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A Page of Her Own: How Women Navigate
the Public and Private Facets of Blogging

Emily Marie Flinders

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Megan Sanborn Jones, Chair
Amy Petersen Jensen
Dean Duncan

Department of Theatre and Media Arts
Brigham Young University
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ABSTRACT

A Page of Her Own: How Women Navigate the Public and Private Facets of Blogging

Emily Marie Flinders
Department of Theatre and Media Arts, BYU
Master of Arts

This paper explores the complexity of the texts women create through blogging and their inherent value. I seek to explore how the mothers who blog are constructing online identities for their family units and family members in this space and how those constructions affect and inform the mothers' construction of their personal identities online. I analyze how perceptions of gender norms and practices of gender performance may affect and inform the identities thus constructed, and further complicate the liminal nature of blogging spaces.

I begin with the sociological framework of Erving Goffman, which is commonly used to deconstruct identity performance in social and digital mediums through his explanation of social performance and identity construction. After presenting the shortcomings of this framework, such as its inability to deal with the more private aspects of blogging, I introduce theories of gender performance and feminist autobiographical studies to frame a constructive discussion of the subjectivities and constructed identities within women's blog posts.

I explore the role and effects of audience relationships in creating autobiographical writing. I illustrate the co-constitutive relationship between understood norms, gender norms, and genres in blogging, as well as the forms that bloggers' self-representations take. I analyze factors that inform female authorship and how these factors are shaped by prior models of female authorship, demonstrating how the private/public paradox of blogging informs how women perceive of their audiences in a gender-conscious way, and how that in turn affects their blogging behavior.

I offer suggestions for how the study questions in this thesis can inform the decisions women make when they perform their identities through disclosive blogging. I demonstrate how an increased awareness of the unique qualities and tendencies of female subjectivity can decrease women's inclination to define their experiences as an "other" to a male normative. I also show that as women highly regard their autobiographical blogging, blogging can become more effective in fulfilling the autobiographical urge and can have a democratizing effect on global dialogue about blogging.

Keywords: blogging, social media, identity performance, autobiography, women, audience

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I dedicate my work to all the brave and kind women finding meaningful ways to engage in social media. I believe they are changing the world.

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Introduction

I hope my girls know that their story—the whole of it, the boring bits, shocking parts and moments of subtle insight—is a story worth telling. I hope they tell it across dinner tables and backyard bbq's and in the quiet of their homes. I hope they seek out the stories of others, especially their fellow sisters in living. We were born with voices because we are meant to be heard.

Megan Conley¹

Although I believe that the experience of writing about one's family, children, and life can be a radically empowering act, I also assert that using a term such as mommy blogger can continue the performativity of prototypical motherhood that women have learned since childhood but that few women can achieve. In so doing, the term can subject women into a form of "spatial captivity" that feels uncomfortable to many women because it defines them by only one attribute of themselves.

Gina Masullo Chen²

In 1929, Virginia Woolf argued for both a literal and figural space for women writers within a literary tradition dominated by patriarchy. She seemed especially frustrated that women as subjects in men's writing seemed so preeminent, while the historical reality of women's basic literacy, education, and voice in public discourse was such an oppressive, muted one, "Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history."³ While in many cultures women are gaining unprecedented access to education, they are still struggling for eminence in discourse, even in a medium like blogging where they constitute a majority of users. Their stories and perspectives, and their more feminine ways of sharing them, are persistently trivialized, belying the complexity of these texts and the value they hold as envoys of feminine perspective and experience.

Both Megan Conley and Gina Masullo Chen write from the lived experience of blogging autobiographically as mothers in a digital landscape still designed for an unfettered, impersonal, male normative. As with so many of the ways in which women have tried to

¹ Megan Conley, "A Call to Womanhood: A Story Seldom Told," *Meg in Progress* (blog), July 10, 2013, <http://www.meginprogress.com/a-call-to-womanhood-a-story-seldom-told/>.

² Gina Masullo Chen, "Don't Call Me That: A Techno-Feminist Critique of the Term Mommy Blogger," *Mass Communications and Society* 16 (2013): 511.

³ Woolf, Virginia. 1929/1989. *A Room of One's Own*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

engage in the digital world, the autobiographical records mothers create through blogging are profoundly infantilized and prematurely dismissed by many people as “glorified electronic scrapbooks,⁴” a dismissal that completely discounts the authorship of the women constructing these texts and that reinforces the expectation of self-perpetuating hegemonic gender performativity. The more than four million mothers who are constructing records of their lives through blogging deserve a more thoughtful analysis.⁵

As a woman and mother who has blogged myself, I have encountered the multitude of factors that deprecate women’s voices in this arena, and have felt compelled to explore them in depth. Blogs and other Internet spaces function as simultaneously public and private realms, which creates challenges for the ways women are inclined to engage in them. Women navigate a high-stakes game of social capital to fulfill their autobiographic urge in a punishing public sphere. They repeatedly make complicated decisions in the process of constructing online public personae, and they are generally aware of the stereotypes they integrate into their representations. They integrate these stereotypes consciously and often resignedly, viewing the stereotypes as the inadequate options available to them.

Many researchers have established that the blogs of mothers are infantilized in public and academic discourse. For example, in 2004 Susan Herring, Inna Kouper, Lois Scheidt, and Elijah Wright sought to explain the absence of women and teens in public discourse about blogs. The researchers found that discourse privileges “filter” blogging and marginalizes the activity of women and teen bloggers, who tend to write in a style classified as “journal-blogging.” The authors also found that blogs are more commonly used as “a vehicle of

⁴ Jennifer Mendelsohn, “Honey, Don’t Bother Mommy. I’m Too Busy Building My Brand,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/14/fashion/14moms.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁵ Jennifer Rooney, “Forget Supermoms—It’s All about the Smart Moms: Survey.” *Forbes*, July 17, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jenniferrooney/2012/07/17/forget-supermoms-its-all-about-the-smart-moms-survey/>.

personal expression than a means of filtering content on the web,” rendering the dominant discourse nonrepresentative of the activity of blogging as a whole.⁶

Because “scholarly activities associated with weblogs . . . show evidence of an adult male bias,”⁷ creating a disproportionate absence of dialogue about the feminine blogging experience and how it differs from the male normative, it is important to explore the nature of that difference. While the perceived gender differences in linguistic and semantic style are not indicative of an inherent difference between male and female authorship, the strong biases associated with filter blogging versus journal blogging suggest reinforced gender normatives that probably both inform and result from the way individuals perceive and perform their genders.⁸

Indeed, the universality of stereotypes applied to women’s online autobiographical content belies the complicated process of navigating social pressures and experiencing the consequences of presenting an online public self. As Liz Stanley has reported, a morass of internal and external factors motivate the creation of women’s autobiographical records.⁹ The idea of authoring or constructing a public “face” or an “audit self” can be deconstructed into a Foucault-appraised vacuity.¹⁰ The real social consequences of the performance of self, as well as the social influences informing that performance and providing the vocabulary for it, can make it a complex task to separate an author from the cultural influences informing her.

⁶ S. C. Herring, I. Kouper, L. A. Scheidt, and E. L. Wright, “Women and Children Last: The Discursive Construction of Weblogs,” in *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*, ed. L. J. Gurak, S. Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff, and J. Reyman, accessed August 2014, http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/women_and_children.html.

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ S.C. Herring and John C. Paolillo, “Gender and Genre Variation in Weblogs,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 10, no. 4 (2006): 439-459.

⁹ Liz Stanley, “From ‘Self-Made Women’ to ‘Women’s Made Selves’? Audit Selves, Simulation and Surveillance in the Rise of Public Woman,” in *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, comp. Tess Cosslett and Celia Lury, ed. Penny Summerfield (London: Routledge, 2000), 40–60.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard and trans. Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113–138.

Discussing filter blogging versus journal blogging is key to understanding differences in gendered subjectivities, and the gendered divide between them is consistent with findings in autobiographical studies.¹¹ While a male subjectivity seems accustomed to defining itself based on its environment and interactions, female subjectivities tend to be more fluid in placing boundaries between self and the other. Therefore, what is or is not relevant to the self at hand is relative, and more periphery data enters into narratives. When women tell stories or illustrate points, they are far more likely to include diagrammatic data, perhaps because they are less likely to assume normativity in their lived experiences. This gendered difference is accentuated in the written subjectivity of mothers with children living at home. The way that a woman's definition of self is in part supplanted by motherhood can manifest itself in the subjectivity of her life writing.

In this thesis, I argue that the texts women are creating through blogging are actually complex, and worthy of serious consideration from both academics and blog readers. Such consideration would require a recognition of the differentia of feminine writing and subjectivity and its inherent value. Blogging functions as a private and public space simultaneously, and this poses unique gendered challenges to women engaged in the medium. Addressing those who are engaging with or studying women's social media habits, as well as blogging women themselves, I seek to explore how the mothers who blog are constructing online identities for their family units and family members in this space and how those constructions affect and inform the mothers' construction of their personal identities online. I intend to contribute insight regarding the motivations for women bloggers to create online identities, and how those motivations are affected by the author's perception of her blog as a more public or private space; I will also illustrate some of the variables and their

¹¹ Filter blogging is generally understood to be the filtering of other online content or information through the filter of the author's opinion. Thus, filter blogs tend to aggregate information from other sources, and share the author's impressions regarding that information. Very rarely does personal information about the author find its way into these texts, other than the occasional "About" or FAQs page.

costs and rewards for the women who construct these identities. I will illustrate the needs that women perceive blogging meets, and I will analyze how perceptions of gender norms and practices of gender performance may affect and inform the identities thus constructed, and further complicate the liminal nature of blogging spaces. I will make suggestions for promoting media literacy among mothers who blog, in ways that may make blogging more efficacious for these women. This population is heavily involved in social media and highly likely to influence the media literacy of their children; however, this population is rarely targeted in media literacy initiatives.

To explore these issues, I will draw on interdisciplinary methodologies. I will begin with the sociological framework of Erving Goffman, which is commonly used to deconstruct identity performance in social and digital mediums through his explanation of social performance and identity construction. After presenting the shortcomings of this framework, such as its inability to deal with the more private aspects of blogging, I will introduce theories of gender performance and feminist autobiographical studies to frame a constructive discussion of the subjectivities and constructed identities within women's blog posts.

Because there is a marked difference in gender trends for blogging, in this thesis I will explore the extent to which gender difference stem from performance of gender. I will also explore the ways in which the difference reflects different lived subjectivity. To best illustrate the internal and external forces at work in shaping blog subjectivities, I have interviewed sixty-one female bloggers through an online survey.¹² I felt this was the best way to explore behaviors and motivations that women might not be inclined to share on their actual blogging platforms. I developed open-ended survey questions to prompt reflection and as much information as possible regarding the process of determining identity construction. These

¹² Survey results available in Appendix

women ranged in age from twenty-one to sixty, and all considered themselves bloggers. Most of them were also mothers.

In addition to the survey, I have analyzed 50 blogs as texts. I chose a purposive sample of bloggers in an attempt to maximize relevant variety in the approaches to writing and identity construction.¹³ The number of bloggers and blogs I included was based on when data saturation had been reached. I attempted to select blogs that represented a broad representation of disclosure, subjectivity, and opinions and reflections about blogging within a representative range of prototypical gender performance. All but one (male) blogger I analyzed were women between ages 18–50, and 29 of these bloggers acknowledged at least one child living in the household on their blog.

For each of these blogs, I selected and analyzed at least one blog post for indications of how the author chose to perform her identity. I analyzed the posts for tone, voice, disclosure and privacy, representations (visual and written) of self, representations of family members, audience reactions to disclosure via comments, and any markers of blog type/genre or direct references to the activity of blogging, as well as for indications of the blogger's relationship with and assumptions regarding the activity of blogging.

In this thesis, I will discuss how the author's concern for audience reception, especially perceived blogging types/genres, boundaries, and niches affect the way women choose to perform their identities, particularly how women choose to perform gender. I will identify ways women may increase the effectiveness of meeting this need by exposing pressures and systems at work that may impede some women from achieving the type of expression that would serve them best. I will present an overview of the overarching expectations and pressures shaping women's representation decisions, both concrete and perceived, and I will discuss the implications of these decisions.

¹³ Chadwick, Bahr, and Albrecht, (1984). *Social Science Research Methods*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Feminism and Online Identities

Considering the abundance of factors at play in a blogger's self-presentation, the politics of gender are apt to weigh heavily in the process of impression management and identity performance. The politics of gender are especially prevalent in decisions made about disclosure. Aside from issues of actual gendered differences in writing behaviors, blog content is unavoidably judged based on the gender or perceived gender of the author. Armstrong and McAdams found that the same blog post receives higher credibility ratings from readers when a distinctly male name is listed as the author rather than a female or gender-neutral name. This sweeping dismissal of women's writing extends exigently to the divisive topic of "mommy blogging."¹⁴

Chen trenchantly critiqued the way the term *mommy blogger* is often used, expressing concern that the term invites a preemptive dismissal of the writing of women. Chen argued the term also reinforces hegemonic norms and gender performances, "thrusting women who blog about their children into a form of digital domesticity in the blogosphere." She also expressed concern that the puerility of the language used to categorize and describe women's writing is indicative of the "larger context of women's social location" and that being labeled thus inhibits women's writing from resonating as deeply or broadly as it might if unencumbered by markers of gender and class.¹⁵

Despite this potential impediment, there is evidence that mommy blogging informs social norms and societal conversations in transformative ways. Lori Kido Lopez described this influence:

As we look at the way that these women wrestle under the expectations and implications of the title that has been given to them, attempt to earn an income but are criticized for doing so, and eventually find strength in the community they have

¹⁴ Cory L. Armstrong and Mindy McAdams, "Believing Blogs: Does a Blogger's Gender Influence Credibility?" in *Race/Gender/Class/Media 3.0: Considering Diversity Across Audiences, Content, and Producers*, 3rd ed., ed. Rebecca Ann Lind (New York: Pearson, 2013), 37–44.

¹⁵ Chen, "Don't Call Me That, 510, 512.

worked to create, we find many reasons to be optimistic. Mommy bloggers are developing their own voice for discussing motherhood, and it is distinctly different from the radiant image of the good mother that has dominated our media, with its impossible demands and assumptions about women. Women who blog about their children are transforming their personal narratives of struggle and challenge into interactive conversations with other mothers, and in so doing, are beginning to expand our notion of motherhood, female bloggers and the mother's place within the public sphere. In this sense, showing the ugly side of motherhood has the potential to be liberating and beneficial for all women.¹⁶

Despite the way that much of women's writing has been categorized and consequently dismissed, enough women have blogged about their experiences with motherhood and gained enough visibility to begin altering public discourse about motherhood. This change is linked to women writing disclosively about ways their lives and experiences do not match the current discourse. This type of disclosure is difficult to account for in social performance theory. When considering the blogging of mothers, Goffman's distinctions between the public self and the private self become murky. Certainly, writing about the "ugly side of motherhood" is essentially rendering backstage processes as part and parcel of one's public performance. But women with young children are often allowed less of a public self in hegemonic power structures. Therefore, these women instead assert their private self publicly in a manner that mirrors generational consciousness and suggests a subculture expropriating the meaning-making potential of blogging in a manner that reflects women's unique cultural values distinct from those of the hegemony.¹⁷

Erving Goffman and Identity Performance

Nearly all conversations about the presentation of online selves have been founded on Goffman's 1959 treatise *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, which transformed sociology by treating everyday interpersonal interactions as a subject of consequential

¹⁶ L. K. Lopez, "The Radical Act of Mommy Blogging: Redefining Motherhood through the Blogosphere," *New Media and Society* (2009): 729–747.

¹⁷ John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts, "Subcultures, Cultures, and Class," *The Subcultures Reader*, 2nd ed., comp. Ken Gelder (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2005), 100–111.

study.¹⁸ Goffman found a helpful metaphor in comparing the identity that individuals construct and perform publicly to a dramaturgical study of onstage and backstage processes. He claimed that when performing, players strive to present to their audience a desired and curated “definition of the situation,” one that would invariably be contradicted and somewhat negated if the audience were privy to the more complicated, messier parts of life that are intentionally not disclosed. This phenomenon speaks to the pervasive experience of tidying up before company arrives.

Goffman’s work creates a vocabulary for conversations about social performance. According to Goffman, *social organization* is a mutually understood heuristic hierarchy, and *maintaining of face* is the continued effort required for individuals to avoid perceived stigmatization and to maintain the desired “definition of the situation.” *Performance* is behavior intended to be seen and to support the desired “definition of the situation,” implying a complicated give-and-take relationship between a social performer and the audience, with audience members willing to suspend disbelief and acknowledge or accept the performance. Goffman viewed social performance as a necessity of social organization, simplifying messy lived realities into digestible edited selves. Further, Goffman asserted that on a cognizant level, every player is aware that every other player is presenting only a fraction of himself or herself but that accepting those performances at face value is required for social frameworks to function.

As early as 1995, scholars began referencing Goffman’s work when they spoke of presentation of self on the Internet;¹⁹ by 2005, scholars began applying Goffman’s framework and vocabulary to blogging specifically.²⁰ Blogging is identified as authorship in

¹⁸ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959).

¹⁹ Hugh Miller, “The Presentation of Self in Electronic Life: Goffman on the Internet” (paper presented at the Embodied Knowledge and Virtual Space Conference, London, June 17, 1995).

²⁰ K. D. Trammell and A. Keshelashvili, “Examining New Influencers: A Self-Presentation Study of A-list Blogs,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* (2005): 968–982.

the medium of a weblog (or blog), which is defined as a dynamic website where content (or posts) are listed in reverse-chronological order. Blogging platforms offer users a basic layout, a domain, and web hosting without cost. Most blogging platforms allow for readers to leave comments on a blog post; these comments are usually in response to a post's content or to a previous comment. Blogging remains a prominent source of content linked to on other social mediums, such as Twitter, Pinterest, and Facebook. Consequently, the interaction of blog authors and audience members has extended into interactions on other social mediums.

Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor has been a logical theory to use when starting to analyze online presentations of self in blogging—blogs have direct parallels with the stage, the audience, and the subject. The increasingly ubiquitous nature of online interactions has only strengthened the nature of the correlation. "New media technologies have become part and parcel of everyday interaction. Goffman, as the observer and theorist of everyday interaction par excellence, seems an appropriate starting point."²¹

Indeed, Goffman's framework is a strikingly effective starting point; however, discussions built on Goffman's analogies remain focused on the individual's presentation of self and on team efforts to maintain mutually desired definitions of the situation. There is an intrinsic conflict between Goffman's assumptions about the front and back of social performance on the one hand and the act of mothers blogging about their domestic life and family responsibilities on the other hand. Goffman concluded that "teammates" work together to create mutually beneficent definitions of the situation:

It is apparent that individuals who are members of the same team will find themselves, by virtue of this fact, in an important relationship to one another. . . . Each teammate is forced to rely on the good conduct and behavior of his fellows, and they, in turn, are forced to rely on him. There is then, perforce, a bond of reciprocal dependence linking teammates to one another. . . . Secondly, it is apparent that if members of a team must cooperate to maintain a given definition of the situation

²¹ T. Pinch, "The Invisible Technologies of Goffman's Sociology from the Merry-Go-Round to the Internet," *Technology and Culture* (2010): 409–424.

before their audience, they will hardly be in a position to maintain that particular impression before one another.²²

Contrary to the dynamic described by Goffman, the very focus of what ought to be backstage in social performance is often featured when mothers blog. Also, the inclusion of family members as “teammates” in the mother’s representation of the family unit does not fit any of Goffman’s descriptions of how teams work in social performance. Whereas in many instances other members of the family may have a voice in determining the parameters of how they are represented, when mothers write blog posts that present other members of the family, the mothers must invariably construct a performance on behalf of others.

Researchers have extensively studied the unique intersubjectivity of the feminine autobiographical voice—of the ways in which women life-writers tend to have different relationships with their audiences and the subjects presented than is seen in the normative male subjectivity of most canonized autobiography. However, this recognition has yet to be extended toward blogging, a medium that further complicates subjectivity with inherent real-time reader/writer dialectic and an inherent allowance for episodic rather than definitive narrative.

Although a fair number of scholars have explored gender issues in social media, most have elected to conduct quantitative sociological studies; the theoretical possibility of deconstructing the female participatory experience has been overlooked. Two disciplines already in a constructive dialectic with one another provide a template and a vocabulary for exploring how women choose to represent their lives and their families in blogs: feminist theory and autobiography. Feminist theoretical discussion of gender performativity, especially regarding the social capital involved in that performance, has coalesced richly with the discipline of autobiography studies to create an examination of how the female experience is lived, remembered, and curated for an audience.

²² Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 82–83.

Incorporating the insights from these studies does not account for all of the contradictions and nuances in the ways women present their lives when blogging, but the research is a foundation for expanding conversations about social media and presentations of self beyond the known limits of Goffman's frequently referenced rhetoric. Admittedly, most scholarship in feminist autobiography contains a heavy application of psychology and archetypes, including application of a Jungian collective to the feminine experience of otherness and an identification with mother figures that does not apply to all women. Some gendered issues will inevitably be treated as essential binaries when they are certainly more nuanced across a spectrum of experience for both genders. Despite these limitations, the research provides a rich context for exploring how women's subjectivity of self diverges from a sovereign male normative, as well as how this variance has historically been subject to intense infantilization.

Perhaps the most helpful conversations in feminist autobiographical studies are those drawing out the interiority of feminine narrative. Exploring the lived-subjectivity differences that contribute to the looser, less defined parameters of self also illuminates the gendered differences in blogging habits that have been established in quantitative scholarship. These studies of intersubjectivity infer that "the narration of a self cannot be understood in isolation from an other it acknowledges, implicitly or explicitly, and with which it is in a constitutive relationship."²³ Such studies also explore and allow "the notion that women in particular have a more fluid sense of self, developed in the relationship to their mothers,"²⁴ enabling a converse exploration of how the mother-child relationship can be definitive for the identity construction of both daughters and mothers.

²³ Cosslett, Lury, and Summerfield, *Feminism and Autobiography*, 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Most current dialogue about genre in blogging either divides the activity of blogging into two or three distinct types²⁵ or defines the parameters of a genre of blogging and then explores the texts that fit within the definition.²⁶ Neither of these approaches allows for analysis of the phenomenology of genre distinction or for exploration of how perceptions of genre definitions are affected and changed by the process of authorship within (or without) a genre. Rick Altman provided a helpful framework for discussing film genres with more fluidity; as an analytic tool, his semantic-syntactic approach is helpful in exploring how perceptions of a blogging genre inform the way women construct their online identities, especially as these genres come to be associated with accepted performances of gender.²⁷

Studies in Online Identity Performance

In the mid-1990s, a number of scholars began comparing rhetorical performances on Internet home pages and personal websites to Goffman's models of constructing and performing a "self." Most of this research, which occurred before the emergence of blogs and their lexicons, focused on framing rhetoric and content strategies, as very few Internet users were incorporating images or other media as part of their performances and most home pages were static.²⁸ Even during this nascent period of the Internet, there were ample opportunities to identify how impression management affected the choices made by home page authors. As online presences became more ubiquitous and uniform, scholars were increasingly able to study how social performance is framed by individual Internet and social media platforms and how the establishment of social norms in online mediums informs social media behaviors.

²⁵ Herring and Paolillo, "Gender and Genre Variation in Weblogs."

²⁶ Aimee Morrison, "Autobiography in Real Time: A Genre Analysis of Personal Mommy Blogging," *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace* 4, no. 2 (2010): Article 5. <http://www.cyberpsychology.eu/view.php?cisloclanku=2010120801&article=5>.

²⁷ Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre," *Cinema Journal* 23, no. 3 (1984): 6–18.

²⁸ Matthew J. Smith, "E-merging Strategies of Identity: The Rhetorical Construction of Self in Personal Web Sites," *Dissertation Abstracts International* A59, no. 12 (1998), 4315; Joseph R. Dominick, "Who do You Think You are? Personal Home Pages and Self-Presentation on the World Wide Web," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* (1999) 646-58.

In 2002, John Bargh, Katelyn Mckenna, and Grainne Fitzsimons experimented with Carl Rogers's idea of a "true self" and the potential for its expression on the Internet.²⁹ For many people, this true self is difficult to present in person because "people are cognizant of the fact that they are one type of person in social settings but contain within them relatively unexpressed qualities and interpersonal abilities that they would like to but feel unable to present to others."³⁰ However, in studying chat room behavior, Bargh, Mckenna, and Fitzsimons found that because Internet interactions do not occur in real time (allowing longer reaction time for intentional expression) and do not involve the immediacy of social consequence, many individuals feel better able to communicate and express their "true selves" on the Internet than in person. When interacting in person, individuals express what Higgins termed the *actual self*, which is the sum of the qualities an individual expresses to others through words, actions, inference, and nuance.³¹ (The actual self is distinct from the ideal self a person strives to be and the ought self the person feels obligated to be, but all three combine in the audience's process of constructing perception.) The simultaneously public and private nature of these chat room platforms allowed individuals to navigate a more fulfilling combination of their public and private selves than could be accomplished in live social settings.

It is not uncommon for female bloggers to address this construction of selves in their blogging; some even map out their decisions about disclosing more personal or emotional information in this public space. Blogger Monica Lee wrote, "There's an awful lot of talk being thrown around the web lately about 'authenticity.' Apparently the word 'passion' needed a replacement. I prefer to use the phrase 'showing up as your best self.' . . . As a

²⁹ John A. Bargh, Katelyn Y. A. Mckenna, and Grainne M. Fitzsimons, "Can You See the Real Me? Activation and Expression of the 'True Self' on the Internet," *Journal of Social Issues* (2002): 33-48; C. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951).

³⁰ Bargh, Mckenna, and Fitzsimons, "Can You See the Real Me?," 34.

³¹ E. T. Higgins, "Self-Discrepancy Theory," *Psychological Review*, 94(1987), 1120-1134.

blogger you probably have a lot of interests and a lot of people to please.”³² Such language directly addresses the concept of multiple selves and of choosing which are appropriate or inappropriate for use on such a liminal platform.

In 2002, Zizi Papacharissi hypothesized that the webpage tools available through the website platform inadvertently shape the way website authors perform self-presentation, sometimes compromising the desired definition of the situation. Papacharissi found that distinct social capital is associated with various website design and programming choices and that authors who are mindful of social mobility are obliged to go beyond the tools provided by the website platform in order to control more elements of the authors’ self-presentation. This finding suggests that those without access to extra web page resources are limited and possibly compromised in their self-presentation.³³ This circumstance is an additional factor of control, resources, and concern for those performing their identity on blogs. In addition to an option to curate and stage photographs and choose how to frame experiences, bloggers have the added concern of curating the actual web platform on which readers encounter the content. Women devote an immense amount of time and resources to controlling these elements.

Women who blog, perhaps because they are more prone to including backstage processes in their performances, regularly divulge the extent of their efforts to manage the design and user experience of their blogs. Managing these elements often involves extensive time and money. Upon revealing a new blog design, Jordan Ferney, a renowned event planner and design blogger, wrote the following on her blog, *Oh Happy Day*:

I really want to thank Paul Ferney for taking a couple months off of his own work to design the blog. There is no way I could have gotten the functionality that I wanted *just right* without standing over his shoulder while he designed. I also want to thank

³² Monica Lee, “Be Authentic,” *Altitude Summit: The Blog* (blog), December 31, 2014, <http://altitudesummit.com/blog/2013/12/31/be-authentic>.

³³ Zizi Papacharissi, “The Presentation of Self in Virtual Life: Characteristics of Personal Home Pages,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* (2002): 643–660.

Alison Piepmeyer my managing Editor for the last two years for managing this whole site redesign from start to finish. A big thanks to Abby Bridges for the hours of tedious categorizing work! There were lots of other people that gave input and contractors that came in and advised and tested out the site. THANK YOU! And last a big thanks to Shiv Asthana for carefully coding all our clumsy old content into a sleek and beautiful fast site.³⁴

Bloggers that incorporate design and visual elements into the identity performance of their authors tend to treat management of these elements as a normative control issue. These bloggers readily expend resources so that the visual and functional coding and user experience better align with the “actual self” the bloggers are trying to convey. This expenditure of resources indicates that bloggers understand that the impressions resulting from their blogs have significant social consequences and profoundly affect opportunities in their lives and businesses.

In 2007, Emmanuelle Vaast explored the changing nature of the relationship between online identities in social media and lived social consequences of the performance in interpersonal interactions. In particular, Vaast investigated the way employers interact with the social media profiles of prospective employees. The research results indicate that employers are unlikely to hire individuals if their social media content is incongruous with the behaviors the employers desire in employees. Thus, Vaast found a connectivity developing between the “multiple selves in fragmented electronically mediated environments.”³⁵ She suggested that in the near future, social media users would need to be aware of all of their individual public selves in all of their online self-presentations because of the searchable nature of social media platforms and the increasingly ubiquitous practice of researching people online to evaluate their self-performance in detail.

³⁴ Jordan Ferney, “Introducing . . .,” *Oh Happy Day* (blog), May 5, 2015, <http://ohhappyday.com/2015/05/announcing/>.

³⁵ Emmanuelle Vaast, “Playing with Masks: Fragmentation and Continuity in the Presentation of Self in an Occupational Online Forum,” *Information Technology and People* (2007): 348.

Perhaps the most well-known example of this phenomenon is that of blogger Heather Armstrong, author of the blog *Dooce*, who lost a job based on content she posted online. “It was during my stay in Los Angeles that I started this website as a hobby. In February 2001, I launched dooce.com as a place to write about pop culture, music, and my life as a single woman. I never expected more than a couple of dozen people to read it. A year later I was fired from my job for this website because I had written stories that included people in my workplace. My advice to you is BE YE NOT SO STUPID.”³⁶ As this example illustrates, blogging women experience real-life social consequences of their online self-presentations in a wide range of intersecting ways. Potential consequences pressure female bloggers to perform with high verisimilitude to what an observer might experience, and makes disclosure a potentially risky prospect.

Carlow Cano-Viktorsson and Paula Uimonon pointed out that in the Web 2.0 landscape, “The manner in which we present ourselves on social media, the impression management we aim towards will, as Goffman pointed out, be dependent on the community’s vocabulary and shared set of values.”³⁷ As the shared value set for online conduct substantializes, the interconnected searchability of online content renders Goffman’s idea of performance somewhat convoluted. Goffman envisioned environments in which actors could identify or control which audiences accessed specific performances. As such, Goffman believed that “when an individual or performer plays the same part to the same audience on different occasions, a social relationship is likely to arise. Defining social role as the enactment of rights and duties attached to a given status, we can say that a social role will involve one or more parts and that each of these different parts may be presented by the

³⁶ Heather Armstrong, “About,” *Dooce* (blog), 2015, <http://dooce.com/about/>.

³⁷ Carlow Cano-Viktorsson and Paula Uimonon, “Social Media and the Networked Self in Everyday Life” (Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden, 2010).

performer on a series of occasions to the same kinds of audience or to an audience of the same persons.”³⁸

While this isolation of differentiated social performances is less tenable in the modern media landscape, authors still attempt to distinguish which performance is intended for which audience, the most ubiquitous distinctions being between content intended for single-gender or for mixed-gender audiences. In a sense, compared to live social performance, bloggers trade control over audience composition for control over their stage and their performance. While they have less control over dividing their performance for different sectors, they have more control over the experience and context through which readers will gauge the bloggers’ performance.

In dissecting the tools used by bloggers and individuals in other social mediums, Liam Bullingham and Ana Casconcelos found many ways in which online identity performance accentuates Goffman’s performance model, as the online environment has an enhanced potential of editing the self. But they found that despite the increased editorial power, most users prefer to re-create an edited version of their off-line self rather than construct and adopt a whole persona. Bullingham and Casconcelos also discovered that bloggers establish this verisimilitude in part through disclosing personal information and that authors embellish rather than fabricate their identities, usually in pursuit of real-world social or cultural capital.³⁹

For women in particular, the sociality of the blogging medium is most rewarding when they sense they are interacting with readers who have come to know the authors well through their blog posts. Spurious self-presentation does not meet this social need. Comments such as the following from a respondent to my survey suggest that verisimilitude is a

³⁸ Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 16.

³⁹ Liam Bullingham and Ana C. Vasconcelos, “‘The Presentation of Self in the Online World’: Goffman and the Study of Online Identities,” *Journal of Information Science* (2013): 101–112.

foregone conclusion for many female bloggers because it is required for bloggers to fulfill their purposes for blogging: “I became friends with many of my early readers. We would comment on each other’s posts, then correspond, and then eventually I even met many of them in real life, and they have jumped from being names on my computer to faces around my kitchen table. . . . I have hundreds of people in my life who I would otherwise not know were it not for blogging.”⁴⁰

Verisimilitude and disclosure have increased significantly as Web 2.0 mediums such as blogging have matured. Studying self-presentation on (preblogging) home pages in 1999, Joseph Dominick noted that “most personal pages were fairly ‘thin’ and did not reveal any great depth of personal information. . . . It is not surprising that coders categorized most of the pages at the lowest levels on the “knowing” scale [regarding how much they knew about the author based on the web page content]. A cynic might interpret this data to suggest that when given the chance to address the world, most people have little to say.”⁴¹ This cynicism does not take into account the nascence of the medium or the lack of developed social codes for performance and expression within the medium in 1999. While preferences for disclosure still vary, overall literacy regarding the way human audiences interact with web pages has increased, and there is a pervasive pressure for social media authors to find their niche and use their unique voice. A similar study performed in 2015 would likely find that many authors of blogs and other website content are far more purposeful with their impression management than were authors sixteen years ago and that audiences are able to infer much more quickly how authors are framing their presentations of self and framing the overall content of their websites. Both of these changes would be due largely to increased exposure to the medium and the development of medium-specific norms and literacy over time.

⁴⁰ See the appendix for the survey results.

⁴¹ Joseph R. Dominick, “Who Do You Think You Are? Personal Home Pages and Self-Presentation on the World Wide Web,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* (1999): 646–658.

Because of changes in performance and audience expectations, the level of “knowing” would also be much higher for contemporary web content.

While evidence indicates that bloggers engage in impression management when blogging, the extent to which it is a conscious act of construction varies. Goffman later expanded upon the ideas of managing impressions and maintaining a desired “definition of the situation.” He discussed the idea of “face-work” and maintained that “ordinarily, maintenance of face is a condition of interaction, not its objective. Usual objectives, such as gaining face for oneself, giving free expression to one’s true beliefs, introducing depreciating information about the others, or solving problems and performing tasks, are typically pursued in such a way as to be consistent with the maintenance of face.”⁴² Thus, Goffman underscored the idea that self-presentation and impression management are not typically primary objectives in interpersonal interactions. Maintaining face *informs* decisions made in person and online, but the degree to which maintaining face *determines* decisions and behaviors may depend upon the extent of the perceived difference between the impression the individual wants to construct and the lived reality—or the spectrum between a deceitful presentation and a flattering one. When I asked my survey participants about whether their readers affected what the participants posted and whether they made decisions in their personal lives based on pressures related to their blogs, the overwhelming response was “no.” While the unconscious purity of that reflexive response is dubious, it supports Goffman’s observation that impression management is a secondary concern when performers are in the process of navigating their performance.

Goffman’s concept of the social organization, which frames social performance, has become relevant to blogging as audiences and bloggers have robustly interacted and their expectations of each other have settled into established patterns. The relationship between a

⁴² Erving Goffman, “On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction,” *Reflections: The Society for Organizational Learning Journal* (2003): 7.

blogger and a blog reader has somewhat normalized since the medium's infancy, and readers and authors are now dealing with established (if still evolving) media behaviors, rather than charting unknown waters. Regina Anaejionu, a blogging coach, described on her blog, *By Regina*, perception of a reader's expectations of a blog author: "People will naturally start to define your role to them (your place in their life) based on the content you put out. Do you teach us something? Do you make us laugh? Do you make us want to achieve more in life? If so, we love you, and we give you prominence in our social life. We've made the judgment that you are helpful and that we want to keep you around."⁴³ Many blog authors are cognizant of their efforts to remain relevant to readers who have established routines and criteria for their social media consumption habits.

Limitations in Goffman's Model

Goffman spoke primarily about maintaining face as a behavioral strategy when in the presence of those for whom a loss of face might have social implications. To transfer these concepts to blogging, a medium in which neither the performer/author nor the audience is present, requires some public behavior to be replaced with linguistics. Transferring the concept also requires acknowledging that the text is a separate entity from its author, as well as introducing a layer of reader/writer dialectics that Jean-Paul Sartre familiarized in *What Is Literature* and that Lynne Pearce took even further in *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*.⁴⁴ Pearce asserted that a reader's identification with and emotional response to a text are subject to social and cultural analysis. Pearce also stated that the level of engagement (or disengagement—"affective reading") a reader brings to a text is often not a measure of literacy or legitimacy of the reading process but a measure of the reader's ability to identify with the self inside the text, which is often conditional upon lived context.

⁴³ Regina Anaejionu, "You Are Your Content (Who You Are Online: Part One)," *By Regina* (blog), August 11, 2014, <http://byregina.com/you-are-your-content/>.

⁴⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (France: Gallimard, 1948); Lynne Pearce, *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*, ed. Lynne Pearce (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

Because of the highly voluntary nature of blog reading, audience members typically search for texts that resonate with their lived experiences and imminent concerns and interests. When they find such texts and the texts present a self that the readers find accordant with their own perceived selves and proceed to invest in the texts, the audience members are likely to develop loyalty to the blogs. Thus, there is a cycle of finding blogs and becoming loyal to blogs, which means that blog authors face the pressure of speaking simultaneously to first-time readers and to long-time readers, a complicated task for disclosive authors.

Because an identity performed through publicly available writing cannot be refined or nuanced for each social interaction with a reader, authors tend to view their performance as being directed to a diverse but focused aggregate audience, even though phenomenologically each reader encounters the text in isolation and may or may not belong to the demographic envisioned by the author. This sociology is applicable to any written text that addresses its audience directly, but the speed and frequency with which blog content reaches audiences and with which audience feedback reaches authors renders the intersubjectivity of blogging very different from that of other published writing.

The way my survey participants wrote about their relationships with their audiences suggests that they viewed their blog posts as their half of a conversation with their readers as much as they viewed their posts as texts they crafted or authored. Multiple participants shared responses such as, “I am working on developing my relationship a lot more with my readers. . . . Now that I am getting more readers that I don’t know, I need to figure out how to react with them.” This perspective suggests a conversational conception of the act of blogging. While Sartre posited that any text has an inherent reader/writer dialectic, in blogging that dialectic has the potential to evolve into an actual dialogue as bloggers and their readers interact online. The dialectic occurs both phenomenologically in the reader’s experience reading the text and overtly in interaction via e-mails and blog comments.

Autobiography Studies as an Adjunct to Goffman's Model

In addition to Goffman's dramaturgical model of social behavior, it is important to consider other approaches for obtaining a deeper understanding of why and how women publicly blog about their private lives. I argue that insight into the simultaneously private and public nature of blogging can be gained from adapting literary autobiography theory to blogging; this theory aptly expounds on some phenomena that social performance theories cannot. Goffman's dramaturgical model does not allow or account for the control and lack of control authors have in the online environment in which they perform their identity. His model does not account for the lack of involuntary social cues that aid an audience in interpreting an author's performance. Social media accommodates much longer response times than do in-person interactions, drastically altering the navigation and interpretation processes in performing and interpreting performance. Further, some online interactions are invisible or one-sided. Goffman's consideration of mutually understood social norms seems wholly inadequate to address the semantic and syntactic role of linguistics in identity construction. Additionally, the way online identities change, are curated, and are affected by the monetization of online platforms are phenomena well outside of the scope of Goffman's model.

These phenomena make more sense viewed through the lens of autobiography studies. Allowing theoretical and temporal space between authors and their texts, as well as looking at authors' drawn-out relationships with their audiences (compared to a live performer's instantaneous relationship), creates new criteria that illuminate the processes and experiences of blog authorship in instructive ways. Autobiography theories allow for exploration of the nuance involved in the uniquely feminine public expression of deeply personal and private content. In navigating the simultaneously private and public nature of blogging, women attempt to balance an autobiographical urge and the expected social or

financial benefits of disclosure with the potential risks and certain costs of disclosing private information in a publicly available location.

