

Teenage pregnancy in the dominant Dutch discourse

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Table of contents

3	1.0 Introduction
4	1.1 Why is this research important?
5	2.0 Methodological and theoretical approach
8	3.0 Theoretical framework
12	4.0 The dominant Dutch discourses: working at a Dutch healthcare organization
13	4.1 Dutch academic literature
15	4.2 Teenage pregnancy in Dutch newspapers
17	4.2.1 The recent Rutgers research
19	4.2.2 The attention toward boys
20	4.3 The social media responses
21	5.0 The analysis of 'Vier handen op één buik': The introduction of the episode
24	5.1 The well-known mother as the depiction of 'good' mothering
26	5.2 The focus on responsibility in order to reinforce the dominant discourse
28	5.2.1 The responsibility in preventing the pregnancy
31	5.3 The absence of the father in the depiction of parenthood
33	5.3.1 The episode's ending
34	5.3.2 What is not addressed
35	5.4 The next season
38	6.0 Conclusion
39	7.0 Literature
44	8.0 Appendix

1.0 Introduction

The Netherlands has one of the lowest birth rates among teenagers in the world. With 3,7 teenage pregnancies in 2014 among every 1000 girls till the age of twenty, only Denmark and Switzerland have lower rates (CBS 2016). Still, as I discovered during my internship at a Dutch healthcare organization, teenage pregnancy is seen as a serious social problem.

Therefore, I decided to focus more on the topic of teenage pregnancy in this thesis. Why is there so much attention on the subject, while it is not a problem of significant size? In this thesis I aim to understand teenage pregnancy within dominant Dutch discourses. Therefore I will analyze a wide array of Dutch sources. These sources include the following: firstly, I will use information I gathered during a ten-week internship at a Dutch organization. During these ten weeks I critically looked at the organization and performed participant observation next to the assignment I had received. Secondly, I will perform a textual analysis of Dutch academic literature, Dutch newspaper articles and social media responses. Thirdly, I will perform a critical discourse analysis of the Dutch television program Vier handen op één buik or Four hands on one stomach (VHOEB). I am seeking to expose and analyze popular attitudes about youth, gender and fertility. By incorporating different kinds of sources into my thesis, I hope to find a complete understanding of the perception of teenage pregnancy in the Netherlands.

The internship was done at a Dutch government supported health care organization, which name shall remain anonymous. This organization gave me the specific assignment to research teenage pregnancy in a Dutch city in order to improve their prevention. At the beginning of my internship, it became evident that my co-workers all agreed that teenage pregnancy is a problem and decided for the teenagers that it also *should* be a problem, even though they were aware that these teenagers experienced it differently themselves. The organization saw teenage pregnancy as a problem because they thought it led to problem children, who are ‘doomed-to-fail.’ Despite the low amount of teenage pregnancies in the Netherlands, the organization saw it as a serious social problem, in need of much intervention. Within the organization’s discourse, the children’s future is already decided upon before they are born. Because teenage parents are seen as irresponsible and incapable, their children are expected to become problem children and teenage parents themselves. Teenage pregnancy is seen as a vicious circle that almost cannot be escaped. Even though I say parents, the organization focussed mainly on the mothers, the boys were often excluded or seen as an absent factor. In the organization’s discourse a clear gender dynamic came forward, in which

parenthood was actually understood as motherhood. I decided to use 'teenage parents' instead of 'teenage mother' to indicate that teenage pregnancy does not only concern girls.

The organization's discourse is quite stigmatizing and therefore problematic, which forms the incentive for this thesis. Their discourse does not conform to the way knowledge is produced within Gender Studies. Herein I learned to pay attention to power structures and let people speak for themselves. At the organization somebody always spoke on behalf of the teenagers, resulting in a relation of dominance. As a consequence, the voices of the teenagers were silenced, therefore not allowing to let 'other' marginalized voices speak. I want to find out how this organization's view toward teenage pregnancy relates to dominant discourses present in Dutch society. Therefore, I will use the framework I learned during my internship, which focuses on the relationship between gender, age and class, to analyze the dominant Dutch discourses further.

It is important to research the dominant Dutch discourses to find out what the cultural underpinnings of the stigmatization of teenage pregnancy are. I will take the problems I encountered, such as questions of representation and inclusion and exclusion, as the starting point for this thesis. Instead of focusing on policy or the experience of teenage pregnancy, I will research the normative discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy by looking at its popular perception and depiction. The main question I will answer is the following: how is teenage pregnancy constructed and represented in dominant Dutch discourses? In order to answer this question, I will give an answer to the following sub-questions: Firstly, is teenage pregnancy seen as a problem or not, for whom and why? Secondly, how is sexuality among young boys and girls represented within Dutch discourses? And thirdly, how are mother- and fatherhood constructed within Dutch discourses?

1.1 Why is this research important?

Although I did find literature regarding teenage pregnancy that used a feminist lens (Bok 1987; Ellis-Sloan 2014; Fields 2005; Kelly 1996; Harrison et. al 2001), the amount was sparse. The Dutch literature about teenage pregnancy did not use a specific gender or feminist lens at all, so my research could add new perspectives. The literature that the organization handed to me at the start of my internship was focused mostly on the prevention of teenage pregnancy (Hakvoort and Haartsen 2013; de Vos 2015; Wels 2012) and not on understanding

it. Most of the mainstream¹ research is also carried out with a focus on prevention, or the possible medical consequences of teenage pregnancy (A. van Enk, W. van Enk and Gorissen 2000; Garssen 2004). As a consequence, the focus lies less on understanding experiences and more on policy, which could result in less attention toward the interest of young boys and girls. In most mainstream literature, teenage pregnancy is not acknowledged as stigmatized even though it is almost always formulated as a serious social problem. Why it is constructed as a social problem is often not questioned, but seen as an accepted fact. The majority of the research on teenage pregnancy originates from the United States. The American context cannot be compared to the Netherlands due to their sex education focused on abstinence only. Therefore, this research could add to the already existing mainstream international literature.

This research is relevant especially for society because it deals with the perception and construction of teenage pregnancy. We should question why teenage pregnancy is seen as a social problem, not just state that it is one. Within Gender Studies, I learned that scientific knowledge is culturally biased, meaning that the researcher's position influences the research. Therefore it is important to be critical about why teenage pregnancy is seen as a problem since this might reflect internalized biases toward the subject. If teenage pregnancy is understood as always being problematic, the teenagers' different contexts will not be taken into account. As a result, negative expectations might be placed upon teenage parents, influencing their experiences of parenthood. With this in mind, it is important to discover the underlying assumptions about teenage pregnancy that might have influenced policy and interventions.

2.0 Methodological and theoretical approach

For this thesis I aim to research the dominant Dutch discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy. I will analyze a wide variety of primary data sources, in order to understand how teenage pregnancy is constructed within the Dutch context. These sources include the experiences I obtained during my internship, Dutch academic literature and newspaper articles, as well as the television program and its social media responses. Through researching different kind of sources I hope to gain a more complete understanding of how teenage pregnancy is perceived in the Netherlands. I will research why teenage pregnancy is seen as a problem, explain why its stigmatization is problematic and research if there is room for

¹ With 'mainstream' literature, I mean literature that is less critical toward taken for granted assumptions about teenage pregnancy. Literature that does not pay attention to the possible influence of common sense assumptions on one's understandings about teenage pregnancy.

counter-discourses or alternative voices in dominant Dutch discourses. Since I use different kinds of sources, I will also use multiple methods in my analysis. VHOEB will be researched through the use of critical discourse analysis, while I will use textual analysis to learn more about teenage pregnancy in Dutch academic literature, newspaper articles and social media responses. All the sources will be placed in the context of discourses about youth, fertility and gender, in order to critically look at the place of teenage pregnancy in Dutch society. By employing a framework that focuses on the relationship between gender, age and class, I want to challenge the taken for granted assumptions about teenage pregnancy, possibly offer an alternative, or at least create awareness of the stigmatization of teenage pregnancy.

Intersectionality is a key feature of gender studies and feminist analysis. Intersectionality focuses on studying the intersections of multiple axes of differentiation, therefore creating a more complex understanding of the studied subject (Brah and Phoenix 2004). By focussing on multiple axes of differentiation instead of a single axis, the multidimensionality of experiences is acknowledged. Since there is an endless variety of axes of differentiation (Davis 2008, 77), it is important for the scope of this thesis to make a demarcation, while being aware that each demarcation could possibly lead to exclusion. During my internship, gender, age and class seemed to be the most interwoven with teenage pregnancy. This came forward because of the topics my co-workers talked about, but also because of the answers the participants gave during the interviews. Therefore I will focus more on gender, age and class in this thesis. I am aware that these will not be the only axes of importance, but incorporating a broader scope will be too extensive for this thesis. What happens if this particular framework, which was created in the context of a Dutch healthcare organization, is applied in another context? I will use this framework as a red thread throughout my thesis while staying critical toward it at the same time. I will be aware of possible exclusion mechanisms while asking myself if there are any blind spots. In order to analyze various dominant and public Dutch discourses, I will look at the intersections of gender, age and class while using textual analysis and critical discourse analysis.

During my internship I started watching VHOEB out of curiosity, but after a few episodes it became clear that the show echoed the same problematic assumptions about teenage pregnancy as the organization did. Therefore, I want to find out if there is room for the voices of the teenage boys and girls within VHOEB and how these voices are interpreted. For my analysis of VHOEB, I will use critical discourse analysis to discover ‘accepted knowledge’ (Geronimus 1992) about teenage pregnancy. Critical discourse analysis is not just a method, but also a theoretical approach (van Dijk 1995). Through critical discourse analysis,

it is possible to focus on power relations and inequality in society. I will focus on how VHOEB can be seen as a source of influence and how this power is used to communicate a certain representation of teenage pregnancy toward its audience. Critical discourse analysis can be understood in the following way:

This approach allows for the analysis of language, spoken or written, and of images, symbols and other media representations. Discourse analysis aims to understand how realities are constructed through these media, and to observe cultural and societal influences on subjective experiences. (Elichaoff and Frost 2014, 46)

Through critical discourse analysis, it is possible to understand how teenage pregnancy is represented in VHOEB and how this representation relates to the construction of normative discourses. I want to understand what kind of realities are constructed, by looking at the use of images and language. Discourses can be understood as “*patterned ways of understanding*” (Elichaoff and Frost 2014, 47) through which we make sense of the world around us by creating “*cohesions of clusters of terms and phrases*” (Elichaoff and Frost 2014, 47). They are a system of meaning that inform sense-making practices. An important part of normative discourses’ power lies in the fact that they are seen as common sense or normal: “*A particular social structuring of semiotic difference may become hegemonic, become part of the legitimizing common sense which sustains relations of dominance*” (Fairclough 2001, 124). Discourses thus not only include representations of how things are, but also of how they should be (Fairclough, n.d. 6). Because these ideas are taken for granted they are usually not questioned. As a result, these taken for granted ideas remain accepted and are therefore sustained, in which also lies its dominance. Therefore, I want to focus especially on taken-for-granted assumptions about teenage pregnancy.

With this thesis I aim to effect change in the perception of teenage pregnancy or at least create awareness and acknowledgment of the way it is constructed. I want to gain insight into the power dynamics surrounding teenage pregnancy and its representation. During my internship, the organization wanted me to find out what the absolute objective truth entailed, probably in order to generalize the data. Gender Studies taught me that there is no absolute truth since knowledge is socially and culturally situated (Harding 1991). Therefore, I wanted to allow ambiguity into my research, but the organization instructed me to find ‘the objective truth’. Since there is no absolute truth but different kinds of possible truths (Harding 1991), I want to find out if there is room for these alternative constructions of experiences in Dutch

media representations. I choose to analyze teenage pregnancy in various Dutch media sources because the media plays an important part in reflecting, sustaining and constructing dominant values about teenage pregnancy (Kelly 1996, 444). This can be described in the following way:

Mass media are understood to help construct and maintain cultural ideas. These ideas can be referred to as cultural norms, dominant ideologies, or mainstream concepts. The ability to define, convey and uphold what is normal allows for the inclusion of some ideas and the exclusion of other ideas. (Cuklanz and McIntosh 2014, 266)

Mainstream media is often part of the public or normative discourse, which can affect to some extent how people think about a subject (Van Dijk 1995, 10). Especially when there are no counter discourses available that can provide oppositional knowledge. I will use textual analysis to research Dutch newspaper articles, academic literature, as well as social media responses to VHOEB. Textual analysis can be used to describe and interpret what is said in a text (Botan, Frey and Kreps 1999, 1). Through textual analysis it is possible to "*try and obtain a sense of the ways in which, in particular cultures at particular times, people make sense of the world around them*" (McKee 2003, 1). While using textual analysis I hope to find out what is said about teenage pregnancy, explicitly as well as implicitly. I will critically look at understandings about youth, parenthood and fertility while looking out for possible biases and judgments toward teenage pregnancy.

