

Self Presentation Online: An Analysis of Mom Blogs

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Communication Department
at Southern Utah University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Arts in Professional Communication

By
SHAWNA RIDDOCH WAKEFIELD

Dr. Brian Heuett, Thesis Supervisor

June 2010

APPROVAL PAGE

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of Humanities and Social Science, have examined the thesis entitled

SELF PRESENTATION ONLINE: AN ANALYSIS OF MOM BLOGS

Presented by Shawna Riddoch Wakefield,

a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in Professional Communication, and hereby certify

that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Brian L. Heuett

Professor Kevin Stein

Professor Jon Smith

Self Presentation Online
An Analysis of Mom Blogs

Shawna Wakefield
Dr. Brian L. Heuett, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to research how moms use blogs as a tool to present themselves online according to the following categories: creativity, expressiveness, and intimacy. This study was modeled after research done by Z. Papacharissi (2002, 2006) on blogs and personal web pages. Fifteen blogs written by moms, during the months of July and September 2009, were analyzed to gather data for the study. Through the use of grounded theory twelve different themes (graphics, pictures, feedback, sophistication, text, direct address, formality, humor, outlook, narrative and personal information) evolved in the creativity, expressiveness and intimacy of blogs written by moms. This was further analyzed through the lens of Goffman's theory of self- presentation to understand how moms used creativity, expressiveness and intimacy to present themselves online. It was found that mom blogs exemplified creativity with the use of excessive pictures, innovation and sophistication. Creativity was an important aspect to look at because it identified how moms use their blogs to set the stage as Goffman explains in the theory of self-presentation. As moms express themselves through various aspects of their blogs they are attempting to control the impressions they give off. Within intimacy, it was found that moms are sharing a lot of personal information which means that they are not trying very hard to keep their backstage or personal life separate from their public front stage selves.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my amazing husband, Curt, for all he has done to help me complete this paper. I could never have done this without his encouragement, patience and support. It has been a fun and challenging experience to complete this degree together. There were many times I wanted to quit this thesis before I finished but Curt believed and pushed me to the finish. I would also like to thank my children, Heidi, Tanner, Alia and Isaac, for their patience with me while I did my “homework”, went to class and met with professors to complete this degree.

I would like to thank everyone on my committee, Brian Heuett, Kevin Stein, and Jon Smith, for hanging on with me during the last year and for their patience as this study evolved into what it is. I could not have completed this without the constant direction that came from my committee.

I am very grateful to Brian Heuett, who spent many hours on the phone, in his office, and even in St. George, walking me through the process of completing this study. Thanks Brian for all your patience and many revisions, suggestions and advice amidst his own busy schedule.

I would like to thank Kevin Stein for helping me decide the best type of methodology to represent this particular type of study and for his guidance in this paper. Thanks to Jon Smith for his professional opinion and advice in making this study worthy of the communication world.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the professors that taught me in the communication department and for the knowledge that they gave me; those who have already been mentioned and those not yet mentioned particularly Dr. Challis, Dr. Larson, and Dr. Husselbee. As well as the wonderful secretaries that were always been there to answer my many questions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL PAGE.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
Background.....	7
The Problem.....	25
Purpose of Study.....	25
Research Questions.....	28
3. METHODS.....	29
Grounded Theory.....	29
Samples.....	30
Procedures.....	32
4. RESULTS.....	36
Creativity.....	36
Expressiveness.....	38
Intimacy.....	41
5. DISCUSSION.....	45
Limitations.....	51
Future Research.....	52
Conclusion.....	53
6. APPENDIX A.....	55
7. APPENDIX B.....	56
8. REFERENCES.....	57

Chapter 1

Introduction

There are a variety of ways to communicate through the internet today via email, online chatting, and social networking sites such as facebook or twitter and through blogging. The field of communication is saturated with new types of media and communication to identify, study and understand. One of the most popular methods of communicating on the internet today is through weblogs or “blogs” as they are referred to. Blogs are individual websites where people share personal thoughts and information, typically in the form of an online journal, in order to communicate with the rest of the world. Blogging is a fairly new type of communication tool online which essentially started in the late nineteen nineties (Jost & Hipolit, 2006). This study investigates blogs authored by mothers. Blogging has become a significant and rapidly increasing form of mass communication appealing to moms and even to the interest of advertisers.

Most recently, there have been several studies regarding specific types of blogs. For example, Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) studied blogs found on the A- List, a list of the most linked to blogs which were written by both males and females of various ages. Bortree (2005) looked at teenage girls’ weblogs. Papacharissi (2004) researched content, structure and design of blogs written by both females and males. Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmohl and Sapp (2006) studied Polish-language blogs written by males and females. Lawson- Borders and Kirk (2005) investigated campaign blogs. Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, Wright (2004) did a study to distinguish blog genres.

The research mentioned previously covers a wide variety of blog types, for example; teenage blogs (Bortree, 2005), the most linked to A-List blogs (Trammel and Keshelashvili, 2005), blogs authored by males and females of various ages (Papacharissi, 2004, Trammell, Tarkowski, et al., 2006, and Herring, et al., 2004) and even Polish-language blogs (Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmokl and Sapp, 2006). Regardless, there is currently only one study that discusses moms and their contribution to the blogging world (Lopez, 2009). Lopez analyzes mom blogs through the lenses of feminism and autobiography. Although Lopez demonstrates the coming forth of and significance mom blogs have to the communication patterns of the modern mother, it fails to identify how mothers use blogs as a form of self-expression.

Since research has demonstrated the significance of other types of blogs, it seems reasonable here to investigate whether mom blogs play a significant role in mass communication. Thus, the following narrative and literature will discuss more of the research in regards to blogging and more specifically moms and blogging.

Technorati (2009) estimated that there are over 133 million blogs in existence today and more blogs are being created worldwide each day. Blogs have had a growing appeal to parents, particularly mothers who enjoy connecting with others online. It has been reported that there are nearly 79 million women online and of those there are 23 million women blogging (Wright & Page, 2009). Many of those women are mothers and potential female bloggers. Mommy bloggers, as they are referred to according to Lopez (2009), blog about everything from politics to the kind of diapers they buy. Many moms use blogs to chronicle their family's lives, goals and accomplishments. Moms also use blogs because they are a fast and convenient way to keep in touch with family and friends. One thing every mommy blogger has in common is the use of

blogging as an outlet for self-expression (Papachrissi, 2002b, Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmohl and Sapp, 2006).

Presently there are no studies or data that would indicate how moms use self-expression to explore how they share information with others through blogging. This form of self-presentation is unique because women often present themselves differently online than they would in face to face conversations by sharing secrets, recording personal stories, giving and sharing advice as well as bragging about personal and family accomplishments to others who may read their blogs. Blogs are known for their diary like format, their informal style and their unwritten rule that anything goes. Blogs written by moms uniquely capture the inward goings-on of the maternal mind and all the intimate and otherwise commonplace things that encompass women and mothers. These distinctive characteristics allow moms to open up and express themselves in a way that has never been so real and accessible compared to other media domains.

Considering the huge volume of mommy bloggers and blog readers, moms have opened an opportunity to share their lives and others to a mass audience. Moms are heading up what is now a large group of media users around the world. As moms use blogs to communicate online they are also creating a type of blog that are distinctive to only moms and differ from other types of blogs. For example, individual moms have a unique lifestyle, goals, jobs, and characteristics which in turn make their blogs different from professional, political campaign, and journalist and other types of blogs.

Moms are important to society for many reasons. They are the primary consumers for their families and therefore they are significant to advertisers and to consumer productions. Companies can benefit from mom communication to identify the needs, wants and desires of

moms so that they can then supply those needs. For example, Design mom, a popular mom blogger, was invited along with a select few other design bloggers to a Toyota design seminar in 2008. Following this invitation Toyota benefited as Design mom blogged about the latest innovations that Toyota was unveiling in their vehicles. It is this type of “free” advertisement from a respected and well read mom blog that most companies would jump at.

Moms are also the primary, or in some cases, the secondary caretakers of their children and the children of others. As mothers they are educators, role models and influencers of children and the future of commercialism as well as communication. Children often follow the habits and communication patterns that their moms exemplify. If moms are blogging than their children and teenagers are more likely to blog even at a young age. Mothers also play an important role in politics as voters and political educators to their children. Therefore, as blogs become increasingly more important to the world of communication then the unique niche of mom blogs need to be studied, evaluated, and understood. This form of communication offers a unique way for the world to know what moms think, need, and how they present themselves.

With more blogs being created daily and more moms utilizing the blogs, there is a significant need for researchers to investigate this unique group of women and the blogs they develop. This study specifically examines blogs authored by moms to determine whether or not the information read in the blogs can be identified using three categories: creativity, expressiveness, and intimacy (Papacharissi, 2002b, 2004).

This study explores Goffman’s theory of Self-presentation to understand how moms use blogs to present themselves to others online. Goffman’s theory explains that every person is like an actor on a stage that is acting the part they want the audience to believe is the real them but off the stage this is not their exact person. Goffman’s theory regards how, where and in what

manner people present themselves. He particularly focuses on the idea that people present themselves differently in public than they do in private. He explains that every person has a front stage where they act for their public audience and a backstage where they are their real selves and set aside their public fronts. Blogs therefore allow a window into the lives of mothers to understand the front stage as well as many glimpses into the backstage. For example, blogs open the curtain between the front and the backstage in a way that is only done through the blogging medium. Through their diary-like format, moms record things distinctive and personal to themselves that become accessible to any person who happens to read their blog.

Based on Goffman's theory, this study focuses on the following three categories to determine the kinds of information that mom's blog about; creativity, expressiveness, and Intimacy.

Creativity entails decoration and design features used on mom blogs. This portion of the blog could be described as the front stage where moms utilize their blog homepages to give off an impression of who they are based on their choice of pictures, graphics, and design.

Expressiveness identifies the amount of text, the presence of humor and the overall positive or negative outlook that the author displays on the blog. This illustrates the expressiveness of the blog, according to how much information the author is willing to share.

Intimacy looks beyond the amount of content that is displayed and identifies the level of personal information that is shared within the blog content. Much of the personal information identified in blogs can be referred to as backstage information.

Using the three categories above, this study employs Goffman's theory looking for the presence of both front and backstage behaviors. Furthermore, this study investigates the

different situations of how information of blogs provides a different environment with which moms communicate.

Blogs create a matchless opportunity to study people and how they choose to present themselves online. Specifically blogs are unique because of their diary- like style and the strong tendency that bloggers have to self-disclose information about themselves online in a way that they may not communicate in public. Papachrissi (2004) stated that blogs tend to show more of a backstage persona than other forms of media which enables researchers to study self-presentation in a whole new way (as cited in Trammell, p.972, 2005).

Blogs, as a relatively recent form of media, are important for the field of communication to study and understand. Presently, no other studies have researched self-presentation in blogs written by moms. Furthermore, with only one other study on mom blogs, there is currently much to understand and learn from this type of mass communication. The following literature review discusses further why it is important to study blogging among moms in the media.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

According to Technorati (2006), a blog monitoring web site, the number of blogs created doubles every six months. With 900,000 blog posts every 24 hours and more than 77 million readers, the utility and influence of blogs should not be overlooked (White, 2009). Blogs have universal appeal and are written by teens, young adults, teachers, politicians and journalists.

A blog is defined by Technorati (2009) as a, “Web site, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse- chronological order.” The people who create blogs are referred to as bloggers. Although it can be hard to pinpoint the first online journal, Jorn Barger was the first to coin the phrase, “weblog” in 1997 regarding his method of logging information on the Web for others to read (Jost & Hipolit, 2006). Matt Drudge was one of the first to make it big in the blogging world or the “blogosphere” in the nineties (2006). A conservative, Drudge writes about politics on his blog, the Drudge Report, which made its appearance on the Web in 1996. In 1999, Pyra-labs created Blogger, which is currently the most popular blog software available, which enables people to create and maintain their own blogs. In 1999 there was only a handful of blogs on the Web, but by the end of 2004 there was nearly 10 million blogs in existence discussing everything from politics to personal crises (2006). In 2003, Howard Dean used blogs to raise money and support for his presidential campaign. Not long after bloggers became an important part of the media and political world.

Blogs are alternative journalism as bloggers continuously post the news online for the whole world to access daily (Herring, Scheidt, Kouper & Wright, 2006). Andrew Sullivan said that blogging is, “arguably the most significant media revolution since the arrival of television,

[providing the ability to] make arguments, fact-check them and rebut them in a seamless and endless conversation (as cited in Papacharissi, 2004).

