

WORKS-IN-PROGRESS: AN ANALYSIS OF CANADIAN MOMMYBLOGS

by

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I explore why mommyblogs are controversial, who the mommybloggers are and what they are doing, what effect commercialization has on mommyblogs, and whether mommyblogs are dialogic spaces. According to Bakhtin, dialogic narratives are those which allow for heteroglossia, or a diversity of voices. I argue that the interlinked story of a blog community—of which the mommyblogosphere is one example—is an innovative genre of writing. I contend that mommyblogs are dialogic in several ways, some that are unique to the mommyblogosphere, and others that can be extrapolated to any blog community. In particular, since most blog readers are also bloggers themselves, they experience blogs in multiple ways: as writers, as readers, and as community members. I conclude that literary theory can contribute to the understanding of blogging as a cultural form and practice.

Keywords: autobiography; blog; dialogism; feminism; intertextuality; memoir; mommyblog; motherhood

Subject Terms: blogs; blogs – Canada; Canadian diaries; internet users Canada; mothers – Canada; women authors – 21st century

To my mom.

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance, it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it.

–Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1994, p. 76)

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1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 A Brief History of the Blog

A blog is a website comprised of regularly updated chronological entries. Most blogs allow readers to add comments to each entry. Unlike traditional websites, blogs are designed to be *unfinished*; that is, the blog *as a whole* is always in production, because it changes every time a new post or comment is added and when new links to existing posts are made.

The term *weblog* (web + log) is attributed to Jorn Barger, who first used it to describe his own website in December 1997. The short form, *blog*, is credited to Peter Merholz because of his 1999 declaration that he was going to pronounce the term “we blog” (Blood, 2000). The online diary form itself originated in the mid-1990s¹ soon after the introduction of the World Wide Web.² However, by 1998, there were still just a few weblogs in existence, primarily because creating one—just like any other website—required a knowledge of HTML (hypertext markup language); and updating meant marking up the text one had written before it could be posted (for example, each paragraph would need `<p>` at the beginning and `</p>` at the end).

¹ Frequently cited examples of early online diarists are Justin Hall (<http://www.links.net>) who started his weblog in 1994 and Carolyn Burke (<http://diary.carolyn.org/>), who started hers in 1995. Hall's original weblog is offline, but see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justin_Hall for history. His current blog is here: <http://interactive.usc.edu/members/jhall/>

² August 6, 1991. See Tim Berners-Lee's original Usenet post describing the World Wide Web: <http://groups.google.com/group/alt.hypertext/msg/395f282a67a1916c>

The introduction of the first blogging software (Pitas and Blogger) in 1999 changed all that. Blog software automatically formats each entry and adds it to the blog at the top of the main page; all the blogger has to do is click the “post” button. The software automatically links each post to the posts before and after it, as well as to the blog’s main page. Each post is given a unique, stable URL, which makes direct linking to individual posts possible. Posts are archived by date, and, if the blogger has assigned them *categories* (also known as *labels* or *tags*), also by category. Once blog software became available, along with free hosting options (for example, Blogger blogs can be hosted at blogspot.com), the number of blogs rapidly grew to hundreds, and by 2000, thousands (Blood, 2000). By 2001, there were hundreds of thousands of blogs in existence (Kornblum, 2001).

In the first years of the web, one of the biggest problems for users was finding information; search engines were in their infancy and sites often were not indexed. As a result, many early weblogs were filter-style; bloggers would post interesting links they had found, along with some brief commentary about them. Since this was the format favored by early adopters of the medium, they often contended that only filter-style blogs, which look outward to the web, were real blogs, while more inward-looking journal-type blogs were not blogs at all (Ozawa, 2001). I disagree; I think that this was an attempt to confine a format to a single sub-format; any website that consists of chronological entries is a blog. For example, we accept that textbooks, comic books, coffee table books, novels and memoirs are all books despite their variation in content, size, amount of text, and the presence (or absence) of images. By using this analogy, it is clear that the term *blog* can encompass both filter-

style blogs and journal-style blogs (as well as photoblogs, video blogs, and podcasts).

In the early days of blogging, bloggers often spoke utopically about the medium. Writing in 2000, Blood said, “I strongly believe in the power of weblogs to transform both writers and readers from ‘audience’ to ‘public’ and from ‘consumer’ to ‘creator.’ Weblogs are no panacea for the crippling effects of a media-saturated culture, but I believe they are one antidote” (n.p.). Blogging was labeled a “grassroots movement” by Evan Williams, one of the founders of Blogger: “blogging is one of the few things on the Web that hasn’t been taken over by commercial interests” (Kornblum, 2001, n.p.). At the same time, those commenting on the new medium were often puzzled both by why people would want to blog, and perhaps even more by why anyone would want to read them: “[Blog posts] often have serious elements of Hyde Park corner blather, besides blatant exhibitionism and obvious self-indulgence. ... People can’t resist updating the diary and apologize if they don’t do it—as if anyone really cares” (Dvorak, 2002, n.p.). Speculation as to the motivations for blogging ranged from ego gratification, antidepersonalization (differentiating oneself from the masses), elimination of frustration (a place to rant), and societal need to share (Dvorak, 2002). One *New York Times* writer said of her own decision to start a blog: “A few months ago I joined legions of other online narcissists and decided to start a Weblog, one of those personal Web sites where people spout their thoughts for the world to read” (Guernsey, 2002, n.p.). There was, however, also a recognition that many bloggers wanted to be writers (Dvorak, 2002), and that blogs were a good genre for women who were “juggling work and

children” both because of the fragmented writing style and because they enabled bloggers to post whenever they had the time (Guernsey, 2002, n.p.).

While many women did take to the medium early on, in the mainstream media, the blogosphere often appeared to be dominated by men. This was primarily due to news media’s focus on men who blogged about politics and post-9/11 topics. “Web logs that discuss the Iraq war and the upcoming U.S. presidential election—often written by men—get as many as tens of thousands hits a day, but that the Internet audience is not as wide for the women who write online about politics in a more personal, everyday-life kind of way, such as parental leave policies of corporations” (Millett, 2004, n.p.). Women bloggers, who were more likely to keep personal journals, were treated like they did not exist (an oft-asked question was “Where are the women?”³) (Guernsey, 2002). The perception that women were missing from the blogosphere turned out to be a false one; for example, a survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that bloggers are just as likely to be female as male (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). This finding was consistent with an earlier academic study that found that women are “key actors in the history and present use of weblogs, yet that reality is masked by public discourses about blogging that privilege the activities of a subset of adult male bloggers” (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt & Wright, 2004, n.p.). That is, the blogs “that are most widely read, cited in the mass media, and receive the most inbound links from other blogs—are predominantly filter-type blogs, often with a political focus” (Herring, Kouper, Paolillo, Scheidt, Tyworth, Welsch, et al., 2005, p. 1). This is despite the fact that journal-style blogs are

³ See, for example, Ratliff, C. (2007). Attracting readers: Sex and audience in the blogosphere. *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 5(2). Retrieved from http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/blogs/ratliff_01.htm

more common than filter-style blogs “for all demographic groups including adult males” (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt & Wright, 2004, n.p.).

While blogs with a focus on politics and journalism gradually began to gain acceptance, personal blogs were frequently thought of as “boring,” the detail of their entries “excruciating” (McNichol, 2003, n.p.). Patricia Pearson, writing for *Maclean’s*, wondered what bloggers “hope[d] to accomplish, beyond being out there, somewhere, in the crowded and boisterous town square of cyberspace” (2004, n.p.). People complained that blogs were cluttering up the internet and polluting search engine results (Orlowski, 2003). One writer referred to blogging as a “modern-day secular version of confession, broadcast to the masses,” and recognized that the opportunity to peek into someone else’s diary was appealing, but complained that many blogs consisted of “tedious navel gazing” (Taormino, 2003, n.p.).

In the decade since the debut of the term *weblog*, “[h]undreds of millions of blogs” have been created, and today, blogging is the most popular way for the average internet user to publish online (Rosenberg, 2007, n.p.). The blog search engine Technorati.com is currently tracking over 112 million blogs. The Pew Survey (2006) found that 37% of bloggers consider their blogs to be personal journals (approximately 41 million). 200,000 of those are estimated to be parenting blogs (Shellenbarger, 2008). Despite the size of the personal blogosphere, most of the discussion about blogs over the past decade has focused on issues such as whether bloggers are journalists. While this is a worthwhile question, it affects a relatively small percentage of bloggers (only 34% of bloggers in the 2006 Pew Survey considered their blog to be a form of journalism, while 65% did not). Thus, the

personal blogosphere in general, and the parenting blogosphere in particular, is a substantial, and growing, genre that deserves more thoughtful consideration than it has received up to now.

1.2 Mommyblogging

1.2.1 Shrines to Parental Self-Absorption

In 2005, David Hochman wrote in *The New York Times*, “For the generation that begat reality television it seems that there is not a tale from the crib (no matter how mundane or scatological) that is unworthy of narration” (n.p.). He calls parenting blogs “online shrine[s] to parental self-absorption” full of “venting and hand-wringing” from “a generation of parents ever more in need of validation.” At the first BlogHer⁴ conference in 2005 (see *Social Mom*, 2005), some audience members at the mommyblogging session wondered how the children of bloggers such as Heather Armstrong of *Dooce* (<http://www.dooce.com/>) will feel when they realize their mothers have used them as material; others countered by asking how this is different from a mother writing a book (for example, Erma Bombeck). Someone suggested that the difference is that Bombeck made money, implying that it is fine to write about your kids as long as you are getting paid, but not if you are doing it for pleasure, which is telling; however, Armstrong’s blog supports her family. Thus, there is no difference between Bombeck and Armstrong at that level, which brings the issue back to why books and blogs that use similar material would inspire different reactions in people.

⁴ BlogHer (<http://www.blogher.com/>) is an online community for women bloggers; the site holds an annual conference for bloggers and has a blog advertising network.

Patricia Pearson (2004) writing in *Maclean's* mentions the privacy concerns that come with posting about one's children online, but then suggests that this is not a significant issue since (according to her observations) most baby blogs are abandoned soon after they are started, which implies that they are not to be taken seriously. Privacy issues were also discussed at the BlogHer conference, with audience members noting that no one balks at writers like Bombeck and Anne Lamott using their real names and names of their children; in other words, if privacy is not an issue for writers of books or articles, then why is privacy supposedly such an issue for bloggers. Sue Shellenbarger writing in the *Wall Street Journal* claims that the "price an at-home mom pays to shoulder her way to prominence in the blogosphere [is] giving up her privacy, sustained time off and any remnants of work-family boundaries at all" (2008, n.p.), which suggests that blogging somehow demands a higher price than other jobs (including other types of writing, presumably). When the *Today Show* recently did a piece on mommyblogs, which included an interview with Heather Armstrong, Kathie Lee Gifford indicated that she thought Armstrong was endangering her child by posting photographs of her online. As many bloggers pointed out, this concern was rather baffling considering Gifford spent years talking about—and showing photographs of—her own children on a network television show (Kamin, 2008, n.p.; McKenna, 2008, n.p.)

Globe and Mail writer Tralee Pearce (2008) claims that the real dilemma for blogging parents is whether blogging makes them worse parents. Pearce focuses on mom (and dad) bloggers who have decided to end their blogs now that their children are older and, with respect to Catherine Connors's blog, *Her Bad Mother* (<http://badladies.blogspot.com/>), asks, "how much family therapy will be in order if

[Connors's] daughter's future schoolmates discover her mom's blogging adventures?" (2008, n.p.). Commenters on the Pearce article verge on irate, referring to parents who blog as "narcissists" whose priorities are skewed and wondering what kind of person reads their "drivel." In a blog post written in response, Connors asks, "why does so-called lifestyle writing in *print* not prompt people to generalize those writers as narcissistic nutbars or neglectful parents or—most pleasantly—*pimps*?" She notes that the genre of lifewriting is not new, but has historically been dominated by men:

There's something about mothers lifting back the veil of the family that upsets people, that leads people to accuse the mothers who dare do such a thing of neglecting their maternal duties, of exploiting their children, of exposing their children to the dangers of the public sphere, of being bad. But that's precisely what makes mom-blogging—to overuse a deservedly overused phrase—a radical act. (Connors, 2008, n.p.)

- **Question 1: What makes blogging different from other kinds of lifewriting?**

1.2.2 Mommybloggers on "Mommybloggers"

Some bloggers suggest that the term "mommyblogger" connotes a certain kind of mom: "[Mommyblogger] is often used in a derogatory, dismissive sense to evoke a stereotype, namely: mothers with depthless blogs who prattle on endlessly about superficial minutiae related to childrearing" (Tracey Gaughran-Perez of *Sweetney* (<http://www.sweetney.com/>) quoted in *Mommybloggers*, 2006/01/09, n.p.). However, what that stereotype is exactly seems to be muddled. Kristen Chase of *Motherhood Uncensored* (<http://motherhooduncensored.typepad.com/>) imagines the

stereotypical mommyblogger as a stuck-in-the-eighties, minivan-driving, scrapbook-loving mom; in other words, the epitome of uncool:

[M]ommy blogger represents some apron wearing, rubber-stamping freak, who blogs about her cute perfect children without coming up for air. She wears high-waisted jeans with a sweatshirt and turtleneck, and her hair is something right out of an 80's (*sic*) magazine. She drives a *gulp* minivan, participates in every school bake sale, and leaves little love notes in her kids' lunches. She reads McCalls, Redbook, and romance-suspence (*sic*) novels. Her life is her kids and her husband, and so is her blog. (Chase, 2006/03/19, n.p.)

While Marrit Ingman agrees that a mommyblogger “writes only about feeding and changing and never touches the culture around us,” she pictures someone more stylish, saying, “You can’t be a ‘mommyblogger’ if you’re at all punk or indie or poor or ugly: ‘The term “mommyblogger” conjures up images of well-fashioned women with smart haircuts brandishing iBooks and roaming down the streets with torches affixed to their strollers, sniffing out and ripping apart the uterus of any woman left in town” (Ingman, 2005, n.p.). While Ingman suggests that “you rise above ‘mommyblogger’ status if you write well, with good prose style, reflection, and insight” (2005, n.p.), Gaughran-Perez indicates that “the term ‘mommyblogger’ has come to more broadly be used to simply signify bad writing” and that this “has a lot to do with the status of women in society and, more specifically, societal attitudes about motherhood (SAHMs in particular)” (Mommybloggers, 2006/01/09, n.p.). Another blogger notes that some mothers who blog differentiate between “mommyblogs” and “momblogs”: “There are mommy blogs, which are self-absorbed blogs that do nothing but chronicle the lives of their children and their domestic activities. Mom blogs, on the other hand, are cool, hip women who happen

to be mothers, posting often humorous takes on life and motherhood” (Christina, 2006, n.p.); however, outsiders do not generally recognize this distinction.

Some mothers who blog hate the term mommyblogger. The animosity toward the word “mommy” seems somewhat curious; as an outsider, when I first heard the term, I thought it denoted a mother of young (rather than older) children, since small children commonly call their mothers “mommy” (similarly, the mommy/mom distinction seemed like it would be related to the age of one’s children, not whether one was cool or not). However, Eden Marriott Kennedy of *Fussy* (<http://www.fussy.org/>) says, “People have used it against me—both offhandedly and ferociously—to infantilize my brain and my blog and my life, non-parents who seem to think that being a mother makes you a second-class citizen, they feel perfectly free to use that term in the most demeaning way possible” (Satterwhite, 2006/07/10, n.p.). Alice Bradley of *Finslippy* (<http://www.finslippy.com/>) adds, “it’s just so belittling a term for the hardest job in the world—much less the hardest job in the world that happens to be unpaid and also causes stretchmarks. It’s infantilizing. Parents should command respect, and for me being called a ‘mommy’ just makes me feel like I spend my day eating Ritz crackers with E-Z Cheez and watching my stories on the teevee” (Mommybloggers, 2006/07/20, n.p.). Liz of *Mom101* (<http://mom-101.blogspot.com/>) thinks that “the diminutive, *mommy*, automatically demeans whatever it is the author has to say. That no matter how many degrees she holds, how many times she uses words like ostensibly and onomatopoeia, she’s still writing something trivial. Or worse, she’s a trivial writer” (Mom101, 2006, n.p.). (Many bloggers share a similar aversion toward the term “momoir,” that is, a memoir written by a mother (Buchanan, 2006).)

Other bloggers want to reclaim the word. Catherine Connors states:

I feel strongly that we shouldn't be afraid of the word mommy, that we should be proud of it and reclaim it from those who use it derogatorily. ... I am sensitive to the fact that many see the term as limiting—that there's this unfounded idea that mommybloggers can only write about 'mommy' issues. As someone who would like to consider herself a writer, this chafes. But I don't think that the answer is to reject my 'mommy' status—I think that the more productive solution is simply to be the best damn writer-mommy that I can be. (Mommybloggers, 2006/10/09, n.p.)

Joy Palmer of *Gingajoy* (<http://gingajoy.blogspot.com/>) points out that “[m]uch of the derision of ‘mommybloggers’ comes from deeply entrenched attitudes about domesticity and women” and adds that she has “made a conscious decision to refer to [her]self as a mommyblogger as an act of resistance—resistance to a long history that disparages women’s writing—especially domestic writing. ... one of the most significant attributes of the mommy-blogging phenomenon (*sic*) is that *finally* there is a place where you can hear (cliche alert) ‘the real voices of women...’” (Palmer, 2007/02/12, n.p.). Bon of *Crib Chronicles* (<http://www.cribchronicles.com/>) adds:

the truth is that the notion that what many of us are doing out here is drivel is, itself, where the drivel lies. that old cesspool of contempt and derision and marginalizing condescension that so often accumulates around feminized work in our society isn't, unfortunately, absent from the discourse surrounding the phenomenon of momblogs. ... because so many of the women who write about their lives and their mothering write with such sharp wit and rich insight about the stereotypes that mommyhood brings with it, i want to have faith that we could, if we chose, reclaim the word 'mommyblog' and make it something proud. (Bon, 2007, n.p.)

While the many of the bloggers seem focused on the use of the word “mommy,” it seems that the real issue is the lack of respect being given to mothers who blog; in other words, it seems likely the attitude toward blogging mothers would be the same even if the popular term was “motherblogger.”

- **Question 2: Who are the real mommybloggers?**

1.2.3 **A Radical Act**

At the 2005 BlogHer conference, Alice Bradley stood up and declared that mommyblogging was a “radical act.” In the comments to a post she made shortly after the conference, she repeated her statement:

I said that one thing I had taken from [the 2005 BlogHer] conference was maybe not so positive. As marginalized as women bloggers are or feel they are, mommy bloggers are perhaps even more marginalized. And I felt this happening even here, at BlogHer. I and my friends had overheard one too many comments about mommybloggers needing to set their sights on larger issues, on needing to think outside their boxes. And I think that’s a shame. On a more positive note, I also learned something from the mommybloggers here: I learned that *mommy blogging can be a radical act*. And it can change people’s lives. (Bradley, 2005, n.p.; emphasis added)

At the BlogHer conference, it was suggested that writing about one’s children is not important, and that mothers should direct their blogging energies to more important subjects (Summers, 2006). This is something mommybloggers continue to struggle with: “There’s the real question, though—is blogging the minutiae (*sic*), the daily details of life as a mother, enough to matter? Or do I (do we) need to do more? The world has a wealth of mothers with their fractions of fragmented time—if we could add all those fragments up, could we change the world? Do we have an obligation to try?” (Mohanraj, 2007, n.p.). Despite the mommybloggers’ feeling that what they are doing is, in fact, important, the opinion that mommyblogs are of little value is pervasive:

During her talk at the Mothering & Feminism Conference at York University’s Association for Research on Mothering, Meredith Michaels—co-author of *The Mommy Myth* ... expressed skepticism that mothering blogs, communities, and other electronic means of expression and coalition-

building are useful for feminism. ... like so many staunch second-wavers, Michaels entirely dismissed independent media and self-publishing (which blogging is, most purely) as divisive and superfluous. (Ingman, 2005, n.p.)

Pearson, the *Maclean's* writer, argues that blogs should be “entertaining” or “useful,” which requires time and thought, and suggests that since she does not have time as a mother to blog in an entertaining or useful fashion, then others should not either (2004, n.p.). However, articles such as these (sometimes written by parents) that wonder when bloggers find the time to blog never seem to address the fact that they somehow found the time to write an article (or book, even). One commenter on the Pearce article in *The Globe and Mail* asks, in response to the suggestion that parents are neglecting their children by taking time to blog: “do you really never have so much as an hour to yourself a few times a week, in which you can read a book, weed a garden, knit a sweater, watch a movie, or, (gasp) write in a journal? Give me a break. At the very least, do your kids not go to bed at least an hour or two before you do? I know that’s when I do the bulk of my writing” (Pearce, 2008, n.p.). The “where do bloggers find the time” question seems to imply that it is not acceptable for parents to have *any* amount of time to themselves; in other words, they should be either working for pay or devoted to childcare at all times. If this is the case, this seems rather an onerous expectation, and certainly one not placed on parents of previous generations.

However, some academics disagree with the negative portrayal of mommyblogs. Joy Palmer, Catherine Connors, Gabrielle Poulton, and Paula Rosinski (all but Rosinski are mothers who blog) presented a panel titled “Mommyblogging: Communal Activism or Self-Centered Blather?” at the Southern

States Communications Association Convention in 2007.⁵ They argue that mommyblogs are “mutual and dialogic processes through which the distinctive qualities of identity and community are produced” and that “‘mommyblogging’ connects to a longer tradition of women’s confessional writing and its surrounding discourses.” Further, they state that mommyblogs are spaces where mothers can “subvert dominant ideologies concerning motherhood,” but suggest that that this may be impacted by the commercialization of mommyblogs (Palmer, 2007/02/02, n.p.).

- **Question 3: Why do mommybloggers blog?**

1.2.4 **Good Writing and Monetization**

One thing the 2005 BlogHer attendees noted was how frequently they encountered both the assumption that mothers who blog are not good writers, along with the attendant surprise when they find out a mother/blogger is a good writer (Socal Mom, 2005). It is clear from a perusal of the mommyblogosphere, however, that just like any other genre, quality of writing varies: there are both skilled writers and naïve ones and everything in between. The most popular mommyblogs are well-written, entertaining, and frequently, funny (McKenna, 2008). While this makes for good reading, the popularity of the “best” mommybloggers is bound to be problematic for those looking for accurate portrayals of motherhood because, of course, once a writer has readers, she will want to produce writing that keeps them reading, which may mean exaggerating for comedic effect, for example. In addition, popular bloggers can earn extra income, and in some cases, a living, from their blogs

⁵ Convention Program: http://www.scca.net/files/conventions/2007/1_100d.pdf

via advertising and sponsorships. But advertising is not the only way bloggers benefit financially (and professionally) from their blogs. Danielle Donders's blog was instrumental in her move "to a new position at work, where [she]'ll spend the best part of a year dedicated solely to developing and implementing policies and projects relating to social media. [She]'ll be looking at the tools of social media—including blogs, wikis, podcasts and the like—as communication tools for the Government of Canada"(2007/06/20, n.p.). Other bloggers have obtained paid blogging positions, written articles for more traditional media, contributed to anthologies, and even earned book deals because of their personal blogs. BlogHer contributing editor Jennifer Satterwhite notes that mommybloggers "are much sought after by marketers, talk shows and magazines. ... We are taking on issues that are changing the world and the way people view it" (Satterwhite, 2008, n.p.).

