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Sharenting: A psychosocial exploration of the performance of motherhood on Instagram

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MA Clinical Psychology Research Report

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14 February 2024



A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Clinical Psychology) in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 14 February 2024.

Declaration

I, Louise van Wingerden, declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is submitted for the Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university. I furthermore declare that:

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Date: 14 February 2024

Acknowledgements

These pages would have remained blank were it not for the following whom I sincerely thank:

My participants, who generously gave of their time, and entrusted me with their in-depth accounts of their motherhood ups and downs

My supervisor, Prof Katherine Bain, who kept me on track and gently untangled many a research, thinking, and writing knot

My family near and far, who stepped in when I had to step out to attend to this study

My absent loved ones, whose memory fuelled me through the mental doldrums and throngs of this process

To three dear friends, who were always to be found when my wings felt weak.

Abstract

Mothers' motivation(s) to 'sharent' (share content online that includes text, photographs, and videos of their children) on the social media platform Instagram has received little research scrutiny to date. This study explored the aforementioned from a psychosocial perspective, which foregrounded three South African mothers' subjective positions in relation to their maternal identities and sharenting practices. It included the examination of their desires, anxieties and defences as understood within a psychoanalytic framework. The qualitative research-aligned Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) method was employed to collect and analyse data that produced five themes. These were *building a memory chest, an online village of mothers, working through the transition of becoming and grappling with the identity struggle of a mother, the scrutiny of motherhood* and *the sharing/oversharing dilemma*. These themes were used to answer four research questions about the relationships between maternal identities and the performance of motherhood on social media, and sharenting. The implications of these findings and recommendations for future research were discussed in an attempt to contribute and expand upon psychosocial research on the intersection of motherhood and social media, especially within the South African context.

Keywords: *FANI, Instagram, maternal identity, motherhood, psychosocial, sharenting*

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"Motherhood changes everything – the way you think, the way you feel, just everything – it really does, and I will never ever think that of any other person that they're weak if they ever felt a certain way or anxious or burst into tears because I've had it all".

Participant 3 'Ann-Lee'

"In the fire of images

Gladly I put my hand".

George Mackay Brown

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Research Aims

This study sought to offer a psychosocial exploration of mothers' motivation(s) to sharent. This included an examination of the desires, anxieties and defences (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013) that influence the subjective positions that mothers take up in relation to their choice to sharent on the social media platform, Instagram. 'Sharenting' is the term coined for the routine dissemination of content (written text, photographs and video clips) by parents of their children's lives and their parenting experiences on online platforms (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Wegener et al., 2022). While the literature has found that sharenting in this way may offer mothers a way of integrating their identity through the staging of motherhood and interacting with an (imagined) audience (Madge & O'Connor, 2006; Wegener et al., 2022), the experience of this and possible outcomes have not been extensively examined. This study therefore took place at the relatively new intersection of motherhood and social media and hopes to contribute to the recent body of literature that addresses the human experience of technology and particularly, social media (Aalbers et al., 2019; Bayer et al., 2020; Luo & Hancock, 2020). By extension this included how mothers choose to engage with privacy issues alongside their motivations for sharenting.

1.2. Rationale

The transition to motherhood has been found to be one of the most demanding and anxiety-provoking chapters in an individual's life (Egmose et al., 2022; Leigh & Milgrom, 2008; von Mohr et al., 2017). In South Africa, more than one million births were registered in 2020 alone (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Mothers therefore make up a significant portion of the total population. Navigating this new territory requires long-term restructuring of priorities, daily activities and other endeavours related to meeting an infant's needs (Perren et al., 2005), which gives rise to a variety of psychological and social coping mechanisms. One of these mechanisms is seeking social connection and support via the Internet (Van Cleaf,

2020), in an attempt to increase maternal well-being (McDaniel et al., 2012). One such practice is that of sharenting, whereby parents routinely disseminate content of their children's lives and parenting journey on online platforms (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Wegener et al., 2022). For the purpose of this study, routinely sharenting was considered to entail posting such content at least once a week. As prevalent as the use of social media has become (Brosch, 2016), mothers' usage of online platforms remains sparsely studied (Madge & O'Connor, 2006). Studies focusing on the intersection between parenting and online platforms have thus far focused more on Meta (previously Facebook), rendering Instagram uncharted territory in comparison (Egmose et al., 2022). Parents continue to fall by the wayside as foci of research studies, especially from a social media perspective (Egmose et al., 2022).

Although digital platforms have increasingly allowed mothers to publish their subjective narratives (Van Cleaf, 2020), few studies have focused on the online digital sharing of child-forward content by mothers (Lazard et al., 2019), let alone within the South African context (Frizelle & Kell, 2010). Even less literature thus far has delved into the subjective experiences of mothers in this regard from a psychosocial or psychoanalytic perspective, focusing rather on how information is presented and issues of children's rights (Perren et al., 2005; Wegener et al., 2022).

Qualitative research is crucial to the social sciences knowledge economy (Jonsen et al., 2018) and findings could contribute to current debates on motherhood, sharenting and the intersection between these two. Understanding the display or performance of motherhood on a platform such as Instagram from a psychosocial perspective, which assumes participants to be defended subjects – whereby the unconscious motivation to portray oneself in a particular way is understood to be driven by anxieties and desires (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013) – has not been researched to any extent thus far. Investigating mothers' sharenting practices from a

psychosocial perspective, can offer insight into the interplay between intrapsychic mechanisms and the social environment, as mothers navigate their new identity in an online space of sharing with an audience. This approach may allow for the possible disruption of dominant discourses in motherhood that have thus far gone unchallenged (Frizelle & Kell, 2010), and may address the positivity bias that has been noted in studies on motherhood and social media (Wegener et al., 2022).

1.3. Psychosocial Theoretical Framework and the Defended Subject

The theoretical framework within which this study is situated is a psychosocial one, that foregrounds the interplay between an individual's unconscious mechanisms in relation to their social environment, encapsulating intersubjective realities (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). The psychosocial approach employs psychoanalytic constructs such as subjectivity, as well as the situating and social construction of identities (Hollway, 2008). In doing so, it is able to address binaries of identity theory in a both/and fashion by accounting for both the intrapsychic and the interpersonal, individual and the universal, the biological and the social, freedom of choice and regulation (Hollway, 2008). This is done in an attempt to seek understanding without reducing phenomena to either social or psychological aetiology (Froggett & Hollway, 2010), also referred to as 'binocular' accounts of phenomena (Frosh & Saville Young, 2017).

It employs both a holistic and individualised stance toward the research subject, employing psychoanalytic interpretive strategies to gain a more meaningful understanding of the subject's subjectivity (Frosh & Saville Young, 2017). This is accompanied by the adoption of the concept of 'scenic understanding' as originally conceptualised by Lorenzer (1986), whereby attention is given to the interplay between a subject's affect, cognition, and inference within a particular setting (Froggett & Hollway, 2010). The psychosocial approach therefore prioritises emotion and how it is embodied as well as recognising the effect past

experiences have on one's identity in the present (Hollway, 2008). It also requires a highly reflexive stance from the researcher (Froggett & Hollway, 2010; Frosh & Saville Young, 2017; Hollway, 2008).

The psychosocial approach also gives priority to defence mechanisms employed unconsciously to protect against anxieties as informed by Klein's theory of object relations (Klein, 1988). According to this theory, external objects in the social realm possess both positive and negative properties that impinge on an individual or subject's psyche. This dynamic exchange brings about defence mechanisms such as projection and splitting, whereby the perceived good is introjected and the bad separated externally to maintain and protect the psyche (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008; Klein, 2011).

Self-deceptive behaviours such as rationalisation, in order to protect the psyche, are subsumed in the human condition (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013; Lemma, 2015). Other defences include intellectualisation and humour, whereby the former involves an emotionally disconnected way of talking about feelings, and the latter employing humour as a way to resist against difficult emotions (Lemma, 2015). Acknowledging that subjects engage in discourses that offer them a way to safeguard against their anxieties whilst reinforcing their identity is to view them as defended, psychosocial subjects. A psychosocial perspective on subjectivity seeks to unpack the dynamics and tensions between the social and historical effects on a singular human experience on the one hand, and the expression of an idiosyncratic human experience or subjectivity within its social context (Layton, 2008). Layton (2008, p. 61) describes this subjectivity as a "site of struggle", highlighting how a subject may divide itself in reaction to its intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Such a struggle is therefore not without anxiety. Within this broad understanding of the concept of subjectivity, however, it is acknowledged that scholarly debate is still rife on the exact parameters of subjectivity (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008; Layton, 2008). Employing

psychoanalysis and approaching research from this perspective offers a theoretical explanation for defensive mechanisms against anxiety that encompass both rational and irrational stances (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). Furthermore, it accounts for the complexity at play when humans defend against external stimuli in the present and past, incorporating both psychic and social dimensions.

1.4. Structure of the thesis

Chapter One served to introduce the study, its aims and rationale, as well as give an overview of the theoretical framework and motivation therefor. In Chapter Two the literature review delineates the pertinent constructs of the study, positioning its relevance in current research and in relation to germane seminal papers. Chapter Three encompasses the methodology employed, including a discussion of the research questions, research design, sampling, data collection and method of analysis. Moreover it includes a discussion on rigour and reflexivity, as well as ethical considerations. In Chapter Four the outcome of the analysis is detailed. First, in line with a case study approach, a vignette for each participant is proffered, followed by an overview and an account of the interviewer's countertransference during her engagement with each participant. Chapter Four concludes with a presentation of identified themes across and within the three case studies. Chapter Five comprises a discussion of the analysis, whilst Chapter Six offers a summary of findings and conclusion. This is followed by the reference list and appendices.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

In an attempt to synthesise extant research findings in under-researched areas of interest (Snyder, 2019), this literature review focuses on the pertinent constructs of the study, namely motherhood, social media with a particular focus on Instagram, sharenting, the curation of motherhood on social media, as well as identity, gender, and the performance of motherhood. These constructs are approached from various theoretical registers and contexts including psychoanalysis, research studies, the South African context and feminism, as the literature review moves between them to highlight germane issues. Although relevant, the interactions of these readings are not extensively unpacked.

2.2. Motherhood

From a scholarly point of view, motherhood can be understood to refer to that which encompasses the procedural and relational aspects attended to by a primary caregiver raising a child (Arendell, 2000). The transition to motherhood is unique and impactful in demanding and anxiety-inducing ways (Egmose et al., 2022; Leigh & Milgrom, 2008; von Mohr et al., 2017). According to Ogden (2004) it also entails a period whereby the mother foregoes the time to do things such as sleep, activities for emotional replenishment, and creating something for herself that stands apart from her infant. For women, motherhood can also be a reinforcer of their gender identity (McMahon, 1995), which according to Butler (2020) is performative rather than statically conferred. Within this conceptualisation, motherhood is not necessarily biologically inferred but rather socially constructed. Butler (2020) thereby posits that women are not innately engineered for motherhood. Rather, it is a social role tied into the performance of gender. This highlights the self-reflective agency mothers have, although it is not entirely dissociable from the female body. This agency nonetheless creates the possibility to reconstruct motherhood within the performativity (Butler, 2020). Therefore,

although there are pressures to this social role, there are possibilities for change through agency and performativity.

Central to the construct of motherhood is the resulting reconstruction of identity (Tummala-Narra, 2009). This reconstruction includes the redefinition of personal space in the face of the infant's dependence, possible social isolation and guilt, grappling with conflicts related to early attachment relationships that may re-emerge, and an engagement with ambivalence (Frizelle & Hayes, 1999; Parker, 1995; Tummala-Narra, 2009). As this reconstruction takes place, mothers often find themselves grappling with blame, guilt and shame due to the propensity to be judged by others but also themselves (Choi et al., 2005; Frizelle & Hayes, 1999; Parker, 1995; Raphael-Leff, 2010). For many mothers this distress subsides over time, but for others can be acute and/or persistent, and in some cases post-natal depression (PND) may be diagnosed. As DeGroot and Vik (2019) also posit, many mothers experience a disavowal of their negative feelings toward their infant out of fear for being labelled a bad or failed mother. This can lead to a suppression of their ambivalence and emotional upset. This perinatal emotional upset and maternal ambivalence had fuelled the feminist stance (Quiney, 2007), as it underlines the importance of acknowledging and understanding maternal subjectivity (Raphael-Leff, 2010).

Within psychology research a shift has taken place from a sole focus on the impact that mothers and their parenting style have on their child(ren), to include a feminist theory-driven focus on understanding motherhood from the mother's subjective stance (Butler, 1999; Hollway, 2008; Jeremiah, 2006; Rose, 2018). There continues to be a disconnection between mothers' actual experiences and prevailing beliefs about motherhood and mothering (Arendell, 2000). This chasm between mothers' lived experiences and the myth of the ideal or perfect mother has been found to correlate with the onset of postnatal distress and depression (Choi et al., 2005). This is also demonstrated by the absence of an agreed-upon

universal experience of motherhood. A variety of intrapsychic and continuously changing social factors influence this finding. Rapid societal changes over the last few decades especially in Westernised societies have impacted upon the way mothers engage with motherhood (Tummala-Narra, 2009). Changing family structures, increased stressors, fluid social support systems as well as greater exposure to and awareness of individual and global trauma all interact with the internal worlds of mothers as they position themselves in relation to their children, their social networks, and the environment.

Social support systems also differ from a socio-cultural perspective (Arendell, 2000). In the USA, it has been noted that white mothers receive less familial support than mothers of other ethnicities, although this discrepancy is becoming attenuated over time in the face of western acculturation (Arendell, 2000). In South Africa, mothers' social support systems are further burdened by a high prevalence of domestic and gender-based violence, low employment rates and non-living wage salaries (Mokwena & Masike, 2020). Mothers' access to economic resources also varies greatly. Inequality along racial lines informed by historical pressures for especially black South African mothers remain pervasive in the face of a history of slavery, forced removals, apartheid laws, urbanisation and political instability, cumulating in a requirement to be especially mobile between rural and urban settings (Moore, 2013). Concurrently, a growing middle class of black South African mothers face additional challenges in their motherhood journey related to the complexities of acculturation shaped by the interplay between their geographical location, how they were parented within their own culture, interactions with other cultures, and changing socio-economic status (Mograbi et al., 2023). Such societal changes have also influenced mothers' intrapsychic functioning, which Tummala-Narra (2009) lists as adapting to a more demanding style of mothering, and personal identity changes. A more demanding style of mothering refers to the expectation that mothers engage with their children on a more one-on-one basis.

From an object-relations informed psychoanalytic perspective, the transition to motherhood involves a psychic reorganisation to the position of primary object in relation to their infant (von Mohr et al., 2017). Earlier conceptualisations of this dyad such as Donald Winnicott's (1960) 'good enough' mother – whereby the primary caregiver is able to sufficiently but not exhaustively attend to her infant – the significance of the attachment between infant and mother as underscored by John Bowlby, and Melanie Klein's good breast-bad breast delineation of the bilateral mother have had an impact on mothers' understanding of the expectations and parameters of the good mother (Frizelle & Kell, 2010; Kruger, 2003; Quiney, 2007). These expectations and parameters are also shaped by the post-partum phase which involves the infant existing in a symbiotic relationship with its mother and through her initial primary maternal preoccupation (Winnicott, 1956), and the subsequent process of separation and individuation (Mahler et al., 1975), which may cause the mother intrapsychic upheaval at times (Hollway, 2012). Expanding this within a feminist framework, Ettinger (2006) conceived of the matrixial borderspace which is encompassed by the feminine transsubjective psychic field around pregnancy, stretching as a stratum across prematernal and postnatal subjectivities within which the self and m/other co-emerge. It therefore acknowledges the transsubjective nature of birth mothers from before pregnancy as well as thereafter, as a way to account for the dynamic nature of their subjectivity.

Tummala-Narra (2009) emphasises the significant role the psychoanalytic lens has played in the definition and value judgement of motherhood and mothering styles. This lens is anchored by biological, traditional, and context-specific assumptions. While useful, in-depth descriptions of the psychic restructurings experienced during the transition to motherhood have been proffered by psychoanalysis (Hollway, 2008; Stern, 2020; von Mohr et al., 2017), it has been critiqued for positioning mothers as solely responsible for the developmental trajectories of their child(ren), reifying the expectation and increasing the

pressure on mothers to be unconditionally available and self-sacrificing (Boonzaier, 2006; Sutherland, 2010). This has rendered mothers as objects in relation to their child(ren) as the subject, at the cost of losing perspective on mothers' subjectivity (Boonzaier, 2006; Raphael-Leff, 2010).

Other changes in motherhood include greater accessibility to and engagement with parenting information via the Internet (Lupton et al., 2016). This has led to an increased engagement with motherhood on public and digital platforms (Wegener et al., 2022). One such engagement is that of sharenting on social media platforms such as Instagram.

2.3. Social Media and Instagram

Social Networking Sites (SNS) such as Meta (previously known as Facebook), Twitter and Instagram offer a virtual platform for people to exchange ideas, share information (Wegener et al., 2022) as well as shape and express their desired identities to an audience comprising known and unknown individuals in their network (DeGroot & Vik, 2021). SNS play an important role in the creation and maintenance of relationships, as well as offering outlets for expressions of personality and individualism (Donovan, 2020).

Instagram is a social media application that was created for iPhone users in 2010 (Zappavigna, 2016). Zappavigna (2016) explains how the application allows users to upload photos with or without filters accompanied by a caption. Between 2010 and 2016, at least twenty billion images had been posted on this platform. Since then, the uploading of video footage, curated stories and reels have also been enabled. Users can follow each other's accounts. Followers – or the audience, have the opportunity to engage with posted content but can also adopt a more voyeuristic stance, rendering the relation dimension asymmetrical (Zappavigna, 2016). Accounts can be private whereby followers need to request permission to access the content, which may be denied by the account holder.

Those engaging on Instagram for the purpose of self-presentation do so by sharing their visual identities (Hurley, 2021). These visual identities encompass photographic images of the self, others, and objects which have been spontaneously photographed or highly curated. 'InstaParents' refers to parents seeking to influence their followers or audience with parenting-related content (Egmose et al., 2022). For some, this is an opportunity to commercialise their status as parents, with sharenting content posted with the goal of increasing their follower count for financial gain and in partnership with sponsors for product endorsements (Jorge et al., 2022). InstaParents can be divided into those who chiefly disseminate the challenging side of parenting, and those who disseminate positive parenting experiences. This study sought to include both views and include those who may not have or not yet achieved commercialisation goals.

For mothers, SNS such as Instagram can afford a space where they can express idiosyncratic embodiments of motherhood (Abetz & Moore, 2018). These online expressions or performances can be accepted as valid symbolic interactions (DeGroot & Vik, 2021). Besides expressing their motherhood-related identities, mothers make use of online platforms such as Instagram to access different sources of information to empower themselves within their identities and mitigate anxieties related to these new identities (Egmose et al., 2022; Madge & O'Connor, 2006).

Those embarking on motherhood in the current age grew up in a world inextricably influenced and shaped by social media (Wegener et al., 2022). This has resulted in a surge of new parents, especially mothers, comprising large cohorts of social media users. Online communities within which they operate constitute imagined audiences and simultaneously broaden their perceived social circles and outlook (Madge & O'Connor, 2006). Although Africa has the most restricted access to the Internet when compared globally (Duffett & Wakeham, 2016), social media use especially on mobile devices has grown exponentially in

developing countries such as South Africa (Dlodlo & Dhurup, 2013). Instagram has also been found to be accessed by a more diverse population, cutting across socio-economic statuses and gender (Adekunle & Kajumba, 2021; Ting et al., 2015). Social media research within the South African context however remains restricted (Bosch, 2020; Budree et al., 2019). Budree et al. (2019) found Instagram to be the second most preferred social media platform among South Africans aged 18-35 years (60%) and only preferred by 30% of the 36–49-year-old cohort. The majority of new mothers would fall into the former category.

Currently, most studies interrogating social media and parents are based on engagements on Meta, as opposed to Instagram (Egmose et al., 2022), despite an increasing trend for and popularity of motherhood-related content posted by mothers on Instagram (Wegener et al., 2022). This suggests an under-researched area.

2.4. Sharenting

Sharenting refers to the routine dissemination by parents of content related to their children on SNS (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Lazard et al., 2019; Putri et al., 2021; Wegener et al., 2022). This can be done via status updates, videos, and photos. The process of sharenting can be divided into six stages: 1) documenting, 2) selecting, 3) editing, 4) captioning, 5) uploading, and 6) garnering reactions (Putri et al., 2021). Firstly, content of a child or children is captured, whereafter the most suitable version is chosen, edited, and accompanied by a caption. Then it is uploaded after which reactions to the uploaded content are engaged with. It can be regarded as a more specialised form of family photography, building on Hirsch's (1981) conceptualisation of family photography as a way of turning captured moments into allegories and symbols. Lazard et al. (2019) found sharenting to comprise an affectively and intersectionally complex phenomenon resulting in the production of motherhood as a communicative endeavour within a digitally informed social context.

As the Internet and online communities evolved, sharenting emerged as a consequence of the expansion of digital media (Putri et al., 2021). This practice can be viewed as both self-presentational and relational (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017) with the propensity for beneficial or adverse outcomes (Bhroin et al., 2022). Some of the benefits noted have included improved well-being and a welcome support system for the mother (Ranzini et al., 2020), whilst criticisms tend to be child-focused and include issues of privacy transgression (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Lazard et al., 2019), reducing a child's autonomy (Hsu, 2019), and a child's right to autonomy and self-actualisation in the digital space (Donovan, 2020).

The motivation to sharent is variably influenced by the need for validation and connection (Cino & Demozzi, 2018; Latipah et al., 2020; McDaniel et al., 2012), the desire to curate and collect memories (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Latipah et al., 2020), a wish to share with friends and family (Bhroin et al., 2022; Cino & Demozzi, 2018; Le Moignan et al., 2017), the processing of maternal guilt (Chae, 2015), helping other mothers (Jorge et al., 2022), possible commercial gain in the form of sponsorships or free merchandise (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Donovan, 2020; Holiday et al., 2022), and the need for a particular self-presentation (Hurley, 2021). Ranzini et al. (2020) note that sharenting plays a greater role in the parenting – and by extension motherhood – narrative, compared to the childhood narrative. Sharenting motivations can also be categorised into three types of profiles according to Holiday et al. (2022), namely 1) polished, foregrounding parents with children in an ancillary function, 2) promotional, whereby children are used to market the parent's skill set, and 3) intimate, which places the child in a central position for memorial purposes.

Sharenting is especially prevalent among those deemed digital natives – a generation within the millennial classification who were born into and grew up in a time where information technology and digital media were well developed and widely adopted – who are

now parents (Latipah et al., 2020; Putri et al., 2021). This places their children in a digital-first culture, which is characterised by the digital documentation of (daily) activities. In their study, Ranzini et al. (2020) found that a supportive network and recurrent sharing habits increased the likelihood of sharenting more often amongst InstaParents.

As can be reasonably deduced, when content of a child receives positive reactions, it has a positive impact on how the parent is perceived (Donovan, 2020). Such perceptions are based on the belief that images and videos capturing happy, satisfied children are representational of effective, loving parents. In this way, children are utilised as mothering markers of success (Goffman, 2002; Lazard et al., 2019). The sharing of child-related content is also guided by obligations parents imagine having to their on- and offline communities, to their children now and in the future, and to themselves (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). Their choice is therefore informed by motivations for socialisation (Latipah et al., 2020).

Although the term is a portmanteau of "parenting" and "sharing", studies have found that women/mothers are more likely to engage in this practice compared to men/fathers, as the former are more occupied with managing child-related content on social networking sites (Ammari et al., 2015). Gradually, sharenting has seemed to evolve into a gendered performative practice (Lazard et al., 2019), which affords sharenting mothers the role of socialisation agents (Damkjaer, 2018; Putri et al., 2021). However, when displays of motherhood take on a professionalised goal, it can severely compromise the ethics surrounding the publication of private images of children (Wegener et al., 2022). On the one hand, parents are responsible for their children's safety on- and offline, and on the other they are the ones engaging in sharenting, which could compromise their children's privacy (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Damkjaer, 2018). Although the intent might be not to compromise privacy, sharenting behaviours can still result in the regular disclosure of personal information. This is known as the privacy paradox (Kokolakis, 2017). This necessarily forms

part of the context of this study and the ways that sharenting mothers position themselves in relation to the privacy paradox i.e., how they engage with or choose not to engage with it, alongside their perceived motivations for sharenting.

