

# Rituals of motherwork through conversations regarding social media use: A feminist re-imagination of mothering

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## Abstract

This study rests on the premise that motherwork is primarily embodied invisible work resonating with a sociological concept of articulation work. Articulation work as originally posited by Strauss (1985) considers social worlds in negotiated orders of managing and making-do with discontinuities. This involves conversations, often difficult to facilitate, that mothers do in their attempts to regulate their adolescent children's social media use.

Using an exploratory interpretivist approach to communication research and using the tools of feminist interviewing and focus group discussion (FGD) facilitating, this paper examined how authentic connections between mothers and their adolescent children are made possible in parental regulation of social media use. Thirty (30) mother informants were selected using intensity sampling.

Guided by Carey's (2009) Communication as Ritual Model and Kramarae's (2005) Muted Group Theory, data revealed how authentic connections between mothers and their adolescent children emerge in conversations that covered following: a.) body, voice, and sexuality—a bridge over muddy waters; b.) housework, productivity, and functionality—a challenge to old paradigms; c.) happiness and success—the convection between the now and the future; d.) community, parenting, and family—the ambivalent “village”; and e.) influence, purpose, and value—the anxiety to matter.

*Keywords: social media use, parental regulation, rituals of motherwork, SDG # 5 - Gender Equality*

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## **Introduction and Review of Related Literature**

### **Mothering and feminism: A sisterhood disrupting communication and media studies**

Motherhood and feminism have not always been in harmony. Luscombe (2012) calls them “feuding sisters” that continue to stretch each other’s frameworks and praxes. This paper is an argument for the need to continue interrogating mothering or motherwork (Green, 2019; Ruddick, 1995) alongside discussions of feminism to enrich both. As mothers aim for meaningful engagements in and outside the home, the dictates of modern politically right domestic life are critiqued to have become too neo-liberal as to be mistaken to challenge status quo. In fact, the so-called modern well-intentioned intensive mothering version of every decade has cemented a compromise with patriarchy that for every liberation mothers make, feminism gets hit in the head (Aguilar, 1996; Cassels, 2017; Jackson, 2010). For instance, the affluent woke moms making sure their children are fed organic sustainable food are the very same group accused of paranoia that makes the next generation gritless. For every self-proclaimed feminist finding community in the fight against patriarchy and capitalism, there are two or more feminist mothers feeling isolated and conflicted (Green, 2019; Tungohan, 2013). As “mothering and feminism were not readily linked, spoken of, or considered to be areas of discussion or activism” (Green, 2019, p. 84), mothering has conveniently been co-opted in liberal notions of empowerment in popular discourse and advertisements (Baldo-Cubelo, 2021).

Strongly influencing this ambivalent experience of mothering are the equally ambivalent representations of motherhood in media texts. Through feminist epistemology, researches on motherhood representations have troubled the convoluted notions of care reified in the maternal role. The roles of doing and being encapsulated in mothering include the giving of attention to the child, securing the child’s successful development, integrating employment into mothering, of being in control, and of being contented (Schmidt et al., 2023). In the last two decades, the use of an intersectional lens in understanding the interplay between the representation of motherhood and the embodied mothering experiences of women shows heterogeneous responses to the prescription on motherhood in media. Meanwhile, feminist women mothers dance between their feminist praxis of resistance to patriarchy and the logistical constraints of everyday care for the children and the family (Mary et al., 2024). Feminists identify neoliberal demands building on and perpetuating inequalities in what is termed as the “social invention” of motherhood. This invention is built on the intensive

motherhood characterized as a “child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive” (Hays, 1996, p. 8).

Subsequently, women’s relationship with such media texts has yielded questions about the experience of discourse consumption. It is clear that mothers are not exposed to linear and cohesive narratives about care and motherhood. Women’s media ecosystem instead presents them with competing and contradictory elements of which they have always made sense and from which they composed their lives with improvisations (Bateson, 2001; Mary et al., 2024). Although there are cultural specificities constituting resistance to motherhood ideologies, women—single, married, and regardless of their SOGIESC—have shown lived mothering complexities across the globe (Wiegman, 2012).

With new media, we see mothers’ extensive all-around role being cushioned with the need for self-care, me-time, or time with partner. The mother is challenged to question normativity with the variation of mothering experiences across socio-economic strata, ethnicity, and lifestyles among mom-centric social media channels (Mary et al., 2024). Thus, while she has now space for sharing and receiving validation for the uniqueness of her experiences, she also encounters critiques. It may be typical for mothers to feel attacked by such critiques because with the ever-growing multiplication of online content, feedback can be very personal and accessed in real time. The said feedback can both be helpful, but also very much overwhelming, and at other times, threatening (Beuckels & De Wolf, 2024; Mary et al., 2024). Advertisements, in particular, have levelled up the silencing in mothering in as much as they have tried to move the needle in mothering narratives. The silencing comes in the muting of problems the advertised products cannot resolve but which call for the immediate address of specific maternal needs (Baldo-Cubelo, 2015; Cino, 2020).

Furthermore, the conceptualization and embodiment of motherwork within the Asian context draws on the devaluation framework (i.e., unpaid care work is devalued work) forwarded by feminist Asian scholars (Tripathi et al., 2022). Likewise, post-modernist ideals of subverting the text through creative work despite limitations in the everyday lived experience has surfaced more strongly among feminist writings in recent years (Parungao-Callueng & Jocson, 2021; Yu, 2009). Themes of alternative agency and precarity of motherhood are also prevalent in the Asian feminist theorization both as a pedestalized ideal and a pragmatic account. Neither an open rebellion against oppressive dictates nor a collective action against systemic injustice, Asian mothers, accounting for their diverse experiences of intersectional oppression, emancipation, advocacy and activism, show acts of struggle and self-determination alongside innumerable constraints

(Cheng, 2021). The transnational nexus of labor migration along with the mothers' immediate desires and needs to cope and survive is a ripe intellectual space for theorization in Asia. There is consistency in pushing for agency to be afforded recognition amidst socio-political and cultural obstacles (Cheng, 2021; Solis, 2023). Furthermore, the strong cultural influence of collectivism and familialism in the heterogenous Asian identity (Vo & Desai 2021; Wong, 2023) plays an important problematique in the feminist reimagining forwarded in this paper.

The main arguments revolve around a feminist re-imagination of motherwork as a necessary venue for disruption in two forms: 1) a disruption of the conceptualization of motherwork through a case-building of motherwork as articulation work and embodied work facilitated through conversations; and 2) a disruption of the conceptualization of conversations through an argumentation of *media talk* as an important area of research on the mediated-interpersonal communication crossroads.

