

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

BY

AMY WILSON

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF COUNSELLING

FACULTY OF HEALTH DISCIPLINES

ATHABASCA, ALBERTA

DECEMBER, 2021

© AMY WILSON

Approval of Thesis

The undersigned certify that they have read the thesis entitled

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Submitted by

Amy Wilson

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Counselling

The thesis examination committee certifies that the thesis
and the oral examination is approved

Supervisor:

Dr. Emily Doyle
Athabasca University

Committee Member:

Dr. Murray Anderson
Athabasca University

External Examiner:

Dr. Ines Sametband
Mount Royal University

December 9, 2021

Dedication

To my family. To my daughters, without whom I never would have come to understand the complexities, impossibility, and beauty of motherhood. You show me how to laugh, to learn, and to grow each day and I am eternally grateful that you came into my life. To my husband, without whom I never would have managed to find the strength to complete this immense project. Your unwavering support and ability to make me laugh no matter what has pulled me through more challenges than I have ever found the words to thank you for. Finally, to my parents, both natural and in-law. I will be forever grateful to you and know that without you supporting and inspiring me along the way I would have never made it to where I am today.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank the mothers who provided the inspiration and content for this project. Your influence is so appreciated.

Thank you to my supervisor, Emily Doyle. Your incredible lens and ability to see concepts in a new light shaped the way I understand the world and has given me such valuable new insights. I will be forever grateful for your humour, patience, and kindness throughout the entire process.

Thank you to Murray Anderson and to Ines Sametband. Your involvement shaped my work into the best possible version. I am so grateful for your support, insight, and assistance.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Abstract

While working with mothers, counsellors face a difficult task of unravelling preconceived mothering ideals alongside clients. Social media can play a significant role in a mother's development. Influencers present an image of what one may come to view as ideal motherhood. Similarly, counsellors hold a high degree of influential capacity that must be carefully understood to avoid unintentional perpetuation of harmful societal expectations. This discourse analysis examines and brings to academic awareness mothering discourses by analyzing Instagram posts by motherhood bloggers. Fifty Instagram posts about motherhood were analyzed. Results of this analysis found prevailing motherhood narratives are repeated frequently across Instagram, and many mothers experience negative effects from internalizing these discourses. Sources of these dominant discourses were linked to influences within the spheres of religion, society, and psychology. Implications for counselling therapists are discussed.

Keywords: maternal mental health, counselling psychology, social media, discourse analysis, social constructionism

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Table of Contents

Approval Page.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Maternal Mental Health Across the Lifespan.....	3
Singular Stories in the Context of This Project.....	4
Social Constructionism.....	5
Who has Influence?.....	6
A Note Regarding COVID-19.....	6
My Entry Into This Field of Research.....	7
Standpoint Theory.....	7
My Story.....	8
My Entry Into This Project of Research.....	12
Statement of the Problem.....	13
Purpose of the Study.....	14
Research Question.....	14
Overview of Thesis.....	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	16
How do Discourses Pertain to Maternal Identity?.....	17
What are Mothering Discourses?.....	18
Career.....	19
Body Image.....	19
Breastfeeding.....	20
Healthy Child Development.....	21
Intensive Parenting.....	22
Where can Mothering Discourses be Currently Found?.....	23
#motherhood Discourses.....	24
What Symptoms Might Present?.....	25
Guilt, Shame, and Fear.....	26
Fear of Failure.....	26

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Maternal Gatekeeping	27
Maternal Burnout	28
Career and Societal Implications	28
What Limitations Exist Within Current Best Practices for Maternal Mental Health?.....	29
From Individually Pathologizing Toward Socially Aware	29
Standards and Practices in Canada.....	31
#motherhood in the Therapeutic Relationship	32
Privilege	33
Attachment Informed Practices.....	34
What Might We Do About It?	36
Why Look to Social Media?	37
Conclusion	38
Chapter 3: Methodology	40
Discourse Analysis.....	40
Philosophical Underpinnings	41
Historical Roots	42
Bracketing of Researcher Assumptions	44
Data	45
Sample Size.....	45
Sample Criterion	46
Data Management and Security	46
Data Analysis	47
Budget.....	49
Ethical Considerations	50
Consent	50
Representation of Influencers	50
Representation of Mental Health Practitioners	51
Rigour	51
Summary	53
Chapter 4: Results	54
Analytic Procedure.....	54
Step Six: Coding	55
Step Seven: Analysis.....	55

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Researcher Standpoint	56
The Stories	57
Motherhood is a Wonderful Experience	59
Motherhood is a Difficult Experience.....	61
Parenting is Mothercentric	65
The Mother’s Purpose is to be Present for her Children Above all Else	69
The Effects	74
Guilt, Shame, and Feelings of Inadequacy.....	74
Active Rejection of Dominant Discourses	78
The Sources.....	81
Religion.....	82
Societal.....	84
Psychology	86
Summary of Analysis.....	89
Chapter 5: Discussion	91
Validation of Findings	92
Coherence	92
Participants’ Orientation	94
New Problems.....	94
Fruitfulness	95
A Metaphor	95
When the Personal Becomes Professional	97
That Which is Acceptable to Share.....	98
Mothercentric Attitudes and Oppression in Academia and Therapy?	99
The Influence of Influential Counsellors	101
Chapter Summary	103
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	105
Contribution and Implications for Practice.....	105
Directions for Future Research	106
Limitations of This Study	108
Strengths of This Study.....	110
Personal Reflections.....	111
References.....	113

Chapter 1: Introduction

“The single story creates stereotype, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete, they make one story become the only story.”

(Adichie, 2009)

#motherhood. The word alone likely conjures up a preconceived notion of what it means to be a mother. Just as the stereotypes described by Adichie (2009) in the quote above have made one story become the only story, so too have the stereotypes of motherhood narrowed it into a few narrow and deeply entrenched stories (Jones, 2012; Kuswara, et al., 2020; Newman & Henderson, 2014). Despite the incredible diversity and range of stories within motherhood, for many, preconceived ideals of motherhood have become the only stories they know, contributing to narrowly defined and understood mothering roles (Locke & Yarwood, 2017). These fabled stories of motherhood, fraught with stereotype, are not new (Phoenix, 2013). They are the stories and characteristics that many girls learn at a very young age, far before having ever had the opportunity to establish their own narrative and identity within motherhood (Arnold-Baker, 2019; Rich, et al., 2011). They are stories that I subconsciously knew by heart from an age too young to recall. They are stories that my three-year-old daughter knows already, acting them out through play with her dolls.

How do we come to know these stories? They exist in nearly every form of social interaction including, but not limited to tv, movies, books, fairy tales, informal conversation, and social media (Atkinson, 2014; Evans et al., 2012; Newman & Henderson, 2014). For some, these stories and identities fit and create alignment, providing peace, structure, and joy (Arnold-Baker, 2019). For some, dominant stories and their conveyed expectations can bring feelings of inadequacy and confusion (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). For others, attempts to align self with

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

the widely accepted stories of what it means to mother can be devastating. The loss of a sense of self that can accompany attempts to align with societal expectations can lead to depression, anxiety, and other severe mental health consequences (Gressier, et al., 2017; Henderson, et al., 2016; Nelson, et al., 2014).

One in four Canadian mothers reported feelings consistent with postpartum depression or anxiety (statistics Canada, 2019) and suicide ranks as one of the leading causes of death among mothers during the postpartum period (Guillard & Gressier, 2017; Vangen et al., 2017). Mothers report maternal burnout and stress throughout the duration of motherhood as the barrage of messages continues to plague each stage of parenting (Henderson et al., 2016; Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018; Roskam et al., 2017). The ripples of this devastation can be felt across generations as maternal exhaustion is linked with neglectful or violent behaviour toward children (Hubert & Aujoulat, 2018; Mikolajczak et al., 2018) and children whose parents endured more mental health concerns tend to experience higher levels of depression and lower life satisfaction (Randall et al., 2015). This thesis project aims to make visible the dominant stories that ripple throughout social media to provide counsellors an additional lens from which to approach their work with mothers.

Despite an awareness of the dangers of stereotypes, expectations, and deeply entrenched stories, they continue to be known, told through means of the complex subtleties of societal messaging, absent but implicit. Who writes these stories and how do we come to know them? The intention of my research project is to make explicit both the plot and the authors of the underlying stories of maternal expectations and to provide a resource for counsellors to shift the narrative, allowing women to write their own stories of motherhood. Despite the impact of these stories on mothers, they are, for the most part, missing from counselling literature. The

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

ubiquitous nature of these stories can make them almost impossible to detangle and to study within academia, so they remain largely absent from that which is knowable within best practices for counsellors and mental health practitioners. An awareness of the mechanisms by which the stories continue to unfold and affect mothers will assist counsellors to provide excellent maternal mental health support.

Maternal Mental Health Across the Lifespan

Postpartum care continues to see advancements and has become well documented and supported by academic literature. The biological and hormonal mechanisms through which mental health challenges may arise during the perinatal phase are frequently discussed, researched, and screened for during and after pregnancy. However, the challenges that accompany motherhood do not end after an arbitrarily defined postpartum period despite returns to pre-pregnancy hormonal levels.

Similarly, not all maternal mental health concerns can be linked to a biological source. Mothers can continue to face a complex landscape of pressures throughout their lives that may lead to distress. The subtleties of influences on mothering can create dissonance between a mother's historical embodied knowledge of mothering and all the "shoulds" presented by family, peer groups, social media, culture, and professions. The story that operates in the background of a mother's lived experience may impact a mother's view of self. A counselling lens which seeks to discern this story and its effects both within and beyond the perinatal phase will allow for more holistic care that better serves the needs of mothers. Despite an arbitrary "end" of the postpartum period, attempts to align self with the pervasive dominant stories of maternal expectations continue beyond the perinatal phase, thus requiring a counselling approach that shifts the emphasis away from commonly discussed biological and practical aspects of new

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

motherhood and toward an understanding of the landscape of pressures that affect mothers across the lifespan. Not only is this awareness crucial for counsellors in the provision of individual maternal mental health care, but it will also allow counsellors to support change on a societal level by shifting the dominant narrative of motherhood.

Singular Stories in the Context of This Project

It is important to pause here to make several qualifications. First, use of the term singular stories does not mean to imply an exact replication of experience for all mothers and in fact the intention of this project is to bring to academic awareness the exact opposite of this assumption. Instead, this term applies to the commonly held preconceived ideas of motherhood that are known subconsciously in an almost uncanny way by most women despite a conscious awareness that each woman's experience can and should be different from another's. While there are multiple stories, some are privileged over others, crowding out other possibilities for the development of self-identity within motherhood. As is described by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) in the quote provided at the outset of this chapter, incomplete stories create an expectation of commonality. In essence, these simplified stories are often applied across society and fail to recognize the nuances of each experience.

Second, the attempts that I will make to describe the singular stories of motherhood cannot claim to capture the entirety of the pressures or expectations that mothers currently face, nor is it realistic to claim that my results will stand the test of time. Although several themes have and will remain consistent, the nuances of the mothering landscape will inevitably shift. Additionally, although it may be assumed that the stories told within social media platforms are representative of broader societal stories, this is not certain and counselling professionals must therefore hold the awareness of the importance of uncovering those stories perceived by and

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

affecting each unique client with whom they work. Each mother is the main character within a unique story and the role of the therapist must be to discover the stories alongside the client.

Social Constructionism

The theoretical positioning of this project aligns with a social constructionist understanding of knowledge. Social constructionism asserts that reality is socially constructed through habituated roles and interactions that form the foundations of the fabric of society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The knowledge put forth through a social constructionist lens is therefore perceived to be neither true nor false as it constitutes only one intelligibility (Gergen, 2011). Through this understanding, it can be understood that the stories of the mothers analyzed in this project constitute socially constructed realities. Additionally, the knowledge that I aim to put forth through this project must be considered as simply that of one awareness, put forth to invite dialogue.

Social constructionism asserts that people interact in a social system to construct mental representations of each other and of reality (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). These representations may include understandings of what constitutes good, bad, rational, and real (Gergen, 2011). As roles play out across society, reciprocal interactions become institutionalized and construct what is known to be reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Gergen (2011) asserts that when this reality becomes unquestionably defined as truth dialogue ceases, leading to deeply entrenched societal ways of thinking and understanding the nature of reality. Unquestionably defined truths can lead to referential structures which are described as generalized cultural beliefs regarding the characteristics associated with certain social reward levels (Berger et al., 2002). This project will aim to understand the referential structures that have come to be

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

associated with motherhood. Through this awareness it may shine light on those referential structures to which counsellors may unintentionally ascribe.

Who has Influence?

The term influencer has recently been equated primarily with the social media sphere. However, the essence of the term applies to any source which may influence change or shifts in perception. From this alternate definition, influencers do not exist solely in the social media realm but can be found across all of society. Family, friends, peers, media, and professionals all hold capacity to influence and their roles in the social construction of motherhood must not be minimized. Although the primary analysis of this study will focus on the words of social media influencers, the influential capacity of professional counsellors is of utmost importance due to the capacity of these individuals to either dispel or perpetuate the narrative of motherhood exemplified through social media. Rose (1996) asserted that the field of psychology has played a fundamental part in the invention of the kinds of people we aim to become due to a societal perception of advanced knowledge or wisdom of the “truth” of the inner workings of the human mind. Similarly, Hook (2001) explained that counsellors often embody an authoritative stance through which their suggestions carry an implicit instructional force. Through this lens, counsellors must come to view themselves as holding a powerful degree of influence which must be carefully tended to avoid doing unintentional therapeutic harm through the perpetuation of harmful societal expectations.

A Note Regarding COVID-19

The needs of mothers are especially heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic as a lack of access to in-person counselling services has created a heightened potential for a failure to adequately triage and treat mothers for mental health concerns (Hermann et al., 2020; Hessami et

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

al., 2020). Although a commonly suggested intervention for maternal mental health conflict is increased social support and involvement in groups, many new mothers are currently choosing to isolate for the physical protection of their child (Hessami et al., 2020). As such, mothers are increasingly turning to social media and the discourses presented through social media channels have gained a disproportionately large impact due to the loss of embodied interactions in which “real life” can be witnessed. The confluence of decreased access to mental health services and increased usage of social media as a means of social support (Zhao & Zhou, 2020) has important considerations for maternal mental health as counsellors must develop a critical awareness of the stories presented to mothers through social media platforms during this vulnerable time.

My Entry Into This Field of Research

Standpoint Theory

Griffith and Smith (1987) described mothering as a personal and emotional experience, inextricably linked to social and institutional organizations historically determined from a male dominated standpoint. Attention to the lived experiences of mothers as researchers allows for a depth of discovery of discourse integral to the mothering experience and crucial to the conduct and dissemination of feminist research (Griffith & Smith, 1987). Smith (1991) argued for the importance of writing women’s lived experiences into social science research and advocated that disclosure of society as it is experienced by the female researcher is crucial. She additionally contended that narrative accounts based upon the underlying organization of gender and class highlight the systems at play yet are largely absent from academia due to the perception that they have no position. As a feminist researcher within a social constructionist paradigm, I align with the perspective that my story is both valid and necessary within the framing of this research. As popular and social media influences public discourse so too do the findings of research influence

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

academic discourse. This research project aims to position itself within the field of academic writing acting as an influencer within the professional counselling sphere. I must therefore acknowledge my position as a researcher, counsellor, and mother, and recognize that my standpoint influences my perspective.

Social media influencers have the capacity to subtly alter public discourse, creating ripple effects that shape the construction of societal expectations and standards. This effect is compounded due to the cyclical effect in which social media users both influence and are influenced by the content presented through social media platforms (McGeechan et al., 2020). In the same manner, content presented by academic researchers both influences and is influenced by currently available literature, resulting in trends and group attitudes amongst professionals and academics that can become entrenched in particular ways and attitudes. Although I do not aim to challenge current practices and trends within the counselling profession, through this research I aim to provide an alternate perspective which may add depth and consideration of a social constructionist standpoint to the field of counselling.

My Story

For as long as I can remember I have held an interest in the lived experiences of mothers, particularly those found at the confluence of intersecting and marginalized identities. I was fascinated with the strength of teenage mothers who face immense stigmatization coupled with the logistical challenges of raising a child. The responsibilities and pressures of these mothers appeared to me to be immense, demonstrating immeasurable strength in the face of conflictual demands to be simultaneously an attentive mother, a successful student, and a responsible developing citizen. At the time, I naively believed that these pressures and conflicting societal discourses regarding the ideal mother would not exist for mothers beyond the teenage years.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

It wasn't until I became a mother myself that I came to understand that societal discourse and pervasive ideology regarding the requirements of mothering are not dependent on maternal age. I became a mother at twenty-six years of age. I was married, owned a home, and had a full-time job from which I could take a paid parental leave. I came from an upper middle-class family and had the support of both sets of grandparents. Although I knew that the practical elements of raising a child would include hardships, long nights, and a lot of diapers, I felt confident that, given my social context and awareness of scientific literature regarding best practices in parenting, I could accomplish this task with ease. I immersed myself in parenting books and courses, made friends with other mothers, designed a perfect nursery, and cultivated my social media accounts to follow those mothers from whom I felt I could learn. Yet, despite all my intentions and plans, motherhood was anything but easy.

Faced with an infant who struggled to breastfeed or gain weight, I turned to the support of my doctor who told me to supplement with formula. I was also referred to a lactation consultant who reminded me that formula can lead to long-term digestive issues. I was provided with several instruments designed to support breastfeeding for smaller infants and reminded of the importance of making breastfeeding work for the health of my child. The message of the evils of formula that I saw within my social media communities was confirmed by these professionals. During my next visit with my midwife, I was reminded that these tools may work, but should absolutely not be relied on long term as they would impact the proper development of my child's mouth and my own mental health. It was crucial that I do more to figure this out naturally. I was told to attend a La Leche League meeting. The meeting was great, I heard stories from other mothers who had struggled and been able to overcome the challenges. To me, these

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

mothers were perfect. I knew I had to do whatever it took to become these mothers. They told me it was easy, just relax and it will happen. So why couldn't I do it? Perhaps I was failing.

One area I was determined not to fail in, however, was the development of a strong attachment. Armed with a repertoire of parenting blogs who appeared to know what they were doing I bought all the baby carriers and was determined to never sleep train. I was confused when a mother from my baby group explained that she had begun sleep training but felt that she aligned with attachment parenting principles. How could this be when the parenting blogs I followed provided such clear rules regarding sleep training. Yet I admired this mother so I decided to become like her. I began to read every book I could regarding sleep training, however this didn't last long because the communities I was part of assured me that they didn't need to sleep train and their babies slept through the night. I also wanted to be like them so, very exhausted, I looked up attachment informed sleep training methods and began following a whole new host of bloggers who described how to get your child to sleep. Despite my sustained efforts, my child did not sleep through the night and I resembled neither my sleep training friends nor my anti-sleep-training friends. Perhaps I was failing.

Despite these practical challenges, I continued to fight to be the "best mother" I could be. My exemplars included my own mother, mothers in tv shows, friends I met at baby classes, and bloggers. Facebook allowed me access to a vast array of communities to whom I could turn for advice. Instagram provided priceless informational channels of moms who could show me how to do it. Armed with these examples I knew that motherhood would be easy if I just remembered to get outside daily, feed my child organically, wait to begin solids until after six months of age, remember to introduce iron rich foods at four months of age (wait that can't be right), quit my job, make enough money to support my family and reject the patriarchy, find time to focus on

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

my passions, sleep when the baby sleeps (maybe my passion could be sleeping?), and love every minute of parenting. This really shouldn't be as difficult as I was finding it. Perhaps I was failing.

I continued to research to try to make the right choices for my family despite the increasing suspicion that I could not make any choices correctly. After the birth of my second child two years later, I realized that I needed some support so I sought counselling. I was diagnosed with postpartum depression and anxiety, which came as no surprise to me. My counsellor helped me to understand my own childhood sources of conflict. We discussed the importance of self-care. A thought log was created and I was encouraged to pay attention to my thinking traps. After ten sessions, I had developed a repertoire of strategies. I told my counsellor that I felt much better. I lied. Perhaps I was failing as both a mother and a client.

As my children grew, so too did the challenges. Logistical challenges of parenting included interrupted sleep well beyond the years I had been told to expect, sibling jealousy, picky eating, and ear shattering tantrums. For every challenge, I had an Instagram page telling me how to manage the situation. They made it look easy. Furthermore, I had progressed beyond the perinatal period so any depression and anxiety I experienced were just that; depression and anxiety. I could no longer fall back on blaming hormones within the perinatal period as a source of my symptoms. Any counselling support I received focused on how symptoms present within the general population, rather than a maternal lens. I felt that I was expected to be better by this point, beyond the hormonal changes and finding my stride in motherhood. After all, everyone I saw around me and online was thriving. Perhaps I was failing.

My Entry Into This Project of Research

Through discussion with peers and colleagues, I have come to the realization that my story is not unique and is not isolated within the postpartum period. Dominant societal discourses regarding motherhood are inescapable across the course of mothering. Although there exists a substantial body of literature regarding the impacts, causes, and treatments of perinatal mood disorders, few researchers have examined the societal sources of maternal mental health concerns as they relate to mothers both within and beyond the perinatal period. Similarly, a current focus on attachment within the family counselling realm runs the risk of ignoring broader impacts of societal discourse and focuses on correcting interactions occurring within the family that may be in part due to the oppressive nature of the socially constructed expectations of mothering. As this social construction of maternal expectations blends with the attachment focus, it can trickle out into society and become oversimplified within mothering communities dedicated to their own, often oversimplified versions of “attachment parenting”. In essence, the attachment lens can run the risk of becoming a singular story. By broadening the focal lens and gaining a deeper understanding of social influences which affect mothers, counsellors may become better equipped to apply important counselling frameworks such as attachment theory within a socially just awareness.

Despite the intimately personal nature of the mothering experience, the foundations of expectations and beliefs surrounding this experience are co-constructed through societal discourses pertaining to motherhood. Mothering discourses can be found throughout the entirety of society including public policies, generational knowledge, medical appointments and information, television media, peer support groups, and social media, to name only a few. They

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

inform expectations of how a mother believes she is expected to act, feel, look, and engage both within and outside of her mothering role.

Although societal discourses related to motherhood are inescapable and prevalent everywhere, societal shifts toward online platforms creates new and unique research opportunities to study language in use. Not only does the publicly available nature of much of this data serve as a research opportunity, it also allows for a focus on discourse that is accessible by all mothers. Although the pervasive nature of societal discourse regarding motherhood is not new, the rate at which mothers are exposed to mothering expectations is increasing exponentially through the advent of modern technology and platforms for the dissemination of information. Social media is used by an overwhelming majority of mothers due to the social support and information available (McDaniel et al., 201; Pettigrew et al., 2016), however it can also become a place in which mothers are held hostage by mothering discourses.

Statement of the Problem

To adequately serve mothers, it is crucial that mental health practitioners hold an expanded understanding of mothering discourses which inform not only the societal construction of what is often falsely viewed as ideal motherhood, but also individual maternal identities. Due to the rapidly evolving landscape of social media, an analysis of discourses currently presented through social media platforms such as Instagram will provide mental health practitioners with the context necessary to better empathize with and treat the complexities of the maternal identity. The limits of professional literature currently available for counsellors to draw upon do not adequately reflect the social and discursive construction of motherhood and may thus miss a crucial component of the sources of maternal mental health concerns. Although the currently available dearth of counselling literature which aims to identify best practices for specific

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

symptomology is of extreme importance, to ignore the social bases of maternal distress would be to fail to treat the mothering population holistically. As attachment and trauma informed counselling practices become increasingly prevalent, counsellors must be equipped with an awareness of societal discourses leading to maternal shame to fully understand the nuances of maternal mental health that may ultimately create barriers to attachment and even abuse or neglect as mothers face the repercussions of maternal stress and burnout. Promising advances within the field of maternal mental health must continue to be threaded with an understanding of the discourses which underlie the challenges faced by mothers.

