The Biographical Experience of Being a Stay-at-Home Mother of a Large Family Versus Online Activity. A Case Study

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Abstract: The article presents the analysis of two cases of women reconstructed based on autobiographical narrative interviews. They are mothers of many children and are active online, having accounts on Instagram and creating content. Most research focused on the activities of online creators is based on an analysis of their web content. Due to the type of research data, autobiographical narratives and the interpretations of one's biographical experiences and actions are the main frame of this analysis. Both narrators represent contemporary modern women, combining opposing patterns of tradition and modernity, which are often presented in public discourses as contradictory or mutually excluding. Internet activity seems to remedy the accompanying experience of tension and supports women's biographical work. What stands out is the identity work undertaken by the two narrators, whose frame of reference is the tension between the planned and voluntary entry into traditionally understood motherhood and the plan for one's development inscribed in the identity of an educated modern woman socialized in a culture of individualism. In this respect, their online activity appears to have a compensatory function in their biographies.

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The objective of this article is to combine two analytical threads that, among other things, have become the subject of research in the project "Post-Transformation in the Perspective of Biographical Experiences of People Born Between 1980 and 2005. A Sociological Analysis."[1] The threads refer to young women—mothers of many children—who are active online, having accounts on Instagram and creating content. The text will present two cases of women called Aleksandra and Helena, reconstructed based on autobiographical narrative interviews conducted with them as a part of the project. We have collected 80 autobiographical narrative interviews with people born in the decades of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000-2005.[2] In the study, we applied a qualitative approach and specifically a method of autobiographical narrative interview developed by Fritz Schütze (Schütze 2008a; 2008b). Each interview lasted from 2 to 3 and sometimes 4 hours. The interviews were anonymized and transcribed.

The transcriptions were analyzed according to the methodology of autobiographical narrative interview analysis.[3] It enables gaining insight into the ways of perceiving social reality both for the life of an individual (individual dimension) and for the social processes (collective dimension). In the applied method, the researchers rely on the informant's presentation of the flux of events and their interpretation.

The cases of Aleksandra and Helena represent the large family category, where 10 autobiographical narrative interviews have been collected (4 with fathers and 6 with mothers) with parents having at least three children. The narrators were found mainly through personal contacts—we asked whether anybody knew people having large families; otherwise, we looked for them on social media. Although 10 autobiographical narrative interviews provide very rich material—each interview is an average of 30 pages of 50 lines per page—this sample has limitations. All the narrators are educated persons representing a middle-class lifestyle and standard of living. Thus, we have not been able to reach lower-class families representing the environments nowadays labeled or even stigmatized due to the large number of children.[4] For obvious reasons, all the narrators were born in the decade of the 1980s. They have children ranging in age from a few years old to teenagers. According to our knowledge, only one family increased the number of children from 5 to 6.

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[1] The project "Post-Transformation in the Perspective of Biographical Experiences of People Born Between 1980 and 2005. A Sociological Analysis," carried out with funds from NCN within the OPUS 21 competition, conducted in the Department of Sociology of Culture at the University of Lodz in the years 2022-2026 (no. UMO-2021/41/B/HS6/02048). When presenting the general characteristic of the project, I use the plural to refer to the work of the entire team: Kamil Łuczaj, Katarzyna Waniek, Joanna Wygnańska, and Aleksandra Drążczyk.

[2] The interviewees represented three spheres of social life: work, family, and social networks. In the sphere of work, among others (small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, people employed in the public sector), we focused on people representing the so-called new professions connected mainly, but not exclusively, with the world of the Internet, e.g., influencers, YouTubers, bloggers, etc. In the family spheres, we selected two cases: large families and couples without children—the so-called dinks (double income, no kids), i.e., people who, at least at the time of the interview, declared that they do not want to have children. The sphere of social networks concerned the broadly understood building of social bonds through membership in various social worlds, e.g., cultural, ecological, religious, political, involvement in local initiatives, etc.

[3] The single case analysis consists of three steps: 1) text sort analysis that aims at a description of the features of the ongoing interaction in the interview situation and the communicative schemes of narration, description, and argumentation; 2) structural analysis—a formal sequential analysis enabling identification of specific modes of experiencing one's life; and 3) analytical abstraction that allows to find out what is essentially unique in one's biography and theoretically remarkable, as well as what is common for several life histories.

[4] This phenomenon will be described in the next section.

Due to the character of the collected data, the distinction of three spheres (work, family, and social networks) did not create a closed set; on the contrary, it intermingled. Thus, in the category of large families, there were mothers who were online creators. Among the 10 interviews collected, there were three whose narrators are active on the internet, and the content they post online is related to their role as mothers. In the paper, I present two of them.

Most research focused on the activities of online creators is based on an analysis of their web content (e.g., Brosch 2016; Archer 2019; Latipah et al. 2020; Jorge et al. 2022). Due to the type of data and our interest in the project, autobiographical narratives and the interpretations of one's biographical experiences and actions introduced in the narratives are the main frame of this analysis that provides insights into the usually absent in the media messages (i.e., presented by content creators) biographical experiences that lead an individual to decide about self-presentation online. From the multifaceted narrative of the two women, two main themes emerge: their motherhood and their online activity, which, as we shall see, is derived from their experience of a large family. To clarify these two frames of reference biographically relevant to the female narrators, I have to make an analytical separation between the themes of motherhood and online activity. This divides the article into two parts.

Thus, the primary objective of this article is to analyze the biographical background that led the two narrators to their online activity. In their social media, a follower sees specific content and a form of self-presentation. The analysis of the narratives allows, firstly, to explore the motives and arguments behind the online activities both narrators undertake and, secondly, to explore how their con-

stellation of biographical experiences and different discourses on motherhood shape the perception of themselves as mothers, which also translates into the decision of their active online presence. In this way, I want to show how biographical analysis can contribute to enriching reflections on activity in the virtual world on the one hand and strategies for coping with motherhood as a biographical challenge on the other.

Before discussing the data, it is necessary to introduce the social context of the analysis. Thus, in the first part of the text, I present the main frame of interpretation to which the two women refer directly or indirectly when they talk about their motherhood. These are various, sometimes contradictory, discourses on family, motherhood, and parenting present in public and private discourse in Polish society. They provide a point of reference in their experience of motherhood. In the second section, I characterize the two cases, focusing on the narrators' experience of motherhood, and then I move to the description of their internet activity, which plays an interesting role in the process of reconciling the identity of a mother and an active modern woman. In the last part of the text, I comment on the specific role of online activity in their biographical experience.

