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UNFIT, UNHOLY AND UNDESERVING
THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF DEVIANCE:
UNMARRIED MOTHERS IN POST-INDEPENDENCE IRELAND

A Dissertation Presented

by

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Abstract

When the Irish Government and Catholic Church collaboratively authored the 1937 Constitution, they centered family as the cornerstone of policy, defining it through a conservative Catholic lens. Marriage was deemed essential to motherhood, rendering unmarried mothers unfit and undeserving of support. This narrative led to 190,000 unmarried pregnant women being sent to Catholic-run mother and baby homes, where they were hidden from society. Many abuses occurred, including the forced separation of children from their birth mothers, and their adoption to married families.

In 2021, the Irish Government released *The Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes*, examining these institutions. Using Schneider and Ingram's Theory of Social Construction (1993) and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (1999), I analyzed how the report represented unmarried mothers, past and present. While this study focuses on Irish women between 1937–1998, it highlights how policy shapes social narratives that enable inhumane practices. This is especially relevant today, as religious influence on government policies continues to threaten women's reproductive rights.

Keywords: *Ireland, Deservingness, Unmarried Mothers, Schneider and Ingram Theory of Social Construction, Critical Discourse Analysis*

Dedication

This labor of love is dedicated to my grandmother - Margaret O'Shea, my mother - Ursula McMahan, and my daughter, Maggie O'Shea Homsted.

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Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Rebecca Callahan, whose wisdom and support guided me through this process. I learned so much from Dr. C., and benefited greatly from her counsel and thought partnership. Dr. Suzy Comerford, a true champion of women, was always with me, pushing me forward when I wanted out, and picking me up when I hit my lows. And to Dr. Nicole Conroy and Dr. Daniella Sutherland – two inspirational academics who beautifully demonstrate that motherhood, research, and higher learning can indeed work well together and lead to amazing results.

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And, finally, to my husband Scott – the greatest partner, cheerleader, and big love of my life. Thank you for entertaining the kids, taking on the lion's share of our home duties, and always being willing to do whatever I needed to work. Your support and kindness, encouragement and love got me here. You are truly a wonderful person.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

*In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority and to Whom,
as our final end, all actions both of men and States must be referred,
We, the people of Éire,
Humbly acknowledging all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ,
Who sustained our fathers through centuries of trial,
Gratefully remembering their heroic and unremitting struggle to regain
the rightful independence of our Nation,
And seeking to promote the common good, with due observance of Prudence, Justice and
Charity, so that the dignity and freedom of the individual may be assured, true social
order attained, the unity of our country restored, and concord established with other
nations,
Do hereby adopt, enact, and give to ourselves this Constitution.*
Preamble to the Irish Constitution, 1937

Between 1937 and 1998, Irish families placed an estimated 190,000 of their daughters and sisters into Ireland's mother and baby homes to hide these pregnant but unmarried women from public view (Dept of C.E.D.I.Y., 2021). The Catholic Church subsequently took the newborn babies from their mothers and adopted them out to "proper" families while the Irish Government ignored the illegal and immoral actions of the Church. To this day, thousands of Irish mothers still do not know where their children are or if they survived their childhoods in the homes, while the children are waiting to access their birth records to learn of their origins. The secrecy and shame associated with these unmarried pregnancies and the subsequent treatment of the women and children have decimated families for decades and weakened the fabric of Irish society. While the last mother and baby home closed in 1998, the ramifications of the Church and State's actions continue to haunt families throughout the Republic of Ireland.

Unmarried mothers had traditionally been marginalized in all European countries in the early 20th century (Doherty, 1996). However, at the end of World War I with

soldiers returning home, European governments and communities became more accepting and forgiving of pregnancies outside of wedlock. Birth control became publicly available, and financial supports were put in place to support these mothers and children. The opposite was true in post-independence Ireland, where birth-control restrictions became tighter and punishments for unmarried mothers harsher (Prunty, 2017). In fact, the new Irish Government, a theocracy in everything but name, became stricter and more vociferous in its disdain for these women, and allowed for the transfer of power to the Catholic institutions to hide the women and their children away. The unified Catholic Church and Irish State wanted to present the image of a wholesome and virtuous new Ireland, a bastion of Catholic virtue and family values, which was separate and different from the corruption and loose morality of the British. And they did so at the expense of the Irish women and children.

In 2015, as a response to major scandal in Ireland where the bodies of 798 children were discovered in a mass grave on the grounds of a mother and baby home, the Irish Government established a Commission to investigate Mother and Baby homes. The Commission's final report, published in 2021, serves as the focus of this study.

Topic and Research Problem

Drawing on Schneider and Ingram's (1993) framework of Social Construction of Policy Targets, I examined how the Irish Government and Catholic Church drove the narrative that framed unmarried mothers as a deviant population. Schneider and Ingram's policy classifications determine "deservedness" for target groups, identifying some for support, others for punishment. Specifically, I examined the language used in survivor mother's narratives as included in the Final Commission Report to understand how these

mothers perceived the complicity and conformity of their families, the Catholic Church, and the Irish Government in facilitating and perpetuating a narrative that encouraged and enabled their incarceration and mistreatment. Additionally, I analyzed how the current Irish government classified unmarried mothers through their representation in the 2021 Final Report of the Commission of Investigation in Mother and Baby Homes.

Rationale and Purpose of the Study

My study aims to identify the social construction of deviancy in the context of Irish unmarried mothers and their confinement in Catholic mother and baby homes. The importance of language in the official Commission Report of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes frames the social construction of unmarried mothers in both a historical and contemporary way. While the Irish Constitution formed the social expectation of the citizen, the Church and State drove the social construction of the “deviant” classification of unmarried mothers. The choice of language used in all arenas of family, religious and civic life created, perpetuated, and hid the mistreatment of Ireland’s most marginalized citizens.

This study is important because the rights of mothers are once again under threat by the conservative governments taking power across the world. The impact of the State, with its greater collaboration with religious factions worldwide, influences contemporary policy and the reproductive rights of women. We cannot ignore the power of language in creating a “moral majority” and those excluded from its inner circle. We cannot allow the patriarchal institutions of the Church and State, those with the power and authority over policy, to dictate the treatment and experiences of women who do not meet their gender-specific expectations.

Research Questions

1. How do the authors of the 2021 Confidential Committee Report represent and utilize the voices of the unmarried mothers who survived the Mother and Baby Homes?
2. How does the authors' selection of quotes included in the Confidential report frame the impact of the Church, State, and Families on the historical social construction of unmarried mothers?
3. How do the key findings, as articulated in the Executive Summary of the 2021 Commission report, reflect the Commission's contemporary framing of the role of the mothers, family, church, and state.

Historical Context: Church and State Partnership in a Time of Need

After the separation of the Republic of Ireland from Great Britain in 1922, resources were scarce, and Ireland had some of the worst slums and highest poverty rates in Europe (Earner-Byrne, 2008). The new republic had no stable economy, no financial reserves, and no established social services. Ireland's citizens were at odds with the leadership of the new republic, and old farming communities conflicted with the new city-based leadership. Civil war was looming large on the horizon, and reunification with Britain remained a threat. The citizens of Ireland had their pride, but pride was not enough to keep food on the table (Earner-Byrne, 2008).

In a strategy designed to unify the country and encourage the citizens to come together, the new Irish Government and the Catholic Church worked in unison to foster a sense of national identity that was based on Catholicism, the main unifying characteristic in the country (Fuller, 2015). This coalition was a mutually beneficial partnership. The church had money, an established structure, scores of trained educators and social service

providers through their clergy, and the respect (and fear) of the Irish citizens. On the other hand, the Irish Government had a population in need of guidance and presented an opportunity for the Church to establish a Catholic haven in Europe, enforce a Catholic way of life, and create a model of active Catholicism for other nations to follow (Whyte, 1980). The government of the newly formed Republic of Ireland partnered with the Catholic Church to create and embed a new national identity for the citizens of Ireland - one that was unique and succinct from that of Great Britain. The new Irish national identity was designed to be grounded in the concept of a Catholic family, and promoted the themes of “moral purity, chastity and virtue” (Fischer, 2016). To establish this new, unifying Irish identity, the Church and State needed to eliminate all threats to its existence, and established policies and actions to protect it at all costs.

The citizens of Ireland, long held beholden to the laws of England, embraced the new national identity and resulting Constitution created by the Irish State (and heavily influenced by the Catholic Church) in 1937. Some have attributed this replacement of values to “an intellectually inanimate populace” who were as “pliant as clay, sculpted by the forces of neo-colonialism, (and) ultramontane Catholicism” (Doherty, 1996). Others have attributed this successful transition in support to the new Constitution to the use of fear, shame, and punishment, along with the implementation of a system of containment and culture of silence, to ensure that these moral ideals and policies were adopted by Irish society (Smith, 2007). I suspect that the speedy adoption of the new constitution and its values was more heavily driven by the latter with the Church and State using the social construction of target policy groups to achieve their means.

The Irish Constitution: Framing “Family” through a Catholic Lens

Once the authors of the new Constitution of the Republic of Ireland defined their own independence and outlined the structure, governance, fiscal management, and naming of the new government in Ireland, they turned to a series of articles that defined the priorities of the new Republic. Article 41 of the Constitution specifically named the importance of “the family” and recognized the family unit as:

the *natural* primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a *moral* institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, *antecedent and superior* to all positive law, and guarantees its protection by the state. The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the Family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State. (Article 41, Section 1) (emphasis added).

“The Family in its constitution” was defined in a very Catholic and conservative way, with the institution of marriage underlying the foundation of a family. Indeed, the Constitution states that “The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the Family is founded, and to protect it against attack” (Irish Constitution, 1937, chapter 41, article 3). Marriage and family are therefore clearly defined as instrumental to the national character or identity of the new republic. However, only the women’s role in the family was constitutionally defined, therefore placing the responsibility of the family squarely on the shoulders of the Irish women. The Constitution itself makes clear that the woman’s role in Irish society was to support the state by her function within the home, and that the common good cannot be achieved without her role:

In particular, the State recognizes that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall endeavour (sic) to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour (sic) to the neglect of their duties in the home. (Constitution, Article 41, Section 3)

Women were constitutionally expected to marry and become mothers. It was their national duty to support the new republic via their service in the home, without which “the common good cannot be achieved.” To do anything other than marry and have children was therefore unpatriotic, and damning.

The Constitution’s Impact on Women

The new Government and the Catholic Church were both highly patriarchal institutions that took limited input from women making it inevitable that women would have less representation in policy creation, and more culpability assigned when things went wrong (Fisher, 2016). Scholars of Irish history have documented how the responsibility of the family was disproportionately placed on the shoulders of the women in Ireland (Fischer, 2016; Hogan, 2020; Smith, J.M., 2008; Costello Wecker, 2015). The Constitution specifically elevated and honored the role of the Irish mother, and at the same time pathologized and ostracized women who fell outside of the narrow definition of a family. The Constitution led to unmarried mothers being deemed a disgrace to both their families and to society, and as such, Irish citizens blamed the women for the ‘illegitimate’ pregnancy, liberating the men from any culpability.

Gendered expectations codified in public policy fueled negative narratives labeling and identifying unmarried mothers (Fisher, 2016). With family providing the foundational cornerstone of public policy, politicians and clergy perpetuated the myth of unmarried mothers as deviants - temptresses who duped innocent men (Fisher, 2016). In a contemporary policy discussion on financial support for Women and Children a male politician argued that: “Finally, I think the House will recollect that it was Eve that originally made Adam pluck the apple from the tree.” (PDSE, 7 May 1930, vol.13, col. 1023-1026.), conjuring Catholic, biblical teachings as historical fact.

Fischer (2016) theorized that the Church and State positioned women as the bearers of virtue, the moral puritans responsible for the family and the national identity of moral purity. In doing so, she theorizes that the Irish Church-State used shame as a mechanism of social control over women, as women’s sexuality and women’s real and potential sexual transgressions, posed an ongoing threat to the godly national identity. Women were subject to ongoing societal scrutiny– especially from other women – to ensure that they did not misstep (Muldowney, 2008). Those who deviated were hidden away in one of the many social institutions designed to hide these women, protect other impressionable girls in society, and maintain the mask of the new national identity. The effectiveness of shaming as a tool demonstrates how labeling people as right or wrong, good, or bad, deserving, or deviant, wielded tremendous power in Irish society (Fischer, 2016).

The Constitution’s Impact on Social Policy

To meet the Constitutional goal to “protect the family in its constitution and authority,” the State and Church colluded to hide those who deviated from their norm

(Fischer, 2016). A remnant of Ireland's Poor Laws (1834), "Poor Houses" were repurposed, empowered, and funded to serve as mother and baby homes to hide any evidence of moral impropriety in the new Republic (Prunty, 2017). Post-colonial Ireland became more draconian in the usage of these institutions and utilized tactics of punishment rather than rehabilitation (Prunty, 2017). Concurrently, similar institutions around Europe were undergoing reform to focus on a more person-centered and supportive approach to deal with issues of poverty, orphan children and single parenthood. While other European countries limited incarceration to criminals alone – Ireland used incarceration to deal with women and children who fell outside of the cultural ideal (Fischer, 2016). In fact, I contend that incarceration became the norm for dealing with unmarried mothers and their children, as the church-state empowered and funded mother and baby homes, magdalen laundries, and industrial schools as the ultimate signifier of deviancy, thereby perpetuating and enforcing the idea of unfit, unholy and unpatriotic single mothers.

Contextualizing Mother and Baby Homes in the New Irish Republic

In post-independence Ireland, society deemed an out-of-wedlock child the greatest disgrace that a woman could bring on her herself and her family (Fischer, 2016). Carefully written public policies produced the negative social pressures necessary to tarnish the family's reputation, making future options for the pregnant girl bleak at best (Hogan, 2020). Secrecy and discretion were of ultimate importance for a family's reputation, if not survival (Fischer, 2016). Mother and baby homes, institutions run by various orders of Catholic nuns, were used to sequester the pregnant mother until after the child was born. Entering a mother and baby home was a secretive experience for all

involved, and a lonely experience for the pregnant girl, who was dropped off at the doors of the institution by her parents or a priest. To explain the pregnant girl's absence from society, families would often report that she had gone to England to find work or that she was visiting family in the countryside. The Church would decide when the mother could be released to move back home, without her child. The child was either sent to an Industrial School or adopted out to an "appropriate" family. Oftentimes, young mothers remained forbidden by their families to return home, their "shame" being too much for their family to bear (Hogan, 2020).

