Short Communication

Motherhood social models on Portuguese facebook sites[a]

Filipa Cesar
Department of Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal

Correspondence: Filipa Cesar, Department of Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal, Email filepa.cesar@gmail.com

Short communication

Throughout history, motherhood has been culturally appropriate and prescribed, although each woman may experience it differently, considering her life history, her social position, and her permeability to the cultural dictates of the society in which she lives.[1] Online social networks are currently important sources of informal support for mothers given their accessibility and extensive information on child care and motherhood performance.[2–5] Also, Portugal has extremely traditional family values, but most families assume more modern values in the professional world and are dual-career. This requires mothers to reconcile multiple roles.[6] knowing that, we designed a study that aimed to identify the currently dominant motherhood model in Portugal.[b] To achieve this, we analysed the Goals (motherhood main purposes), Attitudes (the way motherhood is or should be performed), Feelings (the way motherhood is or should be emotionally experienced), and Practices (tasks commonly included in the act of caring for the child's basic needs) attributed to mothers and spread by Facebook Portuguese groups and pages dedicated to motherhood.

We began by identifying 132 Public Pages, 47 Closed Groups and 5 Public Groups (N=184) in Portuguese facebook, in October 2015. Then, we analysed their descriptions and pinned posts looking for the two main motherhood models: the *intensive* and the *extensive* models. According to the *intensive* motherhood model,[7] mothers should dedicate themselves to offspring in a selflessly and significantly way in terms of care, feelings, education, schooling, and information seeking, therefore achieving happiness and ensuring children's well-being and good development. For the so-called *extensive*[8] or *negotiated*[9] motherhood model, the indispensable mother's constant presence with the child is questioned, and women who carry out various social roles seek to articulate their maternal and professional roles in a functional way. In this model, women try to reconcile more vectors of personal accomplishment beyond that of motherhood.

Content analysis was performed with NVivo software to, initially, identify words or expressions that would be attributed to our 4 great predetermined categories[10–12] concerning motherhood: *Attitudes*-which represent 55% of the 273 references collected, followed by Feelings (19%), Practices (18%) and, almost residual, Goals (8%). Since Attitudes refer to ways motherhood is or should be performed, its prevalence may suggest some normativity in discourses and, therefore, reflect a set of social expectations, which are frequently assumed by mothers themselves,[13] on how to play this role. Subcategories

emerged in Attitudes' analysis and revealed positive parenting models of high respect and consideration for the child in interaction. It also revealed the promotion of great involvement in children's education, formation, and stimulation. Also, motherhood *meaning* seems to be an intense, challenging and a positive experience for mothers, and it is expected from their *performance*[14–16] that they are dedicated, emotional, responsible, that they follow their instinct, that they care about the child's schooling and that they try to keep themselves informed in whatever concerns their offspring. Most of these can be considered as being part of an intensive model. Regarding *Feelings*, the majority of them are *positive*: love and affection for the child, in one hand, and joy, happiness and confidence of both mother and child, on the other. *Negative* feelings are attributed only to the mother, and the most referred–fear, doubt, and anxiety–may correspond to performance anxiety due to intensive model's demands.[1]

Indicators associated with an *extensive* or *negotiated* motherhood model are clearly less present and diverse. This is the case when *family* as a whole, and the *woman* beyond the mother are valued. *Equality in parenting*, another indicator of the extensive model, was explicitly mentioned only once. The fact that several pages and groups address 'parents' and not just 'mothers' as a target audience does not allow us to assess their position on that same equality.

The intensive motherhood model prevails whether we look at working mothers or full-time mothers. Levels of demand for maternal performance seem to be similar for both. In mothers' speeches, all are considered "Super Mothers" and their accumulation of responsibilities is called "hallucinating" regardless of their position towards work. Our research thus appears to confirm the prevalence of an *intensive* motherhood model in Portuguese Facebook groups and pages, and its consequences for Portuguese mothers should be assessed and discussed, mainly on the scope of low fertility rates in Portugal (1,3 children/woman).

Acknowledgments

Conflicts of interest

The author declares there is no conflicts of interest.

---

[a]Filipa César, Alexandra Oliveira & Anne-Marie Fontaine (2017)
[b]This study is part of Filipa César's doctoral project entitled "Different motherhood models and their implications: Motivations, expectations and realities of Portuguese mothers", and that is taking place in the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Porto, under the supervision of Professors Anne-Marie Fontaine and Alexandra Oliveira, with a grant from FCT – Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology.

References

1. Birns B, Hay DF. *The different faces of motherhood*. New York: Plenun Press; 1988. 117 p.

2. Holtz B, Smock A, Reyes Gastelum D. Connected motherhood: Social support for moms and moms-to-be on Facebook. *Telemedicine and E-Health*. 2015;21(5):415–421.

3. Drentea P, Moren Cross JL. Social capital and social support on the web: The case of an internet mother site. *Sociology of Health & Illness*. 2005;27(7):920–943.

4. Neubaum G, Kraemer NC. My friends right next to me: A laboratory investigation on predictors and consequences of experiencing social closeness on social networking sites. *Cyberpsychology Behavior and Social Networking*. 2015;18(8):443–449.

5. Kaufmann R, Buckner MM. To connect or promote? An exploratory examination of Facebook pages dedicated to moms. *Computers in Human Behaviour*. 2014;35:479–482.

6. Matias M, Andrade C, Fontaine AM. Diferenças de género no conflito trabalho-família: Um estudo com famílias portuguesas de duplo-emprego com filhos em idade pré-escolar. *Psicologia*. 2011;25(1):9–32.

7. Elliott S, Powell R, Brenton J. Being a good mom: Low-income, black single mothers negotiate intensive mothering. *Journal of Family Issues*. 2015;36(3):351–370.

8. Christopher K. Extensive mothering: Employed mother's constructions of the good mother. *Gender & Society*. 2012;26(1):73–96.

9. Badinter E. *O Conflito: A Mulher e a M*ãe. Lisboa: Relógio D'Água Editores; 2010. 35 p.

10. Bardin L. *An*á*lise de conte*ú*do*. Lisboa: Edições 70.1979. 6 p.

11. Badinter E. *O amor incerto–Hist*ó*ria do amor maternal do s*é*c. XVII ao s*é*c. XX*. Lisboa: Relógio D'Água; 1986. 365 p.

12. Bartholomew MK, Schoppe Sullivan SJ, Glassman M, et al. New parent's Facebook use at the transition to parenthood. *Family Relations*. 2012;61(3):455–469.

13. Alstveit M, Severinsson E, Karlsen B. Readjusting one's life in the tension inherent in work and motherhood. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. 2011;67(10):2151–2160.

14. Madge C, Oconnor H. Parenting gone wired: Empowerment of new mothers on the internet? *Social & Cultural Geography*. 2006;7(2):199–220.

15. Milkie MA, Nomaguchi KM, Denny KE. Does the amount of time mothers spend with children or adolescents matter? *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 2015;77(2):355–372.

16. Monteiro R. *O que dizem as m*ães: Mulheres trabalhadoras e suas experi*ê*ncias. Coimbra: Quarteto; 2005. 244 p.

17. Obercom. *A Internet em Portugal. Sociedade em Rede 2014*. Obercom; 2013. 22 p.