

SHARENTING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SHARENTING THROUGH THE  
LENS OF THE PRESENTATION OF SELF

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

School of Communication and the Arts

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and interpret the sharenting of moms who post to Facebook. Sharenting is a term to describe the practice of parents sharing about their children on social media. The theory that guided this study was Erving Goffman's presentation of self. More specifically, the phenomenon was analyzed to understand how moms use their appearance, setting, and mannerisms to construct motherhood with their performance team on social media. This study used a scroll back interview method to gather data to co-create the essence of sharenting and interpret its meaning. Twenty moms who had elementary-aged children and regularly posted to a personal Facebook account were selected from a mom's group on Facebook named Mom Service. In-depth interviews were conducted at a local coffee shop. The interviews were transcribed, and the essence of sharenting was developed. The description of sharenting revealed that moms intentionally construct posts to establish an appearance that is either reflective or other-focused. The analysis of the setting revealed that for a performance to be believable, the performance team must conform to the expectations of the star performer and director—the mom. The analysis also showed that moms develop an etiquette for their social media mannerisms that are based on their beliefs, expectations, and interactions. These insights further the understanding of the ideal self, deviance, and authenticity, which advise practical tools for stakeholders. This interpretation informed three conversation starters for moms to use to engage their children in dialogue about social media literacy and sharenting. Future studies should investigate social media lurkers, children with their own accounts, and video sharing through stories.

*Keywords:* Facebook, motherhood, phenomenology, presentation of self, sharenting

### **Dedication**

Thank you to my husband for loving me perfect. You are more than I ever wished for or imagined. To my mom, your mark is on every word of this study, and it is inspired by your keen intelligence. My parents have always supported every idea I have ever dreamed of accomplishing. I so appreciate the unparalleled work ethic that my dad and mom have instilled in me through every commitment they take on. I also want to thank my in-laws for believing in our family. This accomplishment is possible because you all have supported me. Finally, to my son: always align your goals with God's word. "Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4).

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

When I was a little girl, my mom was meticulous about our family photo albums. The images were organized chronologically, each photo had a clear plastic sleeve, and they were all stored in black leather albums displayed on our living room shelves. I loved looking through these albums. On occasion, my mom would pull one off the shelf, and she would tell the best stories about the experiences captured and preserved in that album. It made me feel like I was an important part of our family. Her favorite story, which she frequently recounted, was when we climbed to the top of Stone Mountain. I was a toddler, and so my grandfather was carrying me. There were only cloth diapers back then, and since it was hot that day, that was all I had on. She would laugh before she got to the punch line, share a picture from the summit, and say, “Poppy was holding Evie and her poop in his hands.” Potty stories always seem to garner a lot of attention.

When I became a mom, I wanted photographs of my family to remember and share those special moments. I was challenged to collect the memories of my child. I wanted to document all the things we were doing so that my son could be reminded of all of the special memories. I needed to capture and curate his childhood to show how great it was. I also wanted him to have those memories to share with his future family. He, too, loves looking through old photographs as he learns about our family. I struggled with the right way to organize it, and I eventually turned to social media as a way to document our family narrative. I prefer Instagram because the purpose of my account is to create a tangible photo album, but I also have a subscription to Chatbooks. Each book contains 60 images from my Instagram posts, printed and bound into a coffee table book. I have collected almost 9 years of daily images. One of my favorite memories, much like my mom’s, is my little guy in a potty predicament. The humor of these childhood

moments can translate from real-life experiences to online experiences. As I use my account to share our experiences, I almost always include an image of my son. Focusing on him allows me to construct posts that I think others will want to Like and comment on because posts with just me are not that interesting. As I actively construct my own digital identity, I passively construct a digital identity for my son and communicate to him what I value. I never thought much of it until he started looking through the feed with me. As an almost 10-year-old, he is aware of the content I share, and although he is a willing participant, occasionally, he will veto videos of his dance moves. Sharing content is fun, and everyone seemed to be doing it. However, I realized this digital footprint will follow him throughout his life, making me very aware of the content that I share.

### **The Phenomenon of Sharenting**

Moms approach social media with several different motivations and desires. This variety results in a continuum of concern displayed by the mom. Sharenting is a term to describe the practice of parents sharing about their children on social media. To study the phenomenon of sharenting, the individual experience is an important part of the description. It is through that experience that meaning is ascribed to sharenting. This approach places the study in the phenomenological tradition of communication in which the central concept is the experience of self (Lindeman & Schuneman, 2020). To gather descriptions of this phenomenon, I will be a co-analyst with each participant as they describe their experience because it is in those interactions that their construction of digital identities will be revealed. Each mom serves as the moderator of what she sharents and therefore specifically chooses her presentation on Facebook. I believe this is important because, as a Christian parent, I have been called to raise my child to glorify God. The verse in Proverbs explains, “start children off on the way they should go, and even when

they are old they will not turn from it” (New International Version, 2005/1973, Proverbs 22:6). Since sharenting is considered a significant part of modern parenting, a mom must first understand the use of social media in her own life because everything she does influences her child. Parents can guide their children through the perils of social media by setting standards for their own social media practices that represent their faith and provide an example to their children. The construction of digital identities illustrates the mom’s existential beliefs of herself and her child, telling others who they are. Therefore, this study follows a social constructivist paradigm in the phenomenology tradition of communication to describe and interpret the meaning of sharenting by using the theory of the presentation of self.

### **Background**

Sharenting is a phenomenon that emerged from the digital age as a convenient way for parents to keep friends and family updated on their children’s lives. Photographs that were once printed are now digital, and one of the easiest ways to share digital images is through social media. This transition changed the way parents share images and tell stories about their children. Moms sharing information about their children is not new, but the internet makes sharenting much more of a concern because of the digital identities that moms construct when they share.

### **Current Sharenting Practices**

Parents find joy in sharing about their children with friends and family. Birth announcements and baby showers mark the introduction of a new baby. Brag books, baby books, and photo albums collect life narratives and can be shared with others. Family photography has been the most popular form of photography since the 19th century (Cino et al., 2020). It was expensive at first, but technology and digitization turned photography into an everyday activity. Whether posed or candid, photographs hold important social and emotional value for a family.

The preservation of memories through photography helps develop an individual's identity by illustrating a life story, reminding them of their dignity, and memorializing them after death (Hoyle et al., 2020; Keskinen et al., 2019; Testoni et al., 2020). The importance of photography spans all ages and all experiences. It is a universal way to capture an individual, share it with others, and revisit it whenever one desires.

The digital age and the popularity of social media have transformed the ways parents share photographs (Verswijvel et al., 2019). Steven Leckart is credited with first introducing the term “sharenting” in a *Wall Street Journal* article in 2012, and the *Collins English Dictionary* added the entry to its database in 2016 (Lazard et al., 2019). The most widely used definition derives from the *Collins English Dictionary* (Fox & Hoy, 2019; Kopecky et al., 2020), which states that sharenting is “the habitual use of social media to share news, images, etc. of one’s children” (as cited in Lazard et al., 2019, p. 1). A version of Blum-Ross and Livingstone’s (2017) description of sharenting, which is often cited in research on this topic, describes sharenting as a “shorthand term denoting when parents share information about themselves and their children online” (p. 110). The word “sharenting” comes from combining the words “share” and “parent.” More than half of moms and a third of fathers share information about their children on social media (Hinojo-Lucena et al., 2020). The popularity of social media has transformed parenting into a digital experience, and many parents use social media as a prevalent part of parenting.

### **Current Sharenting Concerns**

Parents use social media for a variety of reasons. Three-quarters of parents engage in social media, and moms are the most active (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2017). Social media is a convenient place for moms to find information and advice about the challenges they face as new

parents (Setyastuti et al., 2019). Everyday moms look to mommy bloggers for advice (Archer, 2019). Accomplished mothers share good mothering techniques (Lazard et al., 2019), and many moms celebrate milestones and show off their children by posting content about them (Verswijvel et al., 2019). Fox et al. (2022) reported that dads view commonly shared content of their children as highly sensitive, but still, in conjunction with their wives, they share content about their children to present themselves as engaged dads. Research has also shown some concern about the practice of sharenting. Heavy users spend more than 80 minutes a day on social media (Setyastuti et al., 2019), and 30% of moms post content every day that includes their children (Hinojo-Lucena et al., 2020). This activity may lead to social media addiction and other risky online behaviors like oversharing (Yarigarraresh et al., 2020). Moms often fail to protect their child's rights and privacy when they regularly share content online (Archer, 2019). This is prevalent because moms feel pressured to share content about their children with friends and family (Siibak & Traks, 2019). They also build connections with other moms to offer much-needed support (Archer & Kao, 2018). Moms turn to social media because many social interactions have moved to social networking platforms. Most moms have been using social media for many years and are comfortable sharing their thoughts and lives with strangers. So, moms share content to present their desired self and interact with other moms (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). As moms actively construct their digital identity, they passively construct their child's digital identity.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that the relational identity of parenting forces moms to share content about their children to construct a presentation of self on social media. When a mom makes the decision to post online, the relational nature of her status is entangled with her individual self

(Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). Many parents “embrace the notion that being a parent encompasses a relational identity where the child and parent mutually exist in an imbricated visual, social media narrative” (Holiday et al., 2020, p. 1). To create a digital representation of self, the mom will inevitably include images, videos, and information about others. Most often, the other is her child. These posts may include pregnancy announcements, birth pictures, the first day of school, vacations, meals, and holidays. Very quickly the mom has created a digital footprint for her child. These footprints are idealized and capture only the best memories and experiences that the mom wants to share with others. Archer and Kao (2018) discovered that sharenting on “social media in general, and Facebook in particular, is a ubiquitous part of the parenting experience” (p. 134). This has made parenting a digitally shared activity. Through sharenting, parents have the opportunity to develop a digital representation of self (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). The self portrayed on Facebook is usually highly socially desirable but has yet to be fully embodied outside of the digital realm because it is mediated and curated through technology (Zhao et al., 2008). But moms still seek support during the vulnerable days of parenting (Fox & Hoy, 2019), and they post to create an archive for their family (Lincoln & Robards, 2017).

Developing this digital archive creates identities for the parent, the child, and the family. It is a complex narrative that communicates messages about and to the entire family. The literature suggests that moms post about their children as a way to garner parenting advice, establish social status, organize and archive photographs, and manage impressions (Verswijvel et al., 2019). Consequently, moms often post content that includes her children as she actively constructs her digital identity. Atwell et al. (2019) found that 54% of parents admit to sharing photographs of their children on social media. Regularly engaging in sharenting raises concerns

about the child's right to privacy, the child's safety, and the impact of the curated content.

The progression of technology over everything has the ability to change an entire society. A new technology does not just make something better or worse; it is not additive or subtractive. If it does what it is designed to do, it changes everything. If it does not, then it is discarded. This proven efficiency develops a dependency and one's faith that the technology will work. As technology establishes its reliability in a society, it continually reinforces its control. Media ecology, developed by Postman, is "concerned about understanding how communication technologies and techniques control the form, amount, speed, distribution and direction of information: and how, at the same time, these configurations or preferences of information impact people's perceptions, values, and attitudes" (Velazquez et al., 2018, p. 587). The introduction of a new or newly repurposed technique fundamentally restructures the society it enters. The technology gives new meaning to descriptions, images, and relations. It happens quickly and under the guise of progression.

In the United States, this guise of progression, with the country's eagerness and enthusiasm for technology, is the epitome of a technopoly. The United States went full speed into the technologies of radio, television, and the internet. This ensemble of electronics allows one to fully participate in almost any experience from the privacy of one's own home. In a technopoly, the technology replaces needs. It rules like a religion and rates everything from opinion to IQ. Postman (1993) asserted that you must question both the benefits and the consequences, not just one or the other. Social media has been adopted by most of the globe, and only recently have the negative consequences emerged as an area of concern. Facebook prioritizes engagement and uses algorithms to control content and increase profits. The way information appears to the user influences the individual experience.

The inundation of information on social media networks has created a need for algorithms to edit and organize the content that each user views (Gioglio & Walter, 2014). Depending on the structure of the post, things like images, videos, word count, and hashtags can cut through the clutter and send it to the top. Lipu and Siibak (2019) revealed that the affordance and pleasure that stem from sharenting outshadow the potential risk. Even with an awareness of the risk associated with posting content online, most moms still post about their children on social networking sites. “The majority of mothers in our sample felt quite comfortable with sharing photos and information about their children on SNS and were not very concerned about the potential of introducing new risks to their children’s identity and privacy” (Lipu & Siibak, 2019, p. 64). The continual popularity of sharing memories online indicates a need to describe and interpret the meaning of the phenomenon of sharenting.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe and interpret the meaning of the sharenting experience of moms who post to Facebook. This is important because moms use their children as props in their presentation of mothering on social media. As she presents self on social media, she also constructs a presentation of her children. At this stage in the research, sharenting will be generally defined as the regular sharing of images, videos, and content by parents to social media. The theory guiding this study is the presentation of self (Goffman, 1959) as it applies to the appearances, settings, and mannerisms of the performance teams used to construct digital identities. Merunkova and Slerka (2019) believed this framework to be suitable for researching the formation of profiles on social media. Moms need to understand the formation of profiles on social media because they influence the belief in one’s own worth and value. The high level of social media integration into offline social interactions echoes the

importance of understanding the influence of digital identities.

### **Significance of the Study**

The theoretical significance of this study is expanding the understanding of the presentation of self by moms who share on social media. The inundation of social media into the daily lives of much of the world leads to users forming their own digital identities (Merunkova & Slerka, 2019). Blum-Ross and Livingstone (2017) explained the challenges of representing the relational identity of parent and child. They asserted a need to provide parents a way to negotiate the intertwined relationships while presenting self and protecting their child. Aligning with this belief are Holiday et al. (2020), who asserted the need to consider the motivations of the parent's sharenting as a way to ascertain the intention of the performance produced on social media. This study diverges from previous studies to examine the performance team in the presentation of self as described by Goffman (1959). The team includes the star actor, the director, and the ceremonial roles. Taking this approach will produce a more robust description of how moms perform parenting on social media in an attempt to broaden the theoretical understanding of how appearances, settings, and mannerisms construct digital identities.

The practical significance of this study is providing parents with conversation starters to open communication about social media literacy and sharenting. Children have a right to have their voice and choices included in matters that relate to them (Dobson & Jay, 2020). Most children want their parents to ask permission when sharing content that includes them (Moser et al., 2017). However, only 17% of parents have ever asked or even thought about what their child thinks of their sharenting (Atwell et al., 2019). Open communication about the family's expectations, and guidelines for social media use can build trust between the parent and child and increase family efficacy (Procentese et al., 2019). These conversation starters can serve as a

practical tool for parents to integrate into communication with their children.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Since so much of modern life is now experienced on and through social media, it is important to examine the influence of these online interactions. Research has shown that parents incorporate content about their children as a way to present self online (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2017). Moms want to be successful in their presentation goals in order to feel worthy of the attention and love by their family and friends. The relational identity of a parent makes it difficult to perform parenting without the representation of a child (Holiday et al., 2020). Parents—moms especially—post content about their children as a way to garner more attention, connect with other moms, and manage impressions (Lazard et al., 2019). The resulting digital footprint is used to establish a performance that gives the mom social benefits, facilitates social interactions, and constructs her identity. “In the United States, 92% of children under the age of 2 have some kind of presence on social media” (Otero, 2017, p. 412). The construction of these digital identities is often developed without the consent of the child and leads to a presentation of the child and their childhood based on the parent’s preference (Choi & Lewallen, 2018). Additionally, the parent’s right to present supersedes the desires of the child (Archer, 2019). Using Goffman’s (1959) theory of the presentation of self, sharenting can be described as a performance of mothering. This performance has been examined as an extended self (Holiday et al., 2020), as the boundaries of self (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017), and as representation (Choi & Lewallen, 2018). However, sharenting has never been studied in terms of how appearances, settings, and mannerisms captured in the content shared by moms construct a presentation of self.

### Research Questions

Goffman (1959) uses a theater metaphor to explain how individuals perform self in everyday social interactions. Based on the theory of the presentation of self, an individual will animate masks prescribed by society to perform a specific role in a specific situation. This dramatization includes the stage, the performers, and the props (Goffman, 1959). The presentation of self by moms inevitably includes content of her children, and therefore, the mom becomes the star performer and the director of the performance dictating how they are portrayed online. To gain insight into this production, the following research questions will be asked.

RQ 1: How do moms use images, videos, and content to construct an appearance for the presentation of self when sharenting on Facebook?

In the performance, moms attempt to manage others' impressions of them by constructing a specific appearance. Children are the least receptive to sharenting when parents are motivated to post as impression management (Verswijvel et al., 2019). However, many parents still share, which causes contention in the parent and child relationship (Moser et al., 2017). The influence of social media has accentuated the importance of appearance. The purpose of this question is to gather data related to how a mom negotiates appearance on social media in order to meet her presentation goals.

RQ 2: How do moms use images, videos, and content to construct a setting for the presentation of self when sharenting on Facebook?

According to Goffman's theory, individuals intentionally control and alter the setting of the performance to meet their desired impression (Merunkova & Slerka, 2019). This is a strategic way to gain control over one's life, increase one's rewards, and minimize one's costs. The setting is the set of objects that sets the scene, including backdrops, furniture, decorations, and other

items. Asking this question should lead to information about how and why an image is posed, or even if it is posed. The use of these sign vehicles (e.g., status symbols like the newest designer bag) communicates cues to the audience of what type of mom the user is presenting. The intentions and motivations for how the user uses the setting may be revealed during the in-depth interviews.

RQ 3: How do moms use images, videos, and content to construct a mannerism for the presentation of self when sharenting on Facebook?

On social media, mannerisms are reflected in the interactions of Likes, comments, and shares that should align with the performance. These mannerisms are carefully considered and represent meaning for both the poster and the Liker (Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2018). This question is intended to collect details of the intentions and motivations for moms interacting and engaging in conversation with others online. Conversations shared on the platform are rich with insights about presenting self on social media. This information should help to make meaning of the interactions and how they influence the performance.

### **Definitions**

The following definitions of terms are specific to this study and will describe the phenomenon of sharenting.

**Appearance:** all the stimuli that function to tell the audience of the performer's status (Goffman, 1959)

**Facebook Timeline:** a combination of the profile and wall to comprise a reverse-chronological detail year by year of a user's Facebook history (Robards & Lincoln, 2017)

**Identity:** the image of self that is embodied in communication (Merunkova & Slerka, 2019)

**Interaction:** all the interplay that occurs throughout any occasion when a given set of individuals are in one another's presence (Goffman, 1959)

**Mannerism:** all the stimuli that function to warn the audience of the interaction role that the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation (Goffman, 1959)

**Performance Teams:** comprised of three roles: the star who has dramatic dominance, the director who coordinates the scene, and the ceremonial roles, which are all the extras (Goffman, 1959)

**Setting:** expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or inadvertently used by the individual during the performance (Goffman, 1959)

**Sharenting:** the regular posting of images, videos, and content by parents to social media (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017)

### Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe and interpret the meaning of the sharenting experience for moms who post to Facebook. Parents spend a lot of time on social media because of its low cost and convenience. New moms can easily connect with other moms from the comfort of their homes. Moms use social media as a source of information and for entertainment. The problem is that when moms share content online, they are constructing digital identities. The relational nature of parenting intertwines these digital identities, and moms construct a digital footprint for their children that will follow them for the rest of their lives. The popularity and longevity of Facebook indicate that this is more than a fad. Even though social media has become an integral part of a mom's daily routine that she is comfortable with, it is important that she understands the impact it has on her and her family. Social media transforms the way individuals communicate with others. This alters the interactions between the parent and

child online and offline. The prominence of social media in the mom's life influences her children and the impression she makes on others. Children do not need their parents to prioritize photographing, editing, captioning, and posting their experiences. They need parents to step away from the technology and engage with them. Idealized presentations on Facebook have become more important than experiencing the actual moment, making it critical to understand this phenomenon.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter traces the origins of sharenting by explaining the importance of family photography and the influence of the stories that accompany them to illustrate the shift to the modern day sharing of digital images through posts on social media. The use of social media by parents, and moms especially, has become a significant component of parenting. Moms use social media for a variety of reasons, and it has been integrated into everyday routines, which emphasizes the importance of the interactions that occur within the social networking platforms. This chapter also includes current research on the posting practices of moms and how social media is used to construct digital identities through the presentation of self. The theory of the presentation of self will be used to interpret the meaning of the description of sharenting by moms who experience it on Facebook. The final section identifies the gaps in the literature, which support the need for this study.