The Image of Mother and Motherhood in Contemporary Public Discourse

According to the regular surveys carried out by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) (Boguszewski 2019), the family is invariably regarded as the highest value by Poles—as a rule, this is stated by more than 80% of respondents. At the same time, the family model has begun to change in recent decades. This applies both to parenting plans and to

ideas about motherhood and fatherhood. Divorce rates are increasing, resulting in a growing number of patchwork families. The conscious choice to be single, especially for women, can be combined with the decision to parent alone without a partner. Thus, the figure of a *single* mother is now substituted by an *independent* mother. Poland has had consistently negative birth rates since 2013. It currently stands at minus 3.9 per mille, higher than the European average (- 2.8 per mille). In addition, in 2023, Poland was the fastest depopulating country in Europe. At the same time, the number of dink families (double income, no kids) is growing. More and more couples openly declare that they do not want to have children. In some environments, motherhood is not recognized as one of the life goals. On the contrary, women consciously assume not to have children, and a woman making such a decision is no longer identified as *childless* but as *childfree* (Gromkowska-Melosik 2011 as cited in Krause 2020:48). There is no room here to discuss all these processes in detail, but it must be emphasized that they are the frame of reference for contemporary models of motherhood, which influence the idea of mothering. What is important nowadays, women must confront its various models supported by specific discourses focused on different, often contradictory, images of motherhood.

For years, a traditional model of a mother devoting herself to raising her children has been the most common in Polish society (Kusio 2004; Imbierowicz 2012; Titkow 2012). It had its sources not only in the image of a patriarchal family typical to the European culture (Rothman 1989; Taylor 2011) but also in the shape and strength of specific political and social circumstances. In particular, the history of the nineteenth-century independence uprisings and the two world wars in the twentieth century contribut-

ed to the establishment of the cultural figure of the so-called *Mother the Pole*[5] (*Matka Polka*). This phraseology was first used in romanticism by Polish poets and is still recognized in Polish society, also among young generation. The role of the mother was identified not only as the responsibility of housekeeping and childcare but also as the duty to struggle to cultivate tradition, patriotism, and bringing up children in the spirit of love for the fatherland and readiness to defend it. Therefore, heroism, sacrifice for the homeland, responsibility, and a willingness to give up one's aspirations for the sake of the family were inscribed in the figure of a *Mother the Pole*. Remarkably, this image, conservative in its reference, was also exploited in State Socialism. Two perspectives can be distinguished here. At the bottom up, it referred to the thousands of Polish women who had to combine their maternal, domestic, and professional roles within the framework of the traditional patriarchal family model (e.g., with little or no participation of husbands/fathers in household duties) and the additional difficulties resulting from the hardships of socialism (e.g., low living standards, shortages of provisions, the need to stand in long queues to obtain products necessary for living, etc.). Women/mothers became family "life managers" (Titkow 2012:30) creating a "domestic matriarchate" (Walczewska 1999:164-169), but with a focus limited strictly to managing the crisis of everyday life associated with the shortcomings of socialism. At the same time, mothers continued to cultivate patriotic values (counter to those offered by socialist propaganda) and conducted religious initiation into Catholicism being a crucial component of Polish identity built in opposition to the socialist system (Imbierowicz

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[5] This expression may sound bizarre in the English language; yet, it is idiomatic and, in my opinion, it cannot be translated as Polish mother as it can be found in some publications because it would limit its meaning.

2012:430-431). On the other hand, from a top-down perspective, the appeal of power to this figure was an element of socialist propaganda seemingly ennobling women (as brave mothers and workers) without simultaneously invalidating the patriarchal frame.[6]

Although the concept of *Mother the Pole* is more dated than actual, it needed to be given some attention because, over the years, its symbolic power has shaped not only the image of motherhood but also the concept of fulfilled femininity. Thus, it provides an important imagined point of reference. In the majority of texts on the contemporary role of women or the evolution of the concept of motherhood in Polish society, we find references to the image of *Mother the Pole* (e.g., Hryciuk and Korolczuk 2012; Imbierowicz 2012; Szerszunowicz 2013; Urbańska 2015). Still, the message of the Catholic Church is often limited to a vision of such a model of femininity—focused solely on self-sacrificing motherhood, with no consideration for the aspirations of women today, which otherwise reinforces contemporary criticism of the Catholic Church (Leszczyńska and Zych 2011; Pękala 2012; Radzik 2020).

In contemporary literature, at least two dimensions of critical approach toward such a model can be distinguished. On the one hand, a *Mather the Pole* model is contrasted with the concept of the super mother—the modern, professionally successful woman supported by her partner in the process of childcare, having the right to fulfill her personal needs (Demir and Vural Batik 2024). Thus, to some extent, a super mother model is a variant of a *Mother the Pole* model filtered through modernity, which is criticized especially from feminist positions (Rich 1995; Taylor 2011) promoting matricentric feminism (O'Reilly 2019) and another image of a contemporary mother who may have the right to be imperfect, for example, having her emotional problems (Sikorska 2012). On the other hand, the very idea of combining the realization of the fullness of femininity with motherhood has been denied. The questioning of the maternal instinct as inherent in the nature of femininity (Badinter 1982), together with the social emancipation of women, undermined the perception of motherhood as the only fulfilling life model for women. Thus, motherhood/parenthood has today become more of a socio-cultural construct than a biological imperative embedded in a woman's physiology. Investing in education and careers, women have begun to see tangible economic benefits of childlessness. The child began to be seen not as the most important goal in life but as the end of autonomy, a limitation, a necessity to give up the previous lifestyle, the main feature of which was the lack of obligations and responsibility for another person. The media has created the process of parenting as something extremely difficult and is constantly increasing the scale of difficulties, often presenting parenting as a traumatic experience and, on top of that, very expensive (Kusio 2004:41-42)—each year, the current annual cost of raising a child is made public.[7]

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[6] For example, one of the biggest and the most professional hospitals dedicated to women and children opened on May 26th, 1988 (the 26th of May is Mother's Day in Poland) was called the Memorial Hospital of *Mother the Pole* Health Center [trans. KK]. On the same day, the "Motherhood" monument in front of the hospital was unveiled. Such a name for a modern medical facility was intended to symbolize the socialist authorities' respect for femininity realized primarily in motherhood. It was also a clever change in the term's scope of meaning. According to this interpretation, the then *Mother the Pole* was supposed to sacrifice herself for the good of the socialist society, whereas the original meaning of this phraseology was inscribed in the cultivation of the independence tradition and, in this vein, contradicted the socialist system perceived as oppressive. Needless to say, this name has been very difficult to translate for foreign visitors.

[7] Adam Smith Research Center. See: https://smith.pl/pl/szukaj?search_api_views_fulltext=koszty+wychowania+dzieci+. Retrieved January 25, 2025.