Through critical discourse analysis and textual analysis, I will research the (hidden) relations of power in the dominant Dutch discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy. I will focus especially on what voices and experiences are in- and excluded and what is communicated about them. Therefore, I will look at what is not said or shown and what kind of image is produced about teenage pregnancy. Therefore, this thesis is not about understanding the experience of teenage pregnancy, but creating awareness about the way in which teenage pregnancy is portrayed and represented in mainstream media and literature. This thesis is about contributing to the representation of teenage pregnancy and the normative discourses that surround it and can therefore be understood as a critical intervention.

3.0 Theoretical framework

At the organization I came across the attitude that teenage pregnancy is a social problem that should be prevented, even when there is a conscious desire to have children. A positive view

toward having children at a younger age was not accepted, which also came forward in the literature the organization provided me. This literature focused mostly on prevention and irresponsible individual behavior instead of understanding teenage pregnancy. Therefore, I decided during my internship to focus on more critical literature toward teenage pregnancy, such as literature that is more ambiguous, allows tensions and not only focuses on prevention as its main goal.

In mainstream literature², the inadequate parenting of teenagers and the negative consequences of teenage pregnancy are often highlighted (Macleod 2001). Teenage pregnancy could, for example, lead to a low birthweight, premature birth and premature death (Me & Society 2011; Berlo, Wijssen and Vanwesenbeek 2005). Teenage pregnancy is seen as leading to behavioral problems, fewer opportunities in the future and prematurely leaving school (Berlo, Wijssen and Vanwesenbeek 2005). Despite the common idea that teenage pregnancy is bad, multiple authors state that teenage pregnancy is not as problematic as often thought (Buccholz and Korn-Burisztyn 1993; Furstenberg 2007; Geronimus 2003; Luker 1996; Mollborn 2011; Trad 1995; Weber 2012). Some authors state that teenage pregnancy does not create medical or health problems (Lawlor and Shaw 2002) or that teenagers are actually at their peak of physical childbearing (Stapleton 2010). It is not the age of the mother that creates problems, but other factors prior to the pregnancy (Lawlor and Shaw 2002, 552). These authors not solely focus on age, but connect teenage pregnancy to other identity markers such as class. Multiple studies even indicated that age had no effect on the outcomes of a pregnancy or that a younger age even resulted in a better outcome (Makinson 1995; Geronimus 1992, 1996).

In a 30-year-study in Baltimore, America, Frank Furstenberg (2007) confirms that the adverse effects of teenage pregnancy are often overstated. In his research, he followed more than 300 teenage mothers for over 30 years, in order to show the diverse effects of teenage motherhood on teenage mothers and their children (Furstenberg 2002, 45). In this research, he looked at the history of public concern over teenage pregnancy, while paying attention to class and age as markers of difference. He states that conventional wisdom distorts reality and that the causal effects of teenage pregnancy are often overstated (Furstenberg 2007, 67). If there were effects on education and economic achievement later in life, these effects were only modest in comparison to the context before the pregnancy. It is questionable whether opportunities would be improved when becoming pregnant at a later age due to structural

² In this case, not just the literature that was handed to me by the organization, but also other Dutch and non-Dutch literature (e.g., A. van Enk, W. van Enk and Gorissen 2000; Garssen 2004).

constraints. Furstenberg states that teenage pregnancy does not produce social disadvantage, but that it is a product of social disadvantage (Furstenberg 2007). Unfortunately, in the prevention of teenage pregnancy, the focus often lies on individual behavior instead of structural influences that cause social disadvantage (Duncan 2007). Next to Furstenberg, Arline Geronimus also pays attention to class differences in his research. He asks us how conventional wisdom can be so misleading in “Clashes of common sense: on the previous child care experience of teenage mothers-to-be.” (1992) He states that the common sense assumption that teenage pregnancy is bad is a reflection of the values of the majority, and is therefore often not questioned. Common sense is not a universally agreed upon system, but culturally variable (Geronimus 1992). Therefore, differences can be found among, for example, socio-economic classes. However, these differences are often not accepted; common sense assumptions are thought to be universal and are therefore placed upon different contexts.

Not only class plays an important role in teenage pregnancy, age also comes forward as an important axis of differentiation. Discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy often come paired with blame and judgment (Harrison et. al 2001). Teenage pregnancy is seen as breeding poverty because young girls are expected to be incapable mothers. Teenage mothers are seen as ignorant (Duncan 2007), selfish and irresponsible (Kelly 1996, Vinson 2012). Therefore, their children are doomed to repeat the cycle or will turn out to be problem children (Fields 2005; Kelly 1996; Macleod 2001; Stapleton 2010). Multiple authors mention the patronizing attitude toward teenage pregnancy. It is often thought that relationships at a young age cannot be taken seriously, so the possibility of having complicated sexual desires and feelings is often not acknowledged (Fields 2005). Psychological explanations of teenage pregnancy are often infantilizing. For example, young women supposedly want babies because they are searching for the love they missed in their own youth (Kelly 1996). Weber (2012) states that the main concern is actually that teenage pregnancy disrupts cultural expectations about sexuality and fertility. The discourses of blame and judgment can possibly be connected to these disruptions.

What these more critical authors have in common is their broader view toward teenage pregnancy. Instead of only focusing on prevention and individual behavior, they connect it to more general views about sexuality, fertility and gender roles. Marcia Bok for example stated in “Teenage pregnancy and parenthood as feminist issues” that boys are encouraged to express their sexuality, but “*girls are expected to inhibit their sexuality and are punished (stigmatized, oppressed) if they transgress.*” (Bok 1987, 51) There also exists literature that

criticizes the absence of the father in academic literature (Duncan 2007; Glikman 2004; Weber 2012; Macleod 2001; Bunting and McAuley 2004). Herein lies the assumption that teen pregnancy is a woman's issue. The depiction of the father is often stereotypical; he is seen as irresponsible or always absent. Not only do these authors connect teenage pregnancy to gender, age and class, multiple authors also mention how the discourses around teenage pregnancy and sexuality are racialized (Vinson 2012, Fields 2005). The actions of white boys and girls are often seen as innocent missteps, but non-white boys and girls are seen as less innocent, or even sexually opportunistic (Fields 2005, 560-565). This made me think about the role of ethnicity within discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy. At the organization, ethnicity was not taken into account and not included in the framework they used. Does that mean that, in the Netherlands, ethnicity does not play a role in the experience and representation of teenage pregnancy? Or is there a difference in the perception of white teenage parents and non-white teenage parents, and did the organization not take those differences into account?

These more critical authors also connect teenage pregnancy to the medicalization of reproductive processes and the social control that follows from it (Lawlor and Shaw 2002; Murcot 1980; Stapleton 2010). Stapleton states the following: "*Medical discourses play a significant role in policing and regulating women's bodies, in defining 'appropriate' female behaviours and in authorising socio-cultural constructions of femininity.*" (Stapleton 2010, 2) Teenage pregnancy is connected to an "*underlying problem (...) in society's attitudes toward women's reproductive lives*" (Lawlor and Shaw 2002, 558). Therefore incorporating gender as a marker of difference in their research. These authors critically ask if "*labelling teenage pregnancy as a public health problem affords any benefit to the mothers or children*" (Lawlor and Shaw 2002, 553), instead of merely stating that it is a problem. These authors question broader structural forces in society that might influence teenage pregnancy, instead of striving to delay or prevent the pregnancy (Lawlor and Shaw 2002; Stapleton 2010). Teenage pregnancy is also connected to ideas about socialization and childhood (Murcot 1980). Socialization is often seen as a one-way process, meaning that early experiences fix later patterns (Murcot 1980). This corresponds to the 'doomed-to-fail' scenario, in which children of teenage parents are seen as problem-children-to-be. Murcot states that the "*orderly view of the world comes under threat*" through teenage pregnancy (Murcot 1980, 19). Teenage pregnancy can thus be seen as disrupting cultural expectations (Weber 2012), threatening the 'orderly view of the world' (Murcot 1980, 19).

The authors I mentioned allowed more tension by not only emphasizing the negatives but also the benefits of being a young parent (Duncan 2007; Harrison et. al 2001; Macleod 2001). Teenagers expressed joy and pride in their parenthood and stated that they felt confident about their parenting (Harrison et. al 2001). Duncan adds that parenthood made them feel strong and confident about themselves while they still acknowledged the difficulties they came across with (Duncan 2007). In this theoretical framework, I tried to create an overview of the already existing literature that is more critical toward teenage pregnancy. This research is more ambiguous about the medical consequences of teenage pregnancy and emphasizes that the adverse effects are often overstated. Instead of seeing teenage pregnancy as creating poverty, this literature suggests that teenage pregnancy is a result of socio-economic deprivation or prior negative circumstances. Therefore, these authors acknowledge that teenage pregnancy is interwoven with issues surrounding class. Teenage pregnancy is not seen as an individual behavioral problem but is connected to broader gender roles, the medicalization of pregnancy and the feminization of birth control. These authors emphasize that teenage pregnancy comes paired with stereotypes about the parents because of their younger age. These stereotypes are taken-for-granted ideas, such as the notion of the absent teenage father. In the following chapter, I will share my experiences of working at a Dutch healthcare organization.

4.0 The dominant Dutch discourses

Working at a Dutch healthcare organization

During my internship I worked for a Dutch government supported healthcare organization. This organization has multiple settlements across the Netherlands and works with healthcare policies that are set up by the ministry of public health, wellbeing and sport. This organization is an important branch in converting national health policies into local or regional policies and can therefore be seen as an authority in Dutch healthcare³. In this part, I will shortly share my experiences of working here and especially the underlying assumptions about teenage pregnancy that I came across. These mostly came down to 1) the exclusion of the voices of teenage boys and girls, 2) the exclusion of teenage boys within the organization's discourse and 3) stereotypical assumptions about teenage pregnancy.

³ During my internship I had to agree upon confidentiality, therefore I cannot refer to my sources or specify further about the organization, since this information would make the organization public.

The organization gave me the specific assignment to research teenage pregnancy with a focus on prevention. Therefore, they told me to interview as many professionals as possible. As a result, the focus was on the professionals instead of the teenage boys and girls. I gained information about teenage pregnancy through these professionals, not by asking the boys and girls themselves. Because these professionals spoke for the teenagers, the voices of teenage boys and girls became excluded. Therefore it was not possible to understand teenage pregnancy from the point of view of those who had experienced it. These professionals talked from a different, often privileged position, in comparison to the boys and girls. As such, their answers and understandings of the world could be distinct from those of the teenagers themselves. Since these professionals answered from privileged perspectives, how much can they actually say about the experience of teenage pregnancy? Still, the organization wanted to base my research on the opinions of the professionals, instead of teenagers' experiences. The differences between teenagers and professionals, in for example socio-economic status and class, were not acknowledged as a possible source of influence.