This is a curious situation for both bloggers and observers. Some bloggers express concern about the commercialization of mommyblogs, and the pressure to be funny like many of the popular bloggers: "I feel like the push for traffic, ads and comments is causing women to write in voices that are not necessarily their own. Nobody is funny all the time. Look at Dooce or Finslippy. The writing is so engaging because they have a balance between the snark, the mundane and the difficult. I don't think ads or traffic are worth the loss of voice" (Jess, 2006, n.p.). Tracey Gaughran-Perez positions her decision to be a stay-at-home mom as a statement against both capitalism and second-wave feminism. She argues that feminism's success at earning middle-class women the right to pursue careers traditionally held by men is not an unmitigated win for women: "its (*sic*) not as though we've even come close to being equals ... The structures of capitalism—crafted and maintained

by men—OF COURSE deny that at every turn. It will *never* allow large numbers of women to assume positions of real power (oh and ps: being bullshit middle-management doesn't count as *real power*). It will *never* allow women to make the same as men." She believes that feminism has "duped" her:

I'm frankly sickened by the constant braying from mainstream Feminists about how women like myself have failed Feminism, about how we're traitors to the cause because we've dared step off the hamster wheel of generating capital. To my mind, Feminism has failed me and all other mothers who've made the choices I've made, as we're suddenly made irrelevant in pursuing something that is and always has been a staple of womanhood: bearing and raising children. The demeaning reduction of that relative to capital-producing labor, and Feminism's overt collusion in that reduction, is both shameful and traitorous. (Gaughran-Perez, 2006, n.p.)

However, Gaughran-Perez's blog is no longer simply a personal journal; she is a popular blogger with a substantial number of ads on her blog. In other words, her blog is a commercial venture. Thus, she seems to not only have bought back into the system she claims to have rejected (she is "generating capital" from her writing), but arguably, she is also commercializing the traditionally unpaid labor of motherhood. Thus, it seems problematic for her to claim that she has opted out, and raises the question of whether it is misleading for a woman to claim to be a stay-at-home mom when she earns money from her writing, and what effects such claims might have on other mothers, for instance, the perception that all mommybloggers are stay-at-home mothers or that for women/mothers, writing is a hobby, not a career. Of course, claiming to be a stay-at-home mom when one is actually a *work-at-home* mom is not confined to bloggers. Writer Caitlin Flanagan claims to be a stay-at-home mother despite the fact she writes for *The New Yorker* (and before that, *Atlantic Monthly*).

Salon editor-in-chief Joan Walsh asks, “So how is she not a career woman who’s also a mom?” (2006, n.p.). Walsh suggests that

[a] not-so-great consequence of Betty Friedan’s “The Feminine Mystique” is that it led to the conclusion that stay-at-home motherhood was bad because it felt bad to a lot of women in Friedan’s generation; by the same logic, we’re now being told by writers like Flanagan that stay-at-home motherhood is good, because to some women (who believe they’d been denied it by feminism), it feels good. (Walsh, 2006, n.p.)

This point by Walsh seems to speak to Gaughran-Perez’s issues with feminism and gives some insight into why a woman who gave up her career to be a stay-at-home mom (and perhaps was, for a time) would continue to hang onto the stay-at-home label when she is actually earning income.

Some bloggers argue that monetizing their blogs validates them, that is, they are more likely to be taken seriously (Satterwhite, 2007), which is no doubt true. However, it seems problematic that one should have to turn one’s hobby into a business just to be able to justify why one does it. Others oppose advertising on parenting blogs because they feel such parents are exploiting their children, even though, as one blogger points out “[t]hey are NOT making money out of their kids; they are making money from the fact that people choose to consume and support the stuff they write, which just happens to be about their kids” (Albertyn, 2006, n.p.). Even the top mommybloggers are not immune from criticism. Heather Armstrong of *Dooce* is estimated to earn \$40,000 a month from her blog, an amount that supports her family (her husband quit his job in 2005) (Shellenbarger, 2008). Because of this, commentators have turned their focus to how difficult it would be for Armstrong to stop blogging now (Pearce, 2008). I imagine it *would* be difficult—as difficult as it would be for *anyone* to give up their primary source of income. However, I believe

the message here is meant to be that one should keep one's personal and professional lives separate—but writers have always mined their own lives for material; this is nothing new. The difference is how many people have access to the blog medium, as opposed to traditional media.

- **Question 4: Does commercialization affect the authenticity of mommyblogs?**

1.2.5 A Multiplicity of Viewpoints

Blogs in their individuality—the way they are dominated by a single voice, the way they enforce a lack of community or consensus as they are focused on the experience of one person—might seem to undermine the work of creating a unified experience of feminism. But in fact, in allowing marginalized voices to have a presence, to be heard—or, in this case, read—I believe they function in the exact opposite way. Mothers who go online are finding a multiplicity of viewpoints, a real and humanized investigation of the complex and varied ways in which we mother, and mothers who recognize themselves in the writings of these mother-bloggers feel valid. They feel heard. And they feel empowered. (Buchanan, 2006, n.p.)

Most people who read more than a few blogs on a regular basis use what is called a feed reader, such as Bloglines (<http://www.bloglines.com>) or Google Reader (<http://www.google.com/reader>).⁶ Most blogs, and many other sites that are frequently updated (for example, news sites like *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>), have feeds that can be subscribed to. Feed readers aggregate the content from subscribed sites in one place, so, instead of having to go to each individual blog to check whether there is anything new, people can just check their feed readers to see if there are any new posts—just as they would check their email. This makes it much easier to keep up with a number of sites. The feed reader displays the *content of the posts* (including embedded photographs, video, and

⁶ A “plain English” introduction to feeds: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0klgLSxGsU>

mp3s, in most cases), but not the style of the individual sites, nor any of the other site content.

The typical way one reads blogs is not like a one reads a book, that is, pick up one book, read from beginning to end, pick up next book, repeat. Rather, with blogs, one keeps up with several blogs simultaneously, reading new posts as they are written and added to the blogtexts. A typical blog reading pattern (in a feed reader) would be: Monday, read posts from blogs A and B; Tuesday, read posts from blogs B, C, and D; Wednesday, read posts from blogs A and E; and so forth reading the new posts from blogs that have been updated. In this way, one can see that for the reader, individual posts are not juxtaposed against posts from the same blog, but rather from *other* blogs. Thus, while each blog has an individual voice, the blogs taken together *as they are read*, have a multiplicity of voices (which will of course vary with each reader, depending on which blogs are read). The story the reader reads is not just Blogger A's personal story or Blogger B's personal story, but rather both of those (and those of all the other bloggers read), *as well as* the overarching story that is revealed in the common themes, connections, agreements, and discordances between those individual stories. It thus becomes clear that the connections between blogs can transcend merely the obvious (hyperlinks).

Mad Hatter, who is an academic librarian, acknowledges that “[o]ne of the big critiques of mommy blogging is that it is a rarified and homogenous space” (2007/03/14). She agrees with the criticism, noting that there are issues of race, class, access, and especially literacy: “How many women are out there who not only can write thousands of words a week but who want to as well? Blogging will always be

a genre of privilege just as publishing has always been a genre of privilege” (Mad Hatter, 2007/03/14). However, she also points out that the people she has met through blogging are far more diverse (in ways such as occupation, age, location, religion, and whether they are parents or not) than her offline friendships have ever been:

Never in my real life have I been exposed to such diversity in my peer group. Never. We may all be white, middle class women in the West but we are more diverse as a group than likely most of us could manage to hobble together for a Wednesday night reading group. ... Sure, this degree of diversity may not be world altering but it does have its trickle-down effect. My ideas and opinions have been broadened. The way that I respond (and will respond) to issues in my local community has been altered. I have learned heaps and mounds from all the social justice posts that have come to my attention of late. I have broadened the scope of my charitable giving since becoming a blogger. I have been able to speak with other mothers in my community about parenting issues that have been addressed in this space. In short, blogging has done a lot more than just make me feel fulfilled and smug. What I have learned here is starting to seep out a bit into the concrete world that surrounds me (Mad Hatter, 2007/03/14, n.p.; emphasis added).

Another blogger, Veronica Mitchell, points out that she and her friend (who also blogs) feel privileged to have the opportunity to read viewpoints that differ from their own:

Although [Antique Mommy] and I are Christians (or maybe because of it), we each have a favorite atheist blogger. We both agreed that the ability to read the personal thoughts and experiences of someone with such different beliefs from our own feels like a great privilege. Blogging gives us a chance to know people on a level that we might not be allowed in person. The walls don't go up so quickly. Small talk does not first weed out to whom we will reveal our true selves. The strange, instant intimacy of blogging gives us the opportunity to understand how other people see themselves and the world in a way that casual conversation does not. (Mitchell, 2007, n.p.)

Catherine Connors notes that the writer of *The Globe and Mail* article that quoted her offered to have the offensive comments removed, but she declined the

offer, in part because it was her choice to enter into the discussion (agree to be interviewed and quoted) and in part because she is not in favor of censorship. She admits to having second thoughts about “[l]etting comments that refer to me as ‘vile’ and ‘zombified’ and ‘pimp’ stand for eternity on the interwebs” but decides that maybe “open discourse require[s] a bit of personal discomfort—perhaps more than I’m used to—sometimes” (Connors, 2008, n.p.; italics author’s).

- **Question 5: Is the mommyblogosphere dialogic?**

1.3 Rationale for this Study

Despite the proliferation of blogs, there is little literature on the medium yet. A keyword search on “blog” of the Simon Fraser University Library catalogue, for example, turns up 92 items, but the majority of these are how-to books, with respect to either blog development or business/marketing, or else general surveys of the new medium. While there have been some articles and books written on blogs in general, many of which are cited in this thesis, database searches on the terms “blog and motherhood” turn up primarily newspaper articles (many of which are cited above), not academic papers. The term “mommyblogging” (and variations thereof) is barely mentioned in academic research, although this appears to be changing: there have been a few conference presentations on the topic—one of which I noted above, and another by Lori DesRochers (2007) that was inspired by Alice Bradley’s “radical act” statement at the first BlogHer conference. This shows that a few people, at least, are starting to think about the medium. Nevertheless, there is a definite gap in the literature with respect to the genre of mommyblogs that this study attempts to address.

In this thesis, I explore why mommyblogs are controversial, who the mommybloggers are and what they are doing, what effect commercialization is having on mommyblogs, and whether mommyblogs are dialogic spaces. In the next chapter, I describe the approach I have taken to my research and my basis for doing so. Chapter 3 is a review of the relevant literature. I begin with an introduction where I discuss the relevance of the theories of dialogism and intertextuality to blog narratives, as well as the potential applicability of database theory. I then discuss research into earlier genres that bear similarities to blogs and what the significance of those theories is from the different perspectives of blog writers, blog readers, and the blog community. In Chapter 4, I analyze eight Canadian mommyblogs. In Chapter 5, I discuss my findings. I conclude that:

- the mommyblog inspires such strong reactions because it is written by a woman, and combines a “feminine” form, the personal blog,⁷ with content that has historically been considered taboo (birth, miscarriage, all manner of bodily fluids);
- while mommybloggers *do* conform to the “mommyblogger” stereotype in some ways (they are likely to be heterosexual and married, for example), they *do not* conform in other significant ways, for example, they are likely to be employed and are no more likely to be homeowners than the general population;

⁷ This is not to say that the personal blog is a genre favored only by women—as noted above, more male bloggers keep personal blogs than any other kind of blog as well—but that it is *perceived* as feminine (because of its focus on the private sphere), while the filter blog, with its focus on the public sphere, is perceived as masculine.

- mommybloggers' motivations for blogging vary. Bloggers may be seeking a community, a place to vent or be "alone" (that is, apart from family), a way to keep family/friends up-to-date or create a scrapbook for their children, or a place to polish writing or web design skills. Motivations often change over time;
- despite the focus on children/motherhood, many mommybloggers see their blogs as entrepreneurial ventures or opportunities for self-promotion. Where a mother has left full-time employment for freelance work, these opportunities are more actively pursued. A paradox is created, however, when a "stay-at-home" mom earns an income from her "hobby" without adjusting her status; and
- while each blog is dominated by a single voice, the blogosphere *is* dialogic for several reasons including the fact that readers experience many points-of-view as they read *across* blogs. As well, most blog readers are also bloggers themselves, which means they are experiencing blogs in multiple ways: as a writer (at own blog), as a reader (at other blogs read only or *lurked* at), and as a community member (at other blogs both read *and* commented on).

2: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Delineating the Sample

For the purposes of my study, a mommyblogger was defined as a mother who blogs about her children and/or her experiences as a mother; however, motherhood did not have to be sole focus of the blog. Since a comprehensive survey of all mommyblogs in existence would of course be beyond the scope of this thesis, I chose to take a purposive sampling approach. Because I am interested in blogging as a new media phenomenon that is accessible to ordinary people and reflective of a general trend in society to publicize private lives, I chose to avoid blogs written by celebrities, for example, writer Rebecca Eckler's *Nine Pound Dictator* (<http://ninepounddictator.blogspot.com>) or "blogebrities," for example, Heather B. Armstrong's *Dooce* (<http://www.dooce.com>). The interaction of celebrities / blogebrities with their readers and other bloggers is not representative of the average blogger's experience, but would be worth investigating in a separate study. I limited the population to bloggers who had been blogging for more than one year so that it would be possible to see how each blogger's narrative, as well as the overarching narrative of the mommyblogosphere, developed over a period of time. Finally, I restricted the population of sample blogs to Canadian-based blogs because this is an understudied population; it has not been the focus of prior studies, and is less likely than other populations (American blogs, in particular) to be the focus of future studies.

To find mommyblogs that matched my criteria, I went to *BlogHer* (<http://blogher.org/>), a site that is promoted as “Where the Women Are.” *BlogHer* maintains blogrolls, that is, lists of blogs in various categories. Each blogger must submit her blog to *BlogHer* in order for it to be listed there. Therefore, any blogger listed on this site has made the explicit choice to promote her site. For ethical reasons, this made it a good place to start: these bloggers want readers. Another reason is because one of the sub-groups at *BlogHer* is Canadian blogs (<http://blogher.org/links/world-blogs/canadian-blogs>), which not only suited my criteria, but was also a much smaller group than mommyblogs in general to search. I searched the Canadian blog listings for ones that were cross-listed as “Mommy and Family Blogs.” In addition to eliminating those blogs that did not meet the criteria mentioned above, I also eliminated those where the blogger appeared to be using the blog as a digital version of a paper journal (no links in posts, nothing in sidebar, no comments), because, while such blogs are an interesting sidenote, like the blogebrities, they are not indicative of the average blogger’s experience.

Because I am interested in who the mommybloggers actually are and what they are doing with their blogs, I did want to preserve a certain amount of randomness to the sample. For example, I did not want to choose only blogs that I personally consider well written or deliberately choose a widely diverse sample of bloggers, since such selections obviously would have skewed the results of the study. This means that I did not read the blogs extensively prior to selecting them (thus, any connections between the bloggers only became apparent as the study progressed). Once I had confirmed that a blog met the criteria outlined above, I bookmarked it and moved onto the next. When had a sufficient sample size, I

stopped. I kept the sample relatively small so that I would be able to focus on analyzing the texts. The eight blogs chosen for this study were: Heather Cook's *The Writing Mother*, Dani Donders's *Postcards from the Mothership*, Haley-O's *The Cheaty Monkey*, Ali Martell's *Cheaper Than Therapy*, Shazia Mistry's *Adventures in Motherhood*, Trudy Morgan-Cole's *Hypergraffiti*, Sherry Osborne's *Chaos Theory*, and Leanne Palmerston's *Momcast: Subvert the Dominant Motherhood*.

2.2 Method

My method grew from the desire to address the issues identified in the literature. After reviewing the discussions and controversies about mommyblogs currently taking place in the blogosphere, I decided to address five key questions in this thesis:

1. What makes blogging different from other kinds of lifewriting?
2. Who are the real mommybloggers?
3. Why do mommybloggers blog?
4. Does commercialization affect the authenticity of mommyblogs?
5. Is the mommyblogosphere dialogic?

In her study of online diaries and blogs, Viviane Serfaty addressed the conflict between the literary and social scientific approaches to autobiographical research:

A literary approach to online diaries rests on the assumption that, no matter how 'truthful' diarists purport themselves to be, their version of truth, of character, or of protagonist is a fictional construction. ... Ethically speaking, it means that personal writings on the Internet are not to be viewed as 'slice-of-life' documents or faithful reflections of reality. Attention is instead focused on the internal logic of the text, seen as a self-contained, self-referential artifact. (Serfaty, 2004b, p. 10)

Serfaty's characterization of personal writing online is in keeping with Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's definition of life narrative "as a historically situated practice of *self-representation*" where "narrators *selectively engage* their lived experience through personal storytelling" (2001, p. 14, emphasis added). In other words, whether online or off, the lifewriter decides which aspects of her life to write about and which to leave out, in order to create a particular image of herself. In this way, she turns herself (and others) into characters and the events of her life into a story.

The social scientific approach, on the other hand, raises a number of problems. One is that obtaining bloggers' permission means a switch from unobtrusive textual analysis to participant observation. Such direct contact may lead the observer to empathize with the subject and thus be less likely to make observations that might be construed as criticisms of the blogger. Philippe Lejeune, quoted in Serfaty, states: "Reading the diary of a living person even as it is being kept, while simultaneously maintaining a relationship with the diarist, is closer to an intimate pact than to a scientific approach. No one ought to be encouraged to undertake such an adventure" (2004b, p. 11). In the context of blogging, any contact between researcher and blogger is likely to have an impact on the blogtext itself. For example, a blogger might censor her thoughts, delete a controversial post, or even acknowledge the study outright, which would then impact her readers' behavior as well. This would in turn modify the results of the study. Another requirement of the social scientific approach is guaranteeing the anonymity of participants; however, where blogs are concerned, this requirement is moot. Bloggers are not *participants* (that is, doing something in response to a prompt by the researcher), but rather self-

identified⁸ *writers* of publicly-available texts, which academic integrity requires be properly cited. With all this in mind, Serfaty determined that blogs are “certainly personal, often intimate but not private” (2004b, p. 12); rather, they are “published literary works whose study demands compliance with copyright law and quotation rules, without, however, any further precautions regarding privacy or anonymity” (Serfaty, 2004b, p. 13). Following this rationale, I also chose to take the literary approach, and treat the blogs as published texts. My method of inquiry was therefore textual analysis.

I chose to focus on the *content* of the posts because, as explained above, the common way to read blogs is in a feed reader, and when reading blogs that way, the posts are the only part of a blog a reader sees (unless of course, they click through to the post to make a comment). I analyzed the blogtexts as literary works, focusing on the content and themes in the posts, blogs, and community (blogosphere). I also examined the relationship between the bloggers (the writers), their blog personas (characters), and blog readers, and considered whether each blogger (writer) and blog (text) was influenced by factors such as readership, commercialization, and interaction with other bloggers. In order to track the development of the blogs’ narratives over time, I analyzed the posts from each blog’s first month and anniversary months, and the last complete month of posts before I began my study (September 2007).

⁸ While some bloggers do use pseudonyms, this is no different than any other form of writing. Where a blogger only uses a pseudonym, s/he should be given credit for the work under that name.

3: LITERATURE REVIEW

In first part of this chapter, I discuss the relevance of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism to the study of the blogosphere, as well as the potential application of Manovich's database theory to the genre of the blog as a new medium. In the latter part of the chapter, I discuss the blog's relationship to earlier media, in particular, how the form the blog most resembles depends on whether the blog is being looked at from the perspective of a blogger, blog reader, or community member (commenter). I discuss each of these in turn.

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Dialogism and Intertextuality

In his theory of *dialogism*, Mikhail M. Bakhtin argues that all texts are based on previous *utterances*. An utterance can be a word, a sentence, an essay, or even a novel, but the significance is that any utterance is a link "in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 92). The consequence of this is that no text is ever completely original nor can it belong to a single author (Stam, 1989); while each utterance is individual, "the organizing center of any utterance, of any experience, is not within but outside—in the social milieu surrounding the individual being" (Volosinov, 1985, 60). In other words, "*word is a two-sided act*. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is

precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*" (Bakhtin, 1994, p. 58; italics author's).

With a hypertext, readers must decide which links to follow and how far to follow them. Because links are usually embedded in words, it is possible to see that any (or all) words are capable of leading out (or in) to a text and thus, do not belong solely to the author of that particular set of words:

Each of the threads in a hypertext is a fragment of conversation, subject to the influence of those threads to which it is linked, by accident or design. The link is a space of convergence, contact, interpellation—a social space, from which the combined effect of this chorus of discourses radiates outward to other threads and other links. Though any single hypertext is composed of a finite number of threads and links, it is potentially woven into a fabric of multiform discourses that exceeds the text's capacity to represent its own boundaries. (Harpold, 1992, n.p.)

If we think of a blog post as an utterance, then the links within that post make the linked-to texts part of the utterance, and so on, and, just as out-bound links blur the ending of the utterance, in-bound links blur the beginning of the utterance. The openended nature of blogtexts challenges the status quo, that is, the predominant view that a text should be closed, stable, fully discoverable, and that any given text *belongs to* an individual author. In other words, blogs make manifest the critique of closed texts that Bakhtin challenged in the 1920s. However, just like other texts, it is not only links that connect blogs to other texts, but all references contained within the blogtext. For example, all of the mommybloggers are linked by the myths of motherhood that they are all familiar with, whether they agree or disagree, or react consciously or sub-consciously.

According to Bakhtin, *monologic* narratives are those in which there is an authoritative narrator that subordinates all other voices in the text (Kristeva, 1986, p. 41), while *dialogic* narratives are those which allow for *heteroglossia*, or a diversity of voices. Bakhtin argues that “the polyphonic novel fights against any view of the world which would valorize one ‘official’ point-of-view, one ideological position, and thus one discourse, above all others” (Allen, 2000, 24). Like the polyphonic novel, blogs contain multiple points of view. While a single blog, on its own, may *appear* monologic because of the dominance of one blogger’s voice, it is important to understand that each blog does not stand alone; rather it is part of an extended narrative stretching across a community of blogs. In other words, each mommyblogger is the equivalent of a character in a polyphonic novel, while it is the mommyblogosphere (*not* any one blog) that is the novel’s counterpart.

Julia Kristeva’s development of Bakhtin’s ideas in her theory of *intertextuality* describes the ongoing dialogism (doubleness) and instability (neverending production) of texts. Here *dialogic* does not literally equate to *dialogue*, rather “dialogue can be monological, and what is called monologue can be dialogical” (Kristeva, 1986, p. 38). She argues that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (1986, p.37). Roland Barthes elaborates, stating that the modern writer (or *scriptor*) creates “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture” (1988, p. 146). Thus, even if a blogger does not directly engage in conversation with other bloggers, a dialogue is still taking place: “every utterance, including the solitary utterance, has its ‘others’ and exists against a backdrop of

other utterances" (Stam, 1989, 189). For example, a mommyblogger's struggle to reconcile her role as a working mother can be considered dialogic because the blogger is engaged in a dialogue with herself, the issues (and the myths and pre-existing texts surrounding them), and her audience (even if they are just readers who do not comment, or "lurkers").

