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Doctoral Thesis

'Rebuilding after the Storm': Stories of Young Motherhood

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Thesis Abstract

This thesis consists of a literature review, a research paper and critical review which reports on young motherhood. The literature review provides a meta-synthesis of findings from 13 qualitative studies which examined young mothers' conceptualisations and meanings of motherhood and identity development. The formulation: 'negotiating motherhood and me' was interpreted. This included three main themes: (1) stepping into womanhood; (2) the 'good' versus the 'bad' mother; (3) my mother, my model? This formulation highlighted a fluid movement between these themes, which were influenced by familial, societal and intrapersonal interactions. The findings suggested that the majority of mothers adapted and integrated these conflicts and roles into their identity, which brought positive as well as negative changes and continuities in their overall identity.

This research paper explored stories of young motherhood from the perspectives of two cohorts: 'mothers of young mothers' and 'young mothers', and how shared stories of motherhood were constructed in particular social, interpersonal and cultural contexts. A qualitative methodology incorporating a narrative interview and analysis was conducted, which generated rich and detailed stories. There were a number of shared plots as well as diversities across and within cohorts, with three acts resembling a series of progressive and regressive phases: (1) derailment; (2) a bumpy, terrifying and fun ride, full of surprises; (3) coming to terms with reality: better equipped for the future. Located within personal stories, there were key cultural narratives, which demonstrated the relationship between mothers' own expectations formed by society and their own experiences. The literature review and research paper discuss the contribution of the findings to existing theoretical literature; wider clinical implications; the political context; and future research.

Finally, the critical review presents my individual story of the journey I encountered during the research process. This is presented as three chapters: chapter 1: getting to grips with my thesis; chapter 2: becoming and being a narrative researcher; chapter 3: light at the end of the tunnel. Recurring plots which accompanied me on my journey included 'personal reflexivity', reflective practice in supervision, and ethical, methodological and quality issues. These plots are discussed
alongside a critique of the research and the clinical and research implications for the future.