2.5. The Curation of Motherhood on Social Media

DeGroot and Vik (2021) proffer the concepts of front stage and backstage as spaces where motherhood occurs. The former comprises online spaces such as Instagram where a curated version of motherhood is presented to an actual audience. Exploration of mothers' fantasies in relation to this both real and imagined audience may allow access to patterns in these mothers' engagement with social narratives on motherhood, which aligns with the social aspect of the psychosocial approach. It could also be viewed as an extension of Parker's (1995) notion that mothers scrutinise other mothers to find reflections of their own mothering when seeking validation of their efforts. DeGroot and Vik's (2021) backstage construct refers to the offline space where motherhood exists without a 'real' audience. However, the imagined audience is still present. What mothers choose to share and what not to share may reveal aspects of their internal object relational structures and defensive systems i.e. how they feel in relation to the imagined audience's response may reveal much about current societal narratives on motherhood, but also much about the mother's own personal experiences, as these experiences will influence which societal narratives she responds to and how she responds to them (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). What these mothers feel needs to be hidden from an audience, or alternatively what needs to be challenged in the imagined and real audience's perceptions of motherhood will be explored.

The concepts of front stage and backstage were inspired by Goffman's (1959) theory of dramaturgy constituting 1) actors (or those involved in an interaction), 2) the scene (where the interaction is communicated), 3) a front stage (the performance shared and observed by others), 4) backstage (the performance that remains concealed from others), and 5) the script

(which refers to the penned communications of interactions). Thus, the mother and her online audience represent the actors, Instagram represents the scene where the front stage comes alive, with little insight into the backstage comprising a mother's life away from her online representations. The script comprises her posts. This study hopes to explore the backstage elements of this 'theatre' and examine how this informs and interacts with the events on front stage.

When presenting the narratives of motherhood that mothers believe are expected from them by society, they tend to simplify and skew their narratives toward a more positive light (DeGroot & Vik, 2021). There can be a tendency in the online performance to conceal what are perceived as failures in parenting in an attempt to portray an idealised version of motherhood (Reichel, 2012). This can be achieved by manipulating portrayals of their children, whilst comparing themselves to others.

From a social media perspective, motherhood implies disseminating related content including one's personal views, experiences and seeking dialogue on the topic (Quiney, 2007; Wegener et al., 2022). These exchanges carry the advantages of being almost instantly accessible, with the option of anonymity and engaging with experts in the field (Lupton et al., 2016). It has been found that mothers who belong to and perform motherhood in particular online communities or groups, where their identities have been reified by group members, in turn enjoy a bolstering of their identities through their performances as determined by the dominant narrative upheld by the group (Gibson & Hanson, 2013). 'Unacceptable' performances do not receive reification in the form of likes or comments, serving to inform the mother that these performances do not align with the expected normative expressions of motherhood. In an attempt to put forward the imagined 'perfect' version of motherhood, mothers risk losing touch with their authentic selves (Lopez, 2009).

2.6. Identity, Gender, and the Performance of Motherhood

A mother's identity is not amalgamated at one point in time, such as at the moment of giving birth, but constitutes an ongoing process (Arnold-Baker, 2019). This ongoing process is complex and dynamic. Mothers have to exist and perform their identity within a variety of subjectivities that require them to be flexible with their boundaries (Tummala-Narra, 2009). The gender- and hetero-normative stereotype of the mother continues to be perpetuated both off- and online (Madge & O'Connor, 2006; Wegener et al., 2022). From a feminist constructionist point of view, motherhood continues to exist within societal contexts informed by gender belief systems organised by gender (Arendell, 2000). Furthermore, two distinctive perspectives on motherhood can be identified within the feminist framework: rationalist feminism, which negates any difference between women and men, accepting that either gender can perform the mothering role; and romantic feminism, which explicates motherhood as distinctly female, celebrating it as an establishment encompassing power, love and caring (Boonzaier, 2006).

According to Freud (1933) when a woman becomes a mother it can revive an identification with her own mother. This may or may not reinforce her sense of competence, with possible reignitions of anxiety and internal conflicts about societal expectations of their gendered roles. This can lead to feelings of isolation (Tummala-Narra, 2009) and behaviours seeking validation, affirmation, praise and understanding (Frizelle & Kell, 2010). During this identity reorganisation, a new mother goes through stages of identifying with herself as an infant, her own infant, and her mother (von Mohr et al., 2017). The infant is viewed as both separate from the mother as well as an extension of herself (Fonagy & Target, 2007). This psychic reorganisation places the infant and its needs front and centre – as informed by a newfound need to relate to and be supported by one's own mother figure – with other

important relationships such as that to a partner moving to the background, something Stern (1998; 2020) conceptualised as the motherhood constellation.

In her study, Reichel (2012) found mothers to be in a constant battle in the orientation towards and projection of an idealised identity they perceive to be expected from them according to US values. Within the South African context, acculturation and increased globalisation have caused a shift in the valuation of a 'good mother', namely from being a good and caring provider to priority given to the achievement of personal goals and individuation (Frizelle & Kell, 2010; Moore, 2013). The complexity of motherhood in relation to the competing demands of a professional and family life remain a source of identity expression (Riches, 2014) that occupy both the offline and online arenas (DeGroot & Vik, 2021). Engagement with the identity of being a mother is inextricably linked to a child, but can be expressed either in the confluence of the two entities or in the mother's attempts at individuation and therefore separation from the child (Holiday et al., 2022).

For the purpose of this study a mother's identity is approached from a feminist perspective as conceptualised by Butler (2020). She proposed that that which constitutes a mother is created through the performance of motherhood as opposed to being only socially constructed. This implies an active and contextually based practice, as the identity is represented on social media (Choi & Lewallen, 2018; Damkjaer, 2018). Maternal subjectivity is anything but static and possesses a fluidity attuned to context and subsequent performance (Kawash, 2011). In line with Foucauldian thinking, self-transformational technologies of the maternal self, aim to achieve specific goals of morality such as happiness (Lazard et al., 2019). Further goals that a mother negotiates for herself in the face of ongoing expectations to be the ideal mother, can result in empowering practices effecting transformation over time (Ghosh, 2016). Furthermore, the concept of performativity invites debates around resistance,

transformation and how agency can be established (Jeremiah, 2006) within a psychosocial framework.

2.8. Postnatal Depression

As previously mentioned, central to the construct of motherhood is the resulting reconstruction of identity (Tummala-Narra, 2009). As this reconstruction takes place, mothers often find themselves grappling with blame, guilt and shame due to the propensity to be judged by others but also themselves (Choi et al., 2005; Frizelle & Hayes, 1999; Parker, 1995; Raphael-Leff, 2010). For many mothers this distress subsides over time, but for others can be acute and/or persistent, and in some cases post-natal depression (PND) may be diagnosed. Although PND is the most diagnosed psychiatric condition among perinatal mothers (Choi et al., 2005; Tronick & Reck, 2009), it is profoundly common in developing world contexts such as South Africa due to mothers' exposure to extreme social stressors such as poverty, poor health care and stigma (Mokwena & Masike, 2020; Ramchandani et al., 2009). Additional contributing stressors to PND in South Africa include a lack of early detection, inappropriate referrals, and treatment plans (Stellenberg & Abrahams, 2015). PND in South Africa has found to affect up to 50.3% of mothers in rural areas (Stellenberg & Abrahams, 2015), whilst 57.14% of mothers residing in an urban setting presented with PND symptomatology in a study conducted by Mokwena and Masike (2020). Studies have found that stigma around PND arises when it is characterised as an expression of personal dysfunction on the mother's behalf, bereft of sociopolitical contextualisation (Kruger et al., 2014; Kruger & Lourens, 2016). Further conceptualisations upholding such a stigma also include the belief that PND reflects a mother's unhappiness with her new role, therefore by extension representing her failure to live up to the culturally expected ideal standard of motherhood.

2.7. Conclusion

To situate the study in extant literature findings, the literature review delved into pertinent constructs related to motherhood, social media and Instagram, the performance of motherhood, and the role of identity and gender in motherhood. Having identified where this study's findings would contribute to the current knowledge base, four research questions have been formulated, which are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methods

3.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the research questions, research design, sampling, data collection and method of analysis of this study. It furthermore includes a discussion on rigour and reflexivity, as well as ethical considerations.

3.2. Research Questions

1. What are mothers' perceived motivations for sharenting?
2. What desires, anxieties and defences are reflected in mothers' sharenting practices on Instagram?
3. What are the subjective positions that mothers assume in relation to sharenting on Instagram?
4. How do these assumed subjective positions relate to maternal identities?

3.3. Research Design

This study was situated within a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm because this allows for the comprehension of the subject matter within a wider context (Pham, 2018). As this study sought to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the unconscious investments at play in mothers who sharent on Instagram, it interrogated unique singularities, prompting the use of a qualitative approach (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Muylaert et al., 2014). The interpretivist paradigm also prioritises a self-reflective focus informed by the subjectivity of the researcher, the participant, and the reader, and is aligned with feminist research (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Within a qualitative approach, a multiple case study methodology was employed. Case studies comprise extensive depictions from various perspectives of individual cases and their analyses within a particular context as generated over time (Starman, 2013). In accordance with George and Bennett's (2005) classification of case studies, this study's approach fell within the disciplined configurative category whereby

established theory was applied to explain each case. Advantages for a case study approach included addressing causal complexity; high conceptual validity; utility for identifying causation within individual cases; and procedural robustness for the promotion of new hypotheses (George & Bennett, 2005). Potential disadvantages to this method included low generalisability, limits to hypothesis testing, and verification bias (Flyvberg, 2011).

This qualitative research design also fell within the narrative category as data was elicited and analysed employing the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) method situated within the psychosocial research approach (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, 2013). This narrative interview technique elicited idiosyncratic individual stories from a subjective point of view whereby the past, present and future came to life (Muylaert et al., 2014). Analysis was done in accordance with psychoanalytic interpretation (Frosh & Saville Young, 2017).

3.4. Sample and Sampling Procedure

Non-probability purposive and snowball sampling was used to recruit three South African participants who met the inclusion criteria. This sampling technique carried the risk of a biased sample but nevertheless offered value in the accessibility of otherwise harder to reach participants (Etikan, 2016). Participation calls were directed through open WhatsApp groups dedicated to South African mothers of which the researcher was a member, that could be joined with an open access link, and had hundreds of participants. Eligibility for participation in the study required participants to be South African and at least 18 years old, a mother whose youngest child was older than 12 months, proficiency in the English language, and managing an active, unrestricted access account on Instagram, with evidence of weekly sharenting practices published in the English language. Although motherhood was not restricted to biological motherhood, the participants who volunteered for this study happened to be the biological mother of their child. The choice for unrestricted accounts was informed by the literature that considers sharenting a practice in the open domain with the goal to

provide access to and reach as wide a possible audience in their online representations of parenting on a regular basis (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). The decision to exclude mothers whose children were younger than a year was informed by findings that those initial months can be fraught with uncertainty regarding motherhood (Arnold-Baker, 2019). It is in this period that an intense re-evaluation occurs whereby a shift in a mother's purpose, values and beliefs take place. For this study participants were sought who had had some time to adjust to this new role.

Participant (Pseudonym)	Ethnicity	Age	Number of children	Age of child(ren)	Number of followers	Frequency of posting
Odette	Caucasian	43	1	5	720	2 x week
Simangele	African	32	1	6	600	2-3 x week
Ann-Lee	Caucasian	38	1	13 months	600	1 x week

3.5. Data Collection

The FANI method (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, 2013) was used as it allowed for the in-depth exploration of participants' narratives, whilst holding shared meanings within the framework of understanding. FANI approaches participants as meaning-making and defended subjects whose interpretation of the question might be based in a different meaning-frame; who position themselves in a particular way during an interview to safeguard against impingements on their vulnerabilities; who may be unaware of the impact of their experiences and emotions; and can be unconsciously driven to distort accounts of their behaviours and emotions (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). This biographical-interpretative method of data collection sought to retain the participant's *Gestalt* or whole – greater than the

sum of its parts – by using open-ended questions, eliciting stories, avoiding 'why' questions, and following up on participants' ordering and phrasing (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013).

3.6. Instruments

In line with the FANI methodology, participants were interviewed twice using semi-structured interviews (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, 2013) (see Appendix A for the interview schedules). The interview schedules for the first and second interviews were drawn up in accordance with relevant topics identified in the literature review, the chosen methodology and recommendations by the supervisor (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Butler, 1999; Egmose et al., 2022; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013; Madge & O'Connor, 2006; Putri et al., 2021; Ranzini et al., 2020; Rose, 2018; Stern, 2020; Tummala-Narra, 2009; Van Cleaf, 2020). The first interview included a possible 33 questions grouped according to demographics, motherhood, identity, sharenting, own upbringing, and change. While interviews followed the schedule broadly, ad hoc questions were also used to follow and clarify areas of discussion led by the participant. Participants' posts on Instagram were not included as data as such, they were however referred to and questioned about in service of understanding mothers' motivations for and subjectivities in relation to sharenting.

Within the broad framework of a semi-structured interview the psychoanalytic method of free association was employed to invite a sharing of unconscious logic shaped by attempts to avoid anxieties, which are usually characterised by incoherencies. One of the limitations of the narrative interview technique is that relevant issues are not necessarily covered in a systematic way. Of importance is that both the participant and researcher are understood to be defended subjects and that their engagement with one another is understood to include the sharing of unconscious material as evidenced by projections and introjections. The researcher was therefore just as active in the creation of the data as was the participant (Froggett & Hollway, 2010; Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, 2013). Participants were interviewed

twice to allow for the follow-up of initial hypotheses garnered during the first interview, and to allow participants the opportunity to reflect on the first interview and any thoughts that may have emerged between interviews (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). Therefore, the two interviews were scheduled at least one week apart. The first participant's interviews took place two weeks apart, the second participant eight weeks apart and the third participant almost four weeks apart. The first interview was informed by a biographical-interpretative method. Participants were asked about their experiences of and relationship to motherhood both as mothers and daughters, and how they had navigated their new identities with the use of sharenting practices.

The second interview was used to follow up on possible foci of interest that emerged during the first interview and could be viewed as the resumption of an already established relationship. Participants were asked to reflect on the first interview and anything that may have stood out to them. Any thoughts or feelings that may have emerged since the first interview were also explored. Other foci were identified by the researcher in relation to noted moments of possible contradictions, hesitations, avoidances, or tensions during the first interview. These foci differed from participant to participant. This interview also served to explore themes that were significant in their absence during the first interview.

3.7. Procedure

Potential participants who responded to the call for participants posted on open access WhatsApp groups dedicated to South African mothers of which the researcher was a member were contacted via WhatsApp and email. Once interest had been established, the researcher ensured that the participant met the inclusion criteria of the study. Potential participants who met the criteria were then supplied with a participation information sheet (PIS) (see Appendix B) and consent form (see Appendix C). When written signed consent was received by the researcher, the first interview was scheduled. For the first participant this occurred in person

at a time and place convenient for them, whereas the second and third participants chose to be interviewed online. In both instances interviews were audio recorded with the participants' permission – online interviews were video-recorded as well. Interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes each and upon completion of the first interview, a second interview was scheduled. The first participant preferred to do their second interview in person, whilst the other two participants remained online for their second interviews.

With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded. Interviews were then transcribed verbatim and kept on a password-protected device. Once the research project has been examined digital recordings will be destroyed. With participants' permission, anonymised transcripts will be retained for future possible research use or deleted after examination of the research report. All three participants agreed to the anonymised transcripts of their interviews being stored for possible future research. The data was analysed using psychosocial interpretation in line with the FANI method and triangulated with input from the supervisor. Data for the study also included the researcher's field notes on her thoughts and emotional responses to the interviews. It excluded the contents of participants' Instagram accounts beyond what was discussed and described during the interviews as informed by the posts.

3.8. Method of Analysis

Considering that data analysis is usually driven by participants' subjective descriptions that have been rationalised, FANI-captured data seeks to go beyond the face value of what was said. Within the psychosocial theoretical framework of the defended subject, one seeks to understand parts of the interviews in relation to the whole or *Gestalt* when making interpretations (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). As opposed to clinical psychoanalytic interpretation, which is done during an encounter, psychoanalytic interpretation for research purposes occurs after the encounter. Therefore, a familiarisation

with the whole content of both transcribed interviews per participant is required, paired with a constant avoidance of fragmenting the qualitative data (Froggett & Hollway, 2010; Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, 2013). Whilst reading the raw data, field notes were consulted, and extracts of possible significance were highlighted. These extracts involved areas of interest to the aims of the study and the researcher looked for repeating patterns, inconsistencies, contradictions, omissions, and moments of high affect in the data. According to Frosh and Saville Young (2017) a psychoanalytic reading:

> goes 'behind' the text as the positions that individuals construct through their talk are taken to be indicative of anxieties, defences, and particular ways of relating that develop in infancy and recur throughout their lives. Interpretive strategies used…include analysing participants' personal biographies, applying psychoanalytic concepts (such as splitting, identification, projection) to narrative material and analysing the research relationship or 'countertransference' as a form of triangulation. The result is a coherent psychoanalytic formulation in which often fragmentary material is 'repaired' or put together (p. 513).

The data analysis was then captured in a descriptive, scenic summation of each participant to give the reader an idea of the whole against which interpretations were determined using an object-relations psychoanalytic lens (Froggett & Hollway, 2010; Hollway & Froggett, 2013). This method of presentation of results is also consistent with case study methodology (Froggett & Hollway, 2010; Starman, 2013). Each summation included noted contradictions, inconsistencies, and confusions (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). Possible links were sought informed by psychological and social justifications. Interpretations were checked by the supervisor of this research project to ensure interpretations were not skewed toward the researcher's subjectivity. The analysis was guided by the understanding that it would be limited by what the evidence proffered (Hollway &

Jefferson, 2013). Within case and across case themes that related to the research questions posed by the study were then identified (Hollway & Froggett, 2013; Hollway & Jefferson, 2008) for the purpose of noting areas of discussion.

3.9. Rigour and Reflexivity

Qualitative researchers are not detached from their subjects nor the research process but inextricably influence and are influenced by the process (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). It is therefore important to acknowledge and interrogate our subjective involvement on a conscious and unconscious level as it informs our interpretation of data. One of these is recognising that no frame within which interviews take place is ever neutral. Another is to approach the data in a sincere and just fashion as informed by a curious stance and not one of advocacy (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013).

In addition to the use of member checking (having a supervisor check analysis and interpretations of the data) and transparency (the provision of evidence for interpretive choices in the write up) (Stahl & King, 2020), researcher reflexivity is foundational in lending credibility to qualitative research (Jonsen et al., 2018). The reflexive space allows for the verification of the researcher's responses to the participants, which culminates in a construction of experiences as opposed to objective and positivist knowledge outcomes (Frosh & Saville Young, 2017). Researcher responses informed by countertransference emotions and phantasies were therefore recorded in a journal and discussed with the supervisor. Keeping in line with acknowledging the influence of the research process and participants on the researcher, detailed countertransference accounts with each participant are given. Sharing the countertransference experience of the researcher serves to highlight its possible and probable influence on the interpretation of the data. It also flags in a transparent manner how the data are co-constructed by researcher and participant, which increases the

trustworthiness of the study. This also allows the reader to know the researcher and participant through the interplay of their subjectivities.

In the interest of not circumventing my own values and beliefs, and their impact on the robustness of the research process (Kalu, 2019), I acknowledged my own subjectivity as a white, cis-gendered mother in the South African context, from a socio-economic class that afforded me access to more resources than the majority of the population. My subjectivity impacted upon the dynamics of the research process, from building rapport with my participants during the interviews, to how the psychosocial interpretations were made based on my current skills and knowledge of psychosocial dynamics at play. I also acknowledge my own biases regarding the use of Instagram and sharenting practices on this platform. Whilst I find it a most useful source for information on motherhood and parenting-related topics, I personally refrain from sharenting in the interest of my child's right to privacy and my own ambivalence about the long-term effects of creating a digital presence for my child without their consent. As a trainee psychologist I have also chosen not to have an open access Instagram account with visible posts, rendering my social media presence as that of consumer and not contributor.

From the moment of having to conceptualise a pertinent and engaging research topic I experienced a strong countertransference of anxiety and excitement, relief, and insecurity. I was anxious about tackling a qualitative study at master's level for the first time but excited to realise that a research topic engaging in an aspect of motherhood was possible, as I found myself in the throes of early motherhood. At the time I was relieved to find a topic that felt like it aligned with my lived experience of navigating motherhood with the help of social media sources, but I was unsure about sufficiently conceptualising and designing a study that felt worthwhile and safe enough for mother participants, as the first year of motherhood brings with it many idiosyncratic challenges. After engaging in some reading around the

topics of motherhood and Instagram, I was surprised to find much less literature than anticipated. This served as impetus to finalise my topic as I felt it was important to delve into these dynamics as I imagined them to have a profound impact on mothers adjusting to their roles within the broader motherhood discourses, and which in turn could potentially have a profound impact on their children.

The initial meetings with my supervisor evoked its own motherhood constellation as I looked to her for guidance and understanding as we both had to take care of the study in its infancy and ensure its successful completion. My transference was one of seeking an academic mother but also a supervisor who was a mother, as I fantasised that she would be able to understand this elusive, pervasively consuming and at times maddening role and how it would also impact upon the research process.

Throughout the process the need to understand and be understood lay central. I personally was of the mind that children's online presence should be kept to a minimum as I sought to clarify for myself to what extent one had the right to create a permanent online presence without their consent. There was a constant iterative process of feeling a strong need for privacy arising, yet at the same time I was equally participating in gratefully following Instagram accounts wherein mothers openly shared about anything and everything. The concept of voyeurism with a conscience kept arising and felt like it needed to be challenged. I was fascinated and baffled by mothers who diligently and openly shared their motherhood journey and could not ascertain whether it was a compulsion, a way of life or a desperate attempt at making sense of it for themselves through likes, comments and having a space to discharge what they were experiencing – both good and bad.

The immediate and eager response from a larger than expected number of interested participants caught me off-guard as I had anticipated a more cumbersome sampling process. Yet it became quickly clear that mothers seek safe or trusted spaces to share their experiences

and process their tribulations, or at least just tell their story knowing they will be heard. Many reached out to participate but did not meet all of the inclusion criteria, which made me feel slightly guilty for having to turn them away but also curious as to what potentially rich data they could provide, perhaps for a study with a different focus.

When preparing for the first round of interviews, care was taken to balance the semi-structured interviews so that they would not scare off the participants but also sufficiently produce rich enough and pertinent information that would serve as foundation for the second interviews – which sought to go much deeper. I was nervous before meeting each of the participants for the first time as I did not want to come across as too nosey, or in any way judgemental, or inept in any way that would make them feel more vulnerable or evoke mistrust. It was of the utmost importance to build a good rapport with each of them, and therefore, in appropriate moments I chose to briefly share some of my motherhood experiences as a way to show that I too was 'one of them' and reduce any perceived power imbalance. However, I also found myself sharing unexpectedly in moments, which I realised afterwards were when I became drawn into their narratives and identified with the participants' emotions or experienced a twinning transference.

At the end of the first interviews I always felt a mix of gratitude, empathy, and guilt. I was grateful for what and how the participants shared their stories and vulnerabilities; I could empathise with some of their challenges that all mothers seem to face one way or the other; but I also felt guilty and responsible for evoking any doubt in them. Also that they willingly shared more than I was able to, based on the frame of the interviewer-interviewee dyad. My countertransference was experienced more acutely during the in-person interviews compared to those conducted online, but for both formats I felt increasing pressure to honour these mother's narratives as best I could because they had confided in me. Especially during the second round of interviews, when I attempted to better understand more vulnerable aspects of

their narratives, and a change in mood was palpable with all three participants, I felt the weight of having borne witness to some of their unconscious conflicts.

I was a researcher first and foremost but the intersubjective space with each of them was charged with the differences and similarities in our social identities and motherhood journeys. At times it felt like I was seesawing between being the interviewer who 'knew the most' about the study and the direction of the research process in relation to my participants on the one hand, and being a new mother consciously, and perhaps unconsciously, seeking understanding and to understand from more experienced mothers, regardless of differences in our social identities.

Analysis partially commenced after the first interview with each participant, in a process where my supervisor and I identified areas for further exploration in the second interview. Overlaps and differences in psychosocial interpretations between myself and my supervisor evoked more curiosity for the second interviews but also highlighted the difference in experience as researchers and mothers. It often became apparent that my interpretations were strongly and at times unconsciously influenced by my own lived experience as a fairly new mother impacted upon by a history of exposure to the risks of sharenting. My limited proficiency in psychosocial research in the field of motherhood studies also produced limited understandings of what my participants were possibly experiencing or trying to communicate subconsciously. This was expanded upon by my supervisor's experience in the field, but also her ability to distance herself from the immediacy of the interview-setting and the countertransference it had evoked in me, as informed by her expertise as researcher and knowledge as a more experienced mother. The immediacy of the interview-setting and countertransference evoked at times made me lose sight of the broader psychosocial contexts at play for each participant, as we connected on a

more personal level as mothers together bearing witness to the idiosyncratic yet universal struggles and joys of motherhood.