In 2004, bloggers were credentialed to attend and write about political party conventions (2006). Blogs have grown in number since 2004 and are popular all over the world. Since the beginning of blogging, many other social networks have appeared on the internet, all of which can be attributed to some way to weblogs, such as MySpace, Facebook and Twitter. Mark Earls of HERDmeister describes it this way, “The Blogosphere continues to evolve – with micro-blogging, long blogging, video blogging all taking off this year. . .it’s becoming something that more and more ‘civilians’ do- ordinary folk” (Technorati, 2009). All of these blogging mediums are interconnected in a circle of information- seeking and communication. Micro-blogging will always be simple and convenient but blogging will continue to be utilized by people who have a continuous story to share.

According to Technorati’s, “State of the Blogosphere Report 2008” over 133 million blogs have been recorded worldwide since 2002 and according to Universal McCann 184 million people have started a blog. Their statistics show that the average global blogger is between the ages of 18-34, most are college graduates. U.S. bloggers are more educated than world bloggers. U.S. bloggers are majorly college graduates, 42 % have been to graduate school and 50% make at least \$75,000 a year. “As a group, they are educated, affluent, and influential” (Technorati, 2009). Technorati also found that among the 133 men and women blogging, 36 percent of women and 16 percent of men focus their blogs on family updating.

One increasing group of bloggers taking up a significant part of the blogging population is mom bloggers. Pamela Paul of TIME said,

More parents, especially mothers, are entering the blogosphere, transforming the way moms commiserate and families communicate. Mommy blogs often take the navel gazing to uninhibited depths recording every aspect of parenthood, from the pregnancy blood test through the umbilical-cord clipping to the latest triumph in toilet training—complete with photographs, video clips and message boards (p. 2, 2004).

Mom blogs is a term that is be used throughout this paper describing blogs written by mothers with children. The authors of the mom blogs are generally referred to as mommy bloggers (Lopez, 2009). There are two basic types of mommy bloggers, professional mommy bloggers and regular mommy bloggers. Professional bloggers are popular and have a large following of readers. Often professional bloggers use their blog as a source of income. “The most popular blogs can attract more than 50,000 hits per day and collect hundreds of comments per entry” (Lopez, 2009). Regular mommy bloggers have less than 300 people reading their blog every day and do not rely on their blog as a source of income. Although this paper discusses both professional and regular mom blogs, only regular mom blogs are examined in more detail in this study.

In a study done by Pew Internet & American Life Project in 2002, more than half of the parents that are online say that online media has enhanced their family relationships and friendships. Mom blogs are a unique niche in the blogosphere and have yet to be studied independently. Lycos, a blog hosting site claims that moms are the future of blogging and predicts that someday every family will have a blog (Paul, 2004).

The website, momblogs.com, an online directory of blogs written by moms gives the following reason for moms that blog, “Blogging is fun, it’s a great way to be creative, to let loose and to connect with other moms” (p.1, 2009). Moms are utilizing blogs to connect with other

moms, brag about their children and express themselves. Not only that but moms use blogs as a way to discuss parenting and get ideas for other moms about the best methods for soothing a sick baby, sleeping schedules, dealing with tantrums and anything else that pertains to motherhood.

Moms relate to other moms that are struggling because they have been through similar experiences. For Heather Daugherty said, “I get feedback from women who really understand what I’m going through . . . one woman who miscarried e-mailed me with encouragement. This (the blog) is my place to heal and grow” (p. 3, Paul, 2004). Moms also share advice. Daugherty said, “I haven’t cracked open a parenting book since Thomas was born. I’d rather go to a blog and hear it from a real mom” (p. 3, Paul, 2004). Paul explains another reason moms blog is to connect to others especially in what she calls today’s “confessional culture” (p .2). She says, “In a harried society in which people can barely return calls on their cell phones, blogging offers a quick way to feel connected to a community” (p. 2, 2004). Blogging is a fast and convenient way to share information with others without any obligations.

Although we cannot pinpoint the exact amount of mothers who blog, we can get an idea based on other research done on women and the internet. BlogHer.com (2009), a blogging community for women, describes the activity of women online in their most recent study. According to BlogHer.com there are 79 million women online in the United States. 42 million of those women are using social media such as blogging, twitter or other social networks online weekly. 23 million women in the United States participate in some form of blogging weekly. 8-12 million women are publishing or posting to a blog weekly and 20 million women are reading blogs weekly.

In BlogHer’s survey of 1,838 women online who participated in blogging, more than half of the women had completed college, and most importantly over 1,000 of the 1,838 women were

mothers. 10-12 % of those women/ mommy bloggers had been blogging for 5 or more years which means that mom blogs started popping up between 2003 and 2004(Wright & Page, 2009).

For many blogging is more than a hobby, it is a paying profession. 1.7 million people are paid to blog and 452, 000 of those people make blogging a full-time job that provides their primary income. A blogger can get paid about \$75,000 a year when they get at least 100,000 unique visitors each month. Bloggers that receive more visitors get paid more (Technorati, 2008).

Major companies have taken notice of the growing number of mommy bloggers and have recognized their influence in a world of buying and selling. Moms are identified as the main buyer for the entire family which in turn means that moms have a considerable amount of buying power (Thompson, 2007). Maria Bailey labels this generation of mothers as the “Trillion- Dollar Moms” and as such they are the ultimate consumers. Moms are responsible for buying the food that ends up on the table, the clothes that keep their kids covered, a wide array of household products from cleaning supplies to furniture and décor. Moms spend money, its part of their job description. When moms started using the internet and blogs as a resource to, “seek out other moms’ advice for what they’re looking for” (Thompson, p. 2, 2007) companies started taking notice.

Brandy Walleshauer is just one of many mommy bloggers who was asked by several different companies to give reviews of products on her blog (Silva, 2009). Brandy Walleshauer started her blog to journal her life. When she began her blog she was just a regular mommy blogger and then her popularity and readership grew and now she makes a living blogging. Gap Spokeswoman, Louise Callagy said, “We see (moms who blog) as a vital force for our brand strategy. They are the voice of our customers, and we are working harder to develop and

maintain their trust and respond to their feedback” (Sauter, p. 1, 2009). According to a study done of 1500 women online, women were more likely to buy something after reading about on a blog (Wright & Page, 2009). Businesses are being advised to watch blogs to understand what consumers think of their products. Forrester analyst Charlene Li stated, “Forrester believes that blogging will grow in importance, and, at a minimum, companies should monitor blogs to learn what is being said about their products and services” (Woods, p. 3, 2005). Mom Bloggers that get paid to advertise are not the only ones with advertising clout. Regular mom blogs consistently and many times unknowingly advertize in their blog by sharing likes and dislikes about products they use. These blogs do not have the consistent readership that professional bloggers do, however because of the sheer number of regular mom bloggers, their presence and is felt.

Alice Bradley described mommy blogging as a radical act. She believes that mothers need to carve their niche in the blogging world and prove their importance in their role as a mother. She said,

We’re redefining the roles with our blogs. The messages we get about motherhood typically either comes [sic] to us in sanitized or idealized form (television shows, magazine articles) or sensationalized (newspapers). There’s nothing in the in-between because the in-between doesn’t have a hook, an angle; it doesn’t sell. So that’s what we’re dealing in here. The unexciting, every day, in between stuff. But in doing that, we’re also delving into new territory. Into radical territory, I think (As cited in Lopez, 2009).

Lopez continues the conversation in her study on mom blogs saying that if the internet provides a place for women to share their thoughts and ideas and they have their own built in community of

mothers supporting those thoughts and ideas then these websites are significant and require more attention (2009).

Lopez defines mom blogs as a growing community where moms relate to and support each other. According to her findings, women receive validation and solidarity from being a part of the mom blog community. She said, “If mommy bloggers are truly forming communities and evidence for this is strong, then this kind of community is vastly beneficial for the physical wellbeing of the mothers who participate” (2009).

Lopez found that mom blogs generally attract the readership of other moms, besides some of the consumer world that wishes to utilize mom blogs for advertizing. Despite this seemingly small audience Lopez said,

While the blogs initially may attract only other mothers . . . the conversation is open and visible to outsiders, and in time the conversation about motherhood may expand beyond the limits of tightly-knit mommy blogging communities. Moreover, the explicit political issues that mothers face, such as discrimination in the workplace or the inadequacy of childcare, may begin to be addressed now that the community is beginning to grow and organize themselves around their collective issues (2009).

Among the many studies done on blogs, several different types of blogs have been examined. These studies have looked at campaign blogs (Lawson- Borders and Kirk, 2005), political blogs in China (Xiang Zhou, 2009), travel blogs (Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts, 2007), information blogs (Bar-Ilan, 2005), teenage and young adult blogs (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005, Mazur and Kozarian 2010), girls’ blogs (Davis 2010, Bortree 2005), celebrity blogs (Sweetster & Kaid 2008), Polish language blogs (Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmokl and Sapp, 2006) and A-

list blogs (Trammell and Keshelashvili, 2005). Only one study to date has looked specifically at mom blogs (Lopez, 2009).

The following lists the previous research found on blogs that helped develop the framework for this study. This list also illustrates the various blog genres and blog characteristics that have been investigated in order to demonstrate the commonalities and differences of studying self expression on mom blogs.

Lawson- Borders and Kirk (2005) studied of campaign blogs. They found that campaign blogs are used as social diaries and an organizational tool for campaigners. Lawson- Borders and Kirk both expect to see blogs as an important and necessary tool in future campaigns.

Sweetser and Kaid (2008) looked at celebrity blogs. They did a study to test the effects of personalized or ‘stealth’ political discourse within those blogs on reader’s levels of political trust, information efficacy and political uses/gratifications. They surveyed readers of three celebrity authors; Roger Avary, Dave Barry and Wil Wheaton. The results showed that readers of these celebrity blogs had moderate levels of political cynicism, older readers have a greater political efficacy, and “the more one avoids political content on the blog, the more cynical one will become.”

Xiang Zhou (2009) examined political blogs in China, looking specifically for political discussions and opinions regarding current politics. The study was done following the dismissal of Shanghai leader Chen Liangyu. Zhou found that not only did bloggers respond to the recent political events but also expressed personal opinions and criticized the government unlike the censored news media. This shows a political independence is found through online expression on blogs.

MacDougall (2005) looked at the personal, social and political significances of news blogs. He found that news blogs represent a new form of political participation and social interaction.

Bar- Ilan (2005) studied information blogs which are blogs that give professional information regarding specific topics. This study identified blog characteristics, post topics, and blog popularity. Results of the study found that Professional blogs are good sources of secondary information and can be seen as, “one-stop information kiosks.”

Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts (2007) examined travel blogs and their effect on destination marketing. They found that travel blogs are a useful tool in, “monitoring the competitive environment of a destination and provide valuable customer feedback that is richer and more detailed than Likert response survey measurements.”

Doorn, Zoonen and Wyatt (2007) choose to analyze gender identity on blogs. Looking at Dutch and Flemish blogs they tried to identify how people present their gender identity within their blogs. Blogs authors exhibited various performances expressing “masculinity” and “femininity” on their blogs using multiple methods. Both men and women were found to present their gender identity in many ways.

Bortree (2005) studied teen girls’ blogs. The findings were that teen girls used both direct and indirect expressions of self in their blogs to gain acceptance from friends and peers. Specifically the girls used three types of self- presentation strategies on their blogs which included; ingratiation, competence and supplication. The study also suggested that teen blogs were different than adult blogs in that teens had a greater struggle for self-identity.

Davis (2010) did a study of girls’ blogs. According to the study girls started blogs to socialize with other friends who had blogs and their writing styles reflected that of their friends.

The study found that girls spend more time reading friend's blogs than they do in writing their own blogs. The girls also described blogging as an intimate activity with friends as they are able to have in-depth on-going conversations, share things they wouldn't necessarily share offline and stated that blogs help you to understand your friend's feelings and emotions more. Lastly the girls identified that the longer they blogged the more unique and personalized their writing style became and the less it mimicked their friend's writing style as it did when they first began blogging.

Mazur and Kozarian (2010) looked at how teens and young adults present themselves on blogs. They identified the common topics used in blog entries, overall blog appearance, emotional tone of blogs, how they described themselves on their blogs, and their interactions with others online including their comments and feedback. It is interesting to note that 47 percent of the blogs in their study had a positive emotional tone to their blogs and 33 percent had a mixed positive and negative emotional tone. Also 57 percent of the blog authors described themselves positively on their blogs. Most of the blogs studied had little or no comments following entries and 37 percent listed no friends on their blogs.