Barthes argues that the death of the Author (that is the Author-God, presenter of a single truth) makes way for the birth of the *reader*, the person who pieces various texts together: the "reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (1988, p. 148). The death of the Author also makes way for *writers* (plural). Barthes points out that to "give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (Barthes, 1988, p. 147). When the term *Author* is distinguished from *writer*, it is possible to credit the various writers who contributed to a text for their contributions, while still arguing that the text as a whole is without an Author, and thus leave the text *open*. Barthes distinguishes the "text of bliss" (*jouissance*) from the "text of pleasure" (*plaisir*). While reading a text of pleasure (readerly text) can be enjoyable, it is "a pleasure of consumption; for if I can read these authors, I also know that I cannot re-write them" (Barthes, 1988, p. 163). With a text of *jouissance* (writerly text), the separation between writer and reader is diminished; it is a "pleasure without separation" (Barthes, 1988, p. 164); thus the reader experiences ennui (boredom) as well as bliss. This is especially evident in the blogosphere, where each person can be both a blogger (writer) of her own blog and a reader (and perhaps commenter) at other blogs. In this way, blogs are carnivalesque: "A carnival

participant is both actor and spectator” (Kristeva, 1986, p. 49). In other words, the separation between writer and reader is lost, because each blogger is *both* writer and reader, and this “challenge[s] assumptions about what is intrinsic or extrinsic to the literary ‘object’” (Becker-Leckrone, 2005, p. 13). Furthermore, no one person has control over the text, which means the text can never be closed.

3.1.2 Databases and Narratives

Lev Manovich asks, “how can one keep a coherent narrative or any other development trajectory through the material if it keeps changing?” (2000, p. 178). He contends that “[m]any new media objects do not tell stories; they don’t have beginning or end; in fact, they don’t have any development, thematically, formally or otherwise which would organise their elements into a sequence. Instead, they are collections of individual items, where every item has the same significance as any other” (2000, p. 176). Manovich’s theory makes sense when thinking of a traditional website, where it does not matter what page of the site you look at first because they are not arranged in any particular order, and if the site is of any size, users are probably going to use the search function to find what they want. A good example of a “collection” site is the Internet Movie Database, (<http://www.imdb.com/>) which is a collection of information on movies and television. IMDb users are most likely to go straight to the page of the movie or actor they are interested in by typing a name into the search box. From there, they may click on the name of another actor, another film, or even a date or place name—everything is linked. While following a link might have some logic to it (clicking the name of a sibling, for example), it might

also be near-random (clicking the year the film was made or the name of an obscure crew member).

However, while blog posts are stored as a database, and they *can* be searched and viewed in any order, they are not purely random collections of data, nor are additions random. Generally posts are written from the perspective of today. When an out-of-chronological-order post is added, context is given to explain where that post fits compared to today (for example, “Two years ago...”). Because of the events that take place in the posts, there is an awareness of past / future context, even when posts are read out of order (the birth had to come *after* the pregnancy, even if one reads the birth post first). Manovich does acknowledge that *some* new media objects are experienced as narratives, despite being based on underlying databases; for example, computer games, and I argue that this is how the regular blogreader experiences a blog. On the other hand, someone who stumbles across a post while doing a Google search might experience the blog more as a database, depending on whether their experience was limited to just that post, or whether they were pulled into the narrative and started to follow it. This double way of reading the text is one of the ways it is dialogic.

Manovich states, “As a cultural form, database represents the world as a list of items and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events)” (2000, p. 181). I argue that this is exactly what bloggers are doing: taking the events of their lives (however random they might seem) and ordering them, which creates a narrative. It is clear when reading a blog over a period of time that certain events lead to others; so while

there may be some posts that could fit anywhere (a link to a funny YouTube video, for example), the majority of posts have a semblance of order. In addition, most blogs are centered on a few key themes, and for the most part, it is the events that advance the stories surrounding those themes that are shared. In other words, no blogger includes everything that happens in her life; she shares the things that develop her blog persona (character) and advance the storyline(s) in her blog. Manovich also says that it is incorrect to assume that a user who chooses her own path “constructs her own unique narrative”; he argues that “if the user simply accesses different elements, one after another, in a usually random order, there is no reason to assume that these elements will form a narrative at all” (2000, p. 183). However, I argue that in a blog, although a reader does have a choice of whether to click a link (or watch a video or play a song) or not, the paths these links create are not random; in fact, links and references have been chosen carefully by the bloggers to create a particular narrative. In other words, the blogger does not embed a link in every significant noun, as in a Wikipedia entry, for example. Rather, she adds links and other elements where they enhance the story she is trying to tell. While each reader is likely to choose a somewhat different path (and by only following *some* links and not others, the reader might miss out on part of the story), this does not negate the rationale behind the links or the connections between the texts.

In fact, most readers will not follow all the links in a text or watch all the videos or view all the extra photographs at Flickr.⁹ For one thing, the time it would take to do that if one reads more than a few blogs would be prohibitive. But even assuming all the time in the world, most readers will not go in all the directions a

⁹ <http://www.flickr.com/> -- a photo storage and sharing site.

blog post points them. As an example (and keep in mind, I am simplifying a great deal), imagine a reader who is reading a post wherein a blogger is relating a story. Mid-way through the second paragraph, just as things start to get interesting, there is a link. It is a link to an older post that provides some context. The reader knows this because the blogger says something like “when this happened before” and the word “before” is a link. Does she click the link? If she does, she has to leave this current story to go to the older one. Assume she chooses the older story. She starts reading that post and there are links in it. She thinks about following them, but she is still interested in the first story and wants to get back to it. She now has to decide whether to follow a link in the older story or go back to where she started.

My point is, even though the writing in a personal blog can seem fairly straightforward, it can get complicated quite quickly. There is always a feeling of incompleteness. Even the most dedicated reader is likely to have the nagging feeling of never quite getting to everything at some point. This can be frustrating, especially when one first starts reading blogs. What does one do with an exceptionally link-rich post? Check out all the links at once but only follow them one iteration? Save the post and read one link at a time? Ignore the links because it is all too overwhelming? Caitlin Fisher, writing of her doctoral dissertation, which was written as a hypertext, explains that “the reader was challenged to choose her own pathways through the material from among many others I had coded; to build the text from fragments. No two readers were likely to have read the same screens in the same order. I think of this text as my text of jouissance ... In other words, it was a text that very few people seemed to enjoy” (2002, n.p.). Fisher considers “the navigational apparatus” (way the posts are organized, how they are linked) to be “a signifying component of the

text”; however, she found that readers “read the words and quotations, the elements of the database, but not its structure or associative method of organization. The lexias or screens full of text were understood as the ‘real’ content of the dissertation and the structure itself—its contours, its conventions, new ground I’d hoped it might break—was largely unintelligible to many of them” (Fisher, 2002, n.p.). This is what I am trying to say: that even though the text *within* a post may be a readerly text, a text of pleasure; the text of the blog, and beyond that, the text of the community, is a writerly text, a text of jouissance. So here again, the text can be read in two ways. This is another way it is dialogic.

Like the readers of Fisher’s dissertation, many blog readers likely focus on the text of the posts in order to keep the text enjoyable, at least initially. (However, even if the reader does not follow a link, she knows, by virtue of the link being there, that the writer has assigned some extra value to that word.) One of the reasons why reading a blogtext in a non-linear way is difficult for readers used to linear texts is precisely because, as noted above, it does have a chronology and a narrative attached to it. Reading in a non-linear way, however, forces the reader to take an active role, as Barthes noted, in piecing together the pieces of the narrative and putting them in order in a way that makes sense. New blog readers may feel as Laurie McNeill does, that blogs are “absurd parodies” of diaries, “fragmented narratives that jump disconnectedly from topic to topic, recording in mundane detail the diarist’s daily life” (2003, p. 30). However, as readers become more familiar with how a blogtext is constructed, they become more accustomed to reading the text in a non-linear way. A seasoned blog reader (J), for example, will be able to pick up on a comment made by one blogger (K) at another blogger’s blog (L) and not only add

the content of the comment to what J knows about K's narrative, but also the significance/context of why K provided that information at L's blog and not her own. N. Katherine Hayles, citing Jane Yellowlees Douglas, "suggests that closure is achieved not when all the lexias have been read, but when the user learns enough about the central mystery to believe she understands it"(2005, p. 165). Similarly, Smith and Watson contend that autobiographical truth "is an intersubjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing a shared understanding of the meaning of a life" (2001, p. 13).

3.2 Writer: Diaries and Scrapbooks

For the writer, blogs are the latest incarnation of lifewriting, with predecessors that include diaries, journals, personal essays, editorials, memoirs, autobiography, and even letters. In contrast to biography, which looks at a life from the perspective of a third party, "[i]n life narrative people write about their own lives ... and do so simultaneously from externalized and internal points of view" (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 4-5). As well, blogs are compilations of memorabilia, with similarities to commonplace books, writer's notebooks, scrapbooks, photo albums, and personal websites. In a blog, however, these items are integrated into the narrative and used to embellish and advance it (that is, they are not random). In this section, I argue that the polarized reaction toward mommyblogs are a result of a *combination* of who is writing them (ordinary women), where they are writing (in public), and what they are writing about (formerly taboo topics). This combination of factors appeals to individuals who identify with the bloggers (other mothers), but often repels others.

3.2.1 Who?

Historically, the diaries of ordinary people, with their preoccupation with the personal, were dismissed as literary or cultural texts (Hassam, 1993; Wylie, 1995; Carter, 2002; Zalis, 2003; Cadle, 2005). As Lanette Cadle points out, “this predisposition to consider personal writing as less significant extends into cyberspace” (2005, p. 7). For example, Laurie McNeill writes, “I’ve learned too much I didn’t need to know about too many people’s everyday lives—lives without anything particularly extraordinary to recommend them, except the diarists’ own sense of importance and relevance” (2003, p. 24).

To value a personal blog written by an ordinary person means rethinking one’s biases: “Web diaries challenge not only our notions about *whose* lives should be written, but *how* they should be written, forcing readers to examine their own aesthetic, cultural, generational biases” (McNeill, 2003, p. 45; emphasis added). Because of this resistance, some scholars think that on some level, all blogging is an act of rebellion:

Writing and experiencing the writing, the community, through emotional and social links and a feeling of belonging, this is a description of blogging as a middle- or even low-brow art. As such it opposes the hegemony of the cultural elite, and it serves the same purpose as punk rock did in the late 1970s, early 1980s. (Mortensen, 2004)

Feminist scholars note that Western society has traditionally placed value on the life stories and experiences of men, which means that “knowledge, truth, and reality have been constructed as if men’s experiences were normative, as if being human meant being male” (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 3), and that the term *autobiography* has come to be associated with the particular style of individualistic

quest narrative associated with Western white males (Gilmore, 1994). In contrast, women's memoirs often employ a non-authoritative narrator. While it may seem counter-intuitive, readers often find this type of narrator "more convincing because it implies the multiplicity of a relational field, rather than the singleness of viewpoint that traditional narrative voices project" (Buss, 2002, p. 25). That is, by taking a non-authoritative stance, a memoirist acknowledges that readers' experiences may vary and implicitly encourages them to also share their own stories.

Autobiographies tend to be closed texts that encompass their own endings (Serfaty, 2004b); they "are linear, chronological, progressive, cumulative and individualist, and follow highly particular narrative conventions" (Stanley, 1992, p. 11-12). Blogs, on the other hand, like diaries, are constructed as the events in them happen, and as such, they are perpetually works-in-progress. This means that they may feel incoherent to readers used to reading texts that follow traditional literary conventions (Conrad, 1982; Lensink, 1987; Serfaty, 2004a). The very aspects of personal blogs that are frequently disparaged—the repetitiveness, the minutiae of day-to-day life, the artlessness of the text, the lack of focus—are what feminist scholars find most valuable about women's memoirs. Sinor argues that that "the diurnal form ... captures the openness and immediacy of a life in progress. What we learn from reading ordinary writing is how the unmarked moments of our days equally and fully participate in the continual making of identity and the making of texts" (2002, p. 202) and Serfaty adds that "the familiar, the trivial, the commonplace are precisely what gives access to the essential reality of humanity. Through the investigation of the minute events of everyday life, the reality common to all may emerge and lay the foundation for a new community" (2004, p. 468).

To summarize, the first reason mommybloggers are held in low esteem is because of the ingrained biases in our society against personal writing, writing by ordinary people, and women's writing.

3.2.2 **Where?**

Irene Kacandes points out that a storyteller "cannot 'tell' without active listening. ... [T]o tell [her] story at all [she] needs a capable hearer with whom [she] shares similar talk behavior" (2001, p. 35), that is, someone who understands what the storyteller is saying. Historically, paper diarists often attempted to create a sympathetic listener by beginning their entries "Dear Diary" or by addressing their diaries in the form of a letter to a real or imagined friend. Blogs address the need for a listener by providing the storyteller with a real audience. Nevertheless, many writers and scholars are confounded by the existence of blogs (see, for example, McNeill, 2003; Sorapure, 2003). This disbelief is grounded in the assumption that diaries are a private genre; that is, not intended for an audience other than the diarist herself. However, Lynn Z. Bloom makes a compelling argument that the majority of personal diaries *are*, in fact, intended for an audience and that the only truly private diaries "are so terse they seem coded" (1996, p. 25); that is, the reader of a diary that was actually private would not be able to understand what the diarist was writing about without additional context being provided. In contrast, most diaries, even so-called private ones, are not written like this. Instead, they employ "[t]echniques to circumvent the diary's dailiness includ[ing] the employment of foreshadowing and flashbacks; emphasis on topics rather than chronology; repetition of philosophical themes and pervasive issues; character depiction; scene setting; and the use of

integrative metaphors, symbols, and other stylistic devices” (Bloom, 1996, p. 29). In other words, they *are* intended for an audience, if only a future, imagined one.

Other scholars point out that the idea of a paper diary being a private space is a recent one. Jennifer Sinor argues that the “sentimentality for the secret diary is strictly a twentieth-century pre-occupation[.] ... Women writing in the nineteenth century [and earlier] neither had the privilege nor expectation of ‘true’ privacy” (2002, p. 37). Like letters, early diaries were actually intended to be read by others—not just some imagined “future reader,” but a real audience of friends and family members (Field, 1989; Sjoblad, 1998; Carter, 2002). For example, diaries were read aloud in the evenings as entertainment, they were sent by women in the New World to family in the Old—since mail was so irregular, it was easier to keep a long narrative and send it all at once (Carter, 2002), and they were passed back and forth between sisters (Conrad, 1982). This means that, in making their diaries public, bloggers are remediating an earlier form of the diary. Like their historical counterparts, it seems that bloggers no longer hold the same expectations of privacy as diarists in the 20th century did. However, there is a difference: in the past, this was connected to women’s status as second-class citizens (where a woman might only be allowed to keep a diary if she could show that it served some useful purpose, such as entertaining the family or keeping in touch with relatives); now it has more to do with the rise of neo-liberalism and the accompanying loss of privacy in all aspects of modern life. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

To reiterate, the second reason contributing to the negativity toward mommyblogs is because they resemble diaries and, because many people presume that diaries have always been private, an online diary seems like an oxymoron.

3.2.3 What?

Diarists have always self-censored, omitting some things, writing around others (see, for example, Lensink, 1987; Wylie, 1995; Sinor, 2002; Reed, 2005). Usually the omitted topics were the most important, but also the most sensitive, ones having to do with hatred, sex, sexuality, birth control, and bodily functions (Conrad, 1982; Lensink, 1987; Wylie, 1995). The fact that such topics could not even be written about in diaries demonstrates just how taboo they were (and in some cases, still are). In contrast to their historical counterparts, mommybloggers frequently transgress this taboo by writing about topics such as pregnancy, miscarriage, birth, breastfeeding, and potty training—and, what is perhaps more significant, they do so not in an oblique, sanitized fashion, but in messy, gory detail—or, to use a Bakhtinian term, with *grotesque realism*. As Catherine Newman writes,

Blogging is the underbelly of scrapbooking, its tantruming, scatological doppelgänger. In the scrapbook version of my summer vacation, I would paste together a sunny collage of sea and sand and smiling kids. In the blog version, I might be more inclined to mention the steaming beach Port-A-John, where the final quarter of Birdy's sandwich ended up tumbling into the reeking blackness. If scrapbooking is the urge to put it all together, blogging might be the urge to take it all apart. (2008, n.p.)

Grotesque realism “is opposed to severance from the material and bodily roots of the world; it makes no pretense to renunciation of the earthy, or independence of the earth and the body” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 19). It degrades “all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract ... to the material level, to the sphere of earth and

body" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 19). According to Bakhtin, the grotesque body "exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 26); "the act of birth is grotesque because the body's surface is no longer closed, smooth and intact—rather the body looks as if it may tear apart, open out, reveal its innermost depths" (Creed, 1993, p. 58). At such times, the body demonstrates that it is unfinished and open: it "is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 26–27).

The pregnant body, in particular, represents a loss of boundaries: "Maternity is the only human experience that includes both enlargement, from one being to two, within one, and diminishment, from two beings to one" (Malin, 2000, p. 98). When Catherine Connors says that she thinks of her daughter as "[her] property, [her] work of art," "a work in progress that [she's] involved in" (Pearce, 2008), she touches a nerve with *Globe and Mail* readers, perhaps because, as Barbara Creed argues, women are often considered monstrous because the mother "has the power to deny her offspring an autonomous identity" and woman's "ability to give birth links her directly to the animal world and to the great cycle of birth, decay and death" (1993, p.47-48). The focus on pregnancy, miscarriage, and birth in mommyblogs emphasizes the *abjection* of the female body: "The womb represents the utmost in abjection for it contains a new life form which will pass from inside to outside bringing with it traces of its contamination—blood, afterbirth, faeces" (Creed, 1993, p. 49).

“Abject things are those that highlight the ‘fragility of the law’ and that exist on the other side of the border which separates out the living subject from that which threatens its extinction (Creed, 1993, p. 10). While the male body is “clearly differentiated from the world,” the female body is not, and thus “threatens the integrity of the patriarchal symbolic order” (Creed, 1993, p. 50–51). This threat to the symbolic order is why the grotesque and the abject are often portrayed in a negative way. However, “[t]he essence of the grotesque is precisely to present a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life. Negation and destruction (death of the old) are included as an essential phase, inseparable from affirmation, from the birth of something new and better” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 62). The grotesque is always double: death/birth, inside/outside, two-in-one/one-in-two. The grotesque realism of mommyblogs, with their focus on the abjection of women’s bodies, is another way in which mommyblogs are dialogic. As well, the openendedness of mommyblogs mirrors the openness of the grotesque body.

There is an additional layer here: while the book—which in “its apparent completeness recalls the image of totality in relation to which the ego first ‘discovers’ its autonomy” (Keep, 1999, p. 167)—exemplifies the *symbolic* (socially signifying language, reason, communication, singularity and unity), the blog, being openended, acts on the level of the *semiotic* (drives, erotic impulses, bodily rhythms and movements retained from infant stage) (Allen, 2000). Thus, the embracing of the blog medium by mothers is significant because “[i]t is the mother who for the child and metaphorically for culture at large, facilitates, enacts and embodies the passage between the semiotic and symbolic modalities and the path to representation” (A.-M. Smith, 1998, p. 22–23). Furthermore, it is not uncommon for bloggers to

contribute to print anthologies or obtain book deals (representing passage to symbolic). In other words, not only does the content of the mommyblogs focus on facilitating children's entrance into the symbolic, but their chosen form is an analogy for that process. This is another way in which mommyblogs are dialogic.

To review, the third reason that mommyblogs are belittled is because mommybloggers write about the grotesque and the abject—topics that many people find unsettling—and it is easier for people to ridicule the mommybloggers than to address their own issues with respect to these topics.

In conclusion, the mommyblog is controversial because mommybloggers are ordinary women whose stories are therefore considered unimportant, because mommyblogs are public and many people cannot reconcile writing about personal topics in a public forum, and perhaps most importantly, because mommybloggers frequently write about taboo topics that threaten the symbolic order. If any one of these things were changed, the reaction would be less polarized. For example, if a woman were blogging about birth from the perspective of health care provider (doctor, midwife), this would remove the personal aspect that the mommyblog has and make the discourse clinical, which would be acceptable because it is useful information. Similarly, a personal blog by a man writing about childcare (changing diapers, feeding) would more likely be regarded as comic (in keeping with a long line of Hollywood movies, such as *Mr. Mom*, *Three Men and a Baby*, *Daddy Day Care*) than grotesque.

3.3 Reader: Soap Operas and Docusoaps

Blog readers include both those who comment (are involved in the community) and those who “lurk”; that is, read, but do not comment. In this section, I focus on the audience as reader. I argue that, for readers, blogs most resemble soap operas and docusoaps—reality programs that mimic the soap opera format but feature real people instead of actors. An example of a docusoap is *The Hills*, a reality program that follows the purportedly unscripted—but definitely heavily edited—lives of a group of real-life friends and “frenemies.” Blogs also bear some resemblance to observational documentaries; however, these tend to follow persons with some celebrity connection (for example, *Living Lohan*) or have more of a work-based focus (for example, *Miami Ink*), and the narrative structure is looser.

Jason Mittell argues that “people who don’t watch soaps with some regularity cannot really understand the form, as the whole point of the genre is the long-time accrual of meanings and experiences, not the individual narrative segments of episodes” (2007, n.p.). The same thing is true with blogs (Walker Rettberg, 2007). Read individually, blog posts may appear to be “naïve” (Buss, 1991); that is, without any real narrative structure and without the context that more sophisticated texts provide readers. However, the regular reader of a blog community is not limited to the information provided within a single post, but is able to put that information together with what she already knows from reading that blog and others in the community. For example, a mommyblogger might write a post about a child, identifying that child by name (for example, Jane), but not specifically indicating that the person being discussed is her daughter. As such, it

might be unclear to a casual reader who Jane is. Regular readers, on the other hand, would know, because presumably, given the lack of explanation in the current post, the information that Jane is the blogger's daughter must have been conveyed in an earlier post.

Similarly, a blogger might refer to another blogger simply by name because she presumes (or knows) that her regular readers know whom she is talking about, either because they also read that blog, or the blogger is well-known within the community—and on the off chance that they are not familiar, they can always click the link embedded in the other blogger's name and check out her blog for themselves. Like soap operas, the mommyblog community is a decentered narrative. The individual bloggers in a blog community can be compared to the multiple viewpoint characters in a soap. Each soap will have multiple storylines occurring concurrently, and each episode will focus on several of these, switching between characters at each scene break. This can be compared to a reader checking in on the blogs she reads each day and reading the current posts on the blogs that have been updated. In other words, she will be updated on several (but not necessarily all) storylines that she is following, and when she finishes reading a post and starts a new one, she switches to a new viewpoint character.

Tania Modleski contends that soap operas are writerly texts because they eschew the dominant narrative pattern; that is, a closed ending equals truth/meaning/value. With a soap, resolution is always deferred. Truth in a soap opera lies not in a tidy conclusion, but in expectation and familial disorder: "the 'mini-climaxes' of soap operas function to introduce difficulties and to complicate

rather than simplify the characters' lives" (Modleski, 1982, p. 107). A soap opera imitates life in that its goal is not to reach a definitive conclusion, but to keep the narrative going as long as possible (decades, even). While certain plot points may be resolved, the overarching story continues. The same thing is true of blogs.