Upon completing the interviews, I was again humbled by my participants' trust and willingness to engage in the process with me, whilst uncovering layers of understanding in making sense of motherhood through the use of Instagram. By this stage my initial activist stance relating to the privacy paradox had drastically diminished as I had truly become interested in my participants' motivations and sensemaking of their sharenting practices. It made me reflect on my own beliefs about the use of social media and disarmed me in a way that I felt was conducive to the research process. I realised my strong apprehension to sharing child-related content was partially informed by my framing as a therapist-in-training and worrying about the wellbeing of others; but also my experience related to my previous career at a national news desk, which had exposed me to a myriad of cases of the traumatic intricacies of the violation of children's rights, online fraud, identity theft, online paedophile rings and kidnappings.

Transcribing the data became increasingly difficult as I was drawn back into my participants' inner worlds, which included trauma, loss, guilt, and frustration. As a researcher I felt myself slipping into the minutiae of defensive moments, whilst as a mother I felt identified with these mothers and I was reliving moments of the interviews that had touched me on an emotional level. I was becoming mentally and emotionally fatigued, which upon further reflection I believe underlined once again the profundity of the identity transition that motherhood imposes. I also felt angry and frustrated that even in this day and age mothers are struggling and not receiving or finding timeous and sufficient support that could alleviate some distress. It seems I too am influenced by discourses that proclaim the myth of the 'perfect mother' who does not struggle. I learned that regardless of the era we find ourselves in, certain innately human fears and anxieties remain pervasive – such as needing external

validation of being good enough; not wanting to judge or being judged but both inevitably happening; and seeking authentic connection despite pervasive feelings of shame and guilt.

The analysis phase proved fruitful and healing, as a gradual clarity of shared but also idiosyncratic themes for each participant illuminated pertinent constructs that deserved further interrogation, appreciation and understanding. By this stage of the research process I also felt that I had grown as a neophyte psychoanalytic psychologist and researcher, but also as a mother, which brought with it a better understanding and acceptance of the ambivalence-ridden journey that is motherhood. Yet again my own feelings toward sharenting coloured the write-up of the results; my supervisor's pointing out how my choice of words inadvertently pointed to my conflicting feelings around sharenting, encouraged further grappling with my own subjectivity as a researcher and my influence on the research process. While I came to understand sharenting better as a form of 'processing motherhood online', my own pervasive doubts continued to colour the research process, however, this is acknowledged in the write-up of the results. Further supervision and reflection aided in ensuring that the intersubjective nature of this kind of research was respectfully accounted for but did not unethically sway the reporting of the data.

3.10. Ethical Considerations

The methodology conceived by Hollway and Jefferson (2013) is based on relational dynamics requiring the application of respect, understanding, sympathy and honesty in an attempt to attenuate structural power differences. Even though participants willingly but perhaps unwittingly provided insight into their unconscious (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013), the fact that they could not control what they revealed about their unconscious, rendered them vulnerable at times and necessitated a sensitive and respectful stance from the researcher. Although Hollway and Jefferson (2013) view the payment of participants as a way to bring homeostasis to the balance of power, other views consider payment to hold risks in relation to

potential for coercion. Participants for this study were not remunerated. Additionally, care was taken not to unduly influence the principles of free association and narrative interviewing, by ensuring participants understood that their responses did not have to follow a prescribed formula or pattern of response. Rather, data was gathered in line with how they interpreted and made sense of the open-ended questions posed as impetus for free associative answering.

Ethical clearance for this low-risk study was applied for from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Witwatersrand and granted under protocol number MClin/23/09 (see Appendix D). Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, their right to discontinue their involvement at any time before submission of the research report without any negative consequences to their person, as well as the level of confidentiality and final anonymity that could be guaranteed as captured in the PIS (see Appendix B). Although participants shared content on an open access public domain, confidentiality in relation to their identities was ensured in the interest of creating a trustworthy context within which intrapsychic vulnerabilities could be shared. This remained challenging as the methodology entailed a rich description of a participant's inner psychological world. Nevertheless, care was taken to change identifiers such as names, and other identifying information and location.

Written informed consent was required from each participant including a request for permission to use direct quotes. It is noted that, as was found by Hollway and Jefferson (2013), it can be challenging to sufficiently inform participants of the interview experience to be expected because the narrative structure is unlike the conventional structured and semi-structured nature of interviews participants might be used to or anticipate. This confounds the concept of informed consent somewhat in that participants cannot reach a priori judgement in a rational way; therefore, the emphasis shifts to a continued effort by both participant and

researcher to avoid harm (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). Participants were informed that they could choose not to answer any questions that they did not wish to answer. This did not preclude any potential distress participants may have encountered during the interviews, but it was the researcher's responsibility to create a safe context.

Audio-recordings (or video-recordings for online interviews) of the interviews and the anonymised transcripts were only available to the researcher and her supervisor. These were stored on password-protected computers and kept safe for the duration of the study. After examination of the research report, recordings will be deleted. All three participants gave permission for their anonymised transcripts to be stored on the researcher's and her supervisor's computers for potential future research use.

One participant became distressed during her second interview. The researcher temporarily halted the interview to check in with her and only continued the interview when the participant indicated that she wished to continue. Additional support or counselling services for participants following the interviews, were made freely available at the Emthonjeni Centre on the Wits main campus, but none of the participants had indicated that they wished to make use of this service.

3.11. Conclusion

The FANI methodology of data collection and analysis, which falls within an interpretive paradigm was employed for this study. Six semi-structured interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analysed in line with the FANI method. The following chapter will discuss the results of this narrative analysis.

Chapter 4: Analysis

4.1. Introduction

This chapter unpacks the outcome of the analysis. First, a vignette for each participant is presented, which seeks to paint the scene of the participants' unique defended and psychosocial subjective positioning with regards to motherhood discourses, and how each participant performs this on Instagram. Depth was determined by the extent to which participants were prepared to share their experiences in detail. Attention was paid to the defences they employed as a guide to the unconscious dynamics at play in their navigation and accommodation of their new identities as mothers. Patterns of relating to themselves, their children, and their real and imagined audiences on Instagram were triangulated with patterns from their personal histories and with the process of the interview, including interviewer countertransference. Pseudonyms were employed and potentially identifying information was disguised insofar as it did not detract from their subjective truths.

Each case study is followed by an overview and an account of the interviewer's countertransference during her engagement with each participant. Presentation of the three vignettes is followed by a delineation of identified themes across and within the three case studies.

4.2. Vignettes

4.2.1. Odette

4.2.1.1. In Odette's Words

Odette was the first participant to be interviewed. She was the oldest mother of the three participants, yet still found herself in a phase of looking for a life partner. Dating and meeting potential partners vied for her attention alongside being the kind of mother she wanted to be and portray herself to be on Instagram. Being viewed as 'cool' and possibly

finding popularity as well as fame and fortune without coming across as “too mothery” lay at the heart of her motivations for engaging the way she did as a mother on Instagram.

From the get-go Odette eagerly and kindly reached out to be part of the study. We arranged to meet in person at a neutral location near her home. She was punctual and painted an ambivalent picture from the start. Her petite build and brown hair framed a fiery but somewhat wary stance. We got talking straight away and it was easy to speak to her. She was excited to be part of the study but shared her suspicions about the bias she believed the term ‘sharenting’ embodied. As a single mother in her early forties who identifies as Caucasian, her history revealed a somewhat tumultuous personal life and path to motherhood, that translated into Instagram engagements seeking possible fame and fortune, but also validation of her narrative. Odette resides in an urban area with her 5-year-old son. She grew up in a nuclear family with her mother, father, and two sisters (one older, one younger), and currently works as a midwife and nurse in the NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) of a state hospital. Her mother passed away a few years before her son was born, and her father a few months after his arrival. She studied fine art, and harbours a love for photography, which enhanced the appeal of Instagram as a visual social media platform. Her mother was also an avid lover of photography.

Odette joined Instagram a few years before becoming a mother, and currently has around 720 followers, the majority of whom are not known to her or part of her circle of friends and family. She posts on average twice a week and defines her current use of Instagram as personal, but is “thinking of getting into, doing some family shoots or family photos”. She felt very lonely before becoming a mother, although she “had partners on and off…the loneliness, feeling lonely, was a constant theme”. When her son was born she found the demands of motherhood “just exhausting. But… it's - yeah, I have a little companion now”. Although she has a little companion now, loneliness – and consequently seeking

connection or being part of a conversation on Instagram – followed her throughout her pregnancy and thereafter, as she would reach out to the platform, even when "breastfeeding … (child's name) would wake up and cry and I'd grab my book, or my phone and be happy to lie back with him and you know, go through it and scroll". She found that "often when I post, it's like I'm lying in bed, I'm scrolling through my Instagram, I'm seeing the beautiful photos and like "oh, you know what? I took some nice photos last week. Oh, I'm just gonna add".

Her pregnancy was the unplanned result of two dates with an at the time "complete stranger" who did not want children. The decision to go ahead with the pregnancy and fulfil a lifelong dream of becoming a mother was fraught with sceptical and critical friends and family, in tension with her fear that this might be her only chance:

> …[f]alling pregnant accidentally and then being worried about: did I do this on purpose, did I ask for it? And um. And to, to be completely honest, I decided (pause) 'Who cares at this age', actually, and 'I'm tired of being the responsible one', so maybe it was a night of not being the responsible one. And why should I always have to be responsible, especially when – if I fall pregnant, then I'll have a child.

Once the baby was born she described irrational fears that "something bad would happen to him", indicating possible post-traumatic stress and that both the pregnancy and becoming a mother was experienced as somewhat traumatic, especially in light of the loss of her mother before the birth of her child. The transition was not a straightforward one and continues to be painted by ambivalence:

> Yeah, just like - I love it. I found a lot of things that I felt like I was missing beforehand before being a mother, covered. Like you know, a lot of - a big sense of contentment, sort of fulfilling and purpose. I always wanted to be a

> mother. Oh, but obviously it is quite hard. And I'm a single mom so I'm at home with my son without - We have a nanny, but she's there when I'm at work and when I'm at home she's not there, so I've obviously found that hard…[And] well, this I really didn't anticipate. So when I took him home for the first time from the hospital and ... A big sense of detachment, like, somebody had given me this baby to look after and placed this individual person in my hands to look after. So I didn't feel like this was *my* baby or I didn't feel, em, what's the word? It took a long time to feel that sense of 'this is mine' … Like yeah, it took me a while, that said, to really orientate myself as a mother. Yeah, there, there was a mo-, it was. It was a transition; it wasn't like the day it was before and then I was a mother. It was a transition.

The transition her identity underwent was marked by a distinct sense of separateness between herself and her baby boy because she "felt like he was very much a person in his own right, right from when he was born". Attempts to assimilate and accommodate her new identity as mother included defending against the difficulties by finding ways "to make it easy" for herself, like extending "breastfeeding and keeping him in [her] bed". She also had a lenient approach – perhaps out of necessity – which she also feels guilty about, such as not having brushed his teeth properly from an early age and ending up with teeth difficulties and having to pull teeth.

Although she feels like she accomplished what she wanted to because she "wanted to be a mother", she also felt like having become a mother impinges at times on her wishes for other parts of her identity as she searches for a life partner:

> I embraced the role … you know eventually. But, or maybe it comes up with a certain picture in my head of: what is a mother? And maybe I wasn't ready yet to…I don't know (pause) but I, uh, also I guess that the conflict in me is

> being single and wanting to meet somebody and wanting to come across [as] this care-free and fun and, you know. And also getting older - being an older mother. So yeah, maybe there is a bit of conflict in my head, about ***that*** side of things.

This conflict seems to permeate her motivation for using Instagram and her engagement with it, as she seeks to create a particular representation of herself. This representation of herself appears to be how she would like the world or her audience to identify her – she wants to be acknowledged as a mother but not come across as "mothery". Although she "was a breastfeeder and so proud of that", there seems to be a pervasive anxiety about how others perceive her because she doesn't "want to be one of those moms that shares so many pictures of their kids". She further explained that:

> I'm looking at Instagram, uhm… And when I go to check one profile and I look at myself through other people's eyes…and then the sense of wanting to see how it looks through other people's eyes but being a mother and a mom and how I look, and then that holding back a bit and keeping it for myself a little bit. I mean, that has made me not wanting to share, Jah... not ready to share, wanting to open up to people.

Despite the excerpt above being a little unclear – perhaps representative of her own lack of clarity about her feelings in this regard – what is clear is her anxiety about how she might be viewed by others and a defensive "holding back" and "not wanting to share". She also related this to practical considerations, like the fact that her managers at work follow her, and she was wary of showing "semi-naked" pictures of herself for fear of "what people will think". She spoke of her need to be perceived as exciting and interesting, but fearing overwhelming her audience with content they might deem irrelevant:

> Not wanting to be boring…not wanting to be yah…like wanting to have a page that people keep coming back to and enjoy…not like overwhelming people with so many photos and so much honesty…I guess maybe that's why I held back from time. That's not what I …like I wanted it to be…like it's not what I wanted when I started sharing on Instagram, I guess. I wanted those pictures where you post once a day and have thousands of followers and have a niche…but it is not easy…and is that what I really want.

The conflicts in identity are further underlined in her fluctuating needs and content choices on Instagram as she juggles between them and their online versions:

> The whole thing is creating a narrative. I like – and I've even in my own personal work when I was studying fine art, I was very interested in the stories, storytelling aspect and creating a narrative and wanting to use words and pictures that, but never quite knowing what I wanted to say. Whatever. Whereas now I'm a mom. And now I have something to say… and also like when I look at the photos before (child's name) they sort of, ja were all over the place, like am I trying to tell stories about [the city], or who am I, what am [I] trying to say, whereas as a mom , I guess that's it, I am a mom and this is my story with the child, I am a single mother, uhm I am raising him on my own, and I am also a photographer, and also at the same time I feel like 'by the way I am also a midwife so I am also going to post a pictures of that' (laughing)… So ja not quite getting…but yes.

While motherhood appears to have helped Odette discover an aspect of her identity that felt clearer, her words "not quite getting…" suggested that some of her uncertainty and sense of her photos, her story and perhaps even her identity feeling "all over the place" may well still be present. Underneath this, a strong wish for "fame and fortune" – often delivered in a

whispered tone – and being popular and showered with material items of validation permeated both interviews. Odette explained how you "can become a popular mom on Instagram and then maybe people will send you free stuff". This popularity was sought not just as a mother but also as an artist: "You know, maybe my work is going to be so popular that I'm going to be famous". This popularity wish is rooted in her childhood experiences: "I want to be popular deep down…I think like…it goes back to high school where I wanted to be popular and being a cool kid". Even at the end of our second interview, the dream of perhaps winning the Instagram lottery of becoming an account with an impressive number of followers reappeared:

> Ja, like I think like that guy that I was talking about that at one point had 200-thousand followers, he just had a photo posted on somebody's page with a link to his page and something random or he entered something uh and suddenly just got all these followers. I mean guess that's the feeling of Charlize Theron been standing in the back of the queue or, somebody is scrolling through Instagram and coming across one of my photos and sharing my photos …you know I think I quite like *that* aspect of it that it could happen to anybody. I think that feeling of not really having to work too hard and yet I could be successful, it has that aspect of it.

In her attempt to attain this wished-for status, Odette started off by meticulously curating her content in order to attract followers by being "very selective of the photos that I posted in the beginning, they must be like, beautiful photos". Although she had a plan, it did not come to fruition, as she rationalises the failure:

> So in the beginning I used to do all the hashtags, hoping (whispers) like I'll attract all the followers (back to normal voice) and now I don't do hashtags. You know, I know it's not - it's not gonna happen. Do I even want it? I'm just

> happy to share, like (child's name)… (child's name) with, the followers I have. You know.

Coming to terms with not having achieved her desired 'momfluencer' status and realising that although she had been posting for her imagined audience, perhaps the fact that she was posting for herself sufficed was further evident from statements such as:

> ..at some point I became realistic enough and I thought like you know what, I'm never gonna be that kind of Instagrammer…So you can't post too much or else you slip too easily into: 'Look at me with my perfect life,' even if it's hard…I mean there's so much, there is a story I can tell that people could relate and enjoy and be interested in but I mean I guess…I didn't….what's the word? I didn't…uhm… cash in on that story…you know. I mean it's always like how personal does one want to get just for like followers? Um, but I'm also wary. Not to make fun of them but me and my best friend Alisha are a little bit mean *(laughs)* about some of them. And so I'm very aware of how easy it is that, like, I could over- overshare my life and people on the other side are making, actually making fun of me…and maybe where I am now is also a less interesting phase, and less - maybe that's also why…I feel like I really don't have to share very much anymore, because it's not as interesting…to me, therefore probably less interesting to other people watching.

Of note is that she considers her followers to be "watching" her journey. While she appears to want followers, she also appears a little untrusting of the audience and what they may think of her. She relates this uncertainty to the fact that she has negative thoughts about others on Instagram, however, it is possible that what she fears they may think is her own projected criticism of herself.

Further evidence of projection is suggested in the fact that, alongside a performance for an imagined audience, she also seemed to be expressing that much of her posting about her motherhood journey on Instagram was about finding her motherhood identity for herself. Now that her motherhood identity has settled somewhat, she is in "a less interesting phase" and she feels "like I really don't have to share very much anymore". Perhaps now that she is more secure in her motherhood identity, it is less evocative and anxiety-provoking – "not as interesting to me…to other people watching".

An interesting interaction occurred between us when I asked whether her son was aware that photos of him were being shared with strangers. She commented somewhat facetiously in a whispered tone: "People are watching us. *(Louder)* Are viewing, nah I haven't. Never thought to actually". I wondered whether she may have felt criticised by me in that moment – another example of her fear of being judged – and then responded in a way that was intended to make light of any concerns about safety with regards to posting pictures of children online. While the audience may think negatively about her, she had not considered any other negative consequences.

For those "watching," she believes she has "a unique journey that [she] could share, that people could relate to". She also states that she uses the platform to stay in touch with and update people she knows, although she admits that many of the people who would be interested in updates are not on Instagram, and so she resends those pictures to these people:

> It's an overthought situation. And also I know (child's name)'s dad is not on Instagram, and his grannies are on Instagram so I, I also know that, so maybe I'm open in a way I wouldn't be… and often I post things and then I realise they're not on Instagram then I send them the photos directly because Instagram is a way of letting everyone see what the kids are up to, but I might be open about being a single mom because I know that he's not there and talk

> about how hard it is and be more honest about some things…[But] I felt like I finally joined the mom club, and I can finally post about it, now I am legit.

In this excerpt, the theme of using Instagram to work through aspects of motherhood that she found hard emerged. Knowing her child's father would not see it, she appeared to feel free to be honest about what feels hard for her. These attempts to figure herself out through curating a social media account had been happening before she became a mother, when as previously mentioned, her Instagram account was "all over the place". The statement that "joining the mom club" legitimised her need to post about her life suggested that she had previously felt that this need was shameful or 'illegitimate'. Her child and her motherhood journey appeared to have given her a focus, an identity, and a legitimate reason to post.

This legitimacy, however, appeared thrown into doubt when the term 'sharenting' entered the conversation, as she was unfamiliar with the term and had Googled it before our first interview. Although her younger sister regards her as a 'sharenter' –if it means that one overshares – Odette had decided that it sounded "like a made-up word". She questioned whether I was allowed to use made-up words in my research title. Furthermore, when she had looked it up "there was only negative things," which according to her showed my bias and made her question whether I was allowed to "show [my] bias in [my] title?" This opened up a whole discussion about whether sharenting was indeed by default oversharing; where did the boundaries then lie; and what the privacy implications were as Odette questioned her actions:

> And then I start to get worried after I read that – it, should I, do I hold back a bit like, yeah…. I wonder like, is is, ja, will a child? Like are they right? Will a child look back and be like 'Why did you put so many pictures of me?' Like are they are right? I don't know. I've also wondered late- so my profile is public, and then I thought, should I be making it private?

She defended against the possibility that the frequency and nature of her posting on her account amounts to oversharing. She responded to the fact that in certain countries 'sharenting' is deemed illegal by labelling such laws as "weird". Odette also seemed more concerned about possibly oversharing because of how she might be viewed as opposed to what the oversharing might mean for her child in the future:

> So like a year - on this first birthday, I think I looked back, and I posted sort of one or two very pregnant photos, bikini, and an actual photo of me like opening another birthing pool, you know? Uh, So I did go back and do that, but I haven't lately because I think I saw people doing it. Sort of like 'ugh, we're looking back at you pregnant again, so sweet *(laughs)*'. I'm a bit cynical.

This cynicism paired with ambivalence was also detectable in her rationalisation of not having explicitly considered consent when she criticised teenagers posting in their own capacity:

> Ja, well I mean like they can do themselves as much damage, by - via their online presence as, yeah, I don't know…So maybe, I must, if I still want to continue describing the – you know, our lives, whatever, in photos, on Instagram, maybe I should (pause) post more (pause) about motherhood and me with (child's name) but not just (child's name) as the centre, because of the whole consent thing.

Regardless of this, another reason for the way she uses Instagram and "to kind of keep on posting [is] so that [you'll] keep on having memories". This also serves as consolation for not having achieved her Instagram dream because the storing and categorising of photos is perceived as a benefit, despite the potential cost: "Those...benefits, make it…yeah. At least I posted. Let's put it that way. Even if I'm not a famous mom, mom-influencer". This is

reiterated when she accepts that she's "very conscious of how we come across and how we look. So yeah, I think, I guess like I appreciate a journey of motherhood, with nice photos. So maybe I'm hoping my followers are like me and looking for similar journeys".

A key figure missing from Odette's motherhood journey is her own mother. When she found out she was pregnant, she found solace and validation from a good maternal object in the form of her friend's mother whom she had expected to be as judgemental as some others in her inner circle, but who instead said: "I think it's wonderful – I think it's wonderful for her". Odette experienced her own mother as "the most perfect mother…present, loving". This may be true or a partial idealising defence against any ambivalence or negative feelings about her mother because her mother has passed on. Nevertheless, she seemed to have missed her own mother when becoming a mother herself and felt her mother's advice continued to guide her during those early years:

> I couldn't get, like phone her: what should I do now? But I felt like I'd, you know, cause I was interested in motherhood and doing things naturally…. So she, ja…So I knew a lot of her advice, a lot of her stories already…So I, you know, I kind of knew what she would say in a lot of the circumstances.

Odette was, however, able to reach less idealised, more vulnerable spaces in the interview and her anxiety became evident. It became apparent that her relationship with her mother was not perfect and she had wondered about her own lack of confidence in this regard. One thing she spoke about trying to do differently, as informed by how she was raised, is to instil more confidence in her son:

> I think I'm not a confident person, so I'd love to give (child's name) more confidence. So I'm conscious of that, like how to get him more confident, confidence, maybe that's something I see I'm doing differently to my mom. Maybe, like, did she do something wrong that I'm not confident? Or was it

> just in my nature? You know, like a genetic thing. My other sister believes it's a genetic thing. Um.

Another dynamic at play is her mother's love for photos and how that possibly informs Odette's need to share her motherhood journey through photos: "She was loving it, you know, she wanted to see the photos. She, she was an artist herself and very, very big on photos, so…". Her own artistic ability and appreciation for "beautiful photos" appears to be an area of identification with her mother. Perhaps in some ways her documenting of her own motherhood journey in photographs was an attempt to feel closer to her own mother – to have Instagram act as a digital '(m)other' – a holder of memories, a source of support and affirmation, and a way to validate her worth and value – perhaps in ways she wished her own mother could have done. Odette was able to reflect thoughtfully on her journey and her use of Instagram:

> You know, high school's not it and finding a niche in like studying art and maybe to a certain extent doing nursing but not wanting to be a nurse because it wasn't a very popular or cool profession but also letting go of that. And then now being on Instagram and wanting to be the cool, popular kid…and worrying about what people maybe think of you and ja, maybe that's what an anxious person looks like on Instagram. Like these bursts of sharing and then suddenly you are stepping back and like overthinking everything, and then sharing again.

Despite this anxious profile and ambivalence about the platform, Odette remains a dedicated Instagrammer, not just because of the eternal hope for fame and fortune, but also because there are "moments of actually enjoying the platform".

It was apparent during the second interview that she had thought about her Instagram engagement since the first interview and presented as needing to defend against her guilt for

what she has already posted about her son without considering the long-term effects thereof on him. There were “moments [of being] worried about now (child’s name) is on social media” but in the end she believes that “as he gets older [she] will post him less, [she] want[s] to try and be respectful, if he says, ‘don’t take a photo’ then” she won’t out of “respect of his consent”. At the end of the day she admitted: “I still feel at this moment the page is mine and although it’s about him it’s mine for now”. She also seemed to make peace with feelings of ambivalence and conflict, and perhaps also her embarrassment at failing at her goal to be famous:

> I guess yah I felt that it’s fun and it’s a nice creative outlet, and yes maybe I didn’t, I didn’t get the, I didn’t create the page that I wanted or that I pictured myself, the ‘the fantasy page’ but ja, I still enjoy it and I am glad that what I have posted… also to look back, it’s so nice that it’s all there. Ja, so I am glad that it is what it is, and maybe I don’t need to be popular anymore, maybe I’ve outgrown that idea.

