently confronted with stigmatization.[5]

The dominant discourse that stigmatizes young mothers in the Netherlands is based on the assumption that sexual practices need to be approached rationally. Sexual education and sexual health policies aimed at young people are, therefore, characterized by the encouragement to act responsibly and be in control of their sexuality, to prevent unintended pregnancies.[6] Cense and Ganzevoort point to the importance of narratives around themes of responsibility and choice in the regulation of young people's sexuality. Teenage pregnancies,

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[1] Adrienne Rich, *Introduction from Of Woman Born.* In: O'Reilly, Andrea (ed). *Maternal Theory. Essential Readings, The 2nd Edition.* (Bradford, Ontario: Demeter Press, 2021) 17.

[2] Andrea O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, Practice* (Bradford: Demeter Press, 2021) 11-3.

[3] Pamela Klassen, "Contraception and the Coming of Secularism: Reconsidering Reproductive Freedom as Religious Freedom," in: *Secular Bodies, Affects and Emotions: European Configurations*. Ed. Monique Scheer, Nadia Fadil and Johansen Schepelern Birgitte. London,: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. 17–30.

[4] Shari L. Thurer, "The Myths of Motherhood." In: O'Reilly, Andrea (ed). *Maternal Theory. Essential Readings, The 2nd Edition* (Bradford, Ontario, 2021) 193-206.

[5] Andrea O'Reilly, "Normative Motherhood." In: O'Reilly, Andrea (ed.), *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings, 2nd Edition* (Bradford: Demeter Press, 2021) 494.

[6] Marianne Cense, Ruard Ganzevoort, "The storyscapes of teenage pregnancy. On morality, embodiment, and narrative agency." Journal of Youth Studies 22:4 (2019) 568.

become either a failure of rational acting, or labelled as irresponsible.[7] This goes hand in hand with the socio-political expectations that delay the timing of becoming a mother in western nations.[8] Bekaert notes the influence of implicit government policy, public thinking and media portrayal that has embedded this stigmatization within mothers themselves.[9] Psychological and social developmental theory has added to this narrative, by focusing on linear progression through the different stages of psychosocial development. Young parenting, here, is viewed as a roadblock for the progression of their development.[10] However, none of these public conceptions are based on the stories and lived experiences of young mothers themselves. It is important to give them a voice within the debate regarding their own situation. This study aims to be an exploratory study that stars filling this academic gap. In the section below I will elaborate on this.

Aim of the thesis

To move beyond the stigmatisation of this group, it is important to not just speak about them but to also listen to their experiences, and refrain from treating them exclusively as 'other'. The aim of this study is to shed light on the lived experiences of young mothers without ignoring their social context. This will form the framework for understanding the experiences. The central question it tries to answer is: *How can the relationship between lived experiences of motherhood and normative discourses about role perceptions on motherhood in young mothers in the Netherlands be understood in a meaningful way?* I will do so from my own background in religious studies. This especially comes back in the analysis on binary constructions that underly the contemporary mothering norm. Religious studies also focus on how people make sense of themselves, the world around them and how they find meaning. While there was limited space to delve into the spiritual aspect of motherhood, this reflective character is central to both religious and maternal studies.

A feminist approach to motherhood

In line with O'Reilly, I understand motherhood as a social and historical construct, that is a practice, rather than an identity.[11] I agree with her when she states: 'When I use the term "mothers," I refer to individuals who engage in motherwork. […] Such a term is not limited to biological mothers but to all people who do the work of mothering as a central part of their life.'[12] Culturally and historically "mother" has been a gendered term. While I recognise

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[7] Cense, Ganzevoort, 'The storyscapes of teenage pregnancy,' 575-581.
[8] Sarah Bekaert, "Reconceiving Young Motherhood." In: O'Reilly, Andrea (ed.), *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings, 2nd Edition* (Bradford: Demeter Press, 2021) 679.
[9] Bekaert, 'Reconceiving Young Motherhood,' 680-7.
[10] Bekaert, 'Reconceiving Young Motherhood,' 681-3.
[11] O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism,* 43.
[12] O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism,* 41.

that not all mothers are women, the participants of this study all identify as such. I therefore chose to use the word "woman" at certain times to refer to these mothers outside of motherhood. The main consideration here is readability. I am sorry if this in anyway is conceived as harmful, this would never be my intention.

There is an on-going debate about the gendered nature of the word mother. And whether to use a more inclusive word instead, such as parent. The cultural and historical meaning of motherhood is profound and suggests carrying, birthing, raising, feeding, caring, etc. Because the meaning of e.g., 'parent' doesn't have such underlying implications, I saw it more fitting for this research to use the word mother. As it directly relates to the public conception mothers have to deal with.

Furthermore, this thesis is positioned within a feminist tradition/field, as it tries to give a voice to marginalised mothers. It sees motherwork as political and socially important and valuable. And 'contests, challenges, and counters the patriarchal oppressive institution of motherhood and seeks to imagine and implement a maternal identity and practice that is empowering to mothers.'[13]

In addition, I speak of *young* motherhood, rather than *teen* motherhood. The terminology of 'young mothers', as Sarah Bekaert notes, has come to replace 'teen motherhood' in recent decennia in media and policy.[14] This term is not only less specific, but it extends the stigma regarding teen mothers to an age group until mothers in their late twenties, she argues. This embeddedness in public as well as personal ways of being affects political decision making and women's own expectations. The normalization of this vague language and the message behind it, Bekaert argues, 'represents an extension of the social control on women's fertility.'[15] I choose to follow her framework of young motherhood as mothers in their adolescence. Sawyer and Azzopardi argue that in modern western countries adolescence is expanded until 24 years old.[16] I am also aware that what is seen as young is a cultural and historical construct and therefore context dependent.

Chapter outline

First, a cultural-historical analysis will be done in the shape of a literature analysis. This conceptual chapter will form the theoretical framework for the empirical chapters. It looks at the historical developments regarding motherhood in Europe and the Netherlands. Underlying this are binary constructions that are still predominant in contemporary

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[13] O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism,* 46.
[14] Bekaert, 'Reconceiving Young Motherhood,' 679-689.
[15] Bekaert, 'Reconceiving Young Motherhood', 680.
[16] Susan M. Sawyer, Peter S. Azzopardi, Dakshitha Wickremarathne, Geroge C. Patton, "The age of adolescence" *Lancet Child Adolesc Health* 2(2018) 223-28.

mothering discourses. It will close on contemporary motherhood and the normative discourses central to it. It strongly builds on maternal theory.

After an elaboration of the methodological choices made for the empirical chapters, this becomes the main vocal point. Based on the stories of six mothers, I first look at how they experience motherhood. The context for their experience, which is embedded within them, is the social interpretation of motherhood as analysed in the first chapter.

The final chapter will take this embeddedness a step further, using the Dialogical Self Theory as a tool to understand this interplay between inner-self and outer-world within a person. It will investigate how these young mothers make sense of themselves and the world around them.

Maternal theory and Dialogical Self Theory both form the theoretical framework for the study. Whereas maternal theory focusses on the public conception and normative discourses mothers are confronted with in conversation with their experiences, on a content-related level. Dialogical Self Theory is used as a tool to analyse and understand the intricate dynamic between these personal and cultural notions. DST therefore builds on the insights of maternal theory, and they complement each other.

Chapter 1

The context of Dutch motherhood: a historical-cultural analysis of motherhood in the Netherlands

Introduction

As the maternal studies pioneer, Adrienne Rich was the first to research motherhood and what effects it has on mothers. She acknowledges motherhood as cultural construct. In which she distinguishes two sides. Motherhood as 'the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and children'[17] focusses on the experience of mothers. On the other hand, the institution of motherhood is shaped by the dominant patriarchal culture. The latter is controlling of mothers, denying women access to their potential.[18] It is about dominant culture shaping ideas that are imposed on mothers through motherhood ideals. This chapter will study these ideas and the historical and cultural context of motherhood in the Netherlands.

In this chapter I unpack motherhood and question its binary constructions. Simone de Beauvoir put the nail on the head when she stated: 'Maternity is the enemy of autonomy.'[19] This conception has often been used by western feminists in their struggle for female emancipation. Taking it away enables me to empirically research and question the experience of young mothers in the Netherlands in its own right. This chapter will form an analysis of the historical side of motherhood. It will look more broadly at European history. Narrowing down to specifically the Dutch case, it will point out some binaries and paradoxes. This will lead to investigating a more conceptual exploration of motherhood. Social binaries, that are characteristic to modern linear thinking, will be examined. Finally, normative discourses within society will be studied in relation to current trends.

The industrial revolution and the restructuring of society

Family structures of most modern western societies, first emerge during the time of the industrial revolution, in the Netherlands from around 1850. This marks the redivision of labour and the organisation of society according to it. Work became positioned outside the house, in factories, creating a division between public and private. Underlying this was the

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[17] Rich, "Introduction from Of Woman Born," 18.
[18] Rich, "Introduction from Of Woman Born," 18.
[19] Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe 1890-1970: The Maternal Dilemma* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 228.

gendered nature of these spheres, where men became the representatives of the public and women were compelled to the private domain. [20]

In 1982 Mosse researches the relation between nationalism and respectability in the nineteenth century according to this gendered division of social spaces.[21] He approaches the (effects of) the industrial era in relation to the French revolution. Common perception argues this is when the concept of nationhood is introduced, which leads to the start of nationalism.[22] For Mosse, society needed certain ideals to back its rules and regulations. Nationalism was able to provide such ideals. It defined the opposition between normalcy versus abnormalcy. Which mostly applied to the regulation of sexuality.[23]

Sexuality was placed opposite rationality. Especially women's sexuality became associated with chaos. Male sexuality, the earmark of public life, needed to be desexualized as well, to keep from disorder. Nationalism helped to control sexuality by having a strong moral compass that stated what was 'normal' and 'abnormal' behaviour. In addition, it offered a framework for cultivating sexual attitudes into respectability. Sexuality became a way for the state to govern people.[24] A parallel was made between personal behaviour and national well-being, i.e., exceeding rules of respectability was believed to ruin not only the personal, but the national condition as well. A similar equation was made between the family and the nation. Marriage and family life was the ideal representation of a successful state. However, Mosse resumes, because women became associated with the private sphere, the state had to govern the men. In simplistic terms: the state governed the men, and the men, as the head of the family, would govern the family.[25]

Mosse's critical analysis of sexuality and nationalism shows this is based on a modernity narrative of linear progression. As I demonstrate below, this narrative has become part of the Dutch national narrative.[26] While its portrayal is problematic and simplifies the complexity of reality, it colours the way people think and act, and therefore shapes their world.

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[20] Linell E. Cady, Tracy Fessenden, "Gendering the Divide: Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference", in: Linell E. Cady, Tracy Fessenden (eds.), *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) 3-24.

[21] George L. Mosse, "Nationalism and Respectability: Normal and Abnormal Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century." *Journal of Contemporary History* 17:2 (1982) 221-246.

[22] Note that this is a theory, scholars like Benedict Anderson argue for a concept of pioneer nationalism that was already present with the American settlers. Peter van der Veer also notes that nationalism is often connected to a modern European model, however, nationalism can take on many different shapes according to its context and is not a one-size-fits-all framework. Finally, it can also exist separate from a nation(-state). Peter van der Veer, "Nationalism and Religion", in: John Breuilly (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 655-671.

[23] Mosse, "Nationalism and Respectability", 222.

[24] Mosse, "Nationalism and Respectability", 220-6.

[25] Mosse, "Nationalism and Respectability", 222-233

[26] Rogier van Reekum, "Out of Character: Dutchness as a Public Problem", in: Jan Willem Duyvendak, Peter Geschiere, Evelina H. Tonkens (eds.), *The culturalization of citizenship: belonging and polarization in a globalizing world* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) 23-37.

Dutch emancipation and the struggle for legal and economic independence

Mothers have long been aware of the public dimension of mother work. In their struggle for equality this started as an argument for legal recognition. Civil marriage was introduced in the Netherlands in the 16th century. When getting married, women lost all legal status/rights. Unmarried women were in a worse position, especially mothers, who were often outcast from society.[27] After solely having legal recognised paternity, in 1956 the rights of the child were introduced. The underlying argument was that children were seen as national property; a soldier to protect the fatherland.[28] This changed the role of mothers. Allen states: 'If children belonged to the state as well as to the family, then parental care became a public duty rather than a private right.'[29] Legal recognition of mothers was reinforced by the idea that procreation was women's purpose in life.[30] This essentialises and genders motherhood. In line with Mosse, feminism was seen to undermine the stability of the family, thus weakening national strength.