The repetitiveness of blogs correlates to the redundancy embedded in soap operas. Just as soap operas rely on "As you know, Bob" dialogue to fill new and returning viewers in, the blogger usually has an About Page that explains who they are so that new readers can jump in without reading through the complete archives. This is often just a one-sentence biography, but might be something more elaborate. In addition, bloggers make extensive use of flashbacks (linking back to earlier posts) and foreshadowing (sometimes adding links to future posts, sometimes other references to things to come). As Kylie Jarrett notes, "a blog does not only progress in one direction" (2004, n.p.).

While flashbacks in film and fiction are generally new to the audience (in other words, while presented as something that happened in the past, the scene is new to the reader/viewer), this is *not* the case with soap operas. In soap operas, flashbacks are used to remind viewers of important past events and provide continuity between now and then. As such, flashbacks on soap operas are scenes that have been previously broadcast. Similarly, flashbacks in blogs are not new to the audience (at least those who are long-time readers), rather they are reminders of topics already discussed and stored in the blog's archive (Jarrett, 2004). Being able "to refer back to one's own narratives in one's own words" (Kennedy, 2007, n.p.) is another way blogs are dialogic; that is, each time a scene is revisited, a new gloss is

put on it. The circularity of soap operas and blogs corresponds to the recursiveness of daily life:

the events and routines of daily life do not have a one-way flow to them. The terms 'social reproduction,' 'recursiveness' and so on indicate the repetitive character of day-to-day life, the routines of which are formed in terms of the intersection of the passing (but continual returning) days and seasons. Daily life has a duration, a flow, but it does not lead anywhere; the very adjective 'day-to-day' and its synonyms indicate that time here is constituted only in repetition. (Anthony Giddens, quoted in Manga, 2003, p. 61–62)

While it might seem that the redundancy in soap operas exists just to drag out storylines as long as possible (and that is part of it), it is also an acknowledgement of how people watch soaps, that is, they are usually doing other things at the same time, and they may miss episodes and need to catch up. Similarly, blogs are well-suited for reading (and writing) in fragments on breaks between doing other things. Janice Radway's analysis of romance readers can be applied here. Radway (1991) found that women romance readers positioned romance reading as a way to have some time to themselves, away from their roles as wives and mothers. Radway argues that the women used romance reading as a form of resistance against the assumption that women are the only ones capable of being the primary caregiver. Reading romances was often a guilty pleasure, since time spent reading was time away from caregiving. Blogreading (and writing) can be seen in a similar way.

In addition, while romance novel plots (like soap opera plots) are formulaic, heroines are usually described as intelligent and independent, and heroes portrayed as being attracted to such qualities; Radway argues that even though the stories end

stereotypically, the message readers took away was that they could be wives and mothers and not lose their independent identity. The women in Radway's study also felt that they became more assertive because they had to continually defend both the time they took for reading and their choice of reading material. What is unclear, however, is whether this small act of resistance actually had any significant impact on these women's lives. This relates back to the "mommyblogging is a radical act" remark. Bloggers often portray themselves as being edgy or rebellious (and in some ways, they are, as mentioned above with respect to grotesque realism) but at the same time, they may actually be modeling a very traditional lifestyle (mom as primary caregiver), which blogging/blogreading may simply be validating rather than questioning. Modleski reads soap operas as a wishlist for women, for example, loyalty, community, attention to feelings, and a self-sufficient family. The complexity of soap operas lies in the reading process: "the fragmentation and interruptions of soap opera imply an 'ideal spectator' who is constructed as an idealized maternal figure" (Dibben, 2002, p. 169).

Mittell's assertion that "serial television prioritizes relationships over events—thus even when a major event happens in a soap opera, the question of 'what happens?' is often secondary to 'how does it affect the community of relationships?'" (2007, n.p.) is key to understanding the narrative structure of mommyblogs. Radway notes that although most of the women in her study never met each other, they felt that by reading romances they became a part of a community of women (all the women who read romances), and it is likely that blogreaders feel the same way.

In conclusion, from the perspective of the blogreader, the mommyblog community resembles the soap opera, both in structure and content. In particular, the mommyblog community resembles the docusoap, because both genres present a more or less fictionalized view of reality with real people as characters. A key structural similarity between soaps and blogs is that one must be a regular viewer or reader to fully understand the form because both genres accumulate meaning over time. While watching/reading may be positioned as a form of resistance, it is questionable whether this can actually lead to substantive change if the content continues to reinforce traditional roles. However, both genres do provide readers with a sense of community.

3.4 Community: Talk Shows and Girl Groups

While the public nature of blogs is more a return to an older form of personal writing than an innovation, what is new about blogs compared to their precursors is their *interactivity* (Sorapure, 2003). As Serfaty observes, “online diaries explicitly search for an audience and in so doing, turn themselves into a collaborative project. The interactions between writer and audience turn the diary into a process of co-production and co-enunciation” (2004b, p. 39–40). Thus, “[t]he reader of an online diary ... actively participates in constructing the text the diarist writes” (McNeill, 2003, p. 27). For the community member, blogs are akin to talk shows and other reality programming that involves confession and testimony (judge shows, makeover shows). As well, the comments sections of mommyblogs bear a strong resemblance to the chorus of girl groups.

Starting in the seventeenth century, there was a prohibition on the discussion of sex in regular conversation. At the same time, there was an “institutional incitement” to discourse about sex, in particular, in the Catholic context of confession (Foucault, 1990, p. 17–18). While in regular conversation, sex was something secret not to be spoken of, it was actually talked about a great deal, both illicitly (as with any banned activity) and in regulated discourse (confession). Over time, confession has moved from its Catholic origins into the therapeutic discourse that we see on television talk shows today (Biressi & Nunn, 2005). In therapeutic culture, public confession (as opposed to private religious confession) and exhibitionism are encouraged, which erodes the public/private boundary. Daytime talk shows, game shows, magazine-style shows, docusoaps, and conventional documentaries all involve self-speaking. Television shows “situate confession and therapeutic discourse within the traditional heterosexual relations and the nuclear family” (Dovey, 1999, p. 116). The trend to reality programming is also indicative of a surveillance culture, where public space is now interspersed with private fragments, for example, via cell phone conversations. Jon Dovey calls this the “superpanopticon”; that is, central surveillance has been replaced by “multiple dispersed networks of different kinds of surveillance” (1999, p. 108).

Laurie Ouellette and James Hay (2008) also use a Foucauldian analysis to argue that reality programming is symptomatic of neo-liberal society. The self-help and self-empowerment messages of reality programs teach citizens to take responsibility for their own welfare (because the state will not), but do not address larger societal issues. Reality TV replaces the hole left by government and the public good is privatized. Through reality programming, makeover practice becomes a part

of daily life: anyone can be a better person, have a perfect family, a beautiful home, a successful career—just do X. Dovey argues that television talk shows are not feminist, but they are “TV at its most feminist” (Dovey, 1999, p. 116), because they do allow women and minority groups a chance to vent their frustrations at the dominant power structure. However, problems are pathologized and solutions are simplistic, often consisting of makeovers to make guests look more conventional or bite-sized nuggets of “advice” —“Go for it!” —that make for good television, but are not useful in any practical sense. Similarly, 1990s girl groups like Spice Girls and All Saints were marketed as being “oppositional to patriarchal constructions of femininity as passive, nurturing and confined to the private sphere” (Dibben, 2002, p. 171), but although the groups espoused an assertive identity, that identity was “framed within, and makes use of elements of a patriarchal construction of femininity” (for example, they did not play instruments, but they did wear makeup and revealing clothing); in other words, it was “a compromised form of resistance” (Dibben, 2002, p. 171). Nicola Dibben suggests, however, that a moderate position such as this “may allow listeners to situate themselves amid competing ideological forces in a way that reflects the tensions of lived experience” (2002, p. 172).

Because the daytime talk show focuses on topics of interest to women and the “audience—in the studio and at home—is encouraged to tell its own stories, to agree or disagree, confirm or contradict, confront or support the speaker, generating a polyphony or ‘cacaphony of narratives’ on and beyond the small screen” (Livingstone, 1993, p. 43), an obvious comparison to mommyblogs can be made. It is argued that talk shows give voice to ordinary people, with the audience becoming “joint author of the text” (Livingstone, 1993, p. 36), and “offer a sense of community

where everyone belongs" (Livingstone, 1993, p. 39). Also similar is the fact that the real audience for talk shows is not the one seen in studio (which could be compared to the blog readers who actually comment), but rather, the audience at home (lurkers), which is unseen, but measured by ratings (or site statistics, in the case of blogs). However, talk shows are still controlled by mainstream media, and the focus of the program is still the host. Mommyblogs take on a no-host format. While certainly, each individual blogger is the focus of her own blog, no one blogger is in control of the whole mommyblogosphere. In addition, talk shows value controversy: "any controversial argument is welcomed, any boring or consensual argument is not" (Livingstone, 1993, p. 40) while, as demonstrated by the comments, mommyblogs value harmony. The response of mommyblog audiences to the text suggests that the texts are being given a "romantic" reading by the majority of readers: "The romantic reading endorses an individualistic ethos which celebrates the ordinary person and the authenticity of direct personal experience and which legitimates the expression of emotion" (Livingstone, 1993, p. 61). This varies from other types of blogs which are clearly being read as debates.

The comments section of mommyblogs can feel a bit like a chorus, with readers agreeing with and supporting the blogger. This recalls both the girl groups of the early 1960s, as well as the early 1990s "girl power!" movement. Cynthia J. Cyrus argues that girl groups are "an antecedent of the women's group of the next generation" (Cyrus, 2003, p. 174) because the interchange between group members encouraged each listener "to choose her own perspective ... and to try on new roles" (Cyrus, 2003, p. 186). Girl group songs are "complicated by a dialogue between a 'contradictory chorus' and the feminine self of the lead singer" (Cyrus, 2003, p. 173);

“these songs [allowed] a sense of camaraderie. The girls of the songs giggle, gossip and argue, offer multiple opinions, and most of all share with one another, sometimes through competition, sometimes through advice-giving, sometimes through empathy” (Cyrus, 2003, p. 174). Girl group songs are conversational; the backup singers generally support the lead’s position, but at the same time, each member of the group has an opportunity to speak her mind. “Furthermore, the implicit involvement of the audience as the person addressed by the singer(s) reinforces an emotional identification with the singers. We can participate by doing the dance, by listening to the message, by singing along, and ... by belonging to the conversation” (Cyrus, 2003, p.185).

However, while girl group members were interchangeable and anonymity was encouraged so that a backup singer could take over the lead or singers could be easily replaced, mommybloggers and blogreaders are rarely anonymous, and while their comments are often made to similar effect, they are not identical; that is, each blogger tends to have her own way of expressing herself, which is unique, even if the thoughts expressed are similar. More importantly, each reader is likely to have her own blog, where she is the lead, and the others are the backup. As with the BBC program *Video Nation* (which consisted of mini-documentaries made by “regular people” of themselves) that Dovey discusses, there is “much more of dialogue” between bloggers than on talk shows (Dovey, 1999, p. 126). Here, the viewer is positioned as a participant in a conversation rather than as judge/jury/therapist, so the pleasure in watching it comes from “recognition and identification” rather than “naming or prescribing” (Dovey, 1999, p. 126). Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn argue that reality programming that focuses on the personal narratives of ordinary

people lacks a progressive political agenda, but it does give viewers insight into what people today are concerned about and hope for themselves. As well, the focus on community in many of these programs speaks to the isolation many people feel in today's society. Similarly, many mothers are drawn to blogging because it makes them feel that they "are not alone. If there's a single fact to take from the 70 million blogs that inhabit the Internet, it's this: Whoever you are—however thrilled or frantic, bored or despairing, buoyant or afflicted with love like an aching in your bones—someone out there understands. Especially if you're a mother" (Newman, 2008, n.p.).

In conclusion, for community members (those who comment), blogs resemble daytime talk shows and girl groups. Blogs give the mommybloggers a place to share and vent, and the purpose of comments is often to affirm and validate positions. While the mommyblogosphere is valuable in terms of providing a community for a group that is often isolated, and in modeling supportive behavior to other mothers, the ability for mothers to keep tabs on other mothers also has the potential to increase competitive or judgmental behavior, which in turn may lead to increased conformity, rather than empowerment.

3.5 Conclusion

To recap, the mommyblogosphere can be seen in three different ways from three different perspectives. From the perspective of bloggers, they can be read as the struggle of the blogger to reconcile her role as a mother with the myth of motherhood. For bloggers, they resemble diaries and scrapbooks, in that blogs are a place for recording memories. From the perspective of blog readers, they can be read

as an ongoing story, in the vein of soap operas and docusoaps. Like serial dramas, the mommyblogosphere has multiple viewpoint characters and no defined ending. From the perspective of community members, blogtexts can be read as a confessional/therapeutic discourse between bloggers, in the vein of talk shows and girl groups. Mommyblogs give mothers a place to vent, show their support of each other, and offer advice. Additionally, any one person may occupy all of these positions at different times. This means that the subject position is constantly shifting.

These three readings are one way that blogs are dialogic. Mommyblogs can also be considered dialogic because they can be read two ways (double) in terms of:

- the underlying database vs. narrative interface, including the ability to read posts in the present and revisit them as flashbacks;
- the pleasure of the simple blogtext (reading an individual blog or post like a book or article) vs. the *jouissance* of the extended blogtext (following links, making choices, the blogosphere as a whole);
- the grotesque realism of the mommyblog text, which emphasizes doubleness, especially the two-in-one, one-to-two nature of pregnancy;
- the openendedness of the text, and that both in content and form, mommyblogs represent the move from the semiotic to the symbolic;
- the literal conversation between bloggers and community members (in comments) as well as between bloggers each posting to her own blog; and
- the dual nature of the blogger (writer) vs. blog persona (character).

It is important not to see blogs just as separate individual stories, but as part of a larger interlinked story. It is the interconnected narrative of the mommyblogosphere, as opposed to the narrative of any one individual blog, that is innovative.

4: ANALYSIS OF THE BLOGS

Fisher writes, "I have always seen my texts as three dimensional, sculptural. Perhaps this is why linear forms always felt one step removed from my writing process. I would build a set of notes with many linkages and then work hard to flatten it all out again to construct a persuasive, two-dimensional essay form" (2002, n.p.). Like Fisher, I have struggled with how to represent the three-dimensional blogtext in the two-dimensionality of this thesis. In the analysis that follows, I have attempted to simulate the typical blog reader's experience by discussing the sample posts from each blog in chronological order (that is, alternating between bloggers) rather than discussing each individual blog in turn. I have used present tense and given names in my description of each month's posts as it best reflects the immediacy and intimacy of blog reading. Given names are also used as a means of distinguishing blog persona (character) from blogger (writer). In the discussion that follows in Chapter 5, I refer to the bloggers (writers) by surname.

As noted in Chapter 2, I analyzed each blogger's first month of posts, plus the posts from each anniversary month, and September 2007. It is important to note that I have done the work of a blogreader and pieced together bits and pieces of the bloggers' stories as they became available in order to create a coherent narrative. I did not include everything; rather, I included sufficient information to answer the questions that I outlined in my introduction.

4.1 2004

4.1.1 June | Ali: “So...I’ve done it. I’ve jumped on the blog bandwagon...”

In her first post (June 24, 2004), Ali Martell positions her blogself as a reader and a writer: “In an attempt to publish quality material, and not bore people to absolute tears, I will take the Nick Hornby challenge.” The original title of her blog, *I Write, Therefore I Blog*, reflects this position. She does not mention her children or that she is a mother. (Her current blog title, *Cheaper Than Therapy*, does not mention her children either, but it could be interpreted as a commentary on her life as a mother.) In addition, her choice to mention *High Fidelity* is an attempt to position herself as an atypical woman; that is, *High Fidelity* is not a stereotypical female book choice. She uses the book’s narrator’s job to hint at her own (he is a music critic; she is an editor) and ties this to her new venture (he starts a record label; she starts a blog). She views her blog as “a published piece of work”; this indicates that she is focused outward (oriented to audience, considering potential of medium) from the very beginning. There are no comments on her first post, which indicates that she is new to the blogosphere.

Most of Ali’s posts (which focus on popular culture and celebrities) seem to be made while she is at work. She is married, and her husband reads her blog (he comments once). She has an eating disorder. She is surprised that so many of her friends do not vote, but at the same time professes ignorance about Canadian politics and says she made her decision to vote Conservative in the current federal election based on an internet poll and the Josh Cooper sign her husband put up on their lawn (leading readers to wonder what her mom and stepdad, whom she calls

“hardcore Democrats,” think of this). She is originally from the United States and has lived in Toronto for seven years. Specifically, she lives in Thornhill, an affluent suburb¹⁰ north of the city. In an ironic foreshadowing of a future event (in 2005 she buys a minivan), she indicates that she thinks women who drive minivans are bad drivers.

4.2 2005

4.2.1 January | Leanne: “Getting ready to take over the universe”

In Leanne Palmerston’s first post (January 4, 2005), she positions herself as web-savvy: she mentions switching from a handcoded blog to Blogger and indicates that she plans to start a podcast,¹¹ which is why she chose *Momcast* for the name of her blog. She implies that she is not well-off (she does not have a credit card) and thus chooses a free option for her blog (Blogspot). She also positions herself as a mother (“You should expect to see stories ripped from the bosom of my family, information benefitting moms and those who love them...”); however, both in the title of her blog (*Momcast: Subvert the dominant motherhood*) and in her post (“Fuck it.”) she tries to show that her version of motherhood is perhaps not what readers might expect. At the same time, she locates the “revolution” (grassroots media?) in the kitchen: “Join us here: the revolution will take place in the kitchen,” which makes one question what exactly is being subverted. Like Ali, she is focused outward from her initial post, addressing her audience and indicating that the blog

¹⁰ Josh Cooper was the 2004 Conservative candidate in Thornhill. This CBC riding profile from the 2006 election (<http://www.cbc.ca/canadavotes/riding/196/>) lists Thornhill’s average family income at \$102,459.

¹¹ From iPod + broadcast, that is, an audio or video program that can be downloaded to one’s mp3 player.

is just the first part of her plans. Despite the fact that Leanne indicates she had a blog before this, she only gets one comment on her first post.

Leanne works, and her son Kieran is in daycare in a private home. She uses public transit because she does not drive. For entertainment, the family goes to minor league hockey games (Hamilton Bulldogs). She is pregnant. She refers to her husband as “Daddy” in an early post; his name and their precise relationship are not made explicit in this month’s posts (but are later on); this form of address reflects a child-centered perspective (so even though she explicitly addresses other mothers, it seems implicitly addressed to her son; perhaps she intends this in part as a scrapbook for him).

She has some pre-existing knowledge of the blogosphere and indicates her interest in blogs and podcasting is, at least in part, professional. She discusses two current podcasting controversies, one between two podcasters over the term podcast, and another over whether scripted/fictional podcasts are an acceptable use of the medium. She is critical of the podcasters who are not interested in dialogue and who want to limit the medium to fit their definition. She also discusses a mommyblogosphere controversy at the popular mommyblog *Dooce*, explaining why she agrees with the decision other *Dooce* readers are critical of, but then strongly disagreeing with the flippant remark Heather Armstrong makes about riding unrestrained in a car as a child. By intervening in these controversies, she demonstrates her awareness of current issues in the blogosphere and willingness to contribute to the conversation; and in fact, she explicitly addresses the issue of dialogue and chastises those who would like to suppress it. Despite her outward-

facing focus, she thinks her readership consists of her husband and her little sister, and is excited to receive her first comment from someone she does not know.

4.2.2 February | Dani: “OMG, I’m a blogger!”

In her first post (February 2, 2005), Dani Donders positions herself as a mother, explains how she will find the time to blog (at work, ostensibly on her lunch hour), and indicates what kind of voice she is aiming for (“somewhere between Erma Bombeck, Jerry Seinfeld and Bill Cosby, but in the 21st century, not Jewish, not male and not black”). Her concerns seem to be a bit exaggerated for comedic effect (“What else is there of significance in my universe?” in reference to writing about her children is clearly tongue-in-cheek), especially as she indicates the importance of humor in her post (so, she is using herself and her position as material); this is also reflected in the title of her blog (*Postcards from the Mothership*). While her post is focused on herself, at the same time, it is consistently outward-facing in that she addresses her potential audience directly throughout. This is by far the longest first post among the blogs studied. There is one comment from a friend on her post, made about two weeks after she posted (which was when she told her friends and family about her blog). The friend notes that Dani has touched on all the concerns she has had about starting a blog.

Dani has worked for the federal government for fifteen years, and has just returned to work after her year of maternity leave. She earned her communications degree part-time while working, graduating *magna cum laude*. She met her second husband (whom she calls Beloved on her blog) in 1995; her first marriage ended in divorce. She and Beloved, who teaches animation, had trouble conceiving and used

in vitro fertilization to conceive their older son (age almost three). Their younger son (age one) was a surprise. They still have one frozen embryo and she wonders if “maybe there is a little girl in the picture somewhere” (Donders, 2005, Feb. 7). She initially refers to her sons as Luigi and Frankie; however, she cannot get used to the nicknames and reveals they are Tristan and Simon. She posts a few photographs: one of her and her sons and a few of Simon. For her, being able to refer to her children in a more authentic way wins out over any imagined privacy concerns. She keeps the nickname Beloved for her husband, though. While this has the potential to sound overly precious, she makes it sound genuinely affectionate (possibly it works because this is her second marriage).

She thinks it is time to start pottytraining Tristan. Simon does not talk yet, but is almost walking. During the month, he learns how to crawl down the stairs backwards, and starts sleeping through (most of) the night. She is still breastfeeding, but only a couple of times a day. She links to and discusses articles about daycare, saying, “All things being equal, of course I would prefer to stay home with my kids. *Actually, in a perfect world, I’d work three days a week [and] get paid for double that*” (Donders, 2005, Feb. 9; emphasis added). So while her initial impulse was to say she would prefer to stay home, that is not actually her ideal scenario. This indicates that perhaps her first response was defensive, made to ward off potential critics.

Dani frequently orders pizza for dinner and says the thing that makes her feel most like an adult is having a cleaning lady (once every two weeks); these two things are indicators of a moderate level of disposable income (however, she also mentions having only one vehicle, and agonizes over whether to spend money she

cannot afford on a big birthday party for Tristan), but at the same time, they also indicate that she is not one of those mothers who tries to “do it all” (work, childcare, cook, clean) and that she is willing to let others know where her priorities lie (her family and her job, not cooking and cleaning).

Mid-month she tells her friends and family about her blog; after this, she frequently gets comments from friends. She is excited when she receives her first comments and when her blog is googled for the first time. She thinks the internet is amazing, explaining that she met some of her best friends on the IVF message board she used to post at; they were online friends first, but later met in person. When she re-posts some older stories, originally posted at that message board, her friends remember them. She discusses a mommyblogosphere controversy that highlights how polarized the mommyblogosphere can be—this indicates that mommybloggers are not all cut from the same cloth.

4.2.3 **June | Ali**

Ali has a sister (who lives in Nashville) and two brothers (one in New York and one in Dallas). Her mom lives in Milwaukee, which is where Ali grew up. She and her husband have a daughter, Emily, and a son. Emily is finishing up preschool and will be starting junior kindergarten in the fall. She posts some studio portraits of her kids, and some of Emily’s ballet recital. Ali is seven months pregnant. July 15 is her last day at work before maternity leave. Near the end of the month, she has contractions. She posts a series of side shots of her belly at 32, 30, 26, 23, and 20 weeks, as well as a 4D ultrasound picture. Her mother-in-law implies that she has gained too much weight (Ali thinks she will probably gain the same amount as her

previous pregnancies) and Ali notes that her mother-in-law was hounding her to lose weight six weeks after her last pregnancy.