Purpose of the Study

This research aims to expand the repertoire of available literature and to present a resource for consideration by counsellors when working with mothers. I do not aim to discount any current counselling practices nor provide guidelines for a specific technique; rather, I aim to provide a thread with which counselling professionals may weave new awareness throughout their current maternal mental health practices. The purpose of this study is to critically examine and bring to academic awareness in counselling psychology mothering discourses of influence by examining the messaging of Instagram posts by motherhood bloggers. Through this examination of a subset of publicly available language surrounding motherhood, I aim to open the door to an understanding of the broader landscape of mothering discourse.

Research Question

What discursive constructions of motherhood are presented through Instagram and given this construction, to what extent do counselling best practices currently meet the needs of mothers?

Overview of Thesis

My intent in writing this thesis is to make explicit the link between colloquial, public discourses of mothering found within the social media realm and professional counselling discourses. Within the initial chapters of this paper, I intend to orient the reader toward my lens and perspective. In chapter two I will provide a review of the current literature as it pertains to this project of study and during chapter three I will provide an overview of my research paradigm and methodology. During the latter half of the paper, I will focus on analysis and synthesis of the data. Within chapter four I will outline the presenting themes of the data and in chapter five I will engage in a discussion of the implications of this analysis. During the final chapter I will provide an overview of the project along with suggestions of direction for further study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The term discourse is credited to Michel Foucault (1972) and denotes a historically contingent social system and way of organizing knowledge to produce meaning. Discourses surrounding motherhood have existed for years (Phoenix, 2013). It could be said that the public perception of expectations within motherhood stem from ancient patriarchal ideologies with roots in the historical widespread oppression of women (Leite, 2013). The pervasive societal ideology of mothering can often paint an image of a nurturing, gentle, organized parent who adores her role (Henderson et al., 2016) and womanhood is frequently equated with the maternal identity (Rich et al., 2011). The description may leave mothers and, more generally, women, feeling a sense of failure and shame if they find themselves unable or unwilling to align their own identity with an increasingly impossible, socially constructed ideal (Liss et al., 2013b). The mechanisms through which these socially constructed standards are perpetuated can be linked to both informal discursive practices such as conversation and social media (Hernández, 2019), and more formal sources such as academic and scientific literature for counsellors that frequently disproportionately centers on the maternal role within descriptions of best parenting practices (Clark & Dumas, 2020; Jagiello, 2019; Woolhouse et al., 2019).

Spencer et al. (2013) defined the term *best practice* regarding medical professionals as “a practice supported by a rigorous process of peer review and evaluation indicating effectiveness in improving health outcomes, generally demonstrated through systematic reviews” (p. 2) however they additionally stated that best practices are not static. Rather, they must be evaluated within the context of the specific time. Best practices shape and constrain what is legitimized within the counselling profession and guide the actions and directions taken by counselling

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

professionals. As such, they must be responsive to circumstantial factors that may be at play for each client at any given time.

Current best practices within the field of mental health and the medical community may not only inadvertently perpetuate the socially constructed ideal of motherhood (Denbow, 2019; Pylypa, 2016) but fail to provide appropriate care for mothers given their positioning within the current landscape of societal messaging. In response, throughout this chapter I will provide a review of current counselling literature describing pervasive social discourses of motherhood. A preliminary understanding of the current discourses represented through various platforms including but not limited to social media and will serve as the foundation for the discourse analysis within the present thesis study. Additionally, throughout this literature review, I will provide an overview of current trends and practices within the treatment of maternal mental health.

How do Discourses Pertain to Maternal Identity?

Becoming a mother is a process that can shift a woman's identity drastically. Sometimes this shift has been anticipated eagerly and the transition is smooth, however, this shift can also transform a woman's identity in new and almost unrecognizable ways (Arnold-Baker, 2019; Nelson et al., 2014). The experience is unique to each mother; some mothers may eagerly welcome this new identity and chapter in their lives while others report begrudgingly giving up their dreams to align themselves with their expectations of what it is to become a mother (Jones, 2012). Despite the perceived individual nature of identity transformation, the process draws on individualized cognitive processes and shared, socially constructed discursive practices (Cresswell & Smith, 2012; Huma et al, 2020; Stokoe, 2020; Wiggins, 2020). As women navigate

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

the transition to motherhood, they may find themselves attempting to integrate personal understandings with their interpretations of interactions with others (Arnold-Baker, 2019).

Interactions with peers, family, media, and other informal discourse can naturally influence a mother's perception of self as she aims to come to an understanding of the expectations of her new role. However, scholars such as Rose (1996) and Hook (2001) have argued that the professional psychology disciplines have played a foundational role in defining identity discourses due to a perceived expert status that may hold disproportionate influential powers. Similarly, religious ideals may play a key component in the formation of identity through their historically ubiquitous nature within societal discourse (Read, 2003) despite current trends away from traditional religious practice. Ultimately, religious and psychological discourses can take root and grow, becoming so intertwined across collective and societal identity that they may become difficult to disentangle from each other, weaving their way into informal discourse without conscious awareness.

What are Mothering Discourses?

The social constructions of parenting standards can be highly gendered in nature, with women experiencing the bulk of the effects of societal standards and expectations (Borelli et al., 2017; Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). Women may find themselves pressured to take on the primary responsibility in nurturing the family (Woolhouse et al., 2019). Mothers face pressure to align themselves to social constructions of motherhood with regards to career choices (Christopher, 2012; Meeusen & Van Laar, 2018; Meeussen et al., 2016), appearance (Littler, 2013; Malatzky, 2017; Prinds et al., 2020), breastfeeding (Carter, 2017; Kuswara et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2013), food choices for older children (Woolhouse et al., 2019), management of children's schedules (Clark & Dumas, 2020), and attachment informed recommendations to meet

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

the emotional needs of children (Carter, 2017; Denbow, 2019; Pylypa, 2016). Attempts to align themselves with these often impossible and conflicting demands can have adverse effects on the mental health of all mothers.

Career

Despite shifts toward greater gender equality, the discourse surrounding engagement in career affects mothers uniquely. Women who work often report feeling guilt for having left their children in the care of others to pursue their careers (Christopher, 2012). Women pursuing career ambitions may experience greater societal pressures to strive for perfection in motherhood to compensate and align with social norms that dictate that women prioritize their family above their career (Meeussen et al., 2016). One author suggested that single mothers may reflect less accountability to the standards of the societal constructions of ideal mothering due to the perception that work outside of motherhood is acceptable only in instances where it is financially needed (Christopher, 2012). By contrast, married women who work experience greater pressure and guilt because they are judged for choosing to work for reasons beyond providing financially for a family (Christopher, 2012).

Body Image

Similar conflictual constructions of ideal mothering identity can be found within standards for appearance and body image. Privilege and marginalization exist within the landscape of maternal expectations with white, heterosexual women often praised as embodying an element of ideal motherhood (Malatzky, 2017), thus disempowering women who exist outside of this idealized and privileged societal norm. Mothers face unrealistic expectations to “bounce back” to a previous body image and exemplify a slim and societally attractive body (Prinds et al., 2020). However, alternate social discourses demand that mothers embody historical Christian

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

ideals of maternal asexuality (Littler, 2013), placing women in an impossible predicament as they seek to embody the image of motherhood and the expectations of societally defined perfect female bodies. Women are subject to shame regardless of their appearance and their bodily autonomy is subtly stripped away by pervasive discourses.

Breastfeeding

The lack of bodily autonomy is also woven through societal and medical standards for breastfeeding and can be particularly conflictual for new mothers. Not only can a mother feel a loss of bodily autonomy due to a sense that she her body is needed every few hours, but she may equally feel a lack of free will from medical professionals who can instill a sense of fear surrounding her feeding decisions. Although most mothers do not describe breastfeeding within their sense of understanding of motherhood just twelve months after the birth of their child (Arnold-Baker, 2019), in the early days and weeks of motherhood there is a substantial focus on the establishment of a breastfeeding relationship (Afoakwah et al., 2013; Kuswara et al., 2020). Substantial evidence exists to support the health and psychological benefits of exclusive breastfeeding for six months (Carter, 2017; Kramer & Kakuma, 2012) and the World Health Organization (n.d.-a) recommends continuation of breastfeeding for a minimum of two years. While scientifically valid, this evidence and pressure to breastfeed may unintentionally signal that any alternative constitutes a failure for which a mother should feel ashamed (Jagiello, 2019; Spencer et al., 2015). Many women identify breastfeeding as a method through which they can validate themselves as a “good mother” (Kuswara et al., 2020) Yet equally conflictual social standards exist regarding the appropriate length of the breastfeeding relationship and what constitutes breastfeeding for “too long” (Williams et al., 2013). These conflicting messages

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

inherently create a sense of shame and remove women from their own right to choose and control their bodies.

Olson and Simon (2020) describe the ways in which breastfeeding has become institutionalized, politicized, and medicalized in such a way that discursive formations of ideal mothering have become interwoven with the idea that “good” mothers must choose to breastfeed. They additionally explain that many medical documents of best practices for infant feeding appear to claim authority over the mother’s intuition by minimizing or infantilizing the mother’s own perspectives and choices. These discourses may lead to confusion as a woman attempts to align her intuition and sense of what feels right for herself with “expert” opinion and authority.

Healthy Child Development

As children grow beyond the breastfeeding years, social constructions of mothering with regards to feeding persist. Many mothers feel that they are expected to take on the primary responsibility of nourishing the family and are expected to provide a continuous supply of healthy, wholesome meals using fresh ingredients (Woolhouse et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2015). Simultaneously, many mothers report that it is not enough to provide healthy food; rather, they feel they must devote themselves entirely to the healthy development of the child by managing their children’s schedules and ensuring the provision of a balance of activities (Clark & Dumas, 2020; Hartshorne et al., 2020; Mazmanian & Lanette, 2017). Mothers can experience pressure to devote a considerable amount of time and effort to ensure optimal development. Yet these expectations are often at odds with one another due to the time commitments necessary, causing mothers not to fully attend to all expectations.

Brenton (2017) interviewed sixty mothers to understand the discourses and perspectives regarding feeding amongst mothers. It was found that there exists a tremendous amount of

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

pressure to feed healthy and wholesome diets at all costs, however this is often highly cost and time-prohibitive, particularly for marginalized populations. Thus, the hegemonic ideal for feeding children has become highly swayed toward the white, middle-class family, leaving many mothers outside this narrow standard.

Intensive Parenting

The combination of these social constructions and ideologies of motherhood can be more concisely defined as *intensive parenting*: the attitude that mothers must exemplify perfection (Liss et al., 2013b; Rizzo et al, 2013). Intensive mothering ideology (Liss et al. 2013a) includes five preliminary aspects:

1. The belief that the mother is inherently better at parenting her children than anyone else.
2. A perception that motherhood is and should be more difficult than other jobs.
3. Children should be prioritized above the mother's own needs.
4. A belief that motherhood should be wholly fulfilling.
5. It is the responsibility of the mother to stimulate the children cognitively.

Although intensive mothering ideologies are not typically perpetuated intentionally, Pylypa (2016) stated that attachment parenting practices are inextricably linked to intensive mothering attitudes. In combination with oppressive societal standards of women and many women's historical embodied understanding of mothering, attachment parenting practices may inadvertently place a disproportionate share of the parenting responsibility upon mothers and subtly perpetuate intensive mothering ideology. Attachment mothering discourses can create the perception that failure to fully embody all aspects of attachment parenting philosophies such as extended breastfeeding (Carter, 2017; Williams et al., 2013) will result in lifelong deficiencies in the children (Gunderson & Barrett, 2017; Pylypa, 2016).

Where can Mothering Discourses be Currently Found?

While it can be said that the construction of the motherhood identity is represented and perpetuated intergenerationally (Jones, 2012), discourse related to motherhood shows up across virtually all manners of societal discursive platforms. Birth prep classes (Little, 2018), health region initiatives (Paterson, 2019), and other perceived expert opinions such as medical professionals provide mothers with information that may inadvertently perpetuate harmful societal constructions of motherhood. Discourses surrounding mothering expectations are present even within penal institutions through the provision of well-intended mothering classes for inmates aimed at maintaining incarcerated mother's identities (Aiello, 2016). While well-intentioned, these programs are contradictory as they aim to provide a sense of self-worth for incarcerated mothers while simultaneously failing to challenge the traditional roles and expectations of women. Magazine articles have been found to add to the conflictual social discourses surrounding expectations placed upon mothers. A textual analysis of advertisements in environmental mothering magazines found that expectant mothers were often presented with parenting solutions that unintentionally reinforced lifestyle choices that had been described as reinforcing the environmental crisis (Atkinson, 2014). Similarly, while scientific studies related to optimal child development and nourishing are indispensable, the recommendations offered can leave women feeling an inordinate amount of pressure to seek perfection within parenting due to gendered societal expectations (Carter, 2017; Jagiello, 2019; Pylypa, 2016, Spencer et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2013).

Further sources of discursive constructions of ideal motherhood are found within conversation by mothers themselves and thus are internally supported. Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) is the largest in-person maternal support group in the United States and is thought by

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

many mothers to provide excellent support for navigating the challenges of motherhood.

However, Newman and Henderson (2014) observed and described the way in which MOPS can unintentionally reflect conservative gender ideology despite claims to the contrary, contributing to harmful social discourses and expectations of mothers. Upon observation of conversation within a meeting, Newman and Henderson discovered that when MOPS participants discussed challenges in meeting the perceived high demands of motherhood, the support received consisted of suggestions for how to achieve perfection, rather than acknowledgement of unrealistic societal expectations which cause shame (Liss et al., 2013a). Although this practice was perceived and described by mothers as helpful, it may, unfortunately, reinforce societal discourses and fail to deconstruct or acknowledge their harmful effects (Newman & Henderson, 2014).

#motherhood Discourses

While the effects of discourses presented through in-person maternal support groups such as MOPS were crucial at the time of the analysis by Newman and Henderson (2014), shifting landscapes of norms of social support have increasingly led mothers to seek support through virtual platforms. Many mothers turn to social media in pursuit of connection instead of in-person groups due to time commitments and perceived anonymity (Evans et al., 2012). Within modern society, online spaces can become a place outside of work and home which provides enjoyment, sociability, diversity, and regularity (Yuen & Johnson, 2017). This effect has been heightened during the COVID 19 pandemic as individuals have been required to increasingly turn toward social media instead of in-person groups (Zhao & Zhou, 2020), thus heightening the need for in depth analysis of naturally occurring discourse observed in social media platforms.

Through their membership within online support groups, mothers can receive emotional, informational, and instrumental support as well as verbal encouragement necessary for boosting

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

self-esteem (Evans et al., 2012). However, similarly to in-person support groups such as MOPS, these online support groups may further contribute to harmful social constructions of mothers through discursive practices centering around self-presentation and perfection (Wang, 2013). At the time of this writing, it is unclear whether noticeable differences can be observed with regards to the capacity to contribute to a social construction of identity within either online or in person support groups. Although this research project does not specifically target online support groups, an exploration of written discourses presented by social media influencers will mark the initial phases of the development of deeper awareness of the complex landscape of social media interactions.

What Symptoms Might Present?

Regardless of their involvement in either in person, online, or community groups, it is unsurprising that many mothers feel unable to align themselves with the impossible and conflicting societal construction of motherhood, resulting in a sense of deep guilt and shame (Liss et al., 2013a). Mothers who do not live up to ideal standards experience both real and perceived social judgement (Liss et al., 2013b) and often find themselves shifting their expectations and identities to align with the societal construction of motherhood. As such, many mothers report a lack of internal norms to give them a sense of certainty and security, having become unaware of what they truly believe to be important and unable to distinguish personal values from society's values (Hubert & Aujoulat, 2018). This shift and the challenges that will be described in this section may appear within the therapeutic relationship. Counsellors must therefore hold awareness of these challenges and the cause of these issues.

Guilt, Shame, and Fear

Expectations and feeling pressured to find perfection by societal standards are associated with lower self-efficacy beliefs, maternal guilt, and higher stress levels (Meussen & Van Laar, 2018). Intensive mothering and providing a high degree of emotional support for children is associated with lower mental health outcomes for mothers (Gunderson & Barret, 2017). The effects are present even amongst mothers who aim to intentionally reject the societal construction of ideal motherhood (Henderson et al., 2016). For example, mothers who do not breastfeed exclusively for the recommended time for any reason including medical complications often report feeling overwhelming guilt, despite awareness of having made the best choice for their family (Williams et al., 2013). These pressures can leave mothers feeling guilt, shame, or fear which may result in tension within the family system (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018).

Fear of Failure

Fear of failure often results in a prevention focus, defined as a regulatory strategy that aims to reduce mistakes by focusing on all the possibilities that may go wrong. The prevention focus causes increased attention on the prevention of mistakes (Ståhl et al., 2012) while a promotion focus is associated with increased attention to how one may achieve positive outcomes. Fear of the social penalties and the shame which may endure for failing to meet the high standards prescribed by social constructions of ideal motherhood may trigger a prevention focus (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). Although a prevention focus may protect performance in the short run it may be highly depleting over time (Ståhl et al., 2012). As mothers find themselves operating from a prevention focus they can become more prone to stress and burnout

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

which may impact intergenerational transmission of maladaptive patterns of behaviour as children learn how to cope through observation of their parents (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018).

Maternal Gatekeeping

Due to the gendered nature of standards of parenting standards, the fear of negative societal evaluation that triggers a prevention focus weighs more heavily on mothers than fathers, thus triggering maternal gatekeeping behaviours (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). Maternal gatekeeping refers to a pattern of restriction of others' involvement in household and childcare tasks, despite a willingness of alternate caregivers to assist. It is crucial to pause here to specify that this pattern of behaviour refers specifically to family systems in which other supportive adults exist who would be willing to help. It does not refer to family systems in which there is a collective assumption of oppressive gender defined roles or a lack of support system for mothers. However, maternal gatekeeping may contribute to or stem from a collective pattern of deeply entrenched gender-based roles.

From a maternal gatekeeping perspective, mothers may guard tasks by doing them themselves, setting standards for how they should be done, and re-doing them to their standards after they have already been completed (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). Unsurprisingly, it appears that maternal gatekeeping behaviours are more robust when the mother endorses and internalizes intensive mothering beliefs (Liss et al., 2013b). Essentialism is a trait that is defined by a belief that the individual is the most capable caregiver (Rizzo et al., 2013) and may result in the limiting of help from others. This consistent rejection of help may result in decreased offers of help from friends and family, leading to the inability for alternate caregivers to learn the nuances of the children, thus adding to the mother's belief that she is the most capable caregiver (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). Although maternal gatekeeping behaviours may decrease fear of negative

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

evaluation in the short run, they also increase the women's portion of household and childcare tasks, thus placing pressures upon them beyond what should be required (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018).

Maternal Burnout

As levels of stress and exhaustion mount, many mothers report experiencing maternal burnout (Roskam et al., 2017), a syndrome associated with overwhelming exhaustion, emotional distancing, and feelings of ineffectiveness (Mikolajczak et al., 2018). Of the many consequences associated with maternal burnout, perhaps the most concerning is the significant association with neglectful or violent behaviour towards children (Mikolajczak et al., 2018). The risk appears to be present for all families, despite income or education level, with some indication that more educated families are the most at risk (Mikolajczak et al., 2018). In addition to the potential risk of violence, Randall et al. (2015), explain that children whose parents endured more burnout tend to experience more depressive symptoms and lower life satisfaction later in life, thus indicating a cycle of mental health challenges for mothers over successive generations.

Career and Societal Implications

The cyclical effect of maternal guilt and burnout is represented in the political sphere with regard to women's participation within the workforce. Subscription to societal constructions of ideal mothers is related to lower work/family balance and in turn relates to decreased career ambitions (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). Consequently, fewer women enter positions of power, or leave the workforce entirely, thus reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes. The effect of women's decreased career ambitions may be compounding as men's career aspirations increase when they perceive the women in their family to take on more family roles (Meeussen et al., 2016). Furthermore, lower work participation rates and reduced pay caused by decreased career

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

ambitions make women less financially independent than men and put them at greater risk of poverty and further mental health challenges (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). These decreased career ambitions and financial implications suggest that social discourses and the social construction of ideal mothers perpetuate the cycle of oppression against women with specific implications for mothers.

What Limitations Exist Within Current Best Practices for Maternal Mental Health?

Developments in the fight for global maternal mental health can be observed over recent years (Rahman et al., 2013; Sawers & Wong, 2018). Increased recognition of issues of maternal mental health within the perinatal period has led to improvements in the provision of care for many mothers (World Health Organization, n.d.-b). Increasing evidence for the effectiveness of an approach to maternal mental health that draws on interventions led by non-mental health specialists such as nurses, midwives, and health visitors has been shown to improve maternal mental health outcomes (Tandon et al., 2011). Despite these improvements, most countries lack effective maternal mental health programs (Baron et al., 2016). Additionally, programs aimed to address maternal mental health often fail to address the sociocultural perspective (Sawers & Wong, 2018) or impacts of the societal construction of motherhood beyond the perinatal period (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). Additional barriers toward progress with regards to maternal mental health include the myth that maternal depression is rare. Rates of postpartum depression range between 10 to 25% with higher rates in low- and middle-income countries (Rahman, et al., 2013).

From Individually Pathologizing Toward Socially Aware

Current screening, identification, and treatment practices often focus on individual characteristics to effectively identify those mothers to whom care should be targeted (Van

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Damme et al., 2020). Identifying specific characteristics such as neuroticism that are strongly associated with increased stress levels (Le Vigouroux & Scola, 2018; Le Vigouroux et al., 2017) may allow for greater ability to quickly identify those mothers at risk of maternal burnout or mood disorders. However, these practices risk pathologizing individual mothers and shifting the focus away from societal discourse on to individual cognition. As health care providers work to support mothers it is crucial that a multifaceted approach be taken in which screening and targeted treatment be implemented in conjunction with socially aware practices that alleviate guilt for women and work to disrupt the cycles of discursive practices that perpetuate these standards.

Because specific maternal mental health challenges are strongly linked to harmful social constructions of ideal mothers and societal discourse regarding expectations of mothers (Henderson et al., 2016; Hubert & Aujoulat, 2018), counsellors and mental health professionals must address these dominant discourses with an intention to deconstruct societal discourse. This work should occur both within sessions alongside mothers and in personal reflective practice. Through reflective practice, counsellors can decrease the likelihood of inadvertently perpetuating intensive mothering ideologies. In particular, counselling practices should acknowledge the role that shame stemming from the societal discourse surrounding motherhood plays in the formation and continuation of typical maternal mental health and family dynamic challenges. Because behaviours such as maternal gatekeeping often stem from a *deeply* embedded fear of societal judgement (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018), suggestions of parenting and lifestyle shifts must be preceded by interventions which acknowledge the societal discourses and aim to liberate mothers from the shame that occurs as a result of ever-present pressures to achieve conflicting and impossible standards of motherhood. It is important to note that this paper does not dispute the

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

validity of screening tools for maternal mood disorders, nor does it intend to devalue the importance of the currently used counselling practices. Instead, the intent of the following section is to highlight the current focus of maternal mental health to give life to those pieces discovered to be underrepresented in the current literature.