### **Ambivalence in mothering on spotlight during the COVID-19 pandemic**

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the fragility of rhythms inside the reproductive sphere has come to the fore (Cummins & Brannon, 2022). Behind the scenes of busy productive lives, cracks in domestic lives inconveniently announce themselves in every frustrated household, disgruntled employee, and conditionally loved child. Suddenly, the difficult set of skills of balancing work-life has unavoidably been required (Andrada-Poa et al., 2022; McClain & Cahn, 2021). Nurturing the young, the old, the sick, and the vulnerable has become the last frontier of human civilization in the last two years as the world shook with fear and uncertainty. Suddenly, the world once again got reminded that there are plants to be tended to and children to be fed. There are bodies needing tending and emotions needing space to breathe in. The color of COVID (Powell, 2020) reveals the fragility of care work that families have long struggled with. Inequity in childcare, elderly care, health care, education, and other essential work came crashing through the loopholes of systems all over the globe (Serra-Labrador, 2022; Whiley et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, with mothers posting perfected sourdoughs as necessary coping, the discord on essential motherwork and the million "extras" deemed selflessly accorded by many made the inner conflict in feminism too bare to ignore. Thrust into the role of the primary care-giver, a task the early feminist pioneers fought so hard to emancipate women from, many mothers were able to pause in the peace of breadmaking that their busy career lives have not accommodated for a long time.

The “guilt thing” among mothers shows a different color this time. There is the guilt of not earning enough, and there is the guilt of enjoying the break from career (Whiley et al., 2021). There were SOS cries not just from mothers but from entire household inhabitants for justice (e.g., extension of deadlines, subsidy). The ones who cried to outlaw motherhood (O’Reilly, 2010) are now making revisions to this battlecry. This time, there is serious consideration of care work as unavoidably foundational to society’s function. It is time to problematize it seriously as the daily grind in hyper-familiar domestic life took center stage again (Schulte & Swenson, 2020).

### **Motherwork as articulation work and embodied work facilitated in conversations**

Most of motherwork, as primarily embodied invisible work, resonates with a sociological concept of articulation work (Strauss, 1985). Articulation work, as originally posited by Strauss, considers social worlds in negotiated orders of managing and making do with discontinuities. Often applied to the study of disparate social worlds such as home and work, articulation work involves the improvisations in leg work, backstage, behind the scenes, behind walls, backlogs, often performed by actors not represented in formal accounts of organizations (Star, 1991; Suchman, 1996). This invisible work is articulated not through language but through repeated rituals of effortful requirement at bringing together discontinuous elements of complex systems (Hampson & Junor, 2005). Likewise, it is embodied work because the body moves through these tasks, even more than the mind. It can also be seen as the mind being primarily the being *in* body, *minding* care as the body *performs* care (Bartky, 2020; Bailey, 2001) in the immediate present while chronicling the past and overthinking the future (Tsabary, 2010). It is a redundantly hands-on work that is also embodied in the constant *minding* about it (*Am doing this right? Am I not screwing this up?*) (Tsabary, 2010). There is relentless self-surveillance that goes with it and a constant low-scoring as well (Bartky, 2020).

It is in conversations—calm, connected or otherwise—that mothering has been provoked, enriched, and dislodged. Since the mothering constructs of today have been challenged to carry all kinds of sensitivities, endorsed in token pop culture revolutions while still not completely breaking free from inherent oppressive frameworks (McClain & Cahn, 2021; Yong & Yong, 2022), mothers find themselves triggered in these difficult conversations that often feel like confrontations with their children regarding practices that reach the home without accreditation (deSouza, 2021; Wallace, 2022). The archetype mother who knows the evils that may come her child’s way (Tsabary, 2010) through the internet, has to navigate discussions of which

she has no template. These navigations could be precarious yet necessarily vulnerable since these expose age-old beliefs about parental scope over regulation (Patrikakou, 2016). When the adolescent is inherently entitled to having their way, the mother's attempt to be part of conversation about technology is almost always resented (Procentese et al., 2019). However, evidence abounds on how families have been scarred by fights over social media use (Altuwairiqi, et al., 2019; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Turkle, 2017).

Nevertheless, these difficult conversations, negotiations, fights, debates, and confessions regarding social media use have become part of parental work (Iqbal et al., 2021). Motherwork, properly equipped or not, now includes doubting decisions made on digital time-outs parents have imposed on children, or losing sleep about posts children make on Twitter. "These are stuff of nightmares I have never imagined myself being confronted with," one mother informant shared. "I was not prepared for the emotional intensity discussions about Tiktok. But we had to do it. It was an urgent need for all of us to discuss" another mother shared.

The study's definition of motherwork builds on Patricia Collins' (1995, 2016, 2022) scholarship on mothering. Collins has strongly claimed that motherwork resists the dialectic between "home" and "work," "private" and "public," "personal" and "political," and "structure" and "agency." These dialectics constraint women who consistently perform productive and reproductive work as a *both-and*, to appropriate Dana's (2021) use of working paradoxes. Drawing primarily from mothers of color and working-class mothers, Collins (1995, 2016, 2022) set on to resist the guilt in motherhood created by patriarchy through the so-called "mommy wars" (Hays, 1996; Roy, 2022). Subsequently, she includes in motherwork the labor that women do in their respective communities (e.g., neighborhoods, schools, and organizations)—all comprised of protecting and nourishing children. Other scholars (Minnote, 2023; Whetstone, 2021) have taken on this resistance implied in motherwork with an interrogation of care for children at its take-off point.

To register alignment with Collins' (1991, 2016, 2022) and other feminist scholars' (Story, 2014; Watson & Baxley, 2021) take on motherwork, this study defines motherwork as the mothers' attunement to children's struggles with social media/internet use facilitated through conversations. These attunements are not always planned nor reasonably carried out, but they are characterized by an intention to confront or converse about social-media related outbursts within the family. By exclusively relating motherwork with mothers in this study, the concept clarifies, as per Collins' (2016, 2021) inclusion of "othermothers" in motherwork, that fathers and other primary care-givers within family systems may also perform such motherwork. It

is in the interest of limiting the study's scope that an initial exploration of motherwork through Filipino mothers is taken. A more comprehensive clarification of sampling is laid out in the methodology section of this paper.

### **Social media use regulation as communication rituals of motherwork in conversations**

As the technology-reliant pandemic brought upheavals in domestic arrangements, families are confronted with the need to consider social media use in order to carry on. With social media as a resource, there is considerable evidence of how conversations among family members have become intensely emotional when discussing the "right" social media use (Iqbal et al., 2021). Parents who were once adamant about openly using social media accounts around their children are now morally conflicted with their own social media addictions (Lembke, 2021). This is heightened when what seems to be ambivalent moral conflict is juxtaposed with their frustrations regarding their children's social media use (Boyd, 2014).

Although regulation used to be surveillance and policing, parents have been called to sit down with their children and engage them. Although many families know that to converse with children about moral panics like internet use has become a cultural necessity, many families do not know where to start (Agren, 2020). However, talks about unfamiliar territories or ventures almost always lead to disruptions inside family units (Showkier & Showkier, 2008) that eventually either compromise the system or elevate the relationships to the next level. "Learning to grow up" is best experienced through authentic conversations that are practiced repeatedly over time and through humanly embarrassing trial and error in conversations (Showkier & Showkier, 2008).