### **Origins of Sharenting**

This phenomenon emerged because the internet has created a new place for social interactions to occur. Photo sharing is a social experience that includes telling stories and constructing identities through what is captured in the photograph. Sharenting has moved this interaction to an online social networking platform. The digitization of photography and the emergence of social media has revealed a new stage on which individuals perform self. Social media is the stage; more specifically, Facebook is a place where digital identities are constructed and shared with an audience.

### **Photography Constructs Identity**

The preservation of memories through photography helps develop an individual's identity (Hoyle et al., 2020). Photo albums can tell an entire life story by flipping through the pages and

seeing the growth and development of an individual and the family. Children in foster care have been found to benefit greatly from the development and curation of a memory book (Hoyle et al., 2020). The collection of memories can include vital information to construct a sense of identity and an autobiographical history. As Hoyle et al. (2020) explained, “The development of stable, explicable life narratives about where we come from and what has happened to us is recognized as essential to the construction of self” (p. 935). These connections to family help an individual feel as though they belong to a family group and have a meaningful role.

Photographs can also bring a sense of dignity to those who have aged and whose faculties have diminished. Photo albums have been used in palliative care to bring back a sense of dignity to patients who no longer feel as they once did (Testoni et al., 2020). The photographs help them remember their lives and remind them of their identity, connecting them to their families by showing their role and importance in overcoming challenges and celebrating accomplishments. When used to facilitate recollection, the photographs illustrate a meaningful life, which, according to Testoni et al. (2020) “enabl[es] patients to reopen windows that time has closed and look at past experiences in order to grasp a sense of unity” (p. 11). The albums also conjure up the feelings of personal dignity because the patients can see their successes, hope for the future, and wisdom in life. They also illustrate a life well lived—an example for future generations. The project illuminated the value of photography to remind an individual of their dignity and identity (Testoni et al., 2020).

Photographs also represent a life once lived and offer tangible memories of a lost loved one. Keskinen et al. (2019) discovered that photographs are imbued with emotion, meaning, and memories that make them of critical importance, especially when those pictured are deceased. Their study found that when children pass away, photographs are often used to remember the

child and grieve the loss. They explained, “Many loved ones want to preserve their emotional bond with the deceased child, and photographs offer a way to both preserve the bond and also remember the deceased child” (Keskinen et al., 2019, p. 610). The pictures share a story about the child—a special occasion, a funny experience, or a milestone moment—that helps those grieving remember the child and make sense of the loss. These photographs are sometimes the only evidence of the lost life (Keskinen et al., 2019). Photographs capture memories, tell stories, and construct identities.

### **Photography Tells Stories**

The digital age has transformed photo sharing. Digital cameras and smartphones have allowed anyone to become an amateur photographer. The instant image revealed in the viewfinder limits the number of photos actually printed but exponentially increases the number of photographs taken (Autenrieth, 2018). The cost and tediousness of printing images has been replaced with social media posts and email attachments. Before the internet and social media, hard copies of images had to be hand delivered or mailed through postal services (Hinojo-Lucena et al., 2020). To share a family photograph with others, another would need to come into one’s home and see the photographs on the wall or be privy to a family photo album. This made family photo sharing intimate and protected. The image was under the control of the owner and was only shared with those they desired (Kopecky et al., 2020). Traditionally, when children arrive, more photographs are taken, and moms are most often the ones behind the camera (Cino et al., 2020). The new addition to the family is exciting, and everyone wants to share the news. Sharing photographs garners immediate feedback and reinforces the family unit. The photo album facilitates interactions between the family and the audience who views the album. The stories of the photographs are shared in these social interactions.

### **Photography Sharing Teaches Communication**

Stories can play an essential role in the construction of an identity. Moms often tell stories about their children (Scharp et al., 2020). The family and individuals who hear and retell the stories construct meaning and establish the importance of the memories. Among family members, authentic stories can easily be told because of their closeness and knowledge of intimate details (Procentese et al., 2019). These stories have lasting effects. They teach family values, important life lessons, ideologies and beliefs, and impressions (Scharp et al., 2020). Families do not just tell stories to each other; they tell stories to others, which reinforce the internal identities and construct external identities that each family member then performs. In recent years, there has been a trend toward intensive parenting. Moms traditionally spend the most time in direct engagement with their children, but dads are becoming increasingly more involved. As Fischer (2020) explained, “Central to this parenting style is the assumption that high-quality parenting results in good children which is the belief that the outcome of children depends on the level of parental involvement” (p. 3). Through instruction, guidance, and training, parents reinforce gender roles and teach their children through their actions and stories. The roles played by each family member reinforce the values and expectations of the family.

The family photo album preserves these stories. These substantial memories play a significant role in who the child believes they are and who they may be in the future. Communicative narrative sense making “emphasizes the ways that people both construct their identities and make sense of their experiences not only as an individual act but also in relationship with others” (Scharp et al., 2020, p. 148). The digital age has popularized sharing content online, and it is the most convenient way to communicate with others. Parents and family communication play important roles in the development of a child’s communication in both face-

to-face interactions and technologically mediated communication. The way a parent communicates will shape the child's beliefs about the extent to which open communication versus compliance and homogeneity are valued in the family (Wang, 2019). The way the mom conforms to gender roles and communicates with others also shapes the child's understanding of the need to consider context and other people's feelings to achieve appropriate communication. The shift to mediated communication promotes the sharing of photographs and stories on social media platforms. When moms post online instead of meeting in person, parenting becomes an online social interaction that is public.

### **Sharenting Digitizes Parenting**

Contemporary culture has shifted much of life into the digital environment. Archer and Kao (2018) asserted that sharenting is a pervasive part of parenting, so much so that "along with antenatal classes, more education for parents' use of social media should be considered" (p. 134). The most widely used definition of sharenting comes from the *Collins English Dictionary* and is defined as the regular posting of images, videos, and content to social media by parents (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Choi & Lewallen, 2018; Kopecky et al., 2020). "Family photography, both online and offline, historically and currently, has been managed primarily by women and particularly by mothers" (Lazard et al., 2019, p. 7). Sharenting produces motherhood and family through communicative activities within digital social practices performed online. Moms make connections with others through online forums, groups, and platforms, and social media is a convenient resource for new moms seeking support and advice.

### **Sharenting Offers Moms Support**

A new baby brings excitement and joy to the family, but it also calls for some major adjustments. Many new moms face postpartum depression and anxiety as they negotiate their

new role and expectations as a mother (Archer & Kao, 2018). When a mom has these types of feelings after childbirth, it can cause long-term effects on the child. It is critical to offer support and services to all moms as a preventive measure to reduce postpartum depression. Much research has been conducted to determine strategies that support women during this time. Archer and Kao (2018) found that social support is influential in helping new moms with young children. A good system of support can provide information, help, and emotional nourishment. Recently, the research has turned to social media and has found both positive and negative consequences for using this resource for new moms (Verswijvel et al., 2019). Moms can use social media to connect with other moms when it is challenging to meet face to face. Social media can fill the gap when new moms need to experience mothering with other mothers. As Archer and Kao (2018) further explained, “Social media, particularly when combined with mobile technologies, such as smartphones, offers further flexibility in accessing the benefits of online social supports” (p. 126). This network facilitates interactions among mothers, normalizes asking for help, inspires healthy and productive choices, and serves as entertainment (Archer, 2019). New moms are often unable to get out and meet with other moms, so the convenience of social media can fulfill those needs.

### **Sharenting Constructs Good Mothering**

Although sharenting is gender-neutral, moms are most often the ones sharing images, videos, and content about their children and families. Lazard et al. (2019) focused on pride, affect, and the day-to-day politics of digital mothering on social networking sites through the visual content and textual content that moms share about their children and family. They discovered that much of the social media postings that depict good mothering reflect the same type of images once preserved in family photo albums (Lazard et al., 2019). Family photography

captures the togetherness of a family, but it does not necessarily represent the closeness of relationships among the family (Cino et al., 2020). It is a snapshot of a moment that can be shared with others through print and displayed in homes. Social media serves a similar purpose in that relational work is carried out between the self, the family, and social circles on the internet when content is shared (Verswijvel et al., 2019). One of the major critiques of social media is that it only captures the beautiful, happy, and positive moments, concealing the challenges (Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019). However, the textual content often incorporates a more robust view of the parenting experience by expounding on the challenges of parenting. Parents want to present themselves as good parents, so they minimize the negative and highlight their successes (Lazard et al., 2019). The pressures of contemporary society and the integration of digital technologies into daily routines enforce a need to do good mothering. While moms are expected to protect their children from the dangers of online predators, there is also a desire to show them off. Much like a newborn picture would be passed around new friends, posting an image online fulfills the same need. The humblebrag allows a mom to show off her accomplished child while receiving accolades for being a good mother (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2017). Lazard et al. (2019) argues that this motherhood pride is “always tentatively perched between claims of good mothering and critiques of humblebragging,” and “can be better understood as a complex affective and intersectional accomplishment that produces motherhood and family as communicative activities within digital social practices” (p. 7). Sharenting is a digital social experience that constructs identities, both relational and individual.

### **Sharenting Is Influenced by Mommy Bloggers**

The rise of blogging and social media trends have given moms an opportunity to capitalize off of their children and family. Mommy bloggers share content to create a following

and ultimately monetize the account by establishing sponsorships (Archer, 2019). The most popular influencers tend to shape the way everyday moms post and share about their lives. Archer (2019) took a qualitative approach to explore what motivates mommy bloggers and everyday moms to share their children's stories and images. Through a series of interviews and focus groups, the study revealed that the mommy bloggers were concerned for privacy but saw their child as an extension of self; and, because the child is too young to voice any objection, the mom felt she had the right to share the stories. The moms were concerned for their child's privacy but felt pressured by family and friends to share content about their child. "Many mothers felt keen tension around how much to share while also noting they were immersed in a world that normalized the sharing of images" (Archer, 2019, p. 52). These moms admitted a limited understanding of the rules and laws associated with online privacy protection and the child's autonomy. The influence of mommy bloggers on everyday moms suggests a need to better understand this trend. Archer (2019) reported that "50% of everyday moms increased their use of Facebook after the birth of their first child . . . and 51% uploaded photos daily, weekly, or every so often" (p. 50). Of the everyday moms that post, a minority of them work to conceal their children's identity by covering their faces or strategically placing them out of focus. Many share because of the ease and the positive affirmations of friends and family, and many share because they enjoy it, and it preserves memories to later share with their children (Verswijvel et al., 2019). The privacy paradox is used to explain this dilemma—the desire to protect the child's privacy but the practice of sharing their stories and images anyway (Lipu & Siibak, 2019). The expectations of families and friends to share images of children forces moms to post even when they are concerned about the child's right to privacy and protection. Archer (2019) argued that this is because "many mothers construct the collation of the online family photo album via

Facebook as a digital ‘play’bour” (p. 54). This compares sharenting to digital gaming as a way to connect and interact when parenting becomes difficult and isolating.

### **Sharenting Is a Resource for Information**

Moms turn to social media not only for connection and entertainment but also to seek out parenting information. In the digital age, social media serves as a resource for information.

Young moms turn to social media instead of their families and neighbors for advice, support, and information as they navigate parenthood. Setyastuti et al. (2019) explained, “Millennial moms entrust and choose the sources of information about parenting on the internet, especially social media, rather than other sources including family and the surrounding environment” (p. 12).

Furthermore, the value of family and tradition as resources of information has shifted to other sources that have been found to be more beneficial in the networked culture. In this research on millennial moms, 443 respondents shared information about their online practices and how much time they spent on social media. Most of the moms fell into the category of medium users, spending between 20 and 80 minutes on social media every day. A mom was considered a heavy user if she was on social media for more than 80 minutes per day with 45.9% of the moms falling into this category. Only 5.4% of the moms were light users engaging for less than 20 minutes a day. Of the moms surveyed, 93.7% used the internet for parenting information. In contrast, 56.3% used family as a source of parenting information, and far less, only 15.6%, used a neighbor for parenting information. This illustrates the role of social media as an information source for millennial moms. It was determined that when parents are faced with contradictory information regarding parenting, they tend to defer to the information found on social media (Setyastuti et al., 2019). Moms use social media because of its low cost and convenience. The digital age is shifting the way parents learn to parent because of the ease and accessibility of

information on social media.

### **Sharenting Is Concerning**

The popularity of social media and the desire to engage in this social activity encourages users to share their lives more publicly. Instagram and Facebook are filled with images of family, children, and infants. Usually, a mom posts content to stay connected with family and friends (Wagner & Gasche, 2018). Still, when she shares a family memory, she also shares every individual's life captured in the image (Keskinen et al., 2019). The University of Basel conducted a study to better understand how families are pictured online (Autenrieth, 2018). In the digital age, children are catapulted into the online atmosphere by parents who share content on social media. This article reiterated that even though parents are aware of the risks associated with sharenting, there is still an immense desire to share. "New parents in particular tend to visually document the lives of their newborn babies and share those pictures via various social networks" (Autenrieth, 2018, p. 221). Parents face the challenge of sharing their lives with friends and family and protecting the rights and privacy of their children (Moser et al., 2017). This conundrum is a concern because so many parents experience it and are not equipped to manage it. A qualitative study of 52 parents of young children who post images to social media gave insight into how families are portrayed online. The purpose of this study was to develop a family online photo guide so that parents can share content and manage concerns for the child's privacy. The author described this practice as "anti-sharenting" likened to the "anti-selfie" (Autenrieth, 2018, p. 226). A few suggestions included disguising the child, placing them in the distance, only showing part of the child, showing the child from behind, or covering the child postproduction. These are practical solutions, but this causes an issue when the posts serve as a family photo album and which documents the memories for future generations. If the child is

never actually seen, the reward of the captured memory is potentially lost. Photography is a form of visual communication, and the construction of each photograph has consequences for the relationships within the family and among others.

### **Sharenting Is Controversial**

In the social media era, sharing content publicly has become a parenting norm. Parenting is often explored, negotiated, and expressed on social networking sites (Archer & Kao, 2018). Visual communication is used to construct the image of good mothering by sharing parenting stories (Lazard et al., 2019). These stories often include images and information about her children. The parent has a right to tell her story of parenting, but it becomes complex when the child she is expected to protect is exposed and exploited in her attempt to present herself (Lipu & Siibak, 2019). The struggle of this relational identity has raised concerns for the online practice of sharenting. They looked specifically at children 9–13 years old who had their own Facebook account and interacted with their mother online. Through interviews with both the mothers and the children, a few interesting insights were discovered. Although the moms seemed to have little concern for the risk to their children's identity and privacy, the children were often frustrated by their mom's posting practices. Lipu and Siibak (2019) explained, "Even when parents knew that their children resented sharenting, they still continued this practice despite the children's wishes, justifying their actions by referring to the young age of the child, or the fact that they as parents had the right to control and decide which information they shared about their children on social media" (p. 63). Moms do this because they believe the child is part of their identity, and to present self as a mom on social media, she must reference and share content about her children. The posts may begin with children too young to consent, but as they come of age, children prefer to choose what is shared and posted about them (Siibak & Traks, 2019). Additionally, there is a

vast discrepancy in the beliefs of who has permission to post. The mom feels the right to share information about the child, but the child expects the parent to ask permission and abide by the child's request. This indicates a need to set clear guidelines and expectations for family sharing practices (Otero, 2017). Sharenting has become such a significant component of being a parent; therefore, it is critical to guide parents in the best practices when engaging in this activity.

Parents should open direct communication with their children about how social media is used in their daily lives (Lipu & Siibak, 2019). Well-developed family communication can lead to sharenting practices that reinforce and establish trusting parent and child relationships (Siibak & Traks, 2019). Even when children are too young to provide consent, the parent must consciously work to protect their rights and privacy. Families suffer without clear communication regarding the rules of online sharing.

### **Sharenting Creates Digital Footprints for Children**

In the last 10 years, social media has exploded all over the globe, and people regularly share content about both their mundane daily lives and their milestone moments. This means that many adults share pregnancy and birth announcements on these online platforms. So, even before the baby is born, their digital identity is already under construction. Parents share because they are excited about their family, they want to share images with friends and family, and they want to find support when issues arise. There is much joy in sharing photographs online, but there is also a concern that the content may be shared with an unintended audience and used for unintended purposes. Therefore, Otero (2017) suggested boundaries be put in place for parents to manage the desire to share and the responsibility to protect their children. The suggestions begin with the importance of understanding the risks placed on children when their image is shared online. It is also important to consider the information that is shared about the child. Something

that one mom considers cute and silly may be considered inappropriate or shameful by others. Finally, there must be an awareness that children have a right to privacy, and their digital presence should include their own desires too. Images shared online serve as visual communication (Choi & Lewallen, 2018). Protecting the child's digital footprint is a concern for their well-being. Stemming from this belief, Otero (2017) suggested that pediatricians offer parents a series of recommendations to consider when sharing information about their children, stating, "do not share online anything that you would not share publicly" (p. 412). These suggestions and information from pediatricians serve to inform parents, but they do not persuade them to enact change. The extreme cases seem distant to most parents as they compare those concerns to their own situation (Yarigarravesh et al., 2020). However, it is the everyday and mundane activities that construct an identity, "the very everydayness of the self performing, presenting, representing, and circulating in digital culture" (Thumim, 2017, p. 56). A mom uses the images of her children to represent and perform mothering (Lazard et al., 2019). This can become problematic because the child is only presented through the lens of the mother's performance goals. Although a respected individual, the child is presented as an extension of the parent (Holiday et al., 2020). Even with an understanding of the concerns and risks associated with sharenting, many parents still regularly share information about their children.

### **Sharenting Violates the Rights of the Child**

In early childhood education, the construct of the image of the child is significant because children are considered unique individuals. They are strong, appreciative, and multidimensional humans that should have their voice, choice, and agency respected. Under the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, children have been afforded the right to voice their opinion on matters that concern them. Dobson and Jay (2020) "encourage[d] children,

families, and educators to enter into sustained dialogue around their participation in social media contexts where each has an authentic choice about how they are represented and can be confident their voices are respected” (p. 74). There are images of children all over the internet because social media encourages users to share visuals to draw attention to their posts, and cute kids are usually very popular (Cino et al., 2020). Dobson and Jay (2020) studied a parent influencer through a qualitative case study, in which her Instagram was analyzed for 1 month. The purpose was to explore how children are represented in the parent’s post. These visual representations not only communicate information about the subject or object, but they also reveal the characteristics of the producer and the culture of the production. The multifaceted nature of visuals can create various meanings for the producer, the participants, and the audience. When parents share visual representations of their children, they are constructing the child’s image through a particular lens (Dobson & Jay, 2020). Influencers’ trends often leak into the feeds of their followers (Archer, 2019). These crafted posts may reflect an idealized image of the parent, the child, and the family, influencing how they view themselves now and in the future. As the trustee of the account, the parent ultimately decides how the child is presented, which can influence the way culture views children and childhood.

### **Sharenting Can Contribute to Diversity**

Visual communication has exploded with the onset of social platforms that encourage users to post content that includes images. Instagram is a site that focuses on visual communication and encourages users to post a snippet of information to attract users to Like and comment (Dobson & Jay, 2020). Parents often share images that include their children, and the internet is filled with representations of children. Sharenting creates adverse outcomes when parents share sensitive information that may impact the child’s mental health, exploit an

underage child, and expose them to safety concerns. Kopecky et al. (2020) monitored a sample of 1,460 Spanish and Czech parents to determine what kinds of images were posted, the platforms they were posted on, and the similarities between the two groups. In this study, 78.89% of respondents shared photos with their friends that included their children, providing access to the user's entire friends list. The parents were comfortable posting images of their children in which their faces were identifiable. These moms also shared personal information about themselves, including their own image, phone number, and email. This risky behavior is typical of online activity, even though warnings have been developed (Yarigarravesh et al., 2020). According to Kopecky et al. (2020), parents are violating the child's right in the digital age, as established by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, when they share the child's name, surname, and images of their real face. This raises concerns about who has the right to share the entwined story of a parent and a child. "Sharenting is a problem in which, on the one hand, a child's right to privacy and protection (independently of the will of the parents) clashes with the right of the parents to share information with the public from the lives of their children, on the other hand" (Kopecky et al., 2020, p. 4).