The organization saw teenage pregnancy as a problem that only concerned girls. As a result, gender was mostly understood as focussing on women. Teenage boys were mostly excluded in their thinking because they expected them to be absent and unreliable factors during the pregnancy. Within this organization, teenage pregnancy was considered to be a problem because of the possible adverse medical and social effects. As stated before, these medical consequences are often overstated. It left me with the question whether there were any concrete medical implications, or whether that focus was used to mask the fact that teenage pregnancy was perceived as undesired. The organization, for example, wanted to prevent all teenage pregnancies, also the desired ones. I often heard statements indicating that children from teenage parents will become problem children and will have fewer opportunities in life, or no opportunities at all. This 'doomed-to-fail' scenario felt stigmatizing because negative expectations are placed upon the parents and the child before the child is even born. Although I am not sure if this stigmatizing attitude toward teenage pregnancy has permeated their policies, it was definitely visible in my co-worker's opinions on the matter. In the next paragraph, I will provide my analysis of Dutch academic literature. Is the attitude I detected at the organization also visible in this literature?

4.1 Dutch academic literature

Through researching the dominant Dutch discourses, I want to find out if the assumptions I encountered during my internship, namely that teenage pregnancy always is and should be a

problem, also come forward in other Dutch discourses. Therefore I will look at the underlying reasons of why research is being done on teenage pregnancy in the Netherlands. For this purpose, I will also use the literature that was handed to me by the organization.

To begin, I could not find much Dutch academic literature about teenage pregnancy. The literature the organization handed to me consisted mostly out of bachelor- and master theses, not published material. There is thus little published Dutch material on teenage pregnancy, which could be explained due to the low number of teenage pregnancies. I will start with discussing the literature that was not handed to me by the organization. The first article is not a Dutch, but a critical Belgian article written by Marjolijn de Wilde. She stated in “Recente evoluties in de perceptie van tienerouderschap” (Recent evolutions in the perception of teenage parenthood) that teenage pregnancy in comparison to half a century ago is problematized more. This trend cannot be explained due to an increase in the numbers of teenage pregnancies; these have actually dropped. De Wilde also stated that teenage pregnancy often becomes equated with dropping out of school, unemployment, poverty and unstable partner relationships. She stated that teenage pregnancy is seen as causing poverty instead of being a result of poverty. Therefore, the prevention of teenage pregnancy is often thought to decrease poverty (De Wilde 2008, 157). De Wilde incorporates class as an axis of differentiation in her research by acknowledging the influence of prior circumstances, instead of seeing teenage pregnancy as causing poverty.

A Dutch book about the living conditions of Dutch youth per province also addresses the topic of teenage pregnancy. They write that they do not necessarily want to define teenage pregnancy as a problem and emphasize that teenage pregnancy is accepted in some communities. This statement is followed by an explanation of how teenage pregnancy creates problems during the upbringing of children (Mak, Steketee and Tierolf 2014, 86). Although the authors acknowledge that not everyone views teenage pregnancy as a problem, they emphasize that it is still problematic because of the problems it causes, therefore implying that it actually should be seen as a problem. This made me wonder what is actually meant by ‘some communities’. Are those possibly the non-white and non-middle-class communities who do not conform to the white middle-class norm?

In another recent Dutch study, which was handed to me by the organization, the motive is preventing teenage pregnancy in so-called “risk groups” (Rutgers 2016). They name girls from lower educations and with Turkish, Moroccan, Antillean and Surinamese backgrounds as extra vulnerable. They state that teenage pregnancies are relatively common among these groups and therefore prevention should be improved (Rutgers 2016, 15). As a

result, teenage pregnancy becomes linked to non-white ethnic groups. It is assumable that these ethnic groups are labeled as vulnerable because they have the highest percentage of teenage pregnancies in the Netherlands. However, in this particular research no clear differences were found among different ethnic groups⁴. Still, non-white ethnic groups were called vulnerable, which does not correspond with the gathered data. In the paragraph called ‘cultural/ethnic groups’ (Rutgers 2016, 41), only the results of non-white ethnic groups are discussed. Could this mean that being white is not regarded as an ethnicity? And if so, is ethnicity understood as everyone who is non-white? This could possibly indicate that whiteness is seen as the norm. Therefore, those who are non-white are seen as different and discussed separately under the banner of ‘cultural/ethnic groups’, instead of incorporating white participants in this paragraph and discussing the differences not just from the dominant white group, but between *all* cultural/ethnic groups in the Netherlands. Again, ethnicity appears to be an important axis of differentiation in discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy, even though I had not taken this into account previously.

Although there is some attention to understanding teenagers’ experiences, prevention is still the main goal. The remaining literature that was handed to me focussed only on prevention. Only one out of the seven articles was not focused primarily on the prevention of teenage pregnancy. This rapport dealt with teaching teenagers more healthy habits, in order to give a pregnancy a healthy start (Aalhuizen, van der Laan, Vaandrager and Wagemakers 2015). Although this rapport sounds promising, it never reoccurred in conversations with my co-workers. The theoretical framework that they provided me with was focused only on preventing teenage pregnancy, not understanding teenage pregnancy from the point of view of those who had experienced it. Therefore we can question if their policy is only based on preventing teenage pregnancy, or that the experiences and feelings of teenagers are also included. In order to understand teenage pregnancy in the Dutch context, I also looked at Dutch newspapers; this analysis shall be given in the next part.

4.2 Teenage pregnancy in Dutch newspapers

To gain a better understanding of the dominant Dutch discourses, I searched online⁵ for articles in Dutch newspapers and randomly picked 10 articles that were no older than two

⁴ With ‘ethnic groups’ I mean *all* ethnicities, thus not only non-white ethnicities but acknowledging that being white is an ethnicity as well.

⁵ I used the online database LexisNexis in my search for Dutch newspaper articles. I used the Dutch search terms ‘tienerzwangerschap’ (teen pregnancy), ‘tienermoeder’ (teenage mother), ‘tiener vader’ (teenage father) and ‘tienerouderschap’ (teenage parenthood). I randomly selected 10 articles that were no older than two years.

years. Among all the results, the term ‘teenage pregnancy’ got 110 hits, the term ‘teenage father’ got 41 hits and the term ‘teenage mother’ got 869 hits. ‘Teenage parenthood,’ which only got 6 hits, is thus actually understood as teenage motherhood. We can already say that the dominant discourses surrounding teenage parenting focus mainly on the teenage mother, not both parents. The main focus of the articles lies on the decreasing number of teenage mothers in the Netherlands. The articles emphasize for example that “*the amount of births among teenagers in the Netherlands belongs to the lowest of the world*”^{A6} (De Telegraaf, 7 April 2016) and that “*nationwide the birth rate among teenagers decreases*”^B (Noordhollands Dagblad, 9 May 2015). Even though the number of teenage pregnancies in the Netherlands is low and still decreasing, the 869 hits on ‘teenage mother’ in only newspapers of the last two years indicate that there is still a lot of media attention on the topic. In 2015 there were 1574 teenage mothers in the Netherlands below the age of 20, which means 3,2 teenage mothers per 1000 girls. This number is decreasing since this percentage was still 3,7 in 2014. To compare, in Belgium there were 6,9 teenage mothers per 1000 girls and in the United Kingdom 15,6 (CBS 2016). The Netherlands actually holds the third place among the lowest teenage birth rates in the world (CBS 2016).

Two articles emphasize that teenage pregnancy does not have to be a problem and that teenage pregnancy is not always unwanted (Het Parool, 13 March 2015; De Telegraaf, 7 April 2016). One of these articles mentions that: “*It can thus go right, but it is still important (...) to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies, because there can also occur problems.*”^C (De Telegraaf, 7 April 2016) Instead of embracing the fact that the Netherlands has one of the lowest numbers of teenage pregnancies in the world, the focus still lies on the negative sides. Teenage pregnancy is seen as a problem because obstacles can occur, which of course can also occur during a ‘normal’ pregnancy. Again is emphasized that, although the number of teenage pregnancies is low, it is still seen as undesirable. Three out of ten articles stress that the percentage of teenage pregnancy is relatively high among girls with a Surinamese or Antillean background, therefore linking teenage pregnancy to non-white ethnic groups (AD, 13 February 2015; BN de Stem, 7 April; Noordhollands Dagblad, 9 May 2015). It is for example stated that: “*A lot of Antilleans and Surinamese live here. The birth rate among girls from these populations is also high nationwide*”^D (Noordhollands Dagblad, 9 May 2015). Although the articles mention that nationwide the amount of teenage pregnancies is

⁶ As you can see here, the ^A refers to the corresponding original Dutch quote in the appendix. Please note that I have not used numbers but both referred to these quotes in capital and non-capital letters, to prevent confusion with the footnotes. The analysis is based on the original Dutch quote, not the English translation.

decreasing, they do not mention that this amount is also decreasing among Surinamese and Antillean girls. The third article mentions that nationwide the amount of teenage pregnancies is decreasing, but rising among those two groups (AD, 13 February). I could not find any data to support this claim. The official data from the Dutch Bureau of Statistics indicates that the amount of teenage pregnancies is decreasing among *all* ethnic groups (Nederlands Jeugdinstituut 2016). Among, for example, Surinamese girls there were 13,3 teenage mothers in 2005 per 1000 girls and 9,0 in 2015. This percentage is higher than among white Dutch girls, but it is nevertheless decreasing. Among white Dutch girls, there were 7,6 teenage mothers per 1000 girls in 2005, and 6,1 in 2015 (Nederlands Jeugdinstituut 2016).

The declining birth rate among teenagers in the Netherlands is not necessarily due to white Dutch girls, but due to a sizeable decline among non-white ethnic groups, such as Surinamese girls. Still, in the newspapers attention is only focused on the higher percentage of teenage pregnancies among non-white groups, it is not mentioned that this percentage is declining rapidly. As a result, the idea is created that these groups are to blame for the amount of teenage pregnancies in the Netherlands. Only focusing on the higher percentage of teenage pregnancies among non-white groups makes it seem like the declining birth rate is due to white Dutch girls, while this decline is actually due to non-white ethnic groups. Based on these newspaper articles, it seems that ethnicity does play an important role in the public discourses surrounding teenage pregnancy, although I was not aware of this before. Since there is a focus on non-white ethnic groups in these newspapers, it is important to question how ethnicity influences the perception of teenage pregnancy. Are these newspapers focussed on non-white ethnic groups solely because of their higher birth-rates, or maybe specifically because these groups are not white? This made me wonder if I actually should have included ethnicity in the framework that I use.

4.2.1 The recent Rutgers research

Multiple articles refer to recent research done on teenage pregnancy by Rutgers, the Dutch center for sexual health (Haarlems Dagblad, 7 April 2016; Reformatorisch Dagblad, 14 May 2016; De Telegraaf, 7 April 2016). In this research 46 teenage girls were interviewed, as well as 13 professionals. Two out of three newspaper articles focussed mostly on the negative circumstances that are understood within the research as possibly leading to teenage pregnancy, such as an 'unstable and unsafe home situation', 'domestic violence', 'low self-esteem', 'lack of structure', 'mental problems' and 'sloppy use of anticonception'. In these newspapers, the focus only lies on prevention while the research itself also focussed on

understanding how the teenagers felt. In the research, attention is paid to the experience of pregnancy and motherhood by the teenage mothers. Positive attitudes toward motherhood were expressed such as feelings of pride (Rutgers 2016, 57), the sense that their child saved them and made them more mature (Rutgers 2016, 64). These more positive experiences that the teenagers expressed were not mentioned in the newspaper articles; only their negative experiences were pointed out. We can assume that more people will read the newspaper articles about the research than the research itself. Therefore, people might get a skewed picture of teenage pregnancy since only certain findings were chosen to be brought up.

Only one of the newspapers that cited the research done by Rutgers emphasized some positive outcomes of the research. This article mentions that teenage pregnancy not only has negative consequences but also can cause a ‘positive turning point’^E (Reformatorisch Dagblad, 14 May 2016). This article is published in a national Christian newspaper, which might be the reason for the different standpoint. Another article from this same newspaper tells the story of a teenage mother, who wrote a book about her experiences (Reformatorisch Dagblad, 23 January 2016). In this article, the view toward teenage pregnancy is more ambiguous and less one-sided since both negative and positive aspects of her experience are mentioned. For example, it is written that the decision to keep her baby was very hard, but that her child enriched her life. It could be that teenage pregnancy is more accepted in a Christian surrounding, therefore allowing for more ambiguous views. On the other hand, a more open view toward teenage pregnancy could be related to an adverse view toward aborting a pregnancy.