These phenomena are reflected in several parallel and largely contradictory discourses (Gromkowska-Melosik 2017:105-106). The first is related to the process of emancipation, women's activity in the labor market, and combining family and professional roles. Two types of this discourse can be identified here—a positive one, emphasizing the power of emancipatory processes to support women in successfully combining these roles, and a pessimistic interpretation, emphasizing the costs of fulfilling two roles with total commitment to them (Gromkowska-Melosik 2017). Expecting women to be good mothers and working professionally with the same intensity, efficiency, and commitment forces them into a superwoman model (Hansen Shaevitz 2000:157-159), often difficult or impossible to achieve. The second discourse is, in a way, a return to the narrative of motherhood as a woman's primary vocation. Women fulfill themselves completely as mothers. The component of modernity is embodied here in the vision of conscious motherhood, called intensive motherhood (Hays 1996). The woman-mother is an educated person, aware of the emotional and developmental needs of her child, and she takes care of the child's comprehensive education. The third type of discourse is associated with the so-called macho mothering (Rothman 1989:6; Smithson and Stokoe 2005) and refers to women actively developing their careers. Having a child completes their femininity, although motherhood here is clearly subordinated to work. Children are placed in the care of grandparents (a common model in Polish society), nurseries, and professional nannies as soon as possible (Gromkowska-Melosik 2017). Recently, one more discourse should be added in the Polish context. It emerged in connection with the increased presence of mothers on the internet and specific events such as the introduction of the parental allowance, commonly known as 500 plus

(Bańczyk 2021:74; Śliwowska 2022) (currently the amount is 800 PLN).[8] This discourse arose in online communities as a reaction to the self-presentations of a particular group of mothers who were labeled as *madka* (Wileczek and Raczyński 2021). According to the Polish language dictionary, *madka* is: colloquially and contemptuously a mother who cares for her child in a way that is burdensome to those around her, convinced of her superiority due to motherhood, and perceived as a demanding person.[9] The proper word for a mother in the Polish language is *matka*. The lexeme expressing dislike for this social group was formed from a combination of the Polish *matka* and the English *mad* (Szerszunowicz 2023).[10] There is no space here to give a detailed characterization of this phenomenon also called *madkizm* (Wileczek and Raczyński 2021). For the purposes of this article, it is important to point out that it is the source of a discourse that degrades motherhood, reducing it to reproduction. Although its origin was in the attitudes of claimant mothers, often uneducated and belonging to the lower class, the rhetoric of negative, ridiculing attitudes toward having children, especially in families with many children, is sometimes extended to motherhood as such (Śliwowska 2022).

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[8] The introduction of this parental allowance was addressed to all those with children aged 0-18. Its aim was to improve the economic situation of poorer families in particular, especially families with many children, and thus to equalize their educational and social opportunities. The second objective was to encourage Poles to have children in situations of dramatically low birth rates. In the first years of this project, the economic situation of poorer families actually improved and poverty among children was eradicated. Poorer families could afford to go on holiday. At the same time, criticism was leveled not only at the distribution of public money but also at its misuse, especially in the lower classes, which, according to these discourses, saw multi-children families as a way of earning money.

[9] See: https://wsjp.pl/haslo/podglad/101056/madka. Retrieved January 25, 2025.

[10] *Madka* is translated into English as welfare mother (Wileczek and Raczyński 2021), "mudda" (Bańczyk 2021), or as a lacunary unit, i.e., the non-equivalent item from Polish-English perspective (Szerszunowicz 2023).

Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik (2017:106 [trans. KK]) comments on the role of the listed discourses in the following way:

> In terms of the problem of "socialization into the discourse of motherhood," there are a large number of contradictions, both at the level of theory and conception, as well as social life. Each discourse of motherhood has "possibilities" and "limitations" within it, depending on the perspective of perception. It is difficult to deny that there is in this area in social consciousness and practice a growing "confusion" (to have or not to have children?; how many?; in a marriage or as a single, to not be tied down?; at what age?; to give up a career and take care of the children?; give the child to the grandparents to raise and "do" a career?; etc.). Consequently, every woman faces at some point in her biography choices that irrevocably determine the shape of her future life.

In the next part of the article, I discuss two cases of women who have consciously decided to start a family and each has four children. In their narratives, they present biographical experiences of motherhood, directly or indirectly positioning themselves in relation to just characterized, contradictory discourses.

The Cases of Aleksandra and Helena

Aleksandra was born in 1986. From an early age, she had artistic interests and liked to paint. Her parents suggested that she take drawing lessons and apply for architecture. Aleksandra was not admitted to study in her hometown and ended up studying architecture in another university town. This was the first time when her expectations were not met. As she said: "I'm from [hometown], so, here, there's also such a big pressure to study in [hometown]. [Home-

town residents] do so, unless they simply don't see other cities as potential places to study." During her studies, she met her future husband, who was also studying architecture. They got married while still being students, and Aleksandra argued the decision in this way:

> And/ but it's also important, actually, 'cause I have been a believer all my life, and I always knew that family was very important to me, that I would like to start a family. I don't know if it comes from faith or if it comes from family experience and just some dreams. But it was obvious to me that I would like to have a family. I even say that it wasn't even in the realm of dreams, but simply that this is how things are, this is the way of things, and that I am sort of aware of it. It's just that all my life, I was convinced that it can be combined, that professional life is just a part of life and there is professional life, there is family life, and it all just goes together and everyone is happy there. ((laughs))

This argument, uttered almost at the beginning of her narrative, shows that Aleksandra's biographical plan combines the traditional idea of family and family life with the modern role of an active woman fulfilling her aspirations. This tension will accompany her throughout the rest of the story and become the main frame of reference in the process of self-presentation.

Aleksandra passed her master's exam when pregnant with her first child. She recalls the first years of their life together as very happy, although their life was very modest: "In general, we were terribly poor. Our parents helped us for a really long time." The husband was looking for a permanent job, which was not easy to find—this was the time of the 2008 crisis. Finally, the couple decided to return to Alek-

sandra's hometown, where they got the chance to live in the narrator's parents' house, and this way, Aleksandra came back to her home and the local community.[11] Slowly, their situation stabilized, but as she says: "We continued to live very modestly, but we seemed to be very much in love with each other. I also have great memories of that time; there was so much good energy in us."

After graduating, Aleksandra started working in her profession, realizing herself as an architect. Every two years, she gave birth to her four children. After the birth of her first and second child, Aleksandra returned to work. She was happy to fulfill her dream of combining her family life with a demanding but rewarding career. Yet, the narrator soon realized that it was a very difficult task.

> This work gave me a lot of satisfaction, especially when something was getting done, a project was being implemented, and then I could go to see it. This was very cool. Well, but I also remember many such situations, yeah, 'cause it was simply difficult for me. It was difficult for me to reconcile these different priorities 'cause I really wanted to be with my children in such/ well, that they would take their first steps with me, say the first words with me, and so on. Uhmm, and I missed some of these things when I was at work and here, er, it's also a matter of feeling this way/ I mean, my parents helped/ helped me a lot to pursue architecture.

