

Bad mothers, good mothers and professional mothers: a study on narratives on maternity in Spanish Instagram spaces.

Gemma San Cornelio*

*Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Spain

Abstract

This paper focuses on an analysis of the narratives present in a set of eight Instagram accounts devoted to sharing information on maternity in the Spanish context. In a qualitative approach that uses participant observation and content analysis (5184 posts), the main objective is to identify the narratives¹ surrounding maternity and to elaborate their relationship with feminist discourses, thus comparing them with previous and current conceptions and representations of motherhood in media. A second aim is to understand the role of information and expertise in these spaces. The results reveal three approaches: affirmative and child-centred narratives, feminist counter-narratives, and discourses on professionalization and authoritative knowledge.

Keywords: social media, instagram, feminism, motherhood, narratives

Introduction

In Western hyperconnected societies, the different ways of experiencing motherhood are conveyed in digital spaces. This is related to the *mediatization* process through which the social world is fundamentally interwoven with the media (Couldry & Hepp, 2017: 16). As many authors have stated (Frosh, 2018: 6), technologically-mediated communication occurs in everyday life alongside face-to face-communication, with which it is interlinked. Nevertheless, the profusion of topics related to motherhood in digital spaces also reflects the isolated situation in which many women find themselves, far from traditional support structures (Lupton, 2017: 1). Since the advent of the internet and personal computing, digital media have provided important sources of advice and support for many women, as previous research in Western countries has demonstrated (Abbetz & Moore, 2018; Lopez, 2009). Blogs, online discussion forums and websites are primary sources of information, allowing users to share their experiences, thus helping each other and alleviating solitude, uncertainty and the overdeveloped sense of responsibility that many women feel during pregnancy and early motherhood (Lupton, 2017). Nowadays, women can use social media and additional digital resources, such as apps or mobile devices, to find and share information and advice about pregnancy and parenting.

The information and content presented in the different online spaces constitute representations and models of motherhood. In this sense, contemporary social media are spaces in which different conceptions and representations of motherhood are performed and circulated as a form of popular culture (Kaplan, 2013; Woodward, 2003). These conceptions shape the discourses that emerge from those who promote such spaces and are accepted, negotiated or contested by those who participate in these online spaces and discussions.

In this study, I focus on Instagram accounts through which mothers share experiences, find information and disseminate various conceptions of motherhood. In this regard, it is interesting to note that these discourses are not created on Instagram: they originate and are developed on more comprehensive sites, like blogs, but find resonance on Instagram, a platform which facilitates their dissemination and connection with a wider audience.

¹ This research is part of the project "*Culturas Narrativas: Storytelling, Digital, Acción Social y Creación de Públicos (D-STORIES)*" (RTI2018-098417-B-I00 Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación) 2019-2021

The objective of this research is to identify the narratives surrounding maternity and to elaborate if there is a relationship with feminist discourses. A second aim is to understand the role of information and expertise in these spaces. The study is focused in the Spanish context, a country with low rates of birth per women (1.33 in 2017), (Miner Guerrero, 2018). Despite the fact that there has been some attempts to undertake policies related to maternity in the fields of health, labor and other issues, according to Martinez (2017), they lack of a gender perspective, in the sense that sometimes the information is either too medicalized - such as the case of breastfeeding- or do not take into account factors of vulnerability and diversity². This situation, which is not exclusive of the Spanish context, contributes to the circulation of different types of information in social media regarding maternity, since there is a strong need for sharing and having support in maternal issues.

Conceptions and ideals of motherhood in media

Conceptions and representations of maternity have been present throughout history, in religion, culture and the media, shaping literary and media archetypes in the imaginary, and thereby influencing the perceptions and feelings of mothers in the social context. According to Green (2012), tacit and nebulous ideals of maternity are normalized and serve to define socially acceptable roles that materialize in the lived experiences of women (Green, 2012). These ideals connect and conflict with different feminist approaches, as pointed out by Nash (2014).

Social media currently resonate with a number of conceptions popularized by the traditional media in recent decades. In their analysis of representations of Western motherhood in the media, Douglas and Michaels (2005) talk about 'new momism' and 'hypernatalism', stressing the unreal and unattainable idealization of motherhood, in which the mother is depicted as the main caregiver of the child. In this child-centred vision, women freely decide to become mothers, but are then expected to bring to child rearing a highly improbable combination of selflessness and professionalism that draws from feminism at the same time as it repudiates it (Douglas & Michaels, 2005: 5).

The concept of mothers as devoted caregivers is similar to that of "intensive mothering", which can be defined as "a romantic and demanding ideology that emphasizes the need for mothers to dedicate a lot of time, energy and money to the care of children" (Hays, 1998). According to this concept, mothers are expected to place the needs of their children above their own, and to be satisfied and realized by this role (Lee, 1997; Otton-Johnson, 2017). Intensive motherhood involves a series of actions that, according to recent studies, are also extended to pregnancy. Tiindeberg and Baym (2017) analyse the depiction of pregnancy in social media, specifically on Instagram, using the term "intensive pregnancy" to refer to pregnant women seem to use the tools available to them (photos, hashtags and captions) to demonstrate that they are disciplined and "doing pregnancy right", in the expectation of recognition (p. 11).