Choi and Lewallen (2018) analyzed 510 Instagram photos by applying self-categorization theory (SCT) to identify how children are portrayed online. SCT is about understanding the process of identity formation and maintenance. It explains how people assign themselves to a particular group based on the perceived characteristics of the group. From this theory comes the idea of ingroups and outgroups. An ingroup is one that the individual belongs to, whereas the outgroup is the group from which the individual is excluded. These groups tend to result in some stereotypical ideas reflected in the media, which can influence how children think they should act and what they should be like. The uniqueness of social media is that users construct content

instead of massive production companies. It is for this reason that Choi and Lewallen (2018) used SCT; parents share images of their children that fit into specific categories that can inflame, reinforce, and contradict stereotypical depictions of children. The benefit of social media is that parents can actively frame how children are presented online. When parents post about their children online, they present a view of childhood. Previously, these images could only be perpetuated through mass media. When the media dictates the ingroup and outgroup, many are left on the periphery because the media-perpetuated standard does not account for the vast diversity that exists in the world. With social media, parents can expand this view and teach children about diversity and inclusion through the content they interact with online as digital identities are constructed.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Now that the phenomenon of sharenting has been described, explained, and current practices revealed, the next section will discuss sharenting as it relates to the field of communication. To examine the experience of sharenting and interpret its meaning, this study will fall into the phenomenological tradition of communication, which focuses on the individual experience. To capture the individual experience, the scroll back method will be used to interview the participants. The theory of the presentation of self will be used to interpret the meaning of the participants' experiences. This analysis will fill gaps in current research by looking closely at the performance team and the mom's intentions in order to develop conversation starters for moms to open dialogue with their children about social media literacy and sharenting.

### **Phenomenological Tradition**

In order to unify the field of communication, Robert Craig developed a metatheory to

organize the field into seven traditions. Communication theory emerged by borrowing literature from a variety of other disciplines as a way to discuss problems and issues of the human experience (Sturges, 2018). As Jan et al. (2017) explained, “There was no common ground on which all the communication scholars could agree or disagree” (p. 14). The incoherent field could now be connected through Craig’s metatheory, which incorporates the many perspectives within the field of communication (Jan et al., 2017). Communication research should fall under one of these traditions. Organizing the research into a tradition allows communication scholars to discuss issues and problems from their own perspectives of communication. This organization builds coherence and establishes the field of communication. This study, in particular, will fall under the phenomenological tradition.

The phenomenological tradition focuses on the experience of the individual. The basic principles of this tradition indicate that knowledge comes from direct experience, language is the vehicle of meaning, and how one relates to an object determines its meanings (Sturges, 2018). The phenomenology of perception posits that one only knows from one’s own experience. It is the process of describing the reality and existence of the individual. As Jan et al. (2017) explained, “Theories in this tradition assume that humans are active and interpret what happened around them and thus experiences the world” (p. 4). The central concept of the phenomenological tradition is the experience of self. Therefore, this study will describe and interpret the meaning of the experience of a mom as she experiences sharenting on Facebook.

### **Theory to Analyze Sharenting**

In order to analyze the experiences of these moms, Goffman’s (1959) theory of the presentation of self will be applied. The study will look particularly at how settings, appearances, and mannerisms are used to perform the self as a mom in the performance team. Goffman (1959)

used elements of dramaturgy, which draws inspiration from Shakespeare and theater, to describe the presentation of self as a performance. He explained that society is made up of ready-made masks that humans animate to perform the self and fit specific performance roles. The comparison is made to actors on a stage putting on a mask and playing a specific role, then changing to another mask when the scene changes (Merunkova & Slerka, 2019). The performance includes the frontstage and backstage, other actors and props, and an audience. Goffman (1959) identified two teams: the performance team and the audience team. The performance team entertains, and the audience team observes. The performance team comprises three roles: the star who has dramatic dominance, the director who coordinates the scene, and the ceremonial roles, which are all the extras. “A teammate is someone whose dramaturgical cooperation one is dependent upon in fostering a given definition of the situation; if such a person comes to be beyond the pale of informal sanctions and insists on giving the show away or forcing it to take a particular turn, he is none the less part of the team” (Goffman, 1959, p. 83).

The performance team in this study will star the mom as actor and director with the supporting roles of her family. These scenes include sign vehicles that give meaning to the experience and cue the audience of the situation. Through these experiences, selves are established and performed to fit the expectations of the mask prescribed by the role and society. Therefore, when a mom sharents, she is constructing the performance of mothering. She directs the scene and the ceremonial roles to fit the impression she wants her audience to accept. “For if the individual’s activity is to become significant to others, he must mobilize his activity so that it will express during the interaction what he wishes to convey” (Goffman, 1959, p. 30). Including sign vehicles in the scene lets the audience know what is going on. When a mom describes her experience of sharenting, she is offering backstage intel into the performance of mothering. This

will help make meaning of the experience to describe the influences of sharenting.

To understand an experience as a presentation, Goffman's theory needs to be extended to include the creator of the stage. In a dramatic show, this would be considered the producer—the person who creates the opportunity for the show and has the final word on all aspects from budget to costumes. To uphold Goffman's metaphor, the producer needs to be identified. Goffman (1959) asserted that all the world is a stage and we are merely playing a part, like an actor in a performance. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (New International Version, 2005/1973). This means that God is the producer, and all performances are ultimately His creation. Once a director and a performer understands this, there is a freedom and ability to present self in light of the Creator's plan, "and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose" (New International Version, 2005/1973, Romans 8:28). The ultimate Creator should be the producer of every performance. Therefore, the experience must be understood through this lens.

The Facebook Timeline captures the presentation of motherhood. When the mom constructs sharenting posts, she is performing her desired presentation of self. Self presentation is the actions and behaviors that one makes to intentionally influence or change how other people see one's self. Most people work to present themselves as favorably as possible. The Timeline captures a variety of selves portrayed by the mom. She may also be a wife, sister, and friend, just to name a few of the many roles that any one individual may construct on social media (Merunkova & Slerka, 2019). To create this performance, the mom will use a combination of her appearance, the setting, and her mannerisms to create a specific impression. The visual style of communication on social media emphasizes the importance of appearance. For instance,

Khedher (2019) argued, “People use their body shape and appearance as a means of expressing their individual identity developing them into social symbols that give messages to others” (p. 103). The mom’s appearance gives off impressions, which she must manage to construct the persona she desires.

In addition to her appearance, she will use the setting to construct the performance. Goffman (1959) explained that the setting includes all the other things in the scene, as well as inanimate objects and ceremonial roles. By analyzing the performance team, the children become a significant component of the setting. Along with other objects, like designer bags or a messy kitchen, they portray a certain type of motherhood. Through this objective, intentional and unintentional, the moms strategically use the setting to complement their appearance. The cues related to appearance and setting in sharenting posts give insight into the production of performing motherhood on Facebook.

The final component is mannerisms. This is a key element in the presentation of self, as mannerisms capture the interactions associated with the performance. Facebook has developed a platform that encourages Likes, comments, and shares to develop and establish mediated interpersonal communication (Lincoln & Robards, 2017). Lowe-Calverley and Grieve (2018) discovered that users apply significant meaning to these interactions. Users reap positive and negative social rewards during both the giving and receiving of Likes, comments, and shares. Although mediated through technology, the interactions on Facebook function similarly to face-to-face encounters, allowing an individual to construct their identity through the way they talk and act. The collection of these interactions on Facebook indicates how the mom will act in any given situation. The appearance, setting, and mannerisms constructed by moms when they sharent on Facebook inform the presentation of motherhood.

### **Presenting Self on Social Media**

Goffman's (1959) theory of the presentation of self is relevant in the digital age of social media. This mediated form of communication sets the stage for performances all over the world to be connected and shared with an audience of observers. This infiltration of social media places high importance on the identity and social life curated on these platforms. The internet is not anonymous, and online interactions are a very real part of a user's lived experience, as Merunkova and Slerka (2019) stated, "Cyberspace has become an alternative world where people create and administer their online identity, make friends, and maintain relationships using texts, visuals, and audiovisual elements" (p. 248). Through these interactions, users disclose information about their lives. Disclosures reveal information about a person that may not be favorable, but they are shared to interact and connect with others (Schlosser, 2020). In the presentation of self, actors strategically work to present themselves in the most favorable role. On social media, users control their impressions by emphasizing certain characteristics and downplaying the negative ones (Merunkova & Slerka, 2019). Goffman (1959) explained that these impressions are given off both verbally and nonverbally. The way the actor incorporates signs and symbols gives meaning to the situation to make sense of what is going on. Merunkova and Slerka (2019) used Goffman's theory as a framework to analyze the Facebook profiles of 50 university students to determine how identity is formed and impressions are managed online. Impression management describes how people strategically present themselves to garner the impression they want others to have of them. Generally, people want to present themselves as good at the role they are performing (Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019). Young people need to work out their identity as they establish themselves as separate from their parents. "These developmental processes though, might become restricted by the sharing behavior of their

parents” (Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019, p. 325). Merunkova and Slerka (2019) established that users work to make a desired impression through their Facebook profile. The roles performed online were categorized as The Public Diary, Job and Education, The Entertainer, Hobby, and The Influencer. It is important to note that online identities, like offline identities, also have multiple roles, and the actor performs them at various times.

### **Social Interactions Through Likes, Comments, and Shares**

Social media is the space where many daily social interactions take place and roles are performed. These sites facilitate communication when users share content and respond with Likes, comments, and shares. Lowe-Calverley and Grieve (2018) explored the thought process that occurs before posting an image and before clicking Like. These social interactions have replaced face-to-face interactions in which people play their roles and engage with other actors on the digital stage (Merunkova & Slerka, 2019). Facebook is the most popular site for sharing visual and textual content. Lowe-Calverley and Grieve (2018) reported that 4,000 photos are uploaded to Facebook every second. Visual communication is the most successful form of communication on social media (Choi & Lewallen, 2018). This type of communication research increases the understanding of how meaning is assigned to the visuals and understood by the user. Having this knowledge can enhance the efficacy of these mediated social interactions. Lowe-Calverley and Grieve (2018) asked 203 participants two open-ended questions. Their responses were thematically analyzed through a series of six steps that resulted in an understanding that posting and Liking practices are not inconsequential, which means that users put thought and consideration into what they post and what they Like (Sherman et al., 2018). This posting and Liking is considered part of the presentation of self and is done intentionally. The most important aspect of a user’s posting consideration is the audience, followed closely by

the attractiveness of the image. The consideration for Likes revolves around how others will perceive it. Users also Like a post because they enjoy the image, which serves as positive feedback to the poster (Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2018). The Like also provides the user, who regularly posts, with social rewards that reinforce the behavior. Both the act of Liking and the act of being Liked produces a neural response that mimics monetary and social rewards (Sherman et al., 2018). Consequently, users keep posting and the audience validates their performance with more Likes. Social media posting and Liking are mediated social interactions that construct and perform self for others. As Lowe-Calverley and Grieve (2018) explained, “The depth and complexity of considerations that participants expressed prior to engaging in these behaviors reveals the importance that social media has in people’s lives” (p. 1908). Social media can facilitate interpersonal communication by the direct and immediate ability to interact with friends. This replicates face-to-face interactions, and people perform identity work on these platforms too. The perceived social norms indicate what is appropriate performance on social media.

### **Social Media Is a Social Stage**

Social media has been integrated into the daily routines of most individuals in modern society, closing the gap between or the delusion of separate online and offline selves. Instead, it weaves the performances together to develop an ever-changing unified self (Barbovschi et al., 2018). These performances, both online and offline, convey the desired impressions of the star actor (Scharp et al., 2020). Young people ages 13–18 are well aware of the importance of the number of Likes and shares their posts receive. The higher the numbers, the more popular the account and the more personal capital afforded to the user. This need for validation from others plays an important role in curating and constructing an online profile (Barbovschi et al., 2018).

What, when, and how something is posted is of significant importance. The Likes validate the performance and confirm the online social rules of engagement. The study analyzed young people as they present self and mutually validate others on social media. These connected social networks require an active realization of social life that is performed, coordinated, rehearsed, and rescripted. Users are “aware of online self-presentation being more durable, especially in written form, with an expected impact on future online selves, which highly influence their online performative presentation practices” (Barbovschi et al., 2018, p. 272). Social media users actively participate in this structure to construct their digital identity and present self. Schlosser (2020) identified the characteristics of social media that differ from face-to-face interaction but still produce a presentation of self. Online interactions are asynchronous, which gives an individual more time to react to a situation. The extra time gives the user the opportunity to reflect, edit, and revise posts before they are shared, making online communication deliberate and calculated. Online communication also serves multiple audiences in which different social groups from the node of the individual overlap. Therefore, the user must navigate multiple roles with minimal incongruencies to present the desired impression. Impressions can be managed through what is said and what topics are discussed. Social media also uses audience feedback that is publicly visible, quantifiable, and available in the form of Likes, comments, and shares. This feedback pushes for accountability by expecting users to present themselves realistically, as the audience feedback will indicate the believability of the performance (Schlosser, 2020). Social media is the social stage in which roles are performed, and sign vehicles are deliberately shared through posts made by the user to portray the individual’s preferred impression.

### **Presenting Parenthood on Social Media**

Facebook offers many social benefits for engaging on the platform. Its configuration allows for community building through 1) groups, Likes, and comments, 2) providing information archiving in the form of digital photo albums, and 3) space for authentic and in-depth conversations (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2017). Moms have found that engaging on Facebook can connect them to other moms. Parenting can be a rewarding experience, but it also comes with challenges and anxiety (Archer & Kao, 2018). About three-quarters of parents engage in social media, with young moms tending to be the most active. They engage on social media by following and sharing posts with other parents who share similar parenting styles or find their content interesting. Through these interactions, moms establish a presentation of self (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2017). The presentation is the performance of the animated mask taken on by an individual in society (Goffman, 1959). Social media allows users to conform their representation to their performance goals, resulting in positive posts that garner much attention (Sherman et al., 2018). This creates a presentation of self that is unrealistic and may contradict the offline presentation. Positive reinforcement can build self-esteem and generally results in more sharing as the performance reinforces the user's goals. This positive reinforcement perpetuates the intense expectations associated with digital parenting. "Young mothers feel more pressure to maintain their positive image online as dictated by their online community" (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2017, p. 25). There are key patterns to the online mother's profile. These patterns are distinguished by the interconnectedness of the mother's identity as an individual and as a parent (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2017). The features of Facebook serve as the stage for identity to be performed and constructed. The network provides an audience in which moms can negotiate their identity and achieve their performance goals. Facebook posts

encourage open discussions and create a more personal connection with followers. Groups can connect people with similar interests and increase interaction among mothers. The visual and textual components of Facebook entice followers and build relationships among users. Facebook is a site in which moms actively engage in many social activities.

### **Sharenting Is a Shared Representation**

Parent blogging intensifies the behaviors of sharenting and can be used to explore the boundaries of self as represented on social media. When an individual becomes a parent, their identity is tied to their children. When the parent decides to post content online, they often use content that includes their children to validate their parenting abilities, access support and advice, and offer others support and advice (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). The sharing of images, videos, and content allows parents to connect with other parents. Through interviews with 17 parent bloggers, data were collected to explore how parents justify what is their story to tell. Identity construction is social and is established through relationships and experiences (Scharp et al., 2020). Therefore, parent bloggers have the challenge of presenting themselves not only as an individual but also as a parent, which causes a dilemma as to ownership of the story. There is a suggestion that parent and child are not mutually exclusive and may benefit from a shared representation. Moms also use social media to build social capital as an opportunity to construct and present themselves as a mother (Sherman et al., 2018). Most collections of content serve as digital photo albums for enjoyment now and in the future, which leads to concerns related to the intended audience. Social media's broad reach and archiving characteristics project the child into an imagined and possibly unknown audience and the child's unknown future. Using Goffman's (1959) explanations of performing self, the stage and the audience are of critical importance. Digital environments shift the localized practice of presentation to the broader, more observable,

and salient self-representation on digital networks. Blum-Ross and Livingstone (2017) made the assertion that “we—and they—have yet to find an approach to representing relational identities in a way that deals fairly with both parents and their children, not only in academic terms but also in the public sphere” (p. 122). There are many benefits to parent blogging, like finding parents who have children with similar ailments. These online communities can offer support and advice, but they also reveal the child’s ailment. Online disclosures can connect moms through their experiences (Schlosser, 2020), but they must consider what should be shared, how it should be shared, and to whom it is shared. Their stories are intertwined, and typically the parent’s desires are enacted, “social media in general, and Facebook in particular, are a ubiquitous part of the parenting experience” (Archer & Kao, 2018, p. 134). Facebook offers a unique design that supports the community and works to establish the well-being of its users. It is also suggested that the American Academy of Pediatrics incorporates guidelines for parents’ use of social media and the influence it has on children. This suggestion is in alignment with guidelines already in place for screentime. As this phenomenon continues to rise in popularity, new moms should be equipped with the most effective way to incorporate social media into their parenting experience.

### **Social Media Is a Stage for Digital Identities**

An individual’s identity is worked out and negotiated through the postings, connections, and experiences that exist in the digital world. This means that “the online presentation of the digital self now recursively influences the construction, development, and maintenance of the offline self” (Holiday et al., 2020, p. 4), emphasizing the importance of the identity work that is accomplished through sharenting. Parents use these posts as self-representation, and children become an element of their definition of self (Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019). That is why Holiday

et al. (2020) examined Instagram posts through a theoretical lens that considers the parent's identity. The images shared by parents that include their children are chosen and constructed as a way to visualize the individual as a parent. Holiday et al. (2020) extracted 125 posts and then examined 25 of them using constant comparative analysis to allow themes and higher-order categories derived from multiple sources to emerge to ensure that new insights could be identified. From this analysis, Holiday et al. (2020) identified three categories of presentation: polished posts, promotional posts, and intimate posts. Children seemed to be supplementary in the posts, and even when the child was the focus, it was still all about the parent. This insinuates that the child is used as an extension of self in order to accomplish the performance goals set by the parent. A mom's style of parenting is illustrated through the content that she shares. Since this study was conducted on Instagram, a study on Facebook will give more insight into the social aspects of the presentation of self. Interactions are more profound on Facebook, allowing more opportunity for identity work.

### **Scroll Back Interview Method**

The scroll back interview method is used to gather rich data from moms who sharent on Facebook. This method was initially established by Robards and Lincoln (2017) as a way to explore the Facebook Timeline of participants in a longitudinal study of life narratives. Facebook has been around for about 17 years, and the longstanding importance of this site for its users indicates that it will continue to constitute a large portion of one's social life. It is an archive of one's life and a portal into the everyday life of the user. Facebook is where users are "literally living out their lives on the site" (Lincoln & Robards, 2017, p. 519). Facebook captures autobiographical information of the user and organizes it on a Timeline that can be scrolled through to review all the content that has been disclosed and shared with others. These

disclosures include shared images, status updates, wall comments, posted links, and a variety of other pieces of content. The longevity of Facebook has proven that it is not a fad. The intense integration and use of Facebook implies that most users would never fully abandon it because of the content that is stored within the site. The meaningful content includes a collection of photographs, important contacts, and accessibility to information (Robards & Lincoln, 2019). Scrolling through Facebook is how users interact with the platform to see what others have posted and also to review their own Timelines. This is the way users navigate through social experiences on social media. Therefore, the scroll back method can be used to study a wide range of social phenomena.

### **Sense Making Through the Scroll Back Interview Method**

The objective of the scroll back interview method is to make sense of the everyday digital traces of social media users as a documentation of their life. This is accomplished by inviting the participant to be a co-analyst with the researcher (Moller & Robards, 2019). Robards and Lincoln (2019) defined two forms of the method: the long narrative and the short snapshot. The main difference between the two is the degree to which the disclosures are reviewed. The long narrative asks the participant to review their Facebook Timeline from start to finish, and the short snapshot reviews a limited number of posts. The methods can be adapted to the purpose of the study. "Scrolling through social media can also be a method of research for navigating and co-analyzing, with research participants, complex digital traces of everyday life" (Robards & Lincoln, 2019, p. 2). The process for the scroll back interview method begins with consent, and then the participant is asked to friend the researcher so that they can be connected on the platform and the researcher can observe the participant's Facebook Timeline. The next step is an in-depth semi-structured interview in which the participants scroll through their own Facebook

Timeline. The participant will record themselves narrating and describing the posts, which will then be transcribed for analysis during the scroll. It is important to note that the participant should drive the scrolling by holding the handheld device and navigating through their own profile. These interviews last 1–2 hours, in which rich data can be collected because the participants can fill in the blanks about the content shared on the site (Moran & Robards, 2020). A review just by the researcher would not garner the same insight on the disclosures. To close the interview and bring the context back to the present, the researcher should ask the participant how they believe social media will change in the future (Robards & Lincoln, 2019). This method should capture the complex narratives curated, stored, and shared on Facebook.

### **Scroll Back Interview Method in Research**

Although this is a relatively new method, several studies have used it to explore the Facebook Timeline. The most significant study was led by Robards and Lincoln (2017), who explored the sustained social media use of long-term Facebook users. The young adult participants needed to have had an account for 5 years or more, as well as significant life experiences captured on their social media profiles. The researchers drew the comparison between one's Facebook Timeline and a child's bedroom. A bedroom is a place where the child explores their preferences, changing the arrangement and design as they mature and controlling who sees it and what is seen. According to Robards and Lincoln (2017) the teenage bedroom is "a space where young people can exert both practical and symbolic forms of control" (p. 716). In the same way, young adults manage their Facebook Timeline by constructing and managing the impression they present. In this study, the scroll back interview method revealed how users were well aware of their audience and edited content to meet standards of appropriateness (Robards & Lincoln, 2017). The limitations of this study led Lincoln and Robards (2017) to explore the

reflexive project of self by scrolling through the Facebook Timeline of young adults.