Enjoying her work, Aleksandra gradually began to notice the cost to her family life. As a result, after the birth of their third child, she and her husband decided that Aleksandra would not continue working

professionally for the time being, as she needed to take care of the children. She recounts:

> I once worked in such an office, I mean, I was offered a job for a competitor. In general, I think this is the most difficult mode of work for a person with children 'cause it is very intense work for a very short period of time, but from 8 a.m. to midnight, all the time, and, and I remember that back then, it was simply **a family tragedy, all the time someone would be terribly ill/ I mean, the children, they were terribly ill. I just felt guilty all the time, when I would come home, they were already asleep and I had/ it was just taken out of my life, as if.**[12] And then my husband said that it just didn't make sense, I mean, it didn't make sense, he said no, no/ that he preferred us to live more modestly, but not to make it so crazy 'cause that was tearing our family apart, right? Yes, and the children always become more difficult then, and it also becomes more difficult emotionally. So, in some/ at some stage, when I had my third child, I decided that for now not/ yes, when my third child was born, I decided I wasn't going to pursue architecture anymore until/ this situation stabilizes. I was always naive that when children go to kindergarten, things get easier, and then that when they go to school, things are easier.

It seems from Aleksandra's narrative that her decision to suspend her professional activity was a collective one. The husband started to bear the responsibility of supporting the family, and they both made the decision that it would be better to live more modestly but without emotional tensions and difficulties defined as a "tragedy." This strong expression relates to everyday difficulties (ill children complicate everyday routines), as well as to the

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[11] Aleksandra lives in one of Poland's largest cities, but the location of the residential neighborhood makes it a kind of local community.

[12] When putting the sentences in bold, I underline crucial statements in the presented excerpt.

experience of crisis in the family life. Besides, as the narrator indicates in the previous quotation, she had the feeling of missing important moments in children's lives. Perhaps the memory of the first years of a modest but happy life was an additional argument for this decision. The suspension of Aleksandra's career appears to be temporary, although the narrator suggests that she was naive in her expectations that slightly older children would require less attention. This statement is followed by a series of arguments related to the tension between seeing one's identity as a mother and as a modern, educated, and professionally active woman.

Thus, in the course of the narrative, Aleksandra conducts biographical work[13] addressing the tension associated with the different images of herself as a working professional architect, as an artistically gifted person, and as a mother. This reconciliation of identity takes place within the frame of the different discourses that Aleksandra confronts. In her narrative, one can find almost all the above-mentioned, as I indicated, mutually contradictory, discourses on motherhood and femininity. Importantly, these are not just imagined or media-mediated discourses. Aleksandra's narrative clearly demonstrates the power of environmental bubbles (Pariser 2011)—the discourses indicated are articulated by specific people and experienced at the level of interaction in particular encounters: family members, friends met at the fitness club who are single, and foremost the catholic community to which the narrator belongs with her husband. It is a specific movement dedicated to marriages and families organized in her

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[13] Biographical work is "the insight that one's own identity is something unique with its own overall *Gestalt*, which matters and is essentially valuable and worthwhile to develop…biographical work consists of narrative recollection; reflection of symbolic, "deeper" meanings revealing self-historical *Gestalts* of life" (Schütze 2008a:160).

parish. Aleksandra emphasizes that it is not only a community of faith but also a network of support groups for childcare, help with daily activities, mutual work, or other household favors, et cetera. During the narrative, it is clear that, for her, this community is the most important reference group. As I mentioned, the main frame of Aleksandra's narrative is a biographical work on the tension between her role as a mother and a modern working woman with artistic aspirations. So Aleksandra is doing a mental operation of constant comparisons referring to her conflicting roles through different contradictory discourses.

> Sometimes, when I talk to someone, I say: "Oh yes! God!" That it is not so popular that people have four children 'cause at our [community] a lot of people have four children ((laughs)) and for me, it is not at all like/ or three/ and it is not for me/ for me, it's not a small fraction, but for me, it's actually half of the people I know. Right? Half of the community has many children. That's why every time I talk to my friends from secondary school, who, for example, don't have children or, in general, I've been going to CrossFit for some time now, and there are also people there who live for completely different, hmm, different things in life. Uhmm, then it's really hard for me to explain what I do, what I do, and what I have/ or what my day looks like. It's terribly, terribly difficult for me to explain it, and, to be honest, I often don't even feel like explaining it anymore. I'm already a grown-up, and, and yes. And those girls who understand me, or guys/ well, men also, usually, we understand each other without, well, without words. Yes? And here, it simply costs so many words, and I still feel that it is simply difficult to communicate. ((laughs))

In this passage belonging to the coda, Aleksandra compares her perspective with the attitudes of

other mothers in her community who do not fully understand her dilemma. In this set, the narrator's artistic and professional aspirations are the point of reference. She then juxtaposes her life as a mother of a large family with that of singles, where her reference point is her committed motherhood. The final evaluation of her choice, although still permeated by reflections on the impossibility of reconciling roles, points to the community of families as the most important reference group. It is here that the narrator builds a world of shared values in which she does not have to explain the choices she has made. Interestingly, Aleksandra devotes so much space in this passage to communication and the difficulties of reciprocity of perspectives concerning peers who are not oriented toward family values.

In the following part of the coda, Aleksandra continues to argue in favor of the choice she has made, although it is still apparent that the biographical work on the accompanying tension has not been completed:

> And what? I'm definitely not in a place now where I could say it's just the top. I've been to a place like this before, and now? Now I feel that I have to work again on some new system of work, life, help, etc. So, when you are at this moment, it is always a little more difficult, but in general, hmm, in general, I have a lot of pride in myself, and more often, hmm, more and more often, I think that it's like/ 'cause it didn't use to be obvious, 'cause now more and more often I think that my children have been brought up really well, such/ in the sense that my work is visible 'cause, for a long time, it seemed like it would never come. In the sense that it's like/ that I know that it's like this, subconsciously I know that I'm giving them something good and, and, hmm, I also kind of trusted the love that my parents gave me, this interest, etc. I also

say/ I love my husband very much, so it's like this is a continuation of our love, but I certainly had a lot of doubts along the way, does it even, shouldn't I have just gone to work, and they would have grown up, and everything would have been just as good? Was it necessary to make so many sacrifices? But they are older, and I also see what problems their peers have, which makes me even more convinced that it was worth it.

Other communication situations are also a source of dilemmas and reflections. Aleksandra speaks of criticism from her husband's family, who believe that she is wasting her artistic talent and training as an architect. The narrator also refers to media discourses on motherhood and large families, initiated primarily by family support programs such as the mentioned 500 plus benefit.