² Strategy for Attention to Normal Delivery in 2007 and the Strategy National Sexual and Reproductive Health in 2010, promoted by the Observatory of Women's Health of the Ministry of Health, Social Policy and Equality. Probably due to the lack of research on the barriers that exist to initiation and breastfeeding maintenance and effective interventions to overcome them and the lack of resources to offer. It is therefore left in the hands of women, the search and cost of these solutions (lactation consultations, pumps, accessories to cope with difficulties, etc. (Martinez, 2017)

A connection also exists between these self-regulated performances by women and other stigma related to women's appearance. According to Littler (2013), there are two predominant maternal figures: "yummy" and "slummy". The first group represents women who are sexually attractive and well-groomed, combining motherhood with glamour (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010). This is an ideal based on consumption and aesthetics. Nash (2015) contends that the "yummy mummy" can be seen through the lens of post-feminism, in terms suggested by McRobbie (2007) as the female sexual agent who has absolute control of her own image, assuming normative femininities while searching for new meanings to the fact of being a mother. These women, whose bodies are thin and disciplined, achieve empowerment through consumption and project an image that is far from traditional representations of maternity (Nash, 2015: 20). The antithesis of the "yummy mummy" is the "slummy mummy", perceived as the woman that has "let herself go", is lazy and unfeminine (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010: 85), and has no interest in aesthetics and discipline.

Natural mothering stands as an alternative to conventional approaches and there is currently a growing body of research dealing with issues related to natural childbirth, breastfeeding and raising children. From a feminist perspective, some of these ideas can be connected to ecofeminism. According to Stearny (1994), the maternal archetype that figures prominently in much ecofeminist rhetoric is potentially useful as a unifying and motivating ideal for the promotion of environmental responsibility. It can be problematic, however, since it undertheorizes and overemphasizes the role of motherhood in women's lives, already overdetermined as a "natural" role for women (Stearny, 1994:154).

Finally, it is interesting to note the incipient constructions trying to break this ideal model and show the negative aspects and contradictions of contemporary motherhood. In the field of social media, Otton-Jones discusses "bad mum" blogs, which employ subversive humour to express the daily experiences of mothers, far from the ideals or mainstream conceptions of motherhood (Otton-Jones, 2017). In this framework, the idea of "progressive mum" identified by Sánchez de Bustamante (2017) is a more appreciable instance of such counternarratives. Emerging from an analysis of the Argentinian web series *Roxi* (and the comments and reactions of the audience), the author contends that the protagonist Roxi evokes a maternity beset with the permanent contradictions – in terms of ideological convictions, class membership and aesthetic tastes – that generate anxiety, dissatisfaction and guilt in mothers (Sánchez de Bustamante, 2017: 251). This archetype entails a more explicit dialogue with feminism and progressive ideologies, drawing attention to the incompatibility of being a young mother and engaging in any kind of activism or activity beyond taking care of children.

Guilt and contradictions: discourses on maternity in social media

Besides media representations and cultural constructions, it is important to consider the discourses that emerge from the communicative practices of mothers. In this regard, social media have become a new arena in which experiences are shared at an individual level. For Abetz and Moore (2017), maternity ideologies have multiplied in the context of the United States over the last decades. The basic choice of two divergent paths – undertake a professional career or stay at home taking care of children – was popularized by the end of the 1980s in the metaphor of the "mummy wars" (Peskovitz, 2005). According to Douglas and Michaels (2005), this division was problematic since, not only did it place mothers in two antagonistic

and isolated categories, it also ignored those who worked part-time, or sporadically (Peskovitz, 2005). Today, several options are available, with the potential for reduced work schedules or unpaid leave, involving complex discussions on flexible maternity leave arrangements.

In fact, the connection between the reproductive and the productive (Beck & Beck, 2001) is key to a number of specific discourses which relate intensive mothering to low income or lack of work-life balance policies. In Spain, low birth rates may be partially related to intensive mothering, perhaps explaining why women choose to dedicate themselves so exclusively to motherhood. These circumstances could also be connected to parallel discussions on natural upbringing or other ecofeminist ideas. In this regard, Stearny (1994) argues that overemphasis on the role of motherhood in women from the ecofeminist perspective invisibilizes the social construction of motherhood and dilutes women's diverse experiences of motherhood (Stearny, 1994: 155).

In terms of diversity of experience, Das (2017) analyses narratives about childbirth on social media platforms, drawing attention to the contradictions, tensions and juxtaposition of discourses surrounding the subject. Das highlights discussion about the "good birth" – what she refers to as the cultural construction of childbirth by women – which is highly idealized and linked to the preference for non-medicalized delivery. She identifies the presence of two juxtaposed discourses: the first of these takes an emancipatory position, imbued with feminist resonances and the second is a neoliberal, self-regulating, self-managed and highly individualized discourse that places these ideal births within the discourse of intensive maternity (Hays, 1998). The two discourses are intertwined, since the justifications for intensive motherhood are sometimes connected to the naturality of motherhood.

These contradictions also appear in more specific issues related to motherhood, such as breastfeeding, a topic in which women are significantly informed in social media (Demirtas et al 2020). Locatelli (2017) analyses breastfeeding images on Instagram, noting that their captions express a desire to capture the happiness of the moment and, at the same time, represent the difficulties involved. This author contends that discourses on Instagram seem to depict a tension between giving "the best" to children and the need to combine breastfeeding with the difficulties and constraints of contemporary life.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative methodology and includes different approaches such as digital ethnography (Hine, 2000), and content analysis (Van Leeuwen, & Jewitt, 2001). The research involved participant observation of these accounts during a period of two years, taking fieldnotes and storing significant posts and images, also interacting with the accounts in terms of commenting and liking. Content analysis was performed in a number of posts, including the ones selected for this paper, connecting them with the literature on feminism and media from a critical point of view.

The main objective is to identify the narratives and discourses surrounding maternity and to elaborate their relationship with feminism and other ideologies, comparing these with previous and current conceptions or cultural representations of motherhood. A second aim is to understand the role of information and expertise in maternity and motherhood.