The idea that teenage mothers will quit school came forward in one out of three newspapers that mentioned the Rutgers research. In the article is stated: “*because of a pregnancy one’s studies are often not finished, which causes socio-economic deprivation at a later age*”^F (De Telegraaf, 7 April 2016). This could imply that class as a marker of difference is not recognized. Teenage pregnancy is understood as causing socio-economic deprivation, instead of possibly being a result of prior socio-economic deprivation. In the research done by Rutgers, on which this statement is based, it is mentioned that the girls regard finishing their studies as highly valuable. First of all, the Rutgers research does not mention that all the girls quit school, only some did. Secondly, some girls that did quit school were planning to go back to school (Rutgers 2016, 58). In these newspapers, only certain negative aspects of teenage pregnancy are highlighted, therefore creating a skewed picture of teenage pregnancy.

4.2.2 The attention toward boys

As stated before, the term ‘teenage father’ did not give many results while searching for newspaper articles. The experience of the father might thus be underexposed in dominant Dutch discourses. Nevertheless, some articles talked about teenage fathers. One of these articles dates back to 2015 and mentions a high school intervention focussed specifically on preventing teenage pregnancy. They state that: “*Until now prevention about teenage pregnancy is mostly focussed on girls. Professionals tell them that they need to be careful with sex, while boys carry the same responsibility.*”^G (AD, 13 February 2015) It seems as if the responsibility to prevent pregnancy is not only placed on girls, but also on boys.

Unfortunately, the reasons they cite for the focus on boys are the following: “*She could have forgotten to take the pill (...) or have the intention to frame the boy*”^H. We can question how often it occurs that a teenage girl is consciously trying to become pregnant without the boy knowing it. This view makes teenage girls seem untrustworthy and unreliable. Although it is a positive change that boys become involved with birth control and preventing pregnancy, the reasons for this attention are stereotypical. The gender axis is quite evident here; teenage boys are not truly involved because they are seen as sharing responsibility, but because girls are seen as sloppy, unreliable and deceiving. As a result, the responsibility of preventing pregnancy is again placed on the girls alone, but since girls are seen as untrustworthy, the boys have to become involved. Unfortunately, a possible good intervention is only based on, and reinforcing, stereotypical views toward female sexuality.

The other article that mentions teenage fathers talks about the movie ‘Keeper.’ It is stated that: “*He [the director] tells a story about teenage pregnancy from the perspective of the future father. Moreover, he does not judge, but puts the experience of the teenagers at the center*”^I. (Het Parool, 6 April 2016) Although ‘Keeper’ is not a Dutch movie, the attention toward the father and the non-judgemental attitude toward teenage pregnancy seem to be appreciated. Also mentioned is the ridiculing and romanticizing of teenagers’ feelings, but in this movie, these feelings are taken seriously. Unfortunately, this view does not seem to come forward in the other news articles who talk about the Dutch context instead of a non-Dutch movie.

Most of the attention on teenage pregnancy in newspapers is directed toward the teenage mother and the decreasing number of teenage pregnancies. It is clear how often the most negative sides of teenage pregnancy are emphasized, possibly in order to create the understanding that teenage pregnancy is wrong. Only a Christian Dutch newspaper focused attention on more positive experiences of teenage pregnancy. Despite the low number of

pregnancies, there is still quite some media attention on the topic. This indicates that teenage pregnancy is seen as a serious problem that should be prevented. Most of the attention therefore lies on the prevention of teenage pregnancy, not on understanding it or placing it in a broader context. As a result, a one-sided story of teenage pregnancy is told, which tells us that teenage pregnancy is more often than not wrong.

4.3 The social media responses

In order to find out what the dominant Dutch discourses entail, I decided to also focus on public opinion. Therefore I looked at people's reactions on social media that responded to episodes of VHOEB. VHOEB is a Dutch television program in which different well-known mothers coach teenage parents. In each episode, a different teenage mother is followed during the pregnancy and a short period afterward. The social media responses can be understood as people's views on the subject and therefore tell us something about the way people think about teenage pregnancy in the Netherlands.

On Twitter⁷, people responded directly to the episode of VHOEB they had seen. People mostly expressed their incomprehension, astonishment and anger toward the participants of VHOEB. Almost all the reactions expressed negative attitudes, in which the participants were called 'stupid,' 'naïve' and 'hopeless'^J (Twitter post, 26 January 2016; Twitter post, 16 February 2016). Multiple reactions expressed that the child should be taken away, that financial help should be ceased or that authorities such as the police and childcare should be deployed. The rhetoric of children having children also came forward multiple times. A user stated: "*Children with a child...that cannot go right*"^K (Twitter post, 26 January 2016). Therefore solely focusing on age as an identity marker. Finding more positive reactions was hard. From the little positive reactions I could find, one was focused more on the grandmother instead of the teenage parents themselves. Striking was that the well-known mothers were often complimented on how they dealt with the teenage parents. For example someone said: "*What an idiot!!! Poor Ellemieke, how great and calm you react*"^L (Twitter post, 9 February 2016). On the other hand, some of the reactions I came across with were more critical of the television show. One reaction questioned why the well-known mother should be able to give advice to the teenage parents, another reaction is critical about the "*crying toy baby*"^M (Twitter post, 1 March 2016) that some of the parents get to use to develop their parenting skills.

⁷ I searched the Twitter hashtags '#vierhanden' and '#vhoeb' and selected 50 tweets that expressed an opinion about teenage parenthood or the participants. I have chosen to not include the usernames in my references, in order to protect their privacy.

It seems like most social media users agree upon the idea that teenage pregnancy is bad. We cannot know for sure if these users generally hold negative attitudes toward teenage pregnancy, or only toward the teenage parents in VHOEB. Still, VHOEB seems to evoke negative responses such as “*Why do people like that get children?*”^N (Twitter post, 5 March 2016). This left me wondering whether VHOEB’s depiction of teenage pregnancy just evokes negative responses, or if it possibly influences people’s perceptions of teenage pregnancy. It is important to emphasize that there are always people who will be more critical about media (Van Dijk 1995, 11) and will not take the knowledge produced in VHOEB as the absolute truth. People are no blank canvasses who will literally absorb everything that is told, but they will form their own truths based on the knowledge they already possess. Still it is important to critically look at the depiction of teenage pregnancy in Dutch media since this might influence how teenage pregnancy is experienced. One thing is sure, namely that VHOEB’s portrayal of teenage pregnancy mostly evokes negative responses toward teenage parents.

5.0 The analysis of ‘Vier handen op één buik’

The introduction of the episode

Next to the previously discussed sources, I also chose to analyze a Dutch television program in order to research the dominant Dutch discourses. IN VHOEB, multiple well-known mothers guide teenagers during their pregnancy. Each episode takes about 45 minutes and momentarily there are three seasons of VHOEB. I analyzed six episodes from the most recent season (2016), which I picked randomly. At the beginning of each episode, the voice-over describes the program in the following way:

Vier handen op één buik follows eight prospective teenage mothers during the pregnancy, at the birth and afterward. Eight well-known mothers commit to the fate of the girls and do everything to ensure that the prospective teenage mothers really make something of their life and that of their babies^O. (English translation)

The voice-over states that the teenage mother is *coached* by this well-known mother, but the father is not named. This could indicate that the father is seen as having a less important role in parenting and therefore does not need coaching, that it is assumed that the father will be out of the picture or that he is simply forgotten. The father is never named in the title of the episode while the teenage mother and the well-known mother are (for example ‘Marlies & Tatum Dagelet’). Therefore, we could question who the ‘four hands’ actually correspond to.

Is it the teenage mother and the teenage father, or the teenage mother and the well-known mother? Since the father is not included in, for example, the title of the episodes, we could assume that the four hands would rather indicate the teenage mother and the well-known mother instead of both the parents. The focus thus seems to lie on the teenage mother, not both parents.

At the beginning of every episode, the well-known mother is introduced. This is done by showing clips in which she is happily playing with her child while explaining what kind of mother she is, what values she finds important in motherhood and what she would like to pass along to the teenage mother. The idea is that the well-known mother can teach the teenage mother something based on her experiences as a mother. It is not clear if these well-known mothers have had any training whatsoever in counseling teenage parent(s)-to-be. Since a different well-known mother coaches every episode, there are some differences to be found among their visions of motherhood. These women are mostly known from Dutch television, therefore we can assume that they have a higher socio-economic status than the teenagers they come in contact with. Because of their different backgrounds, the class axis plays an important role next to their differences in age. This made me wonder more about the well-known mothers in VHOEB. Although not all the well-known mothers are white, most of them are (5 out of 6). Why not the other way around? And why not mothers coming from a similar background, instead of well-known mothers? The well-known mothers gave the following statements on what kind of advice they wanted to pass along to the teenage mothers:

- A. I want to pass some responsibility onto the teenage mother, I find the fact that you are already pregnant a bit irresponsible (Tatum, Episode Tatum Dagelet - Marlies).
- B. That it is not some kind of doll that you can dress every day (Ellemieke, Episode Ellemieke Vermolen - Raimaline).
- C. What I want to pass to my teenage mother is that you should not underestimate it (Renate, Episode Renate Gerschtanowitz - Sharona).
- D. At the moment there is only one thing in your life, the rest does not count. (Euvgenia, Episode Euvgenia Parakhina - Yvanka).
- E. Your child is of course terribly important, but you too, maybe you are even more important because if you are not happy, your child also is not (Soundos, Episode Soundos El Ahmadi - Nadine).

F. I think that structure and order are important for every child. Make sure your life is a bit in order when your child arrives (Sofie, Episode Sofie van den Enk - Silvana)^P.

In the values that these well-known mothers express we can find references of what being a 'good mother' entails, but also the assumptions that they hold about teenage pregnancy. These assumptions are all expressed before the well-known mother meets the teenage mother.

Statement A clearly expresses that the well-known mother is assuming the teenage mother to be irresponsible. She is blamed for a possible one-time mistake and therefore her abilities as a mother are doubted. This statement corresponds to the stereotype of the irresponsible teenage mother. Both statement B and C express the idea that teenage mothers will underestimate what motherhood entails. We can question if this differs from women who become pregnant at a later age. Within VHOEB, age seems to be understood as the most important axis of differentiation. But do people's expectations of parenthood necessarily become more realistic with age? It is a common assumption and often a taken-for-granted idea that teenagers will underestimate what parenthood entails (Geronimus 1992, 1). Geronimus states the following:

Of the teenage mothers-to-be interviewed in this study, most reported previous child care experience that was extensive. Through family and work responsibilities, most were approaching the births of their babies with a practical awareness of the demands of infant care. While it is impossible to infer from these data the quality of that awareness, or how it will translate into 'parenting,' the stereotype suggesting that teen mothers have no idea what an infant's needs are, is inconsistent with the experiences of these young mothers-to-be. (Geronimus 1992, 326)

Previous child care experiences, which might influence expectations about parenting, do not have to be absent among teenagers, indicating that the stereotypical idea about teenagers' underestimation of parenthood does not have to be true.

Statement D focuses on the importance of the baby and even places it above the well-being of the mother. Being a good mother thus means placing the baby's wellbeing above your own. In this statement a sacrificial aspect of motherhood comes forward, meaning that the mother is expected to sacrifice herself for her baby in the dominant discourse surrounding motherhood. Statement E on the other hand is completely the opposite and focuses more on

the well-being of the mother⁸, instead of only the baby. Statement F seems to be less judgemental and is focused on both parents, not just the mother. Similar to how most of these pieces of advice are only focused on the mother, we should also question why it is always a well-known mother that coaches the teenage parents. Why never a well-known father? Why is the advice not focused on both parents instead of just the mother?