> I remember how much anger I felt when 500+ benefit came out and all those comments that, in fact, for me, it was a program that returned some dignity. Well, 'cause, 'cause it's not a big amount really. I mean, I always said please take this money and now live with these children off this money. Well, like, like, people don't realize it, really. And, on the other hand, I understand that maybe some jealousy is also aroused. And besides, the mothers of four children received a pension. Yes? It was also just, I also remember such comments, some unpleasant ones, that at least I would have this pension.

Although family and motherhood are by far the most important issues for Aleksandra during the narrative, she is in constant dialogue with contradictory discourses. The narrator wants to position herself toward them somehow in the middle, which is impossible. She is constantly in the process of reconciling her identity in the face of these conflicting

discourses. Thus, Aleksandra tells the story of her life through the prism of the tension between conscious and intensive motherhood (Hays 1996) and the identity of an artist, a creative individual, and an educated, contemporary woman with aspirations. This theme will be revealed in relation to various discourses mediated by the media or expressed directly by significant others. She refers to the image of motherhood perceived as a way of earning money ("you have 500 plus means you have 2,000 zlotych for four children")—an internet discourse mediated by the stereotyping of *madkizm* (although Aleksandra does not belong to this group); to the image of a mother who should devote herself to her children—the image of motherhood in the religious community to which she belongs; to the image of the modern working mother—the critical voices of her husband's family who think she is wasting her talent; to the lifestyle of her friends who do not have children at all; and last but not least, to her four daughters, toward whom she positions herself not only a mother but also as a modern woman, an artist, and a figure of femininity. In the end, there is one more reference group—her female followers on the internet who accept her as an artist and a mother.

Helena was born in 1988 as the only child. From a young age, she had artistic talents. In secondary school, she began preparing to apply to art school. She graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts. In her narrative, she devotes a lot of space to her artistic activities during her studies and her thesis, which was an art installation. Helena also talks about the tensions with her parents, the difficulties of adolescence, and the therapeutic care she received over a long period. In this respect, her clear biographical plan to get married and have a large family may seem to be contradicted. Nevertheless, at the age of 22, she decided that she should start

a family. She met her future husband through Facebook during her studies and systematically worked on developing this relationship. Besides her love feelings, she identified the man as a good candidate for a husband. He was older than her and engaged in a catholic community, which could mean he was mature and ready to start a family life. Helena, unlike Aleksandra, does not position herself by reference to external discourses and does not discuss them in detail, yet one can find their presence also in her story, especially when she is adopting the position of contestant and outsider.

> And that's when I met my husband, er, and, as I say, he chat/ chatted me up on Facebook. But I also led the conversation in such a way that we would meet up 'cause I didn't want to stretch it. I also had some experience of just stretching, I don't know, an acquaintanceship, which I didn't know if there was going to be anything or not with this friend. And, er, and so I just wanted to embrace this somehow quicker/ in general, I had this conviction that I would really like to get married or get married relatively quickly, and I wanted to have five children since I was a child. I wanted to have five children, but, of course, everyone scoffed at this in the family 'cause we tend not to have such large families.

The decision to marry and plan a large family is not typical for this generation at such a young age, especially in a specific artistic environment. In addition, Helena had to face, if not the critical, then the doubting attitude of her family, including her parents. Nevertheless, she got married and had four children. The story of motherhood is centered on the description of her pregnancies, deliveries, and the first year of life of each child, who is characterized by her as either a high- or low-need baby. After the first difficult delivery, she says:

So it was a bad start, a bad start, but it turned out that the baby was recovering well, and then he developed quite nicely. On the other hand, I have the feeling that, at the beginning of this motherhood, I was very much like that, basically, everything else ceased to exist, and only this motherhood. And it's not a matter of me getting so... that I find it so fantastic this motherhood. The best thing about it is that before I got married and had children, I had the feeling, I was even fascinated by this conservative approach, that I was going to cook dinners and clean the house, everything, er, tradwives,[14] right? It's fashionable now, apparently ((laughs)), so I had this conviction that, all in all, even though I was going on to these doctoral studies,[15] there are such contradictions again, right? I was so convinced that it was so cool: coo/ cooking dinner, when I was still single with my husband, I even cooked my own dinners, even though I don't particularly like cooking. From today's perspective, I hate cooking, but back then, I had the time, so I cooked those dinners, it was even cool, but when the baby was born, it turned out that there was much less time, that it didn't look like that at all, and my perspective changed completely. A partnership, no tradwife, that's not an option at all, we just share half, and that's it ((laughs)). To this day my husband still reproaches me for letting him down with that very approach, that he/ what I said was different, so now what? ((laughs)) So it's like I've changed a lot in this respect. But it's not that I was so oh, wow, wonderful motherhood, wonderful, it was more that I just... well, I didn't have the space for other things at the beginning, it kind of/ nor did I have the feeling that it overwhelmed me, in the

sense that it was so much... I don't know this first baby wasn't so very difficult either.

Helena then talks about her engaged motherhood. In the background, in turn, we find references to images generated by media discourses. The traditional vision of marriage and family, which had been her biographical action scheme (Schütze 2008a) from the beginning, was reinforced by the media-fashionable model of contemporary traditional motherhood (tradwife). Helena, however, quickly revised this vision, and later in the narrative, her description of motherhood can be fitted more into the figure of a contemporary mother who is entitled to her weaknesses (Matthews 2022). The news about the third pregnancy appeared quite unexpectedly, but Helena, although somewhat surprised, accepted the news without hesitation. Surprisingly for her, she faced negative feedback from her significant others:

My mum also didn't take the news that I was pregnant again very well 'cause my parents didn't think it was that nice to have a large family and all that, they just thought I couldn't cope, they had this attitude toward me that I can't cope with organization 'cause, you know, as a child they organized everything 'cause... and till this day, they're still trying to organize for me a bit and, er, so they just thought that it was/ one thing is that my mum, that she was worried about my health, yes, that I'd ruin my health, so every now and then being pregnant for her, some people are pregnant every year, I was there, I was at much longer intervals, but for her it was already hardcore as she only had one child, so, generally, it was a combination of health concerns about the functioning of the family in general and, er, well, generally, yes, on the part of my parents this one, there was some kind of criticism, er, I faced in

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[14] A "tradwife" is a woman who does not work to look after their children, their husband, or their home, and then talks non-stop about how great this is on social media. See: https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2020/jan/27/tradwives-new-trend-submissive-women-dark-heart-history. Retrieved January 22, 2025.

[15] Helena said that she applied for a Ph.D. program but was not accepted.

different kinds of situations, so my mum was originally devastated when she found out about this third pregnancy. Surprisingly, when ((laughs)) she found out about the fourth one, she was completely fine with it ((laughs)), she didn't show/ well, maybe she felt bad after she reacted so badly to the third one, then she apologized to me for it, but it wasn't nice, anyway.