### **Facebook Timelines Archive Digital Identities**

These “life narratives are constructed, shared, reflected upon, and potentially revised” on the site and then archived for future views (Lincoln & Robards, 2017, p. 518). The uniqueness of social media allows an interaction to occur at the time, and then again, and again every time a new audience or the same audience reviews the content. It creates a here and there simultaneously and separately, all while occurring individually and collectively. It exponentially expands the impact and influence of the social exchange, emphasizing the importance and need to understand how the reflective process of self is enacted through social media (Moller & Robards, 2019). This insinuates that selves are made and then revised, remade, and then edited. This is then visualized on the Facebook Timeline, where the user can post, share, edit, revise, and change the stories that are shared. Significant milestones mark some of the changes, such as when someone cleans up their profile before an interview. The act of editing shows the reflexive project of self in which self is made to fit the narrative that produces the greatest reward or fits the performance goals of the user (Lincoln & Robards, 2017). This ties together Goffman’s presentation of self and the theory of uses and gratifications to explain the motivation for reflexive editing and revising.

### **Ethical Considerations and Adaptability of the Scroll Back Interview Method**

This method is not without a few ethical considerations. Social media can make research a little tricky. Moran and Robards (2020) revealed some of the ethical dilemmas associated with the scroll back interview method in their study of African youth in Australia. The aim of the study was to understand how young migrants use social media. The researchers advocated that this method produces rich data and contributes to the field of social research. Therefore, it is

important to examine its ethical implications. A prominent concern exists when the researcher uses their own account to connect with participants because it mutually opens the door to explore all the content contained within the profile. As Robards and Lincoln (2017) outlined, there are “ethical and methodological challenges that must be negotiated when it comes to friending participants for the purpose of participant observations” (p. 725). These disclosures can build comfort in the interview process, but it blurs the line between practitioner and friend (Robards & Lincoln, 2019). Even more so, the connections may remain long after the research has been completed. Careful consideration should be taken to protect the privacy and safety of both the researcher and the participant. Decisions about using personal profiles and accepting friend requests should only be used if pertinent to the study.

Additionally, it must be noted that the intended audience of social media postings is not the researcher. This intentionality issue should be at the forefront of the researcher’s considerations when they are provided access to the participant’s Facebook Timeline (Robards & Lincoln, 2019). As a co-analyst, the researcher must engage with the participant as she reveals the description and analysis of the Facebook Timeline, but the researcher must maintain their position as a researcher, realizing that although a friend request is administered, the intention is not to make friends. The role of the researcher and the participant should be defined and adhered to throughout the study (Moran & Robards, 2020). During the co-analysis, it is possible that looking back at a particular post may bring up emotions for the participant. The researcher should be aware of this and set time aside in the interview if a break needs to be taken (Moller & Robards, 2019). Another strategy to mitigate this concern is to have the participant control the scroll back by deciding what posts to share and controlling the scroll back during the interview. With careful planning, these ethical issues can be managed so the method can be used to reveal

rich data.

The dynamics of technology and social media are constantly changing and updating. Facebook works to meet the users' needs and will adjust the platform to maintain its prominent status in the everyday lives of its users. Over the years, Facebook has evolved the profile and the wall, added pages and groups, and incorporated e-commerce, to name a few (Lincoln & Robards, 2017). In order to research social interactions on social media, research methods must keep up with the changes. The scroll back interview method can be used as the long narrative, the short snapshot, or a variation to fulfill the needs of the study (Robards & Lincoln, 2019). Robards and Lincoln (2017) explained that this "qualitative approach has much to offer when it comes to the discussion of consent, intentionality, recruiting participants as co-analyst, and treating this data as an often personal record of the lived experience" (p. 728). The richness of the data that can be extracted through this method will enhance the description of a mom's sharenting experience.

### **Gaps in Research**

There have been several studies that look closely at the practice of sharenting, both through quantitative and qualitative methods, and both the child's perspective and the parent's perspective have been analyzed. Various theories have been used to make sense of what and how content is shared on social media. Even so, some gaps should be addressed by further researching the topic of sharenting. Three main gaps indicate a need to study the description of the mom's own experience with sharenting. The present study will further the theoretical discussion of the presentation of self by moms on social media, and from the practical side, it should result in conversation starters for moms to open dialogues with their children about sharenting.

### **Sharenting by Everyday Moms**

The first area to examine more closely stems from Blum-Ross and Livingstone (2017), who studied the sharenting experience of bloggers to understand how they manage boundaries of the digital self. This article indicated that there is yet to be an adequate reconciliation of representing digital identities. Mommy bloggers are economically bound to share content about their children to meet their obligation to their sponsors, thus making it difficult to negotiate the relational identity. Looking into this issue through the experience of sharenting by everyday moms is a component of the proposed study because everyday moms have slightly different motivations than those of bloggers because their accounts are not monetized. The need to post for income places an extrinsic pressure on the parent blogger to view mothering differently based on the sponsors she represents. These bloggers influence everyday moms (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). Therefore, it is important to explore how everyday moms manage the boundaries of the digital self.

### **Intentions for Sharenting**

The second area that merits further investigation stems from Holiday et al. (2020), who studied sharenting and the extended self on Instagram. The study identified three self-representations of moms as polished, promotional, and intimate. The researchers indicated a need to look closer at users' intentions to better understand the presentation of self. This inspired the idea of using the scroll back interview method and Facebook as the performance site for this study. The scroll back interview method invites the participant to be a co-analyst, which should give a peek into the backstage self, and the Facebook Timeline encourages a more dynamic social interaction among its users. Taking the study of sharenting to this next step should lead to rich insight into moms' intentional and unintentional motivations.

### **Conversation Starters to Engage Children of Sharenting**

Finally, Atwell et al. (2019) identified the most troubling need for further research on sharenting. They discovered that children are being thrust into the digital world, and only 17% of parents have thought about or asked their children what they think about sharenting. Through this practice, digital footprints are being constructed for children that will follow them throughout life. It is their right to have a voice in matters that concern them. The practical results of this study should provide parents with conversation starters to engage their children in talking about social media literacy and sharenting.

### **Summary**

Sharenting has become integrated into the parenting experience, and it constructs digital identities that will follow users into their future. Moms have traditionally been the ones most often taking and sharing images of their children. The next chapter will lay out the methods to conduct this phenomenological study on the experience of moms who sharent on Facebook. By scrolling back through their Facebook Timelines, moms will narrate their sharenting practices and provide insight into the meaning of this phenomenon.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study aims to describe and interpret a mom's experience of sharenting on Facebook to understand how children are used in the mom's performance of self. The phenomenon of sharenting is centered on the sharing of images, videos, and content of children. The nature of Facebook allows one person per account. Therefore, when a mom shares content about her children, she is constructing her identity as a mother, but she is also passively constructing the digital identity of her children. The child has no username or account, and their presentation is only in relation to the mom. The complexity of this relational identity of parenting forces the mom to showcase her children in an attempt to present her desired impression as a mother (Lipu & Siibak, 2019). This is important because the sharenting practices of moms are shaping what it means to be a mom (Lazard et al., 2019). This digital footprint can offer positive and negative consequences for the parent and the child. Therefore, this phenomenon needs to be studied further. This study employs a hermeneutic phenomenology design (Frechette et al., 2020) to analyze the experiences of 20 moms who have elementary-aged children and regularly post on their personal Facebook accounts. The scroll back interview method was used to conduct in-depth interviews with the participants (Robards & Lincoln, 2019). From these interviews, the essence of the phenomenon was extracted, and thematic analysis was applied to interpret the meaning of sharenting. This should result in furthering the understanding of the presentation of self in the digital age and offering practical suggestions to encourage open dialogue about social media literacy and sharenting.

#### Design

This qualitative study follows a phenomenological design to capture the essence of sharenting. Qualitative research gives a rich description of the topic of study. The data are not

reduced to numbers, allowing the nuance of a lived experience to be revealed (Stahl & King, 2020). This approach is suitable to this study because it allows for the collection of detailed and specific data on each participant's individual experience. There is not just one way to sharent, and the in-depth interviews indicative of qualitative research will collect content about the moms' experiences with constructing posts to share on Facebook. The constructivist paradigm considers that the understanding and meaning of this behavior is developed through the interaction and reflection of the experience (Punch, 2014). As individuals participate in the world and review their experiences, they construct their own representations and incorporate new information into their preexisting knowledge of experience. Knowledge is the production of personal and social meaning-making processes. The phenomenon of sharenting is changing the way moms interact, share information, and tell their stories. The constructivist paradigm relies on the participant's views of the situation and recognizes the impact of the researcher's own background and experience on the research. This aligns with the aim of this study because it takes into consideration the participants' views of sharenting and acknowledges the researcher's experience with the phenomenon.

Furthermore, the phenomenological design looks distinctly at the experience of the individual. Alase (2017) argued that the most important aspect of this design "is its ability to make sense of the lived experiences of the research participants and truly allow the research study to explore the phenomenon that the research is investigating" (p. 10), which aligns with a qualitative study falling within a constructivist paradigm. Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on interpretation to generate the individual's subjective lived experience (Tuffour, 2017). The meaning-making is undertaken through a hermeneutic cycle in which perspectives of understanding between the researcher and participants are fused to provide a broader

understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Edmund Husserl has been attributed as the founder of phenomenology. He was a German philosopher who developed a descriptive approach for revealing the essence of a phenomenon. “Husserl suggested that through bracketing presuppositions or epoche, this essence would emerge from the things themselves” (Frechette et al., 2020, p. 2). This approach focuses on examining the essence of experiences as they occur in the conscious of uncovering reality for the participant. Phenomenology was taken to an interpretive form by Martin Heidegger, who did not believe that personal opinion could be separated from the interpretation (Tuffour, 2017). Therefore, hermeneutic phenomenology includes description and interpretation to make sense of the everyday experience. This approach “illuminates interpretations of meaning (e.g., from human experience, from a text, from artifacts, or from other sources that hold significance)” (Frechette et al., 2020, p. 2). The research design has two primary aims: “to look in detail at how someone makes sense of life experience, and to give a detailed interpretation of the account to understand the experience” (Tuffour, 2017, p. 1). Phenomenology is a study of the lived experience at a deeper level to educate, define, and broaden the understanding of the world.

Approaching the study of sharenting through phenomenological design allows the researcher and participants to be co-analysts. My experience with sharenting is part of my interpretation of my experience. By working closely with the participants, we can establish the description and interpretation of meaning that consistently emerges across the individual experience. According to Frechette et al. (2020) “The main objective of interpretive phenomenology is to uncover or disclose a phenomenon of pulling away layers of forgetfulness or hiddenness that are present in our everyday existence” (p. 2). The philosophical root of phenomenological inquiry makes sense of the interpretive entity known as *Dasein*, the

experience of being a human, and the activity of pulling *existentialia* out of forgetfulness. This happens in the everyday interactions and discourse of experiences that humans engage in to construct one's individual reality (Frechette et al., 2020). The record of sharenting helps to pull those experiences from forgetfulness. Social media, and the Facebook Timeline in particular, creates a record of the phenomenon. Sharenting is bound by the content posted to social media. In this way, the researcher and the participant can analyze and interpret the documented experience of sharenting. This unique characteristic of social media broadens the understanding of the presentation of self through sharenting because the participants do not have to rely solely on their memory. The data preserved in the Facebook Timeline serves to confirm the description and experience of each individual mom who participates in the study. The variety of experiences gives insight into the themes that are consistent among the moms. The hermeneutic circle of analysis is an important tool for revealing these interpretations. This approach brings to light things that may be taken for granted. Individuals do not typically reflect on and analyze an experience from multiple perceptions. Instead, individuals assume others perceive the world as the individual perceives it (Sundler et al., 2019). In reality, each individual enters an experience from a unique perspective backed with their own lifetime of experiences that allows them to make sense of the phenomenon. By collecting stories of the phenomenon, elements that are universal to the phenomenon can be extracted. This research approach should capture the essence of sharenting and interpret its meaning.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the development of the description and interpretation of sharenting.

RQ 1: How do moms use images, videos, and content to construct an appearance for the

presentation of self when sharenting on Facebook?

RQ 2: How do moms use images, videos, and content to construct a setting for the presentation of self when sharenting on Facebook?

RQ 3: How do moms use images, videos, and content to construct a mannerism for the presentation of self when sharenting on Facebook?

### **Setting**

The setting for this study was Facebook. Social media has been integrated into the daily lives of the majority of parents. It is used to socialize, gather information, and share advice. Social media is becoming an integral part of the parenting experience (Archer & Kao, 2018). Pew Research reports that 81% of moms on social media use Facebook (Duggan et al., 2015). This is the most popular social networking site, and its longevity proves that it will not be easily abandoned (Robards & Lincoln, 2019). Therefore, the identity work performed on this site has important offline implications. The Facebook Timeline has distinct features that collect valuable data for this study, making it an appropriate setting to observe the sharenting experience (Robards & Lincoln, 2019). Participants were recruited through Facebook and their posts were observed on Facebook, but to conduct the scroll back interview, the participant met with the researcher at a local coffee shop. The coffee shop was chosen because it offers a level of comfort for the participant as a neutral location, and most people scroll through social media while enjoying this type of establishment. The intention was to create a comfortable experience for the participant to share their sharenting story.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study were moms of elementary-aged children who regularly post to a personal Facebook account. Moms were chosen because although sharenting is gender-

neutral, moms have historically been, and currently are, the parent most often capturing and sharing family photography (Autenrieth, 2018). The choice for elementary-aged children is important because the child is old enough to be aware of social media and can voice their own opinion relating to the mom's sharenting behavior (Choi & Lewallen, 2018), but the child is not old enough to have their own Facebook account. This aligns with the concerns about sharenting and illustrates the passive construction of a digital identity made by the mom for the child. There is also a need to investigate the posting practice of everyday moms. Therefore, the parent had an active personal account. An active user is described as one who uses social media 20–80 minutes per day (Setyastuti et al., 2019) and posts at least once a week. The mom's activity demonstrates her investment in Facebook and the importance of the interactions that occur on the site.

The characteristics of participants needed for this study meant that selective sampling had to be used. A post on Facebook was used to recruit participants, and a survey was used to identify the participants that fit the criteria. The researcher developed the survey to meet the specific needs of this study. A SurveyMonkey questionnaire with six questions was utilized. The first question asked if the mom had an elementary-aged child. The second question asked about the frequency of the mom's Facebook use, and the third question asked for the purpose of the mom's Facebook account. Then three general questions were used to garner demographic information. This included the mom's age, marital status, and level of education. This information is reported in Table 1. From this survey, 20 moms were selected to participate. The suggested number of participants for a phenomenological research design is typically between eight and 10 (Alase, 2017). Increasing the number of participants builds a robust description of sharenting and allows for in-depth interviews that last between 1 hour and 90 minutes with each participant (Moran & Robards, 2020). At the end of the interview, each participant was given a

\$10 gift card to a local coffee shop. The experience of each participant informed the description and interpretation of sharenting.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Children	Age Range	Marital Status	Education
Beth	2	25–34	Married	High School
Carol	4	45–54	Married	College
Ellen	2	45–54	Married	College
Emily	3	35–44	Married	College
Esther	2	35–44	Married	College
Grace	3	25–34	Married	High School
Haley	3	35–44	Married	High School
Jenna	1	35–44	Not Married	College
Kay	2	35–44	Married	College
Kayla	2	25–34	Married	High School
Martha	2	35–44	Married	College
Mary	4	35–44	Married	College
Megan	2	35–44	Married	College
Nancy	2	35–44	Married	College
Priscilla	3	45–54	Married	College
Riley	3	35–44	Married	College
Sharon	2	25–34	Married	High School
Susan	1	35–44	Married	College
Tiffany	3	35–44	Not Married	High School
Tina	1	35–44	Married	College

*Note.* Demographic information of each participant, organized by pseudonym with information about number of children, age range of the mom, marital status, and education.

### **Procedures**

To conduct this study, 20 moms were selected to participate. The moms responded to a Facebook post by completing a survey. The initial post was shared in a Facebook group titled The Mom Service, containing 886 members in Plant City, Florida. It is a group of trusted moms who want to give advice, ask questions, and be supportive in a judgment-free zone. The survey included demographic questions to identify moms who meet the selective sampling criteria. To be included in this study, a mom must have an elementary-aged child, be active on social media, and post to a personal account. Once the participants were selected, they were presented with a consent form following the International Review Board (IRB) requirements (see Appendix D for the consent form). The consent established the purpose of the study, outlined the expectations of the participants and the researcher, and asked the participant to friend request the researcher. The friend request allowed the researcher to observe the participant. It created a reciprocal disclosure because it allowed the participant to view the researcher's Facebook account (Moran & Robards, 2020), which can contribute to the rapport that is needed for the participant to feel comfortable as they share their experience with the researcher in an in-depth interview. Once the friend request was accepted, the researcher reviewed the participant's Facebook Timeline to observe her posting practices, to become familiar with her narrative, and to record her frequency of posting, which is presented in Table 2. This groundwork established a basic connection with the mom.

The next phase began when the researcher messaged the mom through Facebook to set up a meeting at a coffee shop in Plant City, Florida. According to the United States Census Bureau, Plant City is home to almost 40,000 people (2019). The average income is \$54,000, the majority of the population has a high school education or more, and 65% of the population is employed

(United States Census Bureau, 2019). These are characteristics of a middle-class community, which meets the requirements of this study to represent everyday moms. When we met, an in-depth interview following the scroll back interview method was used (Lincoln & Robards, 2019). This semi-structured interview lasted at least 1 hour and was grounded by five questions (Frechette et al., 2020). Probing questions were used to gather more insight from the mom in addition to the five questions that every participant was asked. This method calls for flexibility. The researcher and the participant are co-analysts, and each interview was distinct (Lincoln & Robards, 2017). The researcher listened carefully during the interview and made minimal notes in her data journal to identify important ideas or areas to investigate further. The entire interview was recorded and transcribed for analysis. The analysis resulted in a description and interpretation of the phenomenon.

A hermeneutic cycle was used to analyze the data collected in the in-depth interview. This consisted of a back and forth movement from the part to the whole. It helped develop a robust description and informed interpretation of the phenomenon (Tuffour, 2017). For this part of the analysis, the researcher manually reviewed the transcriptions. The review process began with a read-through of the transcription. The first read-through familiarized the researcher with the content. During the second read-through, the researcher wrote notes in the margins that connected to the performance team, the appearances, the settings, and the mannerisms. The interpretation focused on the theory of the presentation of self, and the notes helped illuminate how the mom used these strategies to present motherhood on Facebook. The third read-through, and a few more to ensure consistency, confirmed the notes and led to preliminary connections across the experiences.

The next phase zoomed out, and the notes pointed to a shared description; in other words,

the essence of sharenting emerged across the transcripts. The researcher then drafted a description of the essence of sharenting by compiling direct quotes from the transcripts of the participants' interviews. To check the essence, the researcher compared the description to the individual transcript by zooming back into the experience of three random participants. This confirmation built trustworthiness in the study. After this was done, the researcher worked to interpret the presentation of self through the experience of sharenting. This interpretation revealed insights into how the moms used images, videos, and content about her children to construct motherhood on Facebook. NVivo 12 software was used to confirm the thematic analysis to assure the results were not tainted by the researcher's bias. The description and interpretation gave insight into the development of three conversation starters that moms can use to facilitate conversations with their children about social media literacy and sharenting. The conversation starters incorporate a Bible verse to make the connection between faith and social media to help guide families as they engage on these platforms.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In a phenomenological design, the researcher plays a distinctive role as a co-analyst. The researcher's personal experience with the phenomenon informs the interpretation of the participants' experiences. Therefore, it is important that the researcher discloses her knowledge of the phenomenon. This study stems from my personal experience with sharenting. I have posted a picture to Instagram every day of my son's life since he was 6 months old. This means I have almost 9 years of daily images. I truly cherish this collection of memories. My son has grown more involved with the process as he has gotten older, and he seems to enjoy it. He often suggests a shot to capture or a quote to include in the caption. I post for the purpose of documentation. My daily post on Instagram replaced my scrapbook. I also have a Facebook

account, but I am not very active on it. Facebook posts consist of the first day of school album, a birthday album, and a family photo each year. I occasionally post an image and a quote on a few special occasions like our wedding anniversary and Father's day. I seldom Like or comment on anything because I feel it is too public.