5.1 The well-known mother as the depiction of ‘good’ mothering

We should critically look at which function the well-known mother has in VHOEB. Why did they choose to include a well-known mother, why not only follow the parents themselves? First of all, including a well-known mother could simply have to do with entertainment reasons. Although the show is placed under the banner of informative programs (BVN 2016; TV Gids 2016), I would argue that it is also focused on entertainment and spectacle. For example, some parents are given a baby doll to look after, resulting in highly dramatic scenes in which this doll is thrown into a closet. We can wonder if this doll was given to actually teach the parents-to-be something useful or to create entertaining television. Second, the well-known mother functions as an example of what a good mother is, of what motherhood is supposed to look like. The teenage mothers are positioned in relation to them, by comparing their views about a topic with each other. For example, one of the teenage mothers-to-be states that she liked the idea of becoming a mother and therefore consciously quit birth control. In a later shot, the well-known mother is responding that being a teenage mother would have been her worst fear at that age^S (Episode Sofie van den Enk - Silvana).

The well-known mother, of course, gives the right and sensible response while the teenager is mocked. This is often done by using weird mocking sounds and music when the teenager is speaking. These well-known mothers are all highly privileged in comparison to the teenagers, who mostly seem to come from lower social-economic classes. Nevertheless, their contexts are compared to each other, almost as if the class axis is not seen as an important factor. It is not taken into account that some things are better accessible for those coming from a higher social-economic class, for example, education or jobs. The beliefs that the well-known mothers hold about motherhood are placed upon the teenage mothers. This is done by expressing taken-for-granted assumptions about mother- and parenthood, such as the idea that

⁸ The ‘you’ in statement E indicates a Dutch singular form that cannot be translated into English. The Dutch ‘je’ is the singular ‘you’, it only refers to a single person. The English ‘you’ can be both singular and plural. In this case the well-known mother explicitly talks about the mother alone through using ‘je’, instead of ‘jullie’, which is the plural ‘you’. The ‘you’ refers to the teenage mother alone, not both parents, in that case she would have used ‘jullie’.

you cannot have parenting experience at a younger age. Geronimus states the following about these taken-for-granted assumptions or ‘common sense formulas’:

In actively implementing ‘common sense formulas’, parents/elders are likely to be aware of their high motivation to secure the best for their children as they see it. They are less likely to be aware of the ways in which their particular strategies or cultural traditions are suited to their distinct mix of social and economic opportunities and constraints and might not be suitable in others. (Geronimus 2003, 885)

The ideas or strategies that these well-known mothers have are thus placed upon a different context. No attention is paid to the fact that their parenting strategies might be less useful in the teenage parents’ lives. When the teenage mother is introduced, she herself may state her name, age and how long she has been pregnant. Apparently these are the only things that seem to matter. After the girl has shortly introduced herself, the voice-over takes over and sets the overall tone of the episode. She herself may only give some basic facts while the voice-over explains her circumstances. The fact that the teenage mothers may not explain their own circumstances could indicate that they are not expected to be rational about them. The voice-over for example states that the mother had a heavy youth, quit school and has had medical problems during the pregnancy^Q (Episode Tatum Dagelet - Marlies). In another episode, both parents are called unstable, had negative experiences during their childhood, the boyfriend lives in a trailer park and often comes in contact with the police^R (Episode Ellemieke Vermolen - Raimaline). At the beginning of every episode, the negative circumstances that the teenagers find themselves in are emphasized, and in this case the negative circumstances of both parents, not just the mother. The father is not even officially introduced; he only joins the picture later as ‘the boyfriend of’.

The explanation by the voice-over sets the tone of the whole episode and forms the basis of why this pregnancy can be seen as problematic. It is never explicitly explained why teenage pregnancy is seen as problematic, as if they assume that everybody agrees that it is. Kelly tells us something similar: “*People are not always so explicit about what should be stigmatized or denounced and what should be defended or advocated. Instead, they talk about needs.*” (Kelly 1996, 427). Something comparable is happening in VHOEB. Instead of explaining why teenage pregnancy is seen as a problem, the show focuses on which practical matters should be improved. Teenage pregnancy is seen as a problem because it does not meet dominant norms surrounding youth and fertility. Within VHOEB, the age and class axes are

interwoven with the problematization of teenage pregnancy, since the teenagers' age and socio-economic status are portrayed as not conforming to the desired norms. The well-known mothers for example express that you are not supposed to become pregnant as a teenager because you should be occupied with other things at that age. Therefore, these teenagers are seen as making the wrong choices in their lives, for example when it comes to their habits, but also because they decided to keep the baby. It is thought that teenage parents cannot provide their child with a future *because* they are a teenager and do not follow a typical life trajectory.

5.2 The focus on responsibility in order to reinforce the dominant discourse⁹

The representation of teenage pregnancy in the media is not value-free. Situations are not just described, but described and constructed in a particular manner. Mass media usually represent the dominant discourse, but on the other hand, they also influence the existing dominant discourse. Because mass media and the dominant discourse influence each other, the depiction of teenage pregnancy on television might have an actual effect on the experience and perception of teenage pregnancy. The knowledge that is created about teenage pregnancy in VHOEB might influence how teenagers think about teenage pregnancy and experience their own pregnancy.

What is happening in VHOEB is that a teenager's pregnancy is positioned against the norm, which is represented by the well-known Dutch mother. We can see this well-known mother as enacting the dominant discourse and is therefore regarded as an example for the teenage couple or mother. She is an example of how their pregnancy was supposed to happen, therefore emphasizing that they are wrong. By not just showing teenagers' experience of pregnancy, but positioning this experience against the norm, the dominant discourse is reinstated. The differences between the well-known mothers and the participants are never addressed. Nevertheless, it is expected that the viewers will compare the mother-to-be with the well-known mother to come to the conclusion that the teenager has done something wrong. Therefore, the depiction of teenage pregnancy in VHOEB becomes a confirmation of the dominant discourse. This is emphasized by the way the television show is edited. When the teenage mother or father has the opportunity to speak, they are always positioned against the well-known mother or the voice-over, who then again confirm the dominant discourse. There is no room for them to talk about things by themselves, someone is always reacting

⁹ Because the same understandings toward teenage pregnancy seem to come forward in VHOEB as well as the other areas I researched, I switched here from 'discourses' to 'discourse'. There seems to be one dominant discourse, instead of multiple discourses.

directly to what the teenagers say. For example, when the voice-over has finished with emphasizing the negative context the teenagers find themselves in, a quote by one of the parents often follows. In one of the episodes, the voice-over stated for example that the mother has had a rough youth, has quit school and has medical problems during the pregnancy (Episode Tatum Dagelet - Marlies). This statement is followed by a quote from the teenager mother who states that she does not worry. This statement after a negative enumeration puts the teenager in a negative spotlight. Although it is not stated implicitly in this scene, portraying her in such a way will make her seem irresponsible because she does not worry despite all the negative factors. Since the voice-over and the quote by the teenage mother are recorded at different times, we can wonder if she knew what she was reacting to.

The scenes in VHOEB are cut and edited in such a way that voices of the teenagers are framed to reaffirm the dominant discourse. As a result, viewers are encouraged to see teenage pregnancy in a particular way. Catriona Macleod talks about something similar in 'Teenage motherhood and the regulation of mothering in scientific literature' (2001):

Marginal, 'bad' mothers [including poor and teenage] provide the pathologized backdrop against which the characteristics of the 'good' mother are defined, as well as the legitimation for the proliferation of professionalized discourse on mothering, and the incitement for mothers to subscribe to the professionalized image of the good mother. (Macleod 2001, 502)

What being a 'good' mother means is thus defined in comparison to 'bad' mothers. The teenage mothers in VHOEB help define what a good mother entails. What Macleod also mentions is that the 'bad' mother legitimates the professionalization of motherhood. Teenage mothers are regarded as lacking the abilities to be a good mother and are therefore in need of (professional) intervention, in this case, the intervention of an older, more 'experienced' and privileged mother. Although this intervention is framed as helping the teenage mother, it could also be seen as a method of social control. Geronimus states the following about the relation between social support and social control:

Social support becomes a vehicle for social control that is offered or withheld to realize beliefs about appropriate ages and circumstances for childbearing in a self-fulfilling way. In this way, individual fertility-related behaviour, while not culturally

determined, is culturally mediated and responsive to social control and social support. (Geronimus 2003, 884)

The help by the well-known mother is not merely coaching, but a method of surveillance. Surveillance implies that the teenage parents need to be controlled. The teenagers are checked upon in order to change their behavior to fit the dominant discourse and follow common ideals. Surveillance, in this case, can be seen as a method of border security, deciding between whose behavior is good and whose behavior is bad. The teenagers in VHOEB are understood as behaving badly because they do not conform to norms about fertility. By coaching these particular teenagers, the idea that their behavior is wrong is emphasized and re-established, therefore confirming and reinforcing the dominant discourse. This border between good and bad behavior, or wanted and unwanted behavior, is not questioned within VHOEB but taken for granted.

Teenage parents are often monitored because they are seen as having individual (behavioral) problems, instead of focussing attention to broader structural forces that might have created or contributed to these problems (Kelly 1996, 428). For example, an recurring problem in the series is the shortage of money. This shortage is often framed as a result of laziness, ‘lying on the couch’, instead of structural forces that might contribute to poverty or might make employment less easily available. Although class markers such as unemployment are named, their influence is not truly acknowledged. Instead, these class markers are masked as behavioral problems such as laziness. As a result, the fathers especially are portrayed as lazy teenagers who do not have their life in order and cannot take care of a child. Not only class is a relevant axis here, the ‘lazy teenager’ depiction seems to be interwoven with age and gender as well. The fathers were, more often than the mothers, portrayed as lazy, unemployed teenagers who do not take responsibility and are therefore immature, emphasizing their younger age. Here can be seen how gender, age and class are all interwoven and reinforce each other. Although within VHOEB teenagers are coached in order to help them, this is simultaneously done in a particular way, confirming that their behavior is wrong and unwanted.

5.2.1 The responsibility in preventing the pregnancy

In the episode with Nadine, the voice-over states that the well-known mother wants to know how things could have come this far. This statement is of course not neutral but implies that this pregnancy should never have happened in the first place. A scene follows in which the

gender axis is apparent. In this scene, the well-known mother is talking with the mother-to-be about her use of anticonception. Instead of asking both the mother and the father, only the mother is asked, therefore the burden of preventing a pregnancy is placed upon the woman. Although there is no clear sign that the women are blamed for becoming pregnant, preventing the pregnancy is still seen as a women's duty. Here can be seen how norms around pregnancy and fertility are gendered. The well-known mothers do not ask the men about their anticonception use as if they do not expect men to use condoms. Women only are seen as being in charge of preventing the pregnancy, which can be dangerous because they could become the ones to blame.

Since the mother-to-be failed to use anticonception in the right way, she is depicted as irresponsible, maybe even dumb. Instead of questioning structural forces, such as gendered norms around anticonception, sex education, peer-pressure or minimal explanation on the use of birth control, her ability to be responsible and therefore be a good mother is questioned. A possible one-time mistake is reflecting upon her future as a mother. Not only gender is an important axis of differentiation here, age as well. The discourse surrounding birth control is focussed on the teenage mother, but her portrayal as irresponsible is reinforced by, or seen as a cause of, her younger age. This is possibly also connected to other factors, for example class because of the received education, but this does not come forward in VHOEB. The well-known mother's opinion functions to express and reinforce the dominant discourse, namely that teenagers are irresponsible and therefore should not become parents. Sometimes the well-known mother explicitly states how things are supposed to be:

He was just completely sick from it for four months, that his girlfriend was pregnant, which actually is the proper response when you are nineteen, you do not want your girlfriend to be pregnant. I still don't understand how this befalls people^T. (Soundos, Episode Soundos El Ahmadi - Nadine)

In this quote, Soundos explicitly states that a nineteen-year-old girl is not supposed to become pregnant, that this is not normal. Although the father did seem to be in shock, Soundos should not be able to tell us what the right response is and what not. After a while, the father became used to the idea of becoming a father. He even came to love the idea, which means that an unplanned pregnancy is not the same as an unwanted pregnancy. Soundos does not seem to make this distinction. An unplanned pregnancy does not mean that the baby is undesired, even though Soundos decides for both the mother and father that it is or at least should be

undesired. She emphasizes the dominant discourse in which a pregnancy at a younger age is not seen as a normal life path. This is a central theme in the show.