Besides legal status, the feminist struggle continued to fight for economic independence. A debate between motherhood as a national service, therefore compensated for by the state. And women participating in paid labour, moving away from motherhood as an identity or lifelong destiny to being a role. This debate centred around the tension between the welfare of society and the liberties of the individual.[31] After WWII new motherhood ideologies responded to the restructuring of society, reinforcing women's position in the private sphere. [32]

The predominance of Christianity at the heart of Dutch society meant a strong marriage- and nuclear family-moral. In 1911 'morality laws' were accepted to legalise this consensus. There was a solid regulation of citizens through the church.[33] Marriage and family-life was seen as the cornerstone for the resurrecting society in post-war times.[34] Between 1947-1960 sexuality became separated from procreation. Anticonception became more accessible. In the 1960's a repressive sexuality moral was replaced by a moral of sexual liberation. This was based on the individual responsibility to try to shape personal sexuality, intimacy, and relationships.[35] It coincides with the separation between marriage, sexuality,

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[27] Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood*, 52.
[28] Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood,* 42-4.
[29] Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood*, 42.
[30] Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood*, 47-49.
[31] Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood*, 63-85.
[32] O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism*, 81-4.
[33] Sipco J. Vellenga, "Tussen preutsheid en permissiviteit: Ontwikkelingen in de protestantse moraal in Nederland, 1945-1955." *Amsterdams Sociologisch Tijdschrift* 22:3 (1995) 511-514.
[34] Vellenga, "Tussen preutsheid en permissiviteit", 515.
[35] Vellenga, "Tussen preutsheid en permissiviteit", 511-7.

reproduction, and love, that before were all intertwined. [36] Motherhood became less of a destiny one should accept and more of an option one could choose.[37]

I argue this is paralleled in Mosse's theory on sexual respectability in connection with nationalism. Nationalism often uses religion to create stability by reinforcing a national narrative. While this was originally based on a religious identity, this is redirected into the private sphere.[38] There it's influence is tactically limited as the regulation of sexual ethics.[39] Interesting to note is the role different religious groups played in the sexual liberation movement, especially at the start in the late 1950's and early 1960's.[40]

Joke Smit published an influential essay in 1967, titled 'The discomfort of the woman'.[41] It portrayed the experience of mothers, their disposition, and the injustice they had to endure. In addition, it is an illustration of the western solution to the struggle of mothers. Because the institution of motherhood is problematic for mothers, it was separated from their personal work. To free women from the hardship of motherhood the emphasis was placed on the choice they had to become mothers. The accessibility of anti-conception helped this choice to materialize. However, this meant social expectations, status and normative discourses surrounding motherhood itself didn't change. Motherhood became a choice but didn't emancipate within itself. This demonstrates O'Reilly and O'Brien Hallstein's argument, that there is a split in the experience of young women. Characterised by a new subjectivity of what it means to be a woman post second wave feminism and a remaining traditionality regarding family-life. Unencumbered men and women's lives are more similar[42], while women experience 'old' gendered inequality when becoming mothers.[43]

Thus, in the struggle for recognition and emancipation of women and mothers, the two were separated. With the rise of consciousness women emancipated and motherhood became a choice. This struggle was interwoven with the sexual regulation of women in connection to the national stability. At the foundation of these developments are binary constructions. For example, the division between public and private, that underlies e.g., the industrial revolution. And how women were associated with their sexuality and were

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[36] Vellenga, "Tussen preutsheid en permissiviteit", 517-8.
[37] Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood*, 209.
[38] Van der Veer, "Nationalism and Religion", 656-660.
[39] Joan Wallach Scott, "Secularism and Gender Equality", in: Linell E. Cady, Tracy Fessenden (eds.), *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) 25-45.
[40] Vellenga, "Tussen preutsheid en permissiviteit", 515-6.
[41] Joke Smit, "Het Onbehagen bij de Vrouw", in: Jeroen de Wildt, Marijke Harberts (eds.), *Er is een land waar vrouwen willen wonen: teksten 1967-1981* (Amsterdam: Feministische Uitgeverij Sara, 1984) 15-42.
[42] Note, O'Reilly states about this: 'as long as both men and women adhere to the norms and institutional assumptions of professional organizations, including the male organizing systems that undergird academe.' Including the idea that the women who are experiencing more similarity to men are also already privileged women, often middle-class, white and heteronormative.
O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism*, 80.
[43] O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism*, 79-81.
Thurer, "The Myths of Motherhood," 205.

therefore placed in the private sphere. This was opposed to men, who were associated with rationality, placing the two in a dichotomy to each other. Which in turn intensified the struggle for women's employment, as their identity was essentialised in terms of their sexuality.

Unpacking the myth of binary thinking

I will now take these historical constructions as the base for a more conceptual analysis. Unpacking these binary structures and the linear progression narrative as introduced above. Building on this I will turn to a conceptual understanding of contemporary motherhood.

Part of the linear progression narrative of modernity is the idea that societies move away from religion. Although 'nationalism and religion are modern transformations of pre-modern traditions and identities,' Van der Veer states,[44] their linear portrayal isn't a sufficient representation, argue Cady and Fessenden. Table 1 structures the binaries that underly the modernity narrative.[45]

Public	versus	Private
Male	versus	Female
Rationality	versus	Sexuality
Secular	versus	Religion
Citizenship	versus	Family
Modernity	versus	Traditional
Sexually liberated	versus	Sexually oppressed
Gender equality	versus	Patriarchal hierarchy
West	versus	East

Table 1. Binaries of the modernity narrative.

In this table the left column is seen as the antagonists of the right one, and either column is perceived to be in accordance with and reinforcing of each other. Cady and Fessenden agree with Mosse about the entanglement of nationalism and sexuality and add religion. They turn his argument around. For them, women's public disposition is not a consequence of the industrial revolution. Instead, they argue that women were banned from public life because they were regarded naturally subordinate to men. This was grounded on their biological

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[44] Van der Veer, "Nationalism and Religion", 657.
[45] Cady, Fessenden, "Gendering the Divide".; Scott, "Secularism and Gender Equality," 25-45.; Saba Mahmood, "Sexuality and Secularism", in: : Linell E. Cady, Tracy Fessenden (eds.), *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) 47-58.; Van der Veer, "Nationalism and Religion", 655-671.

difference.[46] This interpretation points to a strict separation between public and private. Women, sexuality, and religion are banned to the latter. Secularity reinforces the disposition of women.[47] Subordination of women becomes the cause instead of the consequence of social re-structuring. The divisions in table 1 are part of the problem, a better understanding starts by nuancing their contradiction.

This starts with the misconception that the secular is defined as the lack of religion. Both Asad and Mahmood approach the secular anthropologically. For Asad secularism means the replacement of a religious national identity to a national identity of citizenship. This overarches cultural differences within a nation.[48] It doesn't mean the relocation of religion, but a re-conceptualisation of the social world according to a new way of being.[49] Mahmood emphasises the misconception of state neutrality towards religion. It is not the history of gender equality as a characteristic of either religious or secular systems, but the inherent gender inequality caused by the idea of a public/private binary that is problematic.[50] The paradoxical nature of this re-organisation is that religion and sexuality are positioned in the private sphere and are subjected to profound (state/government) regulation at the same time. In this secular organisation the nation-state decides what is classed as religion.[51] Cady and Fessenden add that 'legally separated from the liberal state, religion becomes a protected space of exemption from democratic norms.'[52]

Instead of the assumption that secularism solves religious problems, Cady and Fessenden present an understanding that sees 'religion's hold on sexuality as itself a feature of secular rule.'[53] This started in the Enlightenment when reason replaced dogma. A view that placed religion opposite rationality. Scott explains the connection between religion and sexuality in the private domain:

Patriarchy thrives on either side of the public/private divide: men are at once "the public face of the family and the reasoning arbiters of the realm of the political… The public/private demarcation so crucial to the secular/religious divide rests on a vision of sexual difference that legitimizes the political and social inequality of women and men." The association of religion with domesticity and (feminine) sentiment and the religious control of women and the family in matters of sexuality, marriage and reproduction are two sides of the same coin.[54]

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[46] Cady/Fessenden, "Gendering the Divide," 5-6.
[47] Really, it's not just women, but every human that is not a white-cisgender-heterosexual man.
[48] Talal Asad. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) 5.
[49] Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 21-30.
[50] Mahmood, "Sexuality and Secularism", 47-9.
[51] Mahmood, "Sexuality and Secularism", 47-9.
[52] Cady, Fessenden, "Gendering the Divide", 18.
[53] Cady, Fessenden, "Gendering the Divide", 8.
[54] Cady, Fessenden, "Gendering the Divide", 9.

It is important to see the interconnectedness between the antagonists of table 1. This starts by understanding sexuality, women's social position and family life as evolving processes. Furthermore, Asad reminds us of the misconception that problems regarding inequality are caused by religion and solved by secularism. He states: 'a secular state does not guarantee toleration; it puts into play different structures of ambition and fear. The law never seeks to eliminate violence since its object is always to *regulate* violence.'[55] Scott illustrates this, when she says that within the change from religious to secular rhetoric, the grounds of discrimination changed from moral to 'natural' terminology. Women's submission became based on biological difference, instead of religious morals. [56]

Maternal studies: ten normative dictates

So far, the essentialist, gendered, and private character of motherhood has been mentioned. O'Reilly tries to understand and theorize the normativity of the institution of it. By acknowledging the normativity, she shows the repressive character and the harmful effects it has on mothers. She specifically studies motherhood in a way that transcends the binary way of thinking underlying dominant culture. O'Reilly introduces ten dictates of normative motherhood. She distinguishes: essentialization, privatization, depoliticization, normalization, individualization, naturalization, biologicalisation, expertization, intensification and idealization.[57] She makes clear that these dictates don't portray the reality of most mothers. She admits that 'normative motherhood is only available to mothers who can enact and fulfil these ten dictates.' [58] Anyone who falls outside of it, for whatever reason, is automatically defined by society as a bad mother.[59]

Firstly, essentialization of motherhood, means that maternity is placed at the heart of female identity. This works two ways. It assumes mothers always identify as women, and womanhood can only be attained through motherhood. In addition, motherhood functions as a necessary rite of passage. Privatization positions motherwork at the physical location of the home. This characterises the home as 'reproductive realm.'[60] Moreover, this private space is completely separated from the public domain. Depoliticization takes this assumption one step further: Motherhood is placed in the private sphere and therefore doesn't have political or social impact. Normalisation of motherhood means that maternity can only exist within the setting of the nuclear family. In this setting the mother is the wife to a husband, who is the (financial) provider while she is the nurturer. Individualisation sees

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[55] Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 8.
[56] Cady, Fessenden, "Gendering the Divide", 18.
[57] O'Reilly, "Normative Motherhood," 493-507.
[58] O'Reilly, "Normative Motherhood," 494.
[59] O'Reilly, "Normative Motherhood," 494.
[60] O'Reilly, "Normative Motherhood,"494.

motherwork as the responsibility of one person only. In addition, naturalisation sees mothering as 'natural to women.' All women instinctively know how to mother. O'Reilly describes this conception of motherhood as driven by 'instinct rather than intelligence and developed by habit rather than skill.'[61] Biologicalisation emphasises blood ties. It recognises only the biological mother as 'real' and 'authentic.' Intensification refers to the all-consuming idea of motherhood. Expertization bases itself on the authority of expert ideas and scientific information on motherhood. Mothers need to care, protect, and nurture, and facilitate the best life chances for their children. Mothers need to be perfect. Finally, idealisation refers to these unattainable expectations for mothers.[62]

Good motherhood: from sacrificial to intensive mothering

These ten dictates are characteristic to modern motherhood, labelled as 'intensive motherhood.' This, in its current shape, started in the 1990's. It wasn't, however, created in a vacuum. Post WWII 'good' motherhood was characterised as sacrificial or custodial motherhood. Between the 1980's and 1990's this developed into intensive motherhood.

In the 1950's sacrificial motherhood became the norm. A new psychology of attachment emerged on top of the recurring ideal of women as stay-at-home mothers. This emphasised the importance of motherlove and full-time care of the mother for childhood development.[63] Although motherhood required all of the mother's time, a mother's main job was running the household. Full-time mothering was measured by the physical proximity of the mother to the child.[64]

O'Reilly emphasises the difference between sacrificial and intensive motherhood as both react to different economic and societal transformations. The ongoing response to a changing cultural context illustrates the persistency of patriarchal normativity around mothering. For O'Reilly the main point of transition between sacrificial and intensive motherhood is that good mothering for the first is measured by time spend together according to physical nearness. Intensive mothering requires this time to be characterised as 'quality time.' A mother needs to always be in connection with the psychological, emotional, and cognitive needs of her children.[65] Underlying this is the assumption of the perfect nature of the child. In the nature-nurture debate, nurture victories while mothers' responsibility increases.[66] In addition to this intensive motherhood practice, most mothers nowadays juggle motherhood with a career. Thurer says it all when she states:

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[61] O'Reilly, "Normative Motherhood," 494.
[62] O'Reilly, "Normative Motherhood," 494.
[63] O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism*, 81-4.
[64] O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism*, 81-4.
[65] O'Reilly, "Normative Motherhood," 496.
[66] Thurer, "The Myths of Motherhood", 201.

> *Never before have the stakes of motherhood been so high – the very mental health of children. Yet never before has the task been so difficult, so labour intensive, subtle and unclear.[67]*

Mothers need to be perfect; They need to adhere to the normative dictates and take great joy in mothering. They need to love unconditionally and take all life's fulfilment from mothering.[68] The reality of mothering is an array of emotions, ranging from ecstatic or tender to furious and frustrated. If motherhood is supposed to be dreamy, other experiences would be unnatural, hostile, and traitorous. Speaking about the difficulties and passions of motherhood makes people into bad persons/mothers.[69] The moral imperatives placed onto the mothers weigh them down heavily. The current standards of good mothering are self-denying, un-attainable and conflicting. Most mothers struggle with feelings of guilt, shame, inadequacy, and anxiety.[70] Thurer acknowledges the lack of space for the mother in contemporary motherhood. She calls for a realistic approach to motherhood, giving mothers a voice. O'Reilly clarifies that the problem of oppressive intensive mothering is not the needs of the children, but the (mis)conception that the biological mother is the only person sufficient to meet those.[71]

Scientisation, expertization and social media

One of the major drives behind changes in motherhood discourses is the rise of (childhood) developmental psychology. Ramaekers and Suissa argue that this, in the last few decades, has changed the language surrounding parenthood.[72] They reason that this vocabulary is based on the assumption of linear thinking and causality within psychological (child) development: Certain developmental achievements and outcomes are expected and desired. Everything parents do has a causal effect to either reinforce this outcome or hinder it.[73] Scientific language is used to describe the daily reality of parenthood. This is problematic on two levels. Firstly, these scientific theories are based on assumptions that come from complex theoretical backgrounds. Taking them out of context leads to an incomplete understanding. They are used as universal categories that are portrayed as

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[67] Thurer, "The Myths of Motherhood", 202.
[68] Thurer, "The Myths of Motherhood", 194.
[69] Thurer, "The Myths of Motherhood", 193-6.
[70] Thurer, "The Myths of Motherhood", 193-202.
[71] O'Reilly, "Normative Motherhood," 505.
[72] Stefan Ramaekers, Judith Suissa, "The scientisation of the parent-child relationship." In: Lucy Hopkins, Mark Maclead, Wendy C. Tugeon (eds.), *Negotiating Childhoods* (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010) 179-185.