Standards and Practices in Canada

The Public Health Agency of Canada (2015) defines maternal health as the women's health during pregnancy, childbirth, and during the postpartum period up to 24 months with a notable absence in policy for mothers beyond 24 months. Alberta Health Services (2020) defines postnatal care policy for women up to six weeks postpartum with policy related to mental health extending to only seven days postpartum. These discourses portraying an end date of maternal mental health care and presented through such prominent health agencies may inadvertently create the sensation of failure amongst mothers requiring support beyond these dates.

Additionally, the material highlights that “for most women, pregnancy and birth are a time for celebration. However, this may also be a time of change in a woman's body and lifestyle, which may increase the risk of poor mental health” (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2014). Implicit within these words is a message of othering, in which women who fall short of viewing their experience as a mother are inherently different and lesser than those who find celebration and joy. Additional focus on the change in a woman's body as posing a threat to mental health further adds to the discourse relating to expectations of the maternal body image.

Not all Canadian provinces have adopted official programs regarding maternal mental health. Previously, Saskatchewan had implemented the MotherFirst program which aimed to create policies to improve the mental healthcare of mothers and increase professional awareness (Bruce et al., 2012); however, the program has since been discontinued. Currently, the only

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

provinces to have specific maternal mental health programs in practice are British Columbia (BC Reproductive Mental Health Program & Perinatal Services BC, 2014) and Ontario (Public Health Ontario, 2018). The documents depicting best maternal mental health practices in these provinces list treatment options including medication, electroconvulsive therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, psychoeducation, interpersonal therapy, psychodynamic therapy, group therapy, bright light therapy, and self-care. There is no mention of societal influences on the onset of mental health disorders, or on the treatment of the symptoms. While the existence of programs in two provinces is an indication of progress toward the acknowledgment of a need for increased focus on the mental health of mothers, they may fail to represent the complex needs of mothers given current societal influences.

#motherhood in the Therapeutic Relationship

The implications of this complex social construction of motherhood and the discourses presented to mothers has great importance for counsellors. Not only can discourses create pressure to perform and mental health challenges, but they can also enter the therapeutic relationship in the form of stigmatization of clients (Nakash et al., 2015). Counsellors hold an inordinate degree of power to affect change to client's attitudes and perceptions (Amundson & Stewart (1993). Internalized stigmatization of idealized motherhood norms can therefore create challenges within the therapeutic realm such as a fear of attending therapy (Lasalvia, 2012) and the blaming of mothers for children's developmental challenges (Blum, 2015).

Stigmatizing narratives are often gendered in nature with fathers less likely than mothers to receive blame or shame as a result of challenges that may present in family counselling (Francis, 2012). Mothers receive an inordinate percentage of the blame for developmental differences in their children and often find themselves trapped between enduring remarks about

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

poor quality parenting or seeking a diagnosis that often results in shame pertaining to the gestational period (Blum, 2015; Davis & Manago, 2015). For example, books such as “Origins: How the Nine Months Before Birth Shape the Rest of Our Lives” (Paul, 2010) may inadvertently place blame on mothers whose children are born with developmental or physical differences. Books and scientific narratives of this type may enter the therapeutic realm in harmful manners resulting in the self-stigmatization of mothers who may avoid the care they require due to perception of stigma (Lasalvia, 2012).

Notably, postpartum nurses have been found to provide lower quality care to women with severe mental health challenges (Ordan et al., 2018). This professional stigma may also present in very subtle ways, unknown to the professional, such as directing conversation by providing increased positive feedback for certain aspects of a mother’s narrative (Amundson & Stewart, 1993). Additionally, counsellors and psychology professionals hold a high degree of influence in the creation of social realities due to perceived expert status (Rose, 1998). In this manner, and in conjunction with the capacity for stigmatization to enter the therapeutic relationship, the influential capacity of counsellors and maternal health professionals to construct or uphold social pressures for mothers must be carefully considered (Davis & Manago, 2015; Ordan et al., 2018).

Privilege

It should be noted that the range of treatment practices currently used in Canada often fail to appropriately represent the diversity of women across a range of privilege. Access to treatment options is often inadequate as mothers most susceptible to adverse mental health outcomes such as single mothers (Gavin et al., 2011; Huang et al., 2012), mothers experiencing domestic abuse (Alhusen et al., 2015) and substance abuse (Gold et al., 2012; Gressier et al., 2017). Mothers experiencing social and gender inequalities are often least able to access appropriate care (Fisher

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

et al., 2012; Roy, 2014). Current data indicates that the origins of maternal depression can often be traced to the social circumstances of their lives (Fisher et al., 2012) and intergenerational trauma has significant impacts on mental health during the perinatal period (Roy, 2014). As such, treatment models which focus primarily on individual pathologies rather than on the underlying social discourse fail to address the challenges of all mothers appropriately.

These issues may be especially problematic for mothers who exist outside of the hegemonic ideal of family roles given a recent focus on attachment informed parenting (Liss et al., 2013b). As recent trends in counselling have turned their focus to adult attachment insecurity as a means of addressing adult mental health (Cooke et al., 2019; Corcoran, & McNulty, 2018; Muller et al., 2012; Schimmenti, & Bifulco, 2015), many mothers who attend counselling may be supported through the processing of childhood experiences to understand their patterns and coping mechanisms better. These methods are thought to be crucial for not only the optimal functioning of the mother, but there may also be important intergenerational implications as mothers work to break generational cycles of parenting challenges (Bödeker, et al., 2019; Dittrich, et al., 2018; Madigan et al., 2017; McDonnell & Valentino, 2016).

Attachment Informed Practices

The important role that attachment informed counselling can play in establishing strong families must therefore be applauded and continued to be employed as a therapeutic modality, however this modality must be used with caution when treating mothers given the already vast landscape of societal pressure (Maletzky, 2017). For example, research findings indicating a higher likelihood of problem behaviours and attention deficits in insecurely attached children (Tharner et al, 2012) may add to the ever-growing expectations of mothers. Although these findings bear critical importance in reducing the prevalence of attention disorders, counsellors

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

must be aware of the gendered nature of parental pressures as they disseminate attachment informed recommendations.

Similarly, adoption agencies frequently provide education regarding attachment parenting, painting an image of attachment as both a crucial yet elusive goal without which the child may suffer lifelong psychological and behavioural consequences (Pylypa, 2016). This may instill a sense of fear or hopelessness in mothers who adopt children beyond the infancy years as they may internalize a perspective that attachment wounds are irreparable and that they are unable to do enough. There even exists research to suggest that attachment is developed prior to birth, through ultrasound technology, is linked to greater childhood outcomes, implying that those women who are not able to bond prior to the birth of their child may be sub-optimal (Denbow, 2019). Counselling practices at both the individual and family systems levels should proceed cautiously when implementing attachment-informed practices.

This caution is especially true for women who choose or are required to work, as working mothers inevitably spend a smaller percentage of their children's time together. Women from lower socioeconomic classes who are required to relinquish a certain amount of control within their mothering role often attempt to reject societal constructions of ideal motherhood as they delegate certain maternal tasks to family members (Christopher, 2012). However, while this conscious rejection may partially appear to shift their narrative, the guilt and shame imposed upon them through societal discourses and certain counselling practices including the attachment focused lens remain present and many mothers report feeling a sense of inadequacy despite active attempts to reject the dominant and pervasive societal standards (Henderson et al., 2016). Therefore, it is crucial that counsellors carefully consider the social locations of the women with

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

whom they work and endeavor to utilize a culturally responsive modality that actively aims to reduce stress created by cultural and societal discourses.

What Might We Do About It?

Counsellors must recognize that maternal mental health challenges are often the fault of an impossible standard. Research to examine specific societal discourse surrounding motherhood is required to assist counsellors in better understanding the mothers they serve. Through deeper research and counsellor education, counsellors may become better equipped to educate women about the unrealistic standard of motherhood. Counsellors can assist women in engaging in resistance work against societal discourses by which they feel trapped (Malatzky, 2017).

As counsellors aim to better serve the needs of mothers, they must seek to understand the sources of maternal stress leading to mental health challenges. In particular, it is crucial that counsellors understand how societal discourses affect the actions, decisions, and attitudes of mothers (Henderson et al., 2016) and seek to develop an understanding of the specific discourses perpetuated through various platforms such as social groups. Intentional examination of societal discourses must be established both in session with mothers and individually by counsellors prior to referral.

Provision of support groups and recommendations to seek social connection is common in the treatment of maternal mental health challenges (Sawers & Wong, 2018) due to the awareness that social support is associated with enhanced life satisfaction (Siedlecki et al., 2014). This effect is magnified during the postpartum period wherein new mothers report an increased desire for social support (Negron et al., 2013) as they adjust to their new identity as a mother. Social support is linked to reduced depressive symptoms (Ponomartchouk & Bouchard, 2015) and should therefore be utilized within maternal mental health care along with counselling

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

practices that aim to deconstruct any harmful social constructions that lead to adverse maternal health outcomes in the first place (Newman & Henderson, 2014). Therefore, discourse analysis regarding sources of maternal social support can help counsellors better understand the contexts of their clients and assist them as they support mothers to break down these social constructions and societal discourses.

Why Look to Social Media?

In their quests to find meaning in their experiences, many mothers turn to social media seeking social connection, mental stimulation, and self-validation (McDaniel et al., 2012; Pettigrew et al., 2016). Exceptionally high rates of social media consumption exist amongst mothers of young children and mothers who report lower mental health quality (McDaniel et al., 2012). Despite potential positive outcomes of social media use such as decreased isolation (McDaniel et al., 2012; Pettigrew et al., 2016), the platforms have been found to impact mental health in many cases negatively (Padoa et al., 2018; Bue, 2020; Coyne et al., 2017; Barthorpe et al., 2020). Due to the perceived visibility of other users' experiences, social comparison is common amongst social media users and causes a sense of inadequacy (Fox & Moreland, 2014). Additionally, the messages portrayed through social media have been found to inform the social construction of mothering ideologies (Hernandez, 2019). Because social media can cause unhealthy comparison and feelings of inadequacy amongst the general population, the logical conclusion can be drawn that online social comparison amidst a culture of harmful social constructions of motherhood can be particularly damaging for mothers, thus perpetuating a cycle of maternal stress.

The importance of this topic has increased dramatically in recent months as mothers and the general population have adjusted to modified social support systems in response to the

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

COVID-19 pandemic. The loss of the ability to seek in-person social support groups has increasingly led to a turn toward social media support groups (Zhao & Zhou, 2020). As mothers gain social support, they also gather and internalize the discourses surrounding motherhood. The disproportionate influencing capacity of the social media sphere, specifically blogging professionals, leads readers to a heightened sense of trust and thus increased likelihood of internalization of the discourses presented (Bakshy et al., 2011; Goel & Gupta, 2020). By viewing bloggers through the social constructionist lens, the reader must understand that the words written and disseminated through social media platforms are both influenced by and influence public discourse (McGeechan et al., 2020). Therefore, platforms such as Instagram both rapidly accelerate the rate at which public discourse shifts and reflect these shifting discourses. This representation of societal discourses is of particular interest as it implies that social media may provide a window of opportunity to examine the discourses in their natural and unaltered state. Through this examination, it is therefore possible for a researcher to gain an awareness of the messaging that is presented to mothers, and also to develop an understanding of how these messages and discourses have gained hold within the psyche of mothers who blog on social media platforms.

Conclusion

Societal discourses have challenged maternal roles and expectations, often resulting in frustration as mothers attempt to align with impossible standards. These discourses may stem from informal discursive practices such as media and conversation and may have roots in more professional and traditional realms such as religion and psychology. As counsellors aim to better support the needs of mothers from a socially responsive therapeutic lens, it is crucial to understand the discourses contributing to the pressures faced by mothers and become informed

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

regarding how psychology practices may unintentionally perpetuate these discourses or do therapeutic harm. Specific analysis of the influences of social media influencers may provide a wealth of information pertaining to these discourses and present initial insight into the ways that counsellors may work to intentionally dismantle harmful discourses.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The study of language is particularly vital to social psychology because it simply is the most basic and pervasive form of interaction between people. We spend a lot of our social lives talking to each other, reading the papers, watching movies and writing shopping lists. Most forms of social interaction involve people talking together or reading each other's scribbles. (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 9)

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the theoretical framework and research design choices used to carry out this project. The philosophical underpinnings and epistemological stance of discourse analysis (DA) will provide a foundational understanding of the lens through which I analyzed the data and assumptions pertaining to the nature of social constructionism will be outlined. An overview of design choices will be provided with specific reference to the aspects of discourse analysis that have informed these decisions.

Discourse Analysis

This research project consists of a discourse analysis of a research sample of Instagram posts depicting motherhood. In the most general sense, DA refers to a wide range of methods for studying language in use along with its role in the development of the social world (Potter, 2008). This broad and diverse field is derived from various scientific disciplines and utilizes a wide range of analytical approaches (Yazdannik et al., 2017). Despite the contextual differences and branches of DA, the overarching philosophy of the approach has been informed by the works of scholars such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault (Potter, 2012). Generally, it aims to deconstruct deep-rooted, previously unexamined societal assumptions (Huma et al., 2020).

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

There exist a variety of styles and foci of DA including, but not limited to, critical discourse analysis (Fairclough et al., 2011), discursive psychology (Wetherell & Edley, 2014; Wiggins, 2017; Wiggins, 2020), and Foucauldian discourse analysis (Diaz-Bone et al., 2008; Locke & Budds, 2020; Powers, 2007). Although these approaches share many overlapping features, their nuanced distinctions are crucial and should not be overlooked. This research project most closely aligns with the branch of discursive psychology.

Philosophical Underpinnings

At its core, DA is a social constructionist approach (Ranjbar, 2014) strongly influenced by post-structural thinking (Potter, 2008; Potter, 2012). More specifically, DA is aligned with post structural linguistic philosophy which asserts people construct reality within shared understandings of how they use language (Potter, 2012; Stokoe, 2020). Therefore, DA aims to understand the role of language in constructing an ever-evolving social world and the meanings gained through shared discourse and language (Yazdannik et al., 2017). Inherent to the philosophical underpinnings of DA is the performative nature of language, wherein language must be considered a social action that functions to create or maintain social constructions (Carbó et al., 2016; Wiggins, 2017). Individuals use language as a medium for action or a means to construct their social worlds and identities. In turn, these constructions influence how an individual experiences the social world (O'Reilly et al., 2018).

The epistemological stance of DA is generally relativist, assuming that knowledge is subjective and taking a critical stance to previously socially agreed upon knowledge (Matusov & von Duyke, 2012). Therefore, DA studies phenomena from the perspective of individual participants (Tseliou & Borcsa, 2018) with an interest in understanding the co-construction of knowledge through discourse (Potter, 2010). Yazdannik et al. (2017) elaborated on this point,

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

acknowledging the link between knowledge and social processes in which understandings of the world are created and maintained through social interaction and the construction of common truths. Consequently, how people understand the world are linked explicitly to historical and cultural contexts, evolving alongside shifting social contexts (Anderson & Mungal, 2015; Graham, 2011).

Historical Roots

Historical developments in discourse analysis are complex, however it can be said that the origins of discourse analysis can be traced back 2000 years ago to the study of language, speech, and literature with a focus on grammar, linguistics, and normative rules of language. The earliest recorded use of the term ‘discourse analysis’ was by Zelig Harris and focused on sentence meaning in texts (Potter, 2008) which led to studies of classroom interaction by Sinclair and Coulthard who developed a systematic model of interaction in the classroom (Molinari et al., 2013). The 1960s and 1970s brought in heightened interest in the social sciences and DA shifted to how language shapes an individual’s experiences and relationships (Yazdannik, 2017).

Influences of scholars such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida shifted the focus further to relate to institutionalized patterns of knowledge (Anderson & Mungal, 2015). Fowler, Fairclough, and Kress became specifically interested in the role of discourse within the context of power and control (Liu & Guo, 2016). Beginning in 1987, an ideology which would later become known as discursive psychology was developed by Potter and Wetherell and the official term “discursive psychology” was introduced in 1992 (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Huma et al., 2020).

Due to its complex history and the varied interpretations that scholars have taken to discourse analysis, the term has become quite convoluted and multiple branches have formed.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Anderson and Mungal (2015) differentiate between Discourse analysis with a capital “D” and discourse analysis with a small case “d”; defining small “d” discourse as the study of language in use and linguistic elements of conversation, while capital “D” discourse refers to the study of broader contextual understandings of the meanings of discourse. The latter branch, upon which this research is based, is focused on social constructionism and discursive psychology (DP) (Potter, 2008). For brevity, the remainder of this chapter will focus on the intended methodology of discursive psychology which focuses on the study of the social construction of psychological matters through discourse (O’Reilly, 2018).

The inception of DP occurred in reaction to a shift toward experimental, quantitative approaches to the study of social psychology in the 1980s. It offered an alternate perspective to cognitive psychology by highlighting psychological concepts’ social, historical, and cultural contexts (Potter, 2012). Introduction of the term “Discursive Psychology” by Edwards and Potter (1992) urged researchers to treat language as a mechanism or medium for action rather than as an access to the pathology of the mind (Huma et al., 2020; Potter & Edwards, 1992; Stokoe, 2020). In other words, DP rejects the notion of cognitivism which views the mind as a series of wires predicting behaviour and turns its attention instead to the social contexts of language as a source of human psychology (Cresswell & Smith, 2012; Huma et al, 2020). DP re-specifies human cognition as shared, socially constructed discursive practices, rather than individualized cognitive processes (Wiggins, 2020) and suggests that the core purpose of language is the production and maintenance of human sociality (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Stokoe, 2020).

Influenced by post-structuralist thinking, the social constructionist framework by which DP approaches psychological phenomena challenges the cognitive paradigm that has dominated

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

psychological science for many years (Huma et al., 2020). DP therefore has a difficult task of reconceptualizing strongly understood psychological concepts in terms of the rules of social discourse. DP takes a different approach to research than other qualitative methodologies in psychology as its analysis of language is used as an indicator of social constructs, rather than individual cognition (Stokoe, 2020).

Bracketing of Researcher Assumptions

Critical reflection on researcher assumptions is crucial with an intentional focus on deconstructing and exposing deep-rooted, previously unexamined assumptions about fundamental topics (Huma et al., 2020). An interest in highlighting deep rooted societal assumptions poses an interesting dilemma for a discourse analysis researcher due to the researcher's involvement within the very society that they are studying. Therefore, it is necessary for the researcher to continually reflect on their assumptions and reasons for interpreting discourse in a certain way (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This bracketing of personal and theoretical assumptions allows for a focus on the participant's words, rather than the researcher's interpretations of what was said.

However, it is equally important to note that the researcher's standpoint cannot and should not be ignored, but rather utilized transparently to highlight the researcher's ways of understanding, analyzing and disseminating data (Smith, 1991). I acknowledge my standpoint as a mother and counsellor who aligns with feminist ideology and holds an interest in dismantling oppressive narratives. Although my intention in the analysis of my data was to come to understand the words as they may appear to a mother who engages with Instagram influencers, I recognize my lens and I have made every effort to engage in continual reflexive journaling and peer discussion to ensure that my own assumptions do not sway the results. Notably, the analysis

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

of the data was completed from my standpoint and can therefore not be automatically applied to every mother. Instead, I aimed to analyze for the implication of the data with an awareness of my own standpoint and the academic literature pertaining to maternal discourses.

Data

In addition to what can be known through established methods of quantitative research, qualitative methods such as interviews and surveys can offer insight into alternate ways of understanding concepts. The data used within DP research often differs slightly from more traditional qualitative research methodologies, even those whose epistemological stance aligns with a social constructionist paradigm (Stokoe, 2020). Specifically, DP research aims to study the use of language in its natural environment in settings where real life happens, rather than the experimental laboratory or interview room (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Huma et al., 2020; O'Reilly, 2018; Potter, 2012). The focus of this research was placed on the discourse presented naturally within the Instagram platform and aimed to capture a representation of discourse that Instagram users consume. Due to the publicly available nature of the data sought, this research offers an in-depth examination of discourses presented naturally and unhindered by research processes.

Sample Size

Due to a careful focus on the themes and analysis of social causes and effects of discourse, a large sample size is not necessarily reflective of high-quality work. Instead, Potter and Wetherell (1987) explain that the sample size should be carefully selected with the goal of accurately answering the research question. Data for this study consisted of fifty Instagram posts. This number was selected as a representative number of accounts any given mother may follow, however, it is important to note that the range of accounts followed will vary drastically. It

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

should also be noted that the subset of posts selected for inclusion in this study cannot claim to be representative of the entirety of the mothering discourse available on Instagram, however it will provide a valuable understanding of a relatively large snapshot of the publicly available writings of Instagram influencers.

Sample Criterion

The minimum criterion for inclusion within the study included (a) an Instagram Influencer who writes primarily of motherhood with (b) a minimum of 10000 followers and (c) a publicly available profile. All posts were written within 2020 or 2021 and were 100 or more words. The most recent post was chosen in instances wherein an author has written numerous posts related to motherhood.

Numerous definitions exist to describe the word “influencer”. There is a wide variety of schools of thought pertaining to what may qualify an individual as an influencer including following size, engagement, and verification by Instagram itself. For this study, I have chosen the minimum following number of 10000 to ensure that I capture not only the discourses of mega-influencers who can reach large numbers of readers, but also those of micro-influencers who are often seen as more trustworthy and thus may have more impact (Kay et al., 2020)

Data Management and Security

All posts included within the study were imported into NVivo analysis software and stored in a password-protected device. Text and image data were stored as a cohesive unit to ensure continuity of analysis. Although data was derived from publicly available sources, the confidentiality of the authors was maintained through the use of pseudonyms. Accounts were initially followed using a newly created Instagram account used solely for this study, however

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

these accounts were unfollowed for the confidentiality of writers upon completion of data collection.

Data Analysis

As was previously described, this study utilized the social constructionist assumptions of discourse analysis with specific alignment to the tenets of discursive psychology. The analytical framework of discursive psychology attends specifically to unexamined and assumed societal assumptions through a careful analysis of discourse in action as it is created by and creates societal assumptions (Locke & Yarwood, 2017; O'Reilly et al., 2018). Although there is no specific analytic method or recipe to follow within discourse analysis, attention to the social constructionist framework of discourse allows for the systemic patterns of data to become evident (Carbó et al., 2016).

Potter and Wetherell (1987) outline ten stages for analyzing discourse:

1. Generate appropriate research questions.
2. Select an appropriate sample.
3. Collect records and documents.
4. Perform interviews.
5. Transcribe.
6. Code.
7. Analyze data.
8. Confirm validation of results of data analysis.
9. Generate report.
10. Apply results within practice.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Research decisions relating to the first four stages have been outlined in detail previously in this chapter. Step number four, transcription, involved copying posts verbatim into word processing and analyzing software. All characters were included within the transcription including emojis and italicized or bolded words. Posts were then randomly assigned a number for purposes of differentiation within the final report (ex. Participant 1 = P1). Steps six and seven, coding and analysis followed a cyclical process, moving between analysis and coding until understandable categories were developed (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). As per the recommendations of Potter and Wetherell (1987), data coding was completed as inclusively as possible, ensuring that all data was included and no components were excluded during the coding phase. This initial coding process resulted in numerous codes that formed the foundation upon which I was able to begin to “squeeze [the] unwieldy body of discourse into manageable chunks” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Codes used and their significance will be further detailed within the analysis and discussion chapters. Analysis of the data required careful reading of codes and development of a pattern or framework. The analysis of discourse focuses attention on the broad theoretical framework of the constructive and functional dimension of discourse, rather than a specific analytic method (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The analysis carried out within this study utilized the recommendations of Carbó et al. (2016) who propose two phases of DA. First, the researcher looks for patterns in the data including variability, differences in content and form of the narratives, and consistencies within the narratives. Second, the researcher must locate the pattern and its function including the development of a hypothesis regarding the function of the social constructionist dimensions of the discourse (Carbó et al., 2016).