### **Rituals of conversations as unmutings:**

#### **A feminist integration of theories and models**

This paper is an exploration of James W. Carey's (2009) transformative analytical perspective of the invisible articulation embodied work in difficult conversations about social media use facilitated by mothers. It is also an invocation of Cheri Kramarae's (2005) *Muted Group Theory* with a twist. In my previous work on women advertisement makers, I named their emic everyday resistances in the advertising industry as "unmuting" within liminalities of power and oppression. In this current work, I hope to expose the 'unmuting,' albeit not always intentional, that mothering through social media use regulation offers.

First, let me reword the tenets of James W. Carey's (2009) view of communication as ritual. Carey has long proposed a different take on communication, not as a transmission phenomenon but as a shared and



participative lived phenomenon. The communication as culture model, also known as communication as ritual, posits that human communication needs the lens of culture in order for it to be fully celebrated. In this model, communication is “achieved” when there are commonness, connection, and participation, as opposed to transmission’s emphasis on the receiver “getting” the sender’s message and intention. There is no question of function and even efficacy here but rather of the repetitive acts of sharing space as constituting textured communication experiences. It is through participation that meanings surface through time. I see the ritualistic cyclical motherwork that characterizes mothering in Carey’s communicative rituals. In this study, my focus is on conversations about social media, often difficult at the start but often deemed as authentic spaces for exploring thoughts and emotions among the participating adolescent children and the mothers.

Meanwhile, Cheri Kramarae’s (2005) groundbreaking work on Muted Group Theory has three assumptions:

1. Men and women perceive the world differently because they have different perception-shaping experiences. Those different experiences are a result of men and women performing different tasks in society.
2. Men enact their power politically, perpetuating their power and suppressing women’s ideas and meanings from gaining public acceptance.
3. Women must convert their unique ideas, experiences, and meanings into male language in order to be heard (Kramarae, 1981).

While a nod to Kramarae’s (2005) original above-mentioned propositions and not veering away from the typically theoretical confirmation, my attempt is to venture into expositions of what I call *accidental unmutings* that I see in difficult conversations that mothers facilitate. Accidentals are improvisational or provisional most of the time; they are not typically envisioned through rigorous planning, but rather, by contingencies or detours (Bateson, 2001). Unmutings are counter-labels to the mutedness women experience in conversations and everyday interactions. This current undertaking is proof-building of the presence of the unmutings motherwork surfaces, not just among mothers, but even among children and other adults in the home. While I recognize the oppressive nature in the embodied mandate to immediately address what arises within the mother’s circle of concern, I am that feminist who is always seeing a radical entry point for revisioning discourse in everyday tasks. The reflex to address immediately or to confront and put on the table is a socio-culturally imposed response on mothers in order for their tasks not to accumulate. Given this cultural expectation, I take this as an opportune phenomenon through

which I examine the potential in matricentric feminism to be continuously considered in feminist communication theorizing.

I argue that that the immediate reflex of mothers to “talk it out” is indicative of the maternal movement to confront as well as the continuation of socio-culturally rich material for the personal-is-political affirmation that mothers are first to articulate through complaints and observations. To clarify, this reflex is reported by most of the study’s informants to be true for them, and not so much for the male/father counterparts. The decision to discuss social-media matters with their children is often carried out within the day according to them. The current domestic space in these talks are fertile grounds of intergenerational drama and trauma healing of oppressive notions about the body, sexuality, community and surveillance. Although the mothers in my study do not call themselves feminists, there is authentic desire in engaging with the next generation in rituals of conversing.

### **Problem Statement**

Given the call to renew interest in ritualistic meaning-making in conversations regarding social media use in communication research and the need to surface the evidentiary warrant for the accidental unmutings as embodied articulation work present in mothers’ facilitation of media talks with their adolescent children, I asked:

*How is motherwork articulated in mothers’ reflections on conversations with their adolescent children regarding social media use?*

As a form of conclusion, I clarified the implications of the findings as an answer to this guide question:

*What are the implications of these conversations and the topics covered thereof on feminist theorizing in communication?*

### **Research Design and Methodology**

This study utilized an exploratory interpretivist approach to communication research. Using the tools of feminist interviewing and focus group discussion (FGD) facilitating (Devault, 1990; Ofreneo, 2010) and using three levels of analytical coding (Saldaña, 2015), I examined how authentic connections between mothers and their adolescent children are made possible in parental regulation of social media use.

Out of the initial 30 Filipino mothers who were asked to take part in the study, only 23 committed to in-depth interviews. However, the seven participants who were not able to share detailed recall and reflections of

conversations still decided to join the FGD as observers. They would then add to the discussion some comments and insights that they allowed to be used as data. Ten mothers agreed to have two online sit-down interviews via Zoom while the other eight had only one in-depth interview session with me, while the other five participated in another FGD after each was interviewed individually. Interview sessions lasted from 2 to 2 and a half hours and were conducted from July 2021 to August 2022.

I originally intended to use maximum variation sampling for the selection of informants but later changed my sampling technique to intensity sampling. The criteria I listed were as follows: 1) they should be able to articulate a clear recall of conversing with their adolescent child/children regarding social media use in my initial 30-minute talk with them used as a filtering process; 2) they should have an articulated desire to understand their adolescent child's emotional world; and 3) they can recall intently conversing with another adult about their own or their children's social media use. All three criteria should be voluntarily disclosed by all informants consenting to participate in the research.

The informants were asked what conversations about which topics made them do one or more of the following after such conversations: 1) reflect further on the issues/matters that surfaced within the media-talk encounter with another adult (e.g., work colleague, partner, parent, sibling, friend); 2) conduct online searches for experts regarding the matters arising from such media-talk; 3) reconnect with adolescent-child with the desire to clear some thoughts, confusions, and positions. This means that I particularly pursued mothers' recall of conversations that led to explorations about ideologies and positions, rather than to evaluation of function of regulation.

"Conversation" in this study is defined as any predominantly occurring face-to-face encounter that may include talking through thoughts and behaviors directly linked or ensued by a desire to regulate adolescent children's social media use. These conversations may also be recalled to have happened as altercations, arguments, debates, negotiations, dialogues, discussions, or family meetings in some instances, or simply as digital exchanges of words through private messages. My data primarily come from mothers' recall of these "conversations" often labelled, but not always, as "difficult conversations."

For data analysis, I employed a three-level analysis starting with cluster coding where I grouped data nodes according to their general categorization. This first level of analysis was primarily a form of data reduction using thematic charts. Once the initial labels were made, I then moved to Level 2 where I moved selected data chunks into descriptive charts where I tested categories for their actual "presence" in the data. I used active or process

coding (i.e., using the gerund verb form to verify actual evidence) to describe selected texts from the interview and FGD transcripts. The last level of analysis was the inferencing of abstractions. Here, the findings transformed into a combination of micro-text descriptions and conceptual wording. This last part was intended to surface the scholarly campaign aligned with my feminist framework, as well as to simplify what ought to be a relatable set of meanings understandable to both feminists and non-feminists alike.