My husband, however, is very active on both Facebook and Instagram because he likes to share our son's golfing experiences. He produces videos to promote our son's accomplishments and regularly engages with others on social media. This is important to disclose because I am often recruited to help create the reels and write the captions. It is a family affair, and we all enjoy sharing with our online friends, especially in seeing the reactions. My personal experience influences my beliefs about how I should engage in this activity. As a researcher, I am responsible for analyzing the participants' experiences as a co-analyst, and we will make sense of it together. "In doing so, it not only helps us to understand a phenomenon or an event at a deeper level of conscious, but at the same time it helps us explore our own nature, bringing a transformation at a personal level" (Qutoshi, 2018, p. 220).

The scroll back interview method allowed the researcher to be a co-analyst. I sat alongside the participant as she scrolled through her Facebook Timeline and described her sharenting. The transcription of her account was numbered, and she was given a pseudonym. This added to the richness of the description because her identity was concealed, but her experience was captured verbatim. As the researcher, I needed to describe and interpret their experiences while minimizing my own personal experience. NVivo 12 software confirmed the thematic analysis and precluded any personal bias on the topic. Since the study stemmed from my own personal experience, I am invested in the findings because I want to prepare my own child to navigate social media. As a researcher, I see this as bigger than my own motivations, and

I want to offer suggestions to make a difference for families.

### **Data Collection**

The description and interpretation of sharenting was developed through in-depth semi-structured interviews following the scroll back interview method. This method was developed by Robards and Lincoln (2019) as a way to gather rich data from a participant's Facebook Timeline. The uniqueness of this method helps the researcher contextualize the content shared on social media by allowing participants to narrate and explain their posts (Lincoln & Robards, 2017). The method worked exceptionally well for investigating sharenting because it gave the mom the opportunity to explain how she incorporated appearance, setting, and mannerism into her performance on Facebook. Explanations provided the backstage talk that divulged the mom's intentions for her posting and how the posts were constructed.

### **Observations**

The scroll back interview method began by sending a friend request on Facebook. After the participant agreed to the consent form, the friend status was confirmed by the researcher in the study. This gave the researcher and the participant mutual access to view each other's Facebook Timelines (Lincoln & Robards, 2019). These observations developed background knowledge of the participant's narrative and recorded posting frequency over the last 30 days. The frequency was collected in Table 2 by the participant's pseudonym. Frequency was an indicator of the time spent on Facebook and revealed the mom's investment in the interactions on the site (Archer & Kao, 2018). This information contributed to the description and interpretation of sharenting.

**Table 2***Frequency of the Moms' Posting Practices in the Last 30 Days*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Posts</b>	<b>Sharenting Posts</b>	<b>Average Likes</b>	<b>Average Comments</b>
Beth	6	5	24	8
Carol	30	6	127	16
Ellen	5	4	44	6
Emily	18	7	21	4
Esther	26	16	33	7
Grace	9	7	31	7
Haley	16	4	68	40
Jenna	25	8	12	3
Kay	11	5	58	12
Kayla	12	5	38	8
Martha	19	8	91	15
Mary	10	5	162	39
Megan	12	4	65	7
Nancy	8	4	100	4
Priscilla	10	4	50	8
Riley	6	5	68	17
Sharon	17	8	23	3
Susan	10	6	81	14
Tiffany	9	6	3	1
Tina	20	8	59	13

*Note.* Frequency report of the moms' last 30 days of Facebook usage organized by pseudonym. The second column is the total number of posts. The third column is the number of sharenting posts. The fourth column is the average number of likes per sharenting post. The last column is the average number of comments per sharenting post.

## Interviews

The next step in the scroll back interview method was to conduct semi-structured interviews. These interviews lasted at least 1 hour and were grounded by five questions that were asked of every participant. There needs to be flexibility within this type of interview for probing questions and a break if sensitive information arises (Moller & Robards, 2019). The participant guided the scroll back by holding her own device and showing the researcher the posts as the participant shared (Robards & Lincoln, 2019). The researcher worked to gather a description of at least two posts, preferably three, but made sure the interview did not exceed 90 minutes. The researcher asked probing questions to clarify or investigate further. This was a conversation between the researcher and the participant (Robards & Lincoln, 2017). The participant needed to feel comfortable disclosing information, and the researcher encouraged her with active listening. The entire interview was recorded and then transcribed to be prepared for analysis.

Questions asked of every participant:

1. Will you please start by describing the role Facebook plays in your everyday life?
2. Please show me a post that reflects you as a mom; how does this post represent you as a mom?
3. When you include your children in a post, what process do you go through to prepare the post?
4. How do you interact with your friends on a sharenting post?
5. What do you think your children will think about your posts when they view them?

The first question was intended to get a general understanding of how the mom uses Facebook. There are several different reasons why moms decide to engage on social media (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). Using my description of sharenting, I would pull out my

*statement I post for the purpose of documentation...It is a family affair, and we all enjoy sharing with our online friends, and especially seeing the reactions.* This statement illustrates the purpose of my account and the social importance it holds for my whole family. The literature shows a variety of reasons that moms use social media, and this question should corroborate those reasons and show the importance of the site as a whole. The mom's usage reveals information about the meaning the site holds in her everyday life (Archer & Kao, 2018). The value that Facebook holds for the mom is an important part of the description of sharenting because it will shed light on the importance of the identity she constructs on social media.

Question number two was designed to capture the image the mom holds of herself. The posts she picks can give insight into how she constructs her appearance on social media. Appearance is all the stimuli that tell the audience of the performer's status (Goffman, 1959). Holiday et al. (2020) studied how moms showcased children on social media and suggested a need to look into the intentions. They identified three categories—polished, promotional, and intimate—which provide insight into what is showcased but not why. After the mom described her aesthetics, probing questions were asked to determine why. For example, what does a messy bun represent? The mom's look, clothing, and accessories contribute to her appearance. When she describes and narrates the post, she reveals the purpose of her choices and what she intended to showcase.

The third question sought to gather information about how the setting was used to contribute to the production of mothering. The setting includes expressive equipment intentionally or inadvertently used by the individual during the performance (Goffman, 1959). In Goffman's description of the performance team, ceremonial roles include individuals and objects that contribute to the setting. The setting gives clues to what is going on in the situation

(Merunkova & Slerka, 2019). Children contribute to the understanding of the performance of motherhood much the same way a diaper bag indicates that a woman is a mother. Whether intentional or unintentional, the choices used to create the setting give meaning to sharenting.

The fourth question was intended to gather information about the mannerisms that moms use to perform motherhood on Facebook. Mannerisms are all the stimuli that warn the audience of the interactive role that the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation (Goffman, 1959). The way the mom interacts with others on Facebook through Likes, comments, and shares illustrates the impression she makes and manages on social media. In my personal case, I would note the statement *I seldom Like or comment on anything because I feel it is too public*. This comment reveals my personality as an introvert. I am not especially social in person, which is also represented in my social media interactions. On very few of my posts do I make comments, I rarely engage in dialogue, and the captions are usually published quotes. Seldom do I write journal-style posts on social media. My mannerisms are documented and collected on my Timeline, providing data that support these assumptions. To be believable, the presentation and the mannerisms should be consistent. Most individuals work to produce favorable impressions of themselves on social media (Barbovschi et al., 2018).

The last question takes the interview away from the scroll back. Robards and Lincoln (2019) suggested this strategy to debrief and think forward. This question also ties in the concerning fact that only 17% of moms have ever asked or considered what their children think about sharenting (Atwell et al., 2019). This question may reveal that a mom is entirely unaware of the digital footprint she is constructing for her child. On the other end of the continuum, it may reveal that a mom has planned and considered the child's future and takes precautions for them.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data collected through the scroll back interview method began with a narrative description of the phenomenon. This description of sharenting can be “vigorously reported through the use of direct quotations of the research participants” (Qutoshi, 2018, p. 220). The participants’ descriptions should then be used for interpretation, which helps minimize the researcher’s bias (Alase, 2017). “The dynamism of the interpretation and reflection resounds excellently with the hermeneutic circle model that deals with the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole at numerous levels for a holistic analytical interpretation” (Tuffour, 2017, p. 4). In this case, the part represents the participant’s description, and the whole is the researcher’s experience and knowledge that applies to the phenomenon. This back and forth probing works to bring new insights to the surface while ensuring it stays true to the participants’ lived experience.

Through this reflective process, the analysis was aimed at understanding the complexity of meaning. Analysis should be a data-driven search for patterns of meaning that eventually develop into the themes that interpret the phenomenon (Sundler et al., 2019). The researcher familiarized themselves with the description by reading it several times. Then the researcher looked for meaning by making notes and markings in the descriptions. These notes were extracted and compared for similarities and differences to develop patterns in the meanings. From these patterns, themes were constructed (Frechette et al., 2020). The themes should describe the meanings of the lived experiences in the actual context. “Thus, meaning found from the participants’ experiences are described in a meaningful text organized in themes” (Sundler et al., 2019, p. 737). To reinforce and confirm the themes extracted by the researcher, NVivo 12 software was used to substantiate them. This is an important step to minimize the researcher’s

bias and add validity to the interpretation of the phenomenon. These themes were used to create conversation starters, meaning they were grounded in the experience of the participants.

Following this process of analysis resulted in a rich description and a meaningful interpretation of sharenting.

### **Zooming in with Goffman**

The performance of motherhood through sharenting was analyzed through the lens of Goffman's presentation of self. At the foundational level, the performance team was analyzed to determine how children are used by the mom to present self. Goffman (1959) asserted, "when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole" (p. 35). This implies that the presentation of a mom on social media will encompass what the society believes the role of a mom should entail. Focusing on posts of sharenting isolated the performance of motherhood on social media to illustrate how moms believed society expected them to present. By extending Goffman's theory to include the producer, the values and beliefs can be critiqued through the truths of God's word, furthering the importance of the implications. As Lazard et al. (2019) explained, the presentation "can be better understood as a complex affective and intersectional accomplishment that produces motherhood and family as communicative activities within digital social practices" (p. 7). This is important because social media is influencing and transforming the meaning of motherhood.

Social media expectations mandate a specific appearance, which is exemplified in trending posts that fulfill the expectation of appearance. Goffman (1959) claimed that "we tend to conceal from our audience all evidence of 'dirty work,' whether we do this work in private or allocate it to a servant, to the impersonal market, to a legitimate specialist, or to an illegitimate

one” (p.44), or more currently, to the technical ability of a good edit. Searching the sharenting descriptions for themes related to the appearance of motherhood portrayed on Facebook revealed how moms construct their appearance before, during, and after the post. The performance is only the presentation of the appearance, whereas the mom will put substantial time into concealing this dirty work to appear as though she fits the often unrealistic expectations of social media.

The relational nature of parenting forces a connection between the performance of motherhood to their children. The mom must have the role of the child fulfilled in her performance and therefore relies on their participation, or as Goffman (1959) explained, “Each teammate is forced to rely on the good conduct and behavior of his fellows, and they, in turn, are forced to rely on him” (p. 82). Analyzing the sharenting performance team revealed how the children are used as ceremonial roles to contribute to the setting of motherhood on social media. These ceremonial roles must align with the intention of the performance star, the mom, and the performance director, the mom, to create the setting she wants for the performance. Asking moms how they prepare posts for Facebook should reveal details about how the set is constructed. For some moms, this may mean bribing their child to smile for the camera or removing clutter from the camera frame. “They form a secret society, a team, in so far as a secret is kept as to how they are co-operating together to maintain a particular definition of the situation” (Goffman, 1959, p. 105). The collection of these posts is a moderated version of the mom’s experiences to fit her social media performance goals. The choices to construct the setting of the performance reveal the expectations of the representation intentionally and unintentionally.

### **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, it is important to establish trustworthiness. The complexity that

surrounds qualitative research requires methodical methods and rigor to generate useful results (Nowell et al., 2017). In other words, the study must contain enough detail to be credible, with a rich description reflecting reality (Stahl & King, 2020). The study should also be transferrable, meaning the findings in this context could be applied in other similar contexts (Connelly, 2016). Dependability also contributes to trustworthiness and indicates that the data are reliable and can be checked by another researcher to confirm the findings. The final contributor is confirmability, which is essential because it proves that the interpretation is data-driven (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Attending to these components of trustworthiness results in sound research.

### **Credibility**

Strategies are needed in qualitative research to ensure credibility. These strategies should be worked into the procedures and not just looked at afterward. A strategy to develop and establish credibility involves providing thorough and clear descriptions of the procedures and methods. As Sundler et al. (2019) illustrated, “Credibility stresses that nothing should be taken for granted” (p. 737). Therefore, every aspect of the study should be described and explained so that the findings can be trusted. It is important to establish confidence in the truth of the study. There are several other strategies that can be used to establish credibility in addition to clear descriptions, such as member checking, prolonged engagement with participants, peer debriefing, and reflective journaling (Connelly, 2016). These strategies develop internal validity in both the procedures and methods and were used to generate credibility in this study. Clear and thorough descriptions are incorporated throughout the study. Member-checking was used to increase the accountability of the research and confirm the results. The in-depth interviews and friend requests through Facebook established prolonged engagement between the researcher and the participant. Integrating these strategies throughout the study further enhanced its credibility.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Transparently describing the steps taken from the start of a research project to its completion helps establish dependability and confirmability. These components of trustworthiness are related and ensure the stability of the findings over time as well as the consistency of the findings. Throughout the study, the “process is logical, traceable, and clearly documented” to ensure dependability (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 3). The dependability of a study can be established through “reflexive auditing or describing the involvement of the researcher in the decisions made in the research process” (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 28). This is interspersed throughout this study to show the dependability of the findings. Confirmability shows that the findings are situated within the data and not derived from the imagination of the researcher (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher should be able to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations have been reached. A good way to discuss the conclusions and demonstrate how they are reached is to conduct peer debriefings. These strategies can confirm the research findings to ensure they are data-driven and dependable.

### **Transferability**

The golden prize of research is transferability, meaning the results of the study can make a difference across other settings and situations. Consequently, the study should include details of the context so behavior and experience can be meaningful to an outsider (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This study is filled with a rich description of the essence of sharenting and the process of the phenomenological study. Incorporating thorough descriptions throughout the study ensures the findings can be transferred to other situations. As we learn more and more about the influence of Facebook, it will be of critical importance that the knowledge is transferable. The cycle of research needs that ending step to make the research meaningful. The study should carry

on by adding theoretical and practical suggestions to enhance academia and society. Such a holistic approach aligns nicely with hermeneutic phenomenology to continually go back and forth between the zoom in and the zoom out. In this way, the findings can offer the greatest impact. Trustworthiness has been established and developed throughout the study to enhance its credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

This study employed member checking to ensure trustworthiness. Member checking is when the participants review the final report for accuracy. Because the participant and researcher are co-analysts, member checking can be used throughout the data collection and to finalize the interpretations. During the interview, the researcher confirmed meaning by using probing questions to ask for confirmation (Robards & Lincoln, 2019). Facebook Messenger was used to connect with the participant, and interpretations were shared through this tool. Documenting the data and internal checking practices can improve the rigor of qualitative research, making it more trustworthy (Stahl & King, 2020). Interested participants reviewed the final report, which includes the description, the interpretations, and the conversation starters. This holds the researcher accountable and finishes the research cycle by giving back to the participants. Their insight ensured that the conversation starters are practical and meaningful. Using these strategies throughout the research process ensured its trustworthiness.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Sharenting is concerning because moms use children in their performance of motherhood on Facebook. Although this study is not directly working with children, they are still an integral part of the study. Children are a vulnerable population that should be protected at all times. Therefore, this study did not duplicate the name or image of any child. Children's names were redacted from the transcript, and pseudonyms were used for their descriptions in the final report.

There is also a risk with the scroll back interview method that a post may trigger an emotion as the mom reflects on her Facebook Timeline. This could be in the form of a post that creates an emotional response or the realization of what is captured on the Facebook Timeline. In either instance, Robards and Lincoln (2019) suggested taking a break in the interview to allow the participant space to compose themselves and then restarting the interview when the participant is comfortable. The scroll back interview method was clearly explained in the consent to ensure the mom was aware of the possible risk.

### **Summary**

A qualitative study is rich in both detail and description, which are used to develop a trustworthy study. It is important for qualitative research to be trustworthy because it makes the findings available to others. The aim of this study is to describe and interpret the meaning of sharenting through the theory of the presentation of self. These findings further the knowledge on the influence and impact of Facebook on social interactions and experiences. To do this, a phenomenological design was employed using the scroll back interview method to capture the essence of sharenting. This interview method has emerged as social media, and the Facebook Timeline specifically, has become a site for social research. The Facebook Timeline captures, organizes, and stores the user's posts, Likes, comments, and shares on the site. The researcher engaged each participant in an in-depth interview as they scrolled through the participant's Timeline together. This allowed the participant to fill in the backstory of their social media practices, which is important to the topic of sharenting because moms use their children as props in their presentation of self on Facebook. The relational nature of parenting makes it complicated for a mom to balance the right to share her mothering story with the rights of the relational other. In sharenting, the relational other is the child. This investigation furthers the understanding of the

presentation of self on social networking sites and uses this understanding to develop conversation starters for moms to discuss social media literacy and sharenting with their children.

Several strategies of trustworthiness were incorporated throughout each phase of this study. To establish credibility, the study is written with transparent clarity so that the findings can be trusted. The scroll back interview method prescribes a prolonged engagement with each participant. The interviews were in-depth, and the researcher connected to the participants through Facebook. The study also included member checking to ensure the essence of sharenting was data-driven and based on the authentic experience of each participant. Deliberate use of these strategies throughout the study confirmed that the findings are grounded in the data and that another researcher could derive the same conclusion. I feel accountable for the study. As a mom, it is very important to me to discover the influence and impact of sharenting. This authenticity should be evident through every phase resulting in a study that offers valid benefits.

The final report included a detailed description of the essence of sharenting. The description included a combination of quotes from the participants that create the essence of sharenting. Then the interpretation of sharenting emerged from themes related to the presentation of self. The experience of sharenting establishes a performance team with the mom as the star and the director and the children and everything else as the ceremonial roles. This performance team was specifically investigated regarding the appearance, setting, and mannerism used to perform motherhood on Facebook. Since Facebook is such a large part of the parenting experience, it is important to understand its influence and impact on moms. Social media has changed the way people interact and experience life. Therefore, new tools are needed to negotiate the digital environment. The findings conclude with three conversation starters that are

grounded in the data. The purpose of these conversation starters is to provide moms with an immediate tool to address social media literacy and sharenting with their children and family.

Sharenting has become a pervasive aspect of parenting, and its influence and impact will shape future generations.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The results chapter begins with a detailed review of the participants. Then the essence of sharenting, which emerged from the interviews as a description of the phenomenon, is described. The data are organized according to three themes—appearance, setting, and mannerism—in order to answer the research questions. Each theme included subcategories supported and explained by the participants' quotes and further supported by the literature. This data helps make sense of the sharenting experience of moms on Facebook.

### Participants

The participants for this sharenting study were recruited through a Facebook post. The request was posted in the group Mom Service. The purpose of this group is to support moms in the Plant City community. The group is a place to learn new things, find support, and connect to a community. The ideals of this group aligned with the purpose of this study and provided confidence that members of the group would be willing to offer their experience and expertise on the topic of this study. The post included a link to a SurveyMonkey questionnaire to filter the interested participants and determine which moms fit the study criteria. A total of 54 moms responded by completing the questionnaire. Of these 54 moms, 42 of them regularly posted to a personal Facebook page and had an elementary-aged child. The researcher confirmed the friend status of each participant to ensure a connection between the participant and the researcher was established. After this connection was made, moms were invited to an interview at a local coffee shop. The moms provided three dates and times that worked for them. The researcher identified a reasonable date and set the schedule. Due to scheduling conflicts and the vast responsibility of being a mom, a total of 23 interviews were scheduled to ensure a total of 20 completed interviews in accordance with the IRB approval. The moms who completed the interviews

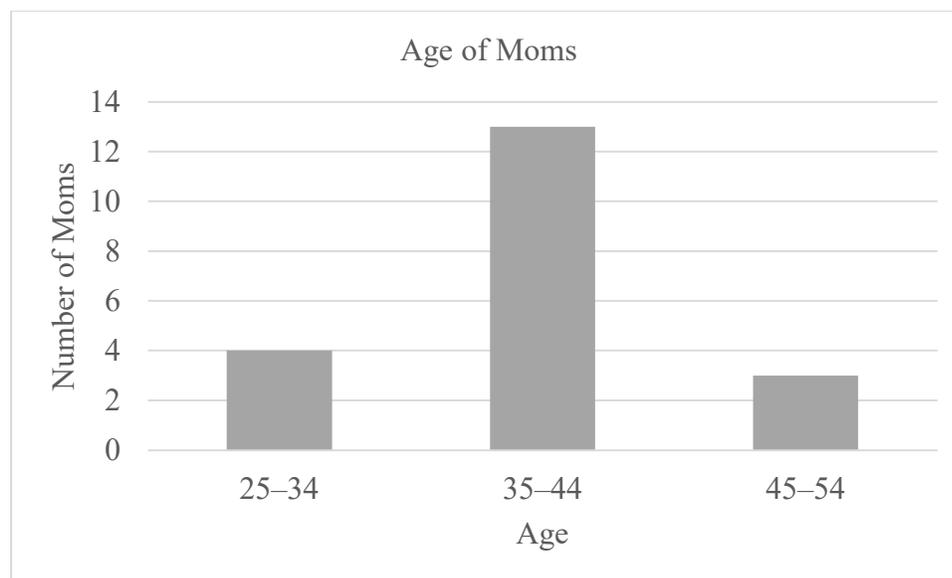
derived from a variety of backgrounds in order to properly represent the Plant City area.