In conclusion, Odette also pointed out that she had come to recognise that her thoughts about Instagram and how ‘postable’ moments with her boy could be were quite consuming. When he had been ill and a sweet interaction took place between the two of them during his recovery, her mind immediately took her to wanting to find the right photo and suitably endearing but funny caption. Her realisation was summed up when she stated: “Ja, it is interesting. And I mean, because we didn’t have social media before…So, what would I be thinking about?”. She appeared to have begun to wonder about what posting meant for her and what she may be missing through it.

To sum up Odette, she had recalled how her “mom always said: “things get better” and this appeared to be her continued hope.

4.2.1.2. Overview and Researcher Countertransference – Odette

The interview with Odette was marked by a palpable level of anxiety about whether she was able to provide me with what she imagined I was looking for. She was an eager participant who proactively participated in the study, at one point calling me out for use of the word 'sharenting', which she felt was 'biased' terminology. I was grateful, excited, and nervous to meet Odette and she arrived ready to share parts of her story. During the first interview our shared nervousness felt like it paved the way for speaking openly enough about the challenges of motherhood. I found myself oscillating between keeping an objective distance as the interviewer and being drawn into sharing some of my own subjective motherhood experiences in relation to her accounts as a way to access more in-depth and rich data.

Having fallen pregnant after the second date with 'a complete stranger' seemed to have coloured the beginning of her motherhood journey somewhat traumatically. Although she had always wanted to be a mother, the initial phase with her newborn was not a smooth one as she reported struggling to accept him as hers and she felt ambivalent about her baby helping her fulfil a lifelong dream, but not in the way she had anticipated. As she described how she navigated those first years I felt conflicted about her descriptions of seeing her baby as a person in his own right from the very first moment on the one hand, and behaviours of possible enmeshment like keeping him in her bed for longer and breastfeeding him until the age of three on the other hand. As she spoke it was impossible not to track and compare her approach to motherhood to mine. At times I felt relieved to hear her speak about aspects I also found challenging but sometimes I felt a distance grow between us where I realised my beliefs differed somewhat. I tried to remain respectful and curious in such instances. It remained imperative to let her tell her story and for me not to influence our intersubjective dynamic adversely with my nonverbal responses. However, I felt it was important both as

researcher and mother to offer authentic validation and sympathy when and as it arose for me during both interviews. Even though she felt motherhood gave her a distinct voice on Instagram and therefore more direction in how she chose to curate her content, a sense of 'defended against but present' disappointment was there. She often reverted to whispering when speaking about wished-for goals such as reaching sufficient followers to be deemed popular or achieving fame and fortune – as if there was shame in having these dreams. Any posts that harboured ambivalence were defended against by comparing them to other accounts that, according to her, also did not achieve their goals, perhaps as an attempt to manage her feelings of failure.

Her awareness of being watched by her followers seemed to evoke both a sense of pride and uncertainty in her, as the question of 'what will people think?' remained. Even as this was typed up, a protective countertransference arose in me in response to Odette's vulnerability and the partial external locus of control that seems to inform her sense of self. Upon reflection, this seemed linked to the loss of her mother. Although her support structure included her sister(s) and some friends, I wondered whether her motherhood journey might've been differently scaffolded were her mother still alive. At the same time, it might've instigated further ambivalent feelings about her lack of confidence, as she wished more self-confidence for her son and was careful to assign blame to her mother for her own lack thereof. In this way it seemed as if Instagram acted as both a source of motherhood-related accounts to aspire to or use as example for both more confident mothering as well as surrogate motherly advice, as well as a platform for testing out the waters as a possible source of mirroring. This also informed my stance toward her during our second interview as she seemed more subdued, as if perhaps speaking about her ambitions and failures on Instagram had brought to consciousness her losses, disappointments, and possible areas of judgement

she had not considered before, such as the issue of consent that is highlighted in the sharenting literature.

I felt somewhat like a perpetrator during the second interview when asking more in-depth about her journey to and through motherhood thus far, fearing I might open up a wound that would require additional care and time to process, which the research process did not allow for. I also felt somewhat guilty for asking more about the loss of her mother, but felt better about it by the end of the interview as it seemed to have assisted somewhat in the processing thereof, as 'no one has really asked [her] about it before'. It also underlined the connection between herself and her mother through their love of photos or the visual capturing of moments, which for Odette has culminated in a treasure chest of memories. Both interviews with her felt like a delicate dance around and against her anxieties as a single mother with not quite the 'momfluencer' status on Instagram that she would like, still seeking love and constant romantic companionship, and navigating motherhood as a dedicated but at times uncertain mother who wishes to share an authentic account, but still often finding herself in the throes of comparing herself to other mothers on Instagram.

4.2.2. Simangele

4.2.2.1. In Simangele's Words

Simangele was the youngest mother of the three participants and from the moment Simangele reached out to participate in the study, her bubbly and kind personality was palpable. She is a 32-year-old mother of a son who turned seven between our two interviews. She identifies as African (Black). We met online for both interviews. Simangele resides in an urban location, but her son lives with her parents on a farm in a rural location; he moved there "when he was about 18 months old," and currently attends Grade One at the local private farm school. Mother and son see each other every two to three months when he either comes to visit her or she goes to see him, but she hopes to move him to the city to live with

her very soon. Her current partner has known her son since he was a baby, and she considers him “a role model” for her boy. Simangele joined Instagram in 2012/13, thus before becoming a mother, and for “primarily personal” use. She has just under 600 followers, of whom the majority are not known to her, and posts on average twice or three times a week.

She initially characterised her experience of motherhood as “great, mostly” in a jovial and self-deprecating, humorous way but as the interviews progressed, her ambivalence about being “a long-distance parent” became apparent. Initially she described the situation as “just great” but then admitted that “it's really difficult. Uuum. I wouldn't advise it, but it's the best thing for him”. The reason for the long-distance configuration was due to her not being financially secure enough at the time of his birth and her mother suggesting he move in with them because they had so much space. Simangele also agreed that her parents had more time for him than she would have had at that stage. But the ambivalence, which she intellectualised and rationalised against, kept making an appearance: “So it's, it's so ideal for him. That's what I keep on reminding myself… that it's, it's quite difficult for me”.

The beginning of Simangele’s motherhood journey was notable in that she had not been aware that she was pregnant until she was moments away from giving birth and described her initial motherhood experience as “a complete surprise…it was a shock”. In trying to make sense of it she explained that she always “wanted to be a mom. [She’s] always loved kids, so when it happened…it was like a seamless transition”, yet the mother role “slapp[ed] [her] back to reality” because she felt like she had been quite selfish in her twenties. Her “family was really supportive” and she doesn’t “regret anything”. In trying to come to terms with her actions that led to this surprise, she explained that she “definitely knew that [she] had him for a reason”. She explained this reason as follows: “the way that it happened, it….um. Don't want to put too much pressure on him. But he basically like saved

my life – like, all of the – like he gave me that 'why'". She also felt that it in some way made sense that she "didn't know that he was coming" because:

> …at that time in my life, if I had found out I was pregnant, I probably would have had an abortion… I think I'm that type of personality also, my family is, we're avoiders. We are avoiders so we avoid anything bad or negative till the last minute – until literally life looks at you and says… 'OK, cool you, now you have to confront it'.

When Simangele became a mother it challenged her identity, way of life and also her relationships:

> Obviously it changed a lot of things like dynamics, with friendships and stuff, because now, I'm not the girl that you can call to go to the club with anymore and stuff. And so it's strained a lot of friendships… And yeah, it was, yeah. It was a shift…. But um the friends that did stay by me were super loyal. So it was…. fine. It just made my, my circle smaller. And more real… and solid.

Being a single mother, in particular, brought with it many conflicting emotions and having to carve out an unknown path as she "came from a nuclear family with mom and dad. And [she] always thought, 'OK that that's the ultimate, you're doing your child a disservice if you give them anything else'". She defended against these difficult feelings by explaining that:

> I've realised that you kind of think it's overrated? *(laughs)* And like, as long as they've got like strong role models, strong then…. then there's no reason why the child would like feel that they don't have everything.

Although her family was very supportive, she still experienced "like a lot of judgement, a lot of confusion, a lot of, you know, criticism, whatever. You know and if people didn't say it to my face… a lot of the time, it's like you can sense it" when she fell pregnant, and it felt like people were handling it "like a teen pregnancy," which gives further insight into how her

identity as a carefree, perhaps almost reckless young adult was perceived. She has always been on social media since she can remember – from MXit onwards – and started posting about her son "quite early. I think his first picture was like when he was 6 weeks". Her main motivation for posting on Instagram is because it has become "literally just like a diary now. So I, the only reason why I keep posting is because when I go back to all of those other pictures I'm like, 'Oh my gosh, this is so nice to go back to this', I need to keep posting so that I can go back to this later also". Her son is aware of her Instagram account and has interrogated her: "[h]e goes, 'Mommy, why are you posting these pictures of me?' And he goes, 'who can see this?' And I'm like 'well it's everyone, everyone can see it' *(laughs)*". She does not mind that everyone can see it because she considers herself "such an Insta-mom also, so I'm like, it's fine, it's fine. I won't post it, I won't post it – but then I post *(laughs)*", which suggests that at times the need to post overrides her child's wishes. Yet she acknowledges that "some of those things must stay his things and I mustn't overstep or post too much". But she mainly "post[s] him" she admits, even though her content is mostly from "recycl[ing] a lot of photos" from her mother and his schoolteachers.

As she explained her posting habits, I wondered if her engagement on Instagram serves a surrogacy role because she "can't go over to him. So… I give them an update of how he's doing, what he's doing now. His first experiences, first moments and stuff like that" – them being her friends and family who follow her, although she admits that among her followers "there are people [she] doesn't know". She does however believe that her content serves as a kind of gatekeeper because otherwise "if you don't know me, my content is like, it's not going to interest you that much, if you don't know me". Yet, if you were to get to know her via her Instagram content, it would be evident that her content and her representation of her identity has become mixed since becoming a mother:

> I still do enjoy my wine and then I'll post like funny videos or whatever. If I do go out, I will post anything out, whatever. So it's different. I think maybe with age also it's changed. So maybe there is some of me because he's not here all the time.

Simangele "had never heard of' the term sharenting before but exclaimed: "when I read your thing I was like, yes! There's a word! And I was like yes. Love it. Through and through. Love it. Ja". She also dreams of still reaching 'momfluencer' status: "I wanted to be a momfluencer, so I'm gonna … My next child! I've already decided". Although she stated that "a baby can survive as long as it's got a blanket, and a breast" she too wants the "all of the free stuff, and the perks that these kids of 'momfluencers' get are wild. Birthday parties sponsored...All of that, I'm like, yes. I'm – I'm here for all of that.. *(laughs)*". Her narrative of being a "long-distance" mother held mixed feelings for her. I wondered whether her ambition of reaching 'momfluencer' status might be a wish for acknowledgement of her motherhood and her as a successful mom despite being away from her son so much:

> I do like the communities that momfluencers actually want to create which is really cool. Um, a lot of them… for me personally, just because I am like a long-distance mom and… stuff like that. Um, I don't really connect with a lot of.. them and some of them kind of irritate me. Um, I would like to like create like a more authent- *(chuckles)* a more authentic community... So um, so a more authentic type of vibe.

In the excerpt above, Simangele's wish to belong to the 'community of moms' is apparent, but her feeling of being different as a "long-distance mom" and her struggle to connect with some 'momfluencers'' accounts suggest some mixed feelings in this regard. Her irritation at their 'inauthenticity', was significant, especially in light of contradictions in this regard in her own profile. She described how she curates her content with posed moments: "They love

seeing him, so they're always like, ‘oh, he's so cute, he's so photogenic’. He's like also, like he’s so good at like switching on, um when I ask him: ‘baby please smile for me.’ ‘OK, Mommy’. Like always. Perfect”.

Simangele does receive criticism from her mother about all the posting, whereas her sisters encourage her “to post more…get more followers”. Although not explicitly stated, she seemed to derive a level of gratification from the number of ‘likes’ received on her posts. She was proud of the fact that her child receives overwhelmingly positive feedback on Instagram: “So… well, all of (child’s name)’s posts that I post of him will always get like 100 likes. Always. So… he's great. He always gives good content *(laughs)*”.

A profound moment in Simangele’s Instagram journey was the feedback she received after posting about a miscarriage. She had grappled whether or not to post about this particular experience and it was a difficult decision to make. She found the experience positive, however and she explained that it helped her realise that one can meaningfully process and share the ups and downs of motherhood via the platform:

> And then I was like, oh, it was like, kick to the gut like oh sh*t like, you know, um.. this is something. And this I've never really spoken about the abortion; um I mean miscarriage or anything like that. And I was like, this is so weird that, that it happened, and I was like - and it felt like very isolating still. And I was like *(sighs)* and I posted and I was like, OK, so everyone, you guys have all been dying in silence. Hello. Like, it was just.. *(half laugh)* …There is something therapeutic about (*sighs)* not going through things by yourself also just like. And then after that, I was like so much better. I was like, it's not even. It's out in the universe it’s not just mine anymore… to carry around.

This experience appeared to give her the courage to post more and confront and process the shame she feels around long-distance parenting: “there were so many moms and like things like thinking ‘oh I was thinking of taking my child to live with their grandparents’. And I’m like, ‘ja, do it! There’s no shame in it’”. Processing and posting about long-distance motherhood brought up the theme of not wanting to be forgotten and the need to be validated as the mother: “that was like my biggest fear. Because I took him to them when he was small…And I was like ‘oh he’s going to forget me’. And every – they don’t forget you; they know you”. She also feared that she may forget how to be a mother if separated from her child:

> I didn’t have a real-life example and it was just like insecurity, um, it was also more like won't I forget what I've learned actually also, without him actually physically being here – will I slip back to being the old person that I was. Or, you know, will I still have that essence of being a mom or him yeah, having an impact if he's not physically here kind of vibes. I think that also is just like a big question mark.

Previously, Simangele had stated that the birth of her child “had saved her”. Giving up her everyday mothering role to her son, she seemed worried that she would return to the version of herself that she had been before her son was born. The daily role of mother was handed over to her mother, whom Simangele believed “played a huge role” in ensuring that she was not forgotten:

> Like anything that she buys him, she's like ‘your mommy bought you this’…He's always called me ‘mommy’. He calls her mommy, but he calls her ‘mommy-granny’ now. So… um, she's always just like, like always admitted it to him that I was mommy, so I am there, I’m working type vibes, like ja, so she's always been, she’s always been a champ like that.

Co-parenting with her own mother over long-distance also came with its own trials and tribulations. Although she experienced her own mother as "super committed…she was good…she wasn't too uptight or anything, very much 'embrace your personality. Do what you like,' you know," there has been a shift in her parenting style: "She's not really very um affectionate…She's very affectionate now with her grandkids". When comparing, she noted that:

> She used to be quite firm or whatever. And now she's like '(child's name) said he doesn't want to, so we're not going to do that'. And I'm like 'Who is this?' *(chuckles)* … she's like on this gentle parenting trip. And I'm like 'Oh OK, I thought you were giving him a hiding.'… Things have changed, times have changed.

She has tried to make sense of the change and difference in parenting styles between herself and her mom and explained that:

> Her gentle grandmother parenting... It's, it's fine to a certain degree, because actually, what she does is then she lets me take the lead. Right…so one thing that I've been really appreciative always is that (child's name) is not confused at all about who his mom is and who the main person in his life is and stuff so, um, I think by her taking that step back and not being like necessarily the disciplinarian or the rule-setter or that person – it still gives her the ability to be a granny, you know, and me to be the mom who comes in and is a little bit more strict and a little bit different in parenting.

Rationalisation helps her make sense of her parenthood configuration: "So, I don't mind that it's so different or whatever. And also, I think…I don't know, but I think that with other people when they raise their children, mom and dad aren't always going to have the same rules *(laughing)*". She is grateful for what her family has meant to her on her motherhood

journey because he unexpectedly came along at a time when she "was a mess…like…from Thursday to Monday, out partying …like just basically reckless". She explained that:

> [I]f I had carried on the way I was living before him, for two even a year or two more, I probably would have gotten into trouble, like into serious trouble. Or, you know, something would have happened because at some time your luck runs out…so I think that's how he saved my life and like literally it was like…my eyes opened, and you know, you snap back into reality. And I wasn't always like a rebel without a cause. You know what I mean? And you start like re-engaging with people that you had stopped talking to because you were just living one part and they were living in another. You know, you start, like, reevaluating relationships with friends, you know everything. Yeah, my relationship with my parents, my siblings, so, that's basically how he brought me back to life.

The changes in her life and identity brought about by her son's arrival are very much reflected in the content of her Instagram account, as she explained that "you post what you want to post, and you've got like all pages… I want to say kind of like of like your identity. You know what I mean?". Simangele appeared to use Instagram to express various aspects of her identity, including motherhood, but perhaps it had also served as a way for her to discover what this identity is. She described her posting as a way of life:

> I will always post, I will always be on social media, on Instagram and stuff. Doesn't necessarily - it will probably change. It could possibly change because you're…constantly evolving and stuff…But I always post and share. I love the concept. I love it, ja.

Her discovery that her identity is “constantly evolving”, much like social media and technology, appeared to have assisted her to make peace with who she is, and the experiences she has had, such as a reckless youth, an unplanned pregnancy, becoming a long-distance parent, and a miscarriage.

The impact of motherhood has been transcendental for her and informs her online presence very much:

> So yeah, it did feel messy. I didn't really have like, a clear…what I'm doing, what I'm posting. I didn’t have a clear purpose in life in general, actually. So, it's like…a lot of the time I find that like your social media and the way that you portray yourself online, it may be like chosen and you may nitpick it, but I think that you can still get like the essence of yourself in that current time and at that current stage, right. So, I found it before (child’s name) I was just like a 20-something-year old living my life. Um, and you don't really have that ‘why’ right, so…once you have your child and you have that ‘why’ it's transcends into like all aspects of your life, your social media, the way you work, like how you carry yourself in life in general. So yeah, I think that that's it's – it did change and…even the way I'm posting like from last year to this year, you know just like showing all the happy things, all you know happy, beautiful, (child’s name) is great, I’m great. Life is great. Until this year where it was just like life isn't great. …All the time, you know. But you know, you kind of let that show through and you know, it's also changing the way you post and stuff.

Alongside her need for likes and comments on her posts, suggesting some need for affirmation and validation of her motherhood and herself more broadly, her Instagram journey appeared to reflect a process of seeing herself reflected back through photos from the

past and images of moments in her life. The visual aspect of Instagram is important for Simangele because “you don't have to speak words”.

The first interview appeared to prompt a lot of thought for Simangele about her use of Instagram. During the second interview she expressed ambivalence about the process of posting authentic content which requires the disclosure of one’s vulnerabilities: “Like in hindsight, I probably…had I known how it feels, I probably would have posted other things a long time ago, like in terms of my life and the truth behind things and stuff, yeah…putting your life out there and putting yourself out there is not easy”. This seemed linked to the conundrum she experiences of not caring but also caring about what others and by extension her followers think:

> I don't know if it's bad or good actually, I'm still trying to decide [but] you do care about what people think about you. You do. Everyone does. I think it's a thing, but it's just like to what degree and to how are you gonna control that? … it's like also if I am this person and I'm owning my life then yeah why not say, it's like, I'm not ashamed. I don't wanna be like…ashamed of the way I live my life, or what happens to me or whatever. I think I'm sick of that.

This shame appeared linked to how she became a mother:

> [W]hen I had (child’s name), everyone was like ‘Oh my god, you should tell your birth story. You should, you should tell people’. And I think I didn't… because I was ashamed… a little bit and I don't think that's right. I probably if… I was me now having gone through that, I probably would have shared it.

Nevertheless, using Instagram seems to allow her to “take control of the narrative” because although she finds that “people know what's going on in your life and it gets around and

someone will tell someone else and whatever", when she posts about it "it's like taking the power and then people know exactly what you know… It's coming from me, the horse's mouth basically". She knows that she can't control "what people [are] going to think," but what matters to her is that she "can control, like, how [her] narrative, how [her] story comes out". She has found this "empowering more than anything". She acknowledged that "in hindsight" she "probably would have posted other things a long time ago, like in terms of [her] life and the truth behind things and stuff".

The personal nature of her content makes her believe that her audience comprises mostly other mothers:

> [they are] mommies because otherwise, what are you doing? If you're not a mom it's creepy and it's weird, like what are you getting from following… like most of my things are mom-, young-mom.. related. Um. Like bargains here, tips there kind of vibes. That's my main *(chuckles)* thing. So I would hope it's, yeah, moms, single moms kind of vibes following me.

Controlling the narrative and finding empowerment in her own experience as a young and single mother has emboldened her to use her voice to advocate for non-traditional family configurations:

> this picture that everyone's trying to paint of… this… like nuclear family kind of vibe and I'm like often a lot that's not the case…And I know that from my real life, it's not the case often. So it's like this whole perfect picture they're trying to paint and I'm like 'that's not what we're going through peeps'.

The theme of judging and being judged as a mother on Instagram was a topic with which Simangele was grappling. It appeared that this had allowed her to confront her

own judgement of herself and even helped her manage her fear of others' judgements:

> So I can judge like people's exterior. And like, how they dress their kids. You know, all that stuff um I don't like to judge moms because I know that moms are judging themselves enough. I know that you, yeah, you are probably harder on yourself than anyone could be. So, I don't like to judge other moms but like I'm always just like, just take it easy. I always feel judged, um and I don't know if it's an internal or I'm just like, you know, projecting, but especially when people like comment and be like 'oh, I can't even spend the night away from my child, I don't know how you can' [or] 'I don't know how you can live away from your child…explain that…'. But as I said, I judge myself, you know. It's your internal judgement of you, it's gonna be more than what they can give, so I don't really take note or like…I try not to internalise it, other people's thoughts because I'm living with my mine.

Simangele appeared to be giving thought to issues of privacy in relation to her son going forward because on the one hand, continuing to build a memory chest was very appealing – as she realised after having lost her phone between our two interviews but recovering many photos from her Instagram account – but on the other hand realising that he will probably "hate it" if she continues to post about him:

> I think it's fine if he hates it because then it's just not for him. And I know what type of person he is. He's probably going to be more of a…private um person, um which is fine because he gets the choice and that's probably why it's also like... I hate that whole like when people open an account for the child. And I'm like eeehhmmm that's too far…[But] I wasn't posting

> anything that I thought would harm him. If he did say that he does feel radically offended by something, definitely I'll retract.

This sense of some mothers "going too far" was also highlighted when she explained how she reached out to a mother who was posting live whilst driving with her child on the passenger seat of her car: "I was like what's happening here? I didn't even hear what she was saying even. 'Cause she was saying something, and I was like 'sorry this child is not in a car seat in the front seat. Are you joking?'". She explained that she had reached out to the mother privately through direct message and told her that it was not safe and didn't look good, let alone that it is illegal, to have her child in the front seat of the car without a car seat. When we explored this her heightened sensitivity to child safety and how it may relate to her being far from her son and not being able to protect him on a daily basis, she admitted that since our first interview:

> I found that like all like pictures my mom sends me and stuff like on a weekly basis or whatever that I share them. And then so I was like ugh actually I feel like they need to be a little bit more precious and a little bit more 'just mine type vibes'. Um, yeah, I don't know. Uh, we we're struggling with the distance at the moment….: I don't know. There's a lot of guilt there and I think I post in a guilt manner…So, I think I need to take that out… it doesn't matter what other people think… but I know that I still have a relationship with him, and I know, you know….ja.

So while she was working through her feelings of shame and guilt about the circumstances her motherhood journey, finding ways to 'control the narrative' and own her unique journey, she was also able to identify that some of her posting on Instagram in relation to her child was due to her continuing feelings of guilt. She also admitted that she struggles with "trying not to compare and stuff and that's very challenging for" her. This suggests that some of her

desire to create an account that is authentic and gives voice to alternative motherhood stories may have emerged from a feeling of not being as good as some of the mothers with traditional family structures with social media accounts that 'irritate her'.

For Simangele, a successful mother is one who can "go with the flow…not at all like trying to control the narrative of their children or the direction of their children". This seemed to be her wish for herself – the space to be who she is without fear of judgement. She seemed to be working hard on her own tendency to judge and acknowledged that she doesn't "think there is like a failure of a mom, even if [she] may look at it and be like, that's not ideal for [her]. In their own right they're doing great for themselves um and [she doesn't] want to be the person, also judging other moms".