Mid-month, they buy a minivan. She has a hard time thinking of herself as a minivan mom (cf. June 2004), but a harder time giving up her Jeep, which she has had since she was 16. They live in a house (she mentions her husband mowing the lawn) and the family has season's passes to Canada's Wonderland; this, along with the prior knowledge of the neighborhood they live in (cf. June 2004), indicates a higher than average family income. On the other hand, she has been driving the same vehicle for 11 years, which indicates that funds are not unlimited.

Ali loves Starbucks. She frequently writes about popular culture (movies, celebrity news), and shares fun and/or weird links. Her pop culture posts often include photographs, sometimes with a "guess who?" which indicates that she is trying to draw her readers in and involve them in her blog. On June 8, she writes about seeing Rebecca Eckler speak: "I love Rebecca Eckler....mostly because she's me, to a t (well, minus the unwed motherhood part). Skinny, Jewish writer. 3 parts snark, 1 part actual talent. and she has my dream job. she writes 'Me journalism' for a Nationally syndicated newspaper. and she gets to work at home, in her pajamas." However, after meeting Eckler in person, her opinion changes: "she was a mess. i felt bad for the poor woman. i just wanted to put her out of her misery. imagine that. feeling embarrassed for someone i idolize." Rebecca Eckler has become the face of mommyblogging for a lot of people in Canada via her newspaper column and books (*Knocked Up: Confessions of a Hip Mother-to-Be; Wiped! Life with a Pint-Size Dictator*); this is problematic because she is what people who are unfamiliar with blogs think

of when they picture a mommyblogger. So, it is significant that Ali, who “idolizes” her, finds her to be a mess in person, and that even her love for Eckler is tempered, and that she shares this on her blog, where anyone can access it.

4.2.4 August | Sherry: “Ready set go!”

In her first post (August 12, 2005), Sherry Osborne indicates that she is switching to WordPress (blog software) and mentions her old design. She positions herself as technically savvy (she is setting up WordPress on her own domain; she mentions themes, sidebar, and registration), and her post seems directed at an existing audience rather than a future audience (she explains why she is not using her old design; she suggests readers register to comment). This, along with the twelve comments on her post, indicates that her blog is not completely new (in fact, she had a handcoded journal on her website prior to this). The commenters tell her how much they like the new look. Half of them have their own blogs (which again, indicates a more established community). She also positions herself as busy (other things take precedence, and she is fitting this in when she finds the time), and as a Harry Potter fan (“I love this Snape and Dumbledore layout”). She does not, however, directly mention her children in this post, and the title of her blog, *Chaos Theory*, does not reference them either (though it could be taken as a commentary on life with children, in fact, she indicates elsewhere that her title and domain name—*andromeda.qc.ca*—reflect her interest in astronomy).

Sherry and George have a daughter, Hayley. Hayley is almost three; she likes to sing, is a picky eater, and has pet rats. Sherry posts a photo of Hayley’s (messy) room, noting that Virgos are supposed to be neat, but Hayley is clearly not. Sherry is

pregnant and has 100 days to go on August 13; *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* premieres in 99 days, so she hopes the baby does not come early. She posts a profile photo of herself at 27 weeks, 5 days. Sherry does not seem to drive (or at least does not have a vehicle) because George's dad drives her to her prenatal appointments.

She is still updating her old handcoded journal and mentions each time she posts a new entry. She wonders whether she should continue or just use her blog as a journal; however, she has had an online journal since 1998 and is reluctant to give it up. The implication here is that, at this time, she is thinking of the blog and journal as serving different purposes, with the journal being for longer entries. This clearly changes (she closes down the journal and switches to using the blog exclusively for all her posts). Since she rarely updates her knitting blog, she thinks she will move her knitting posts here. She plans to knit a Harry Potter scarf. (Knitting does not come up again in any of the subsequent months analyzed; this, combined with her mention of rare updates, seems to indicate that knitting is an on-again, off-again hobby for her.) She comments extensively on *Canadian Idol*, but also on the near-identical news photographs that described white people as "finding" food and a black man as "looting" in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. This shows that she is concerned about serious topics as well as trivial ones.

4.2.5 December | Heather: "~~*~*The Writing Mother*~*~"

In Heather Cook's first post (December 1, 2005), she positions herself as a mother who writes ("I'm a writer. I'm a mother."), and this is also reflected in her blog's title (*The Writing Mother*). Her blog has more of serious, professional tone than others (she introduces herself by full name, for example). She indicates that writing

is a vocation for her, rather than something she is just exploring (“I write non fiction articles...”) and notes the difficulty in keeping writing and motherhood separate. She also looks outward in her post, suggesting that readers should check out other blogs by mothers who write as well as her own (which implies that she does not see her own point-of-view on the subject as authoritative). There are no comments on her post, which indicates that she is new to the blogosphere.

Heather has a four-year-old son from her first marriage, which ended in divorce. She is remarried and pregnant (due August 2006). She works full-time in addition to writing, so she does not have much spare time. She also administers a companion mailing list to her blog.¹² She worries that the cleanliness of her house does not measure up to her mother’s standards. After her son was born, she wanted to be home with him, so in lieu of working full-time, she wrote freelance for two-and-a-half years to support the two of them after her divorce. Eventually this became too stressful and she decided to return to work. Ironically, it turned out that her son loved daycare. From this she learned that “[i]t is ok for my son to be out in the world—without me. ... I learned that I was ok to focus on work, knowing that he was learning and growing as a little boy” (Cook, 2005, Dec. 9). She hopes she remembers these lessons when her new baby arrives.

4.3 2006

4.3.1 January | Leanne

Leanne “love[s] christmas and easter in a totally secular way” (Palmerston, 2006, Jan. 12). Kieran, who is two (three in April), loves trains, especially Thomas the

¹² <http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/thewritingmother/>

Tank Engine, so Leanne found some plans for a train table (top for laying out tracks, storage underneath) online and her stepfather built it for him for Christmas. Her husband Sean's job involves reviewing music DVDs; she wanted to get him a Powerbook, but since she could not afford that, settled for a mini-DVD player. In honor of Sean's birthday, she writes about how she fell in love with him on his birthday seven years ago. In comments, Sean thanks Leanne's readers for their birthday wishes, but admits to being a little embarrassed that she told this story.

She is thinking about becoming a doula: "I had such a positive experience with my Midwives and with my Lactation Consultants that I was inspired to somehow make helping other mothers and babies my life's work" (Palmerston, 2006, Jan. 12). However, she has hesitated because "we don't have a lot of money and I would not be bringing in any income while I worked toward certification (*sic*) and Sean makes too little money to support us while I'm doing a bunch of studying, which costs money in itself." So, instead, she went back to work after her maternity leave, but ended up being let go. Now, she is revisiting the idea: "I want to work part time hours, on a flexible schedule that will allow me to stay home with Kieran and to do my very modest freelance writing and some crafting for cash." After readers encourage her to start selling her crafts and to pursue doula certification (noting that financial aid is probably available if money is what is holding her back), she designs a logo for her crafts; it features a lamp and the letters "l*mp" (her initials). She makes plain here what was implied in her 2005 posts: money is an issue and her income is needed to help support the family. Despite this, she wants to try to piece together a living via things she loves doing rather than doing a job she does not enjoy.

She is very involved in the knitting blogosphere. She posts a pattern for a shrug (sweater-like item) that she and some other knitters at Craftster.com developed together. An “ADDENDUM” links to a later post where she notes this pattern is by far her most popular post (in other words, she gets a lot of visitors who find her via this post, and perhaps do not go further). She links to two controversial (to knitters) posts; Dragon Knitter (one of her regular commenters) brings up an opposing view. She participates in gift exchanges with other knitting bloggers, and joins the Knitting Olympics (challenge to finish a knitting project during the Olympics).

Leanne frequently makes explicit reference to being feminist. For example, Kieran loves *Dora the Explorer* and would like something with Dora on it, however, all Dora items are pink/purple and possibly also frilly/glittery. Leanne says, “I’m a feminist and a punk at heart, but that’s not a paradigm I want to make my son subvert at the pre-political age of 2 (and 10 months!).” She wants to know why there are no gender-neutral Dora things. She is upset about the James Frey fake memoir incident, both at him for lying and at others for brushing it off, because she thinks authenticity is important. She mentions having “voted for the same authentic politician in my riding every single time I’ve been able to vote, from the time I was 18” (Palmerston, 2006, Jan. 31). This is in distinct contrast to Ali Martell’s declaration that she chose her candidate somewhat randomly.

4.3.2 February | Dani

Dani and Beloved own their home (a townhouse). Her parents moved from London to Ottawa after Tristan was born to be closer to their grandchild(ren). Dani

posts a series of photographs showing how they celebrated Simon's second birthday, photographs of the family's trip to the Canadian Museum of Nature, and two of the "studio portraits" they have taken at the grocery store—one of the whole family, and one of Tristan and Simon. She does not let Tristan and Simon watch commercial TV (but they do watch movies and channels without ads). She is a little smug about this, but at the same time aware that she is rationalizing her behavior. She frequently reminisces about classic television (*The Electric Company*, *Schoolhouse Rock*, *Sesame Street*) from her childhood.

She vents about her day-to-day frustrations dealing with an almost-4-year-old (Tristan). She registers Tristan for junior kindergarten, he gives up the guard rail on his bed, and sleeps over for the first time at Dani's parents' house. As she did in 2005, she ponders whether to have a big birthday party for Tristan. She is not enthused about the idea of enduring an afternoon of preschoolers and their parents when Tristan will not even remember the day in the future. Simon is in the top percentiles for height and weight. They decide to go ahead with the implantation of their frozen embryo (cf. February 2005) rather than storing it for another year.

She celebrates her first blogiversary, noting that she gets 150–200 readers a day, that she has been the impetus for many friends starting their own blogs, and that she has met many people because of her blog (in person as well as online). Her blogfriend James, who lives in Austin, Texas, mentions seeing her blog mentioned in an article in his local newspaper. She is nominated for "Best Conversation" in the Share the Love Blog Awards, which she is pleased about "because it's really all about you guys" (Donders, 2006, Feb. 17); she frequently mentions how she much

she enjoys hearing a diversity of opinions. She has started to receive review copies of books; she reviews one she likes and one she does not. While she is critical of the book she does not like, she restrains herself from being as snarky as she normally would be, because she was given the book. A commenter disagrees with Dani's review, but appreciates that Dani was polite and hopes Dani does not take offense at her difference of opinion. Dani says, "Disagreement is part of the fun of discussion." She is "fascinated by how bloggers have become a market worth targeting. Businesses are quickly learning that bloggers are valuable opinion leaders. We're the 'connectors' in Gladwell's Tipping Point model, the ones who build networks and share information. Bloggers have reach, and even those of us with only moderate readership have a strong voice. We're turning traditional marketing models on their ears in many ways, and smart businesses are ready to take advantage of it" (Donders, 2006, Feb. 15).

She has been taking language training to improve her French. She aspires to an intermediate (B-level) score, which will make her eligible for future promotions. She scores a C-level (fluent) in reading and writing; she still has to take her spoken test. Her dream job is "freelance writer and researcher," but she does not see herself making any big career changes; she can retire from the government when she is 55 and thinks she may take up writing more seriously then. She considered teacher's college after she completed her degree, but did not want to give up her job (income) to go to school full-time. She notes, "I guess I'm a little underambitious; I can pay the bills and support my family, but what I'm really passionate about happens after 4 pm" (Donders, 2006, Feb. 8). However, the fact she is interested in being promoted, and also actively making connections between her dayjob and blogging belies this

claim. She still relies heavily on take-out food for meals; they have a regular pizza delivery guy and Tristan thinks dinner comes out of take-out cartons (cf. February 2005). When she is home with Tristan because he is sick, she wonders how work-at-home moms manage to get work done.

4.3.3 **March | Shazia: “Toddlers and Preschoolers”**

In her first post (March 2, 2006), Shazia Mistry eschews introductions and leaps right into describing her current situation (“More than one kid at home is not really that much harder to manage than having just the one...the thing with multiple children is that their interaction with each other can make anyone NUTS!!!”). This *in medias res* beginning may indicate that she had some connection to the blogosphere before this (so her readers do not need introductions), but she does not mention a pre-existing blog or journal. There are also no comments on this post that would indicate an existing readership. It also could be that this kind of beginning is just a reflection of her current state of mind. She positions herself as the mother of three young children and implies that she is at home with them. While she opens by saying that having multiple children is not harder than having just one, the remainder of her post belies this, as she indicates that the antics of the two older children (“screaming and laughing at the top of their lungs”) have her struggling to maintain her sanity. While the post focuses on one particular scenario—Shazia trying to get the kids to eat—this particular situation clearly can be extrapolated to indicate what motherhood is generally like for her at this point in time. Her post focuses exclusively on motherhood/children. Her blog’s title (*Adventures in*

Motherhood) also reflects her focus on parenting, and like her opening line, seems to indicate that she is trying to take a positive view on a difficult time in her life.

Shazia is married and the mother of three boys: a three-year-old, an almost-two-year-old, and a newborn. She generally refers to the children by their ages or eldest/middle/baby; she does not use their names or her husband's name. All three kids are currently sleeping in their parents' bedroom (in their own beds/crib). The middle child does not sleep much and wakes up very early, something her husband is better at sleeping through than she is. She accompanies her husband on a business trip, taking the youngest and oldest boys, and leaving the middle child with his grandmother (presumably because of his sleeping issues). She notes that to save money on food, she cooked in the room, although she did treat herself to a room service dessert. Her sister (a middle child) thought she should have taken the middle boy with them. Later in the month, they go on a second business trip with all three kids.

She mentions that when she was pregnant with her second child, she was on bedrest for a time. (But apparently this did not dissuade her from a third pregnancy.) On March 13, she is alone with all of the kids for the first time since she had her third son. She struggles to handle a day alone with the kids when she has the flu. The two older boys constantly fight. She lets her sons watch TV (though she does not specify what programs). Her husband works late, but she mentions that he does laundry, so it appears that he does help with housework when he is home.

4.3.4 March | Haley: “The Monkey & Mommy @ Gymboree”

In Haley-O’s first post (March 21, 2006), she positions herself as new to blogging. She also positions herself as spontaneous (“This is my first blog! Yesterday, I hardly knew what blogging was”), which is in contrast to the “should I or shouldn’t I?” anxiety of some of the other bloggers. At the same time, she establishes that she has an existing connection to the blogosphere (her offline friend, Alicia, who turns out to be Ali Martell), which is likely to bring her at least a few more page views in the beginning than the average newbie (assuming Ali sends her readers over to Haley’s blog). She positions herself as a mother, both in the post and her blog’s title (*The Cheaty Monkey*, her nickname for her 8-month-old daughter). The photograph she includes in this post, (“me and my adorable daughter at Gymboree”) also reflects a mother/child focus. Her comment about buying her daughter a set of balls at Gymboree just because she hung onto one for a session indicates that money is perhaps not an issue for her. There are two supportive comments on her first post, one from her husband, Josh, and one from Ali.

She and Josh have been married for three years. She says she is much happier now than she was on her wedding day, even though she was much thinner then, implying that she is subverting some paradigm that thin people should be happier. She is doing Weight Watchers, but she is still breastfeeding and she thinks breastfeeding is making her fat. She discusses a debate in the mommyblogosphere over whether women who do not lose pregnancy weight are being disrespectful to their husbands. She mentions how much stores seem to cater to mothers on maternity leave, the implication being that she is on maternity leave, which would seem to indicate that at this time she planned to return to work. She posts

photographs of her daughter (The Monkey) that show her face (significant because later photographs are all back-of-the-head shots), and she also mentions her daughter's name (probably accidentally) in the comments of one post; there are also photographs of herself, Josh, her mom, and her yoga teacher (Haley is qualified to teach yoga). The Monkey does not like to nap. She chats with Ali in the comments section. Haley addresses friends and family who do not understand why she blogs, saying she writes for enjoyment, communication, and self-exploration. She mentions that Jen Lawrence's (*MUBAR*) posts about post-partum depression were very helpful to her during her pregnancy, which seems to belie her first post where she said she did not know what a blog was until the day before she started her own—and indicates that the spontaneity and giddiness of her blog persona may be to a certain extent contrived. She frequently discusses television, especially, *American Idol*, *America's Next Top Model*, *The Young and the Restless*, *Desperate Housewives*, *The Apprentice*, *Survivor*.

4.3.5 **June | Ali**

Ali (short for Alicia) and her husband now have three children: Emily, Joshua (Josh), and Isabella (Bella). They currently seem to have a live-in nanny. Bella does not have any teeth yet, but she is standing and crawling up on things. She defends her parenting skills after photographs of Isabella crawling up onto the fireplace hearth incite some controversy. While her husband is away on a business trip to Israel, Isabella gets croup and Ali is scared and has to deal with it on her own. She thinks Isabella might have whooping cough (it turns out she does not), but makes sure to note that she is immunized while at the same time saying there is nothing

wrong with not immunizing (in other words, pre-emptively making sure she does not give anyone a chance to criticize her parenting skills, but at the same time, trying not to offend anyone). She punishes Josh for breaking her camera, which is significant because it is the first major punishment she has had to mete out. Emily “graduates” from junior kindergarten. Her husband thinks she swears too much on her blog, but she is not planning on changing her blog persona to suit him; she indicates that she tries not to swear around the kids, so her blog is a good place to let that side of her personality out. She spends a morning at the US Consulate getting Isabella’s citizenship. She notes that her grandparents (one set?) only spoke Yiddish and German; this implies that they were immigrants as well.

People keep asking her if she is done with kids. What is notable is how they ask this: “so...is the factory closed?” which is probably meant to be cute, but makes her sound like a baby-making machine. She thinks so, but adds, “in my mind i guess i always thought we’d have 4 kids. i’m not sure why, but in the jewish world, that seems to be a big number for people. ... the husband once said it’s a doubling of the population thing. if every couple has 4 kids, etc” (Martell, 2006, Jun. 6). However, she has realized that kids are expensive (her children attend a private Jewish school), a lot of work, and she has body image issues (cf. June 2004), so finds it difficult to be pregnant. Her religion seems to be important to her in a cultural way, but it is not clear how important it is to her in a spiritual way. She is not a fan of potlucks because she does not like to eat other people’s food, and she frequently shares her clothing purchases, as if seeking approval. Both of these things are probably related to her eating disorder.

She is back at work (less than a year after having Isabella). She wears heels to work because she is short and thinks she looks like she is sixteen. She rants about being kicked out of the employee warehouse because she was wearing heels (this seems a little ill-advised but does not seem to have gotten her in trouble with her employer). She discusses celebrities in a snarky way, often including photographs. In one post she lists her pretend celebrity boyfriends, then in a later post, apologizes for not giving proper credit for the term “pretend celebrity boyfriend,” which she is informed was coined by another blogger.

4.3.6 June | Trudy: “Welcome to my Lab”

In her first post (June 4, 2006), Trudy Morgan-Cole indicates that this is not her first foray into the blogosphere (in fact, she had kept a handcoded journal prior to this, which is still available on her website). She indicates that she is making the switch to blog software for ease of use. Her blog’s title (*Hypergraffiti*) reflects her focus on writing; she does not mention motherhood or children in this post. In fact, her post is extremely short, more of a test post than an introduction. Despite her pre-existing journal (and presumably, readership—her post seems directed at a specific audience rather than a potential one), this post does not have any comments. One possible reason for this is that her earlier journal may not have had the ability to add comments, so it may have taken her readers a little while to get used to commenting.

Trudy is married to Jason. They share the same sense of humor for the most part; she likes *Dr. Demento*, the comedy troupe *The Vestibules*, *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, *Monty Python*, and *Star Trek*, but is not into slapstick.

Trudy and Jason have two children, Emma, who is six, and Chris who is eight. Emma has her last day at daycare (she had gone for three years) since it is now summer (Trudy is a teacher, so she does not work in the summer) and in the fall she will be in grade one. At Emma's kindergarten graduation, the principal sings "Morningtown Ride," with the children joining in on the chorus. Trudy says the song is "emotionally loaded" for her because her parents sang it to her as a baby, and she and Jason sang it to Chris and Emma: "So when I saw my baby—my *baby*—sitting up on stage with all the other Great Big Kindergarteners, singing backup for *that very song*—well, suddenly it hit me that an era in our lives was over. And I began to cry. Openly. Copiously" (Morgan-Cole, 2006, Jun. 20). I think her note that Emma is her "baby" is the key here; many parents seem to take the milestones of older children in stride, but when it comes to the youngest, everything takes on an additional poignancy because of the finality.

Trudy teaches (English and social studies) at The Murphy Centre, an alternative school. She attended Andrews University (a Seventh-Day Adventist university in Michigan). She is also a writer; she has published several books,¹³ including *Esther: A Story of Courage*, a fictional version of a biblical story, which garnered mixed reviews at Amazon—with some reviewers objecting to her treatment of biblical material. She has attended a Writers' Retreat in Eastport every June since the early 1990s. Like Heather Cook, she writes in addition to holding a full-time job, but she seems a lot less overwhelmed. There are several reasons why this might be: her kids are a little older, she has a professional teaching career (in

¹³ http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/search-handle-url?_encoding=UTF8&search-type=ss&index=books&field-author=Trudy%20J.%20Morgan-Cole

contrast to Cook, whose work sounds like just a dayjob), so her work is likely more satisfying and probably pays better, which means she is likely not relying on her writing income to make ends meet.

Trudy attends a Seventh-Day Adventist church and sometimes preaches. Her best friends are Sherry (whom she met in grade 5) and Jennifer, her cousin. Trudy's parents live nearby and also have a cabin. She jokes about her regular readers being her mom and dad (and her dad does comment). She posts photographs of her kids, herself, her cousin and best friend, some of her students. She has an aunt and uncle who live in Tennessee; her Aunt Ruth celebrates her 64th birthday on a visit to Newfoundland and Trudy uses this as a segue into discussing Paul McCartney's 64th birthday, his disintegrating marriage, and his unpopularity in Newfoundland (because of the seal hunt protest), and then segues back to discussing the longevity of marriages in her family and hopes that hers lasts as long.

4.3.7 **August | Sherry**

Sherry and George have lived in the same apartment in Montreal for six years. Her photographs show a typical Canadian apartment (builder's white walls, hardwood floors, small bedrooms), but it does seem to have a washer and dryer in the suite. She still seems to rely on George's dad whenever she needs to go anywhere (cf. August 2005). She works from home; however, she notes that she does not have a steady income. She receives a review copy of Pamela Ribon's new book, *Why Moms are Weird*, noting "You know. Pamie." and adding, "I read Squishy [Ribon's blog] back when there were no blogs and everyone hand-coded their online journals and I loved her writing then" (Osborne, 2006, Aug. 15) This remark is

designed to show her insider, early-adopter status. A buzz marketing company (Matchstick) gives her a free phone; she gets some flak for this (apparently from someone who was upset that she would spend money on a phone) and she reiterates that she did not pay for it; she could not afford the phone if it had not been given to her. She adds that “[t]hanks to this blog I’ve been able to find the confidence to seek out publishing opportunities, something I might have not done in the past” (Osborne, 2006, Aug. 20), but she indicates she will shut down her blog if it becomes too much trouble. While this response sounds rather monologic, internet trolls (which is what it sounds like the person attacking her is) are not interested in dialogue, only in arguing for the sake of arguing; that is, there is no point in engaging with one (in fact, her response here was probably exactly what the troll was looking for). Her dad posts some supportive comments in response.

