

Abstract

This study analyzed 50 responses to the viral case of Wren Eleanor to understand how people react to sharenting and related allegations of child exploitation. The sample consisted of positive and negative reactions (i.e., those supportive and those critical of Wren’s mother and her sharenting). Positive responses revealed themes of Victim, Opposition, Encouragement, Emotional Attachment and Involvement, or Advice, while negative themes emphasized Perpetrator, Exploitation, Fear, or Action. This study demonstrates that parasocial relationships and interactions may play a key role in how people react to sharenting and allegations of child exploitation.

Introduction

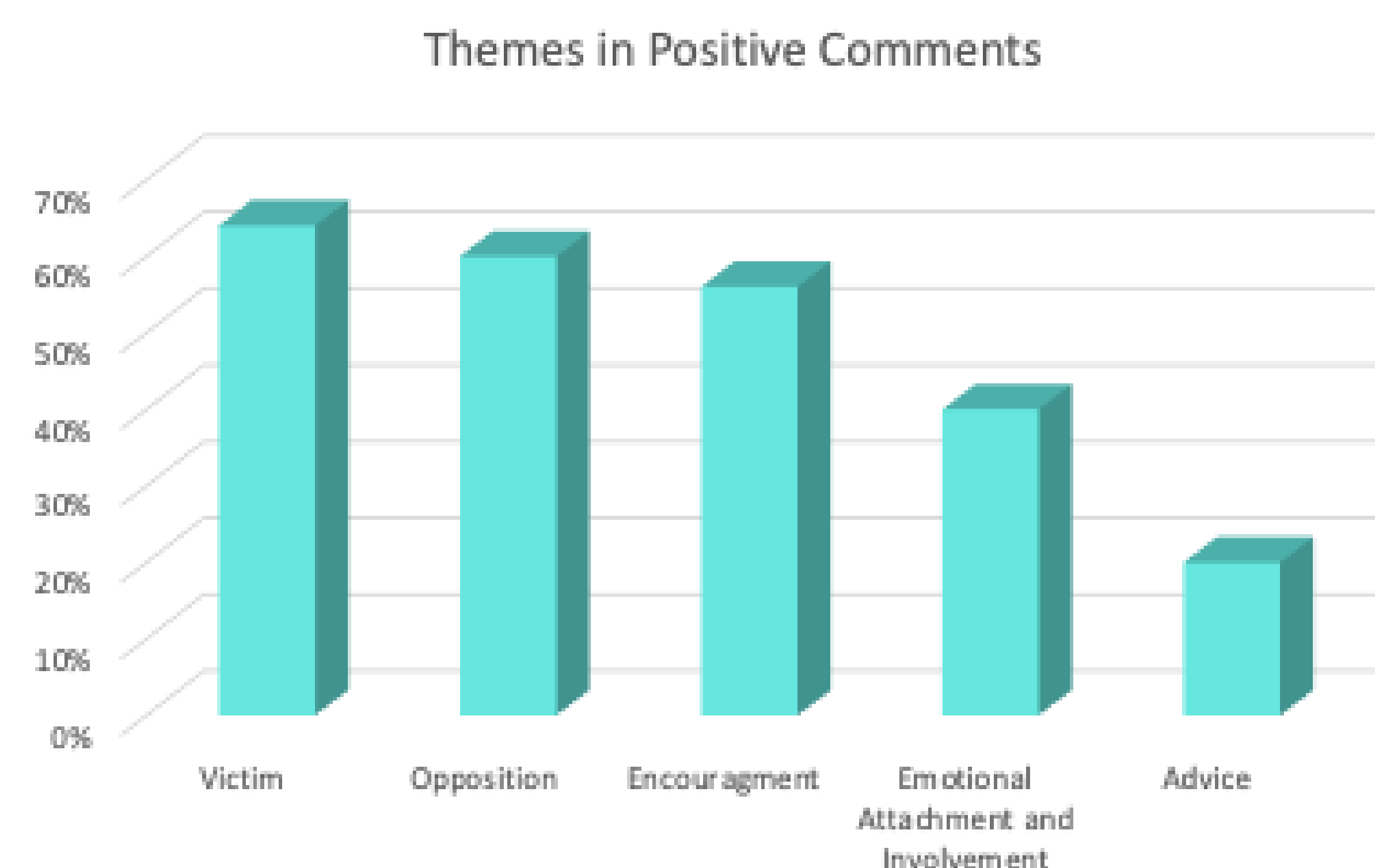
A conversation about children on social media has developed alongside the rise of sharenting, the sharing of content relating to parenting and children on social media (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017, p. 110). Many have voiced concerns over issues such as privacy, consent, exploitation, and child predation (Anderer, 2022, paras. 2-24; Walker, 2022, paras. 2-11). The present study is a content analysis of public responses to the highly publicized sharenting case of Wren Eleanor, a popular child influencer, and her mother, Jacquelyn (Organ, 2022, para. 1). This study is the first to examine a large-scale popular culture event, widely dubbed “the Wren Eleanor situation.” Furthermore, this study deepens our understanding of sharenting by exploring its consumers through their attitudes and behaviours towards the practice.