Sima and Pugsley (2010) examined Chinese youth of the 'generation Y' and their use of blogs. They noted that 'Generation Y' is known as the 'me generation' because they are straying from their once collectivist culture and striving for individualism. Sima and Pugsley were interested in the effect of blogging on Chinese youth. They found that, "Chinese blogs mostly act to provide youth with a platform to express themselves, maintain established relationships, interact with likeminded people and validate their sense of being and belonging."

Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, Wright (2004) sought out to distinguish blog genres. They established three basic types of blogs; filter blogs, personal journals (diaries), and notebooks

(include long essays and combine original and borrowed content) (as cited in Herring, Scheidt, Kouper & Wright, 2006).

Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) examined blogs found on the A- List, a list of the most linked to blogs. They learned that men produced mostly filter blogs (blogs that contain mostly links to other information and little original information from the blogger) and that women produced mostly diary-like blogs.

Papacharissi (2004) did a study of 260 blogs and looked at content, structure and design of blogs. It is important to note that researchers have begun to look at other cultures and non-English-language blogs. Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmohl and Sapp (2006) looked at Polish-language blogs. They compared the information from previous English-language blog studies to Polish-language blogs. Specifically they looked at content, blogger demographics and motivations.

Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, & Wright (2006) were among the first to do a longitudinal analysis of blogs. They did a two year study looking at blog characteristics and features such as identity indicators, blog type, and length of posts. They discovered that most blogs are personal journals, bloggers use their first name to identify themselves and their occupations are primarily students, teachers or information technology.

The previous studies looked at certain blog genres such as politics, gender, teens and young adults, blog motivations and blog characteristics. However, only one study to date has been focused on regular mom blogs (Lopez 2009). Lopez looked specifically at mom blogs through the lenses of feminism and autobiography. She found that women are competing with men in the blogging world. Specifically she found that mommy bloggers are seeking to find their niche in the blogging world while proving their significance to the world. She found that

mommy bloggers use blogging to build online communities where they can connect to and receive support and validation from other moms. She also found that mommy bloggers are finding their niche in the advertising world and many are becoming successful at being paid to blog. This study did not discuss how moms use blogs as a tool to present themselves online.

One of the most prominent theories that researchers have looked at when studying blogs is the Self-Presentation and Impression-Management theory. This theory was developed by Goffman. The Self- Presentation theory looks at how people present themselves through media and which type of media they use to portray themselves. It is important for communication researchers to understand how people use media. Communication researchers can identify communication patterns by studying blogs through the self-presentation theory

Self- Presentation and Impression Management

Self- presentation goes hand in hand with communication and the media. The Self- presentation theory is used to understand how people present themselves to other people. When people communicate face-to-face, on the telephone or through the internet they are all utilizing some form of self- presentation. They want people to see them a certain way and use any attempts to convince their audience that this is who they really are.

Self-presentation, also referred to as impression management, is a concept developed by Goffman which refers to the ways people present themselves to others (Trammell, et al. 2005). Goffman says that every person is like an actor on a stage that is acting the part they want the audience to believe is the real them but off the stage this is not their exact person. The actor only shows his audience what he wants them to see and not what is really happening backstage. Each individual has a *presenting self* which is the public image that they allow others to see. Usually

the *presenting self* that individuals attempt to display is a socially approved image such as a hard worker, a dependable friend, or a kind person (Alder & Towne, 1996).

In Goffman's book, "The presentation of self in everyday life", he describes the average person as having a "front" and a "backstage". The front region is the part of the individual that the public sees and believes to be the real them. The front is where Goffman says the "performance" takes place. The individual puts on a mask creating the "self" that they would like to be (Goffman, 1959, p. 19). The individual or the performer establishes a front that attempts a certain level of "decorum" or give the impression that they are following prescribed rules of how to act in specific situations in society (Goffman, 1959, p. 107). The performer must set the stage by creating the right setting and corresponding appearance, mannerisms and body language that will work together to stage the character the performer desires the public to witness (Goffman, 1959, pp. 22-30). Most commonly the individual has a "team" of actors that work together to establish and maintain the desired roles of each team member. Each actor generally tries to fit some type of pre-defined role that has already been labeled and described by society.

Papacharissi (2002b) explains Goffman further;

He conceptualized the presentation of self in everyday life as an ongoing process of information management and distinguished between the expressions one gives and the expressions given off, specifically that expressions given off are more theatrical and contextual, usually nonverbal, and presumably unintentional. Expressions one gives are easier to manipulate than expressions one gives off. A person stages a daily "information game," whereby the impressions formed of him/her become a result of his/ her expertise in controlling the information given and given off. Goffman referred to this game as a "performance" (p. 644).

Goffman goes on to give many reasons why people feel the need to give a performance. He explains that some people do it to fit into a desired social circle or because they feel pressured to conform to cultural patterns. Some people act like they have less money so they will be charged less in rent or given more handouts, some women feign stupidity to get the attention of a man, or simply because they feel a need to hide certain habits and behaviors they don't want others to discover they have (Goffman, 1959, pp. 27-59).

The second region described by Goffman is what he refers to as the "backstage" or the back region. "Here the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character" (Goffman, 1959, p. 112). The backstage is where the performer becomes his private, unrehearsed true self. The performer participates in many things in the backstage that would not be acceptable and may even contradict the role the performer plays in the front region. The individual may exhibit all the characteristics of a hard worker who never takes a break on the front stage and behind the scenes on the backstage exhibit all the qualities of a lazy loafer.

After having a basic understanding of the front and back regions, it is necessary to note the role of impression management in keeping the two regions separated. Impression management is the tool that individuals use to hide the backstage in order to keep the front ever present. Goffman helps us visualize this by comparing the performance to that of a performance on a stage,

Very commonly the back region of a performance is located at one end of the place where the performance is presented, being cut off from it by a partition and guarded passageway. . . Since the vital secrets of a show are visible backstage and since performers behave out of character while there, it is natural to expect that the passage

from the front region to the back region will be kept closed to members of the audience or that the entire back region will be kept hidden from them (Goffman, 1959, p. 113).

It requires a lot of work for individuals to maintain their front regions while hiding their undesired back regions which is why impression management is so important. Goffman gives several good examples of how this impression management works.

Obviously, control of backstage plays a significant role in the process of “work control” whereby individuals attempt to buffer themselves from the deterministic demands that surround them. . . If the bereaved are to be given the illusion that the dead one is really in a deep and tranquil sleep, then the undertaker must be able to keep the bereaved from the workroom where the corpses are drained, stuffed, and painted in preparation for their final performance. If a mental hospital staff is to give a good impression of the hospital to those who come to visit their committed kinfolk, then it will be important to be able to bar visitors from the wards, especially the chronic wards, restricting the outsiders to special visiting rooms where it will be practicable to have relatively nice furnishings and to ensure that all patients present are well behaved (Goffman, 1959, p. 114).

Impression management is a complex performance that requires hard work and consistency to maintain the individual’s part as an actor as well as keeping the private life of the individual both sacred and separate.

Jones (1990) defines six reasons why people use self presentation to guide certain perceptions in others. They are; ingratiation, competence or self-promotion, intimidation, exemplification, and supplication. To explain further, people want to be liked and accepted and to be perceived as skilled, qualified and competent (as cited in Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). Using the internet, specifically bloggers are able to gain a following of readers which helps them

to feel liked and accepted. Depending on the blog, blogs can have a following anywhere from twenty to a million or more readers. When people share their ideas or accomplishments on their blogs and readers praise those ideas they begin to feel skilled, qualified and competent.

Blogging is unique in that people read perfect stranger's blogs. When a blogger comes across something they like on someone else's blog, whether it is a fun date idea , recipe or new craft the reader shows they like the idea by posting it on their own blog with a hyperlink to the blog that the idea originated from. Blogging praise comes from admiring comments, hyperlinks to great blogs, blogging awards awarded by various groups of people online, and from increased readership. All of these aspects not only encourage bloggers to continue, but to also maintain that presented self which is receiving so much praise.

Self- presentation has been used several times to analyze how people present themselves through online media (Bortree 2005, Doorn, Zoonen and Wyatt 2007, Papacharissi 2002b, 2004, Trammell & Keshelashvili 2005, Sima and Pugsley, 2010). Papacharissi (2002b) did a study of personal home pages looking at self-presentation. She surveyed 260 individuals that had created personal home pages and then analyzed their personal home pages for information regarding their self-presentation. She identified that people used hyperlinks as a status symbol and a way to communicate their interests. It is also interesting to note in her findings that feedback mechanisms attached to most personal web pages are a way for the web authors to feel validated. When someone gives them feedback or visits their site those actions affirm the authors "performance".

In Papacharissi's 2004 study of blogs looked at self-presentation in blogs. Regarding self- presentation, she concluded that, "personal home pages present a medium for self-presentation, whereas blogs, on average, present a medium for self disclosure (as cited in

Trammell, p. 972, 2005).” Or in other words she found, “a good deal of content in blogs provides a “behind the scenes” look into the blogger’s “back stage.”(Trammell, p. 972, 2005).

In their study of the A-list Blogs, Trammell et al. (2005) utilized Goffman’s theory to understand how bloggers use self-presentation. They chose to use A-list blogs because they are considered the celebrities of the blogging world and may have a greater need to utilize impression management. In the 209 blogs they studied on the A-list, they discovered the bloggers all use different impression management strategies to maintain a certain persona to their readers. For example, they use experts to validate their words and they frequently ask for their audience’s opinions. When Marie from the popular “make and takes” blog was redecorating her living room she posted a picture of the room on her blog and asked her readers to give her tips on how to improve the room. Trammell et al. also mentioned the surprising amount of self disclosure found in blogs. Trammell, et al. describes their findings this way;

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 readers sees is the author’s “real self” or “back stage” --- all the while performing in public (p. 978, 2005).

Blogs are a versatile platform of giving out enough information to connect personally with your audience while at the same time being able to share only the information that gives off a certain front.

Researchers have identified many of the motivations of bloggers and even begun to identify how bloggers present themselves in their blogs. Many researchers have described blogs

as a form of online journal or diary (Trammell et al. 2005, Papacharissi, 2002, 2004, Trammell et al., 2006) or social diaries (Lawson- Borders, et al., 2005). Papacharissi(2004) and Trammel et al.(2005) went on to identify blogs as a frequently used method of self-disclosure. If blogs are indeed online journals for the whole world to read, disclosing personal information, this form of media is even more useful to the world than just as a powerful way to get a message out. It is also a great way to understand how women present themselves. Researchers can utilize blogs as a way to understand individuals and relationships on a whole new level as they read millions of personal diaries and see blog authors have ongoing interaction with their readers.

Papacharissi stated, “Blogs present a significant topic of study because they provide the opportunity to study media audiences as content producers instead of content consumers” (p. 21, 2006). With the growing amount of blogs and blog readers, their influence on society is important for researchers to understand the functions, audiences and motivations behind blogs.

No studies have been done looking specifically at regular mom blogs and self-impression that we know of. Mommy bloggers fall across the entire spectrum of bloggers. Some mom bloggers post about politics and news, some post about the community, design elements or a hundred other topics. For every blogging niche there is a mom blog to cover the scene. Many of those mom blogs have been consistent and interesting enough to have garnered hundreds of readers and the less popular mom bloggers are content with a 100 readers or less.

Although the influence of regular mom blogs has not been studied, nor can be quantified, this paper does not try to prove their influence and contribution to the world. However, mom blogs written by moms may give us greater insight into how women who are mothers present themselves to the rest of the world. Because blogging is so prevalent with the average mother, this medium is a way to gain insight on the maternal female in a whole new way.

The Problem

With the limited number of studies on blogs written by mothers and no current studies done specifically on how moms use blogs to present themselves online, there is a need for researchers to examine moms and self-expression.

As the popularity of blogging grows as a form of mass media, blogs are also becoming noticed in the world of journalism, politics, consumerism, and are found as a new form of information online (Herring, Scheidt, Kouper & Wright, 2006, Papacharissi, 2004, Thompson, 2007, Sauter, p. 1, 2009). Researchers have also noticed the significance of blogging as a new form of media and have examined it from several different angles (Jost & Hipolit, 2006, Lawson- Borders and Kirk, 2005, Xiang Zhou, 2009, Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts, 2007, Bar-Ilan, 2005, Mazur and Kozarian 2010, Davis 2010, Bortree 2005, Sweetster & Kaid 2008, Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmokl and Sapp, 2006, Trammell and Keshelashvili, 2005). Only one study to date has looked specifically at regular mom blogs (Lopez, 2009).

There is a continued need for researchers to understand the relationship between blogging and communication and the different ways that it is used by people participating in it.

Purpose of Study

Blogs are significant to the world of communication, not only as a new form of mass media, but as a new way of communicating through a more open, diary-like form that allows constant feedback and access to large audiences. As the number of people blogging grows, researchers can look at bloggers as both media producers and media consumers (Papacharissi, 2006).