In the attitude of Helena's mother, we find earlier doubts of relatives about the vision of a large family, as well as a parental concern for her daughter's health and ability to cope with life's tasks. The first nationwide survey of large families conducted in 2016 by Ipsos Poland[16] shows that entering into a large family category is a turning point, for example, more concerns were declared by parents with the third than with the fourth child. As Helena recounts, it was not her but her mother who had, and expressed, doubts about her third pregnancy. Interestingly, the same study also found that parents and in-laws (among those closest to the family giving birth to many children) reacted most negatively to the news of another child.

As far as Helena's professional activities are concerned, she has pursued artistic endeavors and has also taken up wedding and family photography. However, these activities were irregular due to childcare. When building her life story, Helena has been seeking her identity through constant contestation. Thus, there is much ambivalence in her narrative. For example, she refers to contradictory interpretative repertoires—on the one hand, she seeks ways to be different and rebellious, and on the other, she fits into the traditional pattern:

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[16] *Wielodzietni w Polsce. Raport 2016*, Ipsos. See: https://www.3plus.pl/assets/file/1741,raport%20wielodzietni%202016.pdf. Retrieved April 11, 2025.

seeking a husband and starting a family is a biographical plan, she creates a large family, despite her critical stance, she remains a religious person and passes on her faith to her children. During the whole narration, it is obvious that Helena wants to sustain her identity as an artist commenting and contesting the world. After the birth of her third child, she set up an account on Instagram.

The Narrators' Online Activity

In the previous section, I provided a brief characteristic of the two cases. The narrators raise several themes in their narratives, yet in the above discussion, I have focused primarily on the theme of motherhood. What these two life stories have in common is that both women are educated middle-class representatives, and have artistic abilities, which reinforces their need to be creative and realize themselves in artistic activities. For both, starting a family and having more than two children was a biographical plan supported by religious convictions (although in Helena's case, this theme is less exploited by her). Both have four children and after the birth of their third child, they realized the importance of the emotional effort of childcare. In making this effort, neither of them abandons their aspirations of self-realization. It also becomes clear to both that regular professional work in their living situation is limited. Last but not least, both choose online activities as a field for their creativity. Let us, therefore, take a look at how they talk about it.

Aleksandra set up an account on Instagram some time ago. At the time of the interview, she had 6,000 followers. She presents her artistic works, for example, paintings and drawings, and shares her experience of motherhood. Answering the question in the second part of the interview, she recounts:

[1] I am from the generation that was just starting/ well, I remember that when I was in college, I remember that I started using the internet more. In general, I like fashion very much, I like looking for style there, etc. Yes, all the artistic stuff there, and I usually watched it. Fashion blogs also had their peak back then. Well, but I didn't have the courage to do it. Besides, I didn't have a camera, I didn't have anyone to take these photos of me, but I know that I remember that I just totally wanted to do it, but I didn't do it. And then, much later, when I had children, there was such/ a Facebook group called 365 Days in a Skirt. Oh God, it's always embarrassing when I mention it. Well, but that's how it was. ((laughs)) **And it was a very nice community built on the internet. Well, me too. Since I was at home with my children, I had very limited social contacts, and I was always an introvert, extrovert, a mix of both, and I mainly missed adults. Right? I missed people, especially those who had some interests, not only such family ones, and here, most of them focused on such, on upbringing, etc.** So it was kind of my enclave, where I could take it all out, also wear something crazy, just make a selfie and that's where I kind of got used to taking photos of myself 'cause it wasn't/ I'm just saying that I'm from that generation, that selfie is not yet/ it's lame and an embarrassment…And so, there, I kind of got used to it. And the girls would also share their stories there, as I say, it developed really nicely there. And, generally, I seem to have found a group of girls who think/ maybe even not that they think alike, but we just became for one another. I decided, this group was later deactivated, and I decided that I wanted to continue these relationships with these people, etc. And the plus is that **I always wanted to show my art, I mean, art, things that I drew, that I created there, I also showed them on Instagram, so it was like these two things were combined, that I wanted to show a little of myself and also a little of what I paint and/**

and, of course, Instagram was the best for this. So I generally love Instagram very much from the very beginning, when it was created, I wanted to have it. I didn't have an iPhone for a long time, then it was on Android and it was the first social media that I totally wanted to install. It really felt like this was my space. Well, and now I also feel that this is a bit of a decline in this Instagram…I have started to fulfill myself in these short film forms, these stories.

[2] I did various collaborations as well, there was a moment when I was involved in some children's projects, and I was offered, I don't know, some games for children or something like that. And, at some point, I also realized that this wasn't for me. Unless something actually suits me, but I was just positioning these children to take a photo 'cause, for example, this was the assumption of the cooperation that I had to take a photo with a product and I already remember how frustrating it was…Well, **I can't advertise something with my children**…Recently/ I'm also saying 'cause it's not, it seems to me that I'm not the kind of influencer who receives cooperation offers, but, for example, I receive strange ones/ such as, for example, someone calling me from a casting that they are looking for a family for a program and that we are in a group that would be suitable, which surprises me 'cause they have to do research too. Do I make money? **Generally speaking, I do make money 'cause what I do also influences the fact that I have customers for my paintings, for those individual orders, so this is also a tangible result of what I do. I think that I get a lot of orders 'cause I'm recognizable, right?** From this, from showing my life, I also get orders, and because of it I actually have a job.

In these two excerpts, Aleksandra describes in detail the process of entering into the internet world. As she says, due to her age, the internet is not a "nat-

ural" environment for her. She recounts the beginnings of familiarizing new new mediums (Levinson 2013), building social networks, and overcoming her fears about self-presentation—taking a selfie and uploading it to the web initially seemed strange. She is fascinated by Instagram (in another part of the interview she says that other platforms like TikTok are not acceptable to her as she does not have the skills to make content there). Aleksandra started her online activity of showing her artwork on Instagram what appears to be a form of self-realization—she is starting to get creative and is also running a family life counseling service. Sharing parenting experiences triggers proposals for collaboration.

However, the thread of internet activity is introduced spontaneously by the narrator in the main storyline.