Methods

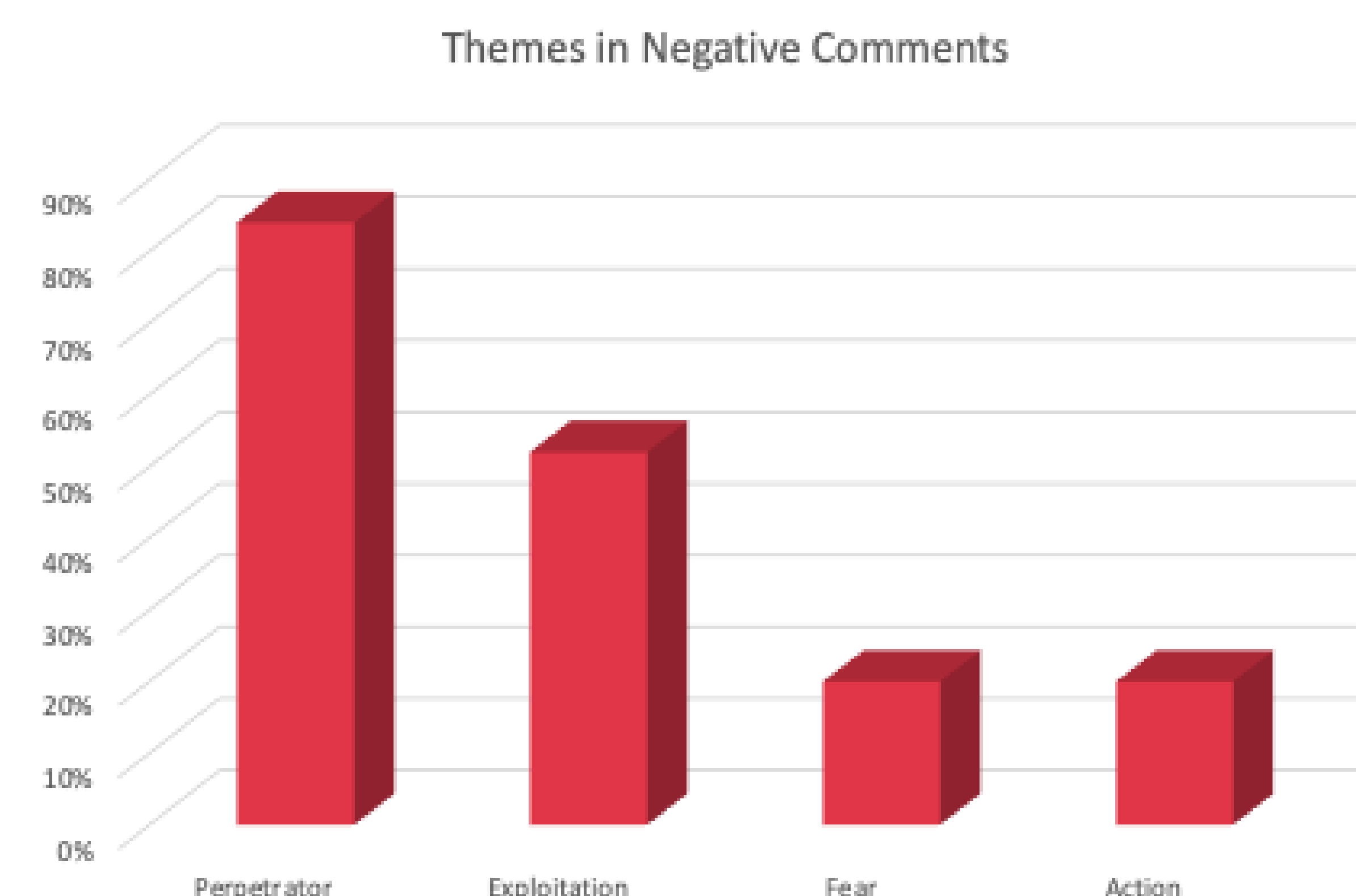
The sample consisted of 50 comments (n=50) from two TikTok videos, with 25 comments retrieved from each. One of the videos was a statement posted by Jacquelyn addressing the Wren Eleanor situation, which had mainly positive comments (i.e., those supportive of Jacquelyn and her sharenting). The second was a viral criticism that alleges Jacquelyn is exploiting Wren and catering to sexual predators, which had mainly negative comments (i.e., those critical of Jacquelyn and her sharenting). Only positive comments were selected from the first video, and only negative comments were selected from the second. The units of analysis were the words and phrases that potentially suggested themes within the 50 comments.

Results

Positive comments revealed five themes: 1) Victim, 2) Opposition, 3) Encouragement, 4) Emotional Attachment and Involvement, and 5) Advice.



Negative comments revealed four themes: 1) Perpetrator, 2) Exploitation, 3) Fear, and 4) Action.



Conclusions

The portrayal of Jacquelyn as a victim was the most prevalent theme in the positive reactions, whereas the portrayal of Jacquelyn as a perpetrator was the overwhelming theme in the negative reactions. Therefore, most responses approached the situation by initially assigning Jacquelyn a role within the Wren Eleanor situation: a victim or a perpetrator.

Positive reactions were motivated by commenters’ parasocial relationships and interactions with Jacquelyn and Wren. These one-sided relationships are “experienced by members of an audience in their mediated encounters with certain performers in the mass media” (Horton & Wohl, 1956, as cited in Oxford Reference, n.d.) and are based on the illusions of intimacy fostered by the performers. This relationship is apparent in most positive comments, especially those that revered Jacquelyn and Wren while vilifying the opposition. According to Horton and Wohl (1956), non-regular viewers of a performer are more likely to be detached, analytical, and cynical of the performer (as cited in Oxford Reference, n.d.), which characterizes the negative reactions. Negative comments focused on Jacquelyn’s actions and motivations for posting content. To many critics, Jacquelyn is purposefully exploiting Wren to make money, a stark contrast to the view of her supporters that she is an idyllic mother.

Source. From an Instagram post by @Wren.tiktok, 2022 (<https://www.instagram.com/p/CIXXoiMuunU/>)



References

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