Potter and Wetherell (1987) explain that the analysis phase of a discourse analysis may yield numerous false starts to begin to form a systematic pattern. This held true within this

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

project. Initial codes were grouped together into themes, often resulting in overlapping codes. As themes emerged, it became increasingly more clear which themes were less fruitful and therefore could be released or grouped within other themes. Other times initial patterns were found to leave too much unaccounted or resulted in a large file of exceptions, at which point I was required to reassess the codes and patterns that had previously emerged, as is detailed by Potter and Wetherell (1987). Through this cyclical method of coding and analyzing, I was able to establish a deeper awareness of the patterns through which social media discourse informs social realities (Searle, 1995).

Step eight, validation of results is described by Potter and Wetherell (1987) as encompassing four primary aspects: coherence, participants orientation, new problems, and fruitfulness. This analysis has made every attempt to give coherence to a body of discourse and has been tied to academic literature to account for the patterns of discourse. Although participant orientation could not be feasibly confirmed, the results of this study have been discussed with numerous stakeholders in the topic including counselling peers, mothers who follow Instagram accounts, mothers who are themselves influencers, and academic researchers. With regards to new problems generated, this research has opened the gates to a wide range of further research opportunities. These opportunities will be discussed in detail in the final chapter of this report.

Budget

Given the nature of this study and a focus on publicly available textual data, budgetary requirements for this study were relatively minimal and were absorbed primarily by the researcher. Athabasca University provided access to NVivo 12 coding software however there were no concerns pertaining to conflict of interest due to the separation and protection of data.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Cost of tuition and hardware including the computer was absorbed by the researcher. No additional equipment was required.

Ethical Considerations

Consent

According to the Government of Canada Panel on Research Ethics (2018), naturalistic observational studies which research behaviours occurring in a virtual environment which do not hold a reasonable expectation of privacy may not require consent from participants. This study analyzed only publicly available Instagram posts, therefore alleviating the requirement for participant consent. Despite a lack of requirement for consent to be provided by the author of each post included in this study, consideration was given pertaining to this decision and a desire to treat the Instagram writers ethically. Ultimately, the decision was made to omit the consent process due to the intention of this study to examine naturally occurring and publicly available discourse, as to seek consent would undermine the validity of the study. Confirmation of this decision was provided through Athabasca University's research ethics board approval.

Representation of Influencers

Although participant consent is not required for the analysis of publicly available texts, every attempt was made to represent the influencers fairly within the dissemination of the study. Concern for welfare includes a consideration of how the results of the study may impact the groups at stake (Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Government of Canada, 2018; Lee, 2018). This study intended to present a detailed account of the publicly available discourses on Instagram and precautions were taken to avoid unfairly representing these writers or damaging their reputations. Anonymity was maintained throughout the writing of this report. Posts were differentiated from each other through the random assignment of corresponding numbers. This numbering system

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

allowed for a more rigorous report and increased anonymity while data was in the analysis stage. Reflexive practice including journaling and peer discussion was utilized to reduce the impact of my pre-existing assumptions within the analysis of the data.

Representation of Mental Health Practitioners

The research intended to broaden the scope of what is visible and considered legitimate academic knowledge when drawing from resources that inform counselling practices. Careful attention was placed on fair representation of practitioners within both the analysis and reporting of counselling practices. Through my work on this study, I aim to represent mental health practitioners as individuals who orient toward sanctioned sources of knowledge to inform their work. Discourses as they are represented in social media is a new area of consideration for counsellors; therefore, academic literature pertaining to the impacts of these discourses can serve to deepen counsellor practice.

Rigour

Discourse analysis offers an analytically and conceptually rigorous approach as it builds upon and uses findings from previous studies, thus leading to a robust and cumulative body of intertwined knowledge (Huma et al., 2020). Therefore, it is of utmost importance that discursive researchers act carefully to complete high quality research as the implications and findings of each DP study serve to build the basis of future studies. The scope and rigour of previous studies against which a researcher maps their claims should be carefully considered with every attempt being made to locate DP research in a robust and analytically rigorous landscape (O'Reilly, 2018).

According to O'Reilly (2018), indicators of high-quality DP research include but are not limited to the quality of recording, level of detail present in transcription, grounding of analytic

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

claims in data, and identification of deviant cases. Additionally, quality assessment of discursive practices involves reflexivity for both the researcher and the reader. As such, transparency regarding the process of analysis increases the overall research quality. Throughout this research report, transparency has been attempted and maintained to the best of my abilities. By identifying participants with a corresponding number, I increased transparency and more clearly demonstrated the analytical process.

Step eight of Potter and Wetherell's (1987) description of discourse analysis includes validation of results. A detailed report of the validation of results is included within the discussion chapter of this project. Considerations of future studies through which the results may be further understood and validated will be detailed within the conclusion chapter. Although this project cannot claim to outline the entirety of discourses pertaining to motherhood present on Instagram, the analysis provided herein lays a framework for additional research to further this field.

Conversely, indicators of poor-quality research include the under analysis of data due to simple summarization of themes without analysis, the tendency of the researcher to position themselves with or against the speaker, and a lack of analytical discussion of quotations or the expectation that data will speak for itself (O'Reilly, 2018). The usage of direct quotations throughout the report of results has ensured that this research demonstrates high quality and transparency.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Summary

This project of research utilizes discourse analysis methodology, and more specifically discursive psychology. Through this research framework, I have analyzed the words of fifty Instagram posts pertaining to motherhood to develop a framework of patterns that emerge. Through a social constructionist paradigm my analysis is founded upon the belief that language constructs the world in which people live and the mindsets through which people come to generate new discourse. This lens and perspective highlighted the importance of an expanded understanding of discourses presented through social media channels. Results from this study can serve to broaden the scope of knowledge of counselling professionals by integrating an awareness of social media discourses as they pertain to maternal mental health.

Chapter 4: Results

[T]here are portions of the real world, objective facts in the world, that are only facts by human agreement. In a sense there are things that exist only because we believe them to exist. (Searle, 1995, p. 1)

The cyclical nature of discourse to both influence and be influenced by the social construction of reality is at the core of this research project. It would be naive to assume that the words that will be analyzed within this study serve solely as influential; rather, this analysis is founded upon the crucial assumption that the words found herein both construct and are constructed by the “objective facts” that exist simply because we believe them to exist. This is particularly true of social media discourse in which it should be assumed that the authors of these posts are deeply involved in the culture of social media discourse, entrenched within circles of collective ways of thinking, both adding to and representing the dominant narratives.

In this chapter I will draw upon the works of Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Rose (1996) to present an analysis of discourse observed within the fifty selected Instagram posts. I will deconstruct the complexities of social media discourse to pull threads of the singular stories that have become woven into the fabric of the discursive construction of motherhood. Potter and Wetherell (1987) noted that discourse should be analyzed for variation, function, and construction. Consistent with this recommendation, this analysis will analyze discourse for variation, function, and construction of mothering discourse that has found its way into public assumptions of the maternal role.

Analytic Procedure

The steps of discourse analysis outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987) and described in the methodology chapter of this report have been followed throughout this analysis. Throughout

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

this chapter the focus will be placed upon steps six (coding) and seven (analysis of data). Potter and Wetherell (1987) explain that in many instances the process of coding and analysis may be cyclical; the phenomenon of interest may not appear readily until some analysis has taken place. In these cases, the analyst may oscillate between coding and analysis for some time while interpreting the data.

Step Six: Coding

A cyclical process of coding and analysis was certainly the case during this project as the large body of data resulted in a large body of initial codes. The coding process was completed using Nvivo 12 coding software. Preliminary coding was done as inclusively as possible, noting all instances of any code, even those that appeared only vaguely related (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This resulted in a highly complex web with many codes appearing to have a high degree of crossover. As I continued to cycle between coding and analysis I was able to refine the coding framework to reveal a pattern that could provide the basis for the analysis phase. Notably, this coding process made every effort to include all cases, even those that lay outside of the initial explanatory framework. Through inclusion of cases that lay outside of the explanatory framework the researcher is often able to more clearly confirm the results through noting special features that set these cases apart (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). As the analysis phase began, many codes were refined with many new codes added. Codes included within each category will be outlined throughout the report to ensure a high level of transparency (O'Reilly, 2018).

Step Seven: Analysis

I followed the analytic procedure outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987) which is made up of two related phases. First, I sought pattern in the forms of variability and consistency in the data. This allowed me to form the basis of a framework and resulted in initial categorization of

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

data and codes. The second phase consists of the formation of hypotheses about the functions and effects of the discourse. These hypotheses were based primarily upon awareness drawn from the literature outlined in the second chapter of this report and validated through recent discursive studies on motherhood. This validation is listed as step eight and will be further detailed in chapter five. Potter and Wetherell (1987) additionally stated that, instead of a consistent analytic method, discourse analysis is founded on broad theoretical frameworks which focus on the constructive and functional elements of discourse. These theoretical frameworks, combined with researcher ability to identify significant patterns and to validate findings through coherence to a body of discourse, can result in high quality discourse analysis.

Researcher Standpoint

Potter and Wetherell (1987) explained that an analysis of this kind requires considerable awareness of context to discern the functional elements of discourse. As such, my involvement at the intersection of the mothering and counselling communities can provide a unique lens through which to view these words. Although this research project aims to ultimately provide reference for counsellors, I analyzed the data primarily through the lens of a mother who interacts with the Instagram platform. This lens will allow counsellors to better understand the discourses affecting mothers. Despite my involvement within the counselling community, I do not intend to use this lens to analyze or critique the Instagram writer's mindset as to do so would be outside of the scope of a discourse analysis and largely impossible without live interaction with the participants. Instead, the focus is placed on understanding the social location of these words, including the historical and embedded structures that have contributed to the construction of the words and how the words themselves may contribute to a construction of reality.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

To establish an understanding of the discourses and to analyze for variation, function, and construction, data was organized into three overarching categories: the stories, the effects, and the sources. The ordering of these categories is intentional; it has allowed for an account that first highlights the voices and narratives of the mothers and subsequently lends itself to an analysis of the position of these narratives within the field of maternal mental health. Additional intentionality exists within the choice of the terms. The terms stories, effects, and sources are used as more colloquial versions of variation, function, and construction. This colloquial language allows me to position myself as an analyst who also holds an identity as a mother. These terms also allow us to understand how the words and stories can become molded into discourses with ripple effects across society. As the reader progresses through this analysis, the complexities and interconnectedness of casual social media words and professional discourses will appear and become evident.

The Stories

Each mother included in this study represents a unique subset of stories. Each mother represents unique perspectives, unique circumstances, unique social locations, and unique desires for self-presentation. The stories gathered herein for this study represent only a snapshot, capturing a moment in time. These are stories that mothers chose to tell in one moment, in one context. While it would be impossible for an analyst to discern with complete confidence the intent or function of the words shared by these mothers, an awareness of the performative nature of these stories is crucial. Through this lens, these stories represent a snapshot in time and also represent only those parts of the snapshot that the mothers chose to share. Behind each of the posts there exist more components to the stories, known only to the writer herself.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

The value that can be gained through analyzing these partial stories is an awareness of which aspects mothers feel safe to share. An assumption can then be made that a more complete story may lay beneath the surface, perceived to be dangerous or unacceptable to share publicly given the current social construction of motherhood. This is supported by Potter and Wetherell's (1987) assertion that "variation in self-presentation is particularly relevant, of course, in experiments where subjects can change their actions to please experimenters or in line with the researcher's subtle cues." (p. 37) Of course, given the nature of this study, the subtle cues to which the mothers may orient their responses do not stem from myself, the researcher, but instead their audience of followers, composed primarily of other mothers.

The posts analyzed are written from the mothering perspective and are primarily written in a blogging format. Although each mother wrote of her own life, it quickly became apparent that similar stories were being told across the entirety of the data. Despite the variation in the fabric of each story, common threads could be found woven throughout, creating unity within variation. This unity is representative of the cyclical nature of social construction as other sources similarly influence these influencers. As I analyzed the posts I aimed to find the themes and stories that were prevalent throughout the data. Four primary story threads were identified throughout the posts.

1. Motherhood is a wonderful experience.
2. Motherhood is a difficult experience.
3. Parenting is fundamentally mothercentric.
4. The mother's purpose is to be present for her children above all else.

Motherhood is a Wonderful Experience

Statements of positivity and joy regarding the mothering experience were depicted throughout most of the posts. While this is perhaps unsurprising, it is noteworthy and necessary to touch upon as a foundational theme for this analysis as we consider both the function and construction. Codes such as beautiful, wonderful, perfection, happiness, blessed, joy, and smile were included within this category.

As was previously described, it would be impossible and beyond the scope of this project to make any assertions regarding the intent of each writer. However, tentative speculations founded upon an awareness gleaned from the literature pertaining to maternal pressures can be made. Two possibilities arise with regards to the functional aspects of statements of joy and positivity. One assumption could be that many of these women truly felt a high level of satisfaction within their mothering role. The alternative assumption would be that statements of this kind are viewed as more acceptable within the current societal structures and serve a functional aspect of bolstering the status of the writer. Of course, a third option exists wherein both assumptions may be true.

“I Couldn’t be Happier Than I am Today”. Many mothers expressed a pure joy regarding their lives as mothers. One mother describes her expression of joy toward her pregnancy stating, “I had just found out I was pregnant with our third child and couldn’t stop smiling” (P14). Another stated that she was “grateful beyond belief for this life I get to call mine” (P17) while a third mother (P49) expressed that “I couldn’t be happier than I am today” following a description of her child as a “living, breathing miracle”. Still others qualified their joy in terms of familial relations and a collective feeling of happiness as a family through

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

statements such as “and then I look at these babies, and all the joy they bring to our entire family” (P23).

“**Moments Like This**”. Along similar lines, many mothers described specific moments within motherhood or family life that brought them joy. Oftentimes these statements took on a whimsical, dreamy, and serene quality, painting a picture of peace. One mother used a description of her family’s homeschooling moments to qualify the serenity and joyfulness of taking a break for the summer:

What better way to hibernate than with endless bookish adventures throughout time and across the globe, discovering and mastering new skills in language and mathematics, poetry and artist's studies, handicrafts and just talking the day away in a warm cinnamon-y kitchen waiting for oven treats. Our cups are full, our hearts are full. (P2)

“**Cherish Every Minute**”. Two mothers expressed joy within specific moments of their children’s lives through statements of “I will always cherish every minute we get to spend together, & all the smiles, laughs, and sweet memories” (P5) and “the greatest treasure has been watching my kids grow” (P41). Although these discourses align with the theme of motherhood as a wonderful experience, the variation in the narrative must be considered as they are underscored with a slightly different tone. These statements may hold within them an element of warning, perhaps serving a function of reminder to either themselves or other mothers of the rapid timeline of motherhood.

“**Gifts**”. In line with the category of motherhood as wonderful, descriptions of children occurred in numerous posts, frequently referring to children as gifts. Although many of these statements will reoccur within other categories of themes, they bear mentioning here as well due to the image that they paint of the mothering experience and family life. In line with the imagery

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

of perfection and wonder, statements of the gift of motherhood included “The greatest gift I have ever encountered is being a mom” (P41), “being your mama is my most treasured gift” (P29), and “her smile warms my heart, her laugh makes me laugh, she hugs me so tight it makes me melt” (P49). An analysis of the function of these statements highlights three options discussed at the outset of this section. Recall that while it would be impossible to ascertain the function of these words with complete certainty, an assumption based upon an awareness of both maternal pressures for perfection and a human need for self-presentation can be drawn. While it is possible that these statements are a simple reflection of the truth of these mothers' opinions, an awareness of the likelihood of a complete story introduces the notion that these statements are carefully chosen for their self-presentational function given the audience for whom they are intended.

Motherhood is a Difficult Experience

An opposing theme presented itself equally as common as the initial theme of motherhood as a wonderful experience. This theme involved mothers who shared the difficulties, trials, and tribulations of motherhood. It included statements coded with the labels difficult, exhausted, chores, shame, pressure, and bad mom. Notably, statements that spoke of the difficulties of motherhood often included more context and invitation into the underlying story of the family's life:

Virtual school is tough, I can't seem to convince my kids to sit still long enough to pay attention. Emotions are running high, frustration is peaking around too many corners...it is a time. We've just hit our quota. (P15)

Implicit within this quotation is a description of the family having navigated virtual schooling during the Covid-19 pandemic, a description of challenges that her children face, and a feeling of

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

frustration that has resulted in high emotions. Another mother described the story of navigating life with a newborn through a detailed description of her child's uniqueness and insight into her own emotional world: "not going to lie, this newborn phase this time around has been the absolute hardest. each of our kids have been difficult in their own ways as babies but Liam is a tough cookie. he's a cute cookie, but a tough one. most days I feel pretty useless to him and it wears me down. he's rarely content (or that's how it feels) which makes the days and nights so long and leaves me (us) with very little quiet, relax time" (P6). Upon initial glance, these descriptions appear to provide a more complete version of the story, in essence widening the focal lens to allow for more contextual understanding.

"Laundry". By contrast a unique theme emerged consisting of numerous stories emerged that could be best defined by the word "laundry". As mothers described the challenges of motherhood, many of them turned to descriptions of practical and stereotypical elements of motherhood, namely cleaning. Although many of these statements do include references to other aspects, they are noteworthy in that they all reference a mother's need to do laundry.

- "I, tired, exhausted, with a huge pile of laundry waiting to get done, still haven't had my coffee" (P18)
- "Otherdays I feel like I am barely scraping by. Full on survival mode. Survival days are somehow more of an accomplishment. I struggle to get out of my own way. My husband isn't around to help. We are somewhat fed & watered & laundry fished out the laundry bin before washing." (P35)
- "#motherhood looks like this:
 - a disheveled house.
 - tear stained faces.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

asking for help.

laundry piles miles high.

milk stained shirts.

every toy on the floor.

unmade beds.

a long to-do list.

struggling behind closed doors.

This is real life.” (P37)

Upon noting the discursive similarities present in these shared stories we may again consider function and construction as outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987). The functional aspect of discourse is described by Potter and Wetherell (1987) as the intent or purpose of the discourse, while the construction denotes both the way that the discourse may contribute to a social construction of meaning and the understanding that all discourse is socially constructed from historical contexts. An overview of the literature pertaining to the pressures and oppression of mothers was provided in chapter two and can shine light on the construction of these phrases. It is also noteworthy to again highlight how these phrases may continue to shape and construct the realities faced by mothers. As we consider the functional aspects of these phrases, a lens on the self-presentational nature of social media allows for a deeper understanding. Previously highlighted posts may indicate a desire for positive self-presentation. From an assumption that most social media influencers aim to present themselves in a favourable light it may appear initially counter intuitive to use their platforms to share discourses that highlight difficulties in aligning with socially constructed ideals. It is possible, however, that the discussion of these stories and description of the challenges serves to function as a sort of scapegoat or method of

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

providing context to the reason that these mothers feel unable to live up to societal standards (note that chapter two of this project ascertained that the standards are both oppressive and impossible to live up to regardless). However if we were instead to operate from a different assumption in which the intention of the influencers is camaraderie and liberation of women then it may be that the function of these statements serves to accomplish the exact task that I previously described: highlighting the impossibility of alignment with societal standards.

“**Sleep**”. A similar thread emerged involving the difficulties that result in decreased personal wellness for mothers. These statements focused primarily on the fatigue felt by mothers however they often portrayed a sense of overwhelm, stress, and exhaustion. Examples of these statements include:

- “the real life of a mom is those with the lack of sleep face, no hair done, and sometimes probably even wearing the same thing” (P18)
- “Shout out to all the moms who are so done and tired, that not even an all inclusive vacation on an island with unlimited free cocktails could undo the stress that is so built up (although it would help a lot 😊)” P3
- “You are always bouncing, rocking, swinging & shushing
You wont know when your next shower is
You wont know when your next meal is
Sleeping when the baby sleeps? It’s the only time to get anything done
Getting out of the house feels impossible so if all you do is go to the store, you feel successful
Every outfit is covered in milk, poop, spit up or pee shortly after getting it on
Sometimes the crying doesn’t stop

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Sometimes the sleep never begins

Sometimes you wonder if you'll ever feel like yourself again" (P42)

Similar assumptions could be drawn pertaining to these statements as the statements regarding housework, however a slightly different tone presents itself within these statements and could perhaps be most closely related to desperation. This tone of desperation may give rise to another functional possibility, outside of self-presentation. It may be that the primary function of these words is to simply tell their story, to feel heard and understood by those who may relate. Through this possibility, the question arises, why have mothers been required to turn to social media to feel heard and whom in their offline lives have failed to hear them?

Parenting is Mothercentric

The term mothercentric refers to an attitude in which the mother is the primary parent while any other parent is less adept and less important than the mother. Statements in line with this attitude often describe mothers as essential within the parenting dynamic and imply that mothers are fundamentally different from other parents and caregivers with regard to their abilities, importance, and nature. To illustrate how this might sound, in discourses of childcare the connotation of "babysitting" is very rarely attached to a mother's caring for her child but a recognizable option available to describe a father's engagement in the same activities. Codes placed within this category included self-sacrifice, best parent, mom strength, and essentialism.

One mother stated that, "Motherhood means unconditional love, superpower strength, and being the favorite parent" (P9) as she described what motherhood meant to her, while another mother explained that "we have some pretty beautiful instincts especially as mamas" (P1). These phrases place mothers in a separate category, implying that there exists something akin to a "superpower" that makes them fundamentally different from others. Let's consider

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

these phrases in light of the literature presented in Chapter Two pertaining to maternal gatekeeping. It can become clear to understand how a mother may feel that this fundamental difference to which so many influencers refer means that she is required to take on the bulk of the parenting work. Despite the often-jesting tone of these phrases, the consequence of this attitude may have important consequences with regards to the construction of identity and the narrowing of gender roles.

“We are Freakin’ Warriors”. Another tone appeared in a few of the posts in which mothers appeared to use mothercentric language to provide support to other mothers and a sense of camaraderie. For example, one mother wrote explicitly to other mothers, saying “To all the mamas... solo mamas, grieving mamas, biological and non-biological mamas... we are freakin’ warriors” (P33) while another said “to all of you amazing women who carry the love of a mother in some way, I hope you feel what a GIFT you are to the word[*sic*]” (P29). The intent of these words is clear: to congratulate or provide support to a community of mothers, to help mothers to feel seen and heard as they navigate the difficulties of motherhood described above. Yet these words hold within them the power to construct or maintain a reality in which mothers continue to perceive an expectation of maintaining the bulk of the parenting work simply to maintain and uphold their title of “warrior” and role as a “gift”. One mother drew attention to this issue through an in depth post highlighting the inequities of these issues:

“This week I’ve felt like a ‘Superwoman’. Managing an insurmountable workload, racing around after my kids/school-run/activities, plus the cooking, laundry & necessary life admin.

Note that I’m being tongue in cheek when I use the term ‘Superwoman’!

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

As dual working parents we pack a lot in to our lives. Because of this I'm sometimes called "Superwoman". Even worse: "Super-Mum" & "don't know how you do it all". I cringe. Every time.

Because Superheroes don't exist in real life (just don't tell my kids that, they love a Superhero). Being a mum shouldn't be about having superhuman abilities." (P35)

This post highlights the oppressive nature of words that are often intended to lift others up and to provide support. The phrase "superheroes don't exist in real life" highlights the impossibility of being a "super-mum". It raises the importance of questioning what might need to change on a societal level that would allow women not to be expected to be superhuman.