The majority of the mothers are college-degree holders. Five have masters' degrees while two have PhDs. The majority are self-identified heterosexual cisgenderers with neurotypical adolescent children (i.e., 11-19-year-olds), while five consider themselves queer but are involved in a heteronormative domestic partnership. Also, while the majority are biological mothers, four informants are adoptive and surrogate parents. Not all have domestic romantic partners but all consider themselves having co-guardians inside the home (e.g., parents and siblings "co-parenting" their children). While half of the informants label themselves as full-time homemakers, all of them mentioned "side jobs" that include the following: online selling, insurance selling, and part-time business processing outsourcing (BPO) work. The ones who labelled themselves as employed or self-employed have paid work outside the home pre-pandemic and typically do paid work for a required 8-hour-a-day routine.

Twelve out of the 30 mothers asked for a copy of transcripts for validation, while 15 of them agreed to come together for a group feedback of my research findings in 2023. The said feedback sessions' insights are currently being articulated in a different article.

All of them chose the pseudonyms used to represent them in the write-up. Quoted texts from the informants are translations languages namely, Waray, Cebuano, and Tagalog. Most interviewees, however, spoke Taglish (a colloquial combination of Tagalog and English).

As an additional note on the presentation of findings and the author's voice in the writing of a socio-scientific qualitative research, I am emphasizing the following: 1) the feminist stance in the writing; and 2) the evidence-heavy "as is" descriptions laid out through quotations as an empirical nod to socio-scientific inquiry. There is an insistence on laying out the informants' voice in heavy direct quotations alongside or often before my interpretations are inserted. This is in observance of the feminist embodied way of writing that responds to the emotional offering in the transcript (Gilmore et al., 2019; Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2024; Ofreneo, 2010). The chosen exemplars are filled with the mothers' hindsight and vulnerability. There is a reading effect that might be unsettling in the showcase of these quotations. This is intentional, feminist, and in support of

Marta Calás and Linda Smircich's (2021) seminal work on feminist writers trying to write differently in academe. For them, capturing the sources' or the informants' words is both an ode to the marginalized voices and an attempt to put forth a rather moving text. The decision to place exemplars is a radical act of showing the readers the knowledge at hand outside the researcher's interpretation (Calás & Smircich, 2021).

Likewise, evidence is of high value. Thus, this current undertaking's style of writing balances the empirical characteristic of a socio-scientific study in the field of communication research while still maintaining the qualitative interpretive tone. Although the naming of the phenomenon in motherwork through the findings is already an interpretivist act, the retention of quotations is an evidentiary warrant following the empiricist approach. The weaving of these two tones — interpretivist and empiricist — is my engagement with feminist epistemologies. There is an active balancing of the position of vulnerability I see from the mothers' tales as well as my own experience being a mother of two adolescent children. The judgement to see texts as vulnerable and worth highlighting, while giving their space to be understood by the readers, is from this position (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2024).

### **Ethical considerations**

Before the signing of the informed consent form, all participants had an orientation regarding the nature of the study, the possible audiences that might have access to study, the length of the interviews, and the possible discomfort that might be ensued by the interviews. Since the topic could trigger emotional responses that the participants might not be prepared for, a debriefing was scheduled for those who felt the need to talk about their responses further. I also provided references for available resources that they can access regarding parenting adolescents. A copy of the transcripts of their interviews was provided to those who asked for it. The interview guide instrument was also reviewed by a licensed social worker.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Facilitating conversations is motherwork. Opening up emotions, finding the right words while failing at them too, getting the adolescent-child's attention — these require hard work and vulnerability. The task in motherwork is intense and for which mothers are not well-trained while being expected to perform excellently without ample resource. As an entry point to the mothers' reflections on conversation with their adolescent-children, I listed cue phrases lifted from the transcripts. These phrases were

efficient compasses for the analysis of motherwork that facilitated further conversations.

1. “disrupted me in one way or another”
2. “caused sleeplessness”
3. “made me want to know more”
4. “*slapped me* on the face”
5. “a process of revisiting the past”
6. “bitter-sweet reminder that they actually know more than I do”
7. “unsettled me in ways I was not ready for”
8. “challenged my authority...[but] in a way I knew I needed”
9. “humbling but difficult way of looking at the problem...[that] my child does not agree with me completely”
10. “shocked at her vocabulary ...[and] bothered by her opinion”
11. “hurtful words that made me weep but...also [made me] realize I needed to think [things] through.”

Although the mothers’ accounts showed occasional defensiveness, my focus remained on their approximations of the words they remember their children uttered. As this section is an argument for the accidental unmutings emerging in the “coverage” of these conversations, I will be highlighting the constructs surfaced. Likewise, these accidental unmutings revealed the embodied articulation work of mothering as central to the difficult conversations’ ability to challenge the status quo.

But first, let me highlight the setting of these conversations as reported by the mothers:

1. “In the kitchen while preparing lunch.”
2. “Inside the car while waiting for the ambulance.”
3. “In the dining room, while the other child was on the sofa with the oxygen tube attached to her.”
4. “In my room where we had to sit on the floor in order not to wake the baby up.”
5. “Outside the house, on the street... because we had to take a walk after that fight.”
6. “In the mall, while queuing for vaccination.”

## **Unmutings in body, voice, and sexuality: A bridge over muddy waters**

Almost all mothers had emotionally laden conversations of social media use that led them and their adolescent children to “lay the cards on the table” regarding the body. This finding informs how the difficulty of first being muted (e.g., being interrupted, gaslighted, or man-speak treated) gave way to unmutings of difficult emotions and thoughts from both children and adults. The mutedness also happened when mothers froze in mid-conversations due to self-doubt about issues thrown at them or simply as a lack of training in sustaining regulated conversations. Moralisms surrounding propriety, prudence, and acceptable behavior were often met with “my body, my say” protestations as well as “why do you have a problem with that?” judgements. Other mothers recall their children challenging their conservative views: “The problem with you is that you have a judgements about bare skin,” “no body-shaming please here,” “do you still think that way [about the body]?” Valerie had this to say:

I was frozen in mid-air when he defended his girlfriend’s profile picture, and of all things, in front of my husband. My husband walked out...He said, “Why the judgement on her [my Gf]? You were a 70s child. I knew how skimpy your clothes were then.” His face told me he was not being mean. But, heck, I was furious inside.

Valerie added that it was revealing how her son had a different take about the body, how he understood where the girlfriend was coming from, that there was nothing wrong with the profile picture she thought was “a bit too much.” She was shocked by how he could be brave about expressing this opinion to her. It is also important to note how Valerie’s husband walked out despite her request for him to stay. It is important to highlight how Valerie’s account of her mutedness as internalizing the male’s description of the insufficiency in the female voice (Spender, 1980). However, the hindsight surfaced in the interviews is typical of women’s ways of culling meaning long after events have concluded and after much self-incrimination (Edell, 2022). The latter can be deemed as a form of feminist pedagogy for the self (Edell, 2022) as well as women’s ways of subjective knowing (Belenky et. al., 1986).

There were conundrums regarding having a “voice” or “say” about certain issues, especially political ones. Since the interviews and FGDs happened around the 2022 Philippine national election, all informants had to contend with their adolescent children’s political participation online. It is important to note that even mothers with children as young as 11-year-

olds had to go through what most of them called “very difficult political talks.” Discussions around politics clearly pointed towards “voice” as online opinion-making, bashing, cancel culture, and call-outs. The mothers shared these observations:

1. “I just wanted them to go easy on the posts. They knew all too well their grandpa wouldn’t be happy about that.”
2. “I heard myself from this 14-year-old. She is me when I was her age. Defiant and full of myself, and so political. I read two books on politics, then suddenly I was an expert.”
3. “The thing with his Twitter account is that he gets pissed off easily by it. I told him, ‘You’re short-tempered with your sibling because you got bashed in Twitter. It’s not fair.’”
4. “I do commend her for posting that thing on FB. He got cancelled by his teacher, hah, his teacher of all people! I got worried about it, yes, of course, but I told her, ‘Way to go!’”

It was also evident how mothers were confronted by the curse words their children are exposed to in their social media accounts, particularly in their private chat groups. It was surprising to them how what most of them labelled as “unacceptable behavior” in their generation now became a familiar occurrence in their children’s worlds. For those who took the cursing in stride, they reasoned that “not all cursing made their way into our conversations inside the home,” “as long as they don’t curse at me, I’m okay,” “I try to dissociate my daughter from the cursing she says online with her friends because she hardly curses when I’m around,” “somehow his explanation makes sense that cursing is not that bad given the context he and his friends are in.” For mothers who expressed offense, however, they still gave their children the benefit of the doubt and were candid enough to express that they were surprised at how they did not get as angry as they thought they would. Melissa shared this thought:

I confronted him with his dirty words I saw in his GC. “What’s with all the cursing?” He said, “What’s with the snooping around? I thought we’re clear with this [boundary]?” So, I shut up. Then I went back to him. I just couldn’t let it go. But I don’t know what I was angry of, really. I was just offended by something. Out of nowhere, I told him, “No *motherfuckers*. I am offended with that one particularly.” There you go. It’s funny finding out that was it [laughs]. It was nothing, really, but it was deeeeeep.



These talks did not often go calmly as intended, but I would like to highlight the effort of mothers to “cross the bridge” to their children. It is clear how they have been called out as well in their attempts to call out their adolescent children’s social media use. There was a pronounced sense of being unprepared for the “retaliation” they received from them, but most of them saw the upside to their children’s will. Even mothers who clearly labelled themselves as terror or strict admitted to having been taken aback by their children’s opinions about the body as “consumed” and “considered” in their social media pages. Some of them felt outdated in terms of worldviews, while others expressed a sense of panic as to how they could “preserve” their children’s innocence.

There is an ambivalent tone to the rituals of being muted leading to unmutings facilitated in these conversations. On the one hand, mothers are called-out, interrupted, or even put in their place. On the other hand, their voice in the interaction, albeit painful or awkward, regulated insights in themselves, their children, and the other adults in the family. Kramarae (1981) pointed out that as women are often caught in ambivalent positions of being marginalized as well as being placed in frontlines of motherwork, they have become familiar with the exact placement of mutedness (i.e., when, why, where it happened) as well as the grit of going through such mutedness in order to advocate some change.

### **Rituals in housework, productivity, and functionality: A challenge to old paradigms**

Most mothers started telling the context of the conversations they had with their adolescent children by how they got “triggered,” “ticked off,” “tested” [*sinubukan*], and “provoked” [*ginalit*] by their children’s entitlement to not taking on household chores. Often, the impulse to turn the internet router off, confiscate the smart phone and laptop, or give their children the cold shoulders, would happen after the mothers get slighted by their children’s failure to help out. Although most of them clarified that they were not consistently clear with how housework should be done and scheduled, almost all of them had definite expectations that children must take responsibility with household chores. The pandemic made it even more important that everyone in the home contributed to daily tasks involving food, cleanliness, maintenance, and repair. Other children were also expected to help younger siblings with homework, pets, plants, and to care for older members of the family. Two mothers had adolescent children with part-time work from the home, but these children were still expected to do their share of housework.

The important conversations surrounding housework, productivity, and functionality revealed multilayered constructs of mothers' multiple responsibilities, a drama of the everyday (Carey, 2009) that is central to mundane and intensive motherwork (Brantley, 2023; Collins, 2016). There is an unspoken offense that they often took from the lack of help from other members of the household: the notion of the lazy body. "Lounging around like they're kings and queens," "as if they're masters and I'm the slave," "they have all the time to fix their room for Instagram, but no time to clean the table;" were some of their statements hinting at their frustration. It is interesting to highlight the adolescent children's notion of the bare minimum in housework challenging the mothers' own paradigms. These reflections are very telling of this challenge:

1. "After one whole day of not speaking to her, she finally apologized. I asked her, 'How hard can it be to pick up laundry?' Then she said, 'How hard can it be to tolerate laundry? Do we have a supervisor visiting us here today?'"
2. "He said, 'You always see my lying around as laziness, that I'm not doing something. Then, you'd tell me to stop doing something, that I need to stop being busy. Why does it always have to be your way?'"
3. "I was taken aback when I heard them say that that their TikTok crowd matters to them, that the editing they spend on the app is work to them. That, I found so difficult to accept. But what can I do?"
4. "At least, I told them, just pick up some house work, at least one each day. I don't have to shout at them just for them to at least contribute to something."
5. "My daughter was so offended when I told her she does nothing around the house. Then I remember she does all the going out to Mercury [drugstore] and to Ministop for all the little purchases we need almost every day."

There were also accounts of how their children lacked the will to implement ideas they plan to copy or apply from what they see in social media. Mothers expressed dismay over how there was "too much planning, not enough doing" with their children's projects. Janessa shared this thought:

I asked her when she was going to start the embroidery project she kept bugging me with. We ordered thread online, then some fabrics too. Then for weeks and weeks, all she did was to watch these YouTube tutorials. It was irritating how she would just watch, and not even attempt to do anything.

Then she would be chatting with her friends the whole time. So, I told her, ‘How you do it is to bring out that threads, use the needle, and do it along the tutorial. You just can’t do it all in your head and expect to know embroidery once you decide to start it.’ Ughh, it was so frustrating.

Again, the emphasis that I am pointing out is not just the frustrations the mothers felt but the intersections they arrived at in what I continue to argue as unmuting. Not intentioned to “hit home,” most of these conversations repeated through time brought the mothers to a reevaluation of their old paradigms. The following statements attest to these reevaluations that ensued after the reflex to “talk it out”:

1. “I admitted, gosh I admitted, that it was a long day at work, the piled dishes were always piled up around that time but are eventually cleaned up around 10 PM. I didn’t want to apologize, of course. But I was struck by her stubborn call-out, ‘Why do you always forget I do wash the dishes every night? Not just according to your timeline, but I do. Always.’”
2. “I just realized after that intense talk that they do feel useless when I keep telling them they are useless. It’s a vicious cycle. The eldest was the one who was dead serious about the complaint [of us not seeing their efforts]. She said, ‘I don’t know how you never point out how clean the house is every morning, how the plants have been watered?’ I didn’t realize she was the one doing that. Then she can’t take it when I would impulsively confiscate her phone every time she wouldn’t answer my call.”
3. “It’s the headphone that I cannot tolerate. So, I asked their headphones to be kept away. Then I imposed this immediately even if I was so tired already: I cannot call their names without response. They need to respond. If not, they’ll do the dishes. Turned out, they actually like washing the dishes. As long as they are with their head phones, that is. It’s crazy! They’re slobs, but they do know how to work given the right paraphernalia.”

The one thing that also irked the mothers was the dissonance in how they were parented versus how they were now called to accommodate a different way of raising their children. Many of them thought that social media or smartphones got in the way of their mothering as informed by how they were raised. Still, most of them expressed the need to revise the parenting they experienced from the previous generation. This is strong

evidence of the unmutings that surfaced in these difficult conversations and the reflections thereafter. An example of women's accommodation of the dominant voice in order to participate in conversations, the mothers were both averse and accustomed to the confrontational voice they used due to lack of an alternative template (Lituchy & Wiswall, 1991). The challenge to old paradigms is part of motherwork's moralism (Whiley et al., 2021). However, this requisite is often at odds with ideas of women empowerment among mothers and the responsibilities surrounding the survival of children. Although such openings of new paradigms are relatively an afterthought for the mothers, an unmuting surfaces nonetheless. The intensity in the mothers' recollections reveals detailed descriptions of the conversations that do not simplistically villainize anyone. Notice how the mothers are well-versed in pointing out when offended their children, when they were taken aback, or when their beliefs were challenged. In a sense, the children are unmuted in this aspect of motherwork, i.e., when mothers retain a certain level of compassionate curiosity about these difficult conversations.

### **Happiness and success in motherwork: The convolution between the now and the future**

The future-oriented mother is one of the embodied images of motherhood that the informants assumed. This orients motherwork as pragmatic, logical, and cost-efficient (Minnotte, 2023; Williamson et al., 2023). Several mothers described their adolescent children's moments of subtle rebellion that opened up "old wounds of unworthiness": "I was also like that when I was her age;" "I remember the rejection;" "I was reminded of the betrayals I experienced in high school." These moments often occurred after intense discussions of the future and how the mothers expressed worry over the lack of assurance that their children would "make it." For the mothers exposed both to their children's articulated vulnerabilities and other people's criticism, a glimpse into their children's anxiety of the future was a critical turning point. Rovie shared this heart-felt realization:

I was pointing my finger at her and accusing her of stuff: 'How will you survive without me? You don't know anything yet. I just want you to succeed and make it out in the world.' Then she burst into tears. After a couple of hours of intense implosion from both of us, she finally took the courage to come to me. She said, 'It's confirmed. I'm a loser. It's more real now that I am not worth anything.' I broke down in guilt.

The context of this story was the adolescent child's impulsive unfollowing and blocking of friends in her FB account. Rovie went into a lecture about impulsiveness and the need to be calm about such decisions:

I really went into 'you can't just erase friends from your life. It's not how it works.' Then I don't know how it happened, but suddenly I was telling her she won't amount into anything if she continues to being a diva like that. I wanted to call her a brat, but didn't.

Others merely wanted to call out their children for their lack of discretion and authenticity, but admitted to have gone overboard with "the scary future" narrative:

1. "I told her, 'I can't take your drama. You took it upon yourself that you posted that on Twitter, now you're here agonizing. That's not how you become an adult. That's how you destroy your name.'"
2. "I saw how his pattern of bullying friends in his online videogames. So, I sat down with him and told him, 'You're a criminal in the making.' Then he said, 'The fuck, Mom!' Then I exploded of course. I remember throwing something at him."
3. "Of course, I had to rant after that. He is so incompetent in the house, then he sounds like a know-it-all on IG. He has this do-gooder face that wants to save the world, climate change thingy. Then I had to tell this to his face, 'Your drama will not save your ass once you don't get accepted in college next year.' It went downhill after that he didn't say a thing for days. Then he DM-ed me: 'You have no idea how your words hurt.'"
4. "If she continues to overthink her friends' messages... that to me were just gibberish, I told her she'll give me heart attack. No kidding. Go ahead be a drama queen, but don't let that ruin my day. I have enough problems for the day."

Undoubtedly, mothers were confronted with their adolescent children's emotional worlds that in turn triggered their "old wounds" as well as challenged their mothering approach. The emotional knowledge (Bratianu, 2015) gained through these encounters is telling of important motherwork that takes place. The revelation in both the mothers' and children's emotional words surface tensions in how the future is prophesied through the mothers' anxiety. "This is stuff for therapy we cannot afford," one mother candidly commented. Her observation was indeed a reflection of the therapeutic albeit in-progress work emerging from these encounters.

Since social media behavior triggers many notions of the good life, the mothers' surveillance of their children's behavior "in order to protect them from the evils of the word" led to further emotional reflections. To call this reflexive aspect of motherwork as intensive is an understatement. The children's future is a rabbit hole that sucks mothers into "nightmares and sleepless nights," to borrow an informant's description. Unfortunately, this scenario is still idealized at present, especially in middle-to-high-income households (Budds, 2021; Forbes et al., 2021).

### **Rites in community, parenting, and family: The ambivalent "village"**

Higgins (2023) claims that mothers lost "the village" during the pandemic. Revealed in the mothers' narration of difficult conversations are the muted uncertainty they experience, triggered both by the pandemic and their children's unfolding identities. Although mothers who had done intensive academic work expressed disappointment with the community that should have supported them, and thereby doubting their ability to support their children, they still referred to the presence of the village, albeit its lukewarm presence. This echoes the many facets of uncertainty in motherwork engendered by a failure of the world at large in providing structural support (Göransson, 2023; Ladge & Greenberg, 2015). Talk about protecting their children from the "prying eyes of strangers" did not open up conversations as much as talk about protection from judgement from a familiar community that would include uncles, aunties, friends' parents, and "relatives from the province." They also mentioned being worried about colleagues from work who might see their "children's mess online." Klara shared this thought:

I know I connected with her when I admitted my shit. I wanted to stretch the point that it's her fault but for some miraculous reason, it went back to my fear of judgement. It just seemed so clear that it was about my fear of being labelled as a too-permissive mother, which I always feel conflicted with. I pride myself with the fact that I am quite a hippie of a mother, but not when I could sense friends judging my daughter because of her opinions on FB. That, I still have to contend with until now... But I know that when I shared this to her, we were more compassionate about each other's perspectives."

Other reflections pointed to similar insights of the “village” that mothers imagine:

1. “It’s like I know she is growing up but not just in front of me, but in front of the world to see, which can be disconcerting sometimes.”
2. “I am struggling with the idea that he is so different from me. He thinks and acts so extremely different from me or his father, which is okay for me, but not when I sense the disapproval from my parents.”
3. “I am torn between defending him and letting him be... From my perspective, he is doing okay, his actions are harmless. But at that same time, ... I overthink the consequences of this action in his school crowd.”
4. “She’s a bit of a weirdo, which is me basically. I’ve always been an outcast, come to think of it. But I don’t want her to over-highlight that. Can she be more like the mainstream kids out there?”
5. “One time, she asked me, ‘If you were not my Mom, would you allow me to post this as a real talk call-out to parents out there?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ Then she gave me a snarky side comment, ‘My point exactly about toxic Filipino culture.’ I was confused for a while there.”

Some mothers also shared that it could be easier talking about body image and self-love had these topics been isolated from the “what would others say?” mindset. Some mothers had been conflicted and then “awakened” by how their children resisted this mindset of overthinking what others would say. Ironically, the mothers also observed how their children could be so anxious at how their peers might judge them. Anita opined:

It’s funny how she told me I could be ‘showbiz’ with my obsession with posting pictures of family milestones. She hates it when I over-edit my posts. However, she also doesn’t like it when I don’t consult her with the pictures that include her. She said, ‘Mom, works both ways. You wouldn’t want me to post pictures of you that you wouldn’t consider flattering.’”

Implied by the mothers’ articulation of motherwork is the necessity for help from the outside as well as the lessening of the judgmental gaze from their significant groups (Watson & Baxley, 2021). As they themselves extended motherwork beyond their immediate families, they also maintained a silent expectation of the same service from the outside. This echoes scholars’ active reflection on the limited resource given to their respective mothers as well as the less isolated familial arrangements from

neighborhoods, communities, and institutions during their parents' time (de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2023).

Meanwhile, John Dewey (in Carey, 2009; Midtgarden, 2021), recognized "associations" in groups or communities as central to the ritualistic view of communication. These associations are the tie that binds individuals, groups, and communities. As both a representation and a guidance for action, Dewey's views of rituals and Carey's (2009) expansion of them inform what this paper attests as the gaze from the village. Although motherwork is more and more relegated to the individual, the village insists its influence as a detached observer and as an invested spectator. Ironically, its detached stance does not lessen the mother's account of the space the village claims in her worries and estimations. As rituals are formed over time, the meanings of roles attached to certain labels likewise cut across time. This means that the participation of the village in motherwork imposes both progressive and limited requirements on the lone-worker mother.

### **Influence, purpose, and value: Unmutings in the anxiety to matter**

Although the mothers identified school work as their children's primary source of anxiety, they also offered glimpses of important discussions they had with their children regarding matters of influence, purpose, and value. To reiterate, the intensity in motherwork lies in the lack of resources and preparation that mothers observe (Guy & Arthur, 2020; Minello et al., 2021; O'Reilly, 2020). All informants mentioned their perceived lack of skill in "talking their children out of anxiety" that they think are triggered by social media. Some mothers concluded that maybe "talking them out of anxiety" is not their role, but rather providing the space where anxiety can be expressed. Given the overlapping moments of "calm and stress," as one mother called the fluctuating emotions inside the home, the mothers were often pressured to overlook several important details about their adolescent children's behaviors needing reminders or call-outs. However, most of them did open up about conversations surrounding "worth," "the pressure to influence," "clout," and "purpose," all of which their adolescent children struggle with daily.

Some conversations started with the parent belittling the value of their children's social media behavior with comments like "what value do you get from that," "it's a waste of our resources," "what good will it give you watching that K-pop band for hours," "will it give you money," et cetera. In many ways, the children already knew that these would not make them instantly wealthy. But the mothers recognized from conversation with their children that to be wealthy is a common aspiration. Melia is torn about this:



I know I would not allow my son to be a pauper in the future. I am certain he wouldn't be. But, you, this is the Philippines, so I am sure about that. I am also disconcerted with how openly he could be boastful about earning his first million in YouTube. I am not sure how I feel about that as well."

This is a common theme in the mothers' evaluation of their children's view of social media influence as a precursor to "valuable work." They found themselves being "educated" on how one could actually get rich by doing TikTok dances and creating random POV content. The connected conversations they considered fortunate to have with their adolescent children afforded important insights into the young generation's notions of "having to matter" in the world. These anecdotes reveal a lot of insights:

1. "I was a bit ashamed at how he could be sell-out on TikTok, as if he truly thinks he'll be a star. Then he looked me in the eye and somehow begged me to indulge him, 'Ma, look, let's pretend I will make a difference here, k?' Who would need a college degree for that, right?"
2. "She is so keen at being updated with what's happening with the world. Then I could see she becomes restless with how she can't keep up with her K-pop merch. She knows I wouldn't indulge her. We don't have money for it. But then she said, 'I know. I know. But here, in this fandom, I do matter. My opinions are supported. I'm okay if I can't go to these concerts.'"
3. "My 15-year-old really got me on this. He said, 'When I complain about what I read from Twitter or Facebook, I am just complaining, okay? I don't want you to fix it for me. I know you can't fix it. I just feel good knowing that I have an opinion about these things. Aren't you glad I am thinking?'"
4. "She reminded me that her anxiety is not because of Discord. It's because of her teachers' emails that come unapologetically in swarm. That's the term she used, *swarm*. She said, 'With the teachers' emails, I am reminded that I still don't have control of my time, that I have a long way to go until I will matter.'"

It is important to point out that a familiar entrenchment of the ideal worker (Zanhour & Sumpter 2022) re-emerges in the mothers' notes on their children's anxieties. The load in motherwork is intense, cyclical, and often provisional, and the expectation for mothers to ideally perform is ever present. They themselves are versed in how their children could be efficient participants in societal functions. With the prevalence of mental

health problems among adolescents being associated with mothers' mental health and the quality time they spent with their children (Babore et al., 2023; Bai et al., 2020), the unmuting of anxieties paradoxically empowers and paralyzes motherwork. The paralysis, like other aspects of motherwork, is often parked and ignored in favor of the daily grind in households. In retrospect, most of the informants revealed that their children's anxieties ironically also triggered the most self-deprecating anxiety among them. The ideal work in motherwork gains a new rubric — how well do mothers spot and regulate their children's anxieties? As a hopeful yet critical take on this, the paper proposes that the painful unmutings in these narratives punctuate the invisible aspects of motherwork as well as its continuing interrogations of sociocultural structures.

### **Conclusions and Implications on Feminist Theorizing in Communication**

I hope to have demonstrated that there is ample evidence of the intensity of accidental unmutings present in conversations on motherwork. I call these insights *accidental unmutings* because the mothers, in their reflections, provide us the necessary material for revising how we engage with technology, how these engagements challenge our identities, and how we need to reevaluate our perspectives about social media technology vis-a-vis parental regulation. These are “accidentals” because the insights from the mothers' reflections went beyond their initial explorations of the issues at hand: too much screen time, waywardness, or irresponsibility in school or housework. By using the term “accidental,” the paper does not inferiorize the involuntariness of this aspect of motherwork. Rather, it highlights the moment-to-moment response that mothers negotiate. The process of unmuting is a counter-label to the mutedness that mothers historically experience when they try to articulate the complexity in motherwork. I am arguing as well that embodied articulation work in mothering surfaces profound insights into human potentials to make authentic connections in rituals of conversations. This time, these insights are shown in conversations not necessarily intended to reveal human potentialities, but mostly address immediate concerns such as children's anxiety, dishes in the sink, and fights with siblings. Like most reproductive work, motherwork is at the heart of these reflexive acts of attuning to what is set before their eyes. The mothers are first responders to the call to correct, mend, and tend to their children.

As a feminist communication theory advocate, I am working towards emphasizing rituals of conversation as a central configuration of human-technology relations minding our private and public communicative

experiences. Let me, therefore, outline below some takeaways that this study surfaced from the mothers' articulations.

### **Home as participation: A feminist call**

Kelly and Senior (2020) called for a parental feminist ethics towards the liberation of the home from neo-liberal cooptation of care work and toward a serious consideration of acts of caring in "invisible emotional work." Feminist communication theory is now challenged to look at communication rituals as upheavals against co-optation. Mothers advocate for the home as participatory space as a genuine articulation of the notion of "it takes a village to nurture human beings." Small acts of caring participated in by members of the family should be extended to the fellowship needed outside the family unit (Parkinson, 2020), i.e., neighborhoods, towns, cities, and nations.

Meanwhile, the interest in communication as ritual should include talk that is always messy around the edges but contains images of cyclical and rhythmic acts of reflection on communicative behaviors. Taking social media use as a precursor to these rituals of talk, *home as participation* is unabashedly endorsed by mothers as windows to the world. Motherwork is further challenged to be participatory and collective. No mother and her child can sustain the expectations and demands of propriety from the home. Moreover, the push to consider parenting as an ecological engagement is likewise affirmed by the mothers' narratives. Motherwork or parenting is beyond the parent-child dyad but constitutive of more-than-human elements. As per Phillips (2016), the requirements of care-taking of children:

...are cognition of the embodiment and vulnerability that is shared by the more-than-human moves the focus of care away from a primary engagement with those deemed to be needy or dependent, such as the maternal relation to a child, to the interdependence of all beings on the planet. (p.481)

In feminist theorizing in communication, it is relevant to pursue how communicative rituals can take on the participatory link between the home and the ecology that it tries to converse with, and in most cases, tries to ask support from. This participatory link expands the discourse of selfless love culturally expected from mothers (Ballaret & Lanada, 2022; Bulloch, 2021; Francisco-Menchavez, 2019).

## **Mothering as forging new paths: A counter language to business-as-usual**

With the accidental unmutings gained in mothers' improvisational mending, feminist communication scholars are once again looking at everyday resistance in the archetypal performance of motherwork. Mothers notice the mess, both as an oppressive pressure to do so as well as a lived survival know-how. They "utter" their observations and often communicate them to others. Not always received favorably by an audience, there is in these mothers' call-outs the reflex to disturb the status quo. "We cannot go with our usual ways," one informant mother emphasized. "I had to say something, lest I will break-down" is a sentiment another mother shared. In motherwork, there is knowledge from the margins. The oppressed sector, embodying the lack of equity, is most likely to express important knowledge on what could be restructured in our systems. Women who have long been urged to make choices, take charge of their lives, and be their best selves, are now are forging new paths; and as Luscombe inquired, "Why did we think they'd treat raising children any differently?" (Luscombe, 2012, n.p.). Discussions on parenting and familial communicative styles are not just objections against the burden of parenting, but are questions of power, hierarchy, and participation (McClain & Cahn, 2021). There is so much proof that the children of shortchanged educated parents are coming to terms with lip-service, haphazard education on equity, respect, and compassion. The youth's provocative sense of entitlement does not completely lie in its most hurtful observations.

In the context of Filipino mothers challenging scholarship to forge new paths, a significant increase in the Filipino youth's expressive call-out on toxic Filipino family culture is worth noting (Baylous, 2019; Ochoa & Torre, 2014). Not going back to the business-as-usual of motherwork may mean a stronger disruption of rituals of care, and an insistence on healing inter-generational traumas (Tarroja, 2010). This paper is an additional pathway to the re-imagination of the Filipino family, in particular its youth who are interrogating universal claims of normativity (Tarroja, 2010).

## **Reparenting as motherwork: The teaching voice as a reclamation of voice**

Belenky et. al. (1986) argues for the importance of women's ways of knowing in constructed knowledge, a knowledge that dialogues with the self as it improvises with compassion in not knowing. The mothers in this study demonstrated the power in what almost all them termed as risky and difficult journeys in conversing with their adolescent children. In many ways, this group of mothers was reluctant to apply the template they had, i.e.,

the because-I-said-so spiel they knew well from their parents. When they did follow this inherited path, all of them were able to reflect on its defect. Upon reflection, they took on a reflexive quest to sift through thoughts and actions. All of them want to know more and understand further. They described moments of being reminded of the pain of not being allowed a “voice,” something that they remembered vowing not to do to their children.

**Conscious praxis of feminist parenting  
with *media talk* as take-off point**

Lastly, I hope to have contributed to the argument for the place in communication and media research of media talk or talk about mediatization as a substantial element in relationships. Because I have made it obvious in this paper that meaning-making is a cultural and ritualistic dance occurring through time, conversations cannot leave the discourse on communication. Either as an endangered human recourse (Showkier & Showkier, 2008) or as a cultural exercise going through transformation and creating its new vocabulary, conversation as space has to be explored further. Since our society is intensely upgrading rituals of mediatization, the feminist insistence on human-to-human connection can hold on to its special place in our communication discipline if we can spare time in our scholarship to focus with renewed fascination on how we as humans relate to media technology. The Filipino mothers’ narratives are reflective of the complex state of motherwork discourse they are actively sifting through vis-à-vis their daily negotiations between the prescribed and the realistic.

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