Autobiographical research is an inherently interdisciplinary field. Haan and Renders defined the field as a convergence of literary studies and historiography, journalism, and other fields in the humanities. The authors credited the field's development to an "increasing convergence in the humanities since the 1970s." Autobiographical research has developed synchronously with feminist scholarship in the humanities; ergo, the field contains a munificent body of work exploring feminine voice and phenomenology of women's autobiographical texts.⁴⁵

The idea of exploring a boundary between self and other, as well as between fact and fiction, creates a theoretical complement to the dynamics of Goffman's sociological study of representation of self. This complementary theory becomes even more relevant as definitions of *autobiography* expand into proliferative mediums.

Jens Brockmeier identified that a central issue in the study of identity in autobiography is "how we construct what we call our lives, and how we create ourselves in the process."⁴⁶ It is interesting to explore how writing about one's own experiences changes the way one remembers them and incrementally transmutes the perception and interpretation of self.⁴⁷ Thus, the performance of identity (if what is written is categorized as performance) informs the internal perception and construction of identity to varying extents, and the relationship between internal perception of identity and external performance of identity is

⁴⁵ Hans Renders and Binne De Haan, *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke, 2014), 14. Autobiographical studies are particularly concerned with "the political ramifications of the shifting boundaries between self and other, past and present, writing and reader, fact and fiction, and with an analytical attention to these within the oral, visual, and written texts that are 'biographics and autobiographies.'"

⁴⁶ Jens Brockmeier, *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self, and Culture*, ed. Donal Carbaugh (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2001).

⁴⁷ Even on a biological level, autobiographical writing has been found to inform the neurological organization of identity markers. (James W. Pennebaker, *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Confiding in Others* [New York: Guilford Press, 1997].)

reciprocal. Those who write their identities perceive their identities differently than do those who do not write their identities.

When Heather Farrell (who blogs about religious topics, including her study of women in scriptural texts) composed a post on her blog, *Women in the Scriptures*, about her parents' divorce some 11 years prior, she explained her need to create the post: "I've been thinking about writing this post for several years now, but have always chickened out. It is still a topic and a wound that is easily reopened. Yet, I've been feeling strongly that I just needed to acknowledge for a moment that divorce is every bit as hard as a death."⁴⁸ She indicated that she could not make this acknowledgement without writing publicly about her experience. It appears she needed to write (publicly) about her experiences in order to achieve a narrative catharsis. Once she organized her post and expressed her feelings, she was better able to correlate meaning with an experience that previously left her discomfited.

Brockmeier identified the linguistic/generic tool of narration as a particularity of autobiographical writing, most of which is composed using a narrative voice with clear delineation between past, present, and future events, with the narrator also acting as a subject. The framing and editing capacities of narration are incisive tools available to an autobiographical author and not to a social performer of identity. Autobiographical writing functions more forcibly than a social performer's attempt to define a situation because narration allows an author to literally define the situation by positing the context and point of view of the narration of lived experiences.

For example, Mara Kofoed, who frequently blogs with her husband about relationships, emotional health, and their shared experiences finding peace despite trials, took an unplanned and unannounced sabbatical from her blog, *A Blog About Love*. Three months

⁴⁸ Heather Farrell, "Divorce Is as Hard as Death," *Women in the Scriptures* (blog), June 3, 2015, <http://www.womeninthescrptures.com/2015/06/divorce-is-as-hard-as-death.html>.

after she began posting again, she endeavored to explain the previous absence: “I’ve been wanting to fill you all in on why I didn’t blog for awhile. But you know, after taking a break I just needed to dive in somewhere, so I did. And I never got back to this post. But today I’d like to share more about my break. And practice some vulnerability. And tell you that a few months ago . . . *I thought I might lose this blog*. As in . . . I thought it might be time to pursue something else. Even the thought of it makes me sad. No doubt it was a devastating time for me as I have given my life to this space for over three years.”⁴⁹ In this post, Kofoed carefully set the parameters for discussing her absence. She solidly set the tone for the disclosure that was to follow; she essentially framed her blog post to invalidate complaints from blog readers that she had abandoned them without consideration for their concern or loyalty.

Another consideration in autobiography theory is the role of memory in the creation of autobiographical texts. When women write about their own lives, they are often rehearsing and curating from cognitive memory. The creation of such a text inevitably involves at least two separate events: the lived experience and the experience of recording it from memory. Brockmeier identified a “retrospective teleology,” or act of making or finding meaning from those experiences, in the act of cobbling distinct stories or episodes from the messier fiber of lived life. But the stories and even the memories of the author are subjective constructions distinct from the reality of the events they portray.

Retrospective teleology is highly evident when a blogger interjects her narrative with meaning or insight gained after the recorded experience. When Mandi Gubler, who primarily blogs about do-it-yourself home décor projects, disclosed a history of dealing with her husband’s drug addiction, the narrative was peppered with interjections of her present self finding and organizing meaning in her past experiences. In a passage on her blog *Vintage*

⁴⁹ Mara Kofoed, “Getting Personal about the State of This Blog,” *A Blog About Love* (blog), February 24, 2015, <http://www.ablogaboutlove.com/2015/02/getting-personal-about-state-of-this.html>.

Revivals about giving birth to her first child while her husband was in an in-patient rehab facility, she wrote, “For some reason I wasn’t dilating even after they had given me pitocin. At about 10 pm Dr. Lunt decided that it would be better to take me off the pitocin and let me sleep throughout the night and re-start it in the morning. What a blessing it was, that I wasn’t dilating. There was zero chance that Courtney [her husband] could have been there that day.”⁵⁰ Writing about lived experiences is a well-explored method for organizing memories into less turbid mental matter, but it appears that publicly sharing that writing (or interpretations of experience) and extending the teleological organization to one’s identity performance is almost requisite for women who require the validation of an audience to authenticate the particular strain of meaning the women have made. This phenomenon seems more prevalent in women, perhaps due to the more socially-centric development of their psychology.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Mandi Gubler, “My Real Life Story,” *Vintage Revivals* (blog), November 2010, <http://www.vintagerevivals.com/my-real-life-story>.

⁵¹ Janet Holmes, “Women, Language, and Identity,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* (1997): 198.

Thesis Outline

My thesis is divided into three chapters, in which I explore three increasingly distinct ideas about women whose blogging follows a normative femininity discourse. While clearly not all women bloggers' behaviors align with the phenomena I will discuss (and while some men blogger's behaviors will), these ideas are relevant for a significant proportion of women currently blogging.. In the first chapter, I discuss the point of intersection between social media, identity construction and performance, and feminist studies. I argue that because blog posts are constructions, the established dialogue of blogging as social identity construction is appropriate, but there are multiple 'selves' that also need to be considered when women blog disclosively. I explore questions about the process of creating a feminine identity in a simultaneously private and public online social medium. I address themes in Erving Goffman's writing of framing and face as they relate to performance in a social medium, and I illustrate aspects of Goffman's model that are problematic when applied to social media. Further, I discuss ways in which Goffman's explanation of social processes seems biased toward a male normativity. Then I delineate how Goffman's dramaturgical framework is helpful for understanding female identity performance online and simultaneously contributes to the dismissal of uniquely female deviations from the normative self it describes, demonstrating how women construct and perform their blogging identity in a more complicated manner than the current rhetoric acknowledges

In the second chapter, I introduce study questions about applying (1) principles of autobiography research to blog writing and (2) feminist autobiography research to blog writing by mothers in particular. I draw in part from my survey of blogging mothers. Viewing autobiography as, in part, a form of public identity performance, I explore the role and effects of audience relationships in creating autobiographical writing. Additionally, because autobiography theories wrestle with the task of representing others when composing an

autobiographical account, I explore the complication of representing a woman's family in her own writing and use of visual mediums within her blog. I explore individuation in identity and how writers (especially women) use other people to define and illustrate their own identities. Through this exploration, I illustrate the complex subjectivity women navigate when writing autobiographically. I also present a more sedulous analysis of women's autobiographical texts. I argue that in navigating the private/public nature of blogging, women attempt to balance an autobiographic urge and the social benefits of disclosure with known and potential risks, demonstrating concerns and challenges unique to the disclosive blogging style of women.

In the third chapter, I argue that the perceived relationship between a blogger and her audience (and the social currents informing this relationship) combine to influence how women engage in blogging and the extent to which they perceive of their blogs as private or public spaces. I apply genre theory to the ways women perform on behalf of themselves and their families online. Using Altman's semantic/syntactic explanation of evolving genre definitions, along with Goffman's concepts of a shared definition of the situation and "willed credulity," I illustrate the co-constitutive relationship between understood norms, gender norms, and genres in blogging, as well as the forms that bloggers' self-representations take.⁵² Returning to Foucault's exploration of authorship and its perimeters,⁵³ I analyze factors that inform female authorship and how these factors are shaped by prior models of female authorship. This will demonstrate how the private/public paradox of blogging informs how women perceive of their audiences in a gender-conscious way, and how that in turn affects their blogging behavior. In this chapter I will treat "mommy blogging" and "lifestyle blogging" as perceived blog genres dominated by women, and relate this phenomenon to

⁵² Valerie Hudson used this word to describe a relationship that is neither causal nor correlative but in which where two processes cause, feed into, or lead to one another organically. (Valerie Hudson, "Podcast 16," *Dialogue*, podcast audio, September 3, 2014, <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/dialogue-journal-mormon-thought/id573087232>.)

⁵³ Foucault, "What Is an Author?"

genre development and issues of gender and authorship. I will not refer to anyone as a “mommy blogger” or to anyone’s blog as a “mommy blog” myself, due to the polemical nature of the term and its potential for exonerating the sweeping dismissal of women’s voices online.

In the conclusion, I offer suggestions for how the study questions in this thesis can inform the decisions women make when they perform their identities through disclosive blogging. I demonstrate how an increased awareness of the unique qualities and tendencies of female subjectivity can decrease women’s inclination to define their experiences as an “other” to a male normative. I also show that as women highly regard their autobiographical blogging, blogging can become more effective in fulfilling the autobiographical urge and can have a democratizing effect on global dialogue about blogging.

This thesis is not a comprehensive study of factors informing women’s online self-representation, and it is not intended that the factors explored here should be understood as universal. Rather, these factors are illustrative of a method of inquiry that allows a more complex understanding of what happens when women choose to self-represent online. I believe such an approach will allow better insight into and appreciation of the value of these texts.

Chapter 1

Women's Identities in Blogging

Contrary to the vibe my blog gives off, I'm not 100% sunny all of the time. I like to believe I'm generally an optimistic person but I have my down time. I'm human. I like to keep my blog sunny and not a chronicle of every bad thing that happens to me because you read blogs to lift you not drag you down.

Melanie Blodgett¹

As I point out in my introduction, the vast majority of the studies about blogging never even address the idea of journal blogging. Most academic work focuses on filter blogging, but most woman bloggers and those who write disclosively are journal bloggers. I want to show that journal blogging is something that merits close examination. I also want to show how it functions socially, which is increasing relevant because in our culture, more and more people are organizing their thinking around social media. A large body of work studies blogging as a social performance online, but many of those models used don't fit for women writing about themselves disclosively. Especially with the longer form of blogging, the existing theories do not explain the function of women's writing. It is important to come up with other ways of examining this disclosive writing.

A big part of women's blog writing is that they are very aware of their gender and are very aware of how they perform that gender, especially when they cannot know the makeup of their audience. On the one hand, women are increasingly willing to take on power imbalances when they see them, but they also have finite resources, and cannot combat every instance, so they need to decide which parts of the social order they willing to work within. As a result, much blogging does, in fact, reaffirm gender stereotypes. However, to expect women to constantly be challenging normativity in everything they do is an unrealistic expectation. When a woman blogger wants to write about herself and she don't want it to be political in nature, she must find ways to use the existing femininity discourse to express

¹ Melanie Blodgett, "Sharing Advice Is My Fave," *You Are My Fave* (blog), February 16, 2011, <http://www.youaremyfave.com/2011/02/16/sharing-advice-is-my-fave/>.

herself without overtly challenging authority. This allows women to write about what women are like and how they function. It helps break the mystique of the woman as the mysterious other. As more women look to the stories that other women are sharing about their everyday experiences, blogs become a script for their lived reality of daily life.

Women bloggers expand the discourse and expand their vocabulary, to better articulate their lived realities, which can help to close the gap between the accepted narrative of woman and the reality of woman that Virginia Woolf criticized.

In this chapter, I argue that the dominant discourse about identity performance in blogging needs to be expanded to more fully account for the types of identity performances women are putting forth. I explore the role of linguistic and cultural semantics in the construction and communication of a feminine self, as well as particularly gendered facets of identity performance. I acknowledge the role of women's more social motivations for blogging in their performances and explore the relationship between feminine identity construction and sociocultural femininity discourse, including the way such discourse affects not only women's individual identities, but also the social nature of their identities and their relationships with others. I will discuss how women are often left to use existing language and gender templates to communicate meaning that these structures have not yet expanded to account for. I will address the usefulness and limitations of the concept of a personal brand and the relationship between gender performance, femininity discourse, and disclosure.

Identity performance is a public-oriented concept. All people perform their identities in social contexts. An awareness of being observed and establishing an impression informs choices and behavior in these spaces. The study of common social performance begins with and frequently returns to Erving Goffman and his work titled *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.² As mentioned in my introduction, Goffman equated social performances to

² Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Random House, 1959).

theatrical performances and found helpful tools for describing social phenomena in the vocabulary of dramaturgy. Goffman found the outward presentation of self in social contexts to be similar to the onstage performance of a play, and all behaviors incongruent with the desired performance (and thus hidden) or required to sustain the desired performance are compared to backstage processes. Goffman discovered that social performers (often working in teams to produce a mutually beneficent effect) work to evoke a desired “definition of the situation” that flatters their social prospects, allows for impressions of upward social mobility, and maximizes social capital. Effectively navigating social performance requires awareness of prevalent social norms and expectations, which Goffman referred to as the *social organization*.

Social performance theories have continued to find application as the Internet has become an increasingly relevant sector of the public sphere. The Internet has also become a space for analyzing behaviors and performances in an attempt to understand how the digital media landscape is informing the way individuals are socialized and come to conceptualize, construct, and perform their identities. Goffman’s model has continually been referenced in attempts to observe, analyze, and describe online social processes. His dramaturgical metaphors are in some ways even better suited for online social performances than for corporeal ones, as online platforms enable much easier distinctions between performer and audience, as well as between what is part of the onstage performance and what is hidden from the public.³

³ Goffman’s model has been deconstructed and expanded upon many times. In particular, scholars have refuted Goffman’s model for the constitutive relationship between identity construction and identity performance. Critics have deemed many of his conclusions as being oversimplified and offering inadequate consideration of the individual wrestle between public performance and inner authenticity. In one critique, Alvin Gouldner compared Goffman’s treatment of the relationship between appearance and reality with that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

Like Goffman, Rousseau, too, was obsessed with the world of appearances; but for Rousseau appearance was the mask of insincerity, the barrier that isolated men from one another, the glittering exterior that alienated him from himself. Appearances, in short, were not vaunted but damned.” (Alvin Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* [New York: Basic Books, 1970], 386.)

Countless attempts by bloggers to reconcile their curated performances with their lived realities reveal a complicated, postmodern breed of social performance. Awareness of the constructed nature of blogging is pervasive in blog authorship. Blogging appears to provide a particularly nuanced landscape for navigating between impression management and a disclosive authenticity because blogging is simultaneously private and public.

Blogs as Identity Performances

The purposes for which individuals present themselves online are legion, and research indicates there are a number of motivating factors. In addition to the autobiographic urge⁴ and external pressures to construct an “audit self,” as Liz Stanley described in her exploration of autobiographical catalysts,⁵ there are significant factors related to monetization and social and cultural capital.

In pursuing social and cultural capital, women are finding ways to participate in public discourse through blogging and other social media, for which there are no precedents. The evolution to more disclosive public representations of the historically private lives of women (and mothers in particular) has frequently challenged the discourse of femininity. As Gina Masullo Chen observed, “Mommy blogging in particular allows women to transform their personal narratives of struggle and challenge into interactive conversations with other mothers, and, in so doing, are beginning to expand our notion of motherhood, female

Still, as Nigel Dodd and Stanley Raffel countered, “Nothing . . . would serve to deny Gouldner’s idea that Goffman’s conclusions make us into too superficial and, especially, too amoral beings. However, Gouldner goes on to dismiss Goffman’s approach as mere symptom of a temporary historical phenomenon. . . . Instead I would say Goffman is at least trying to analyse a phenomenon that is not at all likely to be temporary. . . . Goffman’s valid insight [is] namely that in many of our interactions we do not feel what we are conveying is real.” (Nigel Dodd and Stanley Raffel, “The Everyday Life of the Self: Reworking Early Goffman,” *Journal of Classical Sociology* [2013]: 177.)

⁴ I will address this concept beginning on page 58. It is a commonly accepted impetus for the creation of autobiographical texts in the field of autobiography studies, and is in essence an inherent emotional or psychological need to create and share a record of one’s own experiences.

⁵ Liz Stanley, “From ‘Self-Made Women’ to ‘Women’s Made Selves’? Audit Selves, Simulation and Surveillance in the Rise of Public Woman,” in *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, comp. Tess Cosslett and Celia Lury, ed. Penny Summerfield (London: Routledge, 2000), 40–60. Stanley defined *audit self* as meaning “composite figures, typically heavily gendered ones, which are artefacts of information collection, retrieval and analysis systems. Variables such as age, gender, class and ‘race’ are central to the organization and collection of information, as well as being used as the key means of analyzing these” (p. 50).

bloggers, and the mother's place within the public sphere."⁶ In this sense, the definition of *mommy blogger* relies in part on society's understanding of what motherhood means in contemporary society and the fact that mothers blogging en masse have the opportunity to alter that understanding.

Participation in social media self-presentation has become ubiquitous enough among various populations, such as mothers of young children, to play a prominent role in the social construction of reality as defined by Peter Berger.⁷ Enough people have interacted within social media systems to institutionalize many of the concepts and patterns of representation that have become common, and this process of institutionalization has embedded meanings into society.

There needs to be, however, a recognition that the process of the social construction of reality continues to be shaped by individuals reacting to their lived experience of socially constructed reality. Anthony Giddens argued against Baudrillard's assertion, stating that selves are not passive entities determined by external influences; rather, "in forging their self-identities, no matter how local their contexts of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications."⁸ User behaviors are not only shaped by social norms but also react to these norms and over time change them. This phenomenon has been evident in blogging as it has evolved as a new medium and as expectations and norms have developed based on the experiences of users. It is also true that blogging has contributed to cultural understanding and interest in the discourse of femininity, and the act of women writing about their lives online has (if incrementally) altered the public perception of feminine selfhood.

⁶ Gina Masullo Chen, "Don't Call Me That: A Techno-Feminist Critique of the Term Mommy Blogger," *Mass Communication and Society* (2013): 515–516.

⁷ Peter L. Berger, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Thomas Luckmann and Peter L. Berger (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967).

⁸ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1991), 1–2.

Giddens's rejection of determinism is consistent with Nalawit Pietros's studies of Facebook users and their presentation strategies. Users whom Pietros interviewed often described struggling to balance the desire to "present their best sides and still stay true to their personalities in real life."⁹ A common trait among users is the rather postmodern self-awareness of the struggles inherent in the social media they participate in. This awareness has in turn given rise to a largely implicit code of postmodern ethics, explored in part by Judith Butler¹⁰, that acknowledges an implied relationship between the author and audience in written address, as well as recognizes the limitations of language. As Butler argued, "The very terms by which we give an account, by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others, are not of our making."¹¹

Many women have struggled to communicate their actual selves and their lived experiences with the language and semantics available to them. One anonymous blogger quoted Stephen King, using his words to express her frustration: "The most important things are the hardest to say. They are the things you get ashamed of, because words diminish them—words shrink things that seemed limitless when they were in your head to no more than living size when they're brought out."¹² The use of mediums and tools exterior to the self seems to inherently create a distinction between the self-creating the text and the self-constructed in the text.

Thus, in the process of defining the situation, a blog author is navigating a plethora of factors teeming with social relevance, and the author is often doing so with a certain level of

⁹ Nalawit Pietros, "Identitetsskapande Bilder: En Studie Om Bilddelning Och Identitet på Facebook" [Constructing identity through images: A study about image sharing and identity on Facebook], (bachelor's thesis, Södertörn University, 2012), <http://www.uppsater.se/uppsats/3e8ed4f9f0/>.

¹⁰ J. Aaron Simmons, "A Review of Judith Butler, Giving an Account of Oneself," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 7, no. 2. (2006): 85–90.

¹¹ Butler, "Giving an Account," 21.

¹² Stephen King, "The Body," in *Different Seasons* (New York: Penguin, 1982), as qtd. by Anonymous, "Sometimes Words Don't Work." *H*q: Her Quotes* (blog), July 30, 2008, <http://her-quotes.blogspot.com/2008/07/sometime-words-dont-work.html>.

self-awareness and with multifaceted goals. As Blogger Kate Arends wrote on her blog, *Wit and Delight*:

Whether we realize it or not, our digital footprints are a reflection of how we hope others perceive us. By carefully selecting soundbites from our lives with these labels in mind, we hope others see us for the set of qualities we've aligned ourselves with. Mother of 2. Coffee lover. You know the list. I think our online shields come from our innate instinct to self-preserve; to protect our vulnerability from those who will exploit us. We do this by creating a 2-D version of ourselves through a series of pictures and status updates. We give ourselves boxes so our peers don't have to. If at the airport we are invisible, on the Internet we stand on soapboxes of false individualism. They're both an illusion.¹³

This excerpt illustrates a self-awareness of the highly editorial process of performing an identity online. The use of acknowledged norms, stereotypes, and genres is akin to the use of language in constructing an auditable self, and authors are forced to use ideas and definitions that exist prior to and outside of themselves to express themselves. Additionally, blog authors are often attempting to do so in a way that will evoke action or loyalty from readers. These circumstances render the efficacy of mutually understood norms and definitions (Goffman's "social organization") all the more relevant in the online identity construction process.

Bloggers are using existing social organization along with the developing lexicon of blogging and its accompanying semantics as best they can in their attempts to perform their chosen public identities and to maintain that identity performance through impression management. Women in particular tend to do this disclosively. Kaye Trammell and Ana Keshelashvili found that the bloggers whose content is most frequently linked to tend to provide more information about themselves and do so strategically, actively engaging in impression management.¹⁴ The researchers discussed the control that blog authors have over their impression environment, stating that because of the absence of physical presence, only

¹³ Kate Arends, "On the Vernacular of Good vs. Bad, Us vs. Them, In vs. Out," *Wit and Delight* (blog), December 2, 2014, <http://witanddelight.com/2014/12/vernacular-good-vs-bad-us-vs-vs/>.

¹⁴ Kaye D. Trammell and Ana Keshelashvili. "Examining the New Influencers: A Self-Presentation Study of A-List Blogs." *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 968–982.

intentionally manifest content can be factored into the impression a reader forms. Trammell and Keshelashvili analyzed how popular bloggers used the impression management tactical categories of E. E. Jones, namely, ingratiation, competence or self-promotion, intimidation, exemplification, and supplication.¹⁵ The analysis indicates that less-disclosive filter blogging is less likely to be linked to than journal-style blogging; therefore, bloggers—particularly women—often strategically employ some amount of disclosure to increase and secure their audiences. Further, the researchers found that “the intimacy and personalized tone that create the impression of an uncontrolled, spontaneous flow of feelings and thoughts allow readers to look far beyond the stage into a person’s ‘back stage.’ On the other hand, blogging is a deliberate process and allows bloggers to convey the qualities of themselves, creating the impression that what the reader sees is the author’s ‘real self’ or ‘back stage’—all the while performing in public.”¹⁶

In high-stakes face-saving situations, Jimmy Sanderson found that blog authors are highly motivated to perform in one of three modes of self-preservation: criticizing others, bolstering their own credibility, or performing a kind of inculpable apologia by pointing out and dissecting their shortcomings before others get a chance to.¹⁷ This last mode creates a sense of vulnerability and authenticity that causes readers to sense they are being allowed into the backstage processes of the author. This mode is far more common among female bloggers than among male bloggers. Author/reader rapport creates a sense of intimacy and fallibility—a recurring theme in the subjectivity of audience mindfulness. Readers, it seems, have come to expect this style of disclosure in return for their emotional and temporal investment in a blog author.

¹⁵ Mark R. Lepper, “Social Impressions—Interpersonal Perception by Edward E. Jones,” *Science* 252, no. 5008 (1991): 1020.

¹⁶ Trammell and Keshelashvili, “Examining the New Influencers,” 76.

¹⁷ Jimmy Sanderson, “The Blog Is Serving Its Purpose: Self-Presentation Strategies on,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 4 (2008): 912–936.

Blogging women frequently receive contradictory advice regarding appropriate disclosure. On the one hand are imperatives to maintain universal appeal and avoid content that fewer readers may relate to. There is pressure to embrace the “male” sense of “professionalism” more common in filter blogging. This pressure was evident in advice preached at the January 2015 Altitude design blogging summit: “no navel gazing” and “nobody actually cares about your cute kids.”¹⁸ Conversely, bloggers are also encouraged to disclose enough to motivate reader investment and to express individuality. As Erika Madden told fellow bloggers on her blog, *Olyvia*, “A personal story is a good start, but adding a picture to prove that you’re a regular, approachable person just like everyone else—as opposed to a greasy money monger or snooty, out of touch billionaire—is priceless. A family shot or old photos of you (yep, even that embarrassing one from high school) are perfect.”¹⁹

This concern about presenting a self that is both candid (private) and professional (public) is universal but also relational. Katherine Chen Yi-Ning studied self-presentation from a cultural perspective and found that the relationality a blogger uses to frame impression management tactics is deeply influenced by cultural values and therefore varies across cultures and subcultures.²⁰ Thus the relational selves (disclosure and self-ingratiation included) that blog authors construct are in many ways performances of culture and gender as much as of individual identity, with authors striving to maintain face through the channels most likely to be valued by their perceived audiences. The cultural and gendered facets of identity performance are largely relational conduits for readers to find and relate to blog content that resonates with the cultural and gendered lenses through which the readers experience the world.

¹⁸ Jordan Ferney, Andi Teggart and Pei Ketron, “Grow Your Instagram Deliberately,” (panel discussion, Alt Summit Salt Lake City, January 22, 2015).

¹⁹ Erika Madden, “27 Ways to Earn People’s Trust and Look Credible Online,” *Olyvia* (blog), August 21, 2014, <http://olyvia.co/27-ways-to-earn-peoples-trust-and-look-credible-online/>.

²⁰ Yi-Ning Katherine Chen, “Examining the Presentation of Self in Popular Blogs: A Cultural Perspective,” *Chinese Journal of Communication* 3, no. 1 (2010): 28–41.

The diversity in style and form that are evident in women's blogging can be ascribed to a diversity of factors, but chief among those are the range of motivations that women cite for creating and maintaining a blog. Hsiu-Li Liao, Su-Houn Liu, and Shih-Ming Pi, who studied the motivations for blogging through the lens of expectancy theory, identified both intrinsic and extrinsic types of value in blogging. Intrinsic types include the process of creating and publishing a blog, and extrinsic types include interpersonal interactions of social capital that result from creating and publishing blog content. Intrinsic value is independent of audience response, while extrinsic value depends almost completely on audience response. The scholars also found that "posting articles [over time] can only be motivated by intrinsic rewards. But higher motivational rewards (both intrinsic and extrinsic) will persuade the blogger to spend more time on their blog." The researchers concluded that an average blogger is more interested in intrinsic rewards for blogging than extrinsic ones because intrinsic rewards are significantly more constant and reliable.²¹

The implication of these findings is that the answer to the question of why women blog cannot be restricted to extrinsic motivation. Something inherent in the act of creating content causes women to devote their resources to blogging instead of to other endeavors. As Liao, Liu, and Pi found, blogging purely for social capital or pecuniary benefits is an unsustainable practice. While it may be easy to identify income as the primary motivation for women who blog for profit, the issue is more complicated than that. Steven Kurutz, the author of a 2014 *New York Times* article, expressed incredulity at the lengths to which bloggers go to maintain a consistent stream of content creation; the desire to do so would have to be strong enough to outlast formidable burnout.²² In this thesis, I will tie that intrinsic motivation to the concept of autobiographical urge, an idea commonly accepted as a catalyst

²¹ Hsiu-Li Liao, Su-Houn Liu, and Shih-Ming Pi. "Modeling Motivations for Blogging: An Expectancy Theory Analysis," *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal* 39, no. 2 (2011): 251–264.

²² Steven Kurutz, "When Blogging Becomes a Slog," *New York Times*, September 24, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/25/garden/when-blogging-becomes-a-slog.html?_r=0.

for text creation in autobiography studies. One participant in my survey said that her “creative needs are met by blogging. . . . This helps me put all the things [I’ve learned] to use.”²³ This concept appears to be present in all kinds of protracted self-disclosive blogging, but the extent to which a female blogger hopes to pursue extrinsic motivations also certainly guides her approach to text creation.

Feminine Identity Construction

Indeed, it is not only the performance of identity that can be complicated by uniquely feminine phenomenality but also women’s construction and perception of it. Assuming that language plays a role in how most individuals perceive themselves, Janet Holmes reviewed studies on social dialectology and found that gender differentiation is robust. Women use language differently than do men, and one of those differences is that women employ greater stylistic variability in their linguistic compositions. Holmes suggested that “women’s stylistic flexibility is . . . a reflection of the wide range of social identities they are required to control.”²⁴ It would seem, therefore, that women’s perpetual status of otherness to a male normativity renders the boundaries of women’s linguistic style and subjectivity more fluid. Unable to conceive of themselves in a normative way and finding orthodox feminine archetypes dissonant with their lived experience, women are often left to grapple with language exiguous for its correlative meaning.

Despite the linguistic uncertainty women face in voicing their experiences and perspectives, most feminist scholars consider the processes of composing and sharing women’s contributions to be liberating practices. In the various mediums in which women compose texts, they are theoretically forced to use semiotic systems that are inherently loaded with hegemonic male normativity,²⁵ which can impede effective communication of feminine

²³ See the appendix for the survey results.

²⁴ Janet Holmes, “Women, Language, and Identity,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* (1997): 198.

²⁵ For example, see Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975), 14–26.

motivations, desires, and experiences. Marilyn Bousquin began to address these challenges when she blogged, “When we do sit down to write, we are often tortured by doubt about our writing, which morphs into doubt about our lives, which leads to giving up writing, only to discover that we have to write. Because not writing is the hardest thing going in a writing woman’s life.”²⁶

Within the realm of social media and blogging, however, some would argue that over time the contribution of female voices is amending the normativity inherent in language and in the semantics of particular mediums. Stavrositu and Sundar identified two empowering mechanisms for women who participate in blogging: a sense of agency and a sense of community. The autonomy of crafting and controlling an authored platform, combined with the interpersonal interactions and relationships that these platforms facilitate, can fulfill the otherwise unmet social needs of women.²⁷

Gina Messina-Dysert asserted that “blogs have become a tool for women’s experiences, ideas, and questions to be further shaped and modulated through those of other women” and that “female bloggers engage in embodied thinking by naming their own experiences and offering philosophical and theological reflection. This in turn allows other women to affirm their lived situations and have language to describe them. Through this interaction, acknowledgement of each other as well as acknowledgement of the bloggers themselves transpires. A new understanding of themselves and their positions in the world are provided.”²⁸

In this way, blogging as a medium may be contributing to the construction of a helpful or problematic template for women to gauge their lived experience against—certainly

²⁶ Marilyn Bousquin, “Every Woman Has a Story to Write,” *Writing Women’s Lives* (blog), February 2012, <https://writingwomenslives.com/home>.

²⁷ Carmen Stavrositu and S. Shyam Sundar, “Does Blogging Empower Women? Exploring the Role of Agency and Community,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* (2012): 369–386.

²⁸ Gina Messina-Dysert, “Women and Blogging: An Exercise in the Theology of Carol Christ,” *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* (2011): 155, 161.

one that provides a more corporeal context for women than do the simplistic narratives superficially constructed through hegemonic norms, stereotypes, and expectations. Blogging has provided a place—a community—for women who might otherwise be quite isolated from a relatable populace. Over thirty years before the word *Internet* entered the public lexicon, Dorothy Day discerned that “women especially are social beings, who are not content with just husband and family, but must have a community, a group, an exchange with others. Young and old, even in the busiest years of our lives, we women especially are victims of the long loneliness.”²⁹ It seems likely that blogging communities are a resource that women turn to not only to ward off loneliness but also to establish an etymological framework for understanding and communicating their own experiences since the larger public discourse fails to provide a context for most of women’s experiences.

On her blog, *Design for Mankind*, Erin Loechner described how her relationship with blogging satisfied those kinds of social and contextual needs:

I fell in love with the platform instantly—the community it created, the posterity it promised. . . . Something happened when readers would arrive at Design for Mankind [Loechner’s blog]. They would comment, and I would return the favor and visit the space they had carved out for themselves in their own blog journey. Some were blogging because they, too, were obsessed. Others were blogging to find themselves, just as I had back in 2001. Some were blogging to research, avoid therapy or become writers. Yet despite the many reasons, all were sharing parts of themselves. . . . I recognized that blogging was a catalyst for more opportunities—to do more, help more, envision more. And that blogging looked differently for everyone at any given stage of their lives. Yet we all had something to share, and that’s why we all continued to blog. . . . As a new mother—frenzied and confused—I blogged to find a community with answers. I searched forums and Googled phrases and joined newsletters, hoping for a voice that would stand out among the crowd and teach me how to grow into this new stage of life. And the voices came—some in tiny whispers, others in loud booms.³⁰

The practice of “sharing parts of themselves,” as Loechner discussed, is an approach to blogging that researchers have found to be distinctly feminine. Just as there is a stylistic

²⁹ Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of Dorothy Day* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1959).

³⁰ Erin Loechner, “Why I Blog,” *Design For Mankind* (blog), November 5, 2012. <http://www.designformankind.com/2012/11/why-i-blog/>.

distinction between the linguistic habits of men and women, there is also a distinction in the way they approach blogging. Women's blogging often resembles one of the models Carolyn Heilbrun outlined.³¹ "Heilbrun distinguishes between a woman's life written superficially, hemmed within the traditional female script, and a woman's life written down in fits of emotion and a hard-won fight for truth, self, discovery. Freedom. To Heilbrun's mind, this kind of writing was not only honest, it demanded courage."³² Both of these feminine self-writing types are distinct from normative male autobiographical subjectivity—so much so that these types affect the way women's blogs are ranked by search engine algorithms, usually to women's detriment.

Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, and Wright confirmed that female blog writing differs from male blog writing. (Again, females are likely to apply a journal-type style, whereas males are more likely to use a filter-type style.) The researchers also found that this variation in approach puts women's voices at a distinct disadvantage for establishing legitimacy and channeling web traffic. Thus blog audiences and scholars have dismissed the feminine voice in blogging, despite its majority presence in the medium.³³ Dustin Harp and Mark Tremayne similarly found that women are acutely underrepresented in the top tiers of blogging (as measured by the number of outside links directed to each blog post). These researchers insisted that the "mantra of second wave feminism, 'the personal is political,' is worth contemplating . . . as it involves breaking down the gendered division between the private sphere attributed to women and the public sphere of men. Part of the difficulty female bloggers face in trying to be heard in the political blogosphere rests in the definition of politics, often used in a narrow sense. Arguably, women blogging about the cost of childcare and healthcare are addressing social/political issues. This rearticulation of 'politics' falls

³¹ Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantine, 1988).

³² Marilyn Bousquin, "The Personal Bio," *Writing Women's Lives* (blog), 2012, <https://writingwomenslives.com/about/>.

³³ Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, and Wright, "Women and Children Last."

outside of a normalized definition of politics” and is thus often unwelcome or dismissed on influential political platforms.³⁴ Women face such challenges whenever they try to participate in online rhetoric about typically male-dominated topics and even when they are simply attempting to appeal to a mixed-gender audience.³⁵

Lu Wei found that the type of blogging authors use affects their efficacy in contributing to the production of cultural knowledge. For example, Wei found that because filter blogging is more quickly digested and more likely to be shared and reshared by readers, it has a vast distribution advantage. Additionally, because filter blogging is often employed by individuals who are already in positions of social power, the form is associated with credibility and authority, whereas journal-style blogging may have a co-constitutive relationship with sociocultural disadvantage. Wei did not explore how knowledge production specifically relates to performance of gender, but he suggested that more masculine practices are associated with prodigious sharing and acceptance of blog content as credible.³⁶

Female bloggers are often encouraged to implement masculine writing practices. As an example, advice for improving the SEO (search engine optimization) of women’s blogs is usually a thinly veiled imperative to write more like a man. For instance, Danielle Maveal, an education coordinator for the online marketplace etsy.com, advised women with online profiles to avoid feminine subjectivities and adopt more direct (masculine) approaches. ‘Welcome to my little corner of the web. I hope you enjoy your stay. Put your feet up and have a sip of tea!’ Sure, sounds cute, but in terms of SEO this is a deadly waste of an

³⁴ D. Harp and M. Tremayne, “The Gendered Blogosphere: Examining Inequality Using Network and Feminist Theory,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* (2006): 247–264.

³⁵ See chapter 3, page #114-115.

³⁶ Lu Wei, “Filter Blogs vs. Personal Journals: Understanding the Knowledge Production Gap on the Internet,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* (2009): 532–558.

introduction to your little corner. The first sentence of your Etsy shop announcement, or the first line of text on your website, is shown in a search result, so make it count.”³⁷

Females and males also differ in how frequently they use and update their blogs, with females doing more of both. Females also appear to have different motivations for blogging and find satisfaction from different aspects of blogging. Eric Zhi Feng Liu and Yu Fang Chang concluded based on their research that “female users were more interested in providing personal content and orientation towards social aspect with others,” while male participants were less socially minded in their blogging processes and certainly less engaged in interacting with readers on their blogging platforms.³⁸

Identity and Branding

Beyond traditional concepts of the autobiographic urge, blogging has unique perspicacity that centers on the audience’s experience. Many bloggers, and especially those who desire to monetize their blog content, are giving considerable thought and weight to what happens when readers encounter their posts.

In the world of monetized blogging, personal branding is the haut monde paradigm for thinking about impression management. According to staff at Entrepreneur.com, branding is “your promise to your customer. It tells them what they can expect from your products and services, and it differentiates your offering from that of your competitors. Your brand is derived from who you are, who you want to be and who people perceive you to be.”³⁹ A blogger who incorporates journal blogging rather than filter blogging is pressured to be mindful of aperçu because subscribers and page views are the basis for income, and the brand a blogger promotes is the blogger’s online presentation of self.

³⁷ Danielle Maveal, “Biz Ladies: Understanding Search Engine Optimization,” *Design Sponge* (blog), June 1, 2010, <http://www.designsponge.com/2010/06/biz-ladies-understanding-search-engine-optimization.html>.

³⁸ Eric Zhi Feng Liu and Yu Fang Chang, “Gender Differences in Usage, Satisfaction, Self-Efficacy and Performance of Blogging,” *British Journal of Educational Technology* 41, no. 3 (2010): E39–E43.

³⁹ “Branding,” Entrepreneur, accessed August 22, 2015, <http://www.entrepreneur.com/encyclopedia/branding>.

On the blog *Iterate Social*, Irene Kim discussed the way that personal branding informs her identity construction and performance on her Instagram platform:

I asked myself, “How do I curate my life in little snippets or little squares?” . . . I am not trying to be a fake personality online, but it’s definitely a curated portrayal of my life. People often say to me, “Oh, I feel like your life is so beautiful.” I definitely try and integrate beauty into my life, but valuing beauty, seeing it, and putting it all in one place is the stance that I take with my personal account. It’s definitely not an accurate portrayal of my 24/7 life.⁴⁰

Similarly, participants in my survey expressed great concern about communicating their personal branding in a way that concurs with the Entrepreneur.com definition of the term. Participants noted the following:

- “My aesthetic for my brand is bright colors and happy pictures therefore I do buy only clothes I think will look good in my feed since I’m needing to portray my brand same goes for my home anything unhappy is too dark for my blog.”
- “When people read my blog, they know my words will always be funny, inspiration (sic), and will teach them something. That’s something I make sure happens in every post.”
- “There is careful editing of how my house looks and that the pictures are flattering to all involved. That being said, I am not doing this to make money or present a ‘brand’ so I am a bit less constricted by that.”