[73] Ramaekers, Suissa, "The scientization of the parent-child relationship," 179-181.

neutral. Its content becomes descriptive and normative. However, the problem with taking these scientific theories out of context and using them as a normative measure, is 'none of these theories are non-controversial.'[74] Secondly, these pseudo-scientific categories become a standard for measuring the relationship between parents and children. Ramaekers and Suissa describe this as a 'third-person perspective.' The parents and children involved are the subject and object of the relationship, the first person. But the leading perspective regarding parent-child relating is not theirs, but the third person, 'pseudo-scientific' outsider perspective.[75]

To follow the authority of these theoretical conceptions that are presented as universal, normative categories, parents need to professionalise themselves. They need to choose a parenting style that backs up their actions to be in line with the desired development. Ramaekers and Suissa state about this:

> *Scientific research cannot have the final word in deciding for or against this or that particular parenting style. Not just because there is no conclusive evidence (yet), but because this is a matter of ethical deliberation. It has, first and foremost, to do with questions of how we see ourselves as parents, how we wish to relate to our children, and what kind of human beings we want our children to be.[76]*

In the last few decades, social media has become powerful too. Clements and Nixon research the constant stream of information mothers are confronted with and the authority it gets. They portray what is best, safest, healthiest, etc. for children. Social media shows an ideal picture, that becomes a tool for comparison between mothers.[77] Clements and Nixon state: 'mothers joining [social media] groups for solidarity and support from like-minded mothers still often discover these supposed safe havens to be rife with contention, aggression, and peer pressure to conform to groupthink rather than providing comforting support and discussion.'[78] The streams of information and comparison with other people's situations add to the pressure for mother's as it increases social normativity.

Motherhood, neoliberalism, and patriarchal suppression

A full understanding of the expertization of motherhood through social media is only possible in relation to its capitalist/neoliberal context. It gains authority in this context

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[74] Ramaekers, Suissa, "The scientization of the parent-child relationship," 181.
[75] Ramaekers, Suissa, "The scientization of the parent-child relationship," 180-1.
[76] Ramaekers, Suissa, "The scientization of the parent-child relationship," 182.
[77] Jessica Clements, Kari Nixon, *Optimal Motherhood and Other Lies Facebook Told Us: Assembling the Networked Ethos of Contemporary Maternity Advice* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2022) 1-31.
[78] Clements, Nixon, *Optimal Motherhood*, 4.

because motherhood is shaped according to the patriarchal institute. It is equipped to maintain the status quo. The normative dictates reinforce this repressive character. Empowered mothering needs to be envisaged outside the walls of the patriarchal and neoliberal. Smit already called for this in 1967, when she wrote:

> *It seems necessary to me that women think through their position principally first, separate from the context in which they live. Mostly it happens the other way around, they see things firstly in relation to their man/husband, their children and their environment, and that context is generally so paralyzing that they don't even get around to questioning the principle of things.*[79]

Mothers are often portrayed as the reproducers and carriers of culture.[80] This means they are partially responsible for maintaining the system that suppresses them. It is the numbing effect of the suppressive culture that stops mothers from changing the discourse. In a similar way women pre-second wave feminism were labelled passive by De Beauvoir because their context diminished their agency. [81] Patriarchal nationalism paralyzes mothers in its need for stability. Mahmood summarises the earlier exploration of Scott's and Mosse's arguments:

> *Liberal secularism itself is built on a fundamental anxiety about sexual difference that bumps up against its self-understanding as a rational, pluralist, and tolerant system necessary for the creation of a peaceful public order.*[82]

O'Reilly argues that intensive mothering emerges from neoliberalism. This is characterized by its economic emphasis. It results in market-thinking, cutting of public expenditures and privatization. Again, there is a balancing scale between the 'public good' and 'individual responsibility'. O'Reilly blames neoliberalism for many of the hardships of motherhood. With the privatization of government support systems, mothers have compensated for most of the loss. In addition, they take responsibility for their children's thriving under its rule and are blamed if they don't.[83] She goes even further to argue that intensive mothering is an 'ideological backlash discourse' as reaction to the achievements of

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[79] Smit, "Het Onbehagen bij de Vrouw", 40.
Original text in Dutch: 'Het lijkt mij nodig dat vrouwen hun positie eerst principieel doordenken, los van de context waarin zij leven. Meestal gaat het andersom, zij zien de dingen allereerst in relatie tot hun man, hun kinderen, hun milieu, en die context werkt dan meestal zo verlammend dat ze aan het principieel stellen van de dingen niet eens meer toekomen.'
[80] Mahmood, "Sexuality and Secularism", 55.
[81] Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex.* New York: Vintage, 2011).
[82] Mahmood, "Sexuality and Secularism", 49.
[83] O'Reilly, "Normative Motherhood," 504.

feminism, invented by neoliberalism to control mothers. As argued before by Smit, De Beauvoir and Rich, this discourse paralyses mothers by inflicting feelings of inadequacy and guilt onto them.[84] O'Reilly states:

> *I believe that the guilt and shame women experience in failing to live up to what is in fact an impossible ideal is neither accidental nor inconsequential; rather it is deliberately manufactured and monitored. […] Given that no one can achieve intensive mothering, all mothers see themselves as failures.*[85]

Clements and Nixon expand the understanding of neoliberalism as 'the way norms in modern, ~~developed~~[86] nations are enforced not by literal state force but more subtly through adding a moral value to the behaviour.'[87] They elaborate on individual responsibility that becomes central. This takes away from public responsibility and state action to solve public problems.[88] There's a multitude of ways to deal with different situations. If the outcome isn't desired, neoliberalist consensus is that the individual should have handled differently. People need to be more disciplined, better informed, more efficient, etc. Highlighting individual liability deflects from holding the state/public accountable. In combination with the scientisation of language around parenthood, there is a great pressure and responsibility. This context doesn't only maintain the normative dictates of the patriarchal motherhood institute, it adds to it.

Conclusion

This chapter investigated the patriarchal institute of motherhood as the context for contemporary mothers in detail. Characterised by the historical struggle for women's rights. I argued how the separation between gender and motherhood led to an emancipation of the first, but a remaining traditionality of the latter. In addition, it focused on the contemporary dictates that colour normative motherhood discourses to create unattainable standards for mothers. In addition, motherhood's position in the private sphere created a framework for sexual regulation and depoliticization. In one word: oppression. The neoliberal, capitalist and patriarchal influences were highlighted as I elaborated on the binary constructions underlaying motherhood discourses. By unpacking them I illustrated they illusionary and culture creating character.

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[84] O'Reilly, "Normative Motherhood," 504.
[85] O'Reilly, "Normative Motherhood," 504-5.
[86] Obsolete term.
[87] Clements, Nixon, *Optimal Motherhood*, 10.
[88] Clements, Nixon, *Optimal Motherhood*, 10.

This chapter will form the framework or (social and personal) context in which the mothers in this study mother. It is the foundation for understanding and interpreting their experiences. And will be referred to and built on to place the experiences of motherhood, the personal stories of the mothers that were interviewed, into a theoretical/conceptual and socio-historical context. The next chapter will use this foundation for highlighting the stories of the mothers. Their experiences will be the leading factor and focus point of the remaining part of the thesis.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Introduction

This section will account for the methodological choices made in the empirical research conducted. To answer the questions: How do young mothers experience motherhood? (Chapter 2). And: How do young mothers make sense of themselves and their context, and what effect has becoming a mother had on this? (Chapter 3). It will delve into why these methods suit the research best. And reflect on my positionality, the limits of the research and the underlying assumptions. A constructivist approach is used in an interpretive paradigm.[89] In addition, Hubert Hermans' Dialogical Self Theory (henceforth: DST) is used as a research tool to analyse these mothers' sense-making of themselves and their context.

Research Design

In qualitative interviews I try to seek out the lived experiences of a group young mothers. Understanding their stories cannot be separated from the historical, cultural, and social context. In interpreting this there are no universal truths or stand-alone categories. The interpretation in this study tries to discover the (underlying) complexities of the meanings people attach to experiences, without generalising them. Data collected in narrative, semi-structured interviews is the main source. By using a life-story approach the interviews go deeper into different aspects of motherhood and the influence of motherhood on other aspects in the mother's lives. I use DST to explore the integration of perspectives and positions, to create an understanding of the self that is sensitive to intricate social and personal dynamics. This includes tensions and conflicting positions, etc. as well, by taking into consideration what is not integrated.

The design of the interview guide tries to touch upon different theme's surrounding motherhood, stages of life and the person beyond the mother. This is done through letting the participants draw a lifeline, in which the horizontal axis represents age in years and the vertical axis the amount of wellbeing experienced. I choose for wellbeing because it connects with the narrative analysis that I perform and how it tracks the ups, downs, and turns of events, enhancing all major events within a person's life. In addition, it is a graspable concept, that makes it easy to refer to during the interview. Finally, it opens the conversation with a focus on emotion and experience. Figure 2.1 shows the lifeline of one of the participants in this study as an example, I will fully introduce the participants later. By continuous linking back to the lifeline an understanding is gained of the relation between

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[89] Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter, Ajay Bailey, *Qualitative Research Methods* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2011) 10-16.

the meanings people connect to motherhood and its embeddedness within their broader narratives.
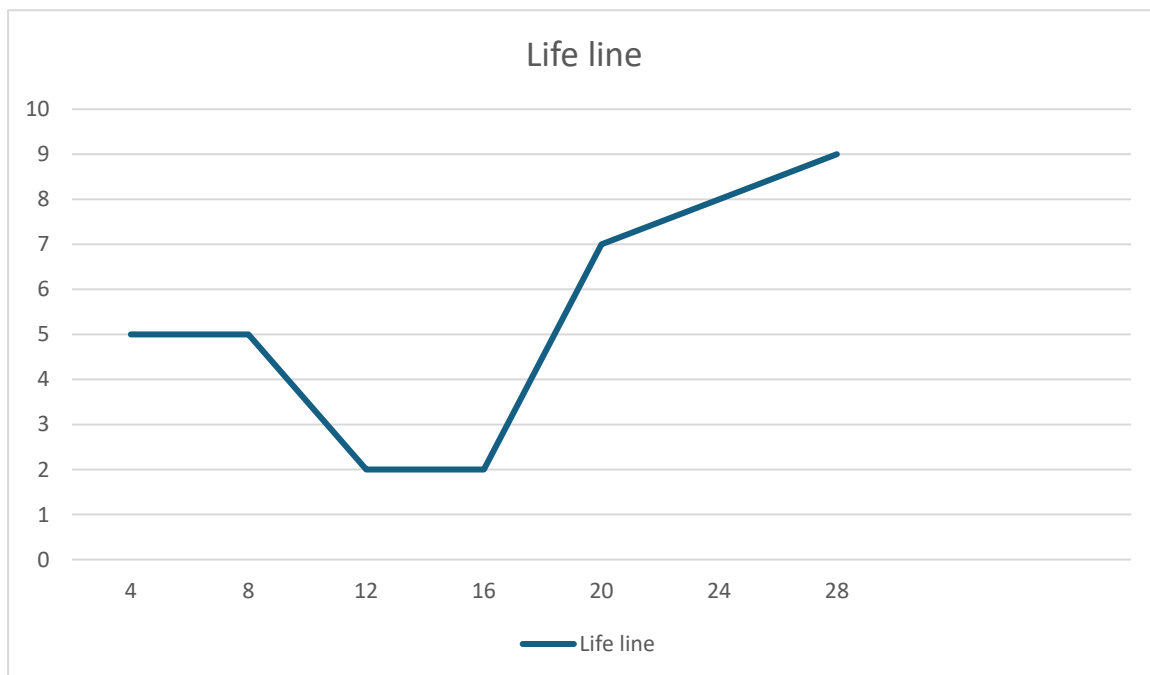

Figure 2.1 Example lifeline.

Selection of participants

The limited scope of this research means a preference of fewer in-depth interviews over quantity of participants. A total of six interviews were conducted, with people who became mothers before the age of 23. Their ages at the time of interviewing range between 22 and 65 years old. The only age restriction set for the current age of the participants was a minimum age of 18 years old. It was interesting to see the differences, especially with Judith, who was 65 years old. I.e., she grew up in a different time and therefore raised her children in the paradigm of a different motherhood discourse. She was considered a 'young mother', but the age difference between her and her peers was about 4-5 years, whereas for the other mothers this was between 8-15 years. All participants were white, identified as female and either grew up or were living in the Randstad area of the Netherlands. All but one of the interviews were conducted at the participant's homes. The participants were recruited through social media posts on LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook and via-via communication. All the names used in the study are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants.

The data procession showed two cohorts of mothers. Kimberley, Jasmijn, Fleur and Hanneke were between 22 and 35 years old. They had small children living at home. They

were closer to the intensive childrearing life phase in which mothering is a fulltime occupation. Their current age and the age when they became mothers means all of them were raised when intensive mothering was already the ideal. This was still the case when their children were born. Patricia and Judith were older. They brought up their children in or before the 1990's, which marks a different cultural context and therefore different normative discourses regarding motherhood were guiding. During their own childhood, the motherhood ideal was different again.