Previous studies point to the role that Instagram plays in idealizing motherhood and maternity; as well as with other aspects of lifestyle's, the depiction of motherhood in terms of images, was considered too unrealistic and causing anxiety (Dfarova and Trofimenko, 2017). That was the origin of a previous research (San Cornelio, 2017) undertaking a case study two self-portraits (one Spanish, the other from the USA)³ that tried to challenge these ideas, fostering natural bodies depictions, together with their respective captions. Other recent studies, on post-partum bodies depiction on Instagram state that this platform enables its users to experience emotional affordances of different nature: 1) criticism and comparisons, 2) inspiration and support and 3) acceptance, get inspired or inspire other women into re-thinking the notion(s) of their post-pregnancy bodies (Dfarova and Trofimenko, 2017) .

Instagram is, of course, about images, but also about conversations where comments are shaping narratives. Consequently, my interest on Instagram turned into the discursive aspects that appeared in comments and the conversations where the audience engaged in every post. In such conversations I found polarized positions that were partly caused by personal affinities. That is why I decided to follow, beyond personal accounts, other type of accounts devoted to spread information on maternity and see what kind of positions I could find and if they were connected to the personal accounts I had previously studied.

It is interesting to note in terms of narrative construction that even that Instagram is not where discourses are created, it is a space through which they are disseminated in a more synthesized form. In contrast to Twitter, a social media that facilitates discussion and the creation of polarized debates, in terms of the topic analysed in this paper, Instagram is a relatively affirmative space, in the sense that the comments are mainly in support of the ideas posted by the promoters of the accounts. In other words, as previous authors have suggested, Instagrammers tend to mimic hegemonic discourses rather than create resistant alternatives (Abidin, 2016; Marwick, 2015). Although both the architecture and algorithm of the platform highlight differences of opinion and negative comments – which generate a lot of responses, often contradictory – it can be stated, on the basis of a scrutiny of most of the comments, that negative comments are in the minority.

The sample is composed of eight Instagram accounts devoted to sharing information on maternity and parenting in the Spanish context. The analysis began in April 2016, following the first of the eight accounts, and was completed in December 2019, six months after the last account was incorporated into the study. The total volume of posts was 5184 (see table 1). This process of two years involved taking field notes, image captures and paying special attention to the comments and replies, as part of the narrative construction in a conversational form.

Accounts analysed

The snowball method was used to select the sample, all the accounts being interconnected. The set of profiles used constitutes a theoretical sampling (Silverman, 2015: 62) in terms of grounded theory, since the sample is complete when theoretical saturation is reached, that is, when no new emergent themes or concepts are generated (Higginbottom, 2004). That meant also that other accounts were excluded on the

³ They both coincided when I was in maternity leave of my second son.

basis that they were insufficiently different in their content and approach to motherhood and parenting (thus excluding accounts only focused on a single topic, e.g. childbirth).

Although the selected profiles were followed from the author's personal Instagram account, the author's interaction with them was minimal (restricted to "liking" some posts during the research period) and the individuals responsible for the accounts were not contacted. It was decided not to anonymize the user identifiers in this paper because, in most cases, the names are denotative rather than casual, and part of the information would be missed if the names were to be changed. They are all public accounts whose aim is to reach as many followers as possible. Nevertheless, personal information on the individuals responsible for the accounts and the identities of the participants in the comments and images have been protected.

The accounts analysed are significant in quantitative terms, some of which can be considered micro and mid-tier influencers, with followers ranging from between 24k and 400k. A number of the accounts have high engagement indexes, making them significant in qualitative terms as well.

Figure 1: Network of Instagram accounts analysed. Own source.

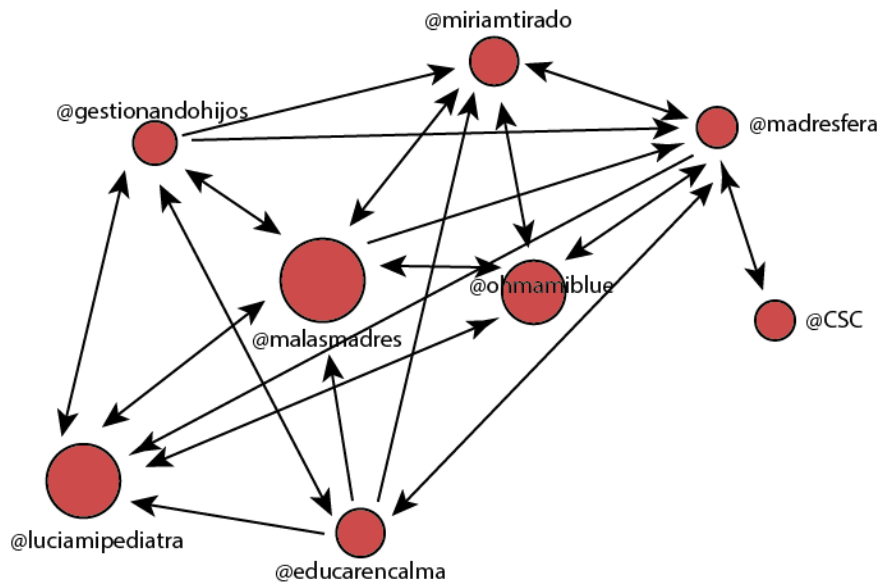


Table 1: Accounts included in the sample listed by date by order (2016–2019)