> I think it was also some family matter, right? The fact that everyone lived in this context, that I am an architect anyway, and during my fourth pregnancy, I just reevaluated certain things and decided that painting was the most important thing to me, and, in fact, in all the activities I had done 'cause I did a lot of things, I did handicrafts, along the way I made Christmas tree decorations, I made jewelry. Well, I tried a lot of different things 'cause I'm also a person who has to have something of my own/ I mean, my own, I just pursue it 'cause I need to have some sense of agency, and it gives me that, either cooking, or doing all these different, nice little things, or, well, that's when I started doing the internet. It had always been my dream, too, but I just didn't have the courage. Then I thought: "Pff, I can also do this and have something interesting to say and to/ maybe I can even help someone with my story, with my life in general." And, well, I had a different feeling, a sense of mission also kicked in 'cause I also needed it at some stage, and I think that's why

I started doing it. And it was also on the internet that I showed my works that I made for the kindergarten 'cause, in our kindergarten, the children always received such angels, guardian angels at the beginning of the year. I didn't like them aesthetically at all, so I told my sister that I would paint them myself 'cause/ 'cause they didn't suit me, and I had to put them in the room. ((laughs)) And I still had such concepts back then, I still had such architectural and design ambitions. And I painted this angel. It was in kindergarten, but then I showed it on the internet and, and I think that it's also like this that there are so many coincidences. Anyway, a girl who was also starting kind of opening a shop, selling devotional items saw it and immediately offered me cooperation. We were both total beginners, so the forms of cooperation were different, but it seemed like a big success.

In this fragment, the argumentation is subordinated to the main frame of reference described earlier. The story of entering into online activity is placed in relation to the dilemma accompanying the entire spontaneous narrative. Here, Aleksandra is again confronted with the issue of having to suspend her professional work as an architect. Thus, she focuses more on online activities as an alternative to professional activity. Having to stop working as an architect does not shut out her need for artistic creativity. The internet turns out to be a space that not only positively verifies her talents but also offers the possibility of professional realization if measured by financial gain. Thus, for the narrator, online activity is a form of alternative to work, and the possibility of earning money is a way of verifying the meaningfulness of these activities, which can be called work. It should be added here that this does not stem from purely economic needs. These are satisfied due to the husband's work. The need for self-fulfillment and utility comes to the fore here. Aleksandra's cre-

ative activity is mainly focused on aestheticizing her surroundings.

Helena set up an Instagram account after giving birth to the third child. This proved to be a turning point in her self-realization, but before that, the narrator recalls having blogged between the ages of 14 and 18. It was the first possible online activity for her generation, providing a space for expression—blogs became popular in the first decade of the 2000s.[17] Helena goes back even further and recalls:

> When I was a child, I used to write books, you know, books that I would just draw, I mean, I would illustrate these books, and I would write them myself. I've had such a passion for it since I was a child. And, er, but let's say I published it more as such, as a book, you know, I never published it anywhere, but it was something that could be a seed of something cool in my opinion, like from today's perspective.

In this context, Instagram becomes part of the framework of her creative abilities developed since childhood and systematically mastered during her studies. At the time of the interview (the end of 2022), Helena had 27,000 followers, and she described her activity in the following way:

> It was also with the birth of Tomislav that my journey began, with running an account on Instagram, with starting it 'cause **simply being so, so frustrated and with three children**, I found some kind of escape in the form of describing my **various maternal experiences and in general those connected with mental health 'cause then it also coincided with this psychotherapy.** It was just on Instagram 'cause I had

this account before, like most people, to upload some pictures, and then I started to, er, vent it somehow by writing, and I started, and I noticed that it was even getting some interest, right? That people were commenting on it, that they were interested in it, that they said I wrote well. So I just started writing more and more, and in the meantime, this prospect of moving and renovating came in. So it came out, it was another topic on Instagram, the renovation, and actually my Instagram became a bit of a springboard so I could, like they even say, that journaling and just keeping notes on what's going on during the day is also helpful for your mental health, it was something like that for me, I just did it in public and I think, er, it was helpful. Well, and then I found that more and more people were just following me, like that… I think moving house was especially useful here 'cause I got a kick out of these interiors, this and that, that that interior design, and I didn't know before that I had such a flair for it, and somehow I found myself in it again. So you could say I've found a lot of new hobbies over the last four years, I started to delve into a lot of subjects. I've found a lot of areas in which, thanks to this, this social media, I'm really good at, areas that I didn't know I was good at before, that, for example, I didn't know I was really good at doing research and being able to deeply, er, analyze a subject that interests me. **And it was only this Instagram that gave me such knowledge of myself, er, so I can say that these last four years, in this motherhood of mine, have been a period of my very intensive development and I don't know getting to know myself and they were very**/ and also I developed during this time such a project, my photo series "Where's mommy?"

In this dense piece, Helena describes the process of developing her activity on Instagram—from a "mere" account holder posting photos to inserting increasingly elaborate comments dedicated to the

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[17] Helena has been blogging from 2002 to 2006. Let us note that YouTube was created in the spring of 2005 and gained popularity in 2006.

experience of motherhood in the frame of an "imperfect" mother (Matthews 2022), to building thematic, evolving stories. These stories include a systematic description of moving and decorating a house, including interior design, or an artistic photography project on maternity themes to engage Instagram followers. Helena began to see her Instagram activity not only as an antidote to the hardships of motherhood and mental health problems but, over time, as a form of artistic expression. In addition, she emphasizes that she is discovering new areas of creativity and getting to know herself. The internet allows Helena to pursue her aspirations and continue her artistic interests, experimenting with creative forms. From the perspective of 2025, we can notice that she continues her activity successfully, increasing her Instagram audience—at the beginning of 2025, it has reached 65,000 followers. Online creativity is becoming a field for artistic contestation and thus for expressing her identity; compared to Aleksandra, she is much more engaged in online activity, embracing it as artistic expression.

Discussion

Analyzing the literature on internet performance, the online activity of the two narrators can be placed between that of an influencer and a content creator. Most definitions of an influencer point to monetizing the brand or influencing purchase decisions as an important component of the role (Ge and Gretzel 2018; Campbell and Grimm 2019; Lou and Yuan 2019). In the case of Aleksandra and Helena, however, this is not the essence of their activity. It is, therefore, worth referring to Robert V. Kozinets, Ulrike Gretzel, and Rosella Gambetti (2023:6), who argue that defining someone's activity as an influencer depends on the following factors: "(1) building relationships with people through (2) a consistent and distinctive voice and image expressed through their (3) social media content. Influencers build relationships by leveraging some quality, virtue, or talent of their own and putting it out there on social media." The authors stress that it is not monetizing but the idea of self-presentation, self-expression, and authenticity that constitutes the core motivation for their activity. "Authentic influencers are true to their own values and character, regardless of the external pressure put on them. They are *real* in this way: they stand for something and aren't afraid to tell you what it is. And they are often passionate and enthusiastic about their beliefs" (Kozinets et al. 2023:7). They also do not need to have a big audience—they can be "nanoinfluencers" and "micro-influencers" (Kozinets et al. 2023:8) and still fulfill their needs.