This is an exploratory study. Its purpose is to create a first perspective that looks at young mothers from their own stories. This is a previously limited explored research area, that needs more attention. At the end suggestions for further research will be done, for a more in-depth understanding of this group. Saturation was not reached, and therefore it is not a decent representation of all young mothers in the Netherlands. As Byrd, Minaker and O'Reilly state: 'Young mothers are not a homogeneous group; they have different cultural and structural locations within interlocking systems of power and privilege.'[90] More research is needed to honour this diversity. Whereas all young mothers are subject to stigmatization, the mothers in this research were beneficiaries of white privilege and some had a wealthy background and good family relations to fall back on. Unfortunately, this is not the case for most young mothers. More research is needed to form a completer and more realistic image.

Operationalization

There was a steep learning curve in the beginning of the designing and conducting process of the empirical research. My confidence increased through practice and feeling humbled by the courage and strength that underlies the stories of these mothers. Through self-awareness and reflection during this process I was able to take charge in the conversation, keep the overview and respond better to each individual narrative. It was valuable to learn how to use silences and refer to the lifeline. During self-reflection sessions after each interview, I was able to focus on how to improve the quality of the next interview.

After conducting the interviews, I created verbatim transcripts that were used for annotation, code-development, and data analysis. My novelty in the subject became apparent here, as the academic skill courses I took focused solely on the information gathering, excluding the processing of it. After the initial challenge of code generation in the shape of a codebook, I resorted to making code-trees instead. I started by creating images in the style of a mind map, to integrate the connections of themes within the life story visually. This 'tree' clearly showed the hierarchies and connections between codes. This enabled me to see the relations and interaction between codes in a more dynamic manner. After I did

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[90] Joanne Minaker, Deborah Byrd, Andrea O'Reilly, *Feminist Perspectives on Young Mothers, and Young Mothering* (Bradford: Demeter Press, 2019) 12.

this per interview, it was easier to integrate them as a totality. Figure 2.2 shows an example of a deductive and an inductive code in Kimberley's narrative and the relations between different themes. Figure 2.3 illustrates how this became a segment in the general codebook.

Kimberley				
Deductive	Body	Normativity	Mother body	
		Empowerment	Relationship	Inherent self-worth
Inductive	Reflection on own childhood	Normativity	'Having everything sorted'	
		Child's interest over own interest	Responsibility	

Figure 2.2 Segment individual codebook.

General

Theme	Code	Sub-code
Normativity	Body	Mother-body/beauty ideal
	Reflection on own childhood	
	Having everything sorted	Restless/worries
	Sexuality	Anti-conception
		Responsibility
		Abortion
	Hard work	

Figure 2.3 Segment general codebook.

In analysing data, categorizing, and conceptualising, I experienced the cyclical nature of empirical research as described by Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter and Ajay Bailey.[91]

Whereas the general data-analysis was a puzzle in the shape of trial and error, applying a DST analysis allowed for a more systematic approach. For the latter, a broad-spectrum narrative analysis was performed per interview. Followed by the selection of four excerpts per interview for a more in-depth DST analysis. In which different (internal and

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[91] Hennink, Hutter, Bailey, *Qualitative Research Methods*, 4-5.

external) I-positions and collective voices are explained to arrive at an intersectional understanding.

Dialogical Self Theory

Hermans summarizes DST as: 'a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous *I*-positions,'[92] to which he later adds: 'in a society of mind in dialogical relationships.'[93] The notion of a dialogical self is built on the assumption that people can look at themselves through the eyes of others. This gives them the ability to comment on and interact with the different versions and positions of themselves as 'embodied actors.'[94] In addition, it assumes an understanding of the self as an *extended self*, going beyond the physical person. Other people in the world inhabit a place within our mind, by us thinking and feeling about them.[95] These other people in the world are referred to by Hermans as *external I-positions*. I-positions form a central concept in DST. For Hermans, these are all the different roles a person takes on. They don't add up like layers, but they interconnectedly relate to each other to constitute someone's identity. This role taking is to be understood as a creative appropriation of the self in that position.[96] With 'society of mind' he refers to the interconnected web of internal and external I-positions and their interaction. By this entwinement between inner self and outer society, DST holds the ability to bridge the seeming contraposition between private and public as debated in chapter 1. The embodiment of social positions is apparent through the use of *collective voices*, that are also a part of this society of mind. Hermans explains this as the different languages people use depending on the social group they belong to or interact with.[97] This can differ per situation or position. I.e., people use different language depending on their age group, with their friends or in a professional setting, etc.[98] These specific words characterise the norms, values, rules, and recognised worldviews of the group. Making people not just receivers or transporters of a culture, but active participants that appropriate the cultural properties accessible to them.[99]

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[92] Hubert Hermans, "Conceptions of Self and Identity toward a Dialogical View," *International Journal of Education and Religion* 2:1 (2001), 53.

[93] Hubert Hermans, "The Dialogical Self as a Society of Mind: Introduction", *Theory and Psychology* 12:2 (2002) 147-160.

[94] Hermans, "Conceptions of Self and Identity", 55-6.

[95] Hermans, "The Dialogical Self as a Society of Mind," 147-160.

[96] Hermans, "Conceptions of Self and Identity", 53-6. /Buitelaar, "Migration and Identity", 8.

[97] Hermans, "Conceptions of Self and Identity", 56-8.

[98] Buitelaar, "Migration and Identity", 14-5. /Hermans, "Conceptions of Self and Identity", 56-8.

[99] Buitelaar, "Migration and Identity", 5.

Personal and social I-positions are closely connected through, what Hermans calls a *coalition of I-positions*.[100] In such a coalition, entwined social and personal I-positions work together. E.g., "I as mother" is in a coalition with "I as caring" and "the child."

The application of DST

Where DST is a good tool for a detailed analysis of certain situations, stories, relations, etc. The narrative approach that it builds on, is great for creating a more general evaluation. This takes into consideration the whole life story. I have therefore, tried to combine the two in my analysis of the interviews. Starting my analysis using the narrative tool, and then going into more detail using DST. I first performed a narrative analysis per interview, and then laid them next to each other. McAdam's narrative approach,[101] helped me create a clear overview picture of the ups, downs and narrative turns in the lives of the mothers. It helped me define certain themes that were present within the stories. And it included following the agency development, and the extent to which they were embedded within (meaningful) social relations. The analysis that came from this was a good basis to perform a DST analysis.

Applying DST I used a combination of the important moments from the narrative analysis in combination with a selection of codes, to pick certain excerpts to analyse. Because of the scope of the paper, I picked specific parts of each interview instead of analysing everything. Laying out the dynamics between I-positions, internal and external and collective voices helped me generate more codes, such as 'adolescence' and 'experimenting/discovering.' And it helped me deepen my understanding of the intricacies within codes I already had. For example, the redemptive character of 'reflection on own childhood' or the different aspects there are to 'responsibility.'

Limitations

Firstly, motherhood, identity, youth, and other concepts that are central to this study are context dependent. They are not fixed entities, but rather relational and dynamic. Secondly, the scope of this research is limited. This means the group is not in any way representative for all young mothers in the Netherlands, with a lack of desired diversity. In addition, it means the empirical research is not saturated, nor does it form the basis of any generalising claims. It does reflect on applicable theoretical concepts as well as individual experiences. Suggestions for further research will be done at the end. All of the participants in this study were very open in sharing their stories and were verbally strong. However, it is important to consider that the participants translated their experience into their words, which I interpreted and translated into English. Finally, gathering and processing empirical data is

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[100] Hetty Zock, "Religious Voices in the Dialogical Self: Towards a Conceptual-Analytical Framework on the Basis of Hubert Hermans's Dialogical Self Theory". In: M. Buitelaar, T.H. Zock (eds.), *Religious Voices in Self-Narratives. Making Sense of Life in Times of Transition* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013) 27.
[101] McAdams, Dan P., "The Psychology of Life Stories." *Review of General Psychology* 5:2 (2001) 100-22.

embarking on uncharted territory for me. This is the first time have researched in this way, a secondary goal of it is therefore a learning curve in this academic skill. This undoubtedly will influence all stages of the research cycle.

Reflection on positionality

As a young mother myself, the research topic of this thesis is personal. Although my experience with stigmatization is limited, reading texts on motherhood that speak about normativity, hardship, pressure, and unrealistic ideals resonates with my own experience. This personal connection is part of the motivation of wanting to conduct this research. At the same time, it illustrates my subjective position towards it.

During my BA comparative religious studies, there was a strong focus on moving between the inside perspective of different religions, anticipating the world of the believer, and an outside perspective that sees religion within its context and studying it as a cultural phenomenon. I tried to use the qualities I gained there to move between me as 'mother', with investment in the research, and me as 'researcher'. This was a process of constant reflection and doubting myself. For the research I tried to mute my own stories and ideas and solely use the interview verbatims as my source. In different instances, I reformulated arguments and made sure these were exclusively based on what the participants said. My own story is completely exempt from it. However, the way I interpret the interviews, will undoubtedly be influenced by my own experience. I believe, when you have embodied an experience and share this with each other there will be a different understanding according to how I, as a researcher, comprehend and embody this understanding within my own frame of knowledge. This would have been the case if I wouldn't have been a young mother because it is a shortcoming of the medium of language. To try and limit my own influence I have had reflective conversations, with peers (both students and parents) and people who work with parents, to reflect on this.

My personal connection to the subject is not solely an obstacle but can be used to my advantage as well. Connecting with participants is important when using interviewing as a research method. Herein the power dynamic and hierarchy between interviewee and interviewer plays a role in the collection of data. For this research this meant that as a young mother myself, in a context of stigma, other young mothers felt more prone to confide in me. Because there was an unspoken assurance that I would not judge them.

Summary

In summary, by using a constructivist stance and a cyclical approach to the data collected during six narrative interviews I tried to discover the underlying meanings and visions

mothers attach to motherhood. Connecting their stories to the cultural context described in the first chapter added depth to their experiences. While trying not to lose sight of my own shortcomings, limitations, and influence. Using DST as a research tool enables an integration of the dichotomy of motherhood as described by Rich. Focussing on the intimate relations and experiences as well as on the embedded cultural discourses of motherhood.

Chapter 3

The experience of young motherhood: wanting to be a good mother

Introduction

This chapter will focus specifically on young mothers. Based on the stories of six mothers who were in their adolescence when they entered motherhood, it will investigate their experiences of motherhood. Looking at their expectations and the influence of the cultural context they are a part of and how it relates to their experience. The underlying premise will be the tension between personal experience and public perception. Following their stories it will go into the themes of responsible behaviour that connects motherhood to age, as well as development theory's approach to life phases. Empowered mothering will be approached, through the concept of 'growing up together' in which the experiences of the mothers show a perspective of personal growth through experience. Finally, it will delve into the mother's agency.

'Having everything sorted' as the precondition for responsible motherhood

This section will focus on the stories of Jasmijn and Fleur. How their experience of becoming a mother is impacted by their expectations and environment.

For Jasmijn motherhood started when she discovered she was pregnant. She says:

At first, I thought that I couldn't be pregnant at all, because I was 19 years old, and I always had the idea that you make sure you have everything *in order first. Also, because in my youth things sometimes were messy. Because my parents separated when I was young and went on to have different partners. That has also had an effect on me. So, I always thought that I wanted to do things differently.* (Jasmijn, 22)

Jasmijn's disbelief is connected to her idea that motherhood requires you to 'have everything sorted' before. With this she refers to her living situation and relationship status. At the time she was working full-time, on a gap year from her studies. She lived in the attic room in the house of a pub owner that functioned as student housing. People smoked indoors, and the house was 'a really big mess'. Jasmijn went out partying multiple nights per week. And when she and her current partner started dating, she had multiple bedpartners.

The first step for Jasmijn was to make an appointment at an abortion clinic. When Jasmijn grew up, her mother always told her 'If you get pregnant before I'm 50 [years old], I'll pull it out on my own.' After she made the appointment, she called her mother to tell her

about the pregnancy. 'But' she emphasised, 'it will be fine, it will be resolved.' Despite her mother's strongly normative statement, she presents abortion as a choice that Jasmijn must make herself. The quote illustrates how Jasmijn was raised under the pretence that a certain age is required to be a responsible mother. Jasmijn's first reaction is coloured by this. There's a strong contrast between the portrayal of choice and the normativity from her context staining the decision. This is reinforced by her partner who refrained from sharing his position, as he didn't want her decision to be influenced by him. While he did this with compassionate intention, his pseudo-neutrality meant she struggled finding rational arguments against abortion. The doctor at the abortion clinic added to this by underlining the responsible nature of her choice. Speaking about the 'Dolle Mina's'[102] and using 'boss in own belly'-slogans. However, she couldn't sign the consent form. Knowing the embryo would shortly be removed, her body told her this was wrong. She looked her partner in the eye, and his reaction was 'mega enthusiastic'; he'd wanted this all along. Jasmijn says, 'I'm not sure if I'd been there by myself how it would have gone. It is easier then, to be convinced by such a doctor.'

In the debate around women rights and abortion, the predominant discourse often focusses on reproductive choice and justice (e.g., agency).[103] Jasmijn's story shows a different dimension to this. The emphasis on individual agency is portrayed as independent and rational, but her story shows this needs to be nuanced. Contextual factors need to be considered. Abortion can (subtly) be imposed on people through power dynamics from their social environment. Thus, in Jasmijn's case from a young age a connection between responsible behaviour and motherhood is made through having a certain age and living situation. This is embedded within her and reinforced by her doctor and the absence of her partners positionality.

The connection between repsonsible motherhood and having 'everything sorted' comes back for Fleur as well. She describes having a desire to have children:

> *I have carried that with me throughout my life. That wish. I don't know where it comes from, it's always been there. Wanting to take care of. Wanting to give love.* (Fleur, 23)

She repressed this for years, because she felt other areas of her life needed to be in order first. Despite both wanting to be parents, the pregnancy was a surprise to her and her partner. She discusses telling her parents about it:

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[102] The "Dolle Mina's" are a Dutch feminist group named after early Dutch feminist Wilhelmina Drucker. From December 1969 they campaigned for equal rights for women.
[103] Ann Furedi, *The moral case for abortion: a defense of reproductive choice* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) 1-9.