She has two engagement rings, but she and George are not legally married. She posts many photographs of her daughters, Breanna and Hayley; she and George are in some of them as well. She also posts some home videos on YouTube. George is in a band, and Breanna and Hayley seem to have inherited George’s musical ability. Hayley has her first sleepover at her paternal grandparents’ house. She posts conversations with Hayley, which reveal the influence of pop culture (children’s TV shows and movies). She participates in *Chookooloonks’* Love Thursday meme (post a photo that represents love), choosing a photo of Hayley listening to George’s band. Breanna turns nine months old; she is standing by herself, and then starts taking steps. She also learns to clap and starts eating regular food. Breanna pops a ligament in her elbow and they have to take her to the emergency room to get it put back in.

Sherry is sad about Pluto's loss of planet status (cf. August 2005 and her interest in astronomy).

4.3.8 December | Heather

Heather attends church. She refers to her son as M, and her husband as "Major Man." In 2006, she signed with an agent, sold a book to a publisher, increased her income by 10% (her target)—and had a baby (cf. December 2005 where she mentions being pregnant). She alludes to writing a controversial editorial and, in response, resolves to curb her opinions. She lists her new year's resolutions, which include writing the book she has a contract for, increasing her writing income, and writing 90 more articles to reach a total of 300 published articles. She is very writing-focused this month, which may account for her minimal posting (that is, she is working on paid writing assignments, rather than blogging).

4.4 2007

4.4.1 January | Leanne

Leanne is 13 weeks and 3 days pregnant on January 3. She notes that she miscarried on her birthday in 2005 (cf. January 2005, where she mentions being pregnant) and links to the post she wrote about it. She sees a midwife. She does not have morning sickness, but does have a really strong gag reflex.

She and Sean work for a magazine (cf. January 2006 where she mentions freelance writing). Sean writes about music. She reviews *Arthur and the Invisibles*, which they got free tickets to. She writes a post about women's anger in music, discussing classic women in rock, early 1990s indie rock, and the Riot Grrrl

movement, demonstrating that she has some musical knowledge. She is excited to find a boxed set of Roald Dahl books on sale at Chapters for \$19.99 (originally \$128), but hesitates buying it because she wants to make sure they have enough money for their bills and groceries (cf. January 2005 and 2006 where she also mentions their financial circumstances). Finally, she decides it is too good a deal to pass up.

The family had a co-sleeping arrangement, but Kieran mostly sleeps in his own bed now. She relates conversations with Kieran. She has trouble getting him to drink milk. She is still involved with the blogosphere (though no mentions of knitting this month): she asks readers to comment for DeLurking Week, but only one of her regular commenters comments, shares a recipe that she got from her grandmother for National Soup Swap Day, and writes about the controversy over moms who have drinks while their kids have a playdate. In response, she says, “I strongly believe that there has been a loose conspiracy aimed to rob women of the power they seemed to attain in the 70’s—at that time, it seemed as if women could achieve anything ... But then the arch-conservative (*sic*) movement that swept in with Reagan, Mulroney and Thatcher killed all that” (Palmerston, 2007, Jan. 29). She argues, “Women’s worst enemy isn’t the patriarchy, it’s other women” who are unable “to see difference and diversity in a positive light.” She says that while her parenting choices are “inviolable,” she is “always open to interesting and reasonable dialogue” and adds that, in her opinion, “Sticking up for each other’s right to make decisions for our families and ourselves is the most important thing we can do to advance the cause of feminism.” This commentary shows her to be politically aware and explicitly open to dialogue.

4.4.2 February | Dani

Simon celebrates his third birthday (cf. 2005 when he was one, and 2006, when he was two). He speaks in sentences, is cheerful and mischievous, and loves music. He does not like to nap anymore. She includes some photographs of his birthday party with extended family (cousins, grandparents). Tristan is into *Toy Story*. Apropos of nothing, he eats spaghetti sauce for the first time (previously he hated it). The boys share a room. She finds out that her last name (which she thought meant “thunder” in Dutch) is used as a mild expletive (meaning to beat someone up) in South Africa. She thinks this is cool and says her sons will thank her for their hyphenated surnames.

She is struggling to find new daycare for her sons and asks for opinions on various rules providers have in their contracts. She thinks she has found someone, but in the end, cannot afford the rates. She snarks at Stephen Harper’s childcare “plan.” She notes that Beloved does not work in the summer (cf. February 2005 where she mentions that he teaches), so the boys are home with him full-time; however, to save their spots for the fall, they have to continue to pay all summer. Mad Hatter awards her the Thinking Blogger’s Award for her post on childcare. Dani notes that Mad Hatter “said that it was your comments, from all points on the political spectrum, which increased the ‘think factor.’ I’ve long known this little blog of mine wouldn’t be half the fun it is if it weren’t for you guys, so we can share this little award” (Donders, 2007, Feb. 23). This post demonstrates that the mommybloggers are, in fact, engaged in a discussion and are listening to each other and considering what others have to say.

Dani celebrates her second blogiversary on February 2 by printing out her blog (762 posts). She links to her favorite posts from the past year (admitting the “inherent narcissism” in such an act). These include posts about their attempt to get pregnant with their frozen embryo (unsuccessful) and a surprise pregnancy in the fall of 2006 that ended in a miscarriage. At the request of two friends, she offers some advice on how to help a friend through a miscarriage, but adds, “I thought that maybe by reflecting on it here, I could both share my own insight and solicit yours. After all, I wouldn’t dare assume that even after three loses (*sic*) I could understand what another person is going through, but maybe collectively we can offer some varied perspectives” (Donders, 2007, Feb. 8). Again, here, she shows that she is interested in discussion and does not consider her opinion to be definitive.

Their dishwasher breaks and she (“the domestic anti-goddess”) is forced to wash dishes by hand (Donders, 2007, Feb. 7; cf. 2005 and 2006 where she writes about her fondness for pizza delivery). She admits to liking reality TV, but is skeptical about the CBC’s *A Week Without Women*: “I would love to think that this could be a thoughtful exploration of gender roles, of the extra weight that women carry when they do a full-time day job and then pull another couple of hours on domestic chores, *or even highlight how much more capable men really are at domestic and relationship issues than they are ever given credit for*. But you know it’s not going to play out that way. Dollars to doughnuts, it will be contrived, sensationalistic, and divisive” (Donders, 2007, Feb. 9). It is noteworthy that she says this, because, although she mentions that Beloved shoulders some of the responsibilities for childcare, she does not really elaborate on that or how they divide up any of the other household chores—and, since it seems like perhaps they do divide

childcare/housework up more equally than other couples, it would be good to see more specific discussion on this topic.

4.4.3 **March | Shazia**

At the beginning of the month, Shazia and her family return from a spring break vacation somewhere in the United States. She enjoyed escaping the cold weather, but also being able to give her kids her undivided attention (that is, not having to work). She notes that her boys are turning into stereotypical boys, and wonders what a girl would be like. She often posts photographs of her sons and her husband (but not of herself).

She is having trouble pottytraining her middle son, who is now almost three. Her eldest son (age four), tries to be helpful and encourage him with big-brotherly advice. Her husband is involved with the pottytraining, but she takes on the bulk of the effort since she is home during the day. She gives up on the pottytraining for a time; however, once she puts him back in diapers he decides he would rather use the toilet. Her youngest son gets croup, but she knows what to do because the kids have had it before (this compares with Ali who was at a loss when Isabella got croup; presumably her older children never had it). They have to take him to the emergency room to get a steroid shot. She notes that they have been to the ER numerous times before, including once when her eldest had pneumonia, and again mentions that she was on bedrest with her second pregnancy (cf. March 2006).

Her eldest son has started school. She notes how important routines are with the three kids and her working at home, and shares a photo of her new business cards (that identify her as a web developer) that she designed herself. At the same

time, she refers to herself as a “stay at home mom” (Mistry, 2007, Mar. 27). Since she is clearly working, it seems like she is perhaps not distinguishing “stay at home” from “work at home.” She mentions having had postpartum depression and that she still experiences bouts of depression, though not as bad as it was. She cooks, but only what she feels like (no special requests).

She backtracks on a rant she posted about bloggers not responding to their readers, telling her own readers. She explains that her post was directed at a popular blogger (not a mommyblogger) whom she implies did not respond to her when she contacted him/her, and not at her readers. She says she did not realize her readers would think it was directed at them. Bloggers often speak cryptically about touchy subjects, so as not to offend anyone, but as this post illustrates, that strategy can backfire.

4.4.4 **March | Haley**

Haley’s daughter is 19 months old. She still refers to her as The Monkey. She frequently posts photographs of her, but all of them show her from the back or side; they do not show her face (cf. March 2006 when the photographs did show her face). Her mom-and-tot class has a Purim parade; Haley neglects to dress her in costume (all the other kids had one), but the teacher has a purple tutu that The Monkey wears. She also posts photographs of The Monkey wearing pink fairy wings and of her wearing a pink boa—next to this one she calls her the “next Pussycat Doll” (Haley-O, 2007, Mar. 25). This does not seem to be ironic, and stands in contrast to Leanne’s January 2006 posts.

After The Monkey poos in the bathtub, Haley notes that she does not like bathtime anymore, but it takes her a little while to put the two together. The Monkey likes (to pretend) to read and being read to and she gets her first haircut. She frequently has tantrums (she is teething), and Haley thinks she has entered the terrible twos early; however, she tempers her listing of all the ways her daughter has been annoying her by saying she is happier than ever and loves The Monkey's antics. This seems part defensive (to fend off the "how could you say that about your child?" crowd), and part saving face ("of course I love being a mother!").

She announces that she is 12 weeks pregnant, and indicates that this announcement has been foreshadowed in her mood and delayed responses over the past few months. She thanks readers for their support. She gets 57 comments (from men as well as women) on her announcement, all of which are congratulations. One reader says she suspected Haley was pregnant from reading between the lines of her posts; Ali is happy that the secret is out because she knew and has had trouble keeping it. A few readers note they are delurking to offer their congratulations (big news always seems to bring out the lurkers). She thinks the baby will be a boy, and notes she felt connected to the baby for the first time at the ultrasound. She is seeing a psychiatrist for prepartum depression; she also has morning sickness. She is also doing yoga (a DVD and a class at the gym); she notes that though she is a certified teacher (cf. March 2006), she wants someone else to lead right now.

Haley refers to her own writing as "stream-of-consciousness." She went to graduate school, and used to work as an editor. She now refers to herself as a "stay-at-home mom." However, she has started a web-based business, Kids Deserve Art,

and she now has a gossip blog at UrbanMoms.ca, *Cheaty's Celebrity Gossip*. It is not clear whether she does not consider these ventures to be work, or whether, like Shazia, she is perhaps using “stay-at-home” interchangeably with “work-at-home.”

Her parents go on a vacation to South Africa, but she does not tell readers until after they return home (this goes along with her not divulging her children's names and hiding their faces). Josh gets home late from work on a regular basis, so Haley's mom babysits The Monkey on Monday mornings so she gets a break; Haley missed this while her parents were gone.

She and Josh own their home (a house); they plan to move in the near future, but she does not specify where or why. They celebrate their fourth anniversary (cf. March 2006).

She attends the UrbanMoms' “Moms Night Out.” She found the event a little weird because lots of people knew her from her blog but she did not know them; although she obscures the Monkey's face, she does show face shots of herself, Josh, and other adults. In the photographs from the Moms Night Out, she looks noticeably pregnant already, which she attributes to being short (under 5'1”).

4.4.5 **June | Ali**

Prior to blogging Ali felt pressured to pretend she enjoyed everything about motherhood. She feels that she can be more honest on her blog: “mommyblogging is radical because it's **truth**. and we women finally have a place where we can be raw and honest and we don't have to hide behind this perception that we have to be June Cleaver or Carol Brady or Claire Huxtable. because Carol Brady had a nanny! (*can*

you believe it! a nanny!) and Claire Huxtable had a job! a real life job!" (Martell, 2007, Jun. 4). Her train of thought is a bit muddled here, but I think her point is that Carol Brady had a nanny (like Ali does) and Claire Huxtable had a real job (like Ali does) and they are still viewed as examples of perfect moms, whereas the competitive moms she encounters intimate that doing either of these things makes one a less-than-perfect mother.

Her current nanny (not the same one mentioned in June 2006) quits on a Friday night with no notice and without saying goodbye to the kids, which upsets her. She is also stressed out about possibly missing work and potentially getting fired (because she has used up all her leave). However, one of the nanny agencies has an emergency number and they manage to interview and hire a new nanny over the weekend. It turns out that her nanny was poached by another family that only has one child and more money. While Ali seems to be more well-off than some of the other mommybloggers, this post indicates that the family is reliant on her income. While a nanny might sound like a luxury, when a family has multiple children, it may actually be the most cost-effective childcare choice, because of the per-child rates charged for daycare (as discussed on Dani Donders's blog).

She alludes to having a business making fleece blankets and wanting to set up a website for it. She also is writing a blog, *Fabulous*, for UrbanMoms.ca. Like Haley, she posts some photographs from the UrbanMoms.ca Night Out, which they both attended.

She and her husband have a regular Sunday night out with friends. They also play softball. She posts conversations with Josh (as Leanne does with Kieran and

Sherry does with Hayley). Josh plays soccer; Emily is in ballet. Isabella unravels toilet paper all over the house. She frequently posts photographs of the children. She sometimes does activities with her daughters while Josh does something different with his dad. For example, she takes Emily and Isabella to Canada's Wonderland, and to Wisconsin to visit her mom. Her children attend a Jewish school, as she did; however, they celebrate Chrismukah with her stepmom, and of her three siblings, one is agnostic and one is Pentecostal, which indicates that the family is to some extent interfaith.

She occasionally appeals to her readers for assistance. For example, on June 15, she asks readers to visit Haley's blog and leave her good wishes; she is vague about why, but indicates it is "family stuff that [Haley] can't talk about on her site." (As mentioned earlier, this is one of the limitations of the blog medium—as open as bloggers are about themselves, they often restrict what they say about others, which can lead to cryptic posts.) She also asks readers for their advice on redecorating their family room (noting that they have lived with the previous owners' ugly carpet for five years), including photographs for their reference. She still discusses pop culture and her current clothing purchases, which engage her readers in discussion.

4.4.6 June | Trudy

Trudy and her family live in urban St. John's. Their current house is the house next door to the one she grew up in. Her dad is a printer and her first summer job was in a bindery. Her original major was history and she later added English as a second major. She has her students freewrite in their journals at the beginning of each class (cf. June 2006 where she says she is a teacher). She is bad at all sports, but

some she enjoys anyway (bowling) and some she does not (softball). She is glad to be an adult so she does not have to participate in the year-end Murphy Centre softball game, and can instead take photographs. She published her first book (*All My Love, Kate*) at age 20 (cf. June 2006 where she mentions having published several novels). She goes on her annual writers' retreat (cf. June 2006).

She posts photographs of Chris and Emma on their bikes. Emma recently learned to ride her bicycle without training wheels. Now that Emma can join him, Chris is eager to go bike riding; Trudy is impressed with how well he is learning his way around the neighborhood. They find a nest of baby spiders in their backyard, which Emma connects to *Charlotte's Web*. Chris goes to the corner store by himself for the first time, with Trudy watching from the front step. At the school awards assembly, both her kids get the "awesome attitude" award for their respective classes as well as academic awards. She is more proud of the attitude awards because they were unexpected. She notes that she should not take her kids' awards as "personal validation" but "when both my kids get Awesome Attitude awards, it seems like the school (and by extension, the world) is telling me, 'You've done something right. You are a Good Parent'" (Morgan-Cole, 2007, Jun. 20). It is clear from her post that it is not so much that she needs validation, but that it is nice to hear that her and Jason's hard work as parents is paying off.

She claims to be "slightly irreverent" with respect to her religion (Morgan-Cole, 2007, Jun. 1) and calls herself a "Card Carrying Bleeding Heart Liberal" (Morgan-Cole, 2007, Jun. 13). The brand of jeans she likes is sold at Wal-Mart, but they stopped selling them in tall (she is 5'11"). She acknowledges the issues with

shopping at Wal-Mart; and goes into a detailed analysis of how hard it is to shop ethically. She hates to shop, and she spends more than she is comfortable with on two pairs of jeans she ends up not liking.

She writes a lengthy rant about how disgusted she is with the ending to the *Pirates of the Caribbean III*, which leaves Kiera Knightley's character passively waiting for her man on a beach, after encouraging viewers to believe that she was a proto-feminist character. About Jason, her husband, she says, "I know lots of women, even in this enlightened post-feminist era, who are struggling to do most of the parenting work alone, with a husband who appears only on the sidelines. I truly cannot imagine what it would be like to do this incredibly difficult and rewarding job without a partner who has been giving 100% ever since he changed the first diaper in the hospital on the first day of Christopher's life" (Morgan-Cole, 2007, Jun. 17). This is the most explicit declaration by any of the bloggers about her husband and his contribution to childcare; more posts along this line would give a very different impression of the mommybloggers, I think.

4.4.7 **August | Sherry**

Sherry is a professional blogger (she writes content for other sites). She has a separate review blog (for reviews of items she has been given). She often shares links of things she finds interesting; she is upset about all the toy recalls.

She posts many photographs of Breanna and Hayley, including some now and then shots to show how much they have grown, some photo essays, and family photographs with her and George. She also shares mp3s of Hayley singing and George singing (separately).

She shares conversations with Hayley and Breanna. She loved board games when she was a kid, and she and George have started playing them with Hayley. Hayley plays soccer (compare with Ali's kids, where Josh plays soccer and Emily does ballet). Hayley is starting school. She is excited for Hayley, but also sad, because she has never really been apart from her. Later, she realizes that Breanna is going to miss Hayley even more. Hayley gets her hair cut (so Sherry does not have to deal with brushing it in the mornings before school). In negotiating the length of Hayley's hair, Hayley says that maybe she will never cut it and then Sherry will have to call her Rapunzel. It turns out she learned about Rapunzel on TV, which makes Sherry feel like a failure. She tries to rectify this by telling Hayley the whole story (or what she remembers of it), and Hayley asks why Rapunzel did not just climb down by herself without the aid of the prince. Sherry says, "So maybe I'm not a failure! Because clearly I am raising a feminist who doesn't need any stinkin' Prince to rescue her resourceful self from the tower!" (Osborne, 2007, Aug. 4). Hayley has all-day kindergarten and takes a school bus to school; her school has a dress code. George's dad shows up to welcome her home from her first day.

4.4.8 **September | Ali**

Ali works in publishing (Scholastic). Her commute is a 14-minute drive on Highway 407. She is excited because a new Starbucks is opening up that she will pass on her way to work; previously there were no coffee shops along the route (cf. June 2005 where she mentions loving Starbucks). (But she is non-discriminatory when it comes to coffee; she also likes Tim Horton's.)

She generally puts the kids to bed by herself (which indicates that her husband works late). She has been struggling to get them to stay in bed at bedtime and is trying to be tougher about it. On the other hand, she mentions that her husband buys her an Abercrombie and Fitch hoodie when he is shopping for kids' clothes—indicating that he does contribute to some extent with childcare-related chores. She takes Emily to a production of *High School Musical*; meanwhile, her husband takes Josh to a Bluejays' game (cf. June 2007 where she takes her daughters on outings without Josh).

She posts conversations with the kids, especially Josh. Josh speaks in "caveman-speak"; that is, he avoids using full sentences. Emily starts grade one. Emily is happy to go back to school; Josh is not. Isabella starts preschool. The family goes to Canada's Wonderland for the holiday. Ali and her husband go to TIFF (the Toronto International Film Festival) every year; they go to a Gruff Rhys concert; and they still play softball. She posts many photographs, including photographs of her children, some of herself, some of various events they attend.

She says she drives a Civic; it seems like this must be a second vehicle, since a small car is unlikely to be a replacement for the minivan they bought in 2005. She posts celebrity gossip (Britney Spears and Tom Cruise are regulars) and discusses TV shows, with photographs of the celebrities discussed; in one post, she reveals that, like Colin Farrell, she used to pull out her hair (Trichotillomania); she says she has never told anyone this before (but chooses to reveal it on her blog).

In her September 24 post, Ali announces that Haley had her baby, and sends readers over to Haley's blog to congratulate her.

4.4.9 September | Leanne

Leanne and Sean are starting a business (Punk Rock Mom PR); this is an expansion on some freelance work they have already done for bands. She promotes a blogging tool just because she likes it (notes that she is not being compensated for her positive review).

Kieran is four. He reaches the milestone of learning to wipe himself after using the bathroom instead of calling for mom (possibly too much information for some readers). Leanne is nervous about Kieran starting junior kindergarten. This is mostly related to an incident a few weeks before at a “private concert/picnic” where a group of slightly older children ignored Kieran when he tried to join them. She tried to distract him with other activities, but later he wandered over to the group again and one of the older boys pushed him, giving him a bloody nose. Now she is worried whether he will make friends at school. Sean takes him to his first day of school (which shows he is involved as a parent). Leanne is a bit sad (as Sherry was when Hayley started school, although Kieran has been in daycare, so she has been apart from him before). Kieran takes the bus to school in the morning and Leanne walks to the school and picks him up afterward. Kieran has some trouble adjusting to playing with other kids (gets frustrated and hits), but he is making friends and is excited to go to school and his teacher thinks he is bright; he has already learned the alphabet.

She shares some photographs of herself, Kieran, and her new baby, Spencer (cf. January 2007 when she mentioned being pregnant), as well as one of her nieces.

In her September 5 post, she uses her breast pump while she posts. Again, this is the kind of thing that critics of mommyblogs may feel is an unnecessary detail.

4.4.10 **September | Dani**

Dani posts a four-part review of the family's weekend at Smuggler's Notch Resort in Vermont, illustrated with lots of photographs. Their stay was complimentary; the resort's public relations personnel read her (unsolicited) review of another trip the family took and offered her the weekend in exchange for a review. Her review is glowing and she writes enthusiastically about returning with her extended family. She also writes a solicited review of the Bob Books (beginning readers books, which Tristan read aloud to her). She gets lots of offers from marketers, and posts a bunch of them on her blog for her readers' benefit, noting that just because she is not interested, does not mean they will not be. In her September 25 post, Dani asks for her readers' advice because she will be speaking to some "local communications and marketing folks who have a professional interest in the tools of social media from a business and government perspective." She notes that "the folks that attend these things tend to be dismissive of mommy bloggers as a whole. But when I start talking to them in terms that matter to them (Google Page Rank, Technorati status, number of visits, etc) they're often surprised... and I'm certainly not even among the rock stars of the mommy blog scene." This is indicative of how thoroughly the value of writing is tied to its financial worth. Once marketers and public relations people realize that they can use mommyblogs to market their products, mommyblogs cease being wastes of time and are repurposed as important

parts of the marketing scheme. Of course, if the value of writing is determined by how well it sells consumer goods, that is problematic.

