

Article

A New State of Surveillance?

Applying Michel Foucault to Modern Motherhood

Angela C. Henderson

University of Northern Colorado, USA.
Angela.Henderson@unco.edu

Sandra M. Harmon

North Carolina State University, USA.
sandra_harmon@ncsu.edu

Jeffrey Houser

University of Northern Colorado, USA.
jeffrey.houser@unco.edu

Abstract

This project analyzed how “New Momism” (Douglas & Michaels 2004) is perpetuated among contemporary mothers. Previous work has argued that New Momism is most powerfully represented through the media. Our results indicate that New Momism is also practiced intensively on an interpersonal level via Michel Foucault’s (1975) Panopticonic stage of punishment: post-structuralist surveillance. We analyzed data from a snowball sample of 323 mothers through an online survey tool. Results indicate that while the media remains an important influence, the strongest predictors of New Momism are surveillance of fellow moms ($p < .05$) and surveillance of self through guilt ($p < .001$). Results are discussed in light of Foucault’s conceptualization of post-structuralist surveillance.

While women have undoubtedly made progress in the workplace over the past fifty years, the ideal that childcare and housework are primarily women’s work has stayed constant¹. In fact, some scholars would argue that expectations for parenting have intensified since the “golden era” of the 1950s (Douglas & Michaels 2004). Indeed, modern scholars suggest that a phenomenon referred to as New Momism is infiltrating the expectations by which women parent. According to Douglas and Michaels, modern motherhood is highly romanticized and “puts the intensive mothering practices of the 1950s to shame” (6). This approach to mothering “seem[s] on the surface to celebrate motherhood, but in reality promulgates standards of perfection that are beyond [one’s] reach” (5). This phenomenon is said to be most frequently and powerfully represented in the media, but the purpose of this project is to analyze the prevalence of New Momism attitudes and behaviours among modern mothers. Indeed, we suggest that it is not the media that upholds these unrealistic standards of perfection for modern mothers, but mothers themselves who are perpetuating New Momism through informal means. In taking this approach, we also apply Michel Foucault’s conception of surveillance. Foucault (1975) suggested that in the 20th century, punishment became post-structuralist, which means that we no longer need social institutions to enforce social control over our behaviour. In fact, Foucault suggests that we “surveil” ourselves through different means; mothers surveil one another through interpersonal communication and observation, ranging anywhere from conversations about children’s appropriate developmental milestones to a covert, silent monitoring of other moms’ disciplining behaviour in public places. This constant surveillance perpetuates the standards of perfection promulgated by New Momism, but does so on an interpersonal, not structural, level. Therefore, we borrow Douglas and Michaels’ definition of New Momism, but suggest that it is not

¹ It should be noted that there are exceptions to this traditional division of household labor, where males (and spouses) assume a large part of and sometimes all of the household work and child care.

“the media” per se, or any given social institution that perpetuates this pressure of perfection, but that mothers are surveilling on an individual level. At the same time that mothers surveil other mothers, they also use these interactions to surveil themselves and their own decisions about parenting. Indeed, Douglas and Michaels (2004) alluded to this self-surveillance by arguing that modern motherhood requires moms to, “put on the dotting, self-sacrificing mother and wear it at all times. With intensive mothering, everyone watches us, we watch ourselves, and we watch ourselves watching ourselves. Motherhood has become a psychological police state” (6). The purpose of the present study is to examine the prevalence of New Momism as it exists among modern mothers, applying a Foucauldian framework that suggests that the most powerful form of surveillance is perpetuated on an interpersonal (i.e., mother to mother), not structural (i.e., media to mothers), level.²

Background

In 1942, Philip Wylie first coined the negatively defined term “momism” in his book *Generation of Vipers*. He defined momism as a way of mothering that characterized mothers who are “smothering, overprotective, and invested in their kids...[which] turned them into dysfunctional, sniveling weaklings, maternal slaves chained to the apron strings, unable to fight for their country or even stand on their own two feet” (Douglas & Michaels 2004: 5). According to this definition, momism resulted in negative outcomes for children; their independence was sacrificed, they suffered psychologically, and maintained a dysfunctional relationship with their mothers because of intensive parenting practices (5). Over two decades later, Betty Friedan identified “the problem with no name” that stemmed out of the very same ideals; she insisted that the idealization of a good wife was a direct cause of the overprotective, oversensitive mother (Friedan 1963). Friedan contended that women embarked on a quest to become the perfect housewife, and in doing so, women gave up their own identities in order to fulfill the expectations of their husbands (Friedan 1963: 126). Friedan argued that this image of perfection was perpetuated through the media, and was innately unattainable, and when women could not live up to the image, they became resentful towards their husbands (Douglas & Michaels 2004).

Sharon Hays also elaborated on this cultural trend in the 1990s, and coined the phrase “intensive parenting” in her 1996 book *Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. Hays wrote about the pressure for mothers to be the primary caregivers for their children, which includes “watching, cleaning up after, and playing with their children” (Hays 1996: 99). The pressure to be the primary caregiver includes pressure to be the perfect parent in order to have a perfect child. Hays’ research claimed that two-thirds of mothers read manuals that include advice on how to raise their children. This became known as child-centered parenting, a parenting style that suggests that a child’s every need is attended to at all times (Hays 1996). Mothers in this era tried to raise what Hays referred to as the “sacred child,” who cannot be raised by any other person besides their own mother, including the father/husband (1996: 99). This was the social prescription for mothers in the 1950s and 1960s: to be the primary caregiver of the children and to intensively pursue perfection in every aspect.