To ensure consistency, the Plant City census was reviewed. According to the records, about 73% of the population is White, 14% is Black, and 13% is Hispanic or other (United States Census Bureau, 2019). In this study, 16 moms identified as White, two identified as Black, and two identified as Hispanic, which aligns with the demographic distribution of the Plant City community. This alignment helps to ensure that the results are transferable. A strong understanding of the participant's background aids in making sense of this phenomenon.

The age of the moms who participated in this study ranged from 25–54. This information is illustrated in Figure 1. The majority of the moms (13) fell in the 35–44 age range. There were four moms in the 25–34 age range, and there were three moms in the 45–54 age range. This range of ages occurred because some of the moms also had children older and younger than elementary age. The experience of each mom at these different ages and stages of parenting helps to broaden the understanding of sharenting.

### Figure 1

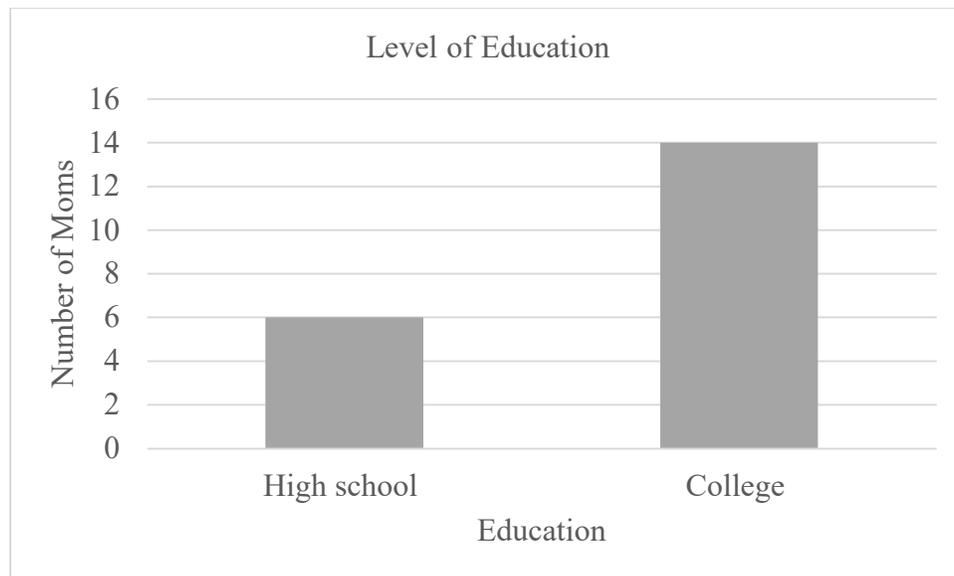
*Age of Participant Moms*



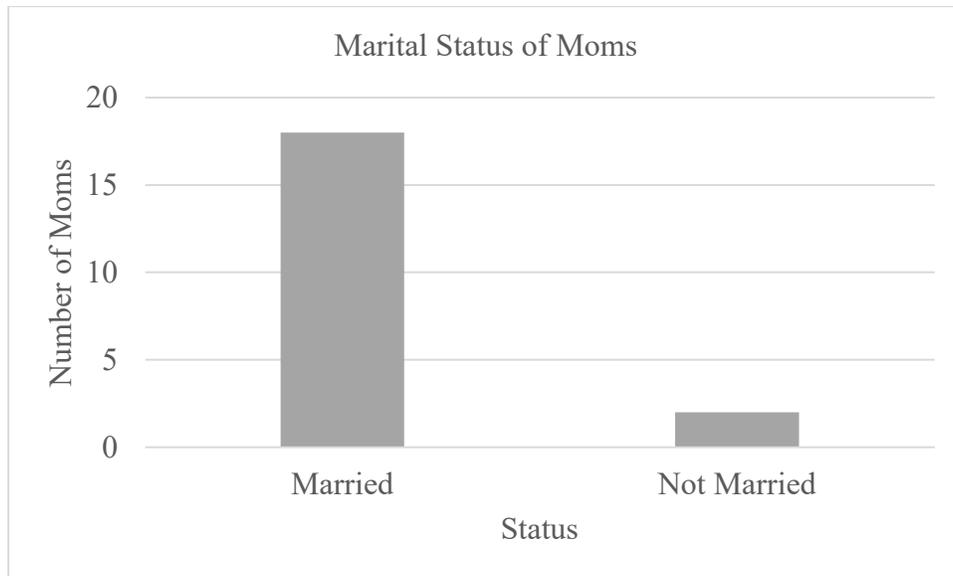
The level of education of the moms in this study was categorized as high school or college. The majority of the moms had earned a college degree. One mom had earned a master's degree, eight moms had a Florida Teaching Certificate, two moms had nursing degrees, and three had business degrees. There were six moms in the study with high school diplomas, of which two homeschooled, two were hairdressers, and two worked in public relations positions. Figure 2 shows the moms' levels of education. These characteristics indicate their academic ability and achievement. The competency of each mom gives credibility to the insight that she shares about her experience.

**Figure 2**

*Education Level of Participant Moms*



Another important demographic characteristic of the moms in this study was their marital status. This study places a focus on communication, and recognizing that the configuration of the participant's family helps to make sense of her experience. Almost all of the moms in this study were married. Only two of the moms were not married. Figure 3 shows this comparison.

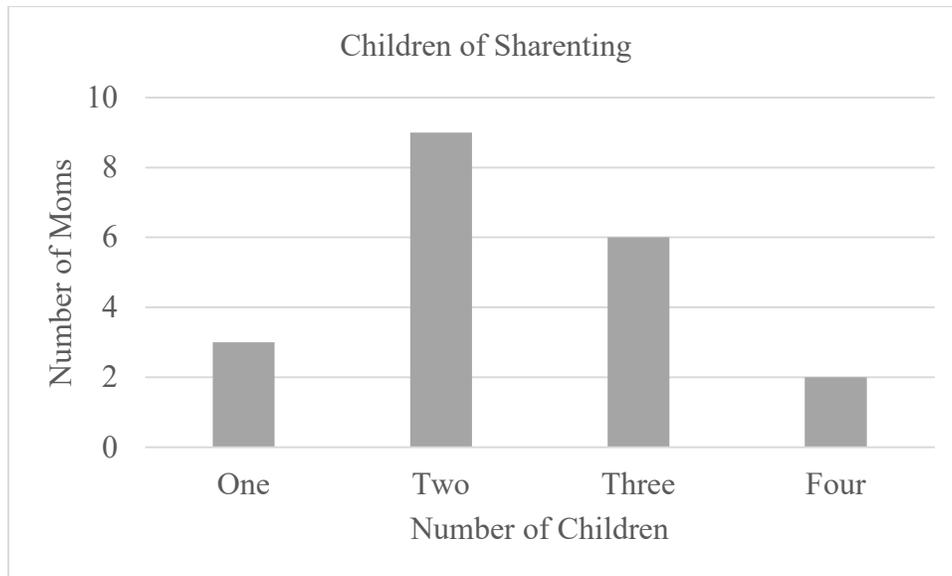
**Figure 3***Marital Status of Participant Moms*

The dynamics of a family are influenced by the number of children in the household.

Figure 4 depicts the breakdown of the children of sharenting. Most of the moms in this study had more than one child. Of the 20 moms selected for this study, 45% had two children, 30% had three children, 15% had one child, and 10% had four children. None of the moms had more than four children. The elementary-aged children ranged from 5 to 12 years old. Some of the moms in this study also had children as young as 2 years old, and some of the moms also had adult children. Each mom's description of sharenting reflected her unique experience.

**Figure 4**

*Number of Children Each Participant Mom Has*

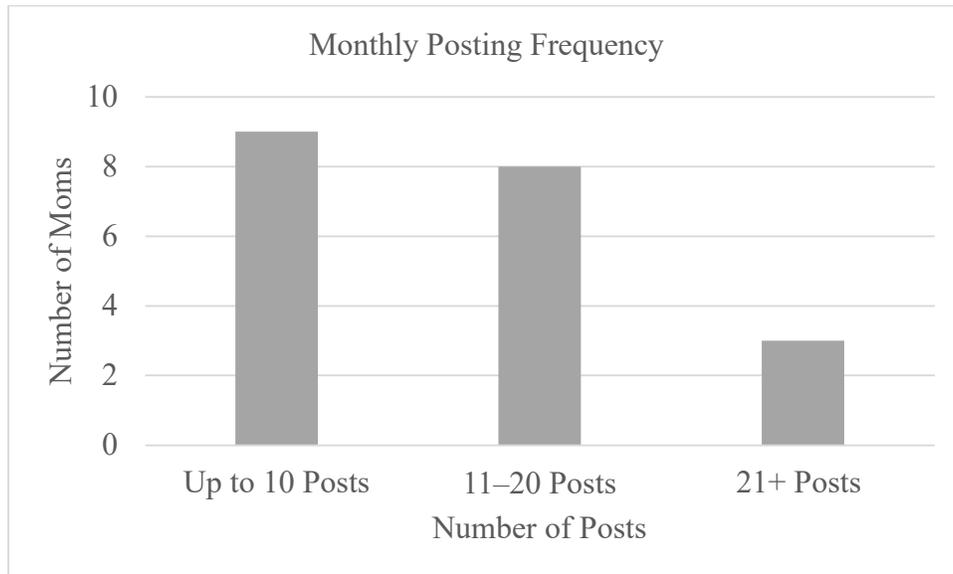


It was essential to identify the frequency with which the moms engaged with social media to determine the value that social media holds in their lives. This is represented in time spent on the platform, the posts shared on the platform, the Likes clicked on the platform, and the comments typed on the platform. During the familiarization phase of the data collection, information was gathered from each mom's Facebook Timeline. Her Timeline was reviewed, and then numbers were compiled over a time period of 30 days. The information extracted from the Timeline included the number of posts, the number of sharenting posts, the number of Likes on each post, and the number of comments on each post (see Table 2). The platform collects this information on the user's Timeline. It does not capture the Likes and comments produced by the user because those are stored on other users' Timelines. Therefore, I asked questions during the interview to determine the process the participant used when she Liked or commented on another friend's post. Figure 5 and Figure 6 break down the moms' Facebook use as a whole and compare it to how often the mom sharents. All of the moms posted content beyond sharenting. In

their Timeline, they included other aspects of their identity such as community involvement, workforce success, and special occasions.

**Figure 5**

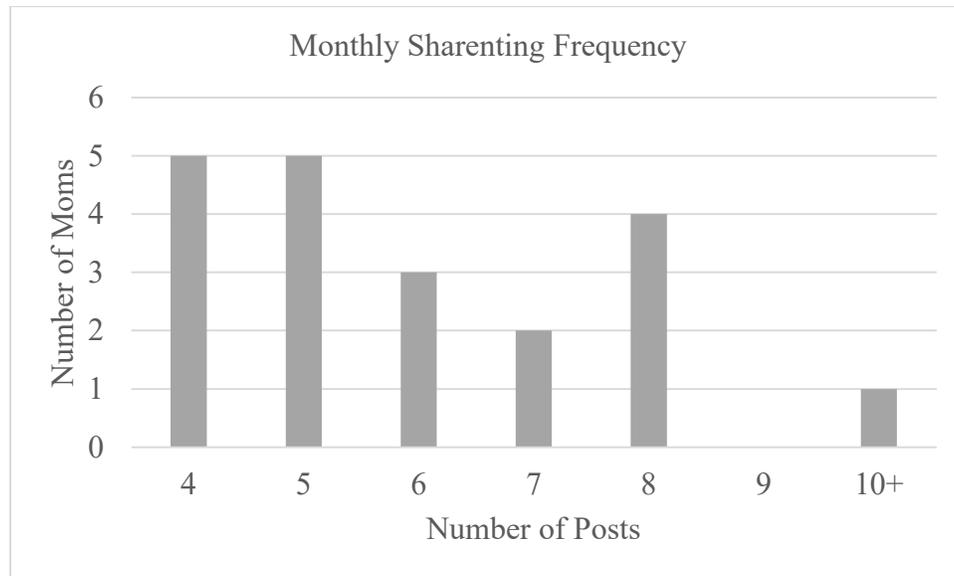
*Number of Posts Participant Moms Shared in the Last 30 Days*



Every mom in the study posted at least once a week. The majority of moms posted several times a week, but none of the moms posted several times a day. During the 30-day period in which numbers were extracted, 19 moms posted between four and eight sharenting posts. Only one mom posted more than that, and she posted a total of 16 sharenting posts during the 30 days. The moms in this study generally fell within the definition of moderate usage, reflecting the criteria of the study.

**Figure 6**

*Number of Sharenting Posts Participant Moms Shared in the Last 30 Days*



### **Results**

The scroll back interview method attained rich data from each mom. The interview allowed for probing questions to find out the process for the mom's use of Facebook, her posting practices, and the value of the platform in her life. The researcher took notes of important points during the interview, especially noting the consistency of similar topics that arose in many of the interviews. The transcriptions were reviewed to learn about each sharenting experience and to answer the three research questions. This process was time-consuming, and the transcripts were read through numerous times to ensure consistency throughout the process. The data revealed both an overall essence of the sharenting phenomenon as well as three themes that are common in all sharenting experiences. To confirm the results, NVivo 12 software was used. The software compiled word clouds associated with the essence of sharenting and each research question. These illustrations are presented at the beginning of each section to visually represent the results. Each section includes direct quotes from the participants as well as connections to the literature



Susan said, *Facebook is my way of reaching out to people that I don't see all the time.*

Ellen said, *I feel like I know things that are happening to my friends from college and places like that who I don't text. Like my mom, she texts me and I think I respond but I don't. Whereas this way, I can keep up with people and know about them 'cause I care about them, they're just not in my sphere, and we are busy people.*

Martha said, *The benefits for me is that, you know, even talking about college friends or, like, people who live in different places. I can kind of still keep up and feel like there's that connection, even if we don't talk every single day.*

This technology offers convenience for moms that make Facebook irresistible. Archer and Kao (2018) found that social media has a “significant impact on interpersonal communication in relationships with partners, family, friends, and children” (p. 123). Moms use Facebook because it is instant, because they can share content, because they can discover community, and because the platform is filled with information.

Esther said, *It's just instant, so it's easy, and it's honestly less work for me in that sense. I don't have to tell my mom where I'm at or what I'm doing or what, you know, we did during the weekend. It is also nice for me because when I do see someone, I can say, "Oh, I saw that you guys celebrated a birthday."*

The most common activity on Facebook is sharing content. A staggering number of photos are uploaded to the site every day, with 4,000 being uploaded every second (Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2018). The digital age has transformed photo sharing, and the ease in which digital images can be shared over the internet allows moms to share their precious memories with family and friends all over the world with a single click (Autenrieth, 2018). The moms in this study enjoy sharing pictures of their children with close friends and family.

Sharon said, *So, like, in the beginning it was to connect with people, and you know, you didn't even have to have their phone number or their email address. And then it transitioned into obviously children and wanting to show them off.*

Grace said, *We actually just post pictures of all the things my family does and the trips we take so that my husband's family can see our family grow up. Because we don't live in the same country so they are not able to without Facebook.*

Tina said, *We have family all over the United States, yeah, and it's all we know, it becomes our main way of communication, and so that's kind of how I watch my nephews grow up, I mean, even more than FaceTime, I check Facebook to see their pictures and what they are all doing. And the same for my son. I post pictures for the grandparents who live away or, you know, my sisters who live up north.*

When moms sharent, they also engage and develop community. This helps them to learn about mothering, and several moms spoke about getting help with breastfeeding. Sharenting has normalized asking for help, and crowdsourcing provides many solutions a mom can consider (Archer, 2019). Millennial moms turn to social media for advice and information, which often supersedes the advice of family and information from physicians (Setyastuti et al., 2019).

Kay said, *When my daughter was first born, since she was nursing, I was alone all the time, but nobody in my life had ever breastfed before, and my mom had used formula. And like, the group was my lifeline. I posted my symptoms and the comments were like, mastitis, mastitis, mastitis, and they gave me all the remedies.*

Mary said, *I post just to, you know, ask the audience to just get information and figure out what other people do that works for them and see what I can learn from that.*

Martha said, *My mom did not breastfeed, like, that was not a thing. So, I had no realistic*

*idea of how it would be. But I breastfed both of my kids for a year. Sometimes it felt like, yeah, no, I am hurting and I can't do it. But to have a community of supportive people saying yes, you can, which helped me to keep breastfeeding.*

Moms value the information that they can learn from Facebook. The ease and accessibility of social media makes it a place that moms go to seek information related to other aspects of life, too (Setyastuti et al., 2019).

Mary said, *And honestly, like information, like I can't tell you how many vacations I booked off Facebook.*

Even with a busy mom schedule, the participants explained that they still found time to scroll through Facebook and share their experiences with others. Research shows that “these new technologies are opportunities for increased family cohesion, adaptability, interactions, planning, and open communication” (Procentese et al., 2019). It is used to wind down, kill time, and escape reality.

Martha said, *I'm probably on way more than I should be. But it's literally like that go-to downtime. Like, if I am waiting on something or at night. You know, once I put everybody to bed and, like, I'm trying to wind myself down, then I'll just scroll and share.*

Emily said, *I use it as a filler, like I am waiting on a kid to get out of something and I'll scroll through Facebook. And sometimes I use it as, let me pray for these people because you can tell they need it. Or other times I use it to screenshot and send it to somebody to gossip.*

Esther said, *In an argument with my child or my husband. I just quickly go to my phone and it allows me just the time out from what I am dealing with. To let me see what everyone else is doing it kind of takes me out of my world for a few moments, you know?*

The moms in this study carefully rationalized their usage choices and determined that

Facebook has more worth than risk. A dependence or addiction to social media has been shown to cause family and relationship issues (Yarigarravesh et al., 2020). A popular strategy to avoid overindulgence in social networking is to unplug, by taking a break from an account or deleting an app from a mobile device. These strategies set boundaries for the usage of social media, but still promote the value of the platform (Setyastuti et al., 2019). There are many benefits to engaging on social media

Riley said, *I'm always afraid I'm gonna miss, like, one important bit of information that I just really need.*

Kay said, *I missed her message. That would have been a gift in my life, and I was like, "I am done." So, after that, my 1-week experiment on that vacation, and then the other time was like, uh, 1 month off, and I was like "No." So, for me, it's more about finding the healthy daily balance 'cause I definitely had times where I spent way too much time on it. And so, for me, it is like my life is not actually better without it in my life.*

Moms truly value the memories that are preserved on their Facebook Timeline. Photographs support narratives of identity and belonging. They help individuals make sense of their lives and feel grounded to their family (Hoyle et al., 2020). These memories are captured in photographs and hold important value to both the consumer and the poster on social media (Keskinen et al., 2019).

Susan said, *You know, memories pop up and I show my daughter. Just this week a memory showed up, she was there and I wrote about her helping me load up the dishwasher. So, I screenshotted it and shared it with her.*

Carol said, *I mean, and mainly I think I do post things like this, so I will have it preserved, so I'll have it again, you know.*

Emily said, *Well, it is the memory that will pop up in several years. Which is part of why I love Facebook. It is because you can see those memories, and that wouldn't have happened 10 years ago.*

The essence of sharenting was constructed from the description of moms who regularly experience this phenomenon. Although moms were not familiar with this term, their description confirmed that moms use social media to make connections with others and they find it convenient to share content, seek information, and be entertained. The themes of appearance, setting, and mannerisms emerged from the essence of sharenting to make sense of the phenomenon in terms of the presentation of self.

