Article

Muted resistance: The deployment of youth voice in news coverage of young women's sexuality in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract
Youth sexuality is typically constructed as a social problem, and associated with a range of negative consequences for larger society and for young people themselves—especially young women. The media play a role in perpetuating this dominant construction, but may also offer a space for resistance. In this article, mainstream news media reportage on youth sexual and reproductive issues in Aotearoa are discursively analysed to identify instances of resistance to oppressive discourses. Taking a feminist poststructuralist perspective, the aim is to connect news reporting, as a representational practice, with broader relations of power. The focus of the analysis, therefore, is on whether and how young people are allowed a voice in news reportage, and to what effect their voices are deployed. The analysis demonstrates not only that youth voice is relatively muted in comparison to experts, but also that it is frequently used to reinforce the dominant constructions of youth sexuality (as problematic and risky). Yet, instances of resistance are also evident. These are assessed in relation to their impact on gender power relations and possibilities for amplifying resistance are discussed.

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Teen sex a health issue (Sunday Star Times, 2012)
Sex education strategies "inadequate" – study (Warhurst, 2016)
Teen pregnancy is a growing concern (Mason, 2013)
Could 'Teen Mom' stop teen mums? (Cooke, 2016)

The newspaper headlines quoted above demonstrate the prevailing view on youth sexuality reflected in the news media in a range of contexts: that it is a serious and growing problem needing to be addressed (Chmielewski, Tolman, & Kincaid, 2017). Significantly, the locus of concern is largely young women's sexual activity. News reports frequently foreground imminent danger and tragedy for young women who are susceptible to pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, or exploitation. This problematisation of young women's sexuality frequently leads to prohibitive or punitive legislation, surveillance, and intervention into young women's lives, with little or no say on their part (Chmielewski et al., 2017; Fyfe, 2014). The media therefore play a powerful role in constructing knowledges about the 'problem' of young women's sexuality and reinforcing current gendered power relations (Fyfe, 2014; Shaw, 2010).

Yet, unlike other sites of public discussion, the media also provide a space where alternative constructions could potentially exist that challenge the problematisation of young women's sexuality. Feminist researchers have argued that there is a need for research to consider how young people are engaged in "speaking back to these oppressive discourses" (Chmielewski et al., 2017, p. 427). Responding to this need, we explored the ways that young people are allowed to speak in reporting on youth sexual and reproductive issues in mainstream news media in Aotearoa (New Zealand). In this article, we investigate how the inclusion of youth voices shapes the ways that young women's sexuality is constructed and the broader implications of these constructions for young women. Our analytical focus, therefore, is on the instances in which young people's perspectives or stories, opinions, or accounts are included in media articles.

Our investigation is guided by the following questions. What are young people allowed to say in news articles? Do they resist the dominant problem discourse and to what extent? What do the ways that youth voices are deployed suggest about the power relations constructed in news media coverage of youth sexuality and more broadly? To answer these questions, we take a discursive approach, grounded in feminist poststructuralism. From this perspective, the news articles we analyse are regarded as representational practices (Gill, 2007) and the analysis focuses on how young women are granted or denied the ability to frame issues related to youth sex and reproduction within a discursive context in which their sexuality is commonly problematized (Chmielewski et al., 2017). Our aim is to connect representational practice with broader patterns of inequality, domination, and oppression (Gill, 2007). Such critical feminist engagement with news media allows us to explore how reportage on a topic contributes to maintaining or potentially challenging

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inequitable social structures, and thus sexual and reproductive health disparities that affect young women (Hodgetts, Masters, & Robertson, 2004).

We offer first, by way of background, a general discussion of the problematisation of young women's sexuality in public discourse internationally and, in the context of Aotearoa. We go on to explicate our theoretical approach to the analysis of news media and describe the method we employed. We then present our analysis, showing how youth voices largely served to support the problematisation of young women's sexuality in "complicit talk" but also highlight instances of "resistant talk" in which young women appear to challenge this dominant construction. We conclude by considering the broader implications of these representational practices for gendered power relations and feminist scholars' role in amplifying young women's resistance.

The 'problem' of young women's sexuality in public discourse
Public discussions of youth sexuality frequently take a problem perspective, featuring young people as irrational, unstable, and risky (Coleman, Kearns, & Collins, 2010). This common construction has meant that "unlike their adult counterparts, issues such as young people's use of condoms, contraception, abortion and pregnancy are likely to receive headline attention in the media" (Jackson, 2005). Moreover, as international feminist research has highlighted, the spotlight is most often directed at young *women's* sexuality. For instance, the media in a range of contexts routinely construct teenage motherhood as a concerning and intractable social problem (e.g., Chmielewski et al., 2017; Fyfe, 2014). This echoes and reinforces similar treatments in social science literature (e.g., Breheny & Stephens, 2007a; Cherrington & Breheny, 2005), medicine (e.g., Breheny & Stephens, 2008, 2010; Macleod & Durrheim, 2003), and government policy (e.g., Duncan, 2007; Pihama, 2011; Ware, Breheny, & Forster, 2016) both nationally and internationally.