The advent of the women’s movement claims to have swept away the strictures of intensive parenting. However, mothers today arguably have more choices; they are not relegated to living as housewives without any opportunity to enter the workplace and become successful wage-earners. Women are no

² It is important to also note here why this study is focusing exclusively on mothers. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that while 159,000 men in the United States are stay at home fathers and are the primary caregiver of children, often times the mother is still considered the primary caregiver in most other instances. Although fathers are pivotal for child-rearing in the home, researchers have not yet studied *intensive fathering*. In fact, the academic conversation on fatherhood in the U.S. is centered on paternal time or lack of it and paternal contributions to the household and childhood outcomes (See Amato and Rivera 1999; Amato and Gilbreth 1999; Cooksey and Fondell 1996; Furstenberg and Harris 1992; Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991; Harris, Furstenberg, and Marmer 1998; Yeung et al. 2001).

longer expected to be subservient to men on a social scale; they can “choose” to enter the workforce or stay at home. However, the crux of New Momism is the façade that a choice *truly* exists, because:

... the only truly enlightened choice to make as a woman, the one that proves, first, that you are a ‘real’ woman, and second, that you are a decent, worthy one, is to become a ‘mom’ and to bring to child rearing a combination of selflessness and professionalism that would involve the cross cloning of Mother Teresa with Donna Shalala³ (Douglas and Michaels 2004: 5).

Thus, New Momism is an extension of Betty Freidan’s “problem with no name” in a new, more covert form; instead of being oppressed by their husbands, women are oppressed by both the pressure to have children and to be perfect mothers. That is, mothers are no longer responsible for just the basic needs (education, discipline, feeding, and clothing) of children today, but are also expected to be the protector of the child’s innocence, perpetuator of all social activities, pediatrician, therapist, and consumer protection expert (Hays 1996; Lareau 2002; Douglas and Michaels 2004).

Therefore, New Momism not only revives the intensive parenting ideals that characterized the second half of the twentieth century, but it magnifies the pressure to be perfect. For several decades scholars have noted the stressful, isolating, and anxiety producing nature of mothering (Arendell 2000; Boulton 1983; Oakley 1992; Ribbens 1994; Ross 1995; Wolf 2001). For mothers in particular, child raising may bring personal development but also increased work and economic stress; it brings feelings of liberation and transformation but also of oppression and subordination (Marshall, Barnett and Sayer 1998; Roxburgh 1997). Indeed, modern feminist scholars have identified a similar phenomenon called “mother-blame,” which describes mothers being held responsible for the actions, behaviour, health and well-being of their (even adult) children (Caplan & Hall-McCorquodale 1985; Jackson & Mannix 2004; Rich 1976; Singh 2002; Singh 2004). Mother-blame is a pervasive mothering ideology that contains essentialized and idealized notions of mother and mothering behaviours (O’Reilly, 2001; Chase & Rogers 2001; Ladd-Taylor & Umansky 1998). These idealized notions are so powerful that fear often governs modern parenting practices now more than ever; it is no longer okay to let your children walk to school solo, as it was in the 1950s. Parents have to be hyper-vigilant about recalled toys and carseats, the presence of unsafe chemicals in the plastic of baby bottles and in infant formula. Parents, especially mothers, are flooded with fearful rhetoric from the media, and are upheld to an idealized version of motherhood that “insists that mothers acquire professional-level skills such as those of a therapist, pediatrician (‘Dr. Mom’), consumer products safety inspector, and teacher” (Douglas & Michaels 2004: 5).

It is clear that motherhood and mothering are dynamic social interactions and relationships, shaped by prevailing societal contexts, including structural constraints and gender ideologies (Apple & Golden 1997). Therefore, we are not framing motherhood as a “natural, universal, and unchanging” social institution (Glenn, 1994: 4). Taking this approach means we assume that mothering is universally not a relationship between a woman and her children, a private, singular, or even primary activity understood to be separate and distinct from other relationships in a woman’s life (Arendell 2000). Rather, we conceptualize motherhood as an ongoing process that is negotiated and re-negotiated by mothers and their support systems.

The literature on mothering and the pressure to be perfect (i.e., New Momism) has yet to fully examine motherhood in the context of mothers’ peers – fellow moms. Recent studies have found that mother-

³ Donna Shalala was the longest serving U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services in history, after which the Washington Post described her as “one of the most successful government managers of modern times (as cited in National Journal, 2009).” Throughout her highly accomplished career, she has advocated for women’s rights, developing programming for young children and improving access to health care.

blame, specifically mothers' feelings of inadequacy and self-blame for their sons' Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) symptoms are subtly reinforced by interactions with other moms in public settings (Singh 2004). In local, every day encounters on the street and in restaurants, church, shopping malls, movie theaters, and supermarkets, mothers reported experiencing reproach and judgment from onlookers witnessing their sons' behaviour (Singh 2004). However, this research focused on a unique group of mothers of boys who have ADHD, and did not focus on New Momism, or the pressure of perfection. Other research (Jackson & Mannix 2004) suggests that mother-blaming is ever-present and a powerful influence over moms' feelings of adequacy and worth, but this line of research has only focused on surveillance of mothers through a formal health care setting (e.g., nurses, pediatricians). While formal influences are important to understanding New Momism, the literature has thus far overlooked a potentially more powerful source of pressure – fellow moms. Therefore, this project moves beyond examining the formal influences of health care professionals, as well as the media's "perfect mother" rhetoric through news stories and magazine articles. Instead, this project invokes a Foucauldian perspective in conceptualizing and analyzing modern motherhood. This suggests that while formal social institutions clearly perpetuate ideals of New Momism, they are not necessary to reinforce New Momism; instead, the pressure to be perfect is most powerfully perpetuated mother-to-mother through interpersonal interaction, or in Foucauldian terms, surveillance.