The well-known mother often reacts surprised when she hears that an unplanned pregnancy is still wanted and welcome. It seems as if these feelings are not acknowledged as true at a young age, revealing the relevance of the age axis. The teenagers' age comes paired with an infantilizing or patronizing attitude toward them. Another well-known mother for example states that: "*It is a nice couple, but I think that they underestimate what a real relationship is and what real parenthood is.*"^U (Euvgenia, Episode Euvgenia Parakhina - Yvanka) We can again use a quote by Geronimus to counter this claim:

One assumption is that teenagers have not had significant previous child care responsibilities and, therefore, hold unrealistic views of what such responsibilities entail. The stereotype suggests that they imagine that their infants will be like baby dolls. (Geronimus 1992)

This is literally visible in some of the episodes. In the episode of Nadine and Tommy, the well-known mother states that the parents have to take care of all doll that needs to be fed and cries, in case they underestimate what parenthood entails^V (Episode Soundos El Ahmadi - Nadine). Through this doll the parents can develop their parenting skills, functioning as a preparation for parenthood. The use of this doll confirms to the stereotype that Geronimus talks about, namely that teenagers will treat their baby like a doll. One of the fathers, Freddie, actively counters this stereotype which we can see in the following dialog:

Ellemieke: I think that you do not realize what it means to be mom and dad soon.

Raimaline: Well I do.

Freddie: Are you here to tell me that I don't realize what I am doing, we are working very hard ma'am.

Ellemieke: No listen dear, I see that you want it very badly, you don't realize what it means to take care of a little one soon.

Freddie: Well I definitely understand what that means.

Ellemieke: Have you ever hold a baby?

Freddie: I was eight years old, watching over my sister while my dad was at the pub^W.

In this dialog, we see that Ellemieke questions Freddie's parenting abilities. Even though Freddie clearly states that he understands what it means to take care of a baby, Ellemieke still does not believe him. Freddie actively resists the dominant discourse by providing an alternative possibility. He explains that he actually has previous child care experiences and therefore knows what it means to be a father. Hereby Freddie counters the stereotype in which teenagers are expected to underestimate parenthood.

Another common assumption is that teenagers who become parents throw away their youth (De Wilde 2008, 157). This view comes forward in VHOEB, but an alternative is also provided. A friend of one of the teenage couples, who also is a teenage mother, stated that you throw away a lot of your life by becoming a parent at a young age. Her boyfriend reacted to her and said: "*Yes but you can also look at it differently, later you can also join in with your grandchildren*"^x (Episode Renate Gerschtanowitz - Sharona). In other words, teenage pregnancy might constrain your youth, but you are still young when your grandchildren are born. The father emphasizes that you can also look at the bright side. We see how the dominant discourse is sometimes contradicted within VHOEB, therefore offering a different image of teenage pregnancy. Unfortunately, this alternative possibility is brought down by many examples in which the dominant discourse is again confirmed.

5.3 The absence of the father in the depiction of parenthood

As mentioned before, the role of the father is often downplayed in VHOEB. The father is not named in the title and explanation of the episodes, not mentioned as being coached and is not formerly introduced. The gender axis is of concern here since different role expectations for the father and the mother are portrayed. We can see how traditional gender roles are placed upon the teenagers even though they do not necessarily conform to this framework themselves. The next fragment sums it up well:

Soundos: What kind of dad do you want to become?

Tommy: A good dad. Caring, give all of my love.

Soundos: Okay, but do you have an income^y? (Episode Soundos El Ahmadi - Nadine)

In this quote we see how the father is expected to be the breadwinner, therefore his caretaking is limited to mainly providing his family with economic security. The father himself focuses on his relationship with the child by stating that he wants to become a caring father. The well-known mother immediately shifts the focus from nurturing to a more public role that the

father is supposed to have. Another well-known mother states for example that she would like to see the dad think: “*I am a man and will save my family*”^Z (Euvgenia, Episode Euvgenia Parakhina - Yvanka). Euvgenia mentions that she understands that the mother stays home when the baby is born, but she does not understand it when a father is not working. It is accepted and understood that the mother stays home, but the father is expected to work. The expectations the well-known mother holds toward the teenage parents are gendered, since these expectations differ toward the father and the mother. But since her expectations are based on the fact that she is coaching *teenage* parents, they are also connected to age. It could be possible that the discourse surrounding teenage pregnancy is always connected to age, since the teenagers’ age makes them differ from the norm. But are the expectations the well-known mothers hold possibly also connected to the teenagers’ class?

Because of the traditional role expectations the public/private binary is reinforced in VHOEB. The mother is seen, or should be seen according to the show, as the more private and nurturing factor and the father as the public one. Macleod highlights the different role expectations for mothers and fathers. She states that fatherhood is considered a “*more encompassing activity than motherhood*” (Macleod 2001, 505). The role of the father is seen as more public, providing the family with economic security and safety. The mother’s role is more private and concerned mainly to the household. The mother’s decision making is expected to be mainly about family issues and the domestic sphere while the father is supposed to take responsibilities in a broader area. The father is, in contrast to the mother, excluded from primary care-taking and more nursing activities. This view also comes forward in VHOEB by placing the breadwinner position upon the father and the nursing position and activities in the domestic sphere upon the mother. For example, in one episode we see how the well-known mother and the teenage mother go shopping for baby stuff, while the teenage father is at home hammering (Episode Ellemieke Vermolen - Raimaline). In another episode, we see a scene in which the teenage mother is doing laundry, while the teenage father is at work (Episode Euvgenia Parakhina - Yvanka).

Not only the well-known mother reinforces this traditional framework, also other professionals the parents come in contact with. In a meeting with child protection services, one of the professionals mentioned that they want to provide the mother with the tools and skills for raising a child. Why not also the father? This could imply that they 1) do not expect the father to take a nurturing role, that 2) they assume that the father is absent or will become invisible in the near future, or 3) that they simply have forgotten about the father. In five out of the six episodes, the fathers were not absent but planning to take care of their child. Still,

the focus was mainly on the mother while the depiction of the father was very one-sided. Through this emphasis on the mother, stereotypes of the father as absent or less important are reinforced. The kind of knowledge produced about teenage fathers is that they will be absent or unreliable, that they are less important than the mother or that his tasks are limited to providing economic security. This can influence our understandings of teenage fathers, lowering the expectations we hold about them.

5.3.1 The episode's ending

At the ending of the episode, the well-known mother revisits the parents when their baby is a few weeks old. The focus not only lies on how things are going at the moment and how they picture their future, but also on how they acted during the pregnancy. One of the well-known mothers for example asks the mother: “*When you look back at the pregnancy now, do you ever think, I could have done that differently?*”^a (Renate, Episode Renate Gerschtanowitz - Sharona). The focus still lies on what she did wrong during the pregnancy, for example, her smoking. The well-known mothers react surprised and express that they did not expect things to go well. Renate for example mentioned that the mother proved that she can be a good mother. The father is again not mentioned or complimented; he is not even present in the footage. When Renate does ask about the father, it only concerns his job. When she hears that he in fact has a job, she almost cannot believe it.

Although two out of the six well-known mothers specifically ask the father how he is doing, the focus still lies on the teenage mother. Out of the three well-known mothers who bought a present, only one bought a present for both parents, not just the mother. In another episode (Episode Euvgenia Parakhina - Yvanka), the well-known mother expresses that she trusts things to turn out well. She tells the teenage mother that she is a good mother, but she does not compliment the father. The father is only mentioned in the last remark of the episode, in which the well-known mother states that he should find a job. The episode thus still ends on a negative tone.

One of the well-known mothers asks the teenage mother if the father is actually helping. This question expresses her doubt about his capabilities as a father. She did not expect him to behave like a father since she explicitly mentioned that he did surprise her. She did ask him what his daughter meant to him. Then again, the voice-over continues and states that he is not worrying about not having a job, therefore implying that he actually should be worrying. Although the well-known mothers ask the teenage parents how they are feeling and picture their future, the focus still lies on the teenage mother. The father is often not

complimented or only mentioned when it comes to his employment. As a result, the idea of the male breadwinner and the more nurturing mother is again reinforced. It almost seems as if the mothers are allowed to 'change' and do well, but that the expectations toward the fathers are so low that they may not even do well. IN VHOEB, there are different expectations toward young fathers and young mothers, indicating the importance of gender and age as axes of differentiation within discourses surrounding parenthood. Next to gender and age, it is possible that class is also relevant. For example, the men are not expected to take responsibility, but are there lower expectations toward young men from lower classes than toward young men from higher classes? One thing is sure, namely that there are low expectations toward young men from lower classes in VHOEB, but since there are no other classes visible in the show, it is not possible to know if there are any differences. Not only could the expectations toward teenage parents be connected to gender, age and class, ethnicity is possibly also an important factor, but within VHOEB the white and non-white participants were not portrayed differently.

5.3.2 What is not addressed

As stated before, the differences between the participants and the well-known mothers are never attended. As a result, the power dynamics between them remain unquestioned. For example, no attention is paid to the ethnic differences between the well-known mothers and the participants, which could result in possible different visions toward parenthood. IN VHOEB, the focus lies mostly on fixing practical matters before the baby is born. As a result, the addressed topics only focus on practical issues such as finding a job, making the baby room ready and cleaning the house. There is for example not much attention paid to why the parents decided to keep the baby at a young age. The well-known mothers often only ask how the parents reacted when they found out about the pregnancy. Most of the parents were completely startled in the beginning. By only asking about this aspect of fear, the downside of the pregnancy is emphasized, warning the audience against teenage pregnancy. Less attention is paid to the fact that the teenagers got used to the idea of becoming a parent and were looking forward to it. If this is addressed, it is often done through one simple question which results in a 1-minute conversation about the topic. For example, "*How do you feel about becoming a father?*"^b (Ellemieke, Episode Ellemieke Vermolen - Raimaline) It could be possible that the well-known mother asks more personal questions about the experience of teenage pregnancy, but that these scenes are not included in the episode. As such, not a lot of attention is paid to how the pregnancy is experienced. The focus only lies on medical aspects,

not on how the pregnancy is experienced mentally. There is often no room for the teenagers to express their happiness since these kind of questions are simply not asked.

At a certain point one of the teenage mothers, Raimaline, expresses that she is looking forward to the baby. She states that she finds motherhood beautiful because it will be the only thing in her life at that moment. She states that she will feel less alone^c (Episode Ellemieke Vermolen - Raimaline). This expression could be included because it can be criticized. The well-known mother responds by stating that having a baby is not the solution for feeling alone. When a parent's view about something is included, it is often done to emphasize their vulnerability, childishness or naïveté. In VHOEB, we do not learn about teenage pregnancy from the point of view of the teenagers themselves but that of an outsider, the well-known mother. As a result, no attention is paid to how the pregnancy is experienced, but mainly to the well-known mother's thoughts about the subject. Traditional gender roles are placed upon the teenagers, not only by the well-known mother, but also by the parents' surroundings. As a result, stereotypical notions about the teenage father are reinforced. Within VHOEB, almost no attention is paid to the joy of parenthood, therefore not allowing teenage pregnancy to be a possible positive experience.