	Name	Followers⁴	Remarks
1	@malasmadres (bad mothers)	400K	Followed by 5 accounts, following 4. Total of posts: 1940 posts Main hashtags: #yonorenuncio
2	@madresfera (mother sphere)	24 K	Followed by 6, following all the remaining 7 accounts. Total of posts: 457 Main hashtags: #madresfera
3	@educarencalma (educate calmly)	34.6K	Followed by 2 and following 4 accounts. Number of posts: 900 Main hashtags: #educarencalma
4	@criarconsentidocomun (common sense parenting)	98.9K	Followed by and following only one account (<i>madresfera</i>). Number of posts: 1460 Main hashtags: #CSC #CriarConsentidoComun #crianza
5	@oh.mamiblue	321K	Followed by and following 4 accounts. Number of posts: 366 Main hashtags: #yosoloveoamor
6	@luciamipediatra (my paediatrician Lucía)	250K	Followed by and following 5 accounts. She appears in the Forbes list of 2019 as a health influencer. Number of posts :1314 Main hashtags: #luciamipediatra
7	@miriamtirado	52K	Followed by and following 5 accounts. Number of posts: 327 Main hashtags: #crianzaconsciente
8	@gestionandohijos⁵ (managing children)	43.1K	Followed by 3 accounts, following 5. The most recently-created account. Main hashtags: #educacion Number of posts = 360

Affirmative child-centred narratives

All the accounts analysed in this article are focused on sharing content related to the day-to-day life of women as mothers. They are, essentially, communicative spaces (some are self-defined directly as “media”)

⁴ Counted in January 2020

⁵ Update: This account has recently changed to @educarestodo (educating is all), currently 82.6 K followers. It has evolved into an entrepreneurial project devoted to providing parents with educational tips and strategies. Thus, the initial aim related to dissemination content on children education has become explicitly a business.

using, to a greater or lesser extent, communicative tools and resources. These include rhetoric, semiotics and other more “trendy” interactive social media techniques, such as audience-oriented quizzes and contests. The content developed in these accounts ranges from specialized content on children’s health issues to more mundane anecdotes of women’s current life experiences, including conciliation of motherhood with professional life. Generally speaking, they obey precepts identified by other authors, such as the need for information or, as described by Tiidenberg and Baym (2017), “to learn” how to be a “good mother” (Lupton, 2017) and understand their new situation, especially in the case of new mothers. It is highly remarkable that all the accounts are centred on the experience of motherhood during the first years of this period, i.e. taking care of children as babies, toddlers or children up to 6 or 7 years of age. References to other phases of childhood, even adolescence – a potentially critical period for parents – are scarce. This is perhaps explained by the fact that most of the promoters of these Instagram accounts initiated them when they became mothers and their children are still within these early development stages. As children grow up and the early years of motherhood are left behind, mothering concerns turn to educational issues. The one exception in the sample is *@gestionandohijos* (managing children), which includes educational content for parents of children of all ages.

The content offered by these accounts satisfies mothers’ need for knowledge, and this is made very clear in the case of *@madresfera*, *@criarconsentidocomun*, *@educarencalma* and *@miriamtirado*. These four accounts provide varied content related to children’s education, health and psychology with the content focused on the children (i.e. their health and well-being), and mothers occupying a secondary position, barely even mentioned. They use the first person combined with poetic texts or fragments describing situations, and they also ask direct questions of their audience in order to trigger responses in the comments space. *@madresfera* is the more generic example within this group, including all these components that are also shared with other spaces outside of this study.

These accounts are entirely aimed at mothers and use different levels of persuasion as they stress the need for mothers to be well-informed and have specific knowledge to raise children properly. They also all offer paid courses and services in other spaces, such as websites, blogs, etc., so in this sense they are businesses as well. In fact, *@criarconsentidocomun* defines itself as a “2.0 tribe, and school for parents” with online seminars taught by professionals and experts, and a private social network defined as a “Support Group”, membership of which is dependent on payment of a fee. The website and private spaces include materials related to parenting concerns and paediatric issues, with a specific focus on breastfeeding.

Previous studies on breastfeeding discourses highlight its child-centred nature and how its incorporation into educational materials is bound up with moral constructions of motherhood (Wall, 2001: 595). Wall (2001) conducted a study of Canadian educational programmes for breastfeeding, comparing them with materials generated by non-state initiatives, like the *Liga de la leche*. She defines the latter as a “maternal” approach that focuses on the embodied connection between mother and child, whereas the medical model focuses on the benefits of the milk itself, treating mothers as disembodied providers of milk to be educated and scrutinized. Wall argues that both models have the potential to both empower and oppress, and aspects of both are evident in the educational literature. This educational approach is found in the blog associated with the account *@criarconsentidocomun*, always focusing on the benefit to the baby. Even though the blog is a private initiative, it exemplifies the medical, normative approach because the content is created by

healthcare professionals. This is illustrated in the following answer to a user post that expresses the decision of weaning, because breastfeeding entails a conflicts with her need for rest.

“If this is the case for you, remember that it’s better to wait until the baby is at least 18 months old and that weaning can be difficult for babies, so patience, love and understanding are important. No white lies or emotional blackmail.”

Difficulties in breastfeeding are recurrent questions expressed by women in this Instagram space, and the advice is always to keep breastfeeding, even while recognizing the mothers’ needs and respecting other ways of feeding, such as formula or bottled milk.

Figure 2: Capture of a conversation on the difficulties of breastfeeding⁶



These online spaces are also filling the information gap left by government institutions, which are not able to provide such content and support⁷. Compared to the other accounts analysed, *@criarconsentidocomun* is the only one without a visible single figure – generally a woman – in a leadership role. In this case, it is necessary to visit the blog associated with the Instagram account to realize that this is a collective project with a number of partners, mostly women. Nevertheless, the presence of a male nurse was quite pervasive, especially in the early stages of this study.