It is important to note here that this type of surveilling is assumed to be most common among middle and upper-middle class mothers. Although Douglas and Michaels did not focus on explaining the relationship between social class and New Momism, understanding how the two interact is pivotal to this area of research. Intensive parenting, which is closely related to New Momism, has been found to be most prevalent among the middle class (Hays 1996). In addition, Lareau (2002) examined a type of intensive parenting in middle class mothers, but used the term concerted cultivation, which is a "cultural logic of childrearing" where parents "enroll their children in numerous age-specific organized activities that dominate family life and create enormous labor, particularly for mothers" (Lareau 2002: 738). These activities transmit essential life skills to children with the end goal of preparing the child for a success in adulthood. However, this type of parenting decreases children's autonomy over time because their daily lives are packed full with formal activities that are led by adults (e.g., soccer, gymnastics, dance) and therefore, children have little opportunity in their daily lives to make independent choices. This type of parenting has children always "on the go" adhering to a constant time crunch to get from one activity to another. The point here is that this type of parenting has never been found to be common among working-class parents. Typically, working class parents focus on the accomplishment of natural growth model which is a more directive type of parenting that still emphasizes the goal of providing a home and income for children, but has little stress on personal fulfillment (Lareau 2002). Working class children's lives are based on more informal activities (e.g., video games, playing with friends in the neighborhood, and visiting with kin); their lives are not under the same time crunch as their middle class family counterparts, and they have more autonomy (Lareau 2002). Therefore, for the purposes of this research, the surveillance we are referring to is most likely practiced among middle- to upper-middle class mothers, and is Foucauldian in nature.

A Foucauldian Analysis of Motherhood

In 1975, Michel Foucault wrote about the social evolution of punishment between 18th and 19th century France. The first type of punishment was retributive, where people feared being punished because punishment was made a public spectacle; deviants were punished through degradation ceremonies or execution, both in full view of spectators.

In the second type of punishment, Foucault referenced Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon (1995). The Panopticon was a proposed circular prison design whereby prisoners occupied the circumference of the structure, and the guard(s) would occupy the center of the circular structure so that they could watch the prisoners at all times (Bentham 1995). According to Bentham's model, this type of surveillance and

disciplinary punishment was made possible by the physical structure of the circular panopticonic prison. Foucault's work on disciplinary punishment focused more on the social and psychological reality for prisoners that they are being constantly surveilled, and this is the approach we take in the present study. Because of the prisoners' knowledge of this constant surveillance, they began to act as though they were being watched around the clock, even though the actual occurrence of surveillance was unverifiable. Constant surveillance was supposed to induce a heightened self-awareness and paranoia among prisoners, which would in effect control their behaviour because of the perceived imminent threat of being watched.

This perceived subjection to constant visibility is very similar to the ideals written about when New Momism was first defined by Douglas and Michaels (2004). While very different in nature, modern mothers are constantly subject to the pressure of being watched by others in formal and informal settings. In a formal setting, professionals in social institutions such as education, medicine, or even child psychology serve as social control agents of New Momism. The key here is that the sources of information are formal sources. That is, they have legitimacy as objective sources of information on how parents should raise their children, and the information is disseminated uniformly to all parents, or is readily accessible through the media at least in the United States. The pressure to be perfect can emanate from several sources, including the education system through teachers and administrators, or through the health care system via health care workers such as pediatricians. For example, pediatricians are supposed to offer the same physical and developmental milestones to parents who bring their children in for regular check-ups. They weigh and measure the height of the child, then proceed to a litany of questions about the child's development (i.e., "does s/he know any words yet?", "do you have the house on lockdown⁴, now that s/he is a toddler?"; "you aren't letting him/her watch television, are you?"). Pediatricians also rank children in terms of physical growth, placing them into "percentiles" in terms of how they compare physically to other children at the same age. A child who weighs significantly less than other children may invoke a warning or suggestion on how to add fat or protein to the child's diet as a way to correct the low percentile ranking. The punishment here is not harsh, but still summons parents to be on guard if their children are not meeting the objective standards of growth, which perpetuates the idea that parents are constantly watched by an external authoritative figure. As in Foucault's discussion of prisoners, where they were to internalize the gaze of the supervisor (203), so too do parents. Both prisoners and parents internalize the power relationship; the pediatrician is the objective source of information who watches how parents answer the standard development questions, how they interact with their children, and any other signs that a parent is not meeting that perfection standard.

Another example of a formal social institution that perpetuates the idea of being ever-watched is the media. As detailed in Douglas and Michaels (2004), countless images and stories exist of "bad moms" who are being punished for bad behaviour, ranging anywhere from public discipline (e.g., yelling at or hitting a child in public) to neglect or murder. This reinforces the idea that parents better constantly be on watch; it is no longer acceptable to harshly discipline a child in public, out of fear that an objective authoritative figure will see it and punish accordingly. This rhetoric of fear is promulgated through the media to modern mothers.