5.4 The next season

While searching VHOEB's Facebook page for more information, I found the advertisement that is looking for next season's participants. Herein, class as an axis of differentiation is undeniable. The advertisement specifically states that they are looking for teenagers with problems: "*Do you have problems at home, with your education, a job or other practical matters before your baby comes?*"^d (Vier handen, 20 April 2016) The teenagers are specifically picked out by the amount and severity of their problems. The producers of this show deliberately decided to accentuate only one side of teenage pregnancy, those teenagers with the most problems. There seems to be a clear focus on teenagers from lower classes, without actually addressing class matters or the class differences between the teenagers and the well-known mothers. When it comes to selecting participants, there is definitely a selection bias. On the one hand, one could argue that they might give 'support' to those teenagers who need it the most. On the other hand, only a one-sided depiction of teenage pregnancy is shown in which teenage pregnancy is portrayed as undesirable because of the problems it could cause. Only emphasizing the negative side of teenage pregnancy makes this representation seem like a universal fact. By only showing teenagers with the most problems,

a one-sided picture of teenage pregnancy is portrayed which implies that all teenage parents confirm to this image.

What is interesting about the advertisement is that some ex-participants of the show have responded to it. One girl states that she is thinking about signing herself up for the show. Teenage mothers from the previous seasons replied to this statement: “*You should not do that. I appeared in season 1 and they just use you*”^e (Ex-Participant, 21 April 2016) or “*I would also not do it. Watch all the previous seasons, they truly ridicule you*”^f (Facebook user, 21 April 2016). The ex-participants criticize the way the show was edited: “*On television there is a lot of cut and paste and that is really a shame! I would never participate again and they know that, they take advantage of the young ladies*”^g (Ex-participant, 20 April 2016). Some of the ex-participants also mentioned that they felt pressurized to do or say things, that they “*put words in their mouths*”^h (Ex-participant, 21 April 2016). One of the teenage mothers is also critical about the well-known mother that helped her. She states that:

Those well-known mothers also always act like they have a monopoly on the truth. But to be honest, these are women with relatively lots of money, nice house etc. Little to no worries. Not meant unkind (...) but they do not know at all how it is to bite a bullet and built something from a lousy situationⁱ. (Ex-Participant, 21 April 2016)

This expression again brings up the relevance of class and age within VHOEB. The ex-participant emphasizes up that the well-known mother is privileged in comparison to her. Because of their differences in class and age, the well-known mother cannot know what it means to raise a baby in the context in which the teenage mother finds herself. She also states that the well-known mother acts like she has a ‘monopoly on the truth.’ This could indicate that there is not one perfect way to raise a baby, but variations depending on the context.

Unfortunately, the person who owns the Facebook page, who is working as an editor of VHOEB, does not respond directly to the negative reactions from the ex-participants. She does reply one time to all the sarcastic reactions about her description of the advertisement in which she states: “*It is going to be a beautiful and positive season!*”^j (Tessa de Groot, 20 April 2016). After all the sarcastic reactions such as “*positive, yeah right*”^k (Ex-participant, 20 April 2016) she explains what is meant by a ‘positive season.’ She states that: “*this time we want to focus less on finger-pointing and more on considering together with the girls what is necessary. So less critical but still a tough conversation when needed.*”^l (Tessa de Groot, 21

April 2016) This statement sounds like they will be less judgemental toward the teenagers in the coming season, which is promising. On the other hand, the statement is patronizing because it is implying that this tough conversation will likely be needed.

In one of the episodes that I watched, we already caught a glimpse of how coaching can be done differently. Since a different well-known mother is coaching in each episode, their approaches differ slightly. Most well-known mothers handle the teenagers very harshly by confronting them with what they are doing wrong in a judgemental way. Their approach is very punitive and comes paired with a lot of yelling or anger. To compare, below we see different approaches to getting the baby room ready:

Renate: You will be a dad in a couple of weeks and there is nothing. Jesus what a mess guys. (Episode Renate Gerschtanowitz - Sharona)

Ellemieke: This is not possible, you cannot put your baby in a bath here, this should have been cleaned a long time ago. (Episode Ellemieke Vermolen - Raimaline)

Sofie: Shall we make an agreement? The next time I am here, you cleared out this room^m? (Episode Sofie van den Enk - Silvana)

We can see a clear difference between their approaches. Renate and Ellemieke are very judgemental, even yelling at the teenage parents-to-be. Sofie on the other hand is more enthusiastic and positive while still raising some issues that could be improved. In this episode, a lot less tension and irritation existed between the well-known mother and the teenage parents in comparison to the other episodes, while most of the goals that the well-known mother set up were still achieved. An approach that is less judgemental is thus possible and also seems to be a goal for the coming season. Unfortunately, the other episodes did not give a good example of how to coach teenage parents-to-be. Most of the well-known mothers held very patronizing attitudes toward the teenage parents. This attitude was not only reinforced by the well-known mother, but also by the voice-over's commentary. Often a stereotypical gender framework was reinforced, in which the man is seen as the breadwinner and the woman's role is limited to the private sphere. In contrast, the men's role in parenting was often downplayed and nurturing tasks were mainly placed upon the women. In VHOEB a very one-sided image of teenage pregnancy is portrayed by only showing those teenagers with the most problems. This lack of diversity creates the idea *all* teenage pregnancies look like

this. As a result, the idea that teenage pregnancy is always wrong and should therefore be prevented is confirmed.

6.0 Conclusion

In this thesis, I tried to research the normative dominant Dutch discourse surrounding teenage pregnancy. Based on the experiences during my internship, I wanted to find out how their stereotypical view toward teenage pregnancy related to the dominant Dutch discourse. While I wanted to research which discourses were at play, it became clear that there seems to be one dominant Dutch discourse, instead of multiple discourses. In all the areas I researched, the same understandings toward teenage pregnancy came forward, indicating a consistent dominant discourse. Not explicitly including ethnicity turned out to be a shortcoming during my research. To understand the dominant discourse better it is therefore important to explicitly incorporate ethnicity in possible future research. Although ethnicity had not been included beforehand, it was still included implicitly. Ethnicity came up multiple times and turned out to be impossible to separate from gender, age and class. This particular framework did have a blind spot, therefore excluding critical understandings about the role of ethnicity in teenage pregnancy. It is important to find out why the topic of ethnicity is avoided in both the discourse of the healthcare organization and the television show and which consequences this has toward understandings about teenage pregnancy.

Despite the modest number of teenage pregnancies in the Netherlands, there is still a lot of media attention on the topic. We saw this for example in Dutch newspapers, in which articles about teenage pregnancy are frequently published. In the newspapers, as well as in the episodes of VHOEB that I watched, a partial image of teenage pregnancy is shown. This one-sided image focused on the problems that can arise after a teenage pregnancy. Attention is only paid to those teenagers who find themselves in the toughest circumstances, and although this depiction might be part of their experiences, the lack of diversity is dangerous. By always emphasizing the downside of teenage pregnancy and never an alternative, the assumption is created that *all* teenage pregnancies will conform to the problematic teenage pregnancy. As a result, negative expectations might be placed upon teenage parents-to-be who might internalize these expectations. Not only teenage parents themselves but also their surroundings might internalize the dominant discourse. As a result, teenage parents might be less heard and understood, therefore possibly receiving help that may not suit their wishes.

Teenage parenthood is mostly understood as teenage motherhood in the dominant Dutch discourse. This came forward during my internship, the Dutch newspapers and

VHOEB. The teenage father is mostly excluded from the Dutch discourse and if he is to be included, it is done in stereotypical ways. We see how the father's role in parenting is considered to be less important than the mother's role. A traditional framework is placed upon teenagers, in which the father is the breadwinner of the family and the mother takes care of the children. As a result, the father is excluded from nurturing activities while the mother's tasks stay limited to the private sphere. Stereotypical ideas about female sexuality are portrayed, in which teenage girls are seen as irresponsible and unreliable. The responsibility of preventing pregnancy is only placed upon the girls, reinforcing and sustaining the feminization of birth control.

Teenage parents do not conform to the picture of the ideal parents who are heterosexual, wealthy, educated and in their 30s. As a result, teenage parents are blamed and shamed for their choices and actions, which we for example saw in the social media responses. Teenage parents are portrayed as incapable and irresponsible parents whose children will suffer. They are seen as behaving inappropriately because they do not meet the dominant norms. The focus on employment and money seems to indicate that teenage pregnancy is wrong because teenage parents may contribute less to economic growth.

Negative images of teenage pregnancy might permeate into policy, therefore it is important to diversify the representation of teenage pregnancy in Dutch media. The next season of VHOEB seems to be an opportunity for possible change. A less judgemental and patronizing depiction of teenage pregnancy, in which the voices of the boys and girls themselves are included, might create a more complex and diverse image of teenage pregnancy. Teenage parents reject the typical life trajectory, but this does not have to mean that they or their children will have an ill-fated future. We should pay more attention to teenage parents' wishes, instead of trying to normalize them.

7.0 Literature

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8.0 Appendix

English Translation	Original Dutch quote
<p>^A“<i>the amount of births among teenagers in the Netherlands belongs to the lowest of the world</i>” (De Telegraaf, 7 April 2016)</p>	<p>Daarmee hoort het aantal geboorten bij tieners in Nederland tot de laagste ter wereld.</p>
<p>^B“<i>nationwide the birth rate among teenagers decreases</i>” (Noordhollands Dagblad, 9 May 2015).</p>	<p>Landelijk daalt het geboortecijfer onder tieners.</p>
<p>^C“<i>It can thus go right, but it is still important (...) to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies, because there can also occur problems.</i>” (De Telegraaf, 7 April 2016)</p>	<p>Het kan dus goed gaan, maar toch is het (...) belangrijk om het aantal tienerzwangerschappen terug te dringen, omdat er ook problemen kunnen optreden.</p>
<p>^D“<i>A lot of Antilleans and Surinamese live here. The birth rate among girls from these populations is also high nationwide</i>” (Noordhollands Dagblad, 9 May 2015).</p>	<p>Hier wonen veel Antillianen en Surinamers. Bij meisjes in deze bevolkingsgroepen zijn geboortecijfers ook landelijk hoog.</p>
<p>^EThis article mentions that teenage pregnancy not only has negative consequences but also can cause a ‘positive turning point’ (Reformatorisch Dagblad, 14 May 2016).</p>	<p>Regelmatig ervaren zij het krijgen van een kind ook als een „positief keerpunt" in hun leven.</p>
<p>^F“<i>because of a pregnancy one’s studies are often not finished, which causes socio-economic deprivation at a later age</i>” (De Telegraaf, 7 April 2016).</p>	<p>Daarnaast kan door een zwangerschap een studie vaak niet worden afgemaakt, wat zorgt voor een sociaaleconomische achterstand op latere leeftijd.</p>

<p>^G“Until now prevention about teenage pregnancy is mostly focussed on girls. Professionals tell them that they need to be careful with sex, while boys carry the same responsibility.” (AD, 13 February 2015)</p>	<p>Tot nu toe is voorlichting over tienerzwangerschappen vooral op meisjes gericht. Hulpverleners vertellen hen dat ze voorzichtig moeten zijn met seks, terwijl jongens daarbij dezelfde verantwoordelijkheid dragen.</p>
<p>^H“She could have forgotten to take the pill (...) or have the intention to frame the boy”.</p>	<p>Ze kan die zijn vergeten te slikken, (...) Of de intentie hebben om de jongen erin te luizen.</p>
<p>^I“He [the director] tells a story about teenage pregnancy from the perspective of the future father. Moreover, he does not judge, but puts the experience of the teenagers at the center”. (Het Parool, 6 April 2016)</p>	<p>Hij vertelt een verhaal over tienerzwangerschap u eens vanuit de toekomstige vader. En hij oordeelt niet, maar stelt de beleving van de pubers centraal.</p>
<p>^J‘stupid,’ ‘naïve’ and ‘hopeless’ (Twitter post, 26 January 2016; Twitter post, 16 February 2016)</p>	<p>Hom dom en naïef kun je zijn? Man man man man wat kansloos dit</p>
<p>^K“Children with a child...that cannot go right” (Twitter post, 26 January 2016).</p>	<p>Kinderen met een kind....kan niet goed gaan</p>
<p>^L“What an idiot!!! Poor Ellemieke, how great and calm you react” (Twitter post, 9 February 2016).</p>	<p>Waaat een idioot!!! Arme @EllemiekeHerman wat reageer je goed en rustig...</p>
<p>^M“crying toy baby” (Twitter post, 1 March 2016)</p>	<p>huilende speelgoedbaby</p>