Among the 133 million men and women blogging, 36 percent of women focus their blogs on family updating (Technorati, 2009). Currently 23 million women in the United States

participate in some form of blogging weekly. Of those 8-12 million women are publishing or posting to a blog weekly and 20 million women are reading blogs weekly (Wright, 2009). With all the women online, moms are actually considered by some to be the future of blogging (Paul, 2004).

Moms play a unique role online as they share their favorite products, give and seek advice while posting updates on their family. Companies have begun to recognize the power of moms as primary consumers and as advertisers. They see moms as an important part of their product design and advertising scheme (Sauter, 2009). While some moms benefit financially from these companies as they do product reviews and use ad placement on their blogs, most moms are satisfied just sharing favorite products for the benefit of their friends. According to Wright and Page (2009) moms are more likely to buy something after reading about it on a blog. Researchers can garner many insights into the world of consumerism, production and advertising from reading blogs written moms.

The main way moms utilize blogs is as a form of self-expression and as a way to connect with family and friends online. Lopez discussed the growing online community of mom blogs and the support and validation that moms receive from being a part of this community (2009). As there are currently no studies done on mom blogs and self-presentation, the main purpose of this study is to analyze blogs written by moms to identify how they use blogs as a tool for self-presentation and self-expression and to further understand Goffman's theory in this new media form. This understanding of communication within blogs written by moms helps validate Goffman's theory as we understand the unique roles that moms play using blogs as a stage for self-presentation.

There are three categories that this study looks at through the lens of self-presentation. The first category is creativity. Researchers identify the degree moms use blogs as a form of creativity. Moms can express themselves creatively as they artistically design their blogs through the presentation of pictures, original page layouts, and specialized html designs which give their blog homepage a look of individuality. It is through the analysis of creativity in mom blogs that Goffman's theory of self-presentation may be considered. This analysis of blogs written by moms enables further understanding of the front stage used by moms.

The second category is expressiveness. This type of expressiveness is found through the written text found on mom blogs. Moms express themselves through the words they use to describe themselves, their families, and their lives within their posts. Those words can be written a variety of ways to express negativism, positivism, formality, and even humor. The analysis of expressiveness once again allows further understanding of the front stage of moms on their blogs in regard to self-presentation. There may be more understanding of the front stage with expressiveness than is found in creativity.

The third category is intimacy. Moms use blogs as a tool to communicate at a certain level of intimacy with their readers. Some moms record personal intimate things on their blogs and others use their blogs in a less intimate way. The examination of intimacy sheds further light into the backstage of moms (Trammell, p .972, 2005). This final analysis lends understanding to how much backstage information mothers provide on their blogs. Furthermore, Intimacy is compared with creativity and expressiveness to attain further perspective of Goffman's theory of self presentation.

If according to Goffman's theory people present their front stage more readily than their backstage, will the same be true with blogs that literally present themselves to the world? It is

assumed that creativity will be found more frequently than expressiveness. It is also assumed that creativity and expressiveness will be found more than intimacy. As we look at mom blogs to understand self-presentation. The following research questions and hypotheses have been generated based on the literature and background information discussed above.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do the blogs created by moms illustrate how moms present themselves according to the following categories: creativity, expressiveness, and intimacy?

RQ2: Will creativeness be more apparent within blogs created by moms than both expressiveness and intimacy?

RQ3: Will expressiveness appear more often in blogs created by moms than intimacy?

Chapter Three

Methods

Grounded Theory

A grounded theory approach was chosen to extend and explore the study of blogs written by moms. Grounded theory debuted in the book, *Discovery of Grounded Theory* in 1967, and was developed by Barney Glaser and Anslem Strauss (Glaser, 1999).

Glaser and Strauss developed this method to identify social patterns and behaviors among various research data. Glaser states that Grounded theory is, “generated from observation to explain the observed” (Glaser, 2002). In other words, researchers use observation to systematically arrive at theories about the subject being observed.

In grounded theory, researchers identify concepts into patterns and use constant comparison to explain social behavior. Glaser describes the specific method of doing a Grounded theory analysis as follows;

First is collecting the data, then generating categories, then discovering a core category which organizes the other categories by continually resolving the main concern. From substantive theory one can go to a higher level, called formal theory. For example, becoming a nurse, a substantive theory, can be generalized to becoming a professional, a formal theory, and even raised to a higher formal level of becoming in general, a theory of socialization. This is done by theoretical sampling and constant comparisons (Glaser, 2002).

When grounded theory was developed it challenged previous research methodologies. Glaser said that researchers were getting frustrated that the results of their studies did not work to

make things better in their field of study particularly in business and health (1999). He said this of the researchers using,

They realize that it is only through discovery that they can find out what is going on.

They could not have dreamed it or deduced it from preconceived ideas. . . Researchers who are new to the scene are looking for a method that yields research that fits, works, is relevant, and is readily modifiable. That the method is modifiable is crucial for two reasons. First, in many preconceiving, verificational methods, it is the data that are poor, not the theory. Second, grounded theory shows that all data, no matter what their quality, can constantly modify the theory through comparisons. This modifying of theory is crucial because it constantly keeps up with what is going on as changes occur and it increases its formal abstraction. It constantly corrects for poor data (Glaser, 1999).

Grounded theory also allows researchers to generate their own theories based on the categories that emerge from the data. In this study, theories emerge that demonstrate specific ways that moms present themselves on blogs. As Glaser states, grounded theory does not need to describe the whole unit being studied, just a “core process” within it (2002).

In this study, data was collected and categories were found in the text, which exemplify how moms use blogs as a tool to present themselves. Grounded theory will enable the researcher to further understand the “core” social processes that are exhibited through blogging and how these social processes relate to self- presentation.

Samples

This study closely models studies done by Papacharissi of personal home pages (2002) and of blogs (2006). Fifteen blogs written by regular moms were analyzed using grounded theory for this study. Each blog contains approximately eight to sixty entries, during the months

of August and September 2009. It was decided to analyze multiple posts within 15 blogs instead of looking at just two to three posts in a greater sample of blogs. This study was more concerned with doing a qualitative study that looked a little more in depth at individual authors than in counting frequencies among a higher number of blogs. In this way the study could really analyze individual authors and how the self-presentation in their blogs related to Goffman's theory.

All of the blog entries in August and September of 2009 were read and analyzed looking for specific details that are described by Papacharissi in her previous studies as well as new themes and categories (2002, 2006).

The blogs were chosen and had to meet certain requirements. 15 blogs were chosen based on the following criteria. See Appendix A for a list of the blogs used and their URLs. The blog had to be written by a regular mom based on the information displayed on the homepage of the blog. The blog had to have at least 8 entries in August and September of 2009 combined, although there was no limit to how many entries they could have beyond 8. A list of the blogs is included in the appendix.

The blog authors (n= 15) were all females and mothers. All of them appeared to be married but only ten of the fifteen specifically mentioned somewhere on their blogs that they were married. Seven of the fifteen mothers specifically mentioned that they were stay-at-home moms although there is a possibility that all of the mothers could have been stay at home moms or worked from home. At least two of them mentioned working from home. The mothers had between one and four children and eight of the participants at least 3 or 4 children. Out of the 40 children the participants had collectively, there were 33 daughters and 7 sons. Not everyone noted on their blogs

where they were from but out of the ones who did there were 3 from Utah, 2 from California, 1 from Texas and 1 from Alabama. After completing the analysis, it could be said that a typical mom blogger is generally a stay-at-home mom who is devoted to her children. She loves to chronicle the events that take place in her family, share good news and accomplishments such as potty-training successes, and ask for advice from her friends. Mom bloggers also enjoy using their blog as a tool to share things about themselves such as goals, fears and desires. Mom bloggers all have their unique hobbies and interests which might include things such as crafts, sewing, cooking, coupon shopping, reading or a variety of other things. They like to share their hobbies online posting their current completed projects, the book they just recently read or the deal they just got couponing.

Procedures

The first category that was studied was Creativity. The following subcategories were analyzed to understand how mom bloggers use creativity in their blogs; Innovation, graphics, use of pictures, feedback and sophistication.

Moms use their blogs as a means of displaying themselves online to others. They do this through the use of specialized templates, graphics, and other artistic means to show their level of creativity and sophistication. The level of innovation was recorded. Innovation is defined as the amount in which the blog author attempted to differentiate their blog from the standard templates and tools that are provided by the webpage service. Next the level of sophistication was recorded that a blog shows which is based on the intricacy of the blog codes. The standard blog templates and standard HTML code were looked at previously in order to identify how moms

deviated from standard blog templates and codes (Papachrissi, 2006). See Appendix B for pictures describing the aspects looked for within creativity on mom blogs.

Next the degree to which the blogger invited feedback was documented. The presence of feedback mechanisms included e-mail, listservs, guestbooks, counters, contact forms, webring or other communities, ICQ or other forms of feedback. The presence of graphics was recorded. Graphics also included any type of animation or audiovisual elements such as playlists or videos (Papachrissi, 2006). The category of pictures was not originally in Papacharissi's study but it was added to this study because mommy bloggers use pictures to illustrate their posts and describe their families. Pictures are being differentiated from graphics because mom blogs include graphics to decorate their blog templates but use mostly pictures in their actual blog posts. The presence of pictures was recorded. The normal amount of pictures was identified as anywhere between one and three pictures per post. 4 or more pictures were defined as excessive. Papacharissi also looked at the level of Graphical user interface which allows users to interact with the website. This category was deleted because it did not directly relate to this study and was not a common component of mom blogs.

The second category that was studied was expressiveness. The following subcategories were analyzed to understand how mommy bloggers use expressiveness in their blogs; Presence of text, address of audience, level of formality, presence of humor, and outlook.

Presence of text looked at how mom bloggers express themselves through their blog based on their level of text and how they address their audience. A few sentences of text per post was defined as very little text and multiple paragraphs or more was defined as excessive text. The amount of text was recorded as was as the degree to which the blogger directly addressed potential reader and the degree to which the blog content was formal. Informal blogs are defined

as blogs that use incomplete sentences and do not use correct grammar, spelling or proper writing etiquette. Informal blogs are also more impromptu, and non conventional. Formal blogs are defined as blogs with more structure, correct grammar and conventional decorum. Formal blogs are also more planned and organized. Papacharissi also looked for whether or not there was content on the blog that could be manipulated but that is being deleted for this study because it does not relate to mom blogs.

Next the presence of humor in individual blogs was recorded as to whether humor is present or not present. Humor is defined as the use of any humorous devices including sarcasm, irony, self-deprecation and jokes (Papacharissi, 2006).

Then it was recorded whether or not mommy bloggers are positive in their blogs. Positive blogs are defined as blogs that refer to most positive events and circumstances, are optimistic and try not to highlight anything negative or would make them look bad. Negative blogs are depressing, focus on the negative aspects of things, and the authors complain about themselves or others. Negative blogs also mention guilt, include confessions and admit weakness.

The final category that was studied was levels of intimacy. The following subcategories were analyzed to understand how intimate Mommy bloggers are in their blogs; Narrative, personal information shared, how well did I know this person after reading her blog.

Other categories were looked at that refer to the level of intimacy bloggers exhibit on their blogs. It was identified whether the blog was in list or narrative form. The amount of personal information provided by the author was recorded. After reading the blog, I recorded how well I thought I knew this person based on the personal information that the blog author shared.

In addition to the methodology taken from Papacharissi's study on blogs, this study also looked at branding. Schau and Gilly (2003) explained that people use brands and products to describe themselves when they self-present. They state that, "the social actions required for self-presentation are consumption oriented and depend upon individuals displaying signs, symbols, brands, and practices to communicate desired impression (p. 387). They explain that consumers manipulate these tangible objects to create the image that they want others to see. "Consumers self-present daily as they select clothes, hair-styles, automobiles, logos, and so forth, to impress others in any given context" (p. 387). People establish their identities and use objects to describe and reaffirm those identities. This study identified and recorded any use of brands, products, logos and links to commercial websites in mom blogs. Specifically it recorded the brands, products and logos seen on the blog homepages and within the posts of August and September.

Chapter 4

Results

Creativity

The first research question sought to explore how blogs created by moms illustrate how moms present themselves according to creativity, expressiveness and intimacy. Within the first category of creativity, specific categories were looked at to discover how moms used blogs to display creativity. These categories included innovation, pictures, feedback and sophistication. The findings within each of the individual categories within creativity are shared below.