I know I was very nervous to tell my parents. Because they have always financed and encouraged me to study. That was the path they envisaged for me. So, it was scary to tell them that that would be a challenge. Uhm. And it was actually my father's first question, like: 'But how are you going to do that?' (Fleur, 23)

Her parents imagined future for her and being raised according to it, explains the necessity Fleur felt to repress her desire to have children. This normativity surrounding responsible motherhood connected to age and life phase was reinforced by her placement supervisor at the university. She says:

I just had to stay strong there [on the internship]. Too much was really asked of me during that period. That was probably a combination of me not setting my boundaries properly and my placement supervisor expecting too much from me. Because I was so focused on, 'I have to get that teaching certificate.' I really wanted to get that minor, despite the nausea. And my placement supervisor actually gave me a failing grade because, according to her, I came to a standstill in my learning process as soon as she knew I was pregnant. (Fleur, 23)

Due to her parent's attitude, Fleur felt a pressure to succeed academically. This made her cross personal and physical boundaries by travelling two hours to her placement every day while suffering from extreme pregnancy sickness. The combination of trying to meet her parents' expectations and her supervisor failing her made for a general sense of failing to act responsible for Fleur. Causing her worry and stress.

The stories of Jasmijn and Fleur show the embeddedness and normative character of their parents' expectations and ideals. The notion they were raised with 'having everything sorted' becomes a precondition for responsible motherhood. When they found out about their pregnancies, they had to come to terms with not abiding by their past expectations. Most of the other mothers were in a similar predicament, except Patricia and Judith. I will use Judith's experience to illustrate this exception, before returning to the theme of 'having everything sorted'.

Judith and her partner met in the 1970's at university. She describes there was an atmosphere of idealism and a search for meaning. This drove them to a hippie-style Christian commune, she describes as 'dogmatic in doctrine, but free in expression.' Judith had a romanticized 'little house on the prairie' ideal of motherhood that connected to what she saw in the commune. Mothers with babies on their breast and arms, raising them together. She was the only mother in this study that planned her pregnancy. She was elated when they conceived swiftly after their marriage. Both her and her partner remained independent and free-thinking whilst living in the community. Which led to them being

expelled from it when she was six months pregnant. Their worldview was turned upside down, they had to make new living arrangements and her husband had to find a job. Two weeks before she gave birth they moved into their new apartment. Her first- and second born children were only a year apart. This was, she tells me smiling, because of their religious naivety: they thought God gave them a child when they wanted, so they didn't need anticonception. She describes her first years of motherhood:

> *Then at a certain point I was sitting there on my own with a baby. And I thought: 'But this wasn't the intention.' It was an anti-climax. Because if you think 'in a community' that is different: you think together, commune. And then suddenly you are sitting on the second floor in Amsterdam, your husband at work and you don't know anyone. I felt very out of place in that neighbourhood. It was an intense time.* (Judith, 65)

Whereas the other mothers experienced pressure from their environment to *not* get pregnant before they were older, Judith's environment in the commune stimulated her desire to become a mother. The spirit of the time and her own determination and readiness to become a mother make Judith an exception. She wasn't subjected to pressure from her parents or environment to act responsibly by having to develop other aspects in her life first. As was the case for the others.

Growing up together

Having looked at the connection between 'having everything sorted' and responsible motherhood that coloured the expectations and ideas of Jasmijn and Fleur. I will now turn to investigate how this theme relates to linear progressive ideas around development.

Jasmijn's mothers envisaged future for her is in line with the predominant social discourse in the Netherlands, described as 'huisje-boompje-beestje.'[104] According to the psychological and social development theory, there is a progressive way of doing things in life.[105] This is presented as a linear progression in which later life stages are dependent on former ones. It focusses on the developmental stages from childhood, through adolescence into adulthood.[106] Inherent is the assumption that children go through different stages to reach this. It is therefore condemned to take on tasks and responsibilities that are too far ahead in the progressive development line.[107] In addition to young motherhood being the effect of irresponsible behaviour, according to this theory, it becomes 'unnatural.' Jasmijn

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[104] A Dutch metaphor literally translated as: little house-little tree-little animal. It symbolised leading a conventional family life, often associated with suburban lifestyle.
[105] Bekaert, "Reconceiving Young Motherhood," 681-2.
[106] Bekaert, "Reconceiving Young Motherhood," 681-2.
[107] Bekaert, "Reconceiving Young Motherhood," 681-2.

and Fleur's experience of motherhood, that contrasts from this social ideal, is part of what causes their initial shock.

However, after this primary reaction, their experience of motherhood differs from this narrative. They experience being able to grow up together with their child as a positive of young motherhood. Jasmijn tells me:

Because I don't have any structure or plan in my life yet, I can just grow with him, instead of him having to fit into my life. Because I sometimes have the idea that people who actually have my former ideal picture, so they've got everything sorted, that a child should really fit into that picture. Which I can also understand. But for me it actually works quite well to develop together as a family. (Jasmijn, 22)

She describes this as a 'beautiful process' and is very grateful to have the possibility to go through this development as a family. At the same time, she emphasises its dynamic character; it requires hard work and is not always easy.

While it is not the socially normative way of organising and establishing (family) life, the mothers in this study experience navigating this 'personal growth through motherhood' as empowering. Bekaert points to this as well, refuting the linear, progressive ideas around life phases. In a more holistic approach, she focusses on new life experiences that are gained through motherhood. And the new perspectives and learning opportunities it creates. The experience of the mothers in this study differs from the way young motherhood is publicly perceived.[108]

The narrative of 'having everything sorted' before becoming a mother, in combination with the discourse of linear development are both part of what Adrienne Rich calls the 'patriarchal institute of motherhood.' The current normative mothering ideal is coloured by neoliberal conceptions. For example, the choice between motherhood and abortion that is central to Jasmijn's story, is presented as rational and stand-alone. In addition, there is the emphasis on individual responsibility that is central to the neoliberal discourse.[109] However, the experiences of Jasmijn and Fleur demonstrate that motherhood isn't an independent, rational decision. As such it stands in a critical relation to this common neoliberal conception. According to Marianne Cense, 'choice' is a 'central organising concept in the constitution of modern identity.'[110] Under neoliberalism people need to be able to make

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[108] Minaker, Byrd, O'Reilly, *Feminist Perspectives,* 9-31.
[109] Clements, Nixon, *Optimal Motherhood,* 1-31.
Marianne Cense, "Rethinking sexual agency: proposing a multicomponent model based on young people's life stories." Sex Education, Sexuality, Society and Learning 19:3 (2019) 249.
[110] Cense, "Rethinking sexual agency," 247.

(the right) choices. Central to the neoliberalist concept of choice, are autonomy and agency. Cense argues that instead, decision-making should be considered within the social contexts and groups one is part of.[111] Which the stories above argue as well.

When Jasmijn finds that for her 'growing up together' works well, she bypasses the normative mothering practice. In Rich's distinction the mothers experience of motherhood is on the flipside of the patriarchal institute. Jasmijn's description of growing up together with her child can be understood as 'empowered mothering.' Thus, the social normative discourses of needing to have everything sorted is countered by Jasmijn's experience of being able to grow up together. With this she resists the oppressive framework of trying to fit into the normative situation and finds a way of mothering that empowers her and her family.

Intensive motherhood and class

In the above section I argue that social normative discourses around motherhood condemn young motherhood. This influences the initial reaction when Jasmijn and Fleur found out they were pregnant. But their experience as they settle into motherhood changes into a more positive outlook. However, social normativity is embedded within them. Consequently, there is a constant tension between wanting to fit into the social idea of how to be a good mother and following their own path. Below, I will use Kimberley and Hanneke's stories to investigate the obstacles these mothers encounter in their endeavour to fit within the normative motherhood framework.

When Kimberley found out she was pregnant she was 16 years old, in her final year of high school. She had exams up until two weeks before her due date and knew her next exam would be two weeks after giving birth. The central part of her thought process around motherhood was being able to provide her daughter with a 'sufficient' future. With this she refers to assuring stability in their living arrangements which connects to the theme of 'having everything sorted.' She lived with her mother and kept doing so during her first years of motherhood. Kimberley implies that working minimum wage jobs wouldn't suffice for offering good future opportunities. She tried to increase future success for her child be continuing her education and climbing up economically. Thus, linking motherhood with money and class.

This relates directly to intensive mothering as discussed in the previous chapter. Kimberley feels the need to spend 'copious amounts of time, energy, and material resources' on her child.[112] The embeddedness of intensive mothering and neoliberal thinking influences Kimberley's idea on what is required to be a good mother.

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[111] Cense, "Rethinking sexual agency," 247-8.
[112] O'Reilly, "Normative Motherhood," 496.

Money, and the lack thereof in combination with the amount of hard work, energy, and sacrifices she makes are a prominent part of her life. Being responsible for someone else gave her the motivation to challenge herself. After high school she continued her education at a university of applied sciences and in the second year she started doing a university course alongside. At the same time, she worked four-to-five nightshift as a hotel receptionist for two years. Three days a week her daughter was in childcare which she funded with a student loan.

In sum, Kimberley's main concern as a mother is to ensure her daughters future, which requires financial means which were challenging to reach in her situation. Hanneke speaks about this financial obstacle as well. After looking into her experience, I will investigate the interconnection between motherhood and class using the stories of the mothers in this study in relation to Fox's theory on this.

Hanneke lived by herself and worked full-time when she became a mother. For years she single parented and she never stopped working. This created a tension between responsibilities, pulling her apart. She describes finding an equilibrium:

> *I started looking at what the right balance is for me. I started my own company where I can work from home. Because of that I no longer needed childcare. And because I didn't need that I could start working less. Before, I paid half my salary in childcare. So, I can work less, be at home full-time. I can be wherever I need to be. If my child is sick, I am there. If help is needed at school, I am there. And I can work. And I am everywhere 100 percent present. I didn't have that feeling before. I was at work, then my child got sick, then I actually had to come home. But my work wasn't happy with that. So, the next day I would take my child to the day-care, although they still had an increased temperature. Then the day-care wouldn't be happy with that, and the child isn't either. And now I have the right balance. And I found that this is what works best for my family.* (Hanneke, 35)

In this quote, Hanneke describes the vicious circle of making ends meet when building a career and being a single mother. The high costs of childcare and the lack of a financial foundation meant she was living hand to mouth. She admits this would be easier if she was older and would have had time to save up money or bought a house. The quote also shows that now she started her own business, she found a balance in being able to intensively mother while working to earn a living. Her desire to do everything at once and be available for everyone is a description of the unattainable ideal of the 'super-mom' as described in the previous chapter by O'Reilly and Thurer. In addition, Hanneke concludes with the fact that this new situation works best for *her family*. This shows that either her own needs are interconnected with those of her family, or she puts the needs of her family before her own. Thus, illustrating the embeddedness of the intensive mothering ideal. That is apparent in the stories of all the mothers in this study. Their situation positions them outside its framework,

and financial resources and class are one of the obstacles to accessing this ideal. This is influenced by the linear thinking of progressive development theory. Where motherhood is understood in combination with the stability of 'having everything sorted', that includes a stable income.

This relation between social normative discourses around motherhood and class is studied by Fox.[113] Her research shows that this entwinement has been prominent in the development of both since the industrial era.[114] Intensive motherhood, as the stories of Kimberley and Hanneke illustrate, requires middle-class resources. The mothers in this study want to be the best mothers possible for their children. Their child's wellbeing is more important than their own. Intensive motherhood is the only way they know how to mother well. To give them the nearest to intensive mothering and middle-class lifestyles, they try to climb up socially. The (underlying) motivation is to expand the chances for their child's success. O'Reilly builds on Fox's theory by arguing that the perceived necessity of middle-class resources for intensive mothering has led to intensive mothering reproducing this middle-class status. Not because it does in reality, but because people believe it does.[115]

In this study, most mothers had a fear of not being able to provide sufficient opportunities for the thriving of their child. Young motherhood positioned them in a perceived working-class status. Although they didn't fit the stereotype of teenage pregnancy (e.g., by being a university student or having a privileged background) the pregnancy positioned them in the stereotype. This created a fear for not being able to be good mothers, as it automatically means they wouldn't be able to access the resources required for intensive mothering. I therefore argue that the general conception that young motherhood is caused by working-class status has led to young motherhood (re)producing working-class status. This is linked with the socially dominant linear development theory, discussed above. Stern linear thinking makes it impossible to see the dynamic character of (personal/social) development. Thus, creating an image of someone further on in their development without having had the time to build a foundation. This lack of resources for the normative position on the development line of motherhood highlights this perceived working-class position. This reinforces and maintains the oppression of patriarchal motherhood.