Even that aspect of the images has improved over the last few months, the images posted are usually taken from other accounts or from image databases, such as the following image that presents to a certain extent, sexualized image of a woman breastfeeding. In this respect, this account certainly has little in common with the other spaces analysed, as the network graph also displays.

⁶ Translation: “That’s how I feel but I’m still convinced that it’s best for my son” “Of course.”

⁷ It is interesting to note here that in Spain, though the public health system – which is governed by regional governments and can therefore vary from region to region – has developed some policies in favour of breastfeeding, it has limited resources, with the result that many women feel the need to seek out more information.

Figure 3: Posted @criarconsentidocomun 7th December 2018

Since breastfeeding has become part of the cultural standard of exclusive mothering, some women accepted an understanding of failure to breastfeed as deviant (Wall, 2001: 594). These findings coincide with Das's (2017, 2018) more recent studies on natural childbirth in social media, where narratives of "failure" and the concealment of pain tend to be eliminated.

Some similarities to this conclusion were found in the spaces analysed, in the sense that only a few dissonant comments contradicted the messages posted by the account. Even though most women would admit that they either had difficulties or "failed" at breastfeeding, women show no opposition to the advice or suggestions. Consequently, there is acceptance of the discourses provided by these sources of information. The lack of significant disagreements could be explained by the fact that the accounts analysed in this paper are considered reliable sources of information and spaces in which women are searching for inspiration and support, and are generally visited with a positive attitude. On the other hand, this reinforces the general dynamic of Instagram, which has an affirmative dynamic of content and comments.

An emergent counternarrative

One of the accounts offered a completely different approach to maternity, precisely to counter women's feelings of guilt as they cope with raising children and working at the same time. Unlike the accounts described above, content in this space is centred on women as mothers, not on their children. *@malasmadres* (in English, "bad mothers") is the personal and professional project of a former advertising creative who was forced to quit her job after having her first daughter. The project was born three years ago with the aim of demystifying motherhood and breaking the myth of the "perfect mother". Even the name of this project is an ironic take on the notion of intensive mothering, aiming to empathize with mothers who are conscious of not fitting the required standard of "perfection".

Figure 4: Post published by the end of 2017⁸

Although not explicitly stated at the outset, the driver of the project has recently conveyed her commitment to feminism and, more specifically, to everything that concerns equality and family life reconciliation. The hashtag most used on this account, and the one that defines it, is #yonorenuncio (“I don’t give up”). In Spain, the maternity leave lasts 16 weeks, so reconciliation is a big issue with mothers coping with babies when they return to work. Many times, this situation involves leaving aside a professional career in order to take care of children and that’s is why in this account the main claim is do not accept this as ‘normal’.

In the featured stories of this profile we find the “violet armchair”, with statements such as “We should all be feminists”, or “I am a feminist because the world has made me like this”. Her discourse combines inviting followers to discuss day-to-day maternal experiences with other activities as part of this professional project with an activist and political component, promoting changes in legislation to bring about equality of working rights for women and mothers. *@malasmadres* is a brand with a clear line of communication which is present in the text, the tone and the images of the different posts.

⁸ Translation: being a feminist is not an option. If you haven’t suffered inequality, (...) gender violence... Don’t do it for you, do it for all of us

Figure 5: Post published by the end of 2018, including a quote by an afro-feminist activist⁹.



It is very interesting to observe how the discursive connection with feminism has changed during the study period. There were no explicit references to feminism until 2017, when she publicly stated her commitment (see fig 4), and received a number of negative comments from followers. Since then, she has posted several similar statements (see fig.5), such as the one on 30 December, 2019 (see fig. 6) when she posted a picture with a quote from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

Figure 6: Post uploaded by the end of 2019 @malasmadres¹⁰



She received a total of 68 comments (on 30 December) in response: 61 positives versus 7 negatives; therefore 87% of the comments in response to a feminist statement were positive. Most of the negative comments from users reflect certain tendentious understandings of feminism, such as "feminism is the female equivalent of male chauvinism", "feminist women are against men", and "feminism is an ideology

⁹ Translation: "It is not necessary to be anti-man to be pro-women"

¹⁰ Translation: A feminist is any women who tells the truth of her life

that divides women”, ideas which have recently been supported by a number of right-wing politicians in Spain, especially among members of ultra-right parties. However, this small number of negative comments can be justified by the evolution of this account, which has gradually made the feminist position of its leader more explicit, with the result that the account’s community is now more concerned with these ideas. This coincides with the increasing presence of feminism in the public agenda. If we delve into details of discussions among followers of the account, we find a number of connections with Angela McRobbie and Rosalind Gill’s notion of post-feminism, which defines a new and “modern” female subject with the ability to choose “freely” in her life. Most of the active commentators express a totally committed position as feminists, according to the power granted to middle-class women through second wave feminism and its legitimate participation in areas of ‘public’ life in recent years in relation to paid employment, higher education and the decision to postpone marriage, or remain single (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2007),

Other commentators express only partial acceptance of feminism, sometimes denying the connection to feminist discourse, or even steering clear of use of the label, for reasons explained in various studies, such as George (2010) or San Cornelio (2017). These contradictions are inherent to the relationship between motherhood and feminism.

There is a clear interaction between this account and *@oh.mamiblue*. They post comments on each other’s accounts, especially in relation to feminism and diversity issues. Led by a woman *@oh.mamiblue* reflects the family life of a same-sex couple and their child. The account expresses a personal narrative committed to green activism, and especially to the visibilization of the LGBTI collective as a family model, and any other kind of diverse parenting model, using their own experiences as narrative (In the summer of 2019 they explain on a trip to Argentina they incidences they met).