These quotes illustrate acknowledgment of a social organization that equates the presentation of self on a blog with the branding strategies of businesses. This working model is often clumsy, and many women have written about the dissonance they experience using it. When writing and creating content disclosively, women inevitably must share components of

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Fein, “How to Use Instagram Like a Pro: An Interview with Chronicle Books’ Instagrammer Wizard,” *Iterate Social* (blog), January 13, 2015, <http://www.iteratesocial.com/blog/2015/1/13/how-to-use-instagram-like-a-pro-an-interview-with-chronicle-books-instagrammer-wizard>.

their lives that they have limited control over and that are on some level incompatible with the self they would prefer to present. These components encompass photographing in conditions that impair the artistic style an author prefers to use, as well as including family members in the presentation of self when the family members' appearances, behaviors, or opinions are incongruent with the author's preferred presentation. In these cases, Goffman's concepts of team presentations of self are inappropriate.

Gender Performance in Blogging

One variable in how women perform their identity through blogging is the way they perform gender in their self-portrayal. Women's blogging embodies a tremendous breadth of interpretations of gender norms, as well as a variety of attitudes toward perceived norms, even though the majority of female bloggers never directly tackle the topics of hegemonic gender norms and femininity discourse. Karen Henwood studied how a social expectation of gendered behavior affects women and their relationships as they age. In particular, Henwood studied the way "femininity discourse" informs mother-daughter relationships, and she found a correlation between the sense of we-ness or one-ness expressed between subjects in a mother-daughter relationship and the extent to which the subjects reproduced traditional gender roles in other ways. The ability to identify with proscribed gender roles—"the assumption that women share a special feminine gender identity, including . . . selfless cooperation, nurturance and empathy"—seems to be associated with "ascriptions of mother-daughter closeness."⁴¹ Thus, this femininity discourse not only informs the way women perform their gender but also how they perceive their own self-ness and the self-ness of other women with whom they regularly associate. Femininity discourse affects not only identity but also how relationships are perceived, enacted, and recorded.

⁴¹ Karen L. Henwood, "Women and Later Life—the Discursive Construction of Identities within Family Relationships," *Journal of Aging Studies* (1993): 303–319.

Though most women might articulate some dissonance between their perception of the dominant discourse of femininity and their own lived experiences, there seems to be an unavoidable pattern among women who blog to reference a facet of femininity discourse as a script or expectation. They then contrast the perceived normative scripts with their experiences, perceptions, opinions, and tastes, thereby defining the parameters of their lived experiences. This pattern is evident in Carly Morgan's post on her blog *Ever Clever Mom* about turning 32, the same age as the fictional character Sally Albright was when she expressed paranoia about the impending age of 40 (which was "just sitting there like a big dead end"). Morgan wrote that in contrast to Albright, "I don't actually feel that way about 40"; with this assertion she revealed an experience that varied from a perceived gender norm. She then explained the reason for her differing attitude: "Everybody is going to be potty trained when I'm 40. They'll probably get their own snacks and maybe they'll be reading books to me for a change. Bring it on."⁴²

A considerable portion of the disclosing women do on their blogs locates their experiences and relationships in relation to their perceptions of dominant gender norms and social expectations linked to femininity discourse. Generally, the more a woman is willing to be perceived as divergent from dominant femininity discourse, the more disclosive she is willing or able to be. Conversely, women whose desired "definition of the situation" includes a strong affiliation with dominant femininity discourse typically have less flexibility in disclosivity and in some cases are more apt to incorporate family members into their paradigmatic performance.

Natalie Holbrook, a blogger who has been very open about her experience with infertility on her blog *Hey Natalie Jean*, illustrated this point in a post about her frustration at the disparity between her perception of normative femininity and her experience:

⁴² Carly Morgan, "Ever Clever Mom Is Changing," *Ever Clever Mom* (blog), January 30, 2015, <http://everclevermom.com/2015/01/ever-clever-mom-is-changing>.

All along when huck was itty bitty i loved my new mom body. . . . i had a really great rack! that was especially fun. ideally i wanted to do it again right as soon as huck's babyhood was reaching it's climax and then keep doing it over, and over, and over again. for as many babies as heaven would send us and as quickly as my body could take them. this motherhood thing just really works on me. and fatherhood has enhanced brandon in such gorgeous ways. so we were all systems go, the holbrook team. i just wanted to be a baby making machine. still do, but, you know, the best laid plans and blah blah blah.⁴³

In this post, Holbrook explored her relation with a part of femininity discourse as well as the disparity between that discourse and her lived experience. Her relationship with the discourse was somewhat resonant, but her inability to control her adherence to it was a source of dissonance and led her to frequently reference in her posts the contrast between the discourse and her experience.

Many women's written, performed, and conceived identities hinge on perceptions of normative femininity discourse and the women's roles in their closest relationships. These two factors are primary in determining what language and contexts women use when they write about themselves. There is precedent for this phenomenon of relational self-conception in feminist psychology. Scholar-practitioners such as Carol Gilligan have found that women speak in a different voice than men do and have a different paradigm for self-perception. Historically, the male-centric approach to psychology emphasized differentiation and separation as principle stages of psychological development; that model is problematic when applied to women for whom relationships and connections are a fundamental part of their sense of selfhood throughout all stages of development.⁴⁴

A woman's self-perception is deeply informed by the people whose presences affect her time, her decisions, her emotions, and her sense of usefulness. In blog writing, this influence is often most evident in the way a female author defines whom she is by detailing

⁴³ Natalie Holbrook, "Mama's Biggest Little Helper and Other Things about Stuff," *Hey Natalie Jean* (blog), April 22, 2013, <http://www.heynataliejean.com/2013/04/mamas-biggest-little-helper-and-other.html>.

⁴⁴ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

interactions and relationships with others. But this unique subjectivity is also at play in the relationship an author has with her audience. There too, the looser boundaries of a feminine self contribute to the way female bloggers perform their identities.

Many women's identity performance in social contexts and online is deeply informed by their understanding of expected feminine behavior, attitudes, decisions, tastes, and interests. In Judith Butler's definitive work, *Gender Trouble*, she illustrated how ideas about identity and its connection to societal institutions always exist in a transactional space, one that is based in dialogue rather than in isolation. Butler rejected gender binaries as natural, and she challenged de facto understandings about the role of gender in identity. She claimed that widely accepted, expected, and enacted gender norms are a false pretext for the culturally constructed nature of gender and sexuality performances.⁴⁵ Rosalyn Diprose further deconstructed gender performance saying that one's identity "is built on the invasion of the self by the gestures of others, who, by referring to other others, are already social beings."⁴⁶ While most scholars who explore gender performativity have been primarily interested in the phenomena of unorthodox performances of gender, the infrastructure they have laid is useful in exploring the ways in which more hegemonic expressions of gender are performed and how this performance of gender is an important component of identity performance. The way a woman perceives socially reinforced gender norms and then chooses to adapt, integrate, or reject them is an invisible process that produces a simulacrum similar to that which Baudrillard wrote about when he defined *simulacrum* as copies of things that never had or no longer have an original.⁴⁷ In many ways, the normative gender behaviors that women choose to enact or conform to have no distinct known origin, and the desire to *not* be radical seems to be the driving force behind the endurance of these behaviors.

⁴⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

⁴⁶ Rosalyn Diprose, *The Bodies of Women: Ethics, Embodiment, and Sexual Difference* (London: Routledge, 1994), 25.

⁴⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres Et Simulation* (Paris: Galilée, 1995).

Author-essayist Chaunie Brusie wrote a blog post for *Babble* on her concern about stereotypical behaviors she had found herself adopting:

Lately, I have to admit, that even *I* am a little tired of our exhausted wife/overwhelmed husband spiel we've got going on here. . . . For whatever reason, I have fallen into the trap of acting like a stereotypical grumpy at-home wife (Debra of *Everybody Loves Raymond* comes to mind) and in turn, my husband has come to expect that I am pretty much miserable all of the time, when in reality, I actually love most of my life. Yes, staying home with my kids does test my patience pretty much every second of every day and yes, I'm perhaps not the world's most "natural" stay-at-home mom, (if such a thing even exists,) but on the whole, I'm incredibly content.⁴⁸

Brusie referenced her cognitive dissonance with both positive and negative female stereotypes, but she also implied that on some level she uses the stereotypes as a template for what her own life or behavior should look like.

The social script for hegemonic gender identities can be deeply engrained in a culture that defines fun, socialization, and desire along gendered lines from the most nascent stages of human development. But as Marie Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet asserted, "To construct an identity, a subject takes up the models offered by society, as transmitted by culture, and shapes them into his or her own type, bringing into play a system of values. The autobiographical process uses not only facts and events, but also social representations and cultural values. A tension exists between self and society, which is resolved by the narrative presentation of a unique self which can also be recognized by society."⁴⁹ This perspective reverberates with blog authors who strive to create texts that are deeply personal but universal enough to be of interest and relevance to readers. Blog authors must use the more universal elements in language, culture, and gender discourse in order to present their experiences in widely applicable contexts. Analyzing the way in which an author/subject

⁴⁸ Chaunie Brusie, "I'm Tired of Living Like a Wifely Stereotype," *Babble* (blog), April 2015, <http://www.babble.com/relationships/im-tired-of-living-like-a-wifely-stereotype>.

⁴⁹ Marie-Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet, "Textualisation of the Self and Gender Identity in the Life-Story," in *Feminism and Autobiography*, ed. Cosslett, Lury, and Summerfield, 61.

performs her gender as part of her identity performance is productive, offering insight into particularly gendered ways of addressing self and the audience.

Media consultant Lauren Jameson wrote a guest blog post expressing frustration with the way some of her blogging peers perform their gender. She lamented, “I love being a mom and there is no doubt in my mind that this is what I am supposed to do with my life, but I just wish that we would all be more honest about motherhood so that we can support one another when we have those crappy moments. My life is a truly wonderful and joyous life, but not every moment of it is wonderful and joyous. And that’s what I want people to know.”⁵⁰ Like many women, Jameson indicated that the social script for feminine discourse is incongruent with her lived experiences, and the femininity binaries of passive perfection and sordidness do not allow space for the kind of experiences she actually has.

In conclusion, there are many previously ignored factors affecting the identity constructions and performances of blogging women, and a serious accounting of the sociology of blogging and other social media would do well to give these serious consideration. In constructing and communication a self, women face unique challenges in dealing with inadequate linguistic and cultural semantics for their lived experiences. They must navigate a simulacrum of femininity discourse in an attempt to perform a self that is both personal and universal enough to be relatable for readers. This balance is further hindered by the fluidity sense of self women tend to develop psychologically, making distinctions between the self/other and the self/audience both less distinct. Ultimately, despite the challenges women face in finding ways to communicate meaningfully through blogs, they do so with more frequency and in higher numbers than men, in part because women rely on their blog texts not only to record their experiences or thoughts, but to establish and maintain meaningful social relationships.

⁵⁰ Lauren Jameson, “It’s Okay to Share the Imperfections of Motherhood,” Babble, 2015, <http://www.babble.com/parenting/imperfections-of-motherhood/>.

Chapter 2

Women's Autobiographical Blogging

People blast social media sometimes, saying it creates an overinflated sense of self-importance. It encourages narcissism. It causes people to measure their realities against other people's carefully crafted online lives and feel inadequate. All of that is potentially true. But social media also allows such a wide and far-reaching sharing of ideas and the potential to find a new perspective that you hadn't thought of before. It lets people across the country and around the world support and encourage each other. . . . It's an amazing thing to have that sort of support come from all over the world, all because they read our story on a website.

Jessica Rushing¹

In this chapter, I explore how women write about themselves when their self-perception is more fluid than that of normative male authors. Understanding this fluid identity of women bloggers helps to explain why they disclose so much and what limits they encounter in writing autobiographically. No one has yet looked closely at blogging as female autobiography, but considering blogging as autobiography explains all the theoretical holes that occur when trying to explain women's blogging behaviors as identity performances and it is a well-suited theoretical framework for social media. The disclosure that women tend to espouse and the need to write autobiographically can be tied to a history of the way women engage when they are creating first person records. In some ways, blogging seems like a more conducive platform to female subjectivities than long-form print autobiography because it allows for a really episodic, less authoritative nature of writing. Whereas traditional forms of autobiography require an author to contain their record with an official ending or finish, in blogging, there is no 'problem of the finish'. Blog authors can continually add new content and edit old content.

Decisions about disclosure are complicated for women, and tend to be a primary concern for woman bloggers. It is complicated to write any kind of autobiography when

¹ Jessica Rushing, "Building a Village," *Little Nesting Doll* (blog), June 2015, <http://littlenestingdoll.com/2015/06/building-a-village.html#more-1807>.

you're not only writing about yourself but also the others who appear in your experiences. The conflicts that surface when writing about these others are especially poignant for women who have children and feel a sense of stewardship over the potential repercussions of this representation. This is more complicated to navigate for women than men because the other is not just a prop to support the feminine story, the other is simultaneously an autonomous subject who is also part of the identity of the writer. In other words, women with children are mothers, a primary identity which is beholden to the children who are both part of the story and are fundamental to making the writer who she is or perceives herself to be.

Women are less likely to feel they have the authority to decide how they construct the narrative around these others. They are more conflicted about the way they describe others, but they include others more because of the fluidity of the boundary between self-and other in identity construction. Every woman who includes information, especially about her family, navigates a balance between the difficulty of representing others and the necessity of it, and there isn't an easy answer for anyone. There are conflicting concerns about the inherent fictionality of how that person is represented, how they would represent themselves differently, and issues of privacy.

One of the great benefits of considering blogging as autobiography is allowing for the value for the author in the intrinsic meaning making (teleology) that comes from organizing thinking into narrative (an important component of the autobiographical urge), and the extrinsic value of the community building and the value in having that community validate the meaning women have made from their experiences. This is where blogging women are getting their social needs met in unprecedented ways, and offers great insight into how blogging can empower women and improve their role in public discourse.

In this chapter I will discuss how blogs function as feminine autobiographies, and how applying concepts already at work in autobiography studies, we can better understand

the the phenomena occurring around the text creation and consumption of blogging. I will discuss uniquely feminine subjectivities that inform the creation of women's first-person writing, discuss the autobiographical urge and the cathartic creation of an interiorly understood self it seeks after, and discuss how autobiographic authorship informs the development of self-perception, especially when performed in a high-frequency, episodic nature such as that facilitated by blogging. I will explore how the unique reader-writer dialectic of blogging informs the sociality of the medium, and the role blogs and other social mediums are coming to play as proof of character in real-life situations. I will discuss the retrospective teleology of autobiographical writing, and how this combines with social interactions to meet social and psychological needs of women. I will explain the difficulty with which women make decisions about disclosure, especially regarding the others they present in their texts, and discuss some of the implicit fictionalities in autobiographic writing, and how both bloggers and their readers relate to these.

Feminine Autobiographic Urge

A post by Courtney Kendrick on her blog, *C. Jane Kendrick*, illustrates the diametric forces that shape the experiences and discourage the writing of female bloggers with young children:

I've been thinking about writing and blogging. I have this general anxiety about never, ever giving up writing and blogging even though I feel like my life is full of little children who need my presence near-constantly. . . . I mean to say, I never, ever want to give up writing in this state that I am in right now because I really worry that if all the women in the space I am in gave up on recording and narrating their lives we will continue to have less and less of a voice on what this—this intense mothering—feels like. . . .

Because there is art in what I am doing—raising kids, building community, navigating faith, being in a romantic relationship, failing at finances, succeeding in chaos, perpetually planning—but there has to be time to write it all down. There has to be time to make sense of it. To make art of it.²

² Courtney Kendrick, "Thinking Ahead," *C. Jane Kendrick* (blog), December 17, 2014, <http://www.cjanekendrick.com/2014/12/thinking-ahead.html>.

This expression of a more private, fluid self and the need to articulate it is consistent with feminist autobiographical studies over the last two decades, and the expression provides cues for understanding how autobiographical blog writing contributes to the construction of identities in ways that are incongruent with Goffman's models. Arthur Miller once quipped that "every autobiographer must secretly believe he has triumphed in life. Maybe, incidentally, this accounts for the paucity of women's autobiographies—they know better."³

However, the paucity of women's autobiographies is being explained in other ways. As feminist scholars have probed autobiography's working definitions, they have found that self-conceptualization and tactical approaches to voice in authorship tend to sharply divide along gendered lines.⁴ Feminist concepts of autobiography contrast with the early definitions in the field of autobiography theory, such as Roy Pascal's. Pascal defined *autobiography proper* as involving "the reconstruction of the movement of a life, or a part of a life, in the actual circumstances in which it was lived [rendering] a coherent shaping of the past [and establishing a] certain consistency of relationship between the self and the outside world."⁵ Because historical definitions contrast with feminist concepts, women's autobiography has not always been categorized as autobiography.

The difference in feminine presence in the blogging world is in some ways correlative with the gendered divide in autobiography. Despite Miller's quip about a paucity of female autobiography, careful studies of history show that women *have* left manifold autobiographic records but in different forms, for different reasons, and with a different subjectivity than male autobiographies. Therefore, the definition of *autobiography* must be expanded in order to include them.

³ Arthur Miller, *Salesman in Beijing* (New York: Viking Press, 1984).

⁴ Cosslett, Lury, and Summerfield, *Feminism and Autobiography*, 1–22.

⁵ Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 5, 9.

Sidonie Smith challenged both the “confidence in the referentiality of language and corollary confidence in the authenticity of the self” that seemed inherent in canonized male autobiography but was conspicuously absent in the writing of women throughout history.⁶ Patricia Meyer Spacks, who studied the letters of eighteenth-century English women, found that their writing “suppress[ed] the fact of their own presence as much as possible, while yet emphasizing [their] powerful role as observer and narrator.”⁷ The distinct self of male autobiography seems to be transmuted into an indefinite consciousness when women write, but they conversely seem to be more aware of the power they wield in authorship, particularly in choosing how to portray the actions, motives, and features of others.

A simultaneous awareness of the power of authorship and a lassitude toward establishing boundaries between the self and the other is also commonly manifest in the language of female bloggers. When Sydney Liann blogged about meeting her father’s birth father, it was apparent that she was more interested in conveying what she observed or inferred than in maintaining her subjecthood. As the following excerpt from her blog *The Daybook* shows, the subjectivity is distinctly feminine, and the identity of the author is established more by proximal inference than by action:

Talking with him, it was obvious that he didn’t think of us. That we were not a part of his story, like he was part of ours. It is strange to meet someone for the first time, when you know deeply personal things about their past, and what they’ve run from. In a strange way, it feels like a moment of connection. I know you on some level. I know you because of my Grandma, and I know you because of my Dad. I know what makes you human and I know, in some part, what you are afraid of.⁸

The results of my survey indicate that one factor motivating women to blog is purely intrinsic; this factor is best described as “autobiographical urge.” For example, respondents noted the following about blogging:

⁶ Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 5.

⁷ Shari Benstock, ed., *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women’s Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

⁸ Sydney Liann Poulton, “The Day I Met the Person Who Gave Me My Blue Eyes,” *The Daybook* (blog), May 14, 2015, <http://www.thedaybookblog.com/2015/05/the-day-i-met-person-who-gave-me-my.html>.

- “It helps me scratch an itch of sorts.”
- “I enjoy telling my story but I want it to be heard.”
- “Committing to writing about my experiences gave me a motivation to actually have them.”
- “This is something that helps meet my need to be creative and share goodness with others.”⁹

Research on the autobiographical urge tends to be based on the idea that when an author narrates his or her experiences, the author is engaged in the cathartic creation of an interiorly understood self. Autobiographic authorship is a process of construction that affects both the author’s understanding of self and the audience’s understanding of the author. As Paul John Eakin asserted, “Self and self-experience . . . are not given, monolithic and invariant, but dynamic, changing, and plural.”¹⁰ Similarly, Eakin found that a flexible notion of self is required to deliberate the autobiographic urge. In turn, this notion of self requires an awareness of the sense of embodiment in autobiographic records. Eakin explained that “the experience of this supposedly intangible thing called self is largely a function of our experience of our bodies.”¹¹ Thus, the recorded self tends to be clearly situated in time and space, with sensory ipseity and distinct subjectivity between the self and the others who appear. Thus, any type of autobiographical author is creating both an interior version of self-perception and a liminal thing that is entirely outside of her or his actual self.

Nancy Miller, who explored the role of autobiographic writing in the creation of a self, found that the subject of autobiographic writing (the written self) is as much about the other as about the self, partly because the narrative tends to be written in a way that is relatable to a reader who is not the self. As Miller noted, “Life writing hinges on a connection

⁹ See Survey Results in Appendix

¹⁰ Philip Douglas, review of *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, by Paul John Eakin, *Modern Fiction Studies* 47, no. 2 (2001): 532.

¹¹ As qtd. in Douglas, review of *How Our Lives Become Stories*, 532.

between reader and text.”¹² Therefore, in constructing a self for readers, the author is dissecting his or her identity for the reader to construct and make meaning of an ideational identity. The meaning making and temporal organization of autobiographical writing tend to receive most of the attention when researchers examine the universality of the autobiographical urge, and both meaning making and temporal organization are pertinent to disclosive blogging. With blog posts averaging between 300 and 1,200 words,¹³ authors must distill meaning from their experiences episodically and construct their intentional retellings expeditiously. Consequently, the sentience of being a blogger and writing about oneself affects and defines the being and performance of self in varied facets.

Blogs as Autobiographies

Both autobiography and social performance necessarily presume there are audiences for constructions of self, and from that point differences between them become difficult to delineate. The presumed audience informs the process of framing and shaping the text, as an autobiographical subject determines what definition of the situation should be encapsulated in the construction. While the memories the autobiographical subject relies on for content are already separated from actuality with a degree of subjectivity, having an audience for the autobiographical text introduces a degree of social performance in the process of authorship that exacerbates subjectivity.¹⁴

Under such conditions, categorizing blogging as both autobiographical and a performance of identity is axiomatic because the capacity for the two to overlap becomes

¹² Nancy K. Miller, *But Enough about Me: Why We Read Other People's Lives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

¹³ Sue Anne Dunlevie, “How Long Should My Blog Posts Be?,” *Successful Blogging* (blog), October 20, 2014, <http://www.successfulblogging.com/blog-post-length/>.

¹⁴ Objectivity becomes as impossible to capture in autobiography as Raymond Williams’ “structure of feeling,” which referenced the impossibility of capturing the full essence of lived history through artifacts. Both suggest that the past and present cannot be captured and preserved for the future without being heavily edited and abridged by the creator of the text. The acts of capturing and preserving are necessarily acts of calculated abridgment. (Raymond Williams, *The Analysis of Culture: Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, 4th ed., ed. John Storey [Athens: University of Georgia, 1998], 32–40.)

considerable. However, as Gurak and Antonijevic pointed out, blogging has the potential to become a much more social endeavor than most autobiographical text creation because blog readers and authors interact on the platform where the text is presented. Gurak and Antonijevic asserted that blogs are “sites of identity formation [that] allow us to engage in conversations with certain aspects of a person’s life, and with the identity that person chooses to construct.”¹⁵

The multiple reasons behind the construction of self are an important consideration when analyzing women’s publicly available autobiographical texts, the private identities constructed by the texts, and the public identities performed in the texts. As autobiographical studies have developed, the definition of *autobiography* has expanded. Liz Stanley has explored the spectrum of compulsion in autobiographical texts, examining the idea that autobiography includes not only writings constructed voluntarily but also those created compulsorily to maintain social mobility or standing. In this regard, she identified the concept of an “audit self” as a presentation of self that is created distinctly for the convenience of those who need to evaluate the individual quickly. Stanley also identified numerous instances throughout history in which an audit self was required, noting these instances were the catalyst for autobiographical data.¹⁶ This concept translates intriguingly to the era of online autobiographical data and its frequent use as proof of character. The concept also provides a counterweight to the assumption that an autobiographical urge inherently spurs all production of autobiographical text.

Media scholars have explored the “blurred line between the personal and the professional in the world of blogs.”¹⁷ Because blogs function as both private and as public

¹⁵ Laura J. Gurak and Smiljana Antonijevic, “The Psychology of Blogging: You, Me, and Everyone in Between,” *American Behavioral Scientist* (2008): 60.

¹⁶ Stanley, “From ‘Self-Made Women’ to ‘Women’s Made Selves’?”

¹⁷ M. Belden, “Archives and Archivists in the Blogosphere,” *Journal for the Society of North Carolina Activists* 7, no. 1 (2009): 54.

spaces, navigating identity performance requires the author to be cognizant of both the individual reader and the scope of all possible readers.¹⁸ The self a blog author constructs online is publicly available and is increasingly likely to be used as proof of character in circumstances with real social consequences.

A number of the participants in my survey referenced the paradoxical phenomenon of making their private lives somewhat public through blogging, but those who chose to blog disclosively did not express regret for doing so. As one participant explained: “My blog is utterly and completely a journal and chronicle of my life, more so than I ever intended it to be when I first logged into Blogger. . . . I needed to find other people in whose lives I saw my own reflection, and where I also found hope. . . . So I wrote, I wrote into the darkness, never imagining who would read, or what worlds would open up. I’ve never regretted it.” This experience is one proof of social value in disclosure for women. High levels of disclosure are often linked to rewarding interpersonal interactions and a strong sense of community and support.

The alignment between the identity performed on a blog and the identity an individual would present in person—or even the perceived identity of the blogger—is usually conveyed via the disclosivity of narrated lived experiences. This disclosivity is an interesting stylistic choice to examine in blog texts. In her 2010 study, Erin Hollenbaugh found that the most disclosive bloggers are women who are generally disclosive in their offline lives as well and that “disclosive bloggers were typically motivated to blog to archive and organize their thoughts.”¹⁹ This finding supports theories in autobiographical studies about the organizational power of writing autobiography—the idea that by summarizing experiences, writers are engaged in meaning making post factum.

¹⁸ However, it cannot be presumed that blog authors necessarily manage that awareness.

¹⁹ Hollenbaugh defined *disclosivity* as “the revelation of personal information” and noted that disclosivity can be measured in both amount and depth: “Amount of self-disclosure is the number of disclosures made, whereas depth is how intimate or personal that information is.” (Erin E. Hollenbaugh, “Personal Journal Bloggers: Profiles of Disclosiveness,” *Computers in Human Behavior* [2010]: 1658.)

Courtney Kendrick, a highly disclosive blogger, illustrated this retrospective teleology in a post on her blog *C. Jane Kendrick* in which she described being handed a piece of paper during a crowded public event:

It all happened so fast I didn't really get to see what was going on. . . . I didn't get to read the slip of paper until I was back in our car ready to go home. When I opened it up it was tiny—smaller than a gum wrapper and it had the words “Your writing has changed me.” I think it was her vulnerability bumping up against mine. It felt like she was as scared to hand me that paper as I am when I write something that pushes my cultural boundaries. I felt like we were giving each other permission to be brave.²⁰

It is very common for women to write about their experiences in this pattern of interpreting meaning from them, especially when there is time or space between having the experience and then writing about it.

Much of the narration used in autobiographical blogging assumes an interior self-subject, which in the long view is a modern phenomenon.²¹ Domna Stanton termed this phenomenon the “writing of self” and found that women’s interior sense of self can be constructed and reimaged by the female author through the act of writing confessionally. According to Stanton, women’s sense of self is not only articulated in but also created (i.e., brought into existence) through the creation of autobiographical texts.²²

Laura Marcus described autobiography as a genre that historically “came to mark, and be marked by, the (usually masculine) privilege of self-possession.”²³ Most feminist study of autobiography has taken this view and contrasted women’s self-conceptualization and autobiographical practices with it. Susan Geiger pointed out that “literacy among women, if considered historically, is a phenomenon that is primarily Western, and the act of writing is

²⁰ Courtney Kendrick, “A Decade of Words,” *C. Jane Kendrick* (blog), May 18, 2015, http://www.cjanekendrick.com/2015_05_01_archive.html.

²¹ Stanley, “From ‘Self-Made Women’ to ‘Women’s Made-Selves?’” 42.

²² Domna Stanton, ed., *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Stanton found autogynography (women’s self-writing/constructing) to be a twin process to autobiography, especially in instances where women were trying to construct a self that could function effectively in a male-centric space.

²³ As qtd. in Cosslett, Lury, and Summerfield, *Feminism and Autobiography*, 2.

class- and culture-bound wherever it occurs.”²⁴ But if women have been categorized as less than autonomous in patricentric cultures, “Women’s autobiography gives an opportunity for them to express themselves as ‘subjects’; with their own selfhood.”²⁵

The phenomenon of women claiming subjecthood through blogging creates an interesting dynamic in this more public, social, and interactive online medium. Women use first-person writing not only to organize their experiences into meaningful episodes but also to create and publicly assert their subjecthood and to invite validation of their attestations. Carina “Azucar,” an eclectic and intermittent blogger, asserted her selfhood with an interior self-subject in a post on her blog *The Jet Set* about her experience with F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel *The Great Gatsby* and the 2013 film adaptation of the book. “I’ve been thinking about *The Great Gatsby*. For me it’s one of those novels that is beautifully written, achingly so, but is full of characters I dislike. Curiously enough, I love Gatsby—who doesn’t love a man in love?—but everyone else? Bah.”²⁶ In this post, Azucar asserted the subjecthood of her internal experiences and thought processes in response to a text over time rather than the subjecthood of her actions or interactions with others. This kind of autobiographical observer is frequently claimed by feminist autobiography theorists as more of a feminine phenomenon along the gender spectrum of writing subjectivity. The author asserted an observer self so inwardly situated that it extended a kind of intimacy that even in-person observation would not reveal. Even though in this case the observation was about a fictional character, it points to the kind of biographic observations that women may make about the people and cultures they interact with.

²⁴ Susan N. G. Geiger, “Women’s Life Histories: Method and Content,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (1986): 334.

²⁵ Cosslett, Lury, and Summerfield, *Feminism and Autobiography*, 6.

²⁶ Carina, “Watching the Great Gatsby,” *The Jet Set* (blog), May 13, 2013, <http://www.jetsetcarina.com/2013/05/watching-great-gatsby.html>.

Disclosure

The public nature of blogging makes decisions about disclosure all the more pertinent when the private nature of blogging makes some disclosure nearly inevitable and the disclosure includes information about others. Bloggers who are concerned about how their representations of family members will affect them in the future tend to set boundaries about disclosure. These boundaries are typically protectionist in nature, establishing what topics and blog post types are off-limits, rather than setting clear style guides for how content that does include family members will represent the individuals. The boundaries can create interesting constraints on the expression of the intersubjective feminine self. Whereas the male self, defined by individuation against others, is only slightly altered by the omission of one of those others, a feminine self that defines itself relationally is fundamentally commutated by the omission of others, rendering supposed “authenticity” in the public expression of a feminine self an ethical minefield.

Each of the blogging-disclosure studies that I examined began with a concession that women (and teens) tend to blog more disclosively than men.²⁷ Women also tend to express more anxiety and remorse regarding disclosure decisions. This phenomenon is evident in the abundant number of blog posts in which women articulate their disharmonized concerns, attempting to craft a conclusive policy that integrates their need for self-expression and their concerns about privacy and their children’s identity construction. One example is a blog post “Sport” wrote on her blog *Meanest Look* in which she shared her reflections on a conference keynote speaker and articulated her choice to remove photographs of her son from her blog:

Dallas Clayton. That guy. I don’t think I’ve ever questioned so many things about myself while some dude was just telling stories. You know, I noticed that while he

²⁷ X. Liu, “Online Posting Anxiety: Impacts on Blogging,” *Chinese Journal of Communication* (2010): 202–222; Hsiu-Chia Ko and Tsun-Keng Chen, “Understanding the Continuous Self-Disclosure of Bloggers from the Cost-Benefit Perspective,” in *Human System Interactions* (2009): 520–527; Jeffrey T. Child and Esther A. Agyeman-Budu, “Blogging Privacy Management Rule Development: The Impact of Self-Monitoring Skills, Concern for Appropriateness, and Blogging Frequency,” *Computers in Human Behavior* (2010): 957–963; R. Delbert, “Blogging Dangerously,” *Index on Censorship* (2010): 88–92.

told stories about his son, he never said his name. I'd like to give that back to the boy. So, I'll be going through old posts . . . and I'll be removing most pictures of him and he'll be getting a blog nickname. He's not for entertainment value. It's a project I've already been working on, but now I very clearly see the importance of doing it sooner rather than later.²⁸

More urgent in nature are the chorus of concerns about the potential negative consequences resulting from disclosure. Posts such as the following one by photographer Hailey Devine at *Something Devine* articulate the fear of rendering not only themselves but their family members vulnerable through disclosure:

I assumed all my followers were these cute young girls. . . . To be honest, I got caught up in the numbers and I stopped looking at WHO started following me. This is where the frightening part happened. One morning I curiously scrolled through my new followers. It was quite the traumatic experience to see what kind of messed up, and really quite evil people were following ME! I was exposed to some really icky stuff on these profiles. . . . A few days later I found stolen photos of my little Lucy on these accounts and they had been fooled around with. . . . I have never felt so sick and vulnerable in my life. The scariest part is that these "messed up" accounts were completely anonymous. During this same time period we had numerous girls show up at our house on different occasions that wanted to introduce themselves and get a picture. It was awful not knowing if one of these girls had been the ones who stole Lucy's pictures. There was NO way to know. This all shook me to my core. "What have I done to myself and my family? There is no taking back what I have already exposed."²⁹

Concerns about safety dominate bloggers' discussions on disclosure in blogging.

While safety from pernicious readers is obviously a valid concern to discuss, it is unfortunate that this type of disclosure dialogue often occurs to the exclusion of all other types of disclosure dialogue. Women might be empowered by engaging in more discussions about their narrative power in choosing how they portray their families and selves rather than engaging in the exclusively protectionist rhetoric of whether they should be representing their families online at all.

²⁸ "Sport," "Alt Summit Recap," *Meanest Look* (blog), February 3, 2015, <http://www.meanestlook.com/alt-summit-recap/#more-3475>.

²⁹ Hailey Devine, "How I Protect My Family on Instagram," *Something Devine* (blog), April 6, 2015, <http://www.somethingdevineblog.com/2015/04/how-i-protect-my-family-on-instagram.html>.

Biography within Autobiography

A feminist approach to autobiography requires recognizing the inevitable presence of biography within autobiography. Pamela Cotterill and Gayle Letherby emphasized that the lives of others are part of any completed autobiographical piece and that any writing that acknowledges a self must inherently, if sometimes circuitously, recognize the ways that self is informed by its affiliation with other selves and with the cultural framework in which it moves.³⁰ Women appear to approach this inevitability of representing others in their autobiographical texts much less directly than men. Susan Stanford Friedman summarized the gendered psychological difference theory in terms of women's autobiography: "[A woman's] autobiographical self often does not oppose herself to all others, does not feel herself to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much *with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community."³¹

In many cases, women use this sense of a relationally defined self in blog writing, and this use has helped shape the blogging medium, the user experience, and audience expectations associated with Web 2.0 technology, particularly because of the significantly larger number of women than men who regularly blog. Aimee Morrison found that female bloggers "seem to understand their texts as at once public and private, in ways that are for the most part enabling rather than paralyzing or paradoxical" and that "most personal (mommy blog) authors are also committed blog readers and frequent commenters, and their alternations between these roles create non-hierarchical, tightly woven webs of interconnection marked by serial, mutual, and intimate self-disclosure." However she also

³⁰ Pamela Cotterill and Gayle Letherby, "Weaving Stories: Personal Auto/biographies in Feminist Research," *Sociology* (1993): 67. They, along with Jane Tompkins, advocated a more feminine voice and subjectivity (and hence an acknowledgement of an agenda-led self and subjectivity) even in scholarly writing; where an archetypal male first-person subjectivity may provoke too nuclear of a narrative focus for writing which should be about research, but a more stereotypically female sense of (presence of) self might be useful in serving to acknowledge the tendentious nature of research and avoiding false claims of objectivity or faultlessness.

³¹ Susan Stanford Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1998), 72–82; italics added.

found that women often intentionally limit the scope of their intended audience in an effort to avoid making their disclosivity political in nature or reception.³²

An example of a woman blogging about herself relationally, both in relation to her mother and to a lesser extent her readers, can be found in a Mother's Day tribute by religious lifestyle blogger Edie Wadsworth. She wrote on her blog *Life in Grace* about her mother as an extension of herself:

This woman carried me through hell and back. She gave me the gift of life. She worked all the jobs. She sacrificed everything a woman can. She NEVER complained. She loved me, she believed in me, she never, ever stopped giving, she worked harder than anyone I've ever known. She laid her life down with quiet courage so that I might someday stand tall and find my voice. This is how I learned to be a woman. This is how I learned what it means to empty yourself. She was *first light* for me. She has made my every homecoming possible.

She is my momma. And her love plays a melody in my heart. She mothers on.³³

It is worth noting that this sort of intersubjectivity occurs far more frequently when female bloggers are assuming their audience is primarily or exclusively female.

By striving for “an audience of sympathetic, like-minded strangers” and minimizing exposure to “a broader, outsider audience,” female bloggers “actively manage the size and composition of their audience to maintain the desired scale and tone in the communities they create together.”³⁴ Thus, in a manner similar to the history of female autobiography, female bloggers tend to assume nonnormative self-definitions and seek or assume a specialized audience for their autobiographical texts. This selectivity in audience seems to be a product of both internal and external pressures: (1) cultural pressures and norms that discourage normativity in a female autobiographical text and (2) internal desires to make the text about something other than a resistance to those cultural norms. While in some ways publishing

³² Aimee Morrison, “‘Suffused by Feeling and Affect’: The Intimate Public of Personal Mommy Blogging,” *Biography* (2011): 37.

³³ Edie Wadsworth, “We Mother On,” *Life In Grace* (blog), May 11, 2015, <http://www.lifeingraceblog.com/2015/05/mother>.

³⁴ Aimee Morrison, “‘Suffused by Feeling and Affect’: The Intimate Public of Personal Mommy Blogging,” *Biography* (2011): 38–39.

autobiographical texts is a radical or emancipatory act for women, in most cultures in which an appreciable number of women blog, these bloggers are largely avoiding political rhetoric. Female bloggers want to write about their lives without it being a radical act, and so they primarily write to and for other women. This narrowing of the intended audience seems to facilitate an increased sense of intimacy and allows women to include more private facets of self than they might on a platform with a broader assumed audience.

Amanda Soule (best known as a lifestyle blogger who readily accrues antiquated homekeeping and homesteading skills) wrote a post on her blog *Soule Mama* clearly assuming a sympathetic female audience: “Mama’s Day. Ah, it can be a complicated holiday, this one, can’t it? Full of expectation and the sometimes resulting disappointment. A reminder of heartbreak and loss. Adoption, miscarriage, infertility, painful mother-daughter relationships. Oh, I see all of that in my family and friends. And in the simplest of ways, I feel it in the self-imposed guilt, pressure and expectation in my role as Mama. We are so very hard on ourselves, every single Mama I know.”³⁵

While the preceding insights into female autobiographical voices and their private disclosures are useful, there are still some distinctions between traditional concepts of published autobiographies and blogging that relates to public social performance models for explaining behavior. Somewhere straddling both realms is the pool of reasons why women are motivated to blog—and to blog about their lives disclosively. Gina Masullo Chen explored the motivations women cite for their self-disclosure in blogging, finding that an urge for self-disclosure or autobiography is an inadequate explanation for the scope and shape of the phenomenon. Chen found that in addition to the need for self-disclosure, women desire to connect with other people and to gain influence among their blogging peers. Further, the dominant factors motivating these women are directly related to the way they

³⁵ Amanda Soule, “Mama’s Day,” *Soule Mama* (blog), May 11, 2015, <http://www.soulemama.com/soulemama/2015/05/mamas-day.html>.

structure their time blogging. Typically, the more social of an activity a female blogger believes blogging to be, the more time she will devote to it, though that time is not necessarily spent only composing posts. The time also encompasses interacting with commenters, maintaining and updating the blog design, researching and coding plug-ins, seeking sponsorship and affiliations, and developing blog-related skills.³⁶ Therefore, while blogging certainly includes autobiography, it also involves the active interpersonal sociality of self-presentation. Both are required to characterize the present scope of the medium, and the navigation of the disclosure of personal information about the self and others close to the self.