### Appearance



An individual's appearance tells the audience about her status as the performer (Goffman, 1959). This is established through the use of videos, images, and content on social media. The

sharenting phenomenon distinctly uses children to construct the appearance of mothering—the analysis of the interview transcriptions revealed how moms use their children to present themselves on Facebook. In order to extract the data related to appearance, the researcher identified any comments the mom shared that related to what she presented online. The quotes were labeled by pseudonym and organized in a Word document compiling all of the data related to appearance. The researcher reviewed the data to identify any subcategories to make sense of the responses. Through memoing, coding, and underlining, two subcategories emerged. These subcategories describe how the mom rationalized her choices for appearance. They are opposites. Moms either reflected on their experience to decide what to share; or moms considered what others might think to construct their social media appearance. The first subcategory was labeled as reflective for moms who turned inward to consider their own values and beliefs as they chose what to post. The second subcategory was labeled as others for moms who chose what to post based on what they believed others wanted. These data answer RQ 1: How do moms use images, videos, and content to construct an appearance for the presentation of self when sharenting on Facebook?

The first group of excerpts shows how moms are reflective in their choices about their social media appearance.

Esther shared about her content, *It's just my motherly platform. I mean, you'll look at my page and all of the pictures are about my family. I want my kids to see that I'm very much involved. That, my babies, I am just going to have them for this amount of time. So, I mean, my energy is towards the most important things in my life, and that's my husband and my two girls.*

Riley shared about her content, *It's more of what's not there. There would never be an occasion to post just myself. Yeah, I would never post a picture of just me. I mean life is all about*

*the kids, yeah, and we're very into the kids right now.*

Sharon shared about her content, *The Play-Doh article represents me as a mother. You know, don't be controlling. Let them be creative. Obviously, you are molding them as a parent in general because, you know, that's what you are here to do. By letting them lead and just try to guide them in the right direction. Yeah, that explains it.*

Carol shared about her content, *It's just like picking up a journal 'cause it is. It's like a timeline of your life, so I would think it would be a positive experience from what I've posted. I don't post anything that I wouldn't be proud for [my children] to read now or later. So, I mean, I think it would be a neat thing for them to look back and kind of learn more about me and, you know, them at all the different times throughout life. 'Cause it is a timeline.*

On the other end of the spectrum, moms made choices to post based on what they believed others wanted them to share. The following excerpts illustrate this subcategory.

Mary shared about her content, *People present what they want to present, and I know how that makes me feel, so I am very intentional about what I present to others about my life. I don't want to be thinking, "What are other people going to think about this?" I know that's inevitable no matter how hard I try to stay away from that. I know that anything I post, I am going to be thinking, "Who liked this?" and, you know, "What are people going to think about my family?"*

Emily shared about her content, *I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that this is how I want you to see me. This is not how I am, but this is how I want you to think I am.*

Haley shared about her content, *You know, I try to always bring value to it because I do think that we have a voice and we can use it for good. We can use it to bring hope. You know, of course we are all going through our own thing, but I thought that it was very important that*

*those of us that had something positive to say or just wanted to bring a little bit of hope that we used our voice. That's the breath of fresh air that I hope to bring to other moms. 'Cause I know what it is like to be overwhelmed, tired, running around rushing, and if somebody can lend out a hand, electronically I guess, then that is what I want to do.*

*Kay shared about her content, I make no mistake, my page is just a highlight reel that I try to update at least once a week. I am always authentic in the sense that I use humor to say, especially with my kids, "By the way, this was a hot mess experience trying to get out the door." When people talk about my page to me, they're like, "It's a breath of fresh air to know that it's like messy and not all perfect." So, I am very intentional, as one of my core values is authenticity.*

Moms use videos, images, and content about their children to construct their appearance on social media. The moms used variations of the word platform to describe their posting preferences. As Lincoln & Robards (2017) explained, "The Timeline is the ultimate visual manifestation of the reflexive project where their lives and the lives of their friends are constantly being revised, updated, and reworked" (p. 522). The moms were very intentional about ensuring the aesthetics of their page. The Timeline "is not just a performative act of posting a selfie or describing an experience in a status update or linking to a news story, but something more complex" (Lincoln & Robards, 2017, p. 526). Moms constructed their appearance on Facebook by reflecting on their own experiences or by deciphering the preferences of others. Posts were constructed with a purpose that aligned with the designated platform of the moms' preferred impression. This resulted in a constructed ideal self visualized through the content shared on Facebook by each mom.



they take into consideration the child's approval or disapproval.

Ellen explained, *My son was like, "Why did you put that?" And I was like, especially when he was younger, I said, "Well you know, I am just sharing it with friends." But now he knows it is on Facebook, and he's seen a few posts and was like, "No! I don't want you to share my pictures on Facebook." So that's why I ask now. Because he realized what I was doing and he didn't know before.*

Grace explained, *So, if I like run into somebody I haven't seen in forever, and I don't even think about them knowing my kids. They'll be like, oh my gosh! They are doing so well in school or something, and I am always taken back for a second. Like how do you know that?*

Esther explained, *It's funny, the girls, now that they're older, they have stopped me. They have said, "Do not post that picture," and I'm like, "Are you sure? It's not good?" And they are like, "Don't," and so I have to listen to them. You know, I want to respect them even if they wouldn't really know that I posted it. Haha, so to be honest, I actually did post one time. One of them told me not to and they found out that I did. She was so upset with me that I vowed to never to do that again.*

Tiffany explained, *And a lot of times I'll take a picture or something and she'll actually say, "Don't put that on the internet, don't put it on social media." And so, I just don't do it if she doesn't want me to.*

Moms also find it important to manage the setting to ensure that what is presented is approved. Most moms put controls on their page to ensure posts are approved before they are tagged to their Timeline, especially if their children are included in the posts.

Tina explained, *So, as he's gotten older, I have been very much more mindful of what we're posting and making sure that I'm thinking 10 years from now, is he going to think this is*

*cute? Or is he going to be mortified because I've posted this for the world to see? I also think that it's through the lens that I want it to be. Because it's what I want you to know about him. I might not want you to know that we just had a 10-minute argument over this, but look how cute he is whenever he's getting ready for bed.*

Megan explained, *It's one thing to be able to put something out there about myself for the whole world to see, but I feel like as a parent it's my job to protect their privacy because I feel like that's pretty important. I certainly don't get upset with people that do post about their kids because every family is different. But for me, and especially with my husband's job, that is the direction that I choose to go. So, I don't ever approve a post if my kids are in it. I'm just really choosy about the pictures. It is a big deal to us, maybe some people have different values and, you know, ways that they feel, but for us and our family, we would like to be the ones to post about our children.*

Susan explained, *When my daughter was born, I actually shut down my Facebook or I turned off where people could write on it or comment or anything. Because I didn't want anyone to know she was born until I announced it.*

Although moms are very aware of the importance of protecting their children, they also recognize that when they share their children, they get more reactions, Likes, and comments.

Beth explained, *If I just put a picture of my daughter first and then when you swipe over I put my daughter and my son. And the last swipe is a picture of all four of us in our family, it gets a lot more reactions than if I just put me.*

Tiffany explained, *I can post my kid and get 1,000 Likes. If I post a picture of me, one person likes it.*

Each mom shared her process for constructing a sharenting post. The details vary, but for

the most part, each mom stated she looked for the best picture and the best caption to present on Facebook.

Tiffany described her process, *Clearly, we pick the most perfect picture. You know, something we all look good in or something I think will catch someone's attention. Actually, I use a lot of quotes with my posts. So oftentimes I will search for a quote, like an inspirational quote or something that related to the picture. And then I have something that's called a Hashtag Expert. You put in what your general picture is about and it generates the best hashtags to use.*

Martha described her process, *If it's like, say, a birthday party. It's like two-fold, right. Like, you know, I'm giving homage to the parents 'cause, as a parent, I know how difficult it is to put on the birthday party. Yeah, so acknowledging, like, you know, "Thank you for the invite, we had a great time at your party." Then a couple of cute pictures to save the memory for me. So, like it might not be in the moment 'cause there's a birthday party happening, there's all kinds of stuff happening. But I make sure to get a couple of good shots, and then I will try to ensure I post that.*

Esther described her process, *If I am going to a new restaurant, I know that it will get posted 'cause that's my way of sharing. And it's my way of showing, hey, look at what we are doing. So, I just know that I'm going to take a picture sometime. It's throughout the event or the night. I'll take a picture, and honestly, sometimes I'll think, maybe there's going to be a better picture so not to post too quickly. So later that night, I will try to think of something catchy to use as my caption, and I will post it.*

Riley described her process, *If it's a picture, I have to make sure. I am just not somebody who's going to be at an event and just boop, boop, and like put it on there. Like, it's always after the fact, 'cause I have to look at it, and I make sure. I ask is there anything weird about this?*

*Can they see anything weird or whatever? Especially, if it's of my kids.*

Emily described her process, *My daughter is involved, so I try to share, like, the same hashtags and stuff. And I've only gotten smart in the last couple of months to do a notepad with all of those. So, I will scroll through and grab the same hashtags or the same comments so I can keep it. I just find that posting to social media also gives you a place to store those memories. Like, with Facebook, you put them in an album, and they are stored in order.*

Haley described her process, *If it's something I took a picture of, I will look at it and think what can I grab out of this. With this picture, I had an idea, so I wrote it in the notes because I didn't want to take time away from being there, present. So, I took the picture and then later that night I went back to my notes, put in a few more thoughts and then posted it.*

Children have critical roles in establishing a believable performance of motherhood on Facebook. Moms use videos, images, and content of their children to construct the setting of their performance on social media. Moms carefully position their children in their content by considering their consent, controlling what is shared, using them to increase reactions, and developing a comprehensive process for assembling each sharenting post. Open communication about consent and discussing expectations of permission reduce the tensions that arise over sharenting (Moser et al., 2017). Cino et al. (2020) showed that parents are driven to share about their children “by the desire to get validation as a parent and connecting with important people in one’s life” (p. 123). Photographs are the primary currency for online social transactions, making children a valuable commodity (Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2018). Moms work to balance the tension of this relational identity by managing the content they share.



about not only social media but also society in general.

Kayla shared, *Sometimes if it's a good thing or somebody needs help or somebody needs some praying or something like that, that's for good, and I'll do that kind of stuff. But I try not to get involved with the drama.*

Susan shared, *I don't say anything negative, where some people, it would make it easier to say something negative 'cause they are not face to face with them. But I don't. I don't get involved in any of it when it's a hot mess. Because it is written and everyone will see it forever.*

Beth shared, *Life is Facebook, and Instagram and YouTube. It's a huge part of culture and society. If you are not posting your kids or your husband, you're just not happy.*

Megan shared, *I am a firm believer that there are times when you gotta laugh at yourself. My profile picture is of me and my sister being funny and like yelling at the kids. It's a ridiculous picture, but it's me.*

Moms make decisions about how to act on Facebook based on perceived expectations.

Beth said, *You feel like you have to share because everyone else is posting their Christmas cards, and Christmas with their kids, and all the Christmas presents, for example, or whatever is trendy. I just feel like, I guess I'm supposed to do that too. Everyone is doing it. Why am I not doing it too?*

Kay said, *The entire time I have posted, it has always been stuff that I would be perfectly fine having in my legacy. But something that I had to clean up because of so much backlash over having an opinion. That I am done, and so I save all that for being in the groups where I think I am in a safe place.*

Ellen said, *If I want to encourage them, then I will do that so that I am not just scrolling. I mean, a Like is very intentional. The people that I do that with and the things that I do 'cause I*

*think as I've gotten older, I've become more intentional about the use. Especially now that I have a daughter that uses social media. Sometimes I'll comment on things, but it is always positive, and it is always brief.*

Moms make decisions about how to act on Facebook based on social interactions.

Susan admitted, *It is easier for me to compliment someone or say something nice on Facebook because I can think it through.*

Esther admitted, *No, I am not going to post that my husband and I are arguing or that I think that he's a jerk in the moment because, you know, in a few hours, I'm gonna think he's the best thing ever. And then everybody will be left thinking that he's a jerk.*

Haley admitted, *If there's a post that I see and I feel I can offer some information or an answer, I will start the conversation in comments. Then, depending on where it's going, maybe I will move it over to messenger just for courtesy and respect.*

The beliefs, expectations, and interactions inform the etiquette to which a mom subscribes herself. Some moms ensure posts will not be tagged to their page without approval, and some moms turn off notifications to avoid being interrupted. All moms found it important to acknowledge others by Liking and commenting on their posts.

Megan said, *When I look at it, I hit Like, or I may add a simple comment. Because I may feel awkward with a compliment, but it is rude to not respond.*

Esther said, *I will heart something as a comment 'cause I don't want them to think I am rude, but I don't always have time or want to comment. Honestly, the heart is what I do most of the time.*

Jenna said, *I am always commenting on family stuff. Obviously, you know, like a great picture or a word of encouragement. People, I guess, that's what people are looking for most of*

*the time when they post. They want comments. So yes, I try to. I try not to be completely silent with friends though and, like, past coworkers and stuff, I try not to engage that much, but family, obviously.*

The following stories shared by moms illustrate their use of mannerisms in sharenting.

*Kay shared this story, There are obviously people who think that I overshare because they're so private. They're projecting their privateness on my publicness, and I chose to publicly share that my daughter had diagnosed anxiety and the clinic that we went through to get help and what a difference that it made. And so, when I posted about my daughter's mental health, somebody did choose to share with me that they didn't understand why I would put that out to the world. And you know, I basically told her she's walking with her life, her way. But the only way that I found this out for my daughter was because somebody else online had talked about their experience, and had they not shared their experience, my daughter's life would have never been changed the way that it was, and so I feel an obligation to pass forward the message.*

*Carol shared this story, Every now and then I would share some of the day-to-day things, you know, my laundry is piled up, you know, just kind of because I want other moms to know that I'm just normal and I have laundry to do. And you know, I do not rant on social media like that. I don't like to read it. I don't like to get into arguments. So I avoid doing that. I mean, I think one time I did post about the carline butters or something like that. And even then, I was like, I shouldn't do this. It feels wrong.*

*Emily shared this story, I do share a lot, but I think you can tell when things are going good because there's a lot of stuff. And when things aren't, there's like nothing to post. We know there are plenty of times that I haven't shared the details of the bad stuff.*

*Haley shared this story, I love when parents post what their kids are doing. I think those*

*are the ones I interact the most on because I'm so proud of them. I mean, it's almost like a brag session.*

Moms use videos, images, and content of their children to construct their mannerisms on Facebook. These mannerisms derive from beliefs, expectations, and interactions. Research has found that the most important aspect of considering a reaction to a post is the intended audience, followed closely by the attractiveness of the image. The consideration for Likes revolves around how others will perceive the response, if the observer enjoys the image, and if it presents positive feedback to the poster. These perceived social norms indicate what is appropriate performance on social media (Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2018). Moms believe their role places them “within a set of gendered pressures and specificities that can be seen to limit what it might be possible to say” (Lazard et al., 2019, p. 7). This results in a set of etiquette that moms use to interact on Facebook and is exemplified in the stories shared by moms who regularly sharent on Facebook.

### **Summary**

The scroll back interview method collected rich data about the moms' sharenting experiences on Facebook. The direct quotes describe the essence of sharenting and inform the themes and subcategories used to answer each research question. Moms use videos, images, and content of their children to present motherhood on Facebook.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

This phenomenological study aimed to describe and interpret the experience of sharenting on Facebook. It is important because the relational nature of parenting forces a mom to share videos, images, and content about her children to perform motherhood on social media. Social media has established new social norms that inform the appearance, setting, and mannerisms that are required to perform motherhood on Facebook. As a result, a need to better understand the phenomenon and provide stakeholders with practical tools to navigate the technology is indicated.

### **Overview**

The concluding chapter summarizes the results by reviewing the answers to the three research questions that guided this sharenting study. These results advised empirical and theoretical implications related to the presentation of self, deviance in the performance team, and authenticity of the performance. In addition, practical implications have been established to provide stakeholders with tools to improve social media literacy. These include a vision board, a contract, and an etiquette guide that can be immediately utilized. The study's delimitations and limitations are identified and discussed. Suggestions for future research ideas to further the study of sharenting will be presented.

### **Summary of Findings**

The results from this qualitative study provide insight into the sharenting experience for moms on Facebook. Sharenting was analyzed through the theoretical lens of the presentation of self to determine how a mom uses the performance team to establish her appearance, setting, and mannerisms on Facebook. The description of sharenting revealed that moms intentionally construct posts to establish an appearance that is either reflective or other-focused. These

orientations are opposite and inform the types of posts that a mom shares on her Timeline. Reflective posts show the mom's activities and preserve the memories for herself and her family. Other-focused posts are constructed to fulfill perceived views of what the audience wants her to include, like positive posts, lessons learned, and highlight reels. The analysis of the setting revealed that for a performance to be believable, the performance team must conform to the expectations of the star performer and director—the mom. Therefore, she monitors the child's approval of consent, controls who can post to her Timeline, uses her children to increase reactions, and develops a process to construct sharenting posts. This process establishes the aesthetics of the mom's Timeline, which was important to each mom. The actions of the moms were organized under the theme of mannerisms. These behaviors include all of the Likes, comments, and shares that the mom performs on Facebook. The results show that moms develop an etiquette for their social media mannerisms based on their beliefs, expectations, and interactions. The moms hold themselves accountable to their own etiquette guidelines and justify their actions by them. The scroll back interview method generated valuable insight into the sharenting experience to help make sense of the phenomenon.

### **Discussion**

Sharenting is a phenomenon that emerged as the popularity of social media increased. Facebook is recognized as the most popular site for parents to share about their children with friends and family all over the world. Social media provides a unique computer-mediated environment where moms can make connections, find support, and share motherhood with friends (Xiaojun et al., 2019). To sharent, moms have to post videos, images, and content that includes information about their children (Archer & Kao, 2018). The relational nature of parenting forces the mom to use her children in her performance of self. Goffman (1959)

explained the performance of self through a dramaturgical analogy to show how people express their identity through verbal and nonverbal messages to display their most believable image to others. “Online/virtual identity is the principle of co-construction of identity and at the same time an opportunity to make visible what a person thinks significant and valuable in his or her existence” (Deh & Glodovic, 2018, p. 106). Studying the phenomenon of sharenting reveals what moms believe is significant and valuable, and in so doing, defines the role of motherhood.

The analysis of sharenting was organized around three themes used consistently throughout the study to learn more about the performance team in the presentation of motherhood. These themes include the appearance, the setting, and the mannerisms employed by each mom to establish the performance she chose to portray on Facebook. The construction of this identity includes carefully scripted posts to ensure believability, conformity, and performance goals that the star performer deems valuable and significant—all presented through the lens of the mom’s preferred representation. This discussion is organized to show how the themes further the theory of the presentation of self.

### **Ideal Self**

Appearance on social media is established through visual communication. The mom intentionally and unintentionally chooses a photograph to construct the image that the audience believes the mom is performing. Her performance is judged as believable or not believable based on what is shared. To increase the chance that the audience believes the performance, the mom will be selective in the construction of her sharenting posts. Moms make this decision based on a reflective stance using their own beliefs to determine what to share or a stance that focuses on the perceived beliefs of what others desire. No matter the mom’s approach, she projects an ideal self.

A self, although not fake, is not entirely established. As Deh and Glodovic (2018) explained the appearance “in the digital space is most commonly a display of the ideal self” (p. 104). The mom can present selected elements of events, presentations, and characters that are visible in the digital space while concealing the unwanted content by not publishing it. This selective presentation in sharenting influences not only the constructed identity of the mom but also everyone in the performance team, including her children. The selection of visual communication is through the lens of the mom’s performance goals in constructing a believable performance that fits her online and offline self. For the performance to be reinforced in the offline environment, the ideal self must not deviate too far from the mom’s real self. Because Facebook is not entirely anonymous, users share their real name or identifying information like a picture; they are connected to friends, colleagues, and family members with whom they share experiences online and offline. Users often update and edit the content they share on their Timeline. This makes impression management a critical component because the curated images on social media cannot be completely fabricated. The mom must maintain the performance expectations when her offline presentation must corroborate her idealized self on Facebook. Sometimes there is a clear discrepancy between the performances, which forces the audience to make a judgement about the mom. All of these characteristics anchor the user’s performance in real life (Zhao et al., 2008). This helps to bridge the user’s real self and ideal self.

This indicates that the appearance of the ideal self can preconceive future identity. Deh and Glodovic (2018) argued, “It can be concluded that participation in the digital space significantly influences the construction of identity and alters the experience of self, first of all at the psychological level, building bridges from the real self to the ideal self” (p. 109). The progression to the ideal self can help the mom attain her goals. Goal setting can develop an

individual in many areas of her life. A mom's Facebook appearance shows and tells her social media friends who and what she believes her identity to be. She also tells her children who and what she believes them to be by including them in her performance. Therefore, vision boards will be explained in the implications section as a practical tool for stakeholders.