In Aotearoa, this problem orientation is evident as young women's sexuality is typically framed as a social problem and associated with a range of negative consequences for young women themselves and larger society (Allen, 2007, 2008; Ware et al., 2016). Growing concern is reflected in an increase in policy reports on teen pregnancy and parenting in general, and on Māori teen parenting in particular (e.g., Families Commission/ Komihana a whanau, 2011, 2012b, 2012c, 2012a; Social Policy and Evaluation Research Unit, 2015; University of Waikato, 2015; Zodgekar & Families Commission/ Komihana a whanau, n.d.).

Such academic and professional knowledge shapes what is knowable about young women's sexuality and subsequent public discussion of the topic in Aotearoa. Expert and lay discourses are mutually reinforcing, working together to support the construction of young women's sexuality as a problem requiring intervention. This view is evident, for example, in a recent debate in the *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, which was widely reported in the national media. The initial proposal, made by Pickering, Anderson, and Paterson (2015) was that a publicly funded opt-out long-acting

contraceptive programme in Aotearoa could be a solution to the "significant costs [of teenage pregnancy] on the individual and society" (p. 1052). As part of this programme, Pickering and colleagues suggested, "Teens and young adults should be started on long-acting reversible contraceptives before sexual activity commences" (p. 1052). Their generic reference to "teens and young adults" of course somewhat obscures the fact that it is *girls and young women* who would be the targets of such an intervention. Ensuing discussion of the proposal in the media reflected mounting anxieties with the costs associated with early pregnancy and motherhood in Aotearoa.

These concerns are also reflected in welfare reform measures in Aotearoa aimed at decreasing long-term welfare dependency among young mothers that have been introduced in recent years (Ware et al., 2016; Ware, Breheny, & Forster, 2017). In response to "concerns about children being born to those on welfare" (Buchanan, 2012, p. 1)[1] a subsidy for long-acting reversible contraception for female welfare beneficiaries and their teenaged daughters was introduced in 2012. Though recently revoked, these benefits sat alongside punitive measures for mothers on welfare who have further children and/or do not return to paid employment within a designated time (Ministry of Social Development, 2016). In support of these measures, the then-Prime Minister (cited in Buchanan, 2012, p. 1) argued: "Ultimately if people have unplanned pregnancies and are solely dependent on the state, you the taxpayer have to pay for a long period of time for that dependency and we know the outcomes aren't terribly good".

Seeking to address Aotearoa's 'problem' of early pregnancy and parenthood through such measures, Ware et al. (2016, 2017) cogently demonstrate, means that efforts converge upon young, socially disadvantaged, and ethnic minority women. These young women, as research in other contexts also indicates, are frequently constructed as being "inherently 'at risk' for early pregnancy and motherhood due to poverty, [their] culture, and racialized sexual stereotypes" (Mann, 2013, p. 683). Since young Māori women bear the worst social inequities, and are thus most likely to require state assistance (Ware, Breheny, & Forster, 2017), it is young Māori mothers who are most often singled out "as at risk of long-term welfare-dependency and a threat to their own children" (Ware et al., 2016, p. 1).

The problem discourse of youth sexuality evident in Aotearoa and internationally constructs young people as objects of concern—to be instructed, protected, or admonished by more knowledgeable adults—rather than as agentic subjects. Indeed, as feminist research suggests, it is the perspectives of adults, and especially those positioned as experts, that dominate media reportage and routinely "focus on 'negative consequences' associated with young women's engagement in heterosexual sexual activity" (Mann, 2013). We turn to this aspect of the issue in the following section.

Analysing 'voice' in news reports

From a feminist post-structuralist perspective, media reportage does not simply offer a neutral reflection of the world (Jackson, 2005). Instead, media texts are understood as implicated in the construction of what is considered to be legitimate knowledge about young women's sexuality and the sanctioning of particular kinds of responses (Gill, 2007). News reporting is thus considered a form of representational practice, involving 'the active work of selecting and presenting, and of structuring and shaping' (Hall, 1982, p. 60). Part of this process involves the selection and framing of voices to be incorporated into the text in ways that contribute to a particular messaging or 'rhetorical purpose' (Fairclough, 2004). Fairclough (2004) highlights the aspect of voice—and how "different voices are textured together" (p. 53)—as an important feature contributing to the rhetorical force of news reports. It is analytically useful, therefore, to consider which "voices are included, which are excluded, and what significant absences there [are]?" (Fairclough, 2004, p. 56).