The account maintains a certain editorial line and very careful visual content, which is very positive in terms of expressing affection and reaffirming their condition as a family. Their main hashtag is *#yosoloveoamor* (“I only see love”), and this emerged from an incident that happened in 2017 when Instagram censored and erased a picture of them. They started an activist campaign to visibilize homophobia on Instagram and used this hashtag that was widespread all around the world (see fig. 7). The account also includes feminist statements and, as with the previous account, sometimes receives negative comments, though these are the minority.

Figure 8: Post by @oh.mami.blue in 2019 january when they recall the story of the hashtag



These accounts provide some alternative models of motherhood in that their content focuses, not only on children, but on mothers and other aspects of family life beyond the strict physical well-being of children.

Expert knowledge

According to Del Olmo (2014), disconnection from the tribe or the core family began long ago. Grandmothers became a less appreciated source of knowledge for young women as specialized knowledge became more important and books written by experts and scientists – usually men – became prominent sources of maternal knowledge in a broad sense. Del Olmo contends that the most expert sources of information about motherhood “are obsessed with the maternal-filial relationship” and pay insufficient attention to other sources of life experiences and knowledge. In this way, motherhood is presented as something internal to mothers; it is heavily psychologized and its extensive contextual aspects are ignored. This coincides with the neoliberal notion of maternity and motherhood, reinforcing the isolation in which maternity is experienced nowadays (Del Olmo, 2018) and the type of knowledge and information provided to solve and manage parenting, which has a strong psychological component.

In this situation of isolation, information that circulates on social media is becoming a valid source of knowledge, with different levels of authority. Brigitte Jordan (1993) offers the following definition of authoritative knowledge: “for any particular domain, several knowledge systems exist, some of which, by consensus, come to carry more weight than others, either because they explain the state of the world better for purposes at hand, or because they are associated with a stronger power base” (Jordan, 1993: 152). Jordan states that, as social processes legitimize one or other type of knowledge as authoritative and more valid, others are devalued or dismissed altogether (1993: 152).

Some of the knowledge disseminated by the spaces analysed in this study comes from professional sources. This is the case with @luciamipediatra, the profile of a paediatrician who is deeply committed to the dissemination of medical and scientific knowledge (she has won several awards in this field). The central

theme of her account is medical and child care issues from a professional perspective. Her commitment to science has led her to defend scientific positions, for instance, on the influence of anti-vaccine groups. Her narrative also includes personal stories and tips on food and health in general, using images taken by the author.

It must be stated that this is classical authoritative knowledge derived from a health care professional. In fact, she is a recognized authority, the type of celebrity and social media influencer that has written several books and participates in talks and conferences. Her different spaces and productions are aimed at helping families, in approachable style, to reduce anxiety related to children's health and possible diseases. Social media and the internet have amplified the scope and the audience of this doctor, but the type of knowledge she disseminates is also legitimized by the scientific community

Another space aimed at producing and sharing knowledge related to wellbeing and taking care of children is *@educarencalma*. Like the project *@malasmadres*, this project also originated in employment problems experienced by its leader as a result of pregnancy. In this case, she shifts from her habitual occupation (as a teacher) to psychological issues, and the main theme of this space is the promotion of educating children through so-called "positive discipline", with content devoted to aspects of parenting from this perspective. Her developer, who has turned the space into a professional project as well, offers training and conferences, as well as maintaining the online spaces (blog, Instagram profile, twitter). Like the previous one, this space is clearly identifiable with its leader, and includes personal stories; the published images largely correspond to photographs and "selfies" of the author.

Despite the similarities between the two accounts described, the important difference is that, though Molina had no professional or medical knowledge, she decides to learn it in order to use and share it with other mothers and parents in general. This knowledge is in the process of legitimization, using mechanisms such as conferences, courses, etc. In common with most of the spaces analysed, the aim is to reach the maximum audience possible.

The third "expert" space is that of *@miriamtirado*, a former journalist who, like the first two, ends up turning her account into a professional project. Tirado has written several books and teaches courses offering guidance to parents on different aspects of child care and education. She stands as a parenting consultant and a professional, offering advice from her own experiences using "conscientious upbringing", an approach that combines different disciplines. The information is not well grounded in the scientific context but aims to be close to it.

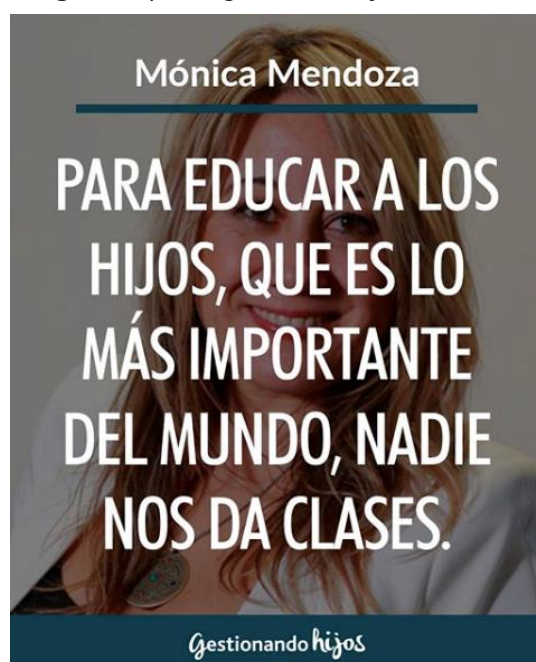
The fact that some of the accounts analyzed are managed by women who have turned her activity into a job can be also related with the idea of aspirational labor as: "a mode of (mostly) uncompensated, independent work that is propelled by the much venerated ideal of getting paid to do what you love" (Duffi, 2017). Even that this concept is sometimes related to creative labor, these women have stated, in their posts how they love this work in social media; *@educarencalma*, *@miriamtirado*, or even *@malasmadres* could be an example of this.