"Nobody can Replace Your Mom". In an emotional post describing her own mother's passing, one writer stated "Nobody can replace your mom" (P4). At its core, this phrase perpetuates the mothercentric attitude however it is noteworthy due to a contextual awareness of the meaning for the author. First, recall the opening quote of this thesis project: "The single story creates stereotype, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete, they make one story become the only story" (Adiche, 2009). As we return to examine the mother's words, we must come to understand that, given the context, this phrase truly means that nobody could replace **the writer's** mom. With this context in mind, it becomes clearer that the function of these words is not likely intended to perpetuate a mothercentric attitude but is simply to tell her story, to be heard, to feel seen.

"The 4th Trimester". Although the bulk of parenting responsibilities could be split evenly to shift the narrative of the "supermom", the postpartum phase (often referred to as the fourth trimester) in many mothering journeys is fundamentally mothercentric due to biological

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

implications of the healing process after birth. Mothers who breastfeed may experience this to an even greater extent, as was described by this mother:

The 4th trimester, you don't hear much about it! I think it should be so emphasized, we can feel so alone, lost, unheard & unappreciated during this transition. Your shift is 24/7. You are the only one that baby relies on for every single thing, every hour & it's never on your terms (P42).

Another mother recalled the newborn and postpartum phase, stating:

I remember wanting to scream and wishing I could have a moment to myself. Not a shower moment, or a groceries alone moment, not pooping by myself, not those kinds of moments. A moment to Breathe, just me. To remember the woman I was before I had her. (P8)

These stories may serve the functional purposes of self-presentation in portraying themselves as doting mothers, or may serve to highlight their personal difficulties, seeking to tell their own story. During this commonly highly mothercentric phase of the parenting journey, telling of these stories appears to be crucial. As we look at this from the counselling lens we can hold an awareness that a highly effective way of preventing and treating trauma is to tell stories due to the processing that can occur during this recounting. Through this logic, the functional element appears highly therapeutic.

As we turn to analyze the construction of these statements, a focus on the impact they may have can hold value in understanding how social media discourse can construct a reality. It is possible that the sharing of these stories may serve as permission for other mothers to discuss the challenges of the 4th trimester and to make some of the invisible work visible. However, it is also possible that they may bolster the mothercentric narrative, reinforcing maternal gatekeeping

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

behaviours as mothers come to assume that they are the “only one” upon whom their babies can rely. A focus on the constructive nature of this assumption leads to a logical awareness of how others may similarly come to view mothers as the primary caregivers during this phase.

The similarity of stories here is of particular interest when examining the broader context of this research project wherein there were no posts discussing any other parental support. Of course this does not imply that there was no other parental support, only that through the lens of a discourse analysis we can understand that the choice of words serves a function that, in the context of social media, is largely self-presentational. This reaffirms the perceived safety of the mothercentric narrative and again highlights the question, why does this narrative feel safe and what are the implications of this singular written story? Does the mothercentric narrative end upon completion of the fourth trimester?

The Mother’s Purpose is to be Present for her Children Above all Else

As I continued to analyze the posts it became clear that the mothercentric theme pervaded long past the fourth trimester however in many cases it was presented through an instructional tone informing mothers of the importance of presence with her children. The importance of this theme arose as I continued to analyze the data and found it difficult to discern the difference between words coaching about presence as a simple parenting approach (non-gendered) and words touting the importance of a mother’s presence above all else in a self-sacrificial manner. Codes such as responsibility, importance, purpose, self-sacrifice, and all-encompassing held a tone that indicated an important subset of mothercentrism. I will organize this section from least self-sacrificial to most.

“**Hugs**”. With a focus on the needs of children, many mothers took on an instructional tone, in which they touted the importance of hugs, empathy, connection, and ensuring that their

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

children constantly felt loved. These posts typically placed their importance upon the needs of children, and were generally gender-neutral rather than mothercentric in their recommendations.

One mother coached her Instagram following, discussing her approach to parenting:

It's about the tone we use when communicating. It's about playing beside our children on the floor, really connecting with them. It's about reading to them, hugging them, and then hugging them some more. It's about creating a safe space where we all feel free to sing and laugh, but also one where we can feel comfortable crying and saying I love you. A place where we can be completely ourselves, ask questions and not be judged, talk through problems or frustrations, forgive and find forgiveness. (P28)

Notably, this post focuses entirely upon the children and does not include any reference to a specific parent. Similarly, one mother advised, "Find time to check in with your kids individually each day. I do this for 2-3 min every night. If we have time for more 1:1 time during the day, I take it", while another explained, "I stop and listen as often as possible. I offer empathy freely. I'm flexible with rules when I can be. I make time for play. Lots of hugs." A fourth mother also spoke of this topic in a similar tone:

If nothing else, I hope you know how loved you will always be by me. I hope I can always be your safe place to come back to, a space of refuge, no matter where you are or what you are going through. You will know my arms are forever open to you. (P29)

These posts contain only explicit reference to children's needs for connection and empathy without any reference to a specific parent or suggestion that the mother is or should be the primary parent. However, given the heavily mothercentric construction of parenting that was outlined previously, it is crucial to highlight the potential implicit tone that readers may perceive, despite the intentions of the authors. The tone may cause some mothers to feel as though the

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

responsibility of the connection and empathy falls solely upon them. Moreover, the presence that is described as crucial should be their first and only priority in life.

“**Above all Else**”. Although the mothercentric tone that many mothers may apply to the previous posts may be largely implicit and born out of assumptions created by the societal constructions of motherhood, this tone is explicitly stated in many instances. Three phases with explicit instruction for mothers to place children’s needs above their own included: “Thank you for teaching me what it feels like to be unconditionally loved and how to put your role as a mother above all else” (P29), “[motherhood means] teaching them to be the best version of themselves and always putting their needs ahead of your own” (P10), and “It is a privilege and honour to be a mother. Motherhood for me is where all love begins and ends” (P9).

These phrases hold utmost importance within this analysis as they exemplify discourse’s capacity to both construct and be constructed by pervasive societal ideology (that is itself often founded by historical discourse). Considering these words from the perspective of a mother who follows these accounts we might consider two alternatives. In the case of a follower who holds similar beliefs, the words serve to function as a reinforcer of ideology and may bolster the perpetuation of these self-sacrificial views. Alternatively, for any mother who has chosen or needed to prioritize her own needs at any point these words may serve to instill shame and self-doubt. Although a benefit-of-the-doubt perspective could be applied here and assumption made that the intent of the writers was simply to educate others about the importance of unconditional positive regard and love for the development of children, the phrases may have a vastly different function given the current social construction of motherhood that was described with references to current literature in chapter two of this project. Given this social construction, it could be reasonably assumed that the intended function of these phrases is truly self-presentational,

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

however they additionally serve to co-construct a tightening narrative of that which is seen as acceptable for a mother to state. Ultimately, although the variation from the statements described in the previous section is subtle, these statements may serve to enforce the construction and perpetuation of long-standing ideals of motherhood that have roots in the oppression of women.

“Nothing Left in the Tank”. It could be argued, of course, that the influential capacity of the previously described posts is limited due to the discerning eye of a critical follower who may choose to actively reject these discourses to place children’s needs above mothers. This discernment, however, may become increasingly limited as the message becomes more subtle and less obvious. For this reason I conclude this section with posts that provide examples of self-sacrificial acts. Subtle yet powerful, these words hold within them the capacity to teach mothers how to actively reject their own needs, admire mothers who do so, and further perpetuate the cycles of self-neglect.

Your body goes through stitches, bleeding for weeks, heavy cramping, back pain, nipples sore, pelvis is aching. The 4th trimester means physically & emotionally you’re running on empty but that newborn would never know it because you give them every ounce of fuel you have left to make them feel loved. They’re the love of your life through every motion. This stage teaches you how to give abundantly without expecting appreciation or reward in return. (P42)

Although this jarring description of the postpartum phase may appear at first to contain a stark and unreasonable contrast, it highlights a reality that is confirmed by many mothers whose writing is included in the analysis of this study. As demonstrated by these words, the discursive construction of motherhood is such that despite the physical distress and trauma of childbirth and the postpartum period, women find themselves in a position in which the safest action is not rest

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

but is instead a kind of self-sacrificial love. It is noteworthy here to return to the previously discussed premise in which this description cannot be assumed to tell the entire story. The story that operates in the background of these words is hidden to readers, yet these are the words that feel safest for the writer to share. While the more complete story may contain a great deal more rest and self-care than is described, those aspects of the story are not shared, thus allowing this story of self-sacrifice to become the singular story. It is arguable, of course, that a newborn infant requires a level of care that lends itself to a form of parental self-sacrifice, however it is equally notable that the analyzed post includes reference only to maternal self-sacrifice.

As we proceed forward in this analysis, the question arises: to what end? At what point in the mothers journey may she reclaim herself? Does the self-sacrificial form of presence pervade beyond the newborn phase? What might happen if a mother continues to prioritize the needs of children above her own at all times?

As I continued to analyze the posts, examples continued to emerge of presence for children above all else, extending far into the mothering journey. One mother wrote “You feel blessed with the new version of yourself while also mourning the old you, as if she’s a stranger now. The days of showers, meals & plans on your own schedule feel like a distant memory” (P42), implying that a return to self-care has not occurred and is not anticipated to occur. Another explained that “I practice selective neglect. Every day I choose to neglect some things over more important things. Sometimes it’s laundry, sometimes it’s dinner... sometimes it’s my sleep” (P38), while a third questioned, “Do I roll my eyes or sigh loudly when my teenagers want to have a long conversation at night (again), when all I want to do is sleep?” (P24) before proceeding to justify the importance of sacrificing sleep for the needs of her children. It becomes apparent through these words that a narrative and singular story has emerged in which mothers,

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

despite their “supermum” abilities and role as the hero of the story, cannot and should not claim the heroes reward; they are instead expected to continue to carry out maternal duties, at all costs, forever. “Just shout out to all of you, who have nothing, literally nothing left in the tank” (P3), writes one mother, capturing with remarkable and concise eloquence the inevitable tone of the story that is felt across the landscape of the social construction of motherhood.

The Effects

Although analysis of the stories provided in the previous section has presented numerous hypothesized effects of the stories upon mothers, specific descriptions of these effects were provided by many writers. A complete study of the effects of social media discourses is outside of the scope of this project and will be encouraged as a topic for future research, however explicit reference to the effects of the social construction of motherhood as seen through social media will be included to the extent possible. Two themes emerged within the category of effects. The first theme which includes feelings of guilt, shame, and inadequacy was expected based on the review of the literature in chapter two, while the second effect, active rejection of the dominant narrative, was less expected.

Guilt, Shame, and Feelings of Inadequacy

Perhaps the most universal story of motherhood could be defined as #momguilt. This story operates in the background of nearly all the posts analyzed, told subtly by some and explicitly by others. It is reflected across the diversity of stories pertaining to motherhood including parenting, pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding. Codes such as good enough, guilt, shame, and inadequate were included within this theme.

“Enough”. “The voices get louder and louder and the nerves get stronger and stronger. Am I doing enough?” (P44) This question provides the basis for all of the words included within

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

the theme of guilt, shame, and inadequacy. As was described previously, it has become clear that the societal story of motherhood is one of self-sacrifice, in which enough is never enough.

Another mother described these feelings of never enough through a series of questions she finds herself asking:

Do you spend enough time with your family? Do people like your designs? Are you doing enough for the charities? The laundry is still waiting to be folded. When are you going to complete that blog post? Another night of takeout? Daddy doing bedtime again? Did you read enough stories today? Are you even a good mom? (P10)

Notably, this post highlights two topics previously discussed, namely laundry (“the laundry is still waiting to be folded”) and mothercentric parenting (“daddy doing bedtime again”). These questions provide context for the manner in which the singular stories and societal discourses of motherhood may ultimately lead to feelings of inadequacy.

Similarly, another mother wrote “That season was busy... which I’m sure is what most moms of an infant and two year old would say but I’ve often wondered, did I enjoy it like I should have? The guilt + dialogue we serve ourselves as mamas is heavy” (P17). Through this quote, the writer highlights the societal expectation for mothers to enjoy every moment, acknowledging how this standard is accompanied by guilt for simply not having enjoyed every moment. This writer goes on to state “it doesn’t serve us YET we dish it out on expensive China and it weighs. us. down”, drawing attention to the harm that these narratives can cause yet acknowledging that she, along with so many others, continue to be affected by these discourses. What is most notable to me in this post is that despite this acknowledgement, the words may still hold the potential to contribute to a construction of motherhood in which mothers feel obliged to enjoy every moment.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

“Be Better”. In some cases, writers who acknowledged feelings of inadequacy spoke of allowing these feelings to inform how they could grow as a mother:

When I feel like I’m failing, I like to get out and learn. How can I be better? What are other people doing that I can try? Failure is the best teacher and makes us stronger/better parents. If you feel like you’re alone in your inadequacy as a parent, know that you’re not. (P38)

This quote is reminiscent of the approach taken within the maternal support group Mothers of Pre-Schoolers (MOPS) , described in chapter two. Within the case study of MOPS it was found that mothers who requested support grappling with feelings of inadequacy were instead provided with instruction and resources to improve their parenting. Newman and Henderson (2014) found that this approach served primarily to bolster the feelings of inadequacy, rather than to improve maternal well-being. While well intentioned, these discourses may serve the function of funneling mothers into a narrow description of what it means to be an “adequate” mother. Through this narrowing of experience, the unique nuances of each mother and each story is lost, filtered out and overshadowed by an umbrella of being “better”.

“Real Motherhood Experience”. Not only did mothers describe feelings of inadequacy with regards to their approaches and abilities within motherhood, but they also described a narrowed perspective of what is socially constructed to be the “real motherhood experience” and “good enough” as it pertains to their body’s ability to conceive, give birth, and breastfeed. In an emotional post depicting her feelings following a twin miscarriage, one mother explained that:

I think I’ve attached pride to my mothering. And now I see myself sometimes harboring bitterness because my pride is hurt that I wasn’t a good enough mother to keep the new twins alive. When people comment on our children, I have subconsciously started hearing

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

‘You are only a good enough mother to handle these 6 children, that’s why you lost the twins.’ (P16)

Although her post describes how she is working towards releasing the feeling of shame for having miscarried, this post brings to mind the question, how did this narrative of shame come to be? How did it come to pass that so many women will immediately understand and relate to this feeling of shame despite the commonality of having experienced a miscarriage?

Similarly, implicit messaging pertaining to a hierarchy of birth experiences was described by a mother who discussed her feelings surrounding having given birth by cesarean section:

This will be my FIFTH C-Section. 🤯 However your baby gets here, just know YOUR EXPERIENCE is valid and worthy. YOU are no less a mother if you needed emergency medical intervention, had a planned c-section, or an epidural. You aren’t a ‘better’ mother if you had a home birth or an unmedicated vaginal birth. And if you grew your brood through adoption or surrogacy or family blending? Those are YOUR babies and YOU SIT PROUDLY at the table of motherhood.👏 It’s not a competition. There aren’t awards handed out for homebirths or all-natural births. If you’ve been blessed with that, then that is incredible. Truly!! But if you haven’t, please know and believe you have STILL BEEN BLESSED. You aren’t less-than, or second-class for needing to rely on a team of doctors for surgery. ALL that matters is that you have a child brought into the world. Entrusted to you to love and nurture.👏 My plan was never to have five c-sections. But you can be sure I’m darn thankful for them. Even if I did grieve with my first at missing out on what the ‘real motherhood experience’ was supposed to be. (P46)

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

The clear intent of this writer's words is to dismantle the hierarchy of birth experiences, however her words are notable primarily because they highlight once again that there exists a need to dismantle these narratives.

Returning once again to a focus on the function, construction, and variation described by Potter and Wetherell (1987) we must first acknowledge that these words differ from those of many of the other posts analyzed as they provide a preliminary awareness of both the social construction of the hierarchy of birth experiences as well as the effects of this construction on other mothers. Given the indication that the feeling of shame associated with this construction affect the writer and her followers, it could be assumed that her words serve to function not only to provide comfort to others, but also to herself. Again, we see a mother craving a world in which diversity of mothering experiences are accepted, valued, and prized.

Active Rejection of Dominant Discourses

Although many of the posts analyzed throughout this study have indicated an awareness of the issue at hand and a desire for change, they have primarily focused upon the feelings of inadequacy that stem from the dominant societal discourses. In other cases, women appeared to have taken this awareness a step further and chosen to actively reject the dominant discourses through living out their narratives and identities as mothers. This category was initially difficult to uncover as there was a high degree of crossover of codes and the stories appeared to lay outside of the norm. Codes such as wonderful and difficult, or good mom and bad mom, appeared contradictory, however taken within the context of the story that was told through the post, many of these posts also received a code of confidence and breaking free. The notion of confirmation through exception indicates that exceptions to an explanatory framework can often be the most informative (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This appeared to be the case in this instance.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

The mothers within this category often appeared to have identified the “singular stories” to which they had previously felt the need to align, and were choosing actively to write their own stories, allowing the nuances of their own experiences to shine through.

“**You do you, Boo!**”. “To my fellow Mamas [...] We are us. We are all unique. We all have different levels of resource and support. And we are all just doing our best with what we have.” (P35) This writer specifically gives rise to an awareness of the diverse experiences and resources of each mother. Although her words may serve to function as a pseudo permission slip to other mothers to reject the societal pressures and constructions, they are likely borne out of a desire to liberate herself from these narratives. In this sense, the phrase “The personal is political”, first attributed to Carol Hanisch (1969) applies perfectly as the function of self-liberation serves equally to assist in dismantling deep-rooted societal constructions that constrain women.

Another mother spoke of the importance of choosing what feels right for each family, however her words are similarly borne from a position of having been forced to grapple with and actively reject societal discourse:

‘Breeder.’ ‘Irresponsible.’ ‘Disgusting.’ All things I’ve been called for having 8 kids. (And those are the tame ones 😊.) It’s no lie that 8 kids is no cake walk...it certainly doesn’t make things easier when I have to brace myself for the comments I get when someone learns how many kids we have, both online AND in person. But that’s ok, this is the life I chose and I have absolutely zero regrets! [...] Live your life for YOU and YOUR family...not for anyone else’s opinion of it. [...] Just your gentle reminder that the world is full of noise. Turn it down, tune it out, and you do you, boo! Because you’re pretty dang awesome just the way you are. (P23)

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Finally, one mother's post responds specifically to the previously discussed pressures to place the needs of children above the needs of mothers by stating:

I know me wanting and wishing for a moment has nothing to do with my children and everything to do with me. I MATTER. I AM IMPORTANT. MY MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS. MY NEED TO BE ME AS AN INDIVIDUAL AND NOT A MOM IS VALID. I love my kids more than they'll ever understand, but I love me too. (P8)

These active rejections of the fabric of the singular stories serve to deconstruct, thread by thread, the fabric of oppressive constructions of ideal motherhood. They create space for diversity of experiences and allow for new story threads to be woven in. Through this active acknowledgement and rejection of oppressive singular stories, not only can current mothers feel liberated in their choices to live according to their values and experiences but sharing the diversity of experience allows for a more complete story to be viewed.

“**#normalizebreastfeeding**”. It is, however, crucial to highlight a variation of this active rejection in which a writer may reject the guilt caused by societal pressures by unintentionally applying her own story to other mothers, in essence constructing or contributing to an opposing pressure. For example, in a discussion regarding societal standards that exist pertaining to breastfeeding, one mother stated:

on my mission to #normalizebreastfeeding I've received a lot of hate and judgement, on everything from how long I should be breastfeeding my children to whether it should even be on my social media. The truth is that there's no better feeling in the world than bonding with my two kids, even as people stare and judge... Raw, unfiltered, and imperfect — this is what motherhood looks like, regardless of society's perceptions on how a woman should care for her child. (P39)

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Although these words may serve to function as a rejection of anti-breastfeeding sentiments, they may unintentionally swing too far in the opposite direction, imposing a standard akin to “breast is best” upon other mothers. If we step back to observe the landscape of pressures that this writer exists in, we may see that these words likely serve a primary function of validating and reassuring her own story. However, given their placement within a publicly available platform the words “this is what motherhood looks like” hold the capacity to place guilt or shame upon a mother who does not breastfeed.

The Sources

At this point in the analysis I will shift focus slightly toward developing a deeper understanding of how these stories came to be. Recall first the quote provided at the outset of this chapter: “[T]here are portions of the real world, objective facts in the world, that are only facts by human agreement. In a sense there are things that exist only because we believe them to exist.” (Searle, 1995, p. 1). Previous sections of this chapter have shone light on the “facts” of motherhood as written by mothers themselves and highlighted the way in which these “facts” can become more deeply entrenched within a collective societal understanding of the maternal role. In essence, until this point, this analysis has focused primarily upon the capacity for the discourses found within social media to construct the social reality of motherhood. Of equal importance, however, is an awareness of how these stories came to be. As a belief in the importance of the whole story is foundational to this project, it would be remiss to neglect to tell the story of the source of the “objective facts” described previously.

Although chapter two of this project provided an overview of the origins of maternal stories as portrayed within the academic literature, this section will highlight the sources that are described by the mothers themselves within their Instagram posts. While not all posts included

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

specific reference to the source through which they drew their ideology, many references could be found peppered throughout the words to give rise to a preliminary understanding of the sources through which mothers came to understand the stories of motherhood. Three primary sources emerged: religion, society, and psychology.

Religion

It is perhaps unsurprising to note that religious discourse was found woven throughout numerous posts, laying the foundation and framework for many mothers' perspectives. However, it was surprising to note instances in which a religious perspective appeared to provide the self-sacrificial attitudes described previously. One such example was written by a mother navigating a particularly difficult season with a newborn child:

yes [*sic*], it's just a phase of life, but sometimes these phases test us to our core. pure exhaustion can sometimes make us think we're alone, we're hopeless, and we're useless. going through these incredibly tough times since his birth, ive [*sic*] questioned many times, why? why me and why is this situation so hard? and to be honest I've had glimpses as to why things have happened, but in most cases I just carry on with faith. because the truth is that this life isn't supposed to be easy. we're supposed to have trials that TEST us to TEST our faith. to show what we're going to do with things get tough. so sometimes there won't be answers to prayers or questions because it's just part of the journey. and that's often times hard to wrap our heads around. the burdens and pain I've carried the past 5 months with everything that's happened in my life is often too heavy to bear, which is helping me relearn the importance of taking that pain to my Heavenly Father.

(P6)

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

While it appears that this reliance on religion provides a degree of comfort to the writer, this quote is important to highlight as it draws attention to the potential for certain embedded historical and religious discourses to pave the way toward martyrdom through misinterpretation of the texts.

Note, the comfort that this writer appears to draw from her own words must not be ignored; however this analysis will aim to understand the capacity of these words to construct a reality upon being read by her followers. With a particular focus on the capacity for social media to skew intentions, we must be aware of the possible outcomes of this religious dialogue as it is read by followers within social media, contributing to collective ways of knowing. Similarly, other mothers describe children as a gift from the lord and included religious discourse within their posts. “We are so lucky! We are so BLESSED by these tiny souls filled with so much joy” (P20); “I see you mama - in your grief and your joy. In your expectation and your disappointment. You have a Father who loves you in the midst of it all” (P12); “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward” (P46); “ the moment they snuggle you, staring up at you with big eyes, the world stops & God says, I chose YOU for this human” (P42). While these references to religion do not appear to prescribe or order any shifts in perspective for their followers, it is worth noting that religious discourse makes its way into the informal realm of social media.