Because of the formal social institutions' seemingly objective standards for parenting, as well as media messages' rhetoric of fear, mothers begin to behave in a way that is indicative of Foucault's prisoners on constant watch. This is where Foucault's ideas become post-structuralist in nature; people begin surveilling themselves and others without the necessity of formal institutions. Indeed, Foucault suggested that a "carceral continuum" exists, whereby surveillance can be centralized, or at the very opposite end, decentralized, but still ever powerful (Foucault 1975). The continuum ranges from the maximum security prison, probation, police, and teachers (i.e., members of formalized social institutions), to our everyday

⁴ By "lockdown," we are referring to locking up a household so that danger is minimized for small children as much as possible (i.e., covering unused electrical outlets, blocking or gating staircases, etc.)

interactions with coworkers, friends and family (i.e., nonformal, interpersonal relationships). All are connected by the witting or unwitting supervision or surveillance (application of norms of acceptable behaviour) of some humans by others (Foucault 1975).

This post-structuralist approach to surveillance is the one we apply in the present study. It is merely an extension of the Panopticonic way of thinking and behaving; it is called “post-structuralist” because no particular social institution, or formal source of fear or punishment, is necessary. In fact, people who are subject to the formal rules and regulations of the social institutions have simply internalized those rules, to the point that they become normative. Foucault suggests that this happens when the structure or social institution is only:

a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they themselves are the bearers (1975: 201).

Foucault goes on to say that this is important because it automatizes and disindividualizes power. Therefore, the process of surveilling oneself becomes automatic, and has no traceable source of origin; the source of all the arbitrary rules and guidelines that embody modern child-rearing are anonymous, but omnipresent. In fact, Foucault’s central tenet to his conceptualization of power is that it cannot be located; it is everywhere and therefore also inside us (Foucault 1975: 108). Therefore, we conceive New Momism to be a form of self-surveillance based on Foucault’s conceptualization of internalized control. Self surveillance is, “the attention one pays to one’s behaviour when facing the actuality or virtuality of an immediate or mediated observation by others whose opinion s/he deems relevant – usually, observers of the same or superior social position” (Vaz & Bruno 2003). This would suggest, then, that the type of surveillance in the present study is usually practiced by mothers’ peers – fellow moms – and most likely is subconscious in nature. The surveilling behaviour becomes automatic, and can be taken up by anyone a mother comes in contact with on a daily basis, according to Foucault: “Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine: in the absence of the director, his family, his friends, his visitors, even his servants” (Foucault 1975: 202).

In summary, both the tenets of New Momism and the application of Foucauldian surveillance suggest that mothers exist in a modern age of constant surveillance; they surveil themselves, and other moms. Their judgments are based somewhat on the formal guidelines for parenting behaviour and child development, but they are often arbitrary, based on heightened fear and “mother knows best” practices. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to examine how pervasive New Momism is among modern mothers as well as how New Momism relates to surveillance of moms in the media (as suggested by Douglas & Michaels 2004). In addition, based on Foucault’s (1975) conceptualization of surveillance, we focused specifically on how mothers surveil one another, themselves, and whether or not this surveilling behaviour is predictive of the pressure to feel perfect. Our research questions ask: (1) How prevalent is New Momism among modern mothers?; (2) How influential are specific media outlets in perpetuating New Momism?; and (3) How influential is self-surveillance and surveillance of others in perpetuating these ideals?⁵ Based on these research questions, we test the following hypotheses in this project:

Hypothesis 1: Turning to the media (TV news, parenting magazines, internet, newspaper, and self-help books) when making purchasing decisions for their children will lead to an increase in feeling the pressure to be perfect (New Momism).

⁵ It should be noted that the third research question emerged out of the data once it was analyzed. That is, the researchers did not intend to measure self-surveillance in this way; this data was part of a “grounded” research experience, where the researchers utilize theory that emerges from their data.

Hypothesis 2: Surveillance of mothers in the media leads to an increase in feeling the pressure to be perfect (New Momism).

Hypothesis 3: Surveillance of fellow mothers leads to an increase in feeling the pressure to be perfect (New Momism).

Hypothesis 4: Self-Surveillance leads to an increase in feeling the pressure to be perfect (New Momism).

Method

Design and sample

Data were collected through an online data collecting service once our study obtained Institutional Review Board approval. A snowball sampling technique was used in this study; each of the researchers involved in this study generated a personal e-mail database of mothers over age 18. The original e-mail list was based on personal contacts known to the researchers, and therefore the original list was not a random sample. From each researcher's list, we generated a primary e-mail database. We sent 164 initial e-mails to potential respondents, asking them to fill out the survey via the link provided in the e-mail, and then we asked them to please forward it on to any other moms they thought might be interested who were also over the age of 18. The survey was open for approximately 2 weeks. In total, we received 323 completed surveys. It should be noted that the response rate exceeded the original target sample, which is an unusual occurrence in this type of research. In this way, this study is unique in accomplishing such a large number of participants – over twice the size of the original list of potential contacts – as a final sample.

In the survey, respondents were asked about their demographic background (e.g., age, race, marital and work status, income, and highest education level). Respondents were also asked about their media consumption, surveillance of their behaviour and also fellow mothers, and sources of their expectations for parenting.