Women, more than men, exhibit mindfulness of the autonomy of the others who inhabit their autobiographical spaces. This mindfulness extends to a concern that their representations of another individual might strike that individual as misrepresentations. This concern is heightened by the public nature of blog posts and the potential for repudiative blog comments and blog posts from those individuals. Despite this mindfulness and concern, on some level there is always a subjectivity to an autobiographical record that will be incongruent with the experience of its biographical subjects.

Liz Stanley shared a record of Gertrude Stein visiting America in the 1930s. Stein was “met everywhere by people who had already conceived and personified a ‘Gertrude Stein’ that she then had to learn to (appear to) be.”³⁷ In *Everybody’s Autobiography*, Stein proposed that this experience “was actually only an extreme (or hyperised) case of something much more endemic and ordinary about social life. . . . In relation to organizational encounters, there is a stronger process of normalization involved, for while the organisations ‘may not

³⁶ Gina Masullo Chen, “Why Do Women Write Personal Blogs? Satisfying Needs for Self-Disclosure and Affiliation Tell Part of the Story,” *Computers in Human Behavior* (2012): 171.

³⁷ Stanley, “From ‘Self-Made Women’ to ‘Women’s Made-Selves’?,” 52.

care' as to whether or not actual persons and their lives fit the profiles around which they function, on many occasions the people concerned will."³⁸

Bloggers have some control over the construction of the "profiles around which they function" in the virtual world, but the other subjects who recur in the blogs are inevitably less involved in the construction of their profiles. This circumstance becomes increasingly relevant as nonauthor subjects are featured with increased frequency. Mothers who blog about their families often feature their family members recurrently so that the personas constructed for those individuals, and the portrayals of the family members' relationships with the author, come to be associated with the blog—as a distinctive part of the definition of the situation the blog author puts forth. Some biographical subjects may find themselves having to learn to appear to be more congruent with the online identities constructed for them by the author.

Naomi Davis, blogging at *Love, Taza*, has mentioned and featured family members in nearly all of her posts. The identities she has constructed for her husband and children within her blogging space play a significant role in the branding of her blog and are fundamental to the identity Naomi performs for herself, as evidenced in passages such as, "Now that we're all home, we're taking turns being fascinated with our baby conrad. . . . when you witness your 2 1/2 year old scoot the space heater over to your baby's crib and sit down on it, then voluntarily begin to read one of his favorite books to his new baby brother, you can't help but think, 'are you kidding me? this is the best life. i am living the very best life.'"³⁹ Davis's "very best life" is indistinguishable from her family relationships and roles, and her portrayal of her life is almost entirely made of representations of these relationships and roles.

³⁸ Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (London: Virago Press, 1938/1985).

³⁹ Naomi Davis, "A Name, a Few Favorite Photos and a Video!" *Love Taza* (blog), December 18·2014, <http://lovetaza.com/2014/12/a-name-a-few-favorite-photos-and-a-video>.

The responses to my survey indicate a nearly universal concern about the process of choosing what content involving family members is appropriate to share online. Participants expressed concern not only regarding privacy but also regarding whether the people represented in the blog posts approve of how they are represented. Some of the participants mentioned obtaining approval from featured spouses and older children before publishing posts. One participant said, “I feel like it’s important for me to not get down [on my children]. . . . [I] treat my family with respect and love even in writing.” Whereas one participant asserted, “I heartily believe it is inappropriate to blog in depth about your children’s experiences and find it short-sighted and truly unsafe to publish your children’s images or names online,” another participant stated, “We have been recognized in public, and I know this is because I do post photos of my kids. While it’s a little disconcerting, it hasn’t been unpleasant, I know even on the rare occasion we’re recognized, we’re still very small fish in a very large pond.”

It may be that the sense of stewardship blogging mothers express can somewhat balance out the vulnerability of nonauthor subjects who are family members. While there is the inherent danger of losing face or being portrayed in an unflattering light, it seems that in many cases mother bloggers err on the side of generosity in portraying their family members. These bloggers often extol relationships and individuals, and in abridging history into blog posts, the presentations of others’ selves are typically reduced to a sinlessness that would be unlikely to survive the scrutiny of an in-person encounter.

Thus, when mothers blog and their children inherit the public personas and social profiles their mothers have constructed, there is likely to be at least some dissonance between what the children inherit and the identities the children would choose to perform. This dissonance is more of an issue the more widely read the mother’s blog is or the more pronounced the differences between identity performances, but there is also a likelihood that

the children might use the identities constructed by their mothers and already widely accepted by others as the basis of the children's identity performance going forward.

This identity navigation can be illustrated by comparing the way high-profile design blogger Gabrielle Blair has written about her teenage son, Ralph, with the way he has presented himself online. Gabrielle wrote the following about Ralph on her blog, *Design*

Mom:

You may remember, Ralph spent the last week of August and most of September in England. He's been in France since September 27th. This whole study abroad concept has really grabbed Ralph's imagination. . . . He's even started talking to friends in Japan and Australia about doing exchanges. Who knows if it will happen, but either way, he clearly loves this!

His language is excellent, but he talks often about wanting to get it perfect. His goal is complete fluency and he studies the nuances to figure out where he's still getting it wrong. . . .

One interesting thing is that doing his school work independently has reminded him of how much of a typical school day is just sort of busy work or wasted time moving between classes, and he's wondering what it would take to graduate early and be completely done with high school. So we're looking into that to see what it would take. Ralph seems to do well in a school setting—he's super social—so of course it's interesting for us to see that he's [fine] to be done with that and move on.⁴⁰

In contrast to Gabrielle's highly verbal and fairly disclosive approach to presenting Ralph, his approach on Instagram and YouTube is verbally taciturn, reliant on images to communicate meaning, and seemingly capricious in his self-referential tone, contributing to a sense of identity exploration rather than construction.⁴¹ Yet there are multiple indications that the way he performs these varied versions of himself is informed by his mother's blogging: from the selfie taken with a fan of his mother's who recognized him,⁴² to the regular references to his involvement in his mother's work projects, the locations he visits because of his mother's blog (e.g., Lake Tahoe, Nevada, St. George, Utah; Haiti; and Norway), and multiple instances

⁴⁰ Gabrielle Blair, "Report from France," *Design Mom* (blog), October 20, 2014, <http://www.designmom.com/2014/10/report-from-france>.

⁴¹ Ralph Blair's Instagram page, <https://instagram.com/astroralph>, accessed September 15, 2015; Ralph Blair's YouTube page, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://youtube.com/theralphblair>.

⁴² Ralph Blair's Instagram page, accessed September 15, 2015, <https://instagram.com/p/f-44JhKqlf>.

of referencing or addressing his parents directly and assuming his audience is familiar with their online presences.⁴³

Research indicates parents' oral narratives influence the development of a child's sense of self, and it seems likely that public online records (such as blogs) of a family's history might also play a role. Families are finding new and evolving ways to interact with the archives of social media texts they have created. Jennifer Bohanek, Kelly Marin, Robyn Fivush, and Marshall Duke found "evidence that the ways in which parents discuss the past with their children is related to children's understanding and evaluation of their personal and shared family past."⁴⁴ Kristina Kugler noted that the shifting of family storytellers' identities over time changes the narratives the storytellers share, and these changes can also affect listeners' identities, especially when the listeners are a generation removed from the storyteller and are learning to define for themselves the identities of their families.⁴⁵

This struggle to balance connectedness and individuality or autonomy is particularly relevant as women attempt to represent a child who is aware of the representation and the constructed nature of the represented self. Interior designer Erika Powell shared a candid video of her daughter on Instagram and provided the following caption: "She's so fancy . . . until she realizes I'm recording, then she turns mean and kicks forcefully in my direction. It's only a matter of time before she starts telling me that I can't post photos/videos of her on Instagram. So, I gotta do it while I still can."⁴⁶ While it might be easy to critique Erika's approach, at least she recognizes that her daughter's relationship with others' representations of her online is apt to change over time.

⁴³ For example, see <https://instagram.com/p/VXLFLHKqnq>.

⁴⁴ Jennifer G. Bohanek, Kelly A. Marin, Robyn Fivush, and Marshall P. Duke, "Family Narrative Interaction and Children's Sense of Self," *Family Process* 45, no 1 (2006): 39–54.

⁴⁵ Kristina K. Kugler, "Shaping Family Identity: Personal Narratives as Vernacular Family Tradition" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2004).

⁴⁶ Erika Powell's Instagram page, accessed February 20, 2015, <http://instagram.com/p/yrbWTPrjYh/>.

Memory

Refraining from disclosure is one factor that contributes to fictionality in autobiographical blogging, but another critical factor exacerbating their fictionality is memory. Sidonie Smith stated that memory is one of the necessary “fictions” of autobiography.⁴⁷ Critics of autobiography accept the idea that at least two “selves” are involved in writing about experiences: (1) the self at the time of the experience and (2) the self at the time of recording the experience, and the space between these allows for error. Scholars such as Annette Kuhn have argued for actually maximizing the distance between experience and interpretation of experience for those lacking power and normativity by reflecting and awakening critical consciousness. While increasing the space (both cognitive and temporal) between the experience and the recording of it is likely to decrease factual accuracy, Kuhn asserted such records are the only way to capture important truths about the lives of the disenfranchised.⁴⁸ Linda Anderson opined that memory is a space in which female autobiographers can remake the self. Mary Evans engaged with the problem of how women write a self-in-progress, which changes in intersubjective relation to the social environment; Evans found women’s self-writing to take surprisingly adaptable forms.⁴⁹

Alie Jones, a graphic designer who has included her family in most of her content on her blog *Delighted To Be*, has frequently revisited her experiences losing a newborn daughter to anencephaly. It seems that the role this experience has played in her identity has evolved. An early post detailing the death emphasizes Jones’s sense of powerlessness and intense grief:

Anencephalic babies don’t cry; instead, they squeak. When I hear squeaking baby toys I am reminded of her. But even though because of her condition she wasn’t

⁴⁷ Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography, Marginality, and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 45.

⁴⁸ Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (New York: Verso, 1995).

⁴⁹ Linda Anderson, *Women and Autobiography in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1997); Mary Evans, “Extending Autobiography: A Discussion of Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*,” in *Feminism and Autobiography*, ed. Cosslett, Lury, and Summerfield, 76–88.

supposed to feel (or cry), Amelia cried in those last moments of her life. She cried out, and there was nothing, absolutely nothing I could do as her mother to help and comfort her. I felt so helpless and alone. I felt weak and useless. I was angry. When my sweet Amelia cried out in pain, I grieved and physically ached in ways I hope it [*sic*] never will again. I wept for a long time. A mixed array of pain, anger, joy, and love streamed down my face, soaking my shirt. It all had happened so fast and I wasn't ready for her life to be over. Her physical condition continued to deteriorate and my heart ached more and more for that which I was about to close. . . . As [my husband] Tyler and I sat across from one another with our hands clasped next to hers, her last breath dissolved and her beautiful spirit left this earth.⁵⁰

Jones continued to blog about this memory, and as the space between the experience and her act of remembering it increased, her perspective on the memory softened and she used different language to describe the emotions she experienced:

I remember when it was time to bring you home. I was frightened about the reality of losing you, and spent those precious moments walking a delicate balance of anxiety and joy that you were still with us. I struggled the most when you crossed the threshold into our home, for I knew we had entered sacred ground. You were home, with us, for the last time here on earth. I was heartbroken but understanding that though we had brought you to our home, it wasn't *your* home. You died in our arms just twelve hours later.⁵¹

With another increase in temporal space, Jones no longer recounted her emotional state at the time of her daughter's death but instead referenced the emotional state of remembering:

These are things I missed out on with Amelia. She was a newborn—*she came home with us*—yet she didn't get a nursery or a crib or diaper changes. Jack didn't even realize she was there, and then all of a sudden gone from our lives forever. And it's kind of unfair to me, when I think about it.⁵²

Most recently, Jones wrote about her emotional grief now juxtaposed with previous recollections. The original experience was the catalyst for each, but she no longer cited her initial intensity of grief as a core component of her identity:

It's a weird feeling, bringing your new baby to visit your dead baby. I don't know if it's bittersweet or happy or what. But I realized that it isn't as painful to visit her when I have a new babe in my arms. It broke me a little when I was newly pregnant and leaving her to move to San Diego last year, but now that Owen is here that pain

⁵⁰ Alie Jones, "Part-Four-and-a-Half," *Delighted to Be* (blog), October 4, 2012, <https://delightedtobe.com/2012/10/2695/>.

⁵¹ Alie Jones, "Happy Birthday, Baby Girl!," *Delighted to Be* (blog), August 27, 2013, <https://delightedtobe.com/2013/08/happy-birthday-baby-girl>.

⁵² Alie Jones, "A Lack of Feeling," *Delighted to Be* (blog), May 19, 2014, <https://delightedtobe.com/2014/05/a-lack-of-feeling>.

has subsided. I don't wish she were here instead of Owen anymore. I didn't go to the cemetery with the same family she left us with. I haven't forgotten her, but we've learned to live life without her.⁵³

It is not overly surprising that Jones' initial retelling of her emotional state at the time of the experience differs widely from her second retelling. Neither description is detailed enough to begin plumbing the depths of a trauma of the scale that Jones experienced. Both descriptions probably accurately describe certain facets of what her experience actually was, but neither captures the whole experience. The limitations of language are easy to acknowledge in such a case.

Death of the Autobiographical Blogger

Multiple selves are involved in the process of blogging, and all of them are difficult to delimit, though a blogger's use of them affects how she navigates privacy and disclosure in blogging. Roland Barthes explored issues of authorship in "Death of the Author,"⁵⁴ and Michel Foucault responded to these issues in his essay "What Is an Author?"⁵⁵ Both tackled the indeterminable actuality of an author as a separate entity from all of the factors, culture, experience, and context that inform the individual who writes a text. Barthes emphasized in particular the concept of the author in the mind of a reader of the text, whose only conceptualizations of the author come from the text itself. It is intriguing to explore Barthes' attempts to "liberate the text from interpretive tyranny" in the context of a text constructed by an author, often about the author and with a desired "definition of the situation" in mind. Barthes insisted that taking an author's intent into consideration when determining meaning in a text is problematic because a reader can never detect precisely what the author intended.

⁵³ Alie Jones, "A Family Picture," *Delighted to Be* (blog), December 9, 2012, <https://delightedtobe.com/2014/12/a-family-picture>.

⁵⁴ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *S/Z*, trans. R. Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966).

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, ed., *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977).

This assertion is certainly less true about blogs than about the types of texts Barthes spoke of. Blog authors have multiple opportunities to reassert their authorial authority and their desired interpretation of their text when readers present alternative interpretations. Compared to static texts, blogging allows for rapid and interactive dialogue between an author and a reader. Blog comments, the ability to revise published posts, and the ongoing nature of a blog as a series of posts allow for audiences to ask questions and authors to clarify intent in ways foreign to static published texts, though blogging still functions within the constraints of language and without physical presence.

Foucault's response to Barthes is perhaps more directly relatable to blog authorship, as Foucault explored the power of influence between language and the author, particularly the relationship between a text and its author, what he described as "the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and precedes it." The appreciable crux of Foucault's essay is that he sees the author's function as one that reveals a complex web of discursive practices. As these practices evolve and as new practices appear, the author's function necessarily reflects those changes. Thus, the author's function can be described in historically specific terms as a practice or group of practices. Foucault identified difficulties in separating the author's distinct bearing on text creation from the morass of experiences and enculturation that inform the author.

P. E. Raj explained Foucault's concern as being guided by Samuel Beckett's statement, "What matter who's speaking?" Raj defined the concern as regarding the void left by the "death" of the author in deconstructionism, a question of what delimits discourse so that it becomes recognized as having a certain value and status?⁵⁶ Foucault identified the author's function as an inherent characteristic of the created text, relevant despite, and yet congruent with, Barthes' death (or refutation) of the author-god function. The meanings of

⁵⁶ P. E. Raj, "Author and Text: Reading Michel Foucault's What Is an Author," *The Criterion: An International Journal in English* 3, no. 3 (2012), <http://www.the-criterion.com/V3/n3/Sept2012.pdf>.

authorship can vary widely among readers of a text, but rarely does the idea of who authored a text have no bearing on how it is read or interpreted.

Jakki Spicer, who explored the application of new criticism and deconstruction to autobiography, expatiated the implications of the “dead author” for a text presumably about the author, and expounded on the debate over the inevitable gap between reality and writing about reality. Spicer defined the problem of authorship and deconstructionism in autobiography as follows: “Although the *name* of the author influences the practice of all kinds of reading, in autobiography, the *figure* of the author, as a ghostly presence animating and providing the life for the text, has pressured reading practices in sometimes difficult and troubling ways. The figure of the author is the pivot around which questions of autobiography’s relation to or difference from fiction finally turn.” Spicer compared Paul de Man’s insistence on the fated inaccuracy of written accounts with James Olney’s rebuttal that truth is not the same thing as fact and that truth can be conveyed through writing even when facts are errant. She also quoted Philippe Lejeune’s riposte to de Man’s insistence that autobiography is inseparable from fiction:

We *indeed know* all this (that one is fooled if one believes “in the transparency of language, and in the existence of a complete subject who expresses himself through it,”) we are not so dumb, but, once this precaution has been taken, *we go on as if we did not know it*. Telling the truth about the self, constituting the self as a complete subject—it is a *fantasy*. In spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible, this in no way prevents it from existing. Perhaps, in describing it, I in turn took my desire for reality; but what I had wanted to do, was describe this *desire* in its reality, a reality shared by a great number of authors and readers.⁵⁷

There is no way for blog authors or blog readers to easily demarcate the “reality” from the fabrication in a blog post. Yet each group seems to acknowledge that both truth and fabrication exist in the text; consequently, each group finds ways to weave that recognition into expectations of the medium and interpretations of the text. Cosslett et al. described this

⁵⁷ Jakki Spicer, “The Author Is Dead, Long Live the Author: Autobiography and the Fantasy of the Individual,” *Criticism* (2005): 387–403.

phenomenon as navigating a “virtualized reality” that “bears the hallmarks of ‘the social’ and the kinds of people who are found in social life—it derives from ‘actual reality’ and it is used to manage ‘actual aspects’ of it and ‘actual people’ therein. Moreover, these virtualization processes change not only the *relationship* between what is real and what is false, but, as Baudrillard has pointed out, they also have shared perceptions of ‘what this *is*.’”⁵⁸

Because most blog writers are also blog readers, there is a pattern of reflecting on the understood fictionality, or at least limited perspective, of many blog texts. Jennifer Jones, whose blog *I Heart Organizing* focuses on home organization projects, described her perspective when reading other peoples’ blogs: “I can assume that they live an untouchably perfect life and carry negative feelings about myself and what I haven’t done, *or*, I can select to feel inspired by what they can do and have done and realize that the person writing the blog is sharing their happy moments too. And that they, just like the rest of us, have a personal side that they opt to keep private. That no matter how pretty a room is or how well dressed their children are, that no one lives a ‘perfect’ life.”⁵⁹

The dialectic between blogging women and their readers frequently involves the bloggers providing confessional disclosure of the edited and constructed nature of their autobiographical blog text. That level of disclosure in a public forum is often accompanied by fear and vulnerability. In a *Babble* article, Diana Stone described blogging’s capacity to function on a more intimate level when blog authors disclose more backstage processes:

This is how blogging can be. Friendships. Life. This is how they are *supposed* to be. We are there to be real with each other, to admit we don’t have it all together. There are times where bragging on a great day, or weeks, is part of that. Life doesn’t always suck. But sometimes it’s simply us being honest that sends the biggest impact. As hard as it is to do. I know, there are many times I keep the real bottled for fear of the

⁵⁸ Stanley, “From ‘Self-Made Women’ to ‘Women’s Made Selves?’” 51.

⁵⁹ Jennifer Jones, “Why IHeart Organizing and Thoughts on Perfection,” *iHeart Organizing* (blog), July 1, 2014, <http://iheartorganizing.blogspot.com/2014/07/why-iheart-organizing-and-thoughts-on.html>.

repercussions. It makes us vulnerable to people who want to critique and judge and keep up their own front of perfection.⁶⁰

Because there are so many cumulative degrees of separation between an autobiographical text and the reality or lived reality of the experiences chronicled, as well as between the interior self of the author and the perception of the author noted by a reader, very few experienced perusers of blogs expect high fidelity. Blog readers and blog authors alike are familiar with cognitive dissonance in dealing with these texts. Readers are aware that what they are reading is neither objective nor entirely “real.” Yet the blog posts are largely written and read as though they accurately capture both events and people: “We go on as if we do not know it.”⁶¹

Amid blog posts detailing things the bloggers do accomplish and experience, many authors occasionally interrupt themselves with a post or an aside about how the curated portrayals in the majority of blog posts are an incomplete picture of reality. Ree Drummond, the world-renowned *Pioneer Woman* blogger, has often posted quips such as the following:

“How do you get it all done?” I’ve been asked this question a few times. *“How do you maintain your website? Teach your kids school? Cook meals? Do laundry? Take photos? Work cattle? Write a cookbook? Find time to take a bath?”* First and foremost, these questions imply that I actually *do* get it all done, which couldn’t be farther from the truth. On any given day, I let about fourteen things slide (if I’m lucky). Fortunately, I’m a lifelong underachiever and am able to maintain a sense of peace about me despite my daily failures. But make no mistake: I do *not* get it all done. I have 57 loose ends swarming around my head as I write this . . . and they’re whispering acrid nothings into my ear.⁶²

Even bloggers attempting to achieve the utmost authenticity or candor find they have to edit their realities to fit into the medium of blogging. Blogs and individual posts are necessarily constructions, and they usually function as teleological ones—structured to make sense or use of the content. As social interactions increasingly move to online platforms,

⁶⁰ Diana Stone, “The Impact of Being Honest,” *Babble* (blog), 2012, <http://www.babble.com/pregnancy/the-impact-of-being-honest>.

⁶¹ Spicer, “The Author Is Dead, Long Live the Author,” 440–441.

⁶² Ree Drummond, “Ask Pioneer Woman: Single Question Edition,” *The Pioneer Woman* (blog), August 29, 2008, http://thepioneerwoman.com/blog/2008/08/ask_pioneer_woman_single_question_edition.

there is a widespread (and likely needed) tendency to clarify that what is included in blog and other social media posts is never an accurate portrayal of reality. Reality does not fit into any portrayal. Social media users have to proceed under Philippe Lejeune's pretext: recognizing that what they see is a construction but interacting with it as if it were reality.

In conclusion, considerable understanding of the creation of disclosive feminine blog content comes through serious consideration of it as an autobiographical text. Awareness of the cathartic teleological power of creating an autobiographical record, as well as the validation of an audience response to that record goes a long way to explain factors of women's disclosive blogging that are incompatible with social performance behavior models,. Consideration of the intricacies of disclosure, biography within autobiography, and the implicit fictionalities of autobiography, allows women's disclosive blogs to be seen as complex and valuable texts.

Chapter 3

Audience Subjectivities in Blogging

My personal trials and triumphs weren't beautiful or aspirational enough for my "lifestyle blog." According to whom? According to me. I now realize those experiences were some of the most beautiful moments of my life so far. So why not reconsider what it means to run a lifestyle blog? After all, lifestyle is—by definition—the way in which one chooses to live their life.

Kate Arends¹

In this chapter I argue that the perceived limitations of what women bloggers think their audiences want them to write about constrains their ability to purposefully self-identity as a woman or to write autobiographically. Women bloggers have special concerns about audience as they try to make their blogs meet both their own needs and the perceived desires of readers. Their blogs can become so much of a public space they give up their autonomy and authorship in favor of writing exclusively for what they think an audience wants. This is a key factor in many bloggers getting burned out: the extrinsic rewards are not worth it. One can't maintain a blog purely for these rewards. Extrinsic without intrinsic rewards is not a sustainable blogging practice. Genre theory helps to explain that the expectations of what women - what they think they are "allowed" to write about - can and do evolve. Genre theory also models how fluid this relationship between audience expectation and author's perception of it is and an understanding of this fluidity can help bloggers decide what they want to write about and be more purposeful in defining the parameters of their blog content. For example, rather than saying "I am going to be a design blogger so I have to do what has worked for other design bloggers," a woman blogger can say "I care deeply about how design affects my ability to function within given spaces and tasks. That's something I'd like to write about and build a community around. But I have other interests, passions, and

¹ Kate Arends, "What Do You Mean You're a Lifestyle Blogger?," *Wit and Delight* (blog), July 20, 2014, <http://witanddelight.com/2014/07/mean-youre-lifestyle-blogger/>.

concerns, and I know that these will evolve over time. How can I craft a platform that will allow for this evolution and thus be sustainable and fulfilling for me in the long run?”

In this chapter I will address how concerns about how other people will interact with and interpret the blog text informs the way women create that text. The nature of author/reader relationships in online mediums is constantly evolving, creating an added level of subjectivity and stress for blog authors. Concerns about audience are more immediate for female bloggers, for whom the makeup of her audience is more likely to change her writing decisions than it is to change a man's. As the make up of audiences, and those audience's relationship with the blog texts becomes more difficult to assess, bloggers will find that they cannot simultaneously place a premium on community building and privacy. I will discuss how the relationship between disclosure and perceived audience expectations, informs women's writing choices, as well as concerns about how children will interact with representations of themselves in the future. I will also address how written subjectivity is affected by monetization and sponsored content. Finally I will address the idea of genres in blogging, and suggest empowering ways for blogging women to conceive of and interact with them.

Audience Subjectivity

The presence of an active, current, and volitional audience inevitably impinges upon the scope of information a blogger can share in good conscience. David Brake interviewed a number of bloggers to determine their perceptions of their audiences and how the audiences inform the bloggers' writing. He found that bloggers struggled to aggregate meaningful data about who accessed their blogs and that most bloggers reconciled themselves to directing their writing toward a fictional ideal audience (yet another fictionality in blogging). The bloggers' perceptions of whether this audience comprised friends or strangers were primary

influences on the type of linguistic orientation, self-presentation practice, and disclosure the bloggers adopt.

While audience subjectivity is also of interest in traditional autobiography studies, the audiences considered are far less apt to interact with the author in immediate, consequential ways. In print autobiography, authors typically indicate they are worried about the impression a future reader may have of the authors. By contrast, in blogging, authors are worried about actively dialoguing with readers and commenters, as well as about the privacy and safety of themselves and their family members. Casual treatment of audience has more exigent consequences for bloggers, and bloggers who remain cognizant of readers outside of their ideal demographic are likely to prioritize safety and the public nature of their identity performance over concerns about full self-expression, authenticity, or identity construction.

Concern about blog audiences may develop into the author's acute awareness of the phenomenology of the audience. Bloggers who acknowledge that their content can be read and construed in a number of ways may be acutely aware of the potential for opposition from audience members; consequently, some bloggers choose not to share intimate parts of their lives and identities with a potentially contentious audience. Blogger Natalie Holbrook of *Hey Natalie Jean* has experienced some particularly intense verbal abuse from readers reacting to her disclosivity, and she has blogged about how the abuse has made it difficult for her to remain secure in her sense of identity and to fulfill her impulse to disclose when she has also felt the impulse to protect. Holbrook has also discussed her struggle to make intentional choices about how she allows abusive responses to affect her choices about self-representation:

In the middle of a lot of online scrutiny, and in the beginning stages of writing this book that *I just knew* was going to be torn to pieces by those who truly wanted me to suffer, I broke. I broke down. . . . I was a hollow version of myself. It was bad. I saw doctors, I saw therapists, I saw psychiatrists, I saw specialists. It took *a lot* of work. I am glad for it though, and I am now a hilariously strong person because of it. I stared into the eye of the most frightened parts of myself and the most awful people on the

Internet, and I decided to become brave. I decided to believe that what they were doing in those forums was not “entertainment,” not “critique,” and not “justified.” I decided to face reality and stop trying to find the good in those that perpetrated it. I had to believe that I was worth more than that, and that none of their garbage about me was true. And you guys, I am. I now know I am worth *way* more than that.²

Social media landscapes and their audiences are always in flux. Even loyal audiences change the way they interact with blogs; therefore, most bloggers identify their relationship with their readers as perpetually mutable. Nearly all respondents to my survey indicated they had positive relationships with their blog readers, though it appears the respondents meant they had positive *interactions* with their blog readers—in other words, only readers who reached out through comments or other means were considered. A number of respondents discussed the difficulty of navigating audience engagement and retention as new technologies and programs change the way readers interact with blogs. One respondent noted, “I think Pinterest kind of killed the personal connection, now you hear ‘I found it on pinterest’ not, ‘my favorite blogger.’”³

Concerns about privacy, reader retention, and the monetization that is dependent upon reader retention loom large for bloggers who decide to monetize their blogs. A number of survey participants noted an overall shift in how bloggers need to approach their blogs as sponsored content has become increasingly prevalent and audience engagement has become much more difficult to gauge. Participants noted that “most people don’t comment anymore” or “I don’t get comments on my blog anymore so it is more of a one way relationship.” Grace Bonney of *Design Sponge* described that change as follows:

It started as a little whisper last year. *Are people commenting on your posts anymore?* And then those whispers found other whispers from trusted blogging friends to join. *Oh they’re not? Yeah, mine either. It’s like people just stopped talking.*

Last year seemed like the year that comments died (RIP, comments). From the newest to the oldest blog, comment sections started to wither and disappear. But for a

² Natalie Holbrook, “In Berlin . . . a Post about Haters,” *Hey Natlie Jean* (blog), April 29, 2015, http://www.heynataliejean.com/2015/04/in-berlin-post-about-haters_29.html.

³ See the appendix for the survey results.

lot of people, traffic and readership weren't disappearing as dramatically as comments. So what explained the change? . . . Without noticing it, a lot of us were experiencing the huge tidal shift in the way readers were engaging with blogs. After years of having the luxury of running websites that were the sole place to comment, participate and engage on a certain topic, we were no longer the only outlet. Social media like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest offered new options for people.⁴

Bonney articulated a concern widely held among bloggers: that the nature of the blogger/reader relationship is constantly evolving and the means of monitoring and maintaining that relationship are changing as well. Maintaining an awareness of the shifting nature of audience engagement is an added subjective layer and stress in the identity performance of bloggers.

Audience and Intersubjectivity

Whereas male autobiographical writing lends itself to a self-contained subjectivity, where all thoughts and rationales are treated as intrinsic and the audience is assumed to be a normative copy of the self, female autobiographical writing tends to be classified as intersubjective, as the presence of others—biographical subjects, audience, and their sundry subjectivities—more deeply informs the framing of the narrative. The way that relationality with audience affects bloggers' disclosure is particularly applicable as we examine the way women conceive of and perform in their blogging spaces.

Younbo Jung, Hayeon Song, and Peter Vorderer wrote, "The willingness to self-disclose in personal blogs violates traditional theories of interpersonal communication."⁵ The scholars were primarily referencing penetration theory, which posits that communication becomes more intimate as relational closeness develops over time.⁶ A great deal of disclosive

⁴ Bonney, Grace. 2014. "State of the Blog Union: How the Blogging World Has Changed." *Design Sponge* (blog), January 28th. <http://www.designsponge.com/2014/01/state-of-the-blog-union-how-the-blogging-world-has-changed.html>

⁵ Younbo Jung, Hayeon Song, and Peter Vorderer, "Why Do People Post and Read Personal Messages in Public? The Motivation of Using Personal Blogs and Its Effects on Users' Loneliness, Belonging, and Well-Being," *Computers in Human Behavior* (2012): 1626–1633.

⁶ I. Altman and D. A. Taylor, *Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships* (Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973).

blogging seems incompatible with this theory, as blogs manage to be both an intimate and a public space for their authors and the contents of blogs generally remain open to public consumption. Gunter suggested that the enterprise of blogging inherently quells the distinction between public and private lives and that as the medium has evolved it has become an increased point of compromise for those who navigate it, especially disclosive blogging women.⁷

In many ways, blogs and other online content have resulted in the kind of reproducibility that Walter Benjamin asserted is a potentially useful development of art and expressive mediums. However, just as Benjamin proposed that film and photography led to the decline of the autonomous aesthetic experience, so too has the technological availability of blogging and social media led to a decline in autonomous intimacy with authors.⁸ In an era when everyone from A-list celebrities to middle schoolers are steadily posting personal experiences and thoughts on the Web, conversant relationships become more difficult to delineate. More than one blogger has lamented that those who read her blog know more about her than do her friends and family.

Sheila, blogging syllogisms about food and culture on her blog *Love and Wild Honey*, expressed concern about subjectivity and disclosure:

We live imbrued in a voyaristic [*sic*] society. We thrive (self included) off of getting a glimpse into the minutae [*sic*] of everyone's lives. . . . For myself, this grew into an increasing want to see, "am I alone?" The beginnings of this initially wonderful way of seeing that others did in fact share in the struggles we share was beautiful. But that is changing now. Our thirst has escalated and it seems that many of us cannot live without a glimpse into the worlds of others wether [*sic*] to validate our very being or to condemn those in an attempt to make ourselves feel better. . . . And this makes a writer wonder where should the line be drawn? I have no answers.⁹

⁷ Barrie Gunter, "Blogging—Private Becomes Public and Public Becomes Personalised," *Aslib Proceedings* 61, no. 2 (2009): 120–126. doi:10.1108/00012530910946875.

⁸ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: Norton, 2001), 1051–1071.

⁹ Sheila Applegate, "On Mystery, the Hermit Life, and the Pomegranate," *Love and Wild Honey* (blog), March 15 2015, <http://www.loveandwildhoney.com/archives/2378>.

Sheila was contemplating the relationship between blog authors and readers, as well as expressing concern about the vulnerability of authors in the face of unsympathetic readers. She also articulated the commonly expressed benefit of socialization and support that can come from a sympathetic reader community. The role such a community plays in a blogger's disclosure decisions varies, but, generally, concerns about building a sympathetic community and about maintaining privacy are inversely related.

The reflections on the community-building potential of blogging were positive among the participants in my survey.¹⁰ As one participant explained regarding the members of her blogging community, "They have jumped from being names on my computer to faces around my kitchen table." Another participant noted, "I genuinely feel encouragement from most of them." An additional participant noted that her relationship with her readers is "VERY personal. I see people on the street that I've never met and they hug me and say they feel like they know me. They hug my daughter and tell her that they love her. That they love us. Tears. The whole 9 yards!"

While there is obviously a large scope of audience subjectivity in blog writing, most first-person bloggers (who acknowledge both the presence of their own self and the selfhood of their readers) appear to write with a target audience in mind. Certainly, the author's expected audience influences the quantity and depth of disclosure. The author's consideration of the target audience also informs style and content decisions, including voice, presentation, and formality.

Eric Baumer, Mark Sueyoshi, and Bill Tomlinson explored the ways that blog readers feel they are a part of the blogs they read. The researchers found that "differences in expectations for readers can be traced back to their perception of the blogger or blog, and to the reader's motivation for reading." Baumer, Sueyoshi, and Tomlinson also discovered that

¹⁰ Such an attitude was expected, given that most of the participants were recruited from a blogging conference and were part of a blogging community.

over time, blog readers develop a committed relationship to the blogs they follow. “Some respondents felt that they were part of a blog without ever making their individual presence known to the blogger or other readers. Being part of a blog is more than consistent readership, a sense of community, or a feeling of connectedness, although it includes all those things.”¹¹

When asked about their relationships with their blog readers, the participants in my survey gave a range of answers, including the following:

- “Most of them are people I know in some way. As the blogosphere and the social media world gets bigger, I interact with most of the people who read my blog in some way, even if it just means we follow each other on Twitter.”
- “I have many close readers that I correspond with regularly, but I have a much larger population that reads my blog and I do not have any interaction with.”
- “I would say I don’t really have a strong relationship with my blog readers. Most people don’t comment anymore.”

Most of these blog authors seemed to gauge audience investment based on blog comments. Blog comments are a blogger’s only qualitative measure of audience engagement, but the studies by Jung et al. and Baumer et al. suggest that a reader’s investment in a blog is often unrelated to the reader’s likelihood of commenting.¹²

There is, therefore, no accurate way for a blogger to conceive of the audience that will read the blog or understand the way in which the audience will engage with the blog, and in an era of feed aggregators and mobile devices, comments are increasingly hard to elicit. Thus, the idea of “audience” is increasingly present in the process of blog authorship, even as

¹¹ Eric Baumer, Mark Sueyoshi, and Bill Tomlinson, *Exploring the Role of the Reader in the Activity of Blogging*, ed. Mary Czerwinski, Arnie Lund, and Desney Tan. (New York: ACM, 2008).

¹² Y. B. Jung, H. Song, and P. Vorderer, “Why Do People Post and Read Personal Messages in Public? The Motivation of Using Personal Blogs and Its Effects on Users’ Loneliness, Belonging, and Well-Being,” *Computers in Human Behavior* (2012): 1626–1633; Baumer, Sueyoshi, and Tomlinson, *Exploring the Role of the Reader*.

the identity of that audience becomes increasingly nebulous. As blog audiences grow, blog authors are increasingly aware of the audiences they are addressing (and bloggers often pointedly address their audiences in their writing), even as they are less able to distinguish the identities of their readers or the relationships their readers have with their blogs. A number of practices, such as reader surveys, have been implemented to address this conundrum, but bloggers generally rely upon active audience feedback, meaning their accuracy in capturing the scope of the readership is delimited.

Most of the bloggers who participated in my survey were reticent to explore how audience affects their blogging. Most responses were along the lines of “not at all”—an answer that is more likely the result of an unwillingness to plumb those depths in a short survey than of an actual assessment of how audience informs subjectivity. But some participants expressed opinions such as, “My readers are quite kind and loving. If anything it has made me more comfortable with sharing my experiences, but other than that I don’t let it alter how I post.” Such a response indicates an underlying relationship between the presence of the audience and the self that is performed on the blog.

Awareness of the ambiguous audience markedly informs the voice and performance enacted by a blogger. This phenomenon is perhaps more pronounced among female bloggers, for whom social interaction and interpersonal relationships hold increased value. The audience’s presence becomes an inherent characteristic of the way the author perceives her identity. There is likely a connection between the way Kirsten of the blog *Tollipop* begins every post with “Dear Reader. . . .” and the way she remarks on her uniquely feminine measures of self, which are inclusive of rather than differentiated from the identities of others. For example, in one post she noted her daughter “Caroline is a delight. She’s growing up, still very sweet, and filled with her own quiet passions for life. She shares many of my interests; I don’t know if she comes by them naturally, or if it is more a reflection of wanting

my approval. I remember having many “favorites” in common with my dad, simply because I wanted to love the same things he did.”¹³ Kirsten’s sense of self when blogging includes the presence of the reader, and she references the subjectivity of both her daughter and her father. She uses those relationships as the substance of her self-ness in her blogging.

Intersubjectivity between “Self” and “Others”

When asked about whether and how their families were represented on their blogs, the respondents to my survey provided a range of answers that ultimately fall into three categories. The first category is the decision to include family members in blog content: “I do because they are my life.” The second category is a concern for privacy and autonomy: “I do include my children, but I recognize that this is an unsustainable model if I don’t do it carefully. I talk more about parenting my children than about them in detail. I’ve also started talking about them less and less and focusing more on myself so I don’t have to deal with consent.” The third category is a concern for audience expectations and blog genre or type: “I do a weekly photography post in which my husband and kids show up in photos from time to time but they aren’t the focus of my blog” and “I used to [include my family in my blog content] a lot more but have switched from lifestyle to more diy, décor, and photography.”

Concerns about genre and audience expectations are related to the unremitting advice shared at the January 2015 Altitude Summit Blog conference: “Ladies, nobody cares about your kids.”¹⁴ The pressure to remain “on brand” and to appeal to the broadest audience possible are profound influences on for-profit blogging (and other blogging approaches that prioritize audience aggregation), but even the bloggers who gave this advice *do* include spouses and/or children in blog posts and Instagram feeds, so the heart of this advice is apparently not to quell the urge to represent family but to temper it. In contrast to this

¹³ Kirsten, “Pink Week,” *Tollipop* (blog), March 11, 2015, <http://tollipop.typepad.com/tollipop/2015/03/pink-week.html>.