She seemed to have felt judged herself as a new mother, and overwhelmed by all the discourses on how to be a good mother that she had found on social media, and she did not want to do this to other mothers. In this regard she articulated the vulnerability surrounding new moms and how Instagram was not always a positive or helpful space:

> Imagine if I was a new mom and I'm busy seeing this and it's all over Instagram sleep training this, whatever. Imagine the pressure and if you didn't sleep train your child? So what? You know what I mean? And I was like if you haven't slept trained by the time, they six months, you know you're not doing it right. And I was like, 'wow', I was like, 'that is too much'. That's too much. And I get it, they are forming communities and stuff. It's just, just, I don't know, the delivery and the…the way it's packaged. It's like 'oh no thanks'.

She also finds particular narratives like the do-it-all-mom that she often comes across on Instagram worrisome:

> It's still like being overworked is cute… I'm like ‘oh my goodness’ like that narrative is still so alive and people aspire to be busy and fully jammed. And the mom on the go and supermoms like people aspire to do that. So, if you are trying to promote anything other than that, then people are like ‘oh yeah, you're a little bit lazy. How are you troubled by your child? You should love them; they are a blessing’.

This sense of her approach to motherhood not aligning with the main narratives being portrayed on Instagram were extrapolated when she explained:

> I think that that is like the number one thing that actually drives postpartum depression nowadays is that thing that as soon as they come out, you have to love them immediately and just be so comfortable being a mom and just like, get out there, snatch your body back, get a mommy club, all stand with your prams and take a picture. Like it's just, it's… And if you're not, and if you're not, if you don't have a mommy club or you don't go um on morning walks with the dog and the baby, then you look funny and your parenting is just not interesting to anyone, which is wild, yeah.

It might be that Simangele’s journey, which has included living apart from her son for the past five and a half years, has not ‘fitted the mould’ of the ‘perfect mother’ discourse that she has had to work very hard to find and come to terms with her motherhood identity. She has found that her identity as her son’s mother and what that means for the both of them “doesn't leave” her. Because her “‘why’ is still there. You still wake up in the morning, to fight your fight because you have to do it for him, you know? And that doesn't change. It does not - it’s not something you can forget”.

4.2.2.2. Overview and Researcher Countertransference – Simangele

I found Simangele's jovial stance toward participating and how she carried herself through both interviews was appealing and contagious. Although it became clear quite early on in the first interview that her main defence against anxiety is humour, it also allowed for a relaxed and open way of speaking about motherhood and Instagram. I liked her almost from the first moment and appreciated her quick wittedness as I felt a lot of information was shared through 'many a truth spoken in jest'. Although doing both interviews online impacted on the intersubjective space, it did feel as if the technology created a safe distance which enabled freer engagement on potentially difficult topics. My countertransference was not experienced as acutely as with Odette, but that could perhaps also have been due to the pervasive humour, especially during the first interview.

Simangele exuded a natural warmth and understanding, as well as a higher level of resilience compared to Odette for example. Unexpectedly becoming a mother without having realised she was pregnant until she had started going into labour and the repercussions thereof due to the lifestyle and financial situation she found herself in at the time, seemed to comprise the fulcrum of her motivations to post. Initially the guilt and shame about the beginning of her motherhood journey, her single motherhood (her son's father was not involved), as well as the choice to send her young son to her parents "on the farm" were absent during the first interview but were raised during the second interview when she admitted that she perhaps 'posted out of guilt'. This evoked a countertransference of immense empathy but also sympathy initially, followed by admiration for how she had managed all her motherhood-related variables to date in a different way to the other participants. She acknowledged that becoming a mother had 'saved her life' and that her son had given her that 'why', but the extent of this impactful change in her life remained quite private. There was a pervasive narrative of 'keeping it real' with relation to the struggles of motherhood and what

is posted on Instagram, which resonated with me as a mother and perhaps at times blinded my objectivity as interviewer.

Of all three participants, Simangele's motherhood constellation felt the most complicated as her mother not only constituted an important role in how she forged her own identity as a mother, but she was also her co-parent who got to spend the most time with Simangele's son on a daily basis. Her mother's parenting style had changed since becoming a grandmother, which also evoked ambivalent feelings in Simangele. She appeared to have had to find ways to resolve these feelings as she also felt beholden to her mother. She and her mother also differed in their positions on the posting of content of her son, with her mother expressing some disapproval of Simangele's posting. Ironically, Simangele was also reliant on content from her mother for her Instagram account.

The parenting constellation of her son also seemed to evoke ambivalent feelings in her, in that she grew up in a nuclear family, but her son wasn't currently doing this. Her grappling with these feelings appeared to have gradually translated into her becoming more comfortable to post about long-distance (and single-mother) parenting on Instagram, as she found herself gradually becoming braver about posting about 'non-normative' challenges. Feedback she received from posting about other difficult experiences such as a miscarriage she had suffered appeared to fuel this bravery. She is proud of her content, aware that it is done in a way to stay connected to him during their long absences from one another and she is also grateful that it is automatically creating a chest of memories. Underneath this lies the fear of being forgotten by him and an attempt to not forget what she has learned since becoming a mother and not wanting to slip back into her old way of life. This is accompanied by the wish to achieve 'momfluencer' status and be rewarded with free merchandise and other commercial benefits.

Her narrative reflected an almost compulsive need to post, with Simangele being representative of a generation of digital natives who have grown up in a *zeitgeist* of daily documenting and sharing of life. Even though she at times finds it hard putting her life and herself 'out there' she loves the platform, she loved the term sharenting and she loves a way of life that is based on documenting and disseminating personal content. As she described this, I felt my own anxiety increasing as I have mixed feelings about such behaviour given the uncertainty of the long-term impact thereof, as well as generally being a very private person. But for Simangele this was empowering and meant that she could take control of the narrative and correct people based on her "from the horse's mouth" content. This is also informed by her belief that some of the motherhood narratives on Instagram are "worrisome" and possibly damaging to mothers, especially new mothers. Again, this spoke to my own experiences of early motherhood and made me vulnerable to possible collusion with her as opposed to remaining an objective interviewer. By the end of the second interview, I had the feeling that if Simangele and I were ever to run into each other in a social way, we would become friends.

4.2.3. Ann-Lee

4.2.3.1. In Ann-Lee's Words

Having worked hard at her career, Ann-Lee is an experienced 38-year-old corporate executive and director who became a mother to a daughter thirteen months ago. Together with her husband they reside in an urban area. Ann-Lee identifies as Caucasian and joined Instagram in 2011/12. She has just under 600 followers of whom the majority are not known to her. Her account is mainly for personal use, and she posts on average once a week "or sometimes more". Some reshuffling had to take place for the first interview, as she travels a lot for work. We met online for both interviews, which were scheduled in between her meetings. Having 'grown a thick skin' to make it in the corporate world as a woman, she

never thought any of the difficulties related to becoming a mother such as anxiety or post-partum depression would affect her. She didn't think that her "life was going to change in any way," that she and her baby were going to "just fit" and they were "going to be strong and carry on". She readily admitted that she had been very wrong, because:

> Motherhood changes everything – the way you think, the way you feel, just everything – it really does, and I will never ever think that of any other person that they're weak if they ever felt a certain way or anxious or burst into tears because I've had it all.

She experienced pregnancy as "an absolute breeze" as she was able to continue to gym and play golf right up until two weeks before giving birth – she explained that "everything was great beforehand…didn't have any morning sickness," and that it had been "the most beautiful experience". But three days after her daughter was born "the whole anxiety level just set in" for her and she was beleaguered by anxiety. Further post-partum difficulties also "really affected [her] relationship with [her] partner". She found herself requiring more emotional support and it had been challenging in the eleven months it took her husband to realise and sufficiently change his lifestyle and routine to be able to be a more supportive partner:

> I really didn't expect to be so emotionally affected by the pregnancy, it certainly was for the first, I would say 2-3 weeks that I didn't feel like myself and I also didn't have a partner that understood it at all. So, he was making comments like 'What's wrong with you? Why are you acting like this?' and I just needed someone at that stage to kind of understand that I didn't even understand what was going on and I just needed 'You're doing a great job'; 'Can I help you with the night feed?' that type of thing – so the first couple of weeks was extremely lonely.

This need for a different kind of support also translated into her social relationships. Whereas she had not considered herself "a girly girl that would go out and have coffees" before because she "didn't really have any friends apart from work things," she sought and found a group of friends who "are all mothers, all similar aged" where a space is shared, they are going through the same things and feeling "there's no judgement". Before becoming a mother her "whole life was work-related" whereas now she was "literally trying to navigate this world of being a mom-slash-wife-slash-whatever else you are". If she was struggling with something she didn't think she "would necessarily feel the need to put that on Instagram because [she doesn't] think [she'd] get the support that [she'd] need" because she needs "like instant support from people [she trusts], not so much the 700…how many people following [her]".

She was afforded six months maternity leave for which she was grateful, although she had to work during her maternity leave as director and "the only female on the board of directors". The transition and trying to find the balance "has been a massive struggle" because she described herself as "100% a workaholic trying to grow as much" as she could and that she "never actually wanted children". But the COVID pandemic had brought about a change of heart and that the "meaning of life changed after that". Although they "could not imagine it any other way" since becoming parents, Ann-Lee now feels like she's "50% a mom, 50% work – like you're just never going to be 100% ever again…it will forever be a juggling act". Motherhood also made her "feel a little bit less confident…a little bit insecure during the six months" that she was away from work, as personnel changes during her partial absence "brought on a little bit of insecurities on [her] part – that [she] had to almost prove [her] worth again". She was on track to becoming Managing Director but then personnel adjustments during her maternity leave postponed those developments. Ann-Lee defended against possibly being perceived as "not focused" enough for the job by rationalising that:

> In hindsight I'm not ready to take on that role right now. I'm very much trying to navigate being a mom-slash-this person, so if it means that it's delayed my progress by two years, then so be it. So right now it's a blessing in disguise for me, and I think maybe they see that. But, um, I, yeah, whether it was done because I'm a mother now…?

The change in her identity also brought a lot of uncertainty along with it. Ann-Lee relayed how she is aware that she's "100% changed as a person" and that she's "just very fortunate that [her] husband loves this version of [her] because if he was craving the old version...it would be a struggle for sure". Yet she makes sense of this change also by ascribing it to "growing up". This change already started two-and-a-half years ago when they decided to try to fall pregnant, because she changed her "whole life that way anyway". This change in lifestyle and being acutely aware of the responsibilities she carries as a mother are also informed by the fact that she comes "from a broken family" with divorced parents and a sibling who "struggles with drug addiction and all sorts of things". Although she considers her mother to be "incredible…the most wonderful mother…and [] the most amazing grandmother" she feels it's important that from both sides of the family her daughter "will not have any of that – she needs to have a happy home, she needs to know what's right and wrong". Having undergone this transition to motherhood has also made her "a bit more empathetic to when someone's had family issues or anything like that" and when female work colleagues need to go fetch their children she "now 100% get[s] it".

This change in identity is also visible in the content she posts on Instagram. Before becoming a mother she "was literally just trying to share the highlights of" her life, "you know, all the superficial crap that you see on Instagram… I would post me getting a brand-new car and it would be like something that I would have boasted about. But now even the thought of buying an expensive car doesn't really mean that much to me anymore". When she

became pregnant she started using the platform "almost like a photo album to keep a record of her [daughter's] things…so anything that she does in terms of milestones or any cute videos or anything like that" and has continued to do so since. She likes to "constantly go back and look at photos of her and videos of her and stuff where I don't really keep anything like that on any other hard drives or anything like that. So, for me it's, it's really a place that we save all memories". Her content is also different because:

> the things that mean something to you now being a mom is very different to what it was when you're sort of a single up-and-coming person trying to prove themselves in the corporate world – I think it was important back then what car you drive or what clothes you wearing, all those things. And I feel like maybe it's because I'm at the level that I want to be at now, corporate-wise that I don't feel the need to prove that side of me anymore, I don't know. Or I've just changed…that's just not important anymore.

Ann-Lee had never heard of the term sharenting before and would not consider herself one once I had explained it, as she thought that her account was "a bit more like casual". Yet as the conversation progressed, Ann-Lee explained that her Instagram is used to:

> …obviously post every single milestone. So when she's gotten her first tooth or when she's walked or crawled or anything like that, and then I've copied a lot of things that my friend, that I was talking about…so like when she made the sensory hoop, I wanted to make a sensory hoop. So I've got, like, a video of (child's name) in the sensory hoop trying to lift her neck, trying to, like, grab things like that. And then if I found something to be super useful for me, I've definitely shared it on... So I mean, if I found that a certain um technique worked, or if a certain medicine has worked or something like that, I definitely try share that on my profile for other moms…Any sort of

> postpartum depression or the struggles of a newborn or anything like that. I definitely feel more sympathetic to that, and I want other mothers to know that, you know, you're not out there alone. So I do um sometimes share those types of things. Ja.

She imagines her audience to be mostly "closeknit friends" although she noted "there's no reason why [she has] a public versus private" account. She also believes that "a lot of [her] posts would probably irritate anyone that doesn't have a child because it is just like child, child, child, ja". Even though she openly posts about her baby she considers "extreme' behaviour to be when "people don't want their baby's faces to be present or whatever".

In spite of supporting those who do include their children in their content, she finds it hard as a mother to buy into the narrative other mothers might portray, especially when it comes to food preparation. That kind of content makes her "constantly feel guilty that [she's] not blitzing up like freshly made meals and like thinking of new ways and recipes". Her child is a fussy eater which "brings the element of guilt," but she's also realised that when she speaks "to these mothers face to face that [that] might be like the one time that they did it" and don't necessarily do this on a daily basis. She then intellectualised against the guilt by pointing out that "it's Instagram, you know, you always see what people want you to see, so you never see the actual truth with the child throwing the food, spitting it out, etcetera".

Her content has led to reconnecting with people she hasn't "spoken [to] for absolute years and years" which has become meaningful for her in that "you do sort of touch people that you don't even think that you would ever speak to again". At the heart of it lies the drive to help others with aspects she wished she had received help with at the time, because:

> there's a lot of information that I wish I knew beforehand…So anybody that is about to give birth, I try share everything that I wish I'd known, um, just so that I feel like I've mentally prepared someone a little bit better.

During the second interview she conceded that she isn't "the type of person that shares too many struggles" and would accompany something that felt difficult or potentially berating with "a funny comment like 'even though you give me no sleep, I still love you blah blah blah'". Her post-partum struggles had caught her off-guard and as she uses that to help others through her Instagram posts, she readily acknowledged that:

> I never ever thought that I would be the person that would ever struggle emotionally because I had been such a hardcore female in a male environment, and I was like, nobody's like – I'm not going to deal with any of that nonsense, I'm far stronger. But it comes in and *klaps* you hard like it really comes from nowhere and it's confusing for someone like me that isn't used to sharing any emotion whatsoever and just like getting on with it. So, I'm happy that I can prepare people from what I wish I'd known. I mean, I did all the courses, all the classes, everything but nobody prepares you for the emotional part of becoming a mom.

Upon further discussion there was also an awareness of the impact her content had on some work colleagues who follow her, and how this informed some of the dynamics and perceptions in her professional context:

> I have a lot of people that I work with and like buyers and all those type of people that watch my life as well. So I'm quite aware of what I post. I mean, I'll go to a meeting the next day and then like, 'Oh, I see that you were at xyz' and they'll know exactly what I've done on the weekend and then someone made a comment the other day, um 'Oh, but Ann-Lee's child eats caviar'. And I was like, what perception did I give out that my child eats caviar, like? It was quite bizarre that he had said that. And this is the person that had just

> come back from Dubai with his family. And I was like, 'that's rich coming from you'.

Yet these kinds of judgemental comments also came her way before she became a mom. She recalled how "they used to do it when I just played a lot of golf. Like 'oh, you're always on the golf course,' that type of thing, but it's what you choose to share at the time of what you're interested in at the time". But having thought on it she declared that she probably was "gonna do a bit of a clean-up and delete certain people…I don't think corporate people should be on my platform unnecessarily".

With regard to what her daughter might think in the future of having so much of her life visible on this social media platform, Ann-Lee said that she tried "not to do any nude photos or anything like that" but that she "would like for her to think that [she's] captured a lot of her life…a nice record of her life" because her daughter is amazed by photos of herself, "like, she laughs at it – she loves watching videos of herself".

Apart from creating "a nice record of her life," Ann-Lee also hopes to instil a strong sense of independence in her daughter – just like her mother did in her. She also hopes to have the same "type of relationship with [her] daughter" like she had with her mother growing up, because "the one thing that always sticks out to me as a child is how interactive my mom was…she was always doing something, it was never 'sit in front of the TV and keep yourself busy'". What she would try and do differently is not put her child through "an unhappy home" because although she reiterated that her mother is "amazing…she sometimes can be overprotective and…very pessimistic at times because she sees the worst in everybody". Ann-Lee subsequently quickly defended against this memory by rationalising that it's "just her protective nature of being a single mom".

The interview process appeared to be a thought-provoking space for Ann-Lee, and gave her time to think about her use of Instagram. At the end of the first interview she spoke

about thinking about changing her account to private because "it is frightening what goes on in the world and you see these children are being abducted…so I do need to be more aware of those types of things in the world". This seemed to be one of the ideas that stayed with her from the first interview, as she again spoke about needing to become "more aware of [the] publicness of [her] Instagram" at the beginning of the second interview. She explained that:

> having Instagram as a single person, you don't really have to think about anyone but yourself. But then obviously having an open public platform and having pictures of my baby, sometimes she's in the bath, all those types of things…obviously, those things can get out of hand. So, I think just my motherly instincts kicked in of, like, I need to protect, obviously protect images of my child.

In relation to how motherhood is portrayed on social media, Ann-Lee felt strongly about the lack of true representation of some of the struggles of motherhood, like "really struggling at night trying to settle a little baby" and that "a lot more awareness needs to be put onto that part on social media". Creating that kind of awareness is important to her because:

> [w]e know that the father can't physically breastfeed or whatever the case may be, but just being there and saying, 'Flip you're doing a great job; can I sit with you and chat with you while you're doing this feed?' And I know it's difficult 'cause they go back to work a lot sooner, but there's also sacrifices that need to be made 'cause that night feeding is brutal, for the first twelve weeks, sho! So, more awareness around that or content about any sort of influencing that or anything relating to what happens to a woman emotionally, mentally, all of that, around motherhood I normally shared straight to my husband, so he understands why I was the way I was, but also, I do share it on my own my pages as well.

Sharing to contribute to better understanding does not necessarily extend to her mother, however. Despite her mother "praising on what a wonderful mother" Ann-Lee is, she feels her own mother "certainly hasn't seen the worst in [her] yet when it comes to motherhood". Upon further exploration, it seemed that the fear of judgement lay at the core:

> I think I hide a lot of it away from her and at certain times I'd even lie. I'd say like [my husband] took the night shift last night or whatever… I'm of the opinion that your family should know your struggles, but not everything because it's hard to get those judgments out of people's minds… I think it's just a human nature thing that you, you tend to make a judgement on someone and it's quite hard to change your opinion of someone. So, for my mom in particular with her being quite judgmental when it comes to these types of things, I would hide a lot of things. Obviously, she spends a lot of time with me in the beginning where we had to take (child's name) to the hospital every sort of two or three days for jaundice tests and blood tests, whatever. So, she, she saw me struggle with that, but it was more… It was more me being concerned about my baby being pricked every day and me not being able to sleep and her having colic, more so than the – I would, I don't think anyone in my family would say that I had postpartum depression, but I think I had it. I'm not too sure. It's a quite a fine line methinks, yeah.

Part of feeling like she suffered this form of depression was maybe because she had to navigate so much of the newborn phase by herself, because her mother could not recall much of it herself due to circumstances at the time:

> …[my] brother and I are 11 months apart, so I think the whole process of having newborn slash toddler is like probably quite traumatic for her to reflect on because I would, I would say things to her like 'oh, we've gotta do

> this; we've gotta feed; we gotta change that'. Just a general like a routine that you would do for a newborn, and she would be like 'I don't remember doing that. I don't remember doing that'. So, I think it was like a complete whirlwind for her…my father was nowhere to be found, ever.

After having spoken about how her mother had been less helpful in the new-born stage, Ann-Lee seemed to have felt some guilt, and she rationalised this conflict:

> I mean, she doesn't remember all the tricks of the trade or anything. She doesn't remember any of it, it's like, it's just a big blur to her. So, she's amazing, like loving and that type of thing. But, like, stuff that you get told what you need to do when you need to do it, the milestones that type of thing, I think it's very different these days. We like… have apps and there's a lot of studies that have been done.

Her ambivalence about what she is capable of or whether she is doing what she might imagine is being expected of her resurfaced at the end of the second interview, as she questioned whether she had sufficiently provided me with what I was looking for:

> I'm probably not the best person when it comes to talking about Instagram because I do it, but not to the extent – I think also just being busy. I don't get to do what I need to do, but yeah, I'm totally capturing my family's life as much as I can, and it's more for personal gain than anything else.

Our conversation ended shortly after, as she had another meeting lined up.

4.2.3.2. Overview and Researcher Countertransference – Ann-Lee

Ann-Lee came across as the most professionally orientated mother of the three participants. Even before meeting her online I had a clear sense that she was on a tight work schedule whereby efficiency and time management were of the essence. Her interviews were also the most succinct and she spoke in a slightly pressured but concise and pertinent way. I

had a feeling that there was little room for error and found myself promising to keep it short and not waste her time at the beginning of each interview. I wondered if she felt this kind of intimidation at work, having to prove herself as the only female on the otherwise all-male board, or perhaps having to get it right as a mother as she was aware of being 'watched' by her Instagram followers. Nevertheless, she was generous in her interviews and initially came across as the least defensive of the three participants.

As the only participant who experienced her pregnancy as "an absolute breeze" it was the post-partum period that evoked the most trauma for her. She felt wholly unprepared and possibly resentful at not having been sufficiently prepped by family like her own mother, friends, and professional resources for the post-partum period despite all her efforts for the pregnancy and birth. This has proven the main motivation for her content on Instagram since becoming a mother. There is a strong drive to help prepare other new mothers and inform them on topics related to caesareans, post-partum depression and general milestones. Even though I found myself admiring her for her clear steadfastness in this regard, I also started to feel anxious whilst she spoke, which gave me a glimpse into how difficult the post-partum period must have been for her as she explained how it had "*klapped"* (slapped) her and had had quite an impact on the relationship with her partner and her return to her corporate executive position.

Although her mother is present and involved, Ann-Lee felt she could not rely on her for guiding information in the early days of motherhood as her mother could not recall her own experience. This was further expanded on when Ann-Lee shared her difficult childhood, which took shape in an unhappy home with an absent and philandering father and a sibling struggling with substance use. This further informed her engagement on Instagram as she sought accounts that could assist her with early motherhood and post-partum information, but she also found herself using it to engage in topics she wished she had had help with. This

evoked both empathy, sympathy, and slight identification in me as Ann-Lee relayed how challenging and lonely the initial phase of motherhood had been for her. There was a strong need for emotional support, which seemed somewhat challenging to find. But a group of five friends who are all mothers came into her life and have proven instrumental in helping her adjust to her new identity as mother, although she feels she will forever more be "50% mom and 50% work".

Having to grow a thick skin and prove herself whilst climbing the corporate ladder was evident from her Instagram content before becoming a mother, content which she now deemed "superficial crap". Although she believed her almost 600 followers to mainly comprise friends, family, and other moms, she was aware of work colleagues also watching her on Instagram. Interactions with her work colleagues based on her Instagram posts gave rise to ambivalent feelings, as she sometimes felt attacked by them but also did not shy away from feeling attacking.

In addition to the educative purpose of her account, the fact that her Instagram engagement is building a treasure chest of memories is what she regards as the main goal and benefit of sharing her child on this public platform. She deemed her account as a more "casual" representation of her motherhood journey as opposed to what she understood the term sharenting to refer to, yet in the same interview she explained how every milestone and every cute thing her daughter did was shared. Perhaps the need to defend against any possibility of her behaviour having any negative impact on her daughter or her behaviour being considered not 'on point' created somewhat of a blind spot, although she was able to reflect on that during our second interview. She remained ambivalent about changing her settings from public to private, perhaps also seeking mirroring feedback from the general community and not wanting to be perceived as "too extreme"' in her engagement by withholding.

Albeit that an authentic representation was also important to Ann-Lee, she admitted that she did not generally share any of her personal struggles on Instagram and when she did, it would be veiled in humour. She did openly engage in topics that were important to her like post-partum depression but not necessarily by sharing her own experience thereof. Only when people reached out on a one-on-one basis would she expand on her experience. Her fierce yet guarded independence is something she hopes to instil in her daughter and after having shared that she generally does not share all her struggles with her own mother or feel safe enough to be completely vulnerable because her mother tends "think the worst of people" because of her own traumatic history with her father, I found myself wondering if she would struggle to allow her daughter a safe space to be vulnerable and make mistakes in the future.