### **Deviance**

In the phenomenon of sharenting, the setting was constructed by all of the ceremonial roles at play in the performance of motherhood. Children were always included along with inanimate objects like awards, diaper bags, and clothing. Other people that play supporting roles to the star actor and director, the mom, were also included in the setting. Moms most often talked about their husbands or their own moms in these supporting roles. The use of the setting is important to the performance because it provides information to the audience as to what is going on (Goffman, 1959). The use of a child creates credibility in the mom's performance and assures the audience that it is believable (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). This was important to the moms, and they intentionally made choices about how their children would be used in their presentation of self on Facebook. The moms waited until the child voiced concerns before they would seek consent to use their child's image on their Timeline. Controls were put into place to prevent friends from posting to the mom's Timeline or to restrict the rights of others to share images of the child on Facebook. Moms were guilty of using their children to increase Likes and comments by sharing images and content about them. Each mom followed a process to determine the best image and caption to use when she would sharent on Facebook. The setting communicates important information to the audience about the performance.

The child plays an important role in the performance team directed by the mom. The team is reliant on its members to perform their own role appropriately. "Each teammate is forced

to rely on the good conduct and behavior of his fellows, and they, in turn, are forced to rely on him” (Goffman, 1959, p. 82). Social media users construct a post from a snapshot of the experience. The platform’s format allows for editing and replacement to ensure the production is presented exactly as the director desires. The mom can moderate the content that is posted to ensure that the setting effectively communicates the performance. This control expands Goffman’s (1959) backstage to frontstage analogy because the audience is removed from the performance. The social media post is captured, edited, reviewed, and then posted; it is mediated. The performance can be presented over and over until the director approves it. The divergence from the real self begins as soon as the post is idealized. The mom believes she is doing what is right by sharing the best content, but she has romanticized the experience to fit her performance goals with no regard to the absolute truth. Even when commentary adds to the setting to explain a little of the backstory, the edited version is still an improved ideal self presented as motherhood.

The problem in sharenting is that the child is implied in the performance. As the child becomes more vocal in their consent preferences, the mom is forced to adapt her posts. In this study, boys were the first to voice a concern and starting around the age of 9 refused to have their pictures taken or posted. Girls began voicing concerns around 11 years old. Every mom with children over elementary age described some degree of deviation from the mom’s expectations of the child’s performance. The deviance was illustrated through secret accounts, deletions, and deliberate edits. This is the age of adolescents when children assert their identity independent of their parents (Dobson & Jay, 2020). Typically, children experiment with different styles and levels of deviance to determine their personal preferences (Robards & Lincoln, 2017). The digital age preserves this on social media sites, and children begin to need guidance as they

navigate this technology to avoid risky behavior. Therefore, a social media contract will be included in the implications section to help stakeholders navigate this technology.

### **Authenticity**

The performance presented in a post is also accompanied by the mom's actions in other social interactions on Facebook. Social media facilitates mediated interactions in which a comment can be made at one time, and the audience receives it at a different time, and then a different audience or an unintended audience can view the content at yet another time. These overlaps of social circles create a need for identities to align on social media. A mom may have friends on social media from college, past jobs, parents, church, and a variety of other interests who can all see the same post. This requires that mannerisms match the expectations of a variety of audiences. In this study, moms tended to be intentional about how they interacted on social media. They described beliefs that guided what they thought should be Liked or commented on and outlined clear expectations of how one should interact on social media. For example, it is deemed rude not to acknowledge a compliment; and, if you wait too long to respond to a comment, you should just Like it. Social interactions inform how moms respond on social media. An offline argument is seldomly shared online, and personal information is reserved for Messenger. Social media norms influence how the mom thinks she should act on social media and informs her mannerisms. These beliefs, experiences, and interactions guide the mom's construction of her social media etiquette.

Etiquette on social media is important to establish. It prevents the network from losing the benefits that it can provide. Media ecology reminds us to review both the positive and the negative components of a technology (Postman, 1993). We still have generations of people who predate social media and preserving that community etiquette can help prevent the destruction of

society. “Communication has been, is and will be the most important way to send and receive information, independently of the media used” (Velazquez et al., 2018, p. 584). Media has continued to evolve and improve so that people get the information they need in the easiest and most convenient way. Facebook has progressed the “global village” described by McLuhan (2010) by inventing technology to instantaneously connect people all over the globe in direct communication with one another. Social media makes these connections accessible to everyone and has transformed society. Technology must be survived. McLuhan mentioned “that the strategy to be followed, consists of observing first and then understand them” (as cited in Velazquez et al., 2018, p. 588). The technology has become an extension of the inhabitant. Therefore, media ecology asserts that both the media and the content must be studied jointly.

Mental health has plagued the social media generation, and the popularity of this form of mediated communication has been proven to cause challenges for social media users. A systematic review of the mental health outcomes associated with Facebook “found six main outcomes: Facebook addiction, anxiety, depression, body image and disordered eating, drinking cognitions and alcohol use, and other mental health problems” (Frost & Rickwood, 2017, p. 595). It has fundamentally transformed the way adolescents develop their identity. This technology makes interactions more convenient, but it deducts from the engagement, which causes the results of the interactions to be less significant for the individual. The impact of interactions in the Gutenberg era would emboss meaning into the inner self, developing a core identity for the individual; whereas, in the electronic era, social media interactions fall short. They are edited, revised, and manipulated to foster an idealized self that has yet to be established by the individual and authentically performed. The fast pace of technological updates makes it even more challenging to provide users with tools to manage and teach the software and ensure

trustworthiness, protection, and privacy. Moms are trying to navigate the technology and control their children's actions posted by them and for them. The way people act on social media has led to new social issues like cyberbullying. An article published by NPR reported that "Facebook users saw bullying or harassment 14 to 15 times out of every 10,000 views of content on the app between July and September while Instagram users viewed such content 5 to 6 times out of every 10,000 views" (Bond, 2021, paragraph 2). Clear rules for this behavior can protect users from its damage. Therefore, an etiquette guide will be a helpful tool for stakeholders.

### **Implications Toward Perfecting Self**

This section includes conversation starters for parents. These conversation starters should be used to open internal dialogue about social media and teach social media literacy to family members. This should be an ongoing process as children mature and technology advances. It is a peek into the backstage of social media performance. Goffman (1959) said backstage performances reveal more of the authentic self, are less formal, and are not bound by premade social norms. Teaching users to understand the connection between this core identity and their performance of self on social media will help them establish their ideal self in accordance with God's will. When God is the producer, the rules of society no longer apply. The performance must be in accordance with the Bible. Therefore, the mom must first understand her role in the spiritual realm. Then she can help to guide her children to see themselves through the lens of God's plan for their own lives. This study revealed the three themes of appearance, setting, and mannerisms to draw attention to the components of social media that moms need to pay attention to. Moms should first work through the proposed questions to better understand their use of social media. Then they should engage with their children by modeling and openly discussing the components. The questions are grounded in biblical truths because God is the producer of

every performance. Verses are included that help the mom make sense of and explain the importance of the question. Finally, a practical tool for the mom is included for her to immediately utilize in her conversation.

### **Appearance**

Begin the conversation by asking the question, “Who do you want to be?” This question targets the ideal self. The ideal self is what the user hopes to be and is most often the self portrayed on social media (Zhao et al., 2008). The projection of this self can be fostered to identify and actualize goals; in other words, the vision that an individual has for their preconceived future. “The choice of photographs and overall ‘performance of oneself’ is subject to self-censorship, before being selected in the digital space and then constructed” (Deh & Glodovic, 2018, p. 104). The ability to freely choose an identity is a product of the digital age. “This translates into imperatives around individual responsibility for the ‘free’ choice made, and the courses of action selected for understanding and improving ourselves in relation to that which is true, permitted, and desirable” (Lazard et al., 2019, p. 5). Visualizing who this person would be can help the individual plan to achieve the goal. Social media allows time to construct and edit the appearance one hopes to present, fostering the user’s transition from a real self to a closer version of the ideal self (Deh & Glodovic, 2018). However, this has no real meaning unless the offline version also changes. As Procentese et al. (2019) argued that social media can provide educational and participative spaces for modern parents to open communication between them and their children about responsible and functional use of the technology. The user must align their goals with their performance online and offline. The social media posts bridge the gap and build accountability for the mom, and demonstrate to her children the choices she deems true, permitted, and desirable.

The Bible says we are created in the image of God (New International Version, 2005/1973, Genesis 1:26–27), but sin entered the world (New International Version, 2005/1973, Romans 5:12), and humans were forever separated from Him (New International Version, 2005/1973, Isaiah 59:2). Therefore, Jesus interceded to save us from our sins and fill the gap where our works could never get us to Heaven (New International Version, 2005/1973, Ephesian 2:8–9). Jesus was sent “to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (New International Version, 2005/1973, Ephesians 4:12–13). The sacrificial death of Jesus provides a path for believers to achieve their ideal self. By believing that Jesus is the son of God, that He died on the cross, and that He then rose from the dead three days later, we are made perfect to God. This belief is the first step to any ideal self. It teaches that we must choose to turn from sin and make a change in our life. The ideal self, much like perfection, is never actualized, but it is the disciple’s life of consistent faith that advances the path forward. The way to bridge the gap between the real self and the ideal self is found in Psalms 119:105: “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path” (New International Version, 2005/1973). The Bible is God’s Word and taking one lighted step at a time marks a choice to put God as the producer of the performance. Whatever the season of faith of an individual, from a child needing understanding to a mature Christian with a greater understanding of the Bible, God instructs believers to take up the cross daily (New International Version, 2005/1973, Luke 9:23). This directive requires daily alignment with God’s plan. The goals of an idealized social media self should be constructed from the real image created by God for one’s life. It should be posted on the wall like a movie billboard.

This idealized self in the image of God can be accomplished by developing a vision

board (see Appendix A for a template). A vision board is a collage of images, words, and objects that visually confirms an individual's dreams and goals. This type of collection can "enable identifying, defining, and clarifying what people really want in life and can facilitate communication between people and others who want to help" (Benedict, 2021, p. 231). This is an intentional activity for moms to discuss dreams and goals with their children. This can be adapted to any age. It should be visible to the child and updated routinely. The ideal self is a belief in what one hopes to become in the future. Open discussions about dreams and goals help build connections between the parent and child, and they increase the child's confidence by validating their desires and defining expectations. When these desires are respected, the mom can build trust with her child and increase their self-esteem with open communication, clear expectations, and appropriate boundaries (Moser et al., 2017). A posted vision board is a daily reminder of God's plan.

### **Setting**

Begin the conversation by asking the question, "Who are you?" This seems like a really easy question, and my son would give his name as the answer. However, it is important to look at the implications derived from the intentional and unintentional use of children to present motherhood on Facebook. The concern is that children are presented through the lens of the mom's performance goals. The mom intends to present the best impression of herself (Lazard et al., 2019). Impression management means that she may post a child's academic awards, accomplishments on the football field, or a video of a dance recital to create a positive impression. She does not post a disciplinary note from the principal or a failing grade on an exam because that would not align with the expectations of good mothering. This editing can warp the view of motherhood and childhood on social media and results in unrealistic expectations

perpetuated by the social media highlight reel.

The Bible says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (New International Version, 2005/1973, Hebrews 13:8). No matter the trends of society, the Bible holds truths that always fortify faith. It teaches where believers should find their worth, meaning, and purpose. Psalm 139:14 says, “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (New International Versions, 2005/1973). Jesus affirms we should not fear because He knows every hair on our heads (New International Version, 2005/1973, Luke 12:7). He knows every facet of every self, and following His word is the best guide to an ideal self. “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will” (New International Version, 2005/1973, Romans 12:2). It is a parent’s directive to train a child to follow God’s will so that when they are grown, they will not depart from it (New International Version, 2005/1973, Proverbs 22:6). Society and social media make this an extremely difficult task for parents.

This can be accomplished by developing a social media contract (see Appendix B for a template). A social media contract creates clear guidelines and rules for children and parents to discuss and agree to maintain. The age of the child influences the construction of the document. It should be adapted to the needs of the family. This is important even for children who do not have their own accounts. Encouraging open dialogue among children at an early age helps build trust and confidence for both the parent and child. The newness of social media leaves many moms feeling inadequate in their ability to prepare their children to use it and protect them from its dangers. Moms are learning a technology that their digital native children have already mastered. There are so many shortcuts, advancements, and hacks that most moms feel they can

never understand or overcome. Technology should not be just survived; moms must take the reins and actively parent their children through it. These conversations should start early, and social media independence for a child should be a gradual release by the parent. A contract can facilitate these steps.

### **Mannerisms**

Begin the conversation by asking, “How are you going to act?” Social media is like the Wild West with minimal rules and even fewer regulations. It is critical to establish mannerisms that are appropriate for social media. Facebook has been described as nonymous, the opposite of anonymous, because although social media is disembodied, a user is defined through anchored relationships that exist offline (Zhao et al., 2008). This forces authenticity in the user but still varies from offline interactions. Therefore, it is important to develop rules of social media etiquette. Every mom in this study mentioned the importance of avoiding drama by keeping things positive and carefully responding to comments and questions. Most moms discussed lessons they learned from difficult and negative interactions on the platform. The moms adapted their actions to avoid facing the same issues again. Some conversations were moved to Messenger for privacy, opinions were reserved for groups, and restrictions were put into place to stop negative behaviors. These practical actions can improve the interactions on social media, thus preserving the benefits of the platform.

The Bible says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you” (New International Version, 2005/1973, Proverbs 4:23—25). As Christians in a dark world, we must be the light that reflects our Savior. The life and actions of a Christian may be the only reference nonbelievers have of God. The great

commission commands followers to share the great news with others (New International Version, 2005/1973, Matthew 28:16–20). The fruits of acting in this way further God’s kingdom and bring salvation to those lost. Paul instructs the Philippians to “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (New International Version, 2005/1973, Philippians 1:27).

The aim of this etiquette guide is to help moms and their children navigate social media (see Appendix C for a template). This etiquette guide aims to help moms and their children navigate social media. Many mental health concerns arise from social media usage. Users are exposed to inappropriate content, encouraged to view clickbait, and challenged to be provocative as often as possible. The tech world has no concern for innocence and constantly accosts morality. Children with access to technology will find this content intentionally and unintentionally. The mobile device has become a time filler for moms and a babysitter for children. The song “Slow Fade” by Casting Crowns (2007) warns, “Oh, be careful little eyes what you see.” It is a slow erosion that causes so much damage. It slips in and derails the righteous path. An etiquette guide can establish boundaries to protect users.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The intention of this study was to describe and interpret the sharenting experience of moms on Facebook. Blum-Ross and Livingstone (2017) defined sharenting as the regular posting of images, videos, and content by parents on social media. The activity is gender neutral; both moms and dads post about their children on social media. However, the decision was made to focus on moms because traditionally, moms are the ones most often taking and sharing pictures of their children (Autenrieth, 2018), moms are more active on Facebook than dads, and moms are usually responsible for childcare (Duggan et al., 2015). This restricted the study to focus only

on moms' experiences. Much could be learned from exploring the parenting experience more fully by including dads who sharent.

The scroll back interview method was used to interview each participant. This method required in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Therefore, the study sample was limited to the Plant City community. This is a southern, rural, conservative community in Florida. The characteristics of this location inevitably influenced the stories each participant shared and, consequently, limited the study to the perspective of this community. The use of video conferencing could maintain the integrity of the scroll back interview method and expand the perspective to moms all over the world.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Sharenting is a phenomenon that needs to be studied further. Future studies should investigate social media lurkers, children with their own accounts, and video sharing through stories. Most social media users are consumers instead of content creators. They passively consume content created and shared by others who may or may not know them. This passive audience may influence self-disclosure and impression management. On Facebook, children can create their own account at the age of 13, at which point they can begin to establish their own digital footprint. A cross-comparison of the mom's presentation and the child's presentation could reveal more insight into identity construction theories in the digital environment. As technology continues to advance, the use of video sharing through stories has become a popular form of expression. These videos are easy to capture and edit on mobile devices. Users share more of their life and increase authenticity. The internet and social media are critical sites for society to engage and experience the world. Technology alters the way individuals can interact, which influences their construction of identity and their presentation of self.

### Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and interpret the sharenting experience for moms on Facebook. A scroll back interview method was used to ask moms to talk about their posting practices. The theory of the presentation of self was used to examine how moms use appearance, setting, and mannerisms when they sharent on Facebook. The description of sharenting revealed that moms intentionally construct posts to establish an appearance that is either reflective or other-focused. The analysis of the setting revealed that for a performance to be believable, the performance team must conform to the expectations of the star performer and director, the mom. The analysis also showed that moms develop an etiquette for their social media mannerisms based on their beliefs, expectations, and interactions. These insights further the understanding of the ideal self, deviance, and authenticity, and can be used to inform practical tools for stakeholders. Three conversation starters helped explain these tools, along with the use of a vision board, a social media contract, and an etiquette guide. Technology has inundated society making it imperative to manage the results.

Social media has created and filled users' needs by connecting them to others, providing resources, explaining information, and offering entertainment. It has established worth and value in the lives of most of the population. When children create their own accounts, they are catapulted into the adult world with little to no rules or regulations. Children engage at a younger age and spend more time on the internet than ever before. Parents need to actively assist children in navigating the internet and social media. Kidder and Campbell (2020) explain that a child's worldview is shaped by the age of 13. This means that the collection of attitudes, values, stories, and expectations that inform a child's every thought and action is solidified by the time they are a teen. A child's worldview is influenced by their parents, the media, and their environment. It is

imperative that parents pour into and intentionally help children shape their worldview. This is the most important aspect of my child's development. As Kidder and Campbell (2020) illustrated, "In spite of all the allures of culture, parents still hold the strongest sway over the worldview of their children" (p. 85). Parents have an opportunity and a responsibility to shape the future of social media.

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Appendix A: Vision Board

Personal Goal

Academic Goal

Social Goal

Name

Bible Verse

Things to try...

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Dreams...

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix B: Social Media Contract

# Social Media Contract

The social media contract intends to prepare and protect those who use social media. Individuals who agree and follow the conditions are rewarded with the reasonable use of electronics and social media. Disrespecting the conditions of the contract will result in restricted usage of electronics and social media.

1. Parents will set privacy settings and controls on all accounts, know all usernames and passwords, and review the accounts at any time.
2. Children will be responsible for their actions, avoid negativity, and show respect to others.
3. Everyone will follow time limits, make eye contact and close the device during direct communication, and precisely address issues and concerns.
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Child:** I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to these social media conditions.  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Parents:** We, \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_, agree to these social media conditions and will hold our family accountable.  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix C: Etiquette Guide

# Etiquette Guide

The purpose of the etiquette guide is to encourage social media users to pay attention to interactions with other people online, put an emphasis on safety, and encourage authenticity.

- ✓ I WILL BE A POSITIVE ENCOURAGER
- ✓ I WILL RESPECT MYSELF AND OTHERS
- ✓ I WILL POST WITH A PURPOSE
- ✓ I WILL BE SELECTIVE WITH FRIEND REQUESTS
- ✓ I WILL REMEMBER THAT SOCIAL MEDIA IS PUBLIC

## Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter

### Consent

**Title of the Project:** Sharenting: A Phenomenological Study of Sharenting through the Lens of the Presentation of Self

**Principal Investigator:** Evie Simmons D'Amico, Doctoral Candidate, School of Communication and the Arts, Liberty University

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, the mom of an elementary-aged child, and regularly post to a personal Facebook account. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

#### What is the study about, and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to describe and interpret moms' experiences of sharenting. Sharenting is when parents share news, images, and content about their children on social media. This is important because social media is influencing parenting.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Send a Facebook friend request to the researcher (Evie Simmons D'Amico) through your Facebook account. This should take no more than 2 minutes.
2. Meet in a local coffee shop for an interview. The interview will be audio-recorded. This should take at least 60 minutes and no more than 90 minutes.
3. Review the three conversation starters that will be developed from the data. These will be delivered through Facebook Messenger, and any feedback will be returned to the researcher (Evie Simmons D'Amico) through Facebook Messenger. This should take no more than 30 minutes.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are three conversation starters that can be used as tools to open dialogue with their children about social media literacy and sharenting.

Benefits to society include three conversation starters that can be used as a tool to open dialogue about social media literacy and sharenting.

#### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you are shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data are shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a locked filing cabinet. The data may be used in future presentations. After 3 years, all electronic records will be deleted and all physical records will be shredded.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for 3 years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

**How will you be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Participants will receive a \$10 [REDACTED] gift card. The gift card will be handed to participants at the end of the interview.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Evie Simmons D'Amico. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, [REDACTED].

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the [REDACTED].

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

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Printed Subject Name

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Signature & Date