According to Fox, middle class mothers have more access to the resources required to practice intensive mothering. This doesn't only include material resources, but a sense of ownership of their time and body as well.[116] This sense of ownership of time is essential to

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[113] Bonnie Fox, "Motherhood as a Class Act: The Many Ways in Which 'Intensive Mothering' is Entangled with Social Class." In: Kate Bezanson, Meg Luxton (eds.), *Social Reproduction: Feminist Political Economy Challenges Neo-Liberalism* (Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queens University Press, 2006) 231-262.
[114] Fox, "Motherhood as a Class Act," 231-6.
[115] O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism*, 89-90.
[116] Fox, "Motherhood as a Class Act," 243-5.

intensive mothering. It focusses on the relationship mothers have with time. Do they feel like they can decide how to use their time? Are they free of the pressure of time to be productive outside of mothering?[117] Interestingly, the only mothers that did feel this ownership of time in this study were Patricia and Judith. Both mothered in a different motherhood paradigm. Judith raised her children in the 1980's and Patricia became a mother in the 1990's. Both had partners who were able to provide for the family. Which meant they had the possibility to be stay-at-home mothers. After her relationship ended, this changed for Patricia as she raised her two children by herself while having to work. The same applies to Hanneke and Kimberley who, for most of the first years of child-rearing single-parented. Having to work in addition to having to spend 'quality time' with their children meant they operated in a survival-mode. This is characterised by the experience of not having ownership over their time. Material security is dependent on a providing partner and helps give the mothers a sense of accomplishment and efficacy that enable intensive mothering. All these attributes are related to class.[118] Intensive mothering is therefore interconnected with middle-class status. The lack of this material security is the exact obstacle for the mothers in this study. Fleur described this with a sense of negativity and worry. Her daughter was only two years old, so her struggle was raw. Kimberley, Hanneke, and Patricia had more time of reflection, since their children were ten years and older. Although they admitted early motherhood was hard work, they didn't see this as a negative.

In sum, the intensive motherhood ideology is embedded within the mothers who were also raised under it. For them to be a good mother, means to mother intensively. Which requires middle class resources. However, being a young mother in contemporary society means being positioned within the working class. To try to expand the future opportunities for their children, they work hard to climb up socially and economically.

Agency

The section above showed how class and the financial situation of these mothers is an obstacle for them to access intensive motherhood. Policies are in place that reinforce this, having an additional repressing effect on them. The high cost of childcare was already mentioned by Hanneke and Kimberley. This section will look at some other examples and argue that public framing of young motherhood is agency depriving.

Hanneke mentioned the high cost of childcare and illustrated how the financial disadvantage of young motherhood means they get stuck in a circle of low financial means. This is but one example of a policy that undermines the position of young mothers in society. Young mothers are consistently framed as a problem; a drain on public funds,

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[117] Fox, "Motherhood as a Class Act," 251-6.
[118] Fox, "Motherhood as a Class Act," 250.

immature and irresponsible. Kimberley's birth story, on which I will now elaborate, is another example of this.

Kimberley was the only mother who had a child before she was 18 years old. During her pregnancy and birth, she describes policies and care as 'voorgekauwd' [pre-chewed]. By this she means nothing was explained to her and it was already decided how things would go. She was considered too young to have a say in this. Nine years after her first daughter she had another child and had a completely different experience. She compares the two as '[the second time] I had more control and now it was clear in advance that I had control. And the first time it was just like *you have no control and this is how it goes*.' When I ask her how that made her feel she tells me:

> *The first time I just took it for granted. I also felt like, I have no idea what's coming my way, I'll just leave it be. I didn't really think about it either. And actually, it was only the second time that I realized: "Oh, this is how it can be done too." And then I thought: "Well then I want it that way [like the second time] from now on. If I get a third or a fourth or something. Then I would like it that way again."* (Kimberley, 26)

There is more to this than solely her age, as becoming a mother for the first time is always new and the second time, she already knew what to expect. She didn't question things the first time because she didn't have a frame of reference. However, her age was a factor that influenced policies. It meant she had to have a medical birth, couldn't choose her own midwife, was induced and wasn't allowed certain medication.

Overall, the greatest hardship the mothers in this study experience is when their agency is compromised. These mothers, when finding out they are pregnant, often feel overwhelmed. The situation of being pregnant outside the normative parameters of society creates an intensive situation for these adolescents. In addition, as the above examples illustrate, the policies they have to deal with are often denying of their agency. This works counterproductive and is experienced by them as repressive. In addition, Fleur tells me that when her new-born daughter was submitted into hospital, she didn't feel like she was treated differently because of her age. She does, however, think *she* would have acted differently if she was older. She recognises the situation would overwhelm anyone, but also says: 'I really let everything happen to me. I didn't stand up for myself. I didn't stand up for my child.' (Fleur, 25) This shows how agency is an internal process, influenced by many factors. That all play a role in how people react to situations and policies. Age being one, feeling overwhelmed another. Fleur's daughter was submitted into hospital for the first seventeen days of her life. She concludes by saying during this period she had the reoccurring thought: "I am way too young to experience all of this." Showing that age is not just how she is perceived by others, but also an internal experience.

Conclusion

This chapter investigated how the young mothers in this study experience motherhood. Through their stories and quotes, it tried to uncover how motherhood came about for them. In (most of) their narratives there was a strong focus on 'responsible' behaviour. For Jasmijn, Fleur, Hanneke, and Kimberley this meant having other aspects in their lives sorted and being settled before starting motherhood. Their initial reaction to finding out they were pregnant was of shock. The opinion of their parents and the public discourses on the subject were normatively guiding and embedded within them. Thus, creating a perceived view of young motherhood. As they settle into motherhood their actual experience differs from this. Apart from their stress and worries about not adhering to social expectations, young mothering can be empowering. Growing up together with their child, makes for a more fluid, dynamic process. Personal growth through experience is at the centre of the rebuttal of linear development theories. Motherhood creates an environment for self-cultivation and agentic development. Agency is also stimulated during the life phase of adolescence. Kimberley and Fleurs experience shows that it can be understood as internal processes that are influenced by external (and internal) factors. Being perceived as young and feeling young are two interconnected perspectives that both hold the possibility to stimulate or deny this sense of agency.

However, the (unconscious) embeddedness of social normative discourses within the mothers, make them their only frame of reference. For them intensive mothering is the only way they know how to be a 'good' mother. Thus, they still try to mother according to it. The difficulty they experience here is linked to their exclusion from this framework due to their age and the social position connected to this age. Influenced by linear development theories and stereotypes, young motherhood is placed in a working-class position. These young mothers lack the foundation of resources, and 'having everything sorted', that means money and class become the main obstacles for practicing intensive motherhood. Climbing up socially is how they try to ensure the best future opportunities for their children. They see their child's future success as one of their foremost responsibilities. As the first chapter showed, under neoliberalist rule, the child's thriving is the mothers responsibility.

The public perception of young motherhood is stigmatizing and oppressive. Which is not in coherence with their own experiences but does influence it. With a shift in focus, their experience can become central. Young motherhood is not the easy road in life, as Kimberley said. But their experiences are far more empowering than represented by social discourses.

Chapter 4

Self and other: making sense of the world through motherhood.

Introduction

The previous chapters delved into the socio-historical context of motherhood and the experience of motherhood among six young mothers. Creating a thorough understanding of the social framework of motherhood. Its strong public regulation became clear. Fuelled by the connection between motherhood, sexuality, and religion in the private sphere. We saw the impact of this on the mothers through the embeddedness of normative discourses, expectations, and regulations. There was an emphasis on 'responsible behaviour' as connected to age and motherhood, which placed them outside the framework. The normativity of these claims changed when their children were born. This chapter will deepen the understanding of the social discourses in relation to the experience of young mothers and integrate the two. Using DST as a tool to explore the relations, connections, and interactions between the different elements within the mothers themselves. It will deepen the understanding of the 'embeddedness' of the social reality within the person's self.

Motherhood as a narrative breaking point

Hanneke describes being raised in a strong religious environment:

> *When I was very young, I didn't notice much of that, that was just my familiar environment. But eventually when I became a teenager, I noticed that I felt oppressed during my youth. I couldn't really develop into who I was. And I struggled with that. So that's why I finally left home when I was seventeen. Because I made the choice to allow myself to be myself.*
> (Hanneke, 35)

Partly due to her mother suffering from a mental illness, Hanneke's parents didn't express their love for her during her childhood. As a child she often had to contain her mother's emotions, lacking space to express her own. In her teenage years it hardened her, and she became closed off. Rebelling against her parents to forge her own path made her into an independent woman with a strong sense of self. Becoming a mother softened her. She says:

> *As children from my parents, we never received that piece of real love. And at the moment I became a mother, I experienced real love for the first time in my life. That is when I thought*

'now I am a family myself. A family I've never had like that before.' What I felt for my son in that moment … [wells up]. I felt 'wow, now I know what love is.' (Hanneke, 35)

Her past means she wants to do things different for her children. Her inherent self-worth is the overarching theme of her life story and an important principle she approaches life and relations with. Having the freedom to express yourself and know you are loved regardless are the central values in the upbringing of her children.

Motherhood marks an important moment in Hanneke's life. It can be seen as a narrative breaking point in which her old sense of self and how she views the world change. For her, this is characterised by the experience of 'true love.' This is visible in her lifeline in figure 4.1. The vertical axis represents a sense of well-being, the horizontal axis is age in years. Hanneke was 20 years old when she gave birth to her son. The increasing sense of wellbeing during her teenage years turns around with motherhood. The break in narrative continuity is described by McAdams as a nuclear episode. He describes this as a moment in the life story that anchors either a particular high, low or a turn of events.[119] Motherhood for Hanneke is the latter. Before she became a mother, she finds an ultimate low, but with motherhood the tide is changing for her.
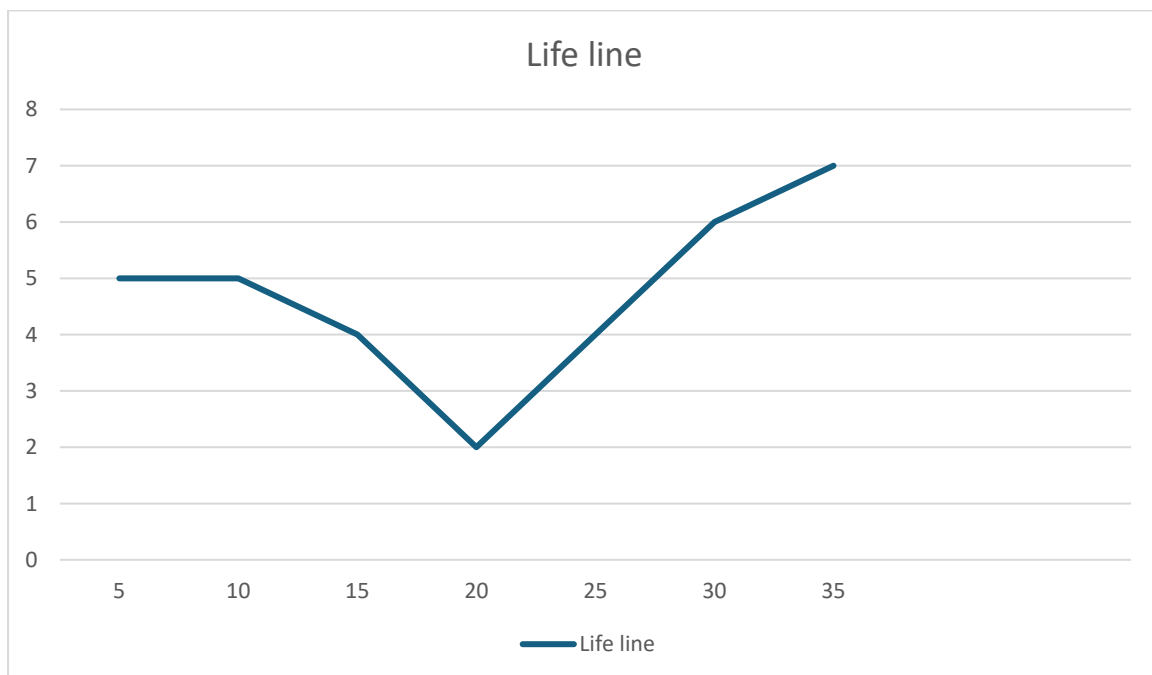

Figure 4.1 Hanneke's lifeline.

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[119] McAdams, "The Psychology of Life Stories", 108.

The start of motherhood is also a time of reflection for Hanneke. Looking back at her childhood she decides which aspects and values she want to transfer to her children. This theme is central to the stories of all the mothers in this study. Oncoming motherhood makes them reflect on how they were raised and ask themselves: 'How can I transform my experience for the good of my children?' This was most prominent in Patricia's story, to which I will now turn. A DST-analysis of Hanneke's story will follow.

Patricia has a past of abuse and becoming a mother she felt she lacked a suitable role model. The only one she had showed her how not to mother. Additionally, having a past of abuse meant she had to unlearn many unhealthy behaviours she had developed. Motherhood was the motivation to transform this and to redeem her own trauma's for her children's sake.

That requires a complete turnaround. That doesn't work one, two, three. I'm still working on it, really. That never stops. I can never do anything unconsciously, because I have to think about everything: what I do and how I do it. Because otherwise I'm afraid I'll have a relapse. [...] We are now 23 years later, and we have finally found a way that I think: this fits. It has really been quite a search. (Patricia, 41)

This quote illustrates the profound embeddedness of her past. Trying to change for herself and the good of her children is an ongoing process. She worked hard to accomplish a situation in which she knows and can communicate her boundaries. Her two eldest children have moved out. Patricia is proud of having been able to provide a safe home for them to grow up. A place of stability and love that she never knew growing up. Her story is characterised by her resilience and perseverance to create a future for her children that is not dictated by her past.

Thus, motherhood creates an environment for reflection which characterizes the shift into motherhood for the mothers in this study. Whether positive or negative, they look back at their childhood. What aspects can they convert for their child's good? This has a profound impact, because it goes back to the essence of according to what principles they arrange their lives. For Hanneke this is being allowed to freely express yourself. For Patricia it is about breaking through a generational cycle of abuse.

Returning to Hanneke's story, I have argued that motherhood can be seen as a narrative breaking point. This becomes clear in the reformation of I-positions and their interaction which I will showcase below, using Hanneke's story.