'Failure was frowned upon' felt like the underlying theme in Ann-Lee's case but at the core of her efficiency and openness lies possible unprocessed trauma which she is trying to partially process through Instagram. Despite her intentional and slightly forceful stance, I felt warmly towards her as it felt like it was borne out of a need to survive, cope and 'always do your best'. Perhaps Instagram is the space where she can show in her own way how she thrives, whilst attempting to master the phases of motherhood and the juggling act of being a corporate executive and somewhat disillusioned mother, but also helping the other.

4.3. Themes Across and Within Case Studies

Overall, five main themes across the three case studies were identified. These were *building a memory chest; an online village of mothers; the scrutiny of motherhood; working through the transition of becoming and grappling with the identity struggle of a mother*; and *the sharing/oversharing dilemma*. Each theme is described with supporting evidence and where relevant, subthemes are further explored as they related to each participant.

4.3.1. Building A Memory Chest

Posting about their children and motherhood experiences on Instagram created a memory chest of photos that all three participants seemed to appreciate and actively pursue. For Odette it was important "to kind of keep on posting so that [you'll] keep on having memories… I am glad that what I have posted… also to look back, it's so nice that it's all there". Simangele regarded her Instagram account as "literally just like a diary now. So I, the only reason why I keep posting is because when I go back to all of those other pictures I'm like, 'Oh my gosh, this is so nice to go back to this, I need to keep posting so that I can go back to this later also'". For Ann-Lee it was "almost like a photo album to keep a record of her [daughter's] things…so anything that she does in terms of milestones or any cute videos or anything like that" are posted about. This is because she did not "really keep anything like that on any other hard drives or anything like that. So, for me it's, it's really a place that we save all memories… I'm totally capturing my family's life as much as I can, and it's more for personal gain than anything else".

4.3.2. An Online Village of Mothers

Being part of and interacting with an online community or village of mothers who could inspire, help, advise but also annoy was proffered by all three participants. It wasn't just a question of what could be gained by such a membership, but also what could be given. As Odette pointed out, she felt like she had "a unique journey that [she] could share, that people could relate to". It was a space for her where she felt she could "talk about how hard it is and be more honest about some things" because she "felt like I finally joined the mom club, and I can finally post about it, now I am legit".

Simangele reflected a more push-pull relationship to the village because she liked "the communities that 'momfluencers' actually want to create which is really cool. Um, a lot of them… for me personally, just because I am like a long-distance mom and… stuff like that.

Um, I don't really connect with a lot of… them and some of them kind of irritate me. Um, I would like to like create like a more authent- *(chuckles)* a more authentic community... So um, so a more authentic type of vibe". In her pursuit of this "more authentic type of vibe" she discovered "something therapeutic about (*sighs)* not going through things by yourself" after she had shared her miscarriage. "And then after that, I was like so much better. I was like, it's not even. It's out in the universe it's not just mine anymore… to carry around".

In Ann-Lee's case the village very much afforded her the space to offer help where and when she could. If she "found something to be super useful" she "definitely shared it on". This included "[a]ny sort of postpartum depression or the struggles of a newborn or anything like that" because she "definitely feel[s] more sympathetic to that, and [she] want other mothers to know that, you know, you're not out there alone". The village also made her realise that "you do sort of touch people that you don't even think that you would ever speak to again". As she processed her own experiences of new motherhood, she found that:

> …there's a lot of information that I wish I knew beforehand…So anybody that is about to give birth, I try share everything that I wish I'd known, um, just so that I feel like I've mentally prepared someone a little bit better.

A sense of solidarity with other mothers as they grappled with challenges she experienced herself also encouraged Ann-Lee to share more about her own motherhood experiences. She felt that: "a lot more awareness needs to be put onto…content about…anything relating to what happens to a woman emotionally, mentally, all of that, around motherhood".

4.3.3. The Scrutiny of Motherhood

A challenge for all three mothers seemed to be grappling with expectations of motherhood – their own and those they perceived to be held by others in their families, communities and in their Instagram audiences. Despite the fact that each of them sought to

provide an authentic account of their motherhood journey, feelings of being judged or compared constantly arose and, at times, usurped a sense of their being in control of their narrative or being aligned with the task at hand without any difficulty. These feelings also arose despite all three of the women demonstrating an awareness that Instagram accounts cannot be taken at face value and that a fair amount of curation takes place. Ann-Lee noted that "it's Instagram, you know, you always see what people want you to see, so you never see the actual truth".

Odette spoke about trying to live up to a perhaps idealised image of motherhood: "But, or maybe it comes up with a certain picture in my head of: what is a mother? And maybe I wasn't ready yet to…I don't know". Simangele found that "putting your life out there and putting yourself out there is not easy". Although her online village felt safe enough to share some of her vulnerabilities, she still felt that certain narratives that were perpetuated by it were unrealistic and misleading:

> …this picture that everyone's trying to paint of… this… like nuclear family kind of vibe and I'm like often a lot that's not the case…And I know that from my real life, it's not the case often. So it's like this whole perfect picture they're trying to paint and I'm like 'that's not what we're going through peeps'.

In her opinion discourses that exclude non-nuclear family constellations can play a role in more serious repercussions such as PND. She also problematized the discourse of the 'perfect mother' and the notion that there is a 'right way to mother':

> I think that that is like the number one thing that actually drives postpartum depression nowadays is that thing that as soon as they come out, you have to love them immediately and just be so comfortable being a mom and just like, get out there, snatch your body back, get a mommy club, all stand with your

> prams and take a picture. Like it's just, it's… And if you're not, and if you're not, if you don't have a mommy club or you don't go um on morning walks with the dog and the baby, then you look funny and your parenting is just not interesting to anyone, which is wild, yeah…Imagine if I was a new mom and I'm busy seeing this…Imagine the pressure and if you didn't sleep train your child? So what? You know what I mean? And I was like if you haven't slept trained by the time, they six months, you know you're not doing it right. And I was like, 'wow', I was like, 'that is too much'. That's too much. And I get it, they are forming communities and stuff. It's just, just, I don't know, the delivery and the…the way it's packaged. It's like 'oh no thanks'.

When Simangele became a mother she experienced "like a lot of judgement, a lot of confusion, a lot of, you know, criticism, whatever. You know and if people didn't say it to my face… a lot of the time, it's like you can sense it". Simangele appeared to have felt judged for the unplanned nature of her child's arrival, but had rationalised this, believing that her not knowing she was pregnant had prevented a possible decision to terminate the pregnancy, and that his arrival had "saved her life". Her fear of being judged for her decision to let her own mother raise her son was never explicitly stated. Rather, this was evident in her repetition of how this was "the best thing for him", and her decision to post openly about this in order to help other mothers in similar positions.

Fear of judgement was also evident in Ann-Lee's narrative as she found that "it's hard to get those judgments out of people's minds… I think it's just a human nature thing that you, you tend to make a judgement on someone and it's quite hard to change your opinion of someone. So, for my mom in particular with her being quite judgmental when it comes to these types of things, I would hide a lot of things". A discourse that 'motherhood should be easy and come naturally' was evident in her narrative, and her discovery that this was not the

case seemed to have been shocking for her. The fact that Ann-Lee had made it a point to be open about this in order to try to mentally prepare other expecting mothers for this seemed to represent her own wish to have been better prepared. Motherhood also made her "feel a little bit less confident…a little bit insecure" because it shifted her focus away from her executive job. She struggled with the loss entailed in having to step back from work and to trust the changes that were taking place there in her absence, whilst she was navigating her own changes. This "brought on a little bit of insecurities on [her] part – that [she] had to almost prove [her] worth again". Her narrative revealed that she felt that she had to work hard to disprove discourses about working mothers that abound in corporate settings, such as 'mothers are less committed to work'.

Part of the fear of judgement from others appeared to come from the fact that all three had recognised their own propensity to judge others. Before becoming a mother, Ann-Lee considered an incapability to cope with situations as a weakness, but as a mother she "will never ever think that of any other person that they're weak if they ever felt a certain way or anxious or burst into tears because [she's] had it all". Odette on the other hand was very much aware of her judgement of other mothers' accounts. As she explained: "Not to make fun of them but me and my best friend Alisha are a little bit mean *(laughs)* about some of them". Simangele also found herself at times judging the choices other mothers made on Instagram, especially when a mother was posting live with her child in the passenger seat with her: "I was like what's happening here? I didn't even hear what she was saying even. 'Cause she was saying something, and I was like 'sorry this child is not in a car seat in the front seat. Are you joking?'". At times she also found that she would "judge like people's exterior. And like, how they dress their kids. You know, all that stuff".

But all three had grappled with this and found that it made them more empathic towards the struggles of others and had made conscious choices to try to judge less. It

appeared as if motherhood inherently invited scrutiny, both from onlookers and by mothers themselves, which needed to be actively ameliorated. Simangele spoke about her caution around judging others as she explained that she doesn't "like to judge moms because I know that moms are judging themselves enough. I know that you, yeah, you are probably harder on yourself than anyone could be...I judge myself you know. It's your internal judgement of you, it's gonna be more than what they can give, so I don't really take note or like…I try not to internalise it, other people's thoughts because I'm living with my mine". Ann-Lee found herself to be much more understanding towards colleagues who were mothers as she described how she was "a bit more empathetic to when someone's had family issues or anything like that" and when female work colleagues need to go fetch their children she "now 100% get[s] it". Odette was "very conscious of how we come across and how we look. So yeah, I think, I guess like I appreciate a journey of motherhood, with nice photos" with the understanding that each motherhood journey is different.

Interestingly, their Instagram accounts appeared to have become a space where they seemed to project their wishes and fears. Responses to their posts from the mostly faceless 'audience' had the power to encourage or affirm, or to discourage and shame. More generalised fears around being scrutinized or judged as mothers seemed to become more tangible through their use of Instagram. These were particular for each mother and reflected themes present in their lives before having become mothers. Odette spoke about her worries in relation to "what people will think" about how she posts as a mother. These were pervasive throughout her account, however, specific to her and perhaps evidencing the projective nature of these fears, was her "not wanting to be boring…not wanting to be…like wanting to have a page that people keep coming back to and enjoy…not like overwhelming people". This seemed to capture something of her desire for popularity and affirmation, and her desire to attract a potential partner. Her fear of work colleagues seeing "semi-nude" photos also

suggested fears of being judged, either for her body or for her 'inappropriateness'. Ann-Lee's grappling with the image she portrays on Instagram was evident in her wonderings about what motivated a colleague to say that her child "eats caviar". Her reflection on how this had caused her to wonder what she had posted to make this colleague think this – as in she didn't know immediately – suggests the possible presence of some unconscious communication in her posting around status as evidence of success. While it may not be bragging about a new car this time, themes of status in relation to her daughter's developmental milestone achievements for example may have continued despite her stated changes in her priorities.

Responses to Simangele's content of her son whereby she is praised for how "cute" and "photogenic" he is, seems to perpetuate the use of him for posts. This was however presented as a normal occurrence because her son is "so good at like switching on" when she asks him to "please smile for me" and he duly replies with "OK, Mommy". Simangele added that he was always like this – "perfect". This alludes to the validation she may receive from both her child and audience for getting it right as a mother. Perhaps the portrayal of a happy child who willingly smiles and poses on cue eases the guilt of being a long-distance mother, affirming that she nevertheless is a good enough mother, despite the separation.

4.3.4. Working Through the Transition of Becoming and Grappling with the Identity Struggle of a Mother

Of all the identified themes, this one was the most dominant and intricate. Initially 'working through the transition' and 'the motherhood identity struggle' were separate themes, but further interrogation laid bare considerable overlap and interaction between the two. This working through entailed much ambivalence, and Instagram appeared to provide a unique space for this transition to be negotiated and for these mothers to establish their unique mother identities.

4.3.4.1. The Ambivalence of Motherhood

In all three case studies conflicting feelings about becoming and being a mother highlighted the ambivalence they experienced about motherhood. While all three mothers found joy in their role as mother, they had all found it to be extremely challenging. Odette loves motherhood as it has brought her "a big sense of contentment, sort of fulfilling and purpose. I always wanted to be a mother. Oh, but obviously it is quite hard." She also found the demands of motherhood "just exhausting. But… it's - yeah, I have a little companion now". Despite this reward she only "embraced the role … you know eventually". Simangele's ambivalence on the other hand revolved around being "a long-distance parent". She described being a long-distance mother as "just great" but then followed it up with "it's really difficult. Uuum. I wouldn't advise it, but it's the best thing for him…it's so ideal for him. That's what I keep on reminding myself… that it's, it's quite difficult for me". Ann-Lee had been confident and successful in her professional role as an executive before becoming a mother, whereas since she is "literally trying to navigate this world of being a mom-slash-wife-slash-whatever else you are". She described this navigation as "a massive struggle" but at the same time "could not imagine it any other way". Although she feels like she's "50% a mom, 50% work – like you're just never going to be 100% ever again…it will forever be a juggling act", she loves her daughter dearly. Despite her own mother "praising on what a wonderful mother" she is, Ann-Lee still feels her own mother "certainly hasn't seen the worst in [her] yet when it comes to motherhood".

4.3.4.2. The Transition to Motherhood

Becoming a mother seemed to have been a significant turning point in all these women's lives and the transition into motherhood was an enormous challenge for each of them. For Odette and Ann-Lee motherhood did not 'come naturally' and they found the initial experience to be far from what they may have imagined. While Simangele grappled

with the loss of freedom that motherhood entailed, she had found becoming a mother a 'life-saving' experience.

Odette had always longed to be a mother and had imagined that when it came to pass it would naturally align with her, perhaps that her child would feel like a natural extension of her. Yet shortly after he was born she experienced "a big sense of detachment, like, somebody had given me this baby to look after and placed this individual person in my hands to look after. So I didn't feel like this was *my* baby or I didn't feel, em, what's the word? It took a long time to feel that sense of 'this is mine'". As opposed to just naturally stepping into her dream role, she found that "it took me a while…to really orientate myself as a mother. Yeah, there, there was a mo-, it was. It was a transition; it wasn't like the day it was before and then I was a mother. It was a transition".

As previously mentioned, the transition her identity underwent was marked by a distinct sense of separateness between herself and her baby boy because she "felt like he was very much a person in his own right, right from when he was born". Nevertheless, she attempted to assimilate and accommodate her new identity as mother by trying to find ways "to make it easy for" herself, and to find this sense of extension by for example becoming an avid breast feeder and sharing on Instagram that she was "very proud of that". Even though this transition proved more challenging than she had anticipated, she still "love[d] it" because she "found a lot of things that [she] felt like [she] was missing beforehand before being a mother, covered".

Simangele's transition to motherhood was initially shocking (discovering she was pregnant when in labour) and, as mentioned previously, she had struggled with the judgements of others in this regard, but thereafter Simangele characterised her experience as a "seamless transition". She spoke about loss of freedom to go clubbing and loss of friends due to her change in lifestyle. Her identity as "the girl that you can call to go to the club with"

was a thing of the past, and her new role as mother had "strained a lot of friendships". However, she appeared to have rationalised these through a belief that her pregnancy had "saved her". She had always "wanted to be a mom" and the mother role "slapp[ed] [her] back to reality". For Simangele "it [the transition to motherhood] was a shift", but one that represented profound meaning for her.

Ann-Lee found the transition to motherhood to be "a massive struggle" because she described herself as "100% a workaholic trying to grow as much" as she could and that she "never actually wanted children". Motherhood has made her feel "100% changed as a person" as she continued to try and solve how to be "50% mom and 50% work". The probability of PND and its impact on Ann-Lee's otherwise efficient, targeted, and intentional approach to life and work seemed to have coloured her experience of finding herself within the "50% mom 50% work" juggling act.

They all found motherhood to be a simultaneous shock and then a gradual process of transitioning and constant identity negotiation and re-negotiation.

4.3.4.3. Identity Negotiations and Role of Instagram

A struggle to establish a motherhood identity and using Instagram to aid in this process were common to all three participants. However, the identity negotiation process occurred in unique ways for each of them, affected by their family histories, their own childhood experiences, the circumstances of their pregnancies, their relationships with the father of the child, and their relationships with their own mothers. Shame appeared to feature in this struggle for all three women. The ways that they used Instagram to negotiate their motherhood identities were also unique to their particular struggles.

For Odette, establishing her identity as a mother and an identity for herself on Instagram ran parallel. Becoming a mother appeared to have allowed Odette a sense of legitimacy and gave her a voice on Instagram, because for Odette "[t]he whole thing is

creating a narrative". Before she became a mother there was a sense of "never quite knowing what I wanted to say...Whereas now I'm a mom. And now I have something to say". Motherhood appeared to ratify her presence and membership because she "felt like I finally joined the mom club, and I can finally post about it, now I am legit".

Perhaps this legitimacy softened her anxieties around the 'illegitimate' way she felt she came to be a mother, as it had not happened in the way that she had fantasised it would and had evoked shame in herself and judgement in others. There was a fear that "falling pregnant accidentally" might have happened because perhaps unconsciously she had done it 'on purpose," making her fret about whether she had "ask[ed] for it" in a rather punitive way. Anticipating the judgement of others and possible shame, she defended with a dismissive splitting off by deciding "[w]ho cares at this age" because she was "tired of being the responsible one". Odette's shame with regards to being a single mother with a wished-for yet unexpected pregnancy may have contributed to her need to present motherhood as beautiful on her Instagram page. This acceptance that she desired was also reflected in her desire to gain fame and popularity through her Instagram account. However, the 'artistic' identity she was curating on Instagram may also have been driven by a need to emulate, and feel close to, a part of her own mother, who also "loved photography". Her identity on Instagram and as a mother were also influenced by her struggle to balance the responsibility of caring for her son and "being single and wanting to meet somebody and wanting to come across [as] this care-free and fun" Odette.

Where Odette had been "the responsible one" up until finding out she was pregnant, Simangele had been the "reckless" one until she found out she was pregnant. She shared that if the stage she was in before becoming a mother had continued, she felt that she "probably would have gotten into trouble, like into serious trouble. Or, you know, something would have happened because at some time your luck runs out". Although not explicitly stated, this

seemed to refer to a stage of partying and associated risk-taking behaviour. She felt the loss of this lifestyle when becoming a mother, but had rationalised her pregnancy as having "saved her". In contrast to Odette who had felt her Instagram account prior to motherhood was "directionless', Simangele still embraced her pre-motherhood identity and appeared to have tried to integrate it with her mother identity, stating: "you post what you want to post, and you've got like all pages… I want to say kind of like of like your identity. You know what I mean?".

Simangele grappled with her shame and guilt at her situation as long-distance mother and this was reflected in her Instagram engagement. While she described her Instagram engagement as her "post[ing] in a guilt manner", it also appeared to be a way of coping with the judgement she felt was directed her way for choosing to let her child be raised by her parents away from her. This shame and guilt could partly have been evoked by her experience of "a lot of judgement, a lot of confusion, a lot of, you know, criticism, whatever. You know and if people didn't say it to my face… a lot of the time, it's like you can sense it". She felt her identity as a mother was not clear. In trying to make sense of this, Simangele needed to find her voice because "it did feel messy". This was because she felt like at the time what she "didn't have a clear purpose in life in general, actually". Part of the difficulty was "struggling with the distance" in that she "can't go over to him. So… I give them an update of how he's doing, what he's doing now. His first experiences, first moments and stuff like that". This 'performance' of motherhood on Instagram may have been Simangele's way of affirming her motherhood identity, to herself, her child, and the 'judging others'. It also seemed partially informed by her "biggest fear", which was that her son would forget her because she took "him to them when he was small" but also because she did not want to "forget what [she'd] learned…without him actually physically being" with her – there was anxiety about possibly "slip[ping] back to being the old person that [she] was". Although it

was a difficult time for her, she took ownership of that part of her identity, and started advocating for families who do not fit the nuclear family stereotype. She seemed to be trying to validate her own situation and that of many other women who have children in circumstances that do not allow for nuclear family-type parenting. Long-distance parenting had also required much processing of her relationship with her own mother, who had taken on the primary caretaker role to her son. Her ambivalence in this regard was evident. Whereas Simangele did not experience her own mother as very affectionate growing up, she noted that "she's very affectionate now with her grandkids". Her mother used to be quite firm but in relation to her grandson Simangele found herself asking "who is this?" as her mother was not dishing out hidings like she used to. Simangele surmised that "things have changed, times have changed". But as a means to find a way out of this ambivalence perhaps, Simangele noted that "her gentle grandmother parenting…[is] fine to a certain degree, because actually, what she does is then she lets me take the lead".

Her journey to find her motherhood identity and her Instagram identity appeared to entail a great deal of emotional work to accept herself, and through this, feel brave enough to share the more difficult aspects of her motherhood journey. She continued to explain how, over time, her content "[does] change … even the way I'm posting like from last year to this year", where things went from 'all is well' to a miscarriage, which Simangele noted "you kind of let that show through and you know, it's also changing the way you post and stuff".

Her orientation to readily share with others her evolving state helped her to process the long-distance parenting situation because even though she initially felt "it's so ideal for him" she explained that "that's what I keep on reminding myself… that it's, it's quite difficult for me".

> Uh, we we're struggling with the distance at the moment….: I don't know. There's a lot of guilt there and I think I post in a guilt manner…So, I think I

> need to take that out… it doesn't matter what other people think… but I know that I still have a relationship with him, and I know, you know….ja.

Simangele reflected thoughtfully about why she did not readily post about all motherhood related issues like her unexpected pregnancy at the time, as she disclosed that she "was ashamed… a little bit and I don't think that's right. I probably if… I was me now having gone through that, I probably would have shared it". Her ambivalence was evident in the sense that Simangele didn't "know if it's bad or good actually, I'm still trying to decide [but] you do care about what people think about you. You do. Everyone does". What she did know is that she didn't "wanna be like…ashamed of the way I live my life, or what happens to me or whatever. I think I'm sick of that".

Simangele seemed to be finding ways to be more authentic in her portrayal of herself on Instagram, feeling that "like your social media and the way that you portray yourself online, it may be like chosen and you may nitpick it, but I think that you can still get like the essence of yourself in that current time and at that current stage". Her knowing that one is "constantly evolving and stuff" meant that what she posts "will probably change" to reflect this evolution, as she thought of herself as someone who will "always post and share" because she "love[s] the concept".

In Ann-Lee's case, her struggle to find a mother identity that integrated her pre-existing work identity and the challenges she experienced in relation to the necessary re-negotiation of the couple dynamic after a baby, was a lonely journey. Her belief "that your family should know your struggles, but not everything because it's hard to get those judgments out of people's minds" suggested that trusting others was hard, likely due to her history and her relationship with her mother. She experienced a myriad of unexpected struggles that were challenging to navigate, because she "never ever thought that [she] would be the person that would ever struggle emotionally because [she] had been such a hardcore

female in a male environment, and…[she's] not going to deal with any of that nonsense, [she's] far stronger". But motherhood "*klap[ped]* (slapped) [her] hard like it really comes from nowhere and it's confusing for someone like me that isn't used to sharing any emotion whatsoever and just like getting on with it". Shortly after the birth of her daughter "the whole anxiety level just set in" and "the first couple of weeks was extremely lonely". Motherhood also made her "feel a little bit less confident…a little bit insecure during the six months" that she was away from work, as personnel changes during her partial absence "brought on a little bit of insecurities on [her] part – that [she] had to almost prove [her] worth again".

Ann-Lee's worth as a person seemed very much linked to her Type A personality traits that did not allow for failure or ambivalence. Yet in her own words "[m]otherhood changes everything – the way you think, the way you feel, just everything – it really does, and I will never ever think that of any other person that they're weak if they ever felt a certain way or anxious or burst into tears because I've had it all". It made her more sensitive and empathetic to those who were experiencing similar motherhood-related vulnerabilities such as PND, as she sought to "try share everything that [she] wish[ed] [she'd known" as she wanted to "feel like I've mentally prepared someone a little bit better". Her Instagram account became a place where she could advocate for new mothers, acknowledge how hard motherhood is, and share information that could potentially help another mother. Needing help and not readily finding it in a way that was digestible for her at the time was very much indicated in how Ann-Lee engaged with motherhood on Instagram. The ensuing experience of vulnerability and dependency from her own PND experience seemed to agitate her pre-motherhood identity to such an extent that it still felt impossible for her at times to be able to reach out for help or share her difficulties – especially with her mother – and reconcile this conflict within her identity as mother. It is possible that her engagement on Instagram and positioning herself as a source of information for other less experienced mothers may have

helped her regain a position with which she was more familiar – being knowledgeable and in control – as opposed to feeling anxious and overwhelmed.

There is a possibility that her struggle with her perceived lack of sufficient preparedness may have been linked to her own mother's inability to help in this regard because her mother didn't "remember all the tricks of the trade or anything. She doesn't remember any of it, it's like, it's just a big blur to her". This, combined with her mother's tendency to "think the worst of people" allows us a glimpse into Ann-Lee's childhood experience of her mother and her need to be so very self-sufficient. Interestingly, her mother is also one of her Instagram followers and perhaps this informed Ann-Lee's choice to limit her sharing of her true difficulties as she didn't "necessarily feel the need to put that on Instagram because [she doesn't] think [she'd] get the support that [she'd] need". She stated preferring confiding in a few close 'mom' friends she has made: "like instant support from people [she trusts], not so much the 700…how many people following [her]".