The same authors emphasize the difference between influencers and content creators, where the latter are defined as creators with professional skills. Thus "content creators are those who focus on creating this high-quality, even distinctive content as a goal. Creators can be expert and highly skilled photographers, illustrators, writers, graphic designers, videographers, video editors, podcast producers" (Kozinets et al. 2023:10).

Given the terminology above, the two narrators are both influencers and online creators. Their artistic background speaks in favor of the latter category. Both aspire to express themselves in the artistic field and place activity in the self within the frame of their aspirations to be artistically creative. Both Aleksandra and Helena emphasize that they have been accompanied by creativity of an artistic nature since childhood. Both have such aspirations—Aleksandra's goal is to make the world more aesthetically pleasing and develop her painting creativity (until the interview, she created paintings on commission,

and this was her source of income) and to interest her audience. Helena, on the other hand, continues the theme of contestation that is characteristic of her biography—for example, she distances herself from perfect motherhood by means of artistic happenings, such as a series of artistic photographs shown online.

It should also be considered to what extent the activity of the narrators is part of the sharenting, defined as a phenomenon involving parents in regularly sharing their children's image on social media (Keith and Steinberg 2017; Jorge et al. 2022). For sure, both narrators present images of their children on Instagram, and in this respect, they represent common contemporary practices. According to various research in the EU, US, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, about 81% of children below 2 years of age have their photographs being published on the internet by their parents (Gotwald, Gregod, and Kowalczyk 2024; Tofil and Jagielska 2024), whereas according to the first research conducted in Poland in 2019 on online sharing of children's images, 40% of parents participating in the study shared images of their child online.[18] Documenting children's lives online has become a fairly common social practice for presenting oneself as a parent, showing competences, seeking inspiration and advice in the parenting process (Chrostowska 2018; Latipah et al. 2020). Sharenting helps build a network of parents/mothers/fathers, creates the space for presenting oneself as a good parent, and can also be a source of income (Brosch 2016; Kierzkowska 2022). A type of sharenting is represented by mumfluencers and mumpreneursers (Archer 2019). These activities are usually linked to profit, monetizing content, or even making

the presentation of their children a business (Blum-Ross and Livingstone 2017).

Thus, we may pose the question: To what extent do Aleksandra and Helena fit into enumerated types of activity? As has been established, the scope of meaning of the terms influencer, content creator, and sharenting encompasses their activities. If we were to subject the content of their Instagram accounts and blogs to analysis, it could be characterized within the framework of the ongoing discussion in the literature on contemporary online activities and the terms invoked. In this analysis, however, the primary point of reference is the autobiographical narrative, and, in this perspective, the concepts indicated and the meanings they contain seem to play a secondary role. What stands out is the biographical and identity work undertaken by the two narrators, whose frame of reference is the tension between the planned and voluntary entry into traditionally understood motherhood and the plan for one's development inscribed in the identity of an educated, modern woman socialized in contemporary society. This typical life project, formulated in the language of the culture of individualism (Jacyno 2007), is captured in this way by Aleksandra:

> I feel like a talented person from the 1990s who will just go to college, finish it, and make a career. Not that I will work, I will make a career. And, of course, family life will also be at a high level here, and I will be very happy. Well, it turned out a little different, so. I mean, it turned out a little different. It's just that this professional work no longer seemed to me as something very, umm, I don't know, prestigious, well, more/ but, I mean, it was a process that, at some point, I decided that I had to match the profession to my family, not the other way around. 'Cause it simply costs me too much.

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[18] See: https://cluepr.pl/sharenting-po-polsku-czyli-ile-dzieci-wpadlo-do-sieci/. Retrieved January 25, 2025.

Here, the narrator presents a vision of the "good life" (Waniek 2023) of a woman belonging to the middle class and realizing her abilities and aspirations, additionally inscribed with artistic talents. Similarly, Helena's narrative is based on a fascination with her identity, biography, and emotions (cf. Sennett 2009:15).

> So it's just that now I have this perspective that I'm just developing this social media thing of mine…I am doing it a bit for myself 'cause I see it as a diversion and an outlet for myself, and I don't do it strictly for a target, I don't do it for profit. I mean, I do get some profit already 'cause I manage to have some collaborations. But it's not like it's a super income and the amount of time is worth the money. It's more that I'm doing it for myself and for my development.

The digital revolution in media technologies favors the singularity of subjects, images, texts, and other cultural elements stimulated by the web and followers. In such a form of virtual self-disclosure, the subject becomes singular, especially in the configuration of various elements: news from one's life, likes, cultural preferences, links relating to interests, a timeline of biographical events from the past, and, of course, images from one's life. Thus, online authenticity always takes the paradoxical form of performative authenticity: it must be presented in front of an audience in the hope that it will be noticed (Reckwitz 2020:151). In the case of Aleksandra and Helena, notability is inscribed in their artistic talents. Artistic creative action is the result of individual expression directed at the audience. In the case of both narrators, the internet has created new opportunity structures (Golczyńska-Grondas and Waniek 2020)—it has helped them to pursue their aspirations and to continue their interests despite having to be involved in family life. The narrators

were socialized at a time when such opportunities did not exist. They slowly entered the virtual world, starting with the now classic and disappearing blog formula. They had to learn the rules of the internet. One of them profits from combining her activity and receiving profits. However, neither Aleksandra nor Helena have an economic compulsion to monetize their activity. The observation of their activity two years after the interviews shows that Helena is more active, gaining new followers, and expanding her Instagram thematically. Aleksandra has not increased the number of followers, and it seems that her story is still relevant—she shows her work on Instagram, shares her family history in a rather limited way, and devotes a lot of space to religious themes.

Concluding Remarks

It is trivial to say that the internet has now become a space of almost unlimited communication. At the same time, when it was initially believed to be the expansion of the public sphere, it paradoxically became a "filter bubble" (Pariser 2011), an "echo chamber" (Wallsten 2005), closing users in digital ghettos limited to a homogeneous discourse and rejecting alternative perspectives, and thus strengthening their world views (Szpunar 2018). In this optics, web content can be a closure rather than an opening. Perhaps the cases presented here allow the positive, opening aspect of the web presentation to be highlighted. The cases of Aleksandra and Helena represent contemporary modern women combining opposing patterns of tradition and modernity, which are often presented in public discourses as oppositional or mutually excluding. Internet activity seems to be a remedy for the accompanying experience of tension and supports their biographical work. In the general sense of the word, this activity has, if not a therapeutic, then a reconcil-

iatory function. Additionally, the definitional scope of terms such as influencer, content creator, and sharenting can be broadened, as their activity can be included in each of them and in none of them at the same time. The source of the blurring of these catego-

rizations is, in my opinion, the starting point for the interpretation of biographical experiences, in which motherhood plays a prominent role, and online activity has a compensatory function and becomes part of the biographical work.

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