A deeper and more complete discourse analysis of religious texts is outside of the scope of this thesis project and exploration of religious texts as they relate to motherhood would be a topic for future study. While it is certainly not my intention to critique any religion, it is important to highlight the similarity of some of the phrases to those previously explored. Many of the phrases and quotes provided here as examples of reference to religious discourse hold

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

within them a tone akin to a self-sacrificial attitude. As was previously discussed, many mothers described the effects of self-sacrificial narratives to be highly damaging and chose to actively reject these narratives. By contrast, these explicit references to religious attitudes appear to provide the writers with a sense of comfort and joy. As counsellors aim to serve a population of mothers each existing at her unique intersection of identities, attitudes, and beliefs, it will do them well to hold an awareness of the way in which religious discourse may serve as a comfort to some mothers, while other mothers may present with a desire to reject certain religious attitudes.

Societal

Although the term societal is incredibly broad, it is used in this context to describe discourse with specific reference to the attitudes and opinions of others within modern society. Many mothers described instances in which their decisions were impacted by opinions of others, either explicitly in the context of spoken opinion or implicitly in the context of those opinions that are assumed to be held. Despite subtle differences between offline societal discourses and social media discourses, I have chosen to combine the two categories for brevity. Codes found within this category included opinion, pressure, guilt, ideal motherhood, appearance, and social media.

As many influencers build their careers upon how they present themselves on social media, it is unsurprising (and is truly the crux of this project) that a desire to portray oneself in a favourable light informs many of the decisions pertaining to image and word choice. However, explicit reference to this effect was made by a few mothers. “Here I am breaking my aesthetic and my obsession with keeping my feed a certain way with a photo of mommy holding both of her babes” (P18). Implicit in this statement is the fact that other photos and captions written by

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

this mother do conform to a certain narrative and appearance. Through this logic we may assume that social media standards inform the majority of the words viewed through the lens of social media, constructing and molding them into the same or similar stories and familiar pathways. Other mothers affirm this assumption by reminding their followers that “This is real life. Not the ‘perfect life’ displayed in little squares” (P37) and “If you catch yourself scrolling through Instagram & automatically think: How does she do it all? Well, she doesn’t always.... you can’t. Not without a village. We just don’t share the “imperfect” things as much as the perfect” (P35).

Notably, the words of these writers express an understanding of the capacity of social media to construct a false reality. They acknowledge that Instagram portrays only the “perfect” yet they simultaneously recognize that they are equally involved in this system. This recognition and apparent disdain for Instagram, contrasted with the continued use of the platform, highlights the fact that use of Instagram to disseminate discourse serves a function for these mothers. As we consider the possible functions (self-presentation, paid advertising, connection with other mothers) we may come to more deeply understand the words and tones of the writers.

Other mothers discussed the way that opinions of others have subtly shaped their thinking or created inner turmoil. One mother described the opinions of others with regards to her family size: “‘Breeder.’ ‘Irresponsible.’ ‘Disgusting.’ All things I’ve been called for having 8 kids. (And those are the tame ones 😊.)” (P23). Although this writer goes on to state that she has chosen to ignore the voices and opinions, an assumption could be drawn that these words have an impact in the psyche of the writer, even subtly. It is these subtle shifts and impacts that hold the capacity for discourse to construct a social reality. Without proper care, it is easy to see how these words could have deeply affected the mother or even affected her decisions pertaining to her own family.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Similarly, another mother discussed societal expectations surrounding breastfeeding. “You guys know that on my mission to #normalizebreastfeeding I’ve received a lot of hate and judgement, on everything from how long I should be breastfeeding my children to whether it should even be on my social media.” (P39) This quote was previously coded within the category of rejection of dominant discourses and was discussed with regards to the mother’s decision to actively reject societal expectations. However, consistent with Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) explanation of the potential for transcripts to appear in a number of different categories, it is important to discuss again. In a similar manner to the previously discussed quote regarding family size, one could make an assumption that the judgement received by this writer has affected her in one way or another. In this case, as was previously highlighted, the dissonance and discomfort created by the opinions of others may have caused this writer to push back against the anti-breastfeeding attitudes to a greater degree, joining forces with a pro-breastfeeding movement. Notably, the reaction of her readers could follow a similar trajectory in which some readers may find themselves pushing back against her words and images, becoming more aligned with an anti-breastfeeding movement. Again, this effect is subtle, however due to the writer's influential capacity there is the power to shift or “influence” collective thinking. Notably, this example of influential power highlights the cyclical nature of discourse to construct social realities as the discourse in question is a response to societal anti-breastfeeding discourse, which has roots in historical discourse.

Psychology

Continued analysis and awareness of the embedded roots of discourse presented on Instagram highlights a complex web of sources that constructs discourse. In particular, the maternal identity has been constructed over millennia and a complete understanding of the

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

ancient roots of this identity would be beyond the scope of this project. However, a focus on more recent roots can provide insight into current, modern trends in maternal discourse.

In particular, the “psy” disciplines, defined by Rose (1996) as the fields of psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, and psychoanalysis, have emerged within more recent history. Rose described the way in which the psy disciplines hold a disproportionately large influence and have played a fundamental part in the creation of identity. Through this lens, it may be possible to see most discourses as having roots in psychological theories and constructs with varying degrees of separation from the original sources. Due to the nature of this study it is not possible to truly ascertain the sources of all discourses unless specifically noted, however for the purposes of this study, posts which clearly alluded to and were coded as mental health, attachment, or academic research were categorized within the psychology source.

A subset of Instagram users has emerged who use their influence on the platform to provide education, rather than the more traditional blog style. Sampling criteria for this study eliminated most of these styles of accounts, however two more educational posts were noted in the analysis of the data. First, one mother spoke specifically about the “research” regarding family meal time, using her platform to educate her followers about this practice.

Can I share with you my favorite part about family meal research?

What makes it so impactful...

(decrease likelihood of drug use, teen pregnancy, depression suicide)

(increase likelihood of academic success, higher self-esteem, better manners)

...is not what kind of food is on the table or that there IS even a table.

WHY is it so powerful? Because the parents are putting family time as a top priority

(P30).

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Notably, the writer does not specifically cite the research to which she refers. An assumption could be drawn that the research to which she is referring pertains to attachment theory. With trends in counselling and psy discourse trending toward a heavily attachment focused lens, it is worth noting that this discourse is present even within informal channels, with a high potential for misunderstanding given a lack of peer review.

A second mother took on a similarly instructional tone but instead discussed a more generalized approach to family time:

Find time to check in with your kids individually each day. I do this for 2-3 min every night. If we have time for more 1:1 time during the day, I take it. It ebbs and flows. There will be seasons when more than a few minutes is all you get in the chaos. It is ok. Just do your best. (P38)

This quote conveys a similar message to the quote regarding family meal time however there exists a slight variation in which the author inserts herself into the advice. This variation gives rise to a slightly nuanced interpretation in which not only is the author providing instructions to her readers, she is equally representing herself in a favourable light. This is noteworthy simply due to the previously discussed assumption of an incomplete story. Psy discourse appears to have provided an instruction manual of sorts depicting the elements of parenting that should be portrayed publicly.

Another mother spoke of attachment and connection in a similar manner, however the tone was less instructional and more self-representational. This distinction is subtle and often perceived through a contextual awareness of the influencer's page which may appear more as a blog. This particular mother's profile documents her own journey with a large family and appears to be predominantly blog based rather than educationally based.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Approximately every other week, we take one of the kids out on a “date,” so that they get some quality time with mom & dad.

With five kids at home, this is one of the ways that we have chosen to be intentional in the way that we parent. Contrary to popular belief, connection & attachment don’t come naturally. They aren’t a byproduct of daily life. (P24)

Reference to words “connection” and “attachment” here are noteworthy. It is unclear and impossible to determine whether the writer’s understanding of these terms is based in academic literature, however a crucial consideration involves the lens of her readers. Recent years have seen a growing trend in usage of the term “attachment parenting” which is often misconstrued and not representational of the intent of attachment theory (Sieben & Yildirim, 2020). Due to the widespread popularity and misuse of the term “attachment parenting” it is highly likely that numerous readers may hold a limited understanding of the concepts. Additionally, suppose we return our awareness to the mothercentric lens present in many Instagram posts. In that case, we may come to understand the way that these psy based words could be applied in a way that places the bulk of the focus on mothers. Notably, these words are not inherently mothercentric, however the broader cultural tone previously analyzed may apply an unintentional filter to these words.

Summary of Analysis

Stories are at the heart of this analysis. An inclination toward storytelling is highly apparent in the posts analyzed as mothers attempted to represent themselves in their virtual space and seek connection with other mothers, their followers. Many mothers represented the favourable aspects of motherhood, portraying an image of wonder and enjoyment within their roles while other mothers chose to display the less pleasant aspects of motherhood. Both

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

narratives are assumed to be partial representations of the truth as we acknowledge the hidden stories that play out behind the scenes. Stories of a mothercentric attitude were highly prevalent. These stories were presented through both frustration with mothercentric societal attitudes and through presentation of mothercentric ideals. Some writers took a slightly more exaggerated tone and indicated the belief that the maternal role is to be present for children above all else. Many mothers expressed feelings of guilt, shame, and inadequacy in response to these ubiquitous societal stories, while some mothers indicated a desire to actively reject these dominant narratives, instead choosing to embrace their own story. Critical examination of the discourses' sources revealed potential roots within religious texts and attitudes, pervasive societal beliefs, and even the psy disciplines. This has particular relevance to counsellors who face the task of dismantling and breaking through harmful discourses with their clients and turning inward to understand how the discourses have become internalized in them to avoid unintentional therapeutic harm through the perpetuation of deeply entrenched narratives.

Chapter 5: Discussion

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you. (Maya Angelou, 1969)

What are the stories of motherhood? As has been observed through the analysis of fifty mothers' stories, this is not a simple question to answer, nor is it a question that should be answered. Rather, the stories of motherhood are (and should be) unique to each mother. It therefore makes most sense to shift the question slightly: how has it come to be that a relatively narrow representation of stories of motherhood can be found represented and repeated like echoes within social media? Given this narrowing of representation, are counsellors currently equipped to assist mothers in broadening their stories? Might it be necessary for counsellors to critically assess the role that they may play within the narrowing of maternal stories? To frame this in more academic terms and relate back to this research project's initial intent, the question becomes: what discursive constructions of motherhood are presented through Instagram and given these constructions, to what extent do counselling best practices currently meet the needs of mothers? Furthermore, what might counsellors do to more adequately serve mothers and support the development of more complete stories of motherhood as they apply to each mother?

The overview of literature presented in chapter two provided a basic framework of the stories of motherhood that have been found within previous studies. Equation of womanhood to a maternal identity (Rich et al., 2013) and a pervasive societal construction of motherhood as an image of nurturing, gentleness, and adoration of her role (Henderson et al., 2016) have been described within academic literature. This analysis aimed to ascertain whether these stories of motherhood continue to hold true within current social media discourses and establish a more complete understanding of the stories that are found threaded throughout the sphere of social media influencers. Although the academic research and literature discussed within the literature

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

review section of this paper holds significant personal value and importance, the analysis completed for this study allowed a unique lens through which to understand the narratives of motherhood in a natural environment. Potter and Wetherell (1987) explained that “variation in self-presentation is particularly relevant, of course, in experiments where subjects can change their actions to please experimenters or in line with the researcher’s subtle cues, meeting the demand set up in the experimental situation” (p. 37). I aimed to design a research protocol that allowed for an analysis of words unimpeded by the research structure. This design allowed for a more representative analysis of maternal narratives that may be seen in the counselling room and influence maternal mental health.

To distill this analysis down into a manageable summary, it could be said that the findings lend themselves to two basic assumptions. First, there is no singularly defined motherhood story as each mother represents an entirely unique set of experiences, values, cultural identities, social locations, and preferences. Second, despite this incredible diversity of experience, mothers have found themselves in a position where they feel pressure to align with a minuscule subset of options deemed acceptable by societal standards for their presentation as mothers.

Validation of Findings

Step eight of Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) description of discourse analysis requires the validation of findings. The four primary methods of validation include coherence, participants orientation, new problems, and fruitfulness. I will address each of these in turn.

Coherence

Potter and Wetherell (1987) explain that a set of analytic claims should give coherence to a body of discourse, allowing us to see how the discourse fits together and produces the effects

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

and functions. Results from this study align with previous discursive research on mothering which has found media discourse to be highly gendered and prescriptive of mothering roles (Lazar & Ke, 2020) and is validated by the literature pertaining to the social construction of motherhood provided in chapter two of this report. These results additionally give coherence to the body of research surrounding motherhood discourse in social media (Coffey-Glover, 2020; Matley, 2020; Ringrow, 2020

Online discourses often equate a “good mother” with a mother who feels that motherhood is wholly fulfilling and typically creates tension for mothers who feel a sense of regret or grief in motherhood (Matley, 2020). This study noted that this tension can often result in mothers attempting to justify any challenging emotions or choices that fall outside of what they perceive to be the standards of ideal motherhood. A further example of this includes discursive justifications of infant feeding choices as many mothers experience tension with regards to breastfeeding, bottle feeding, and pumping (Coffey-Glover, 2020). Additional coherence within the body of discourse can be found within Ringrow’s (2020) finding that religious elements are often found within motherhood discourse on Instagram, providing further support for my finding of religion as a source of maternal discourse.

Additionally, Potter and Wetherell (1987) explain the notion of confirmation through exception in which cases that lie outside of the explanatory framework may be more informative than those that lie within. Confirmation through exception was previously described as it pertained to the category of “active rejection of dominant discourses”. The notion of confirmation through exception also gave rise to an initial analytic challenge pertaining to the opposing story thread of motherhood as a wonderful experience and motherhood as a difficult experience.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

The initial coding framework had included the codes wonderful and terrible. Throughout the coding process, it became clear that posts with the code terrible most often also included the code wonderful. This combination gave rise to initial grouping of these terms, however I became wary of this framework upon noting exceptions to the rule wherein some mothers had simply stated the hardships without justification of bookending of these challenges with the wonders of motherhood. Ultimately, I found that I was able to account for these exceptions through the awareness that these exceptions were tied to the code of active rejection of dominant discourses. Thus, I became able to account for apparent exceptions to the perspective that Instagram bloggers may have intent to portray themselves within a positive light according to dominant mothering ideals.

Participants' Orientation

The perspective of participants or what participants make of the meanings of their interactions is described by Potter and Wetherell (1987) as a further method of validation. As has been previously discussed, this notion may be considered a limitation of this study, however my positioning within the field of motherhood can be utilized as an initial validation method. Although further research involving interviewing techniques will be of value to confirm the results of this study, I found that I was able to initially validate the results of this project through my own lens and conversation with peers and supervisors who also held roles as mothers.

New Problems

Potter and Wetherell (1987) explain that, although one of the primary goals of discourse analysis is to clarify discourse used to make things happen, this clarification should create new problems. Throughout this analysis I consistently found evidence of discourse used to uphold systems and standards that have historically marginalized mothers contrasted by mothers

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

attempting to create their own narratives and faltering to do so due to their involvement within the socially constructed systems. These mothers consistently sought to space to tell their stories, yet doing so may inadvertently perpetuate harmful stereotypes. This dilemma gives rise to a new question. How might counsellors reconcile the need for mothers to tell their stories with the awareness that these stories might stem from deeply entrenched societal beliefs? How might influencers reconcile the social responsibility of their positioning as influencers with their need to share their stories as well?

Fruitfulness

The final method for validation, as outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987), is the capacity for the analysis to generate novel explanations. Within this analysis threads of understanding were able to be pulled forth from the lens of both a counselling professional and a mother. Previous explanations of the capacity of social media have focused primarily on either the negative affects for mental health (Wang, 2013) or the importance of social media for mental health (Yuen & Johnson, 2017). Through the analytic scheme outlined in this report, a new explanation and awareness of the nuances and complexities of social media writing was highlighted in a manner that gives rise to critical thought for counsellors rather than firm prescriptive assertions.

A Metaphor

First, I invite readers to visualize a vast field. Each individual who enters into motherhood is placed at one end of the field. They are told to navigate across the field to the other side in whichever way they choose. As they begin to make the journey, it becomes quickly apparent that a few trails are already formed. While they are technically allowed to choose any route they wish, many mothers begin walking along a trail. Others may initially choose to ignore

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

these trails, instead taking a new path through the grass. However, as they continue along, those taking their own path notice occasional sideways glances and disapproving stares from others. Perhaps they ignore these, or they may choose to move into one of the predetermined trails, at least when they are in view of others. Although they may choose to step out of line briefly, it is likely that they wait to do so until nobody is watching. From the perspective of most mothers, it may come to appear that everyone is walking along a predetermined path experiencing a similar journey.

It may begin to feel odd to step out of the paths, as though they are breaking the rules in some way, despite initial instructions that did not mandate walking in the same path as the others. Over time, the paths become more deeply entrenched; it may feel easier to stay within prescribed lines than climb out. After some time, it could become easy to forget that they were allowed out of the paths in the first place, so much so that mothers who do choose to take their own path become the target of ridicule or criticism. To maintain dignity and cohesion with other mothers, many mothers may come to see the well-worn path as the easiest route forward, the path of least resistance, even when the path becomes so deeply worn out that it forms walls around them, obstructing the view of the field through which they are walking. As they walk the path, following in the trail of others, they may find themselves weighed down as they pick up and carry the discourses of those who preceded them, yet holding within themselves a sense of obligation to carry this weight.

Now, I must digress slightly to note that this field does not truly begin with the first day of motherhood. Rather, throughout centuries girls and women have walked the field and come to understand the routes which may present with ridicule. For this reason, it is easy to understand how a mother may choose to walk along the path from the very beginning. She has watched her

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

ancestors walk the path for years before her. She has been warned of the risk she would be taking not to walk the same paths. She has likely experienced what it can feel like to attempt to choose one's own path as a woman in a society that has written predetermined paths for women for centuries.

A final note of crucial importance is necessary before proceeding. I must ask readers to place themselves within the field with the mothers I have described, to consider their positioning amongst a landscape of societal discourses. For we all experience this landscape, there is truly very little separation between the influencers described in this study, their followers, and those who analyze the discourses from the outside. We all exist within a deeply intertwined landscape, influencing and being influenced by discourses simultaneously until they can be nearly impossible to discern. Both counsellors and clients have been raised to witness the process of navigating the maternal field. Counsellors and clients alike exist within a landscape of societal discourses, so much so that it may be difficult, at first, to discern deeply entrenched cultural ideologies from the vastness of alternate possibilities.

When the Personal Becomes Professional

Doyle and Gosnell (2019) expressed concern regarding how these entrenched ways of thinking may enter and affect their roles as counselling professionals:

On an intellectual level, I can easily say that I do know better; however, on an emotional level, I'm not quite so confident. The messages I've picked up along the way about how to be a mother have been pretty deeply entrenched and insidious, even for someone who studies discourses and the influences and power they can hold over people and their relationships. If I'm someone who should, arguably, know better, but didn't, I can't help but wonder what might be the impact of societal messages on those who aren't used to

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

considering the influences of discourse and the social organization of relationships? (p. 2)

In application to the present study, this sentiment can indicate concern for not only Instagram users who may be unaware of the influences of discourse, but equally for counselling professionals who have not come to approach their practice with this awareness in mind. What societal messages regarding motherhood may be picked up and disseminated through the helping professions, and can this contribute to oppression against mothers?

To better understand this, a concise visual summary of the results of this discourse analysis may provide context.

<u>Stories</u>	<u>Effects</u>	<u>Sources</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Motherhood is a wonderful experience• Motherhood is a difficult experience• Parenting is fundamentally mothercentric• The mothers purpose is to be present for her children above all else	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guilt, shame, and feelings of inadequacy• Active rejection of dominant discourses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Religion• Society• Psychology

That Which is Acceptable to Share

The most basic observation that can be drawn pertains to the first two opposing stories: motherhood is a wonderful experience, and motherhood is a difficult experience. Notably, there exists a considerable degree of overlap of these sentiments. Many mothers appeared to justify stories of hardship with sentiments of wonder. In a sense, it appeared as though the safest route involved expressing primarily feelings of joy regarding motherhood. As soon as mothers

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

attempted to step away from the well-travelled path to discuss some of the hardships of motherhood they appeared to censor themselves by returning to sentiments of joy that could buffer the impact of the more challenging sentiments. Coupled with the work of Henderson et al. (2016) which found a correlation between societal pressures for perfection in motherhood and anxiety levels, the act of pairing stories of challenge with expressions of positivity may be a self-preservation tactic. These writers' careful choice of words may function to bolster their self-presentation (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) highlighting elements of the story that are perceived as acceptable to share publicly.

As we consider the implications of this tendency within the counselling room, awareness must be drawn to the potential for clients to censor themselves, hiding aspects of their stories from their counsellor. Perhaps more concerning, however, is the potential for counsellors to subtly and subconsciously reward positive sentiments due to their own conditioning, in essence silencing client stories that do not align within a societally prescribed mandate of motherhood. Hook (2001) explained that counsellors often listen more intently to certain elements of their clients stories than others, subtly directing the conversation and orienting toward the counsellors perspectives. Although selective listening of this kind is possible, it is especially important to consider within the therapeutic context due to a perceived power imbalance between therapist and client (Amundson & Stewart, 1993; Hook, 2001). Due to implicit expert status, counselling therapists hold the capacity to greatly influence client attitudes through the subtle conveying of deeply entrenched and unexamined discourses.

Mothercentric Attitudes and Oppression in Academia and Therapy?

It seems preposterous even to propose that therapists and academics dedicated to the helping professions could contribute to harmful mothercentric narratives. A contextual note is

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

required prior to proceeding here. In my experience, the dedication and commitment to social justice education and policy within the Masters of Counselling program at Athabasca University is remarkable. Throughout my time within the program my worldview has expanded exponentially and has, in fact, provided the basis for this project. Although I cannot speak from experience, it is my understanding and belief that most universities dedicated to educating counselling professionals provide a similarly exceptional quality of learning pertaining to social justice for their students. Students are typically encouraged to reflect upon their biases and develop a high degree of cultural competency throughout the duration of their program. Therefore, I have no doubt that masters level therapists are highly capable and socially just upon entrance into practice. However, I propose that certain ways of thinking and societal discourses are so deeply entrenched that they may be nearly invisible, requiring specific attention and examination to avoid unintentional therapeutic harm.

Consider two stories highlighted in the analysis section of this report: a mother's purpose is to be present for her children above all else, and parenting is fundamentally mothercentric. The first, a dedication to presence for children, included within it several highly valuable pieces of advice pertaining to children's needs for connection. Many mothers spoke of the importance of presence and stability from parents for children as they grow and develop trust in the world. In many of these cases the primary focus was placed on the children with no specific implication of maternal requirements. However, others oriented slightly differently specifying a maternal role, discussing a mother's requirement to place the needs of her children above all else. In combination with numerous posts presenting mothercentric discourse it becomes clear to understand how a mother who reads these words may come to view all parenting advice as though it is mothering advice.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Consider now the realm of family therapy. Suggestions made to improve family functioning are invaluable and I in no way suggest that family-based support should be removed. I do suggest, however, that the greater context must be considered in the dissemination of parenting advice. We must consider the potential for the bulk of the burden to be assumed by mothers due to societal discourses which orient predominantly toward mothers. Whether the therapist specifically orients toward mothercentric attitudes, any parenting advice may be perceived as mothering advice without careful and intentional discussion. This perspective is echoed within academic literature which has found that the dissemination of research pertaining to healthy child development is often disproportionately centered on maternal factors (Clark & Dumas, 2020; Woolhouse et al., 2019). Counsellor intentionality toward correcting this effect may include a multitude of approaches including, but not limited to, intentional inclusion of all parents within counselling sessions, active deconstruction and examination of societal narratives in counselling sessions with mothers, revised terminology within psychoeducational programs, and reflexive thought to understand our internalized attitudes. These approaches could ensure that mothercentric pressures are not unintentionally perpetuated.