Analytically speaking, 'voice' refers to the reporting of direct and indirect speech of various stakeholders in an issue (e.g., parents, youth, or teachers). So, in addition to quoting speakers verbatim, their words can also be reported indirectly, either by summarising the content of what was said or reporting the speech act (without summarising what was said) (Fairclough, 2004). Our analysis concentrates on instances in news reports when young people's speech is reported in these ways (quoted, summarised, or reported). We paid particular attention to how youth voices are 'framed' or incorporated into news. Framing, according to Fairclough (2004), involves considering the relationship between the report and the rest of the text in which it occurs. This has two interrelated dimensions, which we considered in our analysis, viz., (1) how reported speech features in the text and (2) what work it does in the text. Accordingly, our analytical strategy, as detailed below, sought to explore how voices were framed and the rhetorical effect of such framing, for example, to produce an impression of consensus or support a particular 'angle' of a news story (Fairclough, 2004). Our analysis, as intimated earlier, is concerned with: (1) what is 'sayable' for young people in news articles, (2) the extent to which youth voice resists the dominant problem discourse—if at all, and (3) more broadly, the power relations implicated in the deployment of youth voices in news media coverage of youth sexuality in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Data collection and analysis

We draw our data from a research project about public representations of youth sexuality and reproduction in Aotearoa that included a media analysis. The data corpus comprises 64 relevant news articles published in mainstream press during the fifteen-year period (2001 - 2016) since the launch of the country's Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy (Ministry of Health, 2001).[2] The Strategy's major aim is improving the sexual health of youth, Māori, and Pacific peoples, who are deemed "at-risk groups" (Ministry of Health, 2001, p. iii). As such, the Strategy in a sense formalized the 'problem' of youth sexuality

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in Aotearoa, rendering it a cause of national concern as indicated by a flurry of articles appearing after its inception. We select this period for analysis not only pragmatically, owing to the significantly larger volume of relevant articles appearing after its promulgation, but also to explore how young people themselves have been included in the growing public discussion of the 'problem' of youth sexuality.

Articles were located via a systematic search of online databases and news sites. They were included in the dataset on the basis that they focus on sexual and reproductive matters, make substantive mention of youth, and are specific to Aotearoa. Thus, we excluded articles on sexual and reproductive issues that made only passing mention of youth or teen pregnancy in Aotearoa.

We began with a basic content analysis focused on instances where sources were quoted, summarised, or reported in order to gauge broadly whose voices are represented in the dataset and with what frequency (Gill, 2007), as well as whether there are any significant absences (Fairclough, 2004). We attended not simply to how frequently particular voices appeared, but we also used Fairclough's (2004) characteristics of framing to consider how various voices are presented in an article. This involved assessing each instance of quoted, summarised, or reported speech according to four framing characteristics (Fairclough, 2004), viz., (1) *ordering* (how are quotes/reported speech arranged in relation to one another?); (2) *placement* (where are quotes/reported speech positioned in the article? e.g., close to the headline, in the 'wrap up'); (3) *signposting* (is attention drawn to particular speaker/s? e.g., in the headline); and (4) *relative space* (how much of the text is devoted to particular speakers). Attending to faming provides an indication of the relative importance and authority granted to various kinds of voices, pointing to power relations represented in the texts.

To capture this aspect in the content analysis, we created the codes 'primary voice' and 'secondary voice'. Text coded as primary voice usually appears early in the article and/or before other voices, the source is introduced or flagged as important, and/or there is a relatively larger number of words quoted than other sources in the article. In contrast, text coded as secondary voice tends to appear after the main source quoted, later in the article or at the end, and receive a more cursory treatment than primary voices. Assessing these features holistically within each article, we were able to gain an overview of the relative weight given to different voices by attending to the patterning of various voices across the dataset.

We then analysed the content of what was said by each category of speaker (quoted, summarised, or reported speech) to determine the rhetorical effect of deploying specific voices in particular ways. We thus considered the inclusion of particular voices in news texts as forming part of particular rhetorical strategies. In other words, rather than simply 'giving voice' to particular stakeholders, the framing of voices in various ways does rhetorical work, such as producing an impression of consensus or substantiating authorial claims. To investigate this dimension, we conducted a fine-grained discursive analysis of

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reported speech categorised by speaker, using (Reynolds, 2008) narrative-discursive approach, developed within feminist discursive psychology.

This method attends to: (i) the ways that available discursive resources[3] are drawn on by speakers and (ii) how these "available meanings are taken up or resisted and (re)negotiated" (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p. 23) by means of positioning analysis. Analysis involves two iterative analytical tasks. The first task involves identifying discursive resources as patterns across the data, searching both within a single text and across texts. We thereby identified common discourses employed within the dataset such as the discourses of risk and morality. The second task entails considering how discourses are drawn on in particular instances, in order to understand the positioning and identity work that may be accomplished by drawing on a specific discourse. For instance, we show speakers drew on particular discourses to position themselves positively and so to avoid undesirable social identities. As speakers draw on or re/negotiate discursive resources, they simultaneously reinforce or resist existing gendered power relations (Morison & Macleod, 2013). As we show in the following section, voices are considered in terms of how they are deployed in ways that support or undermine particular representations of young women and their associated power relations.