With the start of motherhood, the new I-position "I as mother" changes the society of mind. I.e., the whole of I-positions and collective voices. The introduction of it shakes up

this whole and the interaction between I-positions. "I as mother" becomes dialogically engaged with all other, already existing I-positions. And sometimes introduces new I-positions, coalitions and parts that become integrated within the self. For Hanneke "I as mother" instigates belonging, and the embeddedness within loving relationships. It reinforces her self-image as an independent woman and her unconventional lifepath. The reflective character of motherhood as discussed above, creates a relationship between "I as mother" and "I as daughter". These form a coalition with the external I-position "my mother/my parents" and "my child." In addition, it influences her understanding of the collective voice "motherhood," and how she relates to this. This collective voice is influenced by all the intricate dynamics regarding socio-cultural motherhood as discussed in chapter one. I-positions, as mentioned before, are subjected to power hierarchies, that sometimes mirror the dynamics of society. For example, the inner dynamics of mothers become smothered in the essentialised identity of intensive motherhood (e.g. O'Reilly's ten dictates). Motherhood as an all-encompassing identity implies a dominant position of "I as mother" within the society of mind as dictated by the collective voice "motherhood".

In this section I argued that motherhood marks a narrative breaking point in the lives of mothers. Characterised by a reconfiguration of the society of mind. Motherhood as I-position and collective voice engages with already existing I-positions and stimulates the development/introduction of new ones. In addition, motherhood marks a time of reflection, with the purpose of redeeming their hardships for their children.

The embeddedness of cultural discourses within Fleur's self

In this section I will perform a DST analysis on a quote by Fleur, about her experience of motherhood when her daughter is away. It will illustrate the coherence and interaction between conflicting internal and external I-positions and collective voices.

> *There are also days I don't feel like a mother at all. Especially those days that I'm home alone. I don't forget it, so to speak. But it doesn't feel like I am a mother for a bit when she's not there. And I do long for her, for the moment she comes back, of course. But yes. That is just like that for a bit. And I think that has to do with my age, that the transition to motherhood has gone very swiftly that I needed that space to sometimes not feel like it. And maybe not to feel that responsibility on such a day.* (Fleur, 25)

Once a week, Fleur takes time by herself while she is recovering from a postnatal depression and PTSS. In this quote she states that during those times she feels a need not to mother. "I as mother" is (among others) in coalition with "I as responsible", "I as caring for someone", and "I as in service of someone". In this situation she lets "I as mother" take a backseat. "I as responsible" is especially a part of this coalition that is conflict with "I as adolescent." When

the external I-position of "daughter" is not physically present, "I as mother" can ease into the background. When "I as mother" takes a step back the collective voice "motherhood" becomes less prominent. This frees up space for other I-positions to be more apparent. However, as soon as she says that there are moments when she doesn't feel like a mother, she realises that there is another external I-position, namely "the interviewer" (me). With the introduction of this outsider, the collective voice "motherhood" is brought back into the conversation, because it amplifies the presence of social discourses. In relation to "the interviewer" this collective voice says: 'by saying this, I am a bad mother.' She then justifies herself by stating she misses her child. This doesn't only show the interaction between different parts of the dynamic self, but also emphasises the embeddedness of social voices.

In a more generalised sense, this dynamic is present in the stories of most mothers in this study. At the foundation is the mutual dependable relationship between "I as mother" and "the child." Both only exist in relation to each other. Which is an integrated part of the society of mind. The mothers in this study characterize this relationship in terms of 'pure love and connection.' At the same time, "I as mother" is linked to the collective voice "motherhood." That voice puts the interest of the child above the self-interest of the mother. Moreover, it places "I as mother" in a dominant position in the society of mind[120] They can't deny this dynamic because they can't deny the normativity of motherhood. Even if there is no physical child to mother over in that time and place.[121] Because this would feel like a denial of the love and connection between the mother and child. Instead, there is a conservation of the dominance of "I as mother" through "motherhood." Which is a mirror image of the dynamic in society. If we look back at the ten dictates of normative motherhood in combination with Mosse's critical analysis of the necessity of respectability (read sexual politics repressive of women) for national stability, we see that the suppressing character of motherhood, e.g., that places it in the private sphere, depoliticalized it, essentialises it, etc., is present within the mothers themselves, and not only in the social world.

In sum, Fleur's story shows the interconnectedness between different I-positions and collective voices, as well as their dynamic and hierarchy. The collective voice "motherhood" embeds patriarchal motherhood into the mother, which influences "I as mother" and how this I-position relates to other I-positions.

The tension between adolescence and motherhood for Kimberley

Fleur's quote above tips at the tension between "I as adolescent" and "I as mother." The following section will focus on these (often) conflicting positions, using Kimberley's story. I

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[120] By making motherhood an essentialist identity (see chapter 1, *Maternal studies: ten normative dictates*).
[121] E.g., when at work, university or on a date, etc.

will also argue that this tension can be a fertile ground for dialogue. A conflicting relation doesn't necessarily mean an exclusive one.

Kimberley was the youngest person in this study to become a mother. She was pregnant at age 16, while attending high school. Before she was pregnant, she had almost no money, no diploma/degree, no driving license, and no house. Her plans were mostly rebelling; leaving the village she was raised in, trying to earn enough money in side-jobs so when she wasn't legally obliged to attend school she could leave to travel. Her mother did all the chores in the house, which Kimberley took for granted. In addition, she wasn't nice to teachers or motivated to succeed in school. She liked to party a lot; 'lekker zuipen'[122] was the general atmosphere between her and her peers in the weekends. She focused on her boyfriend and friends. And describes herself as 'selfish' while seeking external validation. Kimberley describes how motherhood changed her:

> *The main thing that changed me was that I became much more responsible. The realization of "I am really there for someone. I'm responsible for someone." And it gave me purpose in my life. Before I was only concerned with myself, very selfish. With* <u>I</u> *want to travel,* <u>I</u> *want to see the world. Now I had a goal in my life: she is here now,* <u>she</u> *must have a good life. You know, I may have a less good life, but she should at least have a good life.* (Kimberley, 26)

For Kimberley, her adolescence was a time of self-discovery and experimentation. Characterised by a self-centred attitude. She rebelled against the authority of her mother and teachers. She searches for a continuity in her identity through more equal relations (e.g., friends, boyfriend). As she focusses on herself and how she is perceived by her peers. There is an influx in her agency from her childhood. "I as mother" is introduced during this process, and the two become interconnected. Causing an entwinement between her self-realization process and "I as mother", creating the dynamic of 'growing up together' as elaborated on in the previous chapter.

Both I-positions are part of coalitions, as illustrated in figure 4.2 below. As the figure shows some positions within these coalitions are conflicting, others exist in both. In Kimberley's quote the main tension is between the self-centred attitude of "I as adolescent" and the child-centred outlook of "I as mother."

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[122] Reference to drinking a lot.

I as adolescent

- "I as self-centred."
- "I as experimenting."
- "I as concerned with short-term happiness."

"I as friend"

"I as independent"

I as mother

- "I as responsible."
- "I as adult."
- "My child."
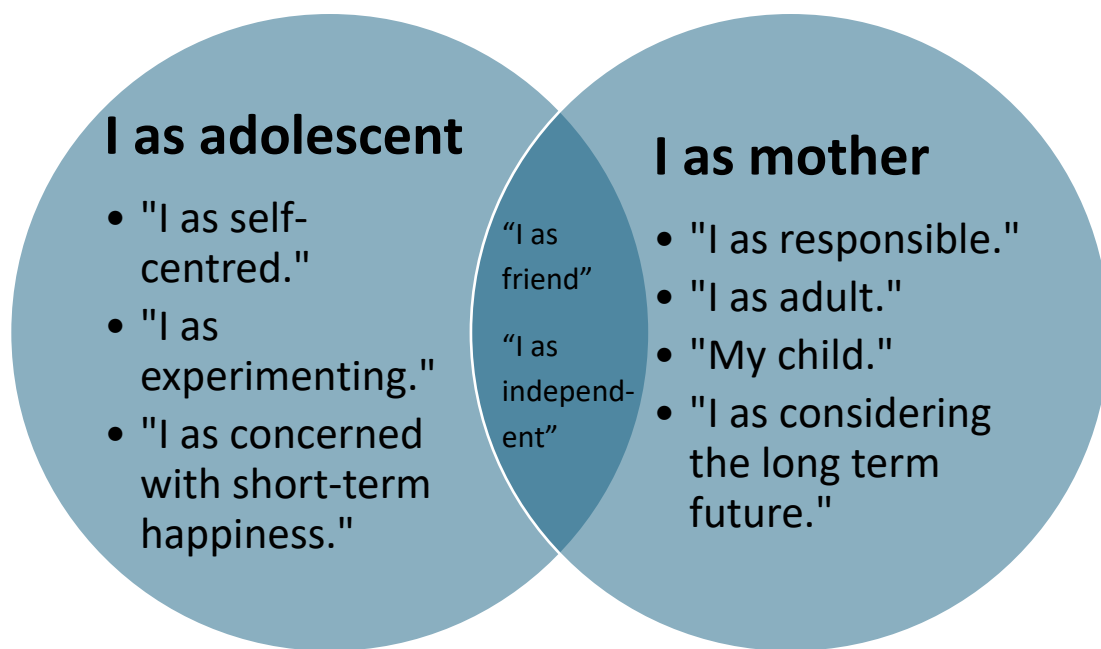- "I as considering the long term future."

Figure 4.2 Examples of coalitions of "I as adolescent" and "I as mother".

These tensions sometimes cause friction, and it requires creativity to integrate them. For Kimberley, on the one hand she felt a desire to create financial stability. On the other hand, she had the dream of travelling. The latter is connected to "I as adolescent," as part of her self-discovering journey. Because she wants both, for two years she works four to five night shifts a week, whilst studying at a university of applied sciences and doing a university degree. By studying she assures a future with better paid job-opportunities. While working means she saves to travel. This illustrates how she uses the tension between "I as adolescent" and "I as mother" to stimulate dialogical relationships. She goes beyond the collective voice "motherhood," and comes to a more empowered mothering practice. "I as adolescent" helps this creativity to go beyond the frameworks of patriarchal motherhood. Minaker, Byrd and O'Reilly go deeper into the tension between the two, taking the social normativity around both as their starting point. They uncover the experiences of young mothers in the USA and Canada and use this to argue for a more feminist understanding of young motherhood.[123] In sum, these conflicting positions of young motherhood are not always an obstacle, but sometimes work to stimulate empowered mothering practices. Below, I will argue how this profoundly effects the dynamics in Kimberley's life.

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[123] Minaker, Byrd, O'Reilly, *Feminist Perspectives*.

The transformation of Kimberley's self- and worldviews

Having introduced the relationship between "I as adolescent" and "I as mother" as central to young motherhood. I will now turn to Kimberley's story, to investigate how motherhood changed the way she looks at herself and the world around her.

Kimberley's story shows motherhood caused a big change in her attitude to life, as it now gravitates around the responsibility for the wellbeing of her child. She became more considerate of the consequences of her behaviour. Giving her focus and purpose, beyond her own instant desires. This shift from personal to external wellbeing (of "the child") is fundamental. It changed her and her motivations in life, thus influencing not only the coalitions of I-positions, but also the focus on cultivating different personality traits, skills, and social positions.

She also says she became less 'hard.' Her and Hanneke both say they are more inclined to nuance the behaviour of others and are more open to hear different opinions. Fleur, Jasmijn, Kimberley, and Patricia feel more aware of their personal/physical boundaries and communicate them more easily. Pointing to a deepened consciousness of themselves and their bodies in relation to others. Jasmijn tells me she finds it easier to set priorities. Her and Fleur see it as a positive that they discover 'what is important in life' at a young age. Having a child provides them with perspective. Through this they find awareness; they choose where to invest their energy and in Jasmijn's words they are less 'people-pleasing.' For Hanneke these developments go hand in hand with her young independence and sense of responsibility. Motherhood reinforces this but is not the instigator. Furthermore, Hanneke experiences motherhood as a bridge socially between mothers. Motherhood, for her, creates valuable contacts with people that she has little resemblance with outside of motherhood. It works as an overarching connection, that stimulates recognition and belonging between mothers.

Returning to Kimberley's situation, before, her sense of self was dependent on her social position among peers. Her external I-positions of "friends" and "boyfriend" and even "boys in general" were more prominent than many internal ones. At the same time, she describes herself as selfish, which goes hand in hand with seeking external validation. Her attention was on how others saw her, so in relating to others she focused on herself. "I as selfish" changed with the introduction of "I as mother". As the collective voice "motherhood" puts the child's needs before the mothers. At the same time the way she approaches life changes. Pre-motherhood "I as rebelling" makes her protest everything in her life that she experiences as controlling or annoying. "I as pregnant" stimulates responsible decision-making within her, giving her a sense of agency. By making the agentic decision for "I as mother" she starts to focus on what it is she wants, and not what she doesn't want. The motivation behind what she wants is the (future) wellbeing of her daughter in relation to "I as responsible" in combination with the collective voice "motherhood."

Another shift within her and the way she views herself comes across when she tells me about her body:

Back then I was very occupied with boys. 'Do they like me?', I was a real teenager. Because I got huge during my pregnancy, and then I shrunk in again, I had a lot of stretchmarks and loose skin. In the beginning I found that horrible and I thought "men won't be interested in me now, especially because I have a child as well." So, I felt fat. But I was less concerned about it then. Partly because I thought boys were no longer in the cards for me. But then, when I started with my current husband, I was very self-conscious. Like, "well I do really have a mother-body. And that is different from what he is used to." But he said "your body created a beautiful child, that your body is able to is amazing. So that only makes you more beautiful." Because he said things like that it became better for me. And for me the only important thing was that he liked it and not so much others. But I excluded the opinion of others very quickly during my first pregnancy. Because I was of course still in high school, and everybody had an opinion. So, I just closed that off. (Kimberley, 26)

This illustrates how "I as adolescent" was very insecure about others liking her, seeking external validation. "Others" or "boys" as external I-positions became less important for her through "I as mother." She links this with not being able to meet social expectations both physically and by being a mother at her age. The collective voice "motherhood" and "beauty" (both normative) became so out of reach that she replaced it with "internal self-worth." She separated self-worth from how others see her. This is a complete turn-around. First, she was focused only on her own wants and needs while needing validation from others. With the introduction of "I as mother" and the coalition of I-positions this formed, she found validation within herself, and became more aware of herself as embedded within social relations.