The Influence of Influential Counsellors

As has been previously discussed, numerous scholars assert that the psy disciplines, defined as psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, and social workers (Rimke, 2016; Rose, 1998) hold disproportionately large influential capacity and power to construct a social reality (Hook, 2001; Rimke, 2016; Rose, 1998; Searle, 1995). I will include counsellors and therapists within the psy discipline as these labels are often used interchangeably with psychotherapist in many jurisdictions. In discussing the impact on women of historical practices within the psy disciplines, Rose (1998) stated that “psychology itself

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

becomes not only a major contributor to contemporary understandings of the person, through the vocabularies and narratives it supplies, but also a discipline whose very existence is to be regarded with suspicion.” (p. 9). He goes on to question, whose interests might these narratives serve? While I would not contend that current practices aim to consciously or intentionally construct a system of oppression, the results of this project give rise to questions regarding their potential to unintentionally do therapeutic harm.

In my analysis, I noted numerous posts that took on a psychoeducational tone pertaining primarily to the importance of parental presence and childhood attachment. It is important to note that the authors of these posts did not claim to be experts in psychology or counselling and were instead repeating their understanding of psychological concepts as they understood them. In and of themselves, these posts did not specifically target the maternal role. However, awareness must be drawn to the entirety of the results of this project which found numerous posts specifically targeting the maternal role. Given this landscape of gendered discourse, psychological concepts of attachment and parental presence may build upon previously constructed societal prescriptions of maternal identity and responsibility.

Amundson and Stewart (1993) explained that it is human nature to seek a sense of certainty. This is especially true for clients who may be in distress upon seeking counselling services, hopeful or even certain that the “expert” to whom they are speaking holds the keys to wellness. In this way, the counsellor’s role and status hold a high capacity for influence and power. Clients may turn to counselling believing that the counsellor holds the keys to the human mind and therefore may willingly follow any suggestions for change, regardless of the fit within their own life and stories.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

In the introduction to this project I described my own story and feelings of despair upon believing that I was “failing at counselling” upon finding that I did not feel better despite trying to integrate my counsellor’s suggestions. Within this story I have come to understand that there was an underlying assumption that my counsellor held the keys to my wellness, however there lacked careful assessment and awareness of my own deeply entrenched, subconscious worldviews about my maternal identity. In the attempts to integrate the “expert” discourse about best practices for maternal mental health, my counsellor and I failed to account for my own story.

Counsellors may have an equal desire and need for certainty (Amundson & Stewart, 1993). It is natural for a counsellor to feel compelled to meet the client’s need for certainty by bolstering themselves upon their expert status and imposing assumptions of the client’s story on the basis of past client stories. “In trying to be helpful there is the temptation to enact our privilege, to impose upon others normalizing standards or to be blinded to diversity by the ‘professional’ certainties of our practice” (Amundson & Stewart, 1993, p. 111). Through this sense of certainty, we risk failing to understand each client’s underlying stories, the greater context, and the systemic factors upon which their lives and distress are based. Rimke (2016) explains that “[p]sychocentrism is itself a form of social injustice, where individual reformation rather than social and economic justice is promoted” (p. 5). Therefore, challenges presented in counselling, must be assumed to be the consequence of societal influences, systemic inequalities, and discourses that uphold these systems.

Chapter Summary

Analyzing the stories and discourses presented by mothers on Instagram allowed for a unique opportunity to view the result of systems that privilege certain elements of maternal stories.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Through this analysis, counsellors may develop a deeper awareness of the vast diversity of stories and maternal experiences and a desire to create a counselling atmosphere in which entire stories are welcomed and encouraged. We must come to view maternal mental health as a systemic issue, rather than a problem that is located within the individual. This will require loosening the hold on therapist certainty and active invitation of the messy and complex stories. It calls for a critical examination of our position within the landscape of maternal assumptions and a sense of curiosity to understand the positioning of others. We must release the desire to diagnose or assume that we understand the entire problem from our standpoint. Instead, by encouraging mothers to develop the complexity and uniqueness of their own stories, we may hold the capacity to better serve our clients and begin to dig out of the deeply entrenched paths to which mothers may feel confined.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

No matter how rich or opportune, it is a “fickle” therapy that only accepts certainty when it works on the spot. Behind this is a belief in minimalism: that individuals are most skilled at writing their own story and the therapeutic encounter simply seeks to place the pen in their hand. (Amundson & Stewart, 1993)

Contribution and Implications for Practice

In many senses, it seems as though this project has unearthed more questions than it solved, however this is perhaps its greatest value. I hope that from this project counsellors may glean a deeper sense of curiosity for the uniqueness of each maternal story. This curiosity may be guided by foundational understandings of common threads of a collective maternal story, some repressed and some more visible or socially acceptable. I cannot claim to have viewed or noted every thread woven into the fabric of each mother’s life, nor can I claim that each thread is entirely representative of a collective maternal narrative. This project can only claim to have captured a snapshot in time that may shine light on some of the narratives that may be unspoken upon first entry into the counselling room.

Through a preliminary analysis of the sources that can inform maternal discourse, counsellors may better understand the concepts that may create maternal distress. Additionally, this study may impart a sense of caution regarding counsellors’ influence and power to impact collective discourse. This study may provide an awareness of how deeply entrenched the narratives may be pertaining to the maternal role. Through this awareness, counsellors and researchers alike may proceed with caution as they implement or disseminate counselling methods that may unintentionally perpetuate harmful narratives.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

This is of course not to say that important contributions to the counselling field should be avoided if they risk edging near to maternal discourses, only that an awareness of these pervasive discourses may shift how counsellors implement chosen theories. Counsellors may complete more preliminary assessments to understand the degree to which the mothers they work with hold ideologies pertaining to motherhood, or the degree to which these ideologies harm or help each mother. They may be better equipped to actively dismantle harmful discourses with each mother and family. They may also more carefully select their words and methods to avoid unintentional perpetuation of harmful social constructions of motherhood.

Directions for Future Research

This study has allowed for deep insight into the social construction of motherhood as it is presented through Instagram. This insight has formed the basis of preliminary recommendations for counselling professionals who work with mothers and may encourage reflective thought. However, despite the important contributions it has provided, it has highlighted important considerations and gaps in academic research. As previously mentioned, in some ways it seems as though this project has shed light on more questions than it has answered. Many of these questions, of course, pertain to the sense of curiosity that I hope this project has imparted upon its readers and can be answered through deep, meaningful conversations with individual mothers. Other questions pertain to the more collective narrative of motherhood and should be further examined in academic research and literature.

First, although this project touched upon the sources of maternal discourses, this coverage is surface level and cannot claim to have fully covered the topic. Analysis into the framework's foundations for the current societally understood maternal story will allow for greater depth of understanding for counsellors and mothers alike. Specific inquiry into the elements of historical

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

and religious texts that may have guided and shaped the maternal identity can allow for increased clarity. Ultimately, clarity and awareness of the socially constructed framework may allow mothers to more fully experience their own unique maternal identity and allow counsellors to practice from a more liberated place, encouraging the entire diversity of experience.

Next, although this project was able to form initial assumptions and hypotheses of the effects of interaction with social media, its capacity to fully understand the effects of social media on maternal mental health is limited. Because this study involved only indirect involvement with the writers of the Instagram posts, speculation into the effects of social media could be deciphered only through my perception. Future studies should be conducted involving interviews with mothers to inquire about the effects of social media consumption from their perspectives. Studies of this kind may extend the findings of the current study to develop a deeper understanding of the extent to which mothers find themselves truly entrenched within the pathways of the socially constructed stories, or if this has merely appeared to be the case due to the self-presentational aspect of the Instagram posts I analyzed.

Further to the previous point, comparative studies of social media to alternate forms of discourses would be valuable. It would be beneficial to gain a deeper awareness of the influential capacity of various discursive sources and to understand the manners in which each source influences its readers. Not only could studies of this kind allow consumers of discourse to be more informed in their consumption of media, but they may also allow for deeper counsellor awareness of potential contributing factors to client wellness.

Finally, research should be conducted to understand the effects of counsellor discourse as it pertains to maternal identity. Although this study drew a connection between the deeply embedded discursive structures and attachment-informed practices that may cause maternal

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

distress, it cannot draw firm conclusions about this effect. Research may be conducted to explore the impact of attachment-based family counselling methods on maternal functioning and identity. Research of this type may allow counsellors to better determine the most appropriate choice of therapy for each unique client.

Limitations of This Study

Although the research design choices of this study allowed for a unique insight into the social construction of motherhood and its implications for counsellors, they also created certain limitations. As previously touched on, this study lacks the ability to confirm results with participants. Potter and Wetherell (1987) list participant orientation as one of the components of validation for research. Unfortunately, due to the design of this study, it would be largely impossible to check for participant orientation. By intentional design, I had no direct interaction with the study participants as to do so could unintentionally sway the discourse and limit my capacity to analyze stories as initially presented on Instagram. I was therefore not able to confirm my results with the participants. However, the written report of this study will be made accessible to provide other writers the opportunity to extend the findings and engage in academic discussion.

Similarly, the nature of this study creates a potential for researchers to misunderstand the intentions of the Instagram writers within their posts. These misunderstandings could have arisen through writer or reader errors in the analysis process. Notably, however, errors of this kind could equally occur in the context of Instagram users engaging with these posts so this limitation may appropriately represent the natural context of this study. I have aimed to minimize the potential for misinterpretation errors through supervisory and collegial discussion with my research supervisor and peers who were able to pose questions to broaden my perspectives and

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

understandings. Additionally, the potential for any misunderstandings to have made a substantial impact on the study's overall results are tempered by the quantity of data sources included.

Analysis of fifty posts taken from fifty different Instagram bloggers allowed for a high capacity to establish an awareness of pattern wherein misunderstanding of or unclear writing from one post will have minimal or no impact on the overall pattern of results.

An additional limitation exists within the usage of a current social media platform that frequently shifts due to updates and trends. It is noteworthy to mention that the changing nature of Instagram trends would have made this study nearly impossible had it been conducted even six months later. Between the time data was collected and the final report written, Instagram trends have moved away from blog-style written posts and toward short videos. While this shift certainly would have changed the study's methods, I hypothesize that similar themes would have emerged. Although a surface level description of this study would state that I analyzed Instagram posts, this study has truly aimed to capture a snapshot of the discursive landscape of motherhood and simply uses Instagram as the data source. Therefore, although the data was perhaps time limited, the implications extend beyond Instagram.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly is the issue of privilege. Research which impacts counselling practices inherently privileges white, upper-class experiences due to systemic marginalization. It is important to note that scientific literature may not accurately represent the experiences of all demographics of mothers regarding maternal mental health care. Issues of privilege must also be acknowledged with respect to the social media posts I analyzed. Although I endeavoured to capture a diverse range of experiences, it must be acknowledged that the field of Instagram blogging is inherently privileged and may not accurately reflect the experience of all mothers across the diversity of ethnic or demographic representation. It must also be

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

recognized that the social media sphere largely captures the experience of a younger demographic (Clement, 2020) and may therefore fail to accurately represent the diversity of motherhood. To combat this issue, I would extend my previously discussed list of future research directions to include research that draws its data from a more carefully selected and representative sample.

In essence, the findings of this study could be bolstered through future research examining mothering discourses across alternate platforms and demographics. As this study aimed to capture a broad understanding of mothering discourses on Instagram, specific inquiry in unique subsets and types of accounts would deepen the findings of this study. Furthermore, intentional examination of any shifts or trends in discourses is necessary and will extend counsellor practice.

Strengths of This Study

Similar to the limitations, the strengths of this study also lie within the design choices that involved indirect involvement with the participants. Edwards and Potter (1992) explain that data collected for the purposes of a discourse analysis should be ideally unhampered by the research process. Observation in an environment in which discourse naturally occurs allows for a deeper understanding of the social construction of the topics studied. Potter and Wetherell (1987) also state that research participants have a high potential to sway their discourse slightly due to conscious or subconscious desires for appropriate self-presentation to the researcher. Because this study utilized only data that would have been written regardless of the research process, it can be assumed that the data was an accurate representation of that which is typically presented on Instagram.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

This natural representation of discourse and nature of Instagram use additionally allowed for insight into the cyclical effect of discourse. Because all of the writers analyzed were both influencers and followers of others, preliminary awareness of the influential capacity could be understood. This study allowed for a unique glimpse into the words that may influence mothers who seek counselling and provided a direct view into the stories of some of the mothers who may seek counselling. Through this direct view of discourses occurring on Instagram, counsellors can gain awareness of some of the potential stories that may present themselves subtly and unspoken within the counselling room. Additionally, counsellors may come to a deeper awareness of the discourses that may have become so deeply entrenched that they have come to be largely invisible yet hold influence, not only to mothers but to counsellors themselves.

Personal Reflections

Within the initial chapter of this research report I provided an overview of my experience and stories within motherhood and counselling. I stated that my stories were not unique, and at the time of writing I truly perceived this to be true. I saw within my stories so many of the stories I had heard from my friends and clients I had worked with and therefore believed that my story was representative of other mothers. Upon completion of this study, however, I have come to understand that it was incorrect of me to state that my stories were not unique. While elements of my stories may resonate with other mothers, the nuances of each mother's stories make them all unique. It is this understanding that I believe can provide the most important contribution to both the field of counselling and my practice. Through this understanding I have developed a much stronger sense of what it means to "place the pen in their hand" (Amundsun

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

& Stewart, 1993) in therapy. My capacity to hold loosely to my assumptions has increased and I have invited a deeper sense of curiosity into both my practice and personal life.

It is my deepest hope that others may glean from this study the same therapeutic value that it provided for me. Not only did the completion of this study provide professional growth for myself, but it allowed me an incredible amount of personal healing. Becoming immersed in the analysis of discourses that have informed the social constructions of motherhood allowed me to more clearly see the pressures that I had assumed within my life and parenting. It granted me the freedom to write my story, to develop the story that is intended for my family and I, and to release the desire to align with anybody else's story. Through this personal healing I believe I will be able to work alongside clients to encourage their story by releasing the narratives of best practices that "should" be utilized for each client. Instead, I may work within the nuances of each individual to ascertain their unique needs.

I hope that this research will afford mothers and counsellors alike the opportunity to write their own stories, to walk their own path, to weave their own narrative. I hope that we may continue to learn from each other in both the personal and academic spheres, observing each other's experiences and reflecting on new counselling literature to develop a deeper capacity to hold and appreciate the nuances of our lives. I hope that mothers may someday feel free to fully explore and share the beauty of their unique stories.

References

- Adichie, C. N. (2009, July). *The danger of a single story* [Video]. TED Conferences.
https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en
- Afoakwah, G., Smyth, R., & Lavender, D. T. (2013). Women's experiences of breastfeeding: A narrative review of qualitative studies. *African Journal of Midwifery and Women's Health*, 7(2), 71-77. <https://doi.org/10.12968/ajmw.2013.7.2.71>
- Aiello, B. (2016). Making mothers: Parenting classes in a women's jail. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 19(4), 445-461. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2016.1226819>
- Alberta Health Services (2020). *Alberta pregnancy pathways*.
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/about/scn/ahs-scn-mncy-pp-nb-pathway.pdf>
- Alhusen, J. L., Frohman, N., & Purcell, G. (2015). Intimate partner violence and suicidal ideation in pregnant women. *Archives of Women's Mental Health*, 18(4), 573-578.
<http://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-015-0515-2>
- Amundson, J., Stewart, K., & Valentine, L. (1993). Temptations of power and certainty. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 19(2), 111-123. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.1993.tb00971.x>
- Anderson, G., & Mungal, A. S. (2015). Discourse analysis and the study of educational leadership. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 29(7), 807-818.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-05-2015-0064>
- Andrews, T. (2012). What is social constructionism?. *Grounded theory review*, 11(1).
- Angelou, M. (1969). *I know why the caged bird sings*. New York. Random House.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

- Arnold-Baker, C. (2019). The Process of Becoming: Maternal Identity in the Transition to Motherhood. *Existential Analysis*, 30(2), 260-274. Retrieved from https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA597616577&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=17525616&p=LitRC&sw=w&userGroupName=nysl_me_72_aesh
- Atkinson, L. (2014). Green moms: the social construction of a green mothering identity via environmental advertising appeals. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 17(6), 553-572. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2013.879817>
- Bakshy, E., Hofman, J. M., Mason, W. A., & Watts, D. J. (2011, February). Everyone's an influencer: quantifying influence on twitter. In *Proceedings of the fourth ACM international conference on Web search and data mining* (pp. 65-74). <https://doi.org/10.1145/1935826.1935845>
- Baron, E. C., Hanlon, C., Mall, S., Honikman, S., Breuer, E., Kathree, T., Luitel, N. P., Nakku, J., Lund, C., Medhin, G., Patel, V., Petersen, I., Shrivastava, S., & Tomlinson, M. (2016). Maternal mental health in primary care in five low- and middle-income countries: a situational analysis. *BMC Health Services Research*, 16, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-016-1291-z>
- Barthorpe, A., Winstone, L., Mars, B., & Moran, P. (2020). Is social media screen time really associated with poor adolescent mental health? A time use diary study. *Journal of affective disorders*, 274, 864-870. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2020.05.106>
- BC Reproductive Mental Health Program & Perinatal Services BC (2014). *Best practice guidelines for mental health disorders in the perinatal period*. Retrieved from

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

<http://www.perinatalervicesbc.ca/Documents/Guidelines-Standards/Maternal/MentalHealthDisordersGuideline.pdf>

- Berger, P. & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality*. Anchor Books.
- Berger, J., Ridgeway, C., & Zelditch, M. (2002). Construction of Status and Referential Structures. *Sociological Theory*, 20(2), 157–179.
- Blum, L. M. (2015). Raising generation RX: Mother kids with disabilities in an age of inequality. New York, NY: NYU Press
- Bödeker, K., Fuchs, A., Führer, D., Kluczniok, D., Dittrich, K., Reichl, C., ... & Neukel, C. (2019). Impact of maternal early life maltreatment and maternal history of depression on child psychopathology: mediating role of maternal sensitivity?. *Child psychiatry & human development*, 50(2), 278-290. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10578-018-0839-z>
- Borelli, J., Nelson, S., River, L., Birken, S., & Moss-Racusin, C. (2017). Gender Differences in Work-Family Guilt in Parents of Young Children. *Sex Roles*, 76(5–6), 356–368. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0579-0>
- Brenton, J. (2017). The limits of intensive feeding: maternal foodwork at the intersections of race, class, and gender. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 39(6), 863–877. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.12547>
- Brohan, E., Elgie, R., Sartorius, N., Thornicroft, G., & GAMIAN-Europe Study Group. (2010). Self-stigma, empowerment and perceived discrimination among people with schizophrenia in 14 European countries: The GAMIAN-Europe study. *Schizophrenia research*, 122(1-3), 232-238. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.schres.2010.02.1065>

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

- Bruce, L., Béland, D., & Bowen, A. (2012). MotherFirst: developing a maternal mental health strategy in Saskatchewan. *Healthcare policy = Politiques de sante*, 8(2), 46–55.
<https://doi.org/10.12927/hcpol.2012.23133>
- Bue, A. C. C. (2020). The looking glass selfie: Instagram use frequency predicts visual attention to high-anxiety body regions in young women. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 108, 106329. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106329>
- Carbó, P. A., Ahumada, M. A. V., Caballero, A. D., & Argüelles, G. A. L. (2016). “How do I do Discourse Analysis?” Teaching Discourse Analysis to novice researchers through a study of intimate partner gender violence among migrant women. *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice*, 15(3), 363–379. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325015617233>
- Carter, S. K. (2017, May). Body-led mothering: Constructions of the breast in attachment parenting literature. In *Women's Studies International Forum* (Vol. 62, pp. 17-24). Pergamon. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.03.001>
- Christopher, K. (2012). Extensive mothering: Employed mothers’ constructions of the good mother. *Gender & Society*, 26(1), 73-96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243211427700>
- Clark, E., & Dumas, A. (2020). Children's active outdoor play: ‘good’ mothering and the organisation of children's free time. *Sociology of Health & Illness*.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.13107>
- Clement, J. (2020). *Distribution of Instagram users worldwide as of October 2020, by age group*. Statista. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/325587/instagram-global-age-group/>
- Coffey-Glover, L. (2020). The boob diaries: Discourses of breastfeeding in ‘exclusive pumping’ blogs. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2020.100446>

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

- Cooke, J. E., Racine, N., Plamondon, A., Tough, S., & Madigan, S. (2019). Maternal adverse childhood experiences, attachment style, and mental health: Pathways of transmission to child behavior problems. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 93*, 27–37.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.04.011>
- Corcoran, M., & McNulty, M. (2018). Examining the role of attachment in the relationship between childhood adversity, psychological distress and subjective well-being. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 76*, 297-309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.11.012>
- Coyne, S. M., Radesky, J., Collier, K. M., Gentile, D. A., Linder, J. R., Nathanson, A. I., ... & Rogers, J. (2017). Parenting and digital media. *Pediatrics, 140*(Supplement 2), S112-S116.
<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-1758N>
- Cresswell, J., & Smith, L. (2012). Embodying discourse analysis: Lessons learned about epistemic and ontological psychologies. *Discourse and Society, 23*(5), 619–625.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926512455880>
- Cresswell, J.W., & Poth, C.N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Davis, J. L., & Manago, B. (2016). Motherhood and associative moral stigma: The moral double bind. *Stigma and Health, 1*(2), 72. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sah0000019>
- Denbow, J. (2019). Good mothering before birth: Measuring attachment and ultrasound as an affective technology. *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society, 5*, 1-20.
<https://doi.org/10.17351/ests2019.238>
- Diaz-Bone, R., Bührmann, A. D., Rodríguez, E. G., Schneider, W., Kendall, G., & Tirado, F. (2008). The field of Foucaultian discourse analysis: Structures, developments and perspectives. *Historical social research/Historische sozialforschung, 7*-28. Retrieved from

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20762257.pdf?casa_token=sT4_FafdkokAAAAA:fgFs0n61TtXegMsTMTH-yEg8s7vn5tQuUT-HegYILaG5_VtCURVbszZ_PXtyEMvoWEjSkxcF80ejGJm5A1c3p8F0vTx2zYr556OkguNuNycbMQgPbX18

Dittrich, K., Fuchs, A., Bempohl, F., Meyer, J., Führer, D., Reichl, C., ... & Möhler, E. (2018). Effects of maternal history of depression and early life maltreatment on children's health-related quality of life. *Journal of affective disorders*, 225, 280-288.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2017.08.053>

Doyle, E. & Gosnell, F. (2019). Performing social justice in family therapy: Exploring the assumptions between the *isms and the *ings. *Embracing Cultural Sensitivity and Social Justice: Re-Shaping Professional Identity in Counselling Psychology* (S. Collins, Editor). Counselling Concepts, Victoria BC

Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive psychology*. London, UK: Sage.

Evans, M., Donelle, L., & Hume-Loveland, L. (2012). Social support and online postpartum depression discussion groups: A content analysis. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 87(3), 405–410. <https://0-doi-org.aupac.lib.athabascau.ca/10.1016/j.pec.2011.09.011>

Fairclough N, Mulderrig J, Wodak R. (2011) Critical discourse analysis. In T. A. Van Dijk (Eds.), *Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction* (pp. 357-378). SAGE Publications Ltd.

Fisher, J., Mello, M. C. D., Patel, V., Rahman, A., Tran, T., Holton, S., & Holmes, W. (2012). Prevalence and determinants of common perinatal mental disorders in women in low-and lower-middle-income countries: a systematic review. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 90, 139-149. <https://doi.org/10.2471/BLT.11.091850>

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. New York: Dorset Press.