Innovation

As stated, the first category that was looked at was Creativity. Within creativity, innovation was the first category. Just over half of the blogs created their own template or found another template online rather than using the standard templates provided by the blog service. For example, many of the blogs used websites such as cutestblogontheblock.com or shabbyblogs.com, to download custom-made blog backgrounds and buttons that looked digitally-scrapbooked, to enhance their blog appearance.

Graphics

In contrast less than half of the blogs used graphics. The types of graphics that were used on the blogs varied from decorative buttons to popular blogs such as “CJANE” or Nie Nie” to digi- counters counting down birthdays or baby due dates and slideshows with family pictures. The Rideout gang blog had several blog buttons for other blogs she reads and even for a friend’s online business. The Ryan Harris family blog used digi-counters counting down their upcoming anniversary as well as three different slideshows of family pictures.

Pictures

More than any other thing, pictures were used on mom blogs to express creativity. For example, the blog *Seen thru green eyes* had at least one picture in each post, which was typical of all the mom blogs. One individual post in July had 19 pictures on the blog *Seen thru green eyes*. Pictures often reflected the text of the post. For example, when the blog, *Seen thru green eyes*, posted a detailed account of her baby shower she posted pictures of all of the guests, the refreshments, and a pile of baby gifts. When the mom from the blog, *Danielsons chatter*, wrote about her husband's favorite pair of work pants that were covered in rips, holes and stains, she posted a collage of pictures highlighted every unseemly part of the pants for her viewers to see complete with labels such as, "threadbare thigh." When the blog, *Ryan Harris family*, wrote about their baby niece burning herself from a pot of boiling water, she included pictures of the burns on her nieces hand and face.

Feedback

Although every blog that was analyzed in this study invited comments from readers at the end of each post, only half of the mom blogs had more than one way to provide that feedback. Some blogs, such as the one written by Mrs. Keele, not only invited comments but listed an email address and asked specifically for readers to send them email. Mrs. Keele's blog, the *Keele Family*, also referenced other blogs that she authored which also invited comments and emails.

Sophistication

Lastly, the amount of sophistication used on mom blogs was split. Half of the mom authors preferred to follow the predetermined html codes that were outlined by the blog provider. The other half of the mom authors showed sophistication by changing the html codes to make

their blogs look different. For example the blog, Seen thru green eyes, did not make any major html code changes but did add some html graphics to blog sidebar. On the other hand the blog, Magical Ordinary, changed her blog html code to make the text space wider and added a uniquely made header that was larger than the standard header size.

One theme that evolved from the categories within creativity was the concept that moms use blogs to create a fun and inviting place for them to record their lives and others to view their recordings. Through the use of pictures, graphics, innovation, feedback and sophistication they are able to create a distinctive niche for themselves in the blogging world.

Expressiveness

The second part of the first research question was to identify how blogs illustrate how moms present themselves online according expressiveness. Within the category of expressiveness, specific categories were looked at that demonstrated how moms used blogs to express themselves. These categories included text, the directness of the address to the audience, formality, humor and outlook. The findings of each category are listed below.

Text

The second category studied was expressiveness. Most mom blogs used a significant amount of text to express themselves on their blogs. The text followed a diary-like format sharing updates about accomplishments, milestones, family outings and other family related information. Sometimes moms used text on their blogs to describe their feelings about things that were going on in their lives. For example, the author of the blog, Magical Ordinary, often shared her feelings of joy about parenting. The blog, Winder Woman, chronicled the process and excitement that came from training and running a marathon. Overall text was used in a

variety of ways to share information, post family updates and express feelings and opinions about various aspects of life.

Direct Address of audience

In contrast, most of the authors of the mom blogs did not directly address their audience on their blogs. The Mom blog authors that did express themselves directly to their audience did so in several different ways. One of those ways was through public gratitude;

“I wish we lived closer so that we could get together more often. We love you guys! Thanks for making time to see us!” (Seen thru green eyes, July, 28, 2009).

“The adorable diaper cake and some decorations that my sister-in-law Kat put together. She is so good at this stuff. She really did an amazing job with the shower. And I am realizing, only now, that we did not get a single picture together! How did that happen, Kat?! You were a fabulous hostess. Thanks for all you did!”(July 20, 2009).

Another way mom blogs directly addressed their audience was through posting questions for their readers to answer. Seen thru green eyes blog asked the following question to her readers; “Now the question is... will she come while my family is out of the country, or will she wait until they return? I posted a poll, just for fun, to see what you all think. Leave me a comment after you vote and let me know!” (Sept. 26, 2009).

The blog, Magical Ordinary addressed her audience many times. One day she simply posted a picture of herself and her daughter in bed reading a book with a caption that read, “We can't blog today because we are sick in bed. However, we *can* accept elaborate gifts.” (Sept. 29, 2009). Another time she wrote a letter addressed to one specific reader that was a friend of hers which read, “Dearest Marci, You did an excellent job of tending to our children in my time of

dire need. You even took the children outside where they. . .” (Sept. 15, 2009). A third time she invited her readers to come over for freshly baked cookies adding a personal note to two friends, “Yes, Bethany and Marci, this is a real invitation. You can put your hands down and your shoes on” (Sept. 15, 2009).

Formality

Only about half of the mom blogs maintained a high level of formality on their blogs. Those blogs that were formal wrote their posts using correct rules of grammar, correctly spelled words and posts were in paragraph form. Informal blogs were sometimes written in all lowercase letters without much punctuation. For example, the blog, a little place called awesome, used no capitalization of text in her blog posts.

Humor

In every single mom blog humor was present. Some examples of the humor displayed in the mom blogs include;

“If **Baby Girl** turns out to be **Baby Boy**, he will have some major issues. Everything is **pink!**” (Seen thru green eyes, September 8, 2009).

“This is the same brother that has had his fair share of awesome cars. *Amazing* cars! I've taken a few road trips with him in these cars. One trip required us to pull to the side of the road every 30 minutes to find the tool (that we lost *every* time) to do something or such with under the hood. And off we'd go again for another 30 minutes. One time we drove in a snowstorm and had to take turns rolling down the window every 5 minutes to reach out and around to "flick" the wipers so they would continue to work.”(Magical Ordinary, July 30, 2009).

This quote was from a little boy regarding his baby sister's wild hair, "Her hair looks like Franken Einstein." Mom asked the little boy, "Okay Sam, do you mean freakin Einstein, Frankenstein or Einstein?" (The Rideout gang, September 27, 2009).

Outlook

Less than half of the mom blogs portrayed a positive outlook on life. A good example of a positive outlook comes from the following quote from the blog, Seen thru green eyes, "I truly believe we are given experiences to help strengthen us and grow in ways we otherwise would not. These past 11 months have taught me things I know I would not have learned under any other circumstance. I also believe the Lord knows when we have had enough, we have learned our lesson, and we are ready to move on." (Sept. 3, 2009). Another example from the same blog, "We are SO excited to be living so close to family and friends, especially with our baby girl so close to joining our family." Authors that exhibited a positive outlook were generally more optimistic and complained less on their blogs.

The overall theme was that moms use excessive text on their blogs to communicate in a diary like manner using humor to make the text more enjoyable for them and their readers.

Intimacy

The third part of the first research question was to discover how blogs exemplify how moms present themselves online according to intimacy. Within the category of intimacy, specific categories were examined that demonstrated how moms used blogs to share intimate things. These categories included list/ narrative, personal information, and the question; how well do you know this person? The findings of each category are listed below.

List/ Narrative

The third category that was studied was Intimacy. The majority of mom blogs was written in a narrative style although some blogs did include lists among their narrative which means that the most of the mom blogs followed a diary-like format.

Personal information

Almost half of the moms shared a lot of personal information on their blogs where more than half chose to not include really personal information online. The blog, *Seen thru green eyes* did not hesitate to share details of her doctor experience while pregnant;

“I went in to my appointment excited to see if I had dilated any since last week, and the guy.didn't.check.me! I called him on it, I said, "I have never heard of an OBGYN not checking a patient for progression, why don't you do that?" He said he doesn't do that because it causes a higher risk of infection. Why does every other doctor in the world do it then?! WHY?! He said he won't check me until I am at, or PASSED, 40 weeks! I'm sorry, but that just doesn't work for me. I am glad that this office is a group practice and that I can see the other doctor next week. She told me that she would be willing to give me some Pitocin if I start dilating on my own. Which means, she will have to CHECK ME. Hmm. What a novel idea.” (Sept. 17, 2009).

The blog, *the Raleigh family*, regularly shared personal information;

“Then at about two in the morning Paige got a high fever. I think I cried for a good hour wondering what to do. How was I going to leave her and have a baby when all she wants to do is have me hold her, and if I did go I couldn't have her at the hospital with a brand new baby so I wouldn't see her for two days and she would miss out on seeing her brand new sister. So after I cried I went back to sleep and just had a feeling all the details would

work themselves out. So when I called the hospital in the morning, they said they were full and I was really relieved.” (July 8, 2009).

Another time the author of the Raleigh family included a list of personal things about herself including, “1. I am incredibly opinionated although I don't throw my opinions in anyone's face. 2. I am really critical. (mostly of myself) 3. I love being a Mom, it is all I ever really wanted to do. 4. I hate tatoo's and piercings with a passion. 5. I don't like following the crowd I prefer to be different.” (Sept 24, 2009).

The blog, the C Dyer family, also shared personal information. For example,

“The past couple weeks have been interesting to say the least and I think part of me is in denial. When asked how its going, I say "its actually not too bad, the kids are adjusting well, but deep down I think I'm struggling more than I would like to admit. Between living in 900 square feet with no stove or freezer, having 2 kids throwing up, stressing about things getting over looked on our home, and really stressing about the reality of having a home and all that comes with it, I've slowly started to become extremely overwhelmed. It's been a learning and growing experience” (July 1, 2009).

How well do you know this person?

In answer to the question, “How well do you know this person”, I felt I knew almost half of the mom blog authors well after reading their blogs based on the amount of personal information they chose to include on their blogs. Some blogs included multiple posts about their family, what they did on a regular basis, as well as their feelings and opinions about many subjects. They included names and descriptions of their children along with multiple pictures and how they felt about each member of their family. After reading all of these descriptions and

details on some of these blogs, I feel as though I am reading a life history or an auto-biography of these individuals which makes me feel as though I know them personally.

The overall theme found within the category of intimacy was that moms enjoy using blogs to share some level of personal information about themselves with others.

The second research question asked if creativeness would be more apparent within blogs created by moms than both expressiveness and intimacy. It was found that there was more creativity and less expressiveness displayed within blogs created by moms. At least a half of the moms used sophistication and over half used sophistication to display creativity on their blogs. Most of the moms used pictures and all of the moms used feedback to display creativity. Although the amount of expressiveness used by moms on their blogs was high with most using excessive text and all using humor, the categories within expressiveness were not as apparent as the categories within creativity. Both creativity and expressiveness were more apparent than intimacy.

The third research question asked if expressiveness would appear more often in blogs created by moms than intimacy. This was also found to be true. Moms were more willing to write about the common things in their everyday lives through humor than share lots of personal information about themselves.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Moms appear to enjoy blogging because they can connect and keep up with their family and other moms. This study has identified several ways that moms use blogs as a form of self-expression. Creativity was the first category that was looked at to help identify how moms use blogs as a way to self-present. Creativity was an important aspect to look at because it identified how moms use their blogs to set the stage as Goffman explains in the theory of self-presentation. In Goffman's theory, actors set the stage in order to portray a certain image. He states, "The performer must set the stage using the right setting and corresponding appearance, mannerisms and body language that will work together to stage the character the performer desires the public to witness" (Goffman, 1959, pp. 22-30). Moms use their blogs as their stage, decorating and embellishing in such a way that reinforces the image they are trying to get their audience to see.

As a whole moms were able to express their creativity on their blogs. With the exception of graphics, mom blogs exemplified creativity with the use of excessive pictures, innovation and sophistication. The majority of mom blog authors personalized their blogs with quotes, pictures of their children and spouse on their sidebars, family bios, and scrapbook like templates in an attempt to make their blogs fun and inviting.

Just over half of the blogs created their own template or downloaded a custom-made template from a website and half of the moms changed their html codes to make their blogs look unique. Most of the moms used excessive pictures in their blog posts, some used graphics and all of the blogs invited some level of feedback. Based on the findings of this study, moms use several methods to display creativity on their blogs. This suggests that mom blogs have a fun,

cute appearance through their fancy backgrounds and multiple pictures. Moms invite readers to their blogs like they might invite guests to their home. They want to give off a great first impression while displaying an environment that is inviting, clean and fresh and tastefully decorated. They also use pictures on their blogs to display their children, brag about their children's accomplishments and show off how cute their children are through the excessive pictures they post.