The mother and baby homes were operated by several orders of Catholic nuns, most often the Bon Secours Sisters and the Sisters of Mercy. The nuns hired lay nurses to attend the births as the sisters themselves were forbidden by the Church to attend the births in case it triggered their maternal instinct (Goulding, 1998). Church rules forbid the nuns and lay employees from becoming friendly with the women incarcerated within the homes. The nuns required that the inmates perform hard labor as they waited for the birth of their children, often scrubbing the floors on their hands and knees, or cutting the grass with shears despite being heavily pregnant (Goulding, 1998). And when the time of birth arrived, the nuns did not permit the women in labor to take any pain medication or anesthesia as the unmarried women were expected to suffer their punishment to pay their penance. Some homes prohibited women from having visitors during their time in home, either before or after the birth, and the babies' fathers were turned away by the nuns from visiting their girlfriends and children – resulting in some fathers never meeting their children. Any time that the mother spent with her child was always under supervision and controlled by the nuns (Goulding, 1998).

The Tuam Mother and Baby Home

In 2014, one mother and baby home rose to infamy. The mother and baby home in Tuam, Co. Galway was run by the Bon Secours Sisters between 1925 and 1961. In 2014, Catherine Corless - a local amateur historian - began to research the home for an article about her community. The mother and baby home had been razed in 1971, and a new housing estate built upon the grounds. Corless approached the Bon Secours Sisters and asked for access to the records to provide some statistical information about how many people the home served; the sisters denied her request. Corless then went to the Office of Registration – a municipal office responsible for recording all births, marriages, and deaths in the county, where she discovered death certificates for 798 children who had died at the home between 1925 and 1961 (Corless, 2021). Causes of death included but were not limited to ‘marasmus’ (severe malnutrition), croup, congenital disease, and tuberculosis. Medical experts have confirmed that the rate of the diseases recorded on the death certificates were five times higher than the rest of Ireland, and comparable to rates in Ireland in the 1700’s. (McGarry, 2018).

Furthermore, Corless discovered burial records for only 2 of the 798 children. Corless was curious as to where the other children might be buried and locals pointed her to a small plot of land separate from the church’s consecrated graveyard, rumored to be where some children were buried. Corless started a committee of locals who agreed that the children’s burial site should not go unrecognized. As a result of her work, and several years of advocacy, the City Council determined that the site be excavated to determine if there were truly children buried there. The excavation team discovered a septic tank and underground system containing the remains of 796 children (Corless, 2020). The sheer

magnitude of the number of dead children, buried in such an undignified and horrific way, sent shockwaves throughout the country. It was clear that not only were unmarried mothers and their children considered unworthy of respect, love, or care in life, but they were also denied a proper burial in death.

Based on this disturbing discovery, in 2015 the Irish Government established the “Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes” to write an investigative report on the Mother and Baby homes, and the lived experiences of the mothers, children and others affiliated with the homes. The report, which took 6 years to finalize and was published in 2021, uncovered many institutional abuses and victims spread across the country. That report, and its representation of unmarried mothers, forms the basis of my research.

Chapter 2: Review of Relevant Theory and Research

In their seminal 1993 work, Schneider and Ingram established the theory of “social construction of target populations” that examined how social and public policies perpetuate degrees of “deservedness” for different populations, identifying some for support and others for punishment. They note that policies are powerful generators and reinforcers of social constructions because they “are the mechanisms through which values are authoritatively allocated for the society” (Schneider & Ingram, 1997, p.2.) Specifically, Schneider and Ingram classified four separate groups of policy targets along two intersecting axes: one of power (high to low), and one of social construction (positive to negative).

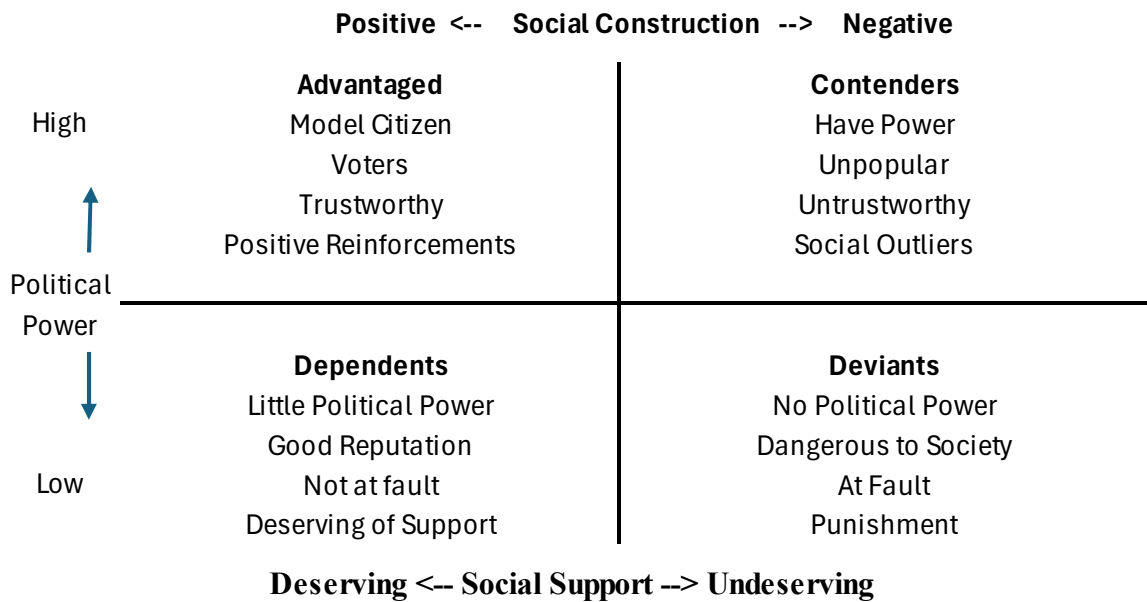


Figure 2.1

Schneider and Ingram’s Model of the Social Construction of Target Populations in Public Policy (1993)

Deservedness: A Framework for Understanding the Impact of Public Policy

I begin by describing individuals in the upper left quadrant - the advantaged, those who enjoy both elevated levels of political power and a positive reputation. Considered model citizens, worthy of respect and support, the advantaged are often politically active as they tend to vote and are courted by politicians seeking their support. Treated with reverence and afforded more respect than the average citizen, the advantaged receive society's "rewards," and its positive reinforcements.

Moving to the upper right, we find the contenders, those who, despite having levels of political power, lack a positive reputation. Contenders tend to be negatively constructed because although they fall outside of the norm, they do not need social support and the public's grace to survive. Despite their political power and/or social status, policies frame the contenders as social outliers, "morally corrupt," or "greedy" and not deserving of support.

I now draw your attention to the bottom left quadrant, the dependents, those who, despite their positive social construction, lack political power. Dependents are the moral masses trying to live good lives and get by, framed by public policy as worthy and deserving of public support and assistance. Dependents are good citizens who are experiencing challenging times through no fault of their own. They do not possess political power as they are disengaged from politics and do not tend to vote, perfect for politicians who like to be seen "doing good things for good people" (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). As such, politicians and policy makers ensure that social services and policies are in place to help and support the dependent group.

In contrast, the final quadrant represents those who both lack political power and are socially cast in a negative light. Deviants are “dangerous” and of “no value to society.” Lacking political power, politicians do not court deviants, who tend to be completely marginalized from society. Again, as politicians like to be seen as doing good things for good people, they are equally happy to be recognized as punishers of the wicked. The deviants are the recipients of those punishments. Their poor circumstances are of their own making through lack of moral judgement or disrespect for governance. Therefore, they need correction and punishment.

Schneider and Ingram’s framework aligns each resulting quadrant to a socially constructed narrative that determines whether and to what degree individuals in that quadrant merit public support. Public policies feed the dominant social narratives of the public consciousness; it is only with major social changes that groups can move from one classification to another.

Examining Deservedness: An Exploration of Public Policy and the Theory of Social Construction

In their theory of the social construction of target populations, Schneider and Ingram (1993) argue that public policies frame groups of people politically and socially into one of four categories of deservingness of support. Policymakers’ political agendas drive the construction of a given public policy and in turn, the policy shapes the social construction of groups, having far-reaching impacts on these populations. Policy analysts have applied the Schneider and Ingram model in multiple contexts to demonstrate how social groups are categorized and impacted by their classification. In the following

sections, I synthesize the research that explores the relationship between public policy and race/ethnicity, nativity, gender, and maternal/marital status.

Gender in the Social Construction of Target Populations

Gender plays a vital role in determining the target populations of public policy. Multiple applications of the Schneider and Ingram model have shown that women are regularly identified as “deviant populations.” Benson-Smith (2005) applied the model to the intersection of race and gender as represented by African American women and welfare policy as represented in *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965), otherwise known as the Moynihan Report. Moynihan was a social scientist and politician who sought to correct the problem of poverty, particularly amongst the Black community. While well intentioned with a goal of creating social policies directed at resolving poverty in Black communities, Moynihan’s report attributed the dominant cause of poverty to the failing structure of the African American family, rather than to the systemic racism within the social, political, and economic structures that disenfranchised African Americans in general. Moynihan cited traditional conservative family values and gendered roles as the basis of a strong family – the father is the breadwinner while the mother’s role is to take care of the home, raise the children and serve her husband. Moynihan placed the blame for the crumbling family specifically on African American women by asserting that Black women emasculate Black men and remove them from their rightful position as leaders of the family. In doing so, Moynihan states that “... the negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole...”(Moynihan, 1965, 9).

By singling out African American women, Moynihan socially constructed African American women as “deviants,” and invertedly contributed to several new stereotypes of Black women: that as being emasculating matriarchs who contributed to the shiftless and directionless Black male.

Benson-Smith later discusses how the U.S. government’s policy foundation in the Moynihan report led to the social construction of the “Welfare Queen” trope - a derogatory term that positioned low-income African American women as “jezebels” who were “overly fertile” and “lazy.” This narrative loomed large in the policy debates around welfare reform in the 1980’s and 1990’s, and positioned Black women, once again, as deviants who abused the welfare system and were drains on society. The narrative contributed to the media’s disproportionate representation of Black women’s responsibility for the need for welfare reform. The “welfare queen” characterization empowered systemic racism that continues to negatively impact African American's economic and social stature to this day.

Single Mothers: A Seemingly Universal Deviant Group

Women, and particularly single mothers, loom large in policy debates and policy construction. While social constructions have changed over place and time, the consistency with which policy separates single mothers from their married counterparts shows that the distinction between the two groups continues to play into social consciousness, social construction, and has a policy impact.

Jung-Eun Et al. (2018) discusses the impact of social policy on unmarried mothers in Korea. The authors note that single motherhood has increased over time as women opt to raise their children rather than give them up for adoption, as was customary

practice in the past. While this reflects social change about childrearing, Korean attitudes and policies have remained conservative and judgmental in their construction of single mothers, distinguishing them from married mothers and offering less support. The Korean government actively incentivizes growth in the national birthrate but the policies apply only to married family births. For example, Jung-Eun Et al. note that Korean law mandates businesses to fund up to one-year parental leave and 30-60 days of maternity leave. However, single mothers are not eligible for this leave due to their unmarried status. Similarly, new families (aka married couples with children) are offered low interest government sponsored mortgage rates to afford a home, but single mothers are excluded from this opportunity. Single mothers are offered financial subsidies to support their children, but the financial support is reduced once a mother takes up employment. Combined with the prohibitive cost of childcare, single mothers are incentivized to neither seek employment nor better their situation. This assignment of burdens and lack of support is indicative of the treatment assigned to deviant populations in Schneider and Ingram's model.

Jorgensen (2012) analyzed how social welfare policy implementation in Denmark between 2010-2013 targeted single mothers as deviant, specifically highlighting their intersectional identities in determining deservingness. While the national policy took one approach of being a model welfare state with universalism being the foundation of tax-fund distribution, Jorgenson demonstrated how the various Danish municipalities applied the national framework in multiple ways, driven by the agendas and social constructions within each municipality. Jorgenson identified that in some municipalities, single mothers of a national and religious minority were disproportionately represented in the media, and

as a result, in the public's perception as being guilty of welfare fraud. These representations played on the Danish citizens fear of recent immigration reforms that brought new refugees, cultures, and belief systems to Denmark. These fears, combined with racist and nationalistic sentiments, illuminated a distrust of 'outsiders' simmering below the surface of the Danish national consciousness.

Each municipality had a "control unit" system for accepting allegations of welfare abuse and investigating anonymous tips from the community to determine if welfare abuse took place. The investigations involved monitoring social media accounts, surveillance of the accused woman's home, and tracking the movements and relationships of the woman to determine if she was guilty of fraud and therefore eligible to have her benefits rescinded. These intense actions left the single mother feeling vulnerable and victimized by the government, rather than supported and assisted as per the intent of the social welfare program. When the municipal cases of welfare rescindments were examined at a national level, the Danish government determined that over 47% of the decisions to rescind funds from single mothers were wrong or insufficiently proven, and the funding was reinstated. The municipalities' implementation of the national policy had "othered" single mothers, making them scapegoats for Danes' dissatisfaction in their welfare system (Jorgenson, 2012).

In the U. S., policy debates for welfare reform under the Clinton administration focused heavily on unmarried mothers (Edwards, 2022). Clinton pushed for reform by replacing the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). AFDC was an entitlement program, wherein anyone who met the classification criteria was eligible for

benefits. The decision to replace the AFDC was based upon perceived abuses within the system (Josephson, 2000). These abuses were attributed to “welfare queens” and teen moms who did not want to work - “immoral mothers who have illegitimate children to garner the increase in their welfare checks” (Josephson, 2000). The reality of the program’s implementation never matched the public’s perceptions of abuse, with studies showing the unmarried mothers actually worked more hours than their married counterparts. While the cost of welfare was indeed increasing, it was due to both an economic recession and a higher percentage of Americans needing support (Edwards, 2022). Despite the economic hardships faced by unmarried mothers in the U.S. (e.g., low wages, expensive childcare) Congress preferred to focus on the social, rather than the economic issue (Edwards, 2022). AFDC funding was replaced with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) grants – money that was given to the individual states to spend as they saw fit. The caveat was that TANF funds could be used as a temporary cash benefit for women and children, or as funding to “promote work and marriage, ending out-of-wedlock pregnancy and encouraging two-parent families” (Edwards, 2022) (emphasis added). Once again, unmarried mothers were deemed a problem that needed to be resolved through policy intervention.

Changing Classification: Accommodating the Political Needs of the Time

Over time, social constructs can change, based upon changes in the needs of the political drivers of policy. Populations can move positions and classifications within the four categories outlined in Schneider and Ingram’s model of Social Construction. By repositioning the policy target, Governments can sway the populace to perceive

deservedness in a new light. Below are several examples of this repositioning of categories in social policy over time.

DiAlto (2005) demonstrates how Japanese Americans as a group have cycled through the Schneider and Ingram's social construction categories and have overcome their negative connotation as being a deviant "problem minority" to representing today's advantaged "model minority" after which all others should emulate themselves (Petersen, 1966).