Ann-Lee also found her motherhood identity establishment to be a continuous process. Before becoming a mother, she was getting on with being a "single up-and-coming person trying to prove themselves in the corporate world" which for Ann-Lee meant that when posting "it was important back then what car you drive or what clothes you wearing, all those things". But once she felt she was "at the level that [she] want[ed] to be at now, corporate-wise that [she didn't] feel the need to prove that side of [her] anymore…that's just not important anymore". Her motherhood identity had taken over her Instagram profile, but she made sense of it by noting that "it's what you choose to share at the time of what you're interested in at the time".

In the end Ann-Lee was aware that she's "100% changed as a person" and that she's "just very fortunate that [her] husband loves this version of [her] because if he was craving

the old version...it would be a struggle for sure" alluding to the fact that her identity had undergone a profound change.

Overall, it seemed as if Instagram provided a platform through which each of these mothers could work through their unique struggles related to the establishment of their motherhood identities, and each had found a voice on Instagram.

4.3.5. The Sharing/Oversharing Dilemma

All three participants appeared to share content of their children as a way of communicating their own journey through motherhood – therefore sharing their motherhood experiences by way of posting about their child. As Odette put it: "I still feel at this moment the page is mine and although it's about him it's mine for now". This brought up the question of where the boundary lies between sharing and oversharing child-related content, but perhaps also sharenting content of a more personal nature that might be judged as oversharing by their respective audiences.

Trying to determine where this boundary lies was something Odette engaged with, as she explained:

> [S]o I'm very aware of how easy it is that, like, I could over- overshare my life and people on the other side are making, actually making fun of me…and maybe where I am now is also a less interesting phase, and less - maybe that's also why…I feel like I really don't have to share very much anymore, because it's not as interesting…to me, therefore probably less interesting to other people watching.

She seemed not to "want to be one of those moms that shares so many pictures of their kids" as this felt risky to her goals of being perceived as "cool", "popular" and "not too mothery" as she sought a romantic partner. In trying to gauge where this boundary lies, she would:

> look at myself through other people's eyes…and then the sense of wanting to see how it looks through other people's eyes but being a mother and a mom and how I look, and then that holding back a bit and keeping it for myself a little bit. I mean, that has made me not wanting to share, Jah... not ready to share, wanting to open up to people.

The question about holding back was perhaps also informed by worries around child consent, with which she had not exhaustively engaged with until I had introduced the construct in our first interview. My asking her about this issue seemed to have initially sparked some anxiety:

> And then I start to get worried after I read that – it, should I, do I hold back a bit like, yeah…. I wonder like, is is, ja, will a child? Like are they right? Will a child look back and be like 'Why did you put so many pictures of me?' Like are they are right? I don't know. I've also wondered late- so my profile is public, and then I thought, should I be making it private?

However, by the second interview this had evolved into a more balanced grappling with how to make the page about her motherhood journey without compromising her child:

> So maybe, I must, if I still want to continue describing the – you know, our lives, whatever, in photos, on Instagram, maybe I should (pause) post more (pause) about motherhood and me with (child's name) but not just (child's name) as the centre, because of the whole consent thing.

Not wanting her audience to judge her for being an inauthentic copycat or source of boring content, cultivated a level of cynicism in Odette as she juggled the curation and level of possible oversharing of her account:

> So like a year - on this first birthday, I think I looked back, and I posted sort of one or two very pregnant photos, bikini, and an actual photo of me like

> opening another birthing pool, you know? Uh, So I did go back and do that, but I haven't lately because I think I saw people doing it. Sort of like 'ugh, we're looking back at you pregnant again, so sweet (laughs)'. I'm a bit cynical.

However, it is clear that her fear is someone else looking at her posts and thinking that same thing about her. Oversharing for Odette seemed more linked to fears of judgement or rejection from others, than being about her son's privacy. Interestingly, Odette was the participant who seemed to take the most offense to the term 'sharenting', accusing me of using a biased term. She feared me judging her sharenting on Instagram.

In Simangele's case her son's feelings about being posted were the main driver in her consideration of the sharing/oversharing dilemma:

> I think it's fine if he hates it because then it's just not for him. And I know what type of person he is. He's probably going to be more of a…private um person, um which is fine because he gets the choice and that's probably why it's also like... I hate that whole like when people open an account for the child. And I'm like eeehhmmm that's too far…[But] I wasn't posting anything that I thought would harm him. If he did say that he does feel radically offended by something, definitely I'll retract.

She knows that she will "always post and share. I love the concept. I love it, ja" and whether sharenting inherently could imply oversharing or not seemed to matter less than her son's feelings about it as she reacted to the term with: "[Y]es! There's a word! And I was like yes. Love it. Through and through. Love it. Ja".

Although Ann-Lee is aware that her account would "would probably irritate anyone that doesn't have a child because it is just like child, child, child, ja," there was an awareness

of what might be deemed inappropriate or too much, because she tried "not to do any nude photos or anything like that" but that she "would like for [child's name] to think that [she's] captured a lot of her life…a nice record of her life" because her daughter is amazed by photos of herself, "like, she laughs at it – she loves watching videos of herself". In this case it almost felt as if her daughter's reactions to the content were the main driver for what and how much Ann-Lee might post. But she was aware that:

> having Instagram as a single person, you don't really have to think about anyone but yourself. But then obviously having an open public platform and having pictures of my baby, sometimes she's in the bath, all those types of things…obviously, those things can get out of hand. So, I think just my motherly instincts kicked in of, like, I need to protect, obviously protect images of my child.

Again, interestingly, Ann-Lee's wish to capture a 'memory' of her child's life stood in stark contrast to her own mother's lack of memory for her childhood.

4.4. Conclusion

A psychosocial analysis of the data produced three in-depth vignettes from which five key themes were identified around which mother's motivations to sharent on Instagram and their experiences of this were congregated. These were building a memory chest; an online village of mothers; the scrutiny of motherhood; working through the transition of becoming and grappling with the identity struggle of a mother; and the sharing/oversharing dilemma. All three participants appreciated and actively made use of Instagram's function as a repository for visual memories. This repository seemed highly valued for the anticipated joy it will provide in the future, as well as having an easily accessible online place where the children can one day look back on their early years. Building this kind of a memory chest also motivated the participants to keep on posting and by extension, sharenting.

Being a member of an online village of mothers was also a valued benefit of actively participating as a sharenting mother on Instagram. It was not just appealing to be able to draw from the experiences of other mothers in the Instagram community, but also to contribute their own idiosyncratic and authentic accounts of motherhood, especially content deemed potentially helpful or inspiring for others. At times the village was also criticised for the skewed representation of motherhood expectations, such as doing it all without complaining or sleep training one's child regardless of their unique circumstance. Not addressing key experiences from the participants such as loneliness, PND, non-nuclear family constellations, long-distance parenting, and single motherhood were also highlighted.

The scrutiny of motherhood entailed making sense of the myriad expectations the participants had of themselves as mothers, but also the expectations from their families, friends, and communities (both on- and offline). The fear of being judged, but also partaking in the judgement of mothers in general lay at the heart of the scrutiny. This also chafed at times with the participants' wish to portray authentic accounts of their motherhood experiences, whilst all three acknowledged a degree of curation to their content. This was out of fear for being judged as either "too mothery", "oversharing", being boastful, being "boring", being "too extreme" or portraying an aspect that could be deemed as not good enough mothering. All three mothers experienced varying degrees of criticism from their inner and wider circles when they became pregnant, as well as during the early post-natal period, which to a certain degree unconsciously influenced their engagement on Instagram as a way to process this criticism. Grappling with their own propensity to judge in the face of the judgement from others, the participants found themselves to have become more empathetic to the struggles of other mothers and actively sought to reduce their own judgements. Parallel to this process was the projection of their fears and wishes through their Instagram accounts. Feedback in the form of responses to their posts from their largely

faceless audience either affirmed or encouraged them in their motherhood journey, or shamed and discouraged them.

Working through the transition of becoming and grappling with the identity struggle of a mother was the most dominant and comprehensive theme. At the root lay the ambivalence each participant experienced and continues to experience since becoming a mother. The joy of motherhood was countered by the struggles of motherhood. The latter included the immense transition each of them underwent after the birth of their child. Even though they anticipated the transition into their new role as seamless, none of them experienced it as such. One mother felt oddly detached and separate from her baby shortly after his birth, whilst another mother struggled with PND. The third mother felt that motherhood had happened to her as a way to save her from the reckless and potentially dangerous path she had been on. These experiences were processed to varying degrees through their sharenting practices. This contributed to the establishment of their identities as mothers, as they navigated their idiosyncratic experiences of shame around motherhood through the use of their Instagram accounts. The establishment of their mother identities was also coloured by their unique histories, the circumstances around their pregnancies, the relationships or absence thereof with the father of their children and their own mothers, as well as their support systems.

By partaking in sharenting as a way of communicating their own journey through motherhood, each mother was sharing content of their children with a known but also unknown audience. At times they almost came across as oblivious or non-perturbed by the extent of their sharing, whereas at other times they felt unsure about possibly oversharing – and what that could mean for their children in the future. Initially, concepts such as ‘safety’ or ‘consent’ were regarded somewhat dismissively, but all three participants engaged in the exploration of where the possible boundary between sharing and oversharing lay. This

differed from participant to participant and was mainly informed by their level of comfort in habitually documenting and posting personal content on Instagram both before becoming mothers and thereafter. It was also informed by the extent to which each participant used Instagram as a way of keeping people updated on their child's comings and goings, achievements, and quirky moments.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1. Introduction

This study sought to contribute to the current limited literature on the performance of motherhood on the social media platform, Instagram. More specifically it sought to offer a psychosocial exploration of mothers' motivation(s) to sharent. Of importance was the respectful interrogation of mothers' desires, anxieties, and defences (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013) that influenced their subjective positions in relation to their choice to sharent. As was noted in the ethical and reflexivity sections previously, the relational dynamics between myself and the participants rested upon my application of respect, honesty, sympathy and understanding to mitigate structural power differences (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). It also required a pervasive awareness of the influence of my own subjectivity as researcher and mother throughout the research process. This included countertransference emotions that were evoked during the interviews, as well as my own phantasies and anxieties on the topic which arose during analysis. They are accounted for in the extended reflexivity section.

Overall, I was humbled and intrigued by each participant's experience of early motherhood and felt empathic toward their attempts at navigating this challenging phase through their online engagements on Instagram. At times I still felt doubtful about the extent to which they sharented as a way to work through this identity transition, but by the end of the results write-up I was able to acknowledge the validity of their different subjectivities in relation to sharenting, as each was uniquely shaped by their history and configuration of defences. Continuously remaining reflexive and absorbing the research supervisor's reflexive contributions allowed for a deeper engagement with the complexity mothers' underlying motivations to sharent.

Five themes across the three case studies were identified in the data, of which some varied within each case. The first theme was *building a memory chest*. This theme captured how all three mothers sharented as a way to build a repository of photos and memories of

their child. *An online village of mothers* brought to the fore the importance of community and having an (m)other to idealise and seek validation from in the form of other mothers on Instagram. A third and the most complex theme was *working through the transition of becoming and grappling with the identity struggle of a mother.* Exploration of this theme highlighted the immensity of the adjustment required and the challenges in adopting the mother identity. The fourth theme was *the scrutiny of motherhood* and encompassed the difficult and variegated emotions mothers experience and have to hold simultaneously. Some of the emotions included guilt, shame, and joy, which were interlaced by the judgement mothers experience from others but also their own judgement of other mothers. The final theme was *the sharing/oversharing dilemma* that mothers face with regards to the extent of creating an online presence of their children when the latter are not able to fully understand it yet or give their consent. These themes are employed in this discussion to answer the research questions posed by this study:

1. What are mothers' perceived motivations for sharenting?
2. What desires, anxieties and defences are reflected in sharenting practices on Instagram?
3. What are the subjective positions that mothers assume in relation to sharenting on Instagram?
4. How do these assumed subjective positions relate to maternal identities?

5.2. Motivations for Sharenting as reflected in the Desires, Anxieties and Defences underlying Mothers' Sharenting Practices on Instagram

Through the course of this study, it became clear that mothers had explicit or more conscious motivations for sharenting that they were able to articulate when questioned, and some less conscious or implicit motivations that were revealed through the analysis of their desires, anxieties and defences and the positions they took up in relation to sharenting on

Instagram. This was possible because psychosocial analysis interrogates how individuals express themselves or position themselves within particular discourses by defending against their anxieties often in a very unconscious way (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). Thus, research questions one and two are answered here together.

Building a treasure chest of memories or visual repository for themselves and their children appeared to be mothers' main articulated motivation for sharenting. This accords with various other studies' findings (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Latipah et al., 2020). The three participants also seemed to sharent in an intimate way, as delineated by Holiday et al. (2022), whereby the child is presented in a central position for memorial purposes. Sharenting also created the possibility of being sufficiently seen and commercially appreciated as an Instagram account with high traffic that would lead to commercial gain in the form of free merchandise and services. Two of the three participants also desired to reach critical mass in online traffic for their accounts that would result in sponsorships and free merchandise, confirming findings by Blum-Ross and Livingstone (2017), Donovan (2020), and Holiday et al. (2022) that some parents engage in the dissemination of child-related content for commercial gain.

Another main motivation for participants' sharenting included keeping their known followers such as family friends up to date with their children's developments. Similar findings have been shared by Bhroin et al. (2022), Cino and Demozzi (2018), and Le Moignan et al. (2017). One participant also sharented in a way as to find a romantic partner by positioning her availability and context within her mother role, which could also be linked to the concept of self-presentation (Hurley, 2021).

Another motivation that was articulated was a desire to help other mothers – whether it was to mentally prepare for motherhood, normalise non-normative family and parenting contexts, or creating a greater awareness of the insufficiently acknowledged difficulties

mothers face. This expands on the scant literature emphasising a desire to help others through the struggles of motherhood via sharenting (Jorge et al., 2022; Ranzini et al., 2020). This motivation seemed especially pertinent to the need for adjusting and disrupting dominant narratives around motherhood (Frizelle & Kell, 2010; Wegener et al., 2022) in an effort to bridge the chasm between the lived experience of motherhood and the myth of the perfect mother, which can cause the onset of PND (Choi et al., 2005). It is likely that this motivation reflected identification with other mothers' struggles and a wish that they had had someone to help them in the ways that they now sought to help. Instagram seemed to provide a platform where help could be both received and given.

A tension was noted between the participants' desire to present an authentic account of their motherhood narrative on Instagram and their desire to be a part of a collective. Being a part of the online village of mothers that could inspire, advise, support and challenge allowed them to feel less alone in their lived experience, becoming a platform where they felt they could make their own unique contribution. Fuelled by the desire to find help and inspiration, all three mothers turned to Instagram and the online village of mothers for a sense of community, aligning with previous findings by Blum-Ross and Livingstone (2017), Lupton et al. (2016), Putri et al. (2021), Quiney (2007), Ranzini et al. (2020) and Wegener et al. (2022). This also highlights the relational nature of sharenting previously discussed by Bhroin et al. (2022) and Putri et al. (2021). However, the online village also created some anxiety in the comparisons that this evoked and subsequent fears of judgement – from others and within themselves. In this way, the participants made use of the online village as a mirror in which they scrutinised other mothers in seeking a reflection of their own mothering as a means to find affirmation of being good enough. This expands on Parker's (1995) notion of mothers using other mothers as mirrors in the aforementioned way, but on an online platform.

A motivation for sharenting that was not explicitly articulated, but rather emerged from the analysis was the desire to process their ambivalent feelings about motherhood, especially the seesaw between the joy of being a mother but also the guilt, shame, and loneliness. This aligns with Frizelle and Hayes (1999), Parker (1995) and Tummala-Narra's (2009) findings that the reconstruction of an identity as mother can bring about a state of ambivalence. This ambivalence can be fuelled by the re-emergence of conflicts related to early attachment relationships, but as the vignettes illustrated, it was also fuelled by conflicts arising from contemporary attachment relationships with their children: Odette experienced ambivalence towards her baby in the postnatal phase; Simangele's ambivalence was made more acute by the imposed long distance and separation from her child; whereas Ann-Lee's ambivalence was fuelled by the loss of her previous status as a respected executive and suffering from PND symptoms. The difference between Ann-Lee's lived experience and the expectations of being the ideal mother likely contributed to her experience of PND (Choi et al., 2005). All three participants sought to process the aforementioned ambivalence, which brought about guilt, shame, and loneliness. Using Instagram to process this guilt aligns with findings by Chae (2015).

The difficult emotions they sought to work through appeared to contribute to feelings of anxiety and self-doubt. All the participants appeared to be using sharenting as a means to gain validation of their new identities as mothers, as similarly found by McDaniel et al. (2012), Cino and Demozzi (2018), and Latipah et al. (2020). This validation was especially sought for each mother's unique narrative and 'voice' on Instagram. For one mother, the possibility of finding 'fame and fortune' on Instagram from her content was deeply desired and seemed to suggest that achievement of this goal may have been linked to a fantasy of then feeling she was good-enough. She used Instagram to proudly reflect her positive position on breastfeeding, being a single mother, but also an artist. For another mother, the knowledge

that she had helped other mothers in better preparing for motherhood to reduce anxiety and depression was a strong desire. She also used Instagram to proudly share her daughter's developmental milestones. A third mother very much wished to normalise non-normative contexts such as non-nuclear families, miscarriages, and long-distance parenting, reflecting a desire to have her situation as a long-distance mother normalised. Her Instagram was used to proudly reflect how happy her son was living with his grandparents in a rural area many kilometres away from her. This supports previous literature explicating how sharenting is engaged with to address the need for a particular self-presentation (Hurley, 2021). Participating in this online community fed back into the desire to find gratification in having helped another (mother), or being validated for one's socially constructed performance of the mother role (McDaniel et al., 2012; Ranzini et al., 2020).

All the mothers appeared to wish to feel like and be seen to be a 'good-enough' mother – a 'good enough' mother is understood according to Winnicott's (1960) notion of a mother being able to sufficiently but not exhaustively attend to her infant. This desire to feel liked and be seen as a 'good enough' mother allowed for a new appreciation of the desire to create a legacy in the form of a visual memory chest. Not only would this serve as a valuable repository of memories for their children, but also as evidence for their efforts in trying to be a 'good (enough)' mother. This curation and collection of memories confirms similar findings by Blum-Ross and Livingstone (2017), and Latipah et al. (2020). It also expands on Hirsch's (1981) positioning of family photography as a tool providing access to our deepest regrets and desires, in addition to being a set of visual parameters shaping our memory and experience.

Trying to be a 'good enough' mother was evidently intertwined with their core anxiety of being judged, as previously noted by Parker (1995) and Frizelle and Kell (2010). This judgement arose from comparing themselves to other mothers on Instagram, but also

from comparing themselves to their former selves before they became mothers. In one way or another all three mothers initially felt a little less confident after becoming mothers, having to navigate this life-altering transition with varying degrees of support systems, especially in relation to their own idiosyncratic motherhood constellation. Answers to questions such as whether they were getting it right or doing enough were sought in the online village of Instagram mothers. The almost unavoidable tussle with motherhood judgement – be it of other mothers or themselves as mothers – has been highlighted in other studies such as Choi et al. (2005), Frizelle and Kell (2010), Raphael-Leff (2010), and Tummala-Narra (2009), yet few studies to date have specifically explored this in relation to sharenting, and none that could be identified within the South African context. While the issues of single parenting and the dilemma of working motherhood are likely to be common across many contexts, the issue of long-distance parenting, although not solely a South African phenomenon, was particularly pertinent to the South African context, where the post-apartheid landscape is still shaped by the aftermath of laws that enforced parental separation (Mograbi et al., 2023; Moore, 2013). It is furthermore shaped by the effects of traditional African customs of intergenerational, shared or alloparenting practices (Mograbi et al., 2023).

Other anxieties included feelings of shame and illegitimacy, fears of being forgotten, feeling guilty for being far away, a single mother, or being a working mother; fears of slipping back into the person they were before becoming mothers; feeling emotionally and physically lonely; difficulty sitting with the ambivalent feelings around motherhood; but also coping with ambivalent feelings about the online village of mothers, which did not always feel as authentically supportive or helpful as it purported to be. As Egmose et al. (2022), Leigh and Milgrom (2008), Tummala-Narra (2009), and von Mohr et al. (2017) pointed out, the transition to motherhood is unique for each mother and impactful in variegated demanding and anxiety-inducing ways.

The natural defences that arose against these anxieties were dominated by rationalisation, intellectualisation, and humour. These are considered mature or neurotic defences from a psychoanalytic perspective (Lemma, 2015). In the initial postpartum phase, some splitting between all good and all bad (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008; Klein, 2011; Lemma, 2015) was evident, especially for two mothers. One mother deemed 'always being the responsible one' as bad and not serving her needs, as the opposite had allowed her to fall pregnant. Another mother had always been 'the reckless one', which had to be split off to make space for the different version of her that was constructing her mother identity. Both processed this splitting through their Instagram accounts to reintegrate split off parts from before becoming a mother in an attempt to wholly construct themselves as mothers. Sometimes their accounts reflected suppression, in that they actively chose to withhold parts of their narrative that were associated with feelings of guilt and shame for fear of being judged unfavourably, as similarly found by Choi et al. (2005). At other times their reports of their sharenting practices indicated reaction formation, whereby a disturbing idea is transformed into its opposite (Lemma, 2015), such as the participant who spoke of and posted about how good it was for her child to be far away from her with his grandparents. Two of the three mothers also presented with punitive superegos that they were actively defending against through their sharenting to prove that they did not deserve to be punished for how they became mothers, or how they have chosen to navigate the motherhood obstacle course. Defending against an overdeveloped superego often gives rise to defences that are uniquely processed (Lemma, 2015), but in this instance through the use of sharenting on Instagram.

There were also anxieties about whether their sharenting qualified as oversharing, although none of the participants initially felt that they were oversharing to any degree. Upon further exploration, the fear of oversharing was more related to the potential judgement it could evoke toward the mother (Choi et al., 2005), as opposed to sharing too much content of

the child and the future repercussions thereof (Wegener et al., 2022). This judgement related to possibly being made fun of, or being viewed as boring, too ‘mothery’, or being a copycat. Questions about consent and their children’s right to online privacy were grappled with, as well as fantasising about their children’s reactions once they were old enough to understand the implications of the online footprints of their mother’s Instagram accounts. These were not fully resolved however, as the current emotionally-driven necessity and appeal of their sharenting accounts seemed to outweigh a hypothetical future impact. These findings expand on Damkjaer's (2018) and Blum-Ross and Livingstone's (2017) position that parents are responsible for their children’s safety online and could potentially compromise their privacy, by highlighting the nuanced context within which mothers are trying to re-establish their new identity. In doing so their pressing need for external validation seems to outweigh any future concerns, even though they expressed no ill intent. Nonetheless they all carried an awareness – some participants to a lesser extent than others – of the potential risks posed to their children’s privacy, thus tying in with Kokolakis's (2017) conceptualisation of the privacy paradox. In this instance the privacy paradox when using Instagram as the chosen platform for sharenting poses an unavoidable risk. Although posts can be deleted at a later stage – yet remain accessible in the meta data of the Internet (Leaver, 2020) – the impact of their existence until deletion has not been extensively researched.

5.3. Subjective Positions Mothers Assume in relation to their Maternal Identities when Sharenting on Instagram

Regular documenting and online sharing did not feel out of the ordinary as these mothers embody digital natives living in a digital-first culture (Latipah et al., 2020; Putri et al., 2021; Ranzini et al., 2020). These participants found Instagram to be their platform of choice to use their idiosyncratic voices for their subjective position as mothers, supporting findings by Abetz and Moore (2018), and Van Cleaf (2020) that Instagram is a preferred

space for expressing subjective embodiments of motherhood. As in the studies by Quiney (2007) and Wegener et al. (2022) these mothers disseminated child-focused content that included their experiences and personal views and content that invited dialogue on their chosen topic. Thus, the subjective positions they assumed on Instagram were closely tied to the developing maternal identities. For this reason, research questions three and four are answered together here.

As motherhood fluidly and often unexpectedly took place for each participant (Kawash, 2011) in the backstage space as delineated by DeGroot and Vik (2021), it was brought to the front stage via their Instagram accounts. Crucial to this subjective positioning of themselves was how they chose to use their voices as mothers – whether it was to legitimise their position as a single/working/long-distance mother or contribute to the current discourses on the lived experiences of mothers. While this appeared to be driven by their articulated motivations, the positions that were taken up were also clearly linked to some perhaps less conscious desires and anxieties, as each mother curated her sharenting content in a way that revealed aspects of her internal object relational structure and defensive system (Hollway & Froggett, 2013).