The last space to be added to the sample is *@gestionandohijos*. This can be considered a meta-space, since the content expressed takes various aspects of the previous spaces – education, love, etc. – but incorporates them into the rhetoric of management and professional life. It is a corporate space, and this is made very clear by the use of colours, typography, etc., in every post. In fact, the posts only include text with no images or photographs. The contents and approach of this space resonate with a number of recent studies

that examine the way in which the discourse of management has been extended to family issues (Miltner, 2018), following, for example, the so-called Agile Family Manifesto. According to Miltner, this method of family organization is inspired by agile methodologies and has grown in popularity in the United States as a result of a proliferation of manuals, tutorials and courses which are uncritically accepted by a section of the population (Miltner, 2018).

The *@gestionandohijos* space could be considered a refined version of this, since many different professionals participate in the events they organize, though the primary focus is on education. Posts include tips and highlight the importance of being trained and educated to raise our children. This is clearly stated in the following post:

Figure 9: post @gestionandohijos 2-1-2020¹¹



The profiles analysed in this section provide different accounts of the importance of knowledge and information, and the need to be informed in the process of mothering. They demonstrate different levels of professionalization and intensity in demanding parents' attention and involvement, from professional advice to the need to become the manager of your children and family.

Towards professional mothering? Preliminary conclusions

In this study, I have examined three types of approach to maternity and motherhood: affirmative and child-centred narratives, feminist counter-narratives, and discourses on professionalization and authoritative knowledge. In regards of the aims of the research, I wanted to look firstly at the different representations

¹¹ Translation: nobody teach us to educate our kids, what is the most important thing in the world.

and narratives on maternity, and their articulations with feminist and postfeminist discourses. It is interesting to note that ideas related to feminism appear explicitly in only one part of this set, specifically, in two out of the eight accounts. The focus in the other accounts is on the children, with the mother firmly in the background, thus reproducing intensive mothering ideas and normalizing the notion that mothers must become the best version of themselves in terms of motherhood. Feminism is evident in some of the counter-narratives and is also present in some instances related to the naturality of motherhood. In this regard, some of the choices by mothers are sometimes interpreted as empowering, in terms of postfeminism, at the same time as they are self-regulating. On the other hand, we can consider the relation to neoliberalism in the individual exclusive responsibility loads for women and consumption related to paying for information, talks and other educational resources.

This ties in with the second aim of this paper, which is to understand the role of information and expertise in maternity and motherhood. In this regard, it is possible to conclude that doubts about parenting are answered in professional information spaces as well as non-professional spaces, wherein information is derived from personal experience and therefore endowed with an emerging authority that is being created by women who become mothering "professionals" and spread the word on the internet.

In this context, the idea of intensive maternity evolves into a sort of "professionalization of maternity" (San Cornelio, 2017) that entails the transfer of responsibilities, logic and professional discourses to maternity and motherhood (whether is a full-time dedication or not). This is where all the knowledge and informational skills obtained on the internet by women come into play in order to perform "successful" or "correct" mothering. It reinforces the intensive maternity adding a layer of the information obtained specially on the internet. In this way, both dimensions – the emotional (contained in myths of the ideal and dedicated mother) and the rational (contained in accumulated knowledge) – are integrated into this idea of "advanced" intensive mothers; in other words, professional mothers. Nevertheless, this information and skills include a moral weight that we should value and balance, since we enter into a bubble of assumptions, norms and feelings that reflect narratives on mothering through which life aspirations and are shaped and framed.

References

- Abetz, J., & Moore, J. (2018). "Welcome to the Mommy Wars, Ladies": Making Sense of the Ideology of Combative Mothering in Mommy Blogs. *Communication Culture & Critique*, 11(2), 265-281
- Abidin, C. (2016). "Aren't these just young, rich women doing vain things online?": Influencer selfies as subversive frivolity. *Social Media+ Society*, 2(2), 1-17, 2056305116641342.
- Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2001) [1990] *El normal caos del amor. Las nuevas formas de la relación amorosa*. Barcelona: Paidós contextos.
- Couldry, N., & Hepp, A. (2018). *The mediated construction of reality*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Djafarova, E., & Trofimenko, O. (2017). Exploring the relationships between self-presentation and self-esteem of mothers in social media in Russia. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 73, 20-27.
- Das, R. (2017). Speaking About Birth: Visible and Silenced Narratives in Online Discussions of Childbirth. *Social Media + Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117735753>