DiAlto explains how, prior to World War II, white farmers in the U.S. felt threatened by Japanese immigrant farmers. Japanese laborers were hard-working and industrious and began buying their own small tracts of land to farm. The Japanese were strong farmers with new techniques that surpassed the white farmers' ability to work the land, and the Japanese farms quickly became successful despite their small size and scarcity. (By 1940, despite owning only one acre out of every eight thousand acres of arable land in California, Japanese farmers earned on average \$279.96 per acre versus the \$37.94 per acre that white farmers earned (LaPore, 1994 in DiAlto, 2005, p.93)). DiAlto claims that the white farmers were also threatened by their own inability to separate Japanese culture and race – and feared that Japanese immigrants were seeking to establish a Japanese empire on American soil. To stem the flow of Japanese immigrants into the US and to prevent them from buying land, the white farmers lobbied their courts for policy change. In 1894, the case of *Saito v. United States*, a Massachusetts court first legitimized and politicized anti-Japanese discrimination via their ruling that Japanese were Mongolian, and not White, thereby prohibiting them from becoming citizens based

on the Naturalization Act of 1790. By framing the Japanese as a deviant population, they were therefore undeserving of the reward of American citizenship.

With the bombing of Pearl Harbor during World War II, and as the Japanese military prowess became a global concern, the ‘deviant’ classification returned to haunt Japanese American families living in the U.S. However, instead of being viewed as a “problem minority,” the political discourse focused on “enemy aliens” – a more negative and more dangerous classification of those with Japanese heritage – and questioned their loyalty to the U.S. outright. Opponents of Japanese Americans advocated for policy change, and in 1942 President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 which authorized the exclusion of Japanese aliens and citizens from the Pacific Coast region (DeAlto, 2005, p. 94). Executive Order 9066 subsequently led to further policies and practices of internment, evacuation, and relocation – whereby thousands of Japanese families were taken from their homes, separated from each other, and detained in prison camps. The Japanese Americans worked together to use their agency and advocated strongly for their identity as American citizens – a favorable construction that positioned them as hard-working descendants of immigrants who the U.S. claimed to welcome to their lands. But the change in the social construction of Japanese Americans by white policy makers did not occur until the political climate and white needs made it beneficial to do so.

In post-war America, Japan represented a strong military ally in curbing the spread of Communism around the world. Additionally, the American government saw an economic opportunity as Japan opened for trade with the U.S. As such, it was imperative that the U.S. Government treat its citizens of Japanese heritage better (DiAlto, 2005). Land-ownership laws were reversed, as was the 1790 standing that only White persons

were eligible for citizenship. The federal government passed the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which removed race as a consideration for citizenship, enabling thousands of Japanese to apply for citizenship and rebound from the injustices of the past. Japanese Americans became landowners, industrious business owners, and strong contributors to the U.S. economy – the “model minority” who overcame obstacles and thrived in the American dream (Petersen, 1966).

DiAlto’s research once again demonstrates how the social construction of target populations as represented in policy is driven by the interests and needs of those in power. In the U.S., those in power are traditionally white men, whose political fancy dictates the policy that impacts the rest of the population. By white policy makers shifting the politically and socially constructed narrative from “problem minority” to “enemy alien” to “model minority,” millions of Japanese Americans have had their lives and experiences directly impacted.

Immigration Status and Social Construction

In a similar vein, the agenda-driven narrative surrounding immigrants has long had an influence on U.S. immigration policy, and immigrant's “deservingness” to enter the United States. Newton (2005) demonstrates how immigrants fluctuate through the various target population quadrants depending on the political and economic winds of the day. For example, immigrants were framed in the “dependent” category – our country was built on the backs of immigrants – to the “deviant” category – immigrants are stealing jobs from Americans. Her research involves a text-based discourse analysis of the Congressional hearings on the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) to examine how immigrants were socially constructed to

deem their deservingness of entry to the U.S.. Newton's research determined that there were five prominent narratives used in the policy debates in the Congressional hearings—two related to immigrants, and three related to the U.S. services, agencies, and Border Patrol guards tasked with enforcing immigration policy.

All three of the U.S.-focused narratives were positive, and portrayed the American services, agencies, and border patrol as being victims of immigrants. The American employees were overworked, “on the front lines,” trustworthy, diligent, and law-abiding, and all fell squarely into the classification that determined they deserved support. The two categories of immigrant classifications that materialized in the hearing however had the opposite effect. The “immigrant freeloader” narrative included both legal and illegal immigrants, and their children. In this trope, immigrants were portrayed as being on welfare, draining resources and means from citizens, and as being non-taxpayers (despite the evidence to the contrary for legal and undocumented immigrants). As immigrants were deemed undeserving of support, they were open to punitive and coercive policy tools, such as restricted access to social security benefits, denied access to public schools, and enforcement of public charge laws.

The more severe classification of the “Criminal Alien” was reserved for the ‘illegal immigrants’ – those who has passed into the U.S. without examination at a border patrol location. These immigrants were considered lawbreakers and as such, deserving of punishments such as incarceration and deportation. The “deviant” classification enabled stricter and more punitive legislation to be pushed through Congress and adopted by the citizens of the U.S.

Yet less than a decade before, the 1986 IRCA- Immigration Reform and Control Act -under President Reagan sought to stem the flow of illegal immigration utilizing a completely different narrative. The goal of the IRCA legislators was to enable a mass amnesty to reduce the number of “illegal” immigrants, to preserve jobs for American and legal immigrants, and to stem the flow of illegal immigration by offering increased border patrol budgets and tighter restrictions on U.S. businesses who enticed illegal immigrants by ignoring employment and residency laws.

Under IRCA, illegal immigrants, mostly from Mexico and South America, were presented as hard-working individuals who deserved support. Farming communities relied on cheap foreign labor, and recognizing the fiscal impact of immigrants in this sector, the act offered immigrants amnesty and an opportunity to legally remain in the U.S. To further position the immigrants in a positive light, IRCA represented the “deviants” in the policy design as the U.S. based sector of commercial growers who employed “undocumented migrants” (rather than illegal aliens) to bypass payroll taxes. This narrative, socially constructed to meet the needs of the farming communities and their economic survival, helped pass IRCA and institute the biggest immigration reform in almost three decades (Choe, 2001).

While IRCA presented immigrants as deserving, and IIRIRA presented immigrants as deviants, the DACA legislation of the Obama era represented immigrants as both, with the distinction being drawn at the age of the immigrant. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) was an executive order that allowed the children of undocumented immigrants who had been brought to the US as children to remain in the US without fear of deportation. The DACA recipients became popularly known as

“dreamers” – a positive connotation that framed these children as pursuing the “American dream” – the foundation on which the U.S. is built. Using this framework, Rendon et al. found that the three most salient themes in the media focused on DACA in terms of 1) protecting immigrants, 2) the economic benefits the DACA recipients brought to the US economy, and 3) the “moral / right” thing to do. (Rendon et al., 2019). However, DACA-eligible children were also framed as victims of parents who brought them to the US, who were placed in precarious situations and under mental duress due to actions beyond their control. This narrative, designed to support the arguments for DACA, had the effect of villainizing the parents and contributing to the harmful trope of “criminal aliens” and “illegal aliens”(Chazaro, 2016). This demonstrates that sometimes social construction has far-reaching and unintended consequences.

Deservedness: Church and State in Irish Public Policy

Having reviewed the research examining how public policies both reflect and reinforce social perceptions and constructions of deservedness, I now focus on understanding the social construction of deservedness in the context of the Catholic-led Irish state. The pseudo theocracy of the new Irish government worked hard to create the mythical image of the Irish Mother – one who nurtured and supported her children’s growth in mind, body, and soul to become patriotic citizens of the new Republic and devout Catholics (Earner-Byrne, 2008). However, thousands of Irish women fell outside of the Church and State’s defined role, their unmarried status pushing them from the “deserving” to “deviant” category which ensured a negative life experience.

Nicholson-Crotty and Meier (2005) posit that the mere existence of socially constructed categories is insufficient for full implementation and acceptance of a policy,

specifically when referencing the “deviant” classification of policy targets. As a first step, the “deviant” category must include a group that is readily recognizable to the public and must hold a marginalized position in society. This group must have a value-laden stereotype and fall on the side of “wrong” rather than “right.” The negative stereotype allows the policymakers to appease society by positioning the deviants as worthy of sanctions rather than support. The second condition for full policy development is that the community must have a “moral entrepreneur” - someone who is willing to point out the moral dangers that the deviant policy group pose to society, and someone clearly supported by an institutionalized base of power. By having an elevated level of expertise regarding “morality,” this moral entrepreneur is respected and has their word taken as truth. The third and final condition is the existence of the “Political Entrepreneur,” or the “Policy Champion.” This person has the political influence and status to convert stereotypes and moral outrage into public policy. This person orchestrates and negotiates the political landscape to please the good and moral citizens and punish the immoral ones.

Applying this template to Ireland, the reader can place unmarried mothers in the role of the deviant policy target group. The moral entrepreneur is epitomized by Archbishop John Charles McQuaid – the Catholic Primate of Ireland and Archbishop of Dublin at the time of the construction of the new Irish Constitution (Cooney, 2009). McQuaid took the lead in providing Catholic input on the Constitution and oversaw all components of policy related to family, gender roles and reproduction (Cooney, 2009). Eamon DeValera, primary author of the Irish Constitution and first Taoiseach (prime minister) of the Republic, clearly fills the role of policy champion. A staunch Catholic,

DeValera worked tirelessly with McQuaid to create the Constitution and infrastructure to establish and formalize the new nation (Coogan, 1995). McQuaid and DeValera's efforts to bind the Church and State in the Republic of Ireland meet Nicholson-Crotty and Meier's criteria for understanding how policy negatively influenced and drove the social narrative of unmarried mothers.

As is evidenced by these articles, the role of social construction is critical to policy development. Policy targets are defined, categorized, and treated accordingly. Over time, and based on the needs of the society, populations can move between categories and become reclassified, resulting in a different outcome. Using Schneider and Ingram's model of the Social Construction of Policy Targets, my research sought to determine how unmarried mothers were socially constructed between 1937 and 1996, and if that social construction fluctuated or remained constant in the publication of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes report in 2021.

Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

Using Schneider and Ingram's (1993) social construction of target populations as a guiding theoretical framework, my research examined how the language used in the 2021 Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes Report socially constructed unmarried mothers in the past, and how the report's authors, and by extension the Irish government of 2021, defined those mothers in modern times. Specifically, I addressed the following research questions:

4. How do the authors of the 2021 Confidential Committee Report represent and utilize the voices of the unmarried mothers who experienced the Mother and Baby Homes?
5. How do the authors' selection of quotes included in the Confidential Committee report frame the impact of the Church, State, and Families on the historical social construction of unmarried mothers?
6. How do the key findings, as articulated in the Executive Summary of the 2021 Commission report, reflect the Commission's contemporary framing of the role of the mothers, family, church, and state.

To address these questions, I applied qualitative document analysis methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), and specifically Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1999) to the Confidential Committee Report and the Executive Summary of the Final Report of the Commission of Investigation in Mother and Baby Homes.

Section Four of the Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Home is entitled "The Confidential Committee Report" (CCR) and is dedicated

to the interview data provided by the “witnesses¹” to the Confidential Committee. In chapter 4, the authors incorporate interview excerpts as illustrative examples of the experiences of unmarried mothers in the homes. While interview excerpts pepper other sections of the report, section four is dedicated specifically to the survivors’ narratives. I focused my content and critical discourse analysis on this section of the report. (For reference, the Commission’s final report is over 2800 pages long.) In addition, I examined the language of the authors of the Commission of Investigation’s Report Executive Summary. I sought to analyze if the concept of “deviant” was reflected in the Irish public discourse and practice of the time, and if the deviant category is represented today. Focusing on survivors’ narratives and quotes, I explored if and how the Church and State in post-independence Ireland established, perpetuated, and reinforced a social discourse that framed unmarried mothers as a social problem, and if they continue to do so today. I used both documentary analysis and critical discourse analysis as my methodological tools.

Methodological Approach

Document Analysis

Document analysis is a research method commonly used in the study of history, education and other social sciences. Researchers use this method to analyze policies, reports, journals, diaries, etc. to elicit meaning and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). By analyzing, deep reading, and coding these documents, “document analysis yields data—excerpts, quotations, or entire passages—that are then organized

¹ “Witness” is the term used by the Commission to identify the survivor mothers, children and lay people associated with the mother and baby homes who came forward and interviewed for the report.

into major themes, categories, and case examples, specifically through content analysis” (Labuschagne, 2003). To analyze the content of the documents, I used Critical Discourse analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis

An offshoot of traditional discourse analysis (DA) methods, critical discourse analysis does not have one single approach or methodology (Van Dijk, 1993). Instead, as a methodological tool, it analyzes pervasive discourses through specific frames of reference (Mullet, 2018). However, all modes of and approaches to critical discourse analysis are concerned with uncovering and transforming conditions of inequality and the work that language performs in society (Mullet 2018). In fact, critical discourse analysis sees “language as social practice” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Specifically, the language used in the discourse frames and shapes the social response and can perpetuate discrepancies in power, privilege, and social positions. To quote Fairclough and Wodak:

Since discourse is so socially consequential, it gives rise to critical issues of power. Discursive practices may have major ideological effects – that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the way in which they represent things and position people (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

By examining the pervasive narrative of the day, I explored how unmarried mothers were rendered powerless, deemed at fault for their pregnancies, and left unsupported by their families, Church and state authorities. Specifically, I employed a CDA approach influenced by Foucault and created by Norman Fairlough (1999). This

approach (illustrated in Figure 3.1) focuses on the unequal distribution of power and the social construction of otherness.

Fairclough's Model of Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough (1999) developed a model of Critical Discourse Analysis that centers on the teachings of Michel Foucault and explores how issues of power and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and legitimized in society. Fairclough's approach examines social institutions, and how they contribute to, and capitalize on, a discourse that "others" and discredits the marginalized. Importantly, Fairclough's (1999) approach to critical discourse analysis aligns with my theoretical framework, Schneider and Ingram's (1993) theory of Social Construction of Deservingness. S&I's (1993) model of social construction of Policy Targets in Public Policy centers on inequality and power, specifically on how social construction via discourse creates a 'deviant' policy target group.