Feedback plays an interesting role in mom blogs. As moms use creativity on their blogs to present their desired public image they are modeling the behavior described in Goffman's theory of Self- presentation. They are manipulating their blogs to give off impressions that support their performance of the public image they want others to see them as. The creativity of cute backgrounds, pictures and customized html codes set the stage for the perfect performance. As moms receive direct feedback and comments on their blogs they are also receiving validation, reinforcement and praise for their performance. This could potentially be one of the driving forces behind a mom's desire to blog.

The second category that this study looked at was expressiveness. It was important to look at expressiveness to understand more about what Goffman calls impression management within his theory of self- presentation. As moms express themselves through various aspects of their blogs they are attempting to control the impressions they give off. Goffman explains that, "a person stages a daily "information game," whereby the impressions formed of him/her become a result of his/ her expertise in controlling the information given and given off" (Papacharissi, p. 644). Moms' main form of expression on their blogs was through the things they wrote in the text of their posts about themselves and their lives.

Despite the fact that moms tend to be very verbose they all exhibited different writing styles. Some of the mom blog authors were very direct or formal in their writing while the text of others followed a loose pattern of thoughts that looked more like a brainstorming session than a unified paragraph. All of the moms used some elements of humor in their writing which included some irony, sarcasm, and a small amount of self-deprecation. As may be expected there was no humor including offensive language due to the family nature of mom blogs.

Most moms write in a diary like format to mostly no one in particular. Less than half portrayed a positive outlook meaning they are conveying a more honest description of both the good and bad in their lives through the text on their blogs. According to Goffman's theory of self-presentation and the idea that everyone is on a public stage where they perform in the "front" as their ideal self or presenting self and specifically hide their imperfections and undesirable behavior "backstage." Based on Goffman's theory, the question was whether or not the blog served as a place where moms only presented their ideal self to their audience. And whether they only portrayed the positive events, feelings and attitudes that would make them appear flawless on the stage they had created for themselves. It was interesting to note that moms did not always follow this pattern of only highlighting the good on their blogs. Although most of the blogs exhibited a positive outlook, several included negative experiences and feelings and shared inadequacies that may or may not have made them appear weak, selfish or flawed in some way to their audience. They don't make a big attempt to sugar-coat the negative or try to hide it. In this way I think they are using blogs as a tool to open up and share their feelings and opinions in a way that has never been quite so public. This echoes the feelings expressed by Papacharissi earlier where she suggested that blogs tend to give a better look into the author's "backstage" than other forms of communication. This study only began to

recognize certain patterns and characteristics found in mom blogs therefore specific reasons for being more open about both positive and negative aspects have not yet been identified.

Speculatively, it can be said that moms are so desperate in their need to communicate and identify with other moms that they are more willing to push aside common social customs in order to validate themselves and receive understanding from others.

It is important to note that moms are not completely sadistic in what they write on their blogs despite not always having a positive outlook because all of the moms utilized humor to lighten the mood of their posts. It appears that moms enjoy expressing themselves through the written text on their blogs. People use journals and or diaries to record their lives, feelings, opinions and release the pent- up emotions they have in a place where moms they feel secure to so. In some indescribable way moms are finding blogs as a safe environment where they are feeling more and more comfortable with expressing themselves. In Goffman's theory of Self-presentation, actors have to work hard to maintain their front stage self while hiding their backstage self. According to the findings of this study, moms are hiding less of their backstage selves on their blogs.

The third category that this study looked at was intimacy. This category was important to look at because it helps us to understand the distinction between what Goffman defines as the front stage and the backstage. He states, "Since the vital secrets of a show are visible backstage and since performers behave out of character while there, it is natural to expect that the passage from the front region to the back region will be kept closed to members of the audience" (Goffman, 1959, p. 113). This study looked at the amount of intimate information that moms shared on their blogs that would in most cases be considered backstage information.

All of mom blogs shared some amount of personal information to the degree that “I felt like I knew” some of the authors fairly well or even really well after reading their blogs. Some of the mom blog authors were very open sharing concerns about their children and their struggles as a mom to the point that I felt as though I was actually reading some of these women’s real journals. All of the blogs maintained a diary-like format in their posts using a narrative style while occasionally incorporating lists within their narratives.

We learn through the narratives we read on mom blogs, that almost half are sharing a lot of personal information and the others are sharing some personal information. Through this level of sharing, the audience can feel they know these blog authors really well without ever meeting or even seeing them in real life. In this way moms really are taking the stage as Goffman describes, playing a part for an audience that may or may not know them. As the internet is available to anyone in the world with access to a computer it can be assumed that most blogs have been read by an unidentified number of strangers.

Through the high level of personal information that is shared on blogs, moms are not following the pattern of self- presentation as described by Goffman. Instead the findings show that moms are not trying very hard, if at all, to keep their private lives separate from their onstage public life.

In Papacharissi’s 2004 study, she stated that blogs usually present more self-disclosure type information than self presentation. After analyzing these mom blogs it was apparent that they balance self-disclosure and self-presentation on their blog. In this instance self-disclosure was noted through the amount of personal information that was shared within individual blog posts. This personal information was not characteristic of the type of information that would be exhibited on the front stage as Goffman defined. Instead this personal information was more of

the kind of information that would be found on the backstage. Moms displayed this type of self-disclosure on their blogs when they shared their weaknesses and struggles in their posts and voiced their frustrations. Some moms chose to primarily focus on only the things that would put them in a positive light which would be more characteristic of Goffman's *presenting self* because these moms were only choosing to share "front" stage information with their audience. Moms demonstrated self- presentation by decorated their blogs in a scrapbook like style while putting their children and husbands on display and bragging about their family's accomplishments. Each blog was different in the way that they chose to self-disclose information and the amount of self-disclosure and how they presented themselves. Some blogs only presented their front stage selves while some were very open about their backstage while still maintaining a front stage image. Not every blog followed the same pattern of self-presentation in sharing both the front and backstage image but most of the blogs shared at least some if not a lot of backstage information. This shows that most moms are not afraid to share their backstage with the blogging world and that in fact in may be the reason why moms enjoy blogging and feel so connected with other moms online. Interestingly, even moms that shared backstage information still made an effort to maintain a front stage image. Just because an author chose to disclose backstage information did not mean that they neglected to make themselves appear acceptable and desirable to society.

The presence of brands and logos on mom blogs was identified and recorded. The findings were unimpressive and almost nonexistent; therefore they were excluded from the results section. It was surprising to discover that the blogs used in this study had very little or no branding on their blogs. A few of the blogs referenced a friend's blog business or a recent restaurant they had been to but no other specific brands, logos or products were mentioned. It

appears that only moms who are paid or endorsed to blog use frequent branding. It would be interesting to study this particular facet of self-expression further to see if a larger sample size would produce the same results as this study regarding branding and mom blogs.

Overall mom blogs display many of the same characteristics of self-presentation that were identified in previous studies as being shown in other types of blogs. It can be seen that mom blogs exhibit more pictures than other blogs do and possibly less branding since many do not blog for money or as a job. Like other blogs, mom blogs contain a lot of text but the content is much different than that of other blogs as it is family friendly and excluded offensive language.

It is remarkable to see the number of moms in the blogging world. A blog is a unique place where moms can go to present themselves to others through expression, creativity and intimacy. Moms have a need and desire to connect with other moms in various ways as well as express themselves as individuals. As they write their blogs they are able to create online journals where they share their personal life story including personal triumphs and trials. Every new visitor, reader or comment on their blog encourages moms to keep writing and sharing their life with others. In this process of blogging, moms have found that they can be praised and admired for their accomplishments and attempted perfection and also receive support when they are struggling. This study also showed that moms use expression, creativity and intimacy on their blogs in such a way that they are more open to revealing their backstage selves in an attempt to connect with others.

Limitations

This study was limited in the number of blogs that were represented. A study done using more blogs and an even bigger span of time may enhance further understanding of mom blogs.

There may have been more differentiated results from doing a survey or an interview along with the textual analysis this study used.

Future Research

A new study looking at mom blogs through grounded theory without pre-determined themes may enable the researcher to discover new categories that define social patterns and behaviors found through blogs. It would be interesting to study the similarities and differences between popular mom blogs and regular mom blogs to distinguish if they present themselves differently online. It may also change results to compare mom blogs from various countries and cultures looking for similarities and differences or even look at blogs from different web hosts such as wordpress and lycos. The most beneficial study would be to do compare blogs from different years to see how the blogs have evolved and whether or not moms changed the ways the utilized blogs for self-presentation over a specific span of years. Additionally, more research is needed to understand branding and how mom blogs influence their readers to buy or not buy certain products. It was mentioned in the discussion that feedback may be one of the driving motivations of why moms blog. What roles does feedback play specifically in motivation and validation of a mom's self-presentation online? More research is also needed to understand how positive feedback through the comments of others increase or decrease the future communication of the mom blogger.

A comparison of mom blogs verses blogs written by dads would also prove to be interesting. Another angle would be for researchers to identify the relationship between intimacy and the number of posts. Are moms that post more frequently more likely to share intimate things or does the amount of post make no difference?

One thing that this study did not consider was how pictures play a role in intimacy on blogs. This study only looked at pictures within blogs as a form of creativity but pictures also share intimate things about people, for example a wedding picture or a picture of mom in the hospital holding her new baby. Future researchers could look at pictures as well as text to understand how much intimate information is shared on mom blogs.

Finally, as researchers look to understand mothers may compare other media forms that mothers use like facebook, twitter and other online groups.

Conclusion

With the growing number of blogs and women online, the number of blogs created by moms is also growing. Moms are imperative to society in that they are the primary consumers of the family and the primary caregivers of the future generation of consumers and communication users. Goffman's theory of self-presentation illustrates how individuals present themselves in society using both verbal and nonverbal communication. This study uses Goffman's theory of self- presentation through a grounded theory approach to understand how moms use blogs to present themselves specifically through the categories of creativity, expressiveness and intimacy. The results of this study help us understand how blogs are used by moms as a tool to self-present and to identify how this communication furthers Goffman's theory of self-presentation. Specifically this study showed that moms use creativity within blogs as a way to set the stage and paint the scenery that validates their performance as an actor. It found that moms use expressiveness on their blogs as a form of impression management to monitor the expressions they are giving and giving off. It also found that moms use intimacy on their blogs as a way to share backstage information in a non- threatening way to their audience. As moms share both front stage and backstage information with their audience on their blogs, it was found that they

are challenging Goffman's theory of self- presentation, in that they are not trying very hard to hide backstage information from their audience as Goffman's theory describes.

Appendix

List of Blog Titles and URLs Used

<u>Title</u>	<u>URL</u>
Winder Women	www.winderwomen.blogspot.com
A Magical Ordinary	www.magicalordinary.blogspot.com
Seen thru Green Eyes	www.seenthrugreeneyes.blogspot.com
Danielson's Chatter	www.danielsonschatter.blogspot.com
Gone with the Simpsons	www.alittleplacecalledawesome.blogspot.com
Our Family	www.ryanharrisfamily.blogspot.com
Just us	www.rideoutgang.blogspot.com
Cherishing the Moments	www.cherishingthemoments.blogspot.com
Our Page	www.laceycurlyandmo.blogspot.com
B+J= Calculus	www.bryanhorspoolfamilychaos.blogspot.com
Jeremy and Hannah Skinner	www.jeremyandhannahskinner.blogspot.com
Troy and Allie	www.troyandallie.blogspot.com
The Raleigh Family	www.bridgetjustinandpaige.blogspot.com
Finding Comfort Keele Style	www.thekeelefamily.blogspot.com
The Dyer Family	www.curtisdyerfamily.blogspot.com

*It is important to note that some of these blogs may not be accessible to the public anymore. Some of these blogs chose to go private within a short time after this study was completed making them accessible only to select individuals invited by the blog author. Also on occasion a blog author will decide to delete their blog which removes it and makes it accessible to no one.