- Das, R. (2018). Mediated subjectivities of the maternal: A critique of childbirth videos on YouTube. *The Communication Review*, 21(1), 66-84.
- Del Olmo, C. (2014). *¿Dónde está mi tribu?: maternidad y crianza en una sociedad individualista*. (Where is my tribe?: maternity and upbringing in an individualistic society) Barcelona: Grupo Planeta Spain.
- Del Olmo (2018) Conference 'Jornada Pensar la maternitat' (Thinking maternity) Barcelona, Bonnemaïson Space 27-11-2018.
- Douglas, S., & Michaels, M. (2005). *The mommy myth: The idealization of motherhood and how it has undermined all women*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Duffy, B. E. (2017). *(Not) getting paid to do what you love: Gender, social media, and aspirational work*. Yale University Press.
- Frosh, P. (2018). *The poetics of digital media*. John Wiley & Sons.
- George, N. (2010). 'Just like your Mother?' The politics of feminism and maternity in the Pacific Islands. *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 32(1), 77-96.
- Gill, R. (2007). Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility. *European journal of cultural studies*, 10(2), 147-166.
- Goodwin, S., & Huppertz, K. (2010). Mothers making class distinctions: The aesthetics of maternity. In *The Good Mother: Contemporary Motherhoods in Australia* (pp. 69–88). Sydney: Sydney University Press.
- Green, F. J. (2012). "Evaluating mothers in Supernanny and Crash Test Mummy". In E. Podnieks (Ed.), *Mediating moms: Mothers in popular culture*. McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP.
- Hall, P. C. (1998). "Mothering mythology in the late twentieth century: Science, gender lore and celebratory narrative". *Canadian Woman Studies*, 18, 59–63.
- Hays, S. (1998). *The cultural contradictions of motherhood*. Yale University Press.
- Higginbottom, G. M. A. (2004). Sampling issues in qualitative research. *Nurse Researcher (through 2013)*, 12(1), 7.
- Hine, C. (2000). *Virtual ethnography*. London: Sage.
- Jordan, B. (1992, December 3). Authoritative knowledge and its construction: Introductory remarks to symposium on "Birth in Twelve Cultures: Papers in Honor of Brigitte Jordan." Paper presented at Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association, San Francisco, CA
- Kaplan, E. A. (2013). "Motherhood and representation: The mother in popular culture and melodrama". London, UK: Routledge Hays, S. (1998). *The cultural contradictions of motherhood*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Ketler, S. K. (2000). Preparing for motherhood: Authoritative knowledge and the undercurrents of shared experience in two childbirth education courses in Cagliari, Italy. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 14(2), 138-158.
- Leaver, T., Highfield, T., & Abidin, C. (2020). *Instagram: Visual Social Media Cultures*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Lee, C. (1997). "Social context, depression and the transition to motherhood". *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 2, 93–108.
- Littler, J. (2013). The rise of the "yummy mummy": Popular conservatism and the neoliberal maternal in contemporary British culture. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 6, 227–243.

- Locatelli, E. (2017). Images of Breastfeeding on Instagram: Privacy Management. *Social Media + Society* <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117707190>
- Lopez, L. K. (2009). "The Redefining motherhood through the blogosphere". *Social media & Society*, 11, 729–747
- Lupton, D. (2017). 'It just gives me a bit of peace of mind': Australian women's use of digital media for pregnancy and early motherhood. *Societies*, 3(3), 1-13
- Martínez, M. H. H. (2017). Políticas de promoción de lactancia materna en España y Europa: un análisis desde el género. *Dilemata*, (25), 201-215.
- Marwick, A. E. (2015). Instafame: Luxury selfies in the attention economy. *Public culture*, 27(1 (75)), 137-160.
- McRobbie, A. (2007). *Post feminism and popular culture: Bridget Jones and the new gender regime* (pp. 27-39). Duke University Press.
- Miner Guerrero, R. (2018). Inmigrantes y refugiados en una España con fuerte despoblación rural y baja natalidad. En: La acción social de la Iglesia: XIX Congreso Católicos y Vida Pública, Madrid 17,18 y 19 de noviembre de 2017, pp. 525-533. Madrid: CEU Ediciones.
- Miltner, K. (2018) The secrets of happy families? Regulating (re)productive labor with agile family management. ECREA conference Lugano: Switzerland 2nd of November 2018.
- Nash, M. (2014) (ed.) *Feminidades y masculinidades. Arquetipos y prácticas de género*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.
- Orton-Johnson, K. (2017). "Mummy Blogs and Representations of Motherhood: "Bad Mummies " and Their Readers" *Social Media + Society*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117707186>
- Peskowitz, M. (2005). *The truth behind the mummy wars: Who decides what makes a good mother?* Chicago, IL: Seal Press.
- Rome, J. M. (2020). *Exploring Constructions of "Good" Motherhood on Social Media: Navigating Neoliberal Mommy Rhetorics and the Negative Affective Entanglements of Women's Discourses on Pinterest, Facebook, and Instagram* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Nebraska-Lincoln).
- Sánchez de Bustamante, M.S. (2016) La mami progre. El ethos de la maternidad en el blog Según Roxi. *Letra. Imagen. Sonido: Ciudad Mediatizada*, (15), 243-256.
- San Cornelio, G. (2017). Visiones contemporáneas de la maternidad en Instagram: una aproximación mixta al estudio del selfie como narrativa personal. *Rizoma*, 5(2), 26-41.
- Silverman, D. (2015). *Interpreting qualitative data*. London: Sage.
- Stearney, L. M. (1994). Feminism, ecofeminism, and the maternal archetype: Motherhood as a feminine universal. *Communication Quarterly*, 42(2), 145-159
- Tiidenberg, K., & Baym, N. K. (2017). Learn it, buy it, work it: Intensive pregnancy on Instagram. *Social Media+ Society*, 3(1), 1-13
- Van Leeuwen, T., & Jewitt, C. (Eds.). (2001). *The handbook of visual analysis*. London: Sage.
- Wall, G. (2001). Moral constructions of motherhood in breastfeeding discourse. *Gender & society*, 15(4), 592-610.
- Woodward, K. (2003). Representations of motherhood. In S. Earle & G. Letherby (Eds.), *Gender, identity and reproduction* (pp. 18–32). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.