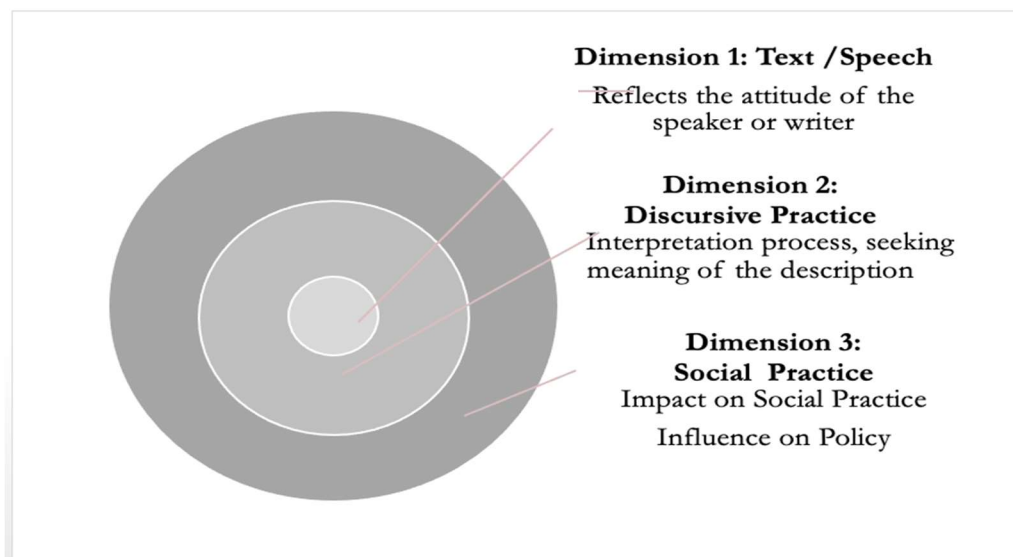


Figure 3.1

Fairclough's Model of Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough's model of CDA has three separate dimensions which inform and influence each other. In a continuous process, narrative feeds through each dimension and contributes to the socially accepted discourse and resulting practice.

Dimension 1 is the **description**. It focuses on text or speech itself, the choice of language, and how it is structured and used to convey the attitude of the speaker or writer. My research uses the text and language of the mothers as included in the Confidential Committee Report and the text of the authors in the Executive Summary.

Dimension 2 is concerned with **interpretation**: How the choice of language conveys meaning. It examines discourse as a "communicator of ideology" (Fowler, 1997) and seeks to examine how language is interpreted within its context. Who are the targets of the language, who are the users of the language? What is the power status of the user, and the recipient? I will examine how the choice of language was used to create a commonly understood narrative about unmarried mothers, and what that narrative entailed.

Dimension 3 focuses on the **explanation**: the use of the narrative to impact power relations and create social and institutional responses (Fowler, 1997). This dimension looks at the influence of the discourse on policy and social practice.

These three dimensions work together to create and perpetuate systems of oppression and power imbalances. This form of critical discourse analysis illustrates how discourse plays a critical role in establishing the deservingness of deviant policy targets and specifically contributes to understanding the experiences of unmarried mothers in Ireland.

The Data: Final Report of the Commission of Investigation Into Mother and Baby Homes

My data source is the Final Report of the Commission of Investigation Into Mother and Baby Homes, (CIIMBH) as submitted to the Irish Government and published on 12 January 2021. Specifically, I focused on two sections: 1) the Confidential Committee Report; and 2) the Executive Summary. The report is readily available on the website of the Irish Government's Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, and a print copy is available for free for those who prefer a paper copy to the digital version.

Given that many of these survivor mothers have now passed away, the CIIMBH report provided access to data already in existence and publicly available. My reliance on secondary data via the report is by necessity; the Catholic Church restricted access to records to such an extent that they have limited the role of historians and social scientists to perform their craft (Smith, 2008). In addition, the Irish Government placed a 30-year moratorium on archival data associated with the Commission's Report and destroyed the recordings of the mother's interviews after the publication of the report (Flanagan, 2021). Therefore, the official Commission report and survivor testimonies chosen for inclusion in the report offer a limited view into the experiences of unmarried mothers in the mother and baby homes. My data collection process did not need IRB approval, as the records were publicly available. (See appendix A). For reader clarity, I detail the data collection process followed by the Confidential Committee in Appendix B.

Locating and Preparing the Data

I downloaded the Confidential Committee Report from the Irish Government website, and uploaded it into Dedoose. (I initially used NVivo software to analyze and code the narratives of the mother and baby home survivors. I later switched to Dedoose due to a preference for the functionality provided within that software.) I then separated each section by heading, and exported the report to excel. This process enabled me to code and categorize the text with greater ease. Once the data was prepared for analysis, I began the process of coding.

In the following section, I describe how I employed CDA to analyze the text of the survivors of Irish mother and baby homes, and the text of the authors of the Commission Report. I include Table 3.1 (below) to guide the reader through the analytic steps and phases of CDA.

Coding the Texts

Using Fairclough's (1999) approach to discourse analysis, I coded the narratives first using a priori codes (Kuckartz, 2014) to determine the actors with power and authority, and to identify language and methods used to create a power imbalance and us/them division amongst Irish citizens and unmarried mothers. I uncovered themes through an iterative, emerging coding and recoding process that was both deductive and inductive. Specifically, codes included both predetermined categories (deductive) as well as categories arising from the data (inductive) (Kuckartz, 2014).

Table 3.1

Analytical Framework (adapted from “General Analytical Framework for Critical Discourse Analysis” (Mullet, 2018).

Stage of Analysis	Description	Relevance to Proposed Study
1	Select the discourse ... related to injustice or inequality in society	Unmarried mothers in post-independence Ireland
2	Locate and prepare data sources	Witness accounts to the Confidential Committee of the Commission
3	Code texts Thematic analysis, inductive and deductive coding. Emergent and Iterative process	Create initial (a-priori) codes to determine assess “otherness,” “undeserving” and deviancy
4	Ensure data validity Ensure that coding is consistent across all texts Examine social relations that control the text's production; How do social practices inform the arguments in the texts? How does the text in turn influence social practices?	A second coder completed a 10% sample of coding – Examined for consistency.
5	Analyze the external relations in the texts (interdiscursivity)	Examine the impact on the procedures and narratives created by the Church and State on unmarried mothers.
6	Interpret the data	Present the data, data analysis and discussion

To begin, I examined the excerpts included in the CCR and determined 1) who was the owner of the excerpt (mother/child/affiliate) and 2) whom the quote identified as the actor/speaker (Church/State/Family). Once identified, I focused specifically on the excerpts attributed to the mothers only (mothers n =304, excerpts included n=594). I then coded the mothers' narratives using a priori codes drawn from prior research (Kuckartz, 2014) to better understand how language was used to describe and position unmarried mothers. I provide Table 3.2 below as a sample to illustrate the deductive codes I identified with focused attention on language expression. I used in-vivo (verbatim) coding, which focuses on the actual language of the subject, and stays within the subject's perspective. One of the genre's primary goals is to capture the meanings inherent in the experience by using the participants' verbatim terms and concepts (Stringer, 2014, p. 140).

Table 3.2
Sample Coding Matrix: Lived Experiences (Deductive Codes)

Excerpt	Actors	Language Used (examples)	Type of Coding	Code
Mother 1	Police	"They called me a criminal"	In vivo	State
	Judge	"I was brought to Court" "They brought me right back"		
Mother 2	Priest	"He told me that I was a bad influence"	In vivo	Church
	Nun	"She said I was going to hell."		
Mother 3	Father	"He called me a whore"	In vivo	Family
	Sister	"They took me by car at night to the home to have me hid away"		

Second Phase Coding: Counts and Quantification

After my initial round of coding, I found that the excerpts and integration of the mothers' voices was limited and underrepresented in the data. To investigate this hypothesis further, I used Dedoose to quantify the excerpts from the mothers, and then did a word count to determine how much of the mother's voice was used verbatim. By processing word counts and quantifications, I learned that the "voice" of the mothers was predominantly replaced by the voice of the authors. This led to a new round of coding and reclassifications to ensure that I was focusing specifically only on the voice of the mothers.

Ensuring Data Validity

To address data validity issues, I created and maintained a code book documenting all codes and their definitions. An independent second reviewer coded sample texts (approximately 10% of the data). However, critical discourse analysis is not a neutral approach to qualitative research (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). It incorporates the interpreter's approach and bias. To minimize the insertion of my bias, I first wrote a statement of positionality (included below) to identify my bias. In addition, to keep my bias from influencing the research, I participated in multiple rounds of review by external reviewers to identify what was evidenced in the data, versus what was my interpretation. Monthly (and sometimes more frequent) reviews and feedback from my advisor and writing teammates ensured that I kept my biases to a minimum and focused strictly on the data.

Identification of Major Themes

Identifying themes allowed me to identify and group patterns within the data. By re-reading and summarizing multiple codes, I found commonalities and shared themes among the mother's experiences. As identified in Table 3.3, I grouped themes such as spiritual degradation, social values, and responsive actions. As I proceeded through the coding and analysis, additional themes continued to emerge organically (Saldana, 2015). These themes illustrated the connection to "deviancy" as shown toward the unmarried mothers by the Church, State, and community of Irish citizens. Table 3.3 below is a sample of the thematic coding that I conducted on the data.

Table 3.3
Sample Thematic Coding

Linguistics	Theme	Fairclough Dimension	Assignment
Sin, Sinner, Sinful	Moral degradation	Dimension 1: Labeling (Attitude)	Church
Shame, stigma, not right	Social Values / Expectations	Dimension 2: Interpretation	Mothers (Internalization), Families, Church
Punishment, adoption, secrecy	Response	Dimension 3: Explanation Impact on Social Action/Policy	Family, Church, Government

Interdiscursivity

Interdiscursivity asks the research to "examine the social relations that control the text's production; also, examine the reciprocal relations (how the texts affect social practices and structures) (Mullet, 2018). To accomplish this, I used Fairclough's 3-

dimensional model to show how language labeled and influenced the interpretation of unmarried mothers, and where this resulted in harsh treatment by social and religious institutions. Fairclough's model aligned well with Schneider and Ingram's (1993) model of social construction of target populations as both models complimented the ability to identify how power differentials, dominant ideologies, and pervasive narratives impacted social policies and practices, such as long-term incarceration, illegal adoption practices, immigration and repatriation, and other practices that became emergent through the research.

Data Interpretation

I examined the historical representation of the mothers in their accounts of their interactions with their families, Church and State. Understanding that time has changed and opinions have evolved, I then examined how the mothers were represented in contemporary times through the narrative of the Irish Government's Commission. That data demonstrated that power differentials and control remain constant, but the narrative has become more implicit (rather than explicit) over time.

Using Dedoose to create charts and themes, I summarized my analysis into nine separate findings, with three findings associated with each of my three research questions.

The resulting findings and discussion demonstrate the power of a persuasive narrative and how society is susceptible to acclimating and acting on dominant discourses. This is especially relevant today when Church and State are once again collaborating and creating policies that determine a woman's role in society, and her right to family planning.

Limitations of Study

This research was limited by access to archival sources. The Church is unwilling to share their records, and the Irish Government placed a 30-year moratorium on archives of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes. By necessity and by design, my research is archival, focused on existing data rather than collecting or creating new data. I have no ability to member-check, nor to triangulate data with church or state records. I see this dissertation as the beginning of a long-term study - one which I can revisit when more data becomes accessible.

As noted earlier, many of the survivors of mother and baby homes have since passed, taking their stories and experiences with them. As shame and secrecy was the norm for survivors, I am limited to the few stories of those who did survive the experience in the mother and baby homes and were brave enough to share their stories despite societal, church, and state pressures to remain silent. The women who did feel empowered to share their stories may have had meaningful different experiences from others who chose not to share. The experiences of the women who did take their stories public could indeed have been exceptions, rather than the norm, of the treatment within the mother and baby homes.

Prior research has explored the interrelated institutions of the Magdalen Laundries and the Industrial School System (Smith, 2008). The Magdalene laundries were institutions in which the Church found reason to incarcerate women and girls (some as young as 6) forcing them into unpaid labor for an unspecified time (Smith, 2008). In turn, the Magdalen Laundries were industrial power houses that provided laundry services for hotels, hospitals, and private individuals before the household washing

machine was invented. The Catholic Church forced thousands of women into these laundries as a punishment for perceived sins – “sins” primarily based on their gender and sexuality. Once sent to the laundries, many women remained incarcerated there for ten years or more; the last Magdalen laundry closed in 1996.

Industrial Schools housed the children of unmarried mothers or parents deemed unfit to raise their children (male and female) under the guise of supporting these children. As a result, or by design, industrial schools connected the Magdalene Laundries and the mother and baby homes. The children housed in the industrial schools were subject to terrible physical, sexual, and emotional abuse by the Catholic Priests and Nuns, for which reparations are still being made to the survivors (Arnold, 2009).

While I will reference the Magdalen Laundries and Industrial Schools within the context of this study, my primary focus will be on the mother and baby homes. I cannot do justice to the stories of the survivors of both the Magdalen Laundries and the Industrial schools as a byline in this research.

Researcher Positionality

As critical discourse analysis is influenced by the bias of the researcher (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), I must contextualize my background and biases. I was born and raised in Dublin, Ireland, and lived there until I was fourteen years old. My childhood home was built on the land formerly owned by the Artane Industrial School, the most notorious of the Irish Industrial Schools where children of unmarried mothers were often sent to live, and sometimes learn. I grew up hearing ghost stories of the children who had lived in the school until its closure in 1969. I attended school at the Convent of Mercy, a state-funded Catholic school for girls, where I developed a healthy balance of respect for

and fear of the nuns who ran the school. The nuns enforced a strict dress code— even the slightest infraction was cause for expulsion—and regularly involved our parents in discussions about our comportment and obedience.

In addition to the traditional academic subjects, the nuns taught us home economics with an emphasis on cooking and clothes-making to prepare us to become good wives and mothers. Girls who failed at these lessons were singled out and deemed to be “in danger” of never getting married and ran the risk of becoming fallen women. These lessons have haunted me as I have come to realize the extreme importance that the Irish Government and Catholic Church placed on traditional domesticity and feminine subordination. Even in the 1970s and 80’s while I was in school in Ireland, the nuns still played an active role in conveying the expectations of women for the Church and State.

I am neither anti-church, nor anti-nun; in addition, I am a proud Irish citizen. Instead, I assert that the Catholic Church provided a service in Ireland at a time that the government did not have the funds or resources to support itself. Yet, with this proposed study, I argue that the Catholic Church, Irish Free State, and citizenry of Ireland acted reprehensibly in how they labeled and treated the vulnerable women and children who most needed support. This proposed study is my effort to illuminate and acknowledge the women who were silenced in the far- and not-so-far past, and culturally elided from Ireland’s history.