<p>^N“Why do people like that get children?” (Twitter post, 5 March 2016).</p> <p>^OVier handen op één buik follows eight prospective teenage mothers during the pregnancy, at the birth and afterward. Eight well-known mothers commit to the fate of the girls and do everything to ensure that the prospective teenage mothers really make something of their life and that of their babies.</p> <p>^PA. I want to pass some responsibility onto the teenage mother, I find the fact that you are already pregnant a bit irresponsible (Tatum, Episode Tatum Dagelet - Marlies).</p> <p>B. That it is not some kind of doll that you can dress every day (Ellemieke, Episode Ellemieke Vermolen - Raimaline).</p> <p>C. What I want to pass to my teenage mother is that you should not underestimate it (Renate, Episode Renate Gerschtanowitz - Sharona).</p> <p>D. At the moment there is only one thing in your life, the rest does not count. (Euvgenia, Episode Euvgenia Parakhina - Yvanka).</p> <p>E. Your child is of course terribly important, but you two, maybe you are even more important because if you are not happy, your child also is not (Soundos, Episode Soundos El Ahmadi - Nadine).</p> <p>F. I think that structure and order are important for every child. Make sure your</p>	<p>Waarom krijgen zulke mensen kinderen?</p> <p>Vier handen op een buik volgt 8 aanstaande tienermoeders tijdens de zwangerschap, bij de bevalling en daarna. Acht bekende meiden trekken zich het lot van de meiden aan, en zetten alles op alles om ervoor te zorgen dat de aanstaande tienermoeders echt iets van hun leven en dat van hun baby's gaan maken.</p> <p>A. Ik zou een beetje verantwoordelijkheid aan de tienermoeder willen meegeven, het feit dat je al zwanger bent vind ik al een beetje onverantwoordelijk.</p> <p>B. Dat het niet een soort pop is die je elke dag kunt aankleden.</p> <p>C. Wat ik mijn tienermoeder wil meegeven is dat je het niet moet onderschatten.</p> <p>D. Er is maar een ding in je leven op dit moment, de rest telt niet mee.</p> <p>E. Je kind is natuurlijk hartstikke belangrijk, maar jij ook, misschien ben jij wel belangrijker, want als jij niet gelukkig bent dan is jouw kind dat ook niet.</p> <p>F. Ik denk dat voor ieder kind structuur en regelmaat belangrijk is. Zorgt dat het leven</p>
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<p>life is a bit in order when your child arrives (Sofie, Episode Sofie van den Enk - Silvana).</p> <p>^QThe voice- over for example states that the mother had a heavy youth, quit school and has had medical problems during the pregnancy (Episode Tatum Dagelet - Marlies).</p> <p>^RIn another episode, both parents are called unstable, had negative experiences during their childhood, the boyfriend lives in a trailer park and often comes in contact with the police (Episode Ellemieke Vermolen - Raimaline).</p> <p>^SIn a later shot, the well-known mother is responding that being a teenage mother would have been her worst fear at that age (Episode Sofie van den Enk - Silvana).</p> <p>^THe was just completely sick from it for four months, that his girlfriend was pregnant, which actually is the proper response when you are nineteen, you do not want your girlfriend to be pregnant. I still don't</p>	<p>een beetje op orde is als er een kind komt</p> <p>Marlies heeft een heftige jeugd achter de rug, waardoor ze vroegtijdig het huis verliet en gestopt is met school. Haar zwangerschap verloopt tot nu toe niet zonder problemen. Ze heeft vaak last van een blaastontstekening, ze heeft een chronisch darmprobleem en darmproblemen.</p> <p>Maar heel stabiel zijn ze beide niet. Raimaline heeft een hoop nare dingen meegemaakt in haar jeugd waar ze nog dagelijks mee worstelt. (...) Freddie komt van het woonwagencamp. Hij heeft een lastige jeugd gehad en is veel in aanraking met de politie gekomen.</p> <p>Ik was met allerlei dingen bezig toen ik zeventien was, maar niet met een kind krijgen. Hooguit voorkomen dat ik een kind zou krijgen, dat was wel het ergste wat mij zou kunnen voorkomen op mijn zeventiende.</p> <p>Die was gewoon vier maanden er helemaal ziek van, dat zijn vriendin zwanger is, wat eigenlijk de juist reactie is als je 19 bent, je wilt niet dat je vriendin zwanger is, ik snap</p>
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<p>understand how this befalls people. (Soundos, Episode Soundos El Ahmadi - Nadine)</p> <p>^U“It is a nice couple, but I think that they underestimate what a real relationship is and what real parenthood is.” (Euvgenia, Episode Euvgenia Parakhina - Yvanka)</p> <p>^VIn the episode of Nadine and Tommy, the well-known mother states that the parents have to take care of all doll that needs to be fed and cries, in case they underestimate what parenthood entails (Episode Soundos El Ahmadi - Nadine).</p> <p>^W<i>Ellemieke</i>: I think that you do not realize what it means to be mom and dad soon.</p> <p><i>Raimaline</i>: Well I do.</p> <p>Freddie: Are you here to tell me that I don't realize what I am doing, we are working very hard ma'am.</p> <p><i>Ellemieke</i>: No listen dear, I see that you want it very badly, you don't realize what it means to take care of a little one soon.</p> <p><i>Freddie</i>: Well I definitely understand what that means.</p> <p><i>Ellemieke</i>: Have you ever hold a baby?</p> <p><i>Freddie</i>: I was eight years old, watching over my sister while my dad was at the pub.</p>	<p>nog steeds niet hoe mensen dat overkomt hoor.</p> <p>Het is een leuk stel maar ik denk dat ze onderschatten wat een echte relatie is en wat echt ouderschap is.</p> <p>Voor als jij en Tommy het allemaal onderschatten.</p> <p><i>Ellemieke</i>: Volgens mij beseffen jullie helemaal niet hoe het is om straks mama en papa te zijn.</p> <p><i>Raimaline</i>: Jawel hoor ik wel.</p> <p>Freddie: Kom je mij nou zeggen dat ik niet beseft waar ik mee bezig ben, wij zijn hier keihard bezig mevrouw.</p> <p><i>Ellemieke</i>: Nee, luister lieve schat, ik zie dat je het heel graag wilt, je beseft niet wat hiet inhoudt straks om voor een kleintje te zorgen.</p> <p><i>Freddie</i>: Jawel, ik beseft zeker wel wat het inhoudt.</p> <p><i>Ellemieke</i>: Heb je weleens een babytje vastgehad?</p> <p><i>Freddie</i>: Ik was 8 jaar oud, lette op mijn zusje terwijl mijn vader in het café zat.</p>
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<p>^X“Yes but you can also look at it differently, later you can also join in with your grandchildren” (Episode Renate Gerschtanowitz - Sharona).</p>	<p>Ja maar je kan het ook anders bekijken je kan later weer mee doen met je kleinkinderen.</p>
<p>^Y<i>Soundos</i>: What kind of dad do you want to become? ^{Tommy}: A good dad. Caring, give all of my love. ^{Soundos}: Okay, but do you have an income? (Episode Soundos El Ahmadi - Nadine)</p>	<p><i>Soundos</i>: Wat voor vader wil je worden? ^{Tommy}: Een goede vader. Een zorgzame, al mijn liefde geven. ^{Soundos}: Oke maar heb je een inkomen?</p>
<p>^Z“I am a man and will save my family” (Euvgenia, Episode Euvgenia Parakhina - Yvanka)</p>	<p>Ik ben een man en ga mijn gezin redden.</p>
<p>^a“When you look back at the pregnancy now, do you ever think, I could have done that differently?” (Renate, Episode Renate Gerschtanowitz - Sharona).</p>	<p>Als je nu terugkijkt op je zwangerschap, denk je weleens, dat had ik wel anders kunnen doen?</p>
<p>^b“How do you feel about becoming a father?” (Ellemieke, Episode Ellemieke Vermolen - Raimaline)</p>	<p>Hoe vind je het dan dat je vader wordt?</p>
<p>^cShe states that she finds motherhood beautiful because it will be the only thing in her life at that moment. She states that she will feel less alone (Raimaline, Episode Ellemieke Vermolen - Raimaline).</p>	<p>Is mooi hoor [motherhood]. Eindelijk, ben ik niet meer alleen. (...) Het enigste waar jij voor leeft op dat moment is je kind. (...) Niet meer alleen zijn.</p>

<p>^d“Do you have problems at home, with your education, a job or other practical matters before your baby comes?” (Vier handen, 20 April 2016)</p>	<p>Heb je problemen thuis, met je studie, een baan of andere praktische zaken voordat je baby komt?</p>
<p>^e“You should not do that. I appeared in season 1 and they just use you” (Ex-Participant, 21 April 2016)</p>	<p>Je kan het beter niet doen ik zat in seizoen 1 en ze gebruiken je gewoon.</p>
<p>^f“I would also not do it. Watch all the previous seasons, they truly ridicule you” (Facebook user, 21 April 2016).</p>	<p>Zou het ook niet doen. Kijk alle seizoenen eens terug en ze maken je echt belachelijk.</p>
<p>^g“On television there is a lot of cut and paste and that is really a shame! I would never participate again and they know that, they take advantage of the young ladies” (Ex-participant, 20 April 2016).</p>	<p>Bij tv wordt veel geplakt en geknipt en dat is echt heel zonde! Ik zou nooit meer mee doen en dat weten ze ze maken misbruik van de jonge dames.</p>
<p>^h“put words in their mouths” (Ex-participant, 21 April 2016).</p>	<p>Woorden in de mond leggen heet dat.</p>
<p>ⁱThose well-known mothers also always act like they have a monopoly on the truth. But to be honest, these are women with relatively lots of money, nice house etc. Little to no worries. Not meant unkind (...) but they do not know at all how it is to bite a bullet and built something from a lousy situation. (Ex-Participant, 21 April 2016)</p>	<p>Die bekende moeders doen altijd of ze de waarheid in pacht hebben. Maar even eerlijk, dit zijn vrouwen met relatief veel geld, leuk huis enz. Weinig tot geen zorgen. Helemaal niet onaardig bedoeld (...) maar zij weten toch helemaal niet hoe het is om op een houtje te bijten en vanuit een rot situatie iets op te bouwen.</p>
<p>^j“It is going to be a beautiful and positive season!” (Tessa de Groot, 20 April 2016).</p>	<p>Het gaat een mooi en positief seizoen worden!</p>

<p>^k“positive, yeah right” (Ex-participant, 20 April 2016)</p>	<p>Jaa zeker, heel positief.</p>
<p>^l“this time we want to focus less on finger-pointing and more on considering together with the girls what is necessary. So less critical but still a tough conversation when needed.” (Tessa de Groot, 21 April 2016)</p>	<p>Wat we bedoelen met 'een positief seizoen' is dat we dit keer wat minder met het vingertje willen zwaaien en wat meer samen met de meiden willen kijken wat er nodig is. Dus wat minder kritisch maar nog steeds een pittig gesprek als dat nodig is.</p>
<p>^m<i>Renate</i>: You will be a dad in a couple of weeks and there is nothing. Jesus what a mess guys. (Episode Renate Gerschtanowitz - Sharona)</p>	<p><i>Renate</i>: Je wordt over een paar weken vader, en er is niks. Jezus wat een zootje hier jongens.</p>
<p><i>Ellemieke</i>: This is not possible, you cannot put your baby in a bath here, this should have been cleaned a long time ago. (Episode Ellemieke Vermolen - Raimaline)</p>	<p><i>Ellemieke</i>: Dit kan toch niet, je kan hier toch niet je kindje in een badje doen, dit had al lang opgeruimd kunnen zijn.</p>
<p><i>Sofie</i>: Shall we make an agreement? The next time I am here, you cleared out this room? (Episode Sofie van den Enk - Silvana)</p>	<p><i>Sofie</i>: Zullen we een afspraak maken? Dat als ik hier de volgende keer kom, dat jij dit dan helemaal leeg hebt geruimd?</p>