The demographics for the sample (n=323) are displayed in Table 1. It is important to point out how our sample of mothers differs from that of the general population. First, the mothers in our sample are highly educated, middle to upper middle class, and the majority are Caucasian and have small children. This is clearly not representative of the entire population of mothers or a random probability sample. The average education of the mothers in our sample is a bachelor's degree, compared to the national average of a High School Diploma (U.S. Bureau of Census 2008). The median and average family income in our sample is \$80,000-98,000, and the national median income for the family is over \$63,000 (U.S. Bureau of Census 2008). Ninety percent of our sample worked at least part-time in the home, which is 20 to 30 percent higher than the national average (Bianchi, Casper, & King 2005; Juhn & Potter 2006). Ninety-three percent of our sample is Caucasian, compared to only 75 percent of the American population. In addition, the majority of our mothers reported having children four years old or younger. Sixty-three percent of the women in the sample have at least one child between the age of two and four, which represents a much higher percentage of mothers with young children than in the general population. However, our project is based on the literature of intensive parenting and New Momism, which argues that this phenomenon is often found in educated and middle to upper middle-class mothers with young children (Hays 1996; Lareau 2002). These women are seen as the cultivators of intensive parenting and New Momism and often times, the cultural model of motherhood is a portrayal of middle class mothers (Hays 1996; Douglas & Michaels 2004). Therefore, we targeted a population more likely to experience these phenomena and the demographics of this sample reflect the population of interest.

Measures

Dependent variable: New Momism

Based on Douglas and Michaels (2004), we used the following question to identify the presence of New Momism (0=not at all true, 7=very true): “Sometimes as moms, we feel pressured to be ‘perfect’ in our roles as mothers. How true is this for you?” (M=5.0, SD=1.8).

Independent variables:

(1) Media consumption

Based on Douglas and Michaels’ (2004) assertion that the media is influential in perpetuating New Momism, we controlled for media consumption in Block 2 of our Models. Media consumption was measured by asking the following question: “Please indicate how influential you feel each source of information is for you when making decisions about purchases for your child/ren.” Respondents answered separately for five different sources of media, on a Likert scale (0-not influential at all, 7-very influential): television news (M=2.6 SD=2.0), parenting or other magazines (M=3.3 SD=1.8), newspapers (M=2.22 SD=1.92), internet websites or blogs (M=3.4SD=2.0), and self-help books (M=3.2 SD=2.2).

(2) Surveillance of moms in the media

Douglas and Michaels (2004) also argued that New Momism was propagated through the portrayal of celebrity moms and other moms in the media (news media, reality television), we also controlled for surveillance of moms in the media. This measure asked “Sometimes we see moms in the media (i.e., on the news, or in the celebrity magazines), we notice how they ‘parent’ their kids. Are you critical of moms in this setting?” (Likert scale 0-7, M= 3.3, SD 1.9).

(3) Surveillance of fellow moms

We used three questions to measure surveillance of fellow moms. The questions were 1-7 Likert items and asked about different areas of surveillance – surveillance when purchasing products for one’s child/ren; surveillance of other moms’ parenting; and surveillance of parenting expectations. The first question was phrased, “If the pressure to buy certain products for your child/ren comes from your fellow moms, it was because they had this product for their child” (Likert scale, 1-strongly disagree, 7-strongly agree, M=4.4, SD=1.7). In the second question, respondents were asked, “Sometimes when moms are in a social setting (in public, at the playground, at other kids’ parties, etc.) with other moms, we notice how other moms ‘parent’ their kids. Are you critical of other moms’ parenting styles?” (Likert scale, 1-strongly disagree, 7-strongly agree, M=3.7, SD=1.6). For the third question, respondents were asked, “Where do the expectations for your parenting come from?” The question was a multiple response category with 6 possible responses:(1) spouse, (2) mother, (3) mother-in-law, (4) child/ren, (5) professionals (psychologists, doctor, pediatrician), (6) salesperson/people.

(4) Surveillance of self

Because we are using Foucault’s conceptualization of surveillance in our analysis of New Momism, we used two measures to identify surveillance of self for the mothers in our study. The first question asked about the mother’s guilt for not living up to the expectations for parenting. The measure asked how strongly respondents agreed (7) or disagreed (1) with the following statement: “I feel guilty when I cannot live up to the parenting expectations I set for myself.” The second measure emerged from the data after we began to analyze the question that asked about sources of expectations for parenting. Interestingly, the response categories did not include “self,” but 26.1percent of the mothers wrote in that the expectations came from “self” or “myself” in the qualitative section. The original response categories included (1) fellow moms, (2) spouse, (3) mother, (4) mother-in-law, (5) child/ren, (6) media, or (7) salesperson/people; however, women *wrote-in* “self” more often than they selected “child,” “mother-in-law” or “media,” which prompted its use in analysis.

Analysis

We performed statistical analysis with hierarchical linear regression models in STATA 7.0. In hierarchical linear regression, variables are entered into the regression model in “blocks.” This approach is designed to elucidate any specific and/or moderating effects any of the control variables have on the dependent variables of interest. We entered the variables into the model in the order of our theoretical orientation; in order to test the prevalence of New Momism according to a Foucauldian perspective, we first had to examine the relationship between moms’ media consumption and New Momism (Douglas and Michaels’ proposition). Therefore, Block 1 included media consumption variables. Block 2 included a variable that measured surveillance of moms in the media variable, in order to discern whether or not the structural influence of “the media” was being channeled through surveillance of celebrity moms or other moms in the media. Block 3 examined the hypothesized Foucauldian relationship between New Momism and surveillance of fellow moms as measured by three variables. Finally, Block 4 included two variables that measured moms’ surveillance of self.