Chapter 4: Insights and Findings

*... the Commission may appoint persons it deems to be appropriately qualified to be members of the Confidential Committee. (4) The Confidential Committee shall- (a) operate under the direction of and be accountable to the Commission, (b) provide in its procedures for individuals who wish to have their identity remain confidential during the conduct of the Commission and its subsequent reporting, and [57] 5 (c) produce a report of a general nature on the experiences of the single women and children which the Commission may, **to the extent it considers appropriate** (emphasis added), rely upon to inform the investigations set out in Article 1.*

Charge of the Commission of Investigation

After the discovery of the children in the septic system at the Tuam Mother and Baby's home, the Irish Government commissioned a team to "investigate mother and baby homes and all related matters." This report, known as "The Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into the Mother and Baby Homes" was published in 2021, six years after it was commissioned. The report now serves as the official governmental record on the existence and operation of Ireland's mothers and baby homes. It is this report, specifically the chapters known as the Confidential Committee Report and the Executive Summary, that form the basis of my research.

My first research question explored how the Commission of Investigation incorporated the voice of the mothers² into the official Government report and illuminated their experiences, which had previously been excluded from the national historical consciousness. To do so, I examined the final report of the commission and learned that the Confidential Committee Report played a key role in this capacity. Three

² The report refers to the mothers as "witnesses," in my analyses, I instead use the term "mothers" to ensure that my work upholds their importance and humanity.

findings emerged: first, the Confidential Committee Report is the only section that focuses on the mothers' accounts; second, the Commission limited the voice of the women via the structure and charge of the Confidential Committee; and third, the Commission underrepresented the women's voice in the final report.

Finding 1: The Confidential Committee Report Is The Only Section of The Full Report That Prioritizes The Survivors' Accounts.

Of the 2800+ pages of the Commission's Report, only one 190-page chapter, known as the Confidential Committee Report, focuses specifically on the personal experience of the women, children, and staff who spent time in a mother and baby home. More than half of the remaining 2700 pages focus largely on the architecture, geographical location, operational registers and receipts, and some social history of the buildings selected for inclusion in the report. While this information helps explain the material history of the homes, it does not address the homes' contextual history. Ultimately, the vast majority of the text in the report fails to contribute nuance or understanding as to *why* the mothers were treated so poorly within the confines of the buildings. Instead, the mothers' experiences appear to be purposely buried beneath layers and layers of architectural and administrative details.

Finding 2: The Commission of Investigation Limited The Mothers' Voice (Representation) Via The Structure and Charge of The Confidential Committee.

The Confidential Committee was a sub-committee of the full commission and was charged with conducting interviews of the mothers, children, and affiliated lay people who had experience with the mother and baby homes. The Commission appointed two lay people (non-Commission board members) to serve as the Confidential Committee.

They were assisted by four research assistants and a "Witness Support Officer." (See appendix B for the membership and bios of the Confidential Committee). Their charge, as established by the Commission was as follows:

The Commission shall establish a Confidential Committee to provide a forum for persons who were formerly resident in the homes listed in Appendix 1, or who worked in these institutions, during the relevant period to provide accounts of their experience in these institutions in writing or orally as informally as is possible in the circumstances. Subject to the requirements of Section 8 of the Act, the Commission may appoint persons it deems to be appropriately qualified to be members of the Confidential Committee. (4) The Confidential Committee shall-

(a) operate under the direction of and be accountable to the Commission, (b) provide in its procedures for individuals who wish to have their identity remain confidential during the conduct of the Commission and its subsequent reporting, and [57] 5 (c) produce a report of a general nature on the experiences of the single women and children which the Commission may, *to the extent it considers appropriate* (emphasis added), rely upon to inform the investigations set out in Article 1 (Terms of Reference, p. 5)

The selection and appointment of a "Confidential Committee" that did not sit on the full Commission is disconcerting as it adds yet another layer of interpretation and (mis)representation of the mothers' stories to the final authors of the report. No survivors of the mother and baby homes sat on the Confidential Committee, nor served as part of the Commission. The reader is left to wonder why the women whose lives and history

were being examined and documented by the Irish Government were purposely excluded from the writing of the report.

Per the official charge, the Confidential Committee interviewed the “witnesses” and used this data to “produced a report of a general nature on the experiences of the single women and children which the Commission may, *to the extent it considers appropriate* (emphasis added), rely upon to inform the investigations set out in Article 1.” There is no record of what the Commission found “inappropriate” for inclusion in the Final Commission Report. There is no reference to the original drafts, the editing process, nor the records of the interviews. One is left to wonder what the mothers may have reported that was excluded from the report, and why. I discuss the data and record keeping of the Commission in Chapter 5, as its dubious nature and preservation is not noted in the official record and could not be examined as evidence.

Finding 3: The Commission Underrepresented The Voice of The Mothers.

Of the 549 participants that the members of the Confidential Committee interviewed, barely half (n=304) were mothers, 228 were children born in the homes, and 17 were former affiliates (staff or community members). During the interviews, the Confidential Committee taped, “took notes” (but did not transcribe), and sorted the witness’ accounts of their time in the homes into eight categories: 1) circumstances of pregnancy and admission, 2) conditions in the homes; 3) the birth experience; 4) adoption and consent; 5) fostering and boarding out; 6) the adoption experience; 7) exit and aftermath and 8) tracing. Members of the Confidential Committee chose the categories to provide structure to the array of accounts; however, these categories are notably missing any witness references to the mass graves and extreme infant mortality rates documented

in the mother and baby homes, the high maternal death rates within the institutions, and the discovery of the children's and mothers' bodies in unmarked graves.

Of the 549 interviews, the authors included 594 separate excerpts in the confidential report, but it remains unclear how many unique individuals are represented by these excerpts. Each excerpt was anonymized, eliminating the witness's name and the institution where they stayed. Of the 594 excerpts, 384 can be attributed to mothers (either directly or via their children), 161 to children born in mother and baby homes, 8 accounts to former employees, and 36 to the author's narration of others' experiences. Finally, five accounts cannot be classified as there is no direct evidence to indicate the source of the quotes. The authors indicated the use of verbatim quotes using quotation marks. Direct quotes from survivor mothers constituted 9,545 words in the report – the equivalent of 14 single-spaced pages in a 2,800+ page report (less than 1%). Over 50% of the quotes the authors selected contained less than 20 verbatim words from the mothers – a scant representation. Instead, the authors chose to summarize the mother's experiences, leaving the reader to trust that they did so accurately.

In Table 4.1, the reader will note that 16% of excerpts were between one and five words long, and 51% were less than 20 words, the approximate equivalent of a spoken sentence. The most significant percentage of quotes (22%) from the mothers contained 11-20 words. These data corroborate my assertion that the voice of the mothers was underrepresented in the report.

Table 4.1*Word Count of Mothers' Quotes Used in the Confidential Committee Report*

Total Words	Count of Excerpts	% of Total Quotes
1-5	63	16%
6-10	50	13%
10-20	86	22%
21-30	74	19%
31-40	38	10%
41-50	29	8%
51-75	27	7%
76-100	12	3%
101+	5	1%

Missing Stories

The Commission acknowledged that the Confidential Report participants do not represent a full sample of mothers who lived in the mother and baby homes. Only 12 mothers who participated in the interviews lived in the homes before 1960, which is expected as the Committee's interviews took place 60 years after their experience. However, given the limited representation of mothers in the interviews, the commission elected not to use additional resources to supplement the mother's stories – including the biographies and autobiographies, diaries and older media interviews provided by unmarried mothers, many now deceased. In response to the formation of the Commission, and in some cases even years before the public outcry, advocacy organizations, including the Clann Project, Justice for Magdalenes (Smith, 2020) and the international Law Firm of Hovans Lowell (O'Rourke et.al, 2018) submitted hundreds of survivor statements and evidential documentation including transcribed interviews, and oral histories, for the government's review (Smith, 2020). Yet none of this material was included or hinted at in the final commission report. The resources in Table 4.2 and the

advocacy documents support the claims that unmarried mothers were mistreated in the mother and baby homes and largely ignored by the state in their quest for help. From my reading, the addition of the abundance of external resources would have further laid responsibility on the Church and State, suggesting that their omission was by design.

I include Table 4.2 below to offer a sample of several publicly available resources (non-conclusive) that resulted from a quick Google search that the committee could have included if they wanted to better represent the mothers' voices. This notable absence leaves the reader to wonder why these women's stories are excluded from the Commission's review and omitted from the official record.

Table 4.2

Data Sources For Stories of the Lived Experiences of Unmarried Mothers

Data Source	Title	Author/Owner	Year Published
Biography	My Name is Bridget: The Untold Story of Bridget Dolan and the Tuam Mother and Baby Home	Alison O'Reilly	2018
Biography	The Light in the Window	June Golding	2012
Biography	For the Love of My Mother	J.P Rodgers	2013
Oral Histories	Clann Project	Maeve O'Rourke, Claire McGettrick	2015
Oral Histories	Tuam Oral Histories	University of Galway	2020
Non-Fiction	Banished Babies: The secret story of Ireland's Baby Export Business	Mike Millotte	2012
Biography	The Lost Child of Philomena Lee	Martin Sixsmith	2010
Non-Fiction	Republic of Shame: Stories from Ireland's Institutions for Fallen Women	Caelainn Hogan	2019
Documentary	Children of Shame	Saskia Webner	2015
Documentary	How the Catholic Church Hid Away Hundreds of Irish Children	Times Documentaries	2017
Podcast	Throw Away The Bruised	University of Galway	2020
Podcast	They Will Even Come After Your Soul	University of Galway	2020
Podcast	I Love Every Bone of You	University of Galway	2020
Report	Knowing and Unknowing Tuam: State Practice, the Archive and Transitional Justice	Smith, James	2020

With access to the data physically/textually present in the report, my second research question sought to examine how the Commission’s selection of quotes from unmarried mothers framed the impact of the Church, State, and Families on the historical social construction of unmarried mothers. Specifically, I wished to examine if the social construction of unmarried mothers categorized them as “deviants” as outlined in Schneider and Ingram's Model of the Social Construction of Deservingness (1993). Per Schneider and Ingram, “deviants” are at fault for the circumstances and, therefore, undeserving of support. Deviants have no political power, are considered dangerous to society, and therefore warrant punishment. Three additional findings emerged from this critical discourse analysis that showed that unmarried mothers were indeed treated as deviants – by their families, the Church and State. First, the selection of quotes chosen by the Commission for inclusion in the report suggests that the families had the greatest negative impact on the mothers, followed closely by the Church. Secondly, there is an alarming absence of quotes about the state’s involvement, leading the reader to assume that the State was blameless for the mother’s experience. And, finally, the language used to socially construct unmarried mothers was “othering,” often internalized by the mothers, and detrimental to their lived experience. The language used by the mothers to represent their interactions with their families, the Church and State all fell within Fairclough’s three dimensions of labeling, meaning, and impact on social action. I elaborate more on each of these findings below.

Finding 4: The Committee’s Selection of Mother’s Quotes Suggests Families Had The Most Negative Impact on The Mothers, Followed Closely by The Church.

The Committee’s selection of quotes also contributed to the framing and attribution of blame. Here I include Table 4:3 to summarize the key terms the mothers used when describing their lived experience and selected by the Committee for inclusion in the Confidential Report. The table summarizes in vivo (verbatim) terms and presents a total count of times the word appears in the quotes attributed to the mothers (frequency). The next column assigns the word to the actor responsible for using the term: a member of the Church (nun or priest), a representative of the state (police officer, social worker, judge), or a family member (mother, father, sibling, grandparent). The next columns document the frequency of use by each population and the percentage of the overall use of the word. Finally, the last two columns are dedicated to the mothers who used the words in reference to themselves – an indication of their internalization of the term. The table is sorted from the highest to lowest overall frequency of use of the term.

The Family: Shame and Fear

Beginning with their initial experience of notifying their families, none of the mothers' narratives reported in the chapter described excitement or joy in the response of their families when they shared the news of their pregnancy. With two exceptions, the mothers were subjected to extreme disapproval, including verbal and physical abuse from their families and friends.

Eight mothers whose accounts refer to physical violence, suffered physically as well as emotionally at the hands of those closest to them. The beatings were delivered by their own mothers, fathers, siblings, or grandparents. The mothers stated they received “a severe beating” (p.30), “a hiding of a lifetime” (p.19), and for one, her father “taking out the leather” (p.20). One mother reported that her father tried “to kill the baby”(p.22),

while another reported that the father of her baby pushed her down the stairs “in the hopes that I would miscarry” (p.28). These examples illustrate that shame and fear permeated the mother and her family's experience once the pregnancy became known.

The accounts of the mothers support that their family members often dehumanized their unborn children by calling the baby “it” -as it “get rid of *it*”(p.28), “I’ll get *it* out of you one way or another” (p.30), or “no one was ever to know about *it*”(p.29). The mother’s recounts of the language used towards them and their children show that these children were not viewed as blessings or gifts from God as were children of married mothers. Instead, the language reported by the mothers demonstrates that their children were seen as a physical embodiment of shame, stigma, and disdain.

Shame. The term “shame” is prominently featured in the mothers' narratives, with 27 usages throughout the chapter. Shame is a value-laden term, defined in the Oxford Dictionary as “a painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior.” The mothers used the term shame 52 percent of the time in the context of their immediate family members' feelings, often reporting that their family members worried that the pregnancy would fare negatively on the entire family. For example, one mother was told that “her failing”(p.32) would reflect poorly on her father’s career prospects. At the same time, another was deemed responsible for her father not receiving a promotion at work. At a time when poverty was high and opportunities were few, it appears that families blamed unmarried mothers for economic problems that existed on a national scale.

Table 4.3
Language Used in the Mother's Narratives in the Confidential Committee Report

Term	Frequency	N		%		N State	% State	N Family	% Family	N		%	
		Church	Church	Church	Church					Intrnlizd	Intrnlizd	Intrnlizd	Intrnlizd
Shame, ashamed	27	1	1	4%	0	0%	14	52%	12	44%			
Secret. secrecy	23	0	0	0%	0	0%	13	5%	10	43%			
Hit, punched, slapped	20	12	12	60%	0	0%	8	40%	0	0%			
Sin, sinner, sinful	19	13	13	68%	0	0%	1	5%	5	26%			
Stigma	16	1	1	6%	0	0%	6	38%	9	56%			
Hidden, hide	15	0	0	0%	0	0%	13	87%	2	13%			
"It" / dehumanizing terms for the baby.	12	6	6	50%	0	0%	5	42%	1	8%			
Fallen – woman, from grace	9	5	5	66%	0	0%	4	44%	0	0%			
Derogatory terms: whore, prostitute, dirty, etc.	7	4	4	57%	0	0%	3	43%	0	0%			
Penance, repent, atone, absolution	6	4	4	66%	0	0%	2	33%	0	0%			
Fault, Blame (for the pregnancy)	6	0	0	0%	0	0	4	66%	2	33%			
Right - correct/ socially acceptable	6	1	1	16%	0	0%	1	16%	4	67%			
Totals	166	47	47	28%	0	0%	74	45%	45	27%			

Nearly half (44%) of the mothers whose voices were included use the term shame to refer to their own feelings suggesting they internalized the shame others placed on their shoulders. Many mothers discussed never telling their future husbands and children about their experiences, leaving their family histories incomplete for decades. An example of this:

“The Committee noted that during the interview given by another witness, the word ‘shame’ was used nearly 20 times. She was 22 years old when she gave birth to her child. At the time she became pregnant she said that her overwhelming feelings were of shame – and consciousness of her parents’ fears that the neighbours might find out – these feelings have permanently endured. They have prevented her from telling her subsequent marital children, grandchildren, or even friends about her having had a baby in a mother and baby home and choosing adoption.” (p. 99).