Analysis and discussion

Overall, the preliminary content analysis confirms the dominance of expert voices in the reportage, as indicated in other contexts, reflecting the professionalization of youth sexuality (Macleod, 2011). Expert voices, which include academics and professionals working in medical or social services, receive the highest proportion of coverage, both as primary (90%) or secondary (45.8%) sources. Other adults—such as teachers, parents, and politicians—are called on for comment far less than 'experts', academics and medical or social service professionals. In contrast, young people's voices are clearly under-represented or muted, as they are hardly called upon to comment on issues of direct concern to them. They are very rarely a main source (6%) and occasionally feature as secondary sources (25%). In addition, of those young people's voices that did feature, the sources were mainly young women, with only two quotes in a single article from young men. The failure to make this explicit reflects a broader taken-for-granted societal positioning of women as primarily responsible for sexual and reproductive health (Lowe, 2016).

In the analysis we present below, we specifically considered "youth voice": instances in which young people's speech is quoted or reported. As we shall show, youth voices were mobilised predominantly in the construction of youth sex as risky, thereby reinforcing dominant discourses of youth sexuality. We have termed this "complicit talk". However, we shall also demonstrate that there were instances where youth voices appeared to challenge the problematisation of youth sexuality, which we term "resistant talk".

Complicit talk: re-inscribing risk

Our analysis indicated that not only are youth voices muted, but when they are permitted to speak, they are most often deployed in ways that authorise and lend rhetorical force to arguments already made in the article. For instance: "Teen parents … agreed that sexuality lessons should be compulsory" (Knott, 2014) or "Opposition to the current [abortion] law is also supported by both parents and also teenagers themselves" (Family First New Zealand, 2015). Generally, the deployment of youth voices alongside expert commentators works to support the dominant construction of youth sexuality as a problem and to cast it in a negative light. Moreover, despite generic references to "teens" or "youth", the subject matter of the articles suggests that it is really *young women's* sexuality that is deemed problematic and under scrutiny. Similar to Chmielewski et al.'s (2017) findings, the dominant focus across the dataset is on the 'problems' of teenage pregnancy and abortion. (This was the subject of 40.5% of the articles.)

The problematisation of youth sexuality relies mostly on the intersecting discourses of risk and developmental psychology, which work together to construct youth sexuality as risky. Although we noted a strand of conservative moralising talk running through the dataset, this was usually evident in articles authored by special interest group *Family First* or in opinion editorials. Thus, reflecting the decline of a moral discourse in mainstream discussions of sex and reproduction in recent years, most of the articles eschew moralising arguments (Macvarish, 2010). The more common construction of risky youth sexuality—informed by risk and developmental discourses—is illustrated in the extracts below. Notably extract 1 is part of a *vox pop*, which involves questioning young people about issues related to youth sexuality and reproduction—in this case their knowledge of sex and STIs. The *vox pop* format is a common way that youth voices are included in the articles in our dataset and often appear at the end of an article, as in this instance, functioning rhetorically to reinforce the article's main thrust or argument.

Extract 1: *Sex clinics treating more youngsters*
Kate, 15, Year 11: I have been having sex education since I was in primary school. We don't learn how to have sex, just about puberty and relationships. If kids aren't informed they just do stupid stuff. They need to learn about protection. (Carroll, 2011)

Extract 2: *Sex education overhaul welcomed*
Student Waru Pikia-Slade, 16, was due to give birth in July. "[Sex education] should be taught, it's important. It's frustrating, you don't want to have a baby at this age, you want to carry on doing stuff while you're young." Waru's older sister Mata Pikia-Slade, 18, was also at the school. She has a toddler and said she could not remember sex education at school. "It was a long time ago in year 7. I can't remember what they taught me. They need to start teaching it [when students are]

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younger. By the time you get the education you've probably started already." Tarryn Ihaia, 19, was a student in the Teen Parent Unit. She had two boys and believed there needed to be compulsory sexuality education in schools, until year 13. "It should be compulsory, or we're going have heaps of people like these teen mums." She was working on getting level 3 NCEA and then wanted to go on to study social work. She said she also did not remember much from sexuality health lessons at school. (Knott, 2014)

These quotes demonstrate how young people are commonly rendered 'at risk' and 'a risk' at the same time. In extract 1, risk discourse supports the dominant danger-and-disease framing of youth sexuality (Allen, 2007; Jackson, 2005; Macleod, 2017). This is not surprising in an article about STIs, but what is noteworthy is the way that teenagers are positioned in this talk. Both extracts show how appealing to the need for better sex education and adult intervention allows young people to lay blame for the negative consequences of teenage sex with adults who have failed to educate or equip them adequately. Therefore, they do not necessarily condemn teenage sex—as we have often seen in the past when moral arguments are deployed. At the same time, however, they render young people as inherently deficient and risk prone due to their developmental status. Extract 1 shows the common positioning of youth as particularly at risk by virtue of their age. Teenager's developmental immaturity was often emphasised to explain why teenagers engage in 'risky' sexual activities, such as unprotected sex. In this vein, echoing the scientific literature, when speaking about youth sex and reproduction, young commentators cited "reproductive ignorance, risk-taking behaviour and giving in to peer pressure as some of the factors" (Macleod, 2003, p. 420).