Appendix B

A sample of pictures describing creativity on mom blogs



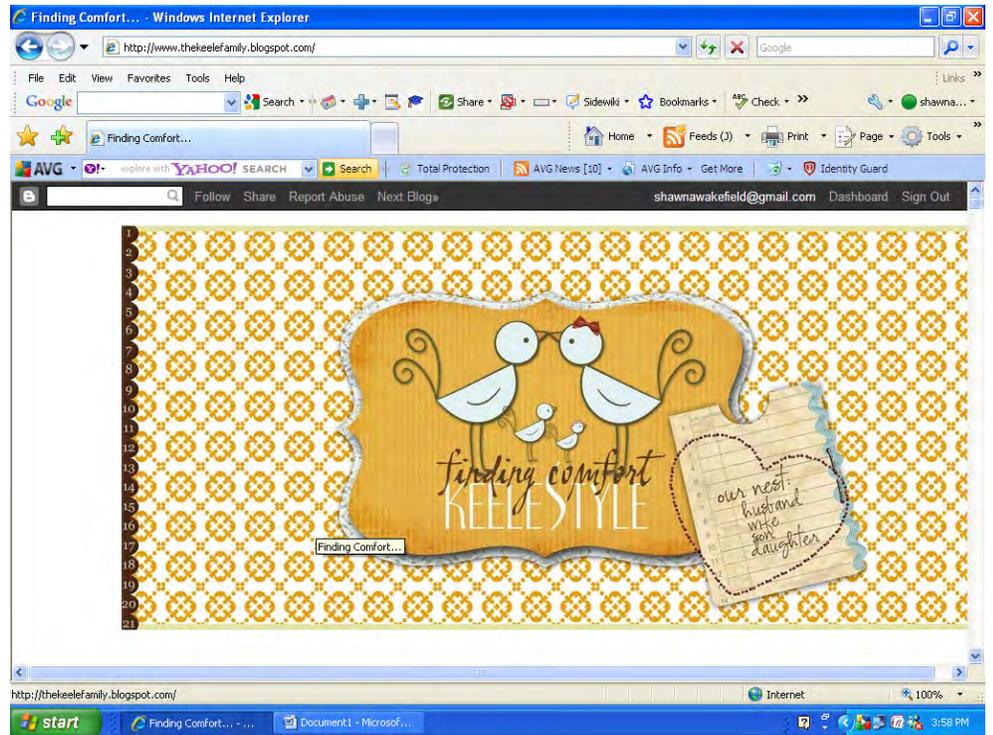
This is a standard template created and offered by Blogger.com. The header is also standard in both the example above and the example below.

This blog used a blog website, in this case the cutest blog on the block, to download a pre-made and designed blog template. Although they kept the standard html codes because none of the sizing of the blog layout has been changed as compared with the blog above.



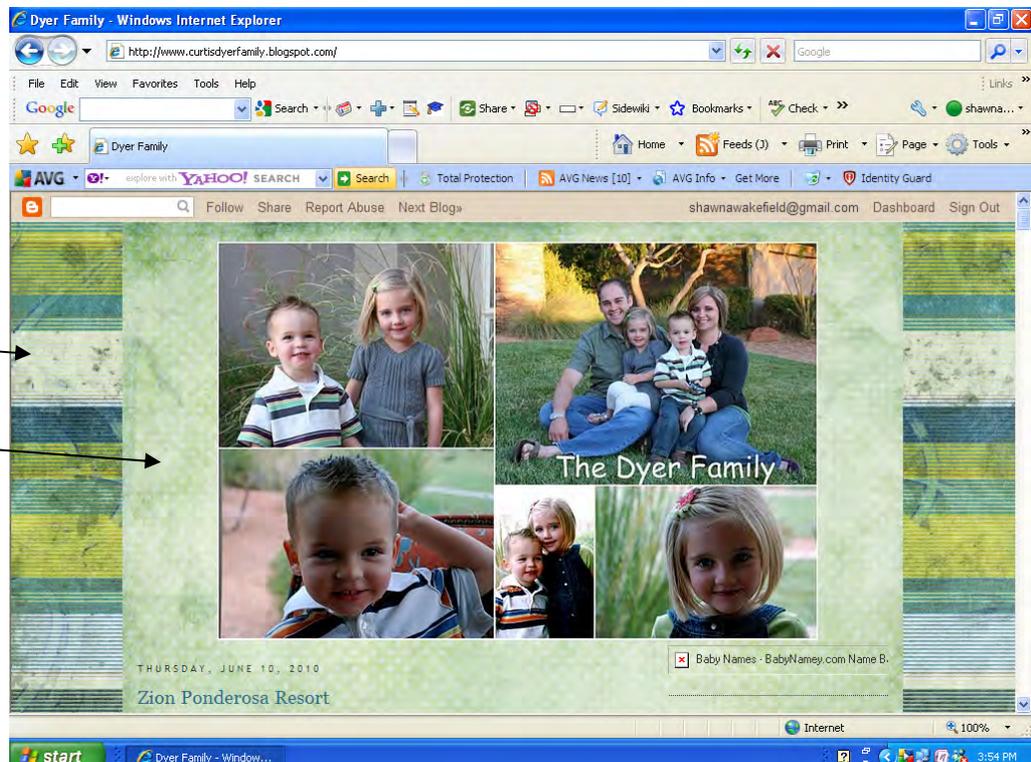
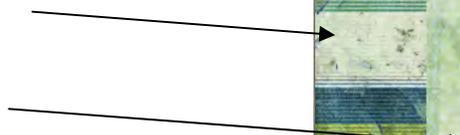
It is easy to tell if the template has been downloaded from a web service because of the service name noted in the upper left hand corner.

Here is an example of a blog that changed their html codes. This image shows the altered blog header. The header is wider and longer than the ones designed by Blogger.com.



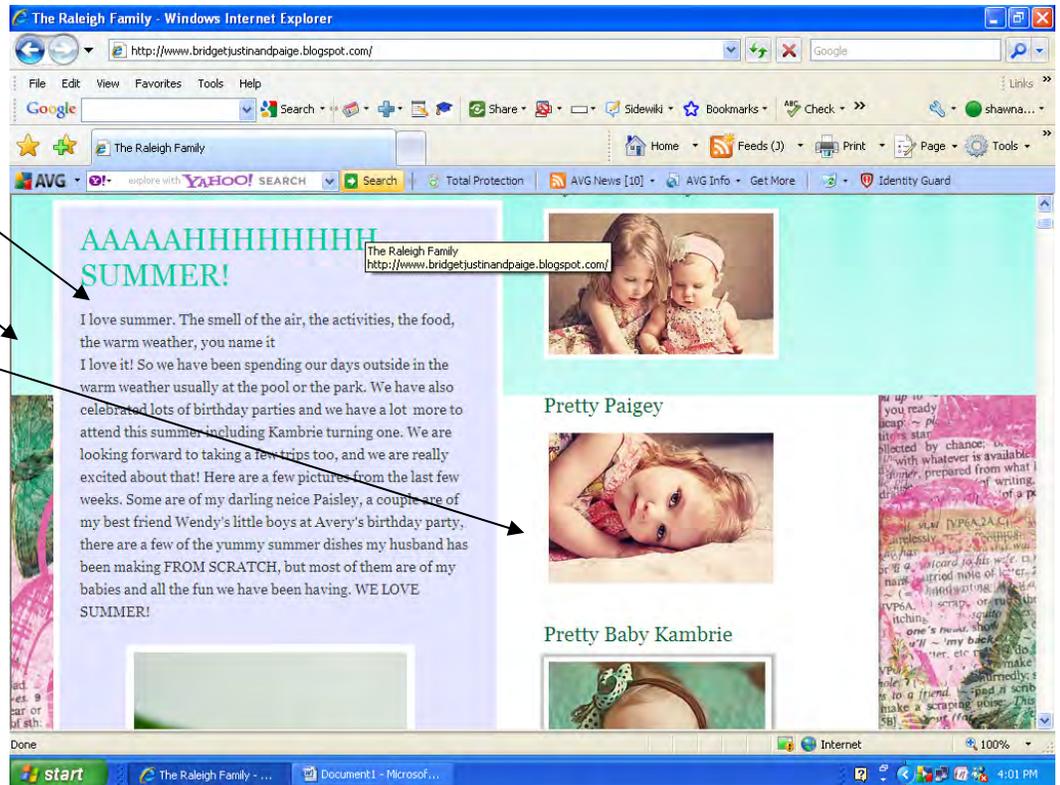
The picture below shows not only an altered header changes in the html code but also the author personally changed the background. She left the dimensions for the posts the same but inserted digital scrapbook paper for the background within the html code.

Changed html codes



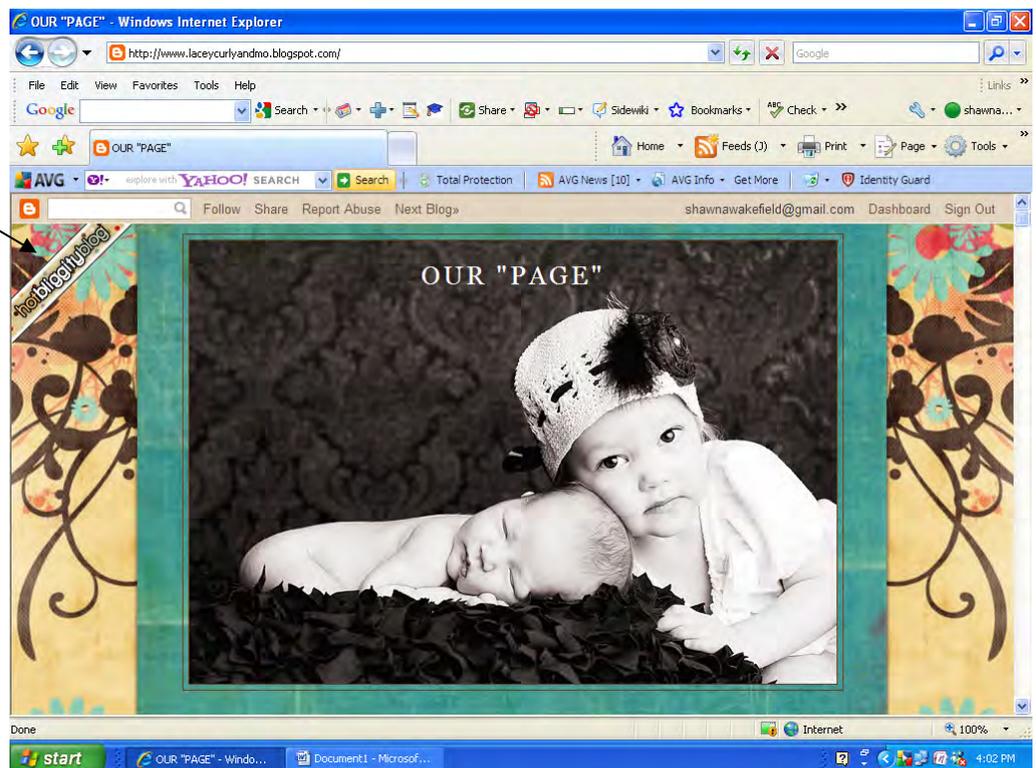
This blog shows significant changes in the html. Notice the width of the post area where the main text is found. The margins are smaller on the right and wider on the left. And the sidebar with the pictures is also wider than most sidebars.

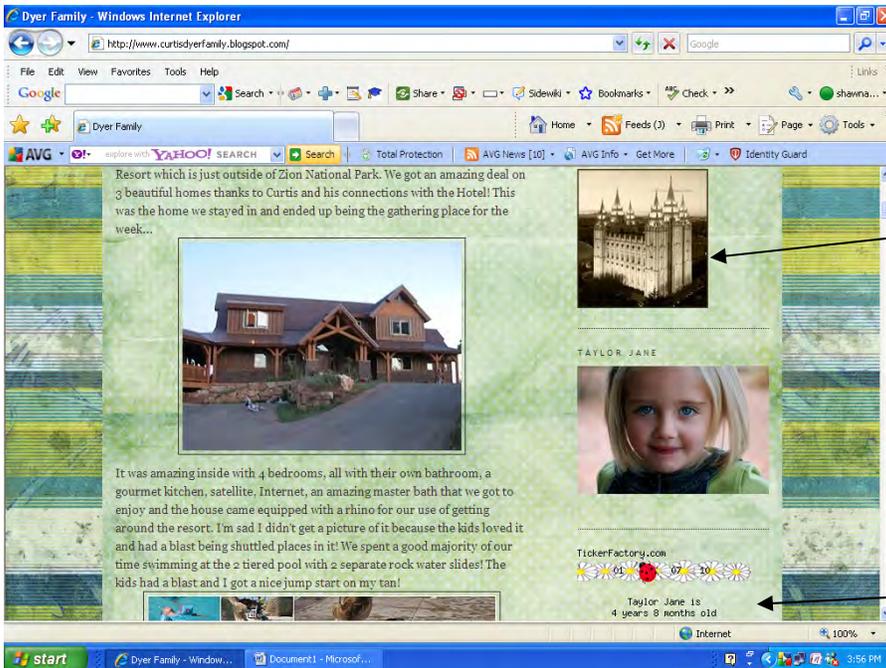
Also the background colors and designs have been altered within the html code.



Here is another example of a template taken from a blog web service, in this case hot biggity blog.com, as noted in the top left corner.

