

TRANSFORMATION AND CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL DISCOURSE ON UNMARRIED MOTHERS IN SOUTH KOREA

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RESEARCH QUESTION

This study seeks to examine the evolution of social discourse surrounding unmarried mothers in Korea from the 1960s to the present day, exploring the interplay and influence of literature, media, and politics in shaping this discourse. This involves investigating the representation of unmarried mothers' anticipation and future aspirations aligned with societal and discursive shifts.

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STATE OF RESEARCH

- Research on unmarried mothers in South Korea predominantly centres on studies of social welfare. It involves examinations of the challenges these women encounter as a result of inadequate social policies to assist them (Lee 2017, Jeon 2017, Moon 2015, Kim 2013, Lee 2011).
- Since the 2010s, there has been an increase in research examining the political and legal implications of stigmatising unmarried mothers and their children, as demonstrated by studies conducted by Sung and Kim (2016), Kwon (2015), Hong (2014), and Hong (2013). They try to identify the origins of discrimination and assess its impact on politics.

- There are studies within the fields of Literature and Media Studies that examine gender roles and sexuality embedded in social discourse (Jeong 2012, Song 2008, Lee 2004, Kim 2003, Park 2000). The researchers analyse shifts in representations of sexuality, love, and symbolic imagery of Korean women in literature and media.

THEORIES

- Each field, as a place of struggle and a separate social universe, has its own functioning laws (Bourdieu 1995). However, they cannot be viewed as unrelated. Through examining literature and the media as fields, this study enables a more concrete and comprehensive analysis of discourse.
- The perception of women's sexuality and identity has been greatly shaped by the impact of colonialism and nationalism in the post-colonial era (McClintock 1993). The ideological dynamics behind the discourse on unmarried mothers are inherently linked to these experiences.
- Millet (1969) posited that patriarchy is a prevalent ideology that is acquired through socialisation, particularly within the family. Hence, it is crucial to understand family norms constructed by society and politics.

SOURCE MATERIAL

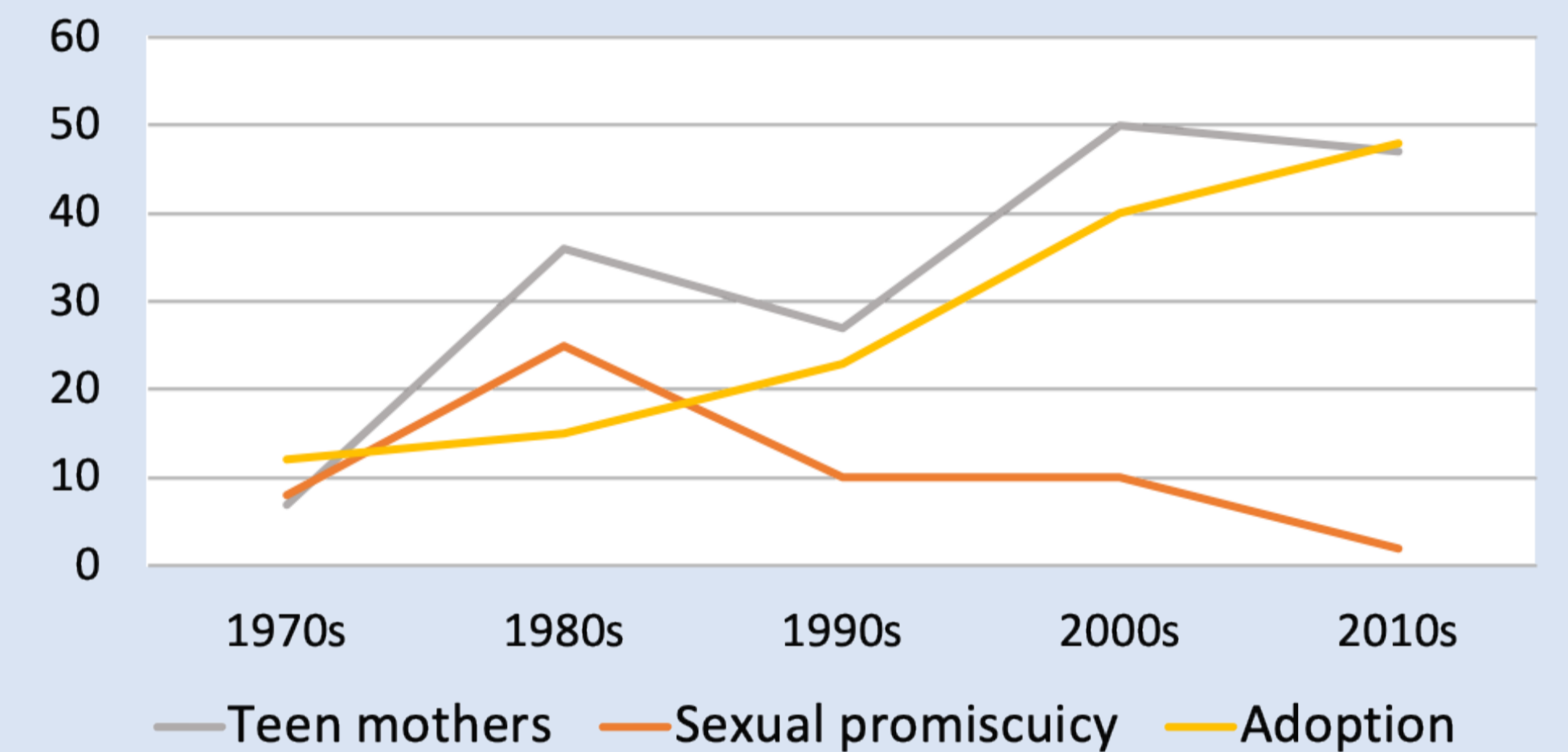
- This study analyses legal measures, newspaper articles, and literary works in the period after the Korean War up to the 2010s, including 2,400 newspaper articles and 32 literary works.

METHODS

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), content analysis, close reading, archival research

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Frequency changes of contents in news articles



'Increasing number of unmarried mothers' 'Raising a kid is a big problem for them' (1973 KyungHyang Shinmun)

Photo of an unmarried mother consulting an adoption agency

<https://newliblibrary.naver.com/viewer/index.naver?articleId=197303300329205001&editNo=2&printCount=1&publishDate=1973-03-30&officeId=0032&pageNo=5&printNo=8462&publishType=0020>

Changes in images and discourse on unwed mothers in literary works

Period	Images	Details
60s-80s	War widows	Bifurcated perspectives: unethical vs. victims in times of turmoils
70s-90s	Sexually debauched	Often marginalised and viewed as uneligible mothers
00-10s	Pihonmo (voluntarily unwed mothers)	Reflects unwed mothers' aspiration of changes and desire to challenge patriarchal order

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Funded by

DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft
German Research Foundation



Offen im Denken