The rendering of youth at risk is supported by a developmental discourse in which the teenage years are seen as a tumultuous developmental stage and teenagers feature "as *risk takers,* as well as young people *at risk* due to inherent characteristics—their inexperience, biological factors, lifestyle and peers" (Monterro & Kelly, 2016, p. 53). This is a common positioning throughout the data and is supported by youth voice as we see in both extracts above. In extract 1, drawing on this common understanding of youth, teenagers are constructed as inclined to "do stupid stuff". This portrayal is reiterated in extract 2 where three Māori teenage mothers are quoted, again, at the end of the article. Here, risk is again implied as teenagers "are positioned in terms of being unwise or unaware of their best interests, … characterised as making choices that do not fit with desirable social norms, regardless of whether it could be objectively assessed to be a rational choice" (Brown, Shoveller, Chabot, & LaMontagne, 2013, p. 337).

It is not surprising that all three of the quotes in extract 2 are from Māori women, which may draw on and reinforce existing stereotypes about who is responsible for the problem of teenage motherhood in Aotearoa. This points to the problematizing of Māori teenage mothers within public discussion of youth sexuality (e.g., Le Grice & Braun, 2016;

Ware et al., 2016). As Chmielewski et al. (2017) point out, young women of colour are frequently thought of as 'high risk' and, as a consequence, they note in their own study that "Girls of color were highly visible in representations as *vectors of trouble*, reproducing racialized stereotypes of teen pregnancy and sexual immorality" (p. 417).

The construction of youth sex as risky justifies adult intervention, in these instances, in the form of sex education. Significantly, intervention is construed both as preventing harm to teenagers and as preventing them from harming others (peers, society). In this vein, in extract 3 early pregnancy is constructed as undesirable both for the individual ("you don't want to have a baby") and for society ("heaps" of teenage mothers). The pregnant teenager is implicitly positioned as contributing to social problems (Macleod, 2017). This positioning is particularly troublesome when pregnancy is attributed to individual action: the failure to avoid the risk of pregnancy. Those who do not take up the 'solutions' proposed—like being educated about sex and acting on this knowledge—move from being considered largely *at* risk to being viewed as *a* risk to themselves, others, and society at large.

Based upon the logic of personal responsibility and individual action, intervention featured largely as youth being educated or equipped by more-knowledgeable adults to be able to make wise or healthy choices. This simplistic construction does not include the contextual realities of young women's lives (Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014) but rather hinges on a neoliberal conceptualisation of an autonomous, rational subject who may or may not act on health information. Those who fail to respond positively to sex education can thus be positioned as recalcitrant or blameworthy, as implied by the somewhat surprising reference above to other young mothers as "these teen mums".

Young women were able to position themselves in opposition to this construction and so to repair spoiled identity. This counter positioning is evident in young people's quotes which featured binary subject positions: exemplary, responsible youth, with whom those interviewed most often aligned themselves, versus feckless or irresponsible youth, as illustrated in the extract below.

Extract 3: *Teen sex a health issue*
The Sunday Star-Times interviewed several 16 and 17-year-old girls about their attitudes towards sex, and whether they were satisfied with their sex education. All seven said they knew of the risks of pregnancy and disease, four said what they learned put them off sex until adulthood, two said they would wait for "the right person", and one cited her Christian faith but said the classes affirmed her decision to abstain. But three girls said they had already felt pressured into having sex, that alcohol was a major factor in teen sex, and that sex education had no effect on them. "We just want to have sex," Destiny, 18, said, while her friend Rose agreed. "It just happens, we don't really care. It's just part of the moment. I do try to use protection though." Rose has had both pregnancy and infection scares from unprotected sex

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after drinking, but said that had not put her off. "At first it worried me, if I got a disease, or pregnant. I wanted to wait, but you never know what will happen." ("Teen sex a health issue," 2012)

Extract 4: *Implant to prevent teen pregnancies*
Jessica Moses, 20, recently travelled to Hamilton to get the [contraceptive] implant and because she is in a stable relationship she felt like it was a sensible precautionary measure. "It's much less hassle than taking a pill everyday [sic]. I'm still young so children are not in the pipeline at the moment." However, Miss Moses said she did not think younger girls, like her 16-year-old sister, should be given the implant. "They're at the age when they look and feel like adults but don't yet have the maturity. They sneak out to parties where there are lots of older guys and alcohol and I know they're at risk of going too far with some of these guys." "There is a more serious problem of STIs if you're still having casual relationships. Taking a pill each day is more of a reminder." (Molloy, 2010)

In these extracts, it is possible to see the 'good' teenage subject who "knows the risks" and chooses "sensible", responsible behaviour (abstinence, taking contraceptive precautions, a monogamous sexual relationship). This is the ideal neoliberal subject: the sensible risk manager who accepts responsibility for her own wellbeing and refrains from harming others through her choices (Kelly, 2001). This ideal young subject is contrasted with the 'bad', recalcitrant teenager who knowingly and wilfully engages in risky behaviour. As discussed above, failure to engage in risk-avoidance practices potentially opens a subject to blame and moral censure (Macvarish, 2010).