¹⁴ I attended this conference, held in Salt Lake City, Utah. Among the bloggers who gave this advice are Jordan Ferney of ohhappyday.com, and Andi Teggart of polishmycrown.com.

prevailing advice, one of the survey participants wrote, “I plan to include my kids, kids sell! Haha! That sounds terrible, but when multiple blogging friends had babies, their stats went up. I would never have a baby just for blogging or have that even be a main reason whatsoever, but I would love to include them as they are a huge part of my life. Numbers going up is a added bonus.”

This survey response indicates that it is socially expected for women to include their families in their blogging and that doing so can even lead to rewards when done in a way that appeals to a large enough audience.¹⁵ In this sense, autobiographical blogging has the potential for universal appeal while also carrying the danger of “navel-gazing” that surfaces in autobiographical and essayistic documentary modes (e.g., the work of Ross McElwee or Alan Berliner).¹⁶ Women regularly seek a balance between the universal and the personal in the tone and content of their life blogs. However, most women believe that such a balance is evasive.

In Cosslett et al.’s attempt to demonstrate the “intersubjectivity” of all autobiographical writing—women’s in particular—the scholars called attention to “the ways in which all selves are structured by interactions with others, and . . . the ways in which the self is framed and created by the social.”¹⁷ The inevitable presence of “others” in one’s life writing is a contested ethical topic. Some, such as G. Thomas Couser, have explored this arena by framing their discussion on a concern for the well-being of biographical subjects within autobiographical texts. Couser argued for what he called “transactional visibility,” the full disclosure of interests that requires the author to carefully and publicly analyze the costs

¹⁵ As an example, a June 2, 2015, blog post of a family photo shoot by Naomi Davis of lovetaza.com generated over sixty comments. The following comment is representative: “These photos are SO stunning and wonderful! Beautiful shots of a beautiful family! I’ve been following your blog since before E was born, and it’s been so amazing to grow up with you guys and feel like we’re all your friends through your writing and pictures. Thank you for letting us in on a little piece of your everyday life!” (Molly, comment on Naomi Davis, “Family Photos!” *Love Taza* [blog], June 2, 2015, <http://lovetaza.com/2015/06/family-photos/>.)

¹⁶ Broderick Fox, “Movements and Modes,” *Documentary Media: History, Theory, Practice* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2010), 40–44.

¹⁷ Cosslett, Lury, and Summerfield, *Feminism and Autobiography*, 7.

and benefits to publication,¹⁸ but that practice is less straightforward in the context of mothers blogging about their children.

At what locus does such a disclosure become necessary or even useful? Couser wrote largely about high-stakes disclosure of information with marked and undeniable power to have social consequences (e.g., imprisonment or loss of employment). Mothers blogging about their families show concern for the well-being of those represented in the blogs, but most of the decisions about inclusion and disclosure do not have obvious or immediate social consequences. Blogging mothers trying to navigate the construction of autobiographical writing are often concerned with the unintended and unforeseeable consequences of referencing family members, particularly how children will feel about the way they were represented once they are older.

Carolyn Kraus wrote about the unintended consequences of autobiography: “Reading about themselves in print is rarely the experience that people expect it to be.” Kraus also explained, “Subjects may perceive a gap between what they meant and how their exact words sound on the page. Perhaps those characters bearing their names are people they cannot recognize, or people who come to stand—in the stories—for ideas they never thought about.”¹⁹ Many mother bloggers are concerned about the inevitable gap between the way their children are portrayed and the more complicated realities of their lives, but the relative nascence of the medium leaves these bloggers without many templates for how children will grow into their representations constructed online. Further, most blogging mothers have a limited understanding of new media theories and insight into what practices will prove most problematic later on.

¹⁸ G. Thomas Couser, *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

¹⁹ Carolyn Wells Kraus, “On Hurting People’s Feelings: Journalism, Guilt, and Autobiography,” *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* (2003): 283–297.

Most bloggers who completed my survey expressed some measure of concern about their blogging behavior in relation to their own privacy and that of family members. The respondents seemed to be striving to find ways to write meaningfully about their lives without violating whatever boundaries for appropriateness they had set for themselves. This concern was particularly prevalent among blogging mothers of children with disabilities. Ashlee Marie, who primarily blogs about baking on her blog *Ashlee Marie*, described her choices regarding how she writes about her family on her blog in a blog post:

I get asked about the Aspergers a lot. I get it, people are curious, and I'm happy to talk about it. I know that people often hear about my life story . . . and they either feel sorry for me or sometimes are in awe of me. . . . I've been asked why I don't blog about Aspergers. . . . After all it's a hot button word, and IF I blogged about aspergers my blog could BLOW UP, I'd be huge and make so much more money than I do with my current blog. But the thing is . . . my REAL life, day in and day out, day and night, is all about my kids/husband and aspergers. It's like the 8th member of our family, always there. I started really pursuing blogging as a break. As my own thing, developing my own talents and focusing, selfishly, on me for a few hours a day/week/month. I know that my balance sometimes get's [*sic*] off but know if this "job" of mine started to hurt my family I would drop it in a second. I love what I do, and the joy and sanity it brings me, but not more than my family.²⁰

Another survey participant expressed a similar sentiment: "I don't like showing any negative parts about my son's autism although there are [negative parts] because I feel like I want less people to be afraid because he really is a blessing but [I] have [a] hard time sharing that." In most cases, blogging mothers are staunch advocates of their children's well-being and are quick to be concerned about any negative impact their blogging may have on their children. But they also find it difficult to write about their own lives without including the parenting that takes up a considerable amount of their time, energy, and focus.

The tendency of some women to view their children (especially young children) as a natural extension of the self is sometimes evident in word choice. For example, female bloggers are notorious for using the royal "we." Intersubjectivity is also sometimes evident in

²⁰ Ashlee Marie Prisbey, "My Mommy Style—Choosing Joy," *Ashlee Marie* (blog), November 10, 2014, <http://ashleemarie.com/mommy-style-choosing-joy>.

female bloggers' projection of self onto the child or of the child onto self, with the absence of "we." This absent presence is demonstrated in a post by Caroline Drake, whose lifestyle blog *Armelle* serves as an adjunct to her jewelry business. In the post, she wrote about setting up an online shop for her seven-year-old son to sell kandamas, and she never once referenced herself or her own participation in this process—everything was written as though she were writing about her son's independent actions and decisions. For example, she wrote that "my little entrepreneur is so excited to be up and running selling his favorite toy." Assuming most seven-year-olds are not sourcing product or setting up online shops and business accounts without considerable adult aid, it appears she omitted her own efforts from her narrative.²¹ The causes of this kind of lapsed identity writing are enigmatic, but they may relate to the fact that many women express that their previous identities are swallowed up in a sense of motherhood, including the needs of young children and running a household. It seems likely that such a shift—and perhaps crisis—in identity perception would manifest in written identity constructions.

These records can, therefore, become formative in the way women process their internal identity conception, and creating these records can play a role in how women organize their identity constructions. The records and constructions of a woman's autobiographical blogging can also affect the identity constructions and perceptions of others. Because few children maintain an independent record of the family experiences that blogging mothers record, the blog texts can influence the development of social memory in both the author-mothers and their children. Robyn Fivush, Jessica Mcdermott Sales, and Jennifer Bohanek studied the narratives that mothers and their children told of stressful events in their collective past. The researchers found that "mothers told more coherent narratives, both negative and positive, saturated with more mental state language (cognitive processing and

²¹ Caroline Armelle Drake, "Black Rhino Toys," *Armelle* (blog), December 18, 2014, <http://www.armelleblog.com/2014/12/black-rhino-toys.html>.

use of emotion words) than those of children” and that “children who engage in co-constructed narratives of stressful events with mothers who include more explanation and emotion display better coping skills and fewer internalising and externalising problems.”²² Thus, the way a child is exposed to the narration of a lived event can affect the way the child conceives of and remembers it. But children are still referring to a narrative in which they are a biographical rather than autobiographical subject, and the emotional responses that they come to associate with the experience may not correlate with their lived experience at the time of the event. In some cases the record may diverge significantly from children’s experience, and they may develop a resistance to the record’s account.

A relatively mild instance of this phenomenon is evident in another post from *Armelle*, Caroline Drake’s blog. For a post sponsored by a clothing company, she dressed her children in pajamas from the sponsor and photographed them decorating a Christmas tree. Her photography was heavily styled and the children appeared to be posed and directed, showing no signs of candidness. However, in her post she wrote, “I decided to let the kids have free reign of the tree this year. I didn’t touch a single ornament, and wanted to see what they would come up with. I think they did a pretty good job. I can’t decide whether I’ll fix it later or not. Wink. . . . Of course, before I knew it the kids broke out in a game of jump rope with the tinsel, and tie up sister.”²³ The incongruity between what she suggested in the narrative (that she was candidly observing spontaneous action) and what the photographs suggested was the likely experience (that she was styling specific shots and directing action to some extent) may present a direct challenge to her children when they encounter the post in the future, depending on the extent to which they remember the experience on their own versus the extent to which the blog post functions as their memory of the experience.

²² Robyn Fivush, Jessica Mcdermott Sales, and Jennifer G. Bohanek, “Meaning Making in Mothers’ and Children’s Narratives of Emotional Events,” *Memory* (2008): 579–594.

²³ Caroline Armelle Drake, “Trimming the Tree with Winter Water Factory,” *Armelle* (blog), November 28, 2014, <http://www.armelleblog.com/2014/11/trimming-tree-with-winter-water-factory.html>.

While many blogging mothers are concerned about how they represent their children because of unseen or unsympathetic audiences, fewer of these authors express concern about how the representations of their children and their children's interactions with those representations will affect the children over time. It might be empowering for mothers to consider their role as the narrators of their children as biographical subjects, as well as the role the mothers' writing and representations may play in their children's identity conceptions, construction, and performance in the future. The question of mothers' teleological role is often dismissed because of protectionism but has the potential to empower blogging mothers to make intentional and constructive choices.

Monetization

When bloggers enter the realm of sponsored content, their audience subjectivity becomes doubly complicated. The potentially contradictory interests of audience and sponsor both influence how and how much the blogger presents and expresses herself. A post on the blog of sisters Emma Chapman and Elsie Larson, *A Beautiful Mess*, described the process of contracting to create sponsored content:

Now, it can be argued as soon as money enters the door all authenticity goes out the window. But ultimately, I think that's up to the blogger. It can be true, but it doesn't have to be. It's your blog, so it's your terms. . . . We get every kind of company inquiring about our [sponsorship] program. . . . I have a pretty simple filtering process for our sponsored content inquiries. 1. Is it a brand [we] like? We will not work with a brand we're not into. Simple as that. Aside from it feeling super shady to write, you guys are too smart for that. We would justifiably get called out immediately. 2. Does it fit our content? . . . We won't invent a whole new feature for a sponsor. We have to design features around readers, not sponsors. 3. Do they actually want what we offer? . . . Often we get requests to do things we just don't and won't offer. . . . If you're a blogger considering sponsored content, I can't stress enough not to back down. If you don't stand up for your blog and your brand, sponsors will definitely overstep and drive readers away. It's your blog. You call the shots.²⁴

²⁴ Trey George, "Sponsored Posts," *A Beautiful Mess* (blog), May 1, 2014, <http://www.abeautifulmess.com/2014/05/hi-there-trey-here-the-ad-guy-so-we-just-put-out-our-blog-life-e-course-and-being-our-ad-guy-i-wrote-a-few-sessions-on-sp.html>.

This post also illustrates a tension between the interests of blogging women and how they attempt to reconcile the interests in a way that meets the women's creative, autobiographical, and social needs. While monetization tends to emphasize the public aspects of a blog, few women would be motivated to maintain a blog if the more private facets were not present. Most female bloggers are motivated long-term by intrinsic rewards inherent in the act of blogging even when also pursuing extrinsic rewards such as monetization.

When a blogger chooses monetization through sponsored content, an understanding of genre becomes important in defining the blogger's parameters of available services and determining how best to incorporate sponsored content without compromising the desired definition of the situation the blogger is establishing with her audience. One respondent to my survey said, "If someone approaches me to write about something I wouldn't normally write about I usually turn it down. I want my blog to be a fun place to visit, not a constant commercial." While it would be easy to posit a Marxist refutation of the authenticity of a blog with commercial interests, the fact remains that most of the women participating in monetized blogging believe they can monetize without compromising the integrity of their online identities or their blog texts.

Adapting sponsored content has the potential to be more complicated for blogging women engaging in other gendered blogging behaviors. Because women tend to write more disclosively and with a more overt and present identity, there is more conflation of the author's identity and blog content. Such is often true for both writers and readers of blogs. Introducing sponsored content, therefore, can have more social bearing and ramifications for a blogging woman. This circumstance and the responsibility bloggers feel regarding it are apparent in a Keurig-sponsored post on Gabrielle Blair's blog *Design Mom*; numerous readers posted negative comments about the environmental ramifications of the product she was endorsing in the post. Blair responded with, "I'm truly sorry. I know zero about coffee

makers and had no idea Keurig had eco issues. You may not believe me but I'm seriously an idiot about all things coffee! But that's not an excuse, it's my blog, and I should have done more research. I've written to Keurig for a response."²⁵

Based on studying 177 bloggers in 2011, Liao, Liu, and Pi concluded that “for ordinary bloggers, blogging is a reliable tool to ensure that an inner group of people who they care about can have an easy way of keeping in contact with them.”²⁶ However, many bloggers concur that such is no longer the case. Casual, relationship-maintaining content has largely moved to other social mediums, such as Facebook and Instagram, that require less administrative effort, and blogging has become an increasingly audience-building endeavor. In 2012 and 2013, as casual bloggers were migrating to other platforms, masses of bloggers were striving to build monetized blogs—and the sizeable audiences required to sustain them. Jenny Komenda, a blogger of high-impact DIY interior design projects at *Little Green Notebook*, explained the motivation for this focus on monetization:

There is usually sort of a turning point when a blogger can start to feel like what they have is more like a business and less like a hobby. For some, this is when the sparkle of blogging starts to fade because it is easy to get caught in the weeds of the business/administrative side of things. I don't think this is a job a person can do unless they are passionate about the subject matter. That said, it can get hard to dedicate the time necessary to maintain something that's just a hobby. Eventually it needs to make financial sense too.²⁷

Komenda described a common turning point for blogging women: they realize that for their blogging enterprise to be feasible given the amount of time, money, and energy required, their perceptions of the enterprise being more private must switch to being more public.

Grace Bonney of *Design Sponge*, the grand-dame of design bloggers, also discussed the need for the time-intensive activity of blogging to make financial sense:

²⁵ Gabrielle Blair, “A Coffee Maker—Even for Non-Coffee Drinkers!,” *Design Mom* (blog), April 29, 2015, <http://www.designmom.com/2015/04/a-coffee-maker-even-for-non-coffee-drinkers/#comments>.

²⁶ H. L. Liao, S. H. Liu, and S. M. Pi, “Modeling Motivations for Blogging: An Expectancy Theory Analysis,” *Social Behavior and Personality* (2011): 261.

²⁷ Jenny Komenda, “Blogging As A Career,” *Little Green Notebook* (blog), July 27, 2011, <http://littlegreennotebook.blogspot.com/2011/07/blogging-as-career.html>.

Some people diversified and taught classes or wrote books, but most of us build our homes on the same platforms [blogging] that ended up sinking home magazines in print. And like them, that toppled and changed last year (2013). . . . the online ad industry was so flooded with so many options that they gained much greater control over the market. Rates dropped dramatically and some of the major ad agencies that support blogs stopped selling traditional banner ads (those things you see blinking on the right side of everyone’s screens) entirely. They were replaced with what is now referred to as “native advertising”—otherwise known as sponsored content. Those posts that people like me railed against and swore to never do were now the only option. Well, the only *advertising* option. . . . Bloggers had to choose quickly whether they would accept sponsored content or downsize quickly.²⁸

Based on this perspective, sponsored posts, such as those by Caroline Armelle mentioned in chapter 2, often must be part of a blogger’s performance if the blogger wants or needs to pursue monetization.

Perceptions of Genre and Audience Affecting Blogging Behavior

Male and female bloggers alike seem to assume that genre and generic norms or codes are contracted parameters for the reader/writer dialectic of blog texts. Tips for bloggers tend to include “create unique, valuable, original content”²⁹ and the contradictory “your audience should know what to expect from your blog.”³⁰ All authorly concerns about blog types and genres center on audience reception, aggregation, and retention. When bloggers are motivated by profit and/or social capital, they decide what types of content to create, what voice to use, and what level of disclosivity to employ largely based on their perceptions of what tactics other bloggers are using to achieve the desired audience results and relationships. The perceived relationship between a blogger and her audience, combined with social currents informing this relationship, influence how women engage in blogging and the extent to which they perceive their blogs to be private or public spaces. Thus, the private/public

²⁸ Grace Bonney, “State of the Blog Union: How the Blogging World Has Changed,” *Design Sponge* (blog), January 31, 2014, <http://www.designsponge.com/2014/01/state-of-the-blog-union-how-the-blogging-world-has-changed.html>.

²⁹ Regina Anaejionu, “Be Epic. Be You.,” *By Regina* (blog), January 6, 2014, <http://byregina.com/be-epic-be-you/>.

³⁰ Annetta Powell, “Why Consistency Is Key for Your Blogging Success,” *Annetta Powell* (blog), April 2015, <http://www.annetapowell.com/consistency-blog-success/>.

paradox of blogging informs how women perceive their audiences in gender-conscious ways and how these perceptions affect blogging behavior.

In March 2015, Kate Baer posted on her blog, *The Life and Writings of Kate Baer* “Blogging has changed a lot over these four years. Personal narrative blogs have been replaced with niche blogs. . . . Readers, including me, skirt to and from blogs so quickly that it’s hard to continue any sort of story, making it necessary to compose essays that can stand alone.”³¹ Blog authors seeking to increase blog traffic and loyal audiences are trying to balance the personal with the universal. A blog post is expected to be a self-contained entity with value for a broad audience, but it is also intended to be unique and personal enough to endear a new reader to the author and thus to begin as many new author-reader relationships as possible.

What bloggers consistently refer to as niche blogging can be understood as writing with the intent to adhere to a blog topic, type, or genre. There seems to be an understanding that audiences are far more loyal to the genre or topic than they will ever be to an individual blog author. David Auerbach described the situation on his blog *Waggish* thus:

Blogging remains a lot more like journalism than it does any other format. Journalism shares with blogs the first two constraints mentioned above. Individual pieces of work are deprioritized (I can never remember what a given person ever won the Pulitzer *for*), and articles vanish into the past day by day. . . .

It’s difficult to see how they fit into genres within the blog world. If most entries are not seen as discrete . . . , but as part of a continuum, what does that say for what kind of work can emerge?

But, you say, the *authors* of these blogs are distinct and discrete. Even ignoring the collaborative aspect of blogs, I don’t think this quite holds true. Blogs are not *content-focused*, in that the content rolls by too quickly to be lasting. But nor are they *personality-focused*.

Auerbach insisted on the replaceability, and even interchangeability, of blog authors within a genre. He did not deny that personality and disclosure are factors in an author’s success in

³¹ Kate Baer, “Four Years of Writing on the Internet,” *The Life and Writings of Kate Baer* (blog), March 10, 2015, <http://www.kbaer.com/2015/03/10/four-years-of-writing-on-the-internet/>.

building an audience, but he insisted that blog audiences read specific blogs because of the blog topics, not the authors' personalities. He arrived at the following conclusion:

Blogs, therefore, are topic focused. (And by topic I effectively mean the definable gestalt of the blog.) Individual content matters less in a blog than sticking to a consistent topic over time. . . . To put it another way, it was up to the individual (consumer) to distinguish what variations they preferred, because the level of homogeneity was so high. And so it is with any given blog, or even with a blog genre. The difference is that the medium makes it that much more difficult to *ever* separate out individual works for praise, and so the gestalt is left to stand on its own."³²

Auerbach articulated a blog-audience phenomenon that many bloggers seem to embrace. These bloggers believe that audiences are more interested in the blog category than in the bloggers' autobiographical narratives; thus, these bloggers make a cognitive switch to conceive of their blogs as much more public spaces. In many ways, these blogs begin to belong to their audiences as much as to their authors.

Syntactic Expectations of the Audience and Semantic Signals in the Text

When bloggers are concerned about reader retention, they are likely to be concerned about keeping their blog content within the parameters of the type (or gestalt) that they perceive their readers are expecting. Several participants in my survey discussed unwritten laws of genre conformity. One respondent asserted, "I would never post a recipe on my blog because it doesn't fit my classification." This concern about audience expectation is reminiscent of Goffman's social organization, with social actors striving to keep their performance within the limits of mutually understood and expected norms. However, bloggers are not necessarily doing so to avoid embarrassment but to build and retain an audience over time.³³

³² David Auerbach, "Thoughts on Genre: Blogs and Genre," *Waggish* (blog), July 11, 2005, <http://www.waggish.org/2005/thoughts-on-genre-blogs-and-genre/>.

³³ This idea is supported by common advice such as, "Nowadays the quality of your content and how you stick to your theme or message is what matters the most to intuitive search engines like Google. Deliver good content that stays on topic and is enjoyable to read, and that's really enough to get found." (Yemina Gonzales, "How to Start a Blog and Get People to Read It," *Creating Beautiful Empires* (blog), April 1, 2015, <http://www.creatingbeautifulpires.com/how-to-start-a-blog-and-get-people-to-read-it/>.)

Kate Arends's concern about the categorized genre of her blog, which might be considered a lifestyle blog, suggests that while bloggers tend to be cognizant of genre distinctions, they are less clear about the changeable nature of genres over time and of the history of genre development. Further, many bloggers express uncertainty about the plasticity of the blog genres the bloggers perceive their writing falls within. But genre definitions aren't fixed. Within blogging, new blog texts are constantly pushing the boundaries of perceived genre parameters in different ways and with different audiences all the time. A blogger who accepts perceived genre boundaries passively rather than engaging with them purposefully, gives up much of her expressive and narrative power.

Genre studies in older mediums may prove insightful for those writing about or analyzing genre in blogging. One film-based model for genre analysis is Rick Altman's semantic-syntactic genre theory. While this theory was developed regarding film genres and the moving image, Altman's observations lend themselves to blogging and other mediums by pointing out the problematic nature of defining genres only inclusively (i.e., the genre includes texts that meet a set criteria) or only exclusively (a set list of texts are canonized as representative of a genre). With these competing "notions of generic corpus on our critical scene, it is perfectly possible for a film to be simultaneously included in a particular generic corpus and excluded from that same corpus." Considering the multiple speakers at the Alt Summit Conference I attended that advised bloggers to "stay on topic" and "stick to their niche", it appears that most blogging women are only defining blog genres inclusively.

Altman emphasized the problems of treating genres as static, or ahistorically, "as though they spring full-blown from the head of Zeus." Rather, he suggested that "genres arise in one of two fundamental ways: either a relatively stable set of semantic givens is developed

through syntactic experimentation into a coherent and durable syntax, or an already existing syntax adopts a new set of semantic elements.”³⁴

Most relevant to bloggers as text-creators navigating genre expectations is Altman’s proposal that “the relationship between the semantic and the syntactic constitutes the very site of negotiation between Hollywood (text creator) and its audience, and thus between ritual and ideological uses of genre.” Audiences, according to Altman, are “heavily conditioned by the choice of semantic elements and atmosphere, because a given semantics used in a specific cultural situation will recall to an actual interpretive community the particular syntax with which that semantics has traditionally been associated in other texts.” (Altman calls this phenomenon a syntactic expectation set up by a semantic signal.)³⁵

This is an empowering prospect for blogging women who prioritize audience building. It means that they can either make content decisions based on trying to replicate what has worked in the past for themselves and for others, only inadvertently contributing to the evolution of their genre, or they can purposefully examine the perceived parameters of their genre and engage in changing and shaping them in deliberate ways. Audience expectations of a genre are a moving and untrackable target anyway, and women bloggers have less control than they might think over how an audience categorizes them.

For women, navigating the relationship between audience syntactic expectations and the semantic signals that trigger them is exponentially complicated by the increased levels of disclosivity that women tend to include in their blogging. That disclosivity seems to be its own semantic signal, regularly categorized as “mommy blogging,” and according to several of my survey participants, women have to go to great lengths to avoid that categorization if they want their blogs to be categorized differently. As one participant noted, “I think that women have to fight really hard to get out of the ‘mommy’ category, and that stigma never

³⁴ Rick Altman, “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre,” *Cinema Journal* 23, no. 3 (1984): 7, 8, 12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 13–14, 16–17.

goes away.” There is an implication that women need to use a more masculine autobiographical voice and write about themselves less relationally in order to maintain control of the generic semantic signal of their blog and its corresponding syntactic expectations.

The dialogue between the text creator and the audience occurs much faster in blogging than in cinema, and accordingly the development of syntactic expectations and semantic signals often occur in accelerated fragments in blogging, necessitating awareness of the fluidity of genre distinctions. However, many bloggers express more cognizance of the changes of a distinct genre over time, rather than recognition of nuanced interpretations of a genre by different authors and audiences. Still, many blog authors assert blog genres are an immaterial contract between themselves and their readers and therefore hesitate to breach their interpretations of a genre’s terms.

Introducing this genre factor into the author-audience subjectivity of a woman’s writing further informs the voice and disclosure with which she will perform her identity. The way a woman perceives her own participation in a genre directs her writing and disclosure into more public or private directions. Immediate and often measurable concerns about her audience’s expectations of her content and their navigation of her posts and website are pressing, but those expectations are constantly evolving, as are the identities (perceived and performed) of the women whose writing composes these perceived genres.

Sarah Bessey, whose blog *Sarah Bessey* has turned into a springboard for public speaking engagements and a book deal for her manifesto on Christian feminism, expressed her interpretation of this tenuous balance between changing audience expectations, a changing self, and her autobiographical urge. “I’m not the same woman I was ten years ago . . . but I haven’t been the only one changing over that decade: blogging has changed

immensely in the past ten years, too. The hard thing is trying to figure out when to ‘change with the times’ and when to stand your ground in the place you’ve established.”³⁶

Gendered Audience Expectations

One of the problems that Altman identified regarding a genre definition containing a list of criteria is its inability to grapple with the essence of a text—in this case, performed identity. Because of women’s tendency for relational rather than detached self-identification, women often express discomfort with the rigid boundaries of inclusive genre distinction. This uneasiness likely contributes to the reason that women dominate two enormous amorphous genres of blogging: mommy blogging and its less gauche counterpart, lifestyle blogging. Both are commonly derided by the blogging community and media scholars. Both are also almost impossible to define with inclusive genre definitions, and both are exceedingly difficult for women to avoid. One survey participant described her battle with the mommy blog category:

Since I blog mostly about my family life I have always accepted the title good-naturedly, but I have recently been very bothered by something a family member said: He works for a large company and is over all of their social media, internet content, etc. I was mentioning someone I thought would be valuable as a contact to him and he dismissed her immediately as “a mommy blogger.” I told him that she was in NO WAY a mommy blogger, but a chef who is in pretty high demand by a lot of national brands. His response, “All the women are mommy bloggers. It’s just what we call them.” And it has been INFURIATING to me ever since. That any art that I create, any goals/honor/awards are dismissed because “mommy.”

Survey participants who considered themselves “lifestyle bloggers” expressed sentiments such as, “I am lucky because I have a broad category. The only thing connecting every post is me.” While such vagaries in lieu of categorical imperatives earn these two genres profound disrespect in the blogging community, these notions also appear to contribute to a meaningful autobiographical experience for women whose writing is thus classified. Another survey participant expressed that “women are sharers, and this is a

³⁶ Sarah Bessey, “In Which I Am Retiring ‘In Which’ and a Few Other Decisions about Blogging,” *Sarah Bessey* (blog), August 19, 2014, <http://sarahbessey.com/decisions-about-blogging/>.

platform to work with.” Another wrote that “‘mommy blogger’ went from being a neutral descriptor, to being a term of derision in certain quarters, where it was used to dismiss the voices and points of view of women with young children as being somehow less valid, or more vapid, than ‘serious’ bloggers. Pinterest did little to change this perception. What is a ‘serious’ blogger anyway(?) A man(?). One who uses footnotes. One who communicates in male-centric voice, regardless of gender.”

Liz Stanley wrote about the difficulty of categorization for women in nonnormative experiences with self-conceptualization and identity performance:

If ‘the single mother’ is the first or becomes the dominant audit self organizationally associated with an unpartnered woman, then other ways of presenting herself—as a full-time woman worker, a home-owner and so-on—not only may be organizationally invisible, but might also be actively denied, withdrawn or made almost impossible to achieve successfully. . . . Many women already make use of the gaps, disjunctures, and silences which exist between audit selves and actual lives, and this adds up to a pattern of disengagements from or rejections of organizational requirements, some of which are intended as resistant, others of which may not be intentionally resistant but constitute fissures, rifts, and failures in organizational functioning nonetheless.³⁷

The tendency of blogging women to disengage from more discrete genre distinction may be a similar “unintentional resistance” to a way in which the social organization fails them.

Aside from the more ambiguous blogging genres of mommy blogging and lifestyle blogging, many perceived blog genres are topical. For any given topic, it is possible to find women who blog meaningfully about it, but most blogging women tend to focus on topics that reinforce hegemonic gender norms. A plethora of females build their blog platforms on domestic and material interests that are part of the larger femininity discourse (e.g., cooking, home organization, sewing, interior design, fashion, young adult literature, and parenting), though certainly many of these bloggers find subversive ways to engage with these topics. Women often struggle to obtain sympathetic reception when they write about more male-dominated topics. For example, women writing about politics, finance, sports, or technology

³⁷ Stanley, “From ‘Self-Made Women’ to ‘Women’s Made Selves’?,” 55–56.

often face incredible criticism from readers. To protect themselves from readers who react as though deeply threatened by feminine online presences in traditionally male spaces, many of these women indicate they are writing for a female audience or they embrace the incendiary nature of their nonnormative participation. For example, Natalie Bacon's message to new readers of her finance blog includes the following: "If you're like most *Financegirl* readers, you are a young, professional woman who is just getting started in her adult life."³⁸ Taryn Foshee, a sports blogger at *Women Can Talk Sports*, writing about the NFL scouting combine, playfully compared the event to her experience in the Miss America pageant.³⁹

While blog authors are invariably engaged in gender performance of some type in their blogging, in many cases their interpretations and adaptations of gender norms are subsumed by their overall concern for audience reception and expectations. When women want to engage in public discourse but do not want their participation to be a manumissive statement, they must carefully choose how to perform their gender as a component of their identity in a way their audience will recognize and accept; often this process requires a female blogger to harness and manipulate hegemonic gender norms to meet the blogger's autobiographical urge and social needs. In Bessey's aforementioned blog post, she later asserted that "blogging is a powerful medium particularly for those of us who are outside of the usual power narratives and structures either because of location or religion or gender or orientation or race or political leanings, let alone all the odd combinations therein. This is how we have been heard. When else . . . would anyone care what a happy-clappy bleeding-heart mum from western Canada thinks about anything? Never. That's your answer. This is a powerful medium for connection and for change."⁴⁰

³⁸ Natalie Bacon, "Start Here," *FinanceGirl* (blog), 2015, <http://www.thefinancegirl.com/start-here/>.

³⁹ Taryn Foshee, "NFL Combine and Crowns," *Women Can Talk Sports* (blog), March 2014, <http://www.womencantalksports.com/nfl-combine-and-crowns/>.

⁴⁰ Sarah Bessey, "In Which I Am Retiring "In Which" and a Few Other Decisions about Blogging."

Therefore, gender norms and normative femininity discourse are a double-edged sword for female bloggers. On the one hand, gender norms and normative femininity discourse enable a shortcut to audience investment and allow for a great depth of mutually understood definition of the situation to be communicated succinctly. Conversely, these factors invariably limit the type and depth of disclosure that a blogging woman can engage in without alienating her readers or disrupting their expectations of her text. Women navigate this paradox between the personal and the universal with every nuance of their online performances, and this paradox is often what makes genre definitions and distinctions so difficult for women to cleanly negotiate.

One of the great advantages of Altman's genre theory is its treatment of genre in historical context. This treatment of both generic syntactic expectations and semantic signals as dynamic and somewhat nebulous is helpful when considering how genre dialogue informs and correlates with Goffman's social organization—a mutually understood (and sometimes thought to be universal) set of normal or socially acceptable behaviors and interactions. Certainly, social organization is as culturally specific and dynamic as genre, and women are navigating more than just shifting genre perceptions; they are doing so in a rapidly changing online social organization in which acceptable and admirable forms of gender performance and disclosivity are sometimes indeterminable.

Blogger and columnist Mandy Wallace illustrated one facet of this phenomenon regarding disclosivity in a post promoting what she called “online transparency”: “I live in two different worlds. One where transparency—being open about my personal life as a blogger and writer—is a requirement of the job. And the other is a relic of the pre-internet age where people think individual privacy still exists. . . . My point is, privacy doesn't exist

anymore. We've already reached critical mass. You just haven't noticed yet."⁴¹ This perspective contrasts sharply with the previously referenced opinion a participant expressed in my survey: "I heartily believe it is inappropriate to blog in depth about your children's experiences and find it short sighted and truly unsafe to publish your children's images or names online." Determining what the social organization even *is* regarding issues with such diverse and contradictory views becomes a feat of social navigation, involving a moving and subjective target. The simultaneously private and public nature of a medium as new as blogging seems incompatible with preexisting templates for social organization, and a new template may be in the making, spanning the experiences of countless bloggers and social media users over time.

In this uncertain environment, it is interesting to examine how gendered genre expectations are reinforced. Several of the participants in my survey expressed relevant sentiments:

- "I don't read any men's blogs. Not on purpose, that's just how it works out."
- "I usually read men's blogs on news and current events and photography, and women's blogs on photography and everything else 😊."
- "I don't think there should be any gender issues with who's coming out with what but my niche has mainly always been what women do."
- "I have noticed that most of my audience is female and most of the blogs I read are written by women."
- "Gender does seem to have strong correlations with certain blog categories. I think this holds people back from entering a niche that's heavily populated by the opposite gender. It's a shame."

⁴¹ Mandy Wallace, "The Jennifer Lawrence Effect: Become a Better Blogger through Online Transparency," *Mandy Wallace Write or Die* (blog), January 19, 2015, <http://mandywallace.com/better-blogging-through-transparency/>.

These perspectives suggest that a myriad of cultural currents maintain and promote gendered divides in blogging.

In a 2007 study of gender differences in British bloggers, Sarah Pedersen and Caroline Macafee found that women are more interested in social aspects of blogging than are men, women tend to show less technical “sophistication,” and they are more concerned about issues of privacy than men are.⁴² These differences are tied to lower search engine rankings and page views for female bloggers than for their male counterparts. Although Pedersen and Macafee did not explore disclosivity directly, they did mention that “personal content and creative work tended to be dominant themes of the women’s blogs,” whereas males’ blogs were more likely to be “opinion-focused.” This finding suggests that inherent and culturally enforced factors (as well as several that defy that binary system) contribute to the perpetuation of distinctly gendered differences in blogging behaviors and topics.

The Simulacrum of Femininity Discourse

The process through which many female bloggers frame their online self-presentations in accordance with the social organization can also be compared to Baudrillard’s simulacrum.⁴³ This simulacrum, as previously mentioned, is essentially a copy of a copy of a copy (and so forth) assumed (often erroneously) to have an original at some point based in a concrete reality. Many female bloggers base their understanding of generic distinctions and the parameters of the relevant social organization and discourse on their perceptions of fellow bloggers. Thus, each blogger’s perceptions and performance of acceptable genre-specific blogging behavior is to some extent a copy of the behavior of others; these copies perpetuate each other and promote the semantic/syntactic evolutions of genre and social organization. There is no concrete original; there is not even a universally

⁴² Sarah Pedersen and Caroline Macafee, “Gender Differences in British Blogging,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12, no. 4, (July 2007): 1472–1492.

⁴³ Jean Baudrillard, *The Precession of Simulacra*, trans. Paul Foss and Paul Patton, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York: Norton, 2001), 1556–1566.

acknowledged Emily Post of canonized blogging etiquette. This nebulous nature of accepted practices is especially relevant for women as they attempt to navigate their online gender performance. In some ways, it is easier for women to perform their gender subversively than in ways that are quiet or normative because interpretations of normative feminine discourse follow this pattern of rapidly evolving simulacra and because what is nonnormative is much easier to identify than what is normative. (However, in an era in which impatience with gender divides is gaining traction in mainstream femininity discourse, even the distinction between normative and nonnormative performances of femininity may fade.)

Nevertheless, it appears that for most women, emancipatory or subversive factors are not major motivations for blogging long-term. Females are consistently turning to blogging to meet social, creative, and autobiographical needs; some women are trying to meet those needs and get paid at the same time. The consistently recurring motivations for blogging and the distinctly feminine psychological impetus behind them are invariably linked with the generic divides in blogging. Both the social and autobiographical factors of feminine motivation lend themselves to the mommy blogging genre, which is the pariah of the serious, still male-centric blog world.

Perceptions of gendered blogging behavior will need to shift significantly before they reflect an accurate understanding of the phenomena behind them. Women publishing content in the current blogging environment have many competing factors to consider as they construct their blogs and their online selves. Based on my research, I recommend a number of concrete strategies to increase literacy among female bloggers in my conclusion and appendix.

In conclusion, a thorough analysis of women's blogging behavior will require consideration of how and by whom she perceives of her blog being read and received. This audience subjectivity is particularly relevant in the blogging behaviors of women, whose

motivations for blogging tend to be more social and community based, and whose relational sense of self often extends to their perceived audience. Examining these factors will help to explain many of the predominant challenges and paradoxes women commonly struggle with in finding meaningful, sustainable ways to author their blogs, including concerns about balancing disclosure and universality, how children will respond to their representations, how and whether women can manage to incorporate sponsored content that meets the needs of the blogger, the audience, and the sponsor simultaneously, and whether women have an accurate or empowered perception of the role of genre in determining their blog content or writing style.

Conclusion

Application

The enchantment of the computer creates for us a public space that also feels very private and intimate. In psychological terms, computers are liminal objects, located on the threshold between external reality and our own minds.

Janet Horowitz Murray¹

While the concepts discussed in the previous chapters can and ought to be considered in academic discussions of blogging and social media, their greatest potential for enrichment is with blogging women themselves. An increased awareness of the unique challenges faced by women because of their distinct subjectivity and disclosive tendencies in a medium that is simultaneously public and private is fundamental to improved literacy for women navigating social media. A greater appreciation of the power that women yield when they engage in autobiographical blogging will allow blogging women to more purposefully influence public perception regarding the value of their lives and their texts.

Women seeking to engage meaningfully in blogging can benefit from an increased awareness of female tendencies and subjectivities. An understanding of the inherent differences in the writing of women: their use of language, narration, and relational identity, can help women better understand, value, and make decisions regarding their own use of language. It can help them appreciate these behaviors in their peers, and to frame discussions regarding such behaviors in ways that do not treat them as necessarily inferior to their more masculine counterparts. Blogging women can become more aware of the challenges they face with both social prejudices and search engine algorithms that favor male subjectivity and use of language. Blogging women can develop the vocabulary to identify and address these issues of systemic inequality where they encounter them.

¹Janet Horowitz Murray, *Immersion*, in *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. (New York: Free, 1997), 99.

Blogging women can become more aware of their tendency to assume a non-normative identity when writing about themselves for mixed-gender audiences, and determine whether this tendency is a socially conditioned behavior they would prefer to challenge or ignore. Because cultural pressures and norms discourage normativity in a female autobiographical text, women can make intentional decisions about which of those pressures they choose to actively repudiate, and which they are willing to accede to, in order to communicate something other than a resistance to those cultural norms.

Disclosure is a near universal concern for blogging women, and the dialogue surrounding the issue could be improved by more thorough understanding of the tension between issues of privacy and community and between the personal and the universal. Women can benefit from consideration of the ways their online presentations of self are used as proof of character (both text and subtext.) Blogging women will benefit from considering gender performance in their disclosure dialogue because the willingness of women to be perceived as divergent from the dominant femininity discourse dramatically affects their ability and willingness to be disclosive.