This quote exemplifies how unmarried mothers lived in fear of bringing shame on their family, and subsequently internalized these feelings as being shameful people. Many of the mothers reported carrying these feelings for decades after the birth of the children. “Shame” was represented as being contagious – the mother, her child, and her family would all have negative consequences if the pregnancy became public.

Stigma. Another common term with negative connotation found frequently throughout the report is “stigma.” Many of the mothers referenced the “stigma” attached to being pregnant while unmarried. Webster's Dictionary defines stigma as “a mark of

disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person,” further supporting the concept that being unmarried while pregnant was socially unacceptable.

Secrecy and hiding. To avoid the shame and resulting societal pressure, unmarried mothers hid their pregnancy and kept it a secret. The terms “silence,” “secrecy,” and “hiding” are used a combined 38 times throughout the Confidential report, demonstrating that not saying anything spoke volumes. The mothers were “hidden away” (p.25) from public view— taken out of their communities and locked behind tall walls. Families resorted to various tactics to hide the pregnancy, including keeping the pregnant woman hidden in their own homes, sneaking girls to the mother and baby homes in the middle of the night, and, importantly, never speaking about the baby or the pregnancy. The mothers reported that their pregnancies were hidden, and their stories were rewritten to justify their absence to friends and neighbors. Mothers were “working abroad,” “visiting relatives” or “exploring opportunities elsewhere.” Disturbingly, one unmarried mother’s mother had her grandchild’s birth induced early to finish and conceal the pregnancy before her family visited for the holidays. Children who remained with their families were raised as siblings or by married siblings of the biological mother. Mothers reported that when they returned to the family home after the birth, they were expected to never speak of the baby again. One mother reported that “she burst into tears at the family dinner table because of her sadness, ‘but everyone carried on as though nothing was happening (p.102)’”.

These data suggest that Irish families learned to act and pretend that these children did not exist, excluding the births from family records and memories. Irish families isolated their daughters, hid them and lied about them, and placed them in

institutions that ensured their separation from their babies. There is no denying that the families of unmarried mothers are accountable for the poor, blame, and shame were dominant emotions during this time. However, my further findings suggest that it was not the families who played the largest role in the mistreatment of unmarried mothers. Their response was largely dictated by the social and cultural norms established by the Catholic Church and Irish State.

The Church: Sin and Punishment

The excerpts from the mothers' interviews included in the report attribute mostly negative language used by members of the Church. The predominant themes here are morality, wrongdoing, and the need to repent.

As was typical in Ireland at the time, the Confidential Committee Report details many families who sought the guidance of the local Parish priest once the pregnancy was disclosed. The parish priests “ranted and raved” (p.38), “roared and shouted” (p.31), and passed judgment on the women, calling them “sinners” (p.17,30,38,42), who “were no longer welcomed in the church” (p.38). One priest recommended that the mother marry her perpetrator (p. 20), while another told the rape victim that it was “her own fault.”(p.22) As illustrated in the report, Parish priests had the authority to influence family decisions and to determine what was “right” for the pregnant woman. Doing what was “right” meant that the pregnant woman was taken away from her family and placed into a mother-and-baby home.

In fact, the mothers used the term “right” six times in the narratives to indicate the socially and morally appropriate behavior and actions, and their deviancy from those norms. Unmarried mothers were told by the Church that the “right” thing to do was to

give up the child for adoption, by their children's fathers that they would not "do the right thing," and by their parents that what they had done was "not right." This data demonstrates that there was a pervasive social and moral norm that dictated what was "right" and therefore determined that unmarried mothers were "wrong" – deviants to the standard expectation.

Sin and repentance. The term sin, sinner, or sinful action appeared 18 times in the report. A "sin" is considered a transgression against the law of God, so it is unsurprising that this term was used primarily by members of the Church (77%). However, the term sin also penetrated the common vernacular, with families using the term sinner or the mother referring to herself as one.

The Church used a special term for unmarried mothers that separated them from other women: "fallen women," i.e., fallen from the Grace of God. The authors of the report included nine usages of the term "fallen woman" – with 5 (66%) attributed to members of the Church and the other 4 (44%) to family members to describe the mother. "Fallen" also appears to refer to fallen from the graces of the community, family, and Church. In Fairclough's dimensions (see below), the term fallen could be interpreted as someone who has strayed, or deviated from the traditional pathway – fallen by the wayside. The social response, therefore, was to 'correct' this event and get the mothers realigned with the social expectations.

Punishment, payment, and retribution. Affiliated with the notion of sin is the corresponding need to "repent" by accepting the "punishment" or "paying the price." Mothers referenced "punishment" 13 times in the report; however, 5 of these uses were attributed to being pregnant while unmarried. The remaining 8 uses described punishment

for disobeying rules or trying to escape the mother and baby homes. The nuns "punished" the pregnant mothers by forcing them to conduct hard physical labor such as washing the floors and stairs in the homes by hand, farming the grounds, cutting the grass with scissors, and cooking in the hot kitchens. Mothers reported going into labor during these activities or being forced to participate in these actions within days of giving birth. Again in both Fairclough's and Schneider and Ingram's models, these social actions of punishment (dimension 3) are a direct response to the narrative that the mothers deserved to be punished for their transgressions.

Finding 5: The Report Portrays The State as Blameless for The Mothers' Experience.

While the Church ran the day-to-day operations of the mother and baby homes, the local government owned the fiscal responsibility, with the exceptions of "private" patients who could afford their own fees. As overseers of the financing of the homes, the state had documented rules and regulations to govern the expectations of the homes (minimal food requirements, health and safety expectations, education for the children, etc.) The Confidential Committee report includes dozens of excerpts indicating the appalling conditions in the homes, with mothers suffering from lack of food, heat, proper sanitation, and physical abuse within the homes, but fails to include any reference to the mothers faulting the government. Instead, the report represented the mothers as blaming the Church (specifically the nuns) for the lack of resources. The government's role and oversight responsibility are conspicuously absent from the narratives chosen to be included in the Confidential Report. The reader is left to wonder whether this omission is by design or if the governmental role never arose in the mothers' testimonies.

A lack of action on the state's side is further enforced by the mothers who reported their rape to the police. Of the accounts that the Commission included in their report, 3 mothers reported their rape to the police, only to declare that "nothing came of it." (pps. 22, 24, 32). Mothers were told to "stay away" (p. 32) from their rapist, but not that police would have the rapist put away. The reader is left to wonder why the police placed the onus on the mother, and did not take on the responsibility of investigating or arresting the perpetrator.

The only place where the state actionably shows up in the Confidential Committee Report is when the gardai (police) enforce the women's return to the home. Two mothers reported running away from the mother and baby home, only to be caught and returned by the gardai. This action demonstrates that while the state had no legal requirement for the women to be kept in mother and baby homes, the gardai were complicit in the continued incarceration of the mothers.

Following this initial phase of descriptive analysis, I then applied Fairclough's three dimensions of critical discourse analysis to the text. This approach to CDA allows the researcher to determine how language sets the tone and narrative, which results in social action based on the construction of a population.

Table 4.4 summarizes the three dimensions of Fairclough's critical discourse analysis. The same language is sorted into three categories: Dimension 1: Attitude of the user/ labeling of the mothers; Dimension 2: The interpretation of the choice of language; and Dimension 3: the impact of the language on social practice and/or policy. These dimensions are represented in Column 1. Column 2 lists the in vivo terms of the mothers' narratives. Column 3 represents which group most frequently used the terms – the

deliverer of the narrative. Column 4 represents the outcome of the language – how it labeled, implicated, and resulted in unjust practices.

Finding 6: The Mothers Internalized The Negative “Othering” Language Used in Their Social Construction, Proving Detrimental to Their Lived Experience.

Fairclough’s style of critical discourse analysis shows how language cycles through stages that label, give meaning and create social action or policy. Table 4.4 presents the various cycles in which each term is situated. The language used in the mothers’ narratives was negative and accusatory, demonstrating that unmarried mothers were disliked and deemed different from married mothers. By first labeling the mothers as “sinners,” “fallen women,” “not right” and other derogatory terms, society identified these mothers as dangerous.

Interpretation of these words informed the predominant ideology that the mothers brought shame and embarrassment to their families. The curation of words suggests that their actions threatened the welfare of the family and its reputation, limiting access to resources such as career promotions and social standing. Moreover, the language chosen often implies that the pregnancy was the sole fault of the mother. It was she alone who was responsible for this birth, and therefore, she alone deserved the punishment.

Table 4.4

CDA Dimensions of Language Used in the Mother's Narratives in the Confidential Committee Report

CDA Dimensions	Term	Result
Labeling:		
	Sin, sinner, sinful	Committed an act against God
	Fallen – woman, from grace	Danger to the community
Dimension 1:	Derogatory terms: whore, prostitute, dirty, etc.	Outsiders, immoral
Attitude / Labeling	Right, Not Right - correct/ socially acceptable	Undeserving, own fault
	"It" and other dehumanizing terms for the baby.	Baby is not welcome
Interpretation		
Dimension 2:	Shame, ashamed	Embarrassment to the family
Interpretation	Stigma	Restricted access to resources (jobs, promotions, education)
	Fault, Blame (for the pregnancy)	Mother in the wrong
Social Practice / Policy		
Dimension 3:	Hit, punched, slapped	Enabled physical violence against pregnant women
Explanation	Secret, secrecy	Forced silence, Children excluded from their families
(Impact on Social	Hidden, hide	Encarceration in M&B homes
Practice and/or	Penance, repent, atone, absolution	Removal of Children, Forced Adoption

Important to note in this finding is that the mothers' internalized these words and meanings. The Confidential Committee Report contains forty-four excerpts where the mothers reference their own thoughts about their pregnancy. For example:

'...When it is said that no-one would want you, a seed of doubt is sown and it stays with you' (p. 161).

It was still in the 1960s when, like many others who came to the Committee, a pregnant 19-year old admitted to a home, 'was 'made to feel like a sinner and a fallen woman' adding, 'after enough exposure to such criticism, you began to believe it' (p.54).

A witness who went to a mother and baby home on her own initiative as an 18 year old, 'to save her parents' shame: I knew it was a home for girls in my situation and my own suggestion was that I would go away to hide the shame. The problem had gone away from my parents' (p.35).

The internalized shame, and the societal pressures placed on these women ensured that they complied with the actions and policy of the Church and State, maintained their silence about their treatment, and kept their trauma hidden for decades.

The negative social construction narrative led to mothers being incarcerated and hidden away in mother and baby homes to ensure silence and protect the family. Their unmarried status and the resulting social construction allowed for physical and verbal violence against them, the removal of their children and forced adoptions, and the exclusion of their children from their family trees and family story. Several mothers discussed how their incarceration in the mother and baby homes had long-lasting effects and led to issues with alcoholism, depression, further institutionalization, problems with

intimacy, and breakdowns of their relationships with their families and other children. Their lives were set on a trajectory that was informed by their traumatic experiences in the mother and baby homes, and their internalization of the negative social construction perpetuated and encouraged by the Church and State. An example of this can be seen in the following quote:

Another mother who gave birth in the early 1970s had no option but to allow her child to be adopted. Almost immediately after leaving the home, she told the Committee, she became addicted to alcohol. She began the search for her child in the year 2000, but discovered he had taken his own life in 1994.

As for herself, having married an 'abusive and violent' man, she divorced him - and while she subsequently had a long-term relationship, is now single and living with 'her dogs and cats.' She came to the Committee to tell her story, she said, because: 'Not everything has a happy ending' (p. 152).

My third research question examined how the Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes, and specifically the Executive Summary, framed the mothers in contemporary times. Again, by examining the language used in the report, I concluded the following three findings: 1) The Commissioner sanitized and underrepresented the scope of the crimes and injustices against the mothers; 2) The Commissioners negated and contradicted the mothers' narratives; and 3) the Commissioners placed the blame on the families and fathers of the children, thereby

negating the extent of the influence of the Church and State. Together, these findings demonstrate that Commissions Report continues to represent unmarried mothers as “deviant.”

Finding 7: The Authors of The Commission Report Chose Language that Sanitized and Underrepresented The Gravity of The Crimes and Injustice against Mothers.

The Commission's Executive Summary outlines its key findings in a 76-page document. This, and specifically the Confidential Committee Report, illuminated the poor treatment of the mothers by their families, church and (debatably) the state. However, the Commission continued the deviant classification of the mothers by using language that lessens the impact of the families, church and state on the women.

Witness.

The report's authors labeled the interview participants as “witnesses” - regardless of whether they were a mother, a child, or a former staff member, i.e., whether they potentially experienced, perpetuated, or observed abuse. In fact, the term is used 865 times throughout the report, indicating its importance to the foundation of the report. Yet the dictionary definition of the term “witness” is “a person who sees an event, typically a crime or an accident take place” (Websters, 2024). These women were not witnesses; they were victims and active recipients of the abuse imparted directly upon them. Using Fairclough’s dimensions, the term “witness” speaks to the attitude of the actor and their interpretation of the term – i.e., the Commissioners interpreted the mothers as passive bystanders in an unfair situation, but not as active recipients in an unjust system created and fueled by the Church and State.

Rape and Sexual Violence.

All the mothers shared the experience of living in a mother and baby home due to their pregnancy while they were unmarried. The authors indicate that of the mothers' stories included in this report, 42 women were pregnant because of rape, with 15 of those women being under the age of 17. However, the authors of the report used language in such a way that they downplayed the extent of the sexual violence experienced by unmarried mothers in Ireland. The authors reference multiple cases of a "witness" becoming pregnant at age "11-17," yet nowhere in the report does it refer to these instances as statutory rape. The age of consent in Ireland was 17. Using that information, my analysis of the report identifies, at minimum, at least 75 additional mothers were victims of statutory rape, all under the age of 17 when they were incarcerated into the mother and baby homes. These expectant mothers were children themselves. With this definition, over 38% of the mothers (nearly 2 in 5) interviewed for the confidential report were raped. The non-acknowledgment of this data point suggests that the members of the Commission underrepresented and silenced the sexual violence associated with these pregnancies.

Adoption.