The dual positions of good and bad teen are supported by the intersection of risk and developmental discourses. Risk discourse is evident in references to pregnancy and disease as negative consequences associated with teenage sex. As it intersects with a developmental discourse, risk is attributed to inherent characteristics and biological factors, which together with inexperience, lifestyle and peer influence, moves the teenage body into the sphere of danger. Youth itself becomes a risk factor (Monterro & Kelly, 2016). Indeed, in extract 4, "maturity" is cited as a reason for the propensity to behave irresponsibly or dangerously and for restricting the types of contraceptives available to younger girls who are positioned as especially "risky" *and* especially vulnerable.

This forms the rationale for the construction of categories of age appropriate behaviour. Behaviours that may once have been construed as morally inappropriate are articulated instead as developmentally problematic (Brown et al., 2013). Thus, "adulthood" is constructed as appropriate timing for sexual activity (extract 3) and motherhood (extract 4). Similarly, the language of risk replaces that of moral judgement (Macvarish, 2010). In extract 3, issue with the timing of sex is not an overtly moral one—in that it is pre-marital, as may have been the objection historically. Abstinence is instead discussed in terms of

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waiting for the suitable time in the developmental trajectory. Similarly,, in extract 4, "casual sex" is not overtly condemned, but rather cast as a youthful phase. Yet, it is clearly rendered objectionable when juxtaposed with the 'good teen's' risk-avoidant choice of a "stable relationship". Thus, the construction of youth as/at risk works to regulate youth sexual behaviour in that a moral discourse serves to contain childbearing within the traditional family structure. Instead, a developmental discourse works to privilege a particular Western and middle-class developmental trajectory with a normative and naturalised sequence of life events, in which young parenthood is seen as disruptive (Macleod, 2011).

Resistant talk? Good teen mothers as reformed subjects

In comparison to the preponderance of negative constructions of teenage sexuality, resistant talk was far less common in our data. We encountered some challenges to the dominant problematisation narrative in a three articles that contained young women's positive stories of teenage motherhood (Filipe, 2009; Neale, 2011; Salter, 2015), as illustrated by the quote below.

> **Extract 5:** *Teenage mums say age no barrier*
> Both girls were shocked when they found out, and Edana even considered an abortion, but had only two weeks to decide. She hadn't thought of an abortion as being a "big issue" but that all changed when she realised she was carrying a baby. "When it came down to it, I just couldn't go through with it," she said. She turned to Chantelle, her parents and her sister for advice, and although her family were shocked at first, they have been supporting her since. Both girls are also still with the fathers of their babies […] Edana said age did not mean you couldn't be a good mother. "It's been an absolute miracle for Chantelle and me. It's been fantastic. I thought it would be hard, we had the odd glance if we were walking around town but we don't care. "It doesn't mean anything to us anymore. We are proud of who we are and we are proud of our bubbas [babies]. "We know we are doing a good job." Both girls said teenage pregnancies didn't have to be a bad thing. "Babies can be a blessing," Chantelle said. While they have embraced motherhood, they do recognise it has stopped them from "going out and drinking" like most of their friends do, but they don't mind at all. Edana is studying by correspondence and plans to study fashion when Damien is ready for preschool, while Chantelle is taking it one day at a time. Chantelle and Edana are two of the thousands of Kiwi teenagers who fall pregnant every year (Filipe, 2009).

The discursive purpose of this narrative, as the overall framing headline suggests, is to present the counter-argument to the widespread assumption that the teenage mother is an unfit parent, that age does not preclude a woman from being a good parent (Breheny &

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Stephens, 2007a). The quote above explicitly challenges the common negative portrayal of teenage motherhood and the idea that young mothers are necessarily inferior. Resonating with research in other contexts, they contradict the common construction of early motherhood as necessarily entailing hardship. Instead, as this quote shows, in their counter-narratives young women cite feelings of pride, competence, and satisfaction engendered by their mothering experiences (Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014; Breen & McLean, 2010; Murphy, 2013).

The tone of these stories was defiant as young women were quoted as saying they had "no regrets" ('Raylene' in Neale, 2011), "I wouldn't change anything" ('Kahlia' in Salter, 2015), and, as shown above "We are proud". The young women's stories did not, therefore, present as penitent, ashamed, or remorseful in order to redeem themselves. In two of the stories, this lack of regret is juxtaposed with the consideration of abortion, as we see in quote 5 above. The conservative rhetorical strategy, which would be undermined by regret, appears to be representing teenage motherhood, however problematic or challenging, as preferable to abortion. A position of penitence would also align more with a moral rendition of teenage pregnancy, but instead the discourse that these stories respond to is the developmental discourse, which positions them as too young for motherhood. Rather than judgement over teenage sex, the issue is having become pregnant at the wrong time, which calls into question the capacity to care for their children.