Results

Results for Hypotheses 1-4 predicting the pressure to be perfect are presented in Table 3. Hypothesis 1 tested Douglas and Michaels’ (2004) proposition that the media perpetuates higher levels of New Momism. Results are partially supported by the data. Column 2 of Table 3 presents Model 1, which reveals that reading the newspaper to make decisions about purchasing products for one’s child/ren significantly predicts *lower* levels of New Momism ($p < .05$), and on the other hand, reading parenting magazines predicts *higher* levels of New Momism ($p < .05$).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that surveillance of moms in the media would significantly increase feeling the pressure to be perfect. This is supported by the data. The relationship between media consumption and New Momism persist from Model 1, when the first surveillance variable, being critical of moms in the media, was entered into the equation. Thus, in addition to the two media consumption variables from Model 1 (newspaper and parenting magazines), being critical of moms in the media also predicts an increase in New Momism ($p < .01$). Explained variance for both Model 1 ($R^2 = .05$) and Model 2 ($R^2 = .08$) are small, indicating that overall explained variance is very low.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that surveillance of fellow moms is significantly related to an increase in feeling the pressure to be perfect. This hypothesis is supported by the data. In Model 3, variables measuring another type of surveillance, informal surveillance of fellow moms, were entered into the model. In this model, mothers who reported feeling like their parenting expectations come from fellow moms were significantly more likely to feel the pressure to be perfect ($p < .01$, $\beta = .18$), as were moms who reported feeling the pressure to buy certain products because fellow moms had it ($p < .05$, $\beta = .13$) and those who reported being critical of fellow moms ($p < .01$, $\beta = .25$). In addition, moms who watch TV news for information about purchasing items for their children were significantly more likely to feel the pressure ($p < .05$, $\beta = .16$), and those who read the newspaper when making purchasing decisions for their children were less likely to feel the pressure to be perfect ($p < .01$, $\beta = -.24$). We performed the F change test for increment in R-squared⁶ (Cohen 1969) to determine whether or not the R^2 increased significantly from Model 2 ($R^2 = .08$) to Model 3 ($R^2 = .17$), and the results indicated that the increment is indeed significant ($p < .001$). In other words, Model 3 has more explanatory power than Model 2 because of the variables we added to Model 3 (surveillance of other moms).

The final model is presented in Model 4 of Table 3, and represents the relationship between media consumption, surveillance of moms in the media as well as of fellow moms, and finally the surveillance of

⁶ This technique is used in hierarchical regression to test for a significant statistical difference of two R^2 s to determine if adding an independent variable to the model helps significantly see how most variance in the dependent can be explained by one or a set of new independent variables, over and above that explained by an earlier set.

self through two measures: (1) self-reporting that the pressure to be perfect comes from one's self, and (2) level of guilt moms feel when they cannot live up to parenting expectations. Results indicate that both being critical of fellow moms ($p < .05$, $\beta = .12$) as well as feeling guilty about not living up to parenting expectations ($p < .001$, $\beta = .48$) both predict higher levels of feeling the pressure to be perfect. In addition, reading the newspaper for information about purchasing products for one's child remains significant through Model 4 ($p < .05$, $\beta = -.17$). Finally, the incremental change in R^2 from Model 3 ($R^2 = .17$) to Model 4 ($R^2 = .36$) was also significant ($p < .001$).

Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to analyze the prevalence of New Momism among modern mothers, specifically investigating Douglas and Michaels' (2004) assertion that New Momism is most powerfully represented through the media. In contrast, we hypothesized that it is not the media, per se, or any formal social institution that perpetuates New Momism, but instead that New Momism is most powerfully channeled through the interpersonal relationships and surveilling behaviours of mothers themselves.

Results of this study support the notion that New Momism is most powerfully perpetuated at the interpersonal, not structural, level. That is, while we find that the media definitely provide a pathway by which mothers learn about and practice New Momism (i.e., surveilling moms in the media as well as themselves), our results clearly show that the model predicting New Momism using interpersonal variables has more explanatory power than the structural (media) models. In other words, not only do our statistical models show a significant relationship between surveillance of fellow moms and the pressure to be perfect (interpersonal variables), but the increment change in R^2 is also significant in the last two models. The R^2 increased significantly from Model 2 (measuring both media consumption and media surveillance) to Model 3 (measuring surveillance of fellow moms) and also from Model 3 to Model 4 (measuring self-surveillance). Therefore, when explaining New Momism, mothers' self-surveillance and surveillance of other moms clearly has more explanatory power than either their surveillance of moms in the media or media consumption alone, as was suggested earlier by Douglas and Michaels (2004). This study adds in many ways to the literature on motherhood and a closely related concept to New Momism, "mother blame." While mother-blame inevitably increases mothers' feelings of self-blame and inadequacy (Singh 2004), our study sheds light on specifically how these messages get reinforced – most notably through interpersonal interactions with fellow moms. Formal social institutions (i.e., health care professionals, such as pediatricians and nurses) are no longer needed to reinforce mothers' feelings of pressure, anxiety, stress, inadequacy, or worth, as was suggested by Jackson and Mannix (2004). This supports Foucault's ideas that modern society has evolved beyond the basic institutional surveillance model; when it comes to motherhood, the ideals and pressure of perfection may emanate from the media, but the most powerful channel through which New Momism is reinforced is through moms' interactions with each other.