Fox, J., & Moreland, J. J. (2015). The dark side of social networking sites: An exploration of the relational and psychological stressors associated with Facebook use and affordances. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 45, 168–176. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.11.083>

Francis, A. (2012). Stigma in an era of medicalisation and anxious parenting: How proximity and culpability shape middle-class parents' experiences of disgrace. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 34, 927–942. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9566.2011.01445.x>

Gavin, A. R., Tabb, K. M., Melville, J. L., Guo, Y., & Katon, W. (2011). Prevalence and correlates of suicide ideation during pregnancy. *Archives Women's Mental Health*, 14(3), 239-246. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-011-0207-5>

Gergen, K. J. (2011). The delight of continuing the conversation. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 24(4), 340-344.

Goel, A., & Gupta, L. (2020). Social Media in the Times of COVID-19. *Journal of Clinical Rheumatology*, 26(6), 220. <https://doi.org/10.1097/RHU.0000000000001508>

Gold, K. J., Singh, V., Marcus, S. M., & Palladino, C. L. (2012). Mental health, substance use and intimate partner problems among pregnant and postpartum suicide victims in the National Violent Death Reporting System. *General Hospital Psychiatry*, 34(2), 139-145. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.genhosppsy.2011.09.017>

Government of Canada - Panel on Research Ethics. (2018). *Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2): Ethical conduct for research involving humans*. Retrieved from <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/documents/tcps2-2018-en-interactive-final.pdf>

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

- Graham, L. J. (2011). The product of text and “other” statements: Discourse analysis and the critical use of Foucault. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 43(6), 663–674.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00698.x>
- Gressier, F., Guillard, V., Cazas, O., Falissard, B., Glangeaud-Freudenthal, N. M. C., & Sutter-Dallay, A. (2017). Risk factors for suicide attempt in pregnancy and the post-partum period in women with serious mental illnesses. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 84, 284-291.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2016.10.009>
- Griffith, A. I., & Smith, D. E. (1987). Constructing cultural knowledge: Mothering as discourse. *Women and education: A Canadian perspective*, 3(1), 87-103. Retrieved from
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED300663.pdf#page=91>
- Guillard, V., & Gressier, F. (2017). Suicidality during perinatal period. *Presse Medicale (Paris, France: 1983)*, 46(6 Pt 1), 565-571. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2016.00138>
- Gunderson, J., & Barrett, A. E. (2017). Emotional cost of emotional support? The association between intensive mothering and psychological well-being in midlife. *Journal of Family Issues*, 38(7), 992-1009. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X15579502>
- Hanisch, C. (2000). The personal is political. In B. A. Crow (Ed.), *Radical feminism: A documentary reader*. (pp. 113-116). NYU Press.
- Hartshorne, J., Huang, Y. T., Paredes, P. M. L., Oppenheimer, K., Robbins, P. T., & Molino, M. D. V. (2020). Screen time as an index of family distress. *PsyArXiv Preprints*
<https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/zqc4t>
- Henderson, A., Harmon, S., & Newman, H. (2016). The price mothers pay, even when they are not buying it: Mental health consequences of idealized motherhood. *Sex Roles*, 74(11-12), 512-526. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-015-0534-5>

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Hermann, A., Fitelson, E. M., & Bergink, V. (2020). Meeting maternal mental health Needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. *JAMA psychiatry*.

<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.1947>

Hessami, K., Romanelli, C., Chiurazzi, M., & Cozzolino, M. (2020). COVID-19 pandemic and maternal mental health: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Journal of Maternal-Fetal & Neonatal Medicine*, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767058.2020.1843155>.

Hernández, L. H. (2019). Discursive Constructions of Motherhood: A Feminist Analysis of Social Media Discourses about Motherhood, Religion, and 19 Kids & Counting. *Journal of Media and Religion*, 4, 134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348423.2019.1696117>

Hook, D. (2001) Therapeutic discourse, co-construction, interpellation, role-induction: Psychotherapy as iatrogenic treatment modality?, *International Journal of Psychotherapy*, 6:1, 47-66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569080120042207>

Huang, H., Faisal-Cury, A., Chan, Y., Tabb, K., Katon, W., & Menezes, P. R. (2012). Suicidal ideation during pregnancy: prevalence and associated factors among low-income women in Sao Paula, Brazil. *Archives of Womens Mental Health*, 15(2), 135-138. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-012-0263-5>

Hubert, S., & Aujoulat, I. (2018). Parental Burnout: when exhausted mothers open up. *Frontiers in psychology*, 9, 1021. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01021>

Huma, B., Alexander, M., Stokoe, E., Tileaga, C. (2020). Introduction to special issue on discursive psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 17(3), 313–335. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1729910>

Jagiello, K. (2019). Seeking to Do What's Best for Baby: A Grounded Theory. *Grounded Theory Review*, 18(1), 65–82. <https://doi.org/10.33915/etd.7193>

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

- Jones, S. (2012). Negotiating mothering identities: ethnographic and intergenerational insights to gender and social class in a high-poverty US context. *Gender and Education*, 24(4), 443-460. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2012.674492>
- Kay, S., Mulcahy, R., & Parkinson, J. (2020). When less is more: the impact of macro and micro social media influencers' disclosure. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 36(3/4), 248–278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1718740>
- Kramer, M. S., & Kakuma, R. (2012). Optimal duration of exclusive breastfeeding. *Cochrane database of systematic reviews*, (8). <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD003517.pub2>
- Kuswara, K., Knight, T., Campbell, K. J., Hesketh, K. D., Zheng, M., Bolton, K. A., & Laws, R. (2020). Breastfeeding and emerging motherhood identity: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of first time Chinese Australian mothers' breastfeeding experiences. *Women and Birth*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wombi.2020.03.005>
- Lasalvia, A., Zoppei, S., Van Bortel, T., Bonetto, C., Cristofalo, D., Wahlbeck, K., ... & ASPEN/INDIGO study group. (2013). Global pattern of experienced and anticipated discrimination reported by people with major depressive disorder: a cross-sectional survey. *The Lancet*, 381(9860), 55-62. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(12\)61379-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(12)61379-8)
- Lazar, M. M., & Ke, S. (2020). Cultural dilemmas of motherhood and gendered public/private spheres: The case of a remediatized Chinese reality show. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 38, 100443. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2020.100443>
- Le Vigouroux, S. & Scola, C. (2018). Differences in parental burnout: Influence of demographic factors and personality of parents and children. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00887>

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

- Le Vigouroux, S., Scola, C., Raes, M. E., Mikolajczak, M., & Roskam, I. (2017). The big five personality traits and parental burnout: protective and risk factors. *Personality and Individual Differences, 119*, 216-219. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2017.07.023>
- Lee, V. (2018). Beyond seeking informed consent: Upholding ethical values within the research proposal. *Canadian Oncology Nursing Journal, 28*(3), 222-224. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6516914/>
- Leite, M. (2013). (M) Othering: Feminist Motherhood, Neoliberal Discourses and the Other'. *Studies in the Maternal, 5*(2). <https://doi.org/10.16995/sim.19>
- Liss, M., Schiffrin, H. H., Mackintosh, V. H., Miles-McLean, H., & Erchull, M. J. (2013a). Development and validation of a quantitative measure of intensive parenting attitudes. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 22*(5), 621-636. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-012-9616-y>
- Liss, M., Schiffrin, H., & Rizzo, K. (2013b). Maternal Guilt and Shame: The Role of Self-discrepancy and Fear of Negative Evaluation. *Journal of Child & Family Studies, 22*(8), 1112–1119. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-012-9673-2>
- Little, V. (2018). First Time Mothers' Experiences of Prenatal Education and Support. [Unpublished master's thesis]. Dalhousie University.
- Littler, J. (2013). The rise of the “yummy mummy”: Popular conservatism and the neoliberal maternal in contemporary British culture. *Communication, Culture & Critique, 6*(2), 227-243. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ccr.12010>
- Liu, K., & Guo, F. (2016). A review on critical discourse analysis. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 6*(5), 1076. Retrieved from

<http://www.academypublication.com/ojs/index.php/tpls/article/viewFile/tpls060510761084/747>

- Locke, A., & Yarwood, G. (2017). Exploring the depths of gender, parenting and ‘work’: critical discursive psychology and the ‘missing voices’ of involved fatherhood. *Community, Work and Family*, 20(1), 4–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2016.1252722>
- Locke, A., & Budds, K. (2020). Applying critical discursive psychology to health psychology research: a practical guide. *Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine*, 8(1), 234-247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21642850.2020.1792307>
- Madigan, S., Wade, M., Plamondon, A., Maguire, J. L., & Jenkins, J. M. (2017). Maternal adverse childhood experience and infant health: biomedical and psychosocial risks as intermediary mechanisms. *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 187, 282-289. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2017.04.052>
- Malatzky, C. A. R. (2017). Australian women's complex engagement with the yummy mummy discourse and the bodily ideals of good motherhood. In *Women's Studies International Forum* (Vol. 62, pp. 25-33). Pergamon. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.02.006>
- Matley, D. (2020). “I miss my old life”: Regretting motherhood on Mumsnet. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 37. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2020.100417>
- Matusov, E., & von Duyke, K. (2012). Broader outside social discourses, embodiment, and technism in James Cresswell’s critique of discourse analysis methodology. *Discourse and Society*, 23(5), 609–618. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926512455883>
- Mazmanian, M., & Lanette, S. (2017). " Okay, One More Episode" An Ethnography of Parenting in the Digital Age. In *Proceedings of the 2017 ACM Conference on Computer Supported*

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Cooperative Work and Social Computing (pp. 2273-2286).

<https://doi.org/10.1145/2998181.2998218>

McDaniel, B., Coyne, S., & Holmes, E. (2012). New Mothers and Media Use: Associations Between Blogging, Social Networking, and Maternal Well-Being. *Maternal & Child Health Journal*, 16(7), 1509–1517. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-011-0918-2>

McDonnell, C. G., & Valentino, K. (2016). Intergenerational effects of childhood trauma: evaluating pathways among maternal ACEs, perinatal depressive symptoms, and infant outcomes. *Child maltreatment*, 21(4), 317-326. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559516659556>

McGeechan, G. J., James, B., & Burke, S. (2020). ‘well that’s the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard! No excuse’ A discourse analysis of social media users’ othering of non-attenders for cervical screening. *Psychology & Health*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2020.1772258>

Meeussen, L., & Van Laar, C. (2018). Feeling pressure to be a perfect mother relates to parental burnout and career ambitions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02113>

Meeussen, L., Veldman, J., & Van Laar, C. (2016). Combining gender, work, and family identities: the cross-over and spill-over of gender norms into young adults’ work and family aspirations. *Frontiers in psychology*, 7, 1781.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01781>

Mikolajczak, M., Brianda, M. E., Avalosse, H., & Roskam, I. (2018). Consequences of parental burnout: Its specific effect on child neglect and violence. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 80, 134–145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.03.025>

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

- Molinari, L., Mameli, C., & Gnisci, A. (2013). A sequential analysis of classroom discourse in Italian primary schools: The many faces of the IRF pattern. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 83(3), 414–430. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8279.2012.02071.x>
- Muller, R. T., Thornback, K., & Bedi, R. (2012). Attachment as a mediator between childhood maltreatment and adult symptomatology. *Journal of Family Violence*, 27(3), 243-255. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-012-9417-5>
- Nakash, O., Nagar, M., & Levav, I. (2015). Predictors of mental health care stigma and its association with the therapeutic alliance during the initial intake session. *Psychotherapy Research*, 25(2), 214-221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10503307.2014.885147>
- Negron, R., Martin, A., Almog, M., Balbierz, A., & Howell, E. A. (2013). Social support during the postpartum period: mothers' views on needs, expectations, and mobilization of support. *Maternal and child health journal*, 17(4), 616-623. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-012-1037-4>
- Nelson, S. K., Kushlev, K., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2014). The pains and pleasures of parenting: When, why, and how is parenthood associated with more or less well-being? *Psychological Bulletin*, 3, 846. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035444>
- Newman, H. D., & Henderson, A. C. (2014). The Modern Mystique: Institutional Mediation of Hegemonic Motherhood. *Sociological Inquiry*, (3), 472. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12037>
- Olson, L. N., & Simon, J. M. (2020). *An ideological analysis of breastfeeding in contemporary America: Disciplining the maternal body*. Lexington Books.
- Ordan, R., Shor, R., Liebergall-Wischnitzer, M., Noble, L., & Noble, A. (2018). Nurses' professional stigma and attitudes towards postpartum women with severe mental illness. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 27(7-8), 1543-1551. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.14179>

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

- O'Reilly, M., Kiyimba, N., & Lester, J. N. (2018). Discursive psychology as a method of analysis for the study of couple and family therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 44(3), 409–425. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12288>
- Padoa, T., Berle, D., & Roberts, L. (2018). Comparative social media use and the mental health of mothers with high levels of perfectionism. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 37(7), 514-535. <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2018.37.7.514>
- Paterson, S. (2019). Emotional labour: Exploring emotional policy discourses of pregnancy and childbirth in Ontario, Canada. *Public Policy and Administration*, 0(0), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0952076719869786>
- Pettigrew, S., Archer, C., & Harrigan, P. (2016). A thematic analysis of mothers' motivations for blogging. *Maternal and child health journal*, 20(5), 1025-1031. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-015-1887-7>
- Phoenix, A. (2013). Social constructions of lone motherhood: a case of competing discourses. In *Good enough mothering?* (pp. 183-198). Routledge.
- Ponomartchouk, D., & Bouchard, G. (2015). New mothers' sense of competence: predictors and outcomes. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(7), 1977-1986. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-014-9997-1>
- Potter, J. (2008). Discourse analysis. In L. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (pp. 223–224). Sage Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n116>
- Potter, J. (2010). Contemporary discursive psychology: Issues, prospects, and Corcoran's awkward ontology. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 49(4), 657–678. <https://doi.org/10.1348/014466610X486158>

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Potter, J. (2012). Re-reading discourse and social psychology: Transforming social psychology.

British Journal of Social Psychology, 51(3), 436–455. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.2011.02085.x>

Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London, UK: Sage.

Powers, P. (2007). The philosophical foundations of Foucaultian discourse analysis. *Critical approaches to discourse analysis across disciplines*, 1(2), 18-34. Retrieved from

https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/journals/cadaad/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Volume-1_Powers.pdf

Prinds, C., Nikolajsen, H., & Folmann, B. (2020). Yummy Mummy—The ideal of not looking like a mother. *Women and Birth*, 33(3), e266-e273.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wombi.2019.05.009>

Public Health Agency of Canada. (2014, October 9). *Pregnancy and women's mental health in Canada*. Government of Canada. [https://www.canada.ca/en/public-](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/pregnancy-women-mental-health-canada.html)

[health/services/publications/healthy-living/pregnancy-women-mental-health-canada.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/pregnancy-women-mental-health-canada.html)

Public Health Agency of Canada. (2015, June 19). *Maternal infant health*. Canadian best

practices portal. <https://cbpp-pcpe.phac-aspc.gc.ca/public-health-topics/maternal-infant-health/>

Public Health Ontario. (2018). Perinatal mental health toolkit for Ontario public health units.

<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/h/2018/hhdt-toolkit-perinatal-mental-health.pdf?la=en>

Puhlman, D.J. and Pasley, K. (2013), Rethinking Maternal Gatekeeping. *J Fam Theory Rev*, 5:

176-193. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12016>

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

- Pylypa, J. (2016). The social construction of attachment, attachment disorders and attachment parenting in international adoption discourse and parent education. *Children & Society*, 30(6), 434-444. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12159>
- Rahman, A., Surkan, P. J., Cayetano, C. E., Rwagatare, P., & Dickson, K. E. (2013). Grand challenges: integrating maternal mental health into maternal and child health programmes. *PLoS Med*, 10(5), e1001442. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001442>
- Randall, E. T., Bohnert, A. M., & Travers, L. V. (2015). Understanding affluent adolescent adjustment: The interplay of parental perfectionism, perceived parental pressure, and organized activity involvement. *Journal of adolescence*, 41, 56-66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2015.03.005>
- Ranjbar, V. (2014). The HIV/AIDS caregiver identity as a double-edged sword: A discourse analysis on HIV/AIDS caregiving in South Africa. *African Journal of AIDS Research*, 13(3), 261–269. <https://doi.org/10.2989/16085906.2014.952650>
- Read, J. N. G. (2003). The sources of gender role attitudes among Christian and Muslim Arab-American women. *Sociology of religion*, 64(2), 207-222. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3712371>
- Rich, S., Tacket, A., Graham, M., & Shelley, J. (2011). ‘Unnatural’, ‘Unwomanly’, ‘uncreditable’ and ‘undervalued’: the significance of being a childless woman in Australian society. *Gender Issues*, 28(4), 226-247. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-011-9108-1>
- Rimke, H. (2016). Mental and emotional distress as a social justice issue: Beyond psychocentrism. *Studies in Social Justice*, 10(1), 4-17. <https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v10i1.1407>

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

- Ringrow, H. (2020). “I can feel myself being squeezed and stretched, moulded and grown, and expanded in my capacity to love loudly and profoundly”: Metaphor and religion in motherhood blogs. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 37.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2020.100429>
- Rizzo, K., Schiffrin, H., & Liss, M. (2013). Insight into the Parenthood Paradox: Mental Health Outcomes of Intensive Mothering. *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, 22(5), 614–620.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-012-9615-z>
- Rose, N. (1998). *Inventing our selves: Psychology, power, and personhood*. Cambridge University Press.
- Roskam, I., Raes, M. E., & Mikolajczak, M. (2017). Exhausted parents: development and preliminary validation of the parental burnout inventory. *Frontiers in psychology*, 8, 163.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00163>
- Roy, A. (2014). Intergenerational trauma and Aboriginal women: Implications for mental health during pregnancy. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 9(1), 7-21. Retrieved from
<https://fpcfr.com/index.php/FPCFR/article/view/189/214>
- Sawers, M., & Wong, G. (2018). Pregnancy and Childbirth: Postpartum Anxiety (PPA) and Support for New Mothers. *Journal of the motherhood initiative for research and community involvement (JMI)*, 9, 45-59. Retrieved from
<https://jarm.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jarm/index>
- Schimmenti, A., & Bifulco, A. (2015). Linking lack of care in childhood to anxiety disorders in emerging adulthood: the role of attachment styles. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 20(1), 41-48. <https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12051>
- Searle, John R. (1995). *The Construction of Social Reality*. Free Press.

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

- Sieben, A., & Yıldırım, A. (2020). Cultural spaces of popularized psychological knowledge: Attachment parenting in Turkey. *Culture & Psychology, 26*(3), 335–357.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X19861055>
- Siedlecki, K. L., Salthouse, T. A., Oishi, S., & Jeswani, S. (2014). The relationship between social support and subjective well-being across age. *Social indicators research, 117*(2), 561-576. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-013-0361-4>
- Smith, D. E. (1991). Writing Women’s Experience into Social Science. *Feminism & Psychology, 1*(1), 155. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353591011019>
- Spencer, R. L., Greatrex-White, S., & Fraser, D. M. (2015). ‘I thought it would keep them all quiet’. Women's experiences of breastfeeding as illusions of compliance: an interpretive phenomenological study. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 71*(5), 1076-1086.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.12592>
- Spencer, L. M., Schooley, M. W., Anderson, L. A., Kochtitzky, C. S., DeGross, A. S., Devlin, H. M., & Mercer, S. L. (2013). Seeking best practices: a conceptual framework for planning and improving evidence-based practices. *Preventing Chronic Disease, 10*, E207.
<https://doi.org/10.5888/pcd10.130186>
- Ståhl, T., Van Laar, C., & Ellemers, N. (2012). The role of prevention focus under stereotype threat: Initial cognitive mobilization is followed by depletion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 102*(6), 1239–1251. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027678>
- Statistics Canada (2019). *Maternal mental health in Canada, 2018/2019*. Statistics Canada.
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190624/dq190624b-eng.htm>

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Stokoe, E. (2020). Psychological matters in institutional interaction: Insights and interventions from discursive psychology and conversation analysis. *Qualitative Psychology*.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000162>

Tandon, S.D., Johnson, J.K., Diebold, A. *et al.* Comparing the effectiveness of home visiting paraprofessionals and mental health professionals delivering a postpartum depression preventive intervention: a cluster-randomized non-inferiority clinical trial. *Archives of Women's Mental Health* 24, 629–640 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-021-01112-9>

Tharner, A., Luijk, M. P. C. M., van IJzendoorn, M. H., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., Jaddoe, V. W. V., Hofman, A., Verhulst, F. C., Tiemeier, H. (2012). Infant Attachment, Parenting Stress, and Child Emotional and Behavioral Problems at Age 3 Years. *Parenting: Science & Practice*, 12(4), 261–281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295192.2012.709150>

Tseliou, E., & Borsca, M. (2018). Discursive methodologies for couple and family therapy research: Editorial to special section. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 44(3), 375–385. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12308>

Van Damme, R., Van Parys, A.-S., Vogels, C., Roelens, K., & Lemmens, G. M. D. (2020). A mental health care protocol for the screening, detection and treatment of perinatal anxiety and depressive disorders in Flanders. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychores.2019.109865>

Vangen, S., Bødker, B., Ellingsen, L., Saltvedt, S., Gissler, M., Geirsson, R. T., & Nyfløt, L. T. (2017). Maternal deaths in the Nordic countries. *Acta obstetricia et gynecologica Scandinavica*, 96(9), 1112-1119. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aogs.13172>

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

- Wang, S. S. (2013). “I Share, Therefore I Am”: Personality Traits, Life Satisfaction, and Facebook Check-Ins. *CyberPsychology, Behavior & Social Networking*, 16(12), 870–877.
<https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2012.0395>.
- Wetherell, M., & Edley, N. (2014). A discursive psychological framework for analyzing men and masculinities. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 15(4), 355.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037148>
- Wiggins, S. (2017). *Discursive Psychology: Theory, Method and Applications*. SAGE Publications, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473983335>
- Wiggins, S. (2020). A brief commentary on discursive psychology and talking to others. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 17(3), 469–475.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1725953>
- Williams, K., Donaghue, N., & Kurz, T. (2013). “Giving Guilt the Flick”?: An Investigation of Mothers’ Talk about Guilt in Relation to Infant Feeding. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 37(1), 97–112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684312463000>
- Woolhouse, M., Day, K., & Rickett, B. (2019). “Growing your own herbs” and “cooking from scratch”: Contemporary discourses around good mothering, food, and class-related identities. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 29(4), 285-296.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2400>
- World Health Organization (n.d.-a). *Breastfeeding*. https://www.who.int/health-topics/breastfeeding#tab=tab_2
- World Health Organization (n.d.-b). *Maternal mental health*.
https://www.who.int/mental_health/maternal-child/maternal_mental_health/en/

THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON #MOTHERHOOD

Wright, J., Maher, J., & Tanner, C. (2015). Social class, anxieties and mothers' foodwork.

Sociology of health & illness, 37(3), 422-436. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.12202>

Yazdannik, A., Yousefy, A., & Mohammadi, S. (2017). Discourse analysis: A useful

methodology for health-care system researchers. *Journal of Education and Health*

Promotion, 6(1), 111. https://doi.org/10.4103/jehp.jehp_124_15

Yuen, F., & Johnson, A. J. (2017). Leisure Spaces, Community, and Third Places. *Leisure*

Sciences, 39(3), 295–303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2016.1165638>

Zhao, N., & Zhou, G. (2020). Social media use and mental health during the covid-19 pandemic:

Moderator role of disaster stressor and mediator role of negative affect. *Applied*

Psychology: Health and Well-Being. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aphw.12226>