As the quote above shows, young women were able to negotiate positive identities as mothers, despite their age. Significantly, this was achieved by drawing on what Barcelos and Gubrium (2014, p. 474) refer to as "a *redemption* narrative". Within this narrative young mothers are still presented as "fallen subjects" (Chmielewski et al., 2017, p. 417), as they might have been within a moral discourse, but in the sense that they have failed to adhere to the ideal life path of the western, neoliberal girl child. They are, therefore, able to redeem themselves and repair their spoiled identity by taking up the neoliberal subjectivity of the responsible choice-making citizen. Hence, Edana and Chantelle describe their responsible choices: seeing their pregnancies to term, seeking social support, staying with their partners, continuing education, and foregoing the irresponsible behaviours of their peers ("going out and drinking"). Therefore, taking individual responsibility for turning one's life around "is seen as key to redeeming oneself from the stigma of early childbearing" (Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014, p. 475).

Another aspect of this redemption is by taking up the subject position of good motherhood, as defined by middle-class, Western norms (Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014; Breheny & Stephens, 2007a). By appearing to meet the challenge of teen motherhood and successfully performing motherhood—rather than becoming a drain on the economy or perpetuating cycles of poverty—young women compensate to some degree for contravening the preferred life trajectory in contemporary neoliberal settings (Breheny & Stephens, 2008). These stories clearly rest on neoliberal notions of personal responsibility and the construction of "the ideal 'girl citizen' who completes her education and is a full

participant and consumer in the 'new economy', unencumbered by children and autonomous from the (welfare) state" (Mann, 2013, p. 682). Those who accomplish this feature as an exemplar against which to compare all young mothers (Breheny & Stephens, 2007a). This positioning can be seen in the description of the young mothers in extract 6 as "two of the thousands" of pregnant teenagers/mothers.

In the redemption narrative, there is no questioning of the construction of 'premature' motherhood as problematic, instead it compels young mothers to 'rise above' adversity and position themselves as reformed subjects. Good teenage motherhood is presented as requiring additional steps to remedy the disruption of young parenthood to the normative and naturalised sequence of life events (i.e., completing school, further education, or employment) and the potential risk this presents to the mothers and their infants as well as wider society. Despite refuting negative constructions of teen motherhood, the Western and middle-class developmental trajectory implicitly therefore remains the ideal (Macleod, 2011). In this way, good teenage mothering might be possible—allowing these young women to salvage positive social identities—but ultimately adulthood remains the ideal life stage for motherhood.

Concluding discussion

Our work contributes to a growing literature documenting the societal disinterest in young women and girls' voices; as we have shown, these voices "are hardly ever invited, let alone *heard*" (Duits & van Zoonen, 2007, p. 161, emphasis added). Our discursive study, framed within feminist poststructuralism, explored youth voice in Aotearoa's mainstream news media reportage of youth sexuality. In these articles, we have shown how young women feature mostly as secondary sources, suggesting that relatively less authority and weight is accorded to their muted voices than to those of adults and experts in particular. Instead, youth voice is deployed in such a way as to verify and lend rhetorical force to more powerful expert voices that commonly construct youth sexuality as a social problem.

Overall, the association of risk with developmental stage supports an individualised conception of youth risk that coheres with a neoliberal logic and presupposes free will and personal responsibility (Brown et al., 2013; Chmielewski et al., 2017). Accordingly,

> …[young women] are individually responsible for making 'good sexual choices' and are held individually accountable when things go awry as a result of making 'bad sexual choices'. Blame is shifted from structural problems (i.e., poverty, racism, heterosexism, sexism) to girls' bodies and desires" (Chmielewski et al., 2017, p. 414).

This is evident as risky behaviour is invariably located at the level of individual action: individuals are portrayed as negotiating risky and protective actions or sensible and foolish choices while contextual factors go unacknowledged. For instance, young girls are depicted as vulnerable to "going too far" (extract 5) with older boys, but gender power relations are not acknowledged. Similar to the scientific literature (Breheny & Stephens, 2007b) and

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policy (Morison & Herbert, 2018), young people are thus largely positioned as responsible—and also potentially to blame—for their life chances and choices (Kelly, 2001).

Moreover, based on the construction of youth as not fully equipped for this task, intervention becomes about adult experts equipping youth to build individual resilience to risk. Intervention is generally construed as increasing individuals' capacities to identify and avoid risks, most commonly through sex education. This echoes the common instrumentalist view that "various social problems can be solved by changing the sexual behaviour of young people and that adolescents are at high risk for the development of various sexual and reproductive dangers and diseases" (Macleod, 2017, pp. 170–171). In line with this view, individual-level interventions are aimed at responsibilisation (Kelly, 2001) and are intended to "encourage the young self to imagine itself as an enterprise, as being, potentially, autonomous, choice making, prudent, risk aware, and responsible" (Monterro & Kelly, 2016, p. 55).