When she met her current partner, the collective voice of "beauty" returned. The introduction of a new external I-position ("partner") mattered to her. She was confronted with the normative public discourse that she had previously muted. Meeting him positioned her as "I as sexual", which contradicts "I as mother" according to the collective voice "motherhood."[124] Before meeting her partner, "I as mother" was the prominent I-position. Meeting him means a challenge in this power dynamic, because "I as partner" became noticeable in relation to him. Through his words and actions of acceptance, Kimberley was able to let go of the dominant normativity of the collective voices within their relationship. Thus, creating a dynamic where "I as partner" in coalition with "I as sexual" can co-exist with "I as mother."

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[124] O'Reilly concurs: 'mothers aren't sexual.': O'Reilly, "Normative Motherhood," 493.

"I as responsible" and "I as adult" that come with "I as mother" create a new positioning within the world as well. Before, Kimberley experienced the world very black-and-white; 'it is good, or it is bad. Either you're with me or you're against me.' "I as mother" made her aware of other people in the world and nuanced this strong contradiction. She is more considerate about people's motivations rather than their actions. There is more interest in other people and their stories. "I as selfish" has made way for "I as part of the whole." This increased her awareness of her influence on her environment. While she feels more grounded in her agency, she is more aware of her position within relationships. The introduction of "I as mother" has repositioned the (external/internal) "other" within her society of mind. Because her self-image in not dependent on "the other" anymore, she broadened her vision on "others" in their own rights. Seeing them as they are, instead of seeing her perceived self-judgement in their eyes.

Judith had a different experience from Kimberley. She was raised in the 1950's, which casts her experience in a different social paradigm. Her upbringing was characterised by the pretence of 'children may be seen, but not heard.' Nowadays, she sees that young people learn communication skills at an early age. Because adults approach them as full conversation partners. This was not the case during her childhood. Which made her shy and reserved. Motherhood prolonged this attitude. She says: 'a pushchair is literally a buffer.' This changed when she started working for the first time at the age of 36 (when her youngest child went to school). She discovered that she developed qualities as a mother, that she was 'good at things.' And that she liked communicating with others outside her own social context. She experienced motherhood (and the loneliness that came with it in its early years) as an obstacle to communication skills. This is different from the experience of the other mothers who feel like they are more aware of themselves, their boundaries and what is important to them. Kimberley and the other mothers experience an increase in their agency and feel more aware of themselves in social relations. While Judith felt more muted and lonelier. This changes when she approached other social relations from a different perspective than "I as mother", when she started working. In connecting with others from different I-positions a distance arose between "I as mother" and other parts of her. Before, "I as mother" had become an essentialist identity. With distance reflection became possible. She discovered that motherhood had also given her qualities and skills.

Motherhood, as a life-changing event, has a big impact on the mothers and their lives. The shift between being self-centred and having someone else to look after is fundamental for the changes of how Kimberley and the other mothers view themselves and the world. Increased self-consciousness causes a realization of their position as part of a whole. With a more independent self-understanding, there becomes more space for the "other" to exist in their own right.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at the experiences of the young mothers in this study through the lens of DST. It tried to discover how motherhood changes the way these women look at themselves and the world around them. Creating an understanding of a deeper layer of the connection between the personal and the social aspects of motherhood. Integrating the division made by Rich. It investigated different stories, starting with a narrative analysis. This resulted in framing motherhood as a narrative breaking point, a turn of events in the life stories of mothers. The new, and unexpected circumstances create an environment of reflection. The mothers look back at their youth and see how they can transform the hardships they had to endure into lessons, so their children don't have to experience the same. Then, Fleurs story showed the embeddedness of cultural normative discourses within the mothers. "I as mother" is interconnected with the collective voice "motherhood", that is shaped by the dominant motherhood ideology of intensive mothering. The same goes for existing social ideas on the behaviour of 'good' adolescents. In combination with Kimberley's story this tension between motherhood and adolescence was examined. Illustrating the cultural normative idea of a binary clash between the two, as well as ways of how the mothers in this study nuance this binary by living as young mothers. Their experience brings the two back together, initiating dialogue between "I as mother" and "I as adolescent." Stimulating creativity of mothering beyond the social frameworks that are exclusive to their position.

I argue that the re-organization of the society of mind is fundamentally changed by the introduction of "I as mother". At the same time, all other parts of the person remain present. The interaction between different parts of the interconnected whole is fundamentally changed. Through the deep love and unique relationship between the mothers in this study and their children, in combination with the cultural normative idea that a mother should sacrifice herself, "I as mother" becomes the organizing principle around which the other I-positions re-arrange themselves. Therefore, their focus shifts from their own wellbeing to that of their child. This has a big effect on the way these mothers view themselves and the world around them.

Adolescence is mostly a time of self-discovery and experimentation; therefore, the emphasis is on the self. Relationships with others are approached from this self-centred perspective. With motherhood, this gravitation shifts. The life of the mother becomes in service of the child. And, as Kimberley showed us, she became more aware of her position within and influence on the world. She became more nuanced and interested in others. She experienced an influx in agency and replaced the opinions of others with inherent self-worth which led to a more conscious attitude towards herself and others. Motherhood fundamentally changed her motivation, purpose, self-awareness, and how these mothers interact with the world around them.

Conclusion

This thesis studied young motherhood in the Netherlands. Based on a conceptual framework that explored the historical and cultural understanding of motherhood, two empirical chapters looked at the experiences of six young mothers. In this concluding chapter I will assess the experiences, stories and theories dealt with and bring them together. I will propose a new way of framing young motherhood publicly, based on their experiences and I will do suggestions for further research.

Summary of the argument and findings

The first chapter investigated the historical and conceptual understanding of motherhood in the Netherlands. It showed the underlying binary constructions that are dominant in the public conception of motherhood. We saw how Mosse explained the national necessity for women and sexuality to be regulated within the private sphere, as it assured (perceived) national stability. This regulation can be understood in the terms of Rich as the 'patriarchal institute of motherhood.' Her distinction between this and *the access of each woman to her powers of reproduction*, is an underlying dynamic throughout the thesis. The first chapter can be seen as a thorough exploration of this patriarchal institute, leading to an understanding of normative discourses around motherhood. Reinforced by neoliberal emphasis on the responsibility of the mother for the thriving of her children. And the scientization of motherhood that has become increasingly pressing through social media. Concluding that in the West feminism helped make motherhood a choice[125], but the vocation itself remains coloured by traditional standards and suppressing binaries.

These normative discourses are embedded within the mothers in this study. Most of them were raised within the framework of intensive or sacrificial motherhood themselves. They, therefore, lack objectivity towards its normative character. And try to mother within its parameters, motivated by the love for their children. Their main obstacle to intensive mothering is their financial resources, in combination with progressive development theories.

The mothers were first confronted with this embeddedness when they found out they were pregnant. They perceived this as an abnormal situation for their age. During their upbringing there had been a consequent connection between responsible behaviour, age, and motherhood. Settling into motherhood, they experienced empowered mothering as well. Through their relationship with their children and the concept of 'growing up together'. Rich, O'Reilly, and other scholars reiterate this by showing how motherhood can work as a feminism of its own.

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[125] Disclaimer: this choice can't be seen as an independent decision.

The empirical chapters further unpacked Rich's distinction. DST helped create a dynamic view of its juxtaposition. As it allows for conflicting positions to exist together in a non-static manner. Through integrating and explaining the different personal role appropriations, of oneself and other people, and collective voices, it offers a nuanced view of the complexity of the self. In researching mothers' agency, it enables power dynamics and hierarchies to become visible, that are otherwise easily overlooked or taken for granted. By taking into consideration the influence other people and social discourses have on someone's seemingly independent decision-making process. And unpacking this in a detailed manner. This brings the two parts of Rich's distinction into conversation with each other. A clear explanation of the different perspectives at play is the first step toward liberating the mother's agency from the patriarchal suppression.

I argued how motherhood forms a narrative breaking point in the lives of the mothers. In the terminology of DST this meant upheaval in the society of mind; a reorganization of the relations and interaction between the various I-positions and collective voices. A big change motherhood brought was becoming more conscious of one's personal boundaries and being able to communicate them. Additionally, it made Kimberley and Hanneke more aware of their position within their environment. They became less hard and more open-minded.

Furthermore, using DST, we came to a more nuanced understanding of the perceived dichotomy between motherhood and adolescence. Showing their dynamic powerplay and interaction. The benefit of being able to 'grow up together' and being playful and energetic shows a congruence between adolescence and motherhood. Whereas in other areas, having to be responsible while experimenting and discovering yourself proves more challenging. These situations can cause friction or stimulate creative solution-seeking, e.g., when Kimberley travels around the world with her daughter.

This shows, how the experiences of young motherhood are dynamic and fluid. The main struggle for the mothers is its non-normative social portrayal. Deflecting from the standard is a constant interplay between wanting to fit in, striving to reach resemblance with the normativity, and finding their own path. The mothers with older children, had some time of reflection. They didn't see their hard work as a negative, but as a valuable lesson for their children.

Framing

Most of the hardships these young mothers endure are connected to the patriarchal institute of motherhood. In collision with agency depriving policies and their experience of feeling (too) young their suffering becomes lasting. I will, based on this study, plead for a new way of framing young motherhood. Centering around the perspective of the wellbeing of the mothers themselves. Inspired by Spronk's call for approaching sexuality in terms of

wellbeing rather than health. As the latter focusses on the prevention of problems and excludes many other aspects.[126] Framing young motherhood as a social problem reinforces and maintains stereotypes. As we've seen, this influences the public image, and the personal experience, through the embeddedness of social discourses. Shifting this framing, makes it possible to include a variety of factors that all encompass young motherhood, painting a more wholesome picture.

Young mothers are in situation characterised by chaos, struggle, and change. They lack a public support system to fall into, i.e., childcare is very expensive, there is no paid pregnancy leave, etc. In the situation of consistent stigmatisation, they find most of their support in relationships that acknowledge their agency within the setting. Without diminishing their hard work.

Cense recognises the power relations inherent to the concept of (sexual) agency, she describes this:

> *Sexual agency can be viewed as the strategic negotiations of an individual to situate oneself and one's choices in a social context, maintain relationships and make sense of experiences. These strategic negotiations take place in a broader social and cultural context which imposes constraints on the agency of all people; however, due to structural inequalities some people experience more constraints than others.[127]*

By having relationships that give the mother the dominant power position within the situation of young motherhood, they put the hierarchy right in that particular context. If stigmatising public discourse prevails, it is empowering to have relationships that reverse that dynamic.

It is important for these mothers to feel they are fully recognised as mothers. They take responsibility, make sacrifices, and work hard to ensure the best life for their children. Instead of policies trying to tell them what to do, maintaining the negative framing around young motherhood, a more fruitful approach would be supporting their agency. An approach that would focus on 'what can we do together, to empower you, so you are a more confident parent?' I think young mothers have the right to mother without having to fight for their existence. Without denying that their situation is a more challenging start within the cultural climate of contemporary western society. The focus should be on offering assistance rather than creating more obstacles. I agree with Cense and Ganzevoort, the

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[126] Rachel Spronk, "Beyond pain, towards pleasure in the study of sexuality in Africa," in: A. Lynos, H. Lynos (eds.) *Sexualities in Anthropology: A Reader* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 375-381.
[127] Cense, "Rethinking sexual agency," 250.

momentum that is created by (unintended) young pregnancy, offers great possibilities for agentic development.[128] A claim that is reinforced by the stories of the mothers in this study.

Suggestions for further research

This exploratory study only touches the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the experiences of young mothers. It seeks to add to the growing body of maternal studies through giving young mothers in the Netherlands a voice, by providing a nuanced experience-led analysis. Approaching motherhood using DST, gives a new perspective on the intricate dynamics between inner- and outer world and how they work together to either create a suppressing or empowering context. Therefore, it is another step towards being able to create a more empowering mothering context. Gathering the experiences of more mothers and expanding the academic literature is important as well, using a more diverse group of participants.

Furthermore, religion and secularism were a part of my initial discourse analysis, but didn't come back explicitly in the emperical data. With my background in religious studies, this is something I would emphasis more in a follow-up study. Because religion, sexuality, and motherhood are all regulated within the private sphere, it would be interesting to research their connection further in the experiences of mothers. I would do so first by targetting my participants within religious or spiritual communities and designating a specific section in the interviewguide to this topic. I would focus on the paradoxality between the influence of patriarchal religion on contemporary motherood discourses and how their spiritual lives offer mothers a context of empowerment.[129] My aim would be to do this in line with Klassens research, looking at the personal experience wihtin this religiosity.

Another suggestion for furhter research would be a focus on the body, in connection with sexuality. In this study there was one question dedicated to this topic. I would like to explore this further. To see how personal experiences, close relations, and social discourses relate together. Since a duality of motherhood seems to be that it is inherently connected to sexuality, but socially motherhood and sexuality are seperated completely. It would be interesting to include the experiences of a variety of mothers in this, not exclusively biological mothers. Since, mothering is a physical practice beyond pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding.

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[128] Cense, Ganzevoort, "The storyscapes of teenage pregnancy," 580.
[129] Vanessa Reimer, *Angels on Earth. Mothering, Religion, and Spirituality* (Bradford: Demeter Press, 2016) 3.

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