The results of our study also show that this group of mothers are clearly self-surveilling. In Model 4, self-surveillance measures were entered into the model (i.e., "I feel guilty when I cannot live up to the expectations for parenting I set for myself"). The incremental change in R^2 was significant from Model 3 to Model 4, which indicates that mothers' self-blame and guilt hold significant explanatory power when it comes to the pressure of perfection mothers are experiencing. This is quintessential Foucauldian behaviour; Foucault considered post-structuralist surveillance as automatic, with no traceable source of origin. Therefore, the source of all the arbitrary rules and guidelines that embody modern child-rearing are anonymous, but omnipresent. In fact, Foucault's central tenet to his conceptualization of power is that it cannot be located; it is everywhere and therefore also inside us (Foucault 1975: 108). Not only are mothers in our study blaming themselves and feeling guilty about the job they do as parents, but it is their self-blame and guilt that leads to a higher level of pressure to be perfect. This supports Douglas and Michaels' (2004) assertion that New Momism is alive and well; how the message of New Momism is

channeled is the point of contention. Our study clearly shows that surveillance of others and surveillance of self is more powerfully related to New Momism than is media consumption or media surveillance.

In addition, while this variable did not emerge significant in our models, the fact that 26 percent of the mothers in the sample self-reported that their expectations for parenting came from “self” is compelling. The respondents were unprompted; every source listed on our questionnaire was an external source. Yet, over one fourth of the mothers felt compelled to select “other” and write in that their expectations come from “self.” Again, this is representative of Foucauldian behaviour; these mothers are not blaming “the media” or their immediate support systems (i.e., family members, professionals, friends) for their blame or guilt over shortcomings in motherhood; they are blaming themselves. This is problematic because even though (according to the present study as well as previous research) women are influenced by the media when it comes to New Momism, they are not externalizing this pressure. Instead, they are internalizing it and claiming that it comes from other mothers as well as from within themselves. This can create a cycle of self-blame, doubt and guilt if women continue to look to themselves for the source of their mistakes instead of realizing that ideals and expectations for parenting do originate from social norms and culture. It is as though the norms and ideals are clearly being received by mothers, as there is some consensus on what a “perfect” mother is (Hays 1996), but when mothers are not quite measuring up to those ideals, they look to each other and to themselves for the source of the problem.

This oppressive cycle of self-blame may indicate that mothers are engaging in horizontal violence, which is a phenomenon where oppressed people or groups lash out or act in a hostile fashion towards their peers instead of their oppressors (Freire 1970; Funk 2004). That is, women are not recognizing or are not admitting that the media, or changing social norms could possibly have as much influence over them as their peers and their own ideals. This is referred to as horizontal violence (Freire 1970) because instead of recognizing and critiquing the source of the unattainable expectations vertically by identifying the oppressive force (i.e., media rhetoric), women are clearly engaging in blame horizontally (by blaming those around them). While this phenomenon has been examined in the context of work relationships (Freire 1970), it seems plausible to suggest that it is also occurring among modern mothers experiencing New Momism. A clear similarity exists between the different perspectives, starting with Momism (Wylie 1942), then “the problem that has no name” (Freidan 1963), followed later by intensive parenting (Hays 1996), and now New Momism (Douglas and Michaels 2004): throughout each historical framework that has been developed, the mother has been historically oppressed, and the expectations for motherhood are intense and unattainable. Our study adds to this body of literature and theory on motherhood; before, the norms and expectations of motherhood were examined. The present study provides a framework for understanding where the expectations are coming from outside of the typical social institution. Mothers are experiencing and reinforcing New Momism themselves, and interacting in a way that does not necessitate a social institution as a “policing” agent; instead, they are practicing exactly what Douglas and Michaels (2004) alluded to: “With intensive mothering, everyone watches us, we watch ourselves, and we watch ourselves watching ourselves. Motherhood has become a psychological police state” (6). Our study adds scientific support to this assertion that mothers are policing others and themselves. At the same time, these results add depth to our understanding of the pressure of perfection and how it is perpetuated.

Limitations

While our study presents many important findings to the literature and theoretical underpinnings of the study of motherhood, there are several limitations that need to be addressed. First, our sample is not representative of all mothers. Our snowball sample represents only White, mostly married, upper-middle class, highly educated mothers of mostly younger children. In addition, the nature of the survey may have attracted mothers who are more prone to experiencing New Momism; that is, they might have been more likely to fill out a survey on something that they are passionate about or are experiencing and frustrated with. Also, the fact that our survey was online automatically restricts the sample to mothers who have access to internet and are technologically literate, which excludes mothers who are not. This may also

restrict the sample to moms who are naturally high consumers of internet media and rhetoric on motherhood or parenting advice.

In addition, because this study invokes a new theoretical framework to the study of motherhood, and also asks questions about a relatively unstudied phenomenon (New Momism) our measure of New Momism could be improved upon. Our measure asked about the pressure respondents feel to be perfect in their roles as mothers. While this is useful and captures an aspect of New Momism, it does not measure the extent to which New Momism infiltrates mothers' interactions with their children (i.e., do mothers feel the pressure to be omnipresent – attentive in all aspects of their children's lives, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week). Such a measure should be developed further in this new area of study.

Finally, our measure of “moms in the media” is a general one, which limits how we interpret these results. In the measure, participants were asked to report how often they compared their parenting to moms in the media, for which we gave the example of celebrity moms or moms in the news. Clearly, celebrity moms are different from moms in the news; celebrity moms have at their disposal ample socioeconomic resources, which might include a nanny, private teachers, and other child care resources. On the other hand, moms in the news would most likely be perceived as moms who have committed a crime against their children. Unfortunately, since this variable gives both ends of the motherhood spectrum as examples, it is difficult to interpret which “mom” participants had in mind when answering this question.