Significantly, our analysis shows that the gendered nature of this construction remains implicit, with generic references to 'parents' or 'youth' often obscuring the fact that it is young women and mothers who are the object of concern, particularly those from marginalised sociocultural groups (Chmielewski et al., 2017). Accordingly, it is almost always young women who are called to account for youth sexuality. As a consequence, young *women* who are constructed as risky subjects—both being at risk of adverse outcomes and potentially a risk to society (Fyfe, 2014)—echoing and supporting public discussion in other arenas like policy-making (Morison & Herbert, 2018) and academe (Ware et al., 2016). It is young women who are thus the legitimate targets of regulatory practices to produce responisibilised sexual subjects (e.g., contraceptive programming, parenthood classes), while their agency is simultaneously limited.

As we noted, there are comparatively very few instances in which young women's voices were mobilised in positive ways, chiefly in redemption narratives of teenage motherhood. Barcelos and Gubrium (2014) argue that redemption narratives suggest that young women "do not entirely subscribe to dominant narratives, but they also do not entirely construct narratives of resistance to hegemonic discourses" (p. 466). We could therefore read these redemption narratives as a more nuanced response than just a passive acceptance of stigmatised positions, despite the fact that they also undercut young women's challenges to deficit discourses. We would argue that by carefully 'listening' to young women's voices, albeit in their mediated form, it is also possible to hear them hinting at more.

Barcelos and Gubrium (2014) see the redemption narrative as allowing young women to reconcile their own experiences with prevailing discourses of teen pregnancy and young motherhood in a way that positions them as good women and mothers. Of course, their participants were allowed to speak on their own terms, without media framing. Nevertheless, even within the constraints of media framing, when 'reading between the

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lines' it is still possible to perceive the struggle of highly stigmatized individuals making positive meaning of their lives, drawing on the discourses available to them, and within a particular discursive context (news media). This is, however, a highly constrained and muted form of resistance.

If we consider these isolated instances of dissent represented by redemption narratives in relation to their overall framing in the news reports, it is clear that they function rhetorically as cautionary tales that "warn adults that adolescent sexuality is dangerous for girls, while blaming girls themselves and absolving boys of responsibility" (Chmielewski et al., 2017, p. 423). This is a tale familiar to the public, already presented in mainstream media, such as popular reality television programmes highlighting the dangers of young women's sexuality gone awry and the hardships of teenage pregnancy (Fallas, 2013; Murphy, 2013). Thus, to a large extent young women's voices are strategically incorporated and deployed in media reports in ways that support the dominant problematizing of youth sexuality, which centre on individual choice and responsibility.

The challenge with regard to young people having an agentic voice in mainstream news media is not only that the discussion is framed within "the oppressor's discourse" (Smith, 1994, p. 235), but that the medium by its very nature prioritises those voices deemed credible. As analysis of academic literature on teenage pregnancy has shown, "'voice' is ordinarily restricted to those in positions of warrant" (Cherrington & Breheny, 2005, p. 106) who have institutional power to make expert claims. In contrast, as we have shown, mediated representations of young women draw on and perpetuate largely negative, discrediting constructions of youth. Young women are, by virtue of their developmental status, disqualified from occupying expert standing and speaking with authority about their own lives and experiences. Instead, when youth voices are permitted, it is only in ways that are easily reconcilable with the dominant narrative of problematic sex.

It is unlikely that young people's counter narratives will have any transformative potential in an adult-controlled arena, which excludes them from representational processes, unless the dominant constructions that we, and others, have identified are challenged. Feminist scholars have begun pointing to the need for acknowledging young people's agency and re-positioning them as "sexual subjects whose sexuality is not automatically constituted 'as a problem' necessitating management" (Allen, 2005, p. 390). For instance, Allen (2005, 2011) has argued for the legitimation of young people's view of effective sexuality education and their constructions of youth sexuality. The task for feminist scholars then, is to find ways to amplify young women's resistant voices and to help construct counter stories. To oppose the dominant narratives emphasising individualised, developmentally-based notions of risk and responsibility, counter narratives should, for instance, draw attention to the contextual constraints on young women's ability to make 'good choices' or question class- and race-based assumptions about what count as 'good' or 'bad' outcomes for specific young women. While this has been done in some research, given the media's influence and its continued reiteration of

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the problematisation of young women's sexuality, it is crucial also to consider ways of making young people's resistant voices heard beyond academe.

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Declaration of competing interests

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] This remark was made by Paula Bennett, of the National Party, who was the Minister of Social Development at that time.

[2] The search terms used (in various combinations) were: teenager, teenage, teen, youth, adolescent, young people, AND sexual health, reproductive health, sex education, sexual and reproductive health, pregnancy, abortion, STI AND New Zealand, Aotearoa.

[3] This term, common to several critical discursive psychology methods, is defined as 'a set of meanings that exist prior to an instance of talk and [are] detectable within it' (Reynolds, Wetherell, & Taylor, 2007, p. 335) . As such it corresponds with the Foucauldian-inspired concept of discourse (Taylor, 2008) as we employ it in this article.

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Muted resistance: The deployment of youth voice in news coverage of young women's sexuality in Aotearoa New Zealand

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