Conversations about privacy and disclosure among blogging women can avoid excessive protectionism when these women better understand the inverse relationship between privacy concerns and the (largely feminine) desire to build sympathetic communities through blogging. Bloggers should be aware that the way they conceive of their blog audience heavily impacts which of these imperatives they will value most. Those who remain cognizant of readers outside of their ideal demographic are likely to prioritize safety and the public nature of their identity performance over concerns about full self expression, authenticity, identity construction, or community.

However, high levels of disclosure are often linked to rewarding interpersonal interactions and a strong sense of community and support, which are in turn fundamental

reasons that women engage in blogging over time. Additionally, disclosive writing can create a heightened sense of intimacy between author and reader, when bloggers reveal private things (insights/reflections/observations) that even those present in person would not know or observe.

In addition to present concerns about privacy, many blogging women would benefit from addressing issues of representation. Women blogging autobiographically are unavoidably representing others as biographical subjects in their writing. At present the medium is still too young for most bloggers to have seen concrete examples of how children will grow into the representations constructed for them by their blogging mothers. Currently few authors express concern about how the representations of their children and their children's interactions with those representations will affect the children over time, and this might prove a powerful adjunct to more prevalent concerns about privacy. Additionally, blogging women may be empowered by a deeper understanding of a woman's power as the narrator of biographical subjects, especially, in the case of women blogging about their children, the mother's role in framing her children's memory. Conversely, bloggers should remain aware of the potential for dissonance between children's memory and those narratives. Rather than solely discussing whether women should write about their children (which is difficult for women to avoid given their relational identities and proclivity for disclosure), women may have more constructive conversations around setting guidelines and creating style guides for the representations of their children.

The idea of audience is increasingly present in the process of blog authorship, even as the identity of that audience becomes less possible to identify. Blogging women can more judiciously determine their own perception of audience and how it influences their perception of their blog as a private or public space. As blog authors strive for a balance between the self and society, they try to create narratives that present a unique self that is still

recognizable by society. They must use language, cultural cues, and narrative tools universal enough to hold meaning for their audience. Blogging women would be especially well served by attention to the tension between the personal and the universal in crafting autobiographical blog content.

Bloggers who conceive of an audience who is more loyal to their blog's genre than to them as individuals tend to perceive of their blogs as more public spaces, belonging to the audience as much as to the author, therefore a heightened understanding of the function of genre in blogging will help bloggers navigate the tension between the private and public nature of blogging. When bloggers are more aware of audience syntactic expectations and the semantic signals that trigger them, they will be able to make more intentional decisions about which elements of a given genre are useful for them to adopt or ignore. This is an especially liberating prospect for women who are paralyzed by concerns about disclosivity, which tends to be pegged as "mommy blogging" when exercised by women.

Genre development in blogging is far less definitive or unified than most bloggers seem to believe. The dialogue between text creator and audience happens much faster in blogging than other mediums, so the flow of expectations and semantic trigger-signals changes much more rapidly and sporadically. Women navigate the personal/universal paradox with each part of their online performance, and this makes perceived genre definitions and distinctions difficult to delineate and even harder to navigate. It could be empowering for blogging women to give themselves permission to reject that which is not useful to them in the simulacrum of gender performance and genre development. Currently ideas of gendered blogging topics do dissuade women from entering non-normative "niches".

On some level most blog authors and readers are aware of the fictionality inherent in autobiographical blogging, but a more overt understanding of this concept may help both authors and readers engage more meaningfully with these texts, freed from any perception or

pressure regarding perfect fidelity. Then, as Philip Lejeune indicated, – “once this precaution has been taken, we (can) go on as if we did not know it.”² Bloggers and their readers can function with greater awareness of the limitations of the medium, and then proceed to engage with it in more constructive and appropriate ways, such as a conversance in how fictionality is exacerbated by human memory/subjectivity, which could allow for the kind of separation of “truth” from “fact” that scholars of autobiography have come to value.³ An awareness of this phenomenon could avail women bloggers who are adapting sponsored content, as they deal with the complications of how their identity is conflated with their blog content and how this increases the social risk for their engagement in monetization.

As women themselves begin holding autobiographical blogging in higher regard, it will begin affecting the overall blogging rhetoric. The ability of women’s blogging over time to change language use and social expectations about women’s roles and realities is a powerful possibility for blogging women to consider. Blogging enables some previously voiceless populations to not only have voices, and be heard, but to actually influence the way language and social understanding relating to them develops in the larger public dialogue. Blogging women, with increased understanding of the power of their blogs to meet their personal needs while also participating in larger public dialogues, can help restructure the very social norms that currently complicate their engagement in blogging. Until then, perceptions of gendered blogging behavior will need to shift significantly before they reflect an accurate understanding and appreciation of the phenomena behind them.

² Jakki Spicer, “The Author Is Dead, Long Live the Author: Autobiography and the Fantasy of the Individual,” *Criticism* (2005): 387–403.

³ Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (New York: Verso, 1995).

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Appendix A: Survey Responses

Basic Contact Information

Text Responses

Name or pseudonym	Cheryl Libutti
Email Address	cheryl.libutti@gmail.com
Your blog url	www.libuttifamily.blogspot.com
Name or pseudonym	Tiffany Han
Email Address	tiffany@tiffanyhan.com
Your blog url	http://tiffanyhan.co/blog
Name or pseudonym	Allison Czarnecki
Email Address	allison@petitelefant.com
Your blog url	http://www.petitelefant.com
Name or pseudonym	Pol
Email Address	atpolsplace@live.co.uk
Your blog url	atpolsplace.blogspot.com
Name or pseudonym	Julie Suarez
Email Address	jmariejohnso@gmail.com
Name or pseudonym	Jennifer Galan (La Yen)
Email Address	waldoswife@gmail.com
Your blog url	galanapalooza.blogspot.com
Name or pseudonym	Connie
Email Address	1102connie@gmail.com
Your blog url	Connie-incaseyouwerewondering.blogspot.com
Name or pseudonym	Rachel Swartley
Email Address	rachelswartley@yahoo.com
Your blog url	http://www.rachelswartley.com
Name or pseudonym	Alyse
Email Address	barber.alyse@gmail.com
Your blog url	abbarber.blogspot.com
Name or pseudonym	Annie
Email Address	hairyshoefairy@gmail.com
Your blog url	http://wildarcher.com
Name or pseudonym	Mitzi Torgersen
Email Address	happyconfetti@mail.com
Your blog url	www.happyconfettidesign.com
Name or pseudonym	Sarah Kimmel (Tech4Moms)
Email Address	sarah@tech4moms.com
Your blog url	http://www.tech4mommies.com
Name or pseudonym	Cheryl Libutti
Email Address	cheryl.libutti@gmail.com
Your blog url	www.libuttifamily.blogspot.com
Name or pseudonym	Mo
Email Address	marissajstewart1@gmail.com
Name or pseudonym	Jessica Hills

Email Address	jessicahills22@gmail.com
Name or pseudonym	marci
Email Address	marcimpreece@gmail.com
Name or pseudonym	Lori
Email Address	Loriadori@ gmail.com
Your blog url	adori.wordpress.com
Name or pseudonym	Carrie
Email Address	Carrielundell@mac.com
Your blog url	Thismamamakesstuff.com
Name or pseudonym	Aliese
Email Address	lieseymagoosjunkmail@gmail.com
Your blog url	smallfrys031007.blogspot.com
Name or pseudonym	Misha
Email Address	Misha.hettie@gmail.com
Your blog url	www.fabbites.com
Name or pseudonym	Elizabeth
Email Address	elizabeth@iteratesocial.com
Your blog url	Iteratesocial.com/blog
Name or pseudonym	Laurel
Email Address	laurel@abubblylife.com
Your blog url	www.abubblylife.com
Name or pseudonym	Stasia
Email Address	stasia@thriftmepretty.com
Your blog url	www.thriftmepretty.com
Name or pseudonym	Kim
Email Address	brella@nottene.net
Your blog url	nottene.net/notes
Name or pseudonym	Lindsay
Email Address	frenchiewraps@gmail.com
Your blog url	http://frenchiewraps.com
Name or pseudonym	Rachel Swartley
Email Address	rachelswartley@yahoo.com
Your blog url	www.rachelswartley.com
Name or pseudonym	Sara Schmutz
Email Address	sara@confettisunshine.com
Your blog url	confettisunshine.com
Name or pseudonym	Ronda Batchelor
Email Address	batchelorway@gmail.com
Your blog url	batchelorsway.com
Name or pseudonym	Amy Cowley
Email Address	thehappyscraps@yahoo.com
Your blog url	www.thehappyscraps.com
Name or pseudonym	Paula Iniguez
Email Address	paula.iniguez@gmail.com
Your blog url	http://www.housewivesofriverton.com
Name or pseudonym	Melissa Hoover

Email Address	melissa@ecosewn.com
Your blog url	www.ecosewn.com
Name or pseudonym	Riley Jo
Email Address	rileyjohanni@gmail.com
Your blog url	rileyjustesen.blogspot.com
Name or pseudonym	Deb/Mommy Crusader
Email Address	mommycrusader@mommycrusader.com
Your blog url	http://mommycrusader.com
Name or pseudonym	Eden Hensley
Email Address	edenhensley@gmail.com
Your blog url	http://www.TheRoadtoTheGoodLife.com
Name or pseudonym	Laura
Email Address	Skinner Skinner23@gmail.com
Your blog url	Skinner Skinner23.blogspot.com
Name or pseudonym	Stacie
Email Address	mormongirl782@hotmail.com
Your blog url	www.redcherries22.blogspot.com
Name or pseudonym	Ashlee
Email Address	ashlee@ashleemarie.com
Your blog url	http://ashleemarie.com
Name or pseudonym	Taylor
Email Address	taylor mcwethy@hotmail.com
Name or pseudonym	Vanessa Myers
Email Address	vrichins@gmail.com
Your blog url	http://2dorksinlove.com
Name or pseudonym	Carly
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Email Address	support@shambray.com
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Name or pseudonym	Katie Clark
Email Address	katie@clarkscondensed.com
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Email Address	grace@thebigrevealblog.com
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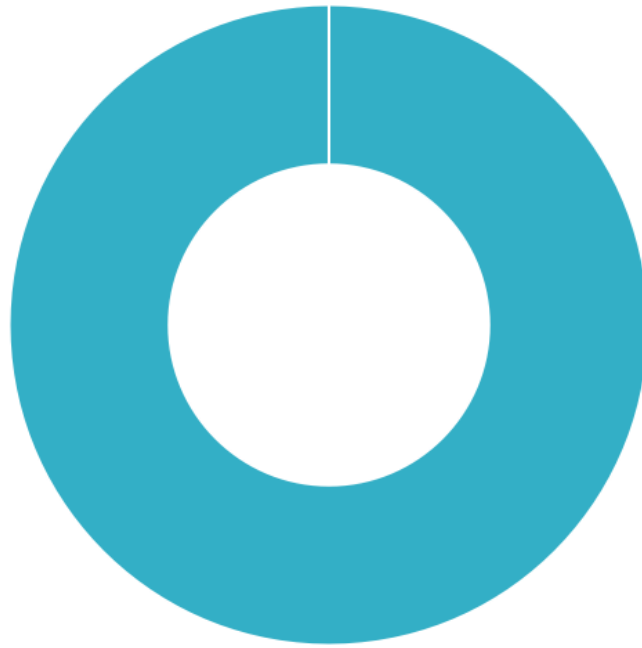
Name or pseudonym	Tiffany Han
Email Address	tiffany@tiffanyhan.com
Your blog url	http://tiffanyhan.com/blog
Name or pseudonym	Sara
Email Address	downey.sara@gmail.com
Your blog url	www.meanestlook.com
Name or pseudonym	Amanda
Email Address	Amanda@handmademood.com
Your blog url	www.handmademood.com
Name or pseudonym	Kat
Email Address	kat@housewifeconfidential.co.uk
Your blog url	http://housewifeconfidential.co.uk
Name or pseudonym	Natalie
Email Address	mrsbeaux@gmail.com
Name or pseudonym	Ginny Winters
Email Address	ginny@vintagerosewraps.com
Your blog url	The Vintage Mother
Name or pseudonym	Julie
Email Address	julie@wellturnedwords.com
Your blog url	www.forthchicago.com
Name or pseudonym	Sari
Email Address	sari_olschewski@msn.com
Your blog url	http://www.ladyofperpetualchaos.com
Name or pseudonym	McCall Humes
Email Address	mccall721@gmail.com
Your blog url	http://mccallofthewild.com
Name or pseudonym	Kate
Email Address	katesig@yahoo.com
Your blog url	www.nearlycrafty.com
Name or pseudonym	Kelly Smith
Email Address	kelly@cloudydaygray.com
Your blog url	www.cloudydaygray.com
Name or pseudonym	Jessica
Email Address	jess@dontmindthemess.com
Your blog url	http://dontmindthemess.com
Name or pseudonym	crystal moody
Email Address	crystal.moody@live.com
Your blog url	http://crystalmoody.com
Name or pseudonym	Karen Walrond
Email Address	karen@chookooloonks.com
Your blog url	http://www.chookooloonks.com/blog
Name or pseudonym	Cylinda
Email Address	ubercyl@gmail.com
Your blog url	arenofamily.com/blogs/cyl
Name or pseudonym	Tracy M
Email Address	dandelion.mama@gmail.com

Your blog url

dandelionmama.com

Gender

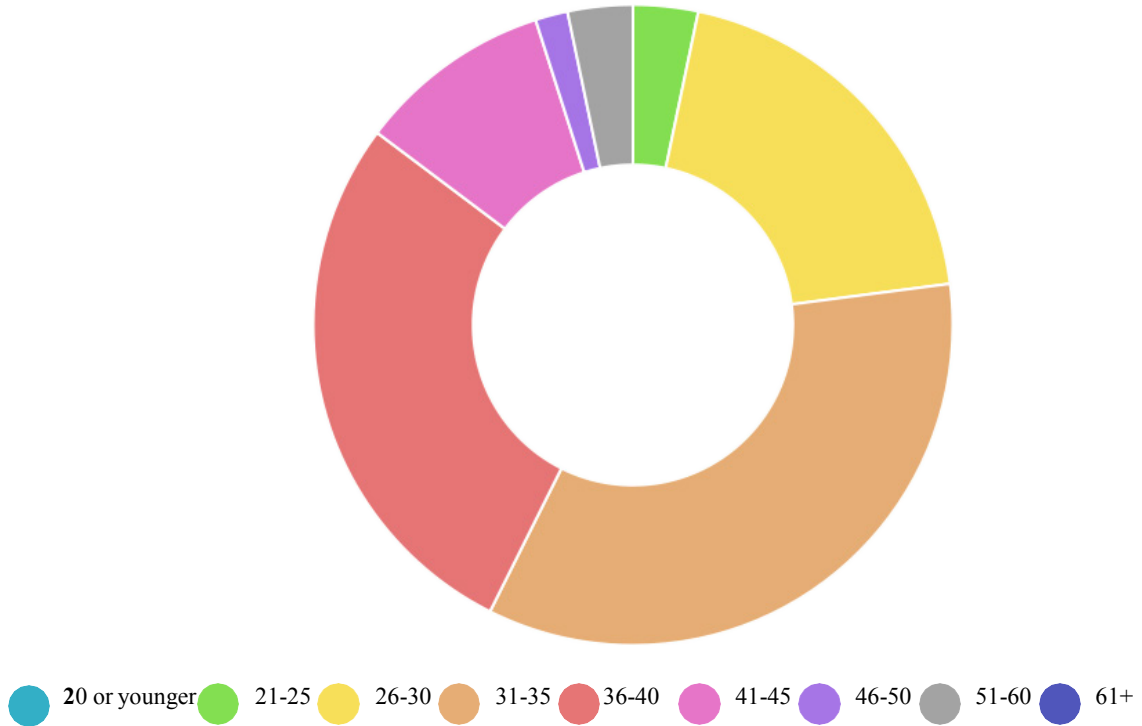
	Female	Male	N/A	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	61 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	28.76	61



● Female ● Male ● N/A

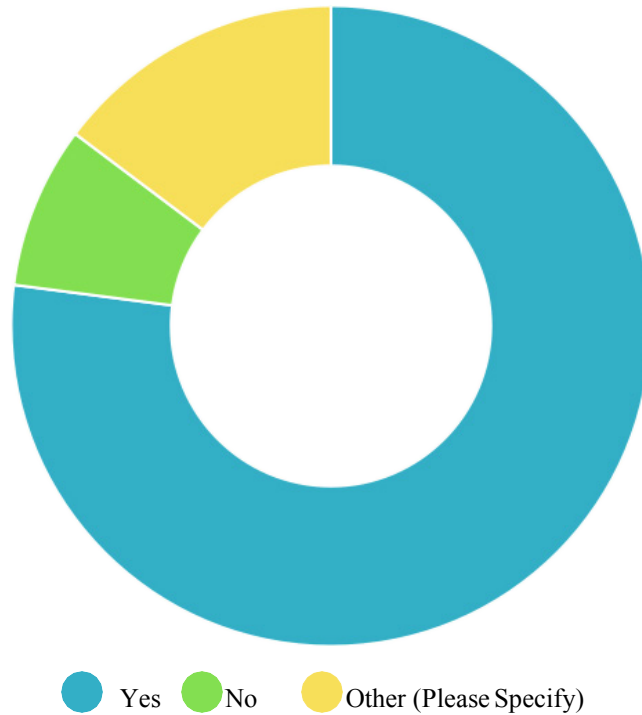
Age Range

	20 or less	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-60	61+	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	0 (0%)	2 (3.28%)	12 (19.67%)	21 (34.43%)	17 (27.87%)	6 (9.84%)	1 (1.64%)	2 (3.28%)	0 (0%)	7.49	61



Do You Consider Yourself a Mother Who Blogs?

	Yes	No	Other (Please Specify)	Standard Deviation	Responses
All Data	47 (77.05%)	5 (8.2%)	9 (14.75%)	18.93	61



Text Responses

I don't blog often enough
 I have a blog and I am a Mom. But I don't consider myself a mom blogger.
 I am not a professional blogger, but my blog compliments my portfolio.
 Mother to BE who blogs!
 It's not my defining feature.
 Lifestyle influencer
 I have a blog but don't blog as much because of my very busy schedule.
 I write about parenting/motherhood for other people's blogs.
 I think it is most accurate to say I am a mother who once blogged and hopes to again.

How do you feel about the classification “mommy blogger” or about the role of gender in blogging categories generally?

Text Responses

- I think it's a demeaning phrase. Women are already on slippery footing in the business world, adding the moniker intimate "mommy" to the title puts women on even more unequal footing.
- Women who blog works just fine, as does "mom blogger".
- I am frequently lumped into the "mommy blogger" category because I have children and have written about them before. I'm not flattered by the label, as it connotes that I am a crafty, shabby chic, gluten free non-vaccer, so I try to keep my blog versatile and lifestyle oriented.
- On the whole, since I blog mostly about my family life I have always accepted the title good-naturedly but I have recently been very bothered by something a family member said: He works for a large company and is over all of their social media, internet content, etc. I was mentioning someone I thought would be valuable as a contact to him and he dismissed her immediately as "a mommy blogger." I told her that she was in NO WAY a mommy blogger, but a chef who is in pretty high demand by a lot of national brands. His response. "All the women are mommy bloggers. It's just what we call them." And it has been INFURIATING to me ever since. That any art that I create, any goals/honor/awards are dismissed because "mommy."
- I do not consider myself a "mommy blogger" and I am not interested in reading "mommy blogs." It is often used as a somewhat pejorative term to refer to blogs written by women about their children and family life in ways which don't hold a broad appeal. They're not about parenting in general, they're about a specific family, and tend to appeal most to the people who know them personally.
- I'd say most of the time bloggers are women. Or that is how I see it since I really only read mommy blogs.
- I think it's inconsiderate and thoughtless to lump all women-with-children who blog into the "mommy blogger" category because it shows very little understanding or validation for the many different types of blogging. While many women with children do blog about their children and could absolutely be termed mommy bloggers, there are many who focus their blogs on other things with only mere mentions of children and family and I think they deserve their own categories depending on their focus. I also think the way mommy bloggers are referred to by some people can seem derogatory or belittling, like their lives and opinions hold little to no value and I'd like to see that change so women-with-children who blog about their families can still be respected by society at large rather than looked down on as having trivial lives. Same goes for daddy bloggers, though they seem a bit less common.
- I think it's totally fine. That's what I am, a mom that blogs. I don't think men would take offense to "daddy blogger" if that is what they are either.

- Some folks are very offended by the term, but I'm not so much. It can definitely have negative connotations, but for the most part it's a valid distinction.
- I think it gives women who are in the home an outlet and a voice to talk about what they are experiencing day to day. Women are "sharers" and this a platform to work with.
- It's a bit simplistic. The term mommy blogger is in the same level as Pinterest for me; I'm sure it's a cool thing for some, but not necessarily a representation of the real world.
- I don't really have an opinion- it's just a description to me
- The term "mommy blogger" has always sounded negative to me. Like it's a silly hobby that stay at home moms do to pass the time since they obviously have nothing better to do. I also think some people view blogs as a way for people to "show off" their perfect lives and how they are the best mom ever - when in reality I don't think many (if really any) moms blog with that purpose.
- I'm not sure why, but mommy blogger seems to have a negative connotation to it. Because it seems so typical to blog when your a mom. I hate being called "mommy" by anyone other than my children. So just because of that, I've always hated the term "mommy blogger"
- Quite honestly, I've never really thought about it. I feel I've only used the term a few scant times and rarely in the most polite of circumstances. I tend to use it whenever someone has lead me to a blog post as a 'legitimate' site for something like anti-vacc, or against Common Core, because they are two things which hold little merit in two worlds I spend most of my time in. And, quite frankly again, tend to be what are cited most frequently as doctrine in those two circles rather than medical journals or educational forums.
- I think Mommy Blogger has negative connotations. I dont like gender used to describe any role, let alone blogging. A female entrepreneur is an entrepreneur. I am not sure why we feel need to apply gender to it.
- Being a mommy blogger is somewhat of a feat, I think. It likely means you're blogging from home, with kids, and in my experience, it's HARD WORK to do much of anything that requires thought with kids around! I don't particularly blog about my kids, but my kids do influence much of what I write about. Because they are, after all, my pride and joy.
- I think it is often misused. I would think a mommy blogger is a mother who is blogging about motherhood, the same way a food blogger blogs about food, but it is often used to describe any woman with children who writes on the internet. It also often has a negative connotation.
- I hate the term. Yes, most of are moms but we are working moms. Most think that we just baked something or decided to make something that day and we're going to post

it. The reality is, a lot of planning goes into the day to day. Our houses are from perfect, same for our children and yet some people try to carry this facade on. I wish that everyone knew that we are real women making money for our family and working hard while having to do a whole separate job at the same time.

- A little derogatory. I don't feel like my blog and being a mother mix all that often. While I might do the two simultaneously, doesn't mean they correspond.
- Doesn't bother me at all.
- When I think of mommy blogger, I think of a mom that blogs about being a mom. I am a mom, but I blog about DIY Craft projects, sewing, paper crafting and recipes here and there. I consider my blog more of a business, because I'm not blogging about being a mom, so I don't really like the term mommy blogger.
- I feel that it is an accurate description, like when someone says mommy blogger the definition immediately pops into my head. However I do think it is demeaning. I know many ladies who make more than their husbands do by blogging and "mommy blogging" makes it sound like it's just some hobby to keep the housewife busy. However there are some "mommy blogs" who are true "mommy blogs" and just blog about their kids for their family.
- I've always seen "mommy blogger" as a derogative term. I was a creative with a blog before I became a mother so my husband and I thought carefully about whether I would share my pregnancy or reveal I had a child once she was born. We decided to tell readers I was pregnant as I write lifestyle content and not including her would be inauthentic. I don't classify myself as a "mommy blogger" as I chose to take a positive approach to my writing on being a mother. I avoid the typical sarcastic tone of "someone take my kids." And I don't share temper tantrums, etc.
- I don't like the term. It seems like all they might blog about is stuff revolving around little kids and that doesn't interest me at all. I don't have kids but if I did, I would not want to be classified as a 'mommy blogger'.
- While I'm a mom that blogs I don't consider myself a mommy blogger. I don't blog about being a mom, I don't blog about my kids therefore no mommying is present. Sometimes mommy blogger can be a bit dismissive since "mommy" instead of mom is a little childish. it makes it harder to be accepted as a real vocation.
- I don't mind the term mommy blogger, because being a mom is my most important job, and I'm also a blogger. However, I do feel there's a negative connotation to it, and it causes people to not take blogging seriously. I support my little family entirely with blogging, and it's a real industry, but when people say, "oh you are just a mommy blogger" or "so you just blog...about your kid." it's kind of annoying, because I do a lot more than just that!
- I'm not a fan of the phrase "mommy blogger". I am a mom who happens to blog, but I don't blog about mommy stuff. A mommy blogger to me, is someone who brings about motherhood in a sarcastic humor, sort of way.

- I don't think of myself as a mommy blogger. I am a blogger who happens to be a mother. I don't have a problem with gender roles in blogging. I think it's wonderful to use blogging to build a community of mothers. Motherhood is hard and if we can help each other great.
- Sometimes I feel mommy blogger has a negative connotation in the blogging world yet a lot of us have kids! And most bloggers are women
- It is disconcerting to me that people feel the need to label women bloggers "mommy bloggers." While I am a proud mother, who truly believes motherhood is one of the greatest achievements of my life, calling me a "mommy blogger" is a trite, diminishing and a pigeonholing term that is wholly unnecessary. Whether blogging about parenting is 100% of what you do or only part of what you do, the term "mommy blogger" is off putting and offensive. It diminishes the total contribution I am making to blogging and really the world as a whole. For me it is like being called a "female athlete" instead of just an athlete. Why the need to differentiate. No one says "male athlete." It is baffling to me why this terminology is needed or acceptable except as an extension of a society that wants to oppress women.
- Ha! I couldn't care less how folks refer to me. I'm a storyteller. I happen to be a mom and I write about my kid. I also write about SEO, so I suppose I could be called an SEO blogger. When I first went to a blogger conference I called myself a "lifestyle" blogger and decided how lame that was, so I just stick to telling people my blog is about storytelling.
- It is not offensive to me at all. I am a mommy and I blog. I am a mommy and I am also a business owner. I actually heard the term more at Alt used a little negatively than I normally hear the term used
- I think the term "mommy blogger" is frequently used in a condescending way. But I don't think that the role of gender in blogging categories is negative. Each gender brings a unique perspective that is valuable.
- I am fine with being called a mommy blogger. I am that. I am a mommy who blogs. Though parenting is not the main theme of what I write about, I do refer to it from time to time because I am writing about own experiences and it is the biggest part of my life. If that is something my readers connect with than that is helpful to me. That said, I know that within the blogging culture the term "mommy blogger" has become a catch all phrase used to describe any woman who blogs as themselves vs as a brand, including those without kids.
- A lot of bloggers I know find it belittling, even if they do often post about parenting, because to the general public it clumps them in with those casual bloggers who don't treat it as a business. To people who are not avid blog readers, saying you have a blog often elicits the idea that you have the hobby of writing about your day-to-day life while your kids nap and maybe your immediate family reads it. This is a stigma committed bloggers who write with the intent of making a successful website (whether that is measured in readership numbers or financial gain) want to end. They work hard to get the general public to realize that there is a difference in classification between the two & the term "mommy blogger" tends, instead, to blur

those lines even further.

- I am not a fan of the label "mommy" being tied with anything outside mothering. Working mother - ugh. Mother/mommy is one thing we do. Why does it need to define our other jobs.
- I don't love the term "mommy blogger". I would rather my blog be categorized as a "lifestyle blog".
- I really dislike it. The stereotype that any woman with children and a blog is a mommy blogger extends to plenty of other things as well (see the recent flurry on the internet about "mommy photographers" for a similar issue). I find that it devalues the work and writing most bloggers do. Very few seem to find the "mommy blogger" a name they stick to.
- ugh. When I see the term "mommy blogger" I think of moms who blog about parenting, kids, family, etc. If that's not your topic, then I don't really think it's relevant that you're a mom or dad or not.
- I hate it. "Mommy" feels diminutive, and particularly for those of us who don't blog exclusively about parenting, it necessarily negates the content we DO write about. It's awful.
- I read a lot of blogs, and a lot of commentary about blogs. "Mommy blogger" and especially "mormon mommy blogger" are phrases that are often used scornfully out in the
- wide world of the web. It doesn't bother me. I think it is a fair way to categorize women who write primarily about their children/marriages/home life.
- It depends. When I started blogging almost ten years ago, it was a very new field with very few lines or boundaries yet drawn. In a way, it felt very "wild west", as there weren't yet genres or subcategories delineating anyone- we just all suddenly had a voice and way to find people with like-minded positions.
- As the platform unfolded and grew, naturally lines appeared and communities unfolded and grew. I'm a mother, and I'm a blogger. Technically, that makes me a mommy blogger, however the general bare truthfulness of the term doesn't contain the fullness of the weight that was laid upon it. "Mommy-blogger" went from being a neutral descriptor, to being a term of derision in certain quarters, where it was used to dismiss the voices and points of view of women with young children as being somehow less valid, or more vapid, than 'serious' bloggers. Pinterest did little to change this perception. What is a 'serious' blogger, anyway. A man. One who uses footnotes. One who communicates in a male-centric voice, regardless of gender. I don't know. But I do know I managed to straddle the divided, even though it was unintentional.

Can You Identify Any Goals You Work Toward or Needs That Are Met For You By Blogging?

Text Responses

- Sharing of talents, bringing a unique perspective to other women across the world. Blogging also provides half of my family's income.
- I blog for my own pleasure these days. The demands sponsored posts put on my creativity ruined the whole point of blogging for me.
- Initially blogging helped me make and maintain friends that have become a valuable community over the past ten years. I have consciously chosen to NOT brand my entire life and monetize because blogging is not my job, nor do I want it to be. As platforms have changed I have shifted more towards twitter and instagram to maintain that community.
- I enjoy sharing my work and creative projects with others who will appreciate them and be inspired to exercise their own creativity. Sharing those projects with others increases the value of my work, as it enables people beyond my family or friends to benefit from my creativity.
- Keeping a record of what is going on with my family. Posting at least monthly and covering holidays and big events.
- I am a social introvert. I enjoy interacting with people when I'm called to but it's horribly exhausting and takes me a long time to regain my energy afterward. Blogging allows me to share things with the world on a regular basis without overextending myself. I can respond as needed and/or as I see fit. I like the sense of community and connection I feel to readers and bloggers from all around the world. It's allowed me to "meet" people and make connections I would never have made otherwise and has helped me feel less alone in the world with my interests and ideas.
- It's nice to have a passion and something to work for. At the end of the day, it's a glorious form of journaling and it will always be there even when I'm gone and people can see who I was.
- Mainly my goal of educating women on technology is met
- For me personally, it is to document the childhoods of my children and the joys and struggles that come with raising three kids.
- Blogging gives me an open forum to get ideas out of my head where they have a tendency to bounce around and do damage. My ability to rationally assess situations and emotions is greatly increased when I can get it out and then read it from a screen. It keeps me sane.
- I am able to review products and keep them, they also pushes me to branch out a little in my photography and work on more projects around the house.
- I use our private family blog to document our lives - basically an online journal that I can print off at the end of each year. For me this is an easy way to remember what's happened in our family and to also share with close family and friends.
- I have a blog with my sisters as well (that I should have out the site url earlier - oops!) it's standandshinemagazine.blogspot.com. It's not a mom blog but one that we've created to provide positive resources and info for LDS teen girls. This is something that helps meet my need to be creative and share goodness with others.
- i love to write. I NEED to write. To record. Or something. But I journal a lot too. Which often takes the place of my blog.
- I like to record the meaningful moments of my family. And when I first had kids, it was

hard for me to find to for any creative endeavors outside of everyday mothering. For me, having a creative outlet is necessary for me to stay and sane and happy mother. Having a creative blog helped me carve out more creative time in my life and look at my everyday mothering in a more creative way.

- I blog for me and my posterity. No one else. That'll be pretty obvious when/if you try to access the URL I included with my survey as it's private. I blog current photos of friends and family to document our lives so there will be electronic copies of our family history. At the end of every calendar year, I print my blog with Blurb.com, so we have a hard copy as well.
- Creativity
- YES! Blogging affords me the time I need to think and process through a situation. I don't journal (no time for that) but this meets the same sort of need for me. To process. Think. Understand. Plus, by simply writing about a particular subject, you become kind of an expert in it, so I've learned quite a lot about my topics. Research baby! AND, it makes me hold myself accountable for things I say I'm going to do. :)
- I am an artist and illustrator, I mostly post pictures of my work or inspiration.
- I'd love to see more visitors to my site and return to my site. There is a lot of variety out there but I also want to be sure that I'm being true to myself. There are companies that offer things for a mention or money, that's not what I set out to do when I started and I continue to stay true to that. I'll make money from sponsored posts and ads but I will also only apply for things that I'd really use.
- I have to be creating. If I don't, then I am not a pleasant person to be around. I relax by creating. I get some affirmation that others get from co-workers, bosses, or a paycheck.
- Currently I have a goal of making my blog more profitable. It is nice to have some income doing things that I love. But after 6.5 years of blogging, it is also nice to see something in return for all the hard work.
- Yes! So many! I set daily, weekly and monthly goals for blogging. My daily goal is to reply to comments and comment on others' blogs as well as interact with the Utah Bloggers facebook page. My weekly goals are to post 3 times a week as well as plan for my next week, email companies, etc. My monthly goals are to keep my numbers up as well as come into one-two sponsored activities.
- My creative needs are met by blogging. I was an English major, history minor in college and I now teach sixth grade social studies. I feel sad that I kind of just ditched my English major, this helps me put all the things I learned to use. It's also just an awesome hobby that I truly love!
- For me, blogging enabled me to make the move to freelance marketing and social media consulting. Freelance allows me to spend more time with my family and act as a positive role model for my daughter. I'm currently working towards a freelance business that employs other people.
- The need for an outlet to let my pictures, thoughts and ideas be heard/seen
- being mom is hard, my kid has special needs, so my day to day life is involved and difficult. I started my blog to be an outlet, a place to share my leadership, continue education (I've loved all that I've learned through blogging). I've learned photography, photo editing, coding, designing, and been able to share what I love, recipes, cakes and parties! I've been able to mentor and educate other bloggers as well as plan and attend fun conferences, GNO's and work with some of my dream brands!
- I want to be able to make a full time income through my blog. I want to stay home with our daughter and any other kids to come, but I also would like to help our family

financially as possible.

- Supporting our family financially. Helping others find their way through parenthood and life - I started my blog because when I was pregnant, there was SO much negative information I ran into about motherhood and children in general. I think it largely contributed to the depression I experienced during pregnancy. So, I started Clarks Condensed to show people that having children isn't a burden, but a beautiful blessing.
- I don't blog for work, so I do it as I feel like. Thankfully.
- My blog gives my children insight into who I am beyond being a mother. Through my blog I get to tell them stories and share my experiences. blogging helps our family travel all my blogging money goes into buying new camera equipment or taking my family on vacation
- I blog as an opportunity to inspire other women to achieve their goals.
- My goals are to gain brand partnerships so I can provide some extras for my family. Blogging gives me an outlet to tell stories and sometimes draw peepes.
- My sister and I started our blog because we were extremely busy business owners. We wanted a way that would sort of helps us get back to what we were feeling as most important and that was being a good mother. The blog helps us focus on our family more and things that we care most about.
- For me, blogging started as a creative outlet when my girls were little but had lead to many friendships and experiences that I really value in my life.
- I started blogging as a creative outlet. As a SAHM I often felt that the only conversations I had with other adults were about my kids. I needed to find a way balance mommy mode with who I was before kids and nurture those other parts of myself that we're being neglected. For me, blogging was a good way to both experience something outside my normal routine and create something new to contribute to the conversation. Committing to writing about my experiences gave me a sense of obligation to actually have them. It helped me prioritize. In a way I guess blogging is a tool I use for self accountability with my goal being to have balance between my "me time" and my "mommy guilt."
- As that need is being met, I continue to find new goals within the blogging world. I have learned so much in the last year about content creation and social media. It has inspired want to write better, grow my community and take new risks.
- Blogging fills my need to have daily tasks that need to be done that are outside taking care of my family.
- I want to increase my following and the engagement of my readers. I enjoy telling my story but I want it to be heard and make waves. Writing is my main goal and the blog gives me a way to write that I get to work on regularly. It helps scratch an itch of sorts.
- Since beginning my blog, I've also taken up photography. It was initially to get better images for my blog but has since become a goal all on its own. Blogging helps me work through my thoughts about my process as an artist.
- I'm an author, photoessayist and public speaker, and my blog is one of my chief marketing tools.

Do You Include Your Spouse or Children in your Blog Content? How Much and for What Reasons? Can You Describe Your Writing Style When Blogging About Your Family?

Text Responses

- I include my family in my blogging when it's relevant. A style post including my teenage daughter or elementary school aged son. Travel, when my family is on a trip together and the content is family focused. I don't write about the particular day-to-day life and experiences of my children.
- I always keep my blog very casual and write as if I was having a conversation. I try to limit content my spouse would perceive as hurtful to our marriage and overly TMI.
- I try to be honest and funny, but as my children have grown older I have blogged less about them because I want to respect THEIR privacy and keep their business theirs. My husband in military, so I seldom blog about his career because of safety restrictions. Mostly he is portrayed as long-suffering. Which is 95% true.
- Many of my creative projects are created for my family, so I mention my children or spouse as the recipient of my project or to provide context for why I made the project, but I don't write much about my children specifically. I only write things that I would be interested in reading, and I don't really enjoy reading about strangers' kids unless they are extremely interesting.
- Yes, as my family has grown my kids have started to play a bigger part. I try to include dates or funny things my husband does, so it's not overwhelmed by kids. But that just shows that I am trying to please an audience and I am not doing it for myself.
- My first blog was mostly about my life in general so it definitely included my children and spouse. It worked for me for a long time. Now that my kids are getting older I'd like to offer them a bit more privacy as they wend their ways. I don't often use their names in public forums and am more careful to consider whether they might find something embarrassing. When I launched my new site with a full rebrand and focus change I made a deliberate choice to steer away from life blogging. I will occasionally mention my children as they're not a secret and sometimes they offer me insight I want to share. I don't want people to be shocked and surprised to find I have children after reading for a while but they aren't the focus of what I share online any longer.
- Yes, but only on special occasions (birth, etc).
- Yes, because my blog is about how children use technology as well as how parents use technology, so both need to be included.
- yes. More my kids than my husband. It is to tell about their growth and development and to capture small moments that I will surely forget. I am pretty open but have censored more as my kids get a bit older.
- I would describe my writing style as conversational and breezy. I try to be funny, with mixed results.
- I write like I speak, though I do use stage names for the significant people in my life. This is my journey, not my family's. Additionally, much of my recent history has been very ugly and involved extremely poor personal decisions by my spouse that ripped my family apart. I am aware of the potential impact on our professions if this information is easily available, so I opt for discretion.
- sometimes but not a lot. Usually when I am sharing something about how we do things in our family. My writing style is pretty brief and to the point most of the time
- Our private blog is all about our family. Pictures, embarrassing moments, funny sayings or experiences. The style is very simple and not showy or written for creativity

necessarily. It's just write down what's been happening in our day to day life.

- The other blog rarely mentions my family since its centered on teen girls.
- I do. Because they are my life. I don't really know how to describe my writing style.
- I do include them, though they are not the primary focus of my blog. I have always used pseudonyms for privacy reasons and as the kids have gotten older, they don't want to "be on the blog" so I have respected that wish.
- Yes, yes, all the time, and because if I don't, I'd appear extremely self-centered to all (few family members and close friends) my readers. I will say, I admin a bunch of other blogs though for different purposes. I do this because those blogs are NOT for chronicling my family. I am a teacher, so I maintain a blog site for my students and their parents. It's to keep them informed about what is going on in class. I maintain a blog site for my school to archive all our PLC efforts and data tracking because I am the staff developer for my school. I use many other URLs as a way to collect information in one place for my students in the form of WebQuests. I know there are other formats I could do all of these things in, but I was already familiar with Blogger at the time and it just seemed easier to create them in that one place rather than using a myriad of other resources. Finally, I also have a public blog which is searchable to serve as the way to update readers of my family blog who use an RSS feed reader so they don't have to constantly check our site-they just wait for the link which says "update" in their feed readers from that blog.
- No, I don't much. Sometimes I show my little girl's hand in a project, but I am not comfortable for security issues sharing much of the kids.
- Though I have two kids, if I'm to write at all about my kids, it's mostly about my daughter. She's influenced the work I do incredibly. In fact, I probably wouldn't be blogging at all (or starting my small biz) if it wasn't for her. My children are my teachers in my so many regards, and I'm not afraid to admit that. When I write, I'm very candid, and incredibly honest. It's what makes me connectable, and people really like that.
- More often they find their way onto my Instagram which is a bigger social media draw for my work than my actual blog these days.
- Yes. Not very often but sometimes I'll mention something about where he is from (another country) or something that my kids said while I was crafting something but rarely an entire post about my own children/spouse.
- I don't blog about my family very often. My children sometimes model for my photos, but that's just about it. Yes, because they are part of what I do as a mom, blogger and DIYer. I write in a fun way most of the time.
- Occasionally. A few times a year I blog about things that we've done. Occasionally I include my boys in posts if it is something that involves my boys.
- I include my spouse and I don't refer to him by any cutie nicknames or code names because I feel that is extremely not genuine. I plan to include my kids, kids sell! Haha! That sounds terrible, but when multiple blogging friends had babies, their stats went up. I would never have a baby just for blogging or have that even be a main reason whatsoever, but I would love to include them as they are a huge part of my life! Numbers going up is a added bonus.
- My writing style is just my voice. Everyone tells me I have a very strong voice when blogging so I try very hard to maintain that.
- I do include my spouse and children in my content. The amount varies depending on time of year and what we're doing as a family. I include them because part of my content is about balancing/juggling motherhood and entrepreneurship. My writing style

towards my family is very positive I don't ever publish content when I'm upset about something that's going on or that I might regret later or that an angry 12 year old girl might use against my daughter later.

- I don't include my spouse in my main blog but we do have a travel blog together. However, I mostly post on that. I don't really have a writing style when it comes to writing about family. I write in general how I talk.
- not really. They are in pictures, holding food, modeling what I've made, and of course the parties I throw are for them, but I RARELY talk about the personal side of my life, and when I do it's about ME, my feelings towards the situation, I leave my kids out of it (out of respect for them, and at my husband's request)
- I do when they fit into what I am writing about. I use our first names and just initials for our daughter. I am Miss Nessa, there's Mister Eric and Miss ZZ. Since the blog is called 2 Dorks in Love, I do like to add at least some posts about us as a couple and family life.
- I sure do - my husband co-writes and manages Clarks Condensed. I do include my son quite a bit - he is always helping me with projects and recipes, and he is the inspiration for many posts.
- Sometimes, but very little. Occasionally, I'll mention my husband and something he does/did. Or sometimes my child will be in a photo, as a model. Sometimes. Only if they are part of the story not the story.
- I do on Instagram which is considered microblogging I used to do a lot more but have switched from lifestyle to more diy decor and photography .. As the blogging world changed so much when Google Reader went away
- I do not include pictures of my children or their real names. I do blog about some of the things that happen in my family and certainly about families in general. For instance a post I published about the lessons we learned from our trip to Disney World.
- I include my son a lot. I'm in SEO, so one of the things I'm in the process of is blocking all the photos of him from Google. THAT'S FUN! He's 3 and a half and the older I've gotten I just think it's not totally cool to take away his magic as a kid by using his picture so much. I can tell stories and stuff, but I'm going back to edit posts to leave out his name and block the photos. It's going to kill my SEO, but that will be fun to document later. My husband isn't that interesting, so he gets left alone! Hahahahaha.
- Yes. We include our families.
- I have a lifestyle blog and my lifestyle is my family so they are definitely included. I don't use anyone's real name to protect their identity and privacy. I do make sure that I don't share anything embarrassing about them out of respect. I have plenty of my own embarrassing moments to work with.
- So far I have referred to my family only peripherally. The main reason being that I am telling stories about experiences I had without them.
- I have contributed articles to other blogs that focus specifically on parenting and kids with special needs because there are things I want to share that fit better on sites other than my own.
- I do. I use pseudo names for them, but I talk about them. I am a craft blogger so when we do a craft together I have to talk about them.
- I talk about them to my audience the same way I would to a friend - with humor and honesty. Sometimes they suck. Sometimes they are amazing.
- Yes, all the time. The reason I started my blog was to record the 72 days spend with my

newborn daughter as she waited for, received, and recovered from a life saving liver transplant. This life event changed our family dynamic and the expectations we had for the future. Those lessons and so much more been recored and replayed on the blog.

- I do include my children, but I recognize that this is an unsustainable model if I don't do it carefully. I talk more about parenting my children than about them in detail. I've also started talking about them less and less and focusing more on myself so I don't have to deal with consent.
- I do a weekly photography post in which my husband and kids show up in photos from time to time but they aren't the focus of my blog. I do, but not very often. I write about travel and lifestyle, and obviously they are part of that, so they make an appearance.
- I don't, however, write about marriage or motherhood, so they aren't integral to my blog content.
- I do. I ask permission before telling stories about my children once they are seven or so. When I blog about my family, I try to keep it short and pithy.
- Yes. Early on, I decided to use our real first names, but have always been careful about surnames on anything public-facing. I try and be respectful about how and what I write concerning family members, but I also made a commitment to myself very early that if I was going to write, I was going to be honest in my writing. Little did I know what was coming...
- There is only one subject I have avoided in my nearly ten years of writing, and that is my mother. Our relationship is tenuous, and has been for decades, and if I were to write honestly about my relationship and struggles with her, it would kill any remaining hope at someday having anything healthy between us. So, instead of writing about it falsely, I just avoid it. I may mention her in passing, but I have never explored the complicated and often painful reality of my life wit her. Otherwise, it's all been on the table.
- Now that my children are getting older, if I write something specifically about them, I let them read it first, and I give them veto power. So far, they continue to enjoy reading about themselves, and it hasn't been a problem. That might change as the teen years deepen.
- When I got remarried this year, I asked my new husband how he felt about my writing about him. He endearingly answered "You write. You tell your truth. It's what you do. I trust you. Write."

To What Extent Does Your Blog Function to Journal or Chronicle Your Experiences and Why? How Likely Are You to Include a Record of Others (Especially Family Members) In a Record of Your Own Experiences and Why?

Text Responses

- My blog is less a journal than a magazine that includes parenting moments. I tell stories that include my children occasionally, but try very hard not to do so often.
- While I write about my family, it is not necessarily to chronicle our lives. My writing is primarily anecdotal. I usually skip over other blogger's "look what we did" posts because it's boring to me. I'd rather read a funny story or look at memes than scroll through someone's unoriginal sponsored vacay.
- My early blog was very faithful and well-updated. My daughter's early life was very well chronicled. Three kids later, I don't even know if I have included the baby. Who is one.
- As I age and the kids age I think that, if I continue, I would like the focus to be more on writing and ideas with occasional appearances by the kids. Maybe. My blog functions as a chronicle of my creative pursuits, but not of my family life.
- My blog is mainly a journal. I try to include things about myself. But not as much as I would in a personal journal. I don't want everyone to know everything about me. I like to record monthly updates in my kids. I don't want to forget what they are doing and I love looking back on posts.
- My old blog was very much a journal or historical record. In fact, it was so much so that I have each year printed for my family to read through. Now, as I'm trying to respect their privacy more as they age, I share less on blogs and more on Instagram. It's just little snippets, takes significantly less time, and is still a great historical record for our family. Again, I have my account printed for easier sharing and reading. I think it's important for my children to be able to go back and see how we lived and why we did certain things. I love that it will give them an insight into me as their mother and some of the joys and hardships I went through in raising them. I appreciate records that are more than statistics but share emotions and stories. I think they're more engaging and families are more likely to go back and read them without falling asleep.
- My blog is definitely a journal. Very much so. I don't blog as much about family records as I do my projects but that doesn't mean they are off limits. I tend to post more pictures of them and tell their stories on social media.
- It does not. My blog isn't necessarily about my family, it's about educating families on how best to use technology, so while my family is featured, it really has nothing to do with our day to day life.
- Very much chronicle of our family life.
- My blog is primarily for personal mental well being, so I certainly hope none of my posterity comes across it! It serves as a personal reminder of my journey that I can reference for my own purposes, and I include my family when their experiences impact my own and how I feel.
- i don't really use my blog to record our family life
- Our private blog is solely for journaling purposes and includes tons of happenings from each member of our family. This is how I record milestones, experiences, Etc for each child so that they have it for future enjoyment or reference.
- I include others often because 1) they are a big part of my life and 2) I feel like my life alone isn't that interesting.

- The style of my blog -when I was posting more often-was to include photos and just a few lines of text. I wanted to keep a kind of journal that would spark personal memories when I looked back and read through the posts.
- As I've stated before, I blog for the primary purpose of chronicling family history. My mother's family was stellar at compiling family history before I was ever in the picture and I LOVE reading the stories from my ancestors both pioneer and present. I feel it's my responsibility to continue this. I like the blog because it's convenient and saved electronically. Those books my mom has so kindly passed on to me have a shelf-life, literally. If our home floods or burns, they're purely memories. While I print my blog books, I do love that I can just order a new one if something were ever to happen to the copies I already have.
- Not much, I primarily do projects, not personal. Very much so! (As previously mentioned)
- As it relates to family, I mostly write about my daughter, and far little about my husband and son. If any, actually. And though there are times I would LOVE to write about my mother (who makes me crazy) I know it wouldn't be nice, so I leave that stuff out. But it's hard, because so much of ME and my way of being in the world is influenced by her (for better or for worse.. mostly worse.).
- My blog is mostly a professional record of my work rather than a personal journal of experiences. But the two are often intertwined. Not really any. I knew when I started that I wanted to make money.
- Not at all.
- I have totally used it to look up a date that something happened in our family. but it in now way chronicles everything we do!
- I used to have a family blog that was like a family journal. I don't keep up with it anymore, but it's primary purpose was to keep a journal or list of things we had done as a family. My blog now is a craft/business blog, so it is primarily for sharing content that I think others will want to read and see.
- That is a huge reason I blog, I don't keep a journal. I feel like I need to sensor myself in such a way that I don't go back and read my journal and want to die of shame. So I really like blogging in that way. I am extremely likely to keep a record of others because that is what makes my life!
- My blog had been a journal/chronicle of my experiences. It's moved more towards more general, regularly occurring content with personal stories when appropriate. As you grow you need to start thinking about how your stories can help others and be less me focused. I include a record of others in my experiences when it's important for the story, for example, if I'm talking about a wedding anniversary and saving up for our celebration.
- My blog is my journal because I prefer to type things out these days instead of write in a book. I don't really record too much about other people but I do include them a little, that they were there. and pictures.
- barely at all, it's not really about what is going on day to day. Sometimes the recipes I share I actually made the year before! Other than birthdays (and not even those half the time) nothing is really super timely or chronological about it
- It's not like a day to day diary. I just post about us when it fits the geeky niche. Otherwise I am adding projects, giveaways and more. Some of it as a record, though I keep a personal blog where I expound more on the details of our day to day life.
- It's only a journal to the sorts of crafts I've done. I used to have a family blog, and wish I kept better on that blog. :(

- My blog totally journals my experiences and the people I have met along the way. Some of my stories are of shared experiences I have had with my children.
- I have a personal Instagram with close friends that is more of my journal where I talk about my kids and what they say but that didn't happen on my big Instagram feed unless it's purposefully done like a staged shot
- I heartily believe it is inappropriate to blog in depth about your children's experiences and find it short sighted and truly unsafe to publish your children's images or names online. Your children have no power or autonomy to assert regarding their online presence and it is our job as their parents to protect their online identity. I would never want someone to be able to read what essentially amounts to their life story from a one sided perspective. I do, within a limited scope, talk about my own experience as a parent. For instance in my 10 commandments of Disney posts, I talked about my experience of Disney and what would have made it better. Any aspect directly involving my daughter was very limited and written in generalities. I do, however, frequently talk about my own life. As an adult, I have the ability to weigh the pros and cons of the information I choose to share online. My children, however, do not. For me, that is the difference.
- I mostly chronicle experiences. Usually only the kid is involved in the stories.
- It is mostly a way to share inspiring or fun ideas or things we do with our family.
- The longer I blog, the less of my private life I share. Mostly because my life has gotten busier as my children have gotten older.
- My blog is 100% about chronicling my experiences, and I will happily write about whomever was with me at the time. But while it is all about my experiences, it is not about all my experiences. Instead it focuses mostly the experiences I have without my family. This is not because I don't want to include my family, but instead because I don't want my role as a mother to hinder me from doing these things and the majority of them simply aren't appropriate for the age my kids are.
- It is really only a journal of the projects we work on, not of the rest of our life.
- I only include the family when it really pertains. It feel like I am taking their story if I include too much. Yes! See answer to 8.
- I want my daughter to have an understanding of where she came from in order to live her best life. Same goes for my son. I want him to understand how important he is in the role of the family, how much we care about his needs, and how loved he is. How loved they both are.
- My blog is definitely a journal, but because it's public I keep it more about myself than I would in a private one. I had a private anonymous online journal where I was allowed to say anything and this is a very different experience.
- My blog is a journal of my process as an artist. It is not the place that I'd record family events/stories.
- To a small degree I mean, obviously, I blog what is happening in my life, so to that extent, there's a record, but I don't write about family milestones or anything like that.
- I rarely write much about other family members, particularly if I believe it's their story to tell, and not mine.
- I have idiopathic hand tremors which make writing by hand more difficult. The theory is that my blog will become my online journal, and it has served that function in the past. Also, the ability to embed pictures into the posts makes it an illustrated story of our lives.
- I am likely to include a record of anyone involved in the even or situation I am writing about, because he/she/they was/were a part of it. "...and why." Isn't that a little word

holding the entirety of a life in it's one tiny syllable. Heh.

- My blog is utterly and completely a journal and chronicle of my life, more so than I ever intended it to be when I first logged into Blogger in August of 2005, in an attempt to respond to a woman's letter on another website. A URL was needed to comment, and I didn't have one. That's the humble nexus of the blog that literally changed my life.
- Why. I don't know. Telling our stories matters. Being honest and vulnerable are valuable and matter. We relate to one another through our lives, and I found myself in a new state, with a new baby, in a new church, and I needed somewhere to spill myself that contained me, and that wasn't about the endless cycle of infant care and being a housewife, but that encompassed and allowed those things as **part** of who I am nonetheless. I needed a place to remember my intellect and sharp mind in the chaos of raising little babies. I needed to find other people in whose lives I saw my own reflection, and where I also found hope. I needed to navigate rocky cliffs and unanticipated byways, and figure out how to do so with a modicum of grace, if such a thing were possible. So I wrote. I wrote into the darkness, never imagining who would read, or what worlds would open up.
- I've never regretted it.

What Are Your Biggest Concerns About the Representation of Your Family On Your Blog?

Text Responses

- Keeping my family's privacy secure. Making sure there are boundaries that protect my family, while still allowing people to see what a real, honest family life looks like for a working mom and dad.
- I am not a "free range" parent, but I do tend to keep things pretty loose with my kids. I worried that readers would take issue with the liberties I give my kids, but I've received overwhelmingly positive feedback.
- Privacy. Privacy privacy privacy. I am much less concerned about pedophiles than I am random fan-moms who see them at grocery stores and forget that we don't actually know each other. I love meeting people, but my kids deserve to have that happen organically.
- Despite my love of social media, I am fairly private about my personal life online. I'm happy to share more details of my personal life with my family and friends I know personally, but I do not want the general public to have an inside look at our family life.
- I want my family to appear real, so I try to include some of the bad/hard times. But I also want to show the fun things we do. I don't post pictures where I look frumpy and fat because I don't want to remember it or have other people see it.
- Sometimes I worry about some psychopath deciding to stalk our family for one reason or another but that can happen with or without a blog. Mostly, I don't want the things I share to come back and humiliate them when they become adults and a google search is done on them as part of a job interview or something important to them. I'm happy to share that we aren't perfect but I don't ever want them to feel embarrassed by something I decided to share about them.
- I don't share too much about them for the reason of keeping some information private.
- I don't really have that many concerns. My philosophy is that if someone is crazy enough to go after you or your family, then they will find you no matter how much you put out there. Having said that, I don't include my husband's name in my blog because of his profession.
- Sanitizing vs. Reality. I have small privacy concerns.
- I want people to know and love my kids like I do.
- I work through my most difficult moments online, and I fear that those who create challenges (primarily my aforementioned spouse) will forever be associated with those terrible decisions.
- I always worry about the wrong type of people reading and finding out info I don't want them to have
- My only fear, if it can even be called that, is that it seems somewhat redundant. Our life is pretty routine and so I guess it could come off as boring since I'm constantly writing about the same things: school projects, silly things someone said, what happened that day, etc. I don't mind since that's the purpose of our family blog but I suppose it could seem a boring blog to some.

- Sharing too much.
- I don't give too much detail about my family on the blog so I'm not worried too much about how I represent them. I've done less and less blogging when blogging became an annoyance to the family. My kids never signed up to be models or have their lives constantly photographed and documented it to have their mom on the computer all the time.
- I have no concerns at all. I privatized because I didn't feel the need to use pet-names or nicknames, and I didn't want to be vague. I wanted to be able to post those adorable bath time photos without worrying about some sicko stealing pictures of my kid.
- I don't them on for security issues
- Good question. I'm often nervous that someone will criticize my parenting choices with my daughter - in a loud vocal and rude way. She's 7 years old and dresses like a boy, and though I fought her for a long time, there came a very poignant moment when I realized I couldn't fight it anymore (you can read about it on my blog). People have all sorts of opinions about this kind of stuff. So far though, it's been all positive and overwhelmingly kind, so that keeps me going. People find out story inspirational, and there is tremendous power for transformation in inspiration.
- Others will try to think that my family is actually theirs. I want my readers to relate but maybe that day will come when someone see's my child and calls her by name and it'll be weird. I may have to invest in a life size dummy to do all my modeling. It might cooperate better anyways.
- None.
- The comments I get from extended family. They are quite annoying and aren't great keeping the comments to themselves. Some freak would single us out. But that can happen just by some one watching you. I am carefull not to let some details out.
- I worry sometimes about sharing my kids names when sharing on the blog or on social media, whether it is a personal social media account or blog account, I try to be careful.
- I just want to make sure I never say anything that they are embarrassed by. I am an open book, almost too open, and my husband and other family members are not that way. I have invaded their privacy before and I am always very careful to try to never do that.
- Not really any but if I had kids I might be more concerned. I think how I represent myself and spouse are just fine.
- I do want to keep a bit of privacy, so I am selective in what I share. I want people to think we are goofy and fun but not weird in the bad sense.
- NOT representing them really. When I started taking my blog to the next level his only concern and request is that I leave the kids and him out of it. So other than modeling they really aren't a part of it, it's NOT a family blog, and it's up to them later in their lives if they want to put it all out there. I don't want them to google themselves someday and already have an online presence from me that they didn't choose.
- I guess privacy concerns. I worry that people will think I'm judging them if they don't do things the way we do (even though I try to emphasize that I am not!) PRIVACY.
- My children are protective of their privacy. If I am to include them in my blogging, or instagram or facebook, I need to seek their permission. They have said yes and they have adamantly said NO. It depends on how the social media presents them.
- That I'm a sucky self centred person for blogging but to be honest I feel like I'm just an emotional person who likes to share and others that are similar get me and don't think I'm nuts pretty sure words of affirmation is my love language
- I am acutely aware of the information I share and how it may impact my children's

lives. I am extremely careful when choosing what information and how much to share. Again, that I'm robbing my son of something we all had as kids.

- That people might not understand why we keep the blog in the first place I do worry that my girls will be cyber stalked by creepy internet weirdos.
- I want to always be honest in my writing. As the mother of a child with special needs I often struggle with intense emotional challenges. I would hate for my son to sometime down the line read my side of things and feel any kind of resentment or guilt about my struggles. I am very conscious about what I write about my life or why I am making this time for myself a priority. My concern is never with how it will make others feel about my family. Instead it is about how it will make my family feel about itself.
- I worry that some day the kids will look back and feel like I made fun of them too much. I try to balance the crazy kid posts with the amazing kid posts.
- I want to be as real as possible without oversharing or getting too personal. I don't want my children safety to ever be in jeopardy. And I never want my drive for success to take away from their time.
- I want to make sure I show a balanced picture, mixing the good with the bad. I see my blog as a way to fight back against the blogs that seem to show only perfect moments. That sometimes means I write about things that are unpleasant or difficult, but to me those are the most important posts.
- maybe that I'd share an unflattering (to them) photo
- I'm always conscious of my family's (and friends') privacy, and am very careful not to cross that line.
- Privacy and accuracy. To the former, my children are their own persons, as is my spouse. They have the right to not have their lives be "blog fodder," or to be told in the public domain. To the latter, I tell their stories through my filter my perceptions and those will not be accurate to their lived experience of the same situation.
- Honestly. I don't think I have any- but then this is where I probably have straddles the mommy-blogger/serious writer chasm. I am not a design blog, I am not a lifestyle blog. I have never presented us a perfect family, but I have also never been cynical and cutting in my depiction of my family and life. I don't have the long hindsight to say if this is a good or a bad thing, but it's worked for us. When people meet us, the reaction has been, without exception, that we are exactly as I have written. This is how I know I have found the balance. I would consider it a catastrophic personal failure (and a failure as a writer) if I had misrepresented the reality of my life.

Do You Try To Establish a Personal Brand or a Consistent Visual Style/Aesthetic on your Blog? Or Do You Have Any Established or Unwritten Criteria for what does and does not get included on your blog? How and to what extent does this affect choices you make for your family?

Text Responses

- I have a very specific aesthetic for my blog. Simple, clean, organized, beautiful. I don't post negative content, reviews, or diatribe type posts. Only happy, pretty things. It's an absolute reflection of how I choose to live my life and the way I raise my children.
- I am not a photographer. I try to avoid "potato quality pictures" when I can, and call it good.
- I have consciously steered clear from branding myself and my family because I feel like it changes the voice of the writing. The few times I have tried it I felt that it came out contrived. I would rather be authentic and have a smaller "base" and no monies. My criteria is "if I suddenly went viral would this make my husband lose his job/would my kid get ostracized/do I want this picture on GMA."
- I try to maintain a visual aesthetic that is light and simple. I try to only post things that will be helpful to other people. I would never want my family to feel like we're doing something a certain way because I need to maintain some image on social media. I want them to feel that our family life is private, and not worry that the things they say or do will be shared with people they don't know. I want them to feel secure, and know that they can trust me to protect their privacy.
- N/a
- For my current site I definitely have an aesthetic I try to maintain and I'm much more conscientious of it than I was about my old blog. It's not a family blog/record any longer and the things I share reflect that. If I mention our family it's mostly just in passing.
- I definitely try to have a consistent aesthetic on my blog. It helps my brand be remembered. I will blog about my children's birthday parties and when I do I make sure they are the best caliber. If they weren't going to make an appearance, I probably wouldn't try so hard.
- Yes, my brand is very important to me, and it resonates with the brands I choose to work with, and those I don't choose to work with. I have turned down profitable campaigns because I don't believe in the brand offering the campaign.
- I try to be very real but it would be untrue to say I let it all hang out- there is a careful editing of how my house looks and that the pictures are flattering to all involved. That being said, I am not doing this to make money or present a "brand" so I am a bit less constricted by that.
- I always strive, on and off the blog, to do things in a way that my kids will look back and say, "She made things nice."
- I focus on myself and my experiences rather than those of my family. As a therapeutic experience it keeps me fairly honest and helps to keep my family members themselves out of the spotlight while still allowing me to discuss my difficulties as a parent, spouse, and all around human being.
- I make my decision about how much I share based on the how I think family members will feel in a decade about the information I share. My special needs son will probably not be happy as an adult knowing that his every issue growing up is out there to be deconstructed, so I don't make it accessible.

- I like it to be clean, bright, and pretty as much as possible. Since my blog is "a few of my favorite things" I can really write about anything that I like. Sometimes I get approached by companies I have no interest in and have to decline offers because it's not me, but if there is a company I am somewhat interested in I am willing to try out new things and my family either reaps the benefits or disadvantages of me trying new things ;)
- Private blog, no.
- The other blog, yes. We only include content that we feel is positive and uplifting for teen girls. Also things that adhere to LDS standards. I can't say if that really affects choices for my family or not, but they are the same standards that we live by in our home.
- I am not very technical. So I just kinda took what Wordpress gave me. Also I don't really have a theme because I don't really have a constant thing that I think to write about.
- When my blog started becoming more popular and I felt like certain posts were expected or could bring me more traffic, I got lost for a while in the excitement of being this creative mom that people wanted to follow. I started doing things not for myself anymore but for the page views and hats when I realized my original goals for the blog had been forgotten.
- I keep it simple. Stories and pictures. The end. I am only careful about keeping a positive spin on things whenever possible. When my daughter has moments where I want to rip my own hair out (and hers as well), we call the mischievous moments and I try to find the humor in the situation (because, let's be honest, there's always some) and keep it more lighthearted, rather than focusing on the tantrums and time-outs, which no doubt accompanied the mischievous moments.
- Personal brand.
- Oh, I'm trying, but I have a long way to go in terms of visual style/aesthetic. I will say this though... when people read my blog, they know my words will always be funny, inspirational, and will teach them something. That's something I make sure happens in every post. 1. Humor 2. Inspiration 3. Education.
- I'm a style blogger... sort of, but I'm not one that likes to just post a bunch of outfit pictures. That's not what style is to me. It's about who we are on the inside, and how we present that on the outside. It's about courage and gusto and bravery and confidence. It's about being powerful yet humble. It's about life, and our choices and experiences - so I write about all that kind of stuff.
- I knew I wanted black and I love simple lines but that is not really me. I found some black roses and a fun handwritten font and that's what I've gone with. Obviously if something fails, I don't post it. I try to be consistent on days and I try to be really creative on what I post. It has for sure taken a toll on my home life and the standard of my home but I have found something I really love doing so the small things can wait while I hang out with my kids or we create together.
- AS mentioned above it is a work-related blog, so this isn't much of an issue for me. On instagram, posting pics of my kids could be said to add humanistic value to my portrayal as an artist or illustrator. I guess :)
- Yes. I have a aesthetic I like to keep. All this means is that I decorate my home and parties in a certain style. But, I would be doing the same thing even if I wasn't blogging.
- I try to always post good quality content. I didn't realize that I have a look for my blog until a couple of friends that read the blog told me that they can always tell from a

picture if the project is mine. I was surprised by this. Sometimes blogging gets in the way of family time, if I am under a deadline. This is a part of blogging that I don't enjoy at all. I am working on getting into a better routine and schedule for blogging so it doesn't cut into family time.

- My personal brand is a one-two year goal. I don't like to blog about just one thing so that makes it harder for me to have a personal brand. I publish anything I want on my blog which isn't always a good thing because I can't characterize my blog easily.
- I have not really tried to establish a personal brand.
- I do try to keep it on the geekier side to create a specific niche. We are naturally that way so it's not too hard :) Yes, Yes and not much.
- Yes I have a brand, it ME, Ashlee Marie, my hair, shoes, cakes it's all me, which means I can share what I want. But it's about me, what I do, NOT about my kids family, etc... I am starting to do travel so my family will take a bit more of a role being in picture's and vaguely talking about aspergers and travel, but not super specific about each kid, and not telling personal stories about the kids.
- I sure do. I write things that are family friendly and that I can fully endorse. We don't always include extended family pictures, as they have requested we don't. But as long as something is family friendly, it's game.
- I have goals of doing that, but it just hasn't happened yet. My blog doesn't affect my family in any way, except for at times, it takes me away from spending time with them. Mostly I Try to do it after kids are in bed.
- My blog is about design, architectural, art, and interiors. My children are not really part of this category. So I really do not worry about how it affects my children.
- yes my aesthetic for my brand is bright colors and happy pictures therefore I do buy only clothes I think will look good in my feed since I'm needing to portray my brand same goes for my home anything unhappy is too dark for my blog
- I do try to create a consistent brand and aesthetic. While my personal brand includes being a wife and mother, I am careful the extent to which they are included on my blog. Their images and names will never be included and stories about them are general.
- I do have brand standards, but it doesn't extend to how my child included in the blog. That may change in the future. Yes.
- I blog about whatever it is I'm thinking about or doing. I think my "voice" changes with my mood. I don't include anything on my blog that my family wouldn't want. And my blog has little to no impact on the choices I make for my family. Family come first, not a blog.
- I am still learning how to establish personal branding and find it hard to be consistent in this time of growth and change on my blog.
- I have unspoken rules on what I will say about my life and kids and so if an experience I might otherwise share crosses that line I simply chose not to write about it. For me the experiences are more important than the posts about them.
- I am still working this. I have an aesthetic I am working towards, but it doesn't totally fit with our home so it takes some tweaking. I don't alter what we do based on that aesthetic though.
- I do try to be as consistent and brand driven as possible. But I don't style my kids for photo shoots. Instead I have tried to match my brand to the esthetic that I actually by.

- Clean, modern, playful, and kid friendly.
- I try to pretend no one I know reads it when I write. The only exception is that I don't want to speak negatively about anyone who is easily identifiable.
- I got divorced last year and I knew that I'd have to write about that very delicately. I couldn't call out things my ex did even though I really wanted to. I could only write my way through my own feelings.
- If I have any kind of signature style, it's openness and sincerity.
- yeah I think I have a consistent visual style. I don't think I've seen any affects from my photos on my family as they aren't old enough yet to notice or complain. I could see this becoming an issue later and I may need to ask their permission or just not continue that series.
- Because at this point my blog is primarily a tool for my business, I only rarely post things that are personal. To that end, my blog doesn't affect choices I make for my family at all.
- I did try; I failed.
- One of the reasons I do not blog much anymore is that I feel I cannot be true to me on the Internet. I fear it will cause me trouble with my friends and in my faith community. A private, written journal is better to safeguard those thoughts, but I find better release when I send those thoughts out into the world to find their kin.
- I do not discuss my parents on any of my blogs, except in the most general terms.
- I possibly do not understand the third question. My blog, past, present, and future, has never affected choices I make for my family.
- No. This is where my husband says I am without guile. I love blogs that have a personal style or brand. I admire bloggers who can successfully do this. I don't, and I don't think I know how, and if I *do* have something that says it's *me", it's purely accidental and a by-product of that promise I made early on to just be open, vulnerable and honest. If I refuse artifice, if I always default to just being who I am, then I don't have any grooming or branding to worry about- and I don't know how to do it any other way.
- As far as criteria about what gets included... I won't violate someone else's privacy. I've had experiences that I've asked friends or family permission to write about, and if they are uncomfortable with the idea, I won't do it. It's been rare though, to be honest. Very few times have I been asked not to write. Even my ex-husband, who went to hell and back during the last ten years, said he trusted me to even tell his story. I consider and hold as a deep personal compliment to my character and writing.

Do you try to establish a consistent written/verbal voice in your blog posts? Do you have any established or unwritten criteria for how you write or what voice you use when you blog?
How and to what extent does this affect what you include or disclose on your blog?

Text Responses

- My blog posts are all consistently in my "voice". I am a bit sarcastic, periodically humorous and sometimes snarky (in a teasing non-mean way). I have several writers, and they each contribute in their own way, but the overall tone of the blog is positive and hopeful and helpful/informative.
- My voice is casual and direct. I try to avoid unnecessary profanity. I want my mom to be able to read my blog, too.
- I try to use my normal voice. I tend to be dry, honest, and kind. I try to err on the side of kindness, if I am feeling snarky. I have several VERY sensitive and quick-to-offend family members and so I always have them in mind, because either the fallout would be too much hassle, or I would spend a lot of time having to tell them that yes, I really do feel that way. Honestly, if I wasn't censoring for those family members I would feel much more authentic. I would love to be able to write about more honest situations.
- I try to write my blog posts as if I'm writing to a real-life friend who lives across town. I want my tone to be consistent with my real voice, so I'm careful not to write things that would sound inauthentic to people who know me personally.
- my voice is a mom and wife. I won't include things that I wouldn't want everyone to know or things that could embarrass my husband or kids.
- I believe in being "real" in that I acknowledge my life isn't perfect. I have no qualms about sharing things that didn't work out for us or things with which I had a hard time. In real life I do my best to see the good in things and I try to carry that into my blog, too, but I try to be careful it's done in an honest way rather than a fake, everything is fine, we don't have any problems kind of way.
- I just try to be me, which I guess is a consistent voice. If people like me, they'll like my content and writing. If they don't, I really don't care so it doesn't affect what I do or do not include that much. I include what interests me at the moment.
- I just use the same voice I would talk to other people in, there isn't really a difference between what I say and what I write.
- I try to be really me in my voice on the blog. I have freely written about how my kids make me batty and about their quirks. My son has some special needs and while I want to share our trials with him, I try to be respectful of his crazy habits.
- I write how I speak. Authenticity is of the utmost importance to me. I will discuss myself, my thoughts, and my response to the challenges of parenting, but the internet is not a place to openess door for emotional harm to others in my life. I respect the dignity of my family, so I always have to draw the line between their experience and mine.
- My experience is open game, theirs should be protected until such time as they wish to share it.
- not really, I'm pretty much just non-descriptive and to the point. I try to write like I'm talking and I do include a lot of sarcasm
- On the private blog it's all from my viewpoint and probably a pretty boring "voice". But I try to write honestly about what is going on (unless it's very personal and I don't want others reading about it).

- On the other blog I try to use a positive and humorous voice so that it creates an engaging and happy tone for readers. This goes along with our goal of providing positive resources and info.
- I just try to write like I talk. It could possibly be confusing.
- I try to keep it short and sweet because I have a short attention span and I know others do too. When it comes to tutorials, I spend more time on those because it's a way I feel like I can give back to the online community. I appreciate so much all the free tutorials that have taught me how to do pretty much everything I've wanted to learn to do.
- I write like I speak, but also try to be as grammatically correct as possible so as to make my reading easy for other readers to follow. One of the biggest compliments I've received about my blog is that people who read it say they can hear me say what they're reading. That's imperative to me. As a Language Arts teacher for a few years, I always told my students that I should be able to tell whose essay/story I was reading without having to look at the name. I think it brings a more personal style, and I like that.
- I do.
- Don't think it affects the family.
- Yes. I use MY voice, which is very much... my voice. It's injected with my honest truths and my sense of humor. And it tends to really resonate with people. I won't write about something that I know squat about, because I couldn't write about it authentically. Or, I might write about what I can't write about... because that would be authentic.
- I am very insecure about my English grammar. I'm sure it has something to do with all the grammar bashers out there but I reread everything 20 times and I can never figure out if I've done it right.
- This is similar to the above in that it doesn't affect my blog very much at all since it is mostly images of my work. no.
- This is something that I feel like I am still trying to figure out. Even after several years.
- My voice is something that makes my blog as successful as it is so it is extremely important to me. When I first started blogging, I accepted any sponsorship that came my way. Now I think hard about if I could fit that product into my blog, make it seem relevant using my voice. If not, it's a no go.
- Not really sure about this. I blog how I talk
- I want to keep it light and fun, I think. I do leave things out. I haven't decided how to treat my husband's illness yet. He had cancer and then a subsequent massive infection, so has been sick for almost 3 months. I have been blogging a lot less. I am not sure if I will bring it up. I know life isn't 100% happy, but might keep this out for his privacy also.
- since I write every post it does end up with a voice, not sure it's a good one, as I'm not a great writer. I'm actually trying to switch over as much as I can to video this year. so it will be even MORE me!
- I do - I try to use my voice and talk in a personable, casual tone. I think it's important to connect with my readers and not just sound like I'm writing a formal article.
- I do try and keep it consistent. This last year I haven't blogged very much, due to personal trials. Starting fresh this year, I plan to be more consistent in posting and how I write (voice)
- I try to have a consistent voice. However, I do feel I am still evolving my voice. I usually do not say anything too personal unless it is how I feel personally about a particular topic that I am posting.
- I try and write optimistically sweet and supportive
- My style of writing always includes humor, often self-deprecating. I am the same me

online that I am in person.

- No not really.
- No, but I think my style and sense of humor generally does come through in my posts.
- I try to write how I speak. But with better sentence structure. I want my stories to be real to the experience and who I am as a person. I try to write with humor and humility so usually my stories end in me making an ass of myself because that's who I am. I try not to let vanity stand in the way of honesty. I don't really have to censor myself because what I chose to write about doesn't call for it.
- This is why I choose to write about what I do rather than about my parenting experiences. Those I would feel an urge to censor. I always try to write from a self deprecating voice. It is how I present myself in real life so it comes naturally.
- I will post embarrassing stories about myself, but I don't ever post anything that would actually embarrass the kids. My voice has developed over time - I just try to be as authentic and consistent as possible.
- I think I do have a consistent voice, very conversational and not heavily edited. By now I've been doing this for so long that I don't think a lot about what I should or should not write about, I already know where I fall on most issues.
- My unwritten criteria for myself is I try not to complain or be negative about anything. When things aren't going well, I try to look for what I can learn from the situation. I only write about my experiences as they relate to creativity and my art.
- I write as authentically as possible. My only criteria is that it remain positive or, if negative, there's a solution provided as well. I don't go negative on my blog, primarily because (a) it's not a blog about my life, it's my profession, and (b) I don't think it's healthy for ME to go negative.
- Again, I just default to that space of honesty and vulnerability. Facades are so tiring and difficult to maintain. There is no way I could have lasted through the last decade had I been trying to be something I am not. I would have crashed and burned and the relationships I had created would have crumbled on false foundations. Instead, quite the opposite has happened.

Have you experienced any difficulties in representing your family on your blog? Can you tell me about them and what you make of those experiences?

Text Responses

- I have not encountered any difficulty.
- I have an adopted daughter and the relationship with her birth mother is very open, but the birth mother is relatively naïve about social media, so I find myself protecting her. There have been times that she has commented and shared things I have written and I have thought that I needed to delete her comments because I didn't want them following her around in case the children she didn't place with us found them. My husband is a military officer and so I have not been able to express myself as politically and honestly as I would like, as well. I feel like I would like to provide a voice of honesty and let others know that they are not alone but many of the challenges we have faced require that discretion.
- Two of my children are step-children, so I write less about them than I do about my son, simply to avoid any possibility of causing or contributing to any kind of conflict with my husband's ex-wife. I haven't had any trouble with that, but I feel like it's wise to avoid the possibility. Also, my step-daughter is old enough to google herself, and I don't want to take the chance that she discovers something about herself on the internet that she doesn't feel good about.
- No
- In general I've been rather open about my family on my blog. I've shared about activities my family is involved in, hardships we're going through, and things like that. I think it adds to the personality and humanity of my posts. When it comes down to it, though, I do my best to state the pertinent facts and express my feelings about it rather than trying to speak for others or tell how I suspect they might be feeling. I only have authority to speak for myself.
- No, not really. I try to keep things pretty real whether it is good or bad. Not really
- My biggest challenge has been disclosing my son's various stumbling blocks in a way that was true but respectful of who he is now and will be in twenty years. For example I have withheld from sharing some of his diagnoses.
- But I think that at 40 years old, I am able to self-censure pretty well and thoughtfully.
- My only difficulty came when my ex-husband decided that personal feelings aren't appropriate for the internet. He felt that any expression of disappointment or sadness shouldn't be out in the ether for public consumption. I altered my blogging enough that I eventually stopped for a time altogether. I was providing an unrealistic version of
- my life and it killed all the helpful parts of the blogging experience for me. No
- Not that I can think of. Since only close family and friends can read it, I know they are people that understand who I am.
- I guess the only difficulties would be when something uber-significant seems to occur and I feel I can't blog it. For example, I have a sister-in-law who is...less than complimentary...when it comes to me. There have been a few times in the time I've known her where things have come to a head. When that happens, I definitely write the personal, gory details, but not on the family blog. I do that in my little "rant journal" which I'm sure my kid(s) will find when I'm old and gray, and we'll have some good ol' laughs about their curmudgeonly mother.
- I haven't had any difficulties n/a

- Again, the only thing I've worried about is people criticizing me for my parenting choices... allowing my daughter to dress like a boy.
- My son and my husband really don't come into my style story very often, so I don't find much of a need to write about them. Anything about them would be way too far off topic.
- No. My family is straightforward.
- Not really, they don't often end up on my blog. no.
- no
- No, haven't experienced anything like that. I have not.
- Only wanting to make sure I kept a little privacy for my daughter especially.
- more just making sure I DON'T represent them too much. because I'm with them every day it's easy to talk about them too much, get too personal, so I work more at NOT including them too much.
- No
- I haven't had an issue. (crossing fingers)
- I once posted a video of my children singing together around an outdoor fire. They freaked and I had to remove it even though it was a lovely video and song. I realized then and there I should have consulted them before I posted it. Even though I was annoyed at their attitude, I had to admit If someone did it to me I would be upset if they had not consulted me.
- My son is autistic sometimes it's hard to talk about what I go through
- It can be difficult to try to explain the impact of something without sharing the whole story. Since I made a personal decision to limit the sharing of information related to my family, I always defer to either not telling the story if it can't be done adequately in some other way or digging into my creativity to share it in a way that is impactful without sharing the details I keep off limits.
- not that I can think of.
- I have become more and more worried about putting my children on my blog and have found that I post less and less about them as time goes by. I wouldn't say that I've experienced specific difficulties though. Probably because my blog is pretty small.
- I really haven't because I have consciously created a blog that falls in a niche that doesn't lend itself to talking about my family. Not really.
- Not yet. Knock on wood.
- My kids are autistic and it can be hard to show just what their experience is like and how they're different from other kids. Sometimes they'll sound just like anyone else. I struggle with trying to get it across and sometimes commenters will downplay my kids' disabilities.
- no. They aren't included on my blog very often. No.
- The only difficulties I have had have been with my mother, but that's because my style of writing terrifies her. The only post I have ever taken down was about her, and that was very early on. I respected her wishes and removed it, even though I didn't find it inflammatory at all. She knows many of her friends read me, and she doesn't want herself represented in any way that contradicts what she presents as her life. Me being honest is incompatible with her wishes. So, I don't write about her.
- My children absolutely love reading about themselves, and my youngest daughter's life is utterly encompassed in the blog, from the positive pregnancy test in 2005 to today. I hope someday she and her brothers will see it as a gift. I know I would love to read about my grandmother's life in such candid detail. One can hope.
- I now have two stepchildren, and I'm just beginning to navigate how to write about

them. Obviously the privacy issues are different, and I have to figure out where their new lines lay. I haven't written about them much, and likely won't in any great detail, but I also won't omit them from the narrative. Their father keeps telling me to just write.

What is your perception of what “type” of blog yours is/are, and what would you base that classification on? How flexible do you think blogging categories can be? What role (real or perceived) do you feel gender plays in blogging categories or genres?

Text Responses

- I would identify my blog as a family- documentation type blog, but I do stray a bit into popular culture at times and I have posted some more serious posts about being a mom, particularly a stay at home mom. Overwhelmingly, my posts are about my children and their activities, mostly written to document funny/ interesting/things I want to remember moments.
- I think categories in blogs like mine with tiny tiny readership can be flexible, but I think if I starting reading a blog about organization, for example, and it veered into another direction, I would not like that. I read blogs who write what they say they are writing about. But if "mommy Blogs" veer off now and then I seem to mind less. Not sure gender in my mind plays a role... for me its more about sticking on topic. That being said, I don;t read any men's blogs. Not on purpose. That's just how it works out.
- My blog is considered "life style" and I don't actually know what that means other than not MOMMY/FOOD/DIY category.
- I think blogging can be flexible, so long as the authors voice is consistent from post to post. Stories can be told while giving directions for a DIY project. Aside from women's issues (or any other gender specific topics) I don't think gender plays an important role in blogging.
- I want my author to know what they are talking about because they experienced something. I want to feel with my author and learn with my author. I don't care what's between their legs.
- Gender plays a HUGE role in blogging. I think that women have to fight really hard to get out of the "mommy" category, and that stigma never goes away. I feel like my writing and experiences are more along the line of personal essays than anything, but I know it gets seen as mommy because I have kids. Even famous bloggers have to reference their kids.
- I consider my blog to be a crafting and lifestyle blog.
- My current blog would probably be considered an art/design blog. It's part portfolio and gallery and part behind the scenes, process, record of my work and family. I think blogging categories can be flexible. I've seen many blogs that fit multiple genres depending on the post and I don't have any issues with that. I don't necessarily feel gender plays a role in categorizing blogs aside from differentiating mommy and daddy bloggers if that's what they are. Seeing a tech post was written by and man or woman doesn't lend it or remove its credence for me.
- I think my blog is lifestyle because I include both party and home decor but I'll blog about anything. I don't really care about a label for my blog or certain genres. I'm a "tech mommy blogger".... My focus is on technology, but has more real world application than a blog like Engadget.
- Most "mommy bloggers" are turning into what could be classified as "lifestyle bloggers" and I think that's a super flexible category to be in, while other categories are less flexible. If you are food blogger, then you really don't vary from that topic, and same with me, I would never post a recipe on my blog because it doesn't fit my

classification.

- I'm just a person writing things, sharing experiences so I can process them and also so that maybe one other person out there can realize that they aren't as alone in their jacked up life as they feel.
- As far as categories I feel like there isn't a need for that unless you're trying to fulfill a specific purpose. Cooking, organizing, home management, etc...those are genres. Other than that we're all just people thinking out loud online.
- I would say my blog is mostly fashion, design, and mom, baby, and beauty products. It might be in the lifestyle category. I don't know if it's a good or bad thing to not be in one specific category. I don't have an opinion on if gender plays a role in what category your blog falls under, but I will say that I usually read men's blogs on news and current events and photography, and women's blogs on photography and everything else :)
- Our private blog is definitely a journaling blog or "mommy blog" since it's written by me, the mom. I don't think blogging categories would be very flexible with its genre. And it definitely feels like a typical female type of blog.
- The other is a religious blog perhaps. I actually haven't thought about that much. It has fashion, beauty, health, spiritual, DIY, etc. topics so I feel like it could fall into many categories though since it's based on LDS principles it would most likely be perceived as religious. Since it's for teen girls it's definitely a very female oriented blog.
- My blogs are personal. Even the ones for my students. I don't expect other people to find them inspiring, noteworthy, insightful, or "going viral" any time soon. I don't think gender has to play a role in blogging unless you want it to. And for those writers, they make it blatantly obvious to readers who/what they're about (examples: Well-Behaved Mormon woman, Mormon Child Bride, Single Dad Laughing, etc.)
- blogging categories are very flexible- diy, entertaining, parties can all come from one.
- I'm still trying to figure this out for myself! I'm not a "mommy blogger" per se, but I am a mommy who blogs. I'm not exactly a "style blogger", though I am a blogger who writes about style. Is there a women's empowerment category, because that's what I want mine to be. And I guess not too many male dudes could fit into that category.)
- I feel I'm a lifestyle blogger cause I post about whatever I want but it's really about what I want to create. I don't think there should be any gender issues with who's coming out with what but my niche has mainly always been what women do.
- My blog is for my professional illustration work, but lots of people who are not art directors or art buyers follow my through instagram or twitter and that might be more where these issues come into play. I think people's blogs are less what they used to be, other social media formats are perhaps dealing with these issues more. I don't think I fall into a category in those formats either, which is nice.
- DIY Party and Entertaining ideas. You can blog about anything you want, but bloggers decide if they want it to be a gender issue on their blog. I know extremely popular males who blog about food/stay at home/ parties/ etc.
- I consider my blog to be a Creative Blog or Crafting Blog. I feel that way because of the content that I share. There are so many categories for blogging out there. When I think of bloggers, I always think of creative bloggers, but there are SO many more out there. I do feel like more bloggers are women than men, and it makes sense to me because women tend to be at home parents more than men do. But this is also based on the bloggers that I spend time with. At least 98% of them are women.
- I usually refer to mine as a lifestyle blog only because I can't define it as anything else. I think blogging categories are extremely flexible! I would love to see more men in

the "mommy" blogging world. I feel like it's becoming a lucrative industry and I feel that men have a good chance to come in.

- I have a geek mom blog. I think they can be a bit fluid. It depends on how strict the blogger is to keeping to their niche. Women are somewhat expected to have blogs about kids, crafts and food, I think.
- I'm a FOOD blogger, but I also do cake tutorials (also food), and over the top parties (but the focus tends to be on the party food). I think my gender prob helps me, although some of the top chefs are men, I think being a women relates more to mom's not "chef" but home cook, hopefully doable, not just WOW (but also wow). I do branch out into how to and other creative posts, but since the brand is me I feel I get away with it.
- Family Lifestyle. I think there are a lot of females that blog, but the amount of men is rising. Some of the greatest bloggers I know are men! I think some people get stuck on the idea that blogging is just moms, when in reality, it's a huge industry.
- Crafty. I don't like being categorized. I just want to be able to do what I want, when I want, and just say I blog. I don't think genders should be a problem. I wish there were more male bloggers. They have a voice too, and it's been ignored! :)
- My blog would be of interest to both women and men. I talk about design in the larger sense. Typical mommy blogger's blogs would be of little interest to most men, young adults, and older women like me.
- i think your posts determine what kind of blogger you are if its sponsored posts with home stuff your s decor diy if it's your personal journey you are lifestyle sometimes they merge but it's pretty easy to define no role because most bloggers I know are women except tech bloggers who are usually guys or ap developers
- I think blogging categories are ridiculous. I'm not sure why we need to limit ourselves. Calling my blog a "lifestyle" blog is offensive. I'm not trying to put out a blog that other people should try to attain, a curated life that is not based in reality. I think the online images in the category of "lifestyle" often tend to create unrealistic ideals. No blogger's real life is as lovely as it is portrayed. There is something inherent in a title like "lifestyle" that gives the impression it is something you should emulate or try to attain.
- I would consider it a lifestyle blog. There seem like very specific classifications in the blogging community.
- I used to call my blog "random crap" but they have since come up with an official category of Lifestyle. I still blog the same, but Lifestyle Blog sounds better. I call it that because I post on a variety of subjects and don't really have a strong niche. I don't feel like my gender plays a role other than that I'm speaking from a female perspective which can be read and appreciated by both females and males. I think your gender role in blogging can be as big of a deal or small of a deal as you want to make it.
- Though I am fine calling myself a mommy blogger, I would not call my blog a mommy blog. I guess I would say I have an adventure blog. Each post covers a first time experience for me and though they are not all grandiose, the blog itself is coming from a place of treating life as an adventure. Though I believe the same blog can cover as wide a range of categories as it's creature wants, it seems gaining a large audience usually comes easier to those with a specific niche. I think there are certain areas that lend themselves to one gender or the other and that there is nothing wrong with that. I also think other categories are easily related to by both genders and that is equally fine. I see no need to have to be more than you want to be as a writer in order to please readers. Whatever you write about, if you do it well, there are people who it

will click with.

- I am a DIY blogger. All I do is crafts and projects like that. I think your niche can be whatever you want it to be - I don't like the idea that people would try to fit into a niche as opposed to being who they are and finding their own tribe.
- Gender plays the same roll in blogging as it does in any other profession. That isn't a good thing, but it does.
- Family/DIY/Children's lifestyle/Inspirational.
- I don't think gender plays a role in my blog theme. My husband has his hand in every post that is published and reflects his point of view just as much as mine. I usually describe myself as a "lifestyle" blog, and I say lifestyle means I write about whatever I feel like. You could also call it a personal blog.
- Gender does seem to have strong correlations with certain blog categories. I think this holds people back from entering a niche that's heavily populated by the opposite gender. It's a shame.
- I'd categorize my blog as an art or creative blog. Categories I think are flexible. Blogs often change over time. I haven't really considered what role my gender plays though I have noticed that most of my audience is female and most of the blogs I read are written my women.
- My blog is travel/lifestyle for sure but it's also a photoblog. I think gender plays a huge role even though I never write about parenthood, and my daughter only rarely appears on my blog, I am CONSISTENTLY categorized as a "mommyblogger." It makes me nuts.
- I think the lines in blogging are plasticine and porous, and frankly, that's just fine. These things evolve, and the nature of a blog is that it allows someone to engage, or to simply pop in, unknown, and touch a familiarity, if they need to. It's part of the beauty.
- I don't know what type of blog I have. I suppose it could be a mommy-blog, of sorts, but then again, not really. It's more of a memoir, though I never intended that to happen, and it's turned me into a good writer.

Can you list some blogs you read or reference that influence or inform your own blog “type”? Or that you try to emulate or use as a template? What parts of them constitute a useful model for you and what parts don't quite fit your own blogging needs or goals?

Text Responses

- Starting out, I really liked the writing part of blogging and used two blogs as inspiration: dooce and mimismartypants. Both were funny and smart and great voice and that's what I strive for in my own writing.
- After i blogged for a while, I felt like i found my own voice... but if you read mine and theirs, I'm sure you could find some similarities. I enjoy irockewhat.com when she's not doing sponsored content and I used to really like the paper mama.
- Initially I started blogging with the Clark sisters, CJane and NieNie before all the hoopla and monetizing. Courtney and I have travelled a similar path with our infertility and kids and she has influenced me a lot. I don't read a lot of blogs anymore, but my heros are Glennon Melton from Momastery, The Bloggess, Kacy Falconer from Every Day I Write the Book, and Michelle Lindquist. I admire their story telling abilities and honesty. I especially admire Jenny from The Bloggess because I desperately struggle with mental health issues and she has truly helped destigmatize. Glennon's motto about "If I feel afraid to write about it then I need to write" has also influenced me. I would rather be honest and helpful to others than stay quiet about a lot of things.
- 71toes
- I love that she uses it as a journal, but she also gives advise. I am not in a position to give advise. But I like that people can take her record keeping as a mother and use it to help their families.
- Recently I've really loved Emily Jefford's site. She's an artist in South Carolina and I love the way she share her work. I enjoy reading Jessica Wiseman of Very Mom. She's more of a life blogger but in an artsy way, sharing goofy sketches and making me laugh almost every time I read. I always love reading Tracy at Dandelion Mama because she writes beautifully and moves me with her words. In the last few years I've enjoyed reading Megan Conley of Meg in Progress because she always shares an interesting perspective and gives me new understandings or things to think about. There are things I want to pull from all of them along with aspects of Oh Happy Day, Design Mom, Stephmodo, and Made by Dana. They all inspire me for one reason or another and I want to integrate small things for each other them and make them my own.
- I don't really have anyone I try to emulate or use as a template. Instead I kind of see the norm out there and try to do something different. That way I am creating a product that is unique.
- engadget, cnet, pcworld, I get latest tech news from these places and curate the items I feel would be of interest to women, and discuss it in a way that isn't too technical and gives real world application to the item.
- I don't read any that I would compare to mine...the women's blogs I read do have a little bit of influence but just on my blog design
- I like the "voice" on makeit-loveit.com - she feels real. I don't follow many other blogs except for family and friends that have similar journaling blogs. There have been some blogs that I don't like to read because they share too much negativity about

maybe people they encountered or a bad experience they had. I'm not saying that people can't share bad things that happen but I don't like when it crosses the line into negativity or gossiping or "my way or the highway" type of opinions.

- I read other family members' personal blogs. Some of them write for masses, others write for small audiences. I wouldn't say any of them influence me in a way to write my own though. And as far as blogs go which ARE written for the masses I don't follow them, I may read a few snippets here and there which someone posts as noteworthy on Facebook, but again, I try to steer clear of any which would be ranty, seemingly uninformed, or against my personal convictions because I get too fired up about them. Most recently, the leggings/yoga pants drama. I mean really...I find it shameful (on both ends) that people feel they need to publish their personal fashion choices and that others feel they need to betrayed them for those choices. Sometimes I feel like those "mommy bloggers" are searching for the fight or notoriety. Those few minutes of fame. It's like bad reality television.
- thecraftedlife
- Crazy as it sounds, I don't read ANY blogs!!! I don't have time for that. I've got kids, remember. :) I like Tatertots and Jello
- House of Smiths A Beautiful Mess
- I don't often read blogs per se any more. The people whose blogs I used to read I know follow on instagram and twitter.
- oh happy day, studio diy, pizzazzerie, house that lars built - all of these have very creative diy ideas, but are all uniquely different as well. I try to create ideas while also keeping to a niche.
- I love to read www.snapcreativity.com, www.summerscraps.com, www.laurascraftylife.com. These are just a few. I mostly read these to see their content. I read Snap Creativity for tips and tricks, and the other two are my good friends, so I read to help support them.
- Yes! Kayleedaily.com, emilyhenderson.com, there are a ton more but that is all I can think of at the moment. These girls are just a positive light into the blogging world and they both have really strong voices. They also don't take themselves too seriously, which I like. Fashion bloggers in particular take themselves WAY too seriously, it's not genuine.
- I just discovered aslobcomesclean.com I love her writing...funny and relatable. I would like to emulate that going forth. Geekychef.com is a fun recipe site and I would like to do similar things.
- I don't. 1. I don't have time. 2. I NEVER want to be accused of copying, or stealing so I just do my own thing! it's too easy to go from "inspired" to "stealing". BUT that said I do love working with and talking with other bloggers to share what has worked for us and what our readers love.
- n/a
- I can't say that I really read others blogs, consistently. I usually only read a blog, if my friend says, I need more views/clicks. THEN I'll go over and do that for them. I don't read them cause I don't like to compare and feel inferior to others and then give up. Cause I know I'm not that great of a blogger.
- I sometime read SFGirlbyBay. I like the homes she showcases. I also like to look at Designlovest, because of her beautiful images and projects, although she posts way too many pictures of herself for my liking.
- housethatlarsbuilt I love her diy but I'm a photographer blue lily photography I love her use of color and playfulness oh happy day hipster vibe with some California color

- I have too long a list of blogs to share. I like blogs that are thought provoking, have good writing and fantastic images with content that is aspirational but wrapped in humility.
- no. None
- Um, is no a valid answer here. It's gonna have to be because it's honestly how I feel. I rely so heavily on the community of bloggers that I don't want it to sound like there aren't people in this world I admire. I constantly look to others for examples of good design, SEO practices, affiliate marketing, etc. When it comes to what I want to write about the real question for me is what do I want to experience. And when it comes to how I want to sound, the answer is simply like myself.
- Make and takes Studio DIY Bloesom
- Pretty Prudent
- I just try to emulate their honesty and business model. And We Play
- Mer Mag
- You Are My Fave The Alison Show Say Yes
- They all know their stuff, have a consistent brand, and the kind of style that I like.
- Early on I really wanted to write like dooce.com or amalah.com, people who I felt were very honest and very unique. But in the last few years I try not to be like anyone else and just do what works for me.
- I read probably a hundred blogs but I don't try to emulate any of them. I'm sure they affect how I do things but I don't have one in mind when I post.
- I don't have any blogs that I read that inform my own blog "type" that said, there are many different types of blogs that I read that I find inspirational from a creative point of view, even if the people do nothing like my work. It's too difficult of a question to answer, I'm afraid.
- There are blogs I enjoy, but I could not in good conscience say I try and emulate or template anyone. I just write. The look of my blog has always been secondary to the content. I think this is part of why I straddle the fence between mommy-blogger and writer. I care for design, and take some effort to keep it attractive and clean, but beyond that, it's never been about perception or beautiful shots of my children looking perfect.
- I write for By Common Consent as well, and this has definitely influence my writing. It's pressured me to be a better writer, to hone myself and own my story and my words. Writing with people one generally feels are smarter and better educated, but who still welcome you, is a good way to stretch yourself past your comfort zone. It's benefited me in a million ways, both as a writer, and personally.

What is your relationship with your blog readers like?

Text Responses

- I know 98% of my readers personally. They are my family and friends.
- I try to respond to their comments when the conversation makes sense. Copy pasting a "thanks for your comment" or installing a not to auto respond seems contrived to me.
- Right now my readers are pretty much people I know. So...great! I haven't put any effort into expanding readership in years. And that is fine with me. I know some posts get pinned and shared, but I don't put a lot of effort into it.
- I receive very little feedback from my blog readers, so I usually feel as though I don't have any relationship with them. Mostly close friends and family.
- Since starting over, I have a very small audience and most of my posts don't foster a lot of interaction. That's something I've been thinking about and hoping to work on over this coming year. I have more interaction with followers on Instagram and FB so I know my stuff is reaching people but my site feels like it's more for display than for interaction.
- It's not as great of a connection as I have on social media where we are creating conversations. I do love anyone who reads my stuff though. I don't really have one
- They are mostly family members, people we are friends with and people from our church. I know all of them personally, pretty much.
- I have developed real life lasting friendships with many of my readers. My best friend was actually a reader of my blog and is an author of her own (fairly prominent) blog. I respond to every comment and cherish the time others give to partake in my little piece of the world.
- I try to respond to all their comments and I like to do giveaways with them, but I've only made a handful of new friends through blogging Private blog - close real life relationships not based online.
- Other blog - all based online
- Family members and close, personal friends are the only readers to my blog because I want to keep it that way. I'm not sure why a complete stranger would find my normal-to-me-middle-income-home-life entertaining or praiseworthy. I talk to all of my readers I person as well, so I wouldn't seem the relationship electronic only either.
- I feel like they know who I am (in Utah) and like me ok but other than that, I am not sure nice, whenever anyone contacts me
- VERY personal. I see people on the street that I've never met and they hug me and say they feel like they know me. They hug my daughter and tell her that they love her. That they love us. Tears. The whole 9 yards!
- I don't get comments on my blog anymore so it is more of a one way relationship. I am closer to my instagram followers than blog readers.
- good, some I know by name
- I try to comment back when the leave comments on my site, and try to comment back to people on social media. I don't feel like I have that great of a relationship with my readers tho.
- I am working on developing my relationship a lot more with my readers. I used to just have readers I actually knew, friends, family, etc. Now that I am getting more readers that I don't know, I need to figure out how to react with them.
- ehhhh not what I wish it was, there use to be comments back and forth, but now it's just questions (or complaints) and not much interaction. Really the best interaction is with

other bloggers! I think Pinterest kind of killed the personal connection, now you hear "I found it on pinterest" not, "my favorite blogger Ashlee..."

- I love to try and connect with them on a personal level, and I encourage dialogue. I really feel like I've gotten to know a lot of them!
- I always will interact with them on FB/instagram and if they interact with me on twitter I'll follow them and interact there as well. I always like to be friendly :) I need to develop it. I have quite a few people who write me for information on certain types of chairs. I have become a bit of an expert.
- I try and comment on every insta comment my followers are my people my tribe they get me
- I have many close readers that I correspond with regularly, but I have a much larger population that reads my blog and I do not have any interaction with. I would say I don't really have a strong relationship with my blog readers. Most people don't comment anymore.
- I'm still relatively new to blogging so my interactions with readers has been limited but so far enjoyable. I hope to grow my following more and increase these interactions. I am still building this. Right now it is like a bunch of new people that are polite to each other!
- I have a really good relationship with a good number of my readers. We write emails back and forth, they comment - I respond, and I genuinely feel encouragement from most of them.
- Most of them are people I know in some way. As the blogosphere and the social media world gets bigger, I interact with most of the people who read my blog in some way, even if it just means we follow each other on Twitter.
- I try to reply and comment back. I often follow readers on Instagram. I have a private Facebook group that they can join. Very warm, cordial and personal. I have a great audience that visits my blog every day.
- Personal.
- I became friends with many of my early readers. We would comment on each others' posts, then correspond, and then eventually I even met many of them in real life, and they have jumped from being names on my computer to faces around my kitchen table. There are still readers who lurk, and don't comment much, but who faithfully check in.
- Facebook changes a lot of those blog-based relationships, when suddenly commenters were sending friend requests, using their real names. I figure I have hundreds of people in my life who I would otherwise not know were it not for blogging.
- I have yet to have a bad experience.

How do your blog readers affect what you do or do not post?

Text Responses

- Obviously I would never put something embarrassing or vulgar in my blog because many people from my church read it. There is a fair amount of filtering that goes on in that sense.
- Quite frankly, they don't.
- My very easily-offended family members really cramp my style. I have taken down posts in the past that I was proud of because I got tired of phone calls.
- Because I don't have a lot of readers who regularly read my blog, I tend to post things that would appeal to people who are finding my blog through a google search, Pinterest, or through my instagram account.
- I want family far away to know what is going on in our lives.
- As I don't have much of an audience they don't affect much of anything.
- I kind of keep my blog as inspiration for myself so it really doesn't affect what I do as much. they don't. Mostly I post about things I see my friends struggling with.
- My readers are really quite kind and loving. If anything it has made me more comfortable with sharing my experiences, but other than that I don't let it alter how I post. They don't really, but I do notice more traffic when I do projects in the home, which makes me want to do more of those
- I can see what they like to read about and can choose to write more posts that are similar
- On the private blog I really don't care what they read or don't read since its not for them.
- They don't. :) I post what I like in a manner that I decide is appropriate. I just try to keep things informative, light-hearted (albeit, sometimes dripping with sarcasm) and positive.
- I post because I want to, not because its expected they do not affect it really
- I haven't been doing it long enough to consider this much. So far, my readers have connected with all of my posts. Some get more comments than others - but then some get more emails and facebook comments than others. I stay on topic - which is very broad - and I stay honest and extremely vulnerable, and people like that. Hell, I've told me readers about my cellulite even. :)
- Not at all. they don't. Little
- I don't let that bother me. I try to post things that I like and have worked hard on. I blog for me, not for them.
- If I try a new series for my blog out and I don't get a lot of feedback from my readers, I know that series won't go much further. Mostly I try to think about what I like and post that, usually they like it too. It's when I try to be something other than myself that I don't get great feedback
- eh, not really, I sometimes try to make sure I'm posting what is most searched that month, sugar cookies in december, ice cream in july, but at the same time I tend to just post what I make after I make it (and I love ice cream year round!)
- I write more posts about the topics that draw in the most readers (such as posts about pregnancy)
- They don't affect me at all. I'm me, and if they don't like it, they're welcome to unfollow. No hard feelings. Same with friendships. Judging by the comments i receive I know that I am on the right track with my subject matter.

- i do what I want and the people that like that content will stay my brand is really what I love do I feel I'm authentic
- My blog is not driven by a need to please others, but my own need to create content that meets my own expectations.
- If someone approaches me to write about something I wouldn't normally write about I usually turn it down. I want my blog to be a fun place to visit, not a constant commercial.
- I ask for suggestions of experiences I can try from my readers and on more than one occasion have let that guide me. I also pay attention to what posts are read more and chose future posts to fit that interest.
- If I have a post that is popular I try to come up with more crafts that follow that genre.
- They don't. I write about what happened, and what is happening now. If they like it - that's a bonus.
- They really don't. I write for me mostly. Every now and then I will write about something because I think other people need to know about it.
- not much. I might use it as a reason to do what I want anyway. For example I didn't want to continue a series so I looked at the (low) stats for that series to back up my decision. :)
- I am conscious that I'm honest, and that I'm not a downer that I share inspirational things, that the stories I share are global and diverse in nature. I hope that people who read my blog frequently go, "Wow, I didn't realize that," or "I learned something today."
- Not in any way shape or form do the readers affect what I post.

How might concerns about your blog's type or category affect what you do or do not post?

Text Responses

- I do not get into politics, but I am fairly open about my religious practices and faith in general.
- I try to keep the whole thing light and fun. When I do talk about harder topics, like when my dad was sick and dying and my profound grief afterwards, but I do a whole lot of thinking, editing, rewriting... but nothing dishonest.
- I did not get into my horrific anxiety and depression last spring/summer because I didn't feel it was pertinent. I mentioned it in a post that I was struggling but did not describe anything. I think my gap in posting spoke for itself.
- It doesn't.
- I have no concerns about that.
- I don't personally care to read "mommy blogs," and so I'm careful to avoid posting things that would cause others to label mine as a "mommy blog."
- my blog is mostly a journal and for family. But I won't post about things that I don't feel confident about. I rarely post about food or recipes because I am not a good cook. But I like to post crafts because I enjoy those.
- I am pointedly trying to be more focused with this on my site and really considering whether something I share is consistent with my "brand" and it's a process for me. I'm still learning and figuring it out for myself.
- I don't really care about blog labels.
- Like I said before, I wouldn't post about food, or a recipe, since I'm a tech blogger. I also wouldn't post about fashion or things of that nature Not even on my radar as a concern.
- I kind of already answered this...I only blog about things I like and things I actually use/do
- For the other blog we definitely want to stay with certain standards and criteria so it greatly affects what we choose to post.
- The only concern I have with blogging is keeping my family safe while attempting to maintain a 21st-century style family journal. That's why I went private when I had my first child.
- I feel like I have had to start multiple blogs to focus on my interests instead of having it all in one place. I don't feel like crafts and giveaways belong on my lifestyle blog I try to stay within my category
- It doesn't. I write what moves my heart and my spirit, and that's what determines what I do or do not post. They do not.
- I keep it to the niche I created. I wouldn't post about anything that doesn't fit the category. I do what I do, my readers affect me some but very little. they like what I do or not
- For a long time I wanted to start posting recipes, but felt like I couldn't because it was out of my niche. I decided that it is my blog and I will post the things I want to post. I've only posted a handful of recipes, and don't plan to post that many, but it is fun to be able to share some of my favorite recipes. Now I feel like I can post about anything that I want to post about.
- I don't usually worry about that. Lifestyle blog is open to anything.
- I've been doing this so long I know what my style is, so I don't really consider it N/a
- Doesn't affect me.
- everyone loves design and architecture.

- i feel like sometimes I just need to post photography stuff and other times I should just post my stylized things I hate feeling like I'm two and want to just be one After recently attending Alt, I have been thinking a lot about the future of my blog and what the real focus is. I hate any category for its limits.
- It doesn't.
- I am lucky because I have a broad category. The only thing connecting every post is me. So as long as what I am writing about is something I am doing for the very first time, I can do it.
- My type is so clear that it doesn't really change what I post.
 - I try to stay inspirational in everything that I write. I try to stay on topic and only partner with brands who match my vision/category/theme.
- They don't. I actually started writing about books because I wanted to, not because there was any clamor from my readers. Now I do it regularly and I don't care much if those posts don't get good stats.
- I don't have any concerns. I post about art and I post whatever I want. I don't really worry about my blog's "type."

How might concerns about your family affect what you do or do not post?

Text Responses

- I am getting more careful about what I write about my older daughter as to not embarrass her. But again, my readership is so small that I don't think anyone really knows about my little space on the internet.
- I try not to overtly describe where we live but obviously it would be easy for someone to figure it out.
- I don't want to make my family uncomfortable. If I'm posting something hot button or overly personal, my family will most likely know about it before publication.
- I am concerned about privacy issues for my little immediate family members, so I try very hard to limit. My tween daughter, for example, is rarely mentioned anymore. I want to put my family in a positive light. But I hate when blogs are only positive so I do try to include some of the things in our lives that aren't happy.
- Mostly I'm just trying to think ahead and respect the privacy of my children. In my current blog it's not as difficult as it was in my previous blog. I keep my family very protected but as long as I feel the subject is safe for them, I am an open book.
- This would definitely affect what I post, as if people have concerns about what their children are doing on technology, or how to protect them from it, I would definitely post about that.
- If I'm busy with my family I won't take the time to post, but that's about it.
- i try to limit personal info as much as I can without sounding like a robot ;)
- On the private blog I try to post things in a positive light. I don't nag on my husband or get down on my kids. Sometimes I'll share frustrating moments due to a particular stage that my child is going through but I never put down the child, just share the behavior. I feel like it's important for me to not get down on those things but that I also treat my family with respect and love even in writing.
- I have minimal concerns about what I post about my family due to the private nature of the blog. On that same token, when I feel like complaining about a family member, for whatever reason, I stick to the hand-written Deseret Book-issued journal.
- i dont post famiy stuff usually
- Again, I don't write about my mother because it would be ugly. Her influence on me (as it relates to confidence, style, value, courage) has not been a positive one. But, as long as she's able to read what I write, I have to skip that stuff because it would come across as down right mean, and she couldn't see it objectively.
- It does not.
- If my children don't want to be in my pictures, I am just fine paying models instead. It's up to them. This isn't something that I'm too worried about since I don't post about them very often at all.
- I am in a unique situation because I have just gotten a "big girl job" and now I have to be very careful what I post about my job so that I don't risk getting fired and since I am the main provider for my family, that would be a terrible thing.
- big time. I have some older posts I've considered taking down that were more personal before I really decided on my direction. I'm much more protective and careful now. I may not post about certain family vacations if I can't avoid using certain family members pictures.
- Last year I had a horrible year with my youngest (8) in school, being on the PTA

board, and health issues for my self, and it was just stress upon stress upon stress. I Just couldn't think about anything else besides getting myself better and being happy, and having a family. so blogggin was the one thing that had to go. :(

- My family is of no interest to my readers.
- i don't like showing any negative parts about my sons autism although there are because I feel like I want less people to be afraid because he really is s blessing but k have s hard time sharing that
- I have a very strong position on the content I publish regarding my family. The only concern that impacts what I do or don't post is the concern of time. There have been some times in the course of my blog where my family's needs heavily outweighed my blogs needs and blogging was adjusted accordingly.
- If I'm worried about whether I should post something or not, I err on the side of caution and don't post it. Mostly they affect how often I post because they affect when I have the time.
- I try not to over share because their story isn't mine to tell.
- I would never post anything that would hurt a family member now or in the future. I try not to write anything that would embarrass my kids. That's about it.
- I would discontinue my photography series if they didn't want their photos on there. I don't blog about my family, so it's not a high concern.
- I take basic precautions- I don't (and haven't ever) used our surname on the blog. I don't give our address or even our city, but keep it to a broad general geographic area (DC metropolitan area).
- We have been recognized in public, and I know this is because I do post photos of my kids. While it's a little disconcerting, it's hasn't been unpleasant. I know even on the rare occasion we're recognized, we're still very small fish in a very large pond.

How might concerns about your blog affect what you do and do not do with your family?

Text Responses

- My blog is purely reflective of what we do. It does not generate activities for us so I can blog about it. I don't let that affect what I do with my family.
- If I find myself thinking "I should do this and blog it!" then I immediately stop. I think about the reality TV shows where all they do is take trips so they can justify being paid to be on tv taking trips I NEVER want to be that.
- I don't want anyone in my family to think that we're doing something because of my blog. I want them to feel free to be who they are without trying to measure up to others on the internet, and so I don't write much about my family.
- at this point it doesn't. I just post what I want to share.
- I don't believe I'm affected much in this way. We still do what we're going to do regardless. Sometimes the things we do spawn a photo or post and sometimes it doesn't but we don't really do things as a family just so I can finally write blog post I've been thinking about or anything like that.
- Besides an extra picture here or there and a little more staged events, it really doesn't affect my family life. It doesn't really affect my family, except for the fact that they have access to a lot of technology.
- None at all... our life comes first, and then the blog reflects what we do.
- I think the very concept of a blog altering what you do with your family is ridiculous. Unfathomable. my blog doesn't affect my family at all really.
- Doesn't really matter to me.
- It doesn't at all. I post all things from family reunions to cabin trips to lounging lazily in my sweats. i spend too much time on it :)
- Not clear... It does not.
- It doesn't. I can't let my blog control my life like that.
- Because I don't blog about what my family is doing, this has no influence on me. Other than sometimes taking time away from family.
- It's kind of silly, but I am a lot more open to an opportunity to do something if it something I can blog about. So my husband wants to go to a concert last weekend, I don't really want to go, but I know it will take care of one blog post for the week so I will go. So I think it's actually made me a more active participant in my family!
- not at all. We have our fun, and I don't really blog about our family time, and when I need to post about something we create a family event around it, but it's not our day to day stuff.
- n/a
- Family first. ALWAYS, no matter what.
- My family is not really an issue since I am not a mommy blogger in the conventional sense.
- sets I do things with my family for content or insta posts and I feel like I need to let go of that sometimes The only concern with blogging is the inordinate amount of time it takes (sometimes away from family time).
- My blog does not effect my family life beyond taking pictures of dinner before we eat if I'm planning on posting a recipe. ;o) Luckily, I haven't had concerns about my blog affect my family in any way outside of the logistics of balancing my time.

- Sometimes I have to slow down a craft to take photos, but that is about it.
- If anything my blog encourages more fun and more activity. That is one reason that I started to write. I needed a push to accomplish more and have a driven purpose. Deadlines do that for me.
- They don't.
- I don't think I have any concern that affect what we do as a family. It doesn't.
- I don't think it does. The blog exists as my outward (and often inward) reflections of my family and personal life. What we do is not influenced by the blog. It's the other way around.

Appendix B: Takeaway Points for Blogging Women

- Women often have different motivations for blogging than men. Their motivations tend to be more social and expressive.
- Women face challenges in the blogosphere, as both prejudices and search engine algorithms favor male subjectivity and use of language.
- The way bloggers present themselves online are often used as proof of character, both the text and the subtext of what is shared.
- There are inherent limitations in the medium of blogging. Because of these, a number of tendencies in blogging tend to be inversely proportionate
 - Higher disclosure tend to mean less control over branding
 - High levels of disclosure are often linked to rewarding interactions and a strong sense of community, but concern about community tends to be inversely proportionate to concern about privacy and cost of disclosure.
 - Generally, the more a woman is willing to be perceived as divergent from dominant femininity discourse, the more disclosive she is willing or able to be.
- Over time, women's blogging has the potential to change language use and social expectations about women's roles and realities.
- One of the idiosyncracies of blogging is that the blogger is simultaneously addressing and trying to appeal to an individual reader and to all possible readers.
- By disclosing private thoughts, insights, or reflections that even a physically present person would not be privy to, bloggers create a heightened (sometimes hyperized) sense of intimacy.

- In writing in a 1st person narrative, women bloggers grapple with cultural pressures and norms that discourage normativity in a female autobiographical text, but most women desire to make their texts about something other than resistance to those cultural norms, and they respond to this paradox, in many cases, by directing their writing exclusively to other women.
- The idea of ‘audience’ is increasingly present in the process of blog authorship, even as the identity and makeup of that audience becomes increasingly nebulous.
- Currently, few blog authors express concern about how the representations of their children and their children’s interactions with those representations will affect the children over time. It might be empowering for mothers to consider their role and narrative power as the narrators of their children as biographical subjects.
- There is fantasy, perhaps informed by voyeurism, inherent in blog reading, and other autobiographical reading. “Telling the truth about the self, constituting the self as a complete subject – it is a fantasy. In spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible, this in no way prevents it from existing.”²¹² And as Philippe Lejeune explained, readers are aware of this impossibility, but “once this precaution has been taken, we go on as if we did not know it..” There is a notable amount of suspension of disbelief in the blogging author/audience dialectic.
- The fictionality of autobiographic blogging is exacerbated by the subjectivity of human memory.
- The constructed nature of blog posts and other social media entries inherently requires curation. Reality does not fit into a portrayal of reality.

²¹² Jakki Spicer, “The Author Is Dead, Long Live the Author: Autobiography and the Fantasy of the Individual,” *Criticism* (2005): 387–403.

- Blogging women tend to struggle for a balance of the universal and the uniquely personal. Striving for “the narrative presentation of a unique self which can also be recognized by society.”²¹³ Blog authors strive to create texts that are deeply personal, creative, and unique, but still universal enough to be of interest and relevance to readers. Blog authors must use the more universal elements in language, culture, and gender discourse in order to present their experiences in widely applicable contexts.
- Believing that audiences are more interested in the category of their blog than in their individual autobiographical narrative, many bloggers make a cognitive switch to conceive of their blogs as much more public spaces.
- Disclosive writing by women seems to be regularly categorized as “mommy blogging,” and women have gone to great lengths to avoid that categorization in cases where they want others to define their blogs differently.
- In considering blog type or genre, there is value in an awareness of the fluidity of genre distinctions, and in an awareness of the nuanced interpretations of a genre by different authors and audiences.
- Adapting sponsored content has the potential to be more complicated for disclosive blogging women. There is more conflation of the author’s identity and her blog content, so sponsored content can have more social bearing and ramifications.
- Each blogger’s perceptions and performance of acceptable genre-specific blogging behaviors is to some extent a copy of the behavior of others; these copies perpetuate each other cyclically, contributing to the evolution of perceptions of the genre.

²¹³ Marie-Francoise Chanfrault-Duchet, “Textualisation of the Self and Gender Identity in the Life-Story,” in *Feminism and Autobiography*, ed. Cosslett, Lury, and Summerfield, 61.