Future research

These findings have the potential to re-frame the way modern scholars conceptualize and study motherhood. The approach utilized in this study is novel; we framed our empirical analysis in theory, using a post-structuralist approach to conduct quantitative research. To date, no quantitative studies we are aware of take mothers' relationships with each other into account when studying parenting in the same way. While previous qualitative studies have suggested that mothers do experience judgment or mother-blame from other mothers (Singh 2004), and also that mothers adjust their parenting to the expectations of other mothers (Blackford 2004; Caputo 2007), this study is the first quantitative inquiry into motherhood using a Foucauldian framework. Therefore, the present study provides the opportunity to not only build on and improve our measures of these phenomena, but also generates new research questions in the literature on motherhood, mothers' relationships with each other, their spouses and/or partners, and practices of New Momism (i.e., which parenting practices are more likely to lead to New Momism?). These questions should also be examined qualitatively as well. Further, an examination of the long-term consequences of New Momism on children, mothers, and perhaps on the relationship between mothers and fathers as well. Does the practice of New Momism decrease as the child ages? Or does New Momism diminish as a result of the birth of a second, or third child? Each of these questions merits further study, and will provide important insight into understanding modern motherhood more thoroughly.

This study provides a first step toward understanding how surveillance of self and other moms affects mothers' experience of New Momism. As the expectations for parents change and intensify, it will become imperative to understand how women's lives are affected by these ideals through analyses of interpersonal reinforcement of societal norms of parenting. In addition, we must find better ways to assess women's experience of the pressure of perfection, and continue to improve upon both quantitative and qualitative measures of New Momism. The present study provides justification for a more extensive investigation into experiences New Momism, especially as women find themselves inundated with fearful parenting rhetoric from multiple sources, including interpersonal relationships. Research should continue to develop new ways of understanding how modern parenting expectations present both opportunities and constraints for contemporary women.

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Table 1: Demographic Variables: Descriptive Statistics (N=323)

Age	18-30= 30% 31-40= 60% 41-50= 10%
Race	White= 85.01% Other=14.99%
Education	Some High School= 0.84% High School Diploma/GED=13.13% Some College=5.31% Associate's Degree=10.34% Bachelor's Degree=41.62% Master's Degree=18.99% Doctoral Degree=9.78%
Marital Status	Married or Living with Partner = 89.92% Divorced= 5.04% Separate=1.12% Single, Never Married=3.92%
Number of children	M=1.82 (SD=1.11) Under the age of 1 = 24.4% Between 1 and 4 years old = 63.20% Between 5 and 9 years old = 35.96% Between 10 and 15 years old = 20.50% Between 16 and 20 years old = 7.30% Over 21 years old = 6.5%
Religion	Protestant Christian= 40.50% Roman Catholic=14.53% Evangelical Christian=13.13% Muslim =0.28% None=23.74% Other=7.82%
Employment Status	Work full-time = 47.19% Work part-time = 25.56% Stay-at-home-parent = 23.60% Student = 3.37%
Income	M=2.99 (SD=2.13) (25,000-34,000) Range=1-Below 25,000; 8-over 80,000

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Independent and Dependent Variables (N=323)

Variables	Means (Standard Deviations)
<i>New Momism</i>	
Pressure to be perfect ^a	4.97 (1.84)
<i>Media Consumption</i>	
Television News ^a	2.57 (1.97)
Parenting Magazines ^a	3.30 (1.77)
Newspapers ^a	2.22 (1.92)
Internet ^a	3.36 (2.00)
Self-Help Books ^a	3.27 (2.19)
<i>Surveillance – Fellow moms</i>	
Critical of fellow moms ^a	3.67 (1.58)
Critical of moms in the media ^a	3.29 (1.88)
Expectations come from fellow moms ^a	41.09%
Pressure to buy products comes from fellow moms ^a	4.39 (1.73)
<i>Surveillance – Self</i>	
Expectations from parenting come from myself (write-in)	26.09%
I feel guilty when I cannot live up to the parenting expectations I set for myself. ^a	4.26 (2.07)

Range: 0=none/not at all, 7=all the time/strongly agree.

Table 3: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting New Momism (N=304)

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β	B β (SE)	B β (SE)	B β (SE)	B β (SE)
TV News	.13 (.07)	.15	.14 (.07)	.15	.15* .16 (.07)	.11 .11 (.06)		
Internet	.06 (.06)	.07	.06 (.06)	.06	.02 .02 (.06)	.02 .02 (.06)		
Newspaper	- .19* (.07)	- .19	- .20** (.07)	- .21	-.23** -.24 (.07)	-.16* -.17 (.06)		
Parenting Magazines	.15* (.07)	.15	.16* (.07)	.16	.08 .08 (.07)	.06 .06 (.06)		
Self- Help Books	-.01 (.06)	.01	-.03 (.06)	- .03	-.01 -.01 (.07)	-.04 -.04 (.05)		
Critical of Moms in the Media	---	---	.18** (.05)	.19	.02 .02 (.07)	.02 .02 (.06)		
Expectations for Parenting from Fellow Moms	---	---	---	---	.67** .18 (.21)	.27 .07 (.20)		
Bought Product Because Fellow Mom Had Product	---	---	---	---	.14* .13 (.06)	.06 .06 (.05)		
Critical of Fellow Moms	---	---	---	---	.25** .25 (.08)	.15* .12 (.07)		
Expectations for Parenting Come from Self	---	---	---	---	---	-.20 -.05 (.21)		
Feel Guilty When I cannot live up to Expectations	---	---	---	---	---	.41*** .48 (.04)		
R ²	.05		.08		.17		.36	
N	304		304		304		304	

*p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001.