Dani shows her interest keeping her profile up in the mommyblogosphere by attempting to improve her search engine ranking (which dropped when she moved her blog to her own domain) by starting a blog chain letter (essentially, getting each of the bloggers who wants to participate to write a post with links to all the other participants). She discusses the controversy over Orkut (a social networking site) users taking photographs of kids from Flickr and using them in their profiles; she acknowledges the distastefulness of this (many people are extremely upset), but says she is not going to take her own photographs down. As when she decided to use her sons' real names (cf. February 2005), she shows here that she is not overly concerned with privacy issues (in comparison with Haley, for example, who does not show her children's faces or use their names on her blog).

They have a nanny now (cf. February 2007 and her search for affordable daycare). Dani continues to rant about the state of daycare; she notes that while they are better off than some families (because they can afford daycare), even when you have the money to pay for it, it is often unavailable (long waiting lists); like Ali, it appears that, for Dani, the solution has been to go with a nanny. Tristan starts senior kindergarten and loves school. The nanny takes Tristan to school and Beloved picks him up on the days he gets off work in time (again, showing that he takes a significant role in childcare).

They are pottytraining Simon and he is doing well with peeing, but has stopped pooping entirely (will not go in a diaper or the toilet without hysterics); he

eventually does go, but then gets diarrhea (another post that is an example of the kind of thing some readers consider too much information). Simon is in preschool (something Tristan did not do). She is stressed out by the gourmet snacks other parents provide for their kids; Simon's school has parents take turns providing a snack for the class and when it is her turn, she sends a fruit tray from the grocery store deli (cf. her love of take-out and pizza delivery).

She takes Tristan to see a pediatric dermatologist (all goes well). They only have one car; which means she does a lot of back-and-forth driving for appointments (but she commutes by bus). She does not want a second car, but thinks they are going to have to get one. She is worried that they will have to get a minivan, since they will need room for three car seats. She is 20 weeks pregnant on September 14. She writes a post titled "A love letter to my daughter, who will never be" (cf. February 2005 where she wonders if a daughter is in their future). She and Beloved have decided to stop at three children and they know she is expecting a boy. She wonders if any of the three babies she miscarried were girls. She will be taking a year maternity leave; she does not discuss why she has chosen to take the full year (perhaps because Beloved's job is already quite flexible?). It would be good to see some of the mommybloggers discuss why the mother always takes the full parental leave, when, in Canada, the time is available to be taken by either parent (or split between them).

Despite the fact she sends her kids to Catholic school (public, in Ontario), she is opposed to the teaching of Creationism in publicly-funded schools: "creationism has no basis in fact. It's completely fallacious and flies in the face of hundreds of

years of scientific theory. It's not a theory, it's a fantasy" (Donders, 2007, Sep. 7). She does not really discuss how she reconciles this contradiction.

She gushes in anticipation of the Rush concert and is thrilled afterward. Her enthusiasm about Rush leads a reader to ask if she has an older brother (since Rush fans are overwhelmingly male). She does have a brother, but he is five years younger. In fact, she traces her Rush fandom back to an album her parents gave her for her twelfth birthday.

4.4.11 **September | Sherry**

Sherry continues to write short posts with links to items of interest, write reviews on her review blog, and share photographs of her daughters.

Breanna gets a cold and Hayley catches it from her, so her second day at school ends up being miserable. After that, she has difficulty adjusting; she likes school, but finds it hard being away for the whole day. Sherry reflects on previous issues that have seemed all-consuming at the time but that they have gotten through, and thinks they will manage to get through this too. She notes that undoubtedly some people will question her decision not to put Hayley in daycare or preschool. As time goes on, this improves, though Hayley is still reluctant to go in the morning, she comes home happy at the end of the day. Sherry's favorite part of the day is when Hayley gets home from school and they go to the park.

Hayley turns five. Sherry posts a photo of herself, looking extremely pregnant, saying, "I can't believe that tomorrow the tiny little six-pound-eleven-ounce baby that was in there is going to turn five years old. I don't even know how

that's possible." Several readers remember when she originally posted that photo (five years ago). Erin says, "I remember when Hayley was born! ... Every year, I always think, 'Oh! Hayley's birthday is coming up!' That's kind of strange, I guess, given that I've never met either of you and I'm not even a frequent commenter or anything." Shirley says, "I remember that photo also. It's been great sharing the last five years with you. ... I don't comment often but I read you everyday" (Osborne, 2007, Sep. 19). These comments nicely illustrate that bloggers do have long-term readers, who are not necessarily involved in the mommyblog community, but who read blogs like an ongoing serial drama.

Breanna and Hayley fight a lot; she remembers fighting with her own sister and knows this is normal, but wishes they would get past it and be friends like she and her sister are now. She is excited when Hayley brings home a Scholastic order form; she loved ordering Scholastic books when she was in school. This connects her with Ali, who works at Scholastic, and actually has written a few picture books for them (maybe Hayley and Breanna will end up reading one of Ali's books).

4.4.12 **September | Heather**

Heather has been working from home for the past year (cf. December 2005 when she is working full-time outside the home, but also December 2006 where she notes that she had a baby—this implies that her idea of maternity leave is to cut back to one job—freelance writing). She is now back working full-time, and has a bunch of writing projects in the works. She is also beginning Pampered Chef training (a line of products that is sold through a Tupperware-like party plan), which indicates that she is trying to generate more income.

She has difficulty juggling her full-time job in sales, writing, and being a mother. Her son, M, has finished kindergarten. He is in Beavers and she accompanies him on an outing. She feels like she should be more involved with her son's school (volunteer in his class, attend PTA meetings), but it is hard for her to find the time, and she also feels like the other moms belong to a clique that she does not fit in to. She does most of the housework (laundry, grocery shopping, breadmaking, cleaning) even though she is working full-time (6–2). Her days average 17 hours long between her day job, childcare, and writing. She notes that “[t]hree days a week my husband stays home to take M to school and watch E for the rest of the day, until I return. Two afternoons a week, the sweet neighbour lady watches E until my return” (Cook, 2007, Sep. 30). Her husband works 3–9; the obvious implication is that they have arranged their schedules to minimize the need for childcare. This indicates both that they are trying to keep costs down, and that her husband does participate in childcare to some extent.

She is reading Caitlin Flanagan's *To Hell with All That: Loving and Loathing our Inner Housewife*, and notes that she is starting to understand Flanagan's decision to hire a nanny, something she was initially critical of: “She just realized that something had to give. She wasn't going to do It All. She wasn't going to buy into the story that I have, that I can bake my own bread, work full time, write the rest of the time, be a good mom, have the laundry done, the shopping squared away and still get to Beavers and swimming and and So I've been re-jigging the priorities. I may write a bit less, I no longer feel the burning desire to write anything and everything that gets offered to me” (Cook, 2007, Sep. 30). Here we see a shift in Cook's perspective; however, it seems unfortunate that when she realizes that she

cannot do it all (something some of the other mommybloggers never bought into; see for example, Dani's blog), she thinks about dropping one of the things that is most important to her (her writing), instead of dropping something less important (breadmaking) or asking her husband to help out more.

She sometimes has difficulty getting people to take her writing seriously, and vents about how disappointed she is when she organizes a meeting of her in-person writing group and no one shows up. She really wants the in-person group to work but thinks that the other writers are not hungry enough to work at their writing. She is glad to have her online group (this shows how important online friends/colleagues can be).

She is concerned that the HPV vaccine was approved too quickly (something she is thinking about now that she has a daughter). However, she notes she cannot guarantee that her children will end up in a lifelong monogamous relationship and directs readers to an article that points out reasons the vaccine is a good idea even if one plans to teach children abstinence. In this post, it is clear that she is trying to reconcile her religious values with common sense (after all, she is divorced, so she has first-hand knowledge that sometimes relationships do not last). She wants people to know that she is Christian and not just a good person, but does not clarify what this means. She says this is hard at work and intimates that she offended someone; she says she will pray for a co-worker (the offended one?).

4.4.13 **September | Shazia**

Shazia and her husband ("The Mousehunter") plan "10 days of kiddy adventures" to finish up the summer. Their adventures range from a trip to IKEA,

geocaching, a trip to Niagara Falls, and the days at a nearby park. The choices of adventures (all essentially free) indicate that they are trying to have fun on a budget. She includes photographs of these adventures that show her kids and husband, but she is always behind the camera. She also posts a video of her sons playing race cars. The boys still eschew their own beds and sleep on a mattress in their bedroom.

She refers to herself as a work-at-home mother, and adds that this is her first September as a work-at-home mom. The summer was challenging for her, because her eldest son is now used to school and planned activities each day. Her son attends a Muslim school. He starts senior kindergarten; she notes that the previous year she was sad (like Leanne and Sherry when their eldests started school), but this year she is mostly relieved. She is struggling to get the kids on a new routine, and feels her husband does not give her the amount of alone time to do her work as she gives him. At the same time, she admits that maybe she has not properly articulated her need for more time alone to work. This is a significant admission; it seems like in a lot of cases, mommybloggers may be using their blogs as a passive-aggressive way to send their spouses a message instead of just asking them outright to do more around the house. For example, Shazia also shares her strategies for manipulating her husband into doing things around the house, like this is something that needs to be done by a sneak attack.

It is Ramadan and they are fasting, or at least trying to; the kids have not quite grasped the concept yet. Her religion seems to be an integral part of her life, as is Trudy's and Heather's. On September 11, she feels like she should say something because she is Muslim, but instead writes about the blogger postcard swap she is

participating in, posting a photo of her handmade postcards, which say: “Every day is a new beginning. Treat it that way. Stay away from what might have been, and look at what can be.” This reflects the positive outlook that she chooses to adopt on her blog, even as here when the circumstances seem to indicate that she is feeling otherwise. She is “going pink” for October (to support breast cancer awareness/research) and encourages others to do the same. She is on Facebook and loves it. She signed up for networking purposes, but ended up reconnecting with old friends and classmates; she is most excited about catching up with elementary school friends. This may be nostalgia for a less-complicated time in her life.

4.4.14 **September | Haley**

Haley has four weeks left in her pregnancy at the beginning of the month. She knows the baby’s sex but is keeping it a secret. However, she gets a blue and brown diaper bag, which leads to speculation that the baby is a boy. She has carpal tunnel syndrome (she includes photographs of her wrists in splints). She is extremely swollen and uncomfortable and whines constantly; she does not know how her readers can stand it. She is looking forward to getting back in shape (cf. March 2006 where she discusses losing pregnancy weight) and mentions having a dance background. Josh is on a diet and losing weight, which is a bit disheartening for her at the moment. She wonders if it will be okay to wear flip-flops to synagogue (for Jewish High Holidays) since none of her other shoes fit. She now has a pregnancy blog at UrbanMoms.ca, in addition to her celebrity blog. She does write about celebrities a little bit, mostly during her Thursday Thirteen list (each celebrity

mentioned is accompanied by a photograph and/or video), but most of her celebrity posts have been moved to *Cheaty's Celebrity Gossip*.

Despite the detail she goes into with her pregnancy symptoms, she describes herself as a private blogger because she does not write about her sex life or other unspecified personal things (this could refer to the “family issues” that Ali mentioned on her blog). She also keeps things that might seem less private to outsiders to herself; for example, she decides not to post a photo of the earrings Josh gives her as a combined birthday and “birthing” gift. (The expectation of a birthing gift, which none of the other bloggers mention, seems to confirm that Haley is the most affluent of the bloggers.)

The Monkey starts preschool and Haley is excited, not sad like some of the other mommybloggers. However, like Sherry, she says that the best part of her day is picking up her daughter from school. The Monkey says her first complete sentence. Haley apologizes for hurting a friend’s feelings by taking a comment she made about giving birth early seriously and writing about it on her blog. She considers whether to post a photo of the new baby’s face (cf. March 2007 where she discusses not posting photographs of her daughter’s face).

On September 23, she posts that her water broke before leaving for the hospital. On September 24, Josh guest-posts to announce that Haley had the baby, a boy. He notes that they will be keeping the baby’s name to themselves, but says, “I really appreciated all the amazing comments and well wishes from everyone who did so. ... Take care and thanks for being such good friends to Haley.” There are 79 comments on this post, all congratulating Haley and Josh. Like her pregnancy

announcement, the news brings out several lurkers. On September 26, she posts that they are home. She is excited that the baby is here and excited not to be pregnant anymore. She posts photographs of the baby with her and Josh, and she does show the baby's face. Her parents hire a nurse to help her at night (which again indicates a significant disposable income). While a cynic might look at this series of posts as the blog needing to be fed at all times, it can also be looked at as Haley having consideration for her readers' loyalty throughout her pregnancy. She was whiny and unpleasant to be around, but they continued to come by and try to cheer her up; the least she can do is let them know when she has the baby. It is also likely that she has stronger ties (than just what is publicly seen in comments) to some of her readers, people that she would normally communicate with via email or other means, but it is a lot easier to make a single blog post than to send out several emails (or even one mass email).

4.4.15 **September | Trudy**

Trudy teaches adult education to young adults (cf. June 2006 and 2007 where she writes about working at the Murphy Centre). She has a master's degree in counselling psychology. This is her third year working at this job, although the year prior to that she worked there part-time as an intern. She finds early September and the transition back to school very challenging. In her English classes, she encourages her students to write about their experiences and she mentions how difficult these stories are to read at the start of each year, but that she gradually gets accustomed to them.

She posts photographs of Emma and Chris, and gets a copy of a story (“novel”) Chris wrote printed at lulu.com; he is thrilled. She mentions that she used to be a stay-at-home mom (but was going to school during part of that time). She notes that balancing work, husband, kids, and housework is tough at times.

She is wistful about the end of summer, but aware that she is using summer as a metaphor for life: “I am aware of passing time, of passing life, of missed opportunities. Maybe that’s why I try so hard not to miss any. Maybe that’s why I write, why I blog, why I am compulsive about albumizing my photographs. Recording time proves I didn’t waste any. Maybe I believe I’m cutting a deal with God: If I show You that I’m really using every moment, really living life to the full, making good use of my time—will You give me more????” (Morgan-Cole, 2007, Sep. 4). This seems to reflect a belief (or at least hope) that making if she makes “good use” of her time, she will be rewarded, but at the same time, doing things with her kids while they are small, enjoying sunny days, and taking the time to appreciate the little moments in life does not seem like a bad philosophy to live by.

Of all the bloggers, she is the one who speaks most explicitly about her religious faith. Throughout the month, she links to posts in a Seventh-Day Adventist series called “Bloggin’ the 28,” where different bloggers write about the principles of the Seventh-Day Adventist faith. For her birthday, she would like donations to the Turn on the Tap (<http://www.turnonthetap.org/>) project. After her birthday party (a backyard barbecue), she notes that her friends and family came through with donations, which she plans to match. Fearing that she sounds too altruistic, she tries

to balance out her generosity by showing her shallow side—she posts some parody videos of the James Blunt song, “You’re Beautiful.”

5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 The Genre: What makes blogging different from other kinds of lifewriting?

As discussed in Chapter 3, mommyblogs frequently stir negative reactions from onlookers because they are written by women, and combine a “feminine” form of writing, the personal blog, with content that has historically been considered taboo. Casual readers may see the mommyblogger’s focus on self as narcissism, when it is more likely the mother is just trying to continue to see herself as an entity separate from her children, something that is undoubtedly difficult to do when the child has been a part of the mother for nine months and is then dependent for even longer. The grotesque realism of the mommyblogs can repulse outsiders (non-mothers). Several of the bloggers are either pregnant when they begin blogging (Cook, Osborne, Palmerston) or become pregnant after beginning their blogs (Donders, Haley-O, Martell, Palmerston). Donders and Palmerston also blog about experiencing miscarriages. Pregnancy, miscarriage, and birth are often described in graphic detail on these blogs. Many of the bloggers also write extensively about breastfeeding (see, for example, Donders and Palmerston) and potty training (Haley-O’s daughter poops in the bathtub, Donders’s son Simon has diarrhea, Palmerston’s son Kieran learns to wipe himself after using the toilet, Mistry’s potty training of her middle son is an ongoing saga). Vomit (Donders’s son Tristan vomits several times one night, for example, resulting in multiple loads of laundry) and blood

(Palmerston's son Kieran bleeds copiously after being hit by another child in the nose) also feature prominently in the stories.

However, I think there are a few additional layers to the animosity here. One is the mothers vs. mothers disputes ("mommy wars"¹⁴) that frequently come up on the blogs (see, for example, Donders, Martell, Palmerston). Many of the mommybloggers make reference to their blog being a place where they can speak about what motherhood is really like, a place where they do not have to pretend to be perfect. However, by exposing the less than idyllic experiences of a mother with young children, they risk upsetting those on the other side of this dispute, the ones who do want to preserve the image of the perfect, self-sacrificing mother.

That this topic comes up so frequently would seem to indicate that the "perfect" mothers are a large faction in the mommyblogosphere. However, the closest any of the bloggers in this study came to that image were those who were struggling with trying to do it all (Cook) while maintaining a positive attitude (Mistry). Still, even these bloggers were at the same time writing about how difficult it is to balance work and motherhood, and not sugarcoating the unpleasant parts of being a mother. This leads me to question if the mothers vs. mothers disputes are not, at least in part, media-manufactured. While relentlessly cheery mommyblogs do exist, it does not appear that they are in the majority. Nor does the perfect mother appear to exist; all of the mothers struggle with the decisions they make. This indicates that perhaps the mothers the bloggers feel inferior to in person *also feel the same way*. In other words, at the park or their children's school, all the mothers feel

¹⁴ See, for example, <http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=mommy+wars>

pressure to put on a happy face and act like everything is fine, but really, inside all are struggling with the same issues. They all feel like they do not measure up, just no one will admit it. It is a kind of self-fulfilling prophesy: it looks like everyone else is doing fine, so I better act like I am doing fine, too.

By writing about their doubts and fears, as well as detailing physical effects such as cracked, bleeding nipples (which ruins idyllic breastfeeding imagery), and low points of parenthood such as having to clean up vomit after a child has been sick, the mommybloggers break the mommy “code” the mothers at the park seem to be adhering to. However, because no one can actually prevent mothers from blogging about whatever they like, once online, tactics ostensibly switch from peer pressuring other mothers into silence to disparaging other mothers’ choices, which leads to battles over various parenting decisions, for example, breastfeeding vs. bottlefeeding, homeschool vs. public school vs. private school; stay-at-home vs. work-at-home vs. work-outside-the-home mother. Whether these “mommy wars” exist to the extent that they are hyped in the media is questionable. What is clear, however, is that the mommybloggers in this study, as well as many of those they came into contact with, perceive this pressure to conform (that is, it is a real pressure for them, regardless of whether it is mostly media hype), and feel like rebels or warriors for a good cause (the *imperfect* mother) when they choose to tell the truth of motherhood as they have experienced it.

There is a third layer at play here as well, and that is the clash between second and third wave feminism. While many of the bloggers (Donders, Morgan-Cole, Osborne, Palmerston) make explicit or implicit reference to being feminist,

their blogs seem to focus on the home, children, family, and often other traditionally feminine pursuits, like knitting or crafts. The blogs themselves are frequently compared to scrapbooks or diaries—again, traditionally feminine forms. These are the things that stand out to the casual reader—and the implication is of a traditional view toward motherhood—which is bound to cause a backlash with second-wave feminists. The first *impression* is that feminism has failed because today's mothers are making traditional choices. However, a close reading of the blogs reveals that the bloggers have jobs (careers in some cases), the majority make use of daycare, nannies, or preschool, their spouses do participate to some extent in childcare/housework, and many of the bloggers have interests that are not gendered or may even be considered masculine (take, for example, Donders's love of Rush). In other words, the first impression is not the reality. The problem is that mentions of the bloggers' jobs and of their husbands doing laundry, running child-related errands, or taking responsibility for childcare are few and far between. While both of these are understandable to some extent, as will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, the need to be a regular reader to pick up on these mentions means that is not the image that a casual reader will be likely to take away. Thus, some of the negativity directed toward mommyblogs from feminist factions might be dispelled if readers would set aside their first impressions and continue reading.

In all of these cases, the conflict centers on mommyblogs spanning the public/private divide. The topics are ones that were traditionally private, or shared between women, but not openly in public. The format (cumulative dated entries) resembles a genre that has been considered private (diaries). Yet, mommyblogs are public, and as such, like other public writing, they invite critique. However, unlike

writers of memoirs or personal essays, mommybloggers are generally not compensated for their writing—at least initially. This leads to the criticism: why would you expose yourself like that for *free*? Because this is baffling to a lot of people (who may or may not take the time to actually read the blogs they are criticizing), they make up reasons—the ever-popular *narcissist*, for example. Ironically, popular mommyblogs often do become commercial ventures. Adding pay to the mix immediately gives blogging value. The criticism then turns from *Why?* (because money is a good enough reason why for most people in capitalist/consumerist society) to *How could you (pimp out your kids)?* But this is also perplexing, because memoirists and personal essayists have always used their families as material. What is the difference between a blogger and someone who writes books or essays for a national newspaper? What is the difference between a blogger and Kathie Lee Gifford, who boasted about her kids for years each weekday morning on *Regis and Kathie Lee*? The difference seems to lie in the assumption that mommybloggers are “ordinary” women, “just” mothers, who came to blogging as a non-commercial venture, a hobby, and who never had any intention of writing professionally until some marketer waved money in front of them, and powerless to resist the call of capitalism, they sold their children’s souls for a review copy of a book / new cell phone / weekend at a resort and some advertising revenue. My research finds that this is a false presumption. All of the bloggers were either already writers, aspiring writers, or otherwise recognized the potential of the medium *before* they began blogging. Of course, the fact that it is not considered acceptable for an ordinary mom (amateur) to decide to turn her hobby into a career (turn professional) is also

problematic, especially when it leads to mothers obfuscating their status to appear to be something they are not. I will elaborate on these points later in the chapter.

5.2 The Mommybloggers: Who are the real mommybloggers?

All of the bloggers in this study live in major cities. Five of the eight bloggers live in Ontario (Ottawa, Hamilton, and three in Toronto). The others live in Calgary, Montreal, and St. John's. According to the 2006 Canadian Census (<http://www.statcan.ca/>), 39% of Canada's population lives in Ontario, and 15% in Toronto. Considering the small sample size, it is not unreasonable that 5/8 bloggers (62.5%) would be from Ontario and 3/8 (37.5%) from Toronto. Although these numbers are a little high, they do fit with the urban trend. Three of the bloggers are renters; one owns a townhouse and three others own houses. In one case, it is unclear whether a house is owned or rented. The number of bloggers who were homeowners—at most 5/8 (62.5%)—was similar to the Canadian population (68%). The rate of homeownership, combined with bloggers' mentions of concerns about money and finances, indicates that the population of mommybloggers is no more wealthy than Canadians in general, and in fact, includes a mix of financial circumstances from those struggling to get by (Cook, Osborne, Palmerston), to those with good jobs, but who still rely on their paycheques (Donders, Martell, Mistry, Morgan-Cole), to one blogger who gives the impression of being quite affluent (Haley-O).

All of the sample bloggers were heterosexual women, born between 1965 and 1978. All had two or three children. Seven of the eight (87.5%) were legally married; the eighth (12.5%) was in common-law relationship. This compares with the 48% of

Canadians age 15 or over who were legally married and the 10% who were in common-law relationships.¹⁵ Obviously, the numbers of heterosexual married women in this study is high; some lesbian and single mothers would be expected given Canadian demographics.¹⁶ However, two of the women had been married and divorced prior to their current marriages, and one had a child from her first marriage and was a single mother for a time (prior to her blog), so there was some diversity in that respect.