The Commission Report relies heavily on the notion that the children were "adopted" to married families and given a better opportunity in life. The word "adoption" is used 163 times in the Confidential Committee Report. However, Ireland had no formal adoption laws until 1953 (McGuire, 2002).³ One child, born in a mother and baby home

³ The state attempted to legalize adoption prior to 1953, but the Church pushed back on the grounds that the legalization process must contain language pertaining to the religion of the adoptive parents.

and “adopted” by an American family, found documents that showed his parents paid “a sum of money” for him and “continued to make annual donations” (p. 173). Another child born in a mother-and-baby home and adopted by an American couple stated ‘My parents told me they had sent the nuns a lot of money. There is no piece of paper saying that my mother relinquished her rights. I definitely believe that I was sold’” (p, 127).

Once adoption was legalized, mothers reported being coerced or tricked into signing adoption paperwork (p.102.) (Several examples of this are included in Finding 8). Coercion, force, forgery, and payment do not represent children being adopted. In reality, it represents children being stolen, kidnapped, trafficked and sold.

Finding 8: The Executive Summary Negated and Contradicted The Mothers’ Narratives.

In addition, I argue that the Executive Summary makes several statements that directly contradict the narrative in the Confidential Committee Report. In this section, I proceed to illustrate this duality.

Example 1: *“There is no evidence that women were forced to enter mother and baby homes by the church or state authorities.” (Ex. Summary, page,3).*

As the reader has learned, only the women’s narratives can attest to whether they were forced to enter mother and baby homes by the church and state authorities, as Church and State written records will not indicate if a woman was “forced.” While parents or siblings brought their pregnant daughters or sisters to mother and baby homes, the narratives of the mothers suggest that it was often the church that mandated or

orchestrated this transaction against their will. Consider the following excerpts from the Confidential report:

- Her mother had noticed she was pregnant. However, her mother died when the witness was eight months pregnant. The day after she died, a priest arranged for an ambulance to take the witness to a mother and baby home.” (p.16)
- A witness (24 years old but, like so many others of that era, not having much knowledge of sex) went to see her GP to find out what was going on in her body. He phoned the parish priest from his surgery and she was taken straight to the mother and baby home as she would be a ‘dreadful example to her siblings.’ (p.20)
- In the mid 1970s, a 19-year old, who had been in a relationship for two years with the only son of a farmer, told the Committee that they wanted to get married but when it was discovered she was pregnant, ‘the local priest, she said, ‘wouldn’t allow it’, and she was placed in a mother and baby home. (p.27)

As these excerpts illustrate, while there were no laws requiring unmarried women’s confinement to the mother and baby home(s), the church was instrumental in ensuring that single pregnant girls were locked away behind closed doors.

The State also played a role in hiding unmarried mothers from sight. The mothers report several instances where the courts threatened women with incarceration, and the gardai (police) were instrumental in tracking down women who “escaped,” and quickly returned them to the homes.

- This judge ‘demanded’ to know who the father was, saying, the witness told the Committee: ‘You’d better answer me now or I’ll put you away where nobody will see you again.’ The witness said she was transferred from the court to another home and then to yet another. (p.13)
- Her mother had ‘kicked her out’ on discovering that she was pregnant, and she had been sleeping rough when the Gardaí picked her up and recognising her situation, told her she needed to go to a mother and baby home. She hated the home and remains ‘extremely angry ‘about her time there and her treatment by the nuns’ (p.28)
- The witness said that his mother then wrote to the Archbishop of her diocese to inform him of the assault, but the action that ensued was that she was brought back to the original care institution by Gardaí - and was then punished [by the nuns] for running away; this consisted of having her hair cut off. (p.43)
- ‘Any girls who tried to run away were brought back by the Gardaí.’ (p.53)

Given the plethora of narratives that attest to the coercion of the church and state, it is problematic that the authors of the Confidential Report claim that they found no evidence that women were forced into the mother and baby homes. Another example from the Executive Summary:

Example 2: The Commission has received evidence from some mothers who signed forms consenting to adoption because they had no alternative. Because of family circumstances and/or insufficient means to support a baby. Some of this cohort of women

are of the opinion that their consent was not full, free, and informed. However, with the exception of a small number of legal cases, there is no evidence that this was their view at the time of the adoption.”

Easily contradicting this claim, I found that the Confidential Report includes 33 separate accounts where unmarried mothers were tricked or forced into signing adoption papers, primarily by members of the Church. Consider the following examples:

- On arrival, she and the baby were separated and the pressure immediately began for her to sign adoption papers. The witness was locked into a room and told she would stay there until she signed the adoption papers for her baby (p. 94).
- She was brought, she said, to an ‘old shop’ in the town, and told to sign a document ‘partially covered’ by the person who offered it to her so she couldn’t see what she was signing. She now believes these were adoption papers (p. 93).

In addition, many mothers reported being illiterate at the time, so they could neither read nor understand what they were signing - “I couldn’t have signed it ..because at the time I didn’t know how to read or write.” (p. 91)

Critical reading of these data would suggest that while no law required the children be adopted, the Church ensured the practice. To illustrate this point, I share the excerpt below in which one mother told a nun of her plan to move to England and raise her child there with the help of her sister. The mother reported the nun’s response:

‘That doesn’t happen here. You’ll do what we tell you and that’s it.
You’re not keeping that baby. You’re going nowhere with that baby.
You’re going home and the baby is going somewhere else.’” (p.95)

To this end, mothers were threatened, punished, hit, verbally abused, and conned into believing they were signing different documents. Even outside of the mother and baby homes, the religious kept up the pressure to hide the pregnancy away, even in situations where the mother had a support system in place to help her raise her child.

Consider the following example:

“One witness, having resisted all pressures and brought her baby home recounted that while walking along a street with the child, both had been ordered into the car of a priest - he had drawn up alongside her, ordered her to get in, and when she did, drove straight to a home. On arrival, she and the baby were separated, and the pressure immediately began for her to sign adoption papers. The witness was locked into a room and told she would stay there until she signed the adoption papers for her baby.

She told the Committee she ‘kicked and kicked’ that door and ‘wouldn’t stop kicking and yelling,’ demanding release, to see her baby, and that her father should be called. She kept it up until eventually the priest arrived back and tried again, through the locked door, to get her to sign papers, even shoving the papers under it, enticing her with a promise she could leave as soon as she signed, then changing tack and calling her a ‘selfish whip! But she continued to yell, protest and clamour for release.

Eventually her father was summoned and he took her home with her baby. A short time later, she left her child with her mother and father while she went back to work in the UK. Not long afterwards, however, she got a panicked phone call from her parents: this priest had been calling to the house, threatening guardianship proceedings against her. She came home to collect her daughter” (p.95).

I argue that this mother’s story of bullying, abuse, and harassment by a member of the clergy, even though she had her parent’s support in raising her child, clearly demonstrates that the church was vehemently against single mothers raising their children and forced the mothers into signing adoption paperwork against their will.

The Executive Summary is filled with examples of the Commission diminishing or negating the mothers' experience. These key differences between the Executive Summary and the women’s experience are portrayed in a way that faults the mothers’ recollections, leaving the reader to question either the veracity of the report or the women. Casting doubt on the veracity of the women’s narratives is a tactic that diminishes the extreme actions of the Church and State.

Finding 9: The Executive Summary Minimized The Impact of The Church and State, Blaming The Families and Fathers of The Children Instead.

In what proved to be a controversial move, the authors of the Executive Summary acknowledged that the Church and State played a role in the negative experience but placed the main responsibility for the mothers' experiences on their families. They wrote:

“Responsibility for the harsh treatment rests mainly with the fathers of their children and their immediate families. It was supported by, contributed to, and condoned by, the institutions of the State and the Churches. However, it must be acknowledged that the institutions under investigation provided a refuge – a harsh refuge in some cases – when the families provided no refuge at all.” Executive Summary, p.1.

Evidence presented in the Confidential Report substantiates the claim that some of the responsibility for the harsh treatment rests with the fathers of the children and the mothers' immediate family. Approximately half of the mothers became pregnant via rape – another compelling case for blaming the fathers. However, I would argue that the data present in the report is more nuanced and tells a different story. There were 4 references to occasions when the Church overlapped with the role of the father of the child, as several women documented their sexual abuse and resulting pregnancy by a priest (p. 15, 43, 91, 130). Additionally, mothers reported that the Parish Priests ran their communities, and families were expected to bow to the rule of the Church (p. 2, 28, 42, 66, 76). Twenty-two excerpts in the Confidential Committee Report speak to parish priests who inserted themselves into family homes or doctor's offices, and mandated and facilitated the movement of the mother into a mother and baby home. The Church even established connections and processes abroad to disrupt women who escaped to England. Mothers reported that priests or Catholic charities met them as they disembarked from the ferries, and were promptly turned around and placed on the boat back to Ireland (p.27). So, while families played an active role in the

incarceration of the women in the Mother and Baby homes, it was under the requirement, guidance and social norms established by the Church that they did so.

Further, I suggest that the data presented in this report also illustrates how the state abdicated any responsibility for its own actions. For example, the State, knowing that the women were being verbally and physically assaulted within the mother and baby homes, or beaten and abused in their own homes, allowed the abuse to continue without intervening. My reading of the data suggests that the State was equally to blame for the harsh treatment of the women. The State had a legal responsibility for the care of its citizens, but did not carry out its responsibilities to unmarried mothers. This data would suggest that the responsibility lay equally between the families, Church, and State, and importantly, that the families undertook many of the actions they did at the behest of the Church and State.

Many of the mothers have questioned what role the Confidential Committee Report played in informing the Commission of the mothers' experience, and how much their experience was considered as part of the (re)writing of this time in history. Debates continue to this day and are discussed in my discussion section. However, my findings in the evidence suggest that unmarried mothers in Ireland were, and remain, "deviants" in the Schneider and Ingram Model of Social Construction of Deservingness.

Chapter 5: Discussion

We took their babies, and we gifted them, or we sold them, or we trafficked them, or we starved them, or we neglected them, or we denied them to the point of their disappearance from our hearts and from our sight, from our country and in the case of Tuam, and possibly other places, from life itself.

Enda Kenney – former Prime Minister of Ireland

The establishment of the Commission and its resulting lengthy investigative report is a small step forward in acknowledging that the women incarcerated in mother and baby homes had a story and a role in Irish history. The report is a starting point for bringing the mothers' experiences into the open and breaking the seal of silence. Yet whilst doing so, it must be acknowledged that the Commission's report continues to isolate and other these mothers. The choice of language, the limitation of women's voices, and the sanitized accounting for the actions of the Church and Irish State demonstrate that unmarried mothers were and remain a deviant classification in the records of Irish history.

Power, Dominance and Control

The themes of power, dominance, and control are heavily featured within the report. In each decade, unmarried mothers were subject to the power dynamics, dominance, and control of Irish men – the Church, State, and fathers of the children. The pervasive power of these patriarchal organizations, which wielded authority and access to resources, ensured the extraction of unmarried mothers from society to create the illusion that Ireland was a uniquely moral country. The oversized presence of the Catholic Church

in the Irish communities brought a level of fear that kept people obedient and compliant in this process (Hogan, 2020). Families feared being called out from the pulpit, having their children excluded from the church-run schools, or being socially ostracized by a populace eager to appear good Catholics (Fischer, 2016). Fear and control tactics like this are easily recognizable and identified in the actions of groups such as the Nazis or Communist regime but are rarely mentioned when discussing the role of the Catholic Church. Under the guise of being charitable, the Catholic Church shaped the nation of Ireland into a cruel, frightened country that enabled ostracism, shame and isolation against unmarried mothers to become a dominant part of the culture.

The partnership between the Church and State was systemically designed to perpetuate the continuance of this unjust system. The Church controlled the social services and education of the nation's youth and as such, oversaw the curriculum, and limited access to knowledge about sex education and biological reproduction. Girls were not taught about their bodies or how they could become pregnant. Over 60% of the mothers in the report indicated that they had no idea that they could become pregnant because of their sexual experiences. The State, under the influence of the Church, then created policies that limited women's access to birth control and family planning resources – for example, the state prohibited the sale of condoms until 1985, almost 100 years after its legalization in England (Enright & Cloatre, 2018). The government limited financial benefits that could have helped unmarried mothers raise and care for their children, and they enabled workforce policies that permitted organizations to terminate a woman's employment if she became pregnant. With no access to birth control or abortion, no access to jobs or financial supports, young women and girls became destitute

quickly. Even the threat of budding sexuality was enough to ensure that girls were incarcerated in Magdalen laundries lest they find themselves in a Mother and Baby Homes. This Church and State partnership perpetuated a system that was built on Catholic morality and, in doing so, caused irreparable damage to thousands of Irish families. (O'Rourke & Smith, 2016). Essentially, without the knowledge and tools to protect themselves, women in Ireland were set up for failure by the Church and State – two institutions that, in theory, were supposed to help and protect them. Whether through the violation of their bodies, violation of their rights, and/or violation of their trust in the protection of Church, Government and Communities, unmarried mothers in Ireland were afforded little respect and autonomy in a country led by these two patriarchal institutions.

Yet the Commission's report does not go far enough in assigning culpability and accountability to the Church and State. Instead, the Government's commission determines that the primary responsibility for the harsh treatment of unmarried mothers lies with the fathers of the children and the immediate families of the mothers. The report states “.. *it must be acknowledged that the institutions under investigation provided a refuge – a harsh refuge in some cases – when the families provided no refuge at all*”(Executive Summary, p.1). I would argue that this statement is unfair. Families **could not provide** a refuge given the strength of the Church and State's influence and power in the community. The Church and State ensured that all resources (financial, spiritual, medical) that could have helped families support their pregnant daughters were removed, thereby ensuring the Church and State could do what they wanted to mold their “morally superior” country. By assigning blame to the fathers and families, the

government-issued Commission's report hides the impact of the Church and State – once again allowing the Church and State to control the narrative and avoid accountability.

So, how does Ireland move forward and come to terms with its (not-so-distant) past? I propose that transparency and accountability need to replace secrecy and dereliction.

Ongoing Secrecy – the Danger of Hiding the Past

As evidenced in the Findings Section, hiding and secrecy played a dominant role in the narratives of unmarried mothers. The use of secrecy as a tool to hide unmarried mothers and their pregnancies is alluded to being a distant wrong committed in the past - something tolerated then but will not be tolerated any further (Smith, 2020). However, in action, the Irish Government continues to carry this secrecy forward. The government has imposed a moratorium of 30 years on the archives of the research data, which ensures that researchers, academics, historians, lawyers and, most importantly, survivors and their children cannot access the full story of what happened to these mothers. James Smith, professor of Irish Studies at Boston College identified the Irish Government's practice of perpetuating secrecy. He writes:

When confronted with evidence of historical abuse in the present, the state again cultivates unknowingness by way of a routine set of responses; first, it establishes an investigation; second, it draws from the National Archives to support the investigation; and third, upon publication of a final report, it then denies access to all the evidence by asserting a statutory obligation to protect the privacy and confidentiality of testimony taken from survivors, other witnesses, and alleged

perpetrators. With this final step, the Irish state once again impedes truth-telling about its own involvement. (Smith, 2020).