All three mothers' narratives expressed some tension or struggle related to identity. One mother struggled with the work/life balance as an executive, and one mother grappled with the difficulties of finding a romantic partner whilst being a single mother, whilst the third constantly swayed in her convictions of long-distance parenting. All three used their voice on Instagram to express this subjective identity struggle, supporting findings by Choi and Lewallen (2018) and Damkjaer (2018). This way of sharenting builds upon other studies explicating how the complexity of motherhood can be witnessed in how identities are expressed in relation to the competing demands of professional and personal life (Riches, 2014). How they navigate these competing demands that give rise to anxieties also dovetailed

with other research that highlighted how mothers use online platforms such as Instagram to access information to empower themselves as they mitigate their anxieties related to their new motherhood identities (Egmose et al., 2022; Madge & O'Connor, 2006).

5.3.1. Finding community and validation through a position of authenticity

There was a desire to find supportive communities of mothers and validation for themselves as mothers through their sharenting, however, this was complicated through continued ambivalence and fear of judgement. However, there was also a shared drive for authentic self-presentation in the face of often internalised, idealised societal expectations by the participants. These findings contradict notions by for example Lopez (2009) who posited that mothers risk losing touch with their authentic selves when perpetually engaging in the narrative of the imagined 'perfect' version of motherhood, and Reichel (2012) who found that mothers tended to hold back information that could be deemed as inadmissible struggles or conceal perceived failures in parenting.

They appeared to sharent in a way that confirms Moore's (2013) view that their subjective positions reflect their personal goals and individuation in addition to evidencing 'good enough' mothering. This feeds into achieving goals such as happiness as a mother (Lazard et al., 2019) and effecting and empowering transformation over time (Ghosh, 2016). By virtue of being a mother, having something to say on Instagram reinforced their subjective positions and vice versa. Contributing to motherhood discourses whilst garnering feedback that is perceived as a positive marker of mothering success – by virtue of being authentic – extends analogous findings (Donovan, 2020; Goffman, 2002; Lazard et al., 2019). This entails willingly inviting others in good faith to 'watch' them forge their way through this lived experience, and in so doing their Instagram audiences not only watch but also bear witness. Little literature to date has focused on the potential benefit sharenting offers in processing maternal ambivalence and trauma by virtue of witness bearing. Other studies have

explored the social process of bearing witness as a valuable tool in attempting to make the incomprehensible comprehensible, and how it can be used as a therapeutic tool within psychoanalysis (Ullma, 2006). In the case of this study, as the participants explained how sharenting made them feel less alone in their subjective experiences, whilst feeling validated through their engagement on Instagram, the researcher was simultaneously bearing witness to their experiences of motherhood within a non-judgemental and respectful space that seemed to validate their subjectivities and create a sense of solidarity in real time. In this instance the interviews felt analogous to the experience the participants have online in feeling heard and validated, whilst there is an (m)other actively engaging with them in trying to make the incomprehensible aspects of the motherhood identity comprehensible.

Although all three participants initially felt isolated in the early phases of motherhood, as confirmed by related studies (Frizelle & Kell, 2010; Tummala-Narra, 2009), they sharented their way through this impactful transition. Sharenting also appears to moderate how a mother navigates the phase of primary maternal preoccupation (Winnicott, 1956), in that it offers a platform for engaging with help, support and a soundboard during times when she might feel intrapsychically conflicted and imbalanced (Hollway, 2012).

5.3.2. Finding the 'me' in motherhood

Although all three participants appeared to lean more towards a romantic feminist perspective on motherhood (Boonzaier, 2006), each grappled in their own way with this subjective experience, as it temporarily required each of them to ablate a part of their individual self (Frizelle & Kell, 2010; Ogden, 2004). Ogden (2004) writes that during the initial phase, a mother foregoes the time required to create something for herself that is separate from her infant. However, sharenting seems to moderate the separation-individuation process in that online engagement of the mother through child-forward content can influence how the infant gradually separates and individuates from the mother (Mahler et al., 1975),

and how the mother separates from her child as she reorganises her identity (Tummala-Narra, 2009). The vital need to work through the transition into motherhood resulted in each mother engaging in various subjective positions through sharenting on Instagram, in an attempt to piece together parts of her prematernal identity, her fantasised maternal identity and her actual experienced maternal identity. Hollway (2012) explains how participants in her own research struggled to find the words for this experience situated around becoming a mother within the matrixial borderspace. As mentioned prior, according to Ettinger (2006) the matrixial borderspace is encompassed by the feminine transsubjective psychic field around pregnancy, stretching as a stratum across prematernal and postnatal subjectivities within which the self and m/other co-emerge. Building on this, Hollway (2012) posits that although the transsubjective stratum is subservient to the autonomous subject's singularity, it comes alive when the birth of an infant initiates the mechanisms required for protection against that which may impede its 'going on being' as originally introduced by Winnicott (1956). This matrixial borderspace and transsubjectivity accounts for the continuous and ever-evolving process of maternal identity reconfiguration as mothers move through the phases of their children's development, but also their own life stages. I would therefore argue that as the self and m/other co-emerge in the matrixial borderspace from birth onwards, it is not only the child but also the emerging m/other who requires protection from impingements on her 'going on being'. Findings of this study could suggest that mothers view sharenting as a way to stay close to and nurture their need to 'go on being', and thus minimise the ablation of the self in favour of reconfiguring the self within their maternal identities.

5.3.3. Normalising maternal ambivalence and the 'imperfect mother'

Participants' sharenting voices on Instagram were also employed to navigate the ambivalence they experience in relation to motherhood (Tummala-Narra, 2009), as well as addressing the scrutiny motherhood inevitably evokes (Frizelle & Hayes, 1999). At times this

included holding back related information that the participants deemed failures or inadmissible struggles on their part, as similarly found by Frizelle and Kell (2010), and Reichel (2012). At other times, this included bringing in other aspects of their identities that are not necessarily directed related to motherhood but still influence who they are as birth mothers. They therefore use their subjective positions to reduce the judgemental space and address the chasm between their lived experiences and the myth of the ideal mother, as found by Choi et al. (2005). Their own motherhood journeys seemed to have allowed for greater overall empathy towards other mothers, which informed how they related to other mothers on Instagram, and likely reflected increased the empathy that they could offer themselves, as they were more able to own the parts of their stories they had previously experienced as shameful. This could be extrapolated as a processing of their own motherhood constellation. For some of the mothers, the knowledge that their own mothers, or the father of their children do or don't see their content appeared to allow more freedom to express their experiences and opinions, despite how this may differ from their own experiences of being mothered. This ties in and builds upon Stern's (2020) conceptualisation of the motherhood constellation. In doing so, they are actively contributing in disrupting dominant discourses of the motherhood narrative and addressing the positivity bias noted in studies on social media and motherhood (Wegener et al., 2022). It also sharpens the focus on mothers' subjectivity (Boonzaier, 2006; Raphael-Leff, 2010).

This subjectivity is reflected in their Instagram accounts, which are populated in ways that inadvertently tracks their evolving identities and offers the possibility to proffer parts of themselves in an online social space, before embarking upon it in the 'real world'. This is done in an attempt to assimilate and bridge difficulties experienced as a mother, whereby the feedback received from their audience can be internalised (both good and bad) and informs the creation of their personal and online identities. This correlates with the interaction

between the front stage and backstage spaces where motherhood occurs (DeGroot & Vik, 2021) and the reorganisation of identity a mother undergoes (Tummala-Narra, 2009). Sharenting could therefore again be posited as a moderator of the dynamic performance of motherhood between on- and offline spaces and the configuration of maternal identity with the framework of maternal subjectivity.

5.3.4. The position of advocate/helper as processing personal vulnerabilities

While maternal identity is inextricably linked to the child, maternal identities alone seemed more vulnerable. Interestingly, the phenomenon of using posts about their children, where the focus is on the child as opposed to the mother herself, appeared to allow for a sufficiently safe space for mothers to talk about the hard things. Mothers struggled to express their vulnerability explicitly – but found creative ways to do this through the taking up of advocacy or helper roles.

Foundationally, the participants accepted and to a certain extent looked forward to their maternal identities, but they all experienced hardship in finding themselves again within these new identities. Motherhood was experienced as usurping the mental and emotional status quos in their identity from before becoming mothers, aligning with prior research in this regard (Egmose et al., 2022; Kruger, 2003; Leigh & Milgrom, 2008; Quiney, 2007; Raphael-Leff, 2010; von Mohr et al., 2017). All three reported motherhood not allowing them to just get on with it like they had before. Thus, an identity transition was required. Each mother predominantly assumed a subjective position particular to her circumstance, how she was mothered and her experiences of motherhood thus far: for the first participant this was being a single mother, who also views herself as an artist and is in search of a romantic partner, navigating motherhood without her mother who had passed. For the second participant it was about being a long-distance mother raising her child in a non-normative, non-nuclear way despite having grown up that way herself with her own mother as a co-

parent; whilst for the third participant it was about being a mother trying to return to her previous professional capacity, having to overcome PND and wanting to help other mothers in this regard, whilst guarding her vulnerabilities from her own mother.

Yet within the difficulties they found sources for sharenting that strengthened their voices as mothers. For one participant it was advocating for breastfeeding, for another it was long-distance parenting and for yet another it was speaking up about the difficulties of PND and the extreme loneliness that can be experienced in the early phase on motherhood. Despite these difficulties, the majority of participants felt like their maternal subjectivities had given them a clear purpose in life, which in turn empowered and reified their maternal identity. This expands upon findings by Ghosh (2016), Holiday et al. (2022), Jeremiah (2006) and Kawash (2011). The taking up of an advocacy or helper role appeared to assist in the establishment of her maternal identity. For each mother, their vulnerabilities such as being single, a long-distance mother or being out of the 'executive game' in a professional capacity became a strength in the online sphere, which also reinforced and perhaps even fortified their maternal identities.

Ultimately, this study revealed an intertwined relationship between sharenting and maternal identity establishment. While sharenting on Instagram appears to allow a space to explore and process a shifting maternal identity, as an identity emerges, this allows for a sense of having 'something to say' and a sense of worth, which encourages further sharenting on Instagram.

5.4. Implications of the study

The principal reason for this study was to gain an understanding of mothers' motivations for sharenting and a better understanding of the performance of motherhood on Instagram through the practice of sharenting from a psychosocial perspective, highlighting mothers' subjectivities. The paucity of literature on this topic globally (Van Cleaf, 2020),

informed the rationale, especially the lack of relevant studies on South African mothers. Previous studies have shown how online engagement in motherhood-related topics is sought in the pursuit of maternal well-being (McDaniel et al., 2012). This study highlighted how sharenting appears to be useful as a means of exploring, establishing, and maintaining an ever-evolving maternal identity, in that it empowers mothers through information-gathering and validation of their subjective experiences. It also contributed to the understanding of South African mothers' psychosocial stressors informing their maternal desires and anxieties (Frizelle & Kell, 2010) which led them to sharent on Instagram.

Its clinical utility lies in its reflection of an array of both conscious and less conscious desires and anxieties. Sharenting was for example employed by the participants to create a visual repository of their maternal activities as an unconscious way of reinforcing their identities but also consciously creating a future gift for their children. This well-intended behaviour should however be balanced against children's needs for and rights to privacy and autonomy, as it seems that the need to sharent can be driven by powerful personal needs of the mother that threaten to eclipse the needs of the child. The drive to achieve maternal well-being could therefore be mitigated by mothers being better informed through guidelines about the advantages and perils of sharenting, to ensure that the needs of both mother and child are balanced and addressed equitably. Therefore, the findings of this study can be viewed as a modest contribution to the better understanding of psychosocial constructs at play that could potentially improve maternal well-being and by extension the well-being of the child, especially in the South African context.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1. Summary of Findings

In investigating mothers' sharenting practices from a psychosocial perspective with three South African participants, the findings provided insight into the interplay between social environments and intrapsychic mechanisms. These include the fact that mothers' histories, circumstances around pregnancy and the available support structure in the postnatal phase – be it their own mothers, other mothers, or the online village of mothers – shaped how they grappled with the transition to a maternal identity. This in turn is reflected in how they chose to sharent. Sharenting was principally motivated by the need to build a memory chest, as this both tracked their motherhood journey but also provided a personalised visual legacy in the future for their children. An engagement in sharenting also gave mothers access to the online village of mothers where they found both an audience for their idiosyncratic motherhood narratives, but also a sense of community, support, and advice. The online village allowed mothers to use other mothers as mirrors. At times there were also ambivalent feelings toward the online village as the fear of being judged in the face of their own judgements was interwoven with comparing themselves to the presented standards of others. Participants also sought to reach out a helping hand where possible as a way of working through their own difficulties, but also to normalise the struggles of motherhood and disrupt dominant discourses of motherhood.

In working through the transition of becoming and grappling with the identity struggle of a mother, their psychosocial desires, anxieties, and defences came most to the fore. Motherhood usurped all three participants' way of life, and as they navigated their way through the transition, sharenting offered both an outlet, but also a dynamic soundboard that could serve as a guide, but also validate their journeys. These journeys were fraught with ambivalence about the implications and expectations of motherhood, both from themselves and their social environments. It was mostly mature defences such as rationalisation,

intellectualisation, and humour that were employed to mitigate the anxieties this ambivalence evoked. The scrutiny of motherhood once again highlighted the pervasiveness of judgement in this sphere. Mothers judging themselves and others, whilst fearing being judged or inadvertently contributing to the judgemental space. In the same instance, the participants sought to present authentic accounts of their motherhood journeys, which contributes to bridging the chasm between mothers' lived experiences and the myth of motherhood.

The sharing/oversharing dilemma that came to light proffered insights into when and how mothers think they are oversharing, and what the repercussions thereof might be. Generally, none of the participants regarded their sharenting as constituting oversharing, yet there was an awareness of how and what they sharented could be misconstrued, made fun of or disavow their abilities as mothers. Privacy repercussions did not seem to be at the forefront for any of them, which could be explained by the fact that they readily engage in the practices of digital natives, which normalises the regular documenting and sharing of activities.

Together, each participant's subjectivity interacted with these themes to varying degrees, but all three embraced their subjectivity as an authentic resource for sharenting. The dynamism and fluidity of reorganising their identity into that of a mother aligned with the transsubjective stratum encompassing the matrixial borderspace within which both a child and the m/other co-emerge. Sharenting therefore offered them a means to 'going on being' within the context of reconfiguring their identities.

6.2. Limitations

This study's findings should be regarded within the framework of a number of contextual and methodological limitations. First and foremost, the study's parameters were set by my own limited experience as a psychosocial researcher. This includes my current understanding of psychoanalytic theory as a clinical psychologist still in training, as well as experience within the qualitative paradigm as a neophyte researcher. This research was also

influenced by my own subjectivity as the mother of a child younger than two years, situating me in the at times tempestuous state of psychic vulnerability and accompanying biases toward motherhood narratives, especially within the context of sharenting. It is important to acknowledge that my own subjectivity played a role in the intersubjective space with my participants, with whom I had to build rapport and trust in a respectful and honest manner in line with the FANI methodology and general ethics of research.

Further methodological limitations included the small sample size of three participants. Even though they were interviewed twice to gain depth and richness of data, the findings are not generalisable. This is, however, balanced by the fact that case studies do not aim for generalisability, rather they aim to gain a depth understanding of process and dynamics, which this study achieved. The purposive sampling method also resulted in all three participants being mothers to only one child. Perhaps if there were siblings, the findings would paint a different scene. All participants' only children also happened to be under the age of seven, even though the exclusion criteria only sought to preclude mothers whose children were under the age of one. Sharenting explored in this study therefore was very much concentrated on the toddler/early primary school child and may be different for participants with older children. All the participants were also employed, proficient in English, and residing in urban areas with access to smart phones, data, and reliable connectivity. This is another limitation as it could be that mothers from a different socio-economic background with limited access to resources, who are less acculturated to Western discourses would provide very different data on the subjective nature of performing motherhood through sharenting. Another limitation is that the study only included birth mothers, whereas the performance of motherhood via sharenting on Instagram, is not limited to only female bodies that procreate. The fact that certain interviews occurred in person whereas others took place online is another limitation as it produced two different kinds of

interactions for data collection between researcher and participant. Finally, the semi-structured to unstructured nature of free association led to a diminished focus on the complexities involved in the feedback loop between sharenting mother and their followers' likes and comments. Had this been brought to the fore more, it could have provided a more detailed understanding of the finer nuances this feedback has on mothers' motivations to sharent on Instagram.

6.3. Recommendations

Due to the sampling method employed as described in the methodology section, and further highlighted in the limitations section, the researcher was restricted in their control over the composition of the sample along class, cultural and racial lines. Future research on this topic could therefore extend the diversity of samples for a more comprehensive and richer data pool. Even though this sample consisted of two white mothers and one black mother, the results obtained through the psychosocial filter were less racially laden, which could either suggest that Instagram is widely used by South African mothers across different racial categories, but in this instance white mothers felt more comfortable to respond to a participation call from a researcher they perhaps felt they identify with; or mothers from racial backgrounds other than white perform their motherhood identity on a different platform to Instagram.

Interestingly though, this study's black participant was the youngest of the three and most readily identified as a sharenter as it aligned with her digital native generation's affinity to posting on an almost daily basis. Further research could consider age as a mitigating factor in the extent to which mothers feel comfortable or drawn to performing their motherhood identities on Instagram through sharenting. The finding that mothers use Instagram and sharenting as a way of working through the transition of becoming and grappling with the identity struggle of a mother deserves more specialised focus where it intersects with trauma,

and how bearing witness contributes to the processing of this particular form of trauma. The findings of this study allude to potential trauma related to becoming a mother, which has a particular impact on the performance of motherhood through sharenting on Instagram – but requires further investigation. Finally, it is also recommended that similar studies include the analysis of actual posts or photos in sharenting mothers' visual repositories as data to further corroborate how they reflect their psychosocial desires, anxieties, and defences as identified in this study.

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Appendix A – Interview Schedules

Interview Schedule – 1st Interview

A. Demographic questions:

A.1. What is your age?

A.2. How many children do you have?

A.3. What are their ages?

A.4. Which ethnicity do you identify with?

A.5. Do you reside in and urban or rural location?

A.6. How long have you been on Instagram?

A.7. Do you use your Instagram account for commercial purposes?

B. Questions related to motherhood:

B.8. Can you tell me about your experiences of motherhood so far?

B.9. What has been difficult for you?

B.10. What has exceeded your expectations/been surprising/been positive for you?

B.11. Can you tell me more about how your expectations of motherhood have changed based on your experience so far?

C. **Questions related to identity:**

C.12. Can you tell me about how your views of yourself have changed or remained the same since becoming a mother?

C.13. Can you tell me about any changes in perceptions from those around you (like friends, family, colleagues) regarding how you are seen since becoming a mother?

C.14. Can you tell me about the ways you've navigated any changes you've experienced in your identity?

D. Questions related to Instagram, sharenting, and audience:

D.15. Can you tell me more about your Instagram account?

(How long have you had it?)

(What do you generally post about?)

(How do you feel about your profile?)

D.16. How do you understand your motivations for sharenting on Instagram?

D.17. Have you noticed a change in the content you post since becoming a mother – if so, can you tell me more about it?

D.18. What of the old you (before becoming a mother) is still visible in the choices you make for posting?

D.19. What does sharenting mean for you?

(Have you been called a sharenter or not and how do you feel about that?)

D.20. Have you ever been criticised or praised for content you've posted? Would you feel comfortable sharing that post with me and tell me a bit about that experience?

D.21. Which posts have you been especially proud of or unsure of to post?

D.22. Are there any posts you feel particularly emotional about in a positive or negative way and can you show these to me?

D.23. What are your thoughts about your Instagram audience?

D.24. What do you hope to give your followers?

(Why do you think this is your purpose?)

D.25. Can you share any posts with me where you hoped to elicit a particular response, in which you succeeded or were pleasantly surprised by the response?

D.26. Can you tell me about the fantasy or hopes you harbour that your sharenting will provide for you, your child(ren) now and in the future?

D.27. Can you tell me about your thoughts regarding your children's online presence and identity?

E. Questions related to own upbringing/being mothered:

E.28. Can you tell me about your experiences being mothered, or how you were raised by your mother/caregiver?

F. Questions related to change:

F.29. Can you tell me about any changes you have made as a mother that were informed by how you were mothered?

F.30. How do you feel about any alignments or possible feelings of dissonance between how you were raised by your mother and how you choose to raise your child(ren)?

F.31. Is there anything else you would like to speak about based on what we have discussed so far?

F.32. How have you experienced this interview and the whole process so far?

F.33. Are you left with anything in particular that you would like to add or feel still needs to be covered?

(How are you feeling? Are you ok to leave it that that for now?)

Interview Schedule – 2nd Interview

Narrative questions will be tailored based on the outcome of the first interview. These will be guided by identified moments of conflict, tension, contradictions, avoidances and hesitations. Absent themes will also be touched on.

Possible questions include:

Q1. Please tell me about your experience of the first interview. Did anything stay with you in the time between interviews? Did any new thoughts emerge in-between?

Q2. Do you think there's anything you struggle with as a mother that might be reflected in your Instagram posts that you weren't aware of?

Q3. How have you experienced this interview and the whole process so far?

Q4. Are you left with anything in particular that you would like to add or feel still needs to be covered?

Appendix B – Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

Sharenting: A psychosocial exploration of the performance of motherhood on Instagram

Dear Madam,

My name is Louise van Wingerden and I'm currently enrolled as a Masters student in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. To successfully complete my studies, I am required to undertake a research project. My study, titled *Sharenting: a psychosocial exploration of the performance of motherhood on Instagram*, is being undertaken under the supervision of Prof Katherine Bain. The aim of the study is to better understand how sharenting on Instagram is a performance of motherhood as mothers navigate the psychosocial influences they face when undergoing this profound identity change.

I would therefore like to invite you to partake in this project, which will entail two interviews of 60-90 minutes each. These can take place in person or online. With your permission, I would like to audio and video record our interviews using a digital device. The recordings will be stored on my password-protected device and the recordings will be deleted after examination of the research report. Your anonymity will be ensured by using a pseudonym instead of your real name, and identifying data changed. These recordings and the anonymised transcriptions of the interviews will only be available to myself and my supervisor. With your permission, the anonymised transcripts will be stored on my and my supervisor's computers for possible future research use. Participation entails no personal cost to you, and should you require, transport or data costs of up to a maximum of R150 will be covered by the researcher. There are also no direct benefits to be received from participating, nor any disadvantages or penalties should you wish to withdraw your participation at any time up until the end of data collection. You have the right to withdraw at any point up to the end of data collection and refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer without any negative consequences. Your identity will remain anonymous, and confidentiality will be upheld during all stages of the study. A pseudonym (false name) will be used to represent your participation in the final report. Should you experience any discomfort or distress at any point during the interviews, we will halt the process and continue at another time convenient for you, should you wish to continue. Should you require additional support or counselling services following the interviews, these

will be made freely available at the Emthonjeni Centre on the Wits main campus. Please contact miss Paballo Lepota at +27 (0) 11 717 4513 or email her at Paballo.Lepota@wits.ac.za for further assistance in this regard. Should you require any further information about this research or after the interviews, please contact me at the below contact details. The final research report will be made available online through the university library website. A summary of this report can also be sent to you at your request. Any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study can be directed to the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), +27 (0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,



Researcher: Louise van Wingerden (2287380@students.wits.ac.za; tel: 076 599 0455)

Supervisor Prof Katherine Bain (Katherine.Bain@wits.ac.za; tel: 011-717 4558)

Appendix C – Consent Form

Research Participant Consent Form

Sharenting: A psychosocial exploration of the performance of motherhood on Instagram

Louise van Wingerden (student number 2287380)

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle or mark with an X the relevant options below)

The research study has been explained to me and I understand what the study is about	YES	NO
I understand that participation is voluntarily	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use the results and anonymous quotes from my interviews in their research report, possible publications and conference proceedings	YES	NO
I agree that the interviews may be audio & video recorded	YES	NO

I agree that some of the information shared relates to my online presence on Instagram and that insofar possible this information will also be anonymised YES NO

I agree that the anonymised transcripts of my interviews can be stored in password-protected computers for the purpose of potential future research use YES NO

……. (Signature of participant)

……. (Name of participant)

……. (Date)



(Signature)

Louise van Wingerden (Name of researcher)

…… (Date)

Appendix D – Ethics Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MClin/23/09**
PROJECT TITLE:	Sharenting: A psychosocial exploration of the performance of motherhood on Instagram.
INVESTIGATOR	van Wingerden Louise (2287380)
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SHCD/Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	16 May 2023
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Low Risk
EXPIRY DATE	31 December 2025
ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 23 May 2023	**CHAIRPERSON** _____ (Dr Aline Ferreira Correia)

cc: Prof. Katherine Bain (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee.

_____ 29 / 05 / 2023

Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES