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#Winemom culture:

An ethics, in perpetuity

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Abstract

Experts trace a congruent trend, pinpointed as originating around the 2010s (Grose, 2020) and only accelerating in the pandemic and its aftermaths: the rise of social media activity relating to parents' performances of their substance abuse – what this paper defines as "#winemom culture" – with a broader social tendency, a general increase in "rates of high-risk drinking" that lead to such outcomes as "long-term health damage" and "dangers to family" (Macarthur, n.d.). I interrogate the ethics of moralizing against #winemom culture under COVID-19 culture and its aftermaths through exclusively quantitative metrics or surface-level analysis. As with anything coded according to the "momification of the Internet" (Dewey, 2015), such cultures are often disregarded, seen as superficial or in receipt of unchecked judgments. I trace the following question: What can #winemom culture reveal about how parents are processing and communicating within this moment? And begin from the premise that there are as-yet undetermined drivers motivating what appears to be a "zoning out" (Heyes, 2020) in the mediation of #winemom culture production. This project then opens into an analysis of *how* to actually study digital feminist practices in this current moment, one that is defined by methodological crises surrounding the increasing complexities of enacting justice in social media research. This paper thus serves as a methodological disquisition for feminist researchers attempting to perform ethically just social media research.

Keywords: #winemom culture; COVID-19; feminist media studies; social media research ethics

1. Introduction: An uncorking

> "Parenting is the ultimate act of optimism, it's a promise to yourself not only that the world will be a good enough place for your kids to survive in, but that you will be a good enough person to help them do so. These images we share are part of that ambition to express the belief that the good parts really are good and outweigh the sleeplessness and helplessness and guilt. When I first shared that sad little selfie of mine, so many other mothers slid into my DMs to assure me it was going to get easier and I was grateful for the optimism" – Amil Niazi (2021)

> "My hobby is doom scrolling and learning the science of Covid and smoking weed and sitting on the toilet staring at the wall" – Julie, mother of two, London, ON, Canada[1]

[1] qtd. in Grose (2020)

During one of the lockdown periods of the COVID-19 pandemic (in 2021), I began to notice two urgent trends in my media landscape: news headlines spouting medical and consumer data on the rise in alcohol consumption (Alcohol and Drug Federation, n.d.; Basch et al., 2021; Hosseini, 2020; Wardell et al., 2020), and medical studies warning of the escalation of parental and caregiver stress during this period (Cluver et al., 2020; De Choudhury et al., 2013; Firestein et al., 2022; Hiraoka and Tomoda, 2020; Wolf et al., 2021). I wanted to understand more about the potential interrelation between these (to my mind) associated phenomena. As someone with relative auto-netnographic[2] depth of understanding of networked parenting, someone who spends a lot of time with my online parenting communities, I began to think about how I might move beyond these data-driven, numerical findings, and towards more intimate understandings of the people behind these figures. I began to think about the hashtag #winemom and how its usage in this particular moment might be illustrative of a more personal dimension of what I saw as twin moral panics of spiking alcohol consumption and increasing parental stress and burnout. I moved towards the research question: What can #winemom culture reveal about how parents are processing and communicating within this particular moment? However, you will note by my usage of the past tense in this introduction that, as I began to explore these findings, my ethical antennae received some cautionary transmissions that implored me to slow down before diving straight into data collection, analysis, and publication of these findings. This paper, then, begins with the research question: What can #winemom culture reveal about how parents are processing and communicating within this particular moment? But moves outwards to the associated questions: How can the study of such an archive be done with true care insofar as not to reinforce pre-existing stereotypes, as well as to resist the extractivist impulse in social media research? This paper thus serves as a methodological disquisition for feminist researchers attempting to perform ethically-just research on social media archives. One of the core queries this speculative project intends to address is how to do ethics within a "matrix of domination" (Costanza-Chock, 2018) that sees social media artifacts as a commodity requiring solely a singular stamp of approval for their harvest, as opposed to those requiring concerted care and ethical questioning through an evolving praxis. As Tiidenberg (2018: 15), building upon Markham, writes: "All methods questions are ethics questions – 'most basically, a method is nothing more or less than a means of getting something done. And every choice one makes about how to get something done is grounded in a set of moral principles.'" Morality is not something one acquires but something one practices through continuous efforts at reflexivity. Taking up a radical revisionist call to put a stop to extractivist research in the neoliberal academy by Cowan and Rault (2018), this essay presents a speculative project on the possibilities of feminist ethical engagement in social media research. #winemom culture is deeply fraught, as this essay will outline. Researching #winemom culture means inhabiting an affective and critical realm of constant discomfort and self-questioning: an unfinished ethics, then, one in perpetual transformation. My initial hunch when I began this project during a pandemic lockdown in 2021 was that it wouldn't be right to publish an analysis based on the available data on this topic at the time. So, I didn't. Instead, I wrote this conjectural approach to a possible ethical engagement with this archive in the hopes that it will inspire others in my field to slow down and consider how their research might affect the online communities they intend to engage with.

[2] I use the term "auto-netnographic" to refer to my situatedness with respect to online mothering communities as I encounter them both as a researcher and as a parent/user. "Autoethnography" combines "autobiography (a personal narrative about one's own life) with ethnography, an immersive qualitative research method used to understand community practice" (Ngunjiri et al. qtd. in Pearce, 2020: 809) that is "focused on knowing through close and sustained proximity and interaction" (Hine, 2017: 22). In 2002, Kozinets defined "netnography" as "a new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities emerging through electronic networks" (qtd. in Costello et al., 2017: 2). More recently the term has been refined in accordance with what are seen as the key standards for its application: namely, "immersive depth, prolonged engagement, researcher identification, and persistent conversations" (Kurikko and Tuominen qtd. in Costello et al., 2017: 5).

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2. Aeration I: Hashtag publics or individuals using a hashtag?

When Internet data first started to be harvested by researchers, it was seen as within the public domain, especially for public accounts on Web 2.0 social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and what was formerly known as Twitter. Researchers felt justified in extracting this data and using it for their own purposes without considering foundational issues such as privacy and consent as they applied to the prosumers producing the content. In my own context, in the territories presently known as Canada, the federal guidelines for research ethics did not include specific precepts for social media research until 2022. Thus, if I had performed #winemom data collection in 2021, I would not have been bound by these re-envisioned regulations pertaining to the collection of human data, as the update now considers social media data as data made by humans, as opposed to open-access textual content that is seen to be severed from its creators (TCPS2 Supplement, 2022). Similarly, at this time in the Canadian context, I would not have needed to apply for ethics clearance for this study from my institution's review board. Zeffiro (2019: 231) explains how institutional ethical review was formerly "not required for research that relies exclusively on secondary use of anonymous information," and counters that "if … social media data is generated by human participants who are likely unaware of the parameters of secondary data … should we not then reexamine [institutional ethical review] exemption?" Thankfully, her call was heeded. Yet, in 2021, while I could, technically, go onto a platform like Instagram or TikTok and search and scrape for all data associated with a given hashtag, in this case that of the #winemom hashtag, I would have done this work without the support and oversight of institutional ethical review and would have likely felt umbrage that this data was "secondary use" and thus mine to do with what I like. Writing on ethics and the past in cultural studies, Dederer (2023: 126) reminds us of the "third conditional tense [which] describes something that did not happen, but could have happened given the right conditions"; she underscores how one often applies positive speculation when imagining what they would have done in a previous situation: "Given the right conditions, we would've done the right thing" (2023: 127). When I began thinking about #winemoms during the height of pandemic lockdowns and moral panics around increases in alcohol consumption, I did not have access to the right conditions. Looking back, I doubt I would have felt that I had done the "right thing" (Dederer, 2023: 127) in harvesting data and attempting surface-level analysis of #winemom hashtag communities. There were people behind this data. How could I treat them with care, especially given what The Care Collective (2020: 5) identifies as a "current reign of carelessness" that is "affect[ing] our interpersonal intimacies"? How could I, instead, bring care to these "activists in constructing libraries of things, co-operative alternatives and solidarity economies" (The Care Collective, 2020: 5)? This is what hashtag communities began as, activist movements rendered by human beings.

Hashtags are semiotic utterances of a prosumer's desire to connect or affiliate themselves with a particular online community. For historically oppressed groups, such as those navigating intersectional[3] barriers accorded to their race, class, gender, sex, ability, etc., the typing in of a hashtag as a label or caption on a particular online post presents a form of radical community seeking. For hashtag communities generated through intersectional feminist fellow feelings, two core theories have emerged, those of Papacharissi's (2014) "affective public" and Berlant's (2011) "intimate public." Papacharissi's "affective public" is highly suited to analyzing social media communities, especially ones emitting strong affective resonances, and is defined as a "formation that is textually rendered into being through emotive expressions that spread" (2014: 133), which also amplifies the awareness and intensity of its particular feelings. Berlant's (2011: 183) "intimate publics" initially referred to communities developed through print culture as opposed to digital ones. Her conceptualization is advantageous as it refers to the "multiple

[3] Crenshaw (1989) coined the term "intersectionality." To explicate her theory of multiple forms of discrimination, she (1989: 149) called on the analogy of traffic in an intersection "coming and going in all four directions." Crenshaw (2017) has subsequently explained intersectionality as a "lens through which you can see where power comes and collides." Puar (2012: 54) reconsiders this theory within "changed geopolitics of reception" (53), querying whether it has "become an alibi for the re-centering of white feminists."

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affective registers of collective life that keep people loosely knotted together … while the ground is shifting." Berlant's (2011: 184-5) intimate publics can be used to "establish solidarity for a political ground" but can also be hindered by their focus on sharing experiences (at the sake of mobilizing against structural discrimination), as well as Khoja-Moolji's critique that affective bonds are only made possible through "shared history or sensibility" (qtd. in Marwick, 2019: 322), which may not be guaranteed. As scholars of critical race and intersectional feminism explore the study of hashtag communities driven by affect and intimacy, they have found that these networks can incite calls for "civic activism" and challenge stereotypes (Brock, 2012: 529), and even, in Bailey's (2015) findings on the Black trans women's hashtag #GirlsLikeUs, "redress the lack of care [that these individuals] receive from the health care community and society." However, in line with Marwick's critique (2019: 322) of hashtag feminism as a "simplistic answer to complicated problems," Hobson (2016), writing about the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, finds that hashtags can be both "a space for subversion and protest" and also "a way of narrowing definitions and understandings of 'black womanhood' and 'black girlhood.'" Such authors demonstrate how hashtag feminism as a form of "feminist activism is both enabled and constrained in digital spaces" (Linabary et al., 2020: 1828).

Social media researchers have begun to heed these complexities. Researchers are beginning to reckon with the fact that the utilization of a hashtag may not connote homogeneity within a group of users, that such a heterogenous grouping of individuals using a hashtag may not ascribe to the same "shared history or sensibility" (Khoja-Moolji qtd. in Marwick, 2019: 322). Brock (2012: 545) cautions against labelling individuals using a given hashtag as a "public," instead privileging the nomenclature of a "public group of specific [platform] users," here challenging the notion that such communities can even be understood as a singular organism. Further, correlating with representational challenges arising out of the #MeToo hashtag feminist movement, when a movement started by a Black woman was then co-opted by a white woman who then became the face of this movement (Borah et al., 2023: 2), researchers have begun to interrogate the economics of popularity and visibility within these perceived communities, querying such notions surrounding the dominance of certain figures within these spaces as accorded to their race or class, and how the labours of historically-oppressed individuals can be extracted to bolster (cishet, white, privileged) slacktivist influencers. Despite such pitfalls engrained within larger, popularized hashtag feminist movements, in their recent analysis of a small-scale feminist political movement, #WitchTheVote, Paulsen Mulvey and Keller (2023: 11) "suggest the hashtag is emblematic of the potential for doing intersectional feminist politics online that pushes back against both popular feminism and platform conventions," due to its lack of mainstream attention and its ability to motivate people to attend political meetings and to vote.

In light of these myriad and evolving debates, I felt torn about analyzing #winemom hashtags purely as data points. The only extant peer-reviewed study on #winemom culture using quantitative data arrived in 2021, right in the peak of this moment. Basch's team (2021: 2) sought to study this phenomenon through a focus on mothers' performances of drinking on social media, due to what they cite as "an alarming increase in alcohol consumption among women during the pandemic," and in effort to shift the focus of such representations on social media from their more commonplace occurrence on the accounts of youth. Their (Basch et al., 2021: 4) findings help to fuel the panic: the majority of the posts they reviewed encouraged alcohol consumption, with only 6 out of 100 posts discouraging this activity. Medical, mental health, and addictions experts trace a congruent trend, pinpointed as originating around the 2010s (Grose, 2020) and only accelerating: the rise of social media activity relating to parents' performances of their substance abuse, primarily alcohol – what this paper defines as "#winemom culture" – with a broader social tendency, that of a general increase in "rates of high-risk drinking" that lead to such outcomes as "long-term health damage" and "dangers to family" (Macarthur, n.d.).

I wonder about the ethics of moralizing against #winemom culture under COVID-19 through exclusively quantitative metrics. By way of an example, I turn to a secondary finding from Basch et al.'s (2021: 4) study: the researchers assert that #winemom culture posts that highlighted "struggle" received

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almost double the 'likes' of those that did not. Their study's overarching claim is that the majority of #winemom culture posts on Instagram endorse alcohol consumption, stoking the broader moral panic about the excesses of parental imbibing under the conditions of this plague. Basch et al. (2021: 5) leave off with a recommendation that telehealth organizations should promote their services on Instagram, by way of offering a possible solution and, perhaps, demonstrating some superficial care for their subjects. But they do not elaborate upon this secondary finding beyond a cursory inclusion of the statistical differential, nor do they define "struggle" in their study: What does this term mean to these researchers? How are coding for it? The effects of the pandemic are borne unequally: the speed and volume of upheavals have served to underscore health and economic inequalities faced by the "most vulnerable in society" (Chan, 2020: 3), including those in poverty, racialized, disabled, neurodivergent, and migrant peoples, and those facing such intersectional challenges alongside caregiving for the very young and old, many of whom remain unvaccinated or immunocompromised.

"Struggle" seems an insufficient term for cataloguing the heterogeneity of these inequities, especially when it goes undefined. #Winemom culture may promote drinking in both race- and class-insular forms; yet, it may also provide "social connection" (Wright et al., 2022: 4) for parents undergoing challenging times (although such connections "can reinforce self-destructive behaviours" (Seaver, 2020: 115)). Performing one's intoxication on social media may indicate "dangers to family" (Macarthur, n.d.), or enact a satirical or cathartic response to "taking the edge off of parenting" (Fetters, 2020), one that undermines the dominant prevailing scripts of motherhood, such as those of "patriarchal motherhood"[4] or "intensive mothering,"[5] which, in brief, condition parents (primarily mothers) to attend to their children's needs twenty-four hours a day at their own detriment, without complaint. Taking a selfie with your full wine glass might then be seen as an act of feminist self-care that resists notions of autobiographical, visual culture performances on social media (via selfies) as narcissistic (Senft and Baym, 2015: 1589), or as acts of vanity (Pham, 2015: 223) or frivolity (Abidin, 2016), especially when such discourses speak to "a rejection of the voices of women in the public sphere" (Zappavigna and Zhao, 2017: 246). Alcohol addiction is a serious matter for many, but for others, according to feminist philosopher Heyes (2020: 7), developing upon Berlant, "the only possibility of resistance (or even the only viable response) [to life under neoliberalism] might be to detach from experience … to slow down, and … to alter or even lose consciousness" – a modality she coins "anaesthetic time." Popular news media loves a 'bad parent' narrative – to biopolitically enforce others to tow the line of a "scientific motherhood"[6] beset on conditioning children, also known as the "social investment" (Pasolli, 2017: 131) that constitutes the future labour force. But parents who drink and share on social media (often) still love their kids and may (often) still do right by them: performing the struggles of parenting may serve as a form of self-conditioning that supports their efforts to be "a good enough person to help … [their] kids to survive," as Niazi speaks to in the aforementioned epigraph. #Winemom culture is therefore not easily summated: neither should the methodologies utilized to study it be straightforward nor confined to

[4] Rich (1986) broadly defines "patriarchal motherhood" as the regulation of women's reproductive power by the dominant (male) society. The notion governing this concept is that the body of a woman and their potential for motherhood presents a woman's "single destiny and justification in life" (Rich, 1986: 34). Rich sees this and related ideas about women's requisite purity in the role of mothers as deeply internalized by society-at-large. More recently, O'Reilly (2010: 18) discusses contemporary motherhood through the distinction of "a woman's relationship to her powers of reproduction [versus] the institution of motherhood which attempts to keep women under patriarchal control."
[5] Hays (1996) defines "intensive mothering" as a model of child-rearing originating in the later years of the Second World War (U.S.) that is marked by child-centered, expert-led, labour-intensive, emotionally-absorbing, and financially-expensive tenets. Bowles Eagle (2019) and Basden Arnold (2016), as examples, explain how this discourse remains pervasive into our current era on social media due to its connections with performances of "good mothers" who never complain, who constantly express gratitude for the experiences of pregnancy and parenthood.
[6] "Scientific motherhood" is a social movement whose origins are linked to an 1842 text, Beecher's *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, and connotes "the new attention the medical establishment paid to child care" (here child-rearing in the home) (Litt, 2000: 21). The rise of this movement coincides with the establishment of the U.S. Children's Bureau (1912), which speaks to its connections to the "century of the child" (see note 10) and its associated drivers to end child labour practices. Scientific motherhood is marked by its promotion of highly prescriptive, supposedly empirically based approaches to parenting as directed by (mostly) male doctors and experts (Hays, 1996: 41), and was motivated by increasing concerns pertaining to the societal effects arising from an influx of immigration, as well as social unrest connected to labour and poverty movements (Hays, 1996: 41-2).

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singular metrics. Individuals using the #winemom hashtag present a "public group of specific [platform] users" (Brock, 2012: 545); trends in their dataset are not representative of the whole.

3. Aeration II: *Zoning out* & *zooming in*, the #winemom

Beyond the aforementioned moral panic-inducing articles arising out of the medical community, my preliminary meta-analysis of #winemom culture through Internet memes, academic articles, Facebook groups, Instagram and TikTok hashtags, and an abundance of online think pieces conveys a dualistic response to this phenomenon. I observe two emerging patterns: 1) Feminist responses, wherein authors attempt to consider the socio-historical constructs that fostered the rise and prominence of #winemom culture. These accounts try and evade judgment of parents who perform acts of "identity-work"[7] online in these ways, instead articulating the challenges of raising children in our current milieu: one in which parents are held to incredibly high expectations all the while facing eroded social systems and loss of social supports (e.g. family, community, childcare), which have only been exacerbated by the wide-reaching effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. 2) What appears to be an acceptance-based response founded upon an inability or unwillingness to critically engage with this culture. #winemom culture has made news headlines for years for its supposed contribution to "high-risk drinking" (Macarthur, n.d.) and its bespeaking of other latent social ills such as, for example, Iqbal's caution about surges of alcohol purchase and consumption under current global health conditions: "COVID will end, right, and cancer will continue, and there will be more cancer because people are drinking more" (due to carcinogens) (qtd. in Roumeliotis and Witmer, 2022), not to mention the effects of alcoholism on children, such as a concomitant increase between alcohol use and forms of punitive parenting including "physical abuse, corporeal punishment, and psychological aggression" (Wolf et al., 2021: 2). However, there are still many people who perform the scripts of #winemom culture on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok with full abandon and, seemingly, little desire or attempt to question them. There are also many people who 'like' and 'share' these posts also, seemingly, at face value. In the following, I trouble these two currents of thought in #winemom culture in order to underscore some of the necessary theoretical and ethical interventions requiring attention in the development of my representative case.

The application of intersectional theories to what I perceive as the first school of thought in broader #winemom culture and scholarly research thereof reveals significant blind spots. While many authors dole out sympathy for individuals performing #winemom culture, few accounts gesture towards intersectional analyses of this phenomena. Seaver (2020: 104) comments upon the racial and classist markers of the majority of those who perform #winemom culture online. His analysis finds that this culture "perpetuates the common stereotype that wine is the alcoholic beverage of choice for middle-aged, middle-class, predominantly white women with children," a point echoed by Grose (2020) who writes that "middle-class parents' self-medication has long been recreationalized, even romanticized in America." These views have theoretical roots in cultural studies: Foucault (1978: 146-7) writes of the "hysterization[8] of women, which involved a thorough medicalization of their bodies and their sex [that]

[7] Poletti and Rak (2014: 7) deploy the term "communicative identity-work" to refer to acts of identity presentation that are not concerned with the constitution of narrative. For instance, they (2014: 7) cite "social media posting" as an example of identity-work that is not dependent upon narrative, and one that is also made possible by the particular technological affordances of the given platform or site. In this paper, I use "identity-work" to refer to #winemom culture artifacts since these can be understood through both narrative and non-narrative lenses, depending on their particular aspects, and are also co-constitutive with technology. As Poletti and Rak's (2014: 7) "identity-work" also incorporates considerations of technological affordances, I further see this concept as aligned with both Poletti's (2020: 12) "self-life-inscription": a "collection of flexible … ways of making lived experience significant" that also attends to technologies of mediation, as well as "automediality," a term that marks a shift in autobiography studies in order to attend to the *tools* of media expression as contributing to constituting the self. Under automediality, "media technologies do not simplify or undermine the interiority of the subject but, on the contrary, expand the field of self-representation beyond the literary to cultural and media practices" (Smith and Watson qtd. in Kennedy and Maguire, 2018).

[8] Hysteria (with roots from the ancient Greek term *hystera* (uterus)) is cited as the "first mental disorder attributable to women" (in 1900 BC ancient Egypt) (Tasca et al., 2012: 110). It was re-popularized by Charcot (Paris) in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, during which time it was understood to be a physical disorder (North, 2015: 499). In 1952, it was listed in the first edition of the *DSM* (U.S.) as a mental disorder – only to be removed in the 1980 edition.

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was carried out in the name of the responsibility they owed to the health of their children, the solidity of the family institution, and the safeguarding of society." When Ahmed (2010: 50) writes of the "fantasy figure" of the "happy housewife," she is referring to a 1950's white, middle-class, suburban mom, one with leisure time and money, whose medicalization (through prescription drugs like valium and non-prescription ones like wine) is viewed as a societal necessity for upholding Foucault's (1978: 146-7) rendering of the bio-political "family institution."

The middle-class white mother's substance abuse has therefore been viewed within the parameters of respectability – a narrative that continues to play out in #winemom culture to this day, yet one that receives insufficient scholarly attention. For example, Wright et al.'s (2022: 3) qualitative focus-group interviews with women in the 40-65 age group who drink alcohol reveals that, "Women appeared conscious of representing their drinking as rational, measured and safe, particularly when discussing weekday use, and drinking alone." However, what Wright et al. (2022), Seaver (2020), and other #winemom culture scholars fail to address is that respectable drinking is not a practice on offer to all: Cooper (2017: 5) writes of the "socially contingent" nature of respectability and how this concept has functioned to keep women of colour, especially Black women, subordinated and surveilled in North American society. In her incisive commentary on #winemom culture, Heyes (2020: 112-3) cites Springer's analysis of news media coverage of mothers who use various substances, writing that, "despite greater negative health consequences for a fetus of maternal alcohol consumption compared with crack, articles about crack users consistently framed them as bad mothers who are responsible for social problems." Springer's (qtd. in Heyes, 2020: 113) overarching finding follows that "the driver of negative representations of mothers … is not the actual risk posed to existing children or a fetus by the drug use of their mother but a prior commitment to representing poor and minority women as unfit and socially irresponsible." Within critical mothering studies, Heyes' (2020) work can be linked to Litt's (2000) foundational critical race critique of scientific motherhood. While the rise of scientific motherhood is rooted in multiple societal agendas – including the "century of the child"[9] and its associated misogynistic impulses to recuperate power from women and undermine their knowledge (Ehrenreich and English, 1975: 202, 211; Spender, 1996: 164) – Litt (2020: 23) posits that "white elites found in [this] ideology a response to gender, racial, ethnic, and class conflicts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly those animosities wrought by immigration, industrialization, and urbanization." Scientific motherhood was thus thought to offer social stability through the re-inscription of "the traditional gender order, cultural homogeneity, and white dominance" (Litt, 2020: 23). It also led to the creation of such "controlling images" (Hill Collins, 1990: 68) as the (Black) "welfare mother," which "become part of the building blocks of 'reality' for many people … [since] they provide simple, uncomplicated, and often wildly (and politically damaging) inaccurate information about what is 'wrong' with some people" (Lubiano, 1992: 330-1). Hill Collins (1990: 68) explains how these tropes "are designed to make racism, sexism, and poverty appear to be natural, normal, and an inevitable part of everyday life." My project seeks to build on these crucial critical race, and intersectionalist feminist analyses in order to connect #winemom culture to its problematic roots. While it is necessary to sympathetically engage with the available #winemom culture archive, it is also imperative to consider who performs this culture and who is left out. Discourses of respectability affect parental performance online: if one is a person of colour or low income, or has a rap sheet tarnished by substance abuse offenses, one may not possess the freedom to perform their intoxication due to the risks of interventions by child protection or welfare agencies. These are legitimate threats that affect certain bodies and control opportunities for identity-work online.

[9] Key's 1909 text *The Century of the Child* advocated for the reorientation of children's rights as the center of ethical concerns for the coming century. Through Key's efforts, children were positioned as requiring concerted care in order to develop; they were also understood to be sites of purity in need of protection (qtd. in Farley, 2018: 1). The "century of the child" arises out of the "horrors of industrial capitalism" and its accompanying child labour (Ehrenreich and English, 1975: 206). Out of these discourses, the figure of the child becomes entwined with efforts towards a more just future; however, the "century of the child" also "requires an entirely new conception of the vocation of mother" (Key qtd. in Ehrenreich and English, 1975: 208), paving the way for societal scripts of scientific motherhood and intensive mothering.

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Riffing on Ahmed's (2010: 17) conceptualization of who is entitled to the "fantasy" of the "happy housewife," my project will query who is "banished" from this archive? How does this archive validate certain performances of alcohol consumption as self-care, relaxation,[10] and/or "digital leisure,"[11] and who has access to these performances, in terms of time, questions of technological participation, and with respect to the aesthetic conventions of this visual culture trope and its preferred domestic settings,[12] not to mention other cultural and religious barriers.

These critiques only scratch the surface of the problematic absences apparent in popular feminist accounts of #winemom culture. In developing my own study, the inclusion of such theoretical currents is therefore essential, along with attention to other marked gaps in this perceived public, such as questions of alcohol use and its relationships to neurodivergence and trauma, as well as the obvious gender essentialism at issue in this culture and its ramifications for the progress of feminist mothering. For instance, while Basch et al. (2021) find that Instagram posts highlighting "struggle" received more 'likes' than those that did not, there is a significant dearth of scholarship relating to the performance of addiction and recovery/sobriety narratives in #winemom culture. In order to ethically attend to #winemom culture, my project will need to analyze posts through core valences of disability and Mad studies, such as the valorization of non-linear trajectories within the performance of coping with chronic psycho-emotional afflictions (Jerreat-Poole and Brophy, 2020: 8), as well as a tenet aligned with Hedva's "Sick Woman Theory" wherein posts refute representations of "the happy and productive liberal subject" (qtd. in Fournier, 2018: 655), which dovetails with Heyes' (2020) anaesthetic time. Adjacently, I am curious as to how the gender essentialism driving Foucault's (1978) medicalization of motherhood and its contemporary analogue, motherhood as crisis (Johnson and Quinlan, 2019: 58), might be deconstructed through a more methodical investigation of #winemom culture. Pat critiques such as Splawn's call for beer to characterized as "daddy juice" (qtd. in Seaver, 2020: 118) only attend to a superficial element; there is much to be deconstructed here.

In considering sympathetic responses to #winemom culture of the feminist varietal, such as those of Fetters' (2020) comment that "the most urgent problem wine-mom jokes reveal is … the idealized notion of momhood [through that of] the 'supermom,'" or Dowsett Johnston's that wine can be understood as "the steroid … [or] escape valve women need, in the midst of a major social revolution still unfolding" (qtd. in Seaver, 2020: 106), I am reminded of broader calls for pay-equity and alarm-sounding over the "motherhood penalty."[13] These interminable refrains express how female-gendered parents and caregivers continue to perform the "mother load"[14] of domestic labour and child-rearing, all the while striving to excel in their careers, despite being paid anywhere from 69-84 cents on the dollar in comparison to their male counterparts (Agagão, 2021; *Canadian Women's Foundation*, 2018; Taub, 2020). Problematically, however, this data is infrequently disaggregated, again limiting the picture of the plight of female-gendered parents and caregivers along race, class, and ability lines. My sense is that what I have cited as the overwhelmingly supportive "feminist response" to #winemom culture is one that remains rooted in the optimism of strategic essentialism. Those in favour of this archive seem to believe

[10] In her summation of two popular #winemom culture Instagram accounts, @mommywinetime and @wine.mom.repeat, Fetters (2020) finds that "where wine *is* invoked, it is as a shorthand for relaxation time, for well-deserved breaks after long, hectic days of mothering" (emphasis in original).

[11] According to Spracklen, "digital leisure" practices "show remarkable parallels with traditional leisure; it's where experiences are lived, identities and networks of belonging are constructed, and power imbalances are reproduced and resisted" (qtd. in Mayoh, 2019: 204).

[12] Kennedy's (2020: 1070-1072) research into the most-followed TikTok accounts during the pandemic showcases "white and wealthy" users, whose posts reveal "spacious bedrooms" in accordance with their privilege.

[13] Kaplan (2018) explains how a given woman's vulnerability to the economic and vocational effects of the gender-wage gap is exacerbated by having children: "recent research suggests that the majority of the wage gap opens up around the time of the birth of the first child" due to the fact that many mothers, upon their return to the work force, often switch to lower-paid roles which enable them to take on the "50 per cent more" (qtd. in Kaplan, 2018) domestic labour than their male counterparts.

[14] *The Guardian* (2017) uses this phrase to refer to the plight of American women specifically due to such factors as "shamefully short maternity leaves … crushing childcare costs … high maternal death rates [and] uneven distribution of household chores." However, the "mental load" of motherhood – understood as "cognitive labour" – is unequally distributed across both gendered lines and national borders. Cognitive labour includes such invisible domestic activities as "anticipating needs, identifying options for filling them, making decisions, and monitoring progress" (Daminger, 2019: 610).

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that #winemom culture can be marshalled to draw attention to issues like wage- and laundry-inequity on a scale that would improve women's global predicaments. However, this strategic essentialism is also founded upon a lingering gender essentialism in motherhood studies even though intersectional feminist mothering scholars have been writing for decades that gender essentialism – here, the *mom* in #winemom – presents the principal stumbling block to meaningful change for parental equality.

Since Rich (1986) and Ruddick (1989) wrote their foundational texts, *Of Woman Born* and *Maternal Thinking*, respectively, feminist mothering scholars have sought to forge their way out of the harmful social scripts of motherhood through changes in nomenclature and efforts to decouple parenting from gender essentialism in the wake of failed efforts on behalf of strategic essentialist feminism due to its inability to consequentially incorporate intersectionality.[15] Rich's (1986: xxiv) work is indebted to currents of thought in Black radical feminism and thus attuned to critical race critiques of white Christian and liberal configurations of "the mystique of [white middle-class] woman's moral superiority [that] can lurk even where the pedestal has been kicked down."[16] Rich's (1986: xxiv) text initiated a deconstruction of a patriarchally-controlled motherhood: seeking to critique the pressure on women to have children in order to be seen as socially valuable; to shirk the enforced cloak of the "suffering mother" as necessary to the "emotional grounding of human society" (Rich, 1986: 30); and to encourage her readers to regain their bodies and spirits for their own joy, pleasure, and autonomy (Rich, 1986: 39). Ruddick's (1989: xxi) intervention took Rich's one step further by interrogating the perceived biological essentialism of the figure of the mother as woman: she reconceived of motherhood through the labour it required as opposed to a biological or gendered positionality, thus coining the verb "mothering" to indicate the work of parenting, work that "does not require a particular sexual commitment," wherein care is divested from biology (O'Reilly, 2010: 27). Despite her efforts, Ruddick's (1989) work has been criticized for its dependence upon feminist standpoint theory (Khanna, 2009) – a methodology which suggests that a "superior vision [of culture or society is] produced by the political conditions and distinctive work of women" (Ruddick, 1989: 129).

Whether the capacity to mother requires one to be a mother, and whether claims to women's broadscale oppression can enact revolutionary change for all women remain pressing concerns in motherhood studies. McLean (2002: 9) writes that "it is precisely this notion of a unified standpoint and women as a unified group that postmodern feminism challenges." Foundational feminist critiques of Foucauldian "power/knowledge" posit that, if truth and knowledge are always produced within a network of power relations, then there is no room for moral or political agency, nor can such a theory analyze the distinctive asymmetries of power across intersectional lines in interventions that would be beneficial to feminism writ large (McLean, 2002: 2). Foucault (1984: 292) himself disagrees, seeing instead that if there is power everywhere, then there is also freedom everywhere – an argument that has been taken up by postmodern feminist scholars who find his theories invigorating for articulating "a notion of subjectivity that is embodied, … constituted historically and through social relations [and] capable of moral and political agency" (McLean, 2002: 14). McLean's (2002) postmodern feminism (vis-à-vis Foucault) supports one of the more recent, successful footholds in feminist mothering studies – an account that defies both biological essentialism and the unification of women writ large. The 'mother' of contemporary motherhood studies, O'Reilly (2010: 18-20), coined "maternal empowerment" – an "identity and practice," as well as a "noun and a stance" – that is characterized by elements such as parents: meeting

[15] This is an undeniably rich and complex topic, which is expertly summated by Bhandar and Ferreira da Silva (2013): "The persistent claim to universalism, which is the core of this White feminism, renders the experiences, thought and work of Black and Third World feminists invisible, over and over again." Scholars such as Daniels (2016: 55-57) point out how critiques of the whiteness of the first and second waves of feminism extend to our contemporary era of new media research since, as she writes, "constructing and protecting whiteness has been a core feature in the rise of the popular Internet," and must be challenged in favour of an "intersectional feminism that centers the experience of Black, Latina, Asian, Indigenous, queer, disabled, and trans women" in order to speak against a "social order."

[16] Dyer (1997: 17) corroborates this point, arguing that white women were indoctrinated with mothering scripts based upon the Christian religion's conceptualization of the figure of the Virgin Mary: Mary's passive striving, purity, grace, self-denial, and self-control thus became the "thumbnail sketch" of the white mothering ideal.

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their own needs, forming community around child-rearing, questioning and challenging expectations placed on parents and conventional parenting practices, and challenging the notion that they only feel love for their children (as opposed to a full continuum of emotions). For O'Reilly (2010: 17), "modern motherhood continues to function as a patriarchal institution which is largely impervious to change because it is grounded in gender essentialism, a gender ideology that establishes a naturalized opposition between public and private spheres"; she sees that the only way out of this is through the "unearthing and severing [of] gender essentialism" in order to move towards the incorporation of maternal empowerment. Ultimately, my #winemom culture representative case seeks to contend with underexamined elements of this archive, such as a scarcity of intersectional feminist interrogations, as well as a continued reliance upon strategic essentialist feminism that is out of step with progressive theoretical efforts in a postmodern feminist critical mothering. I thus move to demonstrate how such currents might be interwoven into my ongoing efforts to ethically examine this archive.

Influenced by scholars of online identity-work, I am reticent to ignore social media trends that appear on the surface to be trivial or vacuous. #Winemom culture is picked up by the medical establishment in an effort to decry societal ills caused by drinking and reinstate biopolitical control; yet, I remain skeptical of strictly quantitative metrics fueling moral panics, wary of the depth and particularity of vital cultural insights such data may occlude. In turning to the cultural production of #winemom culture, primarily social media posts and think pieces in online magazines, my initial meta-analytic observations posit this archive either as reified for its potentiality in supporting the aims of popular feminism, or, in the case of this second category, as devoid of critical engagement insofar as to foster its unacknowledged perpetuation. Seemingly, this lack of criticality can be accorded to the majority of those creating or consuming #winemom culture as unable or unwilling to look closely at it. But, instead, what if #winemom culture represents an example of what Abidin (2016: 16) calls "subversive frivolity," which connotes the "under-visibilized and under-estimated generative power of an object or practice arising from its (populist) discursive framing as marginal, inconsequential, and unproductive" and thus enables content creators to partake in "quietly subversive acts"? In this section, I seek to engage with the potential for the materiality and meaning of #winemom culture artifacts to illuminate the primary research question driving my representative case: *What can #winemom culture reveal about how parents are processing and communicating within this particular moment*?

According to feminist social media researchers Bowles Eagle (2019), Basden Arnold (2016), and Drentea and Moren-Cross (2005), scripts of patriarchal motherhood, intensive mothering, and scientific motherhood that took hold in the twentieth century remain pervasive into the second and third decades of the twenty-first. And yet, their studies were published prior to the pandemic. In my auto-netnographic field work since March of 2020 and situated within North American networks, I have noticed a rise in parenting social media trends that denigrate child-rearing in ways counter to the bio-political conditioning incited by the aforementioned scripts. For example, on Reddit, the sub-thread "Stepdadreflexes" is devoted to the performance of 'bad' parenting (these posts involve mostly male care-givers endangering children by allowing them to partake in harmful activities and not being there to catch or console them in the wake). On TikTok, a recent popular challenge involves parents 'roasting' their children by filming their unwitting progeny and overlaying the videos with judgmental textual commentary about them – denoting their laziness, inability to meet their expectations, etc. Of course, social media also continues to promote idealized accounts of parenting. Bryant, writing about the spike in #winemom culture during the pandemic, notes how anxieties around the interpersonal comparisons afforded by social media are intensifying due to compounding feelings of inadequacy, which are understood to intensify in isolation: "You'll have supermom over there on social media posting all these recipes and arts, crafts, and activities, and you're sitting there with your drink or you're smoking" (qtd. in Hosseini, 2020). It is probable that increases in parental stress during the pandemic (Cluver et al., 2020; Hiraoka and Tomoda, 2020: 497; Wolf et al., 2021: 2) are contributing to these online trends. As parents are forced to spend more time with their children, as extra-curriculars and social communities are diminished, frustrations rise;

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simultaneously, parents must question every decision through the heightened risks posed by the possibility of contagion, all the while wading through the ceaselessly-transforming torrents of public health data. Social media trends that illustrate parents' seeming rejection of the previous stronghold of intensive parenting archetypes (such as those of "Stepdadreflexes," TikTok roasting challenges, and the influx of #winemom culture posts on platforms like Instagram and TikTok) might be understood as the resulting identity-work analogue to base-structural health and social manifestations. They might thus be seen through the psychological lens of Stanislawski's (2019: 3) coping as "unconscious … or automized responses to stress." Since the majority of these posts appear with negligible reflexivity on the part of the content producers, they can thus be seen to proliferate without awareness of their theoretical implications.

If I were to begin my representative case by proposing a theory based on preceding literature, I might then weave an account of Heyes' (2020) anesthetic time with Chan's (2020) "pandemic temporalities" in order to argue for a suspension of intensive mothering under COVID-19. As a temporality of neoliberal refusal, Heyes' (2020) anaesthetic time poignantly illustrates the pressures on the majority who mother in these complicated times, therefore vindicating their desire to *zone out* through alcohol consumption as a seemingly rational response to such stimuli. Heyes' (2020: 111) winemoms resist parental conformity through methods divested from true substance-dependence and its ensuing moral panic: they inhabit a "fun zone of psychological distress where a glass of wine takes the 'edge-off' in a way we can all laugh about but allegedly has nothing to do with 'real' mental illness." However, in gesturing to Heyes' (2020) referencing of Springer's study on the disparate social acceptance of moms who do crack as compared to those who drink wine, the performance of one's *zoning out* is not on offer to all. As per Cooper (2017), respectable drinking is associated with intersectional factors, such as race and income-level, not to mention aspects such as whether one has a pre-existing criminal record or done stints in rehab, or on a material level, in line with Chan's (2020) research, whether one has sufficient access to social media technologies such that true participation in #winemom culture can be attained, which also includes temporal access, since many lower-income people of colour are inhibited in performing online identity-work as a result of their holding down multiple in-person "essential"[17] jobs.

A working theoretical conceit that patently glorifies #winemom culture for its undoing of intensive mothering, even with a commitment to considering underexamined intersectional factors through the proposed theoretical scaffolding, will not, however, fulsomely answer the research question insofar as to overcome a straw-man predilection. In order to both critically and ethically enact this representative case, my sense is that beginning with such a theoretical armature will overdetermine the findings towards my line of inquiry insofar as they will be understood to coincide with the pre-existing data. While initial research lays the groundwork for my production of such a study, in interrogating the second pattern I observe in the broader #winemom culture archive – that of an acceptance-based response founded upon an inability or unwillingness to critically engage with this culture – my presupposition is that a grounded theory[18] approach based upon tenets of automediality (see note 8), feminist constructivism, auto-netnography, and a commitment to *small* or *granular data*[19], would be better suited for the collection and analysis of #winemom culture data under pandemic circumstances. As Abidin (2016) points out, when a particular trend is easily dismissed and readily perpetuates, this is a sign to pay attention. Further, in prematurely overlaying statistics and theory upon evidence, the trees are often forsaken for the forest.

[17] An "essential industry" denotes operations "critical to public health, safety, and economic security," while "essential workers" are defined as "employees within essential industries who must physically show up to their jobs" (qtd. in Roberts et al., 2020: 690).

[18] Influenced by Corbin and Strauss (2012), Mediani (2017), and Groen et al.'s understandings and applications of grounded theory, I take up this method for its onus on features such as: constant comparison of the data throughout the research process; its commitment to dynamism; and its rejection of a singular theory to guide it from the outset, instead its privileging of "a systematic and flexible constant comparative approach for theory-constructing inquiry" (Groen et al., 2017).

[19] In line with calls to reinvent social media research methodologies by turning away from "big data," whose methodologies result in "trading large scale for reduced depth" (Puschmann and Burgess, 2014: 2), my project will conversely attend to what I am calling *small* or *granular data*.

https://doi.org/10.33621/jdsr.v6i3.33325

My initial observation that trends like "Stepdadreflexes," roasting challenges, and #winemom culture artifacts are replicating unconsciously might be able to be corroborated by the pre-emptive application of the disclosed theoretical framework. But what of context? I hypothesize that individual #winemom culture posts re-work and deconstruct the tropes of this genre, as they are continuously remediated, through such tactics as satire, which is, notably, difficult to gauge, especially in large samples that are counted only by virtue of a singular metric, like, in this case, a hashtag. Sharma and Brooker (2017) speak to the challenges of analyzing the semantic intentions behind online discursive practices. For example, in applying their (2017) analysis of the use of the #notracist hashtag on Twitter, the #winemom hashtag might similarly be deployed as a tongue-in-cheek disclaimer or assertion of denial. In such datasets, beyond quantifying hashtags and providing a surface reading of their content, Sanjay and Brooker (2017: 466) urge researchers to examine how posters themselves understand their posts in terms of communicative intentionality with respect to social interactivity. The potentiality for the adoption of a mixed-method approach for my representative case could serve to reveal such crucial insights, enabling me to reap the benefits of deep contextual analysis only afforded by *small* or *granular data*, and further justify my endorsement of non-computationally-intensive data analysis strategies. Notably, the further a researcher moves away from intimate engagement with their objects of analysis, the more likely a loss of "contextual integrity"[20] can occur. While strategies like data anonymization are highly valuable for protecting participants' privacy (of which contextual integrity is a cornerstone), as I will further engage with in the following section, too much distance can jeopardize a given data's meaning, value, and future utility (Tiidenberg, 2018: 10). My project thus seeks to unearth the seemingly unconscious perpetuation of #winemom culture in this moment in order to determine what it is communicating about how parents are actually coping. This is a process that requires continuous immersion in online communities – one that cannot be pre-ordained by existing data and knowledge production, both popular and peer-reviewed, nor a viewpoint that sacrifices depth for breadth.

A key facet that remains unexamined in #winemom culture research is the fact that online identity-work is not an exercise in verisimilitude. In the words of Poletti and Rak (2014: 6, emphasis added) "We argue that when it comes to analyzing the effect of self-representational media our analysis must remain attentive to the self as an effect of representation – the affordances, strategies, techniques, and intended audiences – *rather than one's identity being expressed through online practices*." Combining new media and autobiography studies, these researchers' (Poletti and Rak, 2014: 20) poetic phrase "being online and … online being" evinces how online identity-work is "both a work of mediation and remediation between technology and life." Their intervention builds upon foundational currents in what Landstrom (2007: 7) cites as "feminist constructivist technology studies," which is driven by investigations of "the coproduction of gender and technology," and stresses the "mutually constitutive and always contingent nature of the relationship" (Balka et al., 2009: 5), as opposed to privileging technological or social determinist approaches to their interrelation. In line with calls to attend to the specific affordances of the technologies in question, as per automediality, and my commitments to the theoretical convictions of feminist constructivism as well as the methodological directives of auto-netnography, I will thus "explore

[20] Nissenbaum (2004: 138) details her lengthy account of "contextual integrity" for the purposes of legal scholarship. Her concept explicates the codification of two primary types of informational norms (which, if both upheld, constitute the maintenance of contextual integrity): "norms of appropriateness, and norms of flow or distribution." Nissenbaum (2004: 137) explains how the "texture of people's lives" causes them to move about in distinctive realms that are each defined by their own norms, which are sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit. In terms of translating this concept for social media research, Tiidenberg (2018: 8) writes of the importance of user expectations with respect to the privacy of their personal information on particular sites and platforms." As an example, a user may post to a platform like Instagram without reading the Terms of Service. They might perceive their sharing of their post as one intended for an audience of only their close network of friends, and not enlist the correct privacy settings. This post may then be seen as 'publicly available' by a researcher, through the latter's searching of a hashtag associated with the post that then reveals it. To uphold contextual integrity, researchers need to step back and question what a given user's understandings of privacy are with respect to that given sphere and its particular norms in order to understand how the user envisions the privacy of their post within that specific instance.

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technologies as cultural artifacts, expecting them to acquire meanings in use, specific to particular contexts" (Hine, 2017: 24) with respect to analyzing #winemom culture data.

Therefore, while I will locate the eventual findings of my representative case of #winemom culture within the latitude of broader contexts – such as upticks in alcohol purchase and consumption, psycho-behavioural studies on increasing parental stress under COVID-19, critical race and intersectional feminist interrogations, and what might be understood as a suspension and/or rejection of intensive parenting via social media trends – my study seeks to carve a more intimate, constructivist, and automedial pathway towards its conclusions, in keeping with my prefatory cautions regarding the limitations of studies founded solely upon antecedent quantitative and qualitative data. Ultimately, I begin from a premise that there are as-yet undetermined drivers motivating what appears to be a *zoning out* in the mediation and remediation of #winemom culture production under COVID-19 and its aftermaths. My proposed method will support my *zooming in* to uncover the submerged subversions of this archive – an archive, I hypothesize, whose effects and transmissions are neither wholly subconscious nor trivial.

4. Notes towards fermentation: Method as care

Guided by my watchwords, the imperatives to do neither injustice nor harm, and attuned to some of the myriad sensitivities and ethical conundrums with respect to the #winemom culture archive as outlined above, I move towards attempts to concretize methodological inquiries. While some methodological decisions seem straightforward, others prove much more complex. For instance, in the former camp, I have already declared aspects of my forthcoming study, including methods of grounded theory and auto-netnography and scaffolds of feminist constructivism and automedial identity-work, as such choices seem best suited to my dataset and questions, in addition to the justifications detailed in the previous section regarding my ontological and epistemological orientations. The mobilization of grounded theory will be strengthened through contextual visual discourse analysis, which is ideal for studying social media visual culture archives like #winemom culture, due to its emphasis on treating visual, textual, and hypertextual material (i.e., hashtags) as "intertextually relational" (Tiidenberg, 2017: 4) and on identifying "key visual and textual elements that repeat in different themed accounts, and the rhetorical functions of those repetitive elements that repeat in different themed accounts." However, in undertaking this decision, I must be vigilant in attending to "digital visualities … as problems of power, agency, and ethical praxis in an ongoingly reconfigured visual-digital field" (Brophy, 2019: 57). In fact, in advocating for the deployment of visual discourse analysis, while it might seem the appropriate method for the largely visual archive of #winemom culture (comprised, in my view, of predominantly digital photographs and short videos on the platforms of Instagram and TikTok), I open up a host of ethical dilemmas. A typical #winemom culture post often involves a selfie: "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website" (*OED*). This definition points to two challenges for researching #winemom culture, right off the bat: 1) a selfie is a picture of a fleshy human body, which raises Warfield et al.'s (2019: 2084) central question: "how do we treat data when the data are at once data and a body?"; and 2) #winemom culture artifacts traffic upon social media platforms, which raises burning questions about a researcher's right to collect, store, study, and disseminate findings based upon them.

In 2024, in the North American academy, the perception may exist that knowledge institutions and scholars have figured out the 'right' responses to these questions – that there is a formula for enacting ethical social media research that can be simply and accurately applied. However, this assumption is intertwined with a current crisis in new media research, what can be understood as the "institutionalization of ethics" (Zeffiro, 2022, personal communication). For example, in efforts to move away from 'bottom-up' approaches to decision-making with respect to social media data, scholars such as Samuel et al. (2019: 337) call for "network-level" guidelines that can be shared between researchers and across institutions. Despite efforts to diagnose and ameliorate these issues, ethical quandaries persist. Many researchers now

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have the benefit of institutional ethics boards and even federally-sanctioned guides; and yet, according to Shilton (2016), such mechanisms may not provide sufficient and/or ongoing critique of the iterative ethical obstacles of a given study, and so, instead of being seen as a one-stop-shop for ethical clearance or a post-hoc enforcement mechanism, these "might be best positioned as consultants to research design." Patchwork governance can also lead to ethical gulfs. For instance, review boards and governing documents present the fruits of labours towards the creation of applicable ethics for social media researchers; however, they also speak to Zeffiro's (2022, personal communication) stated "institutionalization of ethics" – the prevailing sense that, by having one's ethics review case stamped (oftentimes only once) for approval by an institutional board, or in following "network-level" guidelines to a 'T,' that one has achieved ethics. But ethics are never met.

In light of these dilemmas, my project will seek institutional ethics approval, but not stop there. Ethics is not a check-box: as Markham et al. (2018: 6) write, ethics is a "matter of interrogating what is happening along the string of actions that eventually lead to the construction of data, focusing on human practices and nonhuman processes that function interpretively." For my representative case into #winemom culture, such interrogations will come in the forms of ongoing conversations with my colleagues and other social media researchers (Samuel et al., 2019: 317; Shilton, 2016), as well as:

- an emphasis on guiding questions, generated iteratively throughout the process, as opposed to the application of a top-down "check-list" (Tiidenberg, 2018: 14).
- a personal and ongoing commitment to reflexivity – what Pearce (2020: 818) calls an "ethical responsibility towards the self."
- a true willingness to demonstrate care for my participants throughout the research process (from the study's inception to potential publication and beyond), which involves the asking of questions such as Bailey's (2015): "Is there room for collaborators to give and rescind consent at different times during the research process?"

Beginning with this preliminary question: What can #winemom culture reveal about how parents are processing and communicating within this particular moment?, and the animating query: I suspect that there are as-yet undetermined drivers motivating what appears to be a zoning out in the mediation and remediation of #winemom culture production under COVID-19, my representative case of #winemom culture will undertake a cross-platform analysis of social media artifacts in the forms of digital photographs and short videos from the platforms Instagram and TikTok. Contemporary social media scholars (Matassi and Boczkowski, 2021: 207) are turning to cross-platform analysis for their studies since it "better represents how most people use social media … [that is] in relation to other media." According to Hasebrink and Hepp, there is a need to "treat social media as belonging to a platform ecosystem" (qtd. in Matassi and Boczkowski, 2021: 214), while also attending to the differential affordances of given platforms and their production of "divergent effects" (Papacharissi qtd. in Matassi and Boczkowski, 2021: 214). This is to say that Instagram and TikTok, as examples, possess different affordances and conventions: automedial identity-work on these platforms thus demands comparative analysis.

The dataset for my representative case will be attained through my searching of the hashtag #winemom on Instagram and TikTok for the period of March-December 2021.[21] I will use purposive sampling to select units of analysis for their reach and interactivity in terms of shares, 'likes,' and comments (these latter aspects inform the rationale for the sample (Taherdoost, 2016: 22)). On Instagram, #winemom posts

[21] This timeframe is selected as it will provide insights into key affective moments in the pandemic thus far. For North Americans, March of 2021 presents the one-year anniversary of living under COVID-19 and can thus illuminate expressions of pandemic fatigue and more routinized attempts at "coping" with the virus's effects upon day-to-day life; the spring of 2021 offered optimism with respect to vaccine approval and uptake and a subsequent decrease in cases; this optimism was then quashed by two successive waves, caused by the variants of Delta and Omicron, which led to the reinstatement of restrictions and, for many individuals, spikes in panic and stress.

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fall into two dominant categories: selfies and memes; on TikTok, short videos using the #winemom hashtag are primarily selfie-videos. While memes are posted by individual accounts, they often travel through the Internet (via cross-platform interaction) and do not contain identifying information. However, both digital photography selfies and selfie-videos depict individual users. Data collection will be harnessed through screengrabbing; image captures will then be labelled by the identifiers of 'platform name' and 'date posted' and stored in two locations, in a password-protected folder on my desktop as well as on a password-protected external hard drive. Once collected, images and thumbnails will be blurred, redacted, cropped to prevent reverse-image searching, and stripped of all metadata. On both Instagram and TikTok, I will set up research profile accounts for the purposes of accountability where I will describe my study and provide my contact information; I will use these profiles to follow all accounts I deem inclusionary to the population from which I will draw my samples (Tiidenberg, 2018: 14). It is my intention to reach out via DM on the two platform interfaces to every user whose content I aspire to include in my representative case. And yet, I am cognizant of the fact that I may not receive individual consent from every user – some users may decline, and others may ignore my requests. Following key currents in feminist ethnography, I will not interpret silence as consent, aware that it may be agentic and/or strategic (Visweswaran qtd. in Tucker, 2002: 302) in its indications of refusal. When I do receive consent to analyze a post, I will follow-up with the user to see if they would like their images included in my study or not – and, if so, query whether they would like edit their images themselves in order to encourage participatory autonomy.[22] This tenet fits with Warfield et al.'s (2019: 2077-8) reminder that some social media content creators want broader recognition for their online work and a researcher's assumption that they don't can be understood as disempowering, especially within a neoliberal economic climate marked by "aspirational labour" wherein increased online exposure can lead to potential revenue, particularly for female content creators (Duffy, 2017: 225). For participants who are interested in engaging more fulsomely with the project, as gleaned by connections made through DMs, I will offer the opportunity for one-on-one Zoom interviews for which my semi-structured interview guide will focalize questions pertaining to reflexive aspects of #winemom culture such as: "Can you tell me about how you were feeling before you created this post?," "Who do you imagine your audience to be?," "When you post using this hashtag, and related hashtags, are you seeking connection with others? Or does the publishing of the post itself offer its own satisfaction and/or catharsis?," and "Do you see your post as a critique of unattainable representations for women/mothers/parents in our era? Is it intended to be humorous?" If I am fortunate enough to be able to conduct such interviews, I will also ask if my participants can recommend other online creators of #winemom culture to potentially speak with, here invoking snowball sampling. I recognize that gaining institutional ethics review for a mixed-method study will likely take more time and planning than a solely qualitative study (and especially if I cannot guarantee that the interviews will occur until after I begin connecting with participants). However, following Hunt's (2017: 115) research into transnational feminist youth networks, I am compelled to try and capture a more holistic picture of #winemom culture through the combination of both virtual and analog methodologies.

Crucially, my representative case must enact continual care towards my participants in order to prevent the integral harms already instigated by the social media platform companies. Core rights for social media users – such as the rights to be forgotten and not to be stored – are often subsumed by the platforms in question, as well as the researchers who investigate them, in keeping with the subjective nature of contextual integrity. As Chun explains, "Rather than 'consent once, circulate forever,' we need to find ways to loiter in public without being attacked. We need a politics of fore-giving that combats the politics

[22] The imperative to anonymize data, especially in relation to human subjects, is vital for social media research. Transparency (Shilton, 2016) and continuous conversations about consent (Bailey 2015; Warfield et al., 2019: 2076) present cornerstones of this praxis. If a participant accepts my request to analyze their content in my study but does not want to edit their image themselves, I will probe further in asking questions of the evidence/my research such as, "Is the body necessary in making my point?" (Warfield et al., 2019: 2076). Regardless, I will strip metadata off all screengrabs.

https://doi.org/10.33621/jdsr.v6i3.33325

of memory as storage" (qtd. in Cowan and Rault, 2018: 131). By harvesting data from these sites – even if my intention in undertaking this representative case is to contribute to "some expectation of benefit to the greater public or a specific group" (qtd. in Rooke, 2013: 266) – I become implicated in the "deceptive practices" (Zeffiro, 2019: 227) of social media platform companies, such as the types of user data stored, the duration and conditions of storage, and the other entities that are granted access to this data. Consent, like ethics, is neither a singular nor finite act and presents a core aspect of my representative case design, in line with calls to undermine the colonial extractivist logics driving research production in academic institutions governed by what Costanza-Chock (2018) calls "the matrix of domination," which refers to "white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and settler colonialism." My project is founded upon such principles of design justice and is therefore concerned with "how the design of objects and systems influences the distribution of risks, harms, and benefits among various groups of people … [and] aims to ensure a more equitable distribution of design's benefits and burdens" (Costanza-Chock, 2018). My representative case will enact design justice through the seeking of ongoing consent throughout the research and dissemination processes, but also through my own situatedness with respect to the participants and "to the string of actions that eventually lead to the construction of data" (Markham et al., 2018: 6). It is imperative to be attuned to my own expectations (Hine, 2017: 24) about my projected conclusions and how these can lead to "ethical fabrication" (Markham qtd. in Warfield et al., 2019: 2081) in terms of how I might interpret the data according to my own narrative culpability.

Furthermore, this representative case depends upon foundational concerns regarding reflexivity in feminist social studies (Pearce, 2020: 817). Scholars such as Mauthner and Doucet (2003) and Smith (2013) explain how situating oneself through the practices of reflexivity is, again, not a one-and-done event, but a continuous praxis involving multiple domains. Smith (2013) (despite recent controversies in terms of her own identity presentation (see Viren, 2021)), critiques reflexive acts based upon the stating of one's privilege, especially with respect to intersectional projects. For myself, as an educated, white, Mad/neurodivergent, cis-female parent investigating the #winemom culture archive – an archive that, as I have alluded to, may present some problematic omissions with respect to race, class, and ability– stating these identity markers at the outset of an ethics review application or in the preface to an article submitted for peer-review based on my findings only serves to position me "as the subject capable of self-reflexivity and the racialized subject[s] as the occasion for self-reflexivity" (Smith, 2013: 264). Smith (2013: 264) suggests, instead, that the "undoing of privilege" occurs through the "creation of collective structures that dismantle systems that enable these privileges," which resonates with Mauthner and Doucet's (2003: 418) caution that reflexivity is "not confined to issues of social location" but also to "the interpersonal and institutional contexts of research, as well as ontological and epistemological assumptions embedded within [methods]." My status as a researcher of the #winemom culture archive is as someone embedded within it, in alignment with my commitments to auto-netnography. As per Smith (2013), my subjects must not be othered, in keeping with Haraway's (qtd. in de la Bellacasa, 2017: 73) deconstruction of binary thinking – "the needless yet common cost of taxonimzing everyone's positions." The guiding touchstone for my representative case at this juncture, then, building upon de la Bellacasa (2017: 75), is to mobilize a praxis of what they call "thinking with care," a modality premised upon equitable relationality between all human and non-human elements (researchers, subjects, data, technology, platforms, contexts, etc.),[23] and one that demands continuous, active reflection so that connections between such entities can become "thicker" than they first appear – an approach intended as a corrective

[23] This attempt to equalize all interconnected elements of my proposed representative case also draws upon foundational currents in the "sociology of infrastructure." Hine (2017: 23-4) explains that infrastructural technologies can often be invisibilized and so can easily be overlooked by both participants and ethnographers; as such, Hine upholds Bowker and Star's methodological lens of "infrastructural inversion," which urges researchers to draw background elements into the foreground.

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to the "current reign of carelessness" that is "affect[ing] our interpersonal intimacies" (The Care Collective, 2020: 5).

5. A conclusion by way of limitations, without conclusion

My aforementioned decisions towards the construction of my representative case are each beset by attending limitations. My privileging of *small* or *granular data* presents a rejection of heralded trends in social media research, such as the use of coding tools for the purposes of scraping large samples. While I believe this approach will help me to move closer to findings that best reflect my preliminary research question and animating query, resist methods that sacrifice contextual depth, and foster more intimate and just connections with my participants, my conclusions will likely be scrutinized for their lack of generalizability and/or applicability to broader populations, as well as their overarching credibility. In a representative case governed by principles of auto-netnography, I am imbricated within my research and, as such, my own capabilities with regards to reflexivity present, perhaps, this project's greatest liability. This is why discussions with other researchers in my broader communities are so integral: this work requires me to constantly look at my own blind spots, which will be impossible to see if I don't seek second opinions. I count myself incredibly fortunate to have access to my institution's digital research centre as well as a social media and activism working group, where I am able to engage with likeminded colleagues; such institutions present "collective structure[s]" (Smith, 2013: 264) that can support the reflexive dismantling of individual researcher privileges, as well as aid in deconstructing "institutional contexts of research" (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003: 418).

Ultimately, this paper's intention has been to work through some of the ethical challenges posed by analyzing #winemom culture but not to provide definitive answers, in keeping with my title and ethos: *an ethics, in perpetuity*. As is clear, there is still much to work through in developing this case. One of the core issues this paper raises is: how to *do* ethics within a "matrix of domination" (Costanza-Chock) that sees them as a commodity requiring a singular stamp of approval as opposed to an evolving praxis? It is in grappling with questions like these that I turn to radical deconstructions of academic knowledge production, for instance, Cowan and Rault's (2018: 131) provocation that, instead of heeding the injunction to *publish or perish*, one considers not publishing their findings if they have the potential to cause any participant a modicum of harm, or Bailey's (2015) invocation of "collaborative construction," wherein she formed a listserv-based community to engage ethics-based queries about her research project that blossomed into a supportive network for the cross-fertilization of ideas. Doing the "right thing" (Dederer, 2023: 127) takes time and self-reflexivity. In the case of this paper, it means going against the grain of traditional scholarly outputs and expectations.

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