Seven of the bloggers were Caucasian; one was of Indian ancestry, but born in Trinidad. Another was originally from the United States. Both immigrated to Canada as young adults. While only 1/8 (12.5%) of the mommybloggers in this study came from a visible minority group, this number is not significantly different from Canada's population as whole (16%). As well, the number of bloggers who were immigrants 2/8 (25%) was also similar to the Canadian population (20%). So, in these respects, it is possible that the demographics of Canadian mommybloggers may not differ greatly from the Canadian population.

Six of the eight bloggers explicitly mentioned a religious affiliation (one Muslim, two Jewish, and three Christian: one Catholic, one Seventh-day Adventist, and one unspecified).¹⁷ Four of the bloggers send their children to religious-affiliated schools (three private (Jewish and Muslim), and one the Catholic public system in

¹⁵ These numbers include both same-sex and opposite-sex marriages and common-law relationships.

¹⁶ Both single mother mommyblogs and lesbian mommyblogs do exist; however, the fact that neither showed up in this study may indicate that they are not represented in the mommyblogosphere in numbers that might be expected given Canadian demographics.

¹⁷ The remaining two did not mention having a religious affiliation; however, one did mention liking Christmas and Easter in a "secular way" and the other seemed to celebrate such holidays in a similar fashion.

Ontario). According to the 2001 Census (numbers for 2006 have not been released yet), only 16% of Canadians do not have any religious affiliation.¹⁸ So, although only 2/8 (25%) bloggers were secular, this was actually higher than the population as a whole (but not significantly so).

Five of the eight (62.5%) have university degrees, with three of those mentioning graduate work. One of these earned her degree part-time while working full-time; another obtained her graduate degree while her children were preschoolers. The other three did not mention university/college, but do mention other training (one earned her doula certification during the time she has kept her blog, for example). According the 2006 census, only 22% of Canadians have a bachelor's degree or higher, so this group definitely has a higher level of education than the general population.

All of the bloggers except one at some time used daycare and/or had a nanny and/or enrolled their children in preschool. All of the bloggers work in addition to parenting, and some have more than one job. One has a dayjob in sales, is a freelance writer, and has a non-fiction book coming out in 2008; one is a teacher and a writer who has published several books; one is an editor for a book publisher and also writes a blog for UrbanMoms.ca. One works in communications for the federal government.¹⁹ One is a doula and freelance writer, and has started a PR business with her husband. One is a web designer who left her full-time job to work freelance

¹⁸ The number of persons with no religion was much higher in BC (35%), which may explain why 6/8 bloggers having a religious affiliation seemed high to me.

¹⁹ Based on her longstanding employment with the government and her description of her husband's teaching schedule, I suspect she may be the primary income earner in this family; this is never stated, however.

after the birth of her third child (but as of spring 2008 has gone back to work full-time). One is a professional blogger for b5media. One left her full-time job as an editor after her first child, but then started a web-based business, and is in the process of branding her blog and turning it into a conglomerate. According to the census, 76.3% of women age 25–54 were employed in 2006 (this includes persons who “did any work at all for pay or in self-employment or without pay in a family farm, business or professional practice”²⁰). So, according to this definition, the mommybloggers in this study actually had a higher level of employment than the general population.

Determining whether in fact the population of mommybloggers is indeed reflective of Canada’s population, would of course require a larger survey, but it cannot be said from these numbers that the composition of the mommyblogger population differs from the population as a whole in the numbers of homeowners, visible minorities, immigrants, and those with a religious affiliation. However, they do appear to be more urban than the general population (and possibly more focused in Ontario/Toronto), as well as more likely to be heterosexual, married, educated, and employed. While some of these things fit the mommyblogger stereotype (urban, heterosexual, married, educated); several things did not. In particular, they all worked to some extent and some were renters, which suggests they are both *more* independent and *less* affluent than the mommyblogger stereotype would have people believe. In addition, at least half of the bloggers made explicit reference to being feminist, which is significant in a climate where feminism is often considered

²⁰ See: <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/reference/dictionary/pop028.cfm>

outdated and many women believe that feminism has no relevance to their lives (or has failed them, see Gaughran-Perez, 2006).

5.3 The Purpose: Why do mommybloggers blog?

It can be argued that there are (at least) two groups of mommybloggers: “writers who came to blogs as another medium in which to hone their craft,” and for whom becoming a part of a community was an unexpected bonus. Then, there are “women who came to blogs as a way to find a community of like-minded people” – for them, making friendships was more important than writing, at least initially. While the term “mommyblogging” seems limiting to the former group, it is freeing to the latter group (Mom 101, 2006, n.p.). Or, in other words, “[t]hat individuals on the face of things share a common practice ... does not mean that the practice fits similarly into their lives, nor that the practice has the same meaning for all” (Manga, 2003, p. 93).

Cook, Morgan-Cole, and Palmerston, who were published prior to blogging, seem to use the medium in part as a means of accountability and way of promoting other projects. They post more sporadically, and seem less concerned with growing their audience than the other bloggers. For Donders and Martell, who both explicitly express their aspirations of writing fiction/creative non-fiction, blogging is both a writing practice and a way of getting a foot in the door. Based on the number of comments, these two, along with Haley-O, have the largest readership of the eight bloggers. Both actively pursue other opportunities that come to them via blogging (Martell writes a blog for UrbanMoms.ca and Donders selectively accepts offers to write reviews in return for compensation, for example, a free trip to Smugglers’

Notch Resort), but do not seem to be overly concerned with earning income from their personal blogs. This is likely because they, along with Cook, Morgan-Cole, and Palmerston, all work outside the home. However, Donders's knowledge of social media actually helps her earn a new position at work, and Palmerston is encouraged by her readers to pursue her dream, becoming certified as a doula.

Haley-O, Mistry, and Osborne more actively pursue income from blogging. Haley-O, who quit her job as an editor after her first child, started a web-based business (Kids Deserve Art). During 2006–2007, she wrote several blogs for UrbanMoms.ca, but is now in the process of turning her own blog into a business. Mistry quit her full-time job as web designer to work freelance from home (she returned to full-time work in the spring of 2008); she actively pursues opportunities to earn money from her blog. In addition to being a professional blogger (she writes content for several b5media.com blogs), Osborne has a review blog on-the-side (for paid/compensated reviews), which is common with bloggers who have an exclusive advertising contract on their blog. She notes that her blog has given her the confidence to pursue writing opportunities that she might not have prior to blogging.

The importance of community for mommybloggers can be seen in the comments. Comments are primarily phatic; supportive comments (agreement, appreciation, validation) and friendly banter/joking far outweigh other types of comments. Even when it is clear that readers disagree with the blogger, they remain polite and often choose to drop the issue (sit on their fingers, so to speak) rather than pursuing in an argument. Some comments did express mild disagreement and there

were a few anonymous snarky remarks, for example, a remark rebuking Donders for her attitude toward daycare providers, and one in response to Palmerston's son's encounter with some older children at a music festival that indicated it was her fault he got hurt because she left him "alone" (he was a distance away, but still in her sight). However, the only real reference to one of the bloggers being attacked by a reader was Osborne's post about the person who was upset when she got the free phone.

This was true of all of the blogs in this study, and is quite different from the dynamic on other types of blogs, where arguments are the norm. This is probably in part attributable to the fact that nearly all of the commenters were identifiable; anonymous comments were extremely rare, and commenters who were not offline friends/family almost always linked to their own blogs. While this is reflective of the natural tendency for people to curb their most obnoxious behavior when they know it may come back to bite them, it also demonstrates how much the relationship between blogger and reader is valued; that is, readers are not willing to risk it to win an argument—even when it is something they feel strongly about. For example, one homeschooling mom's comment on Haley-O's post about her daughter starting preschool could be parsed as: "I disagree that preschool is the right choice, but I am going to let it go, because I value our friendship more than I value convincing you that I am right." Even informative comments are generally oriented towards building relationships between readers and bloggers—information is provided to *help* the blogger (thus, building a stronger connection between the reader and blogger), not *instruct* them. In other words, the information was offered, but with the understanding it was just to give the blogger another choice, not that the commenter

felt the blogger had any obligation to take it. This worked in the reverse, as well. For example, when Dani Donders wrote her post about how to help a friend who has had a miscarriage, she included the caveat that this was just her experience; despite having three miscarriages, she did not feel that she was an expert, and invited readers to contribute their own thoughts.

One thing that should be noted is that the depth of the comments is probably deceptive. More personal, one-on-one discussions are likely to be taken to email or another private venue. It is also clear that many of the bloggers have readers who comment rarely or never, but whom the blogger communicates with in some other way. For example, while family members and offline friends occasionally leave comments, they are (obviously) more likely to communicate with the blogger in person, by phone, or email. However, even long-term online friends may be more inclined to email or instant message the blogger, rather than communicating via comments. Thus, comments are skewed to be somewhat less substantive than the conversation as a whole.

Despite bloggers referring to their blogs as their own spaces, there was no disconnect between online and offline life. In all cases but one, it was clear that family members (including spouses, siblings, parents, cousins, aunts/uncles, in-laws, and even children, where they were old enough) and in-person friends were at the very least aware of the blogs, often read them regularly, and sometimes commented. Blogs are sometimes used to keep long-distance friends and family up-to-date. For example, Martell's family is scattered across the United States, Donders's brother

lives several hours away, Mistry has family in Trinidad, and Osborne's sister moved to Halifax from Montreal.

Bloggers also use their blogs in lieu of baby books, scrapbooks, and journals. While Haley-O said she would never read the posts she made during her second pregnancy ever again, Morgan-Cole explicitly uses her blog to record her children's milestones and other events in her life. When Palmerston started her blog, she referred to her husband as "Daddy" indicating that perhaps she intended the blog in part as a memory book for her son. Osborne mentioned that she was never able to keep a paper journal going, but she has had an online journal since 1998. Donders printed out her blog on its second anniversary, showing that record itself was important to her; she did not want to risk losing it.

And of course, bloggers used their blogs to grapple with the issues they face as mothers today. As discussed in Chapter 1, the act of mommyblogging has been called a radical act. I do think mommyblogs are *provocative*, which gets people talking. Some will identify; others will object. The shared experience and mutual support starts to create a community, but it is the joint resistance to the objections that coalesces it, that is, their shared difference creates a sub-culture. This is affirming and friendships often grow out of this, so I would say that it is a positive thing. Still, I do not think this is *radical*. Foregrounding a mother being a parent is not groundbreaking. What would be radical would be for the mommybloggers to foreground their own careers (take ownership of their aspirations, rather than downplaying them) as well as their spouses' contributions to housework and childcare.

5.4 The Text as Product: Does commercialization affect the authenticity of mommyblogs?

The bloggers' first posts indicate that although subjects discussed in the mommyblogs may be personal, all of the bloggers are focused outward toward an audience from the beginning. As well, the majority of bloggers are thinking about writing in a professional way (either currently or in the future) from the beginning. Some of the bloggers do not even mention that they are mothers in their first posts (Martell, Osborne, Morgan-Cole); they are focused on writing or web design. The other bloggers do position themselves as mothers, but in different ways. Palmerston indicates she is rebelling against the dominant image of motherhood (yet, she remains situated in the kitchen). Donders worries about being funny or whether anyone will read her blog, and positions herself as working mother, noting she is just off maternity leave. Cook's blog has a professional tone; she focuses on balancing work and motherhood. Haley-O positions herself as a mother with ties to another blogger (Ali Martell). Mistry's first post lacks the introductory remarks of the other bloggers' first posts, and instead jumps right into discussing her struggles as a mother of three. The focus on writing and audience in the bloggers' first posts indicates that the bloggers never viewed their blogs as purely private "for me" endeavors, but rather, were thinking about the potential of the medium from the very beginning.

All of the bloggers except for Haley-O use their full names, although they deal with the privacy of other family members differently. Morgan-Cole, Osborne, and Palmerston use both their spouse's and their children's names. Donders and Martell use their children's names, but do not mention their husband's names.

Donders did try using nicknames for her sons initially, but this lasted only a few weeks before she decided to reveal their real names (which is actually more authentic, not less). Haley-O uses first names for herself and her husband, and nicknames for her children. Cook and Mistry use nicknames for their spouses and children. All post photographs of themselves, their spouses, and children except for Cook (although she does have a small headshot of herself on her site). However, Haley-O does not post photographs that show her children's faces (except for when they are babies). Mistry posts many photographs of her husband and children, but very few of herself (one from high school, and her wedding photo). The fact that these choices remain stable over time indicates that bloggers have decided on the level of privacy they are comfortable with prior to beginning to blog (or very early on) and changes in their status (popularity, commercialization) do not have an impact on that aspect of their authenticity. Additionally, while the content of the posts varies between blogs, and the bloggers' interests may change over time, the depth of description does not seem to be restricted as the blogger gains a wider audience or commercializes her blog. If anything, posts become longer and more detailed over time, as the bloggers find their voices.

However, one difficulty that arises is the use of the term "stay-at-home mother." The mommybloggers seem to use the term to encompass any situation that does not involve them going outside the home to work. So, for example, a mother on maternity leave might describe herself as a stay-at-home mom, as might a mother who is going to school, freelancing, or running a business from home, and this becomes more muddled when a blogger starts to earn income via her blog. The blogger may feel like her status has not changed, because what she is doing

(blogging) is not different; however, she must have taken some initiative—pursued advertising revenue, or at least responded to opportunities when they presented themselves. While in each of these cases, the mom may indeed be “at home,” calling herself a stay-at-home mom in these situations (rather than a work-at-home mom, or a mom on maternity leave) is misleading because the stay-at-home moniker implies a mother who has opted out of the paid workforce. While this might seem to be quibbling over semantics, the problem is that it plays into the belief that mommybloggers are women who have dropped out of workforce to stay home—a casual reader who sees “stay-at-home” is likely to assume the blogger is not employed at all. Additionally, because “opting out” is associated with upper-middle-class women (see Belkin, 2003 and Graff, 2007), this gives outsiders the false impression that mommybloggers are affluent women who can afford not to work, which in turn leads to the assumption that they are in traditional relationships where the father works and the mother takes care of the kids. This may make it less likely for mothers who blog to be taken seriously, particularly by academics who think mommybloggers are speaking only for an exclusive group. Furthermore, when a mother who is earning income from her writing²¹ (whether it be her blog or other venues) calls herself a stay-at-home mom (thus presenting her work as a hobby), she makes it difficult for other women who are working from home to have their work taken seriously (as Heather Cook experienced).

²¹ I would go so far as arguing that work-at-home should apply to anyone who is seriously pursuing a career from home, regardless of whether she is earning a substantial income from it yet, because while it may take a while for a new business earn a profit or for freelance income to be steady, *work-at-home* reflects the greater commitment and effort a job (rather than a hobby) requires.

Conversely, it is also problematic that mommyblogs were treated dismissively until marketing firms and public relations people realized how good mommybloggers are at buzz marketing and product reviews. Now that they have demonstrated their capitalist value, they suddenly have gained respect—at least in some quarters; in others they are more denigrated than ever, because now they are not just exhibitionists, they are also “exploitive.” Namecalling aside, it should not be necessary for anyone to demonstrate that a hobby has monetary value in order for it to gain a modicum of respect. Mommyblogs have other kinds of value, which are equally, if not more important to the bloggers: community, self-expression, documentation. While I do not think that transitioning a mommyblog from a hobby to a commercial endeavor changes the authenticity of the content or blogger’s voice in any significant way (it would be hard to make a substantial change content- and voice-wise given that the archives are right there for current posts to be compared to, although this may be different if the blogger shuts down a blog and starts a new one), the question of whether bloggers should be profiting from their hobby is an interesting one. On the one hand, why not? If the blogger is talented and is able to turn her hobby into a career, why should she not do so? On the other hand, the turn to commercialization of mommyblogs reinforces that everything in our society is just waiting to be commercialized—even things that in the beginning seem outside of that—recall the utopic views of blog pioneers like Evan Williams and Rebecca Blood. While it may not have seemed possible ten years ago, blogs *have* been taken over by commercial interests, even mommyblogs—which in the beginning seemed like the least commercial blogs of all.

5.5 The Dialogue: Is the mommyblogosphere dialogic?

In Chapter 3, I argued that the mommyblogosphere is dialogic because it can be read in multiple ways. Bloggers, blog readers, and community members each approach blogs in different ways. However, these positions are interchangeable: each person is, at various times, a blogger, a reader, and a community member. This constant shifting from protagonist to supporting character is dialogic.

Additionally, mommyblogs can be considered dialogic because of the numerous ways they can be read as double. The first way is the underlying database vs. narrative interface. While the majority of mommyblog readers are those who are following the story, there of course will be the occasional visitor who finds a post via a search engine or other link and does not go beyond that post (that is, does not become a regular reader). A good example of a post that is read more often in a database way than a narrative way is the knitting pattern that Leanne Palmerston posted. She noted that this was by far her most popular post, indicating that more people than just her regular readers were viewing it. Comments continued to be added to this post long after it was posted, but all focused on the pattern; in other words, with this post, for the majority of visitors, the pattern itself was more important than who posted it.

Another way that mommyblogs can be read as double is the pleasure of the simple blogtext vs. the *jouissance* of the extended blogtext. A reader may choose to read a blog at the level of a book or article, passively, for the content. Or, she may choose to actively participate in the construction of the blogtext, by following links, picking up on references made on other blogs, making connections, adding

comments, or writing posts of her own that connect to the ongoing story. The more blogs a reader reads, the more likely it is that she will be reading actively—because she will begin to see the way blogtexts are not finite but instead spread out over the blogosphere. Bloggers frequently mention other bloggers in their posts and comment on other bloggers' posts. For example, Martell and Haley-O, who are friends offline, frequently mentioned each other in their posts, and even blogged about the same events, for example, the UrbanMoms.ca Moms Night Out. When Haley-O gave birth to her son, Martell immediately reported the event on her blog for the benefit of readers of both their blogs who were anxiously waiting for news since Haley-O posted she was in labor. As well, comments may be left by the same reader at two or more blogs, where the bloggers do not necessarily know each other, but have that reader in common. And that reader/commenter's name links to her blog, where she continues the story. One example was BubandPie, a blogger who commented at several of the blogs in this study, thus linking them, even though they were not directly connected.

The grotesque realism of the mommyblog text, which emphasizes doubleness, is another way mommyblogs are dialogic. Nearly all the mommybloggers were either pregnant when they began their blogs or became pregnant sometime afterward. Pregnancy is a literal doubling (two persons in one), while birth returns the mother to her singular state. As well, all of the mothers discussed their feelings of sadness (mixed with excitement) as their children started preschool or kindergarten. While metaphorical, this was often presented as a more significant splitting of mother/child than birth. This stage of beginning school, which was often referred to as a *transition*, bears similarities to the child's transition from

the semiotic to the symbolic, which the mother facilitates. Additionally, the mommyblogs themselves, which begin as openended texts, may close as they become commodified (for example, if they are turned into a series of articles or a book).

Another way mommyblogs are dialogic is in the literal conversation between bloggers and community members. Several of the bloggers made explicit reference to the importance of dialogue (Palmerston and Donders, in particular) and noted how much they valued the input from all perspectives on various issues. In fact, Donders received an award from another blogger that specifically mentioned that the reason for the award was the discussion in the comments. As well, each blogger's engagement with the key themes of the mommyblogosphere—pregnancy and birth, balancing work and motherhood, transitioning children to daycare/preschool/school, the mommyblogging community, reasons for blogging, monetization of blogs—gives readers dialogic insight into the issues facing women, mothers, and self-promoting subjects of capitalism in today's society.

Finally, mommyblogs can be read as double because of the dual nature of the blogger (writer) vs. blog persona (character). While mommyblogs are by definition personal, and mommybloggers often discuss topics that have traditionally been kept private, this does not mean that they have no boundaries or that they discuss everything on their blogs. Some areas were routinely left out or skimmed over in the bloggers' narratives: work, relationship with spouse, as well as any details about him (what his occupation is, what his contribution to childcare/housework is), and details about friends and family members other than children. This is clearly done

out of respect for others as well as an abundance of caution (no one wants to be fired), but contributes to the impression that mommybloggers are “me-centered.” Bloggers may also exaggerate or emphasize certain aspects of their personalities to create a more entertaining or cohesive narrative. For example, from the outset Donders noted that it was important to her that she be funny, and she aims for a humorous tone even when discussing serious subjects. In contrast, Haley-O projects an exuberant, almost giddy, persona, and Morgan-Cole aims for thoughtful and reflective.

5.6 Conclusion

It is problematic that the impression casual observers get from mommyblogs, because of the foregrounding of the mother’s experience as a mother, is one of very traditional familial relationships, when this may in fact not be the case at all. While I understand the reluctance to blog about one’s job (people have lost their jobs for blogging about them), at the same time, I think it is possible to write about what one does in general terms (this is what I do; this is how many hours I work) without saying anything that will offend one’s employer. While all of the bloggers do mention their jobs, these mentions are, for the most part, brief, infrequent, and lack detail. For the ones that have full-time jobs, it is possible to make an educated guess as to the type and amount of work, but for those working freelance or starting their own businesses, how much time and effort is being spent on this (as opposed to childcare/housework) is unclear. It is also unknown in most cases what it is that the spouses of the bloggers do; knowing this could go a long way to dispelling the myth of the primary earner father. In other words, by leaving the father’s occupation as

unknown, it leaves it open for people to *assume* that the father's job is more important (in status, in income earned) than the mother's when this may not be the case. They may have jobs of similar status/pay, or the mother may, in fact, be the primary earner. I think this was the case for at least one of the bloggers in this study.

The other thing that I would really like to see is the foregrounding of the fathers' experience with parenting, as well as the mothers'. Some of the bloggers intimated that their spouses took an active and equal role in parenting, but because this was not elaborated on, the reader was still left with the impression that the mother was the primary caregiver, especially so since the mothers in this study were the ones who took maternity leave; they spoke of the "year" of maternity leave in Canada. In fact, this is 15 weeks of maternity leave plus 35 weeks of parental leave which can be taken by either the mother or father or shared between them (Service Canada, n.d.). It would be good to see some discussion of how the family decided that the mother would take the full leave (or whether this was even up for discussion). As with writing about one's job, I understand the reluctance to blog about another person, particularly one who does not have an online presence, in any detail (this is not a spouse-related thing, but rather general blog etiquette). However, by providing only sketchy details of what their spouses do leaves readers with the *impression* (perhaps false) that the mothers do the bulk of the family's unpaid work. The best solution to this, of course, would be for both parents to have blogs where they each write about the same experiences from their own perspectives.²² It would be far more radical to show both parents contributing equally to all aspects of the

²² This arrangement does exist; there is a couple (SciFi Dad and Multi-Tasking Mommy) who commented on some of the blogs in this study who each have their own blogs.

family, and for this to be shown as being both *ordinary* and *preferable* to other arrangements, than it is for mothers to write about being mothers.

Finally, it is important to see mommyblogs not just as separate individual stories, but as part of a larger interlinked story. Because this aspect of the blogosphere is so interactive and relies so much on the underlying technology (it can only exist online), it is doubly challenging to explain to those who have not experienced it first hand: first, it is unfamiliar, and second, any print version is necessarily going to “flatten” the narrative, pushing out many of the nuances of the text. As well, the individual narratives of the blogs have a familiar, readable quality that easily overwhelms the more complex intertwined narrative for the casual reader. Nevertheless, I believe that the interwoven narrative that is created when a community of blogs is read as one overarching story in a feed reader is a new and innovative development, and one that deserves to be explored further.

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