Smith claims that the Irish government regularly claims to have “no awareness” of the past wrongs committed by the State. Then, to corroborate their claim, they hide the evidence that can prove otherwise. This needs to stop.

From Dereliction of Duty to Accountability

Secondly, the Church and State need to take ownership of their actions and provide answers to the survivors of the mother and baby homes. The Commission’s report offers no explanation for why the remains of 796 children were found in a cesspit in Tuam. It does not explain why mothers who died in the mother and baby homes were buried in unmarked graves. There are no explanations for why these unorthodox burials took place. By avoiding these difficult questions, the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes Report serves as little more than a piece of propaganda that attributes the minimum amount of blame necessary to the Church and State to acknowledge some wrongdoing, but far from sufficient evidence to warrant culpability or criminal charges. The government’s imposed moratorium on the archives ensures that perpetrators of illegal and unethical schemes can avoid punishment. Both the Government and the Church remain the official “gatekeepers” of the women’s stories, not to protect the mothers but to protect themselves.

But it must be acknowledged that it was not just the Church and State who contributed to the experiences of the most vulnerable women in Ireland. Irish citizens must recognize that we played a significant role in allowing the Church and State to treat our daughters, sisters, friends, and neighbors this way. We remained complacent and

maintained a state of “willful ignorance”- deliberately avoiding and ignoring what we knew was happening (Allcke, 2017). We chose to remain silent. This, too, must stop.

Publication of the Report

With the release of the Commission’s report in 2021 came a cultural outpouring of support for the mothers and children of the mother and baby homes. By 2021, Ireland had weathered a storm of traumatic reports of the abuses of the Catholic Church and State – including an investigation into the Industrial Schools (Kennedy, 1970) and the Magdalene Laundries (McAleese, 2013). The scandals resulting from these two reports left the people of Ireland in shock, and no longer afraid to stand up to the Church and to call out its wrongdoings.

In response to the Mother and Baby Home report, a team of human rights lawyers and academics, led by Enright and O’Donoghue, issued a public rebuttal to the report. In their rebuttal, the authors wrote from a feminist perspective and rewrote the Commission’s Executive Summary to center on the voices and experiences of the women. For example, they stated that the term “mother and baby home,” should be referenced as a mother and baby “institution” – more accurately identifying the experience of the mothers and children forced to live there. Similarly, they recommended changing the term “birth mother” to “natural mother” as “birth mother” does not recognize the “wider emotional and caring attachment that the women have to their children, beyond the physical experience of birth” (Enright and O’Donoghue, 2021). This rebuttal clearly demonstrates the non-feminist perspective of the Commission, and its pro-government slant in authoring the report.

Many mothers in the Confidential Committee interview process expressed disappointment with the Commission's use of “paraphrased fragments” of their narratives rather than centering their voices and giving them ownership over telling their own experiences (Crowe, 2021). The recordings of their stories were destroyed by the Commission, and no transcriptions exist. Mothers reported that they were not told their stories would be destroyed, and are dismayed that the courage it took to share their stories was a “waste of time” (McGrath, 2021). The Commission’s action of filtering and representing the mothers’ stories rather than allowing them to tell their own stories is epistemic oppression, or the “persistent epistemic exclusion that hinders one's contribution to knowledge production.” (Dotson, 2014) The mothers are again sidelined and silenced, with those in power having control over their story.

Even the small sample of Commission selected quotes from the mothers was contradicted by the Commission in the Executive Summary. The Commission is guilty of “testimonial injustice” – where “prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word” and an individual's “expression of knowledge is granted less credibility due to factors such as race, gender, or other markers of marginalized social identity” (Fricker, 2007). The Commission is presenting itself as the subject experts of the women’s lived experience. This is another form of dominance, erasure, and deviancy.

In response to the outcry from the mothers, the Irish Government agreed to publish an acknowledgment stating that several survivors did not accept the report fully reflected their experiences. The authors of the Confidential Report were called upon to testify before Oireachtas (the Irish Parliament) to answer these allegations, but they

declined stating that “the independence, procedures and safeguards under which the commission carried out its investigation and its carefully considered conclusions would be set at nought by an appearance before your committee and in circumstances especially where prejudgment is already manifest.”(McGarry & Bray, 2021). This action speaks volumes and demonstrates the lack of accountability that persists within the government.

Moving Forward: Beyond the Report

I propose that the creation and publication of the report should be seen as one step in an ongoing process to make amends for the past. It should serve as a starting point to an ongoing conversation – one where all parties are present at the table to participate in restorative justice. Both the Church (2018) and State (2021) have issued formal apologies to the women of the mother and baby homes, which is an important step forward. But the report and apologies cannot be the end of the process. It is insufficient to suggest that a published report and a statement of apologies correct the wrongs committed. Instead, the citizens of Ireland must hold themselves, the church, and the state responsible for ongoing growth and learning from past mistakes. There exists a human need to quickly “fix” things, but some things cannot be easily fixed.

The hunger to resolve and overcome pain is inevitable, universal, and impossible to satisfy. The transformation of power relationships and structures is not easy, inevitable, or quick, and this inherent inadequacy must inform any new conception or approach to justice. An appropriate justice response incarnates inter-generational commitments to remember and transform the meaning and material impact of historical abuses and

includes a haunting sense of inadequacy, rather than justice as triumphalism (Gallen, 2023).

One cannot view the actions to make amends as complete—a checkbox to be ticked or an item to be crossed off a to-do list. Instead, we must continually strive to recognize and acknowledge the harms done, apologize, make amends and reparations, reflect and remember, and take every step possible to prevent the injustice from happening again.

Implications for Policy Today

So why is this research important today? As recently as January 2025, the Atlantic published an article entitled “The Army of God Comes Out of the Shadows” in which author Stephanie McCrummen speaks of the rise of Christian Evangelism and the “New Apostolic Reformation Movement” in the United States (McCrummen, 2025). The article demonstrated how tens of millions of American Christians are working to convert the US to a religious state – one led by “traditional” Christian values. Central to this ideology is the traditional role of the wife and mother – again, binding marriage and childbirth together – whose mission is to support and maintain the family under Christian beliefs and values. “Trad wives” as these women are popularly referred to, are idealized as the core foundation for a pious and charitable future. This belief is shared by millions of American Christians of all denominations, races, economic statuses, and age, and has unified hundreds of former separate congregations. Collectively, they deplore groups that exist outside of their ideal – gay people, transgendered, single mothers - and they advocate strongly for policies and legislation against these populations.

As a substantial group that crosses racial and economic boundaries, Christian Evangelicals are courted by politicians who seek their support in elections. In the Schneider and Ingram quadrant of policy targets, Christian Evangelicals are the “advantaged” – those who are “model citizens, voters, trustworthy and deserving of positive reinforcements” (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). In his Presidential campaigns, Donald Trump heavily courted Christian Evangelicals and received their support in record numbers. In payment for their loyalty and support, Trump has operationalized initiatives from “Project 2025” – a policy playbook that has strong Christian fundamentalist views with an ultimate goal of uniting Church and State (Ward, 2024). Trump’s government and GOP are giving “rewards” to his “highly deserving” voters. For example, there is a recent upswing in the number of states that have implemented complete anti-abortion legislation in 12 states since the overthrow of Roe V. Wade (KFF, 2025). Current political discussions and the proposed criminalization of those who send or receive birth control mirrors the Irish policy of yesteryear. And, the proposed restriction and containment of women’s reproductive rights had PBS Newshour declaring that 2024 “may be the most consequential election for reproductive rights in 50 years” (Yang & Zahn, 2024). Policies designed to abolish Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) initiatives threaten the lives of non-traditional families – those of queer communities, interfaith marriages, and others that fall outside of the fundamentalist ethos.

Ultimately, the union between Church and State proved to have detrimental results in Ireland, which tore the nation apart and destroyed thousands of Irish families. The ongoing reconciliation process for unmarried mothers in Ireland dictates that we learn from these mistakes, remember the harm done, and share the lessons learned so that

history does not have to repeat itself. My hope is that this dissertation is one step forward on that journey.

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Appendices

Appendix A

IRB notification of non-required IRB review and approval.



The University of Vermont

Research Protections Office

To: Gillian H. Homsted, M.A.

From: Research Protections Office

Date: October 11, 2022

Sponsor: Internal

RE: Dissertation: "Deviant" Mothers: The Social Construction of Unmarried Mothers in Post-Independence Ireland

Thank you for completing the Research Not Involving Human Subjects Investigator Self-Determination Tool. You have indicated that this activity **does not meet the regulatory definition of research** under 45 CFR 46.102(d):

(d) Research means a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge.

This research does not require IRB review and approval. If you believe your activities better align with Quality improvement, Program Evaluation or Public Health Surveillance, please go to <https://www.uvm.edu/rpo/forms/research-not-requiring-irb-review>, where you can find additional information and a "Research Not Requiring IRB Self-Determination Tool." You may also contact your assigned IRB Research Analyst for assistance. [OBJ]

Appendix B

Membership of the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation

Chairperson and Commissioner: Judge Yvonne Murphy

Yvonne Murphy, B.L., M.B.S., Dip. Soc. Science, L.L.D. (h.c.) was a Judge of the Circuit Court between 1998 and 2012. She was the Chair of the Commission of Investigation into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin and the Commission of Investigation into the Catholic Diocese of Cloyne. She is a former Vice-Chair of the Employment Equality Agency and of the Employment Appeals Tribunal. She practiced at the Bar on the Northern and Dublin Circuits and is a member of the Bars of England, Wales and of Northern Ireland. Prior to practicing at the Bar she worked with the National Social Service Board and was responsible for setting up a network of citizens' information centres throughout the country. While in practice at the Bar she was co-Editor of the Irish Times Law Reports and authored several books and articles.

Commissioner: Mary E. Daly, Ph.D.

Mary E. Daly is Professor Emeritus in Irish History at University College Dublin and President of the Royal Irish Academy. She is a member of the Taoiseach's Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations, and the National Famine Commemoration Committee, a Governor of the National Gallery, and a member of the Council of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. She was educated at UCD B.A., M.A., and Nuffield College Oxford (D. Phil). She has held visiting positions in Harvard, Boston College and the EUI. She was a founding director of the Humanities Institute of Ireland. She has authored and co-authored several books and publications.

Commissioner: Dr. William Duncan

CMG, LL.D., BA (Oxon), MA, Fellow Emeritus TCD, Barrister at Law (Middle Temple)

William Duncan retired as Deputy Secretary General of the Hague Conference on Private International Law in 2011. In that capacity, he had general responsibility for the Hague Children's Conventions dealing with international child abduction, inter-country adoption, and international child protection. His work involved the provision of advice and assistance on child protection matters to states and their professionals around the globe, as well as the development of judicial networks nationally and internationally.

He was formerly a Professor of law at Trinity College Dublin and a Member of the Law Reform Commission. He has worked with many NGOs on child protection matters and is a former honorary legal advisor to CHERISH.

Members of the Confidential Committee:

The Commission appointed Ms. Lucy Scaife and Mr. Kevin Healy as members of the Confidential Committee. They were assisted by Commission researchers Ms. Roni Buckley, Ms. Meg McMahon, Ms. Sarah Lea, and Ms. Maeve DeSay. Ms. Nora Ni Dhomhnaill was appointed as Witness Support Officer.

Appendix C:

Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes Data Collection Process

In 2015, the Irish Government established a “Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and Certain Related Matters.” As part of the investigation, the Commission outsourced a “Confidential Committee” whose primary task was to “provide a forum for persons who were formally resident in the homes or who worked in these institutions... to provide accounts of their experiences... as informally as is possible in the circumstances” (Commission report, Chapter 4, p.5). The charge of the Confidential Committee was to “ produce a report of a general nature on the experiences of the single women and children which the Commission may, to the extent it considers appropriate, rely upon to inform the investigations set out in Article 1 (CCR, p. 5)

The Confidential Committee was chaired by two lawyers and employed four academic researchers and a witness support officer. They conducted national and international media campaigns to invite mothers, former employees, and children to meet with the committee and provide witness to their experience. To advertise their work and recruit participants, the researchers participated in radio and television shows and provided leaflets to doctors’ offices and government offices around the country. The committee established a website to provide more information and set up a free-phone line for people to call.

“Witnesses⁴” primarily called in on the free phone line, however some used mail or email as a way of making contact. The Confidential Committee then sent the witnesses

⁴ Witness is the official term used by the authors of the CIIMBH to refer to mothers, children, and affiliates who experienced the Mother and Baby Homes, and participated in the interview process with the confidential committee.

an application form that asked for demographic information and the name of the institution(s) in which they stayed, and the years in which they were residents. The Confidential Committee also asked how the witnesses wished to be contacted (phone, email, post) and if they wished to be accompanied to their hearing. Witnesses were also asked if they needed special accommodations for the meetings.

Interviews with witnesses took place between 2015 with a planned end date in 2017. However, subsequent revisions ensured that the interviews continued into November 2020. Each interview was conducted by one of the assigned lawyers on the Confidential Committee, and one researcher. Witnesses could have one person accompany them if the support person did not give testimony themselves. Witnesses were asked to tell their stories, and no pre-set questions were determined. The witnesses were allowed to take as much time as they wanted and were also invited to follow up via phone should they remember additional information after the interview. The follow-up calls were facilitated by their original researcher so that records could be updated accordingly. All in-person interviews were recorded to help the researcher keep accurate information, and all recordings were destroyed after the Confidential Committee's report's creation.

The commission interviewed a homogenous sample (Kemper, Stringfield, and Teddlie, 2003) of 549 people who experienced life in one or more of a select group of mother and baby homes. These former residents and witnesses from 14 different mother and baby homes and four county homes were interviewed to speak of their experience in the homes. Of the 549 witnesses, 304 were mothers, 228 were children who had been born or raised in the homes, and 17 were involved in the homes in other ways. The vast majority still lived in Ireland, although some hailed from the UK and the US. The

interviews primarily took place in the Commission's offices in Dublin; however interviews were conducted in homes and handicap accessible locations throughout Ireland. Some witnesses who lived in the US participated in the interviews electronically, while others elected to submit written letters of their experiences.

Glossary

Garda – Irish Police Officer

Gardai – Irish Police Force

Oireachtas – Irish National Parliament

Taoiseach – Head of the Government of Ireland, a Prime Minister

Tusla - The Child and Family Agency is the dedicated State agency responsible for
improving wellbeing and outcomes for children.