The header has also been altered.



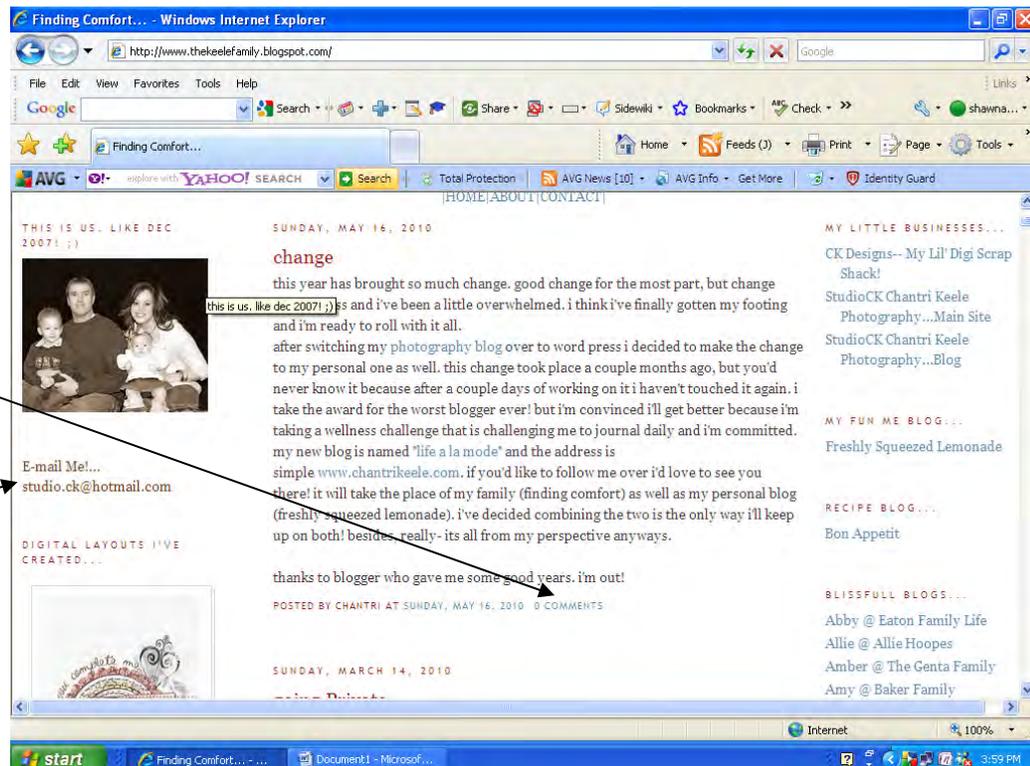


This page gives us an example of digital graphics. The picture of the temple is actually a button that links the blog to a website about the author's religion.

The flowers and ladybug graphic is actually a digi-counter from tickerfactory.com. It counts how old the child in the picture is and changes monthly although all counters are different.

This blog picture helps to illustrate feedback mechanisms. At the end of every post is a place for readers to leave comments for the author. There is an option to disable comments but all of the blog authors in this study had a comment option.

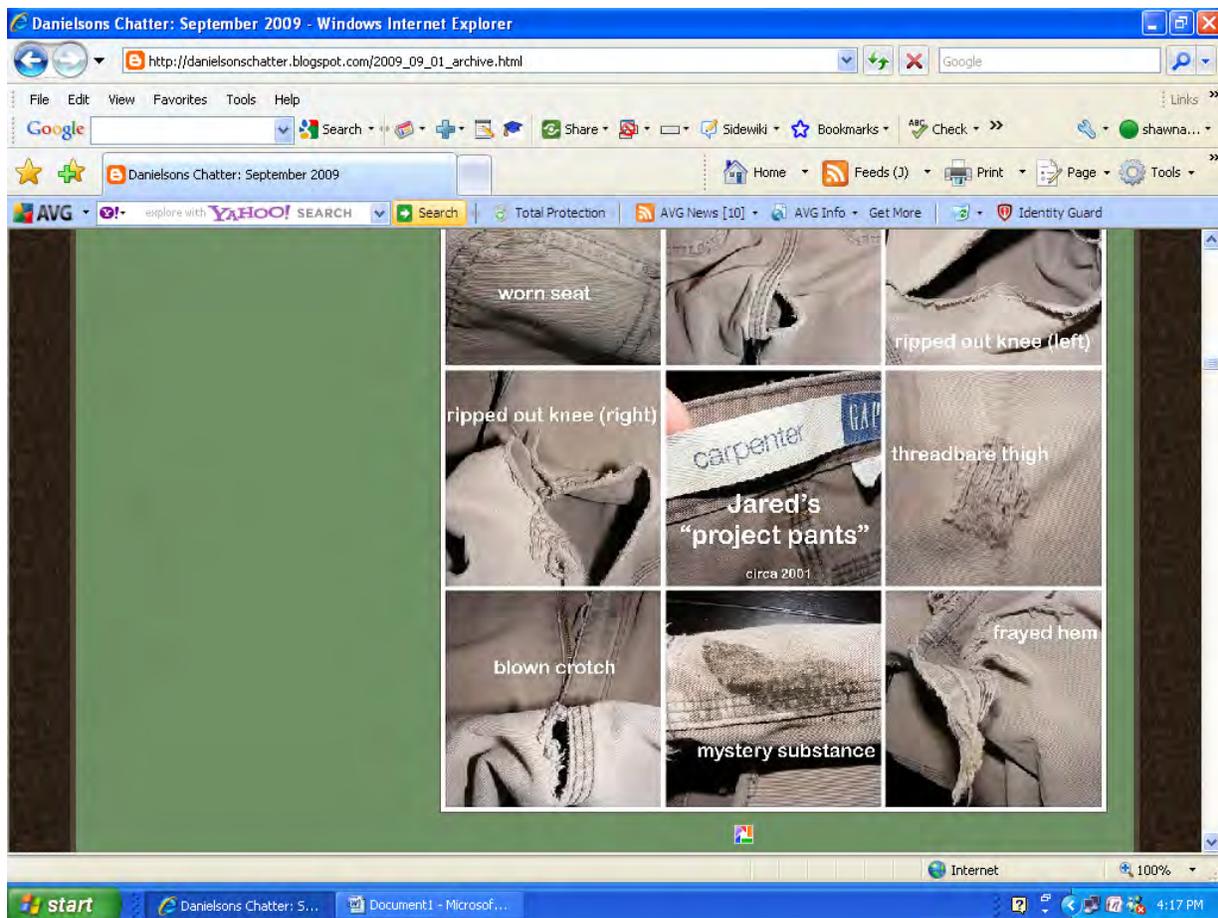
This particular blog author also wrote her email address on her blog with an invitation for readers to email her.



This blog picture illustrates the use of pictures within a blog posting. This particular picture collage is referenced in the results section of the paper. It is common for moms to use at least one picture in each post they write. Quite often they are known to post an excessive amount of pictures, 5 or more pictures, within an individual post. Collages and slide shows are also popular things to include in posts and on sidebars.

Usually the pictures enhance the writing within a post but sometimes moms just include pictures of their kids to bring life to a picture-less post even if it doesn't directly relate to the pictures posted. Often pictures provide the post with some comic relief.

This particular post was written by a mom blog author about her husband's favorite pair of work pants that had really seen some wear and tear.



References

- Adler, R. B., & Towne, N. (1996). *Looking out looking in interpersonal communication* (8th ed.). Orlando: Harcourt Brace.
- Bar-Ilan, J. (2005). Information hub blogs. *Journal of Information Science*, 31, 297-307.
- Bortree, D. (2005, March). Presentation of self on the Web: an ethnographic study of teenage girls' weblogs. *Education, Communication & Information*, 5(1), 25-39.
- Davis, K. (2010) Coming of Age Online: The Developmental Underpinnings of Girls' Blogs. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 25: 145-171.
- Doorn, N., Zoonen, L., & Wyatt, S. (2007). Writing from Experience: Presentations of Gender Identity on Weblogs. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 14, 143.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York, Doubleday.
- Glaser, B. (1999). The Future of Grounded Theory. *Qual Health Res*, 9, 836.
- Glaser, B. (2002). Conceptualization: On Theory and Theorizing Using Grounded Theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), 1-31.
- Herring, S.C., Scheidt, L.A., Kouper, I. & Wright, E. (2006). Longitudinal Content Analysis of Blogs: 2003-2004. In Tremayne, M. (ed.), *Blogging, citizenship, and the future of media* (pp. 3-20). United States: Taylor & Francis, Inc.
- Huffaker, D., & Calvert, S. (2005, January). Gender, Identity, and Language Use in Teenage Blogs. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 10(2).
- Jost, K., & Hipolit, M. (2006). THE ISSUES. *CQ Researcher*, 16(22), 507-514.
- Lawson-Borders, G., & Kirk, R. (2005, December). Blogs in Campaign Communication. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 49(4), 548-559.

- Lopez, L. K. (2009). The radical act of 'mommy blogging': redefining motherhood through the blogosphere. *New Media Society, 11*, 729.
- MacDougall, R. (2005). Identity, Electronic Ethos, and Blogs: A Technologic Analysis of Symbolic Exchange on the New News Medium. *American Behavioral Scientist, 49*, 575.
- Mazur, E., & Kozarian, L. (2010). Self-Presentation and Interaction in Blogs of Adolescents and Young Emerging Adults. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 25*, 124-144.
- Pan, B., MacLaurin, T., Crotts, J.C. (2007). Travel Blogs and the Implications for Destination Marketing. *Journal of Travel Research, 46*, 35-45.
- Papacharissi, Z., & Rubin, A. (2000, Spring 2000). Predictors of Internet Use. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 44*(2), 175.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2002, September). The Self Online: The Utility of Personal Home Pages. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 46*(3), 346.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2002, September). THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN VIRTUAL LIFE: CHARACTERISTICS OF PERSONAL HOME PAGES. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 79*(3), 643-660.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2004). The blogger revolution? Audiences as media producers. In Tremayne, M. (ed.), *Blogging, citizenship, and the future of media* (pp. 21-38). United States: Taylor & Francis, Inc.
- Paul, P. (2004, April 12). The New Family Album. *Time magazine*. Retrieved from world wide web July 16, 2009.
- Sauter, J. (n.d.) Commentary: Harnessing the power of the mommy-blogger. *Daily Record, The (Baltimore, MD)*, Retrieved September 15, 2009, from Regional Business News database.

- Schau, H.J., & Gilly, M.C. (2003, December). We are what we post? Self-Presentation in personal web space. *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 30(3), 384-404.
- Silva, E. (2009, June 21). Keeping Connected: Mom blogs while staying at home with kids. *Times-News (Burlington, NC)*, Retrieved September 15, 2009, from Newspaper Source database.
- Sima, Y., & Pugsley, P. C. (2010). The Rise of A 'Me Culture' in Postsocialist China: Youth, Individualism and Identity Creation in the Blogosphere. *International Communication Gazette*, 72, 287-306.
- Sweetser, K. D., Lee K. L. (2008) Stealth soapboxes: political information efficacy, cynicism and uses of celebrity weblogs among readers. *New Media Society*, 10, 67-91
- The momblogs.com: A directory of moms who blog*. Retrieved January 7, 2009, from Momblog.com Official Site <http://www.themomblogs.com/>
- Thompson, S. (2007). Mommy blogs: A marketer's dream. *Advertising Age*, 78(9), 6-6.
- Trammell, K., Tarkowski, A., Hofmohl, J., & Sapp, A. (2006, April). Rzeczpospolita blogów [Republic of Blog]: Examining Polish Bloggers Through Content Analysis. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(3), 702-722.
- Trammell, K., & Keshelashvili, A. (2005, Winter 2005). EXAMINING THE NEW INFLUENCERS: A SELF PRESENTATION STUDY OF A-LIST BLOGS. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82(4), 968-982.
- White, D (2009, October, 13). *State of the Blogosphere 2008*. Retrieved November 6, 2009, from Technorati website: <http://technorati.com/blogging/feature/state-of-the-blogosphere-2008/>

Woods, J. (2005, January). Digital Influencers. *Communication World*, 22(1), 26-30. Retrieved September 15, 2009, from Communication & Mass Media Complete database.

Wright, S &Page, E. (2009, April 27). *2009 Women and Social Media Study*.

Retrieved October 12, 2009, from Blogher website:

http://www.blogher.com/files/2009_Compass_BlogHer_Social_Media_Study_042709_FI_NAL.pdf

Zhou, X. (2009). The political blogosphere in China: A content analysis of the blogs regarding the dismissal of Shanghai leader Chen Liangyu. *New